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MARIANNA PAPASTEPHANOU

Echoes and Sounds of Karl Jaspers's "Limit Situation"

Abstract: Karl Jaspers' notion of a "limit situation" (*Grenzsituation*) refers to an occurrence in life that existentially displaces, disorients and discomforts subjects by shattering their assumptions of control and certainty. Limit situations create events that are existentially ambiguous, potentially disabling or enabling. Jaspers engagement with "limit situation" sets the premises for opening up the notion to varying philosophical receptions and implications, existential and ethico-political. Of this variety, it is the ethico-political implications that have been mostly neglected in contemporary philosophy. The present article aims to emphasize the significance of "limit situation" for political thought. To this end, it first engages with theoretical echoes of Jaspers' "limit situation" today and then attempts an expanded reading of Jaspers' concept, in the hope of making audible, in Jaspers' parlance, "the new sound in an old thought."

Key words: *Existenz*, comfort zones, justice, poststructuralism, posthumanism

"The truth of present-day philosophy manifests itself less in the formation of new fundamental concepts (e.g. 'limit situation', 'the Encompassing' - *Grenzsituation*, *Umgreifende*) than in the new sound it makes audible for us in old thoughts"¹ We may extrapolate from Karl Jaspers' aphorism that the truth of his own philosophy also manifests itself more in his handling of old philosophical debts than in his forming new

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¹ Karl Jaspers, "On My Philosophy," 1941, p. 4.
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concepts such as “limit situation” (also translated as “boundary situation”).² Jaspers’ aphorism distinguishes the operation of bringing new concepts and terms into an established philosophical idiom from the operation of revitalizing, and recycling, so to speak, older thoughts and voices that acquire new life and new value through our harking to them differently. However, I believe, the separation of coinage and temporal circulation of ideas cannot be neat. Conceptual innovation and acoustic attentiveness often intersect. These two philosophical truth-manifestations, namely, attention to the past and new thought introduced into the world, are occasionally inextricable, and the former generates the latter. For instance, *Grenzsituation* (henceforth: limit situation), indeed, a concept whose specificity was brought to philosophical life by Jaspers, clearly manifests his own, original and unexpected synthesis of older Kierkegaardian, Husserlian and especially Kantian “sounds”. Through Jaspers’ reformulation, Immanuel Kant’s *Grenzbegriff* (limiting concept), antinomies and transcendence³ acquired a different and impassioned tone beyond the rationalist one of their original philosophical setting.

The present article continues an endeavor⁴ to make audible new sounds of Jaspers’ much neglected “limit situation” philosophy. I mention current uses of Jaspers’ concept of “limit situation” and then I provide my reading of it. Thus, in a somewhat unorthodox way, I begin not with the concept but with the concept’s echoes today. Only after this move will I come to my own use, which aims to be both descriptively faithful to Jaspers’ philosophy but simultaneously reflective of the possibility to read it afresh. Thus, instead of aspiring to “update/upgrade” Jaspers’ thought by using new “-isms” as guidelines, the article suggests a revisiting of “limit situation” to make new sounds of it audible for us, philosophers of the 21st century, and simultaneously critical of our own, newly established philosophical comfort zones. Modern philosophical aspirations of “updating/upgrading”⁵ have, in my view, this demerit: the thought that is “updated” is expected to match the new *Zeitgeist*. Its revival is conditioned on its concordance with newly

² I have used Jaspers’ “echo and sound” metaphors again in relation to limit situations but applied to the more specific context of the recent pandemic and its politics. See Marianna Papastephanou, “Pandemic Totalitarianisms, Limit Situations and Forced Vaccinations,” in *Philosophy International Journal*, Vol. 4, Nr. 4, 2021, pp. 1-15.

³ Karl Jaspers, *Kant*, Harcourt Brace, 1962, p. 39.

⁴ See Papastephanou, *op. cit.*, and Marianna Papastephanou, “Loyalty, justice, and limit-situations,” in *Journal of Philosophical Research*, Vol. 46, 2021, pp. 221-242.

⁵ To designate such upgrades, I use the Greek word “epikairopoiēsis” (making something up to date, catching up with time *qua kairos*, opportune time, and simultaneously synchronizing it. See Marianna Papastephanou, “Justice and the Conspicuous” in Inga Bostad, Marianna Papastephanou and Torill Strand (Eds.), *Justice, Education, and the World of Today*, Routledge, New York, 2023.

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valued tenets. It is recruited to support new orthodoxies in ways that block prospects of philosophy's becoming cautious of its own, contemporary ontological tendencies toward arresting time.

With these thoughts as a backdrop, the next section considers echoes of Jaspers' limit situation today. How is "limit situation" positioned (or not) in current philosophical "partages du sensible"? For, distributions of the sensible (Jacques Rancière's well-known term) operate in philosophical discourses, too. Existing orders, vogue and hegemonies affect what becomes visible and heard, and distribute communicative power accordingly.

Echoes

Jaspers' notion of a limit situation is not one of the popular current intellectual choices for interpreting and critiquing the world. Perhaps just as any other scholarly choice, intellectual choices also, and ultimately, chime with existential decisions of the scholars themselves. They are themselves echoes of the scholars' identifications, fixations, and comfort zones, their unwittingly or unconsciously metaphysical commitments to philosophical avatars and their ethico-political, affective and cognitive investments in theoretical camps.⁶ Ultimately, choices of engaging (or not) with a philosopher or a topic echo much rhetoric of broader contextual, socio-political and theoretical settings that affect one's philosophical mindset.

"Limit situation" is still studied (though somewhat limitedly) in existentialist, phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophical contexts. For instance, one theme is how "limit situation" differentiates Jaspers' thought from Edmund Husserl's and Kant's⁷ or how it relates to the question of Being.⁸ A 2022 special-issue of *Studi Jaspersiani* explores limit situation as a key conception in Jaspers' philosophy and contains re-readings, interpretations and transfers of it to literary, psychological, and environmental research. The concept re-emerges as a mobile notion that travels from historical interrogation to social crises and from the frontiers of justice to those of technology. As the special-issue editors argue, limit

⁶ Papastephanou, "Pandemic Totalitarianisms," p. 8. Having said that let me clarify that I do not imply a normativity of engaging with Jaspers. Nor do I imply that lack of interest in Jaspers is reducible to concerns of vogue, popularity and academic visibility.

