

JUDAISM'S OTHER GEOGRAPHIES:

FRANZ ROSENZWEIG AND THE TIME OF EXILE

Every act becomes guilty as soon as it penetrates into history – Franz Rosenzweig (1962, page 9)

Abstract

This paper proceeds from biblical sources and, at times, via allegory, but its argument is consciously oriented by more concrete and contemporary concerns. In direct opposition to the project of modern Zionism, it poses the question of Judaism's 'other geographies' in a fashion that is properly provisional, speculative – not merely because it draws on certain theological and philosophical speculations but in searching for their links to the political present. Focussing on the particular dialectic of time and space in the work of the early twentieth-century German-Jewish theologian and philosopher, Franz Rosenzweig (1886-1929), and paying specific attention to Rosenzweig's understanding of Jewish non-territoriality and non-autochtony, I argue for the importance of revisiting Judaic political theology in order to reassert the radicalism of a theory that has always opposed the conceptual alliance of land and time, history and the sovereignty, historicism and Zionism. Here, I bring Rosenzweig's major work, *The Star of Redemption* (1921), into dialogue with the different voices of Judith Butler and Jaqueline Rose who, from the varying perspectives of ethics and psychoanalysis, insist on an originary self-difference at the heart of Jewish identity and, with this, the impossibility of any project of national affirmation. Indeed, when read together Rosenzweig, Butler and Rose, I suggest, refer us to a tradition of exilic thought which not only recuperates an alternative spatial model within Judaism but elaborates the ground in which to critique the contemporary nation-state.

Keywords: Rosenzweig, Judaic Theology, Political Zionism, Exile, Dispersion, Dis-Identification, Temporality, Meta-history, Nation-State.

Introduction:

Taking up the famous motif from Isaiah 10:20-22 according to which Israel is only ever definable as a ‘remnant or a ‘remainder’, in *The Star of Redemption* (1921), Franz Rosenzweig, declares Jewish history, “in defiance of all world history”, to be a “history of this remnant” (2005 [1921] page 427). But if for the Old Testament prophet, the nature of the remnant is that it promises some future in-gathering or stands as the sign for some ultimate or antecedent unity, what interests the early twentieth-century German-Jewish philosopher, as Robert Gibbs writes, is the remnant as “an intermediary situation” (2000, page 376): that is, as a present and perpetual phenomenon, “as a *qualitative* condition” of human existence (2000, page 376). The time of the remnant, in Rosenzweig’s terms, is thus neither redeemed nor purgatorial time; neither time fulfilled nor time suspended but the facticity of time spent, time lived. Likewise, the space it produces is not the symptomatic response to the predicament of displacement but is one which might generate and sustain this very condition. But the deep structure of provisionality, here, attests to more than just the poetics of biblical prophecy. Once introduced into ‘historical’ time and place, the remnant proposes that provisionality might itself be allowed an identity, one set apart from the confirmations of national territoriality and so fashion its own form of political and historical understanding. Being a remnant, in short, consists not merely in thinking outside the terms of any unity but of approaching temporal and spatial existence in a way that recognises and legitimizes its own displacing force-fields in identity. Indeed, using Rosenzweig as a guide, my argument suggests that the particularity of Judaic time and space – the immanent and principled nature of the remnant – might be carried over into a kind of

contemporary ‘political geography’ and so emphasise an internal position from which to critique Jewish national identification and territorialisation. To draw on biblical and theological themes, in this sense, is not only to bring ‘older’ currents to bear on debates which locate the Zionist enterprise primarily within the terms of Western nationalism and colonialism but to suggest that Judaic sources also deliver the materials from which a paradigm of the non-national might be composed, ones which might become a contemporary resource for thinking another kind of sovereignty. While, on one level, the task of this argument is primarily theoretical, the invitation it offers is a translational one: to identify a passage from a theological to a worldly realm, seeing in Rosenzweig’s interpretation of Judaic themes what we might call a phenomenology of political practice, of what it means to live outside the dominions of time and territory.

Working on his major thesis the *Star of Redemption* from 1919-1921 in the immediate aftermath of World War 1, Rosenzweig could perhaps justifiably conceptualise history from the perspective of the remnant. In a period when the most disintegrative features of modernity – and its definitive agent, the nation-state – were on spectacular display and at a moment, too, when the conventional dream of Jewish self-determination was being prospectively realised, Rosenzweig came to personify a generation of late Wilhelmine and Weimar Jewish thinkers seeking a counter-lexicon to a nineteenth-century model of political nationhood and the apparently “deadening power” (Rosenzweig, 2000, page 13) of an Idealist, predominantly Hegelian, vision of history which underpinned it. Indeed, if, for Rosenzweig, World War 1 signalled the catastrophic but inevitable result of a philosophy bound to the concept of the state “as the image of actuality of reason”, in Hegel’s famous formulation (Hegel 1952 [1821], page 222)– or, rather, if the War was to finally confirm the overdue fate of an ideal and bloodless reason in the very real and bloody death of Europe’s millions – then only an existential turn against historicism could re-orientate philosophy’s task. As part of a broader anti-historicist

reorientation¹, Rosenzweig's "New Thinking" (*neue Denken*)², the move to reinvigorate theological questions alongside the philosophical merits of modernity, represented a fundamental assault on the and recover, in its stead, a language which might speak to the more meaningful experiential structures of "religion, vitalism and *Existenz*" (Gordon 2005, page 31). While Rosenzweig's call for a different temporality is closely connected to challenging the supposedly inevitable laws of historical process, its implications are fundamentally spatial: they involve living on the margins of a national imagination and in a space set apart from the violence of state formation, one structured in the absence of territory, or rather outside the consciousness that the West has shaped as that space. Indeed, "if all secular history deals with expansion", as Rosenzweig's argues, (Rosenzweig, *Star* page?), then what distinguishes Judaism is a concept of space and its inhabitation that cancels the formation of the state precisely because it cancels the dominion of historical time. Thus when, in 1917, the year of the Balfour Declaration, Rosenzweig issues his polemic against the founding of a legal and political home for Judaism, his terms are clear:

It is only by keeping their ties to the Diaspora that the Zionists will be forced to keep their eyes on the goal, which [is] to remain nomads, *even over there*' (Rosenzweig in Mosès, 1997, page 207, my emphasis).

