

PHILOSOPHY AS A WAY OF LIFE TEXTS AND STUDIES

Periagoge

THEORY OF SINGULARITY
AND PHILOSOPHY
AS AN EXERCISE
OF TRANSFORMATION



GUIDO CUSINATO

Translated by

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BRILL

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that starts out from the world. That which characterizes the personal singularity, in this opening up to the world – thanks to the walls erected toward its own egocentrism – is a generative type of *pathos*.

It is reductive to understand the term *pathos* in the sense of an inert passivity. Instead, *pathos* indicates the experience of feeling oneself touched by the world. It is an “active” form of “passivity”. The singularity cannot be traced back to an activity that assumes form by asserting and reinforcing itself, as happens with the *self*, but to an activity that generates beyond itself, insofar as it is touched by an experience. My personal singularity is not only expressed where I have control of the situation or in my way of realizing my intentions and projects, but also where my being steps back or is not recognized. It is also expressed in the face of the unforeseen, of pain, illness, defeat, and severance. This is the legacy of the auroral void.

1.4.8 *The Wound and the Scar: The Paintings of Fontana and the Art of Kintsugi*

The slashes in a canvas by Fontana and the golden scars of a water pot put back together through the art of *kintsugi* are very good expressions of two essential aspects of the singularity.

A singularity assumes form in transcending the self and being reborn in the encounter with another singularity. A doubt that may spontaneously arise is whether in so doing the singularity obliterates its own inner dimension and ends up flattening itself against the other’s *exteriority*. Fontana’s painting, *Concetto spaziale, Attesa, Rosso* (1965),³⁹ suggests a different hypothesis. The compact surface of Fontana’s paintings is reminiscent of a one-dimensional individual prior to the act of self-transcendence, in other words, of the still self-referential dimension of the self. The gash, for its part, represents the wound of the other that opens to the personal dimension. By passing through this wound, the act of self-transcendence is not flattened against the other’s exteriority, but enables the singularity to experience the dimensions otherwise inaccessible to the two-dimensionality of the self. Thanks to the slash, the singularity discovers, on the one hand, a further, deeper interiority than that which is accessible to the self, and on the other an exteriority that is also further and equally inaccessible to the flat surface of the self. Placing these two further dimensions in contact makes possible a new level of attunement with the world, in the sense of *Weltoffenheit*.

39 See, for example: <https://artsupp.com/it/artisti/lucio-fontana/concetto-spaziale-attesa-rosso>.

The gash is the *auroral void* that enables further birth, metaphorically the mother's reproductive organ. In the dimension of the auroral void, my singularity encounters another singularity that is infinitely more intimate and closer to it than my two-dimensional self. Thanks to this encounter, both of us advance in the process of singularization.

Exposing myself in *Weltoffenheit* does not mean merging my own interiority with the other's exteriority; on the contrary, it means opening myself to the dual dimension of a deeper interiority and a higher exteriority. Paradoxically, I only enter myself by going outside myself. And it is only by transcending the two-dimensionality of my self that I can be reborn in the encounter with the other's singularity, that is, interact with the other's deepest interiority and with her highest exteriority.

The wounds that are opened usually remain unknown, and dramatically emerge only in the shock of a crisis. But if I close these wound-openings, I prevent myself from feeling, because *it is only thanks to the openness of these wounds that I can feel myself touched by the world*. This is why the singularity only takes on a physiognomy by gushing forth from its own openings and exposing itself, that is, expressing itself. If, instead, I close all the openings and shelter within myself, then I become apathetic and no longer feel touched by anything.

In Fontana's canvases, the attention is often concentrated on the opening, caused by a wound, of an otherwise compact and impermeable surface. In the art of *kintsugi*, by contrast, the wounds are filled with something precious that becomes the glue that holds the various fragments together as if in an embrace. These scars are precious, because they bear traces of the expressive path by which a singularity has faced the crisis and put itself back together into a uniqueness.



FIGURE 1.1
Japanese water pot (*mizusashi*) recomposed
through the art of *kintsugi*
KINTSUGI BY TADAHIRO IKOMA.
PHOTOGRAPH BY GUIDO CUSINATO

Fontana's slashes represent the wounds that make gaps in the monotonous dimension of repetition, that is, the openings through which it is possible to be touched by the world and experience the unforeseen. For its part, a water pot reconstructed through the art of *kintsugi* represents the rebirth made possible by interweaving with another existence. The singularity does not re-elaborate the fragments of a crisis in a self-referential sense, but it allows "alien" and precious material that was not there before – "*kin*", i.e., gold – to act. This additional material, which puts the fragments of the crisis back together, symbolizes relations of care.

A singularity remains in contact with the world thanks to the openness of its wounds, and at the same time assumes an unmistakable and unique physiognomy thanks to the features of its scars. But these scars are made of gold, that is, of alterity: they are not openings that are then closed, but living signs of an interaction with the other. While the wounds of Fontana's paintings are precious because they make an opening, the golden scars are precious insofar as they preserve a trace of a contagion, that is, of an expressive path of rebirth in the encounter with the other. The singularity is both: a wound open to the world, and a memory of a path of rebirth in the encounter with the other.

1.4.9 *The Celebration of the Fleetingness of Beauty in Japanese Culture*

The art of *kintsugi* or *kintsukuroi* highlights the experience of a beauty perceived on the basis of the vulnerability and fragility that is typical of Japanese culture. The scar becomes aesthetic insofar as it bears witness to a severance, a fracture put back together through experience and contact with the world. In the art of *kintsugi*, falling, severance, and destruction become the starting point for the creation of something new and more beautiful, precisely as an expressive path that brings with it the traces of the auroral void.

It is interesting to note how the tendency in Western culture is to exalt the eternity of beauty, while Japanese culture emphasizes its fleetingness. In Japan, one of the most famous ways to enjoy beauty is *hanami*, which consists in admiring the beauty of trees blossoming in the spring, in particular the blossoms of cherry trees (*sakura*). What is admired in *hanami* is not only the shades and interplay of the colors and forms of the cherry blossoms, but also the fact that these blossoms are something that can be extinguished in the course of a night lit by the full moon, or with the arrival of wind or rain. In *hanami*, what is celebrated is the fragility of beauty, but at the same time one actively identifies with the act that led to the blossoming of that beauty. The enjoyment lies in seeing the overwhelming and exuberant force of a beauty that shines in the very imminence of the end. The imminent arrival of the wind and rain makes

This book returns to the question at the center of our existence, a question that the narcissistic culture in which we are immersed systematically tends to remove: “Why?” The underlying thesis is that the answer must not be sought in success or social recognition, but in a “fragment of truth”, hidden somewhere inside each of us, which reveals itself only if we detach ourselves from our ego and its certainties. It is not, therefore, a matter of finding yet another philosophical theory of the meaning of existence, but rather of shedding light on the conditions under which such meaning can emerge. The author shows us that the ultimate source of our existential orientation lies in the affective sphere, and that the current crisis of orientation is derived from the atrophy of the process of affective maturation on a large scale, and from a lack of knowledge and experience about which techniques are best to reactivate it. We are like glowworms that had once unlearned how to illuminate and have since begun to hover around the magic lantern of the ascetic ideal, already criticized by Nietzsche, and then around neon advertising signs. We are glowworms that have forgotten that we have within our own affective structure a precious source of orientation. The basic thesis is that this source of orientation can be reactivated through the care of desire and practices of emotional sharing.

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