

Mining the Multiply Folded Mountain

“You have come here, come from afar...”

“I have. Like you.”

“I know.”

“You know. You know, and you see that the earth has folded up here, has folded once, twice, thrice, and has opened up in the middle, and there is some water in the middle, and the water is green, and the green is white, and the white comes from still farther up, from the glaciers, one could, but should not, say that this is the language valid here, the green with the white inside, a language not for you and not for me—so that’s what I am asking, for whom is it intended then, the earth, not for you, I say, and not for me—, a language without any I and you, only he, only it, you see, only they, and nothing else.”¹

The history of the mountains is more closely connected with the history of man’s mind than one might assume at first. A view of the world in which the earth seems to have been made by gods or a creator withdrawing into the unknown distance suggests that you may approach the divine sphere through the mountains. Like the divine sphere, the mountains were difficult to access and had no direct link with man’s everyday world. This was the ground for the genesis of mountains religions and myths.² Many mountains became to be regarded as cosmic mountains: the Greek Mount Olympus, the Indian Mount Meru, the Haraberezaiti in Iran, Mount Gerizim in Palestine, the Mount of the Lands in Mesopotamia. According to Islam, the highest place on earth is the *ka’aba*, and for the Christians, Golgotha is to be found on the summit of the cosmic mountain. The cosmic mountain stands as a guarantee to the people that their land is holy ground because it is high country, farther up than other regions, the place nearest to heaven. The fundamental experience in this context is, “I am at the center of the world.” This experience reveals one of the profoundest meanings of holy space. “Where the break-through from plane to plane has been effected by a hierophany, there too an opening has been made, either upward (the divine

¹ Paul Celan, from: *Gespräch im Gebirg (Dialogue in the Mountains)*. The story focuses on a meeting with Theodor W. Adorno. Celan missed; Celan had waited for Adorno in Sils Maria in the Engadin for some time, but left prematurely. Quoted after the booklet published on the occasion of the performance of Elfriede Jelinek’s play *In den Alpen (In the Alps)*, Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich 1999.

² Cf. Bernhard Buderath and Henry Makowski, *Die Natur dem Menschen untertan*, Munich 1986, pp. 263 f.

world) or downward (the underworld, the world of the dead). The three cosmic levels—earth, heaven, underworld—have been put in communication. [...] (a) a sacred place constitutes a break in the homogeneity of space; (b) this break is symbolized by an opening by which passage from one cosmic region to another is made possible (from heaven to earth and vice versa; from earth to the underworld); (c) communication with heaven is expressed by one or another of certain images, all of which refer to the *axis mundi*: pillar (cf. the *universalis columna*), ladder (cf. Jacob's ladder), mountain, tree, vine, etc.; (d) around this cosmic axis lies the world (= our world), hence the axis is located 'in the middle,' at the 'navel of the earth'; it is the Center of the World. Many different myths, rites, and beliefs are derived from this traditional 'system of the world.'"³

3 Cf. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane—The Nature of Religion*, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask, Chapter I, New York und London 1957.

After certain mountains, temples were also identified with cosmic mountains, and Babylonian sanctuaries were called Mountain of the House, House of the Mountain of all Lands, Mountain of Storms. People built temples as terraced artificial mountains, and ascending these structures became equivalent to an ecstatic journey to the center of the world. Reaching the summit, the highest level, implies breaking through to a "pure region" transcending the profane world. On the other side, the connection between heaven and earth led into the regions of the underworld that both preceded and followed life: here, we come upon the "chaos of waters" and "cosmic matter," which is still formless, as well as the world of darkness, of death, and the abysmal.⁴

