

## D. H. LAWRENCE AND THE SPONTANEOUS GESTURE

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A surge and tumble of white lace, and the bride has prised herself free from her carriage. Instinct with laughter and excitement, she climbs the long red carpet laid along the path that leads up to the church. But consternation! Unknowingly she has arrived before the groom and, hearing the sound of his arrival, turns round to look. He catches sight of her and springs into action to overtake her, whilst she, by reflex, turns to flee, half in fear perhaps and half in provocative challenge. It is a flight towards the church. Quickly, steadying herself, she turns and disappears behind the corner of the building, whilst he, muscles visibly straining, chases after her and disappears in his turn.

This, of course, is the marriage of Laura Crich at the start of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*; and it reinforces the general impression created by the opening chapter that, languishing behind the forms of conventional civilised life, there lies the richly unpredictable life of the body, often untapped except at such liminal moments as that of the wedding. Behind the forms of Christian tradition, there lies the potency of a primal sexuality, often suppressed but containing the key to much of our vitality as human animals. The sexual chase of the bride by the groom, as it suddenly emerges out of the disrupted ceremonies of the Christian sacrament, recalls the countless chases of fauns and nymphs in classical literature; the muscular loins of the groom, described in full painterly splendour, recall those perhaps of the centaurs that hunted down the Lapith women. After the intricate psychological analysis of the opening pages, Lawrence's sudden deployment of verb and adjective, together with his concentration upon gesture and action, captures this dangerous irruption of energy and

communicates it to the reader; and for this moment of sudden glory Lawrence has a special word.

At the wedding-party in Chapter II, Gerald deplores the unconventionality of his sister's behaviour, and Birkin disagrees: "I think it was perfect good form in Laura to bolt from Lupton to the church door. It was almost a masterpiece in good form. It's the hardest thing in the world to act spontaneously on one's impulses—and it's the only really gentlemanly thing to do—provided you're fit to do it" (WL 32). In this essay I want to consider, first of all, the historical origins of the concept of spontaneity and, second, to trace its fit in what might well be called Lawrence's first metapsychological scheme, dating from 1916-22. Much of Lawrence's writing in this period may be read as a pathology of the diseases that befall the spontaneous self in its struggles to find expression. How can we will spontaneity? It is "the hardest thing in the world", says Birkin, and the rest of *Women in Love* bears him out. It is a dilemma not unlike that faced by mystics who use their will-power to silence their will so that the grace of God may work in them; and appropriately enough, it is with the theological context in which the concept of spontaneity first emerged into English that we must begin.

## I.

The word *spontaneity* derives from the Latin word *sponte*, meaning "freely, of one's own accord"; and modern authorities identify *sponte* as the ablative form of a lost noun, *spons*, supposed to have meant "free will". Previously, the Roman scholar Varro, followed until its most recent edition by the *OED*, had connected the word with *spondere*, meaning "to promise solemnly, to bind, engage or pledge one's self". In early Roman law a verbal contract became binding when a proposition, followed by the question *spondes?* was answered *spondeo*. This was the required legal *response* which made a person *responsible* for fulfilling a promise freely undertaken: a *sponsor*, for instance, must deliver up the promised *spouse*. In his impressionistic way, working from his sense of the

likeness between words rather than from their historical origins, Varro had located in the word *sponte* the legal and commercial necessity for a contract to be undertaken without constraint, freely and of one's own accord. It is not known whether *spons* and *spondere* derive ultimately from a common root; and this obscurity may be taken as symbolic of the many problems and paradoxes that gather around almost all attempts to look into questions of the nature of the will. Are our promises dependent upon the freedom of our will for their validity? More searchingly, what is our *will*, and what does it mean to say that it is *free*? These are ancient philosophical and theological questions that reach centrally into our lives as moral, religious, civic and – as Varro saw – commercial beings; and they are still alive in the arguments about determinism and creativity in the philosophical debates surrounding contemporary neurology. As Daniel Dennett asks in *Freedom Evolves*, where he distinguishes ideas of causal determinism from a fatalistic sense of inevitability: “Do we live in a universe in which striving and hoping, regretting, blaming, promising, trying to do better, condemning and praising make sense?”<sup>1</sup>

