



The Missed

Evental Aesthetics

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Vol. 1, No. 2 (2012)

The Missed

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Introduction

Mandy-Suzanne Wong

Joanna Demers

"There is what happens, and what does not happen."¹ For the young protagonist of Terry Pratchett's *Nation* (2008), what does or does not happen trumps the "should," simply because the should is an ideal, and what actually occurs (or not) are concrete particulars with tangible, sometimes painful, consequences. The protagonist, a boy forced into adulthood all too quickly, meditates on this. He takes control of the should, which in certain contexts may be known as destiny.

Does not happen, he thought, and the words became a declaration of triumph and defiance. "Does not happen," he said, and the words got bigger and dragged him to his feet, and "Does not happen!" he shouted at the sky. "Does not happen!"²

The fact that not everything that seems as though it ought to happen is in fact inevitable, is reassuring to this frightened child. He invokes "Does not happen!" as a self-empowering mantra throughout his ordeals: as evidence of contingency and possibility, the does-not-happen as failure of the should, as unrealized potential and missed opportunity, is also new opportunity.

Examples abound in aesthetic and philosophical literature. Take this one: certain sounds fail to happen; others, typically unnoticed, come to attention in the so-called silence (John Cage). Conformity does not happen, an exception occurs: this is the happening of truth (Alain Badiou). An atom fails to realize its inexorably downward course. As a result, it collides with other atoms, forming the macroscopic beings that occupy our world (Lucretius).

But failed occurrences, thwarted preparations, can also be destructive, negative, and fatal. Pratchett's young man knows this, but only in a way that he cannot articulate except with anger and hard work, exhausting work, insistent efforts to preserve and grow and reconstruct himself in the aftermath of trauma.

More examples: an encounter does not happen ("Father, can't you see I'm burning?") – the missed encounter here is an encounter with the Real, the trauma and desire that drives human existence and psychology (Jacques Lacan).³ Another example: determination does not happen, discernment cannot happen; so what is left is "pure being," which is merely and powerfully nothing (G.W.F. Hegel). Consider, as well, the failure of best-laid plans, on which one has built all of one's hope, one's very life: the resultant disorder, the giving up that causes one, some one, to fade or violently excise oneself from the world (Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*).

From still other points of view, the contributors to the second issue of *Evental Aesthetics* explore the productivity and negativity of unrealized potential and missed opportunity. But we'd like to note that the coalescence of the articles around this disconcerting theme happened virtually by chance. An open call for papers opened unexpectedly upon a diffuse preoccupation, among surprisingly dispersed and disassociated thinkers, with the does-not-happen in a plethora of forms. Missed encounters, failures to acknowledge, failures of coherence, silence as the failure of speech...: these became opportunities for our contributors to espy and remark upon aesthetic and philosophical questions.

The *Collision*, an encounter with aesthetic phenomena in which questioning is paramount and answering does not (necessarily) happen, turned out to be a popular and effective venue for the overlooked. Isabel Sobral Campos deploys this new genre of brief but potent, speculation in a reflection on Johan Grimonprez's various methods of appropriation in his

filmic history of hijacking. She wonders if all forms of appropriation might harbor streaks of violence, as a result of which coherence, identity, and the sense of possessing a home, cannot happen.

In a moving encounter with the work of H el ene Cixous and the video artist Zineb Sedira, Anna R adstr om wades and wanders through, takes apart and rebuilds the word "passage." Treating the word as both a landscape and a quasi-organic body, R adstr om finds that, rendered in French and split in two, "*pas sage*" connotes the unwise or misbehaving, the failure to make a good decision: rationality does not happen. Rethought, however, the same word suggests an opportunity to remedy its own negativity, to take "*un pas sage*," a wise step.

Rich Andrew delves into the ways in which Facebook's aesthetic machinations both elicit the bad behavior inherent in human nature – our exclusionary and cliquish tendencies, our worship of beauty and social connections – and cultivate new pathologies. The editing mechanism that Andrew deftly identifies, the habit of responding "Fine" to any "How are you?" no matter how insincerely posed, evaporates on Facebook. While such responses might evince an inability to be true to ourselves, Andrew argues that they at least demonstrate an awareness of others, a humility in which we distinguish between that which we want to share because of its importance, and that which we can silently bear on our own. Facebook, in contrast, has transformed us into exhibitionists of the first order, because we not only presume that our supposed friends care what we ate for breakfast or which song we listened to on the way to work, but because we also become fans pandering to others' trivialities. In the process, Andrew argues, we miss perhaps the most important opportunity of all – the face-to-face encounter.

Tom Betteridge and Magdalena Wisinowska present longer evaluations of the productive and destructive potential of the missed. Betteridge demonstrates the power of silence and nothingness as he tackles one of the most challenging aspects of Alain Badiou's philosophy: his simultaneous fidelity to and rejection of Heidegger's thought. According to Badiou, Heidegger strongly implies an equation of philosophy and poetry, and remains enslaved to a conception of Being as presence. Contrastingly, in the work of Paul Celan, Badiou finds poetry that enacts the *inability* of poetry to think Being as presence. By posing questions about Being in poems built from "cut" language – from words and phrases sundered by violent hesitations and intrusive silences – Celan implies that

it is the *failure* of language that authentically articulates Being. In other words, the truly effective ontology is driven by Nothing, by silence and the void. Badiou therefore reads Celan's work as a counterargument and conclusion (in the sense of a continuation that culminates in a cessation) of Heidegger's.

Reading Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* through the tenebrous lens of Ingmar Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*, Wisniewska demonstrates how an excessively rigid sense of morality – which goes so far as to divinize the concept of “the right thing” – may actually prevent ethical behavior, causing opportunities for reconciliation and forgiveness to be passed over. Instead, Wisniewska suggests (in provocative contrast to Betteridge), the reciprocal recognition implicit in acts of forgiveness and dialogue is what is most important and productive. Indeed, for Hegel it is here, in the successful, mutually attentive encounter, that God is to be found – not in a reified idea.

The upshot of any reflection on missed opportunities is that they expose the question of fate. To what extent are missed opportunities truly missed, rather than simply hiccups on an inevitable march toward a preordained goal? We think here of an antipode to Pratchett's hopeful and empowering story: Krzysztof Kieślowski's film *Blind Chance* (1981), in which a single character leads three seemingly unrelated existences. The tragedy of *Blind Chance* is its suggestion of the unavoidability of fate: regardless of the political or romantic opportunities that he heeds or overlooks in all three universes, the protagonist comes up against the same kind of alienation. And when he finally approaches some sense of liberation, of being his own man, misfortune cuts his life short. The question is, then, where, if anywhere, does the power of contingency lie? To what does “the necessity of contingency” (a Hegelian turn of phrase) refer: the necessity that contingency, perhaps in the form of opportunity seized or missed, disrupt apparently inevitable courses; or the subordination of contingency to necessity, the illusory masking of a hopelessly teleological existence by necessity itself disguised as opportunity? Sadly, reflections on prior events or extant aesthetic works cannot provide answers to this question, only dangle the question itself before us in cold, effulgent light.

• Notes •

¹ Pratchett, Terry. *Nation* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), 72.

² *Ibid.*, 73.

³ Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vols. 4 and 5* (London: Hogarth, 1953), 256-57.

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COLLISION

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A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics*, the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.



Rådström, Anna. "Zineb Sedira's 'Saphir' and Hélène Cixous' 'landscape of the trans-, of the passage,'" *Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 2 (2012): 9-16.

ABSTRACT

In this essay I discuss Zineb Sedira's two-screen video projection "Saphir" in relation to the landscape which Hélène Cixous has called the "the immense landscape of the trans-, of the passage." My non-conclusive text explores the acts of transition taking place on the dual screen of Sedira's video work. The work – filmed in the harbour area of Algiers – forms a multifaceted visual narrative of departures and arrivals. Within this narrative an intriguing choreography develops between two solitary characters, a man and woman, who never meet but nonetheless, step by step, mutually perform a ritualistic dance. "Saphir" – which borrows its name from a French colonial hotel – is filled with ambiguities that evoke the landscape described by Cixous. Contemplating its topography, I become involved in Cixous's bodily word world. "Passage" is what she calls part of this landscape, but it is also a word. It is a password which when split in two in the French language becomes ill-behaved and unwise. But could the word, I ask, also lead to a wise step (*un pas sage*)? And where do the steps danced by Sedira's man and woman lead?

KEYWORDS

Zineb Sedira, video art, Hélène Cixous, landscape, passage

COLLISION

Zineb Sedira's "Saphir" and Hélène Cixous' "landscape of the *trans-*, of the passage"

Anna Rådström

Encountering Zineb Sedira's two-screen video projection "Saphir" (2006), I sense the presence of the landscape that Hélène Cixous has called the "the immense landscape of the *trans-*, of the passage."¹ It is a strong yet delicate presence of a topography resisting absolute definition. This landscape does not set everything adrift, but is a vast terrain where knowing and not knowing reside side by side, where that which can and that which cannot be decided share space. According to Cixous, the factors of instability, uncertainty or what Jacques Derrida has called "the undecidable" are inseparable from human life, and one enters into the landscape of the *trans-*, of the passage, if "one remains open and susceptible to all the phenomena of overflowing, beginning with natural phenomena."² I do not know if I am open and susceptible to all the phenomena, but the landscape attracts me, and so does Zineb Sedira's video projection.

Saphir: On the dual screen, parallel flows of images speak to and of each other. Poetically they form visual vocabularies of interconnections and transitions. Background sounds of indistinct human voices, the blowing of ship sirens and traffic intermingle with the moving images. The scenes and sounds are from the harbour area of Algiers; the nearby Hotel Saphir, built by the French in the 1930's, lends its name to the video work. A solitary man overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and the port of the North African city. While at times leaning against a decaying seashore balustrade and at other times standing in front of Hotel Saphir, he watches ships come and go. The big hotel windows behind him, seeming to face the sea like eternally observing eyes, emphasise the act of looking. Inside the hotel, a woman resides in solitude. She moves through empty rooms and corridors, she has coffee and croissants, and through one of many windows she watches the harbour: arrivals and departures. One of the ships at sea is the ferry Tariq Ibn Ziyad. This ferry sails between Algiers and Marseille, but in which direction is it now heading? Is it docking or leaving?

A subtle play between human gazes and the seemingly seeing windows takes place. In his beautiful essay, "Saphir," Richard Dyer refers to the windows as "metaphorical eyes" watching the ferry. He notes how the "relationship between the land-bound hotel Saphir and the water-born [*sic*] Tariq Ibn Ziyad is developed throughout the film as the central trope for arrivals and departures."³ He also pays attention to the dialogue that develops between the sea and two lonely characters who never meet, but who every now and then appear parallel to each other on the dual screen.⁴ Intriguing choreographies evolve when the man and the woman walk in staircases. The steps seem to lead up and down without coming to a halt, a destination. The man climbs a flight of city steps, while the woman walks up and down the stairs of the hotel. At times there is the illusive suggestion that they *will* meet at some point. The stairs are, according to Dyer, used as a metonym for the notion of "transition" and the walking is, he writes, "like a ritual dance of departure and arrival between the man outside and the woman inside."⁵ But to where does this ritual stair dance between the two performers lead?

Passage: Throughout his essay on "Saphir," Dyer emphasises the notion and state of "transition," and when I encounter this work I sense a strong yet delicate presence of the landscape described by Cixous. "Passage": it can be a part of an immense landscape, but it is also a word with many explanations and uses. My *Pocket Oxford Dictionary* from 1992 gives several definitions of this noun. The first is "process or means

of passing; transit." Three other explanations are: "liberty or right to pass through," "journey by sea or air" and "transition from one state to another."⁶ Although this is not a classification exercise aiming to match words with multilayered visual narratives, these concise descriptions point to a certain extent towards elements and actions in "Saphir." Some of them also point towards doings taking place during my encounter with the film. For instance, I first met "Saphir" in Zineb Sedira's solo exhibition *Under the Sky and Over the Sea*.⁷ The exhibition title carries a *trans-*, a passage within it and also indicates a motion through a vast landscape. This certainly nourishes my reflections.

The descriptions from the dictionary merely point towards "Saphir" and towards my encounter with it, and they do not reach all the way through. However, something happens when the lexical definitions of "passage" are followed by a remark within brackets saying: "[French: related to pass]." "Pass" can be a noun referring to a "narrow way through mountains," but in connection to "passage" the dictionary alludes to the verb "pass," of which the "most current and important sense" is given as: "move onward, especially past something."⁸ The reference to "moving past" is essential. It indicates that something, someone is involved in a doing, in an action of movement. However, the fact that the movement is said to move onward and especially past something makes me hesitate. The suggested positional direction somehow evokes ideas of a choreography fixed beforehand, that dismisses any divergent step and so must be overcome ("passed"), following perhaps a hesitation which is therefore itself significant. Also important is the reference to the French language as it reconnects me to the ideas and writings of Hélène Cixous in which words are set in motion, given bodies and are reaching through.

In one of her many essays Cixous writes: "I like the word passage. *Pas sage* (ill-behaved/unwise). All the passwords all the passing and boarderpass [*sic*] words, the words which cross the eyelid *on the interior* of their own body."⁹ As always Cixous plays with the French language, and the English translation of the essay retains her word game with *pas sage*. It could not be translated without losing its serious playfulness, so within parentheses the translator gives an explanation of the meaning that comes forth when "passage" is split right down the middle: "*Pas sage* (ill-behaved/unwise)." When reading this I cannot stop myself from trying to play with my stumbling French: I trip over *un pas sage*, I slip over a wise step. In the unruly word the unwise and wise dwell simultaneously, they

rub against each other and a landscape resisting absolute definition makes its presence known.¹⁰

The landscape of the trans-, of the passage: It is a vast terrain that can be discovered when one sensitively stays open to all phenomena of overflowing. The prerequisites for crossing its borders may seem difficult, if not impossible, to fulfil. But could it be that it is not the landscape setting up barriers and denying entrance to its grounds? Could it be that it is we who are doing this? It may be so because we are, as Cixous underlines, the ones making laws with our languages. We are the ones throwing up borders and we are "the customs officers of communication: we admit or we reject."¹¹ Language can work in an exclusive manner, but it can also be inclusive. There are, as Cixous writes, words "which cross the eyelid *on the interior* of their own body." And, I like to think, while moving through their own interiors they can also open borders for others. But how does one move along with these words? "Passage," it is a part of a landscape but also a word – a password. When split in two it becomes ill-behaved and unwise while also leading to a wise step. Are the two wordplays conflicting with each other? Do they call for opposing actions? Or must one unknowingly move along with both of them, because if one hesitates between the two, the border may close and thus obstruct the crossing? When striving for passage one has to move rapidly as, according to Cixous, "the ground will always give way, always."¹² Hesitating, the wise step may very well become a missed step.

Zineb Sedira – born and raised in France by Algerian parents, and now living and working in London as well as in Algiers – moves between cultures and countries. She lives the multifaceted processes of the *trans-*, in the passage. She knows their forces and fragilities. She explores them in many of her works, and in "Saphir" she does it through parallel flows of images from a contemporary Algiers. It is a present that also contains a past, a past of French colonialism. It is a present hosting experiences of a brutal colonial era during which Hotel Saphir was built. Dyer notes how this majestic but decaying hotel works "as a trope for the fading of the influence of a colonial power, still present, but gradually crumbling away."¹³

In "Saphir," Sedira carefully stages a visual narrative; however the actors involved, the man and woman, do not speak but pass on the narrative through their movements, through their gazes and dance. The unspoken fact that the woman, a French actor, is daughter to a man described as a "pied noir" retrospectively adds dimensions to the story. So

does the fact that the solitary man, an Algerian actor, has lived and worked in France but has now returned to his native country.¹⁴ Departures and arrivals move in and out of each other. Directions multiply. The woman has come to her father's country of birth, a country that he, being a Frenchman, had to leave.¹⁵ She lingers in empty rooms built for passersby. Is she one of those who pass by? The man, returned from the former ruling country across the sea, stays close to the harbour. Is his return final?

Hélène Cixous – who was born in Algeria at the end of the 1930's and who, upon moving to France in 1955, "adopted an imaginary nationality which is literary nationality"¹⁶ – writes that she learned the French language in a garden from which she was on the edge of being expelled because she was a Jew.¹⁷ And she continues: "I was of the race of Paradise-losers. Write French? With what right? Show your credentials! What's the password?"¹⁸ Through her writing, Cixous seems to have found the word. However, since having found it she has not obediently settled down. Growing up in Algeria she saw "the French at the 'height' of imperialist blindness" and from this spectacle she learned everything.¹⁹ Did she learn about the importance of the "passage?" I think so. When writing about her "algeriance" she states: "the chance of my genealogy and history arranged things in such a way that I would *stay passing*."²⁰ And while passing the movements of the passage lead her to the element of writing which is "the necessity of only being the citizen of an extremely inappropriable, unmasterable country or ground."²¹

The *pas sage*, the chances of genealogies, histories and states of passing by, become part of my reflections on "Saphir" along with the film's arrivals and departures, gazes and dance. The man and the woman lead parallel existences. They both look at the sea and the ships in the harbour, but their gazes and their bodies do not meet. Yet, they are involved in a mutual choreography. I think of "pass," of the act of moving onward and above all past something. Is the ritual stair dance between the woman and the man moving in such a way? I do not know, but I know it is moving. And it moves me.

