Rosenstock-Huessy Before, During,and After Postmodernism[1]

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Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century the term "postmodernism" had virtually become almost a household word. The term refers to a loose ensemble of theorists and artists working across a range of disciplines spanning architecture, literary theory, music, the visual arts, philosophy, history, politics and several others provoked, what the literary critic Ihab Hassan called, "a number of related cultural tendencies, a constellation of values, a repertoire of procedures and attitudes."[2] The term, as Hassan's remark indicates, covers a loose array of methodologies including deconstructionism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, and new historicism. None of the traditional disciplines in the social sciences and humanities is untouched by the radical challenge mounted by postmodernism.

The philosophical roots of postmodernism do not lie in any one particular author, but rather to a re-appropriation and amalgamation of ideas and methods found, amongst others, in Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, and Heidegger by a generation responding to the cataclysms of the twentieth century. I do not know whether Rosenstock-Huessy had read any of the writings of that group of French theorists whose earlier works appeared toward the end of his life and who have since emerged (in spite of their disagreements) as the leading theorists of postmodernism: Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Baudrillard. Nor have I seen any reference to those precursors and inspirers of postmodernism who are closer in age to Rosenstock-Huessy: Blanchot, Bataille, Klossowski, Artaud, and Levinas. I am equally unaware if any of them have mentioned him. Nevertheless, in an essay, written by Rosenstock-Huessy in 1949 called "Liturgical Thinking" he spoke of "postmodern man." Although the term was not completely unknown then, it was not in wide circulation.[3] We, he said, counting himself among postmodern men, and in an insight that cannot help but remind the reader of Deleuze and Gutarri's *Anti-Oedipus*, "are analyzed as bundles of nerves.

Schizophrenia is rampant. We are torn and break down."[4] "Stripped to the bone, postmodern man finds atavistic fears, childish dreams, senile deficiencies, animal instincts."

As far as I know this is the only essay in which Rosenstock-Huessy uses the term "postmodern." More important, though, than the use of the term postmodern is the fact that Rosenstock-Huessy's thought shared some fundamental orientations which were also to be developed by postmodernism. Like the postmodernists, Rosenstock-Huessy does not take "man" as a unified subject, emphasizing instead the historical and plastic rather than a static timeless essence of "man." Like the postmodernists he is aware that the deployment of the term "man" has all too frequently been the means by which entire groups of people have been neglected or oppressed because they could be represented as less than human. Like postmodernists, he sees that Enlightenment progressivism and the ideologies of humanism have helped create forces of social oppression and mass destruction. Also like postmodernists, Rosenstock-Huessy sees the complicity of Western metaphysics, and its Platonic basis, in the horrors of Western civilization. And like the postmodernists, he fathoms the path that we have been set on since Nietzsche's declaration that God is dead means that we can no longer retreat back into any variants of Platonism.

The Anti-Idealism of Rosenstock-Huessy and Postmodernism

In *Out of Revolution*, published in 1938, Rosenstock-Huessy anticipates what Lyotard almost forty years later would express as the postmodern refusal to accept grand or meta-narratives in a world whose increasing economic homogeneity was matched by the resistance of its cultural heterogeneity. Rosenstock-Huessy writes that

> With a conscious economic organization of the whole earth, subconscious tribal organizations are needed to protect man's mind from commercialization and disintegration. The more our shrinking globe demands technical and economic co-operation, the more necessary it will prove to restore the balance by admitting the primitive archetypes of man's nature also.[5]

And:

> Economy will be universal, mythology regional. Every step in the direction of the organizing the world's economy will have to be bought off by a great number of tribal reactions.[6]

The similarity between postmodernist responses to globalization and Rosenstock-Huessy's predictions is indicative of deep underlying affinities between his methods

and that of postmodernists. This can be seen with greater clarity if we make a comparison of postmodernist themes and some of the central methodological posits of Rosenstock-Huessy.

In an enviably sharp analysis, Lawrence Cahoone argues that there are five dominant postmodern themes: four objects of criticism and its one dominant methodological posit.

> Postmodernism typically criticizes: presence or presentation (versus representation and construction), origin (versus phenomena), unity (versus plurality), and transcendence of norms (versus their immanence). It typically offers an analysis of phenomena through constitutive otherness.[7]

Cahoone's first point about the postmodern primacy of representation and construction over presence or presentation illustrates the deep indebtedness into Ferdinand de Saussure's emphasis upon the systemic order of signs which are constitutive of language. Saussure is not mentioned in any of Rosenstock-Huessy's major works, but like postmodernists he rejects the idea of thought apart from language, thus rejecting logical positivism and naturalistic empiricisms. When Cahoone reformulates Derrida's "[t]here is nothing outside the text" as "we can never say what is independent of all saying" he could well be summing up Rosenstock-Huessy, for whom the biblical "in the beginning was the word" is taken in its strictest, literal meaning.[8]

Secondly, the idea of the origin as bedrock or stable foundation is also perceived by Rosenstock-Huessy as a vestige of Platonism. The idea of origin as ultimate object of investigation carries with it the error of us seeking a mere object, itself bound up with another fallacy that singles out one mode of human orientation (the desire to know) as if it could exist independently from the rest of the flux of what we are. For Rosenstock-Huessy, because we are as much trajects (moved along by our past) and projects (pulled towards our future) as subjects and objects means that any thinking which takes the bipolarization of subject and object as steady certainties is wrong. Likewise postmodernism takes up from Heidegger the time-embedded self which is as much "thrown" as "projective", and not able to be captured as mere object or subject. For postmodernists, genealogical thinking involves a process of what Derrida calls trace and erasure, so that there is no final or ultimate imprint; the creative intention of

the subject cannot be peeled off from the objects of analysis, nor from the discursive modes in which he or she or the subject matter operate.

