

The Broken Mirror: Dissolution of the Subject and Multiple Personality Pirandello and Late Nineteenth- Century French Psychopathology

Remo Bodei

I

1. I suggest we consider the genesis of the subject and of its crisis in contemporary culture starting from a path, not yet explored and not devoid of surprises, that will take us from scientific and psychopathological models to philosophy and literature.

The distant starting point in the nineteenth century is physiology, and in particular *cytology*. With the discovery by Matthias Jacob Schleien and Theodor Schwamm of the cell as the fundamental unit of the organism, and with Rudolf Vierchow's claim that

[Translated from the Italian by Bruno Martini and Peter Carravetta]

every cell originates from another cell (*Omnis cellula a cellula*, 1855), cellular theory becomes the most influential model of explanation for the phenomena of life. In this context two questions were repeatedly raised: how does one pass from the monocellular to the multicellular organisms? And, how do the cells in the multicellular organisms connect and interact among themselves?¹ Such questions quickly extend beyond physiology and are applied in an analogous manner to other scientific disciplines [*scienze*] or fields of knowledge [*saperi*]. The transition from monocellular to multicellular organisms is thus interpreted (according to Spenceian models) as an *evolution* from the simple to the complex, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. But since the state of equilibrium reached by the composites is unstable, the more complex the organism and the more differentiated its cells, the more it will be exposed to *dissolution*. For Spencer, dissolution and transience [*labilità*] make up destiny, be it of organisms as well as of complex human societies.² When an organism or a society is confronted by challenges it cannot resolve since it has not yet achieved a certain level of evolutionary differentiation, i.e., when it is not capable of going one step further in its level of complexity, at that point—since it cannot stand still—it turns back, it breaks up into simpler and more primitive aggregates. *Evolution and dissolution are complementary terms*: any organism and any society incapable of development is destined to regress to previously achieved levels. That which is older—since it is simpler, more elementary, not composite—is also more persistent and lasting. In other words: *the past is stronger than the present and the future* and can thus condition, in a significant though subtle way, the unfolding of organic, psychic, and social events.

In the field of physiology the transition from the simple to the complex takes the form of a “crescendo” of coordination among the various cells which are gradually deprived of their independence and placed under a centralized command. From the cell qua *individual* one progresses to more complex organisms.³

Not surprisingly, legal and political terminology is applied to physiology even before politics can utilize some of its results. The power of the single cells, it is said, is “confiscated” in favor of a “hegemonic” center, whose delegated task is the coordination of the plurality of cells which are to be assembled in *colonies*.⁴ This holds true not only for the single organisms, but also for the living creatures that dwell in groups, like the coral polyps, *polypes agrégés* or *corallaires à polypier*. These little animals have had the dubious fortune of becoming for some decades paradigm cases, of provid-

ing a model used in various ways, as can be seen in Espina's book *Des sociétés animales; Etude de psychologie comparée* (Paris, 1877) or in Perrier's book, *Les colonies animales et la formation des organismes* (Paris, 1881).

In these as well as in various other succeeding works, we see how each individual of the colony surrenders and confers [*deleghi*] its rudimentary functions of "consciousness" to a system of coordination that transcends the single organism. In such fashion a collective consciousness is generated as *tout de coalition*, resulting from the aggregation of a multiplicity of individual consciousnesses which have given up their sovereignty and have placed themselves under the protection and the control of a central organism. Such a center cannot exist, nor have any autonomy, outside of the system of delegations permitted by the single elements of which it is composed.

2. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, this pattern is applied—with revolutionary results—to the field of psychopathology by three *medecins-philosophes*, who carried great weight in the culture of their time: Théodule Ribot, Pierre Janet and Alfred Binet. Today their names are nearly forgotten by the general public, but they were famous among their contemporaries and their books were enormously successful and were sold by the thousands. Yet traces remain even in contemporary culture, through the effects which they have directly or indirectly produced: various aspects of the works of Bergson, Sorel, Le Bon, Freud, Pirandello and Proust would be unthinkable without their teaching. Théodule Ribot in *Les maladies de la mémoire*, *Les maladies de la volonté* and *Les maladies de la personnalité*, published in Paris in the years 1881, 1883 and 1885 respectively; Pierre Janet in *L'automatisme psychologique* (Paris, 1889); and Alfred Binet in *Les altérations de la personnalité*, which appeared in Paris in 1892,⁵ contributed, in the field of human psychology, to the overturning of widespread conceptions of common sense and of well-rooted religious and philosophical traditions. Through their research, *the I, the soul, consciousness ceases to be a monolithic unit, a simple substance, and becomes an unstable aggregate, an archipelago of poles of consciousness, of "îlots de conscience," a "conscience de coalition" not unlike that of the coral polyps.*

From the psychological standpoint, the consciousness of individuals considered normal is only the strongest, not the only one. Its hegemony is based on a coalition, on a *system of alliances and psychic equilibriums* that is not natural, but construed, and which

demands a continuous expenditure of energy. But since what is most recent and more complex in the evolution of the species is also the most transient, the "*conscience de coalition*" not capable of developing beyond certain levels of greater complexity is liable to dissolution. Incapable of making progress, it thus falls back onto more elementary forms of organization. Such assertions bring about a crucial cultural turning point, a change of paradigm and a true *Gestalt-switch* in the way one looks at consciousness and at the individual. The individual, for example, used to be conceived, literally, as *indivisible*, endowed with a soul or a psychic apparatus similar to a hard kernel, compact, immutable in its essence and, according to some conceptions of religious derivation, immortal. The growth of the individual from infancy to a mature age was in fact understood as an *e-ducation*, that is, etymologically, a drawing out of what was already implicit in it. Now instead, for the first time, it is believed that science and experience demonstrate that the individual is "dividual," divisible and composite.

But another decisive consequence can be drawn from the preceding premises. What is phylogenetically or ontogenetically more atavistic or old becomes in fact—according to this model—stronger, firmer and more solid than what is more recent, younger and hence brittle. Because of this, when the individual is unable to face up to new and difficult situations, the cerebral cortex (which phylogenetically is a recent conquest and the seat of the superior faculties such as intelligence, memory, will) is hit first. And since for Ribot, following Spinoza, body and soul are nothing but *un phénomène à double face*, lesions of the cerebral cortex are responsible for maladies of the personality, of will and memory. The personality splits into independent and contrasting entities. *The whole of coalition crumbles*: the sovereign [*egemone*] consciousness is forced to *abdicate* and the federation of souls dissolves. The partial and multiple consciousnesses resume their autonomy. Thus there arises mental illness, with a process comparable to a sort of restoration of feudal anarchy, formerly abolished by a centralized power but which subsequently proved powerless to govern. *The implicit mandate is withdrawn*: one regresses to a more archaic system. Put in pathological terms, one is witness to the formation of split-ups of consciousness on the synchronic as well as diachronic level, since more than one personality or alternating personalities are present in the same individual. The stronger consciousness (which was not the only one) is weakened and extinguished: the personalities, the wills or the partial memories are not capable of living together as allies. The psychic apparatus becomes "altered"

and breaks up into fragments not entitled to grant *mandates inside that very system*, or to form new hegemonic coalitions. In Le Bon's view the unity of the "I" "is just as fictitious as that of any army"⁶ in the sense that, if the general's staff is decimated, the soldiers turn into bewildered, disoriented stragglers seized by panic. Nevertheless the split-up of the sovereign personality cannot be conceived as pure chaos, since "the disorganization organizes itself"⁷ at a less complex level but organized nevertheless. Even in psychic life, therefore, as in politics, the crises of hegemony never lead to a vacuum of power, but to a dissolution of the more complex and unstable ties which, in turn, give rise to psychic syntheses that are more limited with respect to the ones reached previously. That which does not fall within the gravitational sphere of a pole of consciousness is attracted by another or wanders in search of more stable connections in the psychic space of the sick person.