4 Cf. *ibid.*

Ontologically speaking, the different levels of heaven, earth, and underworld represent three completely different levels of life. Plateaus symbolize a form of existence that is full of life, which we may reach at the permanent risk of descending or falling back, of sinking back into the amorphous, formless, or into a paralysis resembling rigor mortis. "Structures may acquire more immediacy and intensity or lose some of their life and begin to harden. At a certain point of this hardening process, structures abruptly change into systems. Contrariwise, a system may suggest itself for corrections when being continuously liquefied and turn into a structure. This motion is a characteristic of all structures. Structures never stay what they are, or, to be more precise, the lower stages, generally characterized by more stability, promise to be more unshakable. Farther up, it is more difficult to stay the same. This is why structures of higher intensity are less numerous than structures of lower intensity. The lowest forms of intensity, i.e. the things we call 'matter,' not only boast an enormous stability but also a colossal superiority to all structures that are more differentiated, dynamic, intensified. This has led people to believe that the lower structures are more important or more 'normal' or basal and to regard the higher and highest structures as a negligible small quantity. This has been a cardinal ontological error."⁵



Erzberg, Styria, September 2003, photo: Hans Schabus

5 Heinrich Rombach, *Strukturontologie*, Freiburg and Munich 1971, pp. 300 f.

Life may unfold on various levels of intensity. It may rise and fall. Life on the rise sees things turn more reactable and differentiated, sees reality become part of our lives to such a degree that everything is at stake and manifests itself in all things so that each change on a small scale brings about a change of the whole. If we are fortunate, this creates an intensity of life that makes us belong to the so-called real world in a radical and general way.

The rise is experienced as a transition, an elevation, an opening, a liberation.⁶ The opposite direction of this summit reality is “hardening, leaking, alienation”⁷. In this case, life occurs in large unchanging pots and within unalterable horizons named “God,” “one,” “reality,” “time,” “space”—randomness. The intensity with which the world is experienced corresponds to a contraction in which all things are the same, related to each other, full of life. The wider the setting and the huger the scale, the less life we will encounter, and the elements of life will be perceived as mere occurrences related less and less to each other. If you climb one elevation after another you may get lost, becoming ensnared in a world view of only small horizons—a life oriented exclusively towards expectations of partial success.

In the future, we will probably have to look for the sublime in a concretion rather than in a distant reflection, a concretion implying a con-creative growing together with reality. Then the high and the sublime will be replaced by a completely different experience. Contrary to covered paths, roads, courses, and highways, each step, turn, and hold matters in the mountains. Helga Peskoller, the mountain climber and thinker, says: “I really do not know what to think about the fact that the mountains have been called sublime since Immanuel Kant. Kant included the mountains in his reflections of the sublime. For me, it is exactly the other way round: everything becomes very simple there, not ‘sublime’ at all, but profane and very normal rather. When I go up there, I feel connected, part of the texture. This has not got anything to do with standing out but with getting closer to something that constantly makes you get back down to earth. I have already talked about gravity and the mountain as a mass, I just want to add the inorganic you become fond of. This liking makes us understand that some aspect of the mineral outside is also inside. Feeling this makes you feel the scale again which appears to be adequate to man.”⁸

Reinhold Messner has drawn up a charter of values suggesting to not only protect various cultures of mountainous regions but also certain values such as vastness, undeveloped scenery, silence, grandeur, and danger: “Though pointless at first sight, these values need to be protected, and not only because there is an increasing lack of them in the EU. The high mountain regions as a world to experience which would be lost inevitably with the realization of further infrastructural measures has to remain unchanged. No development in the high mountain regions—this must be our obligation. / We must not make it easier to reach these high mountain regions with infrastructural means or modern technology. Who enters this world on his own responsibility and without leaving lasting traces will soon learn to respect the ‘original nature’ as a value and begin to defend this danger zone.”⁹

The history of summits is also part of the history of seeing, of comprehending, and of exercising power—of looking down from above, of surveying, of superiority. The history of the German and the Austrian Alpenverein organizations comprises a subhistory of exclusion and contempt. It was not far from praising the “purity” of the sublime Alpine peaks to excluding the impure. Very early on, the organizers of these associations had the presumption to set down articles in which they demanded to exclude Jews and accept only Germanic, Aryan members. Jews were classified as a people

6 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 304.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 300.