To be dispersed '*even over there*', thus clearly dispels the obligatory dialectics of national affirmation: the uprooted as the opposite of rootedness, estrangement as the opposite of belonging, exile as the opposite of home. If, however, dispersion is considered from the perspective of the Jewish remnant then it can longer be taken as some kind of fallen realm, a surplus or reduced existence that can only be rectified through a return to a putative

¹ On the wider Weimar context of 'theological anti-historicism' see, amongst others, David N. Myers (2005).

² For his own account of the "New Thinking" written in 1925 and intended as a supplementary and explanatory essay to *The Star of Redemption* see Rosenzweig, 2000, pp 109-139. For a very clear summation of its key terms see also, Barbara E. Galli (1999, pp 1 – 41).

homeland. Rather than being a threat to survival, it becomes renewed and critical possibility ‘*even over there*’ – one which might ground a polity in which the remnant is transposed from the periphery to the center; a polity, indeed, where displacement obtains within the claim to place itself. It is in this sense, as I hope to show, Rosenzweig’s early twentieth-century theology not only goes hand in hand with his charge against historicist structures of time which constitute a territorial imagination but issues a challenge to political Zionism from out of the sources of Judaic thought itself.

In recent years, arguments which seek to contest the fantasies of the Israeli state often draw on frameworks that, in various ways, contest sovereign notions of the Jewish subject and state. Such questions are not only inevitably bound up with Israel’s perpetuation of internationally recognized crimes of dispossession and depopulation but also draw on additional registers: of self-difference as it lives in the heart of identity, of an originary or constitutive alienation as basis of identification, of exile ‘repatriated’ into the experience of belonging itself. Importantly, Rosenzweig is not often cited as an explicit source or influence here. Still relatively peripheral to the canon of postmodern philosophy and, indeed, until recently restricted to the field of Jewish Studies, Rosenzweig’s presence has usually refracted through the more familiar interlocutors of Immanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida³ whose various analyses of Jewish otherness not only correlate to so many Continental accounts of ethics and alterity but provide much of the basis for the – however elliptically, a basis for approaching the complexity of the contemporary Israeli/Palestinian situation. The aim of this

³ While Levinas wrote only two essays and two shorter pieces on him, the degree to which Rosenzweig’s break with the conceit of totality and his embrace of a deformalized temporality suffuses Levinas’ writings is both acknowledged and clear. Indeed, in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* ([1961]1969) Levinas declares his debt to *The Star of Redemption* to be “too often present in this book to be cited”. For in-depth comparative studies see, Robert Gibbs (1992) and Richard A. Cohen (1994). Similarly, while Rosenzweig’s influence on Derrida is arguably most evident in the latter’s notion of the “messianic without messianicism” in *Spectres of Marx*, references to Rosenzweig occur throughout Derrida’s writings. See for example, the long footnote on Rosenzweig in Derrida’s *Monolingualism and the Other* ([1996] 1998) and *Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German* ([1989] 1991). For an excellent combined study, see Dana Hollander (2008).

paper is, therefore, twofold: First, that it adds to that body of work which welcomes Judaic theological discussions as a critical element in our understanding of the subject and its relational encounters with others. Second, in focusing on Rosenzweig, that a Judaic conception of time is seen as inseparable from spatial themes of exile and the non-territorial in a way that makes an active claim for displacement and motivates for a correspondence between an earlier theological analytic on the one hand, and a more current political critique on the other.

Unstable at the Origin

In *The Question of Zion* (2005), Jacqueline Rose refracts her account of political Zionism through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. From its founding vision by secular intellectuals in late nineteenth-century Europe to its urgent revision following the genocide of European Jewry, Rose's task is to illuminate the unconscious biography of modern Jewish statehood, seeking to discover patterns of repression in the discourse of its political formation. "Why or how", she asks, "did this movement – inspired, fervent, driven by the disasters that had befallen its people – succeed, so miraculously but also so tragically, in fulfilling itself?" (2005, page xiv) From the perspective of psychoanalysis, the question hinges around the paradoxes of traumatic identification: of the damaged subject as it turns cruel in the struggle to tolerate and survive itself, of an injury so unbearable that it has, simultaneously, to be preserved and denied. For Rose, then, any account of Zionist militancy and state-sponsored racism proceeds from an analysis of how a primary "wound turns into a sword, how historically-inflicted damage arms itself" (page 145). In the intractable coupling of psychic violation and political violence, it is the accumulated wreckage of shame, disavowal and humiliation, she argues, which drives the messianic energy of the contemporary Jewish state, defending the coherence of national identity – and the aggressive exclusions necessary to sustain it – against the experience of an original loss of boundaries.

From a very different perspective, Judith Butler (2012) denounces political Zionism from within Judaism's own theological and intellectual tradition, seeking to derive a set of political principles that, at source, oppose the inauguration of statehood and, with this, any singularity in Jewish self-identity.⁴ On the one hand, then, Butler's task is to draw on Judaic foundations to undermine the project of political Zionism and its legacy of Palestinian expulsion, occupation and land confiscation. On the other, if any Jewish critique of Zionism is to be credible – or even possible – it cannot be on the grounds of any ethnic exceptionalism – the assumption of any exclusively 'Jewish' set of ethical values. Rather, as Butler insists, it would demand renewing one of the predicates of cultural Judaism itself: that is to say, a tradition announced not in the terms of any surety or stability but one permeated by inconsistency and incompleteness, by a certain dislocation out of which Judaism is constituted and to which it is, in some peculiar sense, obliged and committed. Butler's analysis, then, not only rests on the intricate paradox of a tradition identified by dispersion – Judaism's founding disjuncture, its capacity to 'depart from itself' – but on the implications of such dispersion in relation to others (Butler, 2012, page 15) "If one undertakes this critique [of political Zionism] because one objects to the principles of Jewish sovereignty that govern that region, historic Palestine" then, for Butler, one is already shaped by an original detachment, by some kind of founding "scattering" or ceding of the self which is the precondition of any plural, co-existent – in her terms 'binational' – political project (page 5).

