

**Towards a Philosophy of Instant Rhythm and  
Generative Theory.**

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## **Abstract.**

### **Towards a Philosophy of Instant Rhythm and Generative Theory.**

The research project considers a particular notion of rhythm as philosophic concern. Being largely drawn through the work of Emmanuel Levinas, it is perhaps most especially operative as a response, in fact, to his key 1947 work 'Existence and Existents' (the reluctance to name Levinas himself or indeed any other person or persons within the text functioning, however, as a denial of assimilatory propensity and the performance thereby of a particularly Levinasean concern with the procedure of ethical non/responsiveness to difference).

Functioning as the repeated movement between incomprehension and rationalisation, in fact, rhythm is here played out in relation to the 'dialogic' moment within the condition of reading, as itself a process of exchange for an interpreting subject with both an 'original' text's author and with a reader's reader, as it were, that yet takes place within the solitary, albeit 'possessed', status of a reading subjectivity (so that the textual voice could conceivably be allowed, in essence, an alternating presentation of Self and ventriloquizing Other).

Such consideration, moreover, being afforded particular emphasis in relation to the condition of the 'instant', as itself a musically oriented (rhythmic) concern, and its emergence in relation to various Levinasean preoccupations - most notably perhaps, the Saying and Said, Otherness, prayer and testament, the Hy-

postasis and the *il y a* - as well as themes that we might identify as inevitably informing the theoretical - Self, difference, listening, utterance, reading, ascription, presence, generation etc. The overarching intention of the work being to establish an interactive flow between such concerns that functions at the same time as both assessment or mapping, and realisation. The project ultimately existing as an effectuation of the very condition or conditions that it seeks to determine and describe.

Additionally, of course, in so doing the project seeks to postulate an aesthetic underpinning for the theoretical, arguably providing agency for the ethical moment of the text, and challenging the Levinasean conception of an essentially non-ethical aesthetic. In Levinasean thought the fundamental significance of ethics lays with a responsiveness to the primordial call for acknowledgement of the irreducible difference of the non-I, preceding the ontological and rejecting the possibility of aesthetic immanence in the pursuit of a righteous mode of existence. The preoccupation with the dispute between ethics and aesthetics being grounded, as a consequence, in the desire for distance or distinction, with art's 'otherwise' resonance being held to constitute a rhythmic deceit that is preclusive of an authentic alterity, and therefore preclusive of a genuine ethical potential.

The contention here, however, proposes an already extant aesthetic propensity in relation to ethics that, in the application of the same to the theoretical text as indeed the primary focus of the project itself, points to a presence that embraces, as well as being embraced by, the condition of the epistemic (the aesthetic, in relation to such, being worked via Levinasean/Blanchotian conceptions

of the *il y a*, in fact, as it might be furled through a textual condition of Being, and operative through video as moments of, or moments of witness to, incomprehension or independent intentionality, presence in absence, fascination without beginning, end or future, and the condition of 'here' as 'nowhere'). Denying in the same movement theory's persistent inclination as overarching schema in relation to practice, and coextensively indicating the very particular nature of ethical emergence within the text.

**Lawrence Sullivan.**

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\* Un-numbered titles constitute chapter titles and headers from 'Existence and Existents'.

## **DVD tracks.**

Each track precedes a text with which it maintains a particular relation. Such a relation, however, is not illustrative but constitutive of the first part of an aesthetic moment (the second part being realised within the theoretical condition of the text). The contiguous nature of the relation, moreover, means that the tracks could be experienced simultaneously with the text, should a reader so wish to encounter them. Additionally, most of the tracks are looped, with two exceptions ('Back Chat' and 'Exchange'), and could therefore be viewed, in theory, at any point within their running.

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*The essays that follow may be read in any order.*



**Between You and Me**

Card Room, Chelsea College of Art & Design, November 2007.

3 minutes 9 seconds.

Disc 1 track 1. Please press play.

# Music and Prayer.

## Foreword.

The essays which follow are a series of prayers. Equally, they are music. These lines, similarly, are prayer and music.<sup>1</sup> But on what grounds might we make such a claim?

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of music here largely pursues a notion of the same as organisation of noise (see J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), whilst allowing for a more formal conception that determines music as a man-made aural phenomenon arranged for the purpose of experiential enrichment through particular forms of engagement - performance, dance, listening etc. (see J. Levinson, *Music, Art and Metaphysics: Essays in Philosophic Aesthetics*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991). Such a reading should be framed, however, in relation to a consideration of the aural that embraces the condition of silence as a sounding concern (following John Cage's view that posits the impossibility of absolute silence within existence, and which is here taken to encompass the cognitive - including processes of discursive thought). It acknowledges, moreover, the influence of contingent determinants - such as 'code', 'network' (J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*) and 'social context' (J.J. Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), and arrives at the conception (again following Cage) that all sound (including sounding silence) has musical potential.

The definition given to 'musicality' may appear an even greater formalist reading, of course, given its emphasis upon rhythm in this instance as indication of musical status (which could appear an alignment with pre-modernist conceptions of melody, rhythm, harmony etc. as intrinsic properties of musical sounding). Though it should in fact be noted that rhythm here (as generative movement, between dumbfoundedness and rationalisation) is engendered, less conventionally perhaps, at the point of reception (with listening, as creative occurrence, structuring such a condition) rather than the same being extraneously appointed as metric 'beat' with the coextensive imposition of a temporal grid.

In proposing that all sound has musical potential, however, it should also be acknowledged that argument exists for the divergence of music and sound-art, with the latter being determined in relation to an aesthetic that is in fact preclusive of the conditions of music and musicality. The issue then becoming one of effective distinction.

Andy Hamilton suggests two musically oriented positions, in fact, that function in relation to a 'universalist' perspective (the universalist position being an assertion of music as the only sounding art). 'Non-universalism', which, rather obviously, denies such a view and argues for a clear distinction between music and sound-art (Hamilton's own position positing a largely tonal musical characteristic and nascent category of non-musical sound-art), and 'avant-garde universalism', which calls, conversely, for an expansion of musical definition to incorporate all sound. Similarly, he distinguishes two modes of sound-art that seek withdrawal from a hegemonic musical status. Namely, 'documentary sound-art' and 'non-documentary sound-art' (see A. Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music*, London and New York, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007). The former could simply be deemed the capture of sound through framing or field recording, the latter being the fabrication of an environment, or indeed field itself, for the production of sound (drawing it closer, it might be argued, to installation art rather than music). In allowing, however, for the legitimacy of calls for an alternative aesthetic, the reading here, it

Music effects a 'channelization of noise'<sup>2</sup> and might be allowed an organisation of the disorganised (as indeed text might be allowed the organisation of thought's 'noise').<sup>3</sup> An attempt to control the unknown, the unknowable. Music thereby existing as an attempt to negotiate a position in relation to difference (if we posit noise as a particular manifestation of such difference), which locates it as both Scapegoat (in its containment of the 'horror' of noise) and act of Prayer (in its attempt to access the Otherwise made manifest in the condition of

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should yet be said, of course, is pointedly worked through a notion of the need (following Levinas) for coextensive relations between sound and music in order to arrive at a sense of the extraneous (see footnote 3, p. 12). In contradistinction to the views, therefore, that insist upon sound's distance from the regulatory propensity of the compositional *Notenbild*, the suggestion is that the score, or similar organisational structure, *is* in fact necessary since it elicits the condition of 'surplus'. And surplus implies the 'more than' that is the context of difference. Levinas himself using the term 'envers' in relation to such thinking, to denote the 'other side', as it were, and, more literally, the notion of 'toward' that marks the essential turn of his writing (see *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jill Robbins, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Given that music is framed here then as an organisation of noise, it could be argued that noise is, of course, the condition of sound as disorder and chaos. In allowing that to be the case, however, it should be noted that such a reading also carries an inherent danger of a too readily presumed polarity.

Rather, in admitting the disorganised status of noise and the organised status of music, it might be understood that each concern also bears within itself the condition of the other. The negative (if it can be so described) essence of noise is always a constitutive part of the positive essence of music. And noise carries continuously, in its mutative inclinations, the musical propensity for order. So that as Jacques Attali asserts "[c]atastrophe is inscribed in order, just as crisis is inscribed in development. There is no order that does not contain disorder within itself, and undoubtedly there is no disorder incapable of creating order" (J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, p.34).

Noise, it might then be said, is the sounding of a chaos and non-sense that writes itself through the order of music, its rupturing proclivities at the same time signalling, or indeed organising, an interdictory relation to an accepted meaning and the facilitation of potential new meaning. The presentation of noise within music, or indeed as music, constituting the presencing, as it were, within the now of the non-apprehensible, which continuously gives way to, or matures into (as the event of the recurring instant), a unique knowing that is itself the consequence of the positioning or contingency of subjective listening.

In so conceiving of matters then, it may appear that such a view precludes the modernist reading of fixed subjectivity or identity, whilst perhaps advancing the postmodernist concern with representation of the non-representable and the unfixed or multiple. Yet it could also be argued that even within such a context a notion of consensual meaning may be said to take place within the very move to define the heterogeneous. So that the extent of postmodernist destabilisation might itself be thrown into question. In *A Speech for Noise*, Salomé Voegelin posits the

noise).<sup>4</sup> Music might then be read as an ‘offering’ (the condition of Scapegoat equating with Sacrifice) of difference *to* difference (the specific relation here, in the light of such thinking, being that text, as an organising or organised concern, is made available to another whose interpreting agencies, in turn, cannot be specifically anticipated).

Prayer as music becomes then a vehicle of containment and correspondence. But in what sense, and particularly in what sense here, is it correspondence? Prayer exists, after all, in a variety of modes - as supplication, praise, confession and so on. And it addresses a variety of possible recipients - deity, spirit, the deceased - each of which, of course, might be determined as an absolute exteriority. Or it is the inculcation of particular attitudes within the praying subject themselves.

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view, further, that postmodernism “queries the nominalism and homogeneity of those who participate in the meaning making process” but does not question “the possibility of meaning making per se”, going on to suggest that whilst noise (or sound) could offer meaning and value through context and association within postmodern discourse, it needs also to be framed “simply and unstoppably” as always itself. Always in its own right without recourse to a meta-discourse for evaluation of its perception. (S. Voegelin, *A Speech for Noise*, [http://www.salomevoegelin.net/listening\\_to\\_noise...html](http://www.salomevoegelin.net/listening_to_noise...html), accessed December 2010). And whilst being sympathetic to such a view, the inclination here, in fact, as might be understood through the notion of coextensive relations already outlined, would be that the realisation of difference (accepting that the condition of noise might be read as a particular embodiment of the same), or the realisation of difference as an ethical concern in Levinasian terms at least, is actually dependent upon the proximity of a fixed meta-discourse in order to facilitate the possibility of inflected reading, a reading of the otherwise, a reading of the ‘trace’. Alterity (noise) cannot be framed in terms of polar opposition or it could be thought and then thematised. The movement to determine meaning through designation being always undermined, as it were, by the difference which overflows such determination. That is not to deny the notion, of course, of the possibility that “[n]oise forces the sonic discourse ‘outward’”, and “foregrounds the contingent subjectivity of its perception.” (S. Voegelin, *A Speech for Noise*). It is simply to suggest, rather, that it might do so *through* a systemic listening. Noise needing the ascriptive, it could be argued, in order to exist beyond it.

<sup>4</sup> The notions of Scapegoat and Sacrifice being drawn through Attali’s observations of the same in *Noise*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. pp. 21-45 (and for further consideration of the Scapegoat and Sacrifice here, see also ‘The Music of the Il y a’, pp. 115-131).

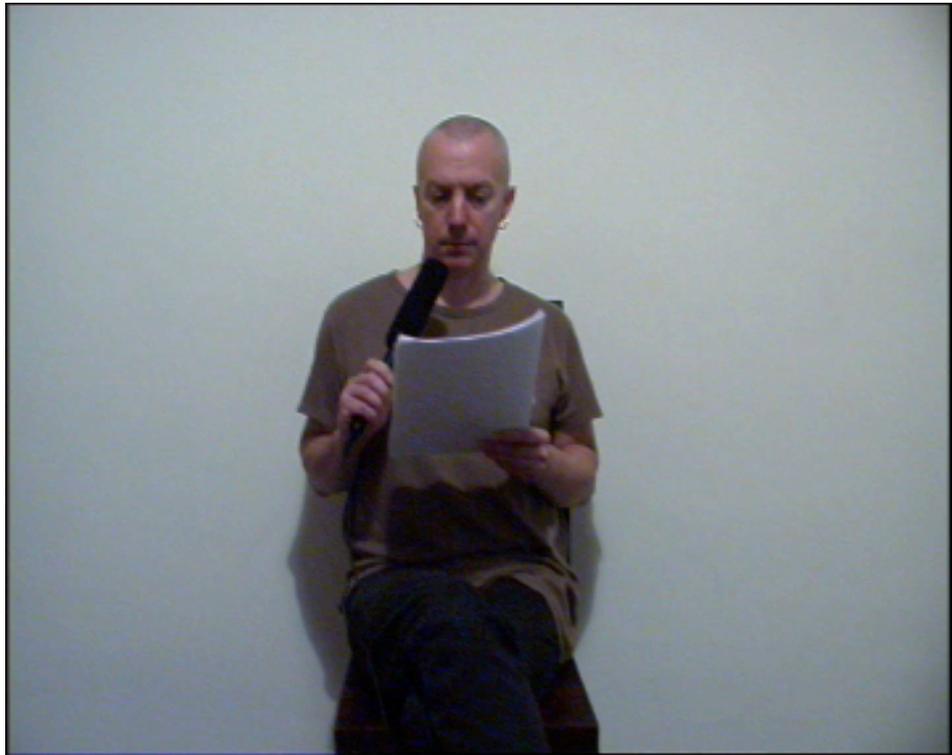
In addition to which, the notion of prayer (as well as the perhaps more contentious notion of music) is played out here through text, or more pointedly the theoretical text, eliciting a further sense of the otherwise in terms of the reader, or Reader. So the question to then be asked is to whom do we write? Who are You?

And additionally, of course, we might consider the position of the Reader in relation to the theoretical process which makes of interpreting subject both reader *and* writer. The theoretical prompting a 'turning' as a matter of course in the process of 'facing' as transition from interpreter as reader to interpreter as writer. The focus of 'facing' shifting from the author of a source text (whilst accepting that even within such a context there are further shifts of facing as we engage with various intertextual readings) to a reader of the interpreting text.

In fact, we could perhaps align the notion of theoretical interpreter with that of father confessor. That is, inasmuch as the act of interpretation (especially in terms of the theoretical) is an act of intercession whereby a subject attempts to make available for another the 'confession' of a first (or initial Other), we might determine a sense within which an interpreting subject is therefore to be read as vessel or conduit for a particular 'message' conveyed from one condition of difference to another. Such action itself arguably becoming a further confession, however, in the interpreting process. Could we ever interpret, after all, without including something of the Self within our interpretation (and isn't a priest's intercession, in fact, the interpretive moment therefore as both inevitable act of self-revelation as well as relaying agency?)?

So here then, we are both confessor and confessed. The change in attitude being predicated upon the moment of interpretation in relation to which we are receiver or giver. You are both interpreted and recipient of interpretation, meaning that equally You are also confessed and confessor. Confession existing as a moment of Sacrifice, wherein interpretation of difference is offered to difference. Your words being the words of a death-bed confession (since all authors are, conceivably, 'dead') offered through our offices in prayer, or music, to the You that is always absolute alterity, absolute Other.

*This is a hesitation before beginning. Or before re-beginning. It might be experienced as a moment of indolence, a moment of gathering up. A reflection.*



**Back Chat (extract)**

Artist's home, North London, August 2003.

3 minutes 44 seconds (of 23 minutes approximately).

Disc 1 track 2. Please press play.

## The Art of Pre-facing.

### A Prayer.

This is a preface. A preface might make us both uneasy and joyful. Uneasy in its authoritarian assertions, and joyful in its (and the following text's) inability to effect the same. Uneasy, because prefacing or pre-facing, functioning as overture, is generally taken as an indication of that which will come later (ostensibly having knowledge, as it were, prior to the event), but may equally be understood as deception since it invariably comes into being as a consequence rather than anticipation of an already extant text. And joyful because we might apprehend it as simulacrum, or witness, of the shifting and inconclusive nature of the work it prefigures (and therefore as happy sign of impotent authority). To frame the condition of writing, or prefacing more particularly (though we would argue that all writing essentially exists as preface in any case), as a moment of either 'Aufhebung' or 'inconclusion' may, however, be inaccurate.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps we could allow, rather, that the two positions are concurrent.

Of course, a preface is generally delivered through a prior knowledge of that which it precedes (whether preface and text are by the same author or not) and it would appear ill advised or ill mannered to conceive of writing a preface in fact without having at least some knowledge of the work to which it attends. But such a course must inevitably then constitute the preface, the 'saying before-

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<sup>1</sup> 'Aufhebung' being "a relationship between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence" (as determined by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the *Translator's Preface* in J.Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976. p. xi), and is derived through a reading of the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, which posits it as a very specific conception of sublation or sublimation.

hand',<sup>2</sup> as therefore a pretense or fiction (since its presentation would invariably suggest a specific primary moment within a linear temporal unfolding).

The notion of 'Aufhebung' attempts the accommodation of such a process, however, seeking the integration of the preface into the body of the text as though both were part of the same living entity. Or we could perhaps view it as a process of re-integration in filial terms, whereby the preface engendered by the parent text is recovered by the same and so becomes justified.<sup>3</sup> That would be, however, to too forcibly locate the text as authority, and potentially preclude an ethicality aimed at the obviation of such a condition.

We might therefore determine the preface (and, to repeat the notion, allow that any given text is a preface since it must function as antecedent event in relation to subsequent readings) as a movement that, to borrow from the condition of musicality, might be divided between processes of interpretation and performance. Where, however, are we to locate the notion of 'performativity' here (or in relation to text per se)? Some interpretations (naturally) would emphasise the condition of musicality as analytic interpretation that in turn elicits performance. It may perhaps be more appropriate, however, in thinking of the theoretical to suggest that the conditions are virtually simultaneous and that musicality as a movement between incomprehension and comprehension is a (rhythmically) performative process of interpretation.

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<sup>2</sup> G.C. Spivak, *Translator's Preface* in J.Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. x. Taken from the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. xi. Spivak here drawing on one of Derrida's structural metaphors.

The event of theoretical interpretation is, however, a process of continuous becoming, and emphasises its condition of performativity, it could be said, through its unique status. That is, as with any musical performance, every interpretation or reading is new. Even in repetition or replication by the same author there is a unique status that attaches to the same. A reading changes from moment to moment (instant to instant) because, as beings in the world, *we* change. And prefacing, it might be allowed, in its application to the unique moment as it is followed by another and another and so on, constitutes a bearing witness to the process of such change.

And in the movement from one subject to another in interpretation, moreover, we might discern perhaps most especially the very particular paradox of dissemination as it is played out in terms of the non/relation between readings occurring in the moment to moment. To engage with such a process, in fact, is to effectively assimilate and relinquish (or grasp and un-grasp) in virtually the same instant, since the assimilatory condition is countered by the condition of the 'new'. Such a notion of constant 'becoming' also bringing into question the condition of 'originality' in a source text, which is itself effectively a network of traces (as with all texts) and equally in a constant state of becoming. So that a sense of the 'original' work is perhaps a fallacy.

This means, however, that in the movement of reading the 'original' or source text, as theoretical 'first' (each text becoming an 'original' or first for a subse-

quent text), is always an 'original in repetition'.<sup>4</sup> The consequence of which is that the imported original (co-opted into the text) remains identical with itself only by differentiating from itself, constituting, in fact, a specific presence in absence:

[T]he original text, then, exists only as a 'moment' of such an hermeneutical 'becoming' within its history of reception and interpretation; it [the original text] is in no way preceding the process of 'becoming' of this hermeneutical history. As far as that goes, an hermeneutical identity is only in and as being-different-from-itself [...]. Eventually, this concept of hermeneutic repetition is therefore dialectical, precisely because with it, sense and meaning of an 'original text' exist only as the 'Other than itself', only in difference from itself [...].<sup>5</sup>

And in returning to the particular concern with preface, it might then be apposite to suggest that the pertinent condition of prefacing (and the condition of prefacing as it affects all texts) is its propensity to bleed into, or infiltrate, a subsequent text or texts as spectral presence - whilst also allowing that the production of a theoretical text is also always a 'continuation' of a previous text or texts, and is therefore itself an already 'possessed' work. In effect, such text is always both inside and outside an ongoing concern (the final word never being achievable), and always therefore 'present' to subsequent readings without knowledge of how such readings might function. Pre-facing is, therefore, anticipation of the un-anticipatable, an awareness of its own being-to-be without knowledge of the extraneous influence that renders it otherwise. A bearing witness to the authorising moment that loses authority.

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<sup>4</sup> W. Lutterfelds, *Subjektivität - ein Wissenschaftsdefizit der Kulturwissenschaften Die Dialektik von Text und Interpretation als Wiederholung des Gleichen*, Manuskript Passau, p. 4, quoted and translated in G. Sedlmayr, *Breaking Through the Closure: Deconstruction and the Ethical Reading of Literature*, Passau, 2006. (accessed July 2007) <http://www.gradnet.de/papers/pomo02.papers/breaking.htm>. p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

*A reader may like to consider his/her interpretive activity as a production of light. A clarity. An apprehension of exteriority through interiority. In the same instant, however, it is also a withdrawal that signals the unique status of the Self. We might recognise then that participation is also an absencing.*



### **In Flight**

Home of Felicity Dowding, North West London, September 2007.

3 minutes 33 seconds.

Disc 1 track 3. Please press play.

## Light Music.

### A Prayer.

Of all the arts, music is perhaps generally regarded as the most definitively abstract. A particular view holding it to be absolutely devoid of extraneous influence, referring only to itself, and existing, in fact, as pure 'sensation'. Such a condition being claimed, additionally, for the status of the aesthetic par excellence:

The way in which in art the sensible qualities which constitute an object do not lead to an object and are in themselves is the very event of sensation qua sensation, the esthetic event. We can also call it the musicality of sensation, for in music this way a quality can divest itself of all objectivity - and consequently of all subjectivity - seems completely natural.<sup>1</sup>

So that all art, though perhaps music most especially, even when structured as 'representation', has a propensity for self-referral. And such self-referral, in its emphasis of 'presence', would appear a condition of hermetic closure, of exclusion. So that 'the message is the presentation, but it presents nothing; it is, that is, presence'.<sup>2</sup>

But such a condition, for all that, cannot exist in absolute terms. Isn't the 'presentation of nothing' not a presentation, after all, of something? And isn't a further sense of 'bearing witness' operative here also? Music is, of course, a bear-

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<sup>1</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> J-F. Lyotard, *Newman, The Instant in The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988. p. 81.

ing witness to its own self contained status and to the impossibility of representing presence beyond its own status, but in the assertion of non-acknowledgement is there not additionally, in fact, a converse sense yet of acknowledgement?<sup>3</sup>

The assertion in 'Existence and Existents' is that the aesthetic event realises a context within which 'musical sound is no longer a noise... enter[ing] into relations and syntheses that no longer have anything in common with the order of objects'.<sup>4</sup> But isn't such a process simply a forgetting, with the implication that forgetting is a forgetting of *something*? Forgetfulness always being attended by the 'trace' or residue of that which it forgets. And is it therefore inappropriate to suggest that music is in fact unable to 'unburden' itself of that from which it emerges - namely, noise? And isn't it, rather, that in its organising condition music cannot do otherwise than intimate its origins?

And would it then be impossible to align music with light in terms of its conceivably 'revelatory' status? That is, whilst music may not be possessed of the seemingly appropriative dimension of light, it yet facilitates not only a 'sense' of extraneous difference, it also makes possible a similar grasping of distance or interval in the resistance of anonymous existence.

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<sup>3</sup> The thought here relating to Jacques Derrida's conception of what might be termed the 'impossibility of alterity's acknowledgment' without a pre-extant 'sense' of the same.

<sup>4</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 47.

To understand such thought we could perhaps consider the condition of light more fully. Light is held to be contiguous in fact with the emergence of sense (or indeed, sensation), and gives rise to the condition of appropriation:

Sense is that by which what is exterior is already adjusted to and refers to what is interior... Sense is permeability for the mind... Or, we can say, it is luminosity. For we can speak of vision and light wherever there is sensible or intellectual apprehension... Light makes objects into a world, that is, makes them belong to us. Property constitutes the world: through the light the world is given and apprehended.<sup>5</sup>

Yet such apprehension, however, is not necessarily authorising or unremittingly acquisitive in its occurrence. Granted, it could be argued that light, in privileging sight, makes objects into a world, and a world that is possessed or to be possessed. But light also proffers distance, the recognition of which facilitates the consideration that a relation with objects might in fact be an engagement without compromise.

So that whilst accepting that the condition of intentionality which gives rise to sense may establish a connectivity with the 'outside' (an 'enveloping of the exterior by the inward, which is the very structure of the cogito and of sense'),<sup>6</sup> wherein the same could be read as a specific continuity of Self, the knowledge formulated as a consequence of light must in fact also constitute an interval itself in relation to an exteriority, since thought (as knowledge) could equally be allowed a displacement or remove from that which is thought about:

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<sup>5</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 41.

[T]hough it tends unambiguously towards an object, knowing is essentially a way of being on the hither side of being. It is a way of relating to events while still being able to not be caught up in them.<sup>7</sup>

Even the thought of Selfhood instills a distance, so that 'a subject is never one with the idea it can have of itself'.<sup>8</sup> Always then, and contiguous with its condition of advance, the thought occurs that thought is simultaneously a moment of retreat, of detachment, from being. And equally, therefore, a rhythmic play between grasping and un-grasping.

Light, we might say, both detains us within being whilst also maintaining an interval for us in relation to the same. And considered in relation to the possibility informing this text (that light might be framed as a condition of music) how are we to then determine the function of musicality? In fact, we might contend that rather than existing beyond, or at a remove from, the condition of objectivity, music actually exists as representation of difference, or an intimation of difference, that both refers to a condition of the otherwise and (through its emphasis of self presence) the impossibility of doing the same. At work within the condition of music is then a movement between witnessing of difference and a witnessing of the impossibility of witnessing.

To what does music then connect us? In fact we might say that music is the organising principle that we apply to the condition that we sense beyond knowledge. Such a condition we may contend, moreover, being that of the *il y a* or *there is*, a manifestation of exteriority that we sense through noise (albeit noise

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 42.

that may be of our own making) but comprehend or even seek to control, as we have suggested, through music. Music functioning as appropriative knowledge that is both a revelatory instrument of difference and a facilitator of organisation (and therefore distance) in relation to the same. A bridge between order and chaos.