St Kinga Chapel in Wieliczka Salt Mine, 110 meters below surface, photo: Janusz Podlecki, in: Janusz Podlecki, *Wieliczka*, Kraków 1998

8 Helga Peskoller, *Extrem*, Vienna—Cologne—Weimar 2001, p. 212.

9 Reinhold Messner, *Werte-Charta Berge: Europa*, homepage Messner 2003.

of the plains, unable to grasp the mountainous in an “adequate manner.” Finally, Adolf Hitler perfidiously used the coupling of mountains and power. Employing the mountain backdrop of the Obersalzberg to found his second headquarters in the awesome, he relied on the impact of the mountains to demonstrate his power over them and to impress other people and belittle them.

Just as Alexander von Humboldt could not enjoy the freedom of Tenerife’s mountains without remarking that slavery had been abolished on the island, we are unable to perceive a landscape without taking in its emotions and its history. There is also an anthropogeographical side to geography.¹⁰

Mountains and landscapes have always been part of a mythical topography. Heaven and hell, life on earth and the hereafter or paradise, for example, are unthinkable without mythogeology. In the cultures’ internal worlds, mountains, rivers, groves, caves, and grottoes have become Mount Atlas, the multiply terraced mountain of the world, Styx, Acheron, Hades, caves of birth, islands of the blessed, etc. Mount Kailash in Tibet still plays its central part within one of the last archaic advanced civilizations. The mountain is the gods’ throne, the cosmic axis that penetrates all levels of life. It attracts large numbers of pilgrims which hope to find their true self while walking around it: universal sympathy, a deep mental solidarity with all creatures, inner peace, perfect harmony with oneself and the world. The path to this awareness is strewn with rocks and stones, is a route of deceleration, claiming the body completely. If the approach succeeds, the body expands into always larger spaces of time which are continuously updated. All this is also felt and thus interwoven with one’s soul and one’s identity in the most intimate manner. Mountain, scenery, human maturing, and identity are indispensably linked with each other and must not be torn apart by scientification.

To expand time, space, body, and soul...Why does a pilgrim crawl around Mount Kailash on her belly in 25 days, and why does an incidental looker-on feel an undreamt-of power flood through his body?

From a geological point of view, mountains often look like mere foldings. The Alps, however, were formed by collisions and crashes of the primeval ocean’s huge masses of dead organic matter. The parts of the erstwhile craton that broke apart are drifting together again and sliding on top of each other on the seafloors. Such geodynamic forces caused the tsunami catastrophe of 2004 and shocked all people sure of a cosy leisure Christmas Mother Earth.

Opening up landscapes everywhere, tourism, sports, fun, and culture in general mantle the scenery and turn it into an attraction, into magnets and playgrounds. Culture increasingly works as a cover. Though the phrase is “open up,” immediate experience is blocked rather. Hans Schabus reverses the order of things: he mantles culture, in the form of a pavilion, with a mountain. This hints at a primeval landscape which underlies civilization, a substratum from which civilization springs. Pavilion, architecture, and culture are all stuck in this primeval landscape.

10 Cf. Jürgen Hasse, *Das Vergessen der menschlichen Gefühle in der Anthropogeografie*, *Geografische Zeitschrift* 1999, issue 2.