⁴ To avoid being misunderstood, here, my use of the phrase 'Judaism's own theological and theoretical tradition' in no way intends one singular definition or uncontested core. On the contrary, and as Butler also makes clear, any reference to a Judaic tradition assumes the holding together of a multiplicity of identifications and historical situations (e.g. the Arab origins of the Mizrahi, the East and Central European origins of the Ashkenazis, the Sephardic community of Iberia and the Spanish diaspora) all of which are necessarily entangled with various other religious and cultural traditions.

Butler's central argument, then, is that Judaism not only demands a critique of Zionism. In its original capacities, it also provides a way to transcend any exclusivity in identity and thus potentially involves a new political sociality – one no longer grounded in any unitary character or any assumption of a common cause. It is in this double sense that Butler is able to say that dispersion is not merely a geographic issue able to be reversed or repaired; it is not something capable of being overcome by claiming autochony or by 'returning' to an ancestral site, a homeland. Dispersion, here, pertains to a peculiar kind of ontology, or rather the condition of what Eric Santner, in a different context, calls an "ontological vulnerability" (2011, page 216). It is an avowal of strangeness that must itself be incorporated, a principle of displacement that must be "brought home" (Butler, 2012, page 6) in order to establish a polity "where no one religion or nationality may claim sovereignty over another, where, in fact, sovereignty itself will be dispersed" (page 6).

Butler's ethics and Rose's unconscious are distinct interpretative frameworks but in many ways they proceed from a similar idea: to consider the relationship of Judaism to the territory of the nation not only requires that we suspend the fantasy of any cultural or political holism but that we insist on the structural possibility of dispersion, of an original gap, a break, *within* even this "most definable, most self-identifiable, communal identity" (Said, 2003 pages 53-4). For Rose, the dislocation is a psychic one – it concerns the organizing principle of historical trauma as it is repressed and its surfeit discharged, a denial of an originary wound which symptomatically turns abjection into omnipotence and the collapse of identity into the coercions of state violence. For Butler, the dislocation – less a psychic formation than a *type* of thought, a certain *process* of thinking – has a different basis. Emerging out of the tradition of Judaic political theology itself, it does not imply any particularity in identity (particularity, as it signifies a prior or given unity, is precisely *not* the point) but consists in a certain

modality of analysis whose basis is precisely that of a radical uncertainty.⁵ In short, neither Rose nor Butler looks to secure the category of the Jew or of Jewishness. On the contrary, at play for both is that very dissymmetry *within* the self that makes any language of security redundant. It is to approach Jewish identification as a condition structured in, or in response to, a founding dis-identification.⁶ It is to re-inscribe the dispersion that somehow organizes Judaism – or rather, that breaks and “divides [it] from within” (Butler 2012, page 6); that incompleteness by which Judaism, in some way, is addressed and to which, in some way, it must answer.

It is in this sense that I pose the possibility of Judaism’s ‘other geographies’. How can one make an active claim for displacement or motivate for the paradox of a space as it ‘departs from itself’? What does it mean to affirm the negativity of Judaic tradition: of a statelessness that will not be repressed, of a founding instability which even, when “brought home” (Butler 2012 page 6), will still demand the principle – and the aspiration – of elsewhere and outside?

Anoriginary Sites

In *Freud and the Non-European* (2003), a reworking of Freud’s *Moses and Monotheism* (1967), Edward Said frames his vision of Israeli/Palestinian binationalism by reference to the biblical narrative of Jewish ethnic and religious formation. What engages Said, in particular, is Freud’s revelation of the doubtful status of Moses’ nativity and the degree to which this might presuppose – and require – a deep rethinking of the origins of Judaic historical

⁵ Butler here comes close to Levinas’ view that “to be Jewish [is] not a particularity; it is a modality” (Levinas in de Vries, 2005, page 352).

⁶ On Judaism’s founding ontological ambiguity – or its “anoriginality” – see Andrew Benjamin (1994). On the relationship of this to the concepts of the ‘host’ and ‘the stranger’ see also A Benjamin (2013, pages 36-48)

experience. For Freud, who famously unmaskes Moses as an Egyptian (not a captive Jew but a nobleman, possibly of the House of Pharaoh and, moreover, a follower of the besieged sun-centred religion of Akhenaten), monotheism now has a wholly other source: it becomes an Egyptian, not Jewish, discovery. More decisively, such a reassigning of ethnic origin means that the order of the liberator and law-giver is now established as foreign. So skewed, the unfolding psychic drama of the Mosaic tradition revolves around a crisis of paternal authority, of a community brought into being by a stranger.⁷ Thus, while Moses might well have “conceived the plan of founding a new empire, of finding a new people” (Freud, 1967 pages 31-2) he is, at the same time, a constant threat to its survival, an illegitimate interloper stationed at the very heart of things. “What good is a legend to a people that makes their hero an alien?” Freud asks (page 20). For Said, the charge of the question is less psychoanalytic than political. It pertains to the idea that self-difference, at its origins and in its contemporary re-foundings, does not merely broaden the remit of the national or recuperate foreignness for a national project. Nor, as in the moderating language of contemporary multiculturalism or pragmatic reformism, is it a matter of ‘accepting’ the figure of the intruder where such acceptance becomes an alibi and discipline for keeping danger safely at bay. Rather, Moses as foreign-founder excites a kind of living disjuncture, an undecidability constitutive of the self, which moves us both beyond the nation and the delusions of attachment it entails.

Said is aware, of course, that the function of biblical scripture is not to verify a historical thesis or serve as proof for any polity. Rather, out of Freud’s account of a biblical foreign-

⁷ In the second part of Freud’s hypothesis, Moses’ leadership ends not with any natural death, but by his murder at the hands of the rebellious Israelites, a collective patricide whose erasure in Judaic myths of origin thus forms part of his analysis of religion as a compulsive return of the repressed. On Moses as foreign-founder see also Bonny Honig (2001) *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) pp. 25-32.

founding, Said fashions a contemporary political parable. Here, Moses the Egyptian not only installs an irreparable break at the core of Judaic identity but makes that brokenness generative, re-arranging an archaic memory into a question that presses upon us now. Indeed if, as Said suggests, the danger of the contemporary Jewish state is that it so violently eliminates the break – “Israeli legislation *countervenes, represses and even cancels* Freud”, he writes (2003, page 66) – then to reveal and transpose it becomes a present demand.