The laboratory is most definitely not the privileged site from which we can gain a method for reaching the truth of things, only for those things which can be meaningfully appropriated within the laboratory. Taking their cue from Husserl and Heidegger, postmodernists recognize that the natural sciences provide a specific (albeit often highly *useful*) construction of things, which are no more the things themselves than a poet's construction. When it comes to the human sciences, the natural sciences can provide very little guidance. The dream of the behavioral scientists, who until the revolt of postmodernism had been so triumphant in the human sciences throughout the twentieth century, is as much an illusion as the secure vantage point of the transcendental subject–not surprisingly given the common time of their emergence.[9] Foucault's attack upon the transcendental subjectivism that reaches from Descartes to Husserl in his"Foreword to the English Edition" of *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* is driven by concerns which Rosenstock-Huessy had written in his epilogue to *Out of Revolution*, entitled Farewell to Descartes, in which he also bids farewell to all transcendental subjectivisms.[10]

losely related to this, the postmodern reaction to the smothering certainty of unities and its variegated emphases upon difference (Deleuze), différance (Derrida), différend (Lyotard) is Rosenstock Huessy's critique of cause and effect thinking in favor of the uniqueness of the event (the same point, as part of a very different project is made by Heidegger in. his discussion of *Ereignis* which is a major impetus for postmodernism on difference). In the case of Rosenstock-Huessy, his discussion of uniqueness is most frequently made in connection with the irreducible power of the name. The name, he insists repeatedly, always carries more truth than the concept or idea. Ideas tend to swallow up differences, compressing a multiplicity of unique forces into a prefabricated mould of the mind. The danger that Rosenstock-Huessy constantly warns against is the transformation of living into dead speech, the encrustation of an act done in time into a concept that appears timeless. The point is powerfully made in his "Heraclitus to Parmenides" where he reenacts (he calls it a conjuration) Heraclitus' wrath at Parmenides for "scalping of names: 'being' is the scalp of divine acts and the political names. This scalp hangs dangling from your belt. To hell with your 'pronoun.' To hell with your pro-verb 'being.' Or we all shall find

ourselves in hell."[11] Or, to take another example, after running through the variables of race, people, family, church, class, status group, he says "There doesn't exist "man" in itself." [12] Yet, also like the postmodernists, Rosenstock-Huessy is as mistrustful of the individual as an adequate concept as any postmodernist. The closures of the mind (again the ideas) are not stable permanencies. The various associations we participate in, our communal bindings shape our circumstance, our vocabulary, our calling. We are always animated by, immersed in and activating processes.

In keeping with the rejection of stable closures and essences another fundamental overlap between Rosenstock-Huessy and postmodernism is the rejection of transcendent norms such as truth, beauty, rationality, and goodness. In the context of postmodernism, Cahoone writes that these are "no longer regarded as independent of the processes they serve to govern or judge, but are rather products of and immanent in those processes."[13] For Rosenstock-Huessy, as much as for Nietzsche, we are creators of norms. We are not governed by facts or truths or values which are simply out there (materialism) or located in the mind (idealism) or its operations (Kant's transcendental idealism). Our social needs and imperatives drive us to form new truths and new norms. Rosenstock-Huessy's and postmodernism's emphasis upon the multiform and creative character of language itself as opposed to ideal or material substances make the identification of absolute standards meaningless.

In the case of moral standards, Rosenstock-Huessy's *Out of Revolution* eschews the relevance of such terms when it comes to epoch making political acts which are born out of the hell of men's hate for an old hierarchy of good and evil and which nevertheless provide freedoms and blessings for later generations. He points out that the good is all too often the enemy of the better, and that

> [t]he category of necessity is beyond abstract good and evil….Our social grammar should be divided into one futuristic and one past. This hits the moralists hard. For their usual epithets of "good" and "evil", as applied to history and politics spring from a timeless, static mind which ignores the differences between past and future. The moralists and the creator live in different tenses. This is usually overlooked; yet if we mix the ethical with the political aspects of life we shall never be able to do justice to our own best actions.[14]

The four objects of criticism singled out by Cahoone really all boil down to one, and it is this one that explains the affinity between Rosenstock-Huessy and postmodernism: the complete rejection of idealism. It is a rejection of metaphysical idealism and all its subsequent dualisms which means a rejection of idealist morality, idealist epistemology, idealist aesthetics, and the privileging of philosophical language over non-philosophical language which underpins all the subsequent dualisms. The dualisms inherent to the major fields of philosophy can all be challenged by postmodernists because their stability depends upon their occupation of some transcendent or transcendental site (such as Plato's ideal world or Kant's cognitive faculties or Husserl's transcendental inter-subjectivism). But any such site is inevitably a construction of a sign system, and postmodernists are able set to work upon philosophical language and expose the *aporias* and elisions, the metaphors and poetic devices which enchant the reader into accepting centers and essences which neither exist in life nor in texts.

Postmodernists take their point of departure in their deconstruction of the authority of philosophical truth from Heidegger (himself continuing in Nietzschean tracks) who emphasizes that the truth disclosed through evocation (such as Van Gogh's painting of peasant shoes) cannot be dissolved into the denotative, the poetic truth cannot be subsumed under and confined to the metaphysical parameters which would have art be nothing more than its servant or illegitimate relative. Jacques Derrida has repeatedly shown how philosophy has not been able to escape the tropes of literature. Similarly the historian Hayden White has demonstrated how narrative types in history shape their subject matter.[15] Rosenstock-Huessy argued that analysis (based on the indicative mood) is but one mode of speech (or, if one were to use Wittgenstein's term appropriated by Lyotard, language game). Analysis simply cannot capture truths which become disclosed through epic (with its backward looking-ness), drama (with its forward-push) , or lyric (with its interior emphasis). Likewise, prose, poetry, legislation and prayer each address and express different needs and create different modes of association and, hence, different parts of the world around us.[16]

The fifth and final theme identified by Cahoone he calls constitutive otherness. That is, postmodernism concerns itself with the repressed and marginalized, that which is not privileged in a system, what is passed over in silence, as if it does not

exist, the absent. It is this idea which is at the basis of the fundamentally political orientation of postmodernism. Cahoone well sums up the moral and political orientation behind postmodernism:

> Every text is built upon some kind of exclusion or repression, hence it belies itself and, when read carefully, undermines its own message. Once we become aware of the constitutive otherness in the text, we see that the text itself, despite its own intentions, alerts us to the dependence of the privileged theme on the marginalized element. The repressed eventually return to haunt us. Social disenfranchisement, marginalization of sexual and racial groups, is the moral and political case of this pattern.[17]