• Notes •

¹ Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 52.

² Ibid.

³ Richard Dyer, "Saphir," in *Zineb Sedira: Saphir*, ed. Claire Grafik and Mériadek Caraës (London: Photographer's Gallery and Paris: Kamel Menhour and Paris Musées, 2006), 10.

⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1992 ed, s.v. "passage."

⁷ This exhibition was shown at Bildmuseet in Umeå, Sweden during the autumn of 2010.

⁸ *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*, s.v. "passage."

⁹ Hélène Cixous, "Writing Blind: Conversation with the Donkey," in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, trans. Eric Prenowitz, (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 186. Emphasis original.

¹⁰ In her writings Cixous repeatedly addresses the states of knowing and not knowing. Intriguing relations between the two states evolve, and when writing about Cixous' work, Derrida, for instance, states: "She knows without knowing." See Jacques Derrida, *H.C. for Life, That Is to Say...*, trans. Laurent Milesi and Stefan Herbrecter (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 133.

¹¹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints*, 51.

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Dyer, "Saphir," 11.

¹⁴ Zineb Sedira quoted in "Zineb Sedira in Conversation with Christine Van Assche," in *Zineb Sedira: Saphir*, ed. by Claire Grafik and Mériadek Caraës, 61.

¹⁵ Zineb Sedira uses the expression "pied-noir" to explain the situation of the actor's father, who was born and grew up in colonized Algeria. Upon Algeria's declaration of independence in 1962, a great number of French citizens had to leave for France.

¹⁶ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints*, 204.

¹⁷ Hélène Cixous, "Coming to Writing," in *Coming to Writing and Other Essays*, ed. by Deborah Jenson, trans. Deborah Jenson with modifications by Ann Liddle and Susan Sellers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 13.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Hélène Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (London: I.B: Tauris Publishers 1996), 70.

²⁰ Hélène Cixous, "My Algeriance, In Other Words: To Depart and Not to Arrive From Algeria," in *Stigmata*, 227. Emphasis original.

²¹ Cixous and Calle-Gruber, *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints*, 52.

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Betteridge, Tom. "Silence Being Thought: Badiou, Heidegger, Celan,"
Evental Aesthetics 1, no. 2 (2012): 17-48.

ABSTRACT

Taking its points of departure from Alain Badiou's readings of Paul Celan, this paper explores Badiou's philosophical departure from Heidegger and its consequences for the relationship between philosophy and poetry. For Badiou, Celan both takes part in and heralds the closure of a sequence in which, guided by "the question of Being," poetry constructs "the space of thinking which defines philosophy." More, in ending this sequence, Celan "completes Heidegger." The theoretical knot comprised by Badiou, Heidegger and Celan invites us to explore the relationship between poetic language, thought and Being. This paper asserts the centrality of a radical nothingness to any poetic "thought of Being," and approaches this ontologically efficacious "nothing" via the privilege afforded to "silence" in both Celan's poetry and Badiou's imperatives for "the modern poem." It does this in order to sharpen our understanding of both Badiou's movement away from Heidegger, and the privileged role Celan plays in this departure. Following an opening discussion concerning the role of silence in Badiou and Celan, this paper then clarifies the relationship between poetic language, silence and Being in Heidegger and Badiou.

KEYWORDS

Badiou, Heidegger, Celan, being, poetry, inaesthetics, ontology, presence, subtraction

Silence Being Thought: Badiou, Heidegger, Celan

Tom Betteridge

In an endnote to *Logics of Worlds*, Alain Badiou declares his philosophical debts to Samuel Beckett and Stéphane Mallarmé. He asserts that concepts fundamental to his philosophy – “generic truth” and “subtractive ontology” respectively – continue to be shifted, modified, “sharpened” by his readings of these writers. Badiou’s thought, it is claimed, is “under condition” of Beckett’s prose and Mallarmé’s poetry.¹ Further, without irony, Badiou declares that understanding the “stories” produced by Beckett’s *How It Is* and Mallarmé’s poem “*À la nue accablante tu...*” is “Perhaps the only goal of [his] philosophy.”² Badiou’s writings on these two figures comprise an entire book – *On Beckett* (2003) – and many prolonged engagements with Mallarmé spread out over the course of thirty years, from *Theory of the Subject* (1982/2009) to *Being and Event* (1988/2005) and *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998/2005), and continuing through the philosophical shift marked by *Logics of Worlds* (2007/2010) and *Second Manifesto for Philosophy* (2009/2011).³ In stark contrast, the page-time afforded to the German-Jewish poet Paul Celan over this writing period consists in about twenty pages, disparately placed among multiple publications. And, this is to be

further contrasted with the time dedicated to Celan by certain of Badiou's philosophical contemporaries, namely Jacques Derrida, both in his posthumously published *Sovereignities in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (2005) and at a distance through his friendship with Celan's close friend and interpreter Peter Szondi. As well, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe has dedicated a book – *Poetry as Experience* (1999) – to Celan and his relationship with Heidegger. Despite Badiou's relatively modest engagement with Celan, he retains a privileged position in Badiou's writings on the relationship between philosophy and poetry. It is always with deep reverence that Badiou cites fragments from Celan's poetry, and it is the more esoteric (and compelling) aspects of Badiou's philosophy that "thinking under condition" of Celan might "sharpen." That Badiou, more often than not, cites Celan's poems in order to colour conclusive points is not arbitrary. At stake throughout this essay, then, is the precise nature of this conclusiveness (what does Celan conclude?), and its consequences for the relationship between philosophy and poetry.

Badiou's most thorough investigations of Celan's poetry take place in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (1998/2005) and *The Century* (2005/2007). It is more useful to begin however, with the importance afforded to Celan in the complementary treatise to *Being and Event*, Badiou's *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989/1999). Badiou claims therein, following Hegel, the willingness of philosophy to subsume itself under the imperatives of science or politics, which Peter Hallward describes as a preoccupation with "the sterile hypotheses of scientific positivism and historical materialism," forced philosophical speculation to take refuge in poetry, inaugurating an "age of poets" throughout which poetry took on a philosophical role.⁴ This "age" is deemed to begin with Hölderlin, continues in the work of Mallarmé and Rimbaud, Trakl, Mandelstam and Pessoa, and finishes, crucially, with Celan. These poets, Badiou claims, in opposition to the poverty of thought emitted by philosophical sutures to science and politics, were those most able to think the real of their epoch, to think *Being* in all its disorientation and inconsistency:

The fact is that there really was an *Age of Poets*, in the time of the sutured escheat of philosophers. There was a time between Hölderlin and Paul Celan when the quavering sense of what that time itself was, the most open approach to the question of Being, the space of compossibility least caught-up in brutal sutures and the most informed formulation of modern Man's experience were all unsealed and possessed by the poem. A time when the enigma of Time was caught up in the enigma of the poetic metaphor, wherein the process of unbinding

was itself bound within the “like” of the image. An entire epoch was represented in short philosophies as a consistent and especially *oriented* one. There was progress, the sense of History, the millenarian foundation, the approach of another world and other men. But the real of this epoch was on the contrary inconsistency and disorientation. Poetry alone, or at least “metaphysical” poetry, the most concentrated poetry, the most intellectually strained poetry, the most obscure also, designated and articulated this essential disorientation.⁵

These poets “submitted to a kind of intellectual pressure” to take on the role of philosophy itself. Badiou recognises their poems as works of “thought...at the very locus where philosophy falters, a locus of language wherein a proposition about Being and about time is enacted.”⁶ Further, such poetry constructs “the space of thinking which defines philosophy.”⁷ Concerning Celan, then, Badiou’s general claim is that his poetry “thinks” and that this poetic thought, through “the art of binding Word and experience,” is guided by “the question of Being,” by the real of the epoch – inconsistency and disorientation.⁸ However, a further claim specific to Celan’s poetry is that it closes the age of poets, and this is a claim inextricably bound to the philosophy of Heidegger; Celan’s poetry “completes Heidegger.”⁹

There is tension to unravel, then, concerning Celan’s relation to “Being,” for his poetry is at once included in the age of poets, this philosophical exploration of “Being,” and yet significantly departs from this exploration insofar as it heralds its closure or saturation. With Celan the exclusive relationship between philosophy and poetry – philosophy’s refuge in poetry – is broken. And this untying of philosophy and poetry bends philosophy, insofar as it *thinks*, away from the influence of Heidegger, the overseer of philosophy’s “suture” to poetry. Badiou recognises Heidegger’s success in “philosophically *touching* an unnoticed point of thought detained in poetic language.”¹⁰ However, in order to go beyond the “power of Heideggerian philosophy,” it is imperative to reconsider the “couple formed by the saying of poets and the thought of thinkers” profuse in Heidegger.¹¹ That is, following a period of near-exclusive intimacy between poetry and thought in the age of poets, it is once more necessary to distinguish the one from the other; thought is no longer to be bound to poetry. It seems clear that, for Badiou, the poetry of Celan embodies this movement through and beyond Heidegger, both in its departure from the “*indistinction*” between the “poet” and the “thinker” and in its ultimately disjunctive relation to the exploration of Being pervasive

throughout the age of poets; Celan breaks the poet/thinker couple, and in the process recasts the thinking of Being beyond the particular remit of the poet and language.

The unravelling of the knot – Badiou/Heidegger/Celan – is a project that exceeds the limits of any one paper. However, it is in exploring one facet at the heart of the knot – the importance of a radical nothingness to any thought of Being – that we may begin to plot this tension's coordinates. If Celan emits a "thought of Being" which at once reckons with and departs from the poetico-philosophical schema of thought evinced by Heidegger, he must contend as well with a radical nothingness at the heart of Being, the correlates of which we find in "the Nothing" in Heidegger, and in "the void" in Badiou. This paper approaches this ontologically efficacious "nothing" via the privilege afforded to "silence" in both Celan's poetry and Badiou's imperatives for "the modern poem." It does so in order to sharpen both our understanding of Badiou's movement away from Heidegger, and the privileged role Celan plays in this departure. Our first section, then, concerns silence in Badiou and Celan, and is followed by a second section clarifying the knot between silence, ontology and poetic language in Heidegger and Badiou.

• Toward Silence •

Critical debates surrounding Celan's poetics have often presented his probing of silence as the means by which he attempts to reach a lost "other" – a *silenced* other.¹² In Michael Hamburger's *The Truth of Poetry*, for example, Celan's *Todesfugue* is claimed to offer "perhaps the only decisive proof that poems could be written not only after Auschwitz but about the cold horrors perpetrated there"; and further, "[s]uch a theme can be taken up only with a reticence that leaves the unspeakable unspoken... Ordinary language will not serve him."¹³ However, we aim to approach the idea of an *originary* silence too, beyond the plane of language; a silence which – as a constituent of any "thought of Being" – must be reckoned with in any analysis of Badiou's account of the relationship between philosophy and poetry. In what follows, questions of language and Being are approached through an examination of Celan's poetics. We take our point of departure from Badiou's comparison of Celan to Saint-John Perse in *The Century*.

Therein, Celan's poetics are extrapolated under the signifier "Anabasis." Drawing at first on Xenophon's narrative of the same name, Badiou infuses the movement of anabasis with three main features: a principle of "lostness," the invention of a destiny and the creation of a new path, a new "return."¹⁴ From a comparative reading of Saint-John Perse's "Anabasis" (1924) and Celan's "Anabasis" (1963), Badiou seeks to draw out how the twentieth century thought such a "movement," how its poetry engaged the celebrated search for a "new man," a "re-ascent towards a properly human home."¹⁵ The "hard core" of the century thus framed – the nineteen thirties and forties – are crucial to the distinction made between the poetries of Perse and Celan, and correlatively between vastly different attitudes towards Being, language and truth.

It is with undisguised disdain that Badiou draws out details of Perse's career in the French State, his position as "a man who belongs to the era of tranquil imperialism" following a childhood in the West Indies, an "obscene and more than succulent colonial nirvana."¹⁶ Perse's "Anabasis" was written many years prior to his becoming the "official poet of the Republic" in the fifties, yet even this poem is cast by Badiou as the work of a pompous reactionary in the service of a dying State. Following this attack, Badiou presents Section VIII of Perse's poem, in T.S. Eliot's translation, and claims it to bear the disjunctive synthesis of epic affirmation and spiritual vacancy. That is, Perse's poetry merely represents what is already deemed to exist, using the triumphant resources of epic poetry. We can apply the language of Badiou's "Third Sketch of a Manifesto for Affirmationist Art" (2003) retrospectively to understand this further: his fifteenth axiom for affirmationist art states that "It is better to do nothing than work formally toward making visible what the West declares to exist."¹⁷ The claim is that Perse's poetry reinforces what is already deemed visible and is guilty of nihilism in its lack of penetrative critique, its refusal to grant existence to anything beyond what is already deemed to be. Already existing "Roads of the world" are to be followed, already existing "signs of the earth" course with authoritative power:

Cavaliers, across such human families, in whom hatreds sang now and then like tomtits, shall we raise our whip over the gelded words of happiness?...Roads of the world, we follow you. Authority over all the signs of the earth.¹⁸

Badiou declares that Perse “will praise precisely what there is precisely to the extent that it is, without attempting to link it to any meaning whatsoever,” and this corresponds to his particular anabasis, a movement of nihilistic force in the form of the epic.¹⁹ This nihilistic claim – the assumption that there is nothing beyond what is already visible, or more precisely, that what is visible *is* everything – denies Being, denies truth. An earlier comment in *Manifesto for Philosophy* serves to tie nihilism with this denial: “nihilism,” Badiou claims, “must signify that which declares that the access to Being and truth is impossible.”²⁰ Perse’s poetics, in their triumphant imaging of reality, are nihilistic insofar as they deny the possibility of any *beyond*, and correlatively of any access to “the truth of the century.”

In *The Century*, Badiou continues: “We are on the other side of the century. The only thing that epic nihilism, in its Nazi figure, has been able to create is a slaughterhouse. From now on it is impossible to dwell *naturally* in the epic element, as if nothing had happened.”²¹ That is, following the Holocaust, the tautness of the tie between epic language and Being loosens – a new path towards Being must be developed, a “signal, a call,” a “moment of peril and beauty” must be emitted; for this, language must plumb its own depths. Thus:

If Celan’s poem is not eloquent, it is because it exposes an uncertainty concerning language itself – to the extent of presenting language only in its cut, in its section, in its perilous reparation, and practically never in the shared glory of its resource. The truth is that, for Celan, although the forties in no way made poetry impossible, they did render eloquence obscene.²²

The question becomes one of crafting a poetry without eloquence. And this would mean dispelling the cooperative relationship thought to be implicit in the language/Being couple inherent to “eloquent” poetry. Language is deemed incapable of approaching the “truth of the century” – its real – as long as it is considered the vehicle for the triumphant rendering and imaging of reality. We find in Celan, then, a lapidary carving of language, a cold sparseness in which layers of language are pared away towards a silent kernel. “Anabasis,” for example, shows Celanian tropes – hyphenated neologisms, line-breaks across hyphens, enjambement, metaphors concerning the very process of speaking *of* – reaching their

apex in the third stanza, stretched as if on a rack, line and image disintegrating into polyglottal stutter:

Then:
buoys,
espalier of sorrow-buoys
with those
breath reflexes leaping and
lovely for seconds only -: light-
bellsounds (dum-
dun-, un-,
unde suspirat
cor),
re-
leased, re-
deemed, ours.²³

Badiou's contention that Celan presents language in its "cut" is echoed by Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe in *Poetry as Experience*, when he refers to "the abruptness of language as handled by Celan. Or rather, the language that held him, ran through him. Especially in his late work prosody and syntax do violence to language: they chop, dislocate, truncate or cut it."²⁴ Celan's final collection of poetry, *Schneepart* (1971), published posthumously, carries this poetic imperative to cut language, to explore its mute points, beyond the forties toward the events of 1968:

The darkened splinterecho
in the brainwave
current,

the buttress above the me-
ander where it is stayed.²⁵

The verbose triumphalism of Perse's poetry is eschewed by Celan in favour of the crystalline and paring effects of prosody and syntax, his poetry always orientated by contraction, reduction and the splintered energy of the broken line.

Under the sign of “anabasis,” Badiou is able to place the question of language’s relation to Being – cast in terms of language’s capacity to grasp the “truth of the century” in this case – under the imperative to push against the boundaries of experience, of language, of what is deemed existent. In so doing, Badiou places an emphasis on approaching an “outside” not yet given to experience, asserting a radical split between language and Being. Badiou’s assertion is that “the truth of the century is linguistically impassable” as long as one remains on the schema of “eloquence”; truth remains impassable as long as the poetic imperative to use language’s abundant resources persists.²⁶ A poetry capable of navigating this impassability must be radically distinct from eloquent discourse, from “the obscenity of ‘all seeing’ and ‘all saying’ – of showing, sounding out and commenting everything...”²⁷ And this is to place the poem, insofar as it rejects eloquence, outside the sphere of commentary and babble; the poem is to be isolated, a space of comparative quiet – or silence, even. For Badiou: “the poem says the opposite of what Wittgenstein says about silence. It says: ‘This thing that cannot be spoken of in the language of consensus; I create silence in order to say it. I isolate this speech from the world.’”²⁸ The poetic imperative is not to *pass over* what we cannot speak about in silence, but to draw out and construct what cannot be spoken, through the creation of silence, and through the isolation of poetic language. But this *creation* of silence is complicated by the way in which Badiou refers to silence in the following.

