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*“Cosmic Radiance”: C.G. Jung, L. Klages, and Lebensphilosophie*

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***Abstract:***

The German philosopher Ludwig Klages and the Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung shared a few important trajectories of research. For some, like Karl Jaspers, they were the “masters” of symbol-interpretation at their time. Surprisingly, these correspondences have scarcely been explored thus far, partly due to Klages’s relative oblivion in contemporary academic literature. This paper aims at introducing them, by looking at a few primary points of proximity and distance between these thinkers, against the background of the encounter between *Lebensphilosophie* and psychology. The paper will present Jung’s critical views around Klages’s most famous work, *The Spirit as the Adversary of the Soul*, and Klages’s own skepticism around psychoanalytic-oriented theories. The paper will then examine the place of the “irrational” in both thinkers and their contribution to the concept of “cosmogonic eros”, whilst taking into account the most prominent elements of difference between their views. The proximity of Klages and Jung opens up a perspective into how vitalist and psychological worldviews respond differently to the modern crisis of meaning. This juxtaposition permits to assess not just their respective critiques of rationalism, but also the implications of their work for philosophical and cultural regeneration. As Jung proposed through his complex notion of the “individuation” process (the task of becoming “whole”), psychological work cannot be fundamentally separated from a broader existential quest for meaning, which operates at personal and collective levels. Similarly, Klages’s conceptualisation of a “philosophy of life” never parts ways from the demands of a profound psychological investigation of the human nature. In both cases, psychological and philosophical research come to terms with the attempts at building a dialogue around challenging the alienation of modern individualism.

*Key Word: Jung, Klages, vitalism, history of psychology, Nietzsche*

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Only someone who does not seek, will find; for only such a person is led by the procession of the gods.

*L. Klages (Rhythms and runes, p. 253)*

As a drop in the ocean you take part in the current, ebb and flow. You swell slowly on the land and slowly sink back again in interminably slow breaths. [...]. You had thought that your movement came from you and that it needed your decisions and efforts, so that you could get going and make progress. But with every conceivable effort you would never have achieved that movement and reached those areas to which the sea and the great wind of the world brought you.

*C.G. Jung (The Red Book: Liber novus, pp. 266-267)*

### 1. *Who Was Ludwig Klages*

A two-time nominee for the Nobel Prize in Literature, Ludwig Klages (1872-1956) was a German philosopher, psychologist, and gifted poet, as well as a forerunner of contemporary ecology and founder of modern graphology (the science of handwriting analysis). Born in Hanover, Germany, he was educated in chemistry, physics and philosophy at the University of Munich, where he became one of the most distinguished thinkers within the German vitalist movement in the late 19th and early 20th century. As a philosophical current, vitalism (also known as "Lebensphilosophie", the "philosophy of life") emerged out of late German romanticism and was inspired by the ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Vitalism placed "life" at the core of philosophical reasoning, arguing that it could only be apprehended by life itself and from within itself, as opposed to scientific materialism or academic intellectualism. Schopenhauer's idea of the blind striving of life ("Wille zum Leben", the "will to live") and the Nietzschean distinction between "life-affirming" and "life-denying" principles were pivotal to the birth of this movement, which advocated for a "life-enhancing" philosophy which could stand to the rise of positivism and mechanistic theories. Since his youth, Klages had widespread intellectual interests which varied from scientific disciplines to poetry and classical studies. In Munich, he lived in Schwabing, the bohemian quarter of the city, along with other intellectuals and artists. He became part of the Munich Cosmic Circle, an influential group of unorthodox writers and thinkers which included figures such as the esotericist Alfred Schuler and the symbolist poet Stefan George. During these years, Klages had a relationship with a woman he affectionately called "Putti", the young daughter of his landlady. Later, he was romantically involved with a central figure in the intellectual life of Munich, the charming Countess Franziska zu Reventlow, who was known as the "Bohemian Countess" of Schwabing (Bishop, 2018a, p. 4). In the summer of 1915, he left Germany and moved to Switzerland, finding the horrors of war unbearable. In the following years, he lived in several provisional locations in Switzerland, before settling down in a house in Kilchberg, on the West shore of Lake Zurich. It was during this phase of his life, particularly across the 1920s and the early 1930s,

that he composed his most famous works: *On the Nature of Consciousness* (*Vom Wesen des Bewusstseins*, 1921), *Of Cosmogonic Eros* (*Vom kosmogonischen Eros*, 1922), *The Science of Character* (*Die Grundlagen der Charakterkunde*, 1926), and his magnum opus *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul* (*Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele*, 1929-1932). He travelled extensively throughout the 30s, visiting the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries, and the Baltic states, as well as Southern Europe and the Balkans. He was particularly impressed by Italy, travelling to Verona, Bologna, Florence, Capri, Pompeii, Naples, and Rome, where he celebrated the remains of the primordial splendour of classical civilisation. In the 1940s, he published another major work, under the title *Rhythms and Runes* (*Rhythmen und Runen*, 1944), and was acknowledged by many contemporaries as one of the greatest thinkers of his time. Nevertheless, his presence in the European intellectual scene began to fade. He remained in Switzerland and continued to work until his death in 1956, with indefatigable intellectual passion and afar from official awards and academic honours.

