

# The Ontology of Perpetual Dissolution: An Examination of Existential Rebirth Through Quantum Lenses

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## Abstract

This paper explores the phenomenological concept of perpetual dissolution—the experience of having “already died over and over”—through an interdisciplinary framework that synthesizes existentialist thought and quantum physics. Drawing particularly from Nancy’s concept of “exscription,” Levinas’s face-to-face encounter, and the Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics, I argue that the self exists in a state of constant transformation analogous to the collapse of quantum wavefunctions. The paper presents a novel interpretation of identity as inherently unstable, suggesting that what we experience as continuity is in fact a series of discrete deaths and rebirths at both the physical and experiential levels. Through prose-poetic analysis, I demonstrate how this phenomenon manifests across scales of being, from quantum fields to human consciousness.

## 1 Introduction

In every cell’s whispered song, the past shimmers, brittle and brief, then crumbles to make way for the new. We are the compost of what we were, each breath a testament to the dying art of becoming, until the only constant is the echo of transformation. This paper explores the phenomenological reality that each of us has “already died over and over” through an interdisciplinary lens that weaves together post-Heideggerian existentialism and quantum physics.

The notion of perpetual dissolution—the continuous death and rebirth of the self—has been articulated across philosophical traditions but remains underdeveloped in contemporary discourse. I contend that this phenomenon operates at multiple scales: from the quantum field where particles exist in superposition until observed, to the existential realm where the self is constantly inscribing and erasing its own boundaries. As Levinas suggests, we die to ourselves in each ethical encounter; as Nancy articulates, we exist only in the constant rewriting of our being (9).

Drawing from quantum physics, particularly the Copenhagen Interpretation and quantum decoherence theory, I demonstrate how physical reality itself models a pattern of perpetual

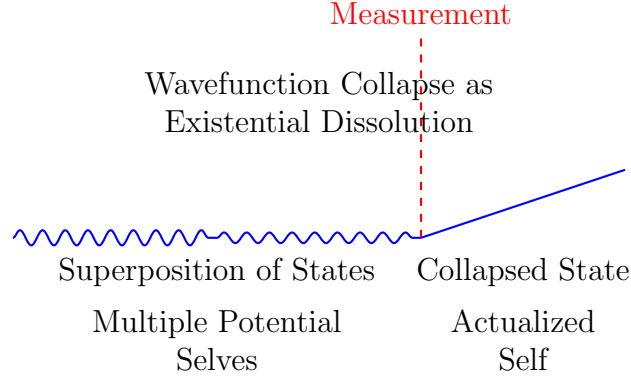


Figure 1: The collapse of the quantum wavefunction as a metaphor for the death and rebirth of the self. Prior to interaction/measurement, the self exists in multiple potential states; after interaction, these possibilities collapse into a single actuality.

dissolution. Just as the wavefunction collapses upon measurement, transforming multiple potentialities into a single actuality, the self undergoes constant collapse and reconstitution through its engagement with the world (5).

## 2 Theoretical Framework: The Quantum Self

The Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum mechanics, developed primarily by Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, posits that quantum systems exist in multiple potential states simultaneously until measured (6). This measurement process—the “collapse of the wavefunction”—transforms possibility into actuality. In this moment of collapse, a kind of “quantum death” occurs: all potential states except one cease to exist.

I propose that this quantum phenomenon provides not merely a metaphor but a structural homology for understanding the perpetual dissolution of the self. Each moment of conscious experience—each interaction, decision, and encounter—represents a measurement that collapses our multiple potential selves into a single actualized self. In this collapse, all other possibilities die, and a new configuration is born.

This perspective aligns with Jean-Luc Nancy’s concept of “exscription,” wherein the self is never fixed but constantly “writing itself anew” (9). For Nancy, existence is not a stable state but an ongoing process of inscription and erasure. We die to what we were in order to become what we are, and this process occurs not occasionally but continuously.

## 3 Quantum Decoherence and the Fractured Self

Beyond the Copenhagen Interpretation, quantum decoherence theory offers a more nuanced framework for understanding perpetual dissolution. Decoherence describes how quantum systems lose their coherence—their ability to maintain superposition—through interaction with their environment (11). This process is statistical and irreversible, resulting in the emergence of classical behavior from quantum systems.