Yet the *alii* that are generated from the split-up of the hegemonic "I" all aspire to an independent life. Not only to a *double view*, but to a multiple life. Janet in fact presents the case of a woman with sixteen different personalities and, in the United States, Morton Prince, in *The Dissociation of a Personality: A Biographical Study in Abnormal Psychology* (a work tied to the research of Janet and Binet), analyzes in detail the case of Miss Beauchamp, endowed with five successive personalities.⁸ We should recall also the recent case of Billy Millingham, the first person considered not guilty of homicide by an American court because under the sway of twenty-three personalities, of which ten were permanent and thirteen suppressed.⁹

3. On the basis of these studies in psychopathology and their circulation among a cultivated but not overly specialized public, one is led to surmise that the "I" is a fragile construction and that the subject is in effect—as Lévi-Strauss will later say—*un pauvre trésor* and an *insupportable enfant gâté*.¹⁰ From this perspective, it seems that for thousands of years Western man has accumulated only an inflated patrimony and has confined himself to adoring a tyrannical and demanding idol. One of the strongholds of modern metaphysics is thus threatened: the very bearer of certainty becomes untrustworthy. If it were possible here to go over even schematically the centuries-old history of the theme of the centrality of the subject and of its subsequent fall, one would see how the strategic value of the notion of "subject" is tied to the weakening of the tradition and of the certainties it ushered in. The subject

can become a witness to truth only in an age—like the modern one, starting from Montaigne—in which every authority is undermined. Hence the value of the subject does not arise from purely epistemological reasons but from *a crisis in the credibility of the objective world*. As a result the subject transforms itself into an Atlas and an interpreter of a reality that has lost its power to persuade immediately. When everything vacillates, one is forced to seek the wherefore of things and the justifications for events inside one's own self; one is forced to redefine the basic evidence and to establish *procedures* of intersubjective communication and a definition of "objectivity," such as can be followed by virtually everyone so as to reach the same conclusions.

It is just such procedures that—from Descartes to Kant—shape retroactively the subject and thus constitute it, delineating the field of valid experience and the private sphere. The end-result: the legislative subject is in reality the product of its own procedures, the guarantor of the structuring of knowing and acting. But every time attempts were made to see what lies hidden behind the procedures, so as to reveal the identity of this sovereign [*sovrano*] ordering agent of the world, it was found that nothing and no one lay behind. Or, better yet, that it was impossible to individuate this "X", the subject, as Kant had already called it. The subject makes knowledge possible but it is not knowable; it is, as Fichte believed, pure activity, but it cannot be intuited. French culture at the end of the nineteenth century seems to demonstrate what Schopenhauer had predicted more than half a century before, namely, that by looking within we lose ourselves in a bottomless pit, as if we were in an empty glass sphere. From the inside of this void, a voice speaks but its cause cannot be found within the sphere: when we are trying to grasp ourselves, we are only grasping with horror an inconsistent ghost.¹¹ Now the credibility crisis does not just concern the objective world, but hits the subject as a unitary center, as an ordering agent of the world according to universal procedures and structures, in its presumably transcendental nature. Failing to find, at the level of mind, any point of support, the only guarantee of personal identity remains finally the "consensus" of the bodily organs, their precarious collaboration which produces consciousness, a health always exposed to sickness and to "degeneration."

French culture, starting with Taine, has especially insisted on the fragility of the "I", whose activity had been compared to that of a slave who, in the Roman world, had to cross a circus full of tired lions and sated tigers yet ever dangerous, with an egg in

his hand. If he succeeded, he would be set free.¹² Likewise in the case of the voyage of life the "I" can get to the end unscathed, but its integrity is a *no-guarantee conquest*, since it is just as fragile as an egg. Put in Freudian terms, one could say that *the subject is no longer master in his own house*, but is tolerated, as in Mallarmé's *Igitur*, only in the guise of simple "guest." Not only has it given up any pretense of being the guarantor of certainty, but—again as with Mallarmé or with Pirandello's characters—it needs to look into the mirror to make sure it exists.¹³

The Delphic precept "Know thyself," which from Socrates to Hegel represented the high point of philosophical research, is no longer tenable and remunerative. To be present to itself is no longer considered to be a presupposition of truth, and the subject begins to appear to many as abandoned to "existential drift."¹⁴ Thus, whereas the Hegelian self-consciousness evaded vicious infinity by returning every time into itself from its relation to others and could bask in the "Sundays of life" in times of rest and spiritual relief, at the end of the century it finds that *the way back is blocked*. And while Hegel guaranteed the enrichment of the personality against the dangers and the contradictions that threatened its integrity by orienting and synchronizing it on the "North star" of the overall movement of true effectual reality [*Wircklichkeit*], now no one believes any longer in the existence of an objective process of the world endowed with its own sense. Sense, order, coherence are declared products of the human will, survival tools of the species.

II

1. What theoretical strategies can we come up with in the face of the discovery of the fragility and dissociation of the "I"? How does one respond to the idea of a radical plurality that's constitutive of the subject? I will here consider three *symptomatic* answers: that of *Bergson*, that of *Nietzsche*, and that of *Pirandello*. The progressively increasing space given to each is due solely to expository reasons and does not in any way imply a value judgment.

Deeply and most directly tied to the culture of Ribot, Janet, and Binet, only in Bergson's case do we witness a great effort to escape the danger of the disintegration of the "I" and to find again the forgotten way that leads back to it. But this "hearth of identity"—as Ernst Bloch would call it—is difficult to reach, it is a goal that demands the maximum of *spiritual concentration*. For it is easier to allow oneself to live with a consciousness that is scattered and

reified, ever exposed to the risk of disgregation and falling into the *ineffectual desire of other possible lives*.

In fact, the break-up of the "I" into *multiple personalities* is actually possible for each one of us, for the possible poles of psychic aggregation have been different throughout our existence and above all during our formative years. Indeed, in the course of our life the personality in each one of us has revolved around certain nuclei, around *îlots de conscience* which, in turn, were subsequently organized into successive coalitions, into *archipelagoes of consciousness*. We have often found ourselves at the *crossroads*, we have continually discarded possibilities of development in other directions, we have removed or buried the potential "I's" that were in the making. Ours has thus been a kind of stalk-like growth [*crescita a stelo*]: every choice has been a victory over alternatives that prior to the decision had still a chance of becoming actualized.

Every development thus comes about via dissociation, through alternatives and *diremptions*, and not just through accumulation or through harmonizing. Our present psyche is like a tree that preserves the scars of the pruned branches, of the possibilities that have been cut off. Bergson expresses this concept quite effectively:

Each one of us, looking back at his own story, can notice that his personality as a child, indivisible though it was, still combined within itself different persons which could remain merged because they were just in the nascent state: this indecision full of promises is one of the major charms of childhood. But, as one grows, the personalities within us become incompatible, and since each one of us lives but one life we are forced to make a choice. In fact, we do choose constantly and constantly abandon many things. The road we travel in time is covered with the debris of all that we started to be, of all that which we could have become.¹⁵

The fact is that—as Ribot, Janet, and Binet taught and as Pirandello knew very well—in *psychic life these choices and these exclusions are not definitive*. Augustine's *in te ipsum rede* seems to come about in the opposite way, that is, it does not lead to the hearth of personal identity, to interior concentration, but rather to the rebirth of the plurality of the "I", to dissociation: the abandoned or excluded "I's" come back. As soon as the old monarch, the sovereign "I" that wanted to rule alone, has become weaker and has lost its strength, they return from the exile where they were banished and reinstate their own partial power. In point of

fact, they are not *aliens*, they are not strangers: it's rather a matter of old acquaintances which have been repudiated; acquaintances *all too well known*, but consciously or unconsciously ignored which have generally tried to prove their alterity in dreams or *rêveries*, for they were often a disturbing [*perturbante*] presence for sovereign [*egemone*] consciousness. Thus they were not something other from us, for they already were within us, in fact *they were us*, except that before they were subordinated to a psychic hierarchy that afforded them little space for independence. When they reawake, one has the feeling of being *possessed* by strange powers. But it is still always *us in the plural*, in all the different personalities that can be formed: simultaneously present or alternating, synchronic or diachronic.