*A reader is invited to remember to forget. And, in forgetting, to remember. The musical orientation of the text means that as with processes of musical reception, wherein uncertainty gives way to rationalisation, reading becomes a reflexive attempt to comprehend, or indeed recollect, the significance of incomprehensible immediacy.*



### **Here and Now**

Card Room, Chelsea College of Art & Design, November 2007.

3 minutes 52 seconds.

Disc 1 track 4. Please press play.

## The Silence of Sound.

### A Prayer.

Listen. There is no such thing as silence.<sup>1</sup> Or rather, there is audible silence and there is absolute silence (the latter being the silence of death, which is effectively unknowable since it constitutes the beyond of lived experience).<sup>2</sup> So that perhaps the real distinction is to be found in terms of intentionality. Sound that seeks the ear, and sound that reaches the ear through chance, randomness, accident or even imagination.

To so consider silence is to posit it as 'sounding', and therefore, in fact, as being on the side of life. Silence existing as a world of sounds:

At my house, you hear the boat sounds, the traffic sounds the neighbours quarreling, the children playing and screaming in the hall, and on top of it all the pedals of the piano squeak. There is no getting away from life.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Such a postulation deriving, of course, from John Cage. The view originating from a visit in 1951 to an anechoic chamber at Harvard University in order to 'hear' silence, where he "literally expected to hear nothing." Instead, he heard two sounds, one high and one low. He was told that the first was his nervous system and the other his blood circulating. This was a major revelation that was to affect his compositional philosophy from that time on. And it was from this experience that he decided that silence defined as a total absence of sound did not exist. "Try as we may to make a silence, we cannot," he wrote. "One need not fear for the future of music." (J. Cage, *Experimental Music in Silence*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973. p. 13).

<sup>2</sup> In *Aporias*, Jacques Derrida makes the point that 'my death' can never in fact be subject to an experience that would be properly be my own, or that 'I' (as sentient being) could be accountable for (J. Derrida, *Finis in Aporias*, California: Stanford University Press, 1993. pp. 1-42). So that whilst death may befall us, we cannot, as the people we are, ever truly know it. And in linking the condition with silence, composers like John Cage, amongst others, would claim that the same is similarly a condition beyond comprehension. The position that we might propose here, however, is one that suggests the possibility of an inflected receipt of the absolute through the apprehensible. A trace of the absolute condition of silence through the occasion of its absence.

<sup>3</sup> J. Cage, *Lectures on Something in Silence*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1973. p. 135.

The same, moreover, locates such silence within the condition of duration or time (the notion of silence as death of course being determined as outside, indeed out of, time),<sup>4</sup> so that existence, throughout its temporal mode of being, could be deemed a cacophony of sound. From the technologically facilitated radiographic revelations of noise produced by changes in the atomic structure of exploding gases, and photo-acoustic spectroscopic recordings enabling audio receipt of naturally occurring phenomena (flowering buds for example), to the subjective noise of our own corporeal states of being (breathing, heartbeat and so on) and even (extending the notion to the imaginary conditions of, for example, interior dialogue) the reverberations of our own thought processes,<sup>5</sup> living is replete with sound. Such that sound cannot be evaded whilst perhaps (in aligning a particular form of silence not only with an absolute exteriority, but also with a condition of desirability) being the one thing from which we would like to be able to withdraw.

And yet, to so frame the relation between sound and silence is also to acknowledge that silence may in fact exist as a presence in absence within sound, inasmuch as death constitutes a presence in absence within life (death occurring as perhaps the ultimately inflected condition of being).<sup>6</sup> Such apprehension de-

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<sup>4</sup> The status of death therein representing the condition of absolute exteriority which is akin to the absolute alterity of the Other, and by extension the absolute difference of the divine - and signals the sense of the infinite within the finite.

<sup>5</sup> Such notions of cognitive 'interior sound' embracing, even, the various degrees of deafness or hearing impairment.

<sup>6</sup> A condition to which Derrida points in *Aporias*, suggesting moreover that a reversal of the positions of life and death, wherein death is generally considered as subordinate to life, is reversed, or simply made redundant (J. Derrida, *Finis* in *Aporias*, pp. 1-42). Similarly in Sigmund Freud, the death instinct is posited as the most emphatic life force, or that life force is in fact always itself a compelling movement towards death (see for example S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle V* in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, London: Penguin Books, 1991. pp. 311-312).

termining, moreover, a sense within which death imposes, as it were, the condition of life upon us, and situates us within a 'here' as a position from which we might formulate an indirect reading of the 'not-here' or, indeed, death itself.<sup>7</sup>

In relation to which it could be said that the sounds which determine our existence within life are actually compelled through an unattainable, or incomprehensible, absolute silence. Such unattainableness obliging our engagement in the world with sound, whilst allowing in turn that we are conversely in coextensive relation always (an awareness without knowledge) with the possibility of the same absolute silence, in fact, through our very immersion in sound. A notion of polarities thereby being precluded since both conditions are able to at once be independent and yet continuously interwoven.

In respect of which (and backtracking a little), we should then perhaps say that two essential notions of silence are in fact extant - albeit that one is extraneous to existence - a tangible sense of being's silence (the sounding condition of which pertains to an 'outer' mode of un/intentional listening and an 'inner' subjective mode of un/intentional listening) and an intangible sensing of death's, or outside being's, absolute silence. The two, however, may be regarded as overlap or even merged, the intimation of the otherwise manifesting itself as the 'presenting' shadow of being's resonant silence (and in framing the *il y a* as manifestation of permeating alterity within being, moreover, we might argue that the same is at once an extraneous/intrinsic condition that is filled out, that we

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<sup>7</sup> That is not, however, to seek to align the notion of an indirectly 'inferred' outside (as we might perhaps seek to do with a Levinasean model of difference) with the Heideggerean conception of 'being-towards-death'. Heidegger's notion arguably inclining towards the already apprehended and the polar, Levinas's towards the always un-apprehended or indeed un-apprehensible and, albeit somewhat perversely, the contiguous.

each fill out, with a sounding silence that simultaneously both alerts us to the desired condition of the infinite beyond, and to our own corporeal status that is itself mired within existence).

And in focusing upon the condition of music in relation to such thoughts, we might by extension then concede that music and silence are each suffused with the other, and that the rhythmic structure that underpins all music could in fact be read as a vibratory movement between sound and silence (whilst emphasising again that it is not a question of polarities or binarisms, since each is already written through by the other. It is, rather, a question of comprehending that each is present to the other, that silence as nothingness is yet a 'somethingness', and that it is not simply a precondition for sound but is already filled with sound).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Attali and Walter Zimmerman, amongst others, indicate two conditions of silence in relation to music, in fact. One is a socially subjective silence imposed by an authorising 'musicality' (an imposition of the organising law which is both protective and prescriptive) and the other, the sense of which takes precedence here, is a silent music that is permitting of noise (or acknowledges the constitution of music within noise). So that silence, in relation to such a view, structures a space that is in fact replete with sound (given that silence is, in any case, an impossibility). And we might even determine it therefore as a space of sounding (or silent sounding) within sound. Moreover, it is the sounding of the peripheral, the marginalised, the disorganised. A sounding within music of the otherwise.

But more than silence being the sounding of the extraneous, in fact, it is the sounding of the Self, since listening within such a context facilitates the apprehension of one's own process and location of engagement. Through listening we hear ourselves as part of the apprehended terrain, part of the soundscape. We might even say that we listen to our listening selves.

Silence may therefore be regarded as the space within which listening gathers a movement from non-sense to rationalisation. And silence might then be framed as a space that marks the emergence of meaning and, indeed, language (which itself leads, of course, to the production of the text). Such emergence must, however, also mark silence as a space of doubt and contestation, since the striving for orientation and meaning (which, aligned with notions of birth and decay in the instant, must continuously be re-worked or re-constructed since doubt consistently overwhelms assertion) is always personal and contingent, with imagination providing the only support for subjective meaning.

Such doubt, it should also be noted of course, is also the source of and for an ethical reading of silence, since the assimilatory propensity that attends the notion of an all-embracing condition of musical sound (including sounding silence) is continuously undermined by the process of a immersive listening, as "an infinite field of innovation" (Salomé Voegelin, *Pondering a Paradox: The Seduction of Noise*, <http://www.salomevoegelin.net/Home.html>. Accessed December 2010), promoting at all turns a series of complex and consistently changing possibilities.

Of course, the apprehension of silence within music has, historically, largely determined the same as a supplementary or subordinate condition to the essential condition of sound. Silence as a process of 'rest' may have long been considered as fundamentally important to the production of composition. Silence may have marked the transitional movement from one musical moment to the next via 'caesura', a deliberate pause. And silence may have delineated the beginning and/or end of a work. But silence, for all that, has most regularly been apprehended as the secondary moment in musical production, its real significance being read through its mode of facilitation only (that, despite the fact that music theory has also long acknowledged that silence could be read as more than a simple discontinuity of sound - inasmuch as silence is 'present', for example, within the condition of a sustained 'fermata', the holding of a note or rest for longer than its usual duration, or an extremely delicate 'pianissimo' or soft playing. So that we might consequently then speak of a music of the 'not yet', or 'no longer', apprehensible, or indeed of the silently resonant).

But that is not, however, to deny a continuous development, throughout the twentieth century and twenty-first century thus far, of appreciation within music for the meaningfulness of silence.<sup>9</sup> The concern with such leading to the formulation of very particular ways of thinking through the relation, and which could in their turn be applied to conceptions of metaphysics, hermeneutics and the theoretical. In relation to which, we might then restate the proposition here that there

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<sup>9</sup> In relation to which we might look, for example, to composers as diverse as those from the Second Viennese School, Alban Berg, Anton Webern and Arnold Schoenberg, to those of the New York School, Morton Feldman and John Cage preeminently. The interests here, of course, being most especially determined in relation to Cage's conceptions of silence, or the non-silence of silence, as well as perhaps the condition of silence as 'imaginary' noise as it might be read through the work of composers like Dieter Schnebel or Mauricio Kagel.

is, within existence, no such thing as silence. Or that there is a sounding silence, and that such silence contains the trace, or intimation, of an exterior absolute silence. But how, more precisely, to understand such a condition both in its musical formation and as metaphysical and theoretical concern?

We might begin by observing that the determination of a 'sounding silence' in music (or the notion to which we allude here initially) could be read in particular relation to the immediate consequence of an encounter with 'white paintings',<sup>10</sup> themselves functioning as 'airports for shadows and dust... [as] mirrors of the air.'<sup>11</sup> In effect, a locus or context for the apprehension and configuration of the unobserved. Or, indeed, the extraneous. The implication being that without a point of realisation, as it were, the extraneous can never in fact be countenanced. So in that regard we might say that white paintings reveal the unapprehended within our, and their, environment, just as the 'bidden'<sup>12</sup> condition of music becomes the context or vehicle for unbidden sound, or indeed a sounding silence (the grasping of which also operates, to emphasise the point, as facilitating agent for the 'sensing' of another layer of exteriority - an outside that exists as pure absence - inasmuch as sounding silence could be said to presage an absolute silence without our in fact having any knowledge of the same).

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<sup>10</sup> The reference, of course, is to John Cage's encounter with Robert Rauschenberg's works of the same name in 1951, which Cage felt gave validation or permission for his production of 'silent' music.

<sup>11</sup> J. Cage, *The Charles Elliot Norton Lectures I - VI*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1990. p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> A bidden condition of music refers both to the sounding of music and/or to the object or situation facilitating such sounding - extending from the context within which such sound might emerge (including notation and instrumentation) to the environment within which it might resonate (concert hall etc.).

In effect, the artifact (or indeed aesthetic event) here proceeds as a point of summons. It draws into consciousness the otherwise ignored (and into an inflected sensing of the unknowable). Such a determination of art thereby rendering the same as incantatory, and as a specific conduit for difference - whilst understanding that it yet functions as a mouthpiece for the realisation of difference without itself being 'different'.<sup>13</sup>

The employment of the mouth as metaphor, moreover, asserts a particular appositeness in relation to the conditions of sound and silence, whilst also drawing attention to the possibility of another mode, it could be said, of extraneous 'sounding silence'. That is, in approaching the nature of the same we might then consider the contrapuntal nature of the relation (between sound and silence) as a 'breathing', the decay of sound into a silence that exists between inhalation and exhalation (such moments functioning as two points within a single event), with such concern invoking a condition of listening focused upon a "sounded vacancy"<sup>14</sup> that is of the inward (a listening to ourselves) rather than the extraneously ambient. Though each concern themselves still, it should be said, with

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<sup>13</sup> A notion that we might link to the Kantian notion of the experience of the artifact in relation to the sublime as the experience of the experience.

<sup>14</sup> C. Lunberry, *Remembrance of Things Present: Steven Foster's Repetition Series Photographs, Morton Feldman's Triadic Memories*, Online Paper, University of North Florida. p. 19. 2004 (accessed July 2008). The essay was delivered as a lecture on April 7, 2004, at the Michael Lord Gallery in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in conjunction with Steven Foster's exhibition of photographs from his series *Repetition*, and Louis Goldstein's performance of Morton Feldman's *Triadic Memories* (1981), which was to take place the following evening on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

the exteriority of sound (and remain concurrent within the process of listening).<sup>15</sup>

Worked through the condition of the *il y a*, moreover, we might posit the notion of the 'universal absence',<sup>16</sup> indeed universal silence, as yet 'an absolutely unavoidable presence. It is not the dialectical counterpart of absence, and we do not grasp it through a thought. It is immediately there... Nothing responds to us but this silence'.<sup>17</sup> In its essence, of course, such silence, such sounding silence, is pure Being (though we might contend that it is also in fact a non/manifestation or non/referral to pure difference).<sup>18</sup> Its realisation, however, is of our own making (framed as aesthetic construct), inasmuch as we conceivably create its sounding within the space of insomnia (in order to attempt to 'fix' the sensing of an otherwise - whilst accepting that it can never in fact be given to

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<sup>15</sup> The difference in mind being something like the distinction between the notion of extraneous silence in John Cage's work (*3' 44"*, or *Waiting* for example), which refers to the sounding silence of ambient noise, and the extraneous silence in Morton Feldman's work (*Triadic Memories* for example), which refers to a 'breathing' silence that, in its emphasis upon the meaningfulness of the relation between somethingness and nothingness, foregrounds the very condition of listening (or effectively perhaps the condition of listening to ourselves listening in order that we might hear that which is not there).

<sup>16</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 52.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Of course, in Levinas the *il y a* is a term of reference for the anonymous, insistent 'sensation' of Being, and not for a condition of alterity - and cannot in that sense therefore be grounded in relation to any notion of ethicality (if we allow that ethicality is grounded in relation to an acknowledgement of difference). The view here, however, to reiterate the point, is that the *il y a* may yet constitute a vehicle of or for an alterity, or an exteriority, or even a witnessing of the same, whilst simultaneously existing as pure Being. Such a perspective linking to the conception of the folding through of sound by silence.

conceptuality).<sup>19</sup> Its noisy emanations the consequence of listening to, or for, our listening selves.<sup>20</sup>

So that in allowing for an interior sounding (operative in terms of imagination and memory - which also embrace an ambient exteriority - as well as physiological occurrence) we hear within the condition of absence all that might sonically bleed into such a vacuum, and ourselves encountering the same. And in effect, we may thereby create the sounding of an exteriority which not only gives presence to the *il y a*, or *there is*, but in the assertion of the same allows (without our having knowledge that it does so) for an intimation through inflection of the absolutely un-apprehensible.

And transposed to the condition of text, we might then contend that text, including this text, is emergent in relation to silence, or, that is, emergent in relation to the silence of white space (indeed, the space of the *il y a*). Such space constituting an ocean of 'sounding silence' that works its way into, around and through the structure of sentences, of words, of letters. Or in effect, posits the text as a moment, or rather moments, in the continuity of the white page. The space between words, between sentences or paragraphs, constituting a

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<sup>19</sup> The thinking here overlaps with the Levinasean conceptions of *Otherwise than Being* and perhaps more especially the Kantian theory of *The Critique of Judgement*, both of which acknowledge that the attempts to apprehend difference, in terms of Otherness or the Sublime, can only meet with failure. And yet such attempts are, for all that, conditions of attestation to an exteriority. So that in the process of assigning a signifier for absence, or a signifier for the absence of a signifier, we are arguably led to the sensation of difference through a reflective adduction of the impossibility of knowing such difference. The recurring moment of the instant being, moreover, the agency through which the viability of such a process is sustained.

<sup>20</sup> We might also make the argument that insomnia, as a condition of 'altered state', is the aesthetic agent that facilitates the notion of a sounding *il y a* as itself aesthetic construct. And in that sense, we could perhaps conceive of insomnia as equivalent to the 'White Paintings' of Rauschenberg, as a specific agency for revelation.

charged space, as a precondition for the emergence of meaning, and into which meaning, or meanings, bleed constantly, since meaning is derived through the play between words, without however achieving definitive status. Such 'espacement'<sup>21</sup> is replete with soundings that are the result of 'diacritical realities',<sup>22</sup> or 'a certain inexhaustibility [of meaning] that cannot be classed in the categories of richness, intentionality, or a horizon'.<sup>23</sup> The process of dissemination operative within such a context constituting an attempt to reveal a contingency of meaning and, in addition, the sounding of misapprehension or 'dumbfoundedness'.<sup>24</sup> Dissemination representing not only a referral to the distribution of unlimited meaning, but also to the loss or dissipation of meaning. So that we might say that '[d]issemination opens out the play of surplus and lack within signification with no prospect of stabilizing or closing it'.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the term must itself remain equivocal in order that such a perspective be maintained. The application of meaning to dissemination being a restriction of the very same process.

So that white space then, the space of sounding silence, exists as a point of dissemination, as a point of resistance to the condition of meaningful intent

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<sup>21</sup> J. Derrida, *Différance in Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Blass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985. pp. 3-27. 'Espacement' being a term employed by Derrida, though borrowed from the description given by Stéphane Mallarmé of the typographic structuring within his own poetry.

<sup>22</sup> J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. B. Johnson, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983. p. 250.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> 'Dissemination' being the Derridean term for the inclination within a text to resist the unequivocal meaning, and to furnish rather, a continuous potentiality of interpretation. 'Dumbfoundedness' being the term employed by Lyotard to denote the moment of initial encounter with the aesthetic (J-F. Lyotard, *Presence in The Language of Art History*, ed. S. Kemall and I. Gaskell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. pp. 26-27).

<sup>25</sup> L. Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge*, California: University of California Press, 1995. p. 12.

within the text. A sounding silence that is contiguous with the sonic stridency of the text. A sounding silence that seeks to undermine the designatory assertions of the text at every opportunity, and generatively projects the condition of the new at every instant. Within any text, within any word, in fact, alternative meanings surface continuously (and are extant in the 'between' of the white space), whether consciously or subconsciously, whether desired or undesired, whether the product of textual contingency or associative reading. Every text, we might say therefore, differing from itself and thereby precluding an authorising interpretation, so that it could be allowed '[t]he text constantly goes beyond... [any] representation by the entire system of its resources and its own rules'.<sup>26</sup>

Here then, we might understand that a distinction is to be drawn between conditions of dissemination and polysemy.<sup>27</sup> Dissemination concerning itself with the play of meanings as infinite openness, polysemy with the status of the same as circumscribed horizons and conditions of closure. The difference between the two (textual dissemination and discursive polysemy) being 'precisely *difference* itself, an implacable difference.'<sup>28</sup> Wherein the process of dissemination cannot be embraced by the polysemous. Or rather, the condition of dissemination cannot be made to give way to a totalising, definitive perspective. Instead,

the text is no longer the expression or representation (felicitous or otherwise) of any *truth* that would come to diffract or assemble itself in the polysemy of litera-

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<sup>26</sup> J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. C. Spivak, Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976. p.101.

<sup>27</sup> The conception that of course underpins so much of Derrida's thinking about the condition of the text.

<sup>28</sup> J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 351.

ture. [And i]t is this hermeneutic concept of *polysemy* that must be replaced by *dissemination*.<sup>29</sup>

The 'presence' then, of a sounding silence, or white space, constitutes a 'non-theme of the spacing that relates the different meanings to each other.'<sup>30</sup> 'Meanings' being shaped here via processes, for example, of the associative, the allusive and the grammatical (elisions, liaisons, games etc.). Whilst the white space (in a further split with the condition of thematisation) also harbours the sense of 'phonemic differentials'<sup>31</sup> and the 'formal, phonic, or graphic 'affinities' that do not have the shape of a word.'<sup>32</sup> So that in effect, in addition to the potential for multiple and/or equivocal meanings that pulse in the space of silence within the text (in opposition to a 'sanctioned' interpretation, which might effectively be allowed a 'solidification' of meaning whilst also existing in an interpretive context as the second part of a musically inclined receipt), a material condition of the text is also constantly facilitating a slipping of definition's leash, or a promulgation of the 'unbidden' within the condition of apprehension, through its approach to the ear or eye of a reader (though we should note that any eruption of difference here is also dependent upon the 'fixed' or 'organising' status of an interpreting text as the object or space against which difference might come into being - in the same way that the sounding silence of music is rendered through its proximity to a 'sanctioned', and 'sanctioning', entity, be it a musical score, sounded notes, a concert hall etc.).

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 262.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 252.

<sup>31</sup> G. Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, California: University of California Press, 1990. p.7. A term used by Stewart to describe the play of text in silent reading.

<sup>32</sup> J. Derrida, *Dissemination*, p. 255.

The white space of the text, we might say, is therefore a space of nothing (or nothing as 'something'). It signifies a 'null-site'<sup>33</sup> within which silence sounds. It could, however, also be considered as the 'presenting' of the *il y a* as the essential condition of Being *and* the bearing witness to the otherwise of Being. The (instant) positing of Self within the same (the move to writing?), as an uptake of Being, as the event of hypostasis, establishing a vibrating rhythm within existence as an apprehending movement between a sounding silence and the intimation of an absolute silence (which may itself be aligned with a condition of absolute exteriority or that which is otherwise than Being).

In effect, we might say that the condition of such space within the text, is then the condition of Saying that must affect the Said of any text.<sup>34</sup> Saying existing as a moment of ethically inclined interruption to the imperialist proclivities of the text as a condition of the Said. And yet, the relation of the two is inexorably, and necessarily, interwoven. The ethical nature of such a condition being played out in the musical overlay of the same (wherein we might infer an alignment of Saying's openness with 'sounding silence', and Said's closure with 'prescribed sound' or indeed 'prescribed music'). That is, in foregrounding a notion of the text, and the theoretical text most specifically, as a point of both musical reception and musical production, we might determine a continuous repetition of the Said's 'unsaying'. But how more precisely to understand this?

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<sup>33</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p. 8. 'Null-site' constituting an 'extraction' or withdrawal from essence that is yet an immersion in the same in order to effect such a remove. It could perhaps in effect be deemed a 'site of non-site'.

<sup>34</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, pp. 5-9. The Saying and Said existing as the ethical moment in language before meaning has 'settled' (Saying) and the authorising moment in language when determination has been applied (Said).

In fact, the condition of language is such that its movement towards definition of an ethical status must overwhelm and assimilate in the same process the very essence it seeks to treat ethically. Whilst the consequence of its perpetually 'amphibological'<sup>35</sup> mode of existence, wherein it is always 'already scepticism',<sup>36</sup> means that it must also function consistently as a mechanism for the undoing of its own designatory propensities. The analogy consistently used, of course, is that of the thread with a series of knots along its length, where such knots might be seen as Saying's continuous interruption of the continuity of the Said's ontological thread.<sup>37</sup>

Configured then in terms of a musical orientation, it might be presumed that rhythm is to be constituted here in relation to a movement between the assimilatory and non-assimilatory. That may, however, be to assign too precisely a condition of polarity. Rather, we should perhaps regard the condition of the text, hinged upon the process of 'reading', as both a point of receipt (musical reception consisting of dumbfounded apprehension followed by rationalisation) and a process of production (identified as performance, and the subsequent availability of the text for another's interpretation). The notion of rhythm constituting a repeated movement into the Being of sounding silence or white space, wherein the initial concern lays with an experiencing of, and bearing witness to, the first

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<sup>35</sup> 'Amphibology' being a figure of speech which could be construed in two distinct senses. And as Robert Eaglestone indicates, 'Amphibology, the name for a figure of speech, is used [in Levinas, and particularly the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being*] as a metaphor to describe the condition of all language... Levinas advances by using linguistic terms as metaphors for language.' (R, Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism; Reading After Levinas*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. p. 140).

<sup>36</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, p. 170.

<sup>37</sup> The metaphor used by Levinas consistently in *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, p. 25, p. 105, pp. 165-171.

moment (in reading) of incomprehension. The second part of each moment then becoming a sifting and determining that congeals into the designatory.<sup>38</sup> And as designation it becomes available for another's reading (or, indeed, performance).

Of course, in framing the condition of the aesthetic we might then consider its viability as a method of evocation. Given that art has on occasion been framed as that which cannot Say, as that which speaks only of its essential condition (with such a notion being applied most especially perhaps in terms of music).<sup>39</sup> The condition of art embracing essence as a 'verb' and 'noun' function (simply perhaps, the assertion of the 'what it is' and 'what it does' condition of essence), which ostensibly precludes the possibility of Saying, of an opening to difference, and identifies it, rather, with the status of the Said.<sup>40</sup> Art effectively being understood here as the thing in itself and nothing more, with a particular example being the condition of the resounding cello which, whilst some might purport to find it as a soul 'complaining or exulting in the depth of sounds',<sup>41</sup> could be more properly understood as simply 'the essence of the cello, a modality of essence, [which] is temporalised in the work.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> We might even posit the 'maturation' of an instant as such a movement from incomprehension to rationalisation.

<sup>39</sup> The consideration here being read of course through a Levinasean perspective.

<sup>40</sup> The 'noun'-function and 'verb'-function of the Said and art in Levinas, are examined by Robert Eaglestone in *Ethical Criticism: Reading After Levinas*, in which he proposes that a contradiction exists in the Levinasean approach to the aesthetic, and that rather than presenting a simple resounding of the Said, the aesthetic is composed of an interactive Saying and Said - pro-pounded through Levinas's understanding of language in general, the use of and appeal to literature in *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, and the same text's own potential 'literary' status. And whilst endorsing Eaglestone's view, the suggestion here is that a condition of Saying may yet be realisable within the aesthetic through an acceptance, albeit perversely, of its own status within the Said.