“The strength of [the Mosaic account] is that it can be articulated in and speak to other besieged identities as well – not by dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion but rather by attending to it as a troubling, disabling secular wound – from which there can be no recovery [...] and no reconciliation even within itself” (page 54).

But if Moses the Egyptian offers a narrative of Jewish history in ways that do not presume a stable origin, we might also consider the geography of that biblical story. For, it is not merely that Rabbinic commentaries of *Exodus* often capture the condition of identity in spatial form. Rather, the two coincide. The dilemma of a community constituted by a stranger – a community given over to strangeness – is thus as much a spatial issue as an ontological one.⁸ Indeed, given prominence by being placed at the beginning of the *Beshallah*, that portion (*Parasha*) of the Torah which tells of Moses’ delivery of the Israelites from Egyptian enslavement, the discussion of space is central. As *Exodus* 13:17 tells us, there were two possible routes to freedom: one a straight, strategic route (*peshuta*), the other more dangerous, indirect, ‘crooked’ (*me’ukum*). Remarkably, Moses’ choice is for the latter. We learn that the Israelites headed towards Canaan not via the well-established Road of the

⁸ For an analysis of the placed-ness of a Judaic ethics of relationality see, Andrew Benjamin (2013).

Philistines (a journey of a few days) but that they turned around towards the Red Sea and thus proceeded back in the direction of their Egyptian pursuers. For the great French medieval scholar, Rashi, the recursive potential of the route is crucial :

“God did not lead them by way of the Philistines *because it was too close*”: and therefore it was easy to return to Egypt by the same road’.

“For God said, *Lest* the people change their minds when they see battle and return to Egypt”: they will *think a thought* about the fact that they have left Egypt; and will set their minds on returning’ (Rashi in Zornberg, 2001, page 200).

The implication of Rashi’s exegesis is clear. If the straight route is too direct, the impulse to retreat – to regress – back into relative safety might be too tempting. Conversely, while the indirect route might thwart any ‘positive’ action, it also allocates a space for precarious thought and so establishes inconsistency at the heart of redemption. If *Exodus* is about the movement to freedom it is, then, only a provisional one, a “difficult freedom” (1990), to use Emmanuel Levinas’ phrase, and one which precipitates possibilities that are entirely other: of limit, of risk, of an awareness of the capacity for failure.⁹ Much like Freud’s reading of Moses as foreign-founder, Rashi’s understanding of the indirect route becomes a meditation of practice as it doubles back on itself: one in which the redemptive ‘way out’ of Egypt is at once the regressive ‘way back’, in which the conflict between escape and return – and the negations it makes possible – constitutes the very meaning of liberation. And indeed, as Rashi

⁹ For a comprehensive account of the relationship between Rosenzweig and Levinas, particularly the latter’s life-long indebtedness to Rosenzweig’s *Star of Redemption* (“a work too often present to be cited”, as Levinas acknowledges in *Totality and Infinity*, 1961), see Robert Gibbs (1992) *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press).

and a host of rabbinic commentators make clear, the drama of *Exodus* escalates with the challenge of unanswerable questions, scepticisms, rejections, injuries: the repetitive address to both God and Moses is *Mah* or *Lamah* – what or why? What distinguishes the biblical narrative, then, is not merely the expressions of dissent but the rhetorical emphasis and self-consciousness of its practice. The aporetic route and its reversible direction of travel, Aviva Zorberg writes

sets aside a kind of ‘academic space’ [...]. It threads through places of vision and faith and, adjacently, of doubt and revision. It makes possible a journey [of] discontinuities [...] that cannot be avoided or dispelled (page 204).

In its various Talmudic readings, then, there is little that makes *Exodus* a myth of origin, or an event of national origination. If it can be said to be about a beginning at all, it is one invoked – and simultaneously revoked – as an anxiety, an equivocation, a beginning grounded in – that ‘begins with’ – its own renunciation. Or, as the route out of Egypt implies, it is a beginning that pivots on the movement of contradiction, one where a crisis in authority – and in location – opens the way for a critical ‘thinking of thoughts’.

Whether turning biblical texts into political parables is a viable move or not, the narrative of *Exodus* – like the figure of Moses the Egyptian – alerts us to a mode of thought that we may properly call speculative, or better yet, *subjunctive*. Like its grammatical mood, this is a state and space of the problem or the possibility – a hope, a doubt, a necessity, an idea of an event that has not yet occurred. We might remember, that with no point of origin (except as the ground on which the ontology of origins might itself be displaced), *Exodus* proceeds with no end in sight that might pronounce an orientation, an advance, a direction. In the desert, “all is anticipatory not final” (Jacobson, 2003, page 240), in this space there is no development as such, but only an impending arrival, a continuously sustained subjunctive. But if, as Said

suggests, there is an important political principle to be gained from Moses the Egyptian, there might be good reasons for renewing the immemorial desert: that is, seeing it as a space that raises the question of the national by virtue of being outside – and somehow against – it, a space that poses the problem of time and territory by necessarily *thinking through*, but not necessarily *believing in*, assurances of origin and arrival.

‘A time between four tent pegs’

In the ‘Germ Cell’ (the *Urzelle*, 1999 [1913]) which anticipates *The Star of Redemption* (2005 [1921]), Rosenzweig, offers his own version of exile as a space of ‘negative’ potential.

From the beginning as well as from the end the world is “infinite,” from the beginning infinite in space, towards the end infinite in time. Only from the centre does there arise a bounded home in the unbounded world, *a patch of ground between four tent pegs that can be posted further and further out* (Rosenzweig, 1999, page 57, my emphasis).

In Part 3, Book 1 of *The Star* – the only section of the work that deals exclusively with Judaism – the spatiality of the “infinite” (that tenuous yet extendable ‘patch of ground between four tent pegs’) emerges as a counter to a still-dominant Hegelian view of history. Written in 1917-1919, after the collapse of German imperialism in 1910 and at the moment when Europe was witnessing the spectacular failure of the modern nation-state, Rosenzweig’s specific target is the principle of historical progress and the wars and revolutions that fulfil it. For Hegel, of course, it is history that ultimately determines the meaning of events; through the triumph or demise of human enterprises, it judges which of them is adequate to the unfolding of universal Reason. But, for Rosenzweig, as Stéphane Mosès argues, the geopolitical cataclysm of recent European history had already judged – and decisively

condemned – Hegel.¹⁰ *The Star* thus sets about reversing every aspect of the theory of historical necessity that, in Rosenzweig’s view, is complicit in state-formation and the civilizational status it denotes. “When a world collapses, the ideas that had given birth to it, the dreams that had penetrated it, also disappears under the ruins”, he writes (Rosenzweig, 2005, page 283ff).