Klages's legacy is accompanied by a singular and paradoxical oblivion. As widely celebrated during his lifetime, his name became almost entirely forgotten after his death. When one reads through the list of praises that many of his more famous contemporaries paid to him during his lifetime (see Bishop, 2018a, p. XI), the contrast with Klages's poor fortune today is stark. Among others, the German novelist Hermann Hesse referred to Klages as a brilliant writer and felt so “deeply moved” by the profundity of his work *Of Cosmogonic Eros* to claim that in that work “something almost inexpressible has found the right words” (Schröder, 1972, p. 78). The German philosopher Karl Löwith regarded Klages's work as “outstanding” (Löwith, 1927, p. 293). Walter Benjamin, who certainly could not be ascribed to Klagesian interests, spoke of *The Spirit as Adversary of the Soul* as “without a doubt a great philosophical work” (Benjamin, 1994, p. 366). Oswald Spengler, the author of *The Decline of the West*, claimed that “in the field of scientific psychology, Klages towers over all of his contemporaries, including even the academic world's most renowned authorities” (Spengler, 1963, p. 605). The Austrian artist Alfred Kubin considered Klages no less than “a scientist of the highest rank” and “the most important psychologist of our time” (Schröder, 1972, p. 82). Jürgen Habermas expressed admiration for Klages shortly after his death (Habermas, 1956, p. 8). Furthermore, Klages was the recipient of two *Festschrift* in his lifetime, on the occasions of his sixtieth and seventy-fifth birthday. In the first one, the German psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn paid tribute to Klages as the “most merciless unmasker of occidental errors” (Prinzhorn, 1932, pp. IV-V). Christoph Bernoulli contributed with a poem in his honour, which began with the line “Anyone who has seen him will never forget him” (Bernoulli, 1932, pp. 251-252). The second *Festschrift* comprised twenty contributions celebrating of his life. One truly wonders how a figure who had been granted such status among his contemporaries,

fell into oblivion in the decades ahead. Today, Klages is fairly well known in the Germanosphere, thanks to the publication of his *Sämtliche Werke* (9 vols, 1964-1992) and Schröder's and Kratnz-Gross' indispensable *Memories of Ludwig Klages* (1986). However, he remains substantially less known in the English world, as revealed by the scarce number of available English translations of his works. In academic literature, Klages has been surprisingly neglected for decades, with some exceptions (Akada, 1985, Stauth & Turner, 1992, Lebovic, 2006, Josephson-Storm, 2017, Radovanović, 2023) and a few more extensive contributions, including Lebovic's book on Klages and the rise of "biopolitics" (Lebovic, 2013; see Bishop, 2014, Klautke, 2015, for reviews of Lebovic's book) and especially the groundbreaking scholarly works of Paul Bishop (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), who provided the first comprehensive English introduction to Klages's life and work (for a review, see Priviero, 2019). An excellent translation of *Of Cosmogonic Eros* appeared in 2018 by the independent publisher Theion Publishing, which seemingly points at a most desirable recent rediscovery of the German philosopher. A few selections of Klages's essays and aphorisms (Klages, 2013, 2015) have also been published by the right-wing publisher Arktos, which accompanies them with their own political agenda and a highly questionable ideological reappraisal of Klages, as well as a few problematic translations.

Ironically, a source of complications for Klages's legacy was brought about by the charges made against him that he sympathised with the National Socialists (similar charges were incorrectly made against Jung; for their rebuttal, see Sorge, 2012). As Bishop carefully expounded (hopefully once and for all), "nothing could be further from the truth" (Bishop, 2018a, p. 32). The root of this confusion seems to lie on certain aspects of a "discourse of race" and "anti-semitic" remarks which sporadically appeared in Klages's writings, even though, as Bishop observed, "this discourse is neither central to his philosophical project, nor is he by any means alone in using it during this period" (Bishop, 2018a, p. 32). In fact, Klages was temperamentally, intellectually, and politically far removed from any Nazi sympathies. Suffice it to remind that even after migrating to Switzerland from his native land, Klages, who was an environmentalist *ante litteram* and despised wars, continued to suffer blows of censorship and repression from the Nazis. In a public address (later reprinted as a pamphlet-book), the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg issued a direct threat to Klages and advised for the avoidance of "any kind of mingling" between "biocentric" philosophy and National Socialism (for a "table" of the most significant differences between National Socialism and Klagesian Philosophy, see Table 1.1, Bishop, 2018a, p. 35). Besides this controversy, Bishop identified a few reasons why an "outsider" like Klages may have disappeared from the European intellectual scene after the Second World War. Among them, the fact that he "was never a big player within the academy" and did not hold an academic post (his

audience attracted “interested listeners outside the university scene”); he had never been a “public intellectual ’in the conventional sense”, avoiding to directly address political issues; his works were (and are) poorly available in the bookshops; his philosophical discourse was “too difficult” to engage lay readers and his knowledge and use of the German language was exceptionally complex; there was never such a thing as a “Klagesian school”, since Klages’s philosophy was always “something of one-man show”; ultimately, Klages was “too radical, too utterly opposed to modernity, and too consistent in his critique, to be a successful figure in the post-War environment” (Bishop, 2018a, pp. 38-39).