<sup>41</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, p. 41. With reference to Iannis Xenakis's work *Nomos Alpha for Unaccompanied Cello*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Such a perspective denying to the aesthetic the possibility of a transcendent propensity, whilst allowing a revelatory turn to the same in relation to Being (though such, in its ontological status, cannot be opened to the otherwise of its own condition).<sup>43</sup> And yet that may be to misrepresent the ethical potential that underwrites the characteristic of 'bearing witness' within the aesthetic. And it may be to miss the ethical nature that, despite itself, informs, as silence within sound, the designatory. So that in suggesting that Saying must 'spread out and assemble itself into essence, posit itself, be hypostatized, become an eon in consciousness and knowledge, let itself be seen, undergo the ascendancy of being',<sup>44</sup> we might look to Saying as an aesthetic act of bearing witness, as a passive acceptance or indeed endurance, of responsibility to make known our own state of incomprehension and to convey (to bear) such non-apprehension to another. Of course, we must then bear witness to the impossibility of Saying's enduring exteriority, since it can only be borne through the designatory (and we must also then bear witness to our own inevitable propensity for failure).

That means, for example, that the theoretical here prompts a process of listening, as 'musically oriented' incomprehension become creative fabrication (as acknowledgement of dumbfoundedness), become determination, become assertion. A movement from opening to closure (the maturation of the instant). A listening as a condition of receipt that in turn becomes a compositional process that facilitates opening (and the repetition of the process) within another. With

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<sup>43</sup> The notion of art as an essence, of course, referring to its condition of being, is a shift from Levinas's earlier position which presented art as 'monstrous', and unable to reveal any condition of Being whatsoever.

<sup>44</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, pp. 43-44.

art, as an act of reception, embracing or occupying thereby both the pulsating white space of sounding silence and the text's solidification of the same into a rationalised position, which then becomes itself a designatory concern or 'score' available to another's reading. The reflexive determinacy informing such becoming operative, moreover, as an acknowledgement of the 'otherwise voicing' which could both surface or be lost, and our own inadequacy in representing the same.

*A reader might seek the violence of thematisation. It is only through the assertion of the same that a reader's reader may approach an inflected difference of signification.*



**Fifth Seal (extract)**

Saint Martin's Church, Ealing, West London, March 2009.

3 minutes 26 seconds.

Disc 1 track 5. Please press play.

## Rhythm and the Instant.

### A Prayer.

In its rhythmic proclivity, the instant structures a unique moment, it might be said, that comes into existence and passes without specific recourse to a past or future. Existing within a state of ‘waiting and forgetting’<sup>1</sup> - a primordial waiting that is not a waiting *for* something, and a primordial forgetting, of Self, that might be deemed a renunciation of ipseity.<sup>2</sup> But should a notion of the unique event, as the instant’s condition of the continuously ‘present presenting’, really be allowed a rhythmic condition when rhythm is perhaps more widely understood as the repetition, or even perhaps underlining, of substance (sounds, events, objects etc.), both within and across the flow of time? Or might we understand the notion of the same somewhat differently? And how precisely is it to then be determined within a metaphysical context?

In fact, rhythm has a largely pejorative application within ‘Reality and its Shadow’, that determines its occurrence in relation to the art object as an imposing presence that absorbs subject interest and distracts from the ‘proper’ sense of engaged responsibility for difference. And whilst the notion of rhythm is therein determined as a pointedly aesthetic condition, its extended application renders a negative ‘aestheticised’ potential to the prosecution of Being within

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<sup>1</sup> E. Levinas, *The Servant and her Master* in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1989. p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> The word ‘ipseity’ comes from the Latin ‘ipse’, meaning ‘self’. In Levinas, the self’s enjoyment of itself, as a condition of elemental pleasure, is a pleasure at being in the world.

the metaphysical. So that as the essential condition of existence, in fact, rhythm could be said to generally determine a loss of initiative and selfhood:

Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation. It is so not even despite itself for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity.<sup>3</sup>

Such rhythmic absorption then, precipitating a condition that is characteristic of the aesthetic state of mind, wherein 'consent... is inverted into a participation'<sup>4</sup> or a 'reversal of power into participation'.<sup>5</sup>

'Participation' signalling here a relinquishment of authorial responsibility and an abandonment more widely of self-interestedness. With such a condition representing a passive deferral, it could be argued, to difference. Though as suggested, such difference is determined as a departure from the ethically inclined notion of alterity that encompasses the trace of the absolute, and indicates rather an openness to the condition of the mythic and subjugation of 'oneself to a force'.<sup>6</sup> For whilst the condition of difference as exteriority may appear redolent of the exteriority occurring in the encounter with another, it is here (as an 'aestheticised' condition) presumed a different mode of exteriority, and perhaps a false mode of transcendence (and ethicality). So that 'participation', in an

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<sup>3</sup> E. Levinas, *Reality and its Shadow* in *The Levinas Reader*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 132. 'Participation' being a term derived from the ethnologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who linked the expression to 'primitive' mentality's mystical belief in supernatural forces, with such belief in its affective relation to collective representation having a transitive influence whereby a mode of thought is structured that is indifferent to any law of contradiction.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> E. Levinas, *Levy-Bruhl and Contemporary Philosophy* in *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, trans. M.B. Smith and B. Harshav, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. p. 47.

alignment with the apprehension of the *il y a*, might best be understood within such a context as ‘the destruction of categories which had hitherto been used to describe the feelings evoked by ‘the sacred’’.<sup>7</sup>

Such a notion of participation then, is moreover a divestment of substantivity, the mergence with difference representing an assimilatory propensity that in its union with the ‘wrong’ difference (in relation to a reading of the *il y a*) precludes the notion of God, or any sense of the ‘beyond’, and consigns the depersonalised subject to existence without exit.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the thought occurs that complete separation, as an ethical movement wherein a subject ‘maintains itself in existence all by itself, without participating in the Being from which it is separated’,<sup>9</sup> is an impossibility. Indeed the expression ‘a break from participation’<sup>10</sup> as a condition of ethical realisation, is an inadvertent acknowledgement that separation is not sustainable (inasmuch as ‘break’ implies a return) and, we might argue, is only ethically sustainable as a consequence of the rhythmic movement between merger and separation (making merger, perhaps perversely, a necessary prerequisite for ethicality). In relation to which, it is also perhaps worth noting that there may be an equally unethical tendency that could attach to the condition of separation in its potential for the assertion of an ‘egological I... [which integrates] all beings as subordi-

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<sup>7</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 55.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. p. 58.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

nate moments of the same'<sup>11</sup> (leading to the possibility that ethics, in fact, could be more properly countenanced as 'a break *from* the break from participation'<sup>12</sup>).

So that we are left to wonder about the real locus of ethics within such a context. Or at least the extent to which merger or assimilation might constitute a necessary, and indeed rhythmic, violence. But how then to understand a condition of 'necessary' or 'good' violence? A relation of assimilation and distance? Perhaps through the notion of the recurring instant as birth or rebirth, we might in fact pursue a sense of the same in relation to the developmental processes of the newborn (with the notion of retreat into the feminine 'dwelling' within being, representing a retreat into the maternal).<sup>13</sup>

And with the mother/infant paradigm we might, in fact, allow an overarching schema for the notion of ethical responsiveness to difference. And in the play between maternal 'attunement'<sup>14</sup> and infantile sensations of omnipotence, we might determine a condition of ethicality that allows for both separation *and* assimilation. That is, we might discern a potentiality wherein the sense of ethical

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<sup>11</sup> A. Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993. p. 49

<sup>12</sup> J. Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. p. 88.

<sup>13</sup> See page 134, footnote 1, for further analysis of the relation between 'maternity', 'dwelling' and 'the feminine'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Attunement' being a key phrase as used by Daniel Stern (see D.N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology*, London: Karnac Books Ltd., 1985).

relations is a connection without compromise, a 'holding'<sup>15</sup> without encroachment, a relation without fusion, where '[m]aternity which is a bearing par excellence, bears even responsibility for the persecuting by the persecutor'.<sup>16</sup> The relation of separation/attachment facilitating a subjective independence that promotes the endurance of existence.

And in making such a postulation, moreover, we might frame a metaphysical context that facilitates subjective movement between conditions of motherhood and infancy without the same being in any sense merged, so that a given subject continuously swaps position with difference, becoming by turns him/herself, it could be said, newborn and mother (with such being played out in the textual 'turn' from the facing of source to the facing of reader - the 'retreat' into dwelling within being conceivably suggesting subjective birth within the context of an original text, whilst maternal accommodation is signalled via the comportment towards the reader).<sup>17</sup> But how to understand the notion of ethicality informing the same?

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<sup>15</sup> 'Holding' being the expressive phrase used by D.W. Winnicott to describe the caring relation between subjects that is developed from infancy (see D.W. Winnicott, *Holding and Interpretation: Fragment of an Analysis*, New York: Grove Press, 1986).

<sup>16</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p. 75. It should be noted, of course, that the reading of the maternal, and indeed the feminine, within Levinas, could perhaps be most appropriately framed as trope rather than essentialist positioning, or even essentialist positioning as trope. See footnote 1, page 134, however, for a fuller consideration of such issues.

<sup>17</sup> And it should perhaps be emphasised that the concerns here are perspectival. That is, the ethicality that might be attached to either the position of the infant or the position of the mother (though never at the same time) is in fact afforded via an exterior view - the reading of ethicality in one position automatically rendering a converse reading to the other. So we could say that, by extension, rhythm as movement between such positions is therefore in this instance an externally imposed condition.

In fact, with the whole situation being set in train via the advent of the recurring instant - repeatedly introducing the subject as infant-becoming-mother-becoming-infant etc. (a cyclical rebirth in the instant) - it could be contended that both 'positions' (of infant and mother) are themselves informed by a sense of ethicality (as well as non-ethicality), depending of course upon the way in which they might be read. Such ethicality being readily apparent in terms of the maternal receptivity towards the child, of course, which proceeds via a notion of attunement - so that the infant is, at least for a time, unaware of its own particular dependence, and feels itself rather the author of a reality that corresponds to its own needs. The same arguably being necessary for the developmental well being of the child:

The communication to the baby is "Come at the world creatively, create the world; it is only what you create that has meaning for you." Next comes: "the world is in your control." From the *initial experience of omnipotence* the baby is able to begin to experience frustration, and even to arrive one day at the other extreme from omnipotence, having a sense of being a mere speck in the universe... Is it not from *being God* that human beings arrive at the humility proper to human individuality? <sup>18</sup>

So that the maternal attitude towards the child is then, in an ethical context, necessarily one of facilitation, and takes place without any sense of, or desire for, reciprocity (other than in the witnessing of the developmental well-being of the infant).

In terms of the child, however, the ethical moment, if it can be so allowed, occurs somewhat differently. Here, the relation moves from a condition of disre-

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<sup>18</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Communication between Infant and Mother, and Mother and Infant, Compared and Contrasted in Babies and Their Mothers*, ed. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd and M. Davis, London: Free Association Books, 1987. pp. 100-101.

gard (on the part of the infant) to one of wilful violence (albeit a condition of imaginary violence), wherein the ability of the object (mother) to survive such destructive intent provides a condition of reassurance for the child as well as a definite sense of exteriority (which could be allowed an ethical proclivity in its preclusion of the assimilatory). So that we could frame the developmental process of the infant as being a movement from a synthesizing and narcissistic propensity determining the world as an extension of the self, to an ethical (albeit violently achieved) sense of separateness, that posits an 'other-than-me' status of the world and objects within the world (the precise condition of ethicality attaching to the same being an acknowledgement through distance of another's real and independent existence). A subject, it could be argued, says to the object

"I destroyed you", and the object is there to receive the communication. From now on the subject says: "Hullo object!" "I destroyed you." "I love you." "You have value for me because of your survival of my destruction of you." "While I am loving you I am all the time destroying you in (unconscious) *fantasy*." Here fantasy begins for the individual. <sup>19</sup>

And in emphasising the condition of fantasy in relation to the notion of violence (in the facilitation of ethicality), moreover, and noting the perhaps somewhat surprising paradox that allows imagination to exist as facilitator of the real, it is also worth stressing the position of creativity here as bridge between self and other, between interiority and exteriority. The creative impulse (embracing notions of aestheticism embodied within symbolisation and play) driving subjective 'constructive-destructive' engagement with the world in such a way that it be-

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<sup>19</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications in Playing and Reality*, London: Brunner-Routledge, 1991. p. 90

comes a joy-based encounter, with ‘the core sense of creativeness that permeates transitional experiencing... [being] reborn on a new level in object usage’.<sup>20</sup> So that it could be claimed that an aesthetic condition, far from being a condition of false potentiality, is actually a primary underpinning of the formation of ethical relations (and that such relations are then grounded within a much less passive mode of existence than the notion of ‘relation without relations’ would ever appear to countenance).

In signalling a notion of subject relations with the world, moreover, it could be allowed that a different focus shifts the perspective from the encounter with an object to that with the wider environment, which, in its same ability to resist destructive intent, structures a boundary and space within which destructiveness might in fact be tempered and symbolised. Reality becoming that which may frustrate but also reassures through its innate capacity for endurance:

[I]n fantasy things work by magic: there are no brakes on fantasy, and love and hate cause alarming effects. External reality has brakes on it, and can be studied and known, and, in fact, fantasy is only tolerable at full blast when objective reality is appreciated well. The subjective has tremendous value but is so alarming and magical that it cannot be enjoyed except as a parallel to the objective.<sup>21</sup>

And if the same is framed in terms of the parent/child relationship it could conceivably be argued that the condition of the maternal therein occupies a dou-

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<sup>20</sup> M. Eigen, *The Area of Faith in Winnicott, Lacan and Bion in International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 62, Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing, 1981. p. 415. Object-use could be framed as the development, by Winnicott, of his own notion of the ‘transitional object’, which posits an entity as ‘bridge’ between self and other, between self and world, functioning as neither me nor not me, or yet both and neither (the child’s toy - a teddy bear or blanket for example - is often apprehended as the child’s first transitional object).

<sup>21</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Primitive Emotional Development in Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975. p. 153.

bled position inasmuch as it may in fact facilitate processes of both appropriation and retreat. Or perhaps the same could be described as 'object mother' and 'environment mother'. As an object, the mother is acquiescent in terms of the 'violence' visited by the infant, but as environment she imposes a limit upon the propensity for such violence.<sup>22</sup>

So we have then two positions, mother and infant, that in themselves move between modes of responsiveness to difference, as well as being positions that are continuously and alternately taken up by subject and other (in relation to an extraneous perspective).<sup>23</sup> A subject being effectively 'reborn' in the instant and maturing into a condition of motherhood that gives birth to the next instant, with conditions of attunement and participation eliciting particular (and perspectival) moments of ethicality. But how then to understand the notion of rhythm within such a context? And its specific application in terms of the theoretical?

Rhythm occurs here, in fact, as a moment that is constituted through the instant's recurrent uptake of Being (as well as the movement between positions of assimilation/non-assimilation that uptake facilitates). Such 'positing' of self structuring the body, moreover, as event rather than substantive, and the con-

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<sup>22</sup> Winnicott refers to such in speaking of the development of the capacity for concern (in *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, New York: International Universities Press, 1965), having also previously spoken of something similar (the 'mother of quiet times' and the 'mother of excited times') in an earlier work (*Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis*).

<sup>23</sup> In another work from 1967, Winnicott in fact posited a triangular relation between child, object and environment as itself equivalent to the triadic relation between child, mother and father. Such a relationship framing a model of the family unit that locates mother as soft holding environment and father as resilient framing environment (see postscript, D.W. Winnicott, *Psychoanalytic Explorations*, eds. C. Winnicott, R. Shepherd & M. Davis, London: Karnac Books, 1971). The intention here however, is to pursue the dyadic whilst allowing that there is movement both within terms of the child's position and within terms of the mother's, which may in turn preclude the possibility of fixed polarities.

tinuous transformation of event into an existent. So that "position" is not to be heard simply as a noun, but as a verb in the process of nominalization'.<sup>24</sup> Such an event, however, which is the instant as the present 'presenting', and within which is constituted the assumption by an entity of its own condition of being, is yet nevertheless a state of compulsion. The condition of positing being a response to a summons - albeit a summons to which a subject has no idea that he/she is actually responding (the thought being here that the 'call' more usually associated with the 'commanding' presence of difference which demands that an 'I' account for itself, and which is part of the intrinsic relationality which leads to language, could be considered as already extant, in fact, prior to the specific encounter with alterity within the world, emerging as an antecedent to subjective realisation but also as itself the point of insistence for the same, whilst remaining beyond the comprehension of unwittingly responsive subjectivity). So that the condition of uptake, the condition of positing, we could say, might be read as a movement that bears already a 'seeded' subjective responsibility for difference.

In framing the same as a condition of the 'generative', however, (which we would seek to so do) it is important to appreciate that such 'seeding', whilst signalling an (unknowing) anticipation of alterity, does not dictate the exact nature of subject comportment in relation to difference (or not in the way that the specific encounter with another is presumed to instigate a condition of passive, and ultimately enthralled, receptivity), which of its own accord pursues an improvisatory mode of being within the world that is yet a comportment 'towards'. So that such comportment therefore retains a potentially violent, albeit instinctive, 'pre-

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<sup>24</sup> R. Bernasconi, *Foreword* in E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. xii.

sumption' (and albeit that the same may itself actually represent a 'good violence' in any case), and passive or indifferent unknowingness (albeit that unknowingness within such a context cannot exist in absolute terms since comportment here, as preparedness, implies instinctual pre-knowledge).

And to understand the same more fully, or perhaps the ethical implications of the same more pointedly, it is then worth recapitulating something of the event constituted by 'position' (or, indeed, the Hypostasis). Position representing the moment of 'hereness', the moment that 'precedes every act of understanding, every horizon and all time'.<sup>25</sup> It is, moreover, the expression of consciousness as origin, and the facilitation of body as event. The spirituality of the body laying not with its ability to give expression to the inward but rather, through being posited, its realisation of the condition necessary for inwardness. So that '[i]t does not express an event; it is itself this event'.<sup>26</sup> But the eruption of coenesthesia, the sense of self as body which elicits in the uprising of the generative instant a contiguity with the world (corresponding to the infant's initial self-perception), is also, it could be said, simultaneously countered by the invasive condition of 'instantaneous maturity',<sup>27</sup> itself obliging an inverted apprehension of an 'otherwise'.

That is, whilst the process of 'maturation' constitutes a return of the present to itself, wherein the 'I' recognises that it is 'riveted to itself',<sup>28</sup> and is encumbered

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<sup>25</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 68.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 79.

always and only with itself (with such awareness, of course, underscoring the 'horror' of the *il y a* - inasmuch as the self is compelled to acknowledge its own condition of containment or stricture within being) it also could be said to facilitate a comprehension of exteriority (akin to the infantile recognition of difference), since isolation must imply a preclusion from 'something else'. Such an apprehension, which we might then contend is the essence of maturational development in the instant, constitutes therefore both withdrawal from, and (indirect or inflected) acknowledgement of, difference (and is an approach to difference that constitutes an ethical modality in its positing of instinctive awareness without knowledge or assumption). The notion of the generative instant thereby determining a recurrent 'un/knowledge' that is continuously both apprehension and non-apprehension. Both of which, moreover, could be construed (depending upon the perspective from which they are viewed) as ethical and/or unethical.

And framed in terms of the theoretical text we might, in respect of such thinking, locate the condition, or conditions, of difference at two particular points in relation to our own position as interpreting subject - original or source text and reader (of our interpretation of such source text). In relation to which the theoretical is generatively 'compelled' into existence on the one hand, and anticipates (without absolute knowledge) the condition of receptive difference (represented by a reader/interpreter) on the other. The notion, moreover, of a generative rhythm obliges a recurring movement between such positions, with the condition of reading (or, that is, our own reading as both passive receipt and designatory interpretation) functioning as hinge between the two.

In allowing for each position, additionally, we might perhaps trace a notion of the realisation of 'good violence' in the turn from original/source text to reader. That is, the reader (of our interpretation) becomes the means by which the original text, violently assimilated through our reading, is 'rehabilitated' (or allowed to endure or become otherwise again) through a new reading's propensity for interpretation in its turn (an insistent trace of difference being facilitated through the inflected formulation of its approach).

So that, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the presentation of interpretation to the reader must then, in order to exist ethically, pursue a comportment of 'imperialist assertion' in language that emphasises its thematising proclivity. Such is the case because in so doing an inversion takes place wherein the appropriating condition of language is interrupted through alterity's ability to 'overflow' any condition of the designatory, and the other therefore remains other still in relation to the definitions of otherness that we might seek to apply. Here then, a facilitation of difference through non-facilitation, wherein the notion of 'being towards' indicates a duplicity of meaning, an inversion of difference, where the 'other' side can never be understood as 'this' side, but remains always as the side that 'may be'.<sup>29</sup> Language, in its designatory propensity, becoming the precise vehicle for alterity since it proffers a means of inflection that marks 'non-indifference against the differential procedures of signification'.<sup>30</sup> The 'iterability' of language and the text, the condition of essential recurrence informing the mark, functioning here moreover as a rhythmic intensification of the ethically in-

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<sup>29</sup> K. Ziarek, *Inflected Language: Towards a Hermeneutics of Nearness*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.

clined grasping/ungrasping proclivities that attend the same, and thereby lending emphasis, we might argue, to the notion that 'the singularity of the event is always inscribed within a space of repetition'.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> S. Glendinning, interview conducted at London School of Economics, November 2008.

*The idea may be considered both the container of thought and the product of thought.*



**Poor Me**

Artist's home, North London, December 2007.

3 minutes 18 seconds.

Disc 1 track 6. Please press play.

## Is Rhythm Fundamental?

### A Prayer.

Two potential readings of metaphysics are indicated within 'Totality and Infinity'. The opening lines offer an unattributed citation and a condemning, if somewhat enigmatic, framing of the metaphysical tradition, "The true life is absent." But we are in the world. Metaphysics arises and is maintained in this alibi'. <sup>1</sup>

This is followed a short time later by a more (sustained) laudatory reference to the same:

It is [the] perpetual postponing of the hour of treason - infinitesimal difference between man and non-man - that implies the disinterestedness of goodness, the desire of the absolutely other or nobility, the dimension of metaphysics. <sup>2</sup>

The distinction, it could be said, being one between the historic notion of a determining (and subsuming) ontotheological condition, and the sense of metaphysics as critical essence of knowledge or theory that presupposes ethicality and the calling into question of the Same by the Other. But how to understand more precisely such a distinction?

Ontology, of course, as a branch of metaphysics (and by extension philosophy), to offer a simple definition, constitutes a striving for understanding and ascription of the nature of Being. Such a process, as a process of enquiry, is neces-

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<sup>1</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. p. 33. The unattributed citation is from Arthur Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

sarily (and, we might even say, 'violently') reductive since it inevitably seeks comprehension through a totalising perspective. An understanding of difference, that is, through an imperialist reduction to the same. Considered in relation to such, the overarching metaphysical enterprise could then be construed as actively oppressive in its pursuit of knowledge, whilst maintaining an air (or alibi) of innocence through the 'elsewhereness' of its questioning. That is, it evades responsibility for difference through an insistence upon its 'otherwise' status and concerns - being here and/or outside the elsewhere of the 'true life', but necessarily preoccupied with the elsewhere's 'true life' rather than (the) here.<sup>3</sup>

Such a reading then frames metaphysics (or the ontological emphasis within metaphysics, more pointedly) as wilfully neglectful and irresponsible. But in allowing for such a condition, it could also be argued that an ethical orientation may yet, in fact, be concurrent - given that an ethically inclined reluctance or prevarication (perhaps to be regarded as the hither side of evasive irresponsibility?) underpins, at the same time, the condition of metaphysics more generally. Between the philosophies of transcendence and immanence, between the 'true life is absent' and 'we are in the world', that is, there occurs a 'strategic hesitation' that yet points towards a different (and more meaningful) apprehension of metaphysical intent. Such a reading being indicated towards the end of Section 1.A of 'Totality and Infinity':

Between a philosophy of transcendence that situates elsewhere the true life to which man, escaping from here, would gain access in the privileged moments of liturgical, mystical elevation, or in dying - and a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every 'other' (cause

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<sup>3</sup> J. Robbins, *Altered Reading: Levinas and Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999. pp. 117-119.

for war), encompassed by the same, would vanish at the end of history - we propose to describe, within the unfolding of terrestrial existence... a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not the totalization of history, but the idea of infinity. Such a relationship is metaphysics itself. <sup>4</sup>

Here then, we find a sense that metaphysics may be informed by an ethical inclination that functions in contradistinction to ontological imperialism. But still we might ask after the condition of such ethicality as well as the nature of the relation, and distinction, between the conditions of enquiry.

Ontology, in fact, implies a comprehension of humanity's factual situation, functioning as 'the essence of every relation with beings and even of every relation in being'.<sup>5</sup> Such knowledge, moreover, formulated in an understanding of difference as theme or concept, must negate another's independence through the possessive mode of its agency. My thoughts of or about you neutralise your difference to the point at which you are rendered the same. The realisation of which establishes my 'freedom', since the identification of sameness precludes the possibility of my alienation at your hands.

Ontology, then, 'as first philosophy is a philosophy of power'.<sup>6</sup> Such power constitutes, however, a renunciation of theory's desire for exteriority, which is a grounding principle, in fact, of metaphysics. The recognition of which delineates a critical propensity within the same that in turn places into question its own ontological assertions. That is, through its comprehension of being, in fact, meta-

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<sup>4</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 52.

<sup>5</sup> E. Levinas, *Is Ontology Fundamental?* in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. A. T. Peperzak, S. Critchley and R. Bernasconi. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996. p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 46.

physics identifies an agency of 'arbitrary dogmatism'<sup>7</sup> at work within the 'free exercise'<sup>8</sup> of ontology, which it then seeks to contest. Such contestation, however, as a specific condition of critique, would simply function as a regressive ontological movement (the reassertion of the same) were it to be allowed as simply exercised theory. Rather, the ethical moment of metaphysics, the calling into question of authorising sameness, is obliged via the proximity of an alterity which overwhelms assimilatory inclinations. So that:

The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics. Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the Other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

The notion of difference here overflowing the potential for comprehension, with such occurrence the consequence of an encounter wherein the comportment of the relation (as face-to-face meeting) must preclude the possibility of thematisation.<sup>10</sup> To address or to be addressed by another, that is, constituting an engagement with the unforeseen, with an infinite exteriority that remains essentially, and properly, unknowable.

