

Towards the Philosophy of Locality.

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Abstract:

The paper derives from listening intently to the connection between man and a place. Under examination here is local man, and along with him, a cultural experience which holds hidden in itself the philosophy of locality and a tale about a place. What would the idea of locality be? Does local man have the power to create the world? These questions accompany reflections on man situated in a place. The author refers to Nietzsche, Heidegger, Márai, Pessoa, Rilke, Derrida, and Deleuze. Using the comparative method, the author tries to create philosophy of locality as a profound thought, which would clarify the road of man according to the teaching of the place. When we take a look at the story commenting upon as well as creating the world, we can observe the movement of “shifting” places: Augé’s *non-lieux*, Nora’s *lieux de memoire*, Reijnders’s *lieux d’imagination*, Foucault’s *hétérotopie*. It is joined by a number of shifts and dispossessions: dystopia, utopia, eutopis, atopia, etc. However, these stories are not able to veil the sense of place. The philosophy of locality exposes man to a place, confronts him/her with a place and compels him/her to fill the place with meaning and commitment. Man situated in a place is man bound to take up his/her place and live in this place creatively, without any support from the inherited thoughtless repertoire of tools for adaptation. The paper derives from the willingness to seek creative power in what is seemingly sluggish, stagnant and separate.

Keywords: place, philosophy of locality, local man

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The power of making and that which is out-of-the-way

The combination of will and power in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche unveils the imperative of making. *Der Wille zur Macht* makes us take life as a challenge, struggle, and transcendence of that which is already there, for where is life there is also the will to power (Nietzsche 1968, 341–365; 1999, 77–78). The power of making and self-overcoming brings forth an incessant growth. The will to power leads us to the space which is open up to the interconnections of desires, power, energy, growth, fire, and affirmation.

Now it is time for our turn from the too omnipotent Nietzschean interconnection of the creator with the self-overcoming of one's weaknesses and of that which has been hitherto insurmountable. It is time to leave behind the cultural correlation between the subversive creation and the spectacular changes of the world and mental revolutions. Depriving the idea of power of its uncontrollable momentum and force let us focus on that which is the power of endurance and resilience. However provocative it may seem toward the Nietzschean reluctance to permanence and inertia, let us turn toward that which is ephemerally lasting, off the way, and withdrawn from the worldly life, that is, toward the local man.

Can we expect to find the power of making on the side of the idea of locality? In order to answer this question, we have to voice certain reservations and shifts. While searching for the philosophy of locality – let us add, the one that does not restrain from the metaphysics of experience – one has to cleanse thinking from the inventory, political, and folk patterns. The formation of the opposition of “local – global” has already delved into the academic and social discourse to such extent that it requires a considerable effort to perceive in the idea of locality and the local man more than village, open-air ethnographic museum, the little, rudimentary, simple, indirect, isolated, constant, and settled. However, it is necessary to liberate the dynamics of locality and, simultaneously not to evoke sentimental longing for the hermetic, settled, and isolated local communities that create mere notions of the past.

Thus, we would not quest for the power of world making in the idea of a man as a herd animal, which seems to strengthen the “familiar” life only. We still remember what Doreen Massey (1995) has distinctly stated, namely, the communal isolation hinders fearful practices of life, hence the affirmation of that which is cramped and locked would certainly occur dubious. However, at the same time, we would not like to succumb to an oversimplified knowledge, which demonstrates the disappearance of locality within the media images by virtue of global ownership. The dissolution of the idea of locality has been declared too early, and it became wrongly perceived as a mere outcome of the global changes or as the “ethnic images” community at play in the global politics or marketing, as Arjun Appadurai (2005, 97) would like to think.

Our too easy agreement with the “places lost in the world” that now are merely “returning in images,” as we can see in Hans Belting's writings (2007, 77). The human being related to existence and the power of making is not only “a place of images,” yet such a view is suggested by a strong visual culture (Belting 2007, 70). The local views, intensified and multiplied in the virtual world, are the outcome of the

visually-oriented culture; however, they still cannot replace experience and deplete the philosophy of locality. “The world grasped as a picture” is an emblem of the modern times, as it is depicted by Martin Heidegger (1938, 89–90; 1977, 67–68). Nonetheless, the statement that the media have transformed the locality into the setting for a produced identity – as it is maintained by Appadurai – seems to be a misinterpretation (2005, 62–75). On the part of the concept of locality, there remains the power of making the philosophy of life and, no matter how metaphysically it sounds, the power of sustaining the world.