The word *spontaneous* made its first printed appearance in English in the middle of a theological debate about precisely these points – a debate in which the civic and political anxieties were as prominent as the theological. The disputants were Dr Bramhall, Bishop of Derry, and the philosopher Thomas Hobbes; their debate took place between 1654 and 1656 and was finally published in 1656 under the title of *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*. *Spontaneity* itself, a word that had first appeared in a religious polemic of 1651 by Christopher Cartwright, was a direct translation of the mediaeval Latin *spontaneitas*, a term invented by the schoolmen to describe what Hobbes, with typical rage for geometric definition, called “inconsiderate proceeding”,<sup>2</sup> or action undertaken freely of one's own accord but unconsidered by the will. The term belonged to religious philosophy and occupied a semantic place between free will and necessity in theological debate. Some human actions are undertaken out of necessity; others

are spontaneous, undertaken without election of the will; whilst others still, the most perfect, are voluntary and undertaken with the full approval of the deliberative will. These three classes are not mutually exclusive. An action may be both necessary and spontaneous, as when a galley-slave starts to row harder when his homeland comes into view; and likewise, an action may be both spontaneous and voluntary, as when the same slave suddenly chooses to eat from one dish rather than another. However, says the Bishop of Derry, no action can be both constrained and free at the same time; as Cartwright said in 1651, spontaneity implied “freedom from coaction” (*OED*), and here for the Bishop we reach the crux of the matter:

I may like that which is inevitably imposed upon me by another, but if it be inevitably imposed upon me by extrinsical causes, it is both folly for me to deliberate, and impossible for me to choose, whether I shall undergo it or not. Reason is the root, the fountain, the original of true liberty, which judgeth and representeth to the will, whether this or that be convenient, whether this or that be more convenient.<sup>3</sup>

The theological debate about free will and necessity, expressing as it does the England of the Civil War, is also a political debate about the nature of the body politic and the good citizen. *Election*, we might say, belongs to the free will of the free citizen, acting unconstrainedly within the law; and only a rational, unconstrained act is truly free.

Hobbes, however, though likewise preoccupied with a country torn apart by a religious civil war, was of a different mind from the Bishop. He was a necessarian, believing that all our actions are necessary, or determined, by their antecedent desires, that men and women cannot will their desires into being, and that they are only free to choose that which they will. Liberty for Hobbes, therefore, had no other meaning than the freedom to fulfil our desires free from impediment of all kinds; and the desire of the wise prince, or

ruler, should be to regulate rewards and punishments in such a way that the desires of his people are directed necessarily, by the calculus of pleasure and pain, to the general good of the commonwealth. *Will*, in Hobbes's scheme, meant simply desire or aversion; it is the name that we give to the last movement of desire or aversion that we feel before proceeding to act. Clearly, for Hobbes, the language of free will is empty, without signification, and his scepticism about the concept of *spontaneity* surfaces when he disdains it as "a word not used in common English".<sup>4</sup> It is a typical example of the "confusion and emptiness" that characterises the language of the schoolmen,<sup>5</sup> who cannot see that spontaneity means no more than "*appetite*, or *will*".<sup>6</sup> Hobbes has broken away from the traditions of classical and Christian psychology; he no longer presents the various powers of the mind as a kind of puppet-show ("Enter the Will, Exit Reason" and so forth) but is preoccupied instead with mental processes ("there is willing, or reasoning", and so forth). It is not the noun but the verbal noun that captures the motions of our mental life. Bramhall disagreed; Hobbes's deterministic vision of the mental life as driven by will, even if mediated at its best by the calculations of reason, was sacrilegious to the Bishop's celebration of human liberty, and of reason as God's light within us. Will is no longer desiring but the volitional power that exercises choice and control over desire. Bramhall described a wide range of volitional acts, from the instinctive to the fully considered, and left it in no doubt that spontaneous actions, whether prompted by instinct or emotion, have their place in the human economy. They are not, however, "free" in that they are not fully rational; they are of a lower order than actions undertaken with the approval of the deliberative, rational will.

What the debate between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall makes clear is that the context within which the concept of spontaneity evolved was theological; and the rapid spread of the word in its new English form shows the widespread interest that people had in such discussion. Dryden, in 'The Cock and the Fox', imitating Chaucer's

*The Nun's Priest's Tale*, actually set part of the debate between Hobbes and Bishop Bramhall into verse. The cock Chanticleer has dreamed in the night of a fox and, when he awakes, he debates with his wife Pertelot whether it will be safe for him to fly down from the perch and peck for grain in the yard; but it is not the value of dream-interpretation that he disputes, as in Chaucer, but the freedom of his will:

If Prescience can determine Actions so  
 That we must do, because he did foreknow;  
 Or that foreknowing, yet our choice is free,  
 Not forc'd to Sin by strict necessity:  
 This strict necessity they simple call,  
 Another sort there is conditional.  
 The first so binds the Will, that Things foreknown  
 By Spontaneity, not Choice, are done.  
 Thus Galley-Slaves tug willing, at their Oar,  
 Consent to work, in prospect of the Shore;  
 But wou'd not work at all, if not constrain'd before.  
 That other does not Liberty constrain,  
 But man may either act, or may refrain.  
 Heav'n made us Agents free to Good or Ill,  
 And forc'd it not, tho' he foresaw the Will.  
 Freedom was first bestow'd on human Race,  
 And Prescience only held the second place.<sup>7</sup>

