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Introduction

Who Do You Speak From?

Richard Kearney and Matthew Clemente

I

Anatheism begins with the question that Paul Ricoeur posed to his students at the start of each new semester: *d'où parlez-vous?* Where do you speak from? To return to this question now, at the start of this new work, seems fitting for a number of reasons. First, because this volume is itself a return to the work begun with *Anatheism* (2011)¹ and continued with *Reimagining the Sacred* (2016)—a repetition forward that seeks to both reexamine and further develop the anatheist proposal.² Second, because the contributors to this volume speak from unique and varied perspectives—as philosophers, artists, authors, musicians, poets, pastors, and theologians. Third, because art speaks. Every work of art is an attempt to communicate something from someone to someone. Each work speaks from one image-making animal to another. And finally because, if one is to consider the possibility of returning to God in and through art, one must first attempt to answer the question: *where does the artist speak from?*

So where do artists speak from? Who or what calls them to speak? Certainly each individual artist will have his or her own experiences and each new work of art will be born out of the utterly unrepeatable life of the one who composes it. But, in art, in the act of making (*poiesis*), we find something “more” than a sum of images and words. We find something greater, an inexplicable extra that transcends individual lives while remaining rooted within them. Artists often speak of feeling as though they are called to compose—as if they are giving themselves over to something deeper, higher, stranger. Their works are called into being, inspired by some inexpressible otherness, and they themselves are the vessels through which that mysterious surplus enters the world.

This quasi-mystical experience of making a work of art has been the subject of poems and plays, paintings and philosophies. Plato likened the poets of his time to “seers and prophets” (*Apology* 22c) and claimed that their works were divinely inspired (*Ion* 534c). He said that they spoke as if spoken through, as if caught up in some rapture, possessed by some demon, and overcome by a “divine madness” (*Phaedrus* 265b). This understanding of artistic invention as a godly endeavor was shared by “the divine” Homer who mentions the Muses as a source of poetic inspiration and by Hesiod who tells us that “it is from the Muses, and from Apollo . . . that there are men on earth who are poets” (*Theogony*, 94). From the time of the Greeks, then, *poiesis* has been understood as a making that makes manifest the divine. And this is paralleled in the Biblical stories of Genesis and Proverbs where Wisdom plays with the Lord in an act of ongoing double creation—God making mortals and mortals making God.

In both the Hellenic and the Abrahamic traditions, *poiesis* is often understood as *theo-poiesis*—God made present in and through making. And it is for this reason that anatheism—the return to God after the death of God—opens naturally to a philosophy of theo-poetics. The art of anatheism follows directly from a wager of hospitality and dialogue. For if we are to clear spaces for the return of the divine, we ourselves must become co-creators in the process. We must return to a God who returns to us. We must aid and even provoke the reappearance of the sacred by rejoining the endless art of creation. Indeed, by opening ourselves to the possibility that we can make with, in, and through God, we may find that the impossible has been made possible—that God makes with, in, and through us. And if we do, we may no longer ask the artist “where do you speak from?” but rather “who do you speak from and who speaks from you?”

II

Each contributor to this volume is some kind of artist. *Theopoetics* is not exclusivist. It is about finding the extraordinary in the ordinary, the divine in the commonplace, and transcendence in the immanence of the everyday. *Theopoetics* means manifesting God in the various arts of action—especially in the making of our daily lives. So, while this volume includes essays by practicing poets, painters, authors, and philosophers—Socrates takes philosophy to be the “highest art” (*Phaedo* 60e)—it also brings in works by those who make art out of life itself.

In the opening section, “Anatheism and Theopoetics,” Richard Kearney, Catherine Keller, John D. Caputo, and John Panteleimon Manoussakis lay the groundwork for the essays that follow by dealing explicitly with the notion of *theo-poetics* as a process of creating and recreating the divine in the wake

of the death of God. This critical overture offers not only a genealogy of the term “theo-poetics” but also a number of hermeneutic applications to specific works of artists and poets. Each of the remaining sections seeks to reimagine the sacred through different modes of artistic making—painting, performing, screening, and writing.

“Painting Anatheism” features Mark Patrick Hederman’s theological investigation of the theist-atheist-anatheist cycles of Judeo-Christian art, Kate Lawson’s engagement with contemporary Buddhist art (showing the inter-religious range of anatheism), Alexandra Breukink’s pastoral meditation on a stained-glass image of David dancing naked, and Sheila Gallagher’s “artist reflections and representations” of paradise gardens in several mystical wisdom traditions. This section concludes with a conversation with Jean-Luc Nancy that follows his commentary of da Messina’s *Annunciata*—a painting also featured in Kearney’s essay from the opening section.

“Performing Anatheism” explores diverse ways in which the holy returns through human performances ranging from popular music (Littlejohn, Keefe-Perry) and sacred liturgy (Gschwandtner, Bradley) to the sharing of stories by participants in Twelve-Step movements (Pigeon).

In “Screening Anatheism,” Stephanie Rumpza analyzes contemporary films such as Martin Scorsese’s *Silence* and John McDonagh’s *Calvary* while Mirella Klomp and Danie Veldsman consider *The Passion*, a televised musical representation of the crucifixion broadcast each Easter in the Netherlands, and Chris Doude van Troostwijk explores the anatheistic implications of Bill Viola’s *Emergence*.

Finally, “Writing Anatheism” features commentaries by Andrew Cunningham and Thomas Altizer on theo-poetic literature and the return of God in contemporary fiction. And the last word goes to the poet Fanny Howe whose theo-poetic work opens the art of anatheism toward new horizons by returning to the source of creation itself. “Anatheism,” she tells us, “hovers at the threshold before knocking or entering. The world from which it comes stands behind it as a remnant of something unknowable and the world before it is lit by threats of annihilation as powerful as love.”

NOTES

1. For brevity’s sake, citations of *Anatheism* in this volume will be abbreviated: (A, p. #).

2. This work is also continued in the forthcoming *Richard Kearney’s Anatheistic Wager: Philosophy, Theology, Poetics*, Doude van Troostwijk, Chris and Matthew Clemente eds. (Bloomington: IN, Indiana University Press, 2017) and *Hosting Strangers: In Conversation with Richard Kearney*, Danie Veldsman and Yolande Steenkamp eds. (Bloemfontein: African Sun Media, 2018).