On our way to the local man and the philosophy of locality, we keep a considerable distance when glancing at the exaggerated eulogy of the scenery, as well as at cosmopolitan frames offering an educational project of transcending one’s own place and time in the name of something we do not entirely know, neither understand – which is discussed in J. Nicholas Entrikin’s argument (2003). “Between” as well as “trans” have already fulfilled our everyday life; however, they have not replaced the local placement of man. James Clifford’s comment that nowadays, the question “Where are you from?” is no longer as significant as “Where are you between?” (1997, 37) seems striking, yet it is not enough rooted in the experience of a place. Due to the time of travelling, today’s “dwelling” has become more important than it was at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Undoubtedly, “the old topographies” have become dispersed and unstable, as Dariusz Czaja explains (2013, 8). When we take a look at the story commenting upon as well as creating the world, we can observe the movement of “shifting” places: Marc Augé’s *non-lieux* (2011), Pierre Nora’s *lieux de memoire* (2006–2011), Stijn Reijnders’s *lieux d’imagination* (2011), Michel Foucault’s *hétérotopie* (2006). It is joined by a number of shifts and dispossessions: dystopia, utopia, eutopis, atopia, etc. Hence we repeat the same question about the components of identity, the central and the peripheral, the recognized and the spontaneous, the old and the new, the present and the virtual. However, these stories are not able to veil the sense of place. Yet, they can certainly blur the philosophy of locality.

Paradoxically, a much desired opening of space and a “worldly” philosophy of life can be guaranteed by powerful places, that is, those that are rooted and distinct on the map of the nearby communities – distinctive yet hospitable places. The media and global experiences enter the local space but they do not program them, for the cultural order as well as spiritual communities cannot be easily constrained to interchangeable social practices. Temporary and fluid social ties of a group, inter- and trans-longings are not enough when the old (seemingly a little archaic when thought in terms of an idea) community of the territory and fate commences to vibrate. The political scene shows that not only are we liberated from such communities, but we can even expect their revival.

The philosophy of locality becomes an imperative that does not let us neglect the power of the place, and, what is more – it makes us perceive in the local man a revitalizing energy that “sustains the world” and makes a specific *ars bene vivendi*. By elevating the peripheral path and place-bound view, we locate ourselves in contradistinction to the non-local or antilocal “from nowhere,” “wherever from,” “anyplace.” A dynamically viewed idea of locality, extracted out of the depths of stagnation, primal source or hermetically sealed fortress, becomes close in meaning to

the Nietzschean image of the sea. The locality, which holds our focus on the house and on that which is nearby, involves the lore which explains us that the reason for holding close to the local and its environs, namely, it empowers us to confront the infinite, the unknown, and the borderless. In this way, “the household philosophy” paves the way for the non-defined, and thus it brings forth a simple knowledge that the household also unveils itself the infinite and the non-definable.

The local man is empowered to build ties with the world and bring forth a story about a place. What then are those ties that enable the local man to sustain the world?

Repetition and the “flame of life”

The local man experiences life while being at the same time a beholder of the world. Life is the only theory. It is good to think – “without thinking,” with no overload of theses, neither evidence. Locality lays the grounds for the act of thinking “without thinking.” We live in a place and this place remains our everyday thinking. The local man is the one who belongs in. He/she learns how to carry this belonging with no negligence to it, and – moreover – he/she does not make it feel like a burden. As Fernando Pessoa (2013, 197) writes, “to explicate means not to believe.” Therefore, the local man does not destroy his/her faith but takes up life with due solemnity. The local man does not explain much so as not to quell the “here and now.” He/she is like a townswoman on Johannes Vermeer’s paintings, the one holding a balance or pouring milk from a water jug. In this way, simple pieces of advice are implemented.