The comedy here, of course, is that this theologically orthodox conclusion is reached by a cock, who is driven by instinct; and whilst Dryden's learned wit pokes fun at the folly of all those contemporary debates over the respective merits of liberty, necessity and chance, of constraint, spontaneity and free-will, the comedy glances beyond its ostensible topic to satirise our own status as talking animals, full of words and ideas but lamentably lacking in self-knowledge and restraint.

But the view shared by Bishop Bramhall and Chanticleer that the dignity of human beings resides in the power of the deliberative will was about to be challenged: the paradigm, the episteme, was about to be transformed and, with it, the semantic fit of the concept of spontaneity. The new sentimental literature that grew out of the accommodation between the aristocracy and the emergent middle classes at the end of the seventeenth century increasingly located individual worth in the immediacy of sociable feeling, and in so doing it naturalised the new social order as a theatre of goodness. In this new arena the semantic context of spontaneity changed from the “objective” sphere of human volition to the “subjective” sphere of human emotion; the word that had once stigmatised the imperfection of unwilled action now signalled the perfection of unwilled feeling. It was the existential mode of our being rather than the moral effect of our doing that came first; spontaneity of feeling conferred authenticity upon the actions it produced. Wordsworth articulates this cultural transition very clearly for us in a beautiful little poem from *Lyrical Ballads*, ‘The Tables Turned’, in which he urges a friend (the young intellectual, William Hazlitt, in real life) to renounce the anxieties of bookish life for a while and to cultivate instead a therapeutic relaxation amidst the goings-on of the natural world:

Books! ’tis a dull and endless strife,  
Come, hear the woodland linnet,  
How sweet his music; on my life,  
There’s more of wisdom in it.

And hark! how blithe the throstle sings!  
And he is no mean preacher;  
Come forth into the light of things,  
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,  
Our minds and hearts to bless –

Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,  
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.<sup>8</sup>

In this new world into which Wordsworth ushers us, questions of moral conduct have become complicated by ideas of mental health; ethics are intertwined with hygiene in a relationship that may be either complementary, contradictory or dialectical by turns. Christianity had always insisted that good deeds were only truly good if they sprang from a good heart; but now the goodness of that heart was defined not only in moral but also in biological terms. The body has entered the ethical equation. Wordsworth's paradoxical phrase "spontaneous wisdom", where spontaneity evokes the body and wisdom the mind, underlines the psychosomatic unity of human beings. It had been Coleridge, after all, Wordsworth's friend and collaborator on *Lyrical Ballads*, who had first seen the need to coin a single word out of the separate ideas of psyche and soma; and increasingly during the eighteenth century, as the body escaped from under the ban of puritanism, goodness was conceptualised in terms not only of right conduct but also of what Wordsworth called the "spontaneous wisdom" of the body. In this late eighteenth-century and Romantic use of the word, spontaneity could be used not only as a description but also, despite its dangers, as a value; and it was this Romantic use of the word that was inherited by D. H. Lawrence over a century later.

## II.

The wartime years were difficult for Lawrence, not least in the career that he had chosen for himself as a professional writer. He had been exempted from military service on the grounds that he had had consumption, and his health remained poor; there was little income for writers of any kind and, in the autumn of 1916, he was living in a state of great poverty with his wife Frieda in a tiny cottage on an isolated hillside in Cornwall. With the banning of *The Rainbow* for obscenity in 1915, in a moral panic intensified by the war, the role that he had assigned to himself as the conscience of



his nation had been stripped from him; and now, although he had just completed and was about to start revising the first version of *Women in Love*, he knew that its publication was impossible in the immediate future. Furthermore, he had quarrelled with Bertrand Russell, with whom he had hoped to deliver a course of public lectures preaching revolution and social reconstruction; and increasingly he found himself marginalised, full of hatred for all things British, and beginning to think of settling in America, which had not yet entered the war and where he hoped to find an audience for his books.

