

of opposites, the signifiers that define human existence lose their meaning. That existence itself loses its meaning. Mortals and immortals alike are robbed of their proper being as each lives/dies the death/life of the other. Death is gone but so too is the *aiōn*, the concept of human existence as a duration of life punctuated by death. Both duration and punctuation are lost. Instead, we go around and around forever in a nightmarish spiral of life-death.

In his chiasmic mimesis of the cosmic cycle, Heraclitus's *logos* speaks in unison with the *logos* that exists always; aesthetic form harmonizes with the structure of the universe, *kosmos* with *kosmos*. Through this mimetic synthesis, Heraclitus synchronizes human and cosmic tempos in a timeless eternal now. He brings human *xunesis* together with the common *logos*, making us feel this unity in our own bodies as a common rhythm, the shared *metra* of the cosmic revolution, and in this way secures the wholeness and unity of a cosmos in which "all things are one." But in fragments B26/D71 and B62/D70 that unity is experienced as annihilation. The chiasms' embrace becomes a death grip, holding us in the cosmic *aei* but at the cost of our mortal *aiōn*.

Fragment B21/D72 holds us in this same eternal chiasmus between *thanatos* and *hupnos*: "Death is whatever we see when awake, whatever we see when sleeping is sleep." Life appears here only as a distressing imbalance in the aphorism's perfect symmetry. And yet perhaps that is enough to wake us from our morbid lethargy. Asymmetry breaks the chiasmic stranglehold of *athanatoi thnētoi thnētoi athanatoi* and opens a space for that which we do not see either in sleep or awake: *bios*.

### STUTTER, SYNCOPATION

In the symmetry of his aphorisms Heraclitus both produces and reproduces a cosmos of such unity and coherence that it leaves no space for human life. But every once in a while, as in B21/D72, we find a subtle but pointed asymmetry, a syncopation generated by the convergence of different tempos. These moments are expressed as a kind of stutter in the text, a "grammar of disequilibrium" within both Heraclitus's *logos* and the cosmic *logos*.<sup>80</sup> This stutter introduces an incoherence into the perfect order of Heraclitus's *kosmos*, but a productive and necessary one, for it is here, I will suggest, in this briefest interval, that we find a space (or time) for human life, as well as the paradoxical origins of Heraclitus's own philosophical discourse.

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offers the fullest treatment of B62/D70; see also Porter's (2024) explication of the fragment's paradoxes. For a very different interpretation see Hussey (1991), who takes immortals and mortals to mean minds with and without understanding.

80. Deleuze 1997, 112: the stutter is "a syntax in the process of becoming, a creation of syntax that gives birth to a foreign language within language, a grammar of disequilibrium." Cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 98, and on the generativity of asymmetry, Deleuze 1994, 22–24.

We saw how the *psukhē* takes part in the elemental transformations of the cosmos, following the path down to water and earth and back up through the same changes.

ψυχῆισιν θάνατος ὕδωρ γενέσθαι, ὕδατι δὲ θάνατος γῆν γενέσθαι, ἐκ γῆς δὲ ὕδωρ γίνεται, ἐξ ὕδατος δὲ ψυχῆ. (B36/D100)

For *psukhai* it is death to become water, for water it is death to become earth; from earth water is born, from water *psukhē*.

That cycle of transformation “measures up to the same amount” (*metreetai eis ton auton logon*, B31/D86), preserving the eternal sameness of Heraclitus’s cosmos, its circular perfection replicated in the annular form and verbal symmetry of the fragment. But there is one small but significant asymmetry: a change from *psukhai* to *psukhē*. Does this difference indicate the merging of particular individual souls into a universal “world-soul,” as some ancient readers thought? Or does it mark the transmutation of spirit into matter, as the life-breath of individuals becomes a physical element of the universe?<sup>81</sup> Perhaps. But the circular form complicates such a linear reading: if individual souls become singular through this process (“from all one”), how do we get from that singular back to the plural (“from one all,” B10/D47) to start the process again? *Psukhai/psukhē* emerges as a point of difference that disrupts the cosmic cycle. The circle does not come full circle: its beginning and end are, very literally, *not xunon* (B103/D54). The aphorism’s broken symmetry introduces a syncopation in the cosmic rhythm right at the moment when the *psukhē* is absorbed into the elements. The human is not fully synchronized with the cosmic and the interval between them preserves the *psukhē* in its individual plurality and difference from the universality of “this cosmos, the same of all” (B30/D85).