For Rosenzweig, what emerges out of the ruins of nations – or what must be engaged at the moment of their disintegration – is a new conception of time; indeed, he identifies a new *need for time*. “To need time means: not to be able to presuppose anything, to have to wait for everything, to be dependent on the other for what is ours” (Rosenzweig, 1999, page 87).

When a beginning is no longer predictive and there is no end to assess it, time arises only as a present contingency. And to be present and contingent is to be open to the fortuity of relations, to be vulnerable to possibilities for change, indeterminacy, translation. And so, for Rosenzweig, being-in-time becomes a mode of being-in-relation. Suspending origin and end by stepping “into time” (Blond, 2010, page 43), then, not only introduces an experience of waiting, it also establishes alterity in the midst of the present. In this sense, to heed time, “to take time seriously” (Rosenzweig, 1999 page 87) does not merely invert a model of successive history. It also loosens the binds of the self-generating subject, revealing the self in its relationship with others in a series of new and ever renewed moments. Hence, relationality by way of temporality – or rather, relationality as an always present action – makes us something more than the subjects of history, more than bearers of an identity able to be defined and absorbed by the aggregations of a larger whole. Indeed, it is precisely against the periodization of epochs as the instrument of institutions, nations, empires – all

¹⁰ On the extent to which Rosenzweig’s project is not to so much to disprove Hegel as much as to ‘take him literally’ and thus follow the inner working of his thoughts into concrete historical reality, see Mosès (2009, pages 35-48)

those “sovereign temporalities” (2001, page 62) which immobilise time or martial it into “an immoveable thing” (Rosenzweig, 2005, page 358) – that life, for Rosenzweig, must be reasserted as an unexpected present. His version of anti-historicism is about experience lived in the hope – and risk – of today, in an always unfinished state, in an ‘exodus’ without the stabilities of limit or totalization. As such, relations – with others, with the realm of an internal Otherness – are not just infinitely possible. For Rosenzweig, they also take place every day, they can be expected *at any time* – perhaps now? today? Being vigilant to what might transpire at such moments, a-waiting the unforeseen energies contained there, is at once our endless and immediate concern.¹¹

Importantly, with its emphasis on what might be suddenly seized upon in present-time, there is nothing in Rosenzweig’s notion of ‘waiting’ that guarantees an ideal end. While hope or even anticipation might well appear in singular moments, there is nothing in their incompleteness that harbours a worldly telos, or might be driven by any necessity. As an *Augenblick* – literally, a glance or blink of the eye¹² – the ever-present and ever-renewed moment does not expand to envision an ultimate fulfilment. This, then, is not any idea of Utopia in its usual sense. Which is to say, at issue is not any venture towards a desirable, if

¹¹ This conception of time is, of course, consonant with Walter Benjamin’s various discussions of the ‘weak messianic hope’ of the dialectical image ‘at a standstill’; that is, of the dialectic as it freezes time and so unleashes what, at each moment, can be discerned as the revolutionary eruption of the new. By his own admission, the theological content of Benjamin’s final philosophy of history – *On the Concept of History* (or, *Thesis on a Philosophy of History*) of 1940 – owes much to Rosenzweig’s earlier *Star of Redemption*. Further similarities between Rosenzweig and Benjamin involving theories of language and translation, specifically in relation to the metaphysical presence of a ‘pure’ or holy language, deepen the connection.

¹² The term is originally Heidegger’s – itself borrowed from Kierkegaard and Luther.

impossible, condition; a condition whose required or imagined elements must, therefore, already be stipulated *in advance*. In contrast, ‘waiting’ cuts through all such projections of a historical imagination. Without prediction or calculation, it brings time to a halt and introduces a fundamental play of tenses: not a reassembly of elements already known but a synchrony of things both immemorial and unpredictable, both ‘original’ and shot with the “unpredictability of the brand-new” (Mosès, 2009, page 51). Indeed if, for Rosenzweig, knowledge and relations ‘take time’ and therefore can never stop at, or be restricted to, essential definitions, then what we do *not yet* know and what has *not yet* been conceived is vital to the possibility of change – or, more radically, to the sudden appearance of change in the here and now. Hence Rosenzweig’s rejection of Hegel: for his is not only a critique of Hegelian theodicy but also an argument that, in any model of historical sequence or necessity, nothing radically new, irregular, or as-yet unthinkable can really occur.¹³ Indeed, to the extent that historical time – the time of the ‘nations’ – annuls the unpredictable, Rosenzweig declares all modern European nationalisms to have involved a kind of eschatological politics.¹⁴ However secular they may appear, when ordered by a point of departure and a point of arrival all world-historical “peoples are chosen people, and all modern wars are holy

¹³ Rosenzweig first launches his critique of Hegel, focussing particularly on the concept of the state as the locus of both personal and national fulfilment as well as on the contribution of the Hegelian legacy to the rise and fall of the Bismarkian Reich, in his doctoral dissertation, *Hegel und der Staat* (Hegel and the State) in 1912, published in two volumes in 1920.

¹⁴ Locating its birth in the universalising ambitions of the French Revolution, charting its course through the creation of a unified German state in the nineteenth-century as well in the moral missions of colonial imperialism, and finally witnessing the catastrophe of Europe ablaze, the laws of a modern Western consciousness, Rosenzweig asserts, are fundamentally the same as those of the history of religion.

wars” (Mosès, 2009, page 28).¹⁵ As Rosenzweig puts it,

Nationalism expresses not merely the people’s belief that they come *from* God [...] but that they go *to* God [...] Hence 1798 is followed by 1914-1917, and yet more “from and to’s” (Rosenzweig in Mosès (2009, page 29).