In a paper delivered in Brazil, entitled “Language, Thought, Poetry” (1993) (an allusion to Heidegger’s influential collection of essays *Poetry, Language, Thought*), Badiou demands that the poem encapsulate silence: “Folded and reserved, the modern poem harbours a central silence.”²⁹ “Central” offers two paths: is there a silence borne *in* the poem, at its centre, or is the silence itself *central*, the foci from which language is drawn, the source of the poem, too? I suggest both at once: the *creation* of silence testifies to an originary silence beyond language. The poem opens a space for nothingness, a silent alcove which operates as the mediation between language and its silent beyond. For Badiou, the poem itself is a space set apart from communication: “The poem does not consist in communication. The poem has nothing to communicate. It is only a saying, a declaration that draws authority from itself alone.”³⁰ Subtracted from the language of communication, the poem harbours *itself* from the noise and bluster of discourse. At the same time, in its “operation of silence,” the poem provides a space for that *central* silence beyond language which “interrupts the ambient cacophony.”³¹ Of course, that this

silence be “harboured,” protected, returns us to Heidegger’s dictum that “Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells.”³² Our earlier contention that a “thought of Being” must reckon with nothingness, with a *central* silence, is complicated by Heidegger, as we shall see later when we compare his account of silence and nothingness with Badiou’s.

Celan’s poetry intensifies the tension between a localised silence on the plane of language – that towards which the poem retreats – and a foundational silence at the source of language. In his Meridian speech, Celan speaks of certain expectations borne by the poem, “to speak also on behalf of the *strange...on behalf of the other* – who knows, perhaps of an *altogether other*.”³³ This seems to be another way of characterising our two silences: “an other,” that particular which does not speak, the silence of those victims of the Shoah who “dig a grave in the breezes” for example; as well as an “altogether other,” the grounding silence or nothingness with which the poem must engage, the central silence that the modern poem harbours.³⁴ In seeking these others, Celan claims, the poem must “take its position at the edge of itself,” and show a “strong inclination toward falling silent”; poetic language is crafted at its own edge, probing a silent source.³⁵

Celan’s preoccupation with silence then goes beyond the “paring” highlighted by Badiou and Lacoue-Labarthe; his poetry, as well as comprising a formal response to the impact of the Holocaust, also seeks an originary questioning beyond language’s plane. And one of the ways his poetry does this is to invite this questioning at the level of sense through various recurring tropes. That is, Celan invites philosophical analysis – concerning Being, truth, language – through the explicit rendering of philosophical concepts in his poems; as well as syntactic paring, there is semantic questioning. It is in James K. Lyon’s analysis of Celan’s “With a Changing Key” from *Von Schwelle Zu Schwelle* (1955), that we find one such example of poetico-philosophical questioning. Lyon traces the explicit influence of Heidegger on Celan through an analysis of Celan’s personal copies of Heidegger’s philosophical works. Lyon is keen to emphasise that directly prior to the writing of this poem in 1953, Celan was embroiled in intensive reading of both Heidegger’s *Wrong Paths* and his *A Letter on Humanism*.³⁶ In both of these works, language is consistently referred to as the house or the temple of Being (to which we referred earlier), and it is this image that figures in Celan’s poem from the same year, the first three lines of which, in Michael Hamburger’s translation, read as follows:

With a variable key
you unlock the house in which
drifts the snow of that left unspoken.³⁷

In this translation, it is the "snow of that left unspoken" that is drifting (and has drifted) in the house; and this is to be contrasted with John Felstiner's rendering in which it is "the snow of what's silenced."³⁸ The contrast is important, for although we must acknowledge that Celan's poetry is orientated by singular experiences – "snow," as Felstiner points out, is a mark of Celan's parents' deaths, for example – we are also seeking answers to questions concerning a "thought of Being" in his poems. By attesting to the "snow of what's silenced," Felstiner closes off this silence to questions that go beyond real, concrete loss; the Heideggerian influence on the poetry and its explicit engagement with questions of language and Being are effaced. The poet's key here unlocks the house in which silence's snow drifts, but this snow drifts in from outside. This silence from outside language provides a mark of Being within – it drifts inside. We are left with two silences marking Being: within and without, the latter providing the origin of the former.

Both silences – the localised silence of the lost and the central silence beyond language – are invoked too in Celan's poem "Below" from *Sprachgitter* (1959):

Led home into oblivion
the sociable talk of
our slow eyes.³⁹

The poem begins with the waning of a conversation, its end point forced upon it somehow, by "our eyes" being "slow" or otherwise. The "*Gast*" of "*Gast-Gespräch*" – "sociable talk" – is usually translated as "guest" in English, suggesting that the conversation invoked in the poem is fleeting – a visiting conversation. This literal translation does more to imply the particular nature of the "other" involved than the more general "sociable talk." The "sociable talk" of conversation finds its "home" in "oblivion," is forgotten, becomes nothing. But "home" implies a point of origin, as if the

very possibility of dialogue is non-existent. An *originary* nothingness from which language emanates and must always return is suggested, but so is the housing or encapsulation of a particular discursive difficulty, the particular difficulty of addressing those lost in the Shoah, of speaking to their silence, for example. Their lack of expression forces the “slowness” of conversation, of sociable talk. Where “eyes” are slow there is an implied muffling of speech; “our eyes” are slow to pick out “that which is seen through discourse”; they see only dimly.⁴⁰ The power of speech to mean wilts under the pressure of the inexpressible. The housing of this discursive difficulty protects the problematic to which Celan’s poetry is directed: how to speak to silence, and more specifically, how to speak to the lost.

In the second stanza, language falls away:

Led now, syllable after syllable, shared
out among the dayblind dice, for which
the playing hand reaches out, large,
awakening.⁴¹

Here we find the rudiments of language disintegrating, falling back into the dark, revealing nothing to our “eyes” unless they should happen to be activated by chance, awoken by “the playing hand.” Further, language is “led” to its disintegration, dissected and distributed syllable by syllable “now.” But the “now” is ambiguous: there is on the one hand the now of the poem’s writing, as if poetic language itself serves to elide the “sociable talk” of the previous stanza, leading it into oblivion, scrapping it for parts; and on the other hand the fact that “Led” floats in both stanzas without a subject, suggesting that the disintegration of language is due to a larger force, is simply inevitable, that spoken language is always already failing in its task. “Now” is at once the present of the poem’s writing and its broader sense, the eternal present in which language is always caught between darkening and awakening. We may take “playing hand,” then, to mean the hand of the poet, awakening silent language, making it visible, and perhaps also the origin of the destruction to which “sociable talk” must be subject, if we take it to invoke language more generally rather than the visiting conversation which comprises every poem. At stake is how to approach the silence beyond the cacophony of speech using poetic language.

The third stanza bisects the "our" of the first stanza into a "me" and a "you":

And the too much of my speaking:
heaped up round the little
crystal dressed in the style of your silence.⁴²

It is interesting that "speaking" fails here. The "too much of my speaking" is perhaps an instance in which, as Badiou observes, "all-seeing" and "all-saying" are "obscene." This excess of speech from a speaker, attempting somehow to approach the other, falls around "the little crystal dressed in the style of your silence," muffling it, preventing dialogue. Fragments of speech fall around this crystal like leaves, dead, unable to penetrate it, but also eliding any light it may give off, preventing it from Being seen, from "showing" anything to "our eyes." The "dressing" of this crystal only occurs following "the too much of my speaking" always already heaped against it; it is this "too much" which obscures. As well, "too much" is subsumed under "my speaking" as if speech itself is conditioned by an excess, saturated from within. The task of the poet is to "undress" this crystal shrouded in saturated spoken language.

In line with Badiou's imperatives – that modern poetry should harbour an originary silence, and that poetic language should oppose itself to "ambient cacophony" – Celan in "Below" calls for this crystal's undressing to be guided by the disintegration of speech, its cutting and pruning towards an originary silent point. We have on the one hand, then, the formal "paring" attested to by Badiou, but also in the poetic rendering of the crystal, the grounds for this prosodic and syntactical experimentation. Further, the excess of speech alluded to in the final stanza of "Below" serves to reinforce the split between Being and language to which we have referred throughout: *too much* speaking prevents silence from Being heard. It is telling perhaps that in Heidegger's "What is Metaphysics?" (1929), despite the assertion that "anxiety reveals the nothing," we find that "in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk"; speech or chatter is a natural response to the anxiety caused by "the nothing," a response that both hides the presence of the nothing but also "proves" its existence.⁴³

However, Celan's relationship with Heidegger's philosophy is complicated by the account Anthony Mellors offers in his *Late Modernist Poetics: from Pound to Prynne*. There, in a reading of Celan's "The Meridian," Mellors claims that when Celan refers to poetry as "*einsam und dunterwegs* ('lonely and on the way', *en route*)" he is making a clear allusion to "Heidegger's pastoral lore of the path, the way...to language and being."⁴⁴ Further, the poem, for Celan, "takes us towards a clearing, to 'an open question 'without resolution,' a question which points towards open, empty, free spaces – we have ventured far out."⁴⁵ However, for Mellors the word "empty" allows us to form an important point of difference between Celan and Heidegger: "Only the word 'empty' in Celan's account keeps it from being identified with the positivity of Heidegger's 'open.'"⁴⁶ Mellors invites us to make the contrast between positive (that is, assertive) openness – "Truth is the openness of beings" for Heidegger⁴⁷ – and a conception of poetic Truth tainted by emptiness, by negativity.⁴⁸ On the one hand we find beings unfolding into truth, into openness, and on the other truth's alignment with open free spaces divested of such content – empty spaces. It is in this difference, borne by the assertion of an *empty* space, that we can anticipate the departure that Badiou takes from Heidegger through Celan. For the emptiness to which Celan points is a seemingly negative space beyond the plane upon which Heidegger's considerations of Being and language operate. Thus Celan effects a radical subversion of the relation between language and Being postulated by Heidegger. With Badiou, as we shall see, we move beyond the entire plane of philosophy on which Heidegger operates: we move from a "thought of Being" arising in poetic language, to a "thought of Being" that is *able* to arise in poetic language, but that also escapes the strictures of such language, testifying to an empty "outside" beyond language.

At the heart of this movement is a radical distinction between the ontological approaches of Heidegger and Badiou. In the former, it is poetic language which is privileged with regard to ontology; in the latter, it is mathematics. But although Badiou privileges mathematics, he does not forsake poetry altogether. Rather, the "philosophical form" for Badiou "combines resources borrowed from those procedures of truth that are most clearly disjointed from sense (if 'sense' means description of a state of affairs): mathematics... and poetry..."⁴⁹ Further, in Badiou's preface to the English translation of *Being and Event*, we find his commitment to maintaining an approach to philosophy informed by both mathematics and poetry, in the wake of Plato, Descartes, Leibniz and Hegel. Badiou's goal, in his words, is "To know how to make thought pass through

demonstrations as through plainsong, and thus to steep an unprecedented thinking in disparate springs."⁵⁰ That thinking Being in Badiou requires the transgression of the boundaries of poetic language, privileging as he does mathematics *as* ontology, invites a comparison between this assertion and Heidegger's "poetic ontology." In the following section, then, we plot the coordinates of Badiou's departure from Heidegger via the analysis of their respective ontologies. Our privileged mediating force between these ontologies is what we have hitherto referred to as an "originary silence," the "central silence" harboured by the "modern poem," a silence harboured too in the poetry of Paul Celan.

• The Nothing and the Void •

In a contemporary account of issues facing the thinking of ontology, Quentin Meillassoux helps to colour Badiou's ontological departure from Heidegger. The key distinction here is between Being conceived as something "given" through poetic language's disclosure, and Being as something that refuses knowledge, subtracts itself from knowledge. This distinction is borne of Badiou's innovative claim that mathematics equals ontology, that the discourse of set-theory is also the discourse of ontology. Badiou's set-theoretical ontology is a "subtractive" one in which Being is never "given"; Being eludes our grasp. Where Heidegger, in a criticism of the rise of the Platonic *idea*, refers to "The chasm, *khōrismos*...torn open between the merely apparent Beings here below and the real Being somewhere up there," Badiou contrastingly places "real Being" far "below" and beyond the appearance of reality in a subtracted realm beyond knowledge.⁵¹ In Meillassoux's *After Finitude* (2009), he proposes that contemporary philosophy attempt to present an ontology in which "*Being* is not co-extensive with *manifestation*."⁵² That is, to present ontology which, by correlation, does not depend on appearance, an assertion of Being that does not depend on its disclosure. This distinction between Being in its givenness, its encapsulation in the word, and Being-qua-Being's subtraction from presence to a realm beyond language is at the heart of Badiou's relationship with Heidegger.⁵³ Once we have coloured this distinction between presence and subtraction, we can proceed towards a discussion of poetic language and the central silence we determined above.

For the young Heidegger, "*Ontology is possible only as phenomenology*."⁵⁴ This maxim is intended to overcome the forgetting of Being enacted via the development of dogmatic metaphysical systems aiming to approach the figure of objective "true" reality, often using the resources of mathematics.⁵⁵ For Heidegger, mathematics partakes in the elision of phenomena, lending itself to knowledge of mere objective presence, the enduring substantiality of Descartes' *res extensa*; Descartes "not only goes amiss ontologically in his definition of the world, [but his] interpretation and its foundations lead him to *pass over* the phenomenon of world."⁵⁶ Further, according to Badiou in *Being and Event*, mathematics for Heidegger contributes to our blindness towards Being: "mathematics...is not, for Heidegger, a path which opens onto the original question [of Being]...mathematics is rather blindness itself...the foreclosure of thought by knowledge."⁵⁷ For Heidegger, fields of knowledge grounded in the objective presence of beings fail to take into account Being itself; the radical efficacy of thought, insofar as it can approach Being, is elided.

This antipathy towards mathematics is decisive for the relationship between Heidegger and Badiou. Quoting from Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Badiou writes:

If "with the interpretation of being as *ιδέα* there is a rupture with regard to the authentic beginning," it is because what gave an indication, under the name of *φύσις*, of an originary link between being and appearing – presentation's guise of presence – is reduced to the rank of subtracted, impure, inconsistent given, whose sole opening forth is the cut-out of the Idea, and particularly, from Plato to Galileo – and Cantor – the mathematical Idea.⁵⁸

Badiou is faithful to this Platonic interpretation of Being as *idea*, declining the intimate tie between Being and appearance affected in Heidegger's interpretation of Being as *φύσις* – *phusis*. Being *comes to Presence* for Heidegger. For Heidegger, the word *phusis* expresses an understanding of the Being of beings, where this Being refers at once to the emergence, the persistent presence, and to the autonomous unfolding of each being *in itself*:

Now what does the word *phusis* say? It says what emerges from itself (for example, the emergence, the blossoming, of a rose), the unfolding that opens up, the coming-into-appearance in such unfolding, and holding itself and persisting in appearance – in short, the emerging-abiding sway.⁵⁹

The etymology of *phusis* lies in *phuō*, meaning “I grow.” In *phusis*, however, there is not only this character of growth, emergence and becoming “from itself” – of “the rising of the sun,” the “surging of the sea” or “the growth of plants.”⁶⁰ There is also the “holding sway,” the persistence in presence of what appears. *Phusis* is both emergence and holding sway at once – “emerging sway.” We may observe the key distinction to bear in mind throughout what follows, then: for Heidegger Being and appearance are originally linked – Being *comes to Presence* – whereas Badiou interprets Being qua Being following the advent of the mathematical *idea* in Plato, forcing a radical separation of Being from appearance; Being is radically subtracted from Presence. All that can be exhibited of Being is its radical lack, and this is the central silence to which the “modern poem” must attest.⁶¹

For Heidegger, Being as *phusis* is veiled, forgotten: “it is precisely Being *as such* that remains concealed, remains in oblivion.”⁶² Poetic language, however, can emit a thought of Being. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger asserts language’s originary access to Being: “In the word, in language, things first come to be and are.”⁶³ That is, it is only via the foundation language provides that Being arises. He then claims the following:

Even if we had a thousand eyes and a thousand ears, a thousand hands and many other senses and organs, if our essence did not stand within the power of language, then all Beings would remain closed off to us – the Beings that we ourselves are, no less than the Beings we are not.⁶⁴

For Heidegger, language is not merely *used* to access our “essence” or the Being of beings, it is *necessary* in Being’s disclosure. Crucially, it is poetic language specifically which offers this access. For Heidegger, poetic language is the archetypal living language and should be treated as prior to the everyday communicative languages we speak; it is fundamental, “the elementary emergence into words, the becoming-uncovered, of existence as Being-in-the-world.”⁶⁵ More, our everyday language serves to obscure

the poetic word's originary access to Being, especially when reduced to what, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger refers to as "idle-talk." In idle-talk our "understanding" fails to "come to a being toward" what is talked about – a "primordial understanding" is forsaken: "One understands not so much the beings talked about; rather, one already only listens to what is spoken about as such."⁶⁶ Idle-talk is the amplification of this "listening" to the detriment of "being toward," such that Being-in-the-world becomes closed off, "covering over innerworldly beings."⁶⁷ However, beyond idle-talk, the language of consensus and dead language, we may still maintain that Being is disclosed to us through language, that "those who create with words are the guardians of this [house of Being]."⁶⁸