A similar interval opens around the *aiōn*. We can return to fragment B52/D76.

αἰὼν παῖς ἐστι παίζων, πεσσεύων· παιδὸς ἡ βασιληίη.

*Aiōn* is a child playing, playing checkers. Sovereignty belongs to the child.

Heraclitus, as we saw, rejects the traditional notion of immortality through reproduction: the child’s sovereignty is the parent’s doom. Instead, we become immortal through our participation in the cycle of cosmic transformation. Kahn reads the checkers metaphor as an image of the alternating *metra* of the eternal fire as it is kindled and quenched, and identifies the *basilēiē*—the kingdom or maybe the king

81. The former is implied by Aët. 4.3.12 (< A15/R48a) and supported by Finkelberg (2013, 149–50; 2017, 84–103); while Betegh (2013, 227–34, 245–57) defends the latter; cf. Kahn 1979, 238; Sassi 2018, 118. Vieira (2013) labels this construction, in which the first and last term are related but in tension, “bow composition,” and sees it as a mimetic description of the union of opposites within a cosmic process that he takes to be rectilinear not circular.

piece in the game—with the governing force of the cosmos.<sup>82</sup> Just as the human *psukhē* follows the cyclical path of the elements, so the human child plays the eternal game, and thus swaps his mortal *aiōn* for the kingdom of *aei*. The fragment encourages this reading with its chiasmic form, which connects it to the *tropai* of the cosmos and their measured beat.<sup>83</sup>

But in the central ring of this chiasmus there is an odd stutter: *paizōn, pesseuōn*. This repetition is often read as a pointed self-correction: human life seems at first, from our limited human perspective, like random play, but is actually a game with clear and orderly rules. This would suggest the shift of perspective that we encountered (apropos of B1/D1) at the end of the second section, where a view from eternity obfuscates human life: from that sovereign vantage point our *aiōn* appears as mere child's play.<sup>84</sup> But if the latter vision corrects the former, it doesn't fully erase it, and *paizōn* is repeated in *paidos* (to which it is etymologically related) and in the alliterative play of plosives that continue right to the end of the line. So the orderly rule-bound *pesseuōn* does not fully overwrite the random, ludic *paizōn*. The equivocation introduces a vacillation precisely where the *aiōn* meets the *aei*. This momentary vacillation—the mere interval of an asyndeton—interrupts the closure of the chiasmus and maintains a gap between human existence and the cosmic game. *Aiōn*, the human lifespan brief as youth itself, persists in that gap, and not only persists but rules. *Aiōn*, like *psukhē* and *bios*, flourishes in asynchrony.

In this vital interval we feel the presence of the author within his own text. In general Heraclitus, like nature (B123/D35), “tends to hide himself.” His book begins with a strong assertion of the authorial voice, implicitly in the opening announcement of “this *logos*” and explicitly in the *egō* who proclaims it (“such words and deeds as I [*egō*] expound, distinguishing each thing according to its nature and saying how it is”).<sup>85</sup> But for the most part his aphorisms are autonomous and

82. Kahn 1979, 227–29; cf. Dasen 2020; Schädler 2020; Macé 2020; and Pl. *Leg.* 903d6 for the creator of the cosmos as a *pestoi* player. Kurke (1999, 254–75) examines *pestoi* as a civic metaphor in early Greek thought (including that of Heraclitus). In its only other occurrence in Heraclitus, *basileus* is associated with *polemos* as the order of the cosmos and the unity of opposites: “War is the father of all and the king (*basileus*) of all; it reveals these as gods and those as men, it makes these slaves and those free” (B53/D64). That fragment's linking of paternity and sovereignty makes the sovereignty of the child in B52/D76 all the more striking.