⁷ Gladys Portuondo, "Jaspers, Husserl, Kant: boundary situations as a 'turning point'," in *Existenz*, Vol. 11, Nr. 1, 2016, pp. 51-56.

⁸ Danijel Tolvajčić, "Man's Limit Situations and the Question of Being," in *Bogoslovska smotra*, Vol. 90, Nr. 5, 2020, pp. 941-948.

situation is a fascinating category whose evocative power is far away from being exhausted.⁹

However, the broader influence of existentialism-related circles has been extensively diminished for various reasons beyond this article's scope. One such reason may be, for example, the old polemics of existential philosophy with philosophers who influenced or even shaped traditions as diverse as (post-)analytic philosophy, the poststructuralist camp and posthumanist thought. Nevertheless, "limit situation" has its own niche in some German psychological and psychotherapeutic circles¹⁰ and has also been introduced to the field of communication studies¹¹ along with Jaspers' conception of "existential communication." Recently, it has been recommended as a conceptual coordinate for critical discussions of technological transformation and escalating global crises.¹² It has even been used for theorizing some of the challenges of one such crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic.¹³ Still, political philosophy has generally bypassed Jaspers' insights (the "limit situation" notwithstanding). Some political philosophers¹⁴ have sought to remedy this and made important contributions;

⁹ Elena Alessiato and Michael Quante, "Introduction to Grenzsituation as a Key-Concept in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy: Re-Readings, Interpretations, and Transfers," in *Studi Jaspersiani*, Vol. 10, 2022, pp. 5-13.

¹⁰ See, for example, Thomas Fuchs, "Existential vulnerability: Toward a psychopathology of limit situations," in *Psychopathology*, Vol. 46, Nr. 5, 2013, pp. 301-308; Christoph Mundt, "Jaspers' concept of 'limit situation': Extensions and therapeutic applications," in *Karl Jaspers' Philosophy and Psychopathology*, Springer, New York, 2014, pp. 169-178; Juan Valdés-Stauber, "Man at the frontier of his being: Scope of the concept of 'limit situation' in psychiatry and psychotherapy following Jaspers' existential ontology," in *Fortschritte der Neurologie-psychiatrie*, Vol. 84, Nr. 1, 2016, pp. 19-27; and Lina Vidauskytė, "On the psychopathological origin of Karl Jaspers' concept of limit situations," in *Existenzerhellung. Grenzbewusstsein. Sinn der Geschichte. Dem Andenken an Karl Jaspers (1883-1969)*, 2020, pp. 49-65.

¹¹ See, for instance, Ronald Gordon, "Karl Jaspers: Existential philosopher of dialogical communication," in *Southern Journal of Communication*, Vol. 65, Nr. 2-3, 2000, pp. 105-118.

¹² Amanda Lagerkvist, "Digital Limit Situations: Anticipatory Media Beyond 'The New AI Era'," in *Journal of Digital Social Research (JDSR)*, Vol. 2, Nr. 3, 2020, pp. 16-41.

¹³ See Hossein Mesbahian, "A phenomenological encounter with the Covid 19 crisis focused on boundary situations," in *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, Vol. 14, Nr. 31, 2020, pp. 305-331; Papastephanou, "Pandemic Totalitarianisms", pp. 1-14; and Jean Grondin, "How a Limit Situation Made Us All More Philosophical" in *Corona Phenomenon: Philosophical and Political Questions*, Brill, 2022, pp. 32-36.

¹⁴ For instance, Giunia Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins: Karl Jaspers and the political theory of boundary situations*, Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2008.

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yet, even these contributions have not been adequately utilized by political philosophy or other disciplines outside of existentialist circles.

I will return, in a later section, to the issue of the limit situation's limited echoes in political philosophies of poststructuralist or posthumanist leanings but, for the moment, let me provide examples of limited, or missing, engagement with "limit situation". The notion of limit situation is curiously absent from contemporary philosophical discourses that consider states of exception and camps, although, I believe, such spaces are visibly relevant to experiencing limit situations. Theorizing them could constitute new, fertile ground for ethico-political philosophy. "Limit situation" is equally missing in educational philosophy. A major educational thinker, Paulo Freire, attempted a reformulation of Jaspers' "limit situation" that has not been further discussed. Freire wrote: "Professor Alvaro Vieira Pinto analyzes with clarity the problem of 'limit-situations,' using the concept without the pessimistic aspect originally found in Jaspers. For Vieira Pinto, the 'limit-situations' are not 'the impassable boundaries where possibilities end, but the real boundaries where all possibilities begin'; they are not 'the frontier which separates being from nothingness, but the frontier which separates being from being more'".¹⁵ For Freire, limit situations should be thought as existential situations that limit human potentiality and hence be overcome. Though his mention offers fertile ground for opening up a fruitful dialogue on limit situation through varying perspectives, too few educational philosophers¹⁶ have mined it. "Limit situation" is also surprisingly missing in peace education, in studies (educational or other) of "affect" and trauma, and in "conflict-resolution" theories.

Jaspers' Limit Situation Philosophy

Jaspers' "limit situation" can be explained in its difference from what Jaspers¹⁷ theorized as a "basic situation" (*Grundsituation*). A human being's basic situation is the trans-historical, existential condition of experiencing, to antinomian effect, a Sisyphian quest for plenitude, coherence and unity. Death, suffering, struggle, guilt, and finitude (the feeling of being at the mercy of chance) are basic situations that ultimately defy human calculation, foresight and preventive action. Thus, in my interpretation, they signify the universality and inevitability of limits that demarcate existence and its

¹⁵ Freire wrote this in a footnote in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, his acclaimed book that was originally published in 1970. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Continuum, Boston, MA, 2008, p. 99, fn. 15.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Anthony Petruzzi, "Between Conventions and Critical Thinking: The Concept of 'Limit-Situations' in Critical Literacy and Pedagogy," in *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, Vol. 18, Nr. 2, 1998, pp. 309-32.

¹⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit*. Piper, München, 1947.