For Heidegger, then, poetic language is capable of primordial access to Being. However, this is by necessity access to an originary silence too. In Heidegger's writings, this silence, this ontological negative space, figures as "the Nothing." Heidegger begins "What is Metaphysics?" (1929) by supposing that science, which "determines our existence," takes "solely Beings and beyond that – nothing" as its object of study, failing in the process to account for the "nothing" thus invoked.⁶⁹ Science, it is claimed, "wishes to know nothing of the nothing."⁷⁰ Yet in expressing what it deems to be its essence – its investigation of Beings themselves and nothing more – it calls on the nothing for help.⁷¹ This nothingness is revealed to Dasein via a specific mood or "attunement," that of anxiety.⁷² Heidegger provides a topology of thinking the Nothing in *Being and Time* and "What is Metaphysics?" In the latter, the Nothing is taken as an entity in itself; that is, "the Nothing" is to be distinguished from simply "not." In the Nothing, then, we find the always present power of "nihilation": not the potential destruction of all things, but the immanent possibility that all things might not have come to be as they are; a grounding nothing which when experienced through anxiety belies the fact that, on a basic level, there is a difference between "something" and "nothing." For, if one is anxious, one's experience of Being-in-the-world, one's feeling of the totality of all things (mode or attunement revealing Dasein's "Being in the midst of things as a whole") forces that whole into meaninglessness, insignificance and irrelevance.⁷³ Then, from the standpoint of the Nothing, from an experience of anxiety, Beings once again arise: "In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of Beings as such arises: that they are Beings – and not nothing."⁷⁴

The Nothing is conceivable as the limit of the meaning of Being, a horizon from which we may turn back and reassess our Being-in-the-

world. It is also conceivable, however, as the always-present source of the "light" or openness of Being, the dark shadow that accompanies all disclosure. The topology of the Nothing is comprised, then, of both the fact that it results from a particular mood (rather than Being the mood itself) which is revealed in a certain mode of Being of Dasein, and its ontological privilege as ground or source, as always present in and constitutive of Being. There is evidence to suggest that Celan was aware of the philosophical issues surrounding Being and the Nothing, not least in his poem "Speak, You Also" from the 1955 collection *Von Schwelle Zu Schwelle*. Celan's second stanza reads:

Speak –
But keep yes and no unsplit.
And give your say this meaning:
give it the shade.⁷⁵

To keep "yes and no unsplit" requires that we think them non-disjunctively. Rather, the assertion of one is always already to include the other; they are mutually implicated. For, one can only speak of the Nothing in relation to the Being of what is, and in turn, the Nothing is the source of Being, the source of presence. The final line of the fourth stanza – "He speaks truly who speaks the shade" – demands the poet breach language from within in order to approach "truth," that which lies beyond the intelligible light cast by everyday speech; the "real darkness" produced in the twentieth century demands its reflection in the poet's language, demands that poetics shifts to reassess its own relation to Being and truth, and by correlation, the Nothing too.⁷⁶

Heidegger continues in "What is Metaphysics":

For human existence, the nothing makes possible the openedness of Beings as such. The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of Beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding as such.⁷⁷

In any poetic "thought of Being," "the Nothing" is always already invoked. The Nothing is afforded an even more "fixed" place in the phenomenological ontology developed through *Being and Time*. Therein, "the

Nothing" is equated precisely with "the world": "What crowds in upon us is not this or that, nor is it everything objectively present together as a sum, but the *possibility* of things, at hand in general, that is, the world itself...what anxiety is about exposes nothing, that is, the world as such..."⁷⁸ The Nothing, as ground, figures as the empty structure of "world," and it is on the basis of "world" that the Being of Beings can unfold. The limits of Heidegger's "thought of Being" are marked by the limits of specifically human Being, for the question of Being arises via Dasein. "The Nothing" as "world," which "ontologically belongs essentially to the Being of Dasein as Being-in-the-world," occupies a fundamental position in Heidegger's thought, then; it is constitutive of the entire plane through which and on which his philosophy is enacted.⁷⁹ And this is a plane that Badiou's ontological reversal can interrogate from the outside.

In Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe's *Poetry as Experience* (1999), the relationship between veiled Being and the Nothing is complicated further. For Lacoue-Labarthe,

the poem's "wanting-not-to-say" does not *want* not to say. A poem wants to say; indeed, it is nothing but pure wanting-to-say. But pure wanting-to-say nothing, nothingness, that against which and through which there is presence, what is.⁸⁰

These lines follow the delineation of a key difficulty in thinking poetry's capacity to approach or grasp Being. The poem, Lacoue-Labarthe contends, always seeks to indicate or show its own source, that from which it has "sprung." Celan makes a similar point in his Meridian speech: the poem takes its position at the edge of itself, but it also "calls and fetches itself from its now-no-longer back into its as-always."⁸¹ There are two crucial points to be drawn from the Lacoue-Labarthe quotation above. First, Being – the poem's source – is aligned, as we have seen, with nothingness. Second, in attempting to approach its own source, in its "wanting-to-say," the poem cannot push beyond its own edge, its source is precisely a nothingness that the poem cannot reach. The poem is only capable of presenting what *is*, having come up against this nothingness; for presence (Being-present) can only arise "against" and "through" this (originary) nothingness. The question of Being is permeated by the question of access to Being. Lacoue-Labarthe presents the crux of this question following a reading of Hölderlin's "The Rhine." The source," the

pure sprung forth," is characterised by Hölderlin as an "enigma"; "the song can hardly reveal it."⁸² Lacoue-Labarthe concludes his reading by stating that the poem, having testified to the source's inaccessibility, also stands as the "stark reminder that *in this place*, it was revealed to so many visitors that the source (of the poem, the song) had dried up. And that previously it had indeed been an enigma that sprang forth."⁸³ The aura of Being is covered over, the source has dried up. The Nothing through which Being unfolds can only be gestured towards via the metaphorical ecstasy of poetic language.

It is this veiling, this aura, which Badiou aims to reverse. The thought of Being produced by the poem in Badiou's philosophy testifies to something far more solid, universal, determined. In *Being and Event*, the distinction between subtracted Being and the Heideggerian "oblivion" or withdrawal of Being is determined as follows:

The "subtractive" is opposed here, as we shall see, to the Heideggerian thesis of a withdrawal of being. It is not in the withdrawal-of-its-presence that being foments the forgetting of its original disposition to the point of assigning us – us at the extreme point of nihilism – to a poetic "over-turning." No, the ontological truth is both more restrictive and less prophetic: it is in being foreclosed from presentation that being as such is constrained to be sayable, for humanity, within the imperative effect of a law, the most rigid of all conceivable laws, the law of demonstrative and formalizable inference.⁸⁴

The Heideggerian thesis that Badiou rejects here is the melancholy "withdrawal-of-being," the assertion that the "truth of Being," as Heidegger remarks in his *Letter on Humanism* and his earlier writings, has been consigned to "oblivion."⁸⁵ However, whereas Heidegger continues to assert the primacy of language in being able to produce a thought of obscured, veiled Being through the workings of poetic metaphor, Badiou overturns this melancholy vision – the "end" of Being, effaced by the modern age – by maintaining fidelity to Being's complete *foreclosure* from presentation. Being qua Being is no longer an "enigma" that "springs forth" but is instead radically subtracted, lacking.

Badiou nonetheless is clear that "the poem" itself "never ceased."⁸⁶ Further, the poem remains fundamentally an exploration in language of presence. However, for Badiou, following the Platonic turn, the poem now figures as (in its "immemorial nature") the "temptation" of a return to

"presence and rest."⁸⁷ This nostalgia for presence enacted in poetry is not due to a loss or a forgetting of Being as Heidegger would have it, but rather to the "interruption" caused by the advent of mathematics: "This nostalgia, latent thereafter in every great poetic enterprise, is not woven from the forgetting of being: on the contrary, it is woven from the pronunciation of being in its subtraction by mathematics in its effort of thought."⁸⁸ There is a reversal of Heidegger's thought here, for the melancholy "forgetting of being" to which he testifies, is replaced by the very precise "pronunciation" of Being following in reaction to the subtraction of Being from presence. This overturning of melancholy is reflected in Badiou's discussion of Being and the void in the early pages of *Being and Event*. Therein, he claims that "being qua being does not in any manner let itself be approached, but solely allows itself to be *sutured* in its void to the brutality of a deductive consistency without aura."⁸⁹ The enigmatic aura of Being, approached in Heidegger by the metaphoric uniqueness of the poem, is overturned here. Inconsistent Being qua Being, for Badiou, is radically subtracted from presence, and is only presentable insofar as it is brutally counted, made consistent, by set-theoretical discourse. The void, insofar as it testifies to Being qua Being's inconsistency beyond the discourse it is written in, is the emblem of the nothing of Being, its inconsistency, its radical subtraction.

In its nostalgia for that "Being," subtracted from presence, the poem pursues "the impossible *filling in* of the void"; in its attempts to once more reveal Being in presence, the poem stumbles against Being's subtraction, revealing the primacy of the void of Being instead.⁹⁰ Badiou declares that the epoch in which poetry is conceivable as the abundant representation of Being "bursting forth" within nature, in which poetry's saying is deemed the necessary conduit in re-approaching Being – which has been foreclosed and concealed since Plato – is now over.

In his appraisal of Celan in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, Badiou writes that, following Celan's poetry, "the thinking of our epoch cannot come from an open space, from a grasp of the Whole."⁹¹ Badiou's surreptitious uses of "open space" and "Whole" mark his departure from Heidegger specifically. To reiterate two key findings in our investigation above: in "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger claims both that we "certainly do find ourselves stationed in the midst of beings that are somehow revealed as a whole," and that "No matter how fragmented our everyday existence appears to be...it always deals with beings in a unity of the 'whole'."⁹² Further, the Nothing, as we have seen, "makes itself known with beings

and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole"; beyond the whole, nothing.⁹³ We must conceive the Nothing here as the ground of the Whole, the empty "world as such" through which presence arises and in which presence endures. However, the Nothing is merely the plot from which presence grows, it does not lie outside the world of things, but rather grounds them; there is no outside, "even Nothing 'belongs' to 'Being.'"⁹⁴ We in effect burrow through what is already made available to us from within; there is no outside point. This is reflected in Heidegger's apprehension of the Nothing in anxiety, for upon returning from the Nothing, what *already* existed is viewed anew as meaningful. Badiou's reading of Celan, however, invites us to go beyond this Whole and its grounding Nothing. Another way to put this is to say that we must overcome a thinking of the Whole contingent upon a certain interpretation of Being; in order to understand what Badiou is writing, we must replace Heidegger's interpretation of Being as *phusis* with Badiou's alternative conception of Being in which mathematics comprises the "ontological text."

The crux of the movement that Badiou charts away from Heidegger through Celan is revealed here, then, for the first "lesson" Badiou learns from Celan is the following:

contrary to the declarations of the modern sophists, there is indeed a fixed point. Not everything is caught in the slippage of language games or the immaterial variability of their occurrences. Being and truth, even if now stripped of any grasp upon the Whole, have not vanished. One will find that they are precariously rooted at the point where the Whole offers up its own nothingness.⁹⁵

We can characterise one of the tasks that Badiou sets himself as the attempt to find an outside point from which what already exists – what is deemed *to be* – can be interrogated, its spaces re-designated. This "fixed point" beyond language refers specifically to mathematics. When Badiou implores us to "listen to Celan" bear witness to "what is fixed (...what remains and endures),"⁹⁶ he is referring to what in *Being and Event* he calls the "infinite possibility of an ontological text" opened up by the Greeks following the advent of the mathematical *idea*.⁹⁷ In poetry, then, for Badiou, thought is projected *in* language to a fixed destination *beyond* language; "Only the poem accumulates the means of thinking outside-place, or beyond all place, 'on some vacant or superior surface.'"⁹⁸

Thought attempts to get outside the myth-making, metaphorical exigencies of language – in other words thought no longer simply provides the conduit between language and Being – because, for Badiou, modern poetic language can only testify to a radical “lack” of Being in presence, the emblem of which is “the void.” For Badiou, this void, the empty set (\emptyset), is the central silence to which the poem’s thought of Being attests. The crucial sentence in Badiou’s writing on Celan, concerning Being, truth, and the void, appears in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*: “One will find that [Being and truth] are precariously rooted at the point where the Whole offers up its own Nothingness.”⁹⁹ This rooting dispels any aura or mystery surrounding Being; it is fixed at a point beyond the limits of language, subjected to the rigour of the matheme. For Badiou: “the Age of Poets is completed, it is also necessary to de-suture philosophy from its poetic condition. Which means that it is no longer required today that disobjectivation and disorientation be stated in the poetic metaphor. Disorientation can be *conceptualized*.”¹⁰⁰ The conceptualisation of Being in the matheme interrupts the poem, and for Badiou, this is to allow a “thought of Being.”¹⁰¹

We conclude with a brief consideration of “truth,” towards which we have only gestured so far. In his reading of Celan’s *Es Kommt* (from *Zeitgehöft: Spät Gedichte aus dem Nachlass*, 1976), Badiou invokes the nature of truth and ties it to the void. He writes: “A truth is unbound, and it is toward this unbound, toward this local point where the binding is undone, that the poem operates – in the direction of presence.”¹⁰² The emblem of the void, which is precisely the “local point” attested to above, binds together the inconsistency of Being – the unbound – and truth itself; truth derives from inconsistency, from subtracted Being. Not only does the void qua emblem stand in for the Heideggerian Nothing following the subtraction of Being, it also marks the point from which truth derives; it is from inconsistent Being, from the unbound, and this is the crux of Celan’s closure of the Age of Poets. Celan testifies to the fixed point of this inconsistency, and therefore, for Badiou, to the removal of the philosophical burden placed on the poem.

Badiou invokes Celan’s “I have cut bamboo...” from *Die Niemandrose* (1963) to conclude his reading:

The cane that roots here, tomorrow
will still be standing, wherever your
soul plays you in un-
boundedness¹⁰³

In testifying to truth's connection to inconsistency, Celan, in Badiou's reading, rescinds the burden placed upon the poem by philosophy throughout the Age of Poets. For Badiou, through its invocation of a radically charged nothingness from which both thought and truths spring – this "local point where the binding is undone" – Celan's poetry points beyond itself in order to "free the poem from its speculative parasites, to restore it to the fraternity of its time, where it will thereafter have to dwell side by side in thought with the matheme, love and political invention."¹⁰⁴

Badiou incisively places Paul Celan at the threshold between Being as *phusis* and Being as radical subtraction and inconsistency. Further, it is in the "central silence" of any poetic thought of Being that we find the means to begin unravelling the tension between these two approaches to Being, for this silence allows us to force key parallels between the nature of poetic isolation and the nature of thought Being. So far we have only plotted the coordinates that the knot Badiou/Heidegger/Celan comprises – *phusis*, *idea*, Presence, subtraction, the Nothing, the void. These coordinates, however, ground further discussion concerning Badiou and the poem, "a negative machinery, which utters being, or the idea, at the very point where the object has vanished."¹⁰⁵ The specific nature of this poetic idea, an idea of subtracted being, of pure nothingness, demands further engagement. And this is to state the importance too of the relationship between philosophy and poetry attested to by Badiou, problematized via Celan's embodiment of philosophy's suture with poetry and this suture's disintegration. Badiou's reading of Celan, more than his protracted engagement with Mallarmé, for example, opens up the questions surrounding this suture – the intimacy of poetic thought and philosophy, the capacity for other discourses besides poetry to "think Being" or to produce truths, the distance between language and Being, the interruption of the matheme. Further, by emphasising the importance of his encounter with Celan, we become immersed in Badiou's departures not only from Heidegger, but also from contemporary Heideggerian interlocutors like Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe.

By privileging Badiou's reading of Celan, we also privilege the roles of silence and subtractive being in any attempt to approach the above

questions. And this is to place the knot comprised by Badiou/ Heidegger/ Celan at the centre of continuing discussion surrounding Badiou's contemporary writing on subtraction and negation.¹⁰⁶ By invoking departures from Heidegger, Badiou's encounter with Celan also opens up contemporary discussions concerning philosophical approaches to Romanticism, or the "romantic glorification" of art described in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*.¹⁰⁷ Questions inherent to the study of Romanticism – concerning infinity, incarnation and transcendence in artistic practice – can be traced from the mid-twentieth-century philosophical-poetical considerations we have encountered here, all the way up to Badiou's 2006 manifesto for contemporary artistic practice – "Third Sketch of A Manifesto of Affirmationist Art" – which takes "art as a suffering and radiant exhibition of the flesh, that is, art as the carnal installation of finitude" as its point of departure.¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, as the key figure Badiou associates with philosophical Romanticism, is crucial to any understanding of Badiou's contemporary engagements with the poem and artistic practice; and it is through Celan that the relationship between Badiou and Heidegger is brought into focus.