Ars vivendi, surfacing from the depths of the experience of locality, is like a piece of advice taken from the *Herbal Book* by Sándor Márai (2008, 9), which tells us to maintain tranquil existence, “very attentively, to perceive with equal strength the world and ourselves, our mind and our emotions, human intentions and our relationship with the universe.” The local man fears the surplus of words and hysterical gestures, he/she avoids acting hysterically. Each enraptured act obscures the risk of disintegration of things. There always hides a temptation to abandon one’s home. For some people self-restraint may be a choice, for others, a mere acceptance of fate according to the rules “as always,” “like it should be.” There is no dramatic difference between a “choice” and an “acceptance of fate,” as eulogists of conscious and creative participation in culture used to believe. From the point of view of the metaphysics of life, we are subject to the power of the world surrounding us, as we are to simple matters. Be it out of choice or acceptance – indeed, we are subject to a place. Locality means the philosophy of place that is experienced daily. Neither is it a eulogy of the separation of man, his/her freedom, and a place, nor it is not suspicious of the corporeal nature of man, for it is tangible – “its touch reaches out the truth of the world.”

The local man leads as simple a life as the words of a prayer. With no eccentricity, best when lived in tranquility. He/she lives in the particular. He/she is accurate, when locking his/her home, arranging flowers in a flower pot or slicing bread. The local man keeps working humbly and does it for the reiteration and detail. He/she expresses himself/herself by adding nothing. He/she walks to the same places, rests under the same tree, or on the same square he/she watches that which is flowing yet remains the same, but ultimately changes. The idea of living in a place – carefully confirmed and cultivated day after day – unveils itself as the recurring “other.” Life is, to some

extent, one's quest for a place. However, this quest should be devoid of frantic searching for and making oneself up. After all, it is a place that finds us. Following the idea of locality, it can be said that we keep looking for what in the end finds us. A place is not a reward, nor a punishment. It is not a transaction, for in the idea of belonging, there are no business deals, neither any reciprocity. We sustain a place, taking on the responsibility of the space that we got a chance to get. The power of making a place is based on the sustenance of the idea of locality.

Locality loves reiterations. Like Marie Luise Kaschnitz (1978, 171), people like the calm feeling when choosing the same known path, along the same river, across the same bridge, or walk towards the same hill. We understand the constant nature of things. The local man is spun from the Nietzschean spirit of eternal return. He/she serves the moment which forever returns. The same is different, as Gilles Deleuze (1994, 41) wrote: "The Identical does not return." Does it mean that repetition and a meticulous locality conceal creative tranquility and equally creative idea of change, brought by the otherness of "the same"? Yet anthropology brings forth a more pernicious suspicion, that is, the local man is at the same time the one who is able to turn into a flame and beloved detail both the recurrent and the repetition. He/she can burn the world in the name of the idea of locality to which he/she is subdued. War, confinement, dislike for the other, encapsulation with fears – all lie within the philosophy of locality. Each house can turn into a bunker, as Józef Tischner (1990, 198) said: "A house turns into a stronghold, a grand castle, a fortress. It no longer serves living but to towering over the lands surrounding it and people dwelling these lands. Such construction is to arouse fear. It is not a house, for now it is a warning and a threat."

However, the "flame of locality" rather favors the will to repeat and strengthen the world, not the will to destroy. The local man chooses at the same time both coexistence with others, and seclusion in time-space. What keeps him/her from dissolving in the masses is his/her individual relation with his/her environs. A place makes us humbly accept the time – the place was before us and it will last after we have departed. It is like perambulating the Heideggerian field-path, yet in the movement of the repetition of things. *Der Feldweg* is the interpretation of joining the bygone with the yet to come. It is wisdom, the experience of proximity that also safeguards the openness (Heidegger 1983, 89–92). *Feldwege* (familiar country lanes that save the openness), as well as *Holzwege* (Heidegger 1950) (paths in the woods, overgrown with weeds, ending in thick bushes, saving that which is concealed), unveil themselves in the contemplative thinking as the pattern of being viewed as a path. Ultimately, it is the vicinity that un-conceals the paths, being itself on the side of "un-concealment" (Heidegger, 2000, 146).