(im)potentialities. When basic situations turn from generalities to actualities, they become "limit situations" that challenge and even shatter the situated self's certainties and solaces.¹⁸ Limit situations differ not only from basic situations but also from those temporary (*vorübergehende*) situational formulas¹⁹ that, having something habitual and ordinary about them, lack existentially vertiginous consequences. Temporary situations do not necessarily shake the subject and may be experienced daily in different guises. Unlike them, limit situations of a kind are eventually experienced, in one way or other, due to situatedness within a world of ultimately inevitable basic situations.

Limit situations lead to antinomies "among general principles" or "between the principles and the concrete actions we must take", or decisions we must make, "as human beings living at specific times, in specific places, and with others."²⁰ Limit situations "cannot be approached as general without losing their meaning" as *boundary* ones.²¹ For example, from a Jaspersian prism, death becomes a limit situation "when I confront existentially the dizzying certainty of my death, not simply when I die." A limit situation is experienced "when I orient myself to the reality that that situation is inescapably mine, that it affects me not only intellectually, but in deeper ways", importantly delimiting my behavior and choices.²²

In facing the limit situation existentially, persons expose or disclose the particular individuals that they have come to be. Phenomenologically, a major question is: what one is conscious of when one has consciousness of a limit situation?²³ Existing within the confines of basic situations entails that limit situations usually emerge in consciousness as mere possibilities. For, without the distress of an actually lived out limit situation, according to Jaspers, a person experiences the world from a variety of unquestioned shells. A shell (*Gehäuse*) is the kind of existential comfort or buffer zone that shields the self from various realities. I metaphorize this as follows: even if ontologically homeless, we are existentially ostracoid (shell-carrying beings).²⁴ When the protective shell becomes challenged or, worse, lost, the person, like a shellfish, is confronted with life/or balance-threatening new givens. In Jaspers' words, „Das Gehäuse besteht nicht mehr, der Mensch kann nicht mehr leben, so wenig wie eine Muschel, der man die Schale

¹⁸ Papastephanou, "Loyalty, justice, and limit-situations.", p. 223.

¹⁹ Karl Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*. Springer, Berlin, 1925, p. 241.

²⁰ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 16.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Alan Olson asks a similar question but for different purposes. Alan Olson, "Metaphysical Guilt," in *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts*, Vol. 3, Nr. 1, 2008, pp. 9-19.

²⁴ Papastephanou, "Pandemic Totalitarianisms", p. 5.

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Shells such as "religious faith and ideological convictions, personal styles of living, and protective relationships" put off the experience of limit situation as utterly disruptive.²⁶ I would add to these examples of shells the protective function of common sense, the narratives (official or marginal) that provide facile answers to thorny questions, the hegemonies that lead public opinion to safe harbors of world interpretations, the master discourses and the "-isms" whose social currency pacifies thought. "Dwelling on the boundary is not something we can do all the time,"²⁷ therefore, we need "leaning points" in the face of limit situations because we cannot endure them "in their most shattering and all questioning power continuously". Without the shells as leaning points, "life would cease and unsustainable despair would prevail."²⁸ Losing our shell threatens our viability. Shells fix how individuals have chosen "to solve the limit-situations". Human beings thereby try to escape "the suffering of the limit-situation by creating a shell."²⁹ In my view, this long-understudied aspect of creativity is open to many politicizations³⁰ and to rethinking how not only religions or older ideologies but also new prospects, and new hegemonic discourses (new and normativized -isms), have a deep connection to our being confronted with limit situations and having learned to cope with them homeostatically by continually renewing the shell.

Limit-situations affect the I as *Existenz*, namely, "they reveal my own potential" and thereby show that "'myself' means something more than an empirical I."³¹ To unpack the potential power of limit situations over the self we need first to unpack what Jaspers means by *Existenz*. *Existenz* "is the possibility, the normative horizon, the freedom of existence."³² According to Jaspers,³³ philosophy is called to make a basic decision: how to answer

²⁵ Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, p. 248.

²⁶ Mundt, "Jaspers concept of 'limit situation'," p. 171.

²⁷ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 36.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ Jonna Bornemark, "Limit-situation. Antinomies and Transcendence in Karl Jaspers' Philosophy," in *SATS: Nordic Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, Nr. 2, 2006, pp. 63-85, 76.

³⁰ For instance, we build monuments to our "shells", arrange eduscapes accordingly and create initiation processes and liminalities (e.g. a PhD thesis may constitute a kind of intellectual date of birth for the student, demarcating her way of viewing the world and dealing with its tensions ever since), rites of passage to cross the threshold of the publicly established *Gehäuse* formally to enter a valued, prospectively protective shell.

³¹ Bornemark, "Limit-situation. Antinomies and Transcendence," p. 77.

³² Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 25.

³³ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie II, Existenzerhellung*, Springer, Berlin, 1973, p. 3.

“the question whether mundane being,”³⁴ i.e., existence and subjectivity as studied by the sciences, “is all there is”. Jaspers replies negatively. Apart from the empirical I, there is also “the being which in the phenomenality of existence *is not* but *can be, ought to be*.”³⁵ That being is *Existenz*. In my opinion, Jaspers’ assertion has exceptional political significance against anti-utopian ideologies and determinist treatments of our world as the best possible. *Existenz* as a consciousness state of transcending material, social and other determinations³⁶ invites this clarification: *Existenz* mitigates between the world and what Jaspers theorizes as “transcendence”, of which we have at times a glimpse. In fact, Jaspers’ notion of transcendence “is not so much ‘vertical’ as ‘horizontal,’ not a movement upwards, above it all, but a moving more penetratingly with ‘gliding awareness’ into and through that which is around us as the world of appearances.”³⁷ *Existenz* is the dimension of our being that has the capacity to stand between the world and transcendence through the event of existential communication. The latter, rather than some exclusively introspective quest, opens a view into transcendence.³⁸ Ultimately, Jaspers’ thought is relational and intersubjective rather than monological or defined by a subject-object, modern philosophical shell.