## 2. Klages in Jung’s Works

The richness and complexity of Klages’s philosophical ideas are outstanding and could be hardly summarised here. He was arguably the spokesman of the encounter between vitalism and psychology in the early to mid twentieth century. Drawing on Schopenhauer, Carus, George, and above all Nietzsche, his main focus lied in the formulation of an in-depth “science of expression” (*Ausdruckswissenschaft*) or “science of character” (*Charakterkunde*) that would re-establish the centrality of life, instincts, and nature over the rupture caused by the emergence of the “ego” in the human species. In the early 1900s, he coined the expression “logocentrism” (later popularised by Jacques Derrida) to portray the tendency, in Western philosophy, to privilege speech and words (“logos”) as primary source of meaning over “eros”, that is, the creative, non-intellectual, and anti-spiritual force of nature, which Nietzsche associated with the realm of the Dionysian. Accordingly, Klages dedicated himself to the study of those primordial symbols and images which conveyed the powers of life and positioned himself as a fervent opponent of those theories which he saw as most “anti-natural” and anti-vitalist, i.e., Christianity and mechanistic science. On this basis, he recognised two main human attitudes towards life, namely “self-assertion” and “self-devotion”, which he respectively ascribed to the opposite categories of “spirit” (“der Geist”) and “soul” (“die Seele”). His entire philosophical system largely inclined to the latter, in the attempt to follow a Nietzschean disposition to “say yes” to life (*Ja-Sagen*) beyond the narrowness of rationality and egocentric purposes, which was echoed in Klages’s particularly “winged” and inspired style of writing. However, a detailed exposition of Klages’s philosophical system goes far beyond the scopes of the present essay (see Bishop, 2018a, pp. 51-119). The focus of the following paragraphs will be limited to some introductory reflections on the connections between Klages and the Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology C.G. Jung.

Among the contemporaries of Klages who read and admired the work of the German intellectual, there was the German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers. In his most famous work, *General Psychopathology*, there are almost as references to Klages (above 40 mentions) as to

Jung's work. Concerning the relationship between movements and personality, Jaspers noted: "Natural direct expressiveness [...] gets moulded by a more conscious expression, of which the person is himself aware. Klages was the first to grasp this—particularly in the case of handwriting—and noted the way in which complex personal and social ideals take on expressive shape" (Jaspers, 1963, p. 271). In particular, Jaspers was highly appreciative of Klages's contributions to the study of personality-structure and typology. With regard to the former, he noted: "Klages made the most effective attempt to bring some order into personality-structure. His study of personality outstrips all the previous efforts", adding that he differentiated between purely "formal characteristics of personality, which he termed the personality-structure, and what he called the personality-qualities, including the instincts, drives and interests" Jaspers, 1963, p. 271). Furthermore, he observed that Klages "most skilfully constructed a number of ideal personality-types", starting from "basic mood and sensibility, from the tempo and inner tensions of psychic life, from will-power and the mainsprings of the drives and their specific hierarchy" (Jaspers, 1963, p. 437). These observations are a valid example of the evident influence that Klages's work achieved during his lifetime, reaching as far as to be taken into serious consideration by one of the most respected psychopathologists of his time. Fascinatingly, in *General Psychopathology* Jaspers also sketched out a comparison between the theories of Klages and Jung, only to affirm the superiority of the former over the latter. Firstly, he pointed out a correspondence between Klages's notion of primordial images and Jung's idea of "archetypes", by giving credit to the two thinkers as the leading contemporary figures in symbol-interpretation: "Nowadays it is Klages and Jung who have become known as the interpreters of symbols. What Burckhardt termed 'archaic images' ('urtimliche Bilder'), Klages termed 'images' and Jung 'archetypes'" (Jaspers, 1963, p. 333). However, Jaspers also noted a few "essential differences" between Klages and Jung:

Klages' interpretation has a fascinating vividness. His presentation of the symbols of poetry and art remains as perhaps the really lasting contribution in all his great work. [...] Jung on the contrary lacks the impressive vividness of Klages and his work has nothing like the same weight. He is the deft master of all the means of interpretation but the inspiration is missing. Klages has inspiration, in as much as he is the true successor of Bachofen, whose work he rediscovered. Jung's expositions become tiring and irritating because of many undialectical contradictions (Jaspers, 1963, p. 333)

As the reader "emerges from many of Klages' pages", Jaspers continued, "he is struck by a winged quality which is lacking from the work of Jung who favours a worldly scepticism" (Jaspers, 1963, p. 334). Nevertheless, Jaspers ultimately thought that both theories were bound to an unsuccessful fate. He saw Jung's efforts as a "fruitless new start through the exploitation of what is

old" and Klages's, similarly, as the victim of the somewhat idealistic attempt of a "hopeless recollection of the lost depths of history" (Jaspers, 1963, p. 334).