83. It is reiterated too in the acoustic structure of the aphorism. *Aiōn* is repeated in the *ai-* of *pais*, *paizōn*, *paidos*, and the *-ōn* of *paizōn*, *pesseuōn*, only to be absorbed into the *aei*, the vowels lengthened, in the final two syllables of *basilēiē*. On the acoustic effects in this fragment, see Ramnoux 1968, 399; Mouraviev 2006, 79–80; Année 2020; and for the history of the fragment's interpretations, Wohlfart 1991, 124–49. I discuss this fragment and Deleuze's stutter in Wohl 2024.

84. Cf. B70/D6 where *ta anthrōpina doxasmata* are compared to child's play and B79/D75: “A man is called childish (*nēpios*) by a god, just as a child by a man.” Ellis (2020a) offers a stimulating Deleuzian reading of child's play in Heraclitus; cf. Ellis 2020b.

85. On the opening authorial *sphragis*, see n. 18 above. Lloyd (1995, 56–70) notes a persistent connection between egotism and innovation in early Greek thought; see also Sassi 2018, 70–73. Grant

self-validating. There is no personal narrative or autobiographical fiction to validate them, such as we saw in Parmenides and shall see in Empedocles, and their truth is not anchored to an authoritative “I.” Indeed, as we shall observe shortly, Heraclitus disavows his personal voice and presents his aphorisms as direct expressions of the cosmic *logos* itself.<sup>86</sup> In their compressed and riddling form, these aphorisms are reminiscent of and may be modeled on the enigmatic pronouncements of an oracle. Heraclitus’s references to the Delphic oracle have been read since antiquity as self-conscious models for his own style. Likening him to the “Sibyl with the raving mouth” (B92/D42), the mouthpiece of the divine *logos*, they figure his paradoxes as the mysterious semaphore of a god who “neither speaks nor conceals but signifies” (*oute legei oute kruptei alla sēmainei*, B93/D41).<sup>87</sup>

But if Heraclitus does liken his *logos* to the oracular speech of the Delphic oracle and present himself as the obscure spokesman of the cosmic word, he also differentiates himself in one important respect. The Pythia’s riddles were delivered in dactylic hexameter. This was the meter of divine speech and social authority alike in Heraclitus’s day, as we have noted, and it would have been the natural form for his presentation of cosmic verities, sometimes couched in religious terms.<sup>88</sup> His rejection of dactylic hexameter is thus a marked choice, a formal break not only from the Greek tradition of veridical speech but also from his own oracular metaphor. This break draws attention to the author’s distinct human voice. That authorial voice is amplified by the poetic quality of Heraclitus’s prose. The highly stylized, carefully wrought sonorous and structural effects we have been examining remind us continually of the presence of the *poiētēs* behind this representation of the cosmos that “no god nor man created” (*epoiēsen*, B30/D85). *Kosmos* as ornamentation denaturalizes the description of *kosmos* as natural universe, for if the chiasmic form of the aphorisms reproduces the cyclical order they describe, that very artifice reveals a poetic origin that disrupts the mimetic effect.

In this way, the author preserves a gap between his own *logos* and “the *logos* that is always” and situates himself at the asyndetic juncture between the two. The

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(2016, 67–71), however, proposes that the aphorism disperses the authority of the proper name; cf. Marsden 2006, 28. Its very iterability undermines any mastery the author claims in repeating it.

86. This effect may be augmented by the history of preservation: Heraclitus may have been cited in such a way as to heighten the vatic feel of his text. Forms of the first person occur in B1/D1, B49/D12, B50/D46, B55/D31, B101/D36, and B108/D43; but as Garin (2017) proposes, authorial presence can take other forms than the first person.

