

Lecture William Franke

Lyric is the language of self-reflection – and is self-reflexive language – par excellence. The question will be: Is self-reflection necessarily a reduction to the self? or, How can self-reflection effect a dissolution of the self and a breaking open to the Other?

Lyric, above all in its modern, I-centered form, has often been viewed as a reduction to the self in its self-enclosure or even to the prison house of language about language that is obsessed only with itself. In this lecture, William Franke considers how in lyric language the filtering of reality through the experience of the 'I' or of highly self-reflective language can actually turn into a powerful way of opening the world into a dimension of infinite self-revelation and of revelation of the Other – which might be the other person, or the other of language, or the Other to thinking itself, or even some kind of divine or absolute otherness. He explores how precisely reduction, especially in the form of self-reflection, leads to discovery of something that is irreducible. He aims to demonstrate this in the case of lyrical language. The dialectic of reduction leading to and revealing the irreducible emerges exemplarily in the case of lyric language. But this is only an example of a dialectic that can be charted more generally as determining the entire course of modern secular culture.

William Franke is Professor of Comparative Literature at Vanderbilt University and was concomitantly Professor of Philosophy at University of Macao (2013-16). He is a research fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung and has been Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Intercultural Theology at the University of Salzburg. His apophatic philosophy is directly expressed in *On What Cannot Be Said* (2007) and *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (2014). It is extended into a comparative philosophy of culture in *Apophatic Paths from Europe to China* (2018) and applied to address current controversies in education and society ranging from identity politics to cognitive science in *On The Universality of What is Not: The Apophatic Turn in Critical Thinking* (2020). As a philosopher of the humanities with a negative theological vision, he elaborates a theological poetics in books including *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (1996), *Poetry and Apocalypse: Theological Disclosures of Poetic Language* (2009), *Dante and the Sense of Transgression: 'The Transgression of the Sign'* (2012). He traces the ramifications of Dante's theological poetics forwards in modern poetry (*Secular Scriptures: Theological Poetics and the Challenge of Modernity*, 2016) and backwards towards Dante's own sources (*The Revelation of Imagination: From the Bible and Homer through Virgil and Augustine to Dante*, 2015).

In 2021 he published three speculative monographs revolving around *Dante: The Divine Vision of Dante's Paradiso: The Metaphysics of Representation* (2021); *Dante's Vita Nuova and the New Testament: Hermeneutics and the Poetics of Revelation* (2021); *Dante's Paradiso and the Theological Origins of Modern Thought: Toward a Speculative Philosophy of Self-Reflection* (2021).

This lecture is part of the ICI Lecture Series 'Reduction', which explores the critical potentials of notions and practices of 'reduction', within and across different fields and approaches. One of the most devastating charges levelled against theories, analyses, and descriptions is that of being reductive or of amounting to a full-blown reductionism. Conceptual frameworks are scolded for being impoverished and descriptions for being too sparse or flat. And conversely, to call something 'irreducible' seems to confer an immediate and indisputable dignity to it. And yet the history of science and knowledge cannot be told without acknowledging the importance of reductionist programmes; reductive paradigms have periodically revitalized the arts. What lies at the root of such different attitudes towards 'reduction'? Can one embrace forms of reduction that are not in the service of production, allowing for the possibility of a 'less' that would no longer have to amount to 'more'?

Self-Reflection and Reduction in the Language of Lyric