There is also a kind of *regressive pleasure*, a "secondary pay-off" in living this scission of the personality: the enormous expenditure of energy necessary to maintain its global hegemonic role stops, and desires and tendencies that had long been repressed find release. Other possible lives, back-up lives, get *activated*; lives that have remained latent but were never totally erased and which now contrast with the actual course one's own life has taken.

The aspiration to experiment with *parallel lives* to one's own, which "normal" personalities satisfy through the reading of novels or historical works, or by traveling and by means of the imagination, becomes here absolute, freed as it is from any conditioning and reality principle. Thus, while it is culturally possible to enrich one's personal identity by living—as if by proxy, "morganatically"—other lives parallel to our own, in the case of the pathological breakdown of the "I" the passion of being others is not directly linked to the passion for personal growth, or to the desire for psychic alliances that are more sophisticated and more respectful of the "otherness" of the colonial "I's." In the case of mental illness it is not possible to go beyond a determinate level of conflict with other possible personalities and to resolve it by an increase in complexity. The single islands of consciousness therefore act separately and the fiction or the ineffectual desire to live several lives becomes psychic reality. The level of personal identity, no longer sustained by one unique history of life, is gauged by the degree of coordination of the organic functions.

Bergson's philosophical strategy can be summed up in the following two moves: acceptance of the *divergent development* even in the area of consciousness and of the subject; a search for the *secret spring* from which the unity of spiritual life flows. It's the *current of consciousness* and the *élan vital* that guarantee in time the

conservation of personal identity and which sweep in a continuous flow the fragments of psychic life, tying them together like the notes of a "melody." With Bergson, *the dynamism impressed by consciousness, the role of memory and the appeal to the phenomenon of "duration" serve the function of exorcising the dissolution of consciousness into independent entities which are foreign to one another and which remain "spaced out."* The unity of the "I" exists solely with the flow, with process: if the current slows down, if "the focus on life" diminishes, then consciousness crumbles and the personality shatters.

2. In Nietzsche also the problematic of the plurality of the "I" is related to that tradition of physiological and psychological research mentioned above.¹⁶

Consequently for him also—and this is a point that must be emphasized—the ego is "a multiplicity of forces of a personal kind, out of which now one now the other come to the fore as ego,"¹⁷ consciousness is formed by a "multiplicity of consciousnesses,"¹⁸ just like the living body in *Zarathustra I* is "a plurality with a sense, a war and peace, a flock and a shepherd" and in *Beyond Good and Evil* it is "a societal construction of many souls" [*Gesellschaftsbau vieler Seelen*].¹⁹ Likewise, man is "a plurality of wills-to-power: each with a plurality of forms and means of expression."²⁰ The difference with respect to the other positions we have considered lies in the fact that for Nietzsche it is the best men, those endowed with an overabundance of vital force, who are especially capable of accepting the conflict joyously, of not submitting the plurality of "wills-to-power" and of "I's" which lie in them to a mortifying and rigid unity. At the summit of the body as society there is no "absolute monarch," but rather an anonymous and variable force, "the barycenter, something changeable" [*das centrale Schwergewicht . . . etwas Wandelbares*].²¹

The hegemonic consciousness is here the result not so much of relatively stable coalitions, but rather of a continuous displacement toward a *temporary point of equilibrium*, of the successive appearance of "forces of a personal kind." One could say that *the disintegration [scindersi]* of consciousness or the prevalence of sickness in the body corresponds, more than to a state of anarchy, to the succession of frequent and sudden displacements of the center of gravity. This condition, and the complementary one of the rigidity of the soul and body, seems to correspond the most to the physical and psychic structure of the mass individual, that is, of those who know only how to be in the herd and are not

capable of being both herd and shepherds of themselves, both plurality and harmonizing, regenerating equilibrium in the tugging of the parts, dissonant harmony. All this because, as can be gathered from Zarathustra's speech in *Of the Thousand and One Reasons*, the pleasure and the inclination that men feel for the herd is older—and hence more powerful—than that which they feel for the "I." The conquest of an ego or of a self that is relatively stable is the end-result of a long, painful, and uninterrupted effort in the history of humanity and of every individual. From such a conflict still not resolved once and for all arises the continuous terror of the dissolution of the "I" and the relapse into something shapeless. It is just such fear that reactively reinforces the idea and the desire for a monolithic and substantial "I."

3. Only the *esprits forts*, those who accept the *eternal return*, can escape the collective call of the species and the related fear of losing themselves should they abandon the herd, the "colony." They would be capable of taking onto themselves—without being destroyed—*more persons* [*mehrere Personen*] and experience the ego not as an "absolute monarch," but rather as a mobile center of gravity. At the same time, however, they do not renounce their selves and are faithful to the end to their own history and to their own decisions, without being tied to that one exclusive personality resulting from insecurity and the atrocities of existence. In this case, *to lose oneself in order to gain many other "I's" means multiplying, not dividing, one's own powers*. The overabundance of vital force, of "health," even gives rise to the desire for insecurity, for audacity, for the voyage of discovery. In light of these considerations, *the eternal return can be viewed as a strategy to slow down or prevent the disgregation of personality and of civilization, the very moment they are accepted as the end-product of "décadence."* It is a way of unleashing from the dissolution all the potential liberating effects. It is as if one would want to refer to oneself, to a multiple identity that constantly changes and disintegrates, everything that has been [*das Gewesen*] by chaining it to repetition. But even to reach such an end-result, in fact above all because of this, one needs discipline, an aptitude for command and for hegemony (hegemony, however, which is quite different from that based on "coalitions" of the "I", modeled, as in Ribot, on parliamentary regimes). The greater freedom of the "I" depends, in fact, not on a greater *consensus* of the parts, but on a harder and cruder hierarchization of psychic instances that culminate—in the case of the subject—in the acceptance of the bond of the eternal return. The procedure

is similar to that practiced by the dancer or the pianist: only by submitting themselves to the *bond of the continuous repetition of exercises* do they obtain a greater expressive freedom and a greater nimbleness of the whole body or of the hands. The powers of pure scission are thus defeated homeopathically and can no longer prevail, since *the personal identity is nevertheless reproduced cyclically within this very multiplicity and disgregation, which are wanted and not suffered*. Thus, there exist no resentments, there are no regrets, *there is no desire to live other parallel lives*, different from one's own. With the thought of the eternal return, any desire of being an other vanishes. The time that it imposes *saves and redeems every instant, making it meaningful*.