The local space, which connects the repeated experience of life, conceals other spaces. Pessoa (2013, 321) wrote that he thought there was no other landscape except for the woods, since the woods concealed all other views, and it was enough for us living there, and for others, as life was a unanimous wander on the dying earth. This account could go on to say that no other landscape stretches in front of the local man, for his/her suffering and his/her fate is to be found right there, at home. Life is lived fully "here and there." Other views often are imaginary visions that evolve on the paths of cognition of things. In the end, they bring forth a realization of a simple thought that this life is enough, for there is no other one, and there never really was any. There was

a mere precariously stoked delusion. Locality is both violent and unhurried. We leave it, fatigued with its further clarifications and loyalty, yet we tend to return to it, for ultimately we always wander with the idea of home held deeply in our mind – even when departing it. “The man and his/her home is a subtle unity,” Dariusz Kulas writes (2011, 60). Life encompasses that which is nearby. However, we have to bear in mind that locality thus understood holds the sounds of the universe.

Ephemeral and constant things

Is the local man a pillar of the permanence of things? The local man cannot easily formulate the eulogy of change. He/she will not put forth theories, and thus he/she will not put forth a theory of impermanence and ephemeral nature of things. Nonetheless, it is the local man who experiences the world that is passing. Clinging to life and regular activities, attachment to familiar places, in a simple way reveal the fact that all that has been so carefully cultivated slowly withers away. Childhood grows dim with each touch of things surrounding us. A place is further away with each look. The world surrounding us turns into a museum, testifying emptiness. Home and bonds disappear. The place becomes blurred. What remains is faith in the local world and faithful endurance in one’s place, as the only possible being there. Never can locality be so palpable but when experiencing the loss of things, places, deeds, words, flora, fauna or people. This is our daily loss that happens incessantly, day by day.

The local view is a meditation on the loss of places and things. It comes as a medieval shocking question about where has everyone gone to, everyone that used to fill the world, which was so evocatively expressed in François Villon’s lament (1982, 329–356, 367–384). This lament tends to recur by means of the philosophy of locality. In the local experience, there is recurrence and ephemeral nature deriving from the Biblical *Ecclesiastes*: “One generation departs and another generation comes, but the world forever stays” (Koh 1, 4). “What has been, that will be; what has been done, that will be done. Nothing is new under the sun!” (Koh 1, 9). The local idea, storing the knowledge that “all was vanity and a chase after wind” (Koh 2, 11), at the same time stores the joy of that which is right now. It wants us to succumb to the flow of things, as there is time for all things. Immersed in recollections the local man experiences impermanence and misery, he/she makes an attempt to touch the gravity of a place. A story of impermanence is spun around him/her. It is his/her service to a place, the one we come to and the one we depart. Kaschnitz (1978, 71) has noted such a recollection: “There we sat on the white sand and observed the Baltic Sea, and then we wandered on from east to west along the whole Vistula Spit between the Vistula Lagoon and the Baltic Sea. There stood a house, sunk in dunes and abandoned as a skeleton. We showed it to our child. We also showed a smokehouse to our child [...]. Who lives there now, in those several houses perched on the ridges of dunes? There once used to wander professors of a university in Königsberg, who, by the way, undressed tossed themselves on the waves.” Those stories express the human humility to a place. The loss of places, people, things, is an irrefutable evidence of our gradual disappearance.

However, this loss becomes somehow the foundations for the permanence of things. In *Schmargendorfer Tagebuch (Schmargendorf Diaries)* by Reiner Maria Rilke we find such a note: “For if people and relations are unforeseeable and change

unceasingly, then, are not things the only constant point of reference?" (2013, 193). Moreover, it is complimented with the note: "It is things that last, our lives flow" (Rilke 2013, 80).

The combination of permanence and ephemeral nature of things is pertinent to the philosophy of locality. The local man takes care of things nearby, and thus fends against death. He/she creates the world of things that become the beholders of the lives of men, their deeds, and places they dwell in. When the local man stops gathering things and finally gets rid of them, he/she experiences the reverse of the im(permanent) world. In a similar vein, Rilke (2013, 35) explained that we do not enrich ourselves by grasping things in our hands, for things should flow through our hands as a thought through a "festive gate we cross in order to return home." Our hands should not constrain things like a coffin. Solemn thought on things that flow through our hands like through a gate leading home constitutes an oikological remark. In it we find, however pompously it may sound, the power of world making. The path to one's domestication goes through living among things, experiencing the permanence of things, and finally through one's acceptance of loss possessions – even of oneself.