87. The connection is often commented on. See, e.g., Hölscher 1968, 136–41, 1974; Cook 1975, 444–46; Kahn 1979, 123–26; Tor 2016; Gianvittorio 2017; and Sassi 2018, 104–6. Maurizio (2012) calls Heraclitus “a Pythia manqué” (116). Bollack (2016, 238–41) rejects the idea of Heraclitus as prophet of the *logos* and the transparent relation to language it implies; cf. Bollack and Wismann 1972, 270–74.

88. Most (1999, 353–57) notes that in archaic Greece dactylic hexameter “functioned as an unmistakable sign that the ultimate source of the text it articulated was not human but divine” (353). See further Osborne 1998. Norden (1915, 44) finds “fairly frequent” hexametric sentence endings in Heraclitus but cites only four examples, and the occasional rhythmic line ending is a far cry from composing entirely in hexameter.

opening words of B1/D1 hold out the promise that the two *logoi* may speak in unison, the rational structure of the universe replicated perfectly in the structure of the book. But that promise is immediately belied and the ambiguity of the opening “word,” instead of an identity between work and world, bespeaks an ironic distance between them. That irony is played out in the first fragment in a tone of pedagogical frustration and epistemological despair. *Anthrōpoi* will always be *axunetoi*. Heraclitus’s words, falling on deaf ears, will always fail to communicate the *logos*, a schism signaled in the vocabulary he uses to characterize his own speech: not *legein* or *logos* but a variety of synonyms (*epeōn*, *phrazōn*) and precisions (*diēgeumai*, *diaireōn*). The repetition of the prefix *dia-*, which often indicates differentiation or separation, sets Heraclitus’s diegesis against the integrating force of *xun-*, aligning him with *axunetoi* mortals and their individual idiocy against the *xunos logos* (B2/D2). This is an epistemological failure but also an ontological one, as we have seen, for a *xunos logos* that cannot be communicated in language is neither *xunos* nor truly a *logos*. Always inaccessible to human comprehension, the *xunos logos* is not *xunos* with itself.

This means that it is not just Heraclitus who stutters. The *logos* itself stutters. The “grammar of disequilibrium” felt in Heraclitus’s work also structures his world.

οὐ ξυνῆασιν ὅπως διαφερόμενον ἑαυτῶι ὁμολογέει· παλίντροπος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης. (B51/D49)

They do not comprehend how what differs with itself agrees with itself (*diapheromenon heōtōi homologeēi*): back-turned *harmonīē* as of a bow and a lyre.

The cosmos is a *logos* in agreement (*homologeēi*) with itself. The fragment encapsulates Heraclitus’s synthetic project, as he sets it out in fragment B1/D1: by remedying their lack of comprehension (*ou xuniasin*) he will bring *axunetoi* mortals into accord with the metaphysical concord. But “itself” introduces a note of discord. The ambiguous placement of *heōtōi*, which can be read with both “differs” and “agrees,” locates difference and agreement in the same place and asserts their fundamental copresence.<sup>89</sup> Stumbling on “itself,” the *logos* agrees in differing and differs in agreeing. Difference (*dia-*) is not a regrettable feature of imperfect human speech or of limited human comprehension, as B1/D1 might lead us to believe. The difference between *logos* and *logos* is a difference within the cosmic *logos*, an intrinsic quality of its identity (*homologeēi*) that ensures that it will never sound fully in unison with itself.

Recognizing this perpetual dissonance in the cosmic harmony is wisdom, a wisdom Heraclitus not only speaks but himself embodies.

89. The dative with *diapheromai* in B51/D49 indicates difference *in* not difference *from*, that is, internal variance not differentiation of one thing from another. Cf. B10/D47: *sumpheromenon diapheromenon, sunāidon diāidon*. Blanchot, in the preface to Ramnoux 1968, stresses the “sovereignty of mysterious Difference” in Heraclitus’s writing, “cette différence qui fait que, parlant, nous différons de parler” (xvii). Cf. Porter (2024), emphasizing “disorderly and disordered (dis)harmony.”