• Notes •

¹ That philosophy is "conditioned" from without is a key tenet of Badiou's philosophical system. Producing no truths of its own, philosophy thinks the truth procedures produced in art, politics, love and science. See Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2008), 23: "Philosophy is prescribed by conditions that constitute types of truth or generic-procedure. These types are science (more precisely, the matheme), art (more precisely, the poem), politics (more precisely, politics in interiority, or a politics of emancipation) and love (more precisely the procedure that makes truth of the disjunction of sexuated positions). Philosophy is the place of thought where the 'there is' (*il y a*) of these truths, and their compossibility, is stated."

² Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 548.

³ Jean Jacques Lecercle's *Badiou & Deleuze Read Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) contains one of the more thorough investigations into how, if at all, Badiou (and Deleuze) can justify privileging the artists and writers they do. See also Badiou's essay "Art and Philosophy" in *Handbook of Inaesthetics* trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005) for more on the "inaesthetic" relationship he postulates between philosophy and art.

⁴ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 200.

⁵ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, trans. Norman Madarasz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 70-71. Emphasis original.

⁶ *Ibid*, 69.

⁷ *Ibid*, 77.

- ⁸ Ibid, 70.
- ⁹ Ibid, 70
- ¹⁰ Badiou, *Conditions*, 36. Emphasis original.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² See, for example, *Argumentum E Silentio: International Paul Celan Symposium*, ed. Amy D. Colin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986)
- ¹³ Michael Hamburger, *The Truth of Poetry* (London: Anvil, 1968), 290.
- ¹⁴ Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 82.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 83.
- ¹⁶ Ibid, 84-5.
- ¹⁷ Badiou, "Third Sketch of A Manifesto of Affirmationist Art" in *Polemics*, trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 148.
- ¹⁸ Cited in Badiou, *The Century*, 86.
- ¹⁹ Ibid, 85.
- ²⁰ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 56.
- ²¹ Badiou, *The Century*, 94. Emphasis original.
- ²² Ibid, 89.
- ²³ Ibid, 88.
- ²⁴ Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe. *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12.
- ²⁵ Paul Celan, "The darkened splinterecho...", in *Snow Part/Schneepart*, trans. Ian Fairley (Manchester: Carcanet, 2007), 153.
- ²⁶ Badiou, *The Century*, 89.
- ²⁷ Badiou, "Language, Thought, Poetry," in *Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Ray Brassier & Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2006), 241.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 240.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid, 239.
- ³¹ Ibid, 240.
- ³² Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (Abingdon: Routledge Ltd., 2008), 147.
- ³³ Celan, "The Meridian," in *Paul Celan: Selections*, ed. Pierre Joris (London: University of California Press, 2005), 163. Emphasis original.
- ³⁴ See "Todesfugue", in Paul Celan, *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1995), 62-63.
- ³⁵ Celan, "The Meridian," 180.
- ³⁶ See J.K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, (1951-1970)* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006), 32-4.
- ³⁷ Celan, "With a Variable Key," in *Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1995), 91.
- ³⁸ John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 73.
- ³⁹ Celan, "Below," in *Selected Poems*, 113.
- ⁴⁰ The "eyes" of this first stanza require some excavation. In Lyon's *Paul Celan & Martin Heidegger* we find a brief reference to Celan's use of the image of the eye. His usage follows, Lyon claims, the conflation of the optical – "that which is seen through discourse" – with speech found in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, reflecting the use of synaesthesia in poetry. According to Lyon "Celan took this notion a step farther in his poetry by relating human communication normally found in spoken language in the image of communicating through the eye" (See Lyon, 16). Language operates as something which uncovers or makes apparent, presents things to be "seen."
- ⁴¹ Celan, "Below."
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 51.
- ⁴⁴ Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: from Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 190.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 23.

- ⁴⁸ For an important discussion of Badiou's response to Heidegger's "Open" in terms of finitude/infinity and "the God of the Poets" see Christopher Watkin's *Difficult Atheism: Post-theological Thinking in Alain Badiou, Jean-Luc Nancy and Quentin Meillassoux* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 60-72.
- ⁴⁹ Badiou, *Wittgenstein's Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2011), 117.
- ⁵⁰ Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), xiv.
- ⁵¹ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried & Richard Polt (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 111. For further discussion of the Platonic *idea* see Badiou, "Nature: poem or matheme?" in *Being and Event*, as well as his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* and Heidegger's *Introduction to Metaphysics*.
- ⁵² Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), 14. Emphasis original.
- ⁵³ See Badiou, "Nature: Poem or matheme?" in *Being and Event*.
- ⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), 33. Emphasis original.
- ⁵⁵ In *Being and Time*, in a discussion of Cartesian ontology, Heidegger claims the following, revealing the confusion that results when the traditional adoption of mathematics as relating to ontology is left unchallenged: "Descartes does not allow the kind of being of innerworldly beings to present itself, but rather prescribes to the world... its 'true' being on the basis of an idea of being (being = constant presence) the source of which has not been revealed and the justification of which has not been demonstrated... This ontology is determined by a basic ontological orientation toward being as constant objective presence, which mathematical knowledge is exceptionally well suited to grasp." Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 94.
- ⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93-4.
- ⁵⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 9.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 125.
- ⁵⁹ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 15.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*.
- ⁶¹ Badiou's essay "The Philosophical Recourse to the Poem," in *Conditions*, develops this notion with reference specifically to the poetic "Idea".
- ⁶² Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 20.
- ⁶³ *Ibid*, 15.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 86.
- ⁶⁵ Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, cited in Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (Abingdon: Routledge Ltd., 1999), 177.
- ⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 162.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 163.
- ⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 147.
- ⁶⁹ Martin Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Ibid*, 47.
- ⁷⁰ *Ibid*.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid*.
- ⁷² See Heidegger, *Being and Time* §40.
- ⁷³ See *ibid*.
- ⁷⁴ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Basic Writings*, 52.
- ⁷⁵ Celan, "Speak you also," in *Selected Poems*, 101.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid*.
- ⁷⁷ Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?," in *Basic Writings*, 53.
- ⁷⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 181. Emphasis original.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid*.
- ⁸⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 20.
- ⁸¹ Celan, "The Meridian," in *Paul Celan: Selections*, 181.
- ⁸² In Michael Hamburger's translation, "A mystery are those of pure origin. / Even song may hardly unveil it." See Friedrich Hölderlin, *Selected Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1998).

- ⁸³ Lacoue-Labarthe, 19. Emphasis original.
- ⁸⁴ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 27.
- ⁸⁵ Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, 166.
- ⁸⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 126.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid.
- ⁸⁹ Ibid, 10. Emphasis original.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid, 127. Emphasis original.
- ⁹¹ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 32.
- ⁹² Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings*, 49-50.
- ⁹³ Ibid, 52.
- ⁹⁴ Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 89.
- ⁹⁵ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 33.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, 126.
- ⁹⁸ Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return to Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Justin Clemens and Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005), 99.
- ⁹⁹ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* 33.
- ¹⁰⁰ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 74.
- ¹⁰¹ See Badiou, *Being and Event* 126-7.
- ¹⁰² Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 33.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Badiou, *Manifesto for Philosophy*, 87.
- ¹⁰⁵ Badiou, "Language, Thought, Poetry" in *Theoretical Writings*, 242.
- ¹⁰⁶ See especially Benjamin Noys' *The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).
- ¹⁰⁷ Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, 3.
- ¹⁰⁸ Badiou, "A Manifesto for Affirmationist Art," 139. See also Watkin's *Difficult Atheism* for a key contemporary intervention on these issues.

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COLLISION

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The Missed

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics*, the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.



Andrew, Rich. "Fakebook," *Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 2 (2012): 49-55.

ABSTRACT

You meet someone new; you like them; you send them to your Facebook page. But how accurate is this representation of you? We all want to look our best, which is why we are drawn to the ability to fudge things a bit online. How does this projection of who we are distort us into who we want to be? Facebook allows us to hide our flaws that are all too visible in real life. We can embellish or correct what we said earlier, edit out what we don't like about ourselves, and only show photos where our chin is down and the lighting is blown out just enough to hide the bump on our nose. Our prospective employers can even turn to Facebook to assess our desirability. So might the constructed aesthetic of Facebook affect our approach to ethics – to interacting with other people? Does the way we design ourselves on Facebook directly impact the other people in our lives? Is each of us really just a rough draft that needs immediate editing? What about Facebook makes it possible to achieve genuine beauty?

KEYWORDS

Facebook, construct, beauty, fan, ethics

Fakebook

Rich Andrew



Facebook is a lie. The aestheticization of you that turns you into *mere* aesthetics. Your doppelganger is not Lea Michele, and you are so not prettier than she is. You do not have 799 close friends. You do not “live life to the fullest, and let what the haters say not bother you,” or else why break up with someone by changing your relationship status to single? 77 people dislike this.

Facebook is about constructing you. The you you want people to think you are. It’s about the aesthetic of you: what makes you desirable to other people. Societal standards measure this according to your physical beauty. But we all can’t be Kelly LeBrock, perfectly created on a computer by two geeks with bras on their heads.

Or maybe we can. Maybe they were onto something.

Oscar Wilde proposed that “by beautifying the outward aspects of life, one would beautify the inner ones.”¹ Facebook gives us the power not just to construct our own aesthetic but to thereafter control it. To

constantly tweak our thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a way that we can never do in the outside world. To edit, to filter – and yes, even Photoshop – ourselves until we are the stars of our own soap opera, entitled “My So-Called Life.” Only this time, even if we are Brian Krakow, we can morph into the über-desirable Jordan Catalano.

On Facebook, your beauty no longer rests literally on your head and shoulders. Aesthetic judgments of you take into account what you think, how you feel, what you like or dislike, how you came to be this person – what you post. In life, you might dress like a slob, work a boring job, and suffer perpetual bad hair days. But online, you don’t have to. Facebook tricks you into equating your personal aesthetic with the *order* of your profile page. Beauty by design.

Facebook reduces the sensorial experience of you by removing the sound of your voice, the touch of your skin, the smell of your perfume, the mannerisms of your bubbling personality. You become a cardboard cutout. Pixels, frozen in time, blips and phrases, icons and symbols. Fragments of you slotted into a profile. An Aristotelian kind of beauty – that is, a symmetrical kind – arises when you can quantify your life into well-laid-out posts, a sleek timeline of photos like a biographical artwork.² Your ordinary life now possesses a design that corrects every event into something more pleasing, more accessible, more grandiose. As you scroll down your page, a selective history of your best thoughts, your funniest quips, and oh yeah, that exotic trip to the Cayman Islands, works to enhance your desirability.

Facebook even does away with the social rankings of the outside world that normally lower desirability. Factoids like your loser job are displayed in a tiny font, easily overlooked; usurped by your latest status updates in a larger font, photo blocks of your friends, playable playlists of your cutting-edge music. The focus of judgment switches from your physical attractiveness and moneymaking capabilities to factors that you can control.

Even the proportions of the page keep the attention on you. Your profile picture is always bigger than your friends’ pictures. Your status updates are in a larger font than your friends’ comments, which can even be truncated into a collapsible link. Life becomes design, inherently beautiful because of its pleasing symmetry. And you reap the benefits: Facebook even autotunes you into the smart, funny, relevant, well-put-

together person you aren't. You *achieve* beauty through Facebook's layout: its beauty beautifies its inner content.

But who we are quickly becomes bastardized into who we want to be: celebrity versions of ourselves. And boy, do we act like it. Picking and choosing who's allowed into our elite inner circle, who's allowed to read our deepest thoughts, get our inside jokes, comment on the most exciting or mundane goings-on of our day. *And who is not.* A hierarchy is formed. A barrier. A proscenium arch that creates distance from friends and turns them into fans. Yes, Tina Darling, there are even actual fan pages. Strangers can subscribe to your page and tune in to watch because these are the days of our lives. Your page is inundated with heated debates, based on a fleeting thought you posted on your wall over lunch. You – who posts pictorial evidence of your own alcoholism – have the ~~right~~ duty to publish daily affirmations, telling your friends how to live their lives because people do care what you have to say. Your wall is actual proof.

The flaw in Facebook's valorizing daily life is that it also fabricates its importance. (Isn't Facebook different from Duchamp? Isn't it just plain vanity, where Duchamp is the opposite?) Nobody cares what you had for breakfast. In the outside world, you edit yourself constantly, answering "Fine" to every "How are you?", but online, something edits out your editing mechanism. You say anything and everything, and nothing you say is of any consequence because everything is. Every thought has the same shape, symmetry, and size. There is no inflection that would normally reveal how we should rank offhanded remarks in relation to, say, the death of your cat or your wedding engagement. The importance is built into the symmetry, so you start to believe that whatever you say *is* important – or can be – or should be. You don't have camera crews exploiting your every move for some reality show, but you do have a Facebook page – which shows you what it feels like to have adoring fans. A friend's "happy birthday" post is but a speck in the white noise that consumes your page, buried under the myriad of other nameless, faceless "happy birthday" posts.

A site that touts the ideals of bringing people together cements its popularity through exclusivity. Facebook started as a site that you needed a special invitation to join from someone who was already special. From the very beginning, it banked on our latent desire for celebrity status. To become desirable, you must be elite: a circle of friends with you at its center. For people to enter the circle, they must first be approved and

accepted by you. You decide what is seen on your page. You pose the topic of conversation. You allow the dialogue to continue, and you delete someone's comment when you deem it too combative for your tastes – or more accurately, your aesthetic. When necessary, you remove someone's presence from your world altogether. You block them into oblivion where they can no longer see or search for you; in all respects, they don't exist to you. With one click, you have the power to make people cease to exist! Now if that's not the illusion of omnipotence and megalomania, I don't know what is.

Facebook by design generates the delusion that you are the center of the universe. News flash – you're not; not even if Rihanna follows your feed; not even if you are Rihanna. But that didn't stop the Catholic Church, and it sure as hell won't stop you. As your circle builds, so does your ego. And the quantitative aspects of Facebook's design only perpetuate this delusion. Numbers become important: you have more friends than someone else – someone who is lesser because they have fewer friends. More people Like your posts. Unlike those of someone lesser, whose posts garner few Likes or no Likes, no further conversation, no relevance, no contribution. The more pictures you have, the more events you're invited to, the more followers you have, the fuller a life you lead. I am > you. You are < me. Something that was once intangible – the way your friends feel about you – Liking someone, Liking their words, and *how much* Liking that involves – now has a measurable unit. The more units you have, the wealthier you are. It is a unit of acceptance.

We like having a number that denotes how people feel about us, rather than the ambiguous and fluctuating feelings of flesh-and-blood human beings. To find out how a person really feels, we must make an effort – talk face-to-face. But that just makes you vulnerable; being vulnerable in front of someone gives them power.

Levinas said that all interactions and the ethical decisions they involve are modeled on the face-to-face encounter. The experience of seeing someone's face in front of you is equivalent to that person saying, "Don't kill me. Don't hurt me." Meeting face-to-face gives someone the power to harm you, to make you laugh or cry – and it burdens you with the responsibility of not hurting them.³ By interacting online, we remove ourselves from these responsibilities. We protect ourselves; we take away a person's power to hurt us; and we eliminate the necessity of ethics.

Even our way of creatively representing ourselves on Facebook – an aesthetic act – affects the way we treat others – an ethical act. The decision to alter your aesthetic – let’s say, by changing your relationship status back to single – can be an ethical choice as well, especially when you do it *in lieu of* breaking up in person, knowing full well that everyone on your friend list will be promptly notified that “You have changed your relationship status to single.” Including your girlfriend. And she may be the last to know. Even removing your wedding ring is not as publicly hurtful as a slight alteration on Facebook can be. Post the wrong pic with the right bong hit or exposed body part, and you may have ruined someone’s life. Am I right, Kate Moss, Anthony Weiner? Do the consequences matter if your numbers go up? If people Like it, does that make it okay? What kind of person treats their “friends” like this? We no longer think about others’ feelings because we’re not really dealing with them. We treat them like the hollow cardboard cutout that they are. Facebook allows us to maintain our relationships with the minimum amount of work. It’s too time-consuming to meet everyone for coffee. Hearing the emotion a person intends in their words is much too tedious when you can just project your own sarcasm onto a tweet and continue that fight you’re having for no reason.

And when we really do, by some horrible (mis)happenstance, actually come face-to-face, we have become so ethically de-skilled that we put our lives on hold to check our lives online. Your phone notifies you of every post with a gleefully obnoxious sound, so that you can re-enter the celebrity game at a moment’s notice. There is no need to listen to the person sitting across from you. You skimmed their page today. Twice! Commented three times. You are such a good friend. Real conversation is redundant.

The quality of face-to-face interaction goes down as we care less about each other in the moment and focus more on maintaining our by-design aesthetic. We can’t give each other the time of day anymore? Is this what we’ve become? Well, have you looked around the street lately? Of course you haven’t; you’re too busy staring down at your phone. There we are, hunched over like Neanderthals, eyes glued to the phone in our hands, our thumbs – thank God for those opposable thumbs – typing away, hoping our peripheral vision keeps us from bumping into a bus –

Instead of enjoying the lived human experience with actual sense perceptions – we document it. We squash it into a gif, caption, archive.

Experience is a rough draft that needs immediate editing. Instead of telling the whole story, we would rather tell the best story, starring the best version of ourselves that is too hard to live. It's our John Malkovich. That's why Maxine told Lotte, "Only in the Malkovich." She was better in the Malkovich. Sometimes life needs a little dressing up in order to be bearable – or do I mean beautiful? I suppose even Mona Lisa needs a frame. Sigh.