Although the major political concerns of postmodernism tend to gravitate around the marginalizations of race, gender, ethnicity and class, the general emphasis upon the need to listen to voices previously silenced and making visible the features of the invisible, that is of taking and developing the perspective of the victims of the established hierarchy in the social production and distribution of power is identical to what Rosenstock-Huessy calls his metaethical and metanomical approach to social existence. In *Out of Revolution* he depicts the explosive effect that acts of repression and un-dealt with injustices have after incubating sometimes over several generations as in the revenge of St. Thomas More (the English Revolution), of John Huss (the German revolution), of the Huguenots (the French revolution), of the Decemberists (The Russian revolution). And in the *Soziologie* he talks of the price that will have to be paid for the burning of witches, a powerful injustice which has motivated the women's revolution. In a passage from *Speech and Reality* he provides a pithy account of the metanomical method which is at work in *Out of Revolution* and the *Soziologie*.

> My own direction of thought, probably, will have to be listed as the meta-ethical search for a synchronization of mutually exclusive social patterns of behaviour, as the "metanomics of the great society" which must contain contradictory ways of life. My grammar of assent, my grammatical organon, is devoted to the task of supplementing the statute law of any given society with the metanomics that explain and satisfy our enthusiasm for the synchronization of the distemporary, of old and young, black, brown and white, government and anarchy, primitive and refined. Highbrow and lowbrow, innocence and sophistication, all at peace in one human society.[18]

Likewise when Rosenstock-Huessy writes that the question constantly to be confronted is "how to balance local interest and the universal welfare of humanity?"[19] he is expressing the same motivation as the postmodern political project with its tacit though all too visible emphasis upon restoring justice, dignity, liberty, respect, and equality to those groups who have so often been silenced in the name of such norms. And when Rosenstock-Huessy adds "Man is but a brute when he does not struggle for both ends simultaneously. The dualism of liberty and particularity, on one side, and unity and universality, on the other side is what makes a man a man,"[20] he makes it clear that the challenge cannot be met by avoiding the complexity of our paradoxical needs. It may seem that the very mention of the words unity and universality is something suspect to postmodernists, but this is oversimplifying the situation: resistance must also be combined with solidarity. Postmodernism is built upon the tensions between difference and identity, resistance and solidarity and nihilism and justice, not by a Quixotic attempt to eliminate one side which through its privilege may serve to oppress, but which must be forced to confront its limits, repressions and exclusions.

The act of forcing the privileged to confront the hidden, unacknowledged components of privilege, that is to show that their privilege does not rest on the noble purity of timeless laws, but on the less noble suppressions and self-validating norms is postmodernism's way of destabilizing existing hierarchies. Postmodernism gets its potency and efficacy from within a liberal-democratic society whose validation depends upon the reasons which are manufactured, upheld and circulated in the various sites of social and political authority (the courts, the parliament, the universities, the schools, the media). Postmodernists have learnt their lesson from Gramsci and the Frankfurt School's critique of capitalism–that the relationships of domination within capitalist society depend upon civil society and the cultural constructions which hold sway there. Hence postmodernists see themselves as intervening to disrupt the flow of circulating truths and in that disruption simultaneously enforcing a potentially more nihilistic and more just set of occasions.

It is not going too far to say that the tension between justice and nihilism is one of the most important of postmodernist political deviations from liberalism and Marxist-Leninism-Stalinism, both of which are generally constructed by postmodernists as sharing with each other, as well as with fascism, the metaphysical baggage and

miseries of modernism. From the traditional metaphysical perspective, and hence also from the perspective of the stabilizing forces wanting to preserve the purity of the party (communism), of race and the people (Nazism) and of the rule of law and parliamentary democracy (liberalism), postmodernism is nihilistic and thus incapable of making any genuine contribution to a more moral political order. Certainly the postmodern emphasis upon the play of the sign and the disruption of presence (Derrida)[21], of its dissimulation, of its glorification of simulacra (Deleuze and Baudrillard) is nihilistic from such vantage points. But postmodernist nihilism creates doubt and instability where there are suffocating stabilities based on indubitable Truths. In fidelity to Nietzsche here, they are able to extract a positive from nihilism that they see as more liberating than the lifeless, nay deadening truths of idealism. Gianni Vattimo, in his *End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* succinctly expresses the point when he writes: "An accomplished nihilism, like the Heideggerian *Ab-grund*, calls us to a fictionalized experience of reality which is also our only possibility of freedom."[22] On the other hand, as if to irritate their critics who want them to admit that they defy the law of contradiction and the moral order, they are almost to man and woman on the political left. They are, at least in theory, committed to a fairer and freer, a more just social order, even though they have abandoned faith in the day of its emergence, and instead preach perpetual resistance to the injustice of established hierarchies. Thus Lyotard: "That is the point of my instructive story: justice in a godless society"[23] And Derrida: "A deconstructive thinking, the one that matters to me here, has always pointed out the irreducibility of affirmation and therefore of the promise. As well as the undeconstructibility of a certain kind of justice [disassociated here from law]."[24] The victims are "of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any other forms of totalitarianism."[25]

The last statement by Derrida points to a need to understand the injustices of the present on a planetary scale. It was just such a scale that Rosenstock-Huessy insisted had to be confronted after the wars of the twentieth century.

> The sufferings of Nanking are no slighter than those of Kiev or Rotterdam. Hiroshima is as terrible as London and Dresden. The sufferings of millions of splendid Sikhs is every bit as inexcusable as that of the Silesians.

> Thus he who wants to determine our point in time must see it on a planetary scale and not only think like a depressed European about his little Pan-Europa. The point in time can in fact only be known from the spirit. That is, it can only be known looking backwards from the word having become spirit, but also looking forwards from our solidarity with those who have suffered, with those destroyed by an incomplete order,
>
> Someone who can pick out the Germans who have been driven Eastwards from the hundreds of millions of homeless people may well do that. But the time can say nothing to him, because he is not able to perceive the diameter of the circle of the suffering, he does not know how to measure it. [26]

The final major affinity between Rosenstock-Huessy and postmodernism I wish to mention briefly concerns their respective appropriations of the ideas of those thinkers who had done so much to leave idealism in tatters and whose ideas have revolutionized how men and women in the twentieth and twenty-first century think.