Despite Jasper's acute observations on the "elective affinities" between Jung and Klages, it is remarkable to notice how the two thinkers seemingly ignored each other, at best. Klages, for his part, was overtly critical of psychoanalytic theories, among which he included the broader category of "depth psychology". One could say, as Bishop pointed out, that the "Klagesian approach to the personality is almost diametrically opposed to that of Freudian psychoanalysis" (Bishop, 2018a, p. 62). Klages alternately deemed psychoanalysis a "mythology", a "religion" or a form of "propaganda". He disputed the concept of "repression" and anticipated Karl Popper's critique of Freudian theories, based on the principle of falsifiability (the capacity for some proposition or theory to be proven wrong). As Klages posited it, the typical psychoanalyst was someone, like the true member of a religion, who regarded objections to psychoanalysis not at face value, but rather as proofs of the "complexes" or "resistances" that would be preventing the "objector" from accepting the "truth" of psychoanalysis. As Kauders pointed out, Klages could be considered one of Freud's "best-known adversaries" around his time, particularly during the years of the Weimar Republic. For Klages, Kauders observed, "Freud belonged to those who usurped (*bemächtigen*) the natural environment rather than allowing it to flourish" (Kauders, 2013, p. 334). Instead of psycho-analysis (the "analysis" of the soul), Klages advocated for the study of character ("characterology") and the science of soul-expression. Interestingly, in the sixth edition of *The Science of Character*, as highlighted by Shamdasani, Klages noted that in the first edition of his book (1910) he had proposed a "typological" distinction between the "outward" and "inward-looking" mind. Subsequently, he added, "two foreign words, extraverted and introverted, were employed by medical men, and an attempt was made to make this a supreme principle for classifying all characters in general. The result, to put it most politely, was nil" (Klages, 1929, p. 280). As Shamdasani put it, "the target of his criticism was plainly Jung" (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 82) (although a study of the similarities and differences between Jungian and Klagesian typology systems would deserve further research). In conclusion, despite Klages's implicit criticism of Jung's "types", one could say that a great part of the critique that Klages advanced towards (Freudian) psychoanalysis was fundamentally shared by Jung. In fact, both Klages and Jung embraced a view of modern psychology which was rooted in the legacy of German romanticism and the thoughts of thinkers like Carus (Jung's personal copy of Carus's *Psyche* was the 1926 edition curated by Klages) and Nietzsche. Nevertheless, Klages's general opposition to psychoanalysis seemingly prevented him from further exploring less orthodox approaches to "depth psychology", such as Jung's, with whom his own theories revealed much common ground.

On the other hand, for his part Jung mentioned a few times Klages in his works. However, he appeared to be primarily (and rather one-sidedly) acquainted with Klages’s most well known book, *The Spirit as the Adversary of the Soul* (1929-1932), which he regarded in an ambivalent way, as an important contribution to the dialectics of “spirit” and “soul”, but also as an overly “philosophical” and excessively long work. Jung did not seem to share the view of those who regarded *The Spirit as the Adversary of the Soul* as one of the greatest philosophical works of his epoch, alongside Martin Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (Bishop, 2018a, p. xvi). Interestingly, although he acknowledged the contemporary relevance of Klages’s perspective on the “spirit”, he also seemed to come to the rescue of the “spirit” on a number of occasions, as if Klages had ventured too far into the land of pre-Christian, “pagan” mysteries. In so doing, he developed a different trajectory to Klages’s antagonistic proposal and at times ended up “revisiting” his views. In particular, this can be observed in Jung’s 1934-1939 seminar on Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*. In this context, the Swiss psychiatrist discussed the “world of the spirit” in relation to the “world” of the earth, warning his audience not to “run away” from “bodily facts”, since “they keep you in real life and help you not to lose your way in the world of mere possibilities where you are simply blindfolded”, i.e. the realm of the spirit (Jung, 1988, p. 66). Jung added that this warning would be especially valid for those who had lost contact with the body, while making the somewhat unfounded assumption that Klages would be one of them, having defined “the spirit as the enemy of the soul, the soul being the life of the body, because he assumed that most people had lost the reality of the body as he had lost it” (Jung, 1988, p. 66). It remains unclear how Jung drew the conclusion that Klages “had lost” his body and what he exactly meant by that, although he was convinced of a similar idea with regard to Nietzsche. Unlike Klages, Jung believed that a great number of people lived entirely in the body, rather than the spirit, and “to those one ought to preach early Christianity, or heathen gods at least, because they haven’t an idea of a spiritual possibility” (Jung, 1988, p. 66). Later in the seminar, he returned to this topic, by juxtaposing Klages and Nietzsche as “opponents” of the spirit: “Klages [...] accuses the spirit of strangling life, of being murderous and depleting life of blood, and to a certain extent that is perfectly true. If the spirit prevails against the body, there is destruction; it has an almost infernal power. Nietzsche often played with that idea” (Jung, 1988, p. 171). On this occasion, Jung sympathised with Klages as he went on to observe that when one talks of the spirit from the Christian standpoint, one is admitted to “the company of the righteous ones” and nobody seems to question that the spirit is a “marvellously good thing”; however, he added, that is “by no means true”, since the spirit has also a “gruesome aspect”, which Klages poked at. Nevertheless, in a similar fashion to his problematic criticism of Nietzsche (Domenici, 2019), Jung thought that Klages had missed the “other half” of the spirit, that is, its positive, creative and