• Notes •

¹ Wilde, Oscar. "The English Renaissance." Quoted in Ellman, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. New York: Knopf, 1988, 164.

² "The chief forms of beauty are order and symmetry and definiteness, which the mathematical sciences demonstrate in a special degree." Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1078a.

³ Several of Levinas' essays are preoccupied with this idea, including several chapters in: Levinas, Emmanuel. *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

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ABSTRACT

The following essay brings together philosophy and film. On the one hand, it is a short study of Hegel’s chapter on morality in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. On the other hand, it deals with some of the moral conflicts presented in Ingmar Bergman’s 1961 film, *Through a Glass Darkly*. Central to my discussion is the concept of God. I aim to show how God, manifest in absolute Spirit, should not be understood as a transcendental figure located in a beyond, but as a concrete entity found within the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation.

KEYWORDS

Hegel, Bergman, morality, conscience, recognition

Becoming Spirit: Morality in Hegel's *Phenomenology* and Bergman's *Through a Glass Darkly*

Magdalena Wisniowska

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel reveals Spirit's true nature in Chapter VI. C., "Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality." Here, he describes how God manifests in the moment of reciprocal recognition that characterises the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Hegel writes,

The reconciling *Yea*, in which the two 'I's let go their antithetical *existence*, is the *existence* of the 'I' which has expanded into a duality, and therein remains identical with itself, and, in its complete externalisation and opposite, possesses the certainty of itself: it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowledge.¹

With this, morality becomes religion. Hegel's determination of Absolute Knowledge is but a step away.

However, why morality stands in need of such transformation is by no means clear. Achieved as it is towards the end of a long section on

“Spirit,” morality represents something of an achievement. Only within the framework of morality can Spirit be said to be “self-certain,” and consciousness truly self-conscious. This is because moral self-consciousness is defined by a universal sense of duty. A moral self-consciousness understands that the law of duty according to which it acts is a product of its own rational nature. No longer is consciousness a kind of awareness characterised by a relation to an object distinct from it. As moral self-consciousness, consciousness can find itself within the world, which is now a place of its own making.

In the following, I will show why consciousness abandons this moral world – why it first turns inwards towards conscience and then later towards another consciousness in the discussion of religion. Central to my argument will be the concept of divinity. Though the appearance of God in the acts of forgiveness and reconciliation is dramatic, it is not the first time in this chapter, or indeed, in the *Phenomenology* as a whole, that Hegel makes reference to divinity. For one, moral self-consciousness posits a God as a kind of divine justification for its actions. Similarly, the person of conscience finds God in its divine and creative power to decide what is “right.” My essay will question the need to refer to divinity here at all. I will show how it hampers the very possibility of lasting happiness.

To make my case, I will refer to Ingmar Bergman’s 1961 film, *Through a Glass Darkly*. This is one of a number of Bergman films that deals with religious themes, and the first in what is generally recognised as a trilogy of work that confronts the concept of God.² What makes it peculiarly appropriate to a study of Hegel is the way it presents moral and religious conflict. Described as a “chamber film,” it follows four characters – husband and wife, father and son – through a single day.³ They begin their day in unity: the four characters emerge from the water together, talking and laughing. But the film ends with the disruption of their lives by the central character’s – Karin, played by Harriet Andersson – rapid descent into schizophrenia. Karin’s father, David (Gunnar Björnstrand), and brother, Minus (Lars Passgård), achieve reconciliation; but Karin and her husband Martin (Max von Sydow) do not.

These conflicts illuminate why Hegel finds that a transition from morality to religion is necessary, in part by clarifying the distinction between divinity and God. Karin and Martin cannot reconcile with one another because theirs is a world in which divinity holds sway. For Martin, this is a moral world, where the divine is associated with the need to say and do the “right thing.” For Karin, this is the imaginary world of voices,

ruled by a God in the shape of a spider, that tell her how to act. Indeed, it is the film's treatment of schizophrenia and morality that elucidates the connection between the inner voice of conscience and madness.

Contrastingly, David and Minus are able to reconcile because their world is one in which such divinity holds no power. They are capable of renouncing divinity, because they understand that it is the act of reconciliation itself which should be seen as Godlike.

• Morality •

Hegel's chapter on morality forms part of the larger section entitled "Spirit," and consists of three parts: A, "The moral view of the world"; B, "Dissemblance or Duplicity"; and C, "Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and forgiveness." In the first part, Hegel defines the moral worldview (*die moralische Weltanschauung*, with implicit reference to the moral philosophies of Kant and Fichte); in the second part he critiques morality; and in the final part, he demonstrates how the problems of the moral worldview can be overcome through the dialogue of two consciences (*das Gewissen*).

To understand what is at stake at this particular stage of the *Phenomenology*, it is best to refer to the distinction between the individual self and the legal person that Hegel makes when introducing the chapter. He writes,

The ethical world showed its fate and truth to be the Spirit that had merely passed away in it, the individual self. This legal person, however, has its Substance and fulfilment outside of that world. The movement of the world of culture and faith does away with this abstract of the person, and, through the completed alienation, through the ultimate abstraction, Substance becomes for Spirit at first the universal will, and finally Spirit's own possession...

In other words, self-consciousness has gained the mastery over the antithesis within consciousness itself. This antithesis rests on the antithesis of the certainty of self and of the object. Now however, the object is for consciousness itself the certainty of itself...⁴

As in his previous chapter on the ethical order and culture, Hegel's concern here is Spirit.⁵ Though the concept of Spirit is introduced as early as Chapter IV, only in Chapter VI, sections A and B, is it understood as a "form of the world" rather than a "form of consciousness."⁶ What Hegel is describing here is a collective rather than individual subject. He is referring to the spirit of a community or people as a whole.

This particular community is marked by its "self-certainty." As Hegel writes, "the object is for consciousness itself the certainty of itself."⁷ For Hegel, the "object" of consciousness includes everything in the external world, including the communities with which single consciousnesses interact. By saying that the object of Spirit is now the certainty of Spirit itself, he suggests that the collective consciousness characterising the spirit of the moral community is different from ordinary consciousness in that it no longer stands in antithesis to its object. As such it represents an altogether different kind of awareness. Instead of being an awareness characterised by a relation to a distinct object, moral consciousness can be said to be "self-aware."

In order to understand more of Hegel's definition of self-certain Spirit, it is useful to sketch something of the theoretical community he had in mind. This is an idea of community that arose in Germany after the political turmoil of the French Revolution and found its clearest expression in the moral philosophy of Kant. Within this community each individual acts morally, according to a sense of duty (*die Pflicht*). The community is defined through the morally acting individuals that comprise it.

As such, it does not seem that different from the communities found in the "ethical world" described in earlier chapters of the *Phenomenology*. As in the city-states of ancient Greece, citizens of the ethical world are aware of their roles in society and are happy fulfilling these roles: the ethical consciousness knows its duty and does it. However, there is a crucial distinction to be made between ethical and moral consciousnesses. Moral consciousness is characterised by a sense of universality that the ethical consciousness cannot claim. The moral individual acts according to a sense of duty precisely because he understands that this is the right thing to do; indeed, he understands it is a reasonable and rational thing to do. Whereas the inhabitants of what Hegel calls the ethical world are compelled to act according to principles that they may not fully understand, the members of the moral community act with full knowledge that their principles are rational. Unlike the

inhabitant of the ethical world, who simply accepts duty as part of his way of life, the moral individual is aware of the principle's rational nature.

The awareness that Hegel attributes to the moral individual places him in a relation to the community that is very different from the ethical individual's social relationships. Because the inhabitants of the ethical world do not fully understand the principles according to which they act, they cannot be fully aware of the role they have in the community that these principles shape. For them, the social life of the community is effectively foreign. On the other hand, the moral individual knows that the principle of duty, which binds him to the community, is part of the same rationality that he practices on a personal level. In this sense, the antithesis between the individual and social reality is overcome. This is what Hegel means when he describes Spirit as "self-certain," in other words, self-aware.

As a consequence, the moral individual can enjoy a new level of freedom. Unlike the previously described ethical individual or indeed the individual of culture, the moral individual understands that the universal law of duty is of his own rational making. He is, as Hegel describes in a later paragraph, an "active agent."⁸ He does not need to question the law or demand freedom from constraint because he "sees freedom as living and acting according to law."⁹ Within the "moral world view," consciousness finds hitherto unprecedented "peace and satisfaction."¹⁰

The question for Hegel is whether this is indeed the case – whether freedom and satisfaction in fact reside in morality, and whether Spirit's goal of possessing Substance can be fulfilled. In the first two parts of the chapter he tests these claims of moral self-consciousness. Following the method established throughout the *Phenomenology*, he takes what moral self-consciousness considers as true, and shows how this truth might be construed as inadequate. To summarise Hegel's argument would require a detailed and systematic analysis of Kant's and Fichte's moral philosophies; which has been done elsewhere.¹¹ Instead I would like to refer to Bergman and *Through a Glass Darkly*, to examine one aspect of Hegel's critique: the discrepancy between moral theory and its practice.

The scene that best illustrates this discrepancy occurs approximately a third of the way into the film, and consists of a conversation between the two central characters, Karin and her husband Martin. Karin has recently suffered from a prolonged spell of mental illness and, as her doctor, Martin has tried to be supportive throughout.

The scene begins with Karin walking into the bedroom and waking up her husband. She chides him for sleeping late, but when he realises that it is only five a.m., he suspects that there is something wrong. Karin confesses that, during the night, she read her father's diary, in which he wrote that her illness is incurable. Martin puts on his glasses and reassures her that this is not the case. He is lying – he was the one who initially described her illness in this way. He then starts to kiss her but she rejects his advances. At that point he gets out of bed and the camerawork changes. Whereas previously both characters were included in a single frame, now the camera cuts between Martin brushing his teeth and Karin standing in front of an open window. Visible behind Martin is a mirror with Karin's reflection. The following conversation takes place.

Karin: Imagine having a placid, rosy woman to give you children and coffee in bed. Someone big and soft and beautiful. Wouldn't you like that?

Martin: It's you I love.

Karin: I know but still...

Martin: I don't want anyone else.

Karin: You always say and do the right things and yet it is always wrong.

Martin: If I do the wrong thing it's from love.

Karin: Those who really love do right by those who they love.

Martin: Then you do not love me.¹²

On the one hand, Martin can be identified with moral self-consciousness. As Karin describes it, he always tries to do the "right" thing. He does what can be reasonably and rationally assumed as "right." Karin, on the other hand, can be seen as voicing Hegel's critique of moral self-consciousness. Martin says and does the right thing, but it is always wrong. He might make a moral case for his action, yet in actuality, this is not how his action is perceived. The two facets of his behaviour, theoretical and practical, stand in contradiction.

In this way, the film highlights the central problem of a moral worldview. Hegel describes moral self-consciousness as "self-certain." It fully identifies itself with the life of the moral community. However, moral

self-consciousness also needs to act. When it acts, it stands in a relation to something other than itself. Thus moral self-consciousness makes a distinction between morality and nature, duty and reality. For moral self-consciousness, it is duty that is of the essence.¹³ Reality – what Hegel generally refers to as nature – is both independent and morally meaningless. Hegel argues that such an unequal distinction leads to profound contradiction, which ultimately affects moral self-consciousness's ability to act.

The contradiction is threefold. First arises the problem of happiness.¹⁴ Moral individuals act out of a universal sense of duty. Martin, for example, tries to do what is "right." But these actions do not guarantee happiness. Throughout the film, Martin's actions only bring him suffering. Second, morality may contradict one's "natural" inclinations. Martin tries to do what is "right" but this means suppressing his desire for Karin. When she asks him not to kiss her, he stops immediately. He tries to understand when she explains that her illness has affected her desire for him. And finally, there is the difficulty of knowing what to do in a specific situation. As a husband and a doctor, Martin wishes to do what is "right." But such a wish does not stop him from hurting people with his kindness and professionalism. He subjects Karin to the electric shock therapy that affects her hearing. He also continually lies to her, attempting to conceal from her the true nature of her illness. And when she finally succumbs to psychosis, he can only stand by helplessly.

For Hegel, these contradictions are significant. Duty may be of essence for moral self-consciousness, yet much more is required to support a moral worldview. First of all, the moral worldview requires the possibility of happiness. There would be little point in acting morally if there was not the hope and promise of achieving happiness. This means that nature, seemingly independent of moral concerns, must provide the necessary ground for happiness to take place. Such is the demand of reason, what Hegel refers to as the first postulate, the harmony of nature and morality. Secondly, the moral worldview requires the possibility of achieving happiness. Happiness and the harmony of nature and morality must be in our power to achieve, if not now, then at a later, more distant stage. This is the postulate of the immortal soul. And finally, the moral worldview requires the possibility of achieving happiness through particular action. Presiding over this is the figure of God, the third postulate, who makes duty plural, connecting it with happiness. As a regulative concept, God ensures that particular action does not come into conflict with the demands of pure duty. God sanctifies particular action so

that it is as effective as pure duty in bringing about happiness. Once again, the concepts of God and immortality provide recourse to something other than duty to complete the moral worldview.

It is worth interrupting the argument briefly here in order to appreciate the difference between the figure of God introduced here and the God that appears later in the *Phenomenology*, in the section entitled "Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and its forgiveness." In the section on "The moral view of the world," the concept of God is introduced in response to the difficulty of specific action. Faced with multiple duties, moral self-consciousness finds the concept of duty to be a poor guide. For example, Martin generally tries to do the "right thing," but struggles to do so when faced with the demands of a particular situation. Hegel resolves the difficulty of multiple duties in the figure of God or "sacred lawgiver" (*der heilige Gesetzgeber*) whose task is twofold.¹⁵ He sanctifies specific duties, and he does so by ensuring that specific duties are as effective a means of achieving happiness as pure duty. Once again Martin's behaviour can serve as an example. For why does he subject Karin to electric shock therapy? Why does he lie to her and try to hide from her the true nature of her illness? He does so in the hope that these specific actions will bring about happiness. These actions might be flawed and may very well not result in happiness; but how is the moral individual to act if there is not the possibility – or rather faith – that his actions are justified?

The problem is that this positing of postulates fails to resolve any of the contradictions inherent in the moral worldview. Indeed, it makes contradictions all the more apparent, as moral self-consciousness first insists that it is duty which is of the essence, then admits that in actual fact, happiness, immortality or God are more important. Hegel accuses moral self-consciousness of "duplicity."¹⁶ For him, it consists of "insincere shuffling."¹⁷

In the section "Dissemblance and Duplicity," Hegel examines the extent of the insincerity in great detail. Once again, a thorough analysis of Hegel's critique is beyond the scope of this study. Instead I would like to return to the film and show how Martin's behaviour embodies elements of Hegel's much more complex argument. For why does Martin do the right thing? Why does he insist on being a good husband and a good doctor? The answer seems to be happiness. He loves Karin and wants her to be happy. But is this position sincere? Not according to Hegel's argument. The kind of happiness that Martin hopes for and that is implied in the first postulate must remain an ideal. In other words, the promise of happiness

inspires him to act morally – but it is a promise that cannot be realised, for with realisation it would lose its ideal and inspirational status.¹⁸

A similar argument can be made against the second postulate, based on the assumption of an immortal soul. Why does Martin try to do the right thing? Because he hopes that happiness might be his reward, if not now, then at least in Heaven. But once again, the position of moral self-consciousness is “not serious.”¹⁹ For what would happen if inner nature were to be overcome and morality established? Morality once again would lose its ideal status. Paradoxically, morality is in need of continual strife. Happiness cannot really be achieved: were it to be attained, it would cease to function as an effective motivation for further moral action.

Finally, objections need to be made against the third postulate: the figure of God, understood as the “sacred lawgiver,” who pluralizes duty and oversees the distribution of happiness. Recourse to a transcendent being by a moral self-consciousness that is only seemingly autonomous offers little for either the concept of God or indeed, moral self-consciousness. As a consequence of the third postulate, neither moral self-consciousness nor God have any real moral agency. Moral self-consciousness has no moral agency, because it has to refer to God to sanctify its particular, moral actions. God has no agency because, once again, he is only a postulate, posited as part of an argument. For what is this God that the moral worldview refers to? Nothing more than a “thought thing” above the “struggles of nature.”²⁰

• Conscience •

In order to be able to act, the moral individual finds that he must refer to a beyond, and posit a divine being in the concept of God. Without the figure of a sacred lawgiver there would be no guarantee that a harmony of morality and nature would take place. God is therefore posited to resolve the unequal and contradictory distinction inherent in the moral worldview between morality and nature, duty and reality. But this positing of God led to contradiction and duplicity, and ultimately failure to achieve freedom and satisfaction. Another kind of justification seems to be required, which we can see personified in Karin. When Karin rebukes Martin, she says, “Those who really love do right by those who they love.” She makes a

distinction between his love and “real love,” a love that is implicitly claimed as her own. Glimpsed in her distinction is the concept of “conscience” (*das Gewissen*). This is the capacity to do the right thing, not through some sense of moral obligation, but out of personal conviction.