Neither were things going well for him personally, in his marriage. The war years were difficult for Frieda too, cut off both from her German family of origin and from her English family whom she had left for Lawrence. In isolation in Cornwall they lived hard on one another, and the strain exacerbated the tensions in their marriage. In the first flush of his new relationship with Frieda, Lawrence had thought himself cured of the “toppling balance” (*SL* 260) caused by his over-close attachment to his mother and his corresponding hostility towards his father; but during the war-years, gradually, old Oedipal patterns began to reassert themselves. We can trace the dawning of this realisation in Lawrence, and the beginnings of his attempt to deal with it, through the two versions of *Women in Love*. It is a process that reached one of its climaxes in the well-known but still astonishing letter that he wrote to Katherine Mansfield in December 1918, after reading Jung’s *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*:

Beware of it – this Mother-incest idea can become an obsession. But it seems to me there is this much truth in it: that at certain periods the man has a desire and a tendency to return unto the woman, make her his goal and end, find his justification in her. In this way he casts himself as it were into her womb, and she, the Magna Mater, receives him with gratification. This is a kind of incest. It seems to me it is what

Jack does to you, and what repels and fascinates you. I have done it, and now struggle all my might to get out. (3*L* 301-2)

Lawrence's struggle to recover confidence in his own masculine authority, which preoccupied his fiction for the next seven years, was complicated by a growing awareness of a homosexual component to his sexuality, and a courageous commitment to explore it, if not in practice then at least in theory. It was a commitment which, as we can sense from the closing page of *Women in Love*, was felt as a threat by Frieda, not least perhaps because it nullified the self-image that Otto Gross had helped to instil in her as a "mütterliches Weib", a "*Weib der Zukunft*", a liberated woman whose love had the power to heal and liberate others.<sup>9</sup> The struggle at the heart of their love was deep, and fed upon itself. Within their relationship there was something that was locked, a systemic impasse that they could not negotiate; in the language of *Women in Love*, action bred reaction, tick-tack, in a mutual hostility that led them flirtatiously to seek out other potential sexual partners.

At a more intellectual level Lawrence's struggle with Frieda's narcissistic self-image was not only a struggle against the liberation programme of Otto Gross but also against Freud and the whole psychoanalytic enterprise. "Lawrence was instinctively against Sigmund Freud, Frieda was intelligently for him", H. D. would write later, with the war years 1917-18 in mind.<sup>10</sup> There were, of course, strong personal reasons for Lawrence's hostility to psychoanalysis; Gross, after all, had brought Freud into his marriage and made Oedipus his bed-fellow. But Lawrence's animus was not simply personal. In London he had met and befriended many of the leading Freudians of the day, and they had left him with much to test against his own experience. Early in September 1916, as he was finishing the first version of *Women in Love*, Barbara Low had sent him the most recent number of the *Psychoanalytic Review* containing Alfred Kuttner's review of *Sons and Lovers*, which had intelligently analysed the book in Oedipal

terms and honoured it as a work of self-therapy. Lawrence wrote back at once to say that he “hated” the review: “My poor book: it was, as art, a fairly complete truth: so they carve a half lie out of it, and say ‘Voilà’. Swine!” (2L 655). It is not a half-truth that they carve but a “half lie” – a half-truth seen from the wrong side, as it were. But what exactly was it that Lawrence found objectionable in Kuttner’s review?

In the first place, Lawrence had a strong sense of the difference between the roles of art and science. “I can’t help hating psychoanalysis”, he told Barbara Low on returning the *Psychoanalytic Review*: “I think it is irreverent and destructive” (2L 659). He chose his words carefully; psychoanalysis, he thought, had no language for reverence or creativity. *Sons and Lovers* “was, as art, a fairly complete truth” – a truth not as biographical record but as art, offering reverence for people tragically damaged and creative in its embodiment of the aliveness of the world and of the people in it. It wasn’t that psychoanalysts couldn’t see the wood for the trees; it was rather that they couldn’t see the living trees for the dead wood of medical science. Their therapy set out to swell the “stream of consciousness” that had made Lawrence’s adolescence so hellish to him (PU 8); it worked by uncovering new knowledge of the past. But even the newest of knowledge, Birkin says in *Women in Love*, can only ever be “of things concluded, in the past” (WL 86); and the deepest need of human beings is to live forward. It is here that art comes into its own, for the role of art is to turn our sympathies away from those things that make for death and towards those things that make for life. *Sons and Lovers*, Lawrence came gradually to think, was, like all tragic art, “a great kick at misery” (IL 459), a living rejection of all that had injured him in the past. It was a way of “attempting to write a new self into existence”.<sup>11</sup> The “common human problem”, as Jung had written in *Transformations and Symbols of the Libido*, was “How am I to be creative?”<sup>12</sup> – and in the face of this question Freudian psychoanalysis was silent. Its conceptual framework needed to be enlarged.