> These four names denied the achievement of the family (Freud), classes (Marx), history (Nietzsche), of man generally (Darwin). Darwin set out the ground rules of becoming prior to the emergence of humanity. Thus human history became an appendix to natural history. Freud uprooted the rules of chastity of the family and with that destroyed the tribal phase. Nietzsche did away with the achievement of Israel when he, like the Pharonic priests of the stars, preached the eternal return; and Karl Marx annihilated property right and the accumulation of wealth, because he annihilated classes and with that, without seeking it, our native roots.[27]

Yet for all their destruction of past stabilities, Rosenstock-Huessy also recognizes that they are "fruitful."[28] While Freud saw the difference between domestic tradition and the disappearing family-ties, he also recognized the need to bury the past; Nietzsche saw that the promise of the coming world wars was a promise of the future; Marx that conflict provides the key to understand the present;[29] and Darwin's's naturalism further assisted in the break down of idealism's dualisms of "good and evil by emphasizing the inherent necessity of qualitative change."[30]

Rosenstock-Huessy's reading of these four thinkers (calling them "disangelists" in order to emphasize their destructive achievements) eschews an essentialist and moralist reading of their work. He is much more interested in the potency that their ideas continue to exercise, in what they awake and inspire in those suffocating under degenerate institutions and inhibiting social practices. Likewise postmodernists are

not in the least bit interested in slavishly adhering to ideas which Marx, Nietzsche, Freud , or Heidegger[31] (he more than Darwin is a major precursor) had about politics or society. They do not treat a text as if there is one literal interpretation they have to find: they celebrate what they can use, thus bringing together a former Nazi (Heidegger) whose Nazism they unequivocally reject, a radical aristocrat (Nietzsche) who hated all the political positions which anticipate postmodern politics (socialists, democrats, feminists and anarchists), and a communist (Marx) amongst whose spawn are the Stalinists who would coldly eliminate postmodernists. What has happened, of course, is that postmodernists have appropriated Nietzsche's (anti-)metaphysics of will-to-power, and followed Nietzsche in an artistic affirmation of the play of life. And more than any of the others, it is the huge influence of Nietzsche that is the most important common source of inspiration to postmodernists and Rosenstock-Huessy. On this point, mention should also be made of the decisive importance for Nietzsche's *gay science* upon Foucault and Rosenstock-Huessy for their work.[32] Like Rosenstock-Huessy, postmodernists have dropped Nietzsche's political elitism, as did that earlier generation of French anti-fascists readers of Nietzsche like Bataille and Klossowski (and when confronted by fascism how could they not?). Postmodernists have retained Marx's identification of capitalism as a social form built upon the relationships of domination and his desire to achieve a society not based upon domination and alienation, though communism as such is not an issue, but perpetual resistance is. From Freud they are as interested in the unconscious as much as the conscious, and, similarly to Marx, the repressive character of the family and society in general, but they generally reject psychoanalysis and much of Freud's own theory (*Anti-Oedipus*, being the title of one of the seminal postmodern works of philosophy.)

As for the other major influence upon postmodernism, Heidegger, there is important common ground between him and Rosenstock-Huessy: Heidegger's emphasis upon temporality and language and his deconstruction of idealism and ancient and modern metaphysics is, as I have suggested above, similar to major concerns of Rosenstock-Huessy. But Rosenstock-Huessy could not forgive Heidegger (nor Carl Schmitt whom had been his friend) for his Nazism. (He called both Nazi scum.) Nor could he abide by Heidegger wanting to re-establish the concept of Being as an adequate launching pad for the future (and generally postmodernists have also not followed Heidegger on this.) As much as Heidegger's deployment of Being is part

of his attack upon idealism (and scientism) and the technological (subject-object) metaphysics of modernity which he sees as resulting from the primacy of beings over Being. It is also an affirmation of the primacy of Greek thinking itself. Greek, says Heidegger is the only language, apart from German, which is capable of speaking philosophically. Heidegger is Greco-centric. Rosenstock-Huessy, in a move, that fits the postmodern rejection of Euro-centrism far more than Heidegger, is every bit as open to tribal thinking as it is to Egyptian and Near Eastern, Buddhist and Taoist thinking as it is to Greek (both in its philosophical and poetic modes) and Jewish thinking. But unlike postmodernists, Rosenstock-Huessy does not just invoke non-Western thought, his conception of the West is fundamentally based upon the living presence within the West of social forms usually conceived of as the other of Euro-centrism.

What Christianity Means for Rosenstock-Huessy and Why He's Not a Postmodernist.

While I have drawn attention to what Rosenstock-Huessy and postmodernism have in common, Rosenstock-Huessy was no postmodernist, even though I believe that those who share postmodernism's critiques of prevailing orthodoxies may have much to learn from him. Rosenstock-Huessy was driven by way of life which existed long before them, which has still existed during their reign, and which he saw has still having a powerful contribution to make to the future. He was, of course, as he insisted a Christian thinker. While it may be possible to be a postmodernist and a Christian, none of the leading postmodernists are Christians. In so far as postmodernists take religious discourses at all seriously, they tend to be more sympathetic to either pagan or Jewish ideas.[33] Lyotard specifically finds allies in paganism. He writes that "pagans never ask whether a narrative conforms to its object; they know that references are organized by words, and that the gods do not guarantee them because their word is no more to be trusted than the word of a man," thus signaling that the polymorphous nature of postmodernism is a further expression of paganism in opposition to the uniformity and universality of the message of Christianity.[34] In contrast to Lyotard, Jacques Derrida's messianic reading of justice could fairly be construed as faithful secularization of his Jewish heritage.