Katsushika Hokusai, *Fuji of the Waves (Kaigo no fuji)*, from: *100 Views of Mount Fuji*, vol. 2, Japan 1833–34

Katsushika Hokusai, *Mount Fuji, Painted with a Single Brushstroke*, from: *100 Views of Mount Fuji*, vol. 3, Japan 1833–34

The Austrian architect Josef Hoffmann's pavilion built for the Biennial of 1934 was conceived as a strictly neoclassicist building. The austere form presents itself as the opposite of a mountain, and what has been once said about Le Corbusier seems to go for today's dominant sort of aesthete: "He epitomizes the politico-cultural Platonism of the modern age. Like the philosopher in Plato's state, the artist is one of a few initiated members of the enlightened ruler's small staff; this elite knows best what is good for the people. [...] It is the engineers' technological creativity, the managers' logistic intelligence that constitutes what is modern. [...] Le Corbusier creates the adequate rooms for these 'selected' beings. Their interiors breathe intellectual fresh country summer air. They smell after active leisure. There is a book beside the Le Corbusier sofa, and you will perhaps discover a cup of coffee or a bottle of soda on the table. [...] The landlord may just take a sun bath on the roof terrace." Corbusier was fascinated by the "ambience of the luxurious consumer world, of classy accessories."¹¹

The mountain towers above this aesthetics with all its rigor and penchant for clear lines and abstraction. It counters the perfection with a provisional structure, with building site architecture, which has room for cheap elements that are more open than the ones that are perfect. The exhibition space which was rather designed for the visual becomes a room to feel, a room for the body, a primeval room, and, perhaps, a sphere beyond all space and time, as corresponds to an archaic and magical structure of life which is rather based on divining and feeling the real world through the body than on knowing and making rational decisions.

The mountain is folded. It is both simple and multiple. Simplicity and multiplicity spring from folds, creases, fissures, faults and ridges, ridge walks and ridge camps, base camps and leads, ledges and slopes, grooves, edges, crests, borders.

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze described the generative principle of the Baroque world as an architecture of folds, invaginations, unfoldings, curvatures, etc. He had come upon a theory of folding in Leibniz's works which concerns a process through which objects and subjects transcend themselves and turn into subjectiles and objectiles—pervaded and supported by an intellectual adventure with a field of experience whose nature may be defined as endless diversity.¹²

The stealth bomber Lockheed F-117A Nighthawk is such a folded objectile: "[It] is regarded as the United States' superweapon besides the B-2 bomber. It has angular, flatly inclined surfaces and a special coating that absorbs and disperses radar energy. [...] [It] can deliver its laser-guided bombs and guided missiles with extreme accuracy unnoticed by the enemy's anti-aircraft defense. Since the engine inlets and outlets are positioned on the wing surface, it is also screened off against infrared vision devices. The jet can fly just under the speed of sound and be refueled in the air. This is why it has an unlimited range."¹³ Despite the best military technology of all times, the most wanted terrorist of the world, Osama Bin Laden, could not be arrested because he probably hides in mountains and caves that defy (military) reconnaissance.



The Alps as seen from Venice, December 2004, photo: Hans Schabus

¹¹ Beat Wyss, *Der Wille zur Kunst: Zur ästhetischen Mentalität der Moderne*, Cologne 1996, p. 192.

¹² Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The fold: Leibniz and the baroque*, translated from the French by Tom Conley, London 1993.

¹³ dpa, 20 March 2003.

Mountains are bodies, which they transcend though, reaching out into infinity in terms of both time and space. In the present case, the mountain resembles Baroque arrangements of folds, which, according to Deleuze and Leibniz respectively, are set into motion and carried along by supernatural winds.

The daily crumpled bed sheets bear evidence of the sleepers' tossing and turning, their emotional convulsions, of digesting and preparing certain situations of life, of love and sex, and the drama of hidden processes.

Yet, mountains have also an inside: mines, caves, grottoes, the night, the other.

C. G. Jung dreamt of a house with an architecture based on strata of history the age of which increased with their depth and finally rooted in a cave below the basement. In this cave, the dreamer discovers rests of a primitive culture which make him realize the realm of the primitive inside himself which is hardly accessible for his waking consciousness localized on the upper levels.