Thus does the logic of the eschaton – the termini of a beginning and end of time – become politicised in the form of the modern nation-state. In experience, as in thought, however, ‘to wait’ is not to stop; it is to go on living and to go on thinking. “Living time knows nothing of points”, Rosenzweig insists (2005, page 358). Indeed, “as little as one could just as well begin a [...] war with a peace treaty [...] or life with death, one must learn to keep waiting until the moment comes, and not skip any moment.” (Rosenzweig, 1999, page 83-4). Being *in* time and *of* the world thus becomes a central theme of *The Star* – not just a foil to classical Idealist speculation but a means of remaining true to the “pure factuality” (page 62) of

¹⁵ As Mosès and others point out, the implications Rosenzweig’s argument, here, are surprising, even idiosyncratic. For, it is not just that nationalism or the realisation of ‘national spirit’, as Hegel developed it, is co-extensive with a particular messianism – indeed, the absolute sanction of the sacred is, for him, the very legitimation of national ambition, the means of conferring upon it its privileged role in history. Rather, Rosenzweig’s more radical argument, developed in his correspondence with and against the leading Protestant theologian, Eugen Rosentock-Huessy, involves the ways that a Hegelian formulation of a European nationalism shaped by the vision of Christianity effectively upends the *biblical idea of election*. Here, election or the assumption of an inalienable right, becomes no longer the preserve of Judaism (as both a classical anti-Jewish and Zionist polemic would have it) but, on the contrary, a consequence of the complete Christianising of modern political formations. On the radicalism of Rosenzweig in this regard see Mosès (2009, pages 44-49). For an extended analysis on Rosenzweig’s understanding of the claim to exemplarity and election in their relationship to ambitions of universalism, see Dana Hollander (2008), *Exemplarity and Chosenness: Rosenzweig and Derrida on the Nation of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press)

existence, to a life punctuated by the inconsistent precisely because it is one lived only “through and within the boundaries of the human” (2005, pages 462-3). For Rosenzweig, this is what it means to be attuned to the ‘star of redemption’. Far from fixing some remote salvific event, this is a thoroughly proximate phenomenon, a present incandescence, a “redemption-in-the-world”. (Gordon, 2003, page xxix). What it illuminates is not any temporal path on the way to eternity, but the labour of rescuing or saving a moment, of sustaining a conditional happening within time. Here, indeed, it is *kairos* not *chronos* – the life of the gap, and not the systemic clock – that ushers time back in, marking the entrance of a new opportunity or the eruption of a critical demand. It is a “sudden and provisional light” (Butler, 2012, page 102) in which history stands unhinged in linear time, a momentary – even miraculous – radiation within the horizon of actual temporal existence.¹⁶

Judaism – or ‘*Judensein*’, ‘Jewish-being’ in Rosenzweig’s Heideggerian language – embodies just such an alternative temporality.¹⁷ “The Jewish people”, he writes, “does not calculate the

¹⁶ For a brilliant analysis of ‘the miracle’ as it arises in Rosenzweig and extends into a larger discussion of the capacity to intervene in the life of the law and so expose a genuine break or ‘emergency’ in social and symbolic representation see Eric L. Santner (2005, pages 76-133)

¹⁷ While *Judensein* is literally translated as ‘Jewish being’, the phrase ‘being-Jewish’ not only better suits the existential tenor of Rosenzweig’s writings but highlights the parallels of his own theology with what he knew of Heidegger’s philosophy of *Dasein*. To be sure, while there is an obvious difference between the two – the one looking to a biblical as the source of mythopoesis, the other to dicta of the Ancient Greeks – the connections, while sometimes troubling are also compelling. Indeed, not only did Rosenzweig’s opposition to the pretences of historicism and his emphasis on the vital facticity of temporal life bear affinities with the major themes of *Being and Time* but, responding in 1929 to the famous debate between Ernst Cassirer and Heidegger at the Davos colloquium, Rosenzweig himself declares Heidegger to be the ‘true heir’ of his own mentor, Hermann Cohen. For the translation of the 1929 text, see Rosenzweig (2000) pp. 146-152. For Karl Löwith’s, writing in the aftermath of Davos, Rosenzweig and Heidegger were “contemporary” in more than a “chronological sense”, see Löwith (1942), “M, Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig, or Temporality and Eternity”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 3:1, pp. 53-77. While Löwith’s comparative intellectual history is the first sustained account of the Rosenzweig-Heidegger connection which many others have also referred to, for a brilliant analysis of the relationship which also places

years of its chronology... Neither the memory of its history nor the official time of its lawgivers can become its measure of time” (2005, page 323). Indeed, if historicist laws of growth and development, understand the present in terms of the future which it produces, or the past by which it is engendered, then the vocation of *Judensein*, for Rosenzweig, is to subject each of its temporal orders to a symbolic overturning. More than this, *Judensein* must not only fail to ‘be in history’ but must perform and enact this failure lest it become merely a nation amongst other nations. For Rosenzweig, this is primarily done in liturgical time where the successions of (secular) history are interrupted by the rituals and rhythms of religious law. “Since the teaching of the Holy Law [...] lifts the people out of all [...] historical relevance of life, *it also removes its power over time*” (page 323, my emphasis). Here, in the cycle of symbolic practice as in the periodic return of ceremonies and observances, time pours into the everyday, expands within it, and so the “moment ceases to fly away” (page 322). Here, too, a memory reactivated, a memory “valid now and forever” (page 322) annuls distance making the past “always equally near, really not at all past” (323) and actualising the future as a suddenly present event.