To better understand what Hegel means by “conscience,” it is again useful to examine the distinction with which he begins this particular section, entitled “Conscience. The beautiful soul, evil and its forgiveness.” This is the distinction between the self of the ethical world, the self of morality and the self of conscience. Again it is important to understand this “self” in general as located within a community, and the differing conceptions of universality harbored by ethical, moral, and conscience-driven “selves.” The ethical self – exemplified by the citizen of the Greek city-state – lives the universal unknowingly. The inhabitant of the ethical community knows his duty, but is unaware that the principles involved are rational in nature. The moral self locates a universal sense of duty within a set of laws and principles that take shape beyond reality. The self of conscience does something else entirely. Here duty and principle are internal. Or as Hegel writes, “duty is no longer the universal that stands over against the self...It is now the law that exists for the sake of the self, not the self that exists for the sake of the law.”²¹ I find it useful to compare this kind of conviction with the way in which rational self-consciousness is actualised in the “law of the heart” in Chapter V. Here there is the following of conviction but without the claim of universality. Whereas in Chapter VI it is the personal conviction associated with conscience that expresses a universal principle, here the conviction of conscience determines whether an action is moral.

It is easy to see how such a definition of conscience resolves the problems that plague moral self-consciousness. Certainly it resolves the difficulties resulting from its many distinctions. Action is no longer separate from duty or moral principle; rather, as long as that action arises out of conviction, moral principle is enacted. Specific actions no longer risk contradicting general principles, because all actions of conscience enact the general principle that personal conviction expresses. Hence there is no need for conscience-driven consciousness to refer to a “sacred lawgiver” or God. It would therefore seem that freedom and satisfaction finally become achievable. Yet, Hegel finds this not to be the case, when he tests the claims made by conscience. He discovers that the very reasons for the successes of conscience are also the reasons for its failings.

Once again, I would like to refer to Bergman to make Hegel's analysis clear. Central to understanding Hegel's argument is the character of Karin. Granted, Karin is schizophrenic. The film makes repeated mentions of her illness and treatment; there is suggestion of a genetic disorder when it is revealed that Karin's mother suffered the same disease; Karin hears voices whispering and believes that God is about to appear to her. But providing that the figure of God is analysed further, as I will do below, Karin's character can also be understood as a personification of the self of conscience. I would like to focus on one particular scene that takes place a short while after the previously cited conversation between Martin and Karin.

Martin and David have left, and Karin is supposed to be supervising Minus's Latin grammar. Instead, she takes him up to the upstairs room in which she had been the previous night. She confesses to Minus that she has been hearing voices.

Karin: I go through the wall, you see? Early in the morning I'm woken up by a stern voice calling me. I get up and come here. One day someone called me from behind the wallpaper. I looked in the cupboard but it was empty. But a voice kept calling me...so I pressed against the wall and it parted like leaves; I was inside. You think I am making it up?

[Minus shakes his head]

Karin: I enter a large room. Very bright and quiet. People are moving about. Some speak to me and I can understand them. It feels so nice and safe. Some of the faces radiate a shining light. They are all waiting for him to come but no one is anxious. They say I am to be there when it happens.²²

In the empty room upstairs, behind the wallpaper, others "speak to [Karin]" and she "understands them." And she derives some comfort from this knowledge. As she explains to Minus, "It feels so nice and safe." It would seem that Karin finds some kind of fulfilment in this strange world – enough to reject the real world and her husband. She also does what the voices tell her to do. In this sense, she can be seen as following the voice of "conscience." And yet these same voices tell her to do terrible things. When questioned by David towards the end of the film, she admits that she has read his diary and told Martin about it because the voices told her to do so. Worse, the voices make her commit an act of incest. The film's

most harrowing scene is Karin seducing her brother Minus in a wrecked fishing boat. No wonder Martin ends the previous conversation by gently mocking Karin – “then you do not love me.” Karin seems incapable of “doing right” by anyone.

The way in which Hegel explains conscience bears on Bergman’s depiction of the schizophrenic. The person of conscience, in a way similar to the moral person, struggles to act according to his principles. This is because conscience is as poor a guide to action as duty. Or, as Hegel writes, “This pure conviction is, as such, as empty as pure duty, is pure in the sense that there is nothing in it.”²³ When action needs to be taken it is ultimately left to the individual to decide which way his conviction swings. And of course, the individual is fallible: his knowledge of specific circumstances is incomplete and he is driven by various impulses. And yet, it is this fallible individual that is important. Decisive in defining an action as moral is how the acting individual perceives the action, not the external impact of the action. Thus, for the self of conscience, duty consists of nothing more than conscience’s own self-assurance – what Hegel describes as an “absolute autarky.”²⁴

From absolute autarky it is but a small step to delusions of grandeur and ultimately madness. An altogether different reference to God is made here. No longer is God a requirement of thought – rather, the face of God belongs to the person of conscience. As Hegel writes,

It is the moral genius which knows the inner voice of what it immediately knows to be a divine voice; and since knowing this, it has an equally immediate knowledge of existence, it is the divine creative power...²⁵

For conscience it is the “inner voice” that is binding. Personal conviction defines an action as moral. But this means that any action, so long as it is accompanied by this sense of conviction, can arguably be presented as conscientious. In other words, personal conviction is the divine and creative power to sanctify any specific action as “right.”

Karin believes that her inner voices offer a kind of divine salvation. She finds them “nice and safe” because they announce a very specific kind of appearance. The “him” that they are waiting for – the “him” who comes when Karin is in their presence – this is what Karin later describes as God. And I would like to argue here that it is precisely because the voices have

this link to divinity that they carry such power of conviction. This is why Karin's voices feel so real to her and why she does not hesitate to obey their orders.

But it is at its seemingly highest power that conscience is also at its most vulnerable. It is when Karin believes to be in sight of God that her suffering is most acute. Believing that he himself possesses divine powers, the person of conscience is utterly alone. Indeed, there is no need to do anything, if all conscientious acts are "right." There is no need to sully such a power with action – no need to relate to the world and others. The person of conscience withdraws into a kind of contemplation of self. Or has Hegel phrases it, becomes a "beautiful soul" (*die schöne Seele*). As he writes,

The hollow object which it [conscience] has produced for itself now fills it, therefore, with a sense of emptiness. Its activity is a yearning which merely loses itself as conscience becomes an object devoid of substance, and rising above this loss, and falling back on itself, finds itself only as a lost soul. In this transparent purity of its moments, an unhappy, so-called "beautiful soul," its light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air.²⁶

Again *Through a Glass Darkly* illustrates Hegel's point well. Karin consistently fails to "do right by" others. She certainly does not "do right by" Martin, and her actions actually hurt both Minus and David. The consequences of her seduction of Minus is something with which both he and David will have to struggle. In a way, she is concerned only with herself – at least the self that hears voices and has visions. This is the path to madness, but it also constitutes a kind of withdrawal from the world and its problems. Throughout the film, Karin refers to a choice between worlds: the real world and the hallucinated world in which her voices live. She can live either in one or the other. Eventually she chooses neither, for when she "crosses over" to the world of her acoustic hallucinations and finally "sees" the God she so yearned for, this God reveals itself as a spider. This God she then rejects, most violently. The film ends with her putting on a pair of dark sunglasses and going back to hospital.

• Evil and its Forgiveness •

The moral worldview is flawed, its claims largely unsubstantiated. Conscience, which replaced the moral worldview, seems similarly inadequate. No peace and satisfaction were found in the one; madness lay ahead of the other. Religious consciousness is something else entirely. Its first glimpse, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, occurs towards the end of the chapter on "Spirit," in the paragraphs on evil and its forgiveness.

The religious consciousness that Hegel introduces here should not be confused with the previous references to God. As we might recall, the moral individual posited a Godlike "sacred lawgiver" to resolve some of the conflicts inherent in the moral worldview. Similarly, the person of conscience found divine creative power in personal conviction. Central to religious consciousness is a concept that so far I have mentioned only in passing. If there is a Godlike figure in religious consciousness, it can be found in the concept of "recognition" (*anerkennen, die Anerkennung*).

As Hegel argues towards the end of Chapter VI, another dimension of conscience needs to be considered: "conscience has to be considered as acting."²⁷ While it might seem that action, whether of conscience or of moral self-consciousness, has been Hegel's central concern throughout this chapter, so far we have only discussed the struggle of consciousness to act. Following Hegel's method, we have examined some of the claims made by both moral self-consciousness and conscience, and shown them to be flawed. In the last few paragraphs of the section concerning the beautiful soul, evil and forgiveness, Hegel changes tack and confronts the problem of action itself. The question is no longer the type of claim that conscience makes for its activity, but how others perceive it. Specifically, the question is how others perceive this activity as a product of a fallible individual. Hegel's overarching concern here, then, is to compare the claims made for action (for instance that it is moral, or that it arises from personal conviction) with how action actually manifests.

Hegel begins this final part of his argument by making yet another distinction. In considering perception, there are two consciousnesses to deal with: there is the consciousness of the person who acts (what Hegel terms the "first consciousness") and the collective consciousness of those who perceive the actions ("universal consciousness"). Universal consciousness judges the activities of the first by holding them up to a

universal standard, expressed in the personal conviction of the inner voice of conscience.

But the universal consciousness can only pronounce one kind of judgement. For universal consciousness, the first consciousness always seems "evil" – more than that, hypocritical. This is because universal consciousness sees what the first consciousness does not: Hegel describes this as the great disparity between the "inner being and the universal."²⁸ The first consciousness might pronounce its deeds as conscientious, but the universal consciousness of others easily finds them not to be so. By looking at the actions of the first consciousness, universal consciousness can see how they might arise from selfish motives such as the desire for fame, ambition or the need to secure happiness.²⁹ Hence, for universal consciousness, following one's personal convictions is not enough to constitute morality. This sense of conviction must be understood in more universal terms, as "right." If others fail to recognise and acknowledge this sense of conviction, then they will be unable to understand actions based on said convictions as "right." A drama unfolds in which universal consciousness attempts to unmask the hypocrisy of the first consciousness, by illuminating the fact that the first consciousness' apparent respect for duty is only for show.³⁰

Soon, however, an impasse is reached. Universal consciousness finds that it cannot easily demonstrate the hypocrisy of the first consciousness without seriously damaging its own position. For to dismiss the claims of the first consciousness, universal consciousness must refer to itself and insist on its own law. By opposing the first consciousness, universal consciousness finds that it too struggles with universal acknowledgement. Certainly, its laws are not acknowledged by the first evil consciousness. Indeed, the effect is the opposite of what universal consciousness intended: such opposition, far from dismissing the same activity on behalf of the first consciousness, constitutes its legitimisation.

It is here that I once again appeal to Bergman's film, this time to the relationship between father and son, David and Minus. David acts like a person of conscience. Throughout the film he struggles with his sense of guilt. This is particularly apparent in an early scene, when he bursts into tears after breaking a promise to his children. Out of all the characters, Minus has the least developed personality – a fact that Bergman admits in a later interview.³¹ Nevertheless he acts as a person who judges. Minus judges David both as a man (he does not like David's choice of girlfriend), and as a writer (David is a novelist suffering from writer's block). This is

apparent in the scene in which Minus stages a play that he has written for his father. It is clear to the audience that, in this play, Minus demonstrates David's inferiority as a writer.

Yet theirs is not an impasse. Indeed, the film ends with their reconciliation. I would like to argue that there are grounds for such harmony laid out in an earlier scene. This is the moment in which David steps into the wreck and learns of Karin's incestuous act. Then, instead of putting forward accusations, he does something unexpected. He reflects on his own behaviour and sees the need for action. Once again I transcribe the scene at length.

David: I want to ask you for your forgiveness. I've had a bad conscience about you; I've hardened my heart and turned away. It nauseates me to think of the life I have sacrificed for my so-called art. My bid for success came just when your mother died; success meant more to me. I rejoiced in secret, yet loved her in my confused and selfish way.

Karin: And when I became ill you went to Switzerland?

David: I couldn't bear to see you had your mother's illness. And the novel...

Karin: Is it a good one?

David: You see, Karin, we draw a magic circle about us and exclude all that disagrees with our secret games. When life breaks the circle, our games become small and grey and ridiculous. We draw a new circle and a new defence.

Karin: Poor little Daddy.

David: Poor little Daddy who is forced to live in reality.³²

I have described David as a person of conscience. Yet as a person of conscience he was largely ineffectual. He admits as much when he talks of leaving Karin and her mother and drawing defensive circles. Only in this scene does he begin to "live in reality." Only now can he function as a first (acting) consciousness.

Keeping this reference to "reality" in mind, it is worth comparing the above dialogue with the film's final scene. Karin has been taken to

hospital. Minus, who had previously hidden in shame, makes an appeal to David.

Minus: I'm afraid. When I clung to Karin in the wreck, reality burst. You know what I mean?

David: I know.

Minus: Reality burst and I tumbled out. It's like a dream. Anything can happen. Anything.

David: I know.

Minus: I can't live in this new world.

David: You can but you must have something to hold on to.

Minus: What would that be? A God? Give me proof of God.

David: I can but you must listen to what I say.

Minus: I need to listen, Daddy.

David: I can only give you a faint idea of my own hopes. It's the knowledge that love exists as something real in the world of men.³³

Within this scene Minus too refers to reality – he admits that he too is forced to confront reality with Karin in the wreck. Reality burst and he tumbled out. There is an undeniable link between the two scenes. What I would like to argue is that the second scene only occurs because of the first. Minus can describe his experience in this way only because David did so first.

Here lies the strength of Hegel's argument. What occurs within this final dialogue is precisely the moment of recognition that announces the arrival of Spirit. Hegel explains this breakthrough in the following way. Returning to the moment of impasse in the drama between the first (evil) consciousness and universal consciousness, Hegel detects a moment for resolution. Universal consciousness judges the activity of the first consciousness, which in its eyes is evil. It attempts to unmask its hypocrisy but fails. Yet there is another way to interpret the perspective of universal consciousness. Universal consciousness that judges is not a consciousness that acts. It tends to shy away from action, refusing the complications that all action inevitably brings. Nevertheless, universal

consciousness wants its judgements to be taken seriously. Thus it too behaves in a hypocritical manner.

It is precisely this aspect of universal consciousness that the first consciousness perceives. It sees the universal consciousness for what it is, hypocritical. And then something very strange occurs. Rather than attempting to unmask the other's hypocrisy, it identifies with it. It *recognises* something of itself in the universal. When this occurs, the first consciousness confesses, admitting its fallibility. This is the point that the film makes so well. Minus confesses to David only when he sees that his father too struggled with the challenges that life brings – when he too is forced to live in reality.

The film makes one further point. It is not David, the person of conscience, who makes the final confession. He had done so earlier, to Karin. The final confession is by Minus, the character who, in my interpretation, represents judging consciousness. For the drama that Hegel describes does not end here. The confession of the first consciousness is only the first step towards reconciliation. It is not enough that the first consciousness perceives itself in the other; judging universal consciousness must recognise itself in the first.

This second confession is far more difficult, as universal consciousness occupies a position that is apparently closer to actual universality. It judges the activities of the first consciousness by holding them up to a universal standard implied in the personal conviction of conscience. Likewise, in the film, Minus judges David by holding him up to his ideas of what a father and writer should be. Hegel ascribes to universal consciousness a sense of superiority: universal consciousness does not see itself as hypocritical. Little wonder then that universal consciousness finds its position difficult to relinquish, and that Minus leaves this task until the very end of the film. At least initially, universal consciousness cannot but repel the confession of the first. Hegel describes the behaviour of the universal consciousness as "hard hearted," an "extreme form of rebellion of Spirit that is certain of itself."³⁴ From this point onward there are two options open to universal consciousness. Either it continues to repulse the confession of the first consciousness, thereby withdrawing from the world to occupy the position of a "beautiful soul," or it renounces its superiority.

Needless to say, resolution comes about when this superiority is renounced. Minus does indeed confess – or at least, he stops judging his father and turns towards him for advice. Again, recognition is central to

this process. When the first consciousness confesses to its inadequacy, its position shifts. It is no longer in the wrong. In fact, the two respective positions have reversed and it is universal consciousness that could now be seen as wicked. By confessing and acknowledging its fallibility, the first consciousness acknowledges its particularity and, in this way, achieves a degree of universality. Remember how David comforts his son: with the knowledge that love exists as something real in the world. He refers to the real, but in terms of a standard, as knowledge.

This shift in position does not go unnoticed: it marks the final turning point of the dialogue of the two consciences. The confession of the first consciousness, with its movement towards universality, allows for a transformation. It allows for universal consciousness to identify itself with the first acting consciousness. It too recognises an aspect of itself in the other. Minus clings to the hopeful words his father offered. When this happens, universal consciousness loses its sense of superiority, the "hard heart" breaks and forgiveness occurs. To explain what he means by "love existing in the world of men," David says: "I don't know if love proves God exists or if love is God himself." With this, David implies that when we love, we are surrounded by God. In *Through a Glass Darkly*, God exists in the love shown when father and son forgive each other. For absolute Spirit is nothing other than this "reciprocal recognition."³⁵

It is this reciprocal recognition that Hegel likens to God – the God that appears, as pure knowledge, in the midst of those who know themselves. Such a divine figure is very different from the one that appeared in previous sections of the *Phenomenology*. Within the moral worldview, God was nothing more than a postulate, posited by thought; in the discussion of conscience, he was no more than a part of a particularly stubborn personality. Here, in what Hegel calls religious consciousness, God is found within the relation of two individuals that is marked by a distinct kind of understanding, thanks to which individuals can forgive by recognising each other's failings.