Taking good care of things and clearing the house off handy things is closely linked with the philosophy of locality. The palpable presence of a place disappears along with us, and with the charm of objects. Tadeusz Sławek expresses this idea while interpreting Henry David Thoreau – a man cleaned off everything reveals him/herself as "dis-connected from objects" (2009, 346). We are being be-littled, as are places, although they remain as space for others. The experience of be-littling forms a good interpretation of place.

The crack and radical opening

Into the center of the Christian world, there enters Buddhist experience. We are and we are not, we experience the river of life, we breathe in myriads of beings – placed locally we leave off thinking about Oneself. We pass ourselves just like we pass thinking of permanence of things. All we ever were and we can ever become, all we never were and will never be – is the eulogy of the philosophy of place. The local man, clinging to the idea of endurance, approaching it like the lighthouse, is at the same time the admirer of a moment and reflections on impermanence.

The experience of locality which serves the purpose of sustaining the world by formulating the philosophy of place, brings forth the concern to lose that which is interpersonal – to "leave some room" in a place, not to stack a place with too many things, not to leave too strong a testimony of oneself. That which is empty is pertinent to peace and distance within the interpersonal. The relation to nature and local neighborhood enables the loosening of ties.

We come to realize that this kind of knowledge gives us relief and that we should live in a place with tender care yet with attachment not stronger than necessary. We exist in relation to the natural order of things – there is the sky, the earth, wind, mountains, water, trees. Along with his admiration for the experience of landscape and daily life Rilke noted down that a place makes "a land of learning," and in this way constitutes real education and journey, which equips people after years of learning with what they

have lived through, and gives them “images for everything” (2013, 138–139). This is expressed in his awe at the fact that one can “speak like landscape, by way of the clouds, winds and sunsets” (Rilke, 2013, 139).

We experience this locally by taking roots in the landscape that is there for us while is not ours. It belongs to us by not belonging. This bizarre law of belonging with no act of ownership makes us see that which is incomprehensible. The disquiet in the surrounding landscape and friendship comprise a great theme of Nietzsche’s works. Caves, raging seas, mountain tops, clear streams, and fresh air, all come to form the room for friendship. Zarathustra flees from the masses, retreats into the mountain cave and summits, flees from musty smell of fairs into solitude, where “a rough, strong breeze bloweth” (Nietzsche 1999, 32). Zarathustra makes a place for himself amongst nature, but he does so by the act of uprootedness. In the distance he desires renewal and growth. The master bemoans the loss of his place – we shall remember that the Nietzschean call (2003, 25), seldom referred to in the humanities: “Woe to him who does not have a homeland” (Weh dem, der keine Heimat hat!). The loosening of ties, detachment, and touching upon the incomprehensible is, to some extent, a petrifying renewal of the image of a place. Having experienced the locality in this opening to the incomprehensible we no longer yearn for the stunted local story about the charm of the cuisine, the specificity of wedding customs or traditional costume. The local philosophy of life is searched out in the isthmus to the infinite. A place sustains this radical opening. It foretells an unforeseen tranquillity, welfare, mystery, and “worldliness,” which is joined with the rupture and wound, which cannot be erased at once. Pessoa (2013, 379) writes: “Yet at the end of Rua Dos there is the universe, as well. God also guards this place so as the mystery of life is found here.” Place and emptiness interweave each other, so Pessoa (2013, 347) notes: “The Ganges River flows though Rua Dos Dourades, too.” The philosophy of locality – through guarding the trifles, loyal love of a place, and a permanent order of things – guards the dark as well.

In locality the world exists – cosmos (κόσμος) and chaos (χάος), beginning and end. In a place the metaphysics of death comes to surface. Life, Michalski (2007, 127) writes, “is permeated by death,” it is like a volcano burning with “an undying fire that can devour all that seems to be permanent in life, accomplished, set once and for good, all sense and all subject of knowledge.” However, this life towards death unveils itself in a certain place, especially when the locus takes us off the familiar trajectories. It is in a place that an abyss, cliff, and end. All that is precipitous and inestimable encounters us in that which has been (not enough) familiarised. The Derridean (1999, 10) *chora* (χώρα), which “is *neither* this *nor* that or that it is *both* this and that,” would itself be similar in understanding this abyss. Nonetheless, the philosophy of locality would defend an overview that it is in a place where the unfamiliar and the unseen presides. By developing a local idea the local man puts forth a task for the contemporary world – life should not be an escape from that which infinite and dark. Place directs towards this.