Secondly, Lawrence knew that the problem that he himself had broached in *Sons and Lovers* went deeper than Kuttner allowed in making his Oedipal diagnosis. He knew that the damage had already been done to him long before he arrived at the Oedipal stage, and that an Oedipal diagnosis that took no account of his infantile experience could never be fully true. "I was born hating my father", he wrote (*IL* 190); and the corollary of this is that he was born loving his mother, impelled to look after her and to protect her from anxiety. It was here that Paul Morel found his life-mission: "He was so conscious of what other people felt, particularly his mother. When she fretted, he understood, and could have no peace. His soul seemed always attentive to her" (*SL* 82). It was this anxiety of his mother, her depression, that he was called upon to remove – a task made all the more difficult because it aroused a corresponding anxiety and depression in him. Barbara Ann Schapiro, invoking the insights of object relations psychoanalysis, has written very well about this element in Lawrence in her book *D. H. Lawrence and the Paradoxes of Psychic Life* (1999); and the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, to whom she refers, described movingly, out of his own experience, the damage that a depressed mother may do to her child in her demand to be cheered up:

The task of the infant in such a case is to be alive and to look alive and to communicate being alive; in fact this is the ultimate aim of such an individual, who is thus denied that which belongs to more fortunate infants, the enjoyment of what life and living may bring. To be alive is all. It is a constant struggle to get to the starting point and to keep there. No wonder there are those who make a special business of existing and who turn it into a religion.<sup>13</sup>

Winnicott's words suggest one of the central conflicts in the character of Lawrence himself, the longstanding conflict between depression and creativity.

This conflict has not always been understood by critics of Lawrence, although it was a conflict that Frieda Weekley struggled hard to grasp in the early days of their relationship. She found in him, she said, “abysses of elusive, destructive, spiritual tragedy” counteracted forcibly by “energies” and “strong virility” (*IL* 494), whilst his depressions she described unforgettably as “a hump, only a monster camel could carry” (*IL* 532). Understood in the light of Winnicott’s account, her words suggest what we might call the pathological shadow of Lawrence’s creativity; and we can take our understanding further by applying to Lawrence himself some words spoken by Lou Witt in the novella *St. Mawr*, as she describes the great horse who is the eponymous hero of the story:

“He stands where one can’t get at him. And he burns with life. And where does his life come from, to him? That’s the mystery. That great burning life in him, which never is dead. Most men have a deadness in them, that frightens me so, because of my own deadness.” (*SM* 60-1)

In these sentences we arrive at the particular constellation of Lawrence’s genius: the wonderful liveliness of his writing; his religious sense of the liveliness of the natural universe; his hypersensitive penetration into other people; and his fiercely satirical intolerance of their post mortem ways of life. “Most men have a deadness in them, that frightens me so, because of my own deadness”. It is in the personal context of this inner conflict, as well as in the historical context of the war and the cultural context of the fashionable spread of psychoanalysis, that we need to approach Lawrence’s concept of spontaneity, remembering that it is only the person who is afraid of losing spontaneity who feels the need to praise it.

It may be thought that Lawrence had always been alive to the importance of spontaneity. He had, after all, always been drawn to the liveliness of the world, and aware of his own ability to communicate it, both in talking and in writing. From the very

beginning he had been one of “those who make a special business of existing and who turn it into a religion”. As early as 1912 the heroine of his novel *The Trespasser* had lain with her head on her lover’s breast, listening to the thump of his heart and wondering: “Was there also deep in the world a great God thudding out waves of life, like a great Heart, unconscious?” (T 79). Yet the word spontaneity was rarely used in those early years. Even in *The Rainbow* the word is only used twice, on neither occasion with great force. Once Lawrence notes the absence of “spontaneous joy” from a relationship maintained by the will (R 407). But then with *Women in Love* comes the change. The word is used 17 times in *Women in Love*; it is used 43 times in the 1918-19 *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 24 times in the 20 pages of the 1919 essay ‘Democracy’; 41 times in the 12 chapters of the essay ‘Education of the People’, first written in 1918 and extended in 1920, and 26 times in the 50 pages of *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, written in January 1920. Clearly by this time we are dealing with a key Lawrentian word, not only in terms of the quantity of times that it is used but also of the quality – it is a word that appears in little ritualistic clusters, a magical word invoking the spirit that it names.

It was in the first version of *Studies in Classic American Literature*, written in 1917-19 with thoughts of a post-war move to America, that Lawrence first set himself seriously to explore, both for himself and for his civilisation, the roots of the spontaneous life that he thought could break through the psychological, cultural and historical impasse symbolised by the Great War. Of the twelve essays that make up the volume, the first eight were published in the *English Review* in 1918-19. Lawrence valued the whole set highly, and it is clear that he directed them particularly at his psychoanalytic friends. Indeed, one of their primary aims was to offer a critique of Freudian theory. Lawrence even told his American publisher Huebsch in 1919 that Ernest Jones, in his first trip abroad after the war, had gone to Vienna partly in order to instruct Freud in the revisions needed to bring psychoanalytic

theory into line with the outlook of the *Studies*. Given Jones's orthodoxy at this early stage of his analytic career, Lawrence's wish was surely father to that thought.