οὐκ ἐμοῦ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ λόγου ἀκούσαντας ὁμολογεῖν σοφόν ἐστιν ἐν πάντα εἶναι.  
(B50/D46)

Having listened not to me but to the *logos*, it is wise (*sophon*) to agree (*homologeîn*) that all things are one.

Along with B51/D49, B50/D46 would seem to epitomize Heraclitus's philosophy of unity. Wisdom, *to sophon*, consists in chiming with the cosmic harmony, speaking in agreement (*homologeîn*) with the *logos* that agrees with itself and proclaiming that all things are one. What is wise is itself one, as Heraclitus says elsewhere (*hen to sophon*, B32/D45, B41/D44).<sup>90</sup> B50/D46 would perform its own propositional content, as all things become one in the *homologia* that is wisdom. All things, that is, but one: Heraclitus himself (*emou*). The phrase "having listened to the *logos*" harkens back to B1/D1 and its ambivalent opening "word," and would seem to resolve that ambivalence by simply bypassing Heraclitus and his speech to offer unmediated access to the cosmic *logos*. But this move merely compounds the ironies of that equivocal *logos*. On the one hand, the instruction is impossible. The command to ignore Heraclitus is Heraclitus's own utterance. The accord of wisdom thus becomes a liar's paradox: to listen to the *logos*, not Heraclitus, is also to listen to Heraclitus, not the *logos*. On the other hand, if it were possible to separate Heraclitus's *logos* from the cosmic *logos* it would negate the wisdom that *logos* offers, the *homologia* that all things are one.

In the ironic tension between the performative and the propositional, the philosophical *egō* appears as a difference not only *from* the *logos* but *in* the *logos*, and the wisdom he offers is not the simple concord with a reality itself in concord, but instead a philosophical discourse characterized by dissonance and discord.<sup>91</sup> Fragment B1/D1's question as to whether mortals can become *xunetoi* through Heraclitus's teaching or whether they truly are *aei axunetoi* is not resolved but rather complicated beyond any possible resolution: what would it mean to be one with a *logos* that both is and is not one with itself? Heraclitus lays claim to this aporetic *sophia*. The difference that is the condition of impossibility of his philosophy is also the condition of its possibility. This paradox entails a bidirectional causality. On the one hand, because Heraclitus's *logos* is not identical to the cosmic *logos*, the latter is not identical to itself. "This cosmos, the same of all" is riven by difference. On the other hand, it is because the *logos* does not speak only and always the same as itself (*homologeî*) that Heraclitus's own *logos*—the philosophy he is expounding and the text we are reading—can be heard. The stutter that

90. See also B32/D45, B41/D44, B108/D43. On the unity of wisdom, see Long 2007. Heraclitus accordingly repudiates the shallow polymathy of those with a reputation for wisdom (B40/D20, B57/D25a, B106/D25b, B108/D43). It seems that Heraclitus may have coined (or been the first to use) the word *philosophos* to describe these pretenders to wisdom: see B35/D40 and Moore 2019, 37–65.

91. *Polemos* (war) and *eris* (strife) are two of Heraclitus's terms for the unity of opposites: B53/D64, B80/D63.

disrupts the perfect cohesion of his universe enables the discourse of that universe, Heraclitus's cosmology.

It also enables his psychology. When Heraclitus breaks from the cosmic *homologia* to say "I," he takes up a complex and self-conscious relation not only to the *logos* but to himself: do not listen to Heraclitus, says Heraclitus. In this utterance he gives voice to the psychological subject whose origin Snell detected in his fragments. This subject is not to be identified, as Snell proposed, with the *psukhē*, which for Heraclitus, as we have seen, is that spark that joins us to the fire of the physical cosmos. But neither is it, as Kahn argues, wholly identical with that cosmos, such that to go in search of oneself is "to lose one's self but to find something better: the unity of all things in the wise one."<sup>92</sup> Instead, it is precisely the difference from that unity; not the *psukhē* itself but the interval between *psukhai* and *psukhē*. If Heraclitus discovers "a new concept of soul," then, as Snell would have it, that concept appears neither as a fully autonomous subject nor just as one element among others in a constantly changing universe, but as a rupture or arrhythmia in the cosmic unity, a moment of difference in the interminable cycling of the same.