Limit situations are one condition of *Existenz* realization³⁹ beyond problem-solving modalities. As Jaspers clarifies,⁴⁰ limit situations are beyond the rational knowledge that we use to solve problems in every-day life. They impel “a radical change in attitude and common way of thinking.”⁴¹ They invite responses, beyond “planning and calculating to overcome them”, that involve our “becoming the *Existenz* we potentially are; we become ourselves by entering with open eyes into the boundary situations.”⁴² Before the outbreak of a limit situation, unshakeable in their knowledge, people dismiss possible limit situations as foreign to them. When a limit situation occurs, it opens the possibility for philosophizing in a way that sheds light on existence. This existential elucidation (or illumination, *Erhellung*) means that we begin to see limit situations as *possibilities* that hit

³⁴ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 25.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ Fuchs, “Existential vulnerability,” p. 301.

³⁷ Gordon, “Karl Jaspers: Existential philosopher,” p. 115.

³⁸ Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, trans. W. Earle, Noonday Press, New York, 1957 (original text 1935), p. 108.

³⁹ Kurt Salamun, “Moral Implications of Karl Jaspers’ Existentialism,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 49, Nr. 2, 1988, pp. 317-323, p. 318.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Jaspers, *Philosophie*.

⁴¹ Salamun, “Moral Implications,” p. 318.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 319.

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the essence of our being.⁴³ Then we move to existential realization: the limit situation becomes not just an objective possibility for others but also an embodiment through our own personal existence. We are it: a "unique translation, a realization in personal existence."⁴⁴ While wrestling with limits, we may realize possibilities beyond the immanence of mundane life.

For Jaspers, the "encompassing," which denotes the unlimited possibilities that an otherwise limited world-structure offers, enables experiences of transcendence. The encompassing is neither object nor subject but combines both.⁴⁵ It is also more than just some particular horizon of meaning. It is ultimately "a deeper, comprehensive whole that engulfs all passing horizons."⁴⁶ We have a glimpse of this encompassing when limit situations actually occur and heighten our consciousness. A transformed ontology becomes in truth impossible, and the planned regulation of the multiple modalities that surround us (what Jaspers denotes with a Greek term, "Periechontologie") is suspended.⁴⁷ All sorts of paths open up then, one of them leading to *Existenzerhellung* (illuminating *Existenz*). It takes a leap (*Aufschwung*) to reach this path, a leap outside the subject's constitution. Hence limit situations are central to effecting *Existenz* as authenticity and transcendence. Limit situations have a disclosing operation (*Freilegung*) in revealing modalities of *Dasein*. But, according to Jaspers, there is no guarantee of *Existenz*. A strong possibility is retreat in the *Gehäuse*, despite the limit situation's striking blows on it (even temporarily crashing it) and disrupting the quotidian unfolding of the subject as narrative. With these terms, Jaspers accounts for discontinuity, break, transformation and dislocation without investing limit situations with exclusively positive connotations or eventualities.⁴⁸ That is, he avoids glorifying or normativizing limit situations, as some adherents to poststructuralism do concerning "limit experience". For, sometimes, such leaps are into an abyss or have paralyzing effects.

Jaspers offers no prescriptions for coping with limit situations. He authorizes a general response to such situations that involves transcendence

⁴³ Jaspers, *Philosophie*; see also Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, pp. 34-5.

⁴⁵ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophische Aufsätze*, Fischer Bücherei, Frankfurt am Main und Hamburg, 1967, p. 216. Also on the encompassing, see Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*.

⁴⁶ David Nichols, "Heidegger and Jaspers on the Tragic," in *Existenz: An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts*, Vol. 4, Nr. 2, 2009, pp. 28-35, p. 31.

⁴⁷ „Eine neue Lehre vom Sein (eine verwandelte Ontologie) ist in Wahrheit unmöglich geworden, ein Entwurf der Weisen des Umgreifenden, worin wir uns finden (eine Periechontologie), muß selber in der Schwebel bleiben" Jaspers, *Philosophische Aufsätze*, p. 83.

⁴⁸ Papastephanou, "Pandemic Totalitarianisms," p. 6.

(rather than overcoming).⁴⁹ He also authorizes a kind of subjectification: the “meaningful way for us to react to limit situations” is not “by planning and calculating to overcome them but by the very different activity of *becoming the Existenz we potentially are*.”⁵⁰ Yet, subjectification does not entail, for Jaspers, subject-object relationality to the world: becoming *Existenz* means a heightened relationality in existential communication and in “loving struggle” (*liebender Kampf*). Jaspers uses “loving struggle” to signify “a wrestling with the other to press other and self further than either has been able to go alone.”⁵¹ As “a non-violent, non-coercive and non-egoistic form of struggle with another person,”⁵² ultimately in solidarity than competitiveness, the loving struggle is an ethical attitude that, as I claim elsewhere,⁵³ may be politicized as an alternative to power relations and power politics.

To sum up: limit situations evoke excess in illuminating the exhaustibility of human power and of one’s ability to cope, mundanely and habitually, with the abysmal force of challenges within our inescapably spatiotemporal situatedness, in our being singular existences, though entangled with one another.⁵⁴ We are compelled to endure them. Limit situations are fundamental for the self. They are inexorably ours. Being tragic and defining, they disclose the persons that we have become, while simultaneously reshaping us and reshuffling our fabrics.⁵⁵ The question, writes Jaspers,⁵⁶ about who or what I would be without them is hollow because I am myself in them. Transcending any comprehensible thought, I find myself in the limit situation “shaken, first, and then as one with chance, which I take to be mine.”⁵⁷ Limit situations make us aware of an existential (rather than rationalist) universality since everybody will be hit by a traumatic limit situation and everybody is destined to experience limit situations at some point. Instead of embracing abstract and objectivist rationalism, Jaspers’ universalism treats reason as “the vehicle by which human beings shuttle” between general principles and concrete, particular situations “where they become aware of (and disturbed by) all the antinomies that remain hidden when principles are simply enunciated in general.”⁵⁸ In

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy, Vol. II*, trans. E. B. Ashton, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, p. 179.

⁵¹ Gordon, “Karl Jaspers: Existential philosopher,” p. 113.

⁵² Salamun, “Moral Implications,” p. 320.

⁵³ Papastephanou, “Pandemic Totalitarianisms,” p. 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jaspers, *Philosophy*, p. 191.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 28.