Such an understanding of God represents significant advantages over the concepts previously introduced. To recall, the central difficulty both of moral self-consciousness and of conscience lay in action. Neither the moral individual with his universal sense of duty, nor the person of conscience with the strength of their personal sense of conviction, could act without hypocrisy. In both cases, because of its abstract nature, duty – whether it is expressed as the self-imposed duty of conscience or the externally-imposed duty of moral self-consciousness – proved inadequate

as a guide. The religious consciousness apparent in the dialogue of two consciences has no need for such guidance. It finds God within the activity of forgiveness itself. Little wonder then that the feeling of freedom and satisfaction, so elusive in previous discussions, can be sensed here.

I would like to turn once more to Bergman's film. Hegel's words are very beautiful – the way in which he announces the arrival of Spirit is very memorable. In terms of literary beauty, it cannot be compared to the resolution offered in the film, where David explains to Minus, "I don't know if love proves God exists or if love is God himself." Yet in one way the film does illustrate the moment of reconciliation with even greater eloquence than Hegel. When Karin discusses love with Martin, the two characters occupy separate spaces. Karin only appears within the same frame as Martin as a partly hidden reflection in the mirror. Thus, the scene emphasises the distance between the two characters. The final scene between Minus and David is filmed very differently. When Minus first speaks, only David is in the frame, facing towards the camera, his back to the open window. Minus then moves into the frame and for most of the scene only his profile is visible. However, at the moment of reconciliation, when David speaks and Minus understands, they face each other. Between their profiles, we see the sun setting.

The reciprocal recognition that Hegel defines as Spirit forms the starting point for the discussion of religion in the subsequent chapter of the *Phenomenology*. Here, Hegel identifies religion as a new form of consciousness – the consciousness of the Absolute. Or rather, it is no longer a question of consciousness of something. Within this new form of consciousness, absolute Spirit is conscious of itself as absolute. In reciprocal recognition we reach a standpoint of complete self-consciousness that foreshadows Hegel's subsequent discussion of the way in which God is revealed within the religious community.

Consciousness could not have arrived at this position without the struggle described in the chapter "Spirit that is certain of itself. Morality." Moral self-consciousness, so sure of itself in acting out of duty, had to be shown as flawed, its position unstable. Conscience, to which this position withdrew, similarly had to be shown as incapable of action. Only by considering the activity of conscience, the dialogue of one conscience with the other, could Hegel demonstrate how consciousness overcomes the instability, duplicity, and powerlessness of morality and conscience: a resolution achieved in the form of mutual recognition. In a historical sense, the paradise-like state of ancient Greece had to be lost and found

again in the progress of Enlightenment. Hegel summarises this in the following way:

The self-knowing Spirit is, in religion, immediately its own pure self-consciousness. Those forms of it which have been considered, viz. the true Spirit, the self-alienated Spirit, and the Spirit that is certain of itself, together constitute Spirit in its consciousness which, confronting its world, does not recognize itself therein. But in conscience it brings itself, as well as its objective world in general into subjection...and is now a self-consciousness that communes with its own self.³⁶

Hegel's emphasis here is on conscience and recognition. In previous forms of consciousness, try as it might, Spirit did not recognise itself in the world. The world was other, foreign. Only within the conscience that grew out of morality, can recognition take place.

It is with this emphasis on conscience and recognition that I would like to end. The aim of this essay was to show why morality had to be abandoned, in other words, to demonstrate why Hegel sought to transform a moral outlook into a religious one. The answer can be found here, in the reciprocal recognition of conscience. Hegel describes conscience as both divine and creative. Inner conviction of duty is the power to decide what is right. But if the self of conscience is not to end as a "beautiful soul," lost to the world, it needs to learn how to renounce its creativity and divinity, precisely so it can find it in another. Divinity must be exposed for what it is – essentially hypocritical. This is only possible through another, equally hypocritical conscience. With the other, conscience comes face to face with its own failings. It acknowledges them through self-recognition. And when such acknowledgement occurs, then truly it comes within sight of the divine.

This essay also aimed to show how, for Hegel, divinity and religion are distinct. The answer can once again be found in the concept of recognition. By identifying God with the reciprocal recognition characterising the act of forgiveness, Hegel locates religion within an activity that takes place within the world. Divinity no longer belongs to some distant beyond, whether inner or outer. But this is not to say that within the *Phenomenology*, divinity is rejected, even though it is productively transformed. Hegel consistently shows how divinity is a necessary concept: how it underpins moral philosophy and how it is central to the definition of conscience.

• Notes •

¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 409. Emphasis original.

² Ingmar Bergman, *Images, My Life in Film*, trans. M. Ruuth (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2007), 244-45.

³ Stig Bjorkman, Torsten Mams and Jonas Simia, *Bergman on Bergman*, trans. Paul Pritten (Austin: A Touchstone Book, Simon and Schuster, 1973), 168.

⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 364.

⁵ Hegel's concept of "Spirit" is far too grand for me to adequately summarise here. Though Spirit is a central concept of Hegel's phenomenology (and his philosophy as a whole) its discussion is surprisingly limited, a fact noted by Tom Rockmore in *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 111-112.

⁶ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 265. My definition of "Spirit" is largely taken from Frederick C. Beiser's very clear account "'Morality' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Kenneth R. Westphal (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 210.

⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 364.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁹ Beiser, "Morality," 221.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 374.

¹¹ For more detailed accounts of Hegel's critique of Kant see R.Z. Friedman, "Hypocrisy and the Highest Good: Hegel on Kant's Transition from Morality to Religion," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 503-22, and Kenneth R. Westphal, "Hegel's Critique of Kant's Moral World View," *Philosophical Topics* 19 (1991): 133-76.

¹² *Through a Glass Darkly*. DVD. Produced by Allan Ekelund. Directed and Written by Ingmar Bergman. (Sweden: Janus Films, 1961).

¹³ In more Kantian terms, this is the autonomous nature of practical reason. The moral principle of the categorical imperative is *a priori*.

¹⁴ Commentators agree that Hegel uses the term "happiness" to refer to two distinct Kantian concepts: "happiness" and the "supreme good." Again see Friedman's "Hegel on Kant" and Westphal's "Hegel's Critique of Kant."

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 371.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Hegel also has a second objection to the first postulate. Is there really an action that can be described as right? An action is particular; "rightness" is an ideal. How is an ideal rightness to be achieved through a particular action?

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 377.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 382.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 387.

²² Bergman, *Through a Glass Darkly*.

²³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 390.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 393.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 397.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 400.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 401.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 404.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 401-02.

³¹ Bergman, *Images: My life in film*, 254.

³² Bergman, *Through a Glass Darkly*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 406.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 411.

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COLLISION

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The Missed

A new genre of speculative writing created by the Editors of *Evental Aesthetics*, the Collision is a concise but pointed essay that introduces philosophical questions raised by a specific aesthetic experience. A Collision is not an entire, expository journey; not a full-fledged argument but the potential of an argument. A Collision is an encounter that is also a point of departure: the impact of a striking confrontation between experience, thought, and writing may propel later inquiries into being.



Campos, Isabel Sobral. "Grimonprez's Chimera," *Evental Aesthetics* 1, no. 2 (2012): 81-87.

ABSTRACT

Johan Grimonprez's *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* has been critically surveyed for its use of mass media: this film, a masterful feat of editing, appropriates found footage from television newscasts to examine the history of hijacking. My reading of this piece further analyzes Grimonprez's use of appropriation, locating the image of the chimera featured in the film as a symbol of the method of montage that *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* uses, and of the links that this work makes between violence, homelessness and art making. The chimera stands for the artwork itself, for the latter's rapid sequence of disparate images functions as a grafted body. As a figment of the imagination, the chimera also stands for the constructed nature of the news event, which the film assays. Furthermore, the eloquence of the chimera's image bespeaks the body that has lost its home. In this film, hijackings are related to homelessness; Grimonprez implies that wellsprings of violence arise from radical histories of displacement. By way of the chimera, he also suggests that art can impact society only by hijacking the images of mass culture, thus relating art making to violence.

KEYWORDS

Johan Grimonprez, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, film, appropriation, violence

Grimonprez's Chimera

Isabel Sobral Campos



The chimera appears near the end of the film: a mouse with a human ear grafted onto its small back. Fidgeting inside an open glass bowl, it sniffs around the edges, trying its paws on the glass as if wanting to get out. The film features other animals in captivity: trapped birds float in a kind of depressurized chamber, hopelessly looping and turning, caught in a zero-gravity zone, and laboratory mice writhe inside a cage; but the image of the chimera, its body turned into a tottering appendage, overlays the captivity of the other animals with presentiments of a more terrible fate.

dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y (1997) is not a film about the Human Genome Project, the ethics of animal experimentation or the wayward ways of science. On the surface, it non-chronologically chronicles television's coverage of hijackings between 1931 and 1996. Made of found footage from CNN and ABC news archives, it also includes various images such as cartoons, advertisements, propaganda and Hollywood films, camcorder shots and didactic videos. Yet in a wider sense, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* surveys the earth from a bird's-eye view, featuring

political and public, private and domestic environments, and inhabiting the liminal spheres of airspaces and TV screens: the places of homelessness. The opening shot of a plane approaching an airfield indicates this ambition, as does the footage of outer space and of the flying house uprooted by a sudden wind. Originally intending to make a film about goodbyes at airports, Belgian artist Johan Grimonprez instead looked back on a personal history of geographic dislocation – from Ghent to New York, Paris to Brussels – and on a global history of division and struggle – the global North versus the South, the Iron Curtain, the East against the West.¹

Many scholars have commented on Grimonprez's appropriation of images. For Eben Wood, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* remixes visual materials, juggling different types of images and their levels of resolution. A remixing of sorts also occurs with the excerpts from Don DeLillo's novels, *White Noise* (1985) and *Mao II* (1991), which make up the film's voiceover narration.² Following Serge Daney's notion that television images lack the ability to reference the other and lack an awareness of this lack, Vrääth Öhner sees the film as a history of blindness.³ Contrastingly, in Alvin Lu's view, Grimonprez's editing technique opposes imagery and meaning to create an "elliptical dialectic."⁴

I suggest approaching the use of appropriation in this film from another angle. The chimera, as I see it, emerges as the matrix shot or the emblem for the film's method of montage, which mounts image upon image, grafting a chain of the most disparate contents, situations, tonalities and forms. An aberration, the chimera is also a figment of the imagination, wild hallucination as much as a final terror imposed on a living organism. As a flight of the imagination, it embodies *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*'s proper dread. A raid on the archives of mass culture, the film seizes their lexicon of images and the types of narratives they create. It imitates the rhythm of television programming, mimicking the movement from newscasts to advertisements, and the haphazard way extraordinary events become news as catastrophe interrupts the comfort provided by daily shows, such as soap operas or sitcoms. By juxtaposing images from different contexts, Grimonprez reflects on the constructed nature of TV reporting: he presents the status of the televised news event as chimeric construct by intensifying the grafting gesture of editing. In Grimonprez's film, the televised coverage of the hijackings acquires an aura of unreality, which contrasts with the historical nature of the events, making us sense both proximity and distance in relation to the news

presented: we see the coverage of the hijackings; we know they happened; yet the rapid succession of images troubles their legibility, asking us to notice the role of editing in the production of meaning. Moreover, as Öhner alerts us, Grimonprez's film shows almost nothing of what happens during the hijackings, only showcasing the aftermath and the confused debris of stunned faces, the distant smoke and fire.⁵

Along with the mouse-ear, one image in particular points toward the chimera or grafted body as a symbol for the use of appropriation in this work: the image of a house on top of a flying airplane as red flashing letters spell alternately "dial" and "history." It is part of the film's initial credit sequence, after images of Lenin and of another house speeding across the sky have already implied the link between homelessness and political struggle to which I will return shortly. Although the film uses montage to order found footage as well as a few original camcorder shots, the shot of the airplane-house is the only frame in the film that uses montage to compose an image, juxtaposing disparate images within a single frame. As part of the opening credits, it indicates the formal approach that the film will use throughout. This image, in which the intervention of the artist is more evident than in any other composition, directly parallels the image of the chimera appearing later on. It is in itself a chimera – half house, half airplane – an image that has lost its proper place. As the airplane-house fuses two spheres of reference, the place we call home and the homeless space of the airplane, the mouse-ear fuses two biological domains. Both are images of alienation; one tampers with mimetic verisimilitude, the other with biological limitations. These chimeras symbolize the significant restructuring of our sense of reality by the artificial mediums through which we ascertain the world, including animals and people, landscapes, fictions and events.

As previously noted, the connection between homelessness and political struggle is central to *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* and its use of appropriation. Most of the hijackings featured in the film link terrorism with the loss of home. From the Vietnam veteran Raffaele Minichiello, who in 1969 seized a TWA jet to fly to his dying father in Rome, to the displaced Palestinian hijackers and the Black Panthers' self-exile into Algeria, the film presents these histories of violence as springing from policies that dislocate and alienate populations and groups. While this link is well-known, the film further connects this geographical dislocation to the final dislocation the chimera undergoes as it embodies the living organism dislodged from its own species and from its own body. The

airplane-house and the mouse-ear images forge this connection, at the same time that they relate homelessness to violence. By placing an uprooted house on top of an airplane, the airplane-house literalizes the claim that homelessness leads to violent acts, such as hijackings, as much as violence generates homelessness. Furthermore, since the airplane-house and the mouse-ear symbolically parallel each other, they comment on one another. The airplane-house turns the chimera's displacement from its own species into a kind of homelessness. In its turn, the mouse-ear, as it resonates with the airplane-house, which announces the technique the film will employ, proposes that the artwork itself is also a product of violent displacements: because the film displaces images from their particular contexts and conjoins them, forming a disparate sequence, it too functions as a grafted body, which places side-by-side the most diverse political contexts. Via montaged images, it puts into dialogue such diverse groups as the Japanese Red Army, the German Red Army Faction, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Black Panthers, alongside footage of Mao's and Stalin's funerals, Castro's ascent to power, and Nixon's speeches. Overall, in Grimonprez's work, appropriation emerges as a method of critique of television news coverage, of capitalism and of tyranny as a much as a method of art production.

To clarify the use of appropriation as a method of art making, I end these brief remarks by turning to the voiceover narration in *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*. The film's narrator reads a monologue by the main character of DeLillo's *Mao II*, writer Bill Gray, in which he claims that the terrorist has usurped the novelist's ability to affect society. "What terrorists gain, novelists lose. Years ago, I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now, bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated."⁶ This claim hovers over Grimonprez's film, as the latter questions the role of the artist in the contemporary world: can an artist affect a society of fast and blind circulation of products, images, words? What happens to the deep things dug from common wells: histories brought out to face (re)presentation, exposed to the force of the image? DeLillo's character does not believe in artists' ability to refer to these common wells and thus to effect transformations; the brutal labor of violence has replaced art's ability to affect and transform, because only a terrible act stands out amidst the ongoing stream of news reports. Grimonprez's film, however, strives to reinstate the force of art by using

television news coverage as art-making material, emulating its tactics and rhythms, creating what the artist has called the poetics of zapping.⁷

The violence of contemporary culture must also be acknowledged. Featured throughout the film, it coalesces in the chimera as the scientist assumes the role of the artist, making forms out of living organisms. In turn, artists have begun to use biological organisms as artistic material: 1997 was both the year of *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*'s première and of Eduardo Kac's coinage of the term "BioArt" to describe the work of artists using genetic engineering, cloning and other techniques to manipulate living organisms. The originality of Grimonprez resides in his suggestion that the chimera has been all along the quintessential symbol of late twentieth century art, for its body literalizes the deep ties between this century's forms of violence, which arise from uprootedness, and a visually and informationally saturated society, which forces the artist to use "violent" methods, displacing images from their contexts.

• Notes •

¹ Grimonprez speaks of his initial intention: "But initially I wanted to make a tape about people saying goodbye in airports, to trace how that has changed in just thirty years. It was to be something more autobiographical, a recollection of memories in relation to my little daughter who was at that time living on the other side of the Atlantic; reunions always happened in airports." Quoted in Catherine Bernard, "Supermarket History: An Interview with Johan Grimonprez," in Datalle, Benoit, ed. *It's a Poor Sort of Memory that Only Works Backwards: On the Work of Johan Grimonprez*. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 231.

² Eben Wood, "Grimonprez's Remix," in Datalle, 247-266.

³ Vrääth Öhner, "On Seeing, Flying and Dreaming," in Datalle, 243.

⁴ Alvin Lu, "Mind Terrorist," in Datalle, 197.

⁵ Vrääth Öhner, "On Seeing, Flying and Dreaming," in Datalle, 243.

⁶ Don DeLillo, *Mao II*. (New York: Viking, 1991), 41.

⁷ Regarding the poetry of zapping, Grimonprez says: "The ideology of zapping could be defined as a new sort of Brechtian rupture. It can be an extreme form of poetry, going much further than collage." Quoted in Catherine Bernard, "Supermarket History: An Interview with Johan Grimonprez," 229.

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