In saying that, however, such a relation ought perhaps not to be framed as a relation in the strictest terms, since the notion of relation (as it might be read

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> E. Levinas, *Is Ontology Fundamental?* in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, p. 6.

most notably through the I-Other encounter) posits a bipolarity which itself effects a totality wherein elements are ultimately reversible (you are determinable through that which I am not, and vice versa). Whilst in making such a claim it could also be argued that an assertion of irreversibility in positions, implied by the sense of 'non relation', should not then itself be framed as a definitive reading (locating itself outside or beyond the 'non relation'), since the move to determinacy constituted by such would conceivably reappoint an ascriptive or thematic condition. With the declaration of such, in turn, making us equally guilty, of course, of precisely the same movement...

In fact, the call here should be for acknowledgement (or, indeed, radically passive acceptance) of an object of thinking (cogitatum) that encompasses the act of thinking (cogitato), thereby inverting the rationalist tendency for thought's assimilating comprehension of its object.<sup>11</sup> Effectively, the non/thought of a necessary 'overflowing' of thought, wherein

[T]he [ethically] radical separation between the same and the other means precisely that it is impossible to place oneself outside of the correlation between the same and the other so as to record the correspondence or the non-correspondence of this going with this return. Otherwise the same and the other would be reunited under one gaze, and the absolute distance that separates them filled in.<sup>12</sup>

Such separation, then, should not be pursued as an apprehensible concern by the same nor a third party outside the same-other 'non relation' relation. And in this way, the other is able to absolve itself from the relation which, nevertheless,

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<sup>11</sup> The consideration being drawn from Descartes' *Third Meditation* (see R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume 2*, trans J. Cottingham, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 36.

must remain to affect the same. Intimations of the impossible distance that exists between same and other, in relation to their relation of 'non relation', as it were, being expressed in the description of such as 'desire'. Desire, in opposition to the condition of 'need', representing an impossibility since it can never be sated, but signalling therein an ethical propensity via its status as longing (for infinite difference) without hope or expectation of fulfillment or reciprocation (a precise reading of such being perhaps most appositely framed, it might be said, via the oxymoronic notion of 'desiring indifference').

The ethical nature of desire, moreover, might be identified as the condition of metaphysics which marks its departure from the ontological:

The metaphysical desire... [is] beyond everything that can simply complete it. It is like goodness - the Desired does not fulfill it, but deepens it... It is a generosity nourished by the Desired, and thus a relationship that is not the disappearance of distance, not a bringing together, or... a relationship whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation, for it nourishes itself, one might say, with its hunger. This remoteness is radical only if desire is not the possibility of anticipating the desirable, if it does not think it beforehand, if it goes toward it aimlessly, that is, as toward an absolute, unanticipatable alterity, as one goes forth unto death. Desire is absolute if the desiring being is mortal and the Desired invisible. Invisibility does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea.<sup>13</sup>

That is not to suggest, however, that infinite alterity cannot constitute a 'presence' for or within thought, but it cannot be thematised or measured as such, and there is a radical distinction to be made therefore between thought and representation as modes of relating to a 'false' alterity (or the alter ego, in fact, which facilitates the identification of the same with itself, it could be said, via a detour through otherness) and the condition of metaphysical desire as the

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 34.

mode of hospitality or generosity in relation to another which specifically lacks an expectation of reciprocity.

Effectively, it could be said that desire, within such a context, constitutes the 'otherwise' than thought that yet signals its own condition through or within thought as the 'sense' of the infinite. But how to then countenance or negotiate such a condition if it cannot in fact be thought? Perhaps a particular reading of rhythm, as pulse or even vibration, might be propounded here. Rhythm in this context becoming extant as the silent undercurrent of the 'melodic' flow of thought and being (consciousness being posited here as a determining condition of being within Being). Though it is important, in relation to such, to acknowledge a reading of discontinuity (or discontinuous continuity) attaching to the same, in contradistinction to any notion of rhythm as durational continuity wherein 'the power to *intuit* futurity within the present'<sup>14</sup> - and to thereby inscribe or reinscribe an assimilatory potential - may make itself available.

And in the advancement of such a reading, of course, a consideration of the operational mode of the rhythmic process of 'discontinuous continuity' (particularly as it functions in opposition to conceptions of 'durational flow') should then be necessarily undertaken here, in order to establish the particular significance that the same will have for the metaphysical concerns that occupy us (including the sense of desire as a rhythmic underscoring of thought and being). So how, therefore, are we to understand the notions of 'discontinuous continuity' and

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<sup>14</sup> G. Peters, *The Rhythm of Alterity: Levinas and Aesthetics in Radical Philosophy* 82, March/April 1997. p. 12. Peters identifies here the point of contestation that Levinas takes with Henri Bergson's notion of rhythm as durational flow, which must, for Levinas, preclude the possibility of novelty and, indeed, alterity, through its predictive claims upon an unforeseeable and unknowable future.

‘durational flow’? How do they function? How, precisely, do they differ? And why should the former, rather than the latter, be most especially framed as ethically-oriented in relation to the condition of Being?

The primary focus for such concerns, in fact, lays here with the notion of the ‘instant’.<sup>15</sup> The instant constituting a break with conceptions of melodic and (durational) rhythmic orders, and facilitating a sense of (non durational) rhythm and musicality that is fundamentally linked (despite determining the movement of existence as it pertains specifically to the solitary subject) to difference or otherness rather than the same. That is, in conceiving of a melody (and its association with duration) as ‘[B]eing lived through musically... [where] there are no instants in the melody’,<sup>16</sup> since each moment must be sonically penetrated by another and the whole reduced to the condition of seamless temporality (effecting a phenomenological continuity that erases difference within the instant), an emphasis given to the instant as a unique point of pulsation, even respiration (a breathing in/out), posits the same as an independent moment of birth and expiration that yet gives rise, like a ‘rebounding movement’,<sup>17</sup> to another moment of birth and expiration, and so on (whilst precluding always the sense of the durational, but pursuing everywhere the condition of the new). So that in an instant’s contact with Being (the taking up of existence representing the intent and pur-

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<sup>15</sup> The formulation of the instant laying at the heart of the dynamism of existence, in fact, as it is most emphatically delineated by Levinas within *Existence and Existents*. In allowing for the concern with the same as a determinism of solitary rather than societal subjectivity, however, it is worth indicating that both are essentially desirous of difference.

<sup>16</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* p. 75.

pose of an instant) 'its detachment from it is already presaged',<sup>18</sup> and the event of rhythm can then be identified (in relation to the instant's evanescence) as a 'discontinuous continuous' effecting of presence without particular reference to a past or future. An effecting of the present presenting. An effecting, however, that in its condition of re-commencement signals a longing for 'non-definitiveness'<sup>19</sup> and alterity.

In such a way, moreover, the instant, in relation to which classical views largely determine a 'negation of eternity',<sup>20</sup> may in fact evoke something of the infinite through its 'evasion', as it were, of temporality, its propensity for apparent existence beyond the 'dialectic of time'.<sup>21</sup> The 'absolute' character of the instant, which gives 'an appearance of being to the past and defies the future',<sup>22</sup> here structuring a presence that is the locus of commencement and cessation, but a denial, as a consequence of its unique status, of an effectuation of the relation with Being at 'the level which leads from one instant to another in duration'.<sup>23</sup>

The instant, then, constitutes a recurrence of effort within the present to formulate a relation with, and initiation into, Being. The occurrence of which indicates a continuous opening to (and desire for) difference - the condition of which, in turn, offers the hope of flight for the solitary subject from his/her definitive status

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 76.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 95.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The suggestion here simply being that the instant, as read through classical conceptions, is immeasurable and, like the infinite, therefore ostensibly outside the condition of temporality which might render it determinable.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

and the possibility of pardon (which can only emerge within another) for transgressive existence. The occurrence is, however, double edged, since the incompleteness of the instant's evanescence (leading to the event of continuous re/beginning) means that the self can never strictly escape itself (and the 'irremissibility of existence')<sup>24</sup> and must continue to take up at every moment, in fact, the very condition of transgressive existence for which it will continue to hope for pardon.

The sense of existence, then, as a condition of both desire (in terms of the redemptive possibilities of difference as well as the possibility of self forgetting or abnegation, as it were, afforded via states of enjoyment within existence) and dread (in terms of transgressive potential and the perpetuation of being within Being as entrapment, which, as a condition without exit, 'constitutes the fundamental absurdity of being')<sup>25</sup> posits a continuously vacillating status for the subject - vacillation, in fact, between a world of light and a world of dark indeterminacy (such a condition, it could also be said, may appear an explanation for the aversion or hesitation before existence - a hesitation constituting the beginning of each instant - that is signalled via a phenomenon of 'weariness' or 'indolence'. That would be, however, to entertain a misconception. Weariness cannot be allowed a deliberating or judgmental ascription here since that would suggest intuitive foreknowledge, with the same, as a reassertion of the durational, positing a creative mode of thinking that facilitates a mastery of futurity within

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. pp. 50-51. The notion of entrapment being framed here in relation to the condition of the *il y a*, which Levinas has as the anonymous sense of an existing without existents and, for the subject, a being without nothingness.

the present and a consequential preclusion of the radical nature attaching to difference and novelty. Rather, the condition of weariness, which should in fact be countenanced as a coextensive movement with effort in the uptake of being, could perhaps be more properly understood as a delay, even a move to refusal, conceivably occasioned by apprehension - in every sense of the term - of the absolute commitment obligated by existence, which has 'the seriousness and harshness of an unrevokable contract'.<sup>26</sup> Though perhaps such conditions (of desire and dread) are a consequence ultimately of the same concern, since they are everywhere underwritten by the preoccupation with the 'beyond' of Being and the longing for the same.

With the emergence of being within Being, then, there occurs a simultaneous inauguration of consciousness, within the rhythmic condition of the discontinuous continuity of the instant, which compels an accordant (even polyrhythmic?) sense of vacillation between binding and transgressive existence, and existence experienced through desire as being 'toward' the Good that is beyond being.<sup>27</sup> In specifically locating the same within the context of thought, more pointedly still, the movement is between an 'egology of synthesis'<sup>28</sup> and a facilitation of difference or the accommodation of the 'presence' of the unthought within thought. The notion of facilitation, however, is worked through a condition of inflection rather than intentionality, since intentionality must inevitably strive for assimilation (and it could perhaps be suggested here, in relation to which,

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<sup>26</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *The Republic* Book VI, trans. P. Shores, New York: Putnam's, 1930. The notion of the Good beyond being is drawn from the Platonic conception of the Good which denotes the highest idea, the idea which casts light upon all other ideas to render them intelligible, and which provides here an ethical perspective for thought.

<sup>28</sup> E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 100.

that the non-assimilating sense of facilitation or hospitality, as a preparedness for difference without presupposition, marks the ethical comportment of the instant in its uptake of being despite its particular orientation towards the condition of solitary existence.<sup>29</sup> The instant's occurrence, that is, being concerned at every moment with a solitude that is marked by the hope for difference and non-definitiveness, which must itself oblige a 'receptivity' towards the condition of the non-self. Or is the condition of such an anticipatory concern nevertheless, and a case, moreover, of 'protention' by another name?).

Of course, an understanding of thought as vision, knowledge and intentionality must signify an inevitable 'reduction of the other [*Autre*] to the Same, synchrony as *being* in its egological gathering. The *known* expresses the unity of the transcendental apperception of the *cogito*'.<sup>30</sup> Even within the context of interior dialogue, wherein 'finite thought is split in order to interrogate and answer itself',<sup>31</sup> the assimilating movement of apperception must yet preclude the possibility of real distance or dissociation:

Thought reflects on itself in interrupting its continuity of synthetic apperception, but still proceeds from the same "I think" or returns to it... The dialectic that tears the ego apart ends by a synthesis and system whereby the tear is no longer seen... the mind in speaking its thought remains no less one and unique, the same in presence, a synchrony despite its coming-and-going where the ego could be opposed to itself. <sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The notion of 'inflection' here owes much to the sense Krzysztof Ziarek allows it (K. Ziarek, *Inflected Language: Towards a Hermeneutic of Nearness*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) which signals the apprehension Levinas himself had of the coextensive nature of thought and language within modern philosophy, leading him to an emphasis of the essential dimension of language which remains 'unheard' in thought and beyond thought's propensity for thematisation.

<sup>30</sup> E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 99.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

But still we might wonder about the moment of reflection, as thought's interruption of its own assimilatory propensities (evoking the sense of metaphysical questioning of ontological assertion), and enquire about the nature of such rupture. Could it not be argued, in fact, that such a movement is actually grounded within a condition of sociality that is *prior* to the encounter with difference (and constituted perhaps in accordance with the same sense of facilitation without presupposition that informs the comportment of the instant in its uptake of being)? And that such sociality is actually 'irreducible to the immanence of representation, [and] is other than the sociality that would be reduced to the knowledge one can acquire about the Other as a known object'?<sup>33</sup> So that within the effecting of interior dialogue there is, it could be said, a predisposition for 'a relationship to the other person as other, and not... a relationship to the *other* already apperceived as the *same* through a reason that is universal from the start'.<sup>34</sup> And cannot speech in the name of the other, as an occurrence of interior dialogue, therefore be allowed a sense of ethicality - even if the condition of such dialogue is auto-generated (perhaps even a conception of thought as a process of erasure - because it exists as symbol - might mean that a network of symbolic associations continues to 'beat' as trace element within the emergence of thought, so that erased or forgotten meaning informs the 'presenting' of thinking and, as a consequence, a subject's own thought could be said to facilitate the very means for the condition of the 'otherwise' than thought within thought, for 'thought that lies beyond the classical categories of representation

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

and identity<sup>35</sup>)? And might the pre-extant condition of 'sociality', as a dis/continuous undercurrent of cognitive flow, not then be considered, moreover, a rhythmic pulsation at the heart of the recurring instant?

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<sup>35</sup> E. Levinas, *The Transcendence of Words* in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand, Oxford: Blackwell Publications, 1989. p. 146.

*A reader might acknowledge the unique status of every reading that he or she makes. No two readings can ever be the same. Within each instant we are different beings.*



### **Address**

The Crypt, Chelsea College of Art & Design, January 2010.

3 minutes 22 seconds.

Disc 2 track 1. Please press play.

## **The Cryptic Instant.**

### **A Prayer.**

The condition of the theoretical text has two moments that conceivably elicit notions of ethicality, of openness to difference. The first frames the notion of Saying within a text which constitutes the transposition to the page of the face-to-face encounter, and signals the call of, the call to, the Other, and the necessity of response to and responsibility for the same. This, we might contend, lays most specifically with the nature of engagement between an interpreting subject as reader/writer and an authorising subject of a 'source' text. The second ethical moment is signalled by the instant in writing (indeed, the 'instant' in writing), which is structured in relation to the message for the reading subject who will be. That is, it concerns the writing subject's comportment in relation to the potential for difference represented by his/her reader, at the moment of writing. And it is the latter notion which in fact concerns us here (or will predominantly concern us whilst allowing that it has a particular relation with the first moment), and will be specifically determined in relation to the 'instant' as a condition of preface (pre-facing) or of overture.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, we might argue that this entire dissertation is in a sense, in addition to being a 'conversation' or facing, a preface or overture. Or perhaps a moment, or series of moments, in the process of writing, of pre-facing. That is, in its look-

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<sup>1</sup> Overture in the sense of a condition that affords emphasis to musical themes that will be subsequently expounded upon, and overture in its social context of movement towards a new relation.

ing towards the moment, or moments, of engagement without knowledge of its or their reception, we could perhaps countenance the possibility that the second ethical condition of writing, as a continuous 'hope for the present'<sup>2</sup> lays with its sense of anticipation and preparation for response. And that such a possibility presents writing as a recurrence of the instant, and a recurrence of hospitality that precedes a 'return' (such a reading of preface inclining here, it should be said of course, towards a conception of opening rather than strict exposition of what will follow, whilst allowing that the actual realisation of a preface is in fact often a post-scripting).<sup>3</sup>

But how more specifically to understand, however, our own position here as writer? Might we, for instance, in fact locate the 'turn' in the theoretical text from source to reader as a playing out of the situatedness between death and life? A midway point, a noon, a middle age?<sup>4</sup> And might we begin to speak, moreover, in relation to such, of a possibility of the movement within the same context as being informed by conditions of 'encryption' or 'haunting'? That is, as a consequence of intertextual inevitability, can this text (or any theoretical text) ever do otherwise than promulgate, as receptacle of the never completely assimilable, something of another text's 'difference' within its own condition of existence (a possession or haunting as scriptural 'substitution')? And might we understand

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<sup>2</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> G.C. Spivak, *Translator's Preface* in J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976. p. xii.

<sup>4</sup> The references here being to the conceptions of autobiography evinced in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, (F. Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin Books, 1979) and read perhaps most specifically through Derrida's considerations of the same in *The Ear of the Other* (J. Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, ed. C. McDonald (English edition), C. Levesque & C. McDonald (French edition), trans. P. Kamuf, *Otobiographies*, trans. A. Ronell, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1985).

this as a very specific moment of ethicality - with 'turning' being read as the emphatic manifestation of 'witnessing' or 'bearing witness to' in terms of its movement between containment and delivery (and might this, to re-foreground the notion of musicality, additionally be framed as the expressly ethical working of the 'overture'?)? Or does the notion of encryption simply signal rather (or even concurrently) a very specific realisation of trauma in the apprehension of the condition of subject entrapment and isolation which horrifies in its preclusion of access to difference? Or trauma in the apprehension of the Self's potential for violence or abuse in the event of encounter?

To address such concerns, we might first consider the idea of the 'crypt' and its application in relation to psychoanalytic readings of the thanatological.<sup>5</sup> The crypt, in essence, representing a condition of containment for an unassimilated, or unassimilable, loved or mourned object, with the object in fact remaining 'like a living dead abscessed in a specific spot in the ego'.<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the 'normal' transference or 'introjection' of object-love, which synthesises the object to the point at which the external object becomes a part of the Self, the condition of 'incorporation' is a failure of introjection to enact such assimilation, leading to the object being 'entombed' live, as it were, in a dead space within the Ego.<sup>7</sup> The crypt thereby becoming the site of the live burial of the love object and its attendant desires - desires which cannot be consciously expressed but maintain

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<sup>5</sup> Interest here deriving from the work in this area of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, as well as Jacques Derrida's responses to their research (see N. Abraham & M. Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, trans. N. Rand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, and J. Derrida, *Fors: The English Words of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok* (foreword to the same), trans. B. Johnson).

<sup>6</sup> J. Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> J. Derrida, *Foreword* in N. Abraham & M. Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonomy*, p. xvi.

a presence (and ‘vocality’) nevertheless - within the Self. So that in the intrapsychic topos of incorporation then, a secret space (the crypt) is erected to commemorate the refusal not only of the loss of the object, but also the associated desires of the same, which are maintained despite their unsynthesised status.<sup>8</sup>

Pursuing the concern a little further, it is also important to understand that the condition of entombment has consequences for both the Ego and the Id (or Unconscious) - both of which become divided. In the case of the Ego, it splits itself but has no knowledge that it does so. And because the Ego lacks such knowledge, the crypt could be described as itself ‘unconscious’. The Ego, moreover, has no knowledge of the crypt and the crypt has no knowledge of anything (including the Ego) beyond its immediate circumstance. And in the withdrawal into seclusion and the construction of a barrier to separate it from the half of itself containing the crypt, the Ego refuses to acknowledge its own refusal to mourn and therefore rejects consciousness of the crypt it has itself erected to receive the ‘dead’ (or perhaps ‘living dead’) object. The Ego, moreover, then mimics ‘real’ mourning as an un-acknowledgement, it might be said, of the crypt. A crypt, likewise, is erected within the Unconscious which might be determined a reflection of the Ego. The splitting is, however, different inasmuch as the Unconscious has no consciousness (in the way that the Ego does) of itself.<sup>9</sup>

In delineating such concerns however, our interests lay not so much with the uncovering of a particular pathology, but the implications of the same for notions of ethical subjectivity and the conditions of language and composition (both

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. xvii.

<sup>9</sup> N. Abraham & M. Torok, *The Wolf Man’s Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, p. 81.

scriptural and musical). Though it may still be important, in relation to such, to remember especially here that the formation of the crypt is engendered through crisis or trauma (and that the recurrence of the instant, which we have elsewhere determined a comportment of openness, could perhaps itself even be allowed a pathological 'tic'). But how are we to understand such a condition? What might be contained by the condition of the 'cryptic'? How might it be understood in terms of the text most specifically? And how is the notion of the crypt to be understood in relation to the condition of 'haunting'?

To approach such concerns, and to try to intimate something of the nature of the trauma that compels the construction of the crypt, we might in fact frame ideas surrounding the same in very specific relation to notions of the 'instant'. That is, in affording emphasis to the instant's recurrent uptake of Being, which might be allowed an affirmational proclivity in its insistent realisation that functions as a consistently pulsating opening to difference, the instant exists equally, it should be said, as an opening to the constraining condition of the *il y a* which must itself continuously structure an overwhelming anxiety. So that:

[w]hat is absolute in the relationship between existence and an existent, in an instant, consists in the mastery the existent exercises on existence, but also in the weight of existence on the existent.<sup>10</sup>

Such weight is an acknowledgement of entrapment within Being (itself a living 'burial'), and the isolation that must attend the same condition, as well as being an acknowledgement, it could be argued, of the harmful potential a Self could represent in the event of encounter. So might we allow therefore that the 'in-

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<sup>10</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 76.

stant' arising within Being is itself cryptic, and that the *il y a* therein constitutes the incorporated (non) essence that is the encrypted traumatising 'object'? (The notion, of course, positing the possibility that the cryptic, like the condition of Being, is simultaneously structured as both interior and exterior occurrence. With the attendant possibility that immersion within the same frames the subject, who contains the encrypted object, as him/herself both cryptic site and the object of trauma encrypted within Being).<sup>11</sup>

So understood, the crypt could then be allowed both a site of containment, and a no-place or impossible place within place. It is the locus of the uncanny, where 'something or someone both dead and alive is buried, where something has happened without having happened'.<sup>12</sup> But it remains indeterminable and cannot be mapped - our naming the *il y a* as the 'object' of containment representing an approach to, rather than identification or delineation of, the same. So that an incorporated difference - if we allow that the *il y a* may be such - is both borne and borne witness to without subjective knowledge that such is the case, and without obvious manifestation of its presence (in absence) other than in terms of the emanation of trauma or, indeed, horror (traced aurally) within a being.

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<sup>11</sup> The notion of interior/exterior can be linked, moreover, to the potential meaning of 'Fors' as Barbara Johnson reads it within a footnote to Derrida's essay/foreword of the same name, determining the word as being derivative of the Latin 'foris' (meaning 'outside' or 'outdoors'), and an archaic preposition for 'except for' or 'barring'. Then additionally, 'fors' as the plural of 'for' refers to that which 'designates the inner heart, 'the tribunal of conscience,' subjective interiority.' (see Barbara Johnson's note for Jacques Derrida's foreword *Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok* in *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, pp. xi - xii).

<sup>12</sup> J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995. p. 295.

And perhaps we might contend that the ‘sound’ of the *il y a*, the ‘rustling’,<sup>13</sup> ‘rumbling’<sup>14</sup> and so on, is actually a manifestation of resistance to synthesis in fact, which in its denial of progressive introjection improvises a ‘ventrilocat[ion] through the “living,”’<sup>15</sup> with such ‘noise’ representing a self-engendered address both to and through a being (a subject is both called and calls). The subjective ‘ear’ being here attentive not to the sound of the *il y a* as such but, rather, the sound of its own condition of pathological responsiveness (which of course it could be argued amounts to an inflected approach to the condition of difference within Being, whilst also positing the possibility that the *il y a* is an invention - but an invention for which a subject is unaware that he/she may be responsible).<sup>16</sup>

We might, moreover, begin to countenance the cryptic instant (as we might so name it) as conceivably effecting, in its relation to the (auto-generated?) ‘anonymous current of being’<sup>17</sup> that constitutes the *il y a*, a simultaneous revulsion and desire, that is informed by both the reading of Being as hope/horror and the reading of cryptology as loss/possession. So that a subject’s apprehension of the *il y a* can perhaps appositely be termed ‘a ravaging joy to which he

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<sup>13</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. pp. 55, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 163.

<sup>15</sup> J. Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 58.

<sup>16</sup> The contention here, in aligning the *il y a* with a notion of the encrypted object, is to suggest that the *il y a* may in fact not only be an aesthetic construct but one that we each invent for ourselves without being aware that we have done so. The *il y a*, as with the condition of the cryptic, thereby becoming a part of and apart from the subject, but facilitating the possibility of an ‘otherwise’ voice that emanates from the Self.

<sup>17</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 52.

can bear witness only by tears, an endless flow of tears'.<sup>18</sup> With the implication that the condition of the *il y a* is never simply a condition compelling horror and repulsion solely, but longing and hope equally. So that the notion of possession (possessing and being possessed) could, moreover, be said to pursue a particularly ambivalent course. And in the bifurcated comprehension of the term, in fact, we find the movement between possession (by the subject) effected in the affirmational uptake of existence (a self-possession), and possession (of the subject) effected in the same context as an owned body ('corps propre'),<sup>19</sup> a contained materiality wherein a sovereign interiority might be 'laid hold of in its works'.<sup>20</sup> To posit the self within Being, being then both a taking up and a being taken up.

And the notion of 'possession', of course, presages the condition of 'haunting' as a further dimension of cryptology (whilst accepting that the two things are not necessarily always and inevitably interchangeable), which adds, it might be said, to a potential for subject fragmentation or indeterminacy as it occurs within such a context. That is, it conceivably adds to an already extant destabilisation of subjecthood (the split between Ego and Id, and the cryptic divisions within the same) as a presumed locus of original unity since it invokes a layer of further undecidability in the positing of another's crypt within a subject's unconscious - leading to the calling into question of the notion of an 'authentic' Self,

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<sup>18</sup> M. Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. A. Smock, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986. p. 72.

<sup>19</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. p. 229.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

and the possibility of real self-knowledge, in its promotion of the polyvocal. Who in fact speaks? Who writes?

Or perhaps we could even conflate this with a notion of 'substitution', which is effectively an assertion of a simultaneous self-definition and self-decentering in order to accommodate difference without assimilation.<sup>21</sup> That is, as a 'relationship with the non-ego [which] precedes any relationship of the ego with itself',<sup>22</sup> the notion of a receptive, indeed substitutive, comportment precedes a subjective relation with the self, but maintains a separateness in order to accommodate difference. The Other being 'in me and in the midst of my very identification',<sup>23</sup> but as a presence without attachment, a relation without relation. Such a notion of 'comportment' being indicative, moreover, of an 'anarchic'<sup>24</sup> propensity that is 'prior to every initiative'<sup>25</sup> and prior to any notion of subjective 'freedom'.