The history of mining illustrates how it came about that the former living organs of Gaia, the Earth Mother, are now traded as raw material assets on the stock exchange, sent all around the world as investments and ingredients of profitable production to be sold for random use. In times of great esteem, mining had a thoroughly sacral aura. And the Middle Ages saw a theocentric interpretation of mining knowledge and technology. The ores, minerals, and riches of the inner earth documented the *magnalia die*, the Mighty Acts of God. The sacral culture of mining mainly stems from the miners themselves, and its traces are still evident in the works of Novalis, Tieck, E. T. A. Hoffmann, a.o. The cult of the saints and of the Blessed Virgin also reached the world of mining, and old deities such as Hathor-Hecate-Isis, the goddess of the lower spheres and mines, and Path-Hephaistos, the god of the forge, underwent a transformation. While the metallurgic alchemist symbols sun and gold were used for Christ, silver was related to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Saint Ann was regarded as the ore maker: she represents the mine providing precious metals.

It was customary for a long time that every person that wanted to work in a mine had to be initiated into its mysteries. For mining was not just about the excavation of materials but rather about cautious deliveries from the cosmic womb. And whoever wanted to accomplish such a feat had to extinguish himself as a subject before and die an ontological death which transported him to a prenatal state. Thus, man could be born together with the materials in an alchemic manner and advance his maturing.

"Uncomprehended, the structure of the alchemic process of change permeated the scenario of psychoanalysis, the science focusing on the unconscious around 1900. In alchemic medicine, it was taken for granted that all healing processes depend on mustering the courage to journey back to one's origins—to suffering the 'little death,' that state of dedifferentiation the alchemists call *nigredo*, blackness. Healing, higher integration, and per-



Construction of the viaduct across the Cold Groove, front view (detail), from: *Views of the Construction of the Semmering Railway*, lithographs by Emerich (Imre) Benkert, ca 1854

Mouth Hole, medieval gallery, Bleiberg mine, December 2002, photo: Hans Schabus

fection become possible only through regression and repetition. This is what death of initiation means. Psychoanalysis uses this fundamental alchemic experience as the setting for an everyday therapy: regressing to the genetic roots of their provenance, the patients—under the analyst’s (or initiation master’s) methodical control—resolve their present formation as subjects, dedifferentiate themselves, suffering the *nigredo*, relive the emotional, sometimes even physical processes of their birth, repeating the drama of microcosmical creation, and—according to the analyst’s (or alchemist’s promise)—acquire those new energies (‘new substances’) in the working-through of this repetition that will enable them to alter their ego structures. The mining stories of Romanticism may be seen as the interface where the passing away of pre-modern mining practice makes the same free for new symbolic uses that constitute the proto-psychoanalytical phase: the history of nature turns into a history of the subject. The mine becomes the arena of the individual.” From now on, the history of the development of mankind relies on connections between mines and the unconscious, mines and memory, rebirthing, mines, and self-discovery. These relations have been inspiring the rather level attitude towards heights and deeps until today.¹⁴

Related to such motifs as prison, inclusion, weight, burden of the past, paralysis, torture, torment, but also search, curiosity, and orientation, Piranesi was not concerned with perfect real rooms such as those of Palladio in his *Carceri*. He was interested in spaces of the soul, in psychoarchitecture rather—in rooms the inside and outside of which are not separated but merge in a true-to-life fashion. People primarily live within a permanent space-time fusion and various forms of actuality, such as dream, vision, reality, hyperreality, or unreality, and Piranesi’s pictures have to be regarded as an adequate expression of this fact. His art represents a kind of educational architecture. The little figures wonder about history and learn from it. The rooms are spaces of transition, passages, mental spheres which tend towards proliferating organically. People immerse themselves in the past in order to enter the present, to go into the light: “Again and again, the viewer is guided around the supposedly round main room in the back through numerous staircases on endless ways—a room which he may never reach. It is impossible to grasp the building completely. Many of Piranesi’s rooms have no beginning and no end, are cut off by the margins of the picture, and do not invite the viewer to stop and linger but to constantly walk around in them, always looking for something new. They are no mere facts anymore but turn into dynamic structures. The viewer as the tiny only staffage figure contrasting with the monumental character of the room is integrated in the pulsating construct as its explorer, as a traveler through its infinity.”¹⁵

