

©2004 The Institute of Mind and Behavior, Inc.  
 The Journal of Mind and Behavior  
 Autumn 2004, Volume 25, Number 4  
 Pages 369–372  
 ISSN 0271–0137

**Dimensions of Apeiron: A Topological Phenomenology of Space, Time and Individuation.** Steven M. Rosen. Amsterdam/New York: Editions Rodopi, B.V. Value Inquiry Book Series # 154, 2004, xxiv + 238 pages, \$56.00 softcover.

*Reviewed by John R. Wikse, Shimer College*

In this challenging, integrative work, Steven Rosen explores the roots of the crisis of postmodernity: the widespread “fragmentation of human culture.” In doing so, he attempts to rethink space, time and individuality “from the ground up.” He asks us to turn around and withdraw the projections of Cartesian and Einsteinian space–time, so that we may embrace the “embodied fusion of subject and object that constitutes the paradox of *apeiron*” — of the limitless, the boundless, the indeterminate. Developing Martin Heidegger’s meditations on early Greek thinking, Rosen invites us to reverse our most basic assumptions. This involves questioning the peculiarly modern Western markers for the self–world relation: our subjective inclination to create meaning through quantification and measurement and our technologically driven possessive object orientation. In order to suspend the classical epistemological assumptions of “object-in-space-before-subject,” we must abandon our quest for self-contained “egoic unity,” what we might call our “idiocy” (Grk. *idiotes*, private, separate person). We need to learn — as Parmenides said at the dawn of philosophy — the untrembling heart of unconcealment.

In Rosen’s *Dimensions of Apeiron: A Topological Phenomenology of Space, Time and Individuation*, *apeiron* is a protean deity, the dark mother of Being, the trans-rational “feminine physis” of Jung, the Mercurial, ever-present origin repressed by Western science for over two thousand years. She is an old nemesis returning to confront us today with a vengeance. In the guise of chaos, cultural discontinuity, addiction and meaninglessness, she grants us postmodernity. But this crisis is both a danger and an opportunity. Following Merleau–Ponty, Rosen invites us to enter the prereflective being we share — the fleshy societal “I” of our species being, a “generic organicity” (p. 152) — to seek there a transformative individuation in order that we may see through new eyes: new “I’s.”

Rosen is an alchemical thinker. The form of this book is organized by dialectical alchemical metaphors. In Part I (“*Solve*”) he works to dissolve the ways we think about ourselves; in Part II (“*Coagula*”) he wants to show us how to bring ourselves back together. He calls us to integrate the fundamental tension between ratio, measure, differentiation and perspective (Greek *peras*) and the “undifferentiated matrix”

---

Requests for reprints should be sent to John R. Wikse, Ph.D., Department of Integrative Studies, Shimer College, Box 500, Waukegan, Illinois 60079. Email: jackw@shimer.edu

(*a-peiron*). We ignore this tension at our peril. The more we seek objective certitude and attempt to control, the more we reap chaos. Thus, paradoxically, we must liberate *apeiron*, and enter her world if we are to contain her. Nor can we escape science. Touching both extremes, we might return deeper than Socratic doubt (rejecting the Cartesian “doubt in order to affirm”) through the black holes and blind spots of our emptiness to creative renewal.

Beginning with the 19th century Michelson and Morley experiments on the phenomenon of light, modern scientists often encountered the boundless discontinuity of *apeiron*, Rosen argues, because they were observing not an object to be seen, but “that by which they saw.” However, at each such encounter, physical science upheld subject/object dualism and restored classical continuity “by acts of abstraction” (e.g., Einsteinian relativity). Similarly, when the subjectivity of perception comes into view in art (e.g., impressionism) it is managed through greater abstraction and detachment (e.g., cubism represents subjectivity as an object). Rosen encourages the reader to press such abstraction “to its limits,” in order to come out on the other side, to face concretely the transformative shock of discontinuity.

These histories of modern physics and art reveal a deeper cultural “crisis of discontinuity” — the “vacuous drift” of contemporary life in which it seems that reason itself (as Norman O. Brown once said) is “at the end of its tether” and we fear the wholesale regression of our species. Rosen presents a reading of the phenomenological tradition and the philosophical “precursors” of this return to *apeiron*. These include Kierkegaard’s affirmation of the paradoxical unity of the finite and the infinite and Nietzsche’s exploration of the a-causal standpoint of the myth of the eternal return. Some of Rosen’s most insightful observations concern his reading of Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*. Rosen’s framework is close to the tension Nietzsche drew between the Apollonian and Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Rosen also gives careful readings of Edmund Husserl’s emphasis on intuition and his rejection of empirical objectivism, and Jacques Derrida’s insight that cybernetic “pluridimensionality” ousts all metaphysical dualisms. Also of note are Kurt Godel’s proof of mathematical inconsistency, and Carl Jung’s appreciation of the psychology of the Oroborean — the serpentine cycle of life and death. A central chapter is devoted to Heidegger’s understanding of the relation between *apeiron* and Being. Though Rosen appreciates the contributions of these thinkers, he also points to their limits, emphasizing the ways in which modernism (e.g., Husserl) and post-modernism (e.g., Derrida) belong together. He will not let us fragment.