constructive side. Thus, he pointed out that the philosophy of Klages, who “fights the spirit as the destroyer of life”, had erroneously identified spirit and intellect. “If he [Klages] knew what the spirit was, he never could assume that, for spirit is originally a most effervescent thing, like the opening of a champagne bottle. It is most emotional, really a culmination of life” (Jung, 1936, p. 365). Similarly, he objected: “Klages thinks the spirit is the destroyer of life, which is *contradictio in adjecto*, the spirit has always been the creator of life. The orgiastic madness of antiquity is *prana*, the breath of life. A god fills you with his *prana*, or his *pneuma* or wind, and you become an air-being, which is of course a ghost or a soul; even body becomes breath. That was the original concept (Jung, 1936 p. 368; see also p. 494). Two years later, he reiterated the same idea, while dissecting the dangers of “undermining” and “hollowing out” the spiritual principle or “identifying it with the mind”: “Klages makes the same mistake in his philosophy: he identifies intellect with the spirit. But intellect is a human business while the spirit is no human business; it is a principle which we do not make. It makes us, it seizes us. And spirit is by no means an enemy of life; it is a dynamic condition, like anything” (Jung, 1936, p. 1056). In a different context, in his 1936 essay on Wotan, Jung preferred to focus on another aspect of Klages’s work, namely the association of his ideas with the German “Dionysian” tradition:

The German youths who celebrated the solstice with sheep sacrifices were not the first to hear a rustling in the primeval forest of the unconscious. They were anticipated by Nietzsche, Schuler, Stefan George, and Ludwig Klages. The literary tradition of the Rhineland and the country south of the Main has a classical stamp that cannot easily be got rid of; every interpretation of intoxication and exuberance is apt to be taken back to classical models, to Dionysus, to the *puer aeternus* and the cosmogonic Eros (Jung, 1936, p. 375).

In a footnote to the same passage, he specified the following:

Ever since Nietzsche (1844-1900) there has been consistent emphasis on the “Dionysian” aspect of life in contrast to its “Apollonian” opposite. Since *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), the dark, earth, feminine side, with its mantic and orgiastic characteristics, has possessed the imagination of philosophers and poets. Irrationality gradually came to be regarded as the ideal; this is found, for example, all through the research of Alfred Schuler (d. 1923) into the mystery religions, and particularly in the writings of Klages (b. 1872 [d. 1956]), who expounded the philosophy of “irrationalism.” To Klages, logos and consciousness are the destroyers of creative preconscious life. In these writers we witness the origin of a gradual rejection of reality and a negation of life as it is. This leads in the end to a cult of ecstasy, culminating in the self-dissolution of consciousness in death, which meant, to them, the conquest of material limitations (Jung, 1936, n.3).

In ‘Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious’, he noted that “the spirit may legitimately claim the *patria potestas* over the soul” and that “Ludwig Klages [*The Spirit as the Adversary of the Soul*]

and Max Scheler were moderate enough in their attempts to rehabilitate the spirit, for both were children of an age in which the spirit was no longer up above but down below, no longer fire but water” (Jung, 1934, p. 32). In the 1939-1940 seminar on Loyola’s spiritual exercises, he observed:

Looking now at this word Geist, spirit, we see that it is a condition, a typical condition of mankind. If someone is lost in reverie, moved by something, carried away by the wind, compelled to move, animated, we talk of the spirit. So it is an augmentation of life and has nothing at all to do with the intellect or the like. A book such as Klages’s *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* is relevant here. Spirit has absolutely nothing to do with the intellect, but is an augmentation of life, a wonderfully elevated life even, as a consequence of which the phenomenon of the spirit in this sense always also meant possession by the spirit (Jung, 2023, p. 165).

Interestingly, in his *In Memory of Sigmund Freud*, Jung claimed that “Ludwig Klages’s saying that “the spirit is the adversary of the soul” might serve as a cautionary motto for the way Freud approached the possessed psyche. Whenever he could, he dethroned the ‘spirit’ as the possessing and repressing agent by reducing it to a ‘psychological formula.’ Spirit, for him, was just a ‘nothing but’” (Jung, 1939, CW15, p. 72). On this occasion too, although aptly locating Klagesian and Freudian perspectives at the opposite ends of the spectrum of psychology, Jung adapted Klages’s phrase to present a version of the “spirit” that seemed to fit more his own theories than the original views of the German philosopher. Klages’s name was mentioned again in ‘The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales’, where Jung discussed the presence of the “spirit” in man’s physiology (Jung, 1945, CW9-1, p. 391). Finally, in *Flying Saucers: A Modern Myth*, he juxtaposed Klages’s writings and Nietzsche’s “Dionysian experience of a ‘breakthrough’” as examples of a similar process which tended to break down “man’s original wholeness into separate functions which conflict with one another” (Jung, 1958, CW10, p. 657).

All things considered, the references to Klages scattered through Jung’s works may reveal a curious dissonance between the intellectual proximity between the two thinkers and Jung’s perspective on Klages. An interesting reference in a letter from Jung to J. Meinertz in July 1939 might explain this dissonance in terms of the “conflict of identities” which the Swiss psychiatrist saw between his clinical profession as a psychotherapist and the role of the philosopher in society. In this letter, Jung thanked Meinertz for giving the “problem of psychotherapy” a central place in the discussion of modern German philosophy. He then bluntly remarked that what “Heidegger, Klages, and Jaspers have to say in this respect has never affected me very deeply, for one notices the same thing in all writers who have never had to wrestle with the practical problems of psychotherapy”, namely “an astonishing facility with words, which they endow with an almost magical efficacy” (Jung, 2015, p. 273).