I only know the psychoanalysts here – one of them – has gone to Vienna, partly to graft some of the ideas on to Freud and the Freudian theory of the unconscious – is at this moment busy doing it. I *know* they are trying to get the theory of primal consciousness out of these essays, to solidify their windy theory of the unconscious. Then they'll pop out with it, as a discovery of their own. – You see I've [*sic*] told Ernest Jones and the Eders the ideas. – But they don't know how to use them. (3L 400)

It may have been partly Lawrence's failure to convince Jones, and thus to influence the course of psychoanalytic history, that made his two later books, *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious* and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, increasingly critical of Freud.

The analytical method used in the *Studies* is deliberately offered by Lawrence as his own critique of the dream-analysis practised by Freud. "Never trust the artist. Trust the tale", he famously wrote, in the final version of the essays (SCAL 14);<sup>14</sup> for in the repressive age in which we live, the self is inescapably split between the demands of civilised morality and those of its unconscious desires.

This quality of duplicity which runs through so much of the art of the modern world is almost inevitable in an American book. The author is unconscious of it himself. He is sincere in his own intention. And yet, all the time, the artist, who writes as a somnambulist, in the spell of truth as in a dream, is contravened and contradicted by the wakeful man and moralist who sits at the desk. (SCAL 168-9)

Throughout the essays Lawrence traces with wonderful versatility the vicissitudes of the instinctual life as it succumbs to the

repressiveness of social life. From the mechanical Franklin, who seems (apart from his untidiness) scarcely to have an instinctual life at all, to the death-haunted Whitman, Lawrence traces in order of increasing severity a variety of dissociative illnesses that characterise American civilisation. His analysis resembles that of Otto Gross, who again and again had seen the origin of mental illness in the “conflict of individuality with *an authority that has penetrated into our own innermost self*”.<sup>15</sup> It is not the artistic achievement of the writers that concerns Lawrence, though he is quick to praise good writing when he finds it; it is rather the kinds of perverse creativity that he discovers, and their symbolic meaning for the history of his time. Looked at in this light, *Studies* is a collection of case-histories detailing the most typical pathological conditions of the age; and they are all, in Lawrence’s view, the result of a civilisation that has anathematised the deepest impulses and desires of the body. It is not a universal or biological necessity that he is describing but a cultural contingency; and his aim is to recover what in ‘New Eve and Old Adam’ he had called the “physical soul” (*LAH* 173) on behalf of a civilisation that he feels has lost it. Where Freud had dealt in the repressed unconscious, Lawrence’s critique focused upon the creative unconscious which meant, for him, the hidden spontaneous life of the material body. It was the equivalent of what Gross meant by *das Eigene* as opposed to *das Fremde*: that which proceeds intrinsically from the self as opposed to that which proceeds from external authority and constrains the self. Puritanism in the time of Hobbes and Bramhall had waited on the motions of the spirit; Lawrence, like some mirror-image of his own nonconformist youth, waited upon the motions of the body, its emotions.

It is not necessary here to describe Lawrence’s views of the body in any detail. He had not only been pondering psychoanalysis in 1917-18; he had also been reading theosophical and neurological textbooks and the *Studies* oddly combine them both, identifying the body as the seat of an extended, federated consciousness. Lawrence divides the body vertically into front and back, and horizontally



into upper and lower, and then maps different modes of consciousness upon each zone. The consciousness of the front part of the body is of love or attraction to others, whilst that of the back is of hatred or resistance; the consciousness of the upper part of the body registers these feelings in spiritual terms, and that of the lower in sexual terms. This is something less than the medicine that Lawrence wanted it to be, and something more than the metaphor that we might want it to be. It is neither a medical nor a metaphorical statement to say that our heart goes out towards someone or that someone puts our back up; it is a recognition that our feelings are mapped upon our body, and manifest themselves to us through it. Lawrence's quarrel is with the view that the seat of consciousness is "in" the brain. What is omitted from this view is that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, that such consciousness always involves our emotions, and that our emotions – to quote Antonio Damasio – "use the body as their theatre".<sup>16</sup> Lawrence's approach is in line with that of William James who had argued that, in emotions, "*the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur IS the emotion*".<sup>17</sup> What is remarkable about Lawrence's thinking is the thoroughness and the intensity with which he dedicates himself to the emotional life of the body. It is as though he is trying to recapture for the early twentieth-century adult, living in a puritanical and repressive civilisation, something of the way that emotions for the very young child are whole-body experiences, carrying their own authenticity. It was perhaps, in one way of looking, the lost body of his own infancy that he was seeking, in an effort to recover from the depressive and stifling self-consciousness into which he had been raised and which, in his view, psychoanalysis would only serve to intensify.