To be sure, in all religious societies the practices of cyclical time oppose the flow of the historical – Judaism has no monopoly in this. To some extent, as Mosès reminds us, the civil calendars of the secular world also include particular moments – holidays, celebrations – whose function is to “tell the same story, repeat the same scenario” (2009, page 58) in a way that both contracts and hastens time or, rather, puts a brake on its mere passing. Rosenzweig’s

Rosenzweig and Heidegger within a shared context of Weimar modernism, see Peter Eli Gordon (2005) *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Amongst those previous scholars whose deem the affinity less probable and, in the light of Heidegger’s war-time political record, even ‘unthinkable’ see also, Stéphane Mosès (1982), *Système et Revelation: La Philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig*, Paris: Édition du Seuil, pp.306-9.

originality does not lie here. More crucial, for my purposes, is an understanding of symbolic life as it excludes itself from identifiable place, or more strongly, from a conception of time in its relationship to territory. Thus while *The Star* emphasises the specificity of Judaism's ritual practices, Rosenzweig's far more radical claim is that ritual law and life bears upon a space in which the concept of historical time is *itself* misplaced. Judaic practice, then, does not merely interrupt chronology. It is an interruption that is permanently held open – made 'eternal' – only through a fidelity to a non-national temporality, to a particular "statelessness in time" (Mosès, 1997, page 207)

[F]or the eternal people, the homeland never becomes its own in that sense; it is not permitted to sleep at home; it always remembers the lack of constraints on the traveller and [...] longs for the homeland it has left than in the times when he is at home. The land is in the deepest sense its own only as a land of longing, as – holy land. And this is why for it, even when it is at home [...] this full proprietorship of the homeland is disputed; it is itself only a stranger and tenant in its land.

Rosenzweig, 2005, page 319).

One can imagine all sorts of objections which would denounce Rosenzweig's definitions or, at least, be troubled about their consequences. Certainly, to position Judaism outside the time of settlement comes close to reproducing a standard trope of anti-Semitism: the Wandering Jew, the non-historical or even anti-historical subject incapable of participating in the "years of the nations".¹⁸ Certainly, too, defining Jewish identity as rootless in its essential foundations might well re-inscribe a singularity that is otherwise in question. But although we might be tempted

¹⁸ The phrase, which Rosenzweig places on the cover of Volume II of *Hegel and the State*, comes from Hölderlin's poem, "*An den Deutschen*".

to understand a ‘landless people’ in mythic terms – whether as anti-Semitic typology or, inversely, as a form of “self-denigration that secretly asserts its contrary” (Žižek, 2005, page 155) – the effect of Rosenzweig’s conception of exilic time leads us somewhere very different. It signals much more than a mere response to displacement (whether real or imagined) to make landlessness its own form of repatriation, to turn errancy into a kind of alternative sovereignty. Here, indeed, the term that Rosenzweig uses to characterise Judaic spatial and temporal experience is not ‘non-historical’ or ‘anti-historical’ but, more properly, ‘*meta-historical*’.¹⁹ That is to say, it is a time wholly external to the historical stage and thus to any ‘becoming’ of the nation-state – or, better yet, it is a time that, reflexively, points up the limits of both. In short, against the time and territory of the nations, the meta-historical vocation of Judaism denotes less a denial of history than a self-conscious critique of it. In Rosenzweig’s account of early Judaism, as Mosès writes,

this [critical capacity] is both ‘the distance that the Pharisees invented from the states of the Diaspora’ and the distance introduced by the prophets who, in the period of independence of a Jewish kingdom, practiced ‘a revolutionary critique of their own state’ (Mosès, 2009, page 46).

But it is also a critical distance that Rosenzweig seeks to reactivate in a context in which the theoretical status of both liberal-assimilation and Zionism posed a fundamental challenge to any deterritorialised identity. Indeed, for that whole late Wilhelmine and Weimar generation of German-Jewish intellectuals (Martin Buber, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas amongst them) the question of whether cultural or

¹⁹ For a general intellectual history of anti-historicism in German-Jewish thought in the early twentieth-century and its relation to Protestant anti-historicists of the same period see David N. Myers (2003).

spiritual Zionism implied any claim to land was itself inextricably linked to complex debates over the definition of German-Jewry and the viability of Judaism's separation from, or participation in, a surrounding German national polity.²⁰ Whether a Jewish faith might be compatible with the philosophical – and essentially Christianising – tenets of German Idealism, whether German national culture, even in its high Fichtean sense, was itself a founding site of cosmopolitanism or whether the recent horrors of European, and specifically German, militancy proved the historical paucity of liberal-assimilation – all such concerns provide the 'meta-historical' with a very specific charge. As such, to make a claim for extra-territoriality when, as Mosès points out, "none of [the] conditions necessary for its realisation were given" (2009, page 44), does more than merely inflect the internal debates amongst German-Jewry about their national status. In Rosenzweig's case, the very sense in which Jews both are and are not a people, means to derive a set of principles from alienated existence itself:²¹ it is to propose a temporality of the 'not-yet' (*noch nicht*) that therefore cannot be a collective 'becoming', it is to venture a sociality of a perpetual 'not yet there' (*noch nicht da*), it is to wager an existence bound to the interval of waiting and wandering. Indeed, for Rosenzweig, only a redemption from teleology, only a future thought of as exilic, without prediction or return, could finally uncouple time from the force of territorial expansion.

For the earth nourishes, but it also binds; and when a people loves a soil of the homeland more than its own life, then the danger hangs over it – and it hangs over all peoples of

²⁰ For the seminal account of the divided and/or conjoined nature of the German-Jewish psyche – particularly of the relation between the legacy of Kantian rationalism, on the one hand, and the ethical precepts of Judaic faith, on the other, see Hermann Cohen (1915) *Deutschtum und Judentum* (German-ness and Jewishness)

²¹ Rosenzweig's understanding of the notion of 'peoplehood' as detached from the logic of historical process but not from some idea of 'essence' (*völkisches Wesen*) is addressed most specifically in "Atheistic Theology," in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. and ed. Paul W. Franks and Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000) pp. 10-24.

the world – that nine times that love may save the soil of the homeland against the enemy and also with the soil the life of the people; but a tenth time the soil remains as that which is loved more and the very life of the people pours out onto it [...] In this way the earth betrays the people that entrusts to the permanence of the earth its own permanence; the earth itself persists, but the people on it perish [...] *For this reason, the tribal legend of the eternal people begins otherwise than with indigenoussness.*²²

(Rosenzweig, 2005, page 318-9, my emphasis)

In this account, then, exile is not just intrinsic to the Jewish condition. It is the requirement and effort that any such identification demands. Indeed, that the land with which Judaism identifies is not claimable, not possessable – the fact that, precisely as a *holy* land, it is defined not by settlement but by separation and deferment – deepens the structure of spatial identification. For here the Judaic subject cannot, by definition, reach backwards or forwards to place itself. Rather, much in the manner of Moses the Egyptian, all spatial identification involves a founding breach, an internal dissymmetry that is not only constitutive of the self but registers the potentiality for its ethical relation with others. Indeed, just as in the parable of foreign-founding, what is installed in subjectivity, then, is not any self-sameness but the presence of the stranger; the outsider who, when “brought home” (Butler, 2012, page 6), resituates the self in relation to its own dis-identity, or what Alain Badiou would call its own “vital disorganisation” (2001, page 60).²³ When recast in spatial terms, in other words, “beginning otherwise than with indigenoussness” becomes more than just a “tribal legend” of Judaism. It is the recognition of an original spatial dis-identification as it proposes a different sort of future

²² Star pp 318-9.