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<sup>21</sup> And whilst there are obviously differences in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of incorporation and the Levinasian conception of substitution, both are prompted it might be argued through an obligation to difference. And though substitution leaves the ego intact and incorporation divides it, the merging of the two processes would seek to posit the possibility that a potential polyvocalism is yet coextensively realisable with a condition of self-determinacy because of the process of 'unknowingness' that informs the cryptic. There are also differences in terms of the specificity of the incorporated 'object' - the psychoanalytic concern framing the process in relation to something known and valued, substitution in terms of a more vague notion of otherness. Again the conflation of the two processes means that something of both notions may be conceivable within the same context when read in relation to the *il y a* - which is a nebulous nothingness apprehended as something, but a something that in its potential facilitation of, or access to, difference, arguably constitutes it as desirable as well as horrifying.

<sup>22</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 125.

<sup>24</sup> The notion of 'anarchy', which might be considered as expressive of the *il y a*, first being applied by Levinas within *Existence and Existents* to denote a contrary position to categoric organisation when he suggests that '[s]ensation is not yet the unorganised quality which Kantian psychology teaches it is. The organisation or the anarchy of sensation does not affect its objectivity or subjectivity'. (See E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 47).

<sup>25</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 38-39.

At stake here, in any event, is the sense that the Self is separated from itself as a consequence of a traumatic 'engagement' with (or, indeed, anticipation of) difference. And, to reiterate our argument, such difference may be the condition of the *il y a*, and the *il y a* may be an object of auto-generation (even potentially a substitution, or channelling point, itself for trauma?), but the consequential (re)beginning and un-knowledge attending the condition of the (cryptic) instant means that engagement affords the continuous exposure to the unforeseen, to the otherwise. The notion of the crypt and its contained 'object' positing the possibility that if the *il y a* is to be allowed a locus of difference, the 'trace' (as the essence of difference) may effectively be the trace of a trace, since the 'object' of alterity is here neither a being nor non-being, or it is perhaps both simultaneously. In effect, it is a ghostly or spectral presence (indeed a presence that must haunt subjective 'becoming' at every turn within existence).<sup>26</sup>

But how then to fully comprehend the significance of the spectral (and the spectral, perhaps most importantly, in relation to text and music)? Psychoanalytic definitions, of course, determine the ghost as the condition of another's crypt within a subject's unconscious. And, as suggested, it is the locating of the same

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<sup>26</sup> As Derrida defines it in *Ear of the Other*, (J. Derrida, *Ear of the Other*, p. 59), and as read through Abraham and Torok's notion of the ghost or phantom (N. Abraham & M. Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*; volume 1: *Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. N.T. Rand, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). The crucial difference between the two strands of the spectral, deriving from Abraham and Torok and from Derrida respectively, being found in the status of the secret. The secrets of Abraham and Torok's 'lying phantoms' - who return in order to maintain secrecy - are unspeakable in the sense of being a subject of shame and prohibition. It is not that they cannot be spoken; on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcised. For Derrida, however, the ghost and its secrets are unspeakable in a different sense. Abraham and Torok seek to return the ghost to the order of knowledge, Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration and to encounter what is strange, unheard, other, about the ghost. For Derrida the ghost's secret is therefore not a puzzle to be solved, it is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not-yet formulated possibilities of the future. The secret is not unspeakable because it is taboo, but because it cannot (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us. Perhaps we might even conceive of such differences in relation to text as differences between the desire to understand and openness to what exceeds knowledge.

that opens a subject to the condition of polyvocalism. To a questioning of the centred 'I'. 'Hauntology'<sup>27</sup> also begins, however, to intimate something else about the relation with alterity that has additional consequences for the notion of ethicality. Namely that it may be impossible for a subject to ever fully assimilate another (an impossibility of introjection), because such assimilation, in its destructive propensity, must always be followed by a (rhythmic) return of the destroyed as spectre. So the condition of 'trace' might then be understood as a form of radical non-negativity, a residual, quasi-material insistence that interrupts any movement of negation. The ghost constituting a presence therefore in absence, a return that cannot be resisted, but a return of that which is 'othered' since its restoration could never occur in an absolute sense.

And applied to language, we might suggest that the sign is never, again in absolute terms, able to displace the named object.<sup>28</sup> The conception that language loses that which it would name in the very movement of nomination, granting within such a moment only an 'idealised' life within the mind, may in fact be misplaced. In fact the object does return. But its return occurs as a condition of

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<sup>27</sup> 'Hauntology' is, of course, Jacques Derrida's neologism (punning on 'ontology'), employed in *The Specter of Marx* (J. Derrida, *The Specter of Marx*, trans. P. Kamuf, New York: Routledge, 1994) to indicate the notion of Communism as a ghostly presence that European neoliberalism has been unable to exorcise. The term having recently been appropriated by music critics, notably Ian Penman and Simon Reynolds, and 'blogger' K-Punk, to exemplify a particular musical condition and genre. The original application of which occurred in relation to the atmospheric and sampling formations of electronic hip-hop and dubstep - with an added point of interest being that 'dub' presumably derives from the Jamaican Patois word 'duppy' meaning 'ghost' or spirit (see J. Corbett, *Extended Play: Sounding Off from John Cage to Dr. Funkenstein*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1994. p. 128).

<sup>28</sup> And it is perhaps important to note, of course, that Abraham and Torok's work does in fact root itself in the condition of language as it is operative in relation to the pathological condition of the crypt. But as Nicholas T. Rand has indicated within his definition of cryptonymy as a theory of readability, the psychoanalytic emphasis, in contrast with deconstruction, is more concerned with how 'signification can be reinstated after its collapse', rather than with the potential for infinite play of the same (see N. T. Rand *Translator's Introduction* in N. Abraham and M. Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, p. lxvi).

the uncanny (as ghost or spectre) which represents a disruption of, or resistance to, the movement towards synthesis.<sup>29</sup>

And when applied to theory, the process of naming or designation, moreover, is continuously troubled (haunted) in its enactment since a subjective assertion can never be absolutely sure of its position either in relation to the notion of an original 'preferred meaning' nor in relation to a subsequent interpretation (we can only guess at the way this might be understood). Effectively, an 'otherwise' form (of meaning) returns incessantly to the assertive declaration to cast its authorising status into question, and to frame a general condition of undecidability in language. Such a condition, within a theoretical context, being played out in the 'turn' between reading and composition, and revealing the extent to which our definitiveness is disputed as we are haunted by ghosts from both the past and the future (with the attendant possibility, of course, that the ghosts of other meanings, as it were, are themselves troubled or haunted by something similar).

Such concerns, moreover, are actualised within an instant. That is, in the moment of a writing's emergence its definitive status is under contention. And this occurs as the 'rebound movement'<sup>30</sup> of the instant wherein a 'withdrawal in the very heart of the present'<sup>31</sup> effecting the present, affords an unbidden alternative 'voicing' on the hither side of the designatory. This means, in fact, that the no-

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<sup>29</sup> Following Maurice Blanchot's view that language cannot 'murder' the object, as Hegel, Lacan and others have claimed, since the thing lost is always subject to a decomposing/recomposing materiality which returns it at the very heart of its supposed absence.

<sup>30</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

tion of haunting could be understood as presence within the very construction of a concept, especially if we allow that the concept is grounded in the linguistic.<sup>32</sup> And that ontology might then be understood as simply an attempt at exorcism, at 'conjunction',<sup>33</sup> at the containment of the spectral, but equally as that which pursues an impossibility, as that which is bound to failure. And could we then ask, by extension, whether the condition of trauma, framed in relation to the hauntological, is a disruptive but perhaps necessary moment of apprehension wherein the subject recognises that he/she is haunted by the 'beyond' of their own interpretive reading? That is, as a condition of the hermeneutic or theoretical are we inevitably trapped within our own reading, whilst sensing the non/presence of alternatives, both prior (original or source text) and subsequent (interpretations of our interpretations), which haunt us as a condition of the excluded (but to which we may, through the notion of 'possession', indirectly give intimation or even voicing without understanding or awareness that we do so)? And in recalling our initial postulation about the notion of preface or overture, and this dissertation as a formation of such, could we equally then argue that the same are not simply haunted by that which might be indicated to follow them, but more precisely in fact by that which cannot be countenanced to follow? So that, in essence, we are haunted by the non-definitiveness of our own reading.

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<sup>32</sup> J. Derrida, *The Specter of Marx*, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Such a consideration of language evoking the condition, it could be said moreover, of 'arche-writing'<sup>34</sup> which establishes the sense of writing as a condition of infinite referral or deferral. So that we can never be certain of that which we write. Our sense of assertion always being grounded within or upon, as it were, shifting foundations. Signification must always refer to other signs, and writing 'is not a sign of a sign, except if one says it of all signs, which would be more profoundly true'.<sup>35</sup> Arche-writing determining a breach that could ostensibly be divided along two particular lines, of spatial 'differing' and temporal 'deferring'.<sup>36</sup> The explication of such terms being that writing 'differs' from itself by splitting (differing) from the absence that makes it necessary (either in terms of reference or address), and that a given text is never to be apprehended fully in terms of its meaning (even by its author) since it must be subject to (or deferred to) unforeseen and wholly unpredictable future reading, which again determines a specific condition of absence (whilst accepting here, of course, that 'arche' could yet be construed as an organising, or even assimilatory, concern itself in its correlation of the inception of a phenomenon with its domination by a principle<sup>37</sup> - but that such organisation, or attempt at organisation, or even self-acknowledgement of such an attempt, is, for all that, written through or indeed 'haunted' by an anarchy, or anticipation of alterity, that instills a preclusion of the

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<sup>34</sup> Arche-writing being Jacques Derrida's term for a condition of writing that is focused upon the instability of the sign and the breach between intent and actuality within all text, making reference moreover to an originary breach afflicting all things that one may wish to keep sacrosanct, including the notion of self-presence (see J.Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> J.Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 43.

<sup>36</sup> With the two conditions, of course, being combined within the Derridean neologism 'différance' (see *Différance in Margins of Philosophy*, trans. A. Bass, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).

<sup>37</sup> Both Heidegger and Schurmann having criticised the notion of 'arche' along such lines. And in relation to which it is worth noting that even within the most ancient Greek writings 'arche' has been consistently applied as a term to signify both commencement and (political) authority.

possibility of definitiveness or closure). So that arche-writing could in fact be construed therefore as intimation of both absence through an ‘iterability that becomes internal to what the mark is’<sup>38</sup> and a deferred absence that signals a potentiality for what the mark may become.

The ‘absences’ encapsulated by the condition of ‘différance’ might then be framed in relation to the condition of ‘turning’ within the theoretical text, in terms of the movement between the reading of an ‘original’ text and the subsequent reading of such a reading. The absences posited, however, are replete with the notion of the ‘returned’. That is, filled by the presence in absence of the spectral. Emanations of which force themselves to the surface of a particular text as ‘vocalisations’ (even ‘evocalisations’<sup>39</sup> of ‘silent textual sounding’)<sup>40</sup> or intimations of difference (of the *il y a?*) within a reading subject, destabilising any sense of decidability in terms of any given reading. The sense here being that an encrypted being carries always a ghost within itself as ‘structural openness’<sup>41</sup> that continuously ‘pushes at the boundaries of language and thought’,<sup>42</sup> and is an effectuation of the specific notions of both ‘différance’ and ‘trace’ where there must occur a state of ‘undecidability or tension... [with] an insistence, a presence of whatever resists us, recalcitrant to our understanding’.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> S. Glendinning, in an interview conducted at the London School of Economics, November 2008.

<sup>39</sup> G. Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext*, California: University of California Press, 1990. A phrase coined by Garrett Stewart in relation to a ‘phonemic’ analysis of reading.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> C. Davis, *Etat Present, Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms* in *French Studies* 59(3), 2005. pp. 373-379.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 379.

<sup>43</sup> J. Jervis, *Uncanny Presences in Uncanny Modernity: Cultural Theories, Modern Anxieties*, eds. J. Jervis and J. Collins, Houndmills & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. p. 10.

Such might even be understood, in its 'obsession' with difference, as a refusal to allow the self to be 'tamed and domesticated by a theme',<sup>44</sup> with a condition of 'anarchic passivity'<sup>45</sup> subverting the possibility of a totalising movement of the same. The inherent concern for the non-self 'strip[ping] the ego of its pride and dominating [the] imperialism characteristic of it. The subject is in the accusative, without recourse in being, expelled from being'.<sup>46</sup> The sense of the same indicating a grammatical nature of existence, with the subject, in the accusative, finding him/herself the object of another's relation. Such being the case anarchically, in fact, before a being can identify him/herself as a subject, as an existent with nominative status, and before a self generating impetus can allow the subject's possessive claim upon the world. But the notion of the same does not, conversely, objectify the subject. It liberates him/her, rather, by negating the condition of arche, so that 'through substitution for others, the oneself escapes relations... in this most passive passivity, the self liberates itself ethically from every other and from itself'.<sup>47</sup>

And in allowing the anarchical haunting of the developmental condition of being (or the developmental void of the *il y a*), we encroach upon a musically derived hauntological conception of existence that itself pursues a generative opera-

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<sup>44</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 115.

tional mode and that, in turn, has implications for the textual.<sup>48</sup> As a creative/procedural generative concern, in fact, wherein the unfolding of a moment (or instant) occurs in the improvisational response to an order to improvise (or a prefaced order to pursue disorder) the hauntological dimension could therein be understood as the forbearing of encrypted instruction to resist instruction.

The same, it might be said, framing a particular problematic in relation to the condition of the 'historic' as it occurs within the context of the spectral. That is, in the question of the proper 'moment' of the revenant (is it, for example, the same thing that it might be said to historically 'represent', or is the same represented object to be properly allowed itself an object of the present?) we might consider the same both a 'return' and 'inauguration', with the hauntological configuring 'a coinage that suggests a spectrally deferred non-origin within grounding metaphysical terms such as history and identity'.<sup>49</sup> So that we might then ask, by extension, if interpretation (as musical or theoretical concern) could ever then truly function as genuine 're-presentation' in absolute terms when any reading (or reading of a reading) must acknowledge the potential influence of multiple historic and contingent spectral 'presences' (that must in turn preclude the sense of authentic replication)? So that we might perhaps argue that the spectral 'makes possible reproduction even as it also fragments reproduction

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<sup>48</sup> The emphasis here laying more with a musical model of the generative, aiming at unpredictability, rather than a linguistic/structural model which arguably facilitates the application of an overarching schema.

<sup>49</sup> From *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, eds. P. Buse & A. Scott, London: Macmillan, 1999. Quoted by K-Punk, *Hauntology Now*, k-punk, abstractdynamics.org, Jan 17th, 2006 (accessed March 2009).

and ruins the very possibility of reproduction's apparent guarantee to represent that which is no longer there fully'.<sup>50</sup>

And more broadly still, the notion of a musically derived condition of hauntology could be said to foreground another dimension of the same as it occurs in relation to the technological (and which, of course, has further implications for the textual). Namely, it invokes a spectral conception of the information realm (notably in terms of recording methods and agencies) which might be deemed 'the technological uncanny'.<sup>51</sup> The sense of the same as 'layers of fizz, crackle, hiss and white noise'<sup>52</sup> being coextensive with the notion of 'sound' as it emerges in relation to textual practices (which themselves, as previously suggested, could be allowed in turn the emanations of the *il y a*).

Such a notion of the spectral in relation to technology positing, moreover, a sense of surfeit or surplus production in the material 'inscription' of music, that structures a haunt (as locus) and haunt (as event) in the space between content and context, between the immateriality of music and the materiality of inscribed sound. So that music exists here as a 'present memory' of itself, as music that is haunted by the technological and that itself haunts the technological. Transposed then to the theoretical (as recording agency), we might suggest that text is informed consistently by emanations that must render it distinct from a source

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<sup>50</sup> J. Wolfrey, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*, New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2001. p. 13.

<sup>51</sup> M. Fisher, quoted by B. Kreidler, *The Music was Dying* in *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2009.

<sup>52</sup> K-Punk, *Phonograph Blues*, k-punk, abstractdynamics.org, October 19th, 2006 (accessed March 2009). An expression used by K-Punk with specific reference to the recorded work of Robert Johnson.

or 'original' text. And as such is configured within the 'ear' of the receiving subject who 'plays back' a text.

Curiously perhaps, the technological imperfections that occur within the field of recording may in fact determine voice as being all the more human (perhaps the layers of anarchic sound, as emanations of the *il y a*, reinforcing the entrapped status of visceral being?), with the reverse occurring in the opposite direction, where the clearer the recording the more inhuman it might sound.<sup>53</sup> But to what does this condition of humanity that is contained or amplified within such degradation, as it were, of the human, actually point? Should we posit it a 'return' in fact, a (re)visiting of the preternatural, to be grasped (in terms of music) as an 'anamorphic sonic object'<sup>54</sup> that is always outside the realm of the human? Or a return, in fact, of absence as 'seething presence'<sup>55</sup> that might be understood as the essential condition of being? As the 'real' condition of continuous being?

And in framing such a perspective in relation to the technological (which in turn might equally be understood as a condition of the textual) we might perhaps conceive of the uncanny thought, perhaps repressed or indeed encrypted, that posits our technically 'doubled' selves (through recording and writing) as enduring entities that in turn are rendered as ghosts of ourselves.<sup>56</sup> And in appre-

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<sup>53</sup> B. Kreidler, *The Music was Dying in The Brooklyn Rail*, with reference to views expressed by Theodor Adorno in his essay *The Curves of the Needle* (see T. W. Adorno, *The Curves of the Needle* in *Essays on Music*, introduction, commentary and notes R. Leppert, trans. S. H. Gillespie, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. p. 271).

<sup>54</sup> K-Punk, *Hauntology Now*. In relation to which it is perhaps of some interest here to note that the term 'anamorphosis' derives from the Greek expression to 'form again'.

<sup>55</sup> A.F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. p. 17.

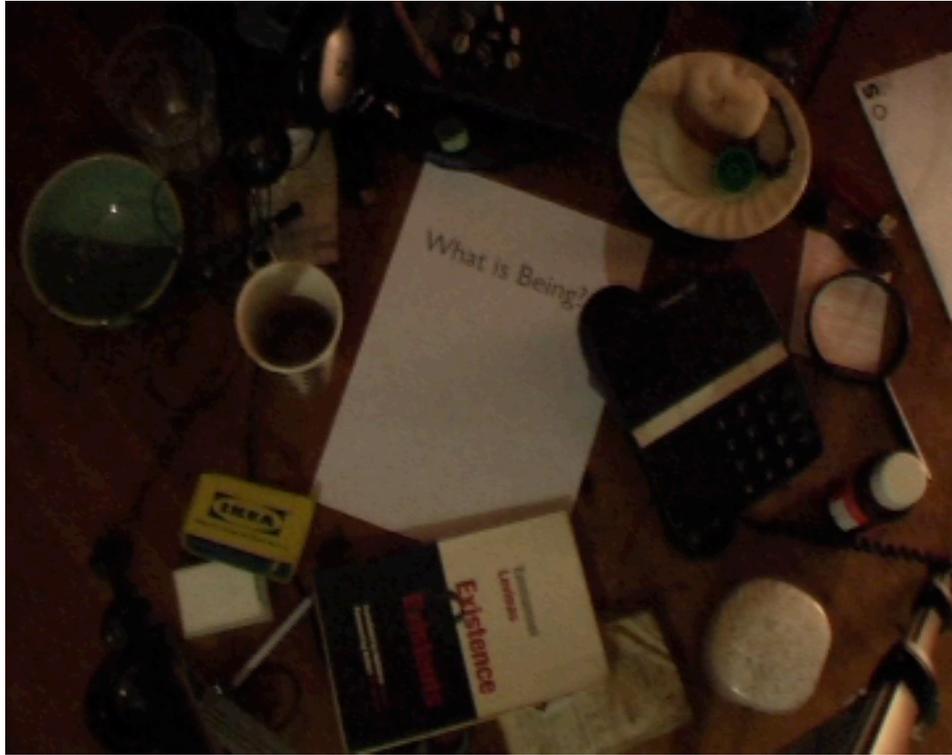
<sup>56</sup> An argument that K-Punk specifically makes in his article *Phonograph Blues*.

hending our ceaseless, spectral selves (the horrifying condition, in fact, of existence) via such means, we are, moreover, obliged to recognise the specific nature of our imprisoned status. The occurrence of which takes place not simply in response to our own 'product' (our own recorded voice, our own text etc.), but also in response to the presence of another's (perhaps most especially) 'dislocated' voice as it might occur within the imperfections of recorded sound, or the incorporation (significantly) of the same within a different body (as in the process of sampling within music or citation within writing). The status of otherness as revenant here conceivably (albeit paradoxically) emphasising an essential condition of being which must in turn oblige the apprehension of the spectral condition of our own existence (the sense of which is to perhaps be drawn through our own encrypted status within Being - and our own condition of trauma which is therein entombed and 'available' to the 'possession' of another). So that it could perhaps be argued that we all ultimately exist as conditions of the ghostly, as 'speaking voids, made up of scraps and citations... contaminated by other people's memories... adrift...'<sup>57</sup> With the most telling condition of the cryptic as it arises within such a context (as we know from psychoanalytic determinations) being the inability it induces within the subject to mourn loss (since loss can never occur in an absolute sense). We essentially mourn, rather, the impossibility to mourn.

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<sup>57</sup> I. Penman, *Tricky: [the Phantoms of] TRICKNOLOGY [versus a Politics of Authenticity]*, *The Wire*, March 1995.

*A reader should struggle to continuously grasp his/her own instantaneous presence, and to read him/herself reading. But might also recognise that in the moment of comprehending the same the present slips away, and he/she must then take up the struggle anew.*



**Exchange (extract)**

Artist's home, North London, December 2005.

6 minutes 21 seconds (of 20 minutes approximately).

Disc 2 track 2. Please press play.

## Insomnia.

### A Prayer.

We will watch and listen. All through the night, we will watch and listen. In the garden, we will watch and listen.<sup>1</sup>

The endless night is at the door, now in the room. Enfolding and demanding. We long for sleep, for flight. But we will watch and listen. We will bear witness. To the rumbling horror. To the murmur of contained absence. To the drone of dis/continuity. We cannot do otherwise. Consciousness will not resist. Consciousness has absorbed the night. Or the night, consciousness. We cannot stay awake, 'it' stays awake'.<sup>2</sup> It watches through us. We have become the space of *there is*. We are one with it. We cannot escape it. We have no past or future. And 'memory would already be a liberation with regard to the past'.<sup>3</sup>

We have listened like animals, for hunter or prey. We have listened as interpreting men. Now we listen in passive panic. Panic enters through the ear. Hearing being 'intensity without specificity'.<sup>4</sup> And we listen therefore without certainty

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<sup>1</sup> An oblique reference to the Garden of Gethsemane and the watchful night that Jesus demanded of his disciples.

<sup>2</sup> E. Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. R. A. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985. p. 49.

<sup>3</sup> E. Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. R. A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> R. Barthes, *Listening in The Responsibility of Forms*, trans. R. Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1985. p. 258. Roland Barthes' use of the term 'panic listening' suggests an inter-subjective formation continuously producing new signifiers without ever arresting their specific meanings. The term seeming particularly apposite in relation to Levinasian notions of the audible condition of the *il y a*, moreover, since the etymology of 'panic' derives from the god Pan, himself the source of mysterious sounds causing contagious fear.

about that to which we are listening.<sup>5</sup> Sound is contingent. Sound depends upon that which comes into contact with it to generate sound. We hear ‘the event of the thing, not the thing itself’.<sup>6</sup> Sound is residual.

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<sup>5</sup> Listening, moreover, is always a condition of the immersive present. That is, it precludes a possibility of the withdrawal pertaining to the visual (itself facilitating a position of certainty and authorisation), and locates a subject within the inevitable ‘now’ of a particular soundscape. Such a soundscape, of course, as perhaps intimated by the notion of ‘hearing without specificity’, is also a constantly ‘created’ space (indeed a self-created, or auto-generated, space) since listening, with limited recourse to the collectively derived meaning that attends visuality, is itself aligned infinitely with the imagination. The generated meaning that might attend such creativity, however, is always fleeting, due to its contingent nature, and needful therefore of its own continuous reconstitution.

And whilst the same, it could be said, evinces an ethical mode of responsiveness (since it signals the negation of dominant meaning), the conditions of transience, intangibility and ephemerality that attach to the ‘fabricated’ soundscape, must also generate a pervasive unease and doubt that underscore the process of listening as an action of solitude. In listening, that is, as an event of subjective individuality, we can never be sure that we each hear the same thing. Such destabilisation compelling a ‘seeing’ that surpasses the visual imagination and ensures the unique nature of the experience.

In *The Anxiety of the Lonely Listener*, Salomé Voegelin, writing of the isolation attending the practice of radio listening (but which we might extend here to the listening practice per se) suggests that: “In his or her engaged solitude the listener can imagine anything, and anything he or she imagines is true in the context of his or her imagination. What public conventions there are, are soon hijacked and manipulated in the private and uncontrollable sphere of the listener’s mind.” Listening producing, it could be said, a sonic and visual (indeed multi-sensory) imagination in relation to apprehended sound, rather than attaching to an a priori visual point of reference. And in so doing, of course, the listener is continually then engaged in an effort of re-orientation, since ‘settled’ meaning as a consequence of listening (and its auto-generative mode of being) is an impossibility.

Voegelin goes on, moreover, to compare such considerations with the ‘accents’ named by Roland Barthes as points within photography that escape any collective and stable understanding (R. Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard, New York: Hill & Wang, 1980), and posits that radio (and listening, as we might have it, in general) produces only accents: “There is no certainty. Every fragment of every sound is an accent, unrecognisable, entreating the listener to place it temporarily in the individual context of his or her imagination... Any notion of an authentic, shared reality is suspended... Of course there are recognisable rules of production and transmission, commercial and independent. However, even within such a structure, the darkness of reception disorients, and in this disorientation demands of the listener an effort of production... organising the material heard to produce a personal and contingent sense” (S. Voegelin, *The Anxiety of the Lonely Listener*, [http://www.salomevoegelin.net/listening\\_to\\_noise...html](http://www.salomevoegelin.net/listening_to_noise...html), accessed December 2010).