However, he sentenced, "if Klages had had to treat a single case of neurosis he would never have brought of that thick tome on the obnoxious spirit" and "Heidegger would have lost all desire to juggle with words" (Jung, 2015, p. 273). After all, it is well known (although far from being settled) that, on numerous occasions in his works, Jung claimed to be an "empiricist", a man of science, and not a philosopher, going as far as affirming to have freed psychology from the "phantasmagoric speculations of philosophers" (Jung, 1955/1956, CW14, p. 53) and to have turned the subject into a science (see Falzeder, 2016).

### 3. Jung and Klages: Proximity and Distance

Jaspers's intuition around the proximity of Jung's and Klages's *Weltanschauung* has not been researched in depth yet. Both thinkers were animated by a common concern: the alienation of modern individuals from the deep currents of life. For Jung, this called for a clinical approach designed to facilitate the emergence of unconscious material into consciousness, thereby promoting the expansion and differentiation of the individual's conscious awareness. For Klages, it meant a metaphysical excavation of life forces obscured by logocentric rationalism. Their respective systems reflect a shared urgency to reclaim vitality from the fragmenting forces of modernity. The first significant step into exploring this topic was carried forth by Bishop (2018b), who highlighted the connections between Jung's notion of the "archaic" and Klages's notion of the "ecstatic". According to Bishop, both Klages and Jung could be considered key players in the vitalist tradition. As he observed,

Taken together, Jung and Klages stand as exponents of the importance of cultivating and nurturing a *cultural memory* (Assmann), and both warn us that, if we do not cultivate this cultural memory, what is not so much repressed as forgotten or excluded can and maybe will return in dangerous forms. For the archaic in general and in its ecstatic form in particular is a striking case of something that is, in the parlance so dear to postmodernism, "always already" there, and it is something that we, quite literally, ignore at our peril (Bishop, 2018b, p. 90).

Although the philosophical category of "vitalism" might be conceptually problematic when it comes to Jung (who preferred, as previously mentioned, the practical angle of "empiricism"), there were certainly aspects of vitalism that were shared by Klages and Jung. Among them was arguably the main inspiration of vitalism, i.e., the critique of a rationalistic understanding of life. For his part, Jung's widespread formulation of the "irrational", besides its connection to the German romantic tradition, appeared directly indebted to the philosophy of Henri Bergson and in particular to his critique of intellectualism, in favour of the central role of intuition in the human mind (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 229). In *Psychological Types*, the Swiss psychologist clarified that he used the concept of the "irrational"

not in the sense of "*against reason*" (Widervernünftigen), but in that one of "*outside reason*" (Außervernünftigen), namely that which is not grounded on reason" (Jung, 1921, CW6, p. 775; Shamdasani, 2003, p. 229), in an attempt to overcome the intellect-driven dualistic opposition between "rational" and "irrational" as pairs of opposites. Because of this, the charge of "irrationalism" was often made against Jung. However, as Shamdasani pointed out:

What is not realised is the fact that for Jung, the concept of the irrational derived its philosophical justification in the Bergsonian delimitation of the provenance of the intellect, and the recognition that life exceeded representational consciousness. Using Jung's terminology seen from a Bergsonian perspective, the key task was one of not subsuming the irrational into the rational (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 229).

On this basis, an essential task of analytical psychology (the school of psychotherapy founded by Jung) was to go "beyond the walls" of rationalism, "by digging up again the fantasy-images of the unconscious which our rationalism has rejected" (Jung, 1927, p. 739). These images, according to Jung, were "part of the nature *in us*" and apparently lied "buried" behind "the walls of reason" (Jung, 1927, p. 739). At the same time, the Swiss psychiatrist warned not to confuse his message with a naive attempt at "going back to Nature" with Rousseau. The real task of self-transformation, he argued, consisted of "holding on to the level of reason we have successfully reached", whilst "enriching consciousness with the knowledge of man's psychic foundations" (Jung, 1927, p. 739). Jung often spoke in those terms of the alienation of modern people from the world of nature, which, elsewhere, Klages similarly viewed as the result of the constraints of the "spirit" (one-sided rationalism) over the free flow of life. Both thinkers came to diagnose, in a Nietzschean fashion, the sickness of the modern civilised individual in terms of a process of internal splitting or "self-division", to use Jung's description of "neurosis", between "animality", i.e. instinctual nature, and "civilisation". Therefore, the practice of analysis held the key role of liberating the drives with a view to put them to a higher use (Shamdasani, 2003, p. 251). In a lecture on dream analysis in 1929, Jung observed the following: Whenever we touch nature we get clean. [...] People who have got dirty through too much civilisation take a walk in the woods, or a bath in the sea. They may rationalise it in this or that way, but they shake off the fetters and allow nature to touch them. It can be done within or without. Walking in the woods, lying on the grass, taking a bath in the sea, are from the outside; entering the unconscious, entering yourself through dreams, is touching nature from the inside and this is the same thing, things are put right again (Jung, 1984, p. 142).