Paradoxically, it redeems the possibility for something new and paves the way for it, just like discipline in music and dance makes creativity possible. Only a few, however, are able to bear "the greater weight" of the idea of the eternal return. The majority of men (those adhering to the collective consciousness and those living ascetically and rancorously with a struggling and divided soul) realize with barely hidden joy the passage of time that destroys everything and their vindictive spirit takes delight in the transience of all things. There is, however, according to Nietzsche, a fundamental difference in the relationship of his contemporaries to *décadence*: the man of resentment not only produces it and accentuates it *involuntarily*, but he also desires it as punishment destined to hit everyone, since he is the very first victim. The "free spirit," instead, desires the *décadence* because he knows that one cannot go backwards "like the crab" when facing the various demands of the times. *He bends decadence back onto itself, accepting it to its ultimate consequences, by curving the parabola of decline until it reaches the circle of the eternal return.*

III

1. Given the fact that Pirandello had gone through painful private experiences marked by inner turmoil, he was especially sensitive to the themes put forth by Binet in *Les altérations de la personnalité*.²² From his early text *Dialoghi tra il "Grande Me" e il "Piccolo Me"* he has notoriously pushed his analyses of the breaking down of the "I" and of the rise of double or multiple personalities to the point of virtuosity. But, while remaining faithful to the conflicts and aporias that arise from the disintegration of the subject before oneself and others, he also wanted to explore the type of road that may possibly take us back to ourselves and

to render nonconventional forms of identity dramatically acceptable.

The point of departure for any search for meaning here is the observation that all of us are *nailed to parameters of casual reality*, a reality not chosen: "time, space, necessity" and, furthermore, "fate, fortune, change: all of them traps of life."²³ We cannot avoid being what we are, being born and growing up in a certain age, in a given country, the result of determinate causes or circumstances. We cannot, for example, avoid having a certain *nose*, a certain *shape*. Society chains us to the principle of individuation because it wants us to be responsible for our acts and our thoughts (as they prefigure our actions), recognizable as belonging to specific communities. *Our every act qualifies us and is ascribed to us as corresponding to our one and permanent "I"*, even though we know quite well that we are not wholly contained in the act that marks us forever.

In judging man by a single action, no consideration is given to the *struggle among the souls that coexist* in every individual (cf., for example, the novels *L'Ave Maria di Bobbio* or *Stefano Giogli, uno e due*); a struggle that in certain instances can end up with the victory of a repressed personality, one judged as socially deplorable and beastly:

Here is a high official who believes himself to be and indeed is, the poor chap, a gentleman. The moral soul prevails in him. But one fine day, the instinctive soul that is like a primitive beast lying hidden deep within each one of us, kicks over the moral soul, and that gentleman turns thief. Oh, he himself, poor thing, he is the first to manifest surprise, he cries, desperately asking himself:—*How, how could you have done this?* But, yes sir, he has stolen. And that other one there? A good man, yes indeed, a very fine man: yes sir, he has murdered. . . .²⁴

Quite rightfully society, from its point of view, condemns these *alterations* of the typical personality and constantly reinforces the mimetic mechanisms of identity. The moral anathema falls therefore on who has not restrained the "beast" and the desires for change that, in various ways, are pre-present in the "brain," an organ which is defined—in a letter of the nineteen-year-old Pirandello—as: "the mysterious depths of the sea populated with monstrous thoughts that flash and dart dangerously about."

In accepting us into its bosom, society gives us an identification tag, a name that already contains a story and that must *stabilize* us into a role, transform us into *one* individual. But the name,

and the permanent "I" that it should help *build*, are suitable only for dead things, not living creatures:

A name is nothing else but an obituary epitaph. It is suitable for the dead, for those who are finished. I am alive and am not finished. Life is not over. And Life knows nothing of names either.²⁵

The name is but one of the many mechanisms in the *production of the personality*. The personality and the "I" are a *construction*, whereby *each one takes some material from him/herself and builds him/herself*. For Pirandello, as for Vico, *verum ipsum factum*: "we can only know what we can give form to."²⁷ The fact is, however, that each one gives form to himself and others in a different way. With similar assertions Pirandello does not invent a literary *topos*: he is already in tune with the most advanced literary and philosophical culture of his time. His are not baroque paradoxes, but epistemological problems that are vigorously debated and which arise from the premise according to which there exist no objective, ontologically guaranteed reality. Our every knowledge of the world is a construction or—in Marchesini's language—a *fiction*. In itself "reality" is an unknowable limit, and, of itself, devoid of sense. Only our abstractions, in fact, give meaning to the world. But to abstractions there corresponds nothing more than *our will to construct*, the *poietic act* that creates them. That entails, however, that they also be fragile, arbitrary, and not guaranteed by any recognized moral or religious authority (God has not died, according to Pirandello, but has aged and become impotent, as we read in "The Aged God" contained in his *Tales for a Year*). Human history is in danger of becoming again that tower of Babel to which Yahveh had, mythically, imposed law and order.

To give oneself form and to emerge from the indistinct means to commit oneself to a form that organizes and structures. But *behind every form there is a force*, more or less intense:

The reality that I attribute to you is embedded in the form that you give me; but it is a reality for you and not for me, the reality that you have for me is contained in the form that I give you; but that is what reality is for me and not for you. As for myself, I have no other reality than the form that I succeed in giving myself. How so? But precisely in constructing myself. Ah, you believe that *we build only houses right*? I build myself continuously, and you do likewise. And the construction lasts as long as the cement of our will holds up and until the material of our sentiments crumbles.

And do you know why such insistence on will and constancy of sentiments? If one wavers but slightly, the other changes also minimally and good-bye reality of ours! We immediately realize that it was nothing but our own illusion. Hence firmness of will, constancy of sentiments. Be strong so as not to dive into the void, so as not to encounter these unpleasant surprises. But what beautiful constructions come out!²⁸

Illusions are abandoned constructions that no longer correspond to any present sentiment or will and that are no longer kept together by any "cement." Consequently, the personality is all the more lasting the less the material of our sentiments "crumbles" and the more constant is our will to preserve them unaltered.

Every form is both an *anchor of salvation* and a *stock*, a principle of individuation but also a condemnation to individuation. Being must be "entrapped" in its form as long as the form resists and must adapt to it. This entails, however, paying a price for it.²⁹ But there are moments when even this anchor of salvation cannot hold up in the face of life's tempests, manifesting its fictional nature. *Life and reality are in fact an indistinct flux that only for convenience's sake do we subdivide into parts and place under the rule of abstractions.* We are not talking here of the Bergsonian flux of consciousness, or of William James' *stream of consciousness*, or of a purifying bath of every slag, but of a kind of infernal and primitive river, of ruinous *flood-waves* that sweep away the "houses" that we have so laboriously erected:

Life is a continuous flux that we laboriously try to arrest to fix into stable and determinate forms, inside and outside of us, because we already are fixed forms! Forms that move in the midst of other motionless forms which, however, in following the flux of life, turn gradually more and more rigid, as the movement slows down and stops. The forms that we try to stop and fix within us in this continuous flux are the concepts, the ideals which we try to stick to, all the fictions that we create, the conditions, the kind of state into which we try to settle. But within us, in what we call the "soul" and which is the life within us, the flux continues, indistinct, underground, beyond the limits that we impose putting together a consciousness, constructing a personality. At certain stormy moments, all these fictitious forms of ours miserably fall as they are hit by the flux: and even what does not flow underground and over the banks but which is distinct to us and which we have carefully channeled in our affections, in the duties we have imposed on ourselves and in the habits we have developed, can sometimes turn into a flood and overwhelm us. There are restless souls almost

in a continuous state of fusion who refuse to set, to become rigid in this or that form of personality. But even for more sedate souls, those who have settled into one form or another, fusion is always possible: the flux of life is in everyone.³⁰

This rich passage has a parallel in a page from *One, No One, One Hundred Thousand*:

It's well that you tap your ears so as not to hear the terrible clangor of a sure underground robbery, beyond the limits which you, like a good judge, have staked out and made yours in putting together your most scrupulous consciousness. They can collapse, you know? In a stormy moment like the one Ms. Anna Rosa has had. What robbery? Oh well, is it that of high tide, your Honor? You have channeled it well in your affections, in the duties you have imposed on yourself, in the habits you developed. But then there come moments of flood-tides, your Honor, and the river overflows its banks and overwhelms everything. I know it. All is submerged for me, your Honor! I dove in and now I am swimming in it, I am swimming in it. And if you only knew how far away I am already! I almost can't see you anymore.³¹

Constructing oneself is a "spontaneous interior artifice, the fruit of secret tendencies or of unconscious imitation."³² Notice the oxymoronic expression *spontaneous artifice*: the construction of identity is spontaneous insofar as it is unconscious and the product of the forces of social conditioning, but it is artificial in that it does not correspond to any normatively binding and rigid human nature. Each one taken in and of itself is nothing, is no one:

Do you want to be? There's this to ponder: in the abstract one is not. Being needs to be entrapped into a form and end up in it for some time, here or there, such and such.³³

We shouldn't ignore, incidentally, Pirandello's native soil and his hometown customs and traditions. Agrigento is the birth-place of Empedocles, the philosopher of metamorphosis and of the cosmic conflict between *neikos* and *philia*. Agrigento is also near Lentini, the classical Leontini, the town of the Sophist Gorgias, who was capable of proving anything and its contrary. And it is indeed the "feeling for the contrary" [*sentimento del contrario*] that characterizes humorism³⁴ and more generally all of Pirandello's art. Vitangelo Moscarda is precisely the one

willing to think and feel also the contrary of what he was thinking and feeling just a while ago, that is, break up and dismantle every mental and sentimental formation by constant and contrary reflections.³⁵

These are the people more likely to experience the discovery of the illusions, more capable of chipping away the cement of the will and of throwing into disarray the various sentiments, of shaking the unconscious construction that stems from imitation and the crystallized images that the others have formed of us.

When this spontaneity and animal innocence of the construction going on (as with ants or termites) is discovered, then everything crumbles and it becomes possible to see the "unformed," the *chaos* from which every form rises as order or protection against it. So whether we have the "restless souls in an almost continuous state of fusion," or the quiet ones "who have settled into one form or another" but who are shaken by some event that *alters* them, they all come to a point where they are forced to abandon every *vital fiction*. We come thus to the moment of confession:

In certain moments of interior silence, during which our soul sheds all of its habitual fictions and our eyes become more acute and penetrating, we see ourselves within life, and life in itself, as if barren, disturbing [*inquietante*] nakedness: we are seized by a strange impression, as if, in a flash, a reality different from the one we normally perceive were revealed to us, a *living* reality beyond human sight, outside the forms of human reason. Then most lucidly the whole context of daily experience, almost suspended in the void of this interior silence of ours, appears to us devoid of sense and pointless; and that different reality will seem to us horrible, in its almost impassive and mysterious crudity, since all of our fictitious, concrete relations of sentiments and images have broken down and dissolved in it. The internal void widens, crosses the limits of our body, becomes emptiness around us, as if time and life stood still, a strange void, as if our interior silence would sink sweeping down into the abyss of mystery. With a supreme effort we try then to reacquire the ordinary consciousness of things, to re-establish with them the usual relations, to re-connect the ideas, to feel alive as before, as always. But we can no longer have faith in this normal consciousness, in this usual *feeling of life*, because we already know that it is one of our tricks for living and that underneath it all there is something else, which man can approach only at the risk of dying or going crazy. It was just a second, but its impression *stays* long with us: a dazzling and eerie quality which contrasts the stability, yet so vain, of things: ambitious or miserable appearances. Life, then, meandering casually and miniscule among

these appearances, seems no longer real to us, appearing rather like a mechanical phantasmagory. Now how do you give it importance? How give it respect?³⁶

This great passage would call for a word-by-word comment. But for now at least two apparently marginal points have to be kept in mind. The first is that Pirandello employs the language of mysticism for the profane discovery of a dimension "that man can approach at the risk of dying or going crazy." He speaks of a sudden revelation, "in a flash," of a "different reality," "of a strange void," of a standstill of time and of life: all of them images, sensations and ideas which are common in the mystical ecstasy, in which the temporal flux is suddenly suspended and in the great void one becomes aware of the "numinous," the terrific. The second point relates to the slight importance of life and to the difficulty of paying it "respect" once the illusion is discovered. This is an element that gives an ambiguous character to all of culture, even the political one, during the turn of the century, divided as it was between the vitalistic cult of existence and the attraction toward death, torn between the *pietas* toward living things and pleasure, destruction and self-destruction.

2. What is one to do after the deception has been discovered, after a crack however minimal (the crooked nose of Vitangelo Moscarda, for example) is found in our "house," in our "spontaneous artifice"? A great part of Pirandello's work seems to revolve obsessively around this topic with a constancy and an insistence which lasted for decades, ranging from his earliest writings to the time of his death. After all it is not just a matter of a semiotic or esthetic problem, but of an entire sequence of existential questions: "I was not a person I was a bunch of personalities [*personaggi*]* in search of a person," Pirandello would confess.³⁷

In the face of such discovery one can react basically in two ways (unless one is able to accept acritically the Jamesian *Will to Believe* and become quickly attached to other illusions once the preceding ones have fallen by the wayside). One way would entail *not being anyone*, that is, to use a term coined by Louis Dugas, "depersonalization," in being "as you want me." One then looks at oneself in the *mirror*, which is the recurrent metaphor for the *otherness and foreignness of the identical* [*dell'alterità e dell'estraneità dell'identico*]. One sees oneself as the stranger before him, the impossible experiment of looking at oneself as the others would

**Personaggio* means both "personality" and "character." [Tr.]

and do look at us (impossible because one would need an infinite number of mirrors, each of which would give a different image).³⁸ Emptied of the sentiment of belonging, what is each individual? "Nothing. Nobody. A poor mortified body, waiting for someone to take it."³⁹ This is the way, in its negative view, of dying while living, this is the path that becomes the destiny of the many people who lower the threshold of their expectations for meaning and happiness in life to the point that, fearing further wounds and humiliations, prefer rather the interior void even before physical death.⁴⁰ But the horrible river, which sweeps away our construction, is life itself, life that cannot be frozen, cannot be "set" without dying innermost. When, in fact, *one's own vital current is congealed*, each one feels oneself inexorably assimilated to one's own principle of individuation, and transformed into an actor that recites a *routine* role. Without enthusiasm, and lessened to a "marionette" fashioned by both himself and others, the actor now looks at himself living.⁴¹ It will then seem as if all that is happening around him has already happened (as in the psychological phenomenon of *déjà vu*, symptom of a breakdown of personality under way) or that he himself is another person, a stranger, as in the short story "The Nail," in which the protagonist unintentionally kills a red-haired girl in New York with a nail that he had casually picked up in some street in Harlem.