Here then, we might suggest that listening, as an event of created meaning, gives shape to a temporal value, that in its repeatedly reworked status gives rise by extension to the apprehension that the Self is both listening to itself within the fabrication of its own meaning (that the subject is always a part of its own soundscape), and that the transient ‘fixed upon’ meaning is derived from a number of potential meanings. So that ‘the heard’ with which the subject engages, with which the subject is in dialogue, as it were, may itself be in dialogue at the same time with an otherwise that is always outside, always beyond, the conception of the listening subject, yet remains always itself insistent in the ‘now’ as a continuous presence in absence.

<sup>6</sup> S. Connor, *Edison’s Teeth: Touching Hearing*, a paper written for the conference *Hearing Culture*, a conference organised by the Wenner-Gren Foundation and scheduled to take place in Morelia, Mexico, October 4-12th 2001. The conference was postponed in the aftermath of the September 11th attack on New York (accessed February 2010).

But sound too, is a paradox. At once both seemingly acousmatic and corporeal.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is both and neither. Sound is always disembodied, never quite belonging to the object or place from which it emerges. Yet sound relies upon a materiality through which to travel, through which to be engendered. And such materiality is never quite abandoned. As itself a residue, it contains a residue of the material. To consider sound as the 'voice' of what sounds, moreover, may be to animate the sounding world. May be to ascribe to it a condition of soul. But it is also to determine sound as owned, as emanating from its source, rather than as an accidental emission from it. So that we find '[p]recisely because of its default condition of disembodiment, sound may be apt to be thought of in terms of how it clings or stays in contact with what begets it'.<sup>8</sup>

Is it correct, therefore, to ascribe an 'interiority' of voicing to the whisper alone? Other 'voiced' sounds, including spoken words, may resonate with an essence of the same. Consider the word 'resonate' in fact. Say it aloud. After the final 't' has been spat into the world, the back of the mouth and tongue still savour the shape of the term. Is it really possible to deny the sense of a lingering continuity?

The notion of the Logos of course frames a division between breath and voice, whilst accepting that speech necessarily combines the two. The Son of God is

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<sup>7</sup> Jérôme Peignot and Pierre Schaeffer were the first to use the term 'acousmatic' in 1955 to define the listening experience of *musique concrète*. The term, from the French *acousmatique*, itself derives from the Greek *akousmatikoi*, a description used to refer to probationary pupils of Pythagoras.

<sup>8</sup> S. Connor, *Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing*.

of the mouth. The Angel of the nose.<sup>9</sup> But theology also accepts that voice in such a context is continuum. The Son of God is the Word of God. Voice is here umbilicus.

The telephone that rings in the next room calls to us. It calls. And we respond. To even refuse to pick-up is still a response. But the telephone is perhaps more especially a pointedly paradigmatic occasioning of umbilical continuity. In relation to which the most important feature of the phone lays not in its separation of voice from speaker (at the Other end of the line), but its propulsion of the voice along a wire that locates the receiver in real-time contact with the speaker. Prior to such invention, sound had been regarded as radiative or diffusive, in contrast with the straight travelling dynamism of sight. The telephone wire, however, posited a sense of tactility, or imaginary tactility, that concentrates sound in a vector. A clear line of communication.<sup>10</sup> The notion of proximity and distance being undercut by the 'presencing' of the speaker, and the physical application of phone to ear admitting of difference, as it were, within.

And to read the telephonic in such a way may be to determine ourselves in specific continuum with the Other - and potentially at the juncture of listening modes predicated upon the notion of pathos.<sup>11</sup> That is, in conceding a generally violent inception for sound (inasmuch as sound production, and reception, might be allowed the consequences of material 'collision' - be it the friction pro-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Following a proposition of the African theologian Lactantius that distinguished the Son of God as speech and angels as the silent breath of God - and that each potentially is emitted via a different orifice.

<sup>10</sup> S. Connor, *Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

duced by air upon vocal chords to produce the voice, the impacting of air particles in the transmission of sound to the ear, or the colliding of sound waves with the ear or skin), sound has the propensity to disturb, to unsettle, and, indeed, to provoke change. Sound having, it could therefore be said, the capacity to inflict agitation and suffering.<sup>12</sup> Though sound could also be regarded as both the subject and object of pathos - being both the product of pathos and the instigator of pathos in others.<sup>13</sup>

In reading the condition of sound in relation to pathos, moreover, it could be contended that an umbilical association posits a proactive potential in hearing that counters the notion of the same as a condition of simple or pure passivity.

So that:

sound can itself have two contrasting sides or dimensions... [Listening] is not always... silent, reserved, withdrawn, passive or alert responsiveness to sound. Most of the time... [listening] is accompanied by different kinds of action, most typically, perhaps in the production of sound in speech, which is perhaps best thought of as a kind of continuous, indistinguishable composite of hearing and speaking, rather than a simple, so to speak, deaf production of sound. Just as we cannot speak without listening or overhearing ourselves, so we cannot listen without taking in to ourselves the sounds we hear. Hearing always operates to some degree on both sides of the active-passive, productive-receptive dichotomy... Sound is imagined in the same-two-sided way as skin: both as that which touches and that which is touched.<sup>14</sup>

To listen here then, is to be already engaged within a process of the interlocutory. The acknowledgement of which, exemplified in the telephonic conversation (wherein 'the listener's silence will be as active as the locutor's speech: [so that]

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 'Suffering' being the literal translation of the Greek term πάσχω, or pascho, from which pathos is derived.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

*listening speaks*)<sup>15</sup>, also points to a mode of receptivity that effectively evokes the sense of alert openness attending, perhaps most especially, the process of psychoanalytic listening.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, psychoanalysis proffers a very particular mode of active or 'dialogical listening' which precludes a possibility of the presumptive, and in its 'panic' mode of being pursues a condition analogous to musical reception (inasmuch as musical listening functions as 'unknowing' receipt followed by rationalisation, and is perhaps somewhat akin to the psychoanalytic procedure of sustained 'openness' followed by interpretation. In both cases, the emphasis laying, it could be said, with *delay*, though it is important to understand that such rationalisation/interpretation is not then to be determined here as definitive, but continues unfolding ceaselessly with new meaning).

So that a notion of pathos in sound instills a condition of 'availability' that whilst being potentially 'harmful' also posits a possibility of passive compliancy, wherein 'the soft, plasmatic body... dominates... [facilitating a listening wherein] hearing and speaking peacefully, erotically alternate'.<sup>17</sup> The notion of the body in relation to the voice, or the 'corporality of speech',<sup>18</sup> could also be allowed a particular consequence of the psychoanalytic mode of listening, a listening to the otherwise of speech - since it embraces the 'residual' condition of speaking (including its point of emergence) in the body:

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<sup>15</sup> R. Barthes, *Listening in The Responsibility of Forms*, p. 252.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Barthes' notion of psychoanalysis and the unconscious being read in relation to particular Freudian concerns - expressed perhaps most specifically in Freud's text *Recommendations for Physicians on the Psychoanalytic Method of Treatment*.

<sup>17</sup> S. Connor, *Edison's Teeth: Touching Hearing*.

<sup>18</sup> R. Barthes, *Listening in The Responsibility of Forms*, p. 255.

[The] voice is located at the articulation of body and discourse, and it is in this interspace that listening's back-and-forth movement might be made. "To listen to someone, to hear his voice, requires on the listener's part an attention open to the interspace of body and discourse and which contracts neither at the impression of the voice nor at the expression of the discourse. What such listening offers is precisely what the speaking subject does not say: the unconscious texture which associates his body-as-site with his discourse: an active texture which reactualizes, in the subject's speech, the totality of his history"... From this point of view, the psychoanalyst listening is a posture oriented towards origins, insofar as these origins are not considered as historical. The psychoanalyst, attempting to grasp the signifiers, learns to "speak" the language which is his patient's unconscious.<sup>19</sup>

Here, of course, in pursuing a psychoanalytic receptivity (without closure) the listener also places him/herself at risk. To listen without seeking determinacy is after all to open the self to the recognition of desire within others. Exposure to which could conceivably overwhelm us:

[for we] cannot, like Ulysses bound to his mast, "enjoy the spectacle of the sirens without risks and without accepting its consequences... There was something marvelous in that song, secret, simple, and everyday, which had to be immediately recognized... a song from the abyss which, once heard, opened an abyss in each word and lured one to vanish into it."<sup>20</sup>

In listening then without presumptive authority, in listening with openness, in developing the modality of psychoanalytic responsiveness that facilitates polysemy, we must risk our own well-being. We must allow for our own potential suffering.

But how does this play in the night? In the ocean of the nocturnal? How then to regard the condition of listening? And to what does insomnia bend our ear? In our state of exposure, to what do we remain vulnerable? Ours is not a dread of

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 255-256. The quotation is from the psychoanalyst Denis Vasse.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. 256. The quotation is from M. Blanchot, *Le Livre a Venir*, 1959.

subsumption, a fear of absolute immersion. Of our own absolute displacement. If the night is an augury of difference that compels the renunciation of 'inwardness', perhaps the night also signals something further. At once both wondrous and horrifying, our listening, attuned to the 'shimmering of signifiers'<sup>21</sup> that attest to the uncontainable, may pose within its occurrence the further question of emanation, and the possibility that we listen only to ourselves. That is, in the moment that questions the origin of nocturnal noise, there takes place a concurrent realisation of our own individual self-contained or, indeed, entrapped status. The recognition of which may conceivably elicit a perception that we ourselves are potentially the source of any noise, that we hear always and only our own perpetually isolated condition of existence. This listening, a listening that encroaches upon panic, is an 'agnostic listening'. A listening of incontrovertible uncertainty. Perhaps the otherwise is otherwise? Difference simply a projection?

And yet, here too perhaps, the emergence of an ethicality. For a nocturnal listening that '*un*-preoccupies' itself with difference is an opening for difference. That is, in the disregard or uncertainty that relinquishes preoccupation with difference, and the thematising potential that exists even in terms of an oppositional relation (difference being that which we are not), the process of 'unthinking' mobilises a condition of, as it were, inflected difference. So that it could be said that whilst alterity cannot be approached or countenanced in terms of difference, since it could then be thought and thematised, it already overflows the condition in fact and marks it with this same excess. So that difference unfolds

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 259.

itself within a condition of overflowing compelled by our 'inwardness', which is at the same time a condition of being 'towards'.<sup>22</sup>

Here then, the paradox of 'agnostic listening'. The process of 'towards' directing us to 'the "inverse" of all differences, of all thinking, the "other side" that can never be reversed and become "this side"; it is the "side" that only "may be."<sup>23</sup> Difference being promulgated through unknowing or, indeed, indifference.

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<sup>22</sup> T. de Boer, *An Ethical Transcendental Philosophy in Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. R. A. Cohen, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986. pp. 93-95. De Boer makes the point that Levinas must be read ethically - intimating that to do so one must read otherwise than in terms of opposition, even perhaps otherwise than in terms of difference.

<sup>23</sup> K. Ziarek, *Inflected Language: Towards a Hermeneutics of Nearness*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994. p. 76.

*A reader might allow that the text is the space of the il y a. The unintelligibility of the same representing the uncoupling of writing and meaning.*



### **Bucket Music**

Home of Andrew Marchant, Linda Pilsbury-Marchant and Martin Charter,

North London,

November 2009.

3 minutes 14 seconds.

Disc 2 track 3. Please press play.

## **The Music of the *Il y a*.**

### **A Prayer.**

In postulating that the *il y a* may be an aesthetic, and specifically musical, construct (whilst not denying the possibility of the *il y a*'s status as separate entity - but positing, rather, the mode of comprehension of, or approach to, the same as creative concern), we might say that the condition of such is underscored or brought into being by a subject's rhythmic uptake of Being that manifests itself within the recurring instant. That is, whilst the *il y a* may exist as the 'unknowable', we strive to render it graspable through an aesthetic 'filter', and in so doing seek order in potential disorder and music (as an organising principle delivered via an overlay of rhythmic instantaneity) in uncontrollable noise. And we could perhaps argue, moreover, that whilst we individually 'make' the music of the *il y a* (with the possibility that such music may sound different for every subject) the aspect of compulsion (the obligation to recurrently take up existence) implies both an exterior authority and a commonality that in itself may promote a possibility of social norms (inasmuch as we are all 'called' to the recurrence of being's uptake, all called to uphold the law affecting and effecting conditions of existence).

But how, more specifically, to understand such a conception of music and rhythm here? Perhaps we could begin by foregrounding the notion of listening to music as a process of memory. Or more pointedly, a process of uncomprehending reception and post-event rationalisation or interpretation (a comprehension of our own inability to comprehend, as it were, which in itself could also

be said to deliver the possibility that the aesthetic renders for each of us a suggested sense of alterity, though we may in fact be listening to ourselves only - or perhaps a condition of alterity which informs our constitution). Such movement might also be framed as an oscillation between the Dionysian and the Apollonian.<sup>1</sup> An oscillation, that is, between immersion and (removed) contemplation. In relation to which, the designation of the *il y a* as a musical condition could be viewed as an attempt (albeit an attempt that is bound to ultimate failure) to control the uncontrollable horror of existence through a rationalisation that permits of an approach toward, and retreat from, difference read specifically as noise.<sup>2</sup>

Various, the *il y a* has been described in aural terms as a 'murmur',<sup>3</sup> a 'rustling',<sup>4</sup> a 'rumbling',<sup>5</sup> an 'incessant buzzing',<sup>6</sup> a 'heartrending bustling',<sup>7</sup> an 'incessant droning'.<sup>8</sup> The delineation of the same conceivably attempting an ap-

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<sup>1</sup> The reading of the Apollonian and Dionysian being drawn most specifically here through the Nietzsche of *The Birth of Tragedy* (F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. C.P. Fadiman, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1995), whilst allowing that both positions are effectively amalgamated under the Dionysian rubric in later works, and that the notion of Dionysus changes, it might be said, from a position of universality to an emphasis upon the subject's 'will to power', and even to a condition of the 'monstrous'.

<sup>2</sup> The aim here is to draw a parallel with the Kantian notion of approach to the sublime - wherein representation must always fail in its attempt to evoke, for example, the might of nature or the infinity of the universe, but permits in its very failure a perception of a metonym of representational inability *as such* before the transcendent dimension of reality - giving rise to an intimation (or perhaps an inflected apprehension), in fact, of the very same.

<sup>3</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. pp. 55, 61.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> E. Levinas, *A Conversation with Andre Dalmas* in *Proper Names*, trans. M.B. Smith, California: Stanford University Press, 1975. p. 152.

prehension of the otherwise through a 'saying of the unsayable', with naming becoming an attempt at the brokering of difference or indeed, through a musical framing, the subsumption of noise - wherein music is defined as:

noise given form according to a code (in other words, according to rules of arrangement and laws of succession, in a limited space, a space of sounds) that is theoretically knowable by the listener.<sup>9</sup>

Our proposition in relation to such thought being that a musical reading posits a framework for Being wherein 'instant rhythm' provides an overlay for the constitution of a system from which noise could be said to 'generatively' take flight (or to strive to 'un-music' itself), only to be overtaken and re-assimilated before taking flight once more (the condition of generative music being one, it could be said, of authorisation that gives way to, or encourages, loss of authority).<sup>10</sup>

And in allowing such a reading, moreover, we could additionally argue that the music/noise determinable here may even be a manifestation or representation, of 'will'. That is, the will of the *il y a* to existence. The will to power.<sup>11</sup> Though of course such 'will' would be a drive, or *the* drive, of Being (or even potentially the subjective drive to overcome Being), which ostensibly then elicits a question about the sustainable employment of musicality, or indeed aestheticism, in the

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<sup>9</sup> J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. B. Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985. p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> Though our argument is not that the generative exists as music and/or non-music in fact, but more perhaps as sequential moments of authorisation and non-authorisation, or more pertinently, it could be argued, as moments of composition and improvisation. The thought being, by extension, that a generative notion of music may offer a more inherently ethical approach (in Levinasian terms) than other musical formations since the move towards assimilation is consistently ruptured.

<sup>11</sup> The notion of which being obviously drawn through the Nietzschean postulation (see F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, ed. W. Kaufmann, New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1968).

delivery of the condition of such a force, since will, according to certain modes of thought, constitutes the 'antithesis of the esthetic [and its] purely contemplative, and passive frame of mind',<sup>12</sup> drawing a definite distinction 'between the concept of essence and the concept of phenomenon'.<sup>13</sup> But that is to perhaps reinforce the perspective in fact that posits musical apprehension as a movement between uncomprehending immersion and comprehending reflection, as well as foregrounding the sense that 'failure', or the specific failure to objectify, becomes yet the means by which the otherwise (as intimation or inflection) is actually rendered 'knowable'.

In positing a notion of 'power', however, we might also consider the relation of the same to music and its function in relation to the societal, wherein music could be said to participate in 'the crystallization of social organization in an order'.<sup>14</sup> That is, in conceding the potential for a musical 'appositeness to a code of power',<sup>15</sup> we might then wonder about the condition of such a code, and whether music's function in relation to the same might really be allowed, in fact, 'a minor form of sacrifice',<sup>16</sup> and if so, in what sense the term 'sacrifice' is to be understood.

To comprehend such a reading, of course, the condition of noise might perhaps first be properly determined as the will towards death or an 'essential violence'

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<sup>12</sup> F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy, Or Hellenism and Pessimism*, trans. C.P. Fadiman, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1995. p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

(which is written through the condition of Being, or the will towards Being), constituting an interruption to transmission, a disconnection, an act of violence. In effect, its destructive propensity determines it as 'a simulacrum of murder'.<sup>17</sup> In relation to which, music as the organisation or 'channelization of noise'<sup>18</sup> becomes, by extension, itself a 'simulacrum of the sacrifice'.<sup>19</sup> That is, as a means of approach to, as well as control of, the condition of difference represented by noise, music could be allowed 'a sublimation, an exacerbation of the imaginary, at the same time as the creation of social order and political integration'.<sup>20</sup>

Such a perspective is to be understood perhaps most specifically in relation to the notion of the Scapegoat as a bearer of, or substitute for, the notion of an essential violence as it informs the condition of the social.<sup>21</sup> The Scapegoat emerging within ancient societies as an agency (designated through political or religious power) for the prevention of a disseminated violence unleashed as a consequence of, it could be said, covetousness and rivalry. So that the real or imaginary sacrificing of the Scapegoat 'polarized all of the potential violence, recreating differences, a hierarchy, an order, a stable society'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. As delineated by Attali following the reading of the same in the anthropologist Rene Girard's determination of the role of ritual sacrifice in ancient societies as a political channeling agency for the condition of a general violence, itself prompted through conditions of competing desire and terror of identity and difference. The origin of the term deriving from the biblical and pre-biblical practice of driving an animal into the wilderness, as a bearer of iniquities, and as an act of ritual purification (see R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. P. Gregory, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The conception of the Scapegoat as sacrifice (and its alignment with music) is not, however, to be read in too simplistic a sense. As the intermediary, it could be said, between mankind and the divine, it is both excluded and worshipped, desired and repulsed, an object of 'Power and Submission. God and Nothingness'.<sup>23</sup> And in its status as 'bearer', of social sin or wrongdoing (or as witness to the same) and presence or intimation of the divine (or witness to the same), it takes upon itself a responsibility that renders it victim, suppliant, power and authority.

And in comprehending the condition of the Scapegoat as such, and transposing it to the notion of, and relation between, music and noise, it becomes evident that the same are not simply moments of polarity. Noise, for example, as 'a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission',<sup>24</sup> is largely framed as a destructive agency, an instrument of torture, pain or death:

In its biological reality, noise is a sense of pain. Beyond a certain limit, it becomes an immaterial weapon of death. The ear which transforms sound signals into electric impulses addressed to the brain, can be damaged, and even destroyed, when the frequency of a sound exceeds 20,000 hertz, or when its intensity exceeds 80 decibels. Diminished intellectual capacity, accelerated respiration and heartbeat, hypertension, slowed digestion, neurosis, altered diction: these are the consequences of excessive sound in the environment. <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 27.

But noise can also be allowed 'a source of exaltation, a kind of therapeutic drug capable of curing tarantula bites or... "fourteen forms of melancholy."<sup>26</sup> So that noise could also be apprehended as a positive or benign force, and in linking it with a condition of the 'beyond Being' (the condition, indeed, with which music seeks communion), we could perhaps determine the same as the presence of terrifying/benevolent divinity (a destructive/healing God?).

And in the alignment with music, it becomes possible to then conceive of musicality as an attempt to order and control the dissonance of noise (to reimpose the social), to organise a moment, as it were, of 'controlled panic',<sup>27</sup> but it could also be read as simply an attempt at the communication with the primordial condition of noise, the exteriority of noise (as the difference beyond existence), and in that sense constitutes a mode, in fact, of prayer.<sup>28</sup> Prayer effectively functioning within such a context as a volitional connection to an extraneous condition (of other authority), its agency functioning however as intimation rather than pointed representation of such alterity (prayer existing, we might say, as a condition of knowing without knowledge, rather than presumptive intuition).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. The quotation is from Boissier de Sauvages (see F.B. de Sauvages de la Croix, *Nosologica methodica*, Amstelodami, 1763).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The reading of intuition here deriving through a Husserlian conception of the same (see E. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay, London: Routledge, 1973).

The connection with the theological foregrounding, moreover, a sense of the terrible/benign 'noiseful' God of Judeo-Christian religion,<sup>30</sup> and music's alignment not only with prayer but the condition of atonement (through sacrifice) of 'Christus Victor'.<sup>31</sup> Such a condition should perhaps be regarded, however, as a recurrent concern (when considered in relation to the instant), rather than absolute cessation of the cyclical condition that atonement might imply (the notion of atonement as 'ransom' aligning itself, additionally, with a conception of endurance through 'necessary violence').

Music then, as a process of sacrifice, a process of scapegoating and prayer, presents a doubled moment, as it were, of witnessing or bearing witness to. And we might say that it in fact carries as witness the iniquities of a noise-filled world (as 'channelization of noise',<sup>32</sup> indeed of murderous noise, for which music becomes a simulacrum of ritual murder) towards an exteriority (towards the divine, and the condition of pardon that the same might represent), whilst simultaneously conveying as witness an intimation of the same exteriority (or divinity) in

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<sup>30</sup> J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, p. 27. As Attali observes, the Old Testament suggests that man does not hear noise until after the original sin has been committed, and the first noise he hears are the footsteps of God.

<sup>31</sup> *Christus Victor* being the title of Gustaf Aulén's 1931 text (see G. Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert, New York: Macmillan, 1969) in which he drew attention to the early Church considerations of the Atonement, and in relation to which Girard delineated the notion of Jesus as Scapegoat and figure of redemptive self-sacrifice (see R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*). Aulén identifies three main types of Atonement theory - namely 'ransom', 'satisfaction' and 'moral influence' - the first of which delineates a deliverance of humankind, from Satanic oppression, through a 'ransomed' Christ, whose Resurrection proves redemptive. The intention with such a conception here being to frame it not only in relation to the condition of the Scapegoat, but also the 'necessary violence' of Winnicottian Infant/Mother theory (whilst accepting that the conditions are not absolutely interchangeable), wherein a notion of difference is proved sustainable through a propensity to endure (see for example D.W. Winnicott, *The use of an Object and Relating through Identifications in Playing and Reality*, London: Routledge, 1991. pp. 86-94). At a personal level, equally, we could say that the 'bearing' of music as sacrifice constitutes a reading of 'will' as the desire and attempt to in fact overcome sin/failings within the Self.

<sup>32</sup> J. Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, p. 26.

the opposite direction (and always allowing that at the same time the condition of noise could itself be said to constitute the very essence of exteriority, the very essence of the divine).

At the heart of the condition of music, however, in its movement between the noise of the world and the noise of the heavens, is an intentionality that aims at the societal. Both in the process of sacrifice and the process of representation there exists a pointed sense of commonality, of a striving for the implementation of social norms. Such a perspective being conceived, moreover, in parallel with the religious:

The channeling power of music, like that of religion, is quite real and quite operative. Like an individual, a society cannot recover from a psychosis without reliving the various phases of its terror; and music, deep down induces a reliving of noise's fundamental endowment with form, the channelization of the essential violence... [The work of the musician] is political because it is religious, [and] serves to integrate and channel anxiety, violence, and the imaginary, and to repress marginality.<sup>33</sup>

So that in effect, music functions as that which might be deemed a 'promise of reconciliation',<sup>34</sup> determining therein an essential function of ritual sacrifice in religious processes - namely the reconciliation of subjects with the social order:

[T]he production of music has as its function the creation, legitimation and maintenance of order. Its primary function is not to be sought in aesthetics, which is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. the quotation taken from Adorno (see T.W. Adorno, *The Philosophy of the New Music*, trans. A. Mitchell and W. Blomstel, New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

a modern invention, but in the effectiveness of its participation in social regulation.<sup>35</sup>

And in reading the same in relation to the *il y a*, and the *il y a* as a condition of music (or in fact a condition of noise that is approached through a musical reading, or perhaps a musical overlay), we could in fact allow that the *il y a* may be a vehicle, a portal, that connects our own condition of existence with the condition of difference (through intimation), as well as being, at the same time, a repository for social ills. So that the *il y a* is itself to be framed as a duality - a locus of divinity and a locus of the base (and perhaps we could even begin to equate the notion of such 'baseness' not with a sense of sin specifically, but a 'materiality' of experience which is 'thickness, coarseness, massivity, wretchedness',<sup>36</sup> in essence the marginalised of existence, made apparent in the presentation of music as sacrifice that in turn renders the *il y a* available).

The attempt to apprehend the condition of the otherwise that pertains to the *il y a*, however, is of course inadequate. We can never in absolute terms grasp a condition of absolute difference without reducing it to a condition of the Same. Or, perhaps more properly, we can never in fact simply grasp the condition of difference at all without immediately negating it, and in the moment of appre-

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 51. The thought here being to align a thinking about sacrifice and art (and music specifically in this context) with the Levinasian contention that certain forms of modern art compel an awareness of an untypified, even fearful, condition of material experience. So that we might say that art is here a foregrounding of the unbidden, the unpleasant, the unsettling, with the uncovering of the same constituting an excess of experience. The notion of a 'material' condition of musicality, moreover, posits music as substantive rather than ephemera, and could perhaps be conceived in relation to Stockhausen's conception of a music carved from "homogenously filled acoustical space." (Robin Maconie, *The Works of Stockhausen*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 47).

hension the condition of exteriority is lost. So that the notion of comprehension becomes an impossibility. The attempt to apprehend, as it were, itself arrests the very condition of apprehension. The question then becoming one of how to acknowledge the presence of difference at all (and of course how we might 'know' that difference is present when such knowledge must render it a condition of the Same).