There is no doubt that the question of "touching nature" occupied a central role also in Klages's reflections, in numerous places throughout his oeuvre. Suffice it to remind that the German philosopher

was one of the earliest proponents of environmentalism in Europe and wrote extensively about it, particularly in his essay *Man and Earth* (1913). The equivalent of Jung’s “fantasy-images of the unconscious” beyond rationalism was found by Klages in those “primordial” or “elementary” images which “seize” the individual and put them in contact with the greater “electrical” current of nature. Klages and Jung thus shared a similar approach to the meaning of “symbol”. They thought it should not be intended, in a semiotic sense, as the “sign” or the “symptom” of a rationally defined object, but rather, to use Jung’s definition of symbol, as a “living thing”, i.e., “the expression for something that cannot be characterised in any other or better way” (Jung, 1921, CW6, p. 816). Or, to use the language of Jung’s *Red Book*, “The symbol can be neither thought up nor found: it becomes” (Jung, 2009, p. 311). Klages similarly held that symbols could be apprehended only through the faculty of intuition, as living images that existed beyond the narrowness of “logocentric” purposes and therefore could not be fixed into deadening conceptualisations. Psychologically, similarly to Jung, Klages felt that the deeper layer of symbols and images had almost nothing to do with the function of the ego and rather belonged to an “archetypal” dimension. When someone was touched by the “universal power of the image”, Klages argued, “the feeling of ego is extinguished” and one became the “reflected content” through which nature spoke by herself (Klages, 1929, p. 364). In his philosophical system, he connected those experiences of “ecstatic rapture” and self-transcendence to the pole of the “soul”, as the “reflections”, in a true Klagesian sense, of the “incessantly self-transforming” movement of life (Klages, 1913b, pp. 256-257). Thus, the “soul” designated a receptive disposition of the mind to hear the cosmic sound of life. In the visionary vein that characterised his writings (which according to Jaspers was lacking in Jung), Klages related this mental disposition to the encounter with a force which permeated all things in nature, by the name “cosmogonic eros” (Klages, 1922, Bishop, 2018c). This unconventional term, which was not debated much among intellectuals at the time, is particularly important in the present discussion because, in parallel, it was also used by Jung, who referred to it even in the last few pages of his conversations with Aniela Jaffé, published in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1963, p. 354). According to Klages, the individual was able to experience the “touch of nature” in them through the similar awakening that characterised sexual rapture, one of the aspects of life in which the individual could reconnect with the ecstatic dimension of the “soul”. Yet, unlike pure sexual desire, it was also “cosmogonic”, when the degree of the person’s rapture no longer regarded the transient relationship between two beings, but the union between the individual and life itself, which he termed “elemental eros”. In the words of an inspired *Lebenspsychologie*, Klages wrote: While the ecstasy of satisfying the sexual drive is associated with the sexual union of two beings, there is presumably no limit to the opportunities that permit entry by the person bearing a soul into the fiery

circle of erotic frenzy. It can consummate itself, or reach perfection, at the mere sight of a beloved being, and that may be a being of the opposite sex, but also one of the same sex, or it might be an animal, or a plant. And it can just as well consummate itself at the smell of a scent, the taste of a wine, the hearing of a sound, and the touch of a dripping branch. It can be roused while awake as if in the most stupefying dream. It celebrates its orgies beneath the breeze of spring storms, in the light of a star-studded heaven, in a hailstone shower, on a flaming mountain ridge, in the raging surf, in the lightning flash of "first love", but not least in the embrace of fate that smites it (Klages, 2018, pp. 109-110).

The subject in the grip of eros, he continued, "feels as if he is pulsing and flooded through with a kind of electrical current", a magnetic process that "makes the most distant souls sense a mutual conjoining pull irrespective of their limits". Eros is "the essence of all happening, [...] which transforms space and time into the omnipresent element of a sustaining and engulfing ocean thus joining together the *poles of the world*, regardless of their never-waning difference" (Klages, 2018, p. 111). Although the poetic and somewhat esoteric tone of Klages's writing did not resonate with Jung's style, the research similarities were fascinating. Through the image of "cosmogonic eros", Klages and Jung appeared to be on the same side when exploring an alternative trajectory to the myth of eros, which was neither confined to the biological reductionism of psycho-sexuality, nor to the Platonic myth of love. Rather, it was based on the tradition of the Dionysian mysteries. It is important to remember that in 1918, Jung proposed to substitute what Freud meant by "sexuality", with the word "eros", "in the old philosophical sense of a Pan-Eros who permeates all nature as a creative and procreative force" (Jung, 1918, p. 5), which corresponded to Klages's vision of a "cosmic" or "elemental" eros. In *Of Cosmogonic Eros*, Klages traced back the genealogy of cosmic eros to the Orphic god Phanes (Klages, 2018, p. 96), who also played a central role in Jung's personal "visionary" endeavours collected in his *Red Book* (Jung, 2009, p. 301; Shamdasani, 2009). The Dionysian substratum of Klages's and Jung's thoughts around eros and the "soul" made them particularly interested in the ancient mysteries. Fascinatingly, although seemingly in a mutually independent way, Klages and Jung explored in depth the theme of the "feminine" symbolism of the "soul", for example through images such as the "Magna Mater" (the "Great Mother"), the "anima mundi" (the "soul of the world"), and the profoundly transformative as well as destructive force of what Klages referred to as the "night-pole" of consciousness (Klages, 1944, 288). As Bishop illustrated, both Klages and Jung acknowledged at the core of the ecstatic rituals of the mysteries a radical experience of "rebirth", as Jung posited. The self-regeneration of the initiate was based on a shift of gravity from personal to impersonal or "cosmic" consciousness, an image which the Swiss psychiatrist associated with "feminine" symbolism. Analogously, both Klages and