But saying that Rosenstock-Huessy is a Christian does not easily assist those who understand the Christian through philosophy, which in modern times is primarily

through either Hegel or Kierkegaard, the two last great philosophers of Christendom and Christianity respectively. Where Hegel is institutional, Rosenstock-Huessy is existential; and where Kierkegaard's existentialism is individualist and anti-institutionalist, Rosenstock-Huessy is institutionalist, in general, and liturgical, in particular, but not Hegelian. For he is no less open to the exigencies, perturbations and outbreaks than the totalizing forms of integration. Whereas Hegel salvages the rationality of Christianity by seeing it as a preliminary form for expressing symbolically what philosophy can express more accurately through concepts (the dialectical development of freedom encapsulated by Hegel himself), Rosenstock-Huessy reveres Christianity as much for its resistance, for its vigor and irrationalism, the blood shed by its martyrs, and the absurdity of its faith, hope and love in a future and way of life that will take us beyond the world of warring nation states that completes the Hegelian system. Yet whereas Kierkegaard loves Christ at the expense of Christendom, Rosenstock-Huessy refuses such a separation.

It is the potency of Christendom, its explosive and its creative components, its regenerative tensions that he loves. Not interpreting Christianity as Nietzsche did, that is as a species of idealism (Christianity, says Nietzsche is "Platonism for 'the people'")[35] and most most-postmodernists do (as the suffocating meta-narrative underpinning the arrogance of the West), Rosenstock-Huessy reads Nietzsche's donning of the role of the anti-Christ as a Christ like act in a time of impending world catastrophe. That catastrophe is propelled by the still unsatisfied cries of the dead revolutionaries going back at least until the first of all total revolutions, the papal revolution under Gregory VII, which itself is, in no small part, the response to the voices of "the first universal democracy…of sinners", All Souls Day.[36] The great revolutions of the last millennia are, for Rosenstock-Huessy, the symptoms and signs of God's providence and Christ's continuing active presence on the earth. Metanomics, says Rosenstock-Huessy in *Speech and Reality*, "might be interpreted as the search for the omnipresence of God in the most contradictory patterns of human society."[37]

It is not surprising that what Rosenstock-Huessy sees as Christian will not be found in the works of most Christian philosophers and theologians (Rosenstock-Huessy tended to think of Christian philosophers and theologians as oxymorons). Take the case of the philosopher and student of Heidegger, Karl Löwith, who knew

and corresponded with Rosenstock-Huessy. He complained in his review of Rosenstock-Huessy's *The Christian Future: Or the Modern Mind Outrun* that Rosenstock-Huessy was not a Christian, and that his real concern

> throughout his book is the future of our Western (Christian) culture and the creation of new communities, but not the original crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the imitation of his life…Thus the theological notions of the cross, last judgment and resurrection are subservient to a philosophy of life which confuse its own 'creative' designs and ambition with the transforming power of faith in Jesus Christ.[38]

Löwith sees Rosenstock-Huessy's version of Christianity as pagan and secular, an evaporization of Christianity that treats crucial Christian terms as metaphors which enable Rosenstock-Huessy to elaborate on the *Die and Become* of Goethe. Löwith is right about the common spirit shared by Goethe and Rosenstock-Huessy. Both are highly energistic or vitalistic thinkers who stand in stark contradiction to philosophies that are more rooted in faith in reason and moral certainties. Most philosophical thinking seeks to find repose from the chaos of the world by laying down the laws of reason that if complied with should (but repeatedly fail to) bring peace either to the world, or, failing that, to oneself. (*The Consolation of Philosophy* is a peculiarly apt title of the meaning of the remedy/ poison [*pharmakon*, as Derrida has noted in a different context] of philosophy by Boethius.)[39] Rosenstock-Huessy, on the other hand, is a thinker of storm, finding in catastrophe, suffering, and *sacrifice*, that is in the states of agony and despair that are compressed into the symbol of the cross the inescapable conditions of life and the source of our greatest creations.

There is also some truth (but only some) in Löwith's complaint about secularization. In his *Lectures on Comparative Religion*, Rosenstock-Huessy states:

> Christianity is a strange thing. It is not a religion. But it is an attempt to put all the religions in their place. Therefore it takes a new shape every generation and every century. Christ did not come to found a religion. That's the…content of the Letter to the Hebrews…Jesus is a secular man. That's very important. Even the pope has to celebrate, gentlemen, the service of the secular man. The priests of our era…have to recognize that the founder was not a priest. Very important. He was the complete man who could alternately be called our high priest, our sacrifice, our king, our prophet, our teacher, our head. Because the complete man…can decide…when to become a priest. And

> when to become a legislator, and when to become a leader, and when to become a teacher.

Christianity is unlike any other of the world's religions in that it absorbs and rejuvenates the truths that they contain. It is this sense of complete integration of energy, which for Rosenstock-Huessy is another way of saying the integration of the times that is at the heart of Christianity's achievement. It is impossible in the short space of a paper to examine in any detail Rosenstock-Huessy's interpretation of Christianity and its achievements. For his entire corpus is but one long meditation on just that. Here it must suffice to simply state some of major claims.

One is that it integrates the major social formations and hence the ways of speech and life that are integral to them: the formations of tribal life (drawing on various examples from native American Indians and his study of ethnography and anthropology);imperial life (especially, but not exclusively, Egypt and Rome), the people of the desert awaiting the Messiah (the Israelites), and of the city-states (the Greeks).[40] In the *Fruit of Lips* he puts it schematically and succinctly:

> When all this had been said, when the Sioux had spoken and the Chinese, the Greek and the Jew, one world came to an end. This was and is the complete cycle of antiquity"
>
> Listeners to the spirits of the dead created Ritual.
>
> Listeners to the skyworld and the cosmic universe built the temples,
>
> Listeners to laws and cities already achieved became poets and artists [elsewhere he emphasizes the distinctiveness of the philosophical whose seeds are sown by poetry].
>
> Listeners to the future became prophets.
>
> These four phases of speech were unified and superseded in Jesus. And because of this action, he is called Christ. Christ is the fruit of lips of antiquity.[41]

And:

> Jesus is the heir of antiquity. He filled and fulfilled the four "listening posts of
>
> > Child of the ancestors in tribes,
> >
> > Child of the times in empires,

Child of nature in Greece

Child of revolution in Israel.[42]