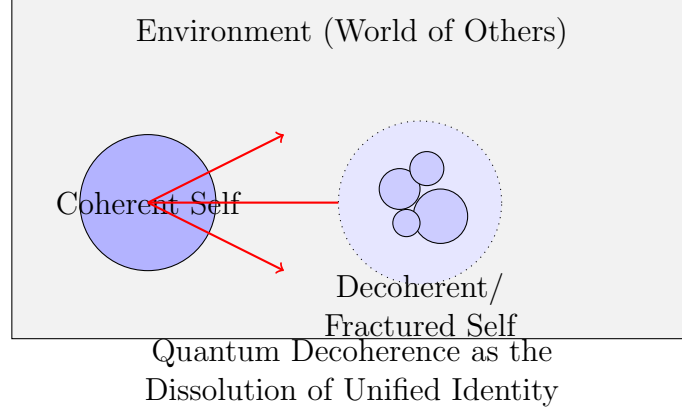


Figure 2: Quantum decoherence as a model for the dissolution of the unified self through interaction with the environment. The coherent self fractures into multiple classical states through engagement with the world.

Similarly, the self undergoes a continuous process of decoherence through its interactions with others and the world. Each encounter fractures the coherent whole we imagine ourselves to be, dissolving the illusion of a unified identity. As Levinas articulates, the ethical encounter with the Other demands "a death to one's prior self and a rebirth into a new ethical being" (7).

This process illuminates de Beauvoir's assertion in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that human existence is defined by its "capacity to become," involving constant self-redefinition (3). What appears as continuity is in fact a series of discrete deaths and rebirths, each precipitated by our encounters with alterity.

## 4 Prose-Poetic Analysis: The Phenomenology of Perpetual Dissolution

We stand in the constant rain of our own dissolution, particles of self washing away with each heartbeat, each thought, each glance exchanged. This dying is not dramatic but mundane—the quiet erosion of certainty, the subtle shift in perspective that renders yesterday's self a stranger. As Nancy writes, we are "singular plural," existing only in relation, only in the space between (9).

Consider the quantum field: particles emerge from nothing, exist briefly in superposition—a dance of possibilities—then collapse into determinate states before dissolving back into potential. Is this not also the rhythm of consciousness? We arise from the field of awareness, exist momentarily as a collection of thoughts and sensations, then dissolve back into the quantum foam of being.

This perspective aligns with Buddhist notions of Pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination), which emphasizes that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena (Majjhima Nikaya). Both quantum physics and Buddhism reject the notion of fixed, independent entities, instead favoring a dynamic, interconnected view of reality where death and

rebirth are not exceptional events but the very fabric of existence.

As Adorno suggests in his dialectical method, change emerges as a response to contradictions (1). The self dies to its present configuration precisely because that configuration contains contradictions that cannot be sustained. Each dialectical movement represents a death of the old structure and a rebirth into the new. This process is not teleological but cyclical, echoing Prigogine’s work on irreversibility and far-from-equilibrium states (11).

## 5 Conclusion: The Ethics of Perpetual Dissolution

If we have “already died over and over,” what ethical implications follow? First, the recognition of our perpetual dissolution undermines the illusion of a fixed, autonomous self that forms the basis of contemporary individualism. In its place emerges what Whitehead called a “process reality,” where entities exist not as substances but as events, constantly “pre-hending” and transforming (13).

Second, this view challenges our relationship to change and loss. If death is not a single future event but a continuous process already underway, our terror of mortality may give way to a more nuanced understanding of transformation. As Benjamin suggests in his concept of *Jetztzeit* (now-time), each moment contains the possibility of radical break with the past (4).

Finally, recognizing our perpetual dissolution may foster an ethics of openness and becoming rather than preservation and stasis. If we are already dying, already being reborn, then the ethical question shifts from “How do I preserve my identity?” to “How do I die well? How do I become well?”

In the quiet spaces between heartbeats, in the pause between thoughts, we find the subtle evidence of our many deaths. We are the afterimage of who we were, the ghost of who we might have been, the chrysalis of who we are becoming. This is not metaphor but ontology—the recognition that being itself is a process of perpetual dissolution and emergence, a quantum dance of death and rebirth that occurs not at the end of life but at every moment within it.

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