²³ On the idea of “vital disorganisation”, a kind of disruptive event within the socialised self that compels some fundamental restructuring in our ways of being and acting in the world, see Alain Badiou (2001).

history. This would be a future faithful to the incompletions of a past, one which in lacking the violent preconditions of progress might also avoid its reiterated activities. At stake, then, is not a “return *from exile to history*” (Butler, 2012, page 123) but the task of remaining – waiting, wandering – amidst all that is persistently dis-identified, untimely, displaced. At stake, too, is that the link between a meta-historical *Judensein* and its extraterritoriality prepares an emphatic critique of the Zionist project of land reclamation. Indeed, when in 1917, the year of Balfour Declaration, Rosenzweig states his opposition to a legal and political home for Judaism, his terms are clear:

It is only by keeping their ties to the Diaspora that the Zionists will be forced to keep their eyes on the goal, which [is] to remain nomads, *even over there*’ (Rosenzweig in Mosès, 1997, page 207, my emphasis).

Re-Membering

The Star is not at heart an argument about politics. It does not propose a theory of political practice and Rosenzweig himself, as Peter Eli Gordon makes clear, remains largely indifferent to the nature of political and public life.²⁴ At the same time, the emphatic self-consciousness of the forms of theological time he addresses, invites a kind of praxis in terms of their function. Indeed, insofar as time, for Rosenzweig, resides precisely within the self and its worldly practice, might it not contain an implicit politics: of a past – and future – lived in the mode of today? Of a ‘redemptive’ moment that appears, if only for a moment, in the temporality of an empirical present? For Rose, this kind of wager would mean transposing into the realm of politics the complex relations that obtain between unconscious and conscious life. Following her account of Zionism’s repressions of its own European history, it would mean glimpsing an

²⁴ On this see Gordon (2003) especially pages 305-14.

original wound, of stealing past those (nationalised) defences of identity in order to “release those moments – dreams, slips, symptoms –” and make their disquieting “presence felt” (Rose, 2005, page 86)²⁵. In this moment, in this break in identity, she suggests, Zionism would not only “show that it knows itself better than it thinks” (page 107) but open up to the rights and claims of those it does not fully know, or whose are not fully recognisable as part of the ‘nation’. In this sense, to address the history of one’s own trauma becomes the precondition for addressing the force of trauma in others, stalling the progress of trauma’s repetitions by opening up a time of “disquiet, tension, dissociation” (page 86). For Butler, in a partly-related but far more radical way, it is also the condition and consequence of dis-identification that matters. Here, to dis-identify means ‘to act’. It is to act ethically, to be open to those activities that might “re-constellate the time of the present” (2012, page 104), re-instating that ancient principle of disorientation, of alterity, at the heart of the Judaic subject and thus restructuring the “primacy of relationality” (page 6) in its present political practice. As such, while Butler often draws on the history of Judaic theology, her attention is given over to how past sources might “cede their ground” (page 8) to become contemporary *resources*, refiguring the effectiveness of a more ancient tradition into the political and ethical obligations of the now. For Butler, wagering a binational future that would shed the commitment to sovereignty in the form of the Zionist state, thus becomes not only a form of ethical responsibility a peculiar task of remembrance.

For Rosenzweig, as I have suggested, exile is the name of this remembrance: not the preservation in memory of a past displacement but its re-actualisation in present experience, in what Walter Benjamin calls the accidental “differentia of present time” (1999, page 456) or what Butler designates as a “place that was and is and in the impossible place of the not-yet,

²⁵ Rose, p. 86. In this account of the history of Zionism, Rose herself does not explicitly say this, but she invokes it by referring to others whose dissenting voices have ‘long been forgotten or deliberately buried’ in Zionist historiography.

happening now” (Butler, 2012, page 224). Rosenzweig died in 1929, and thus too early to encounter the possibility of a National Socialist state organised for genocide or to further elaborate his position on the founding of a Jewish homeland in 1948. However, to the extent that the meta-historical time of *Judensein* stands apart from chronology – the extent, indeed, to which it substitutes chronology for a self-conscious contemporaneity – is also the extent to which we might re-think the opposition to Zionism. Here, the idea of a people constituted by the lack of land, of territory, is not just one born of ancient sources; it is an autochthonous connection to a land uprooted from the outset that must return – reformulated, translated, refigured – in the social conditions of the now. For Rosenzweig, this is precisely the capacity of ritual or symbolic time: the capacity to reside within a break of historical time and to be alert to the strange synchronies found there. Indeed, when the Bible tells the story of Exodus, as when the ritual of Passover commands that we annually retell it – “every individual is supposed to regard the Exodus out of Egypt as if he himself has also gone out”, as Rosenzweig reminds us (2005, page 323) – at issue is not the beginnings of any national narrative. It is the resurgence of a past that makes a claim on the present, an originary displacement experienced as “ever new” and “in the moment” (page 173), a future non-fulfilment which, from the start, is always already there. Here, indeed, the ‘today’ of revelation is that formative day in Egypt, that day of exodus, those days of desert wandering. In short, if for Said, Moses the Egyptian stands for a political aspiration of dwelling in strangeness, then *Exodus* might affirm a similar potential: not just immemorial story of exile but a possible quality of *being exilic*. For Rosenzweig, it is only by surmounting the implicit alliance of land and time that *Judensein* might avoid the dominion of sovereign acts, issuing a criticism opposed to place of force in society and, indeed, to the force of place, itself. While he does not – and could not – explicitly say so, is there not, consequently, a contemporary imperative: thinking exile not as a geographic displacement

from a homeland but as a difference internal to identification held open even within the geopolitical bounds of a nation – whether named Israel or Palestine.

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