Secondly, Christianity is the religion which takes the side of the victims, that activates what other social formations have excluded and repressed, have left un-activated except to satiate the needs and desires of their masters, and then to die.[43] Again, from the *Fruit of Lips*: Jesus "by being the voluntary victim at the feast, he becomes the first victim in the world who can speak. Nobody has ever spoken in this role. But victims, though mute were essential." [44] And: "In the mass, the first victim invites the others, the partakers, of the service in which they themselves are the offerings."[45]

Thirdly, Christianity balances the uniqueness of each person's calling, with the uniqueness of each social grouping and set of roles with the hope in a common peace in which each brings their unique gifts to the banquet. Unlike philosophy which must emphasize one capacity above all others, our capacity to know, and one type, the philosopher, it is polymorphous, polyphonic and polychronic. Yet again from the *Fruit of Lips*:

> Outside the Christian era, we are particularized into the shabby half-ness of one sex, one generation, one place, one class, one intelligence, one individual separated-ness. Inside the Christian era, every hearer of the word who links up with one single underdog, any one team composed of speaker and listener, of battered victim and baptized good Samaritan, together makes epoch.[46]

And:

> [I]f he says that we all together are the Son who shall become as divine as the Father, he will find inside this history his own line which just he and he alone is asked to speak. The We who shall be who they shall be, do not consist of dumb animals. These 'We' cannot contain anybody who remains just anybody. Everybody must enter inside and into the 'we' in his appointed hour, in his power of becoming somebody, this definite person.[47]

Fourthly, Christianity identifies and builds itself upon the three greatest future providing capacities: faith, hope and love. What separates Rosenstock-Huessy's *Soziologie* from other major sociological works of the last century was his examination of the dynamic social formative forces of these great powers which are the soul of Christian speech and act when they are directed at God and neighbor, "Thy

kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven." Christianity articulates and submits to these greatest creative powers, thus possessing a dynamism that is unique. To be sure it is not that these forces could be absent or altogether unnoticed in the other great religions of the world or spheres of life, but in Christianity they are elevated to a place of incontestable importance and made concrete through the life of Christ. This is another major divide between Christianity and philosophy. The Greek philosophers sought virtue, but their thought lacked the breadth and dynamism to make of those virtues more than virtues. Likewise, philosophy does contain love within its practice, but that love is subordinate to wisdom.[48] In the opening to *Out of Revolution* Rosenstock-Huessy writes: " The heart of man either falls in love with somebody or something, or it falls ill. It can never go unoccupied. And the great question is what is to be loved or hated next, whenever an old love or fear has lost its hold."[49] And, even more succinctly, "lack of love is behind all serious conflict."[50] Marx and Nietzsche are right about conflict and struggle as inherent to the real, but love (and here Rosenstock-Huessy shows that Feuerbach is more astute than Marx)[51] is more fundamental than specific groupings (class in Marx or master/ slave types in Nietzsche) or biological drives (also Nietzsche and Darwin). Our expansions (hopes, faith and loves) and contractions (our despair, faithlessness, and hopelessness) which in turn leads to hateful outbreaks and then reintegrations are what Rosenstock-Huessy traces in *Out of Revolution*.

For Rosenstock-Huessy, twice in the twentieth century our passions have involved us in wars of planetary proportions. Yet the dream of the philosophers who helped shape the modern world was that with the help of science we would be free and live in peace. It has not happened. We moderns and postmoderns have created a world of great technical efficacy capable of improving our material conditions, but there is still spiritual hunger, and great cries of injustice and suffering. Rosenstock-Huessy does not see our social tasks as completed when the most efficient economic form has been established. That cannot be completed, for Rosenstock-Huessy, until we have integrated our entire past within us, until we have redeemed the times and the multiplicity of voices and lives that have constituted the human story. For Rosenstock-Huessy our "world making" is pushed by the voices of the past as well as those aspirations for the future which will contribute to a genuine peace and flourishing of our powers.

In this respect, Rosenstock-Huessy sees the Renaissance dream which we have actualized as one-sided and unsustainable. Its one-sided-ness comes from part of its very success. Its radical break with the past enabled it to engage with nature's secrets on a scale heretofore all but unimaginable. But the price it paid was that it did not solve the all-too-human problems which preceded it. The men of the Enlightenment who continued on the trajectory of their Renaissance forefathers believed that once free of superstition those problems would essentially be solved. What the twentieth century taught was the tremendous extent of the species' capacity to dream up new superstitions. Just as Dostoevsky had envisaged that the idea of the man-god would create an actuality of murder and mayhem on a grand social scale, the twentieth century saw that the void created by the dead God facilitated the transformation of men like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Mao Tse-Tung et. al. into ravishing gods far more hungry for human sacrifice than any Aztec gods.

The Renaissance's success was in large part due to the immersion of man and everything else into nature. Nature, as separate from God, was the gauge of truth. One could even speak of God's "nature." What was previously God's creature (that is a living soul called by God) became just one of an infinite number of mere mechanical forces. Since the Renaissance, says Rosenstock-Huessy, we have simplified speech, homogenized time, eliminated shame (the right time for the right knowledge for the right act is now anybody has the right to know anything).[52] As a totality of laws (Kant's definition of nature), nature makes the dead and the living equivalent; life is merely epi-phenomenal. We are unable to listen to the dead of past eons to the extent that we take the speech that deals with dead things as appropriate for judging the loves and lessons of the past, in so far (the Enlightenment's contribution) as we have true speech that is scientifically or methodologically sanctioned and mere art or superstition. The transformation of history into a science brought with it the danger of reducing the loves and hates of our ancestors to what the scientist grasped. The scientist, though, has been limited by a vocabulary which itself has been based upon the division between the more truthful and morally progressives moderns and the superstitious ancients.