Pirandello had closely and personally experienced this disturbing impression of seeing oneself live from the outside, like an automaton, and had felt already in his youth the acute sense of *déjà vu*.⁴² He in fact confessed later on that it often happened to him that when faced with people and landscapes seen for the first time, he knew against all evidence of *having encountered them long before*: "I have always recognized everything."⁴³

The second way of confronting the discovery of the senselessness and illusion of the forms of life consists in practicing the *heroic furor* of Vitangelo Moscarda, that is, in *not* wanting to be a *nobody*, a ghost projected from the images of others or an ephemeral, spontaneous construction of oneself. This way entails wanting to be *one*, but without a name; *oneself*, not like the others forge us, conditioning us, but like one wants to be once and for all: naked masks, divested, à la St. Francis so to speak, of all the external frills, of all the vanities and the illusions that no longer help us to live. The Pirandellian characters—like the protagonist of the novel *When I Was Crazy*, who deprives himself of all his goods and reads *The Little Flowers* of St. Francis⁴⁴—find an authentic dimension only in the knowledge that it is necessary to reject

the unceasing flow of illusions. Paraphrasing Max Weber, one can say that Pirandello here suggests a kind of *this-worldly-asceticism* [*ascesi intramondana*].

To choose for oneself means rejecting the common criteria of identification (name, space, time, cause), but it also means putting oneself outside human fellowship, it means being declared crazy or irresponsible, *wearing a rattle-cap* [*berretto a sonagli*], or being ostracized and condemned to *solitude*. Alternatively, as in the case of the *Il Fu Mattia Pascal*, one can change one's own name and reconstruct a new identity for oneself. After discovering the illusions of identity, Vitangelo Moscarda declares: "I was becoming 'one.' I. I who now wanted to be thus. I who now felt thus. Finally!"⁴⁵ But he quickly perceives the ice of solitude, which is due not so much to the fact of being deprived of the company of others, but rather to being deprived of a *non-ephemeral (one) self*. Even in company one can "founder" in the other's solitude.⁴⁶

To whom can one thus turn saying "I"? What center and point of reference is one to take?

When touching me, when shaking my hands, yes, I was saying "I" but to whom was I saying it to? And for whom? I was alone. Alone in the whole world. Alone for myself. And then a shiver that shook me to the roots of my hair, I felt eternity and the chill of this infinite solitude. To whom was I to say "I"? What did it mean to say "I" if for the others it had a sense and a value that could never be mine? As for me, so much outside of the others, to embrace a value or a sense means to plunge immediately into the horror of this void and of this solitude.⁴⁷

Now one is no longer filled—as in *When I Was Crazy*—with all the other "I's" that had been internalized:

When I was crazy I did not feel myself, which is tantamount to saying: I was not living in my house. I had, in fact, become a hotel open to all. And if I would hit my head a little, I would feel that there was always people lodged in there [. . .] I could not say *I*, within my consciousness, for immediately an echo would resound: *I, I, I, . . .* spoken by all the others. It was like having an aviary within me.⁴⁸

Vitangelo Moscarda is no longer his own guest as in a hotel, but is now master in his own *house*, which, however, is *empty*, at least initially.

And yet to be truly one, so as not to have regrets over the

preceding sclerotized "I", *one needs to be many*, "one hundred thousand." One has to rid oneself completely of every rigid form, of any inelastic determinacy whatsoever. In this case, *uncertainty is the shelter*, existential as well as economical uncertainty (to sell everything, to give everything away, and even to let oneself be robbed, as the Pirandellian "idiot" sometimes does):

This uncertainty within me which shied away from every limit, from every support, and would pull back almost instinctively from every consistent form like the sea pulls away from the shore [. . .].⁴⁹

Well, this uncertainty must be tolerated, because—besides being horrible—it is also liberating for those who can rise up to the perspective of its heights or, according to common sense, its absurdities.

But what is the essence of such a possible strategy of "liberation"? *It consists in fusing and rendering fluid the determinations of consciousness, in abandoning every rigid principle or criterion of individuation, in losing oneself so as to find oneself, in letting oneself go and in foundering, in de-centering and in savoring the pleasure of not having to labor to construct oneself any more:*

Ah, to be no longer conscious of being, like a stone, like a plant! Not to remember any longer even one's own name! Lying down here on the grass, with the hands crossed behind one's head, to see the blue sky with dazzling, sunfilled white clouds sailing along; to hear the wind up there, among the chestnut trees, roaring like the sea. [. . .] Ah to lose oneself there, to lie down and abandon oneself, yes, in the grass, in the silence of the sky: to fill your soul with all that vain blueness, letting every thought, every memory founder!⁵¹

Even Dianella in *The Old and the Young* experiences briefly this tendency toward a panic fusion with nature, this serene and yet at the same time disturbing losing of the self:

The surrounding silence was so astonishing and so intense and thoughtless was the day-dreaming of the earth and of all things, that she gradually felt attracted and fascinated by it. Absorbed in their perennial dream, some trees seemed to her burdened with an infinite and resigned sadness from which the wind was trying in vain to shake them. She perceived, in that mysterious intimacy with nature, the rustling of leaves, the humming of the insects, and she no longer felt she was living for herself: she lived for a moment almost unconsciously, with the earth, as if her soul had

become "fused" with and "con-fused" by all the things of the countryside.⁵²

The beauty of the countryside depends on the fact that when in it we are outside the city,

away from a *constructed* world: houses, streets, churches, squares are *constructed*, not just in the traditional sense, but also because one no longer lives just for the sake of living, like these plants, without knowing that one lives. Rather, we live for something that does not exist and that we put there; a something that gives sense and value to life: a sense, a value that here, at least in part, you can manage to lose, or recognize as distressing vanity. And you turn languid and, yes, melancholic. I understand, I understand. Relaxation of the nerves. A deep need of letting go. You feel a loosening, you abandon yourself.⁵³

This *de-concentration of the will* from policing the "borders" and from the need of a rigid identity can also be perceived as a *conversion* (rather than a reinforcement) of the will itself. One need not then construct oneself once and for all and defend this illusion and this phantasm with a disproportionate expenditure of energy relative to its initial advantages. All one has to do is find a will that utilizes one's energy to construct and reconstruct oneself continuously, that does not literally erect palaces but, as it were, ever-mobile tents, that it build not buildings but ships, that it not enclose itself within the inexorable "prison of time"⁵⁴ which destroys the eternal seeking more than that which wants to be only temporary. In short a will that creates time from one instant to the next, *after having suspended its course in the terrible instant of the discovery of the vital illusions*. Only then can personality be born and be able to transform itself continuously, peacefully, in its apparent anomaly and folly, savoring the freshness of being born and dying at every moment. Thus, symptomatically, ends *One, Nobody, One Hundred Thousand*, with Vitangelo Moscarda who asks to be locked up in the home for the old he had himself founded, after having relinquished all his belongings:

The home for the old rises in the countryside in a most delightful place. I go out every morning at dawn, because I now want to keep my spirit so, dawn-fresh, with all the things as they just open up, that savor still of the raw of night, before the sun dries up their moist breath and dazzles them. Those water-filled and leaden clouds hanging heavily and piled up over those pale mountains

that make that green patch of sky still in the shadow of night appear larger and clearer. And here these blades of grass, they too tender with water, the living freshness of the banks. And that little donkey in the open all night, looking about with foggy eyes and snorting in the silence so close to him and which slowly seems to vanish as everything around comes into the clear with light beams striking the deserted and stunned fields. And the air is new. And everything, moment by moment, is what it is, something coming alive so as to show itself [*che s'avviva per apparire*]. I immediately turn my eyes so as not to see anything more stop in its appearing and die. Only this way I can live, then. Reborn from moment to moment. Preventing thought from starting to work within me again and re-establish the void of vain constructions. The town is far away. Sometimes, in the calm of the sunset, the sound of bells reaches me. But now those bells I no longer hear within me but outside, pealing for themselves, perhaps vibrating with joy in their ringing cavity, against a beautiful blue sky filled with warm sun, between the chirping of swallows or in the cloudy wind, heavy and so high on those lofty towers. Thinking of death, praying. There are those who have still need of this, and the bells speak for them. I no longer have this need because I die every instant, I do and I am born anew and without memories: living and whole, no longer in me, but in everything outside.⁵⁵

3. The highest level of liberation that the Pirandellian character is capable of reaching is the loss of a rigid memory and of projecting and constructing thought. Only thus can his experience—after the dissolution of the illusions—*rebirth at every instant* and experience life as a perpetual “dawn.” With such choices he avoids reflecting on death as the end of everything, because everything dies ceaselessly so as to renew itself, because that which does not have a definitive form can well undergo *metamorphoses*, but never be completely destroyed. Only in this way can it enjoy the *coming alive of appearance and be able to transform illusion from a baroque symbol of transience into a splendid iridescence of phenomena*, in the silent yet expressive voice of all being. The price is high: voluntary segregation from the social context, a regression from all the conquest of civilization (in the double sense of the city and of citizenship, insofar as pertaining to a human fellowship), a desire to no longer live within oneself, a “vegetal” need—symptomatically acute also in D’Annunzio—of becoming plants or stones and to turn one’s back on consciousness.