Though it emerges from a phenomenology of space and time, Rosen’s proposal for transformation is rooted in the work of the pioneering social psychiatrist, Trigant Burrow, and the theoretical physicist David Bohm. Both argued that to overcome cultural fragmentation we need to develop an experiential meditative awareness (a “felt sense” as Eugene Gendlen calls it) of the neurophysiological basis of symbolic thought and language — what Rosen (following Bohm) terms “proprioception of thought.” Thought is a social (shared) phenomenon, located within and between us. Our proprioceptive nervous system enables us prereflectively to coordinate the movements of our physical bodies. When it malfunctions, we can wake up feeling as if a stranger’s hand is at our throat — only to discover it is our own. Thought lacks proprioception to the extent that we are unaware of the social topography of consciousness and separate “mind” as inner from “behavior” as outer. As such, what Burrow called our “eco-somatic” (environment–organism) relations are hidden from us. We are choking ourselves, but don’t know it. We need to

develop what Rosen terms “ecological self-knowledge.” I think this might also be called “socioception” — the perception of our shared interdependence.

To experience this alchemical *metanoia*, it is necessary for us to withdraw and reverse our forward leaning projections. Rosen grounds proprioception philosophically in Heidegger’s reflections on Being, and develops a paradoxical topology of place and posture based on experiential perceptual integration figures (the Necker cube) and mathematical models (the Klein bottle, the Moebius surface) that transcend the dualism of Cartesian coordinates. Learning to perceive paradoxical perceptual integration may help us to suspend our assumptions about “object-in-space-before-subject” and make peace with *apeiron*.

By juxtaposing and integrating images and ideas that reorient dualistic assumptions, Rosen creates a sense of overlapping transparencies that invite the reader to see through many perspectives simultaneously. For example, we can contemplate the uncertainty principle in quantum physics in relationship to the rise of film. Though he muses insightfully on his experiences of writing and television (not for nothing called the “idiot box”) Rosen has mainly accepted classical detachment as the standpoint of this work. Nonetheless, he points us toward a new science of experiential reflection that questions the limits of the conceptual so that we may “think our own thinking.”

I think more could be said on the matter of how a transformation of our epistemological assumptions might heal cultural fragmentation. Burrow developed a group process (“social self-inquiry”) to study what he called our “social neurosis.” He attempted to overcome the authority of the detached psychiatrist and developed a consensual method of group observation. Bohm (influenced by the British group analytical tradition and Krishnamurti) organized meditative dialogue groups through which to explore shared meaning. Bohm thought such groups could “transform culture.” He turned to group psychology because he concluded that mainstream atomic physics was a one-sided projection into the universe of the assumptions of social atomism — the view that human association is composed of isolated, separate individuals. How does Rosen understand the relations between cultural transformation, group dynamics and scientific authority?

Another matter stands out to me as capable of further clarification. How is Rosen’s alchemical dialectic related to the Hegelean and Marxian dialectics of history? *Apeiron* seems at times to be a sort of Hegelean *Geist*, a teleological spirit out of German Idealism, with a sort of agency, manifesting in stages (e.g., the “climactic stage of ontogeny” p. 200) moving us toward a “final greater wholeness.” Though Rosen invokes the paradox that the “birth of Being comes at the end of its development” (p. 166), a sustained discussion of teleology would be edifying. In terms of Marx, it sometimes appears in Rosen’s account that technology drives culture, as in his discussions of the relation between cybernetic media and postmodernity. This would be consistent with a dialectical materialism. When Marx said that we must “recognize and organize ourselves as social beings,” he meant we must overcome the class basis of technological rationality (alienated labor). But this materialist standpoint does not appear to be part of Rosen’s alchemy. It’s quite clear how Rosen views the history of philosophy, less so how he understands the philosophy of history. To incorporate these matters would lead in the direction of the sociology of knowledge, and toward inclusion of the tension between philosophic materialism and idealism.

These observations indicate my own theoretical preoccupations. In the spirit of Rosen's work I offer them as overlapping transparencies relative to the issues he raises. Nietzsche once said we scholars are "fragments of the future" — one perhaps a giant mouth, another a giant ear. Through dialogue these fragments of a new body of thinking may be woven together. Rosen has contributed greatly to such a weaving.