The philosophy of locality would not support an instrumental vision of man’s activities, it would not form a useful plan of social happiness. Locality is no isle of the blessed. To have a house means to have a house that can be lost in any moment. Andrzej Stasiuk (2013, 131) noted that: “The neighbourhood shows signs of decay, house by house, as if my life was diminished. For what will happen with us when all

the places we have been to will finally disappear? We will have to invent them anew, and from this time on our old life will turn into invention, a plaything of memory, and nothing more.” A loss of home unveils the reverse of a place. Tischner (1990, 189) poignantly wrote that each house ultimately teaches a loss, along with the decay of a house, there unfolds the “horizon of transcendence,” for an abandoned house “leaves in a man a blurry imprint – a concept of another house, the house that is immune to fire, to disloyalty – a house of truth.” The philosophy of locality teaches how to be at home, yet with the view of that which is unnamed and incomprehensible. The intimate home space and the touch of a place itself strengthen the mystery of the indeterminate. The unimaginable lurks behind the threshold, in the attic, in the basement, behind the window, the wardrobe, behind the doors – just by the side of that which is known. Bachelard, Márai, and Tischner knew about it. One’s own space smells of and attracts by what is undefined. One’s own space frightens us and thus brings forth – along with the Tischnerian question “Is there anything more fragile than home?” (1990, 188) – fragile knowledge that our beginning and end happen in a place.

Place lies between a petrifying invention and a real order of things. It does not cease to be a disquieting experience, albeit it brings forth an unsettling question, that is, “What is there beyond place?” A place takes us beyond ourselves, toward petrifying questions that Hasidic Jews defined as the ones that open up on the way to cognition and finally lead to the most dangerous question, which – as we read in *The Fiftieth Gate* by Baruch of Mesbiz (2005, 113) – “did not raise before any man.” For Hasidic Jews faith is their liberation from abyss. Faith does not take the human beyond a place, instead, it teaches how we should act, here and in this place, so as to see the light of the hidden life of God, as Martin Buber explains (Buber 2004, 45). The local man would sustain the world by clinging to an idea of a place, for it is what stops man. A place, through storing deep anxiety, at the same time offers liberation.

An abysmal thought as a placed thought

We find it difficult to distinguish between what locality tells us from what the global media story tells us to think. Trust in the birth of mobile, cosmopolitan mass of tourists, TV viewers, gastarbeiters, which transforms locality as in the concept of Daniel Dayan (1999, 19), would not comprise the credo of the philosophy of locality. One can share anxiety concerning cosmopolitan concealment but we find it hard to joyfully declare the mobility of the world, since according the researchers of social processes, global mobility means global ostracism and a mythology of the wealthy world. *Oikos* makes us guard a place as our home, so that we will not go away too far, for we need to return. Even if we are physically far away from our home, we cannot form our own identity by imitating others. Ultimately, the way of *doxa* of the global world does not question a place. *Episteme* of a place is the metaphysical truth, a clear view that we experience the world in a place. It saves us from a brief and spectacular look, overused in modern humanities, about a wonder world of mobility, insurmountable choices, unending paths, common social communication.

Fetishizing globalization, we forgot the simple, the fragile. We would not like to think that the philosophy of locality can be a Nietzschean abysmal thought, which guards both metaphysical anxiety and radical opening to that which is unencompassable, and which develops an infinite longing. At the same time, it is hard to comprehend that the abysmal local idea brings salvation, making the man placed and keeping him or her

directed to life, so that the trajectory of “here” – “everywhere” – “nowhere” – “somewhere” was metaphysically interpreted, rather than instrumentally. We are “local”; we are for the place; and we are marked with the specificity of a place, a particular detail, corporeality. However, this locality seems to be too surreptitious to become a spectacular anthropological story. What is intimate and immediate is genuine when read as existential experience.

The local idea is a stimulus to guard the attentive thought, focused on a place; however, it seems that this withdrawn story of a place possesses a power of making the world. Like Archimedean firm spot, the local idea offers support to earth as *Lebensphilosophie*. Instead of the global and the unplaced that is unfavorable to man, there is a tangible place.

The philosophy of locality – a thought understood as abysmal, radical, save-guarding metaphysical anxiety and salvation, would be such an ennoblement of life.

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