That arrhythmia, I have proposed, arises from the asynchrony between the human *aion* and the cosmic *aei*. As a mortal "I" who speaks the immortal word, Heraclitus himself embodies this asynchrony without mastering or transcending it. He also reproduces it for his reader in the act of reading. The riddling form of his aphorisms, their "obscure" thought and deliberately enigmatic expression, ensures that for us comprehension will never be instantaneous. The time of understanding will always lag behind the time of encounter. This temporal lag enacts the epistemological failure of *axunetoi anthrōpoi*, who "do not think about those things they encounter" (B17/D3) and are strangers to those things they encounter each day (B71/R54). But it also enacts the difference within the *logos* that prevents it from complete *homologia*. Opaque on first reading, "all aphorisms," as Deleuze writes, "must therefore be read twice."<sup>93</sup> And the aphorism is different on each rereading: "It is not possible to step into the same river twice, according to Heraclitus" (Plut. *De E* 392B = B91/≠LM).

Heraclitus forces such rereading not only through his obscurity but also through what we could think of as a stutter at the point of reception. In fact, the book opens with such a stutter: "Of this *logos* that is always mortals are always uncomprehending" (*tou de logou toud' eontos aei axunetoi ginontai anthrōpoi*, B1/D1). Stumbling

92. Kahn 1979, 253; cf. B101/D36: "I went in search of myself" (*edizēsamēn emēouton*). To the extent that Kahn allows for an individual subject, it is as the consciousness that grasps its oneness with the cosmos and thus embodies difference only to resolve it at a higher level (253–54). Laks (1999, 253–54) and Long (1992) propose something similar.

93. Deleuze 2006, 31. He is speaking of Nietzsche's aphorisms and ties this necessity of rereading to the eternal return. Cf. Marsden 2006, 28. Fragment B91/≠LM, quoted by Plutarch, is probably a paraphrase of B12/D65b, not Heraclitus's own words (Marcovich 1966, 19–22; Graham 2013, responding to Tarán 1999).



over the placement of *aei* (as Aristotle already did), I must read it twice. If I read aloud, as an ancient reader would have, reading becomes literal stuttering: *aei aei*. In this repetition I reproduce physically the metaphysical schism the line opens up, the gap between the *logos* that exists forever (the first reading) and my own mortal incomprehension (the second). Another example: “What differs with itself agrees with itself” (*diapheromenon heōutōi homologeei*, B51/D49). Stumbling over the ambiguously placed pronoun, the reader must stop and read again: “Differs with itself”? “Agrees with itself”? Even as I speak the metaphysical *homologia* I reproduce the difference within it. In rereading, the same aphorism differs from itself, and the reader becomes the corporeal manifestation of its paradoxical (dis) harmony. She does not come to understand the *xunos logos* but, like Heraclitus, to embody it precisely in its lack of unity and self-sameness.

This stutter in reading reproduces the cosmic asynchrony that, I have suggested, is the space of human life. “Upon those stepping into the same rivers different and different waters flow” (*potamoisi toisin autoisin embainousin hetera kai hetera hudata epirrhei*, B12/D65b). Above we considered this fragment as an expression of the stability of the cosmos amid its continuous transformation: the waters are always other but the river remains the same. But this fragment contains another ambiguously placed word: *toisin autoisin* (“the same”) could be read with either *potamoisi* or *embainousin*. Cleanthes, who quotes the fragment, takes the river as an image of the *psukhē* exhaled as a moist vapor. This is the posthumous material *psukhē* that “dies” as water and is eventually reborn from water in the eternal revolution of the elements (B36/D100). This transformation would erase any border between steppers and rivers: we become one with the river in the course of this spiritual flow.<sup>94</sup> But the ambiguity of *toisin autoisin* obstructs that confluence and introduces difference into the very image of sameness. The same rivers? The same steppers? The moment of hesitation produces an almost imperceptible syncopation, a tiny breathing space that prevents our individual lives from being washed away entirely in the cosmic flux.<sup>95</sup>