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⁶² Karl Jaspers, *The Future of*
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its difference and tension with the intellect, reason is, for Jaspers, a
movement "constantly defying the fixity and abstraction of intellectual
categories" and "a more promising path for knowing human beings beyond
their objectivity."⁵⁹ I consider this a major, possible contribution to political-
philosophical debates on universalism. A conventional wisdom of
postmodern times has it that universalism is an inherently negative concept
and a politically pernicious idea. I think that such certainties can be
challenged from a perspective that, though critical of some of Jaspers' ideas,
pays nevertheless attention to those of his insights that redirect discourses on
universalism and enable perception of its ambiguities. Jaspers' universalism
also constitutes an alternative to current elaborations on a possibly non-toxic
universalism that nevertheless overlook existential, contextual and affective
dimensions of human entanglement.

Different Sounds

Before I engage with new "sounds" of Jaspers' limit situation and
suggestions for expanding its relevance to ethico-political and educational
philosophy, I briefly return to the notion's limited echoes in various post-
isms. In poststructuralism, the theoretical attachment to "limit experience",
especially the Foucauldian popularization of this notion in educational
philosophy,⁶⁰ seems to me to have sidelined or even excluded "limit
situation" as a possible theoretical ground for exploring issues of
subjectification. Ironically, despite the fact that the notion of "limit
experience" has been associated with "dramatic" and subversive
philosophies such as Georges Bataille's, it becomes, when used in
educational philosophy, a much "safer" and tension-free concept,⁶¹ far more
monologically fascinated with the epiphanic than Jaspers' "limit situation".

In posthumanism, there is a noticeable tendency to ignore all older
theories that are guilty, or suspect, of human exceptionalism. Against
possible, posthumanist objections to Jasper's philosophy, I argue that
theories are complex bodies of ideas, often containing philosophical-
anthropological material that avails itself to different interpretations. Jaspers
depicts humans also in terms that might today count as non-exceptionalist.
For instance, he claims that human beings are not different from other living
creatures.⁶² Their basic situation is the same, since "they devour one another,
defend themselves, and escape." Like other creatures, humans cannot avoid

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Marianna Papastephanou, "Michel Foucault's limit-experience limited," in
Educational Philosophy and Theory, Vol. 50, Nr. 4, 2018, pp. 390-403.

⁶¹ Papastephanou, "Michel Foucault's limit-experience".

⁶² Karl Jaspers, *The Future of Mankind*, trans. E.B. Ashton, Chicago University Press,
Chicago, 1961, p. 31.

force. Humans are, for Jaspers, less defined in their difference from animals than in their difference from angels: force “would be absent only from a kingdom of angels.”⁶³ Another possible posthumanist objection might be this: at first sight, limit situation is by definition (at least Jaspers’ definition) an exclusively humanist term. Personally, I do not endorse this “first sight” assumption. Though non-human otherness may not experience a limit situation as humans do or, if the non-human otherness belongs to non-biota it may not experience it at all, limit situation nevertheless remains relevant because as such, and as I theorize it in some critical distance from Jaspers, it is not reducible to consciousness. It has aspects of an objective category, regardless of how or whether it is lived out. For instance, humans create limit situations of death for other biota and destruction of non-biota as objective states/realities rather than as subjective experiences.

Postmodernist critiques of metaphysics, authenticity, humanism, eurocentrism,⁶⁴ etc., and posthumanist critiques of human exceptionalism have often chimed with tendencies to lump all older philosophies into such categories and thus to dismiss them effortlessly and sweepingly. These tendencies block not only the interest in Jaspers but also any insight into affinities of post-isms with Jaspers’ rejection of closure and plenitude and his attention to finitude, situatedness, contingency, and shattering. Limit situations explode consensus, security, prudentialism and other such things whose critique is so valued in the post-ist context when uttered by respective gurus. Through Jaspers it can be shown that “any clearly stated theory of the whole, whether religious or not, becomes a shell protecting human beings of the original experience” of limit situations.⁶⁵ Granted this, it is unsurprising that Jaspers’ own notion of limit situation has not attracted post-ist interest: his ideas are considered part of the whole that these post-isms reject; and these post-isms, despite their attacks on meta-narratives, have themselves become meta-narrative shells. As a theory of the whole, as meta-narratives, post-isms tend to ignore what may come from a different or older tradition and cause cracks or upset new orthodoxies. Jaspers’ philosophy may cause cracks in these new meta-narratives in at least two ways. (a) It may do so through the notion of the shell that can be employed critically to theorize operations (inter alia political) of which the new master-discourses are also guilty. The risk that Jaspers saw in nihilism and rationalism, namely their becoming a shell when they lose their vital force of tearing down ideological

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Eurocentrism is often detected in some of Jaspers’ statements regarding the Axial Age (*Achsenzeit*). See, for instance, Dafydd Rees, “Decolonizing Philosophy? Habermas and the Axial Age,” in *Constellations*, Vol. 24, Nr. 2, 2017, pp. 219-231

⁶⁵ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 39.

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shells,⁶⁶ equally threatens all "-isms". (b) Jaspers causes cracks in current -isms also through the notion of limit situation when this is concretized as the situation of a vulnerable other and made to show how abstract and generic these master-discourses remain. They remain so even when they pay continuous lip service to diversity and the suffering other, and then capitalize on their paying such lip service. The rest of this article indicates inter alia this potential of Jaspersian philosophy.

This brief detour to limited echoes of limit situations in current post-isms aimed to show that an interest in "new sounds" of Jaspers' voice could be philosophically invigorating and upsetting of new master-discourses, instead of being an updating of Jaspers' conceptual tools along new hegemonies. In this section, then, I indicate some conjectures of neglected, or yet non-theorized, interpretive possibilities in Jaspers' conception of limit situations. The upshot of these conjectures could be rendered thus: the current hegemony of power and biopolitics as tools explanatory of operations that are productive of subjectivities could be critiqued through awareness of limit situations as simultaneously produced by, and productive of, subjects, thoughts, power and worlds. In other words, I recommend that we use limit situations as ethico-political explanatory tools, and not only as tools of existential analytics of lived experiences. As ethico-political tools, they offer us insight into elements of human existence that are irreducible to power relations and to their role in limit situations politics.