Friedrich Nietzsche closely linked his *Zarathustra* with the mountains, and his “path to greatness” is characterized by the fact that true greatness comprises summit and abyss: “Ah, fate and sea! To you must I now go down! / Before my highest mountain do I stand, and before my longest wandering: therefore must I first go deeper down than I ever ascended: /—Deeper down into pain than I ever ascended, even into its darkest flood!” Zarathustra has learned that the mountains come out of the sea and that this genesis is inscribed on their stones, their faces, their summits. So he realizes: “Out

14 Hartmut Böhme, *Geheime Macht im Schoß der Erde*, in: Hartmut Böhme, *Natur und Subjekt*, Frankfurt am Main 1988.

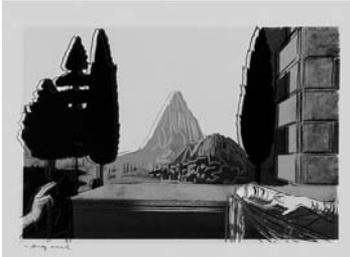


Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Lion Bas Reliefs*, panel 5, from: *Carceri d'Invenzione*, ca 1761, engraving

15 Corinna Höper, in: Max Stemshorn and Susanne Grötz (eds.), *Vision Piranesi*, Tübingen and Berlin 2002, p. 46.

16 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Wanderer*, from: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, translated from the German by Thomas Common, Chapter XLV.

17 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Sonnets To Orpheus*, I, 6, translated from the German by H. Landman, 2000.



Andy Warhol, *Details of Renaissance Paintings (Leonardo da Vinci, The Annunciation, 1472)*, 1984, portfolio of 4 silkscreen prints