Perhaps nowhere is this inaudibility, inattentiveness and inarticulacy more perilous that in our loss of the word gods as a term of current parlance. Over and over again Rosenstock-Huessy reminds us that what consumes us, what we serve is our

god, and the pattern of those services is our religion. Moreover, not understanding gods, we have little chance of taking seriously the name God as the creator of creatures who provides a redeemer, that is a soul who opened up a way of life which shows how to redeem the times, how, through forgiveness, to reintegrate seemingly expended fruitless, destructive acts (our sins and mistakes) into the future. For Rosenstock-Huessy, God is dead because our use of language is so paltry. In so far as the G-O-D of idealism has been killed, Rosenstock-Huessy joins in the celebration, but where that GOD is taken to be what the peoples of the pre-modern world took and still take as God or the gods then we perform a great injustice, and pay the price through our own disorientation and despair.

Of course, the repressed symbols and names flood our popular culture–there talk and song and visions of gods and devils and all sorts of mythical forces abound. But talk of the gods is "only metaphorical", only symbolic. Yet, for all that, things which we sacrifice ourselves to do indeed have us in their grasp, and in a way that is far more like the possession of a living power than a mere lack of control or will on our part, let alone a cluster of mechanical forces. We literally do not have an adequate way to confront these powers because we no longer address them by genuinely meaningful names. In this respect, the polytheism of paganism is a far richer and a far more real depiction of life and our predicaments (even if that speech functions in a more technologically simple world) than is disclosed to us through our more limited speech. No wonder so many of us are mad in modernity, we are overpowered by forces which hide behind names as untruthful as most advertisements are about what brings us happiness.

For Rosenstock-Huessy we can only begin to understand the meaning of God, and hence our own ancestry, by being inducted into the animistic and polytheistic world which historically precedes monotheism. To the extent that any path can lead us out of our myopic vocabulary, it is a blessing. Lyotard's celebration of the pagan, not to mention the renaissance within popular culture of the pagan is a welcome step in the right direction. For it makes us traverse the times, makes us aware of the living speech of dead generations again.

When Rosenstock-Huessy speaks of the one living God, he is speaking of that power that was supreme in its integration of all the living forces that polytheistic cultures had left in dispersion and conflict. But, of course, the dispersal and conflict is

real. So is the tendency to reintegrate what we have dispersed. That's why within poly-theistic traditions there are always monotheistic tendencies. Likewise within monotheistic traditions (including Christianity) there are poly-morphic and diverse supra-human features and creatures. But the path was set with Judaism of historical direction and, above all, that means intergenerational integration of energies, something essential to the tribes, but limited by generational memory, until writing enabled the species to store up experience and hence time in names and words. (Derrida's speech/ writing reversal is, whether intended or not, inevitably an elevation of the religion of the Book.)

When, then, Rosenstock-Huessy speaks of Christianity, he is speaking of that way of life that is responsive to the power of powers, and that enables a genuine communion of the generations, a communion of *all* past, present and future generations in subordination to that power–God. Christianity not only inherited the Jewish mission of the word over time, but made the word becoming flesh its task. The word becoming flesh has involved the creation of the church. Again, it is essential to grasp that Rosenstock-Huessy has no illusions about the moral goodness of the church as an institution. Its achievement was the integration of powers over time and in space. Its constant purgations and explosions have been part of the word becoming flesh. Built upon Christ's words and deeds, resting on the back of a liar and weakling and the vision and labors of a former murderer, it was the creation of outcasts who created a future dedicated to universal salvation out of their faith, hope and love in Jesus Christ's words and deeds. At no point in its history was it pure: only one man was God, no one else. But this is no criticism, this is part of its aspiration of its members to become Christ-like. Its decadence, its repression, its evil, its compromises with the world and worldliness also stood in tension with the words and deeds of Christ. Those words were so built into the process of the church's actuality that it would be constantly rejuvenated by the faithful who regularly and often violently felt its distance from the words which spoke it into existence.

Central to Rosenstock-Huessy's faith and thought are his arguments developed over a life-time that the formation of nation states and our own planetary consciousness has been part of the word becoming flesh. That process, for Rosenstock-Huessy, is still occurring, even though it may look to the myopic eye of the modern noticing the diminishing number of churchgoers and churches in the

industrial world as if its mission had ceased. Rosenstock-Huessy himself is aware of that, but that is not the point. It is not a question of saving the church. As he says in *The Christian Future*:"'saving' Christianity is un-necessary, undesirable, impossible, because it is anti-Christian. Christianity says that he who tries to save his soul shall lose it. Our supreme need is not to save what we smugly presume to have, but to revive what we have almost lost."[53] This is an all-important point that overhangs Rosenstock's work: we live in an era where Christian fruits are everywhere, but most people do not know it. The fruits of Christianity come from lips. That is, the potency of Christianity is in its speech, a speech that is time activating, and in modern times where its speech is often unnoticed, it is incubating, biding its time, waiting to be heard.

Conclusion

Although Rosenstock-Huessy himself attended church, his thought is not a call to go back to church. But it is a call to understand history as a universal story and the future as a continuing story of faith, hope and love. The church keeps alive a particular body of time and that is its fruit. But all of our institutions are bodies of time, and, he argues that their potent combination arose on Christian soil for good reason. Yet as the world becomes ever more forced to combine its resources to stave off wars potentially more perilous than the last one, its hope lies in what since the first World has become manifestly necessary: the creation of a common, global body of interests, a common faith in the future peace which respects the diversity and preserves the wonder of a multiplicity of life-ways. The religions of the world, as practices containing the stories, myths, imperatives and sustenance for social groups are all essential to that process. This cannot be achieved by denying or suppressing their past or present failures, anymore than the Christina churches can continue to have relevance if they not accept responsibilities for their failures. On the other hand, nor can it be achieved if men and women do not understand the times which have brought them to where they are and offer all that variety of experience to assist them in the future.

From Rosenstock-Huessy's vantage point, what postmodernism is doing is assisting in the attack upon the deadly routine speech of post-Renaissance men and women, and thereby helping prepare future generations to hear what for many has

long been inaudible. The nihilist, says Rosenstock-Huessy in the second volume of *Soziologie* "has fallen victim to the point in time in which a man (*Mensch*) must be a nihilist."[54] The nihilist is the modern conscience of the present, being "free from past judgment and not forced into the future" the nihilist insists on his own illusion, delusion or self-will."[55] The major limitation of postmodernism is all too visible to somebody who is not one: in spite of its critique of philosophy and the West, it remains anchored to them in order to perpetuate its critique. It deconstructs leaving construction to others. Not surprisingly, most of its adherents (unlike most of the earlier thinkers who inspired them) work within the university–an institution which was conceived by the Greeks, but, in the form that we now know, resurrected on Christian soil. It may well be that we are in the process, unbeknown yet how, of creating new institutions more suitable for storing and transmitting the energy of people of our times into the future. If we are, then Rosenstock-Huessy provides a way of thinking more helpful for the future because he sees with such clarity how the past and our passions and institutions make it.