For Jaspers, limit situations, along with wonder and doubt, are also sources of philosophy operative through communication among people.⁶⁷ From my perspective, this so overlooked point is highly significant for a meta-philosophy that explores what lies between problem-solving and question-raising. Problem-solving is sometimes attributed to philosophy, for instance by (neo)pragmatism, but it strikes me as impoverishing of philosophy. Problem-solving domesticates philosophy by orienting it to issues that have already cropped up in the lifeworld and require solutions. Against it, and following ancient theorizations of philosophy, we may emphasize question-raising and aporia. Philosophy raises questions precisely there where people are immersed in "shell" certainties. It problematizes precisely what is un-problematic in a lifeworld, i.e., all those things that escape solution logi(ist)cs.

However, in-between problem-solving and question-raising, there is also the operation of philosophy as response to limit situations. Limit situations do not invite problem-solving, in fact, they are outside the register of problem-solving. As sources of philosophy, limit situations are, I posit,

⁶⁶ Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, pp. 300-309.

⁶⁷ Karl Jaspers, *Way to Wisdom*, trans. R. Mannheim, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1973, pp. 24-25. For an informative account on this topic, see Gordon, "Karl Jaspers: Existential philosopher," p. 113.

concretizations of *existential aporia* and thus corrective even of *epistemically* aporetic perspectives on philosophy. Especially relevant to epistemic aporias are some limit situations, namely, those whose consequences are intellectual and shatter one's commonsensical certainties. Instead of being just thought experiments and theoretical exercises, such limit situations correct, so to speak, one's detached experiences of aporetic thought by shaking the ground of one's standardized epistemic attitudes. Other limit situations, of "material" rather than purely intellectual consequences, are those of actual suffering of unbearable, distressing, even harrowing, change in one's conditions of life. Encountered as experienced by others, this kind of limit situations could mobilize empathy and philosophical wonder, or an affirmative sense of curiosity, and set on course truth-seeking philosophical interrogations of the politics that produce such limit situations. The others' limit situation is not experienced as mine; witnessing it, however, may lead me to truth-disclosure.⁶⁸

We must be cautious, though, concerning one possible implication of Jaspers' connection of philosophy and limit situation. Confronted with limit situations (one's own or another's) a subject may resort to philosophy for solace rather than for truth.⁶⁹ Yet, this possibility (which, in Jaspers, seems to be fed – to the point of becoming a certainty – by essentialist remarks such as the one below) obfuscates another relationship between philosophy, truth and limit situation: that of the other's limit situation setting in motion philosophy's truth-seeking operations. I unpack this complex point thus. Jaspers writes that we tend toward stability and quiet: "we cannot bear the infinite vortex of the relativization of all concepts."⁷⁰ His is a psychological-essentialist objection to relativization, whereas mine would be ethico-political and non-essentialist. It is sometimes the other's limit situation (and the demands it makes on us) that resists relativization. For instance, reactions

⁶⁸ Existentially, however, what I have just claimed requires nuance: the other's limit situation is not experienced as mine, especially if this other is remote and "generalized," so to speak. In that case, the other's limit situation dislocates me if it is met with empathy and if it heightens my awareness of the ethico-political demands it may be making on me, which also vary extensively up to exposing me to the limit situation of guilt. If the other is very close to me, e.g., a "concrete" and "significant" other who plays a fundamental part in my life, that other's limit situation is transferred to me and translates into another limit situation, one fitting into my existential positioning in relation to that other. For example, the dizzying certainty of physical death that one person faces as a limit situation may turn into a dizzying certainty of "death" of meaningful existence that I, as entangled person, may experience. In other words, limit situations are mobile and transferrable even when they erupt as situations that a singular self may be in.

⁶⁹ Still, I do not mean this distinction between solace and philosophy as another dichotomy.

⁷⁰ Jaspers, *Psychologie der Weltanschauungen*, p. 304.

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to the Holocaust denialist argument that relativizes all concepts presuppose concepts (truth included) as leaning points. Therefore, we sometimes rely on concepts not because, supposedly, we cannot bear relativization psychologically, but because we find relativization ethico-politically amiss and morally repugnant. Contrary to Jaspers' assertion that conceptual stability shields us from limit situations (also contrary to post-isms' concurring with that), I argue that conceptual stability, even if provisional, precisely enables a glimpse of a limit situation, and more, it enables our acknowledging the limit situation that the other is in. In so doing, it shatters the shell (even if temporarily) that blocks our view of the other's limit situation, a shell which is especially strong in cases where the other's limit situation remains unperceived even if, ironically, we (individually or collectively) have created it for that other. The deportation of the Chagossians from their land, and their being forced to dwell in the limit situation of exile by successive U.S. and U.K. governments, is a case in point, one that I have discussed elsewhere.⁷¹

Nevertheless, to emphasize the aforementioned other-oriented and political dimensions of limit situations we must highlight the possibility, inherent in Jaspers' theorization of a limit situation being also collectively experienced. As Gatta pertinently puts it, Jaspers understands "suffering as both something befalling dramatically and idiosyncratically single individuals, but also as a plural phenomenon, something almost always entangling multiple individuals, situated differently, and reacting differently to it according to their situation."⁷² I take this point further by suggesting that different existential and political positions make limit situations not only collective but also occasionally group-differentiated. Situatedness exposes specific groups, especially the most vulnerable or powerless ones, to limit situations (e.g., forceful deportation and exile) that are only theoretical possibilities for more powerful groups. In my opinion, part of one's existential elucidation (*Existenzerhellung*) should concern not just one's defining oneself within and against the situation one is thrown into (at birth or later) but also the consideration of the situatedness of others. This requires one to experience the encounter with others through heightened political consciousness of how suffering is affected by one's (or people's) being located in space, time and political entanglements of power.

Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that, for Jaspers, all limit situations make, or should make, the self swing into *Existenz* (*Aufschwung*). Such an assumption is particularly wrong, leading even to gruesome implications, when establishing a callous expectation that the other in a limit situation should respond to it with what we consider constructive *Existenz*. The *Aufschwung* is just one possibility. Many limit situations are merely

⁷¹ Papastephanou, "Loyalty, justice, and limit-situations," pp. 228-229 and 236-237.