The supreme theoretical virtuosity consists here again in *changing the signs of the transience and disgregation of consciousness*,

in accepting them together as instruments not of pain and laceration, but rather of a *joy that is not of this civilization* or at any rate contrary to every rule of human co-existence. One accepts *décadence* in its most disturbing nucleus in the idea that at the basis of everything there is *primitive and frightening chaos*, which one cannot look at—as if a Gorgon or a Medusa head—“without dying or going crazy.” The consequence is thus drawn that *all forms, all the structures of order, are stratagems, artificial constructions of civilization produced by the animal man, for whom it is necessary to believe in order to live*, but on which—once put on guard by some collective or individual trauma—one can no longer seriously put faith in.

If this principle is admitted—which looked at retrospectively turns out to be, for us, the most profound assumption that is common to the entire culture we have examined—we usher in every project attempting to give meaning to a world that has been declared to be constitutionally without it, *a potent corrosive, a nihilistic generator of entropy*. That is why—staying within these premises—one can escape in the various ways, among others, we have examined: Bergson’s solution of *overtaking in time* [*battere sul tempo*] the forces of dissociation, reinforcing the dynamic unity of consciousness in its flow and channeling, through memory and the *élan vital*, whatever tends to scatter. Nietzsche’s solution of *saying yes to life and wanting ourselves eternally in the splendor of appearances, in the “great midday.”* Or Pirandello’s solution of adhering substantially to the “feeling of the contrary” and to the varied and detailed analysis of the struggle of souls present in each individual. Pirandello alludes to forms of conciliation which presuppose, from an artistic point of view, a departure from society and the mystical dimension, but which are ever ensnared by an unconcealed attraction for that infernal current the sight of which can make one die or go crazy.

It is a whole culture that experiences the *setback of the principle of individuation*, a principle whose mechanism appears jammed, no longer capable of offering to the individual a network of meanings with which to orient himself. Le Bon used to say that the revolutions that begin are nothing more, in reality, than beliefs that have ceased.⁵⁶ What ceases here is the belief in the naturalness and stability of the “I”, and, also, for a great number of people, the belief in an eternity beyond the time of one’s individual life. The search for meaning, which religion projected into an infinite duration, becomes now problematically contracted in the most sensitive expressions of contemporary consciousness: the individual discovers a death, a pain, a sickness, a loss of meaning *not*

ransomed by any sort of remuneration. The distinction between time and eternity being abolished, time appears now as irrevocable destruction and eternity like a mystical instant of suspension of time which one would like to prolong forever even though fully aware of the futility of his effort. So as to exit from such a mournful state of mind and to restore "dignity" to life and meaning to existence, one experiments thus with various ways of escaping.

Besides those we have considered here, one may recall, among others, the rebirth of Platonic realism in mathematics, in logic, and in the philosophy of essences [*Wesenheiten*] of Russell and Husserl toward the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of our century. Or the restoration of ontology (for example, Nicolai Hartmann, Heidegger, and the late Lukács) as an attempt to give consistence to "being," to rekindle the trust in the event [*Ereignis*] which is not "imperscrutability" or chaos, and finally the attempt to rid "becoming" of its irremediably horrendous character. From this perspective hermeneutics itself seems like a *controlled consummation of tradition*, a slow fading of the apparati of sense. By means of a *de-construction* or of the *Verwindung*, hermeneutics too seeks, in fact, to extract energy from the dissolution of the previous ties, of surviving with whatever remains of a collapse. And with our present-day projects focused on the *redistribution of sense*, we are still feeling today, in small doses, the after-effects of this shock.

1. For a general picture of physiology and cytology in the nineteenth century, cf. M. Klein, *Histoire des origines de la théorie cellulaire* (Paris, 1936); R. Watermann, *Theodor Schwamm. Leben und Werk* (Düsseldorf, 1960); M. Florkin, *Naissance et déviation de la théorie cellulaire*, in *La connaissance de la vie* (Paris, 1967), pp. 43-80; W. Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century. Problems of Form, Function, and Transformation* (Cambridge, 1971); H. Grunze-A.Q.I. Spriggs, *History of Clinical Cytology: A Selection of Documents* (Darmstadt, 1983), 2nd. ed.

2. From 1851-52 onward Spencer generalized von Baer's idea according to which every organism develops by passing from a structural homogeneity to a structural heterogeneity. In 1857, with the essay *Progress: its law and cause*, and in succeeding works, he adds to such a conception the idea of the instability of the homogeneous and of the dissolution which represents the complementary destiny of every evolution.

3. On the cell as *Individuum* cf. M.J. Schleiden, *Beiträge zur Phytogenese*, in "Archiv für Anatomie, Physiologie und wissenschaftliche Medizin," 1838, p. 137; Th. Schwamm, *Mikroskopische Untersuchungen über die Uebereinstimmung in der Struktur und dem Wachstume der Thiere und Pflanzen*, Berlin, 1839, p. 2. It was F. Le Dantec, in *La définition d'individu*, in "Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger," XXVI, 1901, t. LI, pp. 13-35, 151-172, who demonstrated that the thesis which identified the cells with the protozoa and defined the organism as an aggregate of more individuals was false. The property of being individual is independent from the simple or complex structure of organism and is tied to a total morphological and hereditary unity. Thus collapse, from a purely 'scientific' point of view, the concepts behind multiple individuality.

4. It was the liberal Vierchow who applied political metaphors to the field of cytology, such as that of the organism as a society or federation of cells or free State; cf. *Cellular-Pathologie*, in "Archiv für pathologische Anatomie und Physiologie und für klinische Medizin," VIII (1855), p. 25; *Alter und neuer Vitalismus*, *ibid.*, IX, 1856, p. 35; *Die Kritiker der Cellularpathologie*, *ibid.*, XVIII, 1860, p. 9. See also, R.G. Mazzolini, *Stato e organismo, individui e cellule nell'opera di Rudolf Vierchow negli anni 1845-1860*, in "Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento / Jahrbuch des italienisch-deutschen historischen Instituts in Trient," IX (1983), pp. 153-293.