The answer that we might look to, in fact, lays in the understanding that an approach through music (as a condition of representation) is an acknowledgement of the encounter itself, rather than an apprehension of the 'object' of encounter. That is, in the moment of 'exposure' a reflexive propensity acknowledges the self's inability to comprehend, which (somewhat perversely) facilitates a comprehension of difference as 'trace'. The trace constituting a presence of absolute difference without definition.

Such an approach to the condition of otherness, of course, recalls the notion of approach to the sublime. Prior to the evocation of which (in an encounter, for example, with the might of nature), a subject is able to give free reign to the play of imagination within the world, and to secure a sense of belonging and "furtherance of life."<sup>37</sup> The apprehension of an exteriority represented by the sub-

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<sup>37</sup> I. Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement* in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 128.

lime, however, denies the possibility of such play. Here, the encounter reduces a subject to incomprehension and utter dumbfoundedness.<sup>38</sup>

The ethical propensity of the aesthetic, however, consists in an inward focus that structures a commentary upon its own condition of presence and its own inability to represent the unrepresentable (despite its attempt at the very same), which leaves the condition of absolute difference intact. That is, in the encounter with the sublime, the subject's state of unsettlement and incomprehension in the face of difference becomes the condition to which the artwork bears witness, but in so doing is also testament to the fact of its own inability to give representation to the otherwise. In the course of which, it could be said that such failure in fact establishes an inflected referral to the otherwise or unrepresentable, becoming a 'scheme that succeeds through its very failure'<sup>39</sup> (accepting of course that 'failure' within such a context is not failure in an absolute sense - or that it may not even be failure as such at all). And that such a moment, moreover, which we might countenance as a 'second moment' in the encounter with the difference constituted via the sublime, could be understood as an alignment with a condition of musical reception - inasmuch as listening to music is a process of dumbfoundedness followed by rationalisation (though we are making

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<sup>38</sup> In evoking a parallel between Levinas and Kant, in fact, we might look to the notion of representation as it exists in relation to a condition of the sublime (or the sublime as a manifestation of difference), and its relation here to both philosophers, as a condition of 'failure'. For Levinas (or most specifically, the Levinas of *Otherwise than Being*) there is a recurrent attempt at the denial and denunciation of his own representational procedure and ambition (the paradoxical concern to which Levinas takes himself to be responding, being the paradox of 'representing the unrepresentable'). The Kantian approach, however, offers an acquiescent approach to the notion of 'failure', so that a reflexive understanding of representation's impotence is built into the process of representation itself. The sublime thereby overwhelming the condition of normal phenomenological self-experience, with the same intimating a 'beyond' of such experience, and allowing for the formulation of a schema that is 'successful' through its very failure.

<sup>39</sup> S. Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject*, London: Verso, 1999. p. 40.

such rationalisation a pointedly reflexive concern here, as an acknowledgement of the self's dumbfoundedness, rather than an apprehension of particular meaning).<sup>40</sup>

So that we pursue a situation, it could be said, wherein the impossibility of comprehension becomes still a situation within which we adduce a representation of such impossibility. Such a condition is not an adequate representation, as it were, of that which it could be said the first movement (towards representation) failed to apprehend. Though it should also be understood that such a movement's attempt to represent is actually necessary since it elicits failure - which in turn is a prerequisite for the realisation that it cannot represent the unrepresentable, but maintains always an inflected relation with the same. The failure to represent meaning that the alterity of the 'noumenal'<sup>41</sup> entity is indirectly always kept in question.

And art as a condition of representation reinforces such a perspective, since its process of re-presentation is a communication of the 'presence' of the unsettlement prompted by the encounter with difference. Though that is not to frame such as the 'presence of being',<sup>42</sup> and does not indicate a mystical communion

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<sup>40</sup> Following Jean Francois Lyotard's reading of the condition of 'dumbfoundedness' (J-F. Lyotard, *Presence in The Language of Art History*, ed. S. Kemall and I. Gaskell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. pp. 26-27) triggering artistic response (which itself parallels the Kantian response to the sublime), and which could be aligned with the view of listening to music propounded by Morton Feldman, amongst others, for whom we employ a process of uncomprehending hearing that is followed immediately by rationalisation or comprehension. Listening, in that sense, constituting a memory or witnessing of the initial moment of incomprehension.

<sup>41</sup> 'Noumenal', in Kantian theory, representing an object as it is in itself, as the 'thing in-itself', independent of the cognitive attempt at apprehension, and in opposition to the notion of phenomenon (see I. Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgement in The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*).

<sup>42</sup> J-F. Lyotard, *Presence in The Language of Art History*, p. 24.

with the event (of encounter) nor its equivalent, which would determine an apprehension (and assimilation). Rather, it attempts a re-presentation of dumb-foundedness through acknowledgement of its own 'inauthenticity' and a pointing towards the impossibility of adequation and comprehension. In effect, it bears witness to the unrepresentable through a presentation of its own condition of existence - existing (beyond the intentions of its author) as its own communication, with 'the message [being]... the messenger',<sup>43</sup> and the author no longer speaking as 'I' in the revelation of presence.

In relation to such thinking, then, we might allow that difference is irreducible to our calculative comprehension but remains at the edge of consciousness. There must also exist, however, a sense within which the very awareness of 'presence' or awareness of the 'something [that] took place'<sup>44</sup> (when speaking of the event to which the aesthetic may constitute a bearing witness), might be read as an a priori assumption of difference. That is not to define the same, however, as a condition of intuition, which could be determined as presumptive knowledge, but rather as a knowing, perhaps we could say, without knowledge. Such knowing existing as an awareness of difference's irreducibility and subjective failure to represent the same, with such failure presenting, at the same time, a particular condition of ethicality in the emphasis it affords non or misapprehension.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> J-F. Lyotard, *Newman: The Instant in The Inhuman*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991. p. 81.

<sup>44</sup> J-F. Lyotard, *Presence in The Language of Art History*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>45</sup> The intention here being to distance such a condition of knowing from the Husserlian phenomenological, and the Bergsonian intuitive, which could both arguably be deemed presumptive.

At work then in the encounter with difference is a dualism of responsiveness that both acknowledges (or recognises) alterity and concedes that the same is precisely not another intra-worldly object or condition (and therefore beyond the realm of experience, including recognition). Such oppositional perspectives being coextensively assumed, it could be said, in the comportment towards another, with the implicit possibility that such a mode of responsiveness is actually inherent. We already comprehend in our failure to comprehend. The condition facilitating, moreover, a potential for acknowledgement of mediation in the response to the otherness of the Other (an acceptance that an object can exist, and function as filter, between ourselves and absolute difference).<sup>46</sup>

At stake in relation to such a view is the possibility of an acceptance of a signifier that signifies, as it were, an absence of adequate signification. And rather than framing the objects of approach to difference as simply conditions of inadequacy per se, they might be apprehended rather as processes of normative coding that are akin to the occurrence of sublime objects, which fail to give form to that which is evoked by our Ideas of Reason (God, the Good beyond Being etc.) yet in fact evoke or bear witness to such Ideas in the same (rhythmic) instant through an indirect or inflected testament. Effectively, a subject succeeds in 'knowing' difference through recognising that he/she can only ever fail to know such difference.

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<sup>46</sup> Such an acceptance is not something that Levinas is prepared to allow, of course, especially as it might be formulated within the aesthetic, arguing that the difference that confronts the subject invokes only itself in its condition of Otherness. That said, however, the Levinasean notion of ethicality is grounded within a sense, it could be contended, of metaphor - inasmuch as the Other could be deemed a vessel for absolute difference, and the application of the same is an evident device (especially in *Otherwise than Being*) which allows the ethical to signify in its attribution to language (a linguistic condition rendering ethicality, as it were, via its application to ontological language).

And framed in terms of a social consequence, a code of moral law would ostensibly appear to repress the condition of singularity (any law, as with the sublime object's inability to adequately represent difference, must fail to acknowledge the singularity of individuals and the otherness of Others through the need for commonality, the need for community), yet it may be possible to conceive of particularity precisely through an application of such where an implicit acceptance of the same, in its inadequate treatment of individuality, takes place. That is, in the acceptance of an overarching schema in the condition of normative law a subject has an inbuilt propensity to indirectly recognise at the same time a 'beyond' of the prescriptive, and to treat of the singularity of another. Indeed, the singularity of difference.

And in re-foregrounding the notion of Sacrifice and its relation with music, we might argue that a sense of musicality then underpins the process of law as a means of social organisation, and that subjective particularity becomes the Scapegoat in the facilitation of communality and order. A subject must effectively destroy alterity (albeit symbolically), or another's individuality, in order that a condition of general stability might prevail, and in the same instant the recognition of the inadequacy of the same facilitates a receptivity towards particularity (and the exteriority that such individuality represents).<sup>47</sup> Here then, a space is formulated within which the unrepresentable Otherness of others is realised via a 'letting of the other be' in the redirection of focus. A facing, perhaps, without facing.

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<sup>47</sup> Linking of course with the Winnicottian notion of 'good violence' in the relation between mother and child.

*A reader is invited to recognise the occurrence of his/her own state of withdrawal through reading. The retreat to a position of 'home' being the position from which a subject might acknowledge difference.*



### **Garden Feature**

Home of Andrew Marchant, Linda Pilsbury-Marchant and Martin Charter,

North London,

May 2008.

3 minutes 6 seconds.

Disc 2 track 4. Please press play.

## Hypostasis and the Rhythmic Intimacy of Dwelling.<sup>1</sup>

### A Prayer.

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<sup>1</sup> As several commentators (Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Stella Sandford amongst others) have observed, and as it should be acknowledged here, of course, Levinas's treatment of the feminine, pointedly linking conceptions of 'woman', 'home', 'domesticity' and 'dwelling', would appear a wilful reinforcement of patriarchal precepts in the structuring of the Symbolic Order. Such treatment determining the development of the male ego as autonomously derived, as competitive, domineering and privileged - and in direct opposition, moreover, to the empathetic nature of the female ego, itself formulated via a particular propensity for connectivity and nurture.

That may, however, be to too readily presume an essentialist perspective in terms of Levinasean thought. Tina Chanter in fact indicates two significant points of enquiry in relation to Levinasean texts that question such presumption. Namely, the value of comprehending the work from a feminine point of view and, additionally, the value of comprehending the distinction between the feminine as concept and the feminine as actuality. (T. Chanter, *Time, Death and the Feminine: Levinas with Heidegger*, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001). In relation to which, we might also foreground the Levinasean approach to language (or perhaps the approach most especially employed in *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*), giving particular emphasis to the notion of scepticism, and read the same in relation to the condition of maternity, which may itself be allowed then an agitative substratum of paternalist discursiveness. That is, in comprehending the nature of language as itself an amphibology (the constant propensity for ambiguity within the structure of meaning), wherein a condition of scepticism propounds, as it were, a consistently interruptive event within language's own mode of being, the notion of the feminine (or the feminine read in terms of motherhood and the prenatal most notably) might be similarly determined as the metaphoric bearer of, or agency for, recurring doubt, contestation and difference, within the 'language' (and the paternalist ontology) of Being. In taking such a view into account, it should also be recognised that maternity itself proffers a very particular paradigmatic ethical responsiveness, as attendant vehicle of alimentation, as intimation of the transubstantive, and (pointedly aligned with Levinasean thinking) as condition of asymmetric substitution. The maternal body functioning therein as both host and hostage (host/age) in relation to the condition of alterity exemplified by the unborn child (the maternal body representing the antithesis of the secure or neutral conception of subjectivity, in fact, with the loss of control at the body's boundary - the skin - expressing both literally and symbolically the suffering and pain of responsibility as it is played out through the conditions of pregnancy and childbirth).

In relation to which, of course, it could perhaps also be noted that the constitution of the 'face' within Levinasean thought, the encounter with which is determined as the critical focus of subjective destabilisation within existence, has itself been aligned with the feminine. This linking to the notion of the first face we each generally encounter (our own mother's) and the conception of the same as that which constitutes the welcome to the condition of dwelling. Yet in fixing upon the sense of 'home' here, it might also be important to consider that the same is held to take place in relation to a gendered determination of welcome as feminine, but host as masculine, which arguably proffers in turn the apprehension that masculine and feminine subjectivities have in fact ceased to exist within this instance, or are, rather, inseparable from each other (the same linking to the oscillatory propensity realised within subjective conditions of host and hostage, and host and guest - Francois Raffoul indicating the fact that 'hote' can refer in French to both terms (F. Raffoul, *The Subject of the Welcome: On Jacques Derrida's Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*, Symposium, II, 2, 1998. pp. 211 - 222).

Elsewhere, Levinas has conflated the maternal body with the psyche, suggesting that "the one-for-the-other has the form of sensibility or vulnerability, pure passivity or susceptibility, passive to the point of becoming an inspiration, that is, alterity in the same... psyche in the form of a hand that gives even the bread taken from its own mouth. Here the psyche is the maternal body..." (E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p. 67). And in so determining matters, we might then conclude that a

The condition of oscillation within Being, an ostensible movement between longing and recoil, is in fact prompted, it could be said, by a concern (in both instances) with, and for, flight or evasion, and desire for the 'otherwise than being'. That is, as a consequence of the overwhelming desire for the Good that is beyond being,<sup>2</sup> a subject is both drawn to the trace of absolute alterity (as expression or intimation of the 'beyond') manifested by another within existence (or, indeed, the otherness of Being), whilst simultaneously feeling repelled by the possibility of being 'riveted'<sup>3</sup> within an existence that precludes the possibility of escape (and, therefore, access to the 'beyond'). And yet, affirmation of existence - of our own condition as existents - is imperative if we are to actually locate a means at all of deliverance, as it were, from being. In the constitution of an existence, in the rhythmic condition of the instant, we must actively, and repeatedly, take up the same existence with which we are affected (and effected), in order to apprehend an alterity which may facilitate flight (as well as provide the possibility of pardon). We cannot simply exist with our existence, but must take up a position with specific regard to it.<sup>4</sup> We must embrace our condition of

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Levinasean notion of maternity structures a movement that operates beyond a simplistic symbolic sense of inhabitation to arrive at a comprehension of the maternal body as that which has the form both of a dwelling *for* the Other and a context of indwelling, as it were, for the Self as fundamental exposure *to* the Other. Here then, there is no 'fixing' of gendered roles as such, no movement to determine essentialist positions, but the employment of a trope that arguably unshackles itself from the designatory, rather, and establishes the grounds for notions of a primary ethical relation.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *The Republic* Book VI, trans. P. Shores, New York: Putnam's, 1930. The notion of the Good beyond being is drawn from the Platonic conception of the Good which denotes the highest idea, the idea which casts light upon all other ideas to render them intelligible, and which provides here an ethical perspective for thought.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'riveted' occurs within a number of Levinasean texts, most notably perhaps *Existence and Existents* and *On Escape*, as a particularly striking description of the binding condition of being - the latter text, moreover, lending a particular emphasis to the corporeal sense of the same.

<sup>4</sup> A. Lingis, *Translator's Introduction* in E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. xxi.

being as 'Geworfenheit' (or 'thrownness'),<sup>5</sup> as an abandonment to possibilities, and allow that it is necessary that the same assert itself as 'the fatality of being-riveted to that which we cannot desert',<sup>6</sup> in order that we might, in fact, ultimately transcend our own state of existence. But how is such a process to be effected? How does one evade the self through auto-positing and self-affirmation? Or could the notion of escape be afforded in any other way (might we even speak of degrees of flight or withdrawal)? And how might we apprehend the same?

To 'position' the self, put simply, or to posit the self in terms of 'hypostasis' more specifically, is to contractually, as it were, take up existence (which is also to presuppose that Being is distinct from beings). The notion of 'hypostasis', itself designating 'the suspension of the anonymous there is',<sup>7</sup> also significantly signals the 'apparition of a private domain',<sup>8</sup> though the same might be understood as event (or more properly, as the transformation of event into existent) rather than location. Within the occurrence of the same, however, or within the consideration by a subject of his/her own existence within the same, we might argue that a subject 'goes forth outside from an inwardness'.<sup>9</sup> That is, in the uptake of being a subject's movement of apprehension signals a potential, at the same time, for a retreat or withdrawal within existence, that itself determines a posi-

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<sup>5</sup> J. Rolland, *Annotations* in E. Levinas. *On Escape, De l'évasion*, eds. M. Bal and H. de Vries, introduced and annotated by J. Rolland, trans. B. Bergo, California: Stanford University Press, 2003. p. 74. The term, and notion, are Heidegger's (see M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, New York: Harper and Rowe, 1962).

<sup>6</sup> J. Rolland, *Annotations* in E. Levinas, *On Escape, De l'évasion*, p. 75.

<sup>7</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969, p. 152.

tion from which to grasp the materiality of being, so that '[t]he I in the world has an inside and an outside'.<sup>10</sup> And though sleep (a condition of the unconscious within consciousness), can be determined similarly (as itself a 'withdrawal into the plenum'<sup>11</sup> in fact), our concern here is with the notion, rather, of 'dwelling'<sup>12</sup> (to be aligned with the notion of 'private domain'<sup>13</sup>) which is constituted through ambiguous subjective enjoyment of the world as a peremptory effectuation of the postponement of the anonymity of the *il y a*, and occurring most specifically through the occasion of an 'intimacy of recollection'.<sup>14</sup> The essential nature of which might be determined as a position of recoil, prompted in response to an exteriority, that does not return to the immanency of oneself. Effectively, we might determine such movement, of advancement and recoil (indeed of opening and closure), as the rhythmic underpinning (once more) of the event of existence within the world, framed not as a condition of oppositional situations but as a doubling of space into an interval of postponement and separation.

Perhaps the most important aspect of dwelling, however, lays in the sense that the postponement it occasions of the *il y a* is dependent, as suggested, upon an intimacy that is not to be determined in the relation between a subject and being nor to be presupposed as a primary condition of the quotidian, but as a formation of 'gentleness'<sup>15</sup> that precedes the sense of 'recollection'<sup>16</sup> or indeed actual

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<sup>10</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 152-174.

<sup>13</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 83.

<sup>14</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 155.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

postponement of the *il y a*. Recollection signalling a summoning up that is dependent upon a condition of welcome,<sup>17</sup> with the same being at once a condition of difference but without being one of extraneousness. Effectively, the notion of difference here then, as a condition of openness or hospitality, is a condition or place within being and the being, it might be said, within *a* being (perhaps we might even speak of a 'domesticity of being'). And in the alignment of the same with the conception of subjectivity, and the condition of 'welcome' as a pointedly feminine emanation, we find, moreover, a reading that links sexual identity to an ambiguous unicity of subjecthood beyond the limits of the intentional ego. And in associating sexuality then with the subjectivity of dwelling, we might begin to claim that sexuality is neither biologically nor sociologically determined, but is in fact an integral aspect of a subject's unique identity, facilitating a condition of subjective 'unfixedness' and the possibility of multiple potential meanings in relation to the same.

And underpinning such thinking is the possibility for the intimacy associated with the feminine to propound an ontological significance undermining the status of existence as a play of anonymous forces. Intimacy should not be comprehended as an opposition to a primary alienation, but rather as characteristic of it. Such a condition reversing, moreover, the notion of the feminine as the 'mother earth' from which man (with emphasis upon the masculine) becomes alienated.

But how to read the notion of ethicality in relation to the same? Can the welcome afforded by the condition of dwelling, and which establishes a specific re-

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

lation with exteriority, be allowed a genuinely ethical status? Ostensibly, it would seem unlikely, since the postponement (of the *il y a*) effected through intimacy posits the subjectivity of 'intentional consciousness'<sup>18</sup> as a will without inherent powers of comprehension, but with a relation to the world which it 'possesses' across a distance. And whilst the arbitrary condition of the will undermines subjective intentionality, it does not preclude the possibility that it lacks at the same time a violent propensity. So that an ethical dimension would appear sustainable only in relation to the unique encounter with difference, the unique encounter with the Other (and realised most specifically in terms of the process of 'facing'). The notion of ethicality being dependent, in effect, upon the condition of 'graspable' difference.

Perhaps such a concern, however, might be considered more specifically in relation to a notion of intentionality and light in order to foreground at least a potential for ethicality as an essential component of dwelling or the 'domesticity of being'. Consider therefore, the notion that the ego takes possession of the world, but 'is not overwhelmed by that possession and keeps a distance from the object... which is what distinguishes an intention from enjoyment',<sup>19</sup> with '[t]his possession at a distance... [representing that which] constitutes the intentionality of intentions'.<sup>20</sup> The relation, of course, with 'existence', itself being event and relationship but not substantive, would appear to function a little dif-

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<sup>18</sup> E. Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1931. p. 133. Husserlian thought suggesting that consciousness is intentional insofar as it refers to, or is directed at, an object. Intentionality being a property of 'directedness' toward an object. So that whilst consciousness may have intentional and non-intentional phases, intentionality is what gives consciousness its objective meaning.

<sup>19</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 38-39.

ferently inasmuch as '[t]he I does not turn to its existence... [but] is enthralled by it... [So that] one possesses existence, but is also possessed by it'.<sup>21</sup> The effective difference perhaps being between a notion of phenomenological 'graspability' grounded in the real and the assumed or presumed, and the absolutely assumed or imagined. But we might yet allow, for all that, a notion of 'retreat' or an 'attitude of reserve'<sup>22</sup> as still being operative in relation to existence specifically because of, or through, the process of intellection. Thought structuring a simultaneity of forward and backward movement that strives, it could be said, for both apprehension and distance.

But how does thought achieve such a position? Or how, more pointedly, does it achieve the same in relation to the condition of the non-substantive? In fact, thought might be most readily understood as the 'clarity or the dawning of a light',<sup>23</sup> with such light facilitating the 'enveloping of the exterior by the inward, which is the very structure of the cogito and of sense'.<sup>24</sup> That which comes from without is, as it were, 'already ours in the horizon which precedes it... [coming] into being as though it came from us, as though commanded by our freedom'<sup>25</sup> (freedom being facilitated via the condition of distance). So that thought is then, effectively, a process of knowledge, with the mind 'taken to be *what knows*',<sup>26</sup> and 'acts of feeling, suffering, desiring or willing belong to the life of the mind by

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

virtue of the fact of being conscious, being experiences, being thoughts in the Cartesian sense'.<sup>27</sup>

The movement towards something, however (including a movement towards the 'sensed' object or non-object, the movement indeed towards existence), is shadowed always by a retreat:

[T]hough it tends unambiguously toward an object, knowing is essentially a way of being on the hither side of being. It is a way of relating to events while still being able to not be caught up in them. To be a subject is to be a power of unending withdrawal, an ability always to find oneself behind what happens to one. <sup>28</sup>

And the condition persists even in terms of self-apprehension. To conceive of the self is always to withdraw from such conception, so that a subject is engaged in an endless condition of displacement, wherein 'a subject is never one with the idea it can have of itself; it is already a freedom with regard to all objects, a drawing back, an "as for me..."'<sup>29</sup>

Effectively then, we might allow a movement of simultaneity through knowledge, that is both advancing apprehension and relinquishing retreat. And such retreat, as we have proposed, is the locus of 'dwelling' or that which we have deemed 'the domesticity of being' (which could perhaps itself be equated, moreover, with a notion of musicality as the 'recollection' of noise, or the establishment of a context for the apprehension of difference without the absolute presumption of appropriation. In effect, such movement operating as perhaps the will towards

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

the postponement of the *il y a*, and the condition of the *il y a* as unfettered noise. Or equally, we might determine the condition of dwelling as theoretical retreat, the presence of a source text operating as the condition of ‘feminine other’<sup>30</sup> within the habitation of an interpretive text). So that in the imagining of the condition of existence (with emphasis being afforded the creative potential of thought), there conceivably occurs a ‘grasping’ advance that signals a coextensive process of continuous withdrawal.

That is not, however, to specifically posit the notion of dwelling as an action of free will, but rather as an autochthonous inevitability. Though the significant difference between dwelling and enjoyment (albeit that they are not mutually exclusive) as moments of subjectivity lays in their willingness, or otherwise, to, as it were, acknowledge the relation of subjectivity to the condition of being as *il y a*. Enjoyment aiming at a conception of the primary relation to the world as preclusive of the relation of existence to the *il y a*, whereas dwelling and the postponement it effects, not only foregrounds the question of the specific relationship between subjectivity and being, but also structures a rethinking of the same without negation of the subjectivity of enjoyment. So that dwelling might be deemed a retreat that in its very state of withdrawal is an acknowledgement of that from which it withdraws, whereas enjoyment is an attempt to ignore the same (whilst in fact remaining haunted by it). With such responses the result, it could be said, of position as ‘distance’ (from the *il y a*) and position as ‘immersion’ (within the world). Though the notion of dwelling should not, however, be

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<sup>30</sup> See E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 154-156, for detailed perspective of the feminine as condition for recollection, interiority of the home and inhabitation.

read as a specific site as such, but as a mode of thought within existence that facilitates the 'I' recollecting itself as domiciled at 'home' with itself.

The notion of subjectivity becoming here an oscillatory, or perhaps coextensively oppositional, movement between processes of openness and closure - openness inasmuch as it pursues a continuous relation to an exteriority, discovering at the same time that recollection and postponement already refer to a condition of welcome, and closure in terms of a 'contraction' of identity. The condition of dwelling functioning somewhat differently, therefore, to a notion of subjective totality which seeks (via enjoyment) the evasion of an inevitable attachment to the present:

The ecstatic and immediate enjoyment to which, aspired as it were by the uncertain abyss of the element, the I was able to give itself over, is adjourned and delayed in the home. But this suspension does not reduce to nothing the relationship of the I with the elements. The dwelling remains in its own way open upon the element from which it separates.<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps an even more apposite way to conceive of the condition of dwelling, however, is as the realisation of the 'intent' of hypostasis in which it could be said that a verb 'laps[es] into a substantive'.<sup>32</sup> That is, whilst enjoyment might be allowed the suspension of the anonymity of being it is not an effecting of a being, whereas the transformation of verb to substantive elides with the notion of habitation which, whilst sustaining an ambiguity (as a condition of 'extra-

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<sup>31</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 156.

<sup>32</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p, 40.

territoriality' or even 'utopia'), structures 'an amphibological mutation from an event into an entity'.<sup>33</sup>

So that dwelling might perhaps be countenanced as being within Being but otherwise than 'being-in the world'. And though it does not overcome the horror arising in relation to the *il y a*, it is able to structure a persistent postponement of the same. Such postponement acting, moreover, as an act of withdrawal that does not in fact deny a relation of self to the world, but formulates a 'recollection' that is the constitution of an openness.