⁷² Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 41.

shattering or unbearable. It is important to keep this in mind, then, I suggest, when we ethicize and politicize limit situations.⁷³ We should not burden others, especially when our collectivity has created their limit situation, with yet another limit situation, that of guilt for being unable to make something good out of what they experience. What for psychotherapy⁷⁴ might be a perfectly sound approach of helping the self accept, endure or even overcome limit situations through cultivating virtues such as perseverance, courage and reflective capacity, that same thing would be gruesome in ethico-politics if it was turned into an expectation that suffering others should have developed "limit situation skills" and be blamed if they had not, especially when I or we (our collectivity) may be responsible for the limit situation in which others dwell. The others' limit situations should constitute a challenge *for us* to swing into the *Existenz* that allows us transcendence of our own, temporarily protected and safe positioning. Thus I reach from another route Gatta's conclusion that limit situations play a "role in awakening responsibility to others, orienting us to imagine political possibilities with them, and compelling us to political action."⁷⁵

In critical dialogue with Jaspers' philosophy we may also rethink our grasp of (and failures to grasp) concrete human positioning. For, Jaspers exhorted us to enter our limit situation with open eyes, but, in my view, both modern and postmodern philosophy overlooked that we close our eyes to the other's limit situation, especially there where we seem to be at our most attentive, that is, when we aestheticize (and also abstract, romanticize, or ontologize) the other as "the migrant," "the refugee," "the exile" or "the dissident." Therefore, I suggest caution concerning such aestheticizations of limit situations. "Limit situation" could resonate with a sweeping, *Lebensphilosophie* incrimination of un-dramatic and (supposedly) "petty virtues". It may evoke a concomitant glorification of a modernist aesthetic of shock. In my opinion, a fascination with limit situations as "unique moments of existential peril that become a proving ground for individual 'authenticity'"⁷⁶ diverts attention from the ethico-political claims that the inexorable specificity of the other's limit situation makes on us. The "aesthetics of horror" (*Aesthetik des Schreckens*) sets the lifeworld on one

⁷³ This is especially important to keep in view if the concept of limit situation will ever be introduced into peace education and conflict resolution initiatives, especially in those that callously overlook the situation of the conflicting parties, depoliticize reconciliation and disconnect it from political justice by reducing it to individual psychology.

⁷⁴ See, for instance, Fuchs, "Existential vulnerability," p. 308.

⁷⁵ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Richard Wolin, "Carl Schmitt: The conservative revolutionary habitus and the aesthetics of horror," in *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, Nr. 3, 1992, pp. 424-447, p. 432. Wolin also, and most helpfully, critiques such aestheticizations.

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⁷⁷ Wolin, "Carl Schmitt: The conservative revolutionary habitus and the aesthetics of horror," from Karl Heinz Broderick, ed., *Carl Schmitt: Critical Perspectives*, p. 432.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Fuchs, "Existential vulnerability," p. 308; and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory*, pp. 561-576; and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory*, pp. 561-576; and Carl Schmitt, *Political Theory*, pp. 561-576.

⁸⁰ Mundt, "Jaspers' concept of the limit situation," in *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2010, pp. 1-15.

⁸¹ Marianna Papastavrou, "The limit situation in Jaspers' philosophy," in *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2010, pp. 16-30.

⁸² *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2004, pp. 1-15.

in mind, then, I suggest, We should not burden their limit situation, with able to make something psychotherapy⁷⁴ might be a concept, endure or even such as perseverance, would be gruesome in that suffering others blamed if they had not, responsible for the limit situations should constitute shows us transcendence of g. Thus I reach from ions play a "role in to imagine political action."⁷⁵

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side, and "suddenness" (*Plötzlichkeit*),⁷⁷ rupture and discontinuity on another side. The one pole is incriminated; the other is invested with redemptive force. The "society of 'normalization' (Foucault)" must be subjected to "aesthetics of rupture," where "the exception enters the scene, for the exception alone, *qua* borderline concept (*Grenzbegriff*) allows the power of real life."⁷⁸ Here I invite the reader to consider, for instance, the tasks assigned to limit experience by Foucauldians;⁷⁹ in my view, such tasks constitute what is known as "soft" limit situations⁸⁰ valued by the broader Western intellectual glorification of travelling and movement. Instead, I recommend ethico-political theorizations of the production/creation of limit situations that are less blithe and less centripetal than those singled out in some discourses of limit experience and displacement. I agree with Wolin regarding the dangers in embracing thus-conceived limit situations, but I see these dangers as more traceable in conceptions of limit experience than in Jaspers' notion of limit situations. Therefore, I clarify that my next paragraphs should be read against thanatopic and thanatourist,⁸¹ deep-down apolitical, outlooks on others' limit situations that Wolin convincingly criticizes. The aestheticization of horror becomes indeed a self-exculpating and complacent, new hegemony that makes common cause with its supposed opposite, the moralist, philanthropic and charitable stances toward the suffering other.

True, limit situations befall the subject (or a collectivity); but it is also true that some do not fall from the sky. And some have an unavoidably and crucially collective dimension. They are the limit situation of a specific "we." Thus, alongside the centrality of the limit situation for the subject and its processual course toward (in)authentic being, I see a potential centrality of approaching ethico-political situations that we, this "we" be of western localities, powerful public fora, academics, groups of experts, etc., create for others (or that others are confronted with). We overlook this in the generality of our talk about others, while, stuck in a war zone, immigrants, refugees, and rooted subjects experience a limit situation in complex variety, group-specific uniqueness or subjective irreducibility. Western subjects perceive or overlook such otherness through their own theoretical and political "shells."

⁷⁷ Wolin, "Carl Schmitt," p. 433. Wolin takes the term "Aesthetik des Schreckens" from Karl Heinz Bohrer.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ See, for instance, Jan Masschelein, "Experience and the Limits of Governmentality," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 38, Nr. 4, 2006, pp. 561-576; and Christiane Thompson, "Education and/or Displacement? A Pedagogical Inquiry into Foucault's 'Limit-Experience'," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 42, Nr. 3, 2010, pp. 361-377.

⁸⁰ Mundt, "Jaspers concept of 'limit situation'," pp. 175ff.

⁸¹ Marianna Papastephanou, "On ugliness in words, in politics, in tour-ism," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Vol. 47, Nr. 13-14, 2015, pp. 1493-1515.