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[2] Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism" in *A Postmodern Reader*, (eds) Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, New York: State University of New York Press.

[3] For a brief history of postmodernism see Lawrence Cahoone "Introduction" to Fro*m Modernism to Postmodernism*, Blackwell, 1966 pp. 3–10.

[4]"Liturgical Thinking" in Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Rosenstock-Huessy Papers, Volume 1*, Norwich, Argo, 1981), p. 1 of "Liturgical Thinking."

[5] *Out of Revolution: Autobiography of Western Man*, Norwich Vt.: Argo, 1969 [1938], p. 715.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 718.

[7] *Op. cit*., Cahoone, p. 14.

[8] To be sure, Derrida makes much of the speech/ writing disjunction which is not a theme developed by Rosenstock-Huessy.

[9] Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul* is the first work of behavioral psychology.

[10] Foucault's break with Husserl does not concern the latter's phenomenological attack upon the over-extension of the natural sciences, but Husserl's asocial,ainstitutional transcendental subject.

[11] Eugen Rosentock-Huessy, *I am an Impure Thinker*,Norwich, Vt.: Argo, 1970, introduction by W.H. Auden, p. 90.

[12] Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Soziologie, Bd. 1: Die Übermacht der Räume*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1956, p.273.

[13] *Op. cit*., Cahoone, p. 15.

[14] *Out of Revolution*, p. 720.

[15] See e.g. his *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.
[16] See for example "Uni-versity of Logic, Language, Literature" in *Speech and Reality*.
[17] Cahoone, p. 17.
[18] *Speech and Reality*, p. 41.
[19] *Out of Revolution,* p. 496.
[20] *Out of Revolution*, p. 497
[21]See "Structure, Sign and Play" in *Writing and Difference,* tr. and intro. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 1978, p. 292.
[22] Gianni Vattimo, *End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* , tr. and intro. John Snyder, Cambridge: Polity, 1988, p. 29.
[23] "Lessons in Paganism", in *The Lyotard Reader*,ed. Andrew Benjamin, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) p. 123.
[24] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx, The State of Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* tr. Peggy Kamuf, intro. Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, London: Routledge, 1994, p. 90.
[25] *Specters of M*arx, p. xix.
[26] *Soziologie, Bd. 2 Die Vollzahl der Zeiten*, p. 734.
[27] *Soziologie Bd.. 2*, p. 258.
[28] *Soziologie, Bd. 2*, p. 16.
[29] *Ibid*., pp.17–18.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[31] The formula for Foucault by Luc Ferry, and Alain Renaut is Marx+ Nietzsche + Heidegger in *French Philosophy of the Sixties : An Essay on Antihumanism* translated by Mary H.S. Cattani, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.
[32] In *Out of Revolution*, p. 757, Rosenstock-Huessy indicates that his metanomics is the same as Nietzsche's gay science. Foucault likewise indicates that his method derives from Nietzsche, in general and the gay science in particular. See esp. "The Will to Knowledge" in Vol 1 of *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault (1954–1983*), (ed) Paul Rabinow, New York: New Press, 1994, and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in Vol. 2.
[33] Much of the Frankfurt school's criticism of capitalism finds an echo in postmodernism. Amongst them, Ernst Bloch finds inspiration in Christianity. But he is an exception.
[34] J.F. Lyotard "Lessons in Paganism," p. 137.
[35] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, tr.R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 1973, p. 32.
[36] *See Out of Revolution*, pp. 506–515. Nietzsche's published writings, especially his *Soziologie* are littered with references to Nietzsche, but his unpublished writings of 1942 and 1944 are also extremely illuminating. See his "Friedrich Nietzsche's Function in the Church and the Crisis of Theology and Philosophy", "Nietzscheana" and "Nietzsche's Untimeliness", all on reel 7 (items 368, 369, 370) and "Nietzsche's Masks" (reel 7, 368) of his microfilmed work. All who are interested in Rosenstock-Huessy owe a huge debt to the indefatigable labors of Lise van der Molen for his compilation and chronological bibliography and guide to the microfilmed work.
[37] *Speech and Reality*, p. 42.
[38] *Journal of Church History*, XV, September 1946, p. 249.
[39] And more recently, the popular *The Consolations of Philosophy* by Alain de Botton, Viking.
[40] The respective life and speech ways are examined in detail in the second volume of the *Soziologie* and numerous other places, including his Lectures on Universal History.
[41] *Fruit of Lips*, ed. Marion Battles, Pittsburgh, Pennyslvania: Pickwick, 1978, pp. 2–3.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 4.
[43] It is a telling point that in the entire corpus of Plato slaves are nameless, even in the *Meno* where a slave-boy assists Socrates by answering a geometry problem.
[44] *Ibid*., p. 66.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 70.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 129.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 131.
[48] In his L*ectures on Greek Philosophy of 1956* (19: 21), , © Hans Huessy, 1991, Rosenstock-Huessy singles out Plato's *Symposium* as his greatest moment, the moment where Plato lets all have their own voice even at the expense of his own system.
[49] *Out of Revolution*, p. 4.
[50] *The Christian Future Or the Modern Mind Outrun*, New York: Harper and Row, 155.

[51] Feuerbach writes in his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* (paragraph 35: "The new philosophy bases itself on *the truth of love*." Rosenstock-Huessy directly links his grammatical thinking to the pioneering of Feuerbach, adding "he was misunderstood by his contemporaries, especially by Karl Marx." *Speech and Reality*, 9.
[52] This is the central argument of "Liturgical Thinking", *op. cit*.
[53] *The Christian Future*, p. 61.
[54] *Soziologie*, Bd. 2, p. 745.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 746.