In America, according to the *Studies*, the problem had begun with the Puritan fathers when they repressed in their people "the spontaneous impulses and appetites of the self" (SCAL 184). This crucifixion of what Lawrence calls "the impulsive body" (SCAL 176) left the American to live as "a unit of will rather than a unit of

being" (SCAL 231); but, he adds, "our volition is always subsidiary to our spontaneous arrival" (SCAL 175). Here is a clear indication of the semantic shift in the meaning of spontaneity from the sphere of volition to its contrary. Lawrence damns American life as life of "the self-determined ego" (SCAL 231), and its art as "post mortem effects"; Poe is his example of what happens to art when it is driven from the will. Poe can only write tales, he says, not stories, since "in a *story* the movement depends on the sudden appearance of spontaneous emotion or gesture, causeless, coming out of the living self" (SCAL 230). This emphasis on the spontaneous emotion or gesture characterises the *Studies*, and expresses Lawrence's wish to live "spontaneously, from the living, real self" (SCAL 213), from what we might now call the True Self rather than from a False Self of mind or intellect. "The creative gesture, or emanation, for ever precedes the conscious realisation of this gesture" (SCAL 181), he wrote. Lawrence was aware, of course, of the paradox of trying to be spontaneous; he thought it, as we have seen, "the hardest thing in the world" to achieve. In his *Studies* he ridiculed the spuriousness of Crèvecoeur's eighteenth-century sentimentalism – "none of it is spontaneous emotion. It is all dictated from the head" (SCAL 195) – as in *Women in Love* he satirised the grotesquerie of Hermione's classroom antics in pursuit of spontaneity. Poe and Crèvecoeur may have failed, as Hermione fails, but it is the mission of the true contemporary artist to write a new self into existence; and some of the most bountiful writing in the *Studies* belongs to Lawrence's attempt to realise the prodigality of the creative imagination, of "the very impulse itself, the creative gesture, drifting out incalculable from human hands" (SCAL 185).

It is this sense of the aliveness of the healthy body, of the primal unconscious, that Lawrence wished to contribute to psychoanalysis. "Read the essays", he wrote to a friend, "and see if you find anything in them" (3L 278); and in his celebration of the body there is much to find. There is also much that is strained, as we shall see; and this belongs to the difficulty of Lawrence's own struggle to achieve spontaneity. The traces of that struggle are even more

evident when he turns from the aliveness of the human body to the aliveness of the universe around it – and here the *Studies* are at their weakest. Lawrence draws on esoteric sources to invent a creation myth so far from common sense that it is hard for any reader to find anything in it, and I shall make no effort to describe it here, save to say that it recalls the famous lines that Blake wrote for Los in *Jerusalem*: “I must Create a System or be enslav’d by another Man’s. / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create”.<sup>18</sup> It is a dualism of life and matter that Lawrence imagines, with a deep structural balance between the “rare *living* plasm” of the creative Godhead (*SCAL* 262) and the inanimate material out of which the universe is constructed. At every level of creation, “life-plasm mysteriously corresponds with inanimate matter” (*SCAL* 263). Drawing on views of the world that were historically and psychologically primitive, Lawrence was again seeking to recover the lost body of his infancy, with its animistic sense of the circumambient universe.

The fact that Lawrence’s psychology is balanced by a cosmology reminds us that, as with all responsible theorists of spontaneity, his theory of spontaneity was simultaneously a theory of relationship. The emotions mapped on the body are in themselves relationships; they belong to what he calls “the living conjunction or communion between the self and its context” (*SCAL* 230). What is important to Lawrence about that conjunction, however, is that it is unbounded by the tick-tack of the actions and reactions of causality; there is nothing necessary or automatic about the processes of life. Cosmology, he says, “considers only the creation of the material universe, and according to the scientific ideal life itself is but a product of reactions in the material universe. This is palpably wrong”; and it is palpably wrong, he believes, on every occasion that life emerges. Life bubbles up mysteriously, incalculably, through the links of the causal chain, with a spontaneity that saves us from “the materialisation and emptiness” of existence (*SCAL* 262). Lawrence’s argument is religious, an updating for a Schopenhauerian age of the traditional Christian