5. On the work of Théodule Ribot, cf. R. Lenoir, *La psychologie de Ribot et la pensée contemporaine*, in "Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale," XXVI (1919), pp. 739-763; G. Poyer, *L'oeuvre de Ribot*, in AA. VV., *Centenaire de Th. Ribot. Jubilé de la psychologie française*, Agen, 1939, pp. 115-130; L. Dugas, *La philosophie de Th. Ribot* (Paris, 1924). On Janet, cf. F. Kerris, *Integration und Desintegration der Persönlichkeit bei Janet und McDougall* (Diss. Bonn, 1938); E. Minkowski, *Pierre Janet, Essai sur l'homme et l'oeuvre*, in AA. VV., *Centenaire de Th. Ribot. Jubilé de la psychologie scientifique française* op. cit., pp. 199-230; H. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious. The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (New York, 1970); C.M. Prevost, *La psychophilosophie de Pierre Janet* (Paris, 1973); Id., *Janet, Freud et la psychologie clinique* (Paris, 1973). On Binet, cf. E. Claparède, *Alfred Binet*, in "Archive de psychologie," XI (1911), pp. 37-88; M. Robert, *Alfred Binet*, (Diss. Paris, 1924); F.L. Bertrand, *Alfred Binet et son oeuvre. Avec une bibliographie complète* (Paris, 1930); E.J. Varon, *The Development of Alfred Binet's Psychology*, "Psychological Monographies," XLIII (1935), pp. 1-129; A. Marzi, *Alfredo Binet* (Brescia, 1946); G. Avanzini, *Alfred Binet et la pédagogie scientifique: La contribution de Binet à l'élaboration d'une pédagogie scientifique* (Paris, 1969); Th. Wolf, *Alfred Binet* (Chicago, 1973).

6. G. Le Bon, *Aphorismes du Temps présent* (Paris, 1913), p. 3.

7. Th. Ribot, *Les maladies de la personnalité*, op. cit., p. 140.

8. Cf. M. Prince, *The Dissociation of a Personality. A Biographical Study in Abnormal Psychology* (London-New York, 1905). Cf., on this aspect, O. Marx, *Morton Prince and the Dissociation of Personality*, In "Journal of the Behavioral Sciences," 6 (April 1970), pp. 120-130; N.G. Hale, *Introduction to M. Prince, Psychotherapy and Multiple Personality: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), pp. 1-18.

9. Cf. D. Keyes, *The Minds of Billy Milligham* (New York, 1981).

10. C. Lévi-Strauss, *L'homme nu: "Finale"* (Paris, 1971), pp. 614-615.

11. A. Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Wiesbaden 1961), Bd. I, 1, p. 327.

12. Cf. H. Taine, *De l'intelligence* (1870) (Paris, 1906), II. éd., vol. II, pp. 230-231. Jules Michelet employed the same image in *La Révolution* (1847) (Paris, 1898), p. 75. See also C. Evans, *Taine. Essai de biographie intérieure* (Paris, 1975), p. 279 n.

13. Cf. M. Tison-Braun, *L'introuvable origine. Le problème de la personnalité au*

seuil du XXe siècle. Flaubert, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Valéry, Bergson, Claudel, Gide, Proust (Genève, 1981).

14. Cf. J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie* (Paris, 1972), p. 376.

15. H. Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, in *Oeuvres* Edition du centenaire (Paris, 1959), pp. 579-580.

16. In *Ecce Homo* Nietzsche states that after his studies in philology, which correspond to his Basel years, he devoted himself to the study of "physiology, medicine and natural science"; see Nietzsche, KGW, Bd. VI, 3, p. 323. Wilhelm Roux's book, *Der Kampf der Theile im Organismus. Ein Beitrag zur Vervollständigung der mechanischen Zweckmässigkeitslehre*, which had come out in February, 1881, played a key role in defining his philosophy, and its influence can be seen already in the fragments dated spring-autumn, 1881. On this, see W. Müller-Lauter, *Der Organismus als innere Kampf. Der Einfluss von Wilhelm Roux auf Friedrich Nietzsche*, in "Nietzsche-Studien," VI (1978), pp. 189-223. In a letter Nietzsche says that together with "Mind" he considers the "Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale," founded by Ribot in 1876, the best review in the world.

17. Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, Herbst 1880, KGW, V 1, p. 541.

18. Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, Juni-Juli 1885, KGW, VII 3, p. 304.

19. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, I, in KGW, VI 1, p. 35; *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *ibid.*, VI 2, p. 27.

20. Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, Herbst 1885-Frühjahr 1886, KGW, VIII 1, p. 21.

21. Nietzsche, *Nachlaß*, Sommer-Herbst 1884, KGW, VII 2, p. 227; *Nachlaß*, April-Juni 1885, *ibid.*, VII 3, p. 182; W. Müller-Lauter, *Der Organismus als innere Kampf*, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

22. On the importance that Binet's work *Les altérations de la personnalité* (which Gaetano Negri reminds us of in his volume *Signs of the Times* in 1893) had for Pirandello, and on its vast employment already in the 1900 version of the essay *Science and Aesthetic Critique* (besides, of course, on the essay on *Humorism* of 1908), there are references in R. Barilli, *La linea Svevo-Pirandello* (Milano, 1972), pp. 244-247; and in G. Nava, "Arte e scienza nei saggi di Pirandello," in the anthology, *Pirandello Saggista* (Palermo, 1983).

23. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, in *Tutti i romanzi*, edited by G. Macchia, with M. Costanzo (Milano, 1973), vol. II, p. 798.

24. L. Pirandello, *L'umorismo* (1908) (Firenze, n.d., 1920), second augmented edition, p. 213.

25. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, *op. cit.*, p. 901.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 778.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*, p. 779.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 798.

30. L. Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

31. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, *op. cit.*, p. 897.

32. L. Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 206.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 208 and cf. *ibid.*, p. 208 n.: "I am making use of some acute comments contained in the book of Giovanni Marchesini, *Le finzioni dell'anima* (Bari, Laterza, 1905)."

34. Cf. L. Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

35. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, *op. cit.*, p. 780.

36. L. Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.

37. Giovanni Catrufuli in a 1946 letter to André Maurois, cited in F. Rahut, *Der junge Pirandello oder das Werden eines existentiellen Geistes* (München, 1964), p. 296.

38. Cf. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, *op. cit.*, pp. 748-749. Cf. also the tale "La trappola" in *Novelle per un anno*.

39. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, *op. cit.*, p. 756.

40. This sentiment of death, of a progressive detachment from the world, is given literary form in the magnificent tale, "Di sera, un geranio", in *Novelle per un anno*.

41. Cf. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, op. cit., p. 859.

42. Cf. J.M. Gardair, *Pirandello, fantasmes et logique du double* (Paris, 1972) p. 25, who estimated that the problematic of the "double" appears in at least sixty of Pirandello's tales. On the theme of Pirandello and mental illness, see J.-P. D'Anna, *La psychiatrie actuelle devant le théâtre de Pirandello*, Thèse Univ. de Paris III, 1973; Y. Bouissy, *Réflexions sur l'histoire et la préhistoire du personnage "alter ego,"* in *Lectures pirandelliennes* (Paris, 1978); E. Gioanola, *Pirandello e la follia* (Genova, 1983).

43. L. Pirandello, in "Illustrazione italiana," 23 giugno 1935.

44. Cf. L. Pirandello, "Quand'ero matto," in *Novelle per un anno*, op. cit., vol. II, p. 163.

45. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, op. cit., p. 859.

46. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 748, 862, and especially p. 890.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 862.

48. L. Pirandello, "Quand'ero matto," op. cit., p. 161.

49. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, op. cit., p. 892.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 774

51. *Ibid.*, p. 896.

52. L. Pirandello, "I vecchi e i giovani," in *Tutti i romanzi*, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 138-139.

53. L. Pirandello, *Uno, nessuno, centomila*, op. cit., p. 774

54. *Ibid.*, p. 791.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 901-902. Already D'Annunzio, in the *Laus vitae* (1903), had spoken of an I reborn "with every rising dawn."

56. Cf. G. Le Bon, *La psychologie des foules* (1895) (Paris, 1920), p. 121.