Even if facing their own private limit situations, most Western subjects do not experience the political limit situation that "war zone" subjects do. Western subjects are even unaware of a possibly appropriate limit situation of guilt⁸² due to their countries' role in such situations. They may feel guilty for how their countries deal with the immigrant when ashore, but not for the fact that the uprooting and the others' suffering may be related to such countries' politics in some ways. If they are politically involved enough to feel guilty for their countries' treatment of the *arrivant* ashore, then, on what grounds are they absolved from awareness of any responsibility concerning those who did not manage to come ashore? Guilt seems to be limited to how a subject acts or fails to act, or guilt may be associated with the unintended or unforeseeable consequences of one's actions. When guilt is understood as collective, it is typically confined to issues within territory or, recently, to global issues of climate change and natural destruction. It misses the middle ground of international relations (middle because it is in-between the self and the globe) and the failure to act, in political rather than philanthropic ways, for alleviating the suffering that others experience in limit situations abroad. Unlike such current tendencies, Jaspers singled out political guilt as the type of guilt that is especially relevant to collective politics. *Politische Schuld* concerns "the culpability of a group or a people for crimes committed by the state to which one belongs as a citizen—even though one may not have actively supported the leaders and agents of the state responsible for these crimes."⁸³ Jaspers distinguishes political culpability from "collective guilt" because the latter concerns "the consciousness of individuals" rather than of groups.⁸⁴ If we suppose that one's own collectivity or state is not involved in the limit situation that others were made to inhabit, still, failure to show solidarity to these others could be theorized in Jasper's terms through his notion of metaphysical guilt that denotes one's guilt for one's failing to act there where action was needed.⁸⁵ We stand with eyes closed in front of the others' limit situation when our knowledge of the extent of human entanglement and its concatenated effects on collectivities is limited. By this I do not mean the well-rehearsed argument of some poststructuralist and activist circles, with which I strongly disagree, that supposedly, if we are not in the position and culture of another person we are not entitled to speak. I rather mean that the tendency within discourses of empathy to focus on the

⁸² On the issue of guilt, see Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, trans. E. B. Ashton, Capricorn Books, New York, 1947.

⁸³ Olson, "Metaphysical Guilt," p. 12.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁸⁵ Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, and Karl Jaspers, *Tragedy is Not Enough*, trans. Harald A. T., Reiche, Harry T. Moore, and Karl W. Deutsch, Archon Books, Boston, 1969.

⁸⁶ Gatta, *The*
⁸⁷ Fuchs, "Ex"
⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

subject and her emotions grasps the situation of the other only indirectly (to the extent that the situation may have emotive effects observable or imaginable from the point of view of the sympathizer), thus failing to grasp the multidimensionality of the situation as such.

Conclusion

As Gatta has argued, “exclusive reliance on the intellect is possibly what stunts the political promise of modernity to turn suffering into a central problem”; in fact, “modernity’s interest for suffering remains generic”. To change this we could turn to how Jaspers’ limit situation philosophy neither intellectualizes nor abstracts suffering “out of political relevance.”⁸⁶ In line with this view, I have emphasized that it holds also for postmodernity. Moreover, though limit situations are constitutive of existence, specific limit situations may be caused by human handlings. I have suggested that such limit situations have special ethico-political, rather than just intellectual or experiential, significance. A further, related yet neglected, ethico-political issue is that generalities of existential vulnerability turn through action (or lack of action) into concrete, distressing experiences for specifically and unevenly positioned, situated people or for nature. Jaspers’ nuances then help us define cruelty – in its opposition to misfortune (or catastrophe) – as a human-made transformation of a basic situation into a limit situation for specific human or non-human others. My ethico-political perspective has associated limit situations not only with what humans as subjects encounter, or merrily seek for the sake of dislocation and flight from routine (soft limit situations and tamed limit experiences), but also with what they create for themselves, others and nature. Thus, I rethink Jaspers’ emphasis on what the limit situation does to the self and how the self copes with it (even if intersubjectively): what about that which limit situations reveal about the entanglement of beings and collectivities? The emphasis on the effects of limit situations on the individual may continue to relegate the topic to psychology and remove it from ethico-political sight.

With a limit situation “a truth about one’s *Existenz* enters suddenly into consciousness”, one that may be “unbearable for those affected.”⁸⁷ Such truths of limit situations comprise “the unavoidability of guilt, the inexorability of being free, the frailty of one’s body, or the finitude of one’s *Dasein*.”⁸⁸ However, beyond truth and moments of realization for the affected self, I have noted more multiple challenges than those which a monological (self-oriented) frame allows us to perceive. Limit situations also effect a tension of action, an impasse, impossible choices, tragic ethical

⁸⁶ Gatta, *Theorizing among ruins*, p. 29.

⁸⁷ Fuchs, “Existential vulnerability”, p. 302.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

dilemmas.⁸⁹ In my view, Jaspers' limit situation could be thought through beyond his own association of it with fundamental conditions of *Dasein*. In other words, I see a surplus of possible significations of the term and possible instantiations beyond those of struggle, guilt, chance and suffering, though inclusive of them. The term may also be conceptually demarcated by a void and a necessity, an absence and a presence: a limit situation is one where we have to make a choice and decision in the absence of guidelines, of a traveler's guide, of scientific authority and in the presence of urgency, in need of non-deferrable action.⁹⁰ In some cases, this action may be monological – in the sense of being just the creation of a new world orientation for the self. The protective shell is missing and a new home is to be searched within the confines of a by then illuminated existence, one of awareness and reconciliation with human finitude and vulnerability. But, in some limit situations, another kind of action is urgent, a relational one toward justice that directly affects the lives of others. A limit situation (one's own or another's) involves an extra-ordinary spatiotemporality because it is both: a new land (*terra nova*), *hic abundant leones*,⁹¹ and a *tempus terribilis*. Limit situations may be deterritorializing, not in the celebratory, self-congratulatory sense that this term takes when associated with the valorized mobility of the Western nomadic subject but in the self-critical sense that it may have when denoting reflection on our own "shells", namely, on our internal "boundaries" that we carry around even when we cross external borders. As such heterochronies and deterritorializations, limit situations invite *extra territorium jus*, a law, justice and ethico-politics out of the ordinary.

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⁸⁹ Papastephanou, "Loyalty, justice, and limit-situations".

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ "Here lions abound": a phrase written on uncharted territories of old maps.

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