belief in the soul; and it is open to the same philosophical objection to which Bramhall's dualism had been vulnerable in his debate with Hobbes – namely, that it cannot explain or demonstrate the means by which the mind, or soul, interacts with the body. This, as Daniel Dennett says, “is widely regarded as the inescapable and fatal flaw of dualism”.<sup>19</sup> What is at stake is how we choose to punctuate the narrative of our emotional life, of where we choose to say that desire and hatred start. In the view of both the Hobbesian determinist and the modern materialist, emotions are relationships, either with others or ourselves, that form links in the endless chain of cause-and-effect that makes up the ongoing of the world; but Lawrence's emphasis on the spontaneity of bodily emotions tends always to disguise their status as relationship, as it tends also to mask the educational role of culture in authoring – and authorising – them. Liberty for Lawrence is more than “freedom from coercion”; it is a quintessential property of life. It is not the *sense* but the *fact*, the theological fact, of spontaneity that he values. He tends to idealise the body, the “physical soul”, in a way that he would have been quick to condemn in anyone else. It was a necessary emphasis in his struggle against the deadness that he felt in himself and in his age; the idealisation of spontaneity made him feel real, and promised independence in a marriage and culture that always felt a threat to him.

### III.

In so far as Lawrence's aim in the first version of the *Studies* was to lay firm hold upon the body of his own creativity, he clearly succeeded, for he produced a book of great beauty and power that bears eloquent testimony to his inner liveliness. The *Studies* played their part in the great conflict of his life by keeping faith with the creative and spontaneous gesture amidst all the various threats of wartime depression. It was a conflict, however, whose strain is made manifest in the excesses of its neurology and its cosmology. Lawrence's system-building, both with regard to the body and the universe, is a communication that is simultaneously a defence

against communication; and it is clear that the ideas that he wanted Jones to persuade Freud to adopt were ideas that it was impossible for any man of science to accept. They are the ideas of a man who has not only been driven to the margins of his culture but who has voluntarily taken up residence there; and as a result the idea of spontaneity which he cherishes is insufficiently disciplined by the common concerns of the tribe, and is not useful in the way in which he hoped. In so far as his aim was to make a positive contribution to the development of psychoanalytic theory, therefore, it is not perhaps surprising that Lawrence was less successful. Jones and the Eders, as Lawrence himself said, did not know how to use his ideas. But in another way it may be possible to say that he succeeded; for a generation later the psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, brought up in the cultural climate of the Bloomsbury and post-Bloomsbury London which Lawrence had done so much to shape, finally introduced the concept of spontaneity into the discourse of psychoanalysis. Decisively, in his 1960 paper 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self', Winnicott "linked the idea of a True Self with the spontaneous gesture"<sup>20</sup> in a way that is essentially in line with Lawrence's thinking in *Studies in Classic American Literature*. But elaboration of that material belongs to another time and place.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* [2003] (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, 'The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance', in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, ed. Sir William Molesworth, Bart, Vol. V (London: John Bohn, 1841), 82.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>7</sup> John Dryden, 'The Cock and the Fox: or, The Tale of the Nun's Priest, from Chaucer', ll. 525-41, in *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley, Vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 1618.

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<sup>8</sup> William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned', ll. 9-20, in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1787-1800*, ed. James Butler and Karen Green (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992), 109.

<sup>9</sup> See John Turner, with Cornelia Rumpf-Worthen and Ruth Jenkins, 'The Otto Gross – Frieda Weekley Correspondence: Transcribed, Translated and Annotated', *DHLR*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer 1990), 207, 198.

<sup>10</sup> H. D., *Tribute to Freud* (Oxford: Carcanet, 1971), xi.

<sup>11</sup> John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 126.

<sup>12</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformations and Symbolisms of the Libido*, tr. Beatrice M. Hinkle [1916] (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1991), 54.

<sup>13</sup> D. W. Winnicott, 'Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites' [1963], in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment: Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1965), 192.

<sup>14</sup> All future quotations are from the 1918-19 versions of the essays in *SCAL*, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>15</sup> Otto Gross, 'Overcoming Cultural Crisis' [1913], tr. John Turner, in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, ed. Robert Graham, Vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 282.

<sup>16</sup> Antonio Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness* [1999] (London: Vintage, 2000), 51.

<sup>17</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* [1890] (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1998), Vol. 2, 449.

<sup>18</sup> William Blake, *Jerusalem*, Chap. 1, Plate 10, ll. 20-1, in *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford UP, 1966), 629.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* [1991], Chapter 2, Section 4 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1992), 35.

<sup>20</sup> D. W. Winnicott, 'Ego Distortion in Terms of True and False Self' [1960], in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, 145.