18 Cf. Heinrich Rombach, *Welt und Gegenwart, Umdenken über die Wirklichkeit: Die philosophische Hermetik*, Basel 1983.



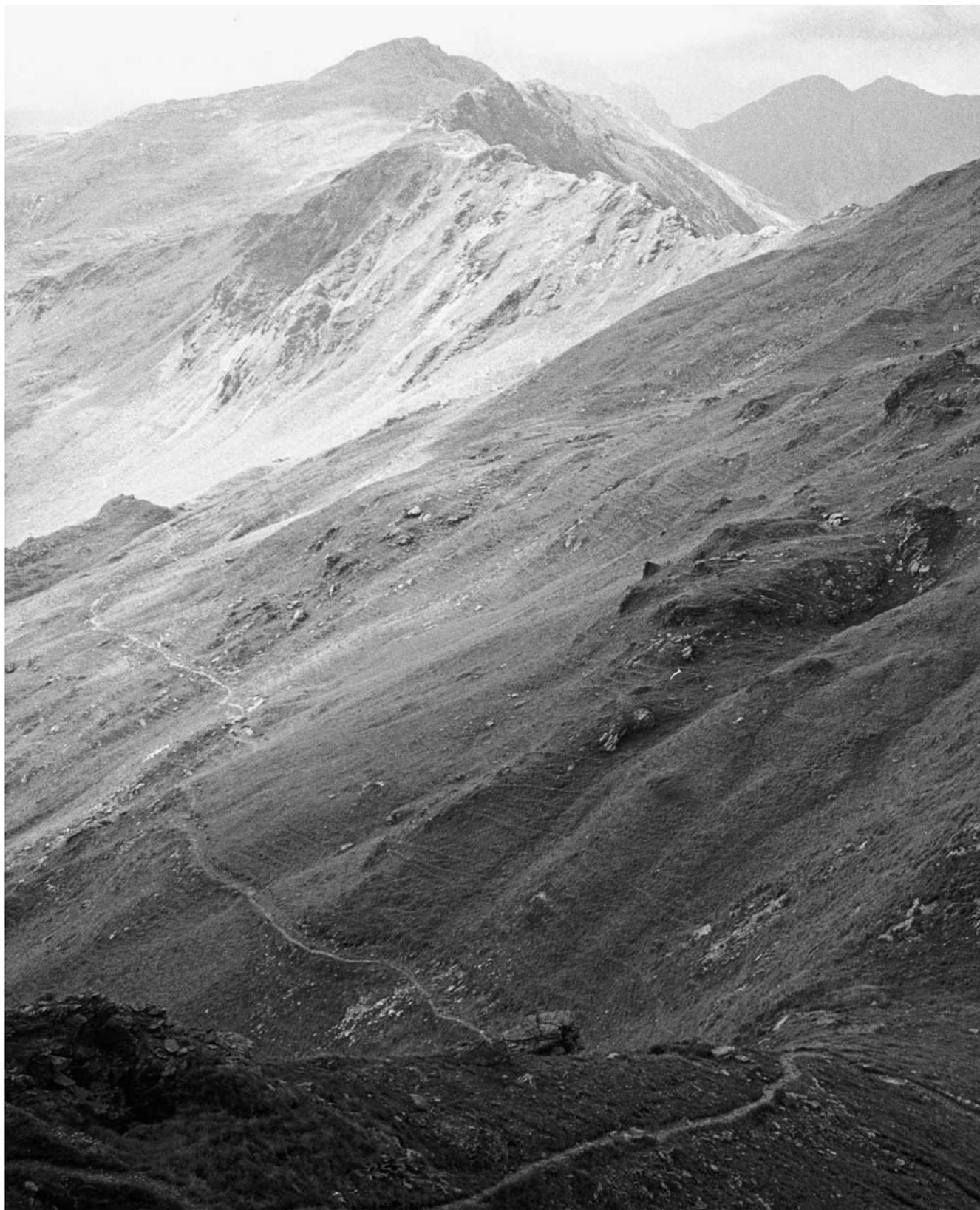
Ascension du Mont Cervin, 14 Juillet 1865, La Chute, lithograph by Gustave Doré and Eugène Ciceri, from: Helga Peskoller, *Extrem*, Vienna—Cologne—Weimar 2001

of the deepest must the highest come to its height. —“ The ocean from which the mountains emerge is also a “dusky monster,” “a sad sea”—it sleeps sometimes, breathing warmly and dreaming. It also groans with evil recollections or evil expectations.¹⁶

“Is he a local? No, his extended / nature grows from both domains. / The willow’s twig he skillfully bends, / who knowledge of the roots has gained,” says Rilke.¹⁷

Andy Warhol’s adaptation of Leonardo da Vinci’s “Annunciation” shows mountains in the background like many works by Leonardo, mountains that encompass the whole range of the subject. Annunciation, birth, revealing oneself also implies rising, moving, projecting. Like “bear” for “giving birth to,” “Berg,” the German word for “mountain,” which signifies an elevation, derives from the Indo-European root **bher* meaning “to rise,” “to move, to stir,” “to bear, to bring, to produce, to generate, upwards, outrage,” etc.; the English “barrow” has preserved the ancient proximity to death.

The history of Enlightenment is also a history of brightness and of some people’s irresistible urge that everything must “come to light,” “culminate in something,” “reach its peak.” This attitude ignores that all crucial phenomena of life have also a dark side to them, a secret fuelling them. If there is an access to this mystery at all, it is hermetical, for the secret requires a different kind of consciousness, a rejection of the desire to know and understand everything. We cannot grasp the mystery, it rather grasps us.¹⁸





Karnischer Höhenweg (Grenzweg
Österreich/Italien), August 2002, Foto:
Hans Schabus / Carnic trail along the
Austrian-Italian border, August 2002, photo:
Hans Schabus