Jung placed an enormous emphasis on the historical and intellectual importance of Nietzsche (and wrote relentlessly about it), whilst having a complex relationship with his work. Interestingly, although Jung, as previously mentioned, at times juxtaposed Nietzsche and Klages as similar “phenomena”, Klages himself made an important distinction between his work and Nietzsche’s. He detected a “devastating self-contradiction” in Nietzsche, namely a betrayal of vitalism — that “the same thinker who, like no-one else, reveals the crimes perpetrated against life by the will-to-power, should try to understand life itself as precisely this will-to power” (Klages, 1926, in Bishop, 2018a, p. 22). As acutely observed by Bishop, at bottom a difference in temperament and course of life existed between Klages and Nietzsche (a similar one could be pointed out for the case of Jung and Nietzsche): “Klages [...] understood all too well the power of the daimon: but whereas he, Klages, had been able to come to terms with his daimons, Nietzsche, for his part, had struggled — and ultimately succumbed” (Bishop, 2018a, p. 28).

On the other hand, when focusing on the points of distance between Klages and Jung, some of them appear more outstanding, while others would require further investigation. To begin with, as Bishop already pointed out, there was a substantial difference in terms of the “institutionalisation” of these two figures. Even before becoming one of the leading figures in the psychoanalytic movement together with Freud, Jung was already a rising international star of psychiatry (due to his verbal association tests at the Burghölzli) and a distinguished professor in Zurich. Later, he became one of the most acclaimed thinkers and psychologists of his time and the founder of an internationally known psychotherapy school known as analytical psychology, which still today is represented by numerous institutional trainings around the world. Jung soon had acolytes and students all over the world and his works were translated in many languages, becoming widely available for decades. On the contrary, Klages went through the very different path of an outsider who always maintained the identity of a solitary and independent thinker. There was never a “Klagesian” school of philosophy or psychotherapy (something that Klages was arguably never interested in pursuing) and the German philosopher, as mentioned before, always kept himself outside the walls of academia, although he was known for his exceptional skills as a speaker at conferences. In addition to this, Jung’s works were significantly more accessible than Klages’s, both in terms of language and content, and therefore were soon substantially more translated than those of the German philosopher. As a testimony of this, one should simply remember that, not only Jung’s “Collected Works” had been available for decades in English (and many other European languages), but a new “critical edition” of Jung’s works, including published and unpublished material, is forthcoming with Princeton Press. Differently, Klages’s far less extensive “Complete Works” (which, in fact, are not complete) has not even been translated yet in

English (except a few parts), with only a scarce minority of his works or sections of his works that have recently become available in English. From an intellectual standpoint, a few of the major differences between Klages and Jung have been mentioned in the previous paragraphs (such as the interpretation of "spirit", the role of psychology in relation to philosophy, the writing style). Bishop also addressed a difference in the underlying orientation of thinking between the two personalities, according to which Klages seemed to embrace a more "pessimistic" outlook, which shaped for example his critique of modernity and capitalism, whereas Jung favoured a slightly more "optimistic" perspective, which, after all, placed the pursuit of "individuation" (Jung's term for a person's inner growth through becoming an individual "whole") at the centre of therapeutic and existential endeavours. A related element of difference may be added to this one, namely the subtle yet remarkable divergent approach to Christianity that Klages and Jung conveyed in their writings. Despite revealing a strong common interest in the pre-Christian roots of philosophy and investigating at length the profound significance of the ancient mysteries, Jung was rarely as fiercely critical and oppositional to Christianity as Klages was. At least in this sense, Klages seemed to embrace Nietzsche's philosophical message more wholeheartedly, whereas Jung maintained a critical ambivalence, especially in light of his self-explorations in the *Red Book*, in which the theme of the "rebirth of God in the soul" played an important part. All things considered, however, the most fundamental difference between Klages and Jung, as outlined in the previously quoted letter from the Swiss psychiatrist, resided in a matter of clash of identities between the doctor and the philosopher: where Jung believed that psychology had the final say in existential matters due to its practical advantages, Klages gave the same role to philosophy and metaphysics.

#### *4. Conclusion*

This essay introduced a few aspects of the correspondences between Jung and Klages. It started by presenting Klages against the background of vitalism and exploring the proximity of this philosophical current to Jung's thought. Taking up a cue from Jaspers, the essay then contextualised the "elective affinities" between Klages and Jung, by first looking at Klages's presence in Jung's works. Following up from this, the paper mapped out a few key themes which convey the most significant connections and differences between the Swiss psychiatrist and the German philosopher, such as the meaning of overcoming "rationalism", the interpretation of symbols and the role of "cosmogonic eros", but also the distance between Jung's view of psychology and Klages's conception of philosophy. This topic of research is far from being exhausted and this should be considered an introduction to a fascinating, yet still largely overlooked subject which promise future avenues of research. For philosophers, Jung's

clinical insights lend empirical weight to vitalist intuitions, grounding speculative concepts in lived psychodynamics. For psychoanalysts, Klages’s work enriches the conceptual horizon of analytical psychology, reminding that individuation cannot be fully grasped apart from a symbolic understanding of human life. This reciprocal illumination offers fertile ground for interdisciplinary reflection.

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