That figurative breathing space is literalized in the breath of the reader as she reads. This breath is the *psukhē* not as a posthumous exhalation but as a vital presence and presence of vitality within the living subject. Consider one final

94. As Kahn (1979, 253) proposes: “The psyche is only one elemental form among others, a bubble that bursts and is forgotten in the continual steaming up of new vapors from the waters ever flowing on in the river of the cosmos.” Graham (2006, 134–37), by contrast, reads the ambiguity of *toisin autoisin* in B12/D65b as reaffirming the identity of the individual through interaction with a changing world. Cf. Graham 2013, 313–17; and Dilcher 2005, 212–16.

95. Graham (2002, 35–37; cf. 2008b, 179–81) considers other instances of this *apo koinou* construction, including B119/D111 *ēthos anthrōpōi daimōn*. See also Graham 2009; Sider 1989; and Mouraviev 2002, 352–55. This construction works as a “speculative grammar,” even a “speculative punctuation mark,” like Hegel’s dash, brilliantly analyzed by Comay and Ruda (2018, 53–61): an ambiguous mark that necessitates rereading, it instantiates their proposal that philosophy “teaches us to stumble” (58).



example, fragment B48/D53: “The bow’s name is *bios* but its work is death” (*tōi oun toxōi onoma bios, ergon de thanatos*). The wordplay on *biós* (bow) and *bíos* (life) encapsulates the unity of opposites. As in B51/D49, what differs with itself agrees with itself, and the bow offers an image of the back-turned harmony between life and death that (as we saw in the last section) shrouds life in the *lēthē* of a morbid slumber. Thus life becomes a mere name (*onoma*), erased by the fact (*ergon*) of death. But the word that holds together this tautly strung aphorism also disrupts its unity, for as soon as I recognize the pun, I must go back and read the word a second time: *biós-bíos*.<sup>96</sup> In that stutter on the word “life,” my voice resists the equation of life with death that the fragment proposes and bodies forth a *bios* made possible only by the difference between my *logos* and the cosmic *logos*. Rooted in the body and in time, that *bios* is not a waking dream of death and immortality in the cosmic *aei*, but the living, breathing experience of an ephemeral *aiōn*.

*Bios, psukhē, aiōn*: life in its difference from the elemental cosmos flourishes in the syncopation between the regular rhythm of the cosmic cycle as it is “kindled in measure and extinguished in measure” and the tempos of our finite mortal existence. Asynchrony is the condition of possibility of human life. This asynchrony is itself *aei*: it can never be resolved into a single tempo. The interminable journey to the limits of the *psukhē* with which we began thus directs us not toward a vanishing point on the horizon where *psukhē* and *logos* will finally converge, but to the eternal rift between them. If that rift means that the *logos* will never be completely *xunos*—that all will never, in fact, be one—this incoherence does not spoil the beauty of Heraclitus’s universe, the *kosmos* of his philosophical and poetic *kosmos*. After all, it is syncopation that turns a simple pulse into music.

96. Most (1999, 358) notes the significance of reading the fragment aloud but interprets it differently: “The reader cannot help but accentuate either the one vowel or the other . . . thereby inevitably reducing a complex truth to a one-sided, and hence partially erroneous, oversimplification.” Cf. Dilcher 1995, 129–33; and Sassi 2018, 102. As B1/D1 predicts, by reason of her very embodiment the *axunetos* reader would seem doomed to forever fail to comprehend the *xunos logos*; she can only live its paradoxes.