

ALBERT CAMUS: THE AWARENESS  
OF EXTRANEOUSNESS

If I were to write a treatise on morals, it would come in one hundred pages, ninety-nine of which would be perfectly blank. Then, on the last one I would write: I only know of one duty, and that is to love. I say no to all the rest. I say no with all my strength. Tombstones remind me that this is useless and that life includes both the rising and the setting sun. Nonetheless, I have mixed feelings about what uselessness takes from my rebellion, whereas I can feel very well what it adds to it. I was thinking about all this while sitting on the floor ... and in the church the muffled sound of the organ and the warmth of its notes, which resurfaced at intervals behind the cries of the children. Death. Should I go on this way, I would certainly end up by dying happy.<sup>1</sup>

Through the *medium* of literary philosophical language, Albert Camus formulates in his *Carnets* a phenomenology of “metaphysical rebellion” as a cipher of the human condition rising against itself, and which – like thought – fulfils the same function as the “cogito” and becomes an “evidence”. The “rebellion” against the shallowness of one’s own being is an *ex-sistere* : to rise, to soar above oneself, as it happens in Art, which is a “demand of unity and a denial of the world.” The building of *universes* that are *other* brings about “rebellion”, hence it is an aesthetic requirement that reveals itself not just in artistic creation, but may as well be fulfilled in every man who, as an exile in his own country, suffers for the incompleteness of every reality that he would rather possess in full. Therefore, Camus argues that: “Everyone is trying to make a work of art of his own life”. In *L’Homme révolté (The Rebel)* the progress of rebellion emerges as the “realization” of something man can identify with: “The rebel wants to be everything, to identify completely with the good he has become aware of, and he wants others to acknowledge it.”<sup>2</sup> In Hegelian philosophy self-consciousness, to assert itself, must become distinct from all that is different from it: according to Camus, in “unconditional idealism” man is the creature that must deny, in order to define its own being and diversity. Consciousness/self-consciousness is an oxymoron, a fulfillment/discontent seen as a denial of man’s appetite for his own circumstance: “What differentiates self-consciousness from the natural world is not mere contemplation, wherein consciousness identifies with the outside world and forgets itself, but the appetite it may feel towards it.”<sup>3</sup> The spiritual

dimension of consciousness unfolds through the acknowledgment of the other, which includes his destruction as well. Destruction, as a tendency of human action, becomes a perpetual struggle for acknowledgment. Such a vision is not dissimilar from what Kojève defines as the dialectic relationship between self-consciousnesses grappling with the idea of death: "In order to be recognized by another consciousness, man must be ready to risk his own life, to accept the possibility of death". Hence, the ideas of the social contract and of the "noble savage" produced by Rousseau's solipsistic consciousness clash against the awareness of the absurd, which implies the other's death as a possibility. According to Camus, basic human relationships are merely prestige relationships, since in the tragedy of the "absurd" the consciousness that is annihilated chooses to acknowledge the other consciousness without being acknowledged by it: the consciousness of the "slave" unfurls between the poles of killing and subduing. Therefore, in Hegelian dialectics, history is identified with the history of the "rebellion", which is accomplished with the presence in the sensible world of the Christ, who reconciles the universal God with man. By acknowledging the man-god, the "spirit of the world" will be reflected in itself and the "human city will coincide with the city of God". "Universal history, the world's court of law, will thus pronounce its judgment, wherein good and evil will be justified and every consciousness will be no more than a mirror reflecting other mirrors, in its turn reflected ad infinitum in reverberated images."<sup>4</sup> Conversely, in the ontological dimension of Camus's "rebellion", it is in the constant tension of the being towards its own limit "that men, reaching out to themselves, start being". "In order to be, man must revolt", for he arises against his own condition: "Human rebellion culminates in a metaphysical revolution" that is revealed to consciousness through rebellion. From the dimension of consciousness, man comes out of his loneliness and feels his *extraneousness* to the world, and he shares the condition of *bios xenikòs* with all men, because "human reality, in its entirety, resents this distance from itself and the world."<sup>5</sup>

Such an apperception of *extraneousness* is defined within the context of everyday life, both through the *medium* of inquiries about the world and the attainment of that liminal circumstance when men start *being*. The awareness of *being a stranger* develops at the very moment when man reaches presence of mind, for "a man who has been seeking for life where it is usually placed (marriage, social status, etc.) suddenly realizes how he has been a stranger to his own existence". Therefore Camus says: "I do not wish to be happy at present, just to be aware." Such an awareness means "to look at oneself being born" in an "adorable silence" wherein the "song of the world rises" and eternity is revealed. However, in the constant presence of oneself where