And in so framing the condition of dwelling, might we then contend that the relation arising therein, the 'relation with the Other who welcomes me in the Home, the discreet presence of the Feminine',<sup>34</sup> is in fact an underwriting (without necessarily being a conflation) of the relation with oneself in the 'freedom of the present'?<sup>35</sup> That is, in allowing that the 'I' is always bound to itself in terms of a 'discernible duality'<sup>36</sup> of subjectivity, the distancing of self from self remains yet a 'dual solitude'<sup>37</sup> that counter-resonates with the condition of dwelling as a condition of retreat without extrication (from the world). The difference perhaps being one of perspective, with the sense of enchainment to self emphasising the condition of entrapment within existence and 'nostalgia for escape',<sup>38</sup> and the event of relation with difference in dwelling signalling a position from which 'I can in-

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<sup>33</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 170.

<sup>35</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 90.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

deed recollect myself in the midst of my life, which is life from...'<sup>39</sup> The latter, whilst not denying the condition of the former, positing a distance that is established through 'a relation with something I do not live from'<sup>40</sup> (namely, the feminine presence). Though in order that such withdrawal should not then simply structure a means of 'possession' in relation to the extraneous, it also becomes necessary that a subject is able to relinquish, or indeed give, what he/she possesses. The same being achieved via a 'paralysis of possession'<sup>41</sup> achieved in the encounter with the face of the Other.

Yet we might argue that the condition of withdrawal or retreat is still a comportment towards, or an anticipation of, difference, giving rise to the notion of an unconditional hospitality, and should therefore be allowed an ethical inclination. The state of being 'at-home-with-oneself' that occurs in dwelling is not a withdrawal as such, but points rather towards the same as the place of desire towards the transcendence of another. The condition of separation extant within such a context is in fact a mark of a proffered welcome and hospitality. The same could not exist without such a process of separation.<sup>42</sup>

So understood it is then perhaps readily apparent that the condition of dwelling or 'domestic being' cannot exist as an insular concern, but is entirely dependent upon its relation with difference to establish a sense of distance. And from its extraneous position such difference, constituted by the Other, is in turn able to

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<sup>39</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 170.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 171.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. pp. 172-173.

throw into question a subject's specific engagement with the world (including its process of possession through withdrawal). The questioning of the same including the unintentional consequences of the will's labours, which in turn awaken the subject to the condition of its own arguable arbitrariness and phenomenality (the phenomenal world being understood as a situation within which things are made manifest in absence, where 'phenomenality does not simply designate a relativity of knowledge, but a *mode of being* where nothing is ultimate, where everything is a sign, a present absenting itself from its presence and in this sense a dream').<sup>43</sup> So that it might be said that inasmuch as the subject of dwelling absents him/herself from his/her own activities within the world, he/she participates in the creation of meaning whilst undergoing a process of dissimulation.

Between subject and difference, moreover, and configured in relation to the structuring of meaning, we can posit the condition of light. Light promulgates a subject's taking possession of the world, being

the event of a suspension, an *epoche*, which consists in not compromising oneself with the objects or the history with which one relates or which one realizes, in always remaining outside of those objects and that history, even outside of the history of the very being that suspends history.<sup>44</sup>

But the light of the phenomenal world is not independent of the approach of the Other, nor yet is it a product of the same. In fact the light, which is necessary for knowledge and representation, neither emanates from the subject of dwelling nor from the Other whom it presupposes (such presupposition therein preclud-

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 178.

<sup>44</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 43.

ing the possibility of its originating within the same), but facilitates the questioning by the Other, however, of a subjective worldly appropriation. Light, simply, may perhaps then be most properly understood as a characteristic of the world's existence.

And as intimated of course, the most significant condition of light is in fact its facilitation of knowledge and representation. And representation, we might contend, is to be apprehended as interpreted and proffered knowledge. But whilst such a process (which could be aligned with the notion of 'designation') should be understood as an appropriative movement, it is also an ethical gesture inasmuch as it constitutes a condition equally of invitation, or perhaps of 'gifting' (of contestable meaning) presented as response (to another's questioning, or in anticipation of another's questions). So that meaning is effectively always relational.

And to locate the same in respect of subject comportment within dwelling we might then connect such to an interval in the condition of consciousness, which, whilst evoking something of the condition of sleep as an adjunctive form of consciousness, is perhaps to be framed more specifically as a retreat in thought, wherein extraneous influence compels a thought of thought or 'knowing of knowing'.<sup>45</sup> Itself obliged, we might say, through extraneous response to subjective representation. The question from outside, as it were, or the anticipation of a questioning response, forcing a gap in the 'possessive' condition of representation as assertion.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 66.

The notion of dwelling, then, could in fact be said to provide the organising or authorising point for representation - though the same is also preceded by an economy that gives rise to possession. Such possession itself being secondary to (and perhaps a consequence of) the recollection of dwelling. The extraneous world becoming a possession via the 'grasping hand'<sup>46</sup> that moves towards the world in order to assimilate the same (as possession rather than nourishment). And with possession then being understood as prior to the process of representation, we might frame such as the origin of a context of exchange grounded in the designation of the world held in possession. That is, through the proffering of meaning, or interpretation, a subject commits to the condition of negotiation which may lead to the fixing of values within a common currency. So that possession might ultimately be regarded as having two irreconcilable meanings - one as subject 'belonging', and the other as exchangeable good with a value to be determined according to the need of the other. Such perspectives being reduced to a common currency via a representation in which an elision of the two views takes place.

As a means of apprehending the world, of course, and despite its movement towards the notion of negotiated or shared value, representation (particularly as a phenomenological concern) could itself, for all that, be determined as a particular form of possession, appearing to be independent of the need governing the labour and exchange value of material possessions, whilst nevertheless presupposing the postponement of the *il y a* effected in labour. But here representation as possession becomes additionally a bearing witness to the expression of the subject in relation to difference and a sociality that is actually

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<sup>46</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. 159.

grounded within a condition of exchange and negotiation, refuting the notion in fact of pure enjoyment and possession. And for representation, therefore, to be more than simply another model of the same, it must seek to establish itself as 'gift'. In order to represent 'I must know how to *give* what I possess'.<sup>47</sup>

The notion of gift, however, has a complex process of realisation here, inasmuch as the apprehension of representation as gift must acknowledge a condition of morality underpinning the activity of thought and language, whilst the ethical sense of 'giving' is unable to exact a return if it is to avoid becoming simply a condition of the assimilatory (in becoming known or readable the subject of difference becomes assimilable. So that the otherwise must in theory remain consistently unanticipatable and beyond the comprehensible). And framed in relation to dwelling, the idea of invitation, which we might itself then align with the idea of gift, must also by extension disavow its own propensity for a presumptive approach to difference (by its nature, the process of invitation - a giving of the status of guest to another - makes assumptive or anticipatory conclusions about difference in order to operate hospitably, with the same inevitably inclining to the reduction of the 'strangeness' of the stranger and their apprehension as something approaching the condition of the Same). So that it would appear impossible to extend an invitation, or to give a gift, in terms of a non-assimilatory ethicality.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> J. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. P. Kamuf, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. pp. 14-16.

But should hospitality then be necessarily regarded as absolutely restrictive? Or might it yet function ethically within such a context? And could a gift ever be given ethically via a condition equating to the unethical? In fact, the notion of representation, aligned with the sense of signification, could perhaps offer a way to comprehend such a position, wherein

signification or goodness, allows us to understand goodness in another way than as an altruistic inclination to be satisfied. For signification, the-one-for-the-other, is never an *enough*, and the movement of signification does not return.<sup>49</sup>

But how more precisely to understand such a perspective? The notion we would foreground here is that of the 'generative'. The generative, it could be said, pursuing a deliberate movement 'towards' (difference) - with such an approach constituting a condition of the unethical, or the ostensibly unethical, since its embarkation is a wilful approach towards definition and thematisation - whilst being unable to control its reception and application (which thereby facilitates a condition of the ethically unassimilable).<sup>50</sup>

The sense of intentionality represented through the movement 'towards' posing an impossibility, then, since the exteriority of the other allows the same to overflow the play of identification and resist such movement (though there are grounds to also claim a pointedly ethical status for the same in any case, since non-movement could be said to suggest an absolutely oppositional position, which would in its turn envelop the other within a condition of totality and

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<sup>49</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, pp. 137-138.

<sup>50</sup> My specific concern with the generative is primarily worked through its application in relation to music, but applied through such reading to the condition of the metaphysical and the theoretical.

thereby conceivably give definition, and thematisation, to difference through being countenanced as that which the self is not).

And played out as an ethical movement then, the generative condition (which we might posit a 'creative/procedural' agency, inasmuch as the occurrence of representation might be understood as the initiation or authorisation of a process but equally an obliged relinquishment of the same in terms of its subsequent application or interpretation) approaches a heteronomy that constitutes 'an attitude that cannot be converted into a category, and whose movement unto the other is not recuperated in identification, [and] does not return to its point of departure'.<sup>51</sup>

Such generative movement might also be equated with the notion of an Abrahamic journey, a journey without return, in opposition (though again, not in absolute terms) to the sense of an Odyssean journey which is a passage of circularity and completion:

To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we wish to oppose the story of Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land, and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure.<sup>52</sup>

The former being characterised by a condition of closure and totalisation, the latter by a preclusion of such possibility. The alignment of such with the movement of consciousness, moreover, positing the condition of thought as both a returning 'selfsameness' that constitutes a reduction of difference and the im-

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<sup>51</sup> E. Levinas, *The Trace of the Other in Deconstruction in Context*, ed. M.C. Taylor, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. p. 348.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

possibility of heteronomous experience, and a prohibition of return that facilitates such heteronomy. So that the advance 'toward', the process of grasping, represents a comportment that promulgates non-ethical ethicality in its simultaneous assertion and affirmation of selfhood, and consequential and obliged relinquishment of authority.

And in the apprehension of such, we might suggest that a condition of necessity attaches to the inherent violence of the assimilatory 'movement towards' in order to facilitate the ethical via the inflected. That is, in approaching the condition of difference in order to grasp it, a subject negates the condition of polarity which, as suggested, facilitates a particular moment of synthesis, and thereby creates the condition wherein alterity is able to evade envelopment through a submission to the same. The generative notion of instruction formulating a position that becomes an authorising principle to lose authorship.

And understood in relation to the condition of dwelling and hospitality, we might consider the condition of invitation as an 'impossible necessity'. The supposition attending the same becoming a required violence through its facilitation of inflection for another. We are compelled to extend an invitation, itself perhaps casting doubt upon specific positions within the dyadic interplay of host and guest (does invitation render a host subject's position questionable within such a schema, so that host becomes guest? Are we as host, in fact, invited to make an invitation?), with the thematising language of the same providing the very means via which difference, ostensibly denied the condition of alterity, achieves the status of absolute other? Difference 'needing' the assimilatory invitational overture in order to transcend the same.

*The movement towards writing and assertion, through reading, is an act of fecundity. The reader of such text being the progeny of the writing. A reader might therefore acknowledge the vacillating condition of his/her own position between offspring and parent.*



**Blow Up (extract)**

Card Room, Chelsea College of Art & Design, August 2007.

2 minutes 57 seconds.

Disc 2 track 5. Please press play.

## Generative Theory.

### A Prayer.

The 'instant', of course, is a denial of duration. Or, that is, the notions of duration that frame it as 'mathematical', and measurable, or 'real', and apprehensible as temporal flow which cannot be disrupted, whilst being available to experience only through processes of intuition.<sup>1</sup> Both of which could be countenanced as authorising responses to potential difference, with the creative proclivities of intuition, in fact, constituting 'not so much... [an association] with the creation of the future as with the power to *intuit* futurity within the present'.<sup>2</sup> The same positing a notion of melodic or indeed rhythmic continuity that overwhelms instantaneity and is preclusive of alterity. so that '[a]s notes in a melody, each instant is sonically penetrated by the others, thereby destroying the very idea of otherness'.<sup>3</sup> But how then to comprehend the condition of the instant, or the time of 'non-time', in relation to time, the relation to Being (or the *il y a*), and the implications of the same for the musical orientation of the text?

The condition of the instant has to be understood in its relation with the solitary subject, and consists 'in the mastery the existent exercises on existence, but also in the weight of existence on the existent'.<sup>4</sup> That is, in the uptake of being

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<sup>1</sup> H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, New York: Kensington Publishing Corporation, 1946.

<sup>2</sup> G. Peters, *The Rhythm of Alterity: Levinas and Aesthetics in Radical Philosophy* 82, March/April 1997. p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978. p. 76.

the subject opens in the present to the inherent potential offered by the instant for the new, for the otherwise, for the alterity which might grant a means of salvation, a means of non-definitiveness, whilst also discovering in the same moment the inescapable condition of his/her definitive status. The 'gravity of being'<sup>5</sup> conceivably functioning as the hinge between joy in the freedom of movement (as facilitated advance, as it were, towards the potential embrace of difference), and despair in the realisation of encumbrance (as a condition of enchainment within the definitive status of subjective being).

The desire for difference, then, as a source of deliverance,<sup>6</sup> is equally a desire for the condition of time as the context wherein the societal might posit, in actuality, the possibility of such release. The instant, despite existing as the 'ferment of time',<sup>7</sup> ostensibly being unable to furnish the condition of the unsolicited, as the process of change, as the process of advancing temporality, since that could only be experienced in specific relation to the other.

The notion here is of time as facilitator for rapture or ecstasy within the state of existence:

[For] the happiness that a being that knows itself temporal can know is the happiness of a new beginning that the future can bring, a new beginning of the being one is and has been - the strange happiness of the *felix culpa*.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> And it should perhaps be emphasized here that such 'deliverance' is dependent upon the responsibility that the subject effects in relation to the Other. So that desire might be understood as the longing to serve another as well as the longing for (or the consequence of which is) the condition of escape.

<sup>7</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> A. Lingis, *Translator's Introduction* in E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. xxvi.

The blessed condition of the struggle within being is then the potential for exoneration and non-definitiveness proffered by the difference available through time. But we could perhaps equally extend such a condition of 'fortunate suffering' to the condition of the instant in its persistent awakening of the solitary subject to hope for the new, to the continuous sensing of another chance for the now. The same, in its process of recurrence, being apprehended 'not as a determinate infinity of instants, but rather... [as] "inifinition, [and] the ever recommencing of the definitive'.<sup>9</sup>

And in so framing instantaneity, we might perhaps then posit its relation with time as something of a dichotomy, inasmuch as the instant is both of, and exterior to, temporality. Classical conceptions would, of course, preclude the possibility of the instant's imitation of eternity 'since it is essentially an evanescence... [and] even the negation of eternity'<sup>10</sup> (the alignment with which would improperly equate it with the condition of the divine). But it might equally be argued that the instant in fact functions at a remove from the condition of time (or time as duration), in its insistent move to denial of past and future, and therefore does evoke something therein of the very nature of the eternal.

So that within the instant's uptake of being (and, indeed, the uptake of the *il y a* as essential Being within existence), we might therefore posit a spatialised sense of 'position' as interim, something even perhaps akin to aeviternity, the time or space of angels (the space, as it were, between the time of the human

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 73. The same as illustration of a classical conception rather than validation of course.

and the eternity of the divine).<sup>11</sup> And as ‘angels of the instant’ (perhaps our angelic status being reinforced through the solitariness that precludes transgression against others?), we exist between states of hope and frustration, between states of desire and disappointment.

Such a space could additionally be compared, it might be argued, with the ‘meanwhile’<sup>12</sup> advocated through the shattering encounter with manifest difference, within temporality, as a locus of ‘dead time’.<sup>13</sup> A significant distinction, however, lays with the emphasis of such an interval as ‘pre-death’ (and conceivably continuous rehearsal for ultimate flight), whereas the understanding of solitary being’s instantaneity or interim status signals a process of ‘re-birth’ (that functions as both condition of hope and condition of anguish in its realisation of inescapable existence).

To so read the condition of the instant, it should be said, however, is not to imply an absolute preclusion of difference. Nor is it to suggest, despite its furl of being and nothingness, that the *il y a*, within which the instant opens, might be an en-

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<sup>11</sup> The most familiar description of the aevum, the space between eternity and the temporal, being found in the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas identifies the aevum as the measure of the existence of beings that “recede less from permanence of being, forasmuch as their being neither consists in change, nor is the subject of change; nevertheless they have change annexed to them either actually, or potentially.” (see T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, First Part, Question 10, Article 5*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican province, London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1912).

<sup>12</sup> E. Levinas, *Reality and its Shadow* in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. S. Hand, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1989. p. 151. The ‘meanwhile’ constituting a parallel condition to the duration of the living, as an ‘eternal duration of the interval’.

<sup>13</sup> E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. R.A. Cohen, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998. p. 109. Levinas here overlaps the ‘meanwhile’ and ‘dead time’ as moments in living that occur between inspiration and expiration, and could perhaps be construed as intimations of the infinite within existence. Blanchot speaks of ‘dead time’ similarly, as being time without time, a space between actions where life is suspended, but temporality and spatiality are rendered porous and open (see M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. p. 31).

tity structured simply upon polarity. Rather, we might contend that the *il y a* derives from an exteriority that exceeds even such putatively fundamental ontological positions. Its status as conceivable inversion (indeed, a melodic transposition), wherein it potentially ‘mimes the transcendence it occludes’,<sup>14</sup> in fact constituting the means by which it might, in its form of insistent Being, be countenanced as a condition of ‘trace’<sup>15</sup> or vestigial presence in absence that is also an overflowing of ascriptive attempts at determinacy. The *il y a* is always more than the definitions we might apply, always more than the conceptions we might entertain (hence the associative linguistic resonance of *il y a* and *illeity*).<sup>16</sup>

And at its most basic, the *il y a* could be allowed perhaps a limitation, or even prohibition, of the authorising proclivities of subjective existence. Whilst extant as non-substantive, being neither locus of experience nor object (its acuteness being in fact constituted through its indeterminateness), it yet strives, as the ‘anonymous current of being’,<sup>17</sup> to affirm its own status as deficiency with regard to the condition of enjoyment within being, and thereby to promulgate the ‘heavy atmosphere’<sup>18</sup> of its existence as interruption of subjective presumption. Here, in other words, as the ‘nothing [that] nothings’,<sup>19</sup> the *il y a* functions as invasive movement of disruption in relation to the ascriptive powers of subjectivity.

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<sup>14</sup> E. Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000. p. xiii.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Trace’ in Levinasean thought might be regarded as the trace of the divine within the absolute other that determines the ethical nature of the relation (see E. Levinas, *The Trace of the Other in Deconstruction in Context*, ed. M. Taylor trans. A. Lingis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 345-359).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Illeity’ being the term that Levinas uses, we might contend, as a pseudonym for God.

<sup>17</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.

<sup>19</sup> The phrase is Heidegger’s (see M. Heidegger, *What is Metaphysics?* in *Basic Writings*, ed. D. Farrell Krell, New York: Harper and Row, 1977. pp. 90-110).

Its evocation, we might contend however, is 'shaped' by individual being (with the 'horror' that informs the *il y a*, in fact, conceivably being drawn not only through the realisation of inescapability pertaining to Being, but also through the compelling sense of isolation, in relation to experiencing subjectivity, that signals the *il y a* as consistently unique experience. The process of 'shaping', of course, functioning as testament to the same).<sup>20</sup>

The taking up of existence, then, as a bearing of (and witness to) Being, effects a relationship in the instant that would apparently exclude reference to past or future, to any being or event situated within that past or future, yet in the nature of such a relation posits at the same time an inflected sense of an ethically charged 'relation without relation'.<sup>21</sup> And taking then the possibility that a 'relation' with difference is conceivably realisable within the presence of solitary subjectivity (and accepting therein the possibility of the *il y a* as an expression of both essential Being and intimation of otherwise than Being), we might wonder about a condition of 'temporality' that could be emergent here with regard to the same (if we are to allow that difference is inevitably the agency through which time is to be made available). In relation to which, and whilst accepting the present as 'a halt, not because it is arrested, but because it interrupts and links up again to the duration to which it comes out of itself',<sup>22</sup> we might also ask whether the condition of 'instantaneous non-time' within time, as it were, should

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<sup>20</sup> The view expressed here is not intended as a specific contestation of the 'self-contained' subjectivity that Levinas would conceivably posit as an ethically inclined responsiveness to difference, but an indication of the anxiety and doubt that must attach to the solitary condition of the same.

<sup>21</sup> E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. p. 80. The term 'relation without relation' is used by Levinas to describe the ethical nature of comportment towards another - but is here extended to the condition of essential difference of, indeed, perhaps illeity, wherein it is constituted as a relation without knowledge of relation.

<sup>22</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 71.

necessarily be countenanced as itself devoid of past or future. Might we not, in fact, speak of a retentive/protentive instantaneity (a temporality of 'passive synthesis')<sup>23</sup> without denying the status of pure presence?

The instant, we find, is of course an effectively compelled movement of 'pure beginning'<sup>24</sup> that spans an 'inner distance',<sup>25</sup> and is enfolded by 'instantaneous maturity'.<sup>26</sup> All of which suggest a developmental condition of existence - but a developmental condition that is grounded, we should say, in the present. Such an apprehension thereby introducing a conception of temporality that exists in terms of immediacy, wherein each instantaneous moment of uptake is also a simultaneous conclusion, or indeed 'accomplishment',<sup>27</sup> demarcated by hesitation to begin (indolence) and diminution of effort (fatigue).

The notion of which might additionally be aligned with an aesthetic concern with process as the realisation of essence. So that we might contend 'the motive... of reality is process not goal'.<sup>28</sup> The primary concern within such a context laying with instantaneous creativity, or indeed generative improvisation, in opposition

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<sup>23</sup> A. Lingis, *Translator's Introduction* in E. Levinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. p. xxvii.

<sup>24</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 78.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74.

<sup>28</sup> C. Olsen, *The Special View of History*, ed. A. Charters, California: Oyez Press, 1970. p. 49, quoted in T. DeLio, *Circumscribing the Open Universe*, New York; University Press of America, 1984. p. 31.

to any a priori compositional determinacy or a posteriori objectification<sup>29</sup> (always accepting that composition is not a formation of ‘slowed down improvisation’,<sup>30</sup> or that process as a condition of improvisation is not the reverse). In relation to which, we could perhaps in fact ascribe distinction in terms of the difference between states of ‘becoming’ and ‘became’, with the condition of improvisation opening to ‘streams of influence that can change from moment to moment’,<sup>31</sup> and composition, once finished at least, being ‘subject only to the vagaries of performance and reception’.<sup>32</sup> Though we might also allow, in saying that of course, that the condition of ‘fixed’ composition could also be the very agency through, or in relation to which, improvisation is in fact realised. Such a perspective affording emphasis to the condition of improvisation as emanation or intimation of an exteriority that ‘overflows’ the compositional structure of the Same).

In evoking then the notion of a generative improvisational model of process with regard to the instant, and a condition of temporality as the ‘time of non-time’ in relation to the same, we might pursue the concern a little more closely still, in fact, with perhaps a particular emphasis being afforded here conceptions of the relation, already touched upon, to the (less definitively musical) act of ‘bearing

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<sup>29</sup> The linking of three musical forms here, the generative, the improvisatory and the processual, may perhaps be most expediently read beneath the rubric of the generative, in fact, with improvisation and process constituting facets of a generative momentum that might be ascribed to both the condition of existence and the condition of the text. The notion of the generative being drawn most specifically through the formulation of the same as it occurs in the practice and writing of Brian Eno, whose thoughts in this area were originally of course influenced by the linguistic concerns of Noam Chomsky (see N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1965).

<sup>30</sup> A. Schoenberg, *Brahms the Progressive in Style and Idea in Music*, ed. L. Stein, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975. pp. 398-442.

<sup>31</sup> D. Toop, in interview conducted at his home in North London, November 2007.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

witness'. The alignment of the same positing a sense of subjective 'gathering up', in both instances (of improvisation and testament), in order to generate an obliged movement towards futurity. With the consequential summation that instantaneity, whilst still constituting the 'present presenting', is also conceivably always a site of the retrospective and prophetic. That is, in taking the eruption of improvisation as an 'obligated' movement (a response to a 'summons' to enter into existence and to convey),<sup>33</sup> in the same way that 'witnessing' is a required, even indebted, bearing of or for (another) and bearing to (another), the occurrence must draw on that which is available to it, including historic knowledge and experience, that is then projected towards a future and the occasion of 'being heard' (or, indeed, 'justified'). The fact of the 'returning', and testifying, realisation of instantaneity (even as a 'rebound movement'),<sup>34</sup> leading to a moment, despite its generation of the continuously unanticipated, of reclamation that is additionally an opening to the future.

And in tying then a condition of bearing witness, or indeed responsibility, to a generative model of music, we might say that the movement forward, towards a making known, is continuously prompted in the instant by a compulsive obligation formulated in the past.<sup>35</sup> In pressing the association, moreover, we might postulate that the moment of expression is a drawing out of that which is in-

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<sup>33</sup> And we might apply such interpellation (applied here as a notion of the 'called' self) both in terms of solo as well as group improvisation - the 'summons' to the former being perhaps auto-generated, however, but obligated as a condition of 'need' in response to an audience that may or may not be present, may or may not be extant.

<sup>34</sup> E. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 75.

<sup>35</sup> And again, we might reiterate the notion of improvisation as a moment of the generative, bridging perhaps most specifically the creative/procedural and biological/emergent formations of the same, and, of course, encompassing a notion of the subject as 'instrument' (which is a necessary conception in the apprehension of generative music here, since we are applying the term as a notion of auto-production rather than technological rendering).

comprehensible to us, but that which is always already present to us, and that too to which we seek to bear testament. Our testimony constituting then both an attempt to reveal and to ultimately rationalise our very dumbfoundedness. The articulation, it could be said therefore, of our very speechlessness. The availability of the same for another, within the context of the societal of course, becoming a further moment in the infinite 'shaping' of the event of the music/testament as the material inevitably evolves 'through the will of the perceiving [or receiving] consciousness'.<sup>36</sup>

The occurrence of the instant is then a moment, in pursuit of such thought, within which the uptake of being might be considered the uptake equally of a responsibility that is engendered prior to the condition of existence (in allowing that 'facing' may of course be the occasion of effectuation, and indeed testament, the condition of responsibility, as a primordial origination of responsibility for difference, is essentially extant before any moment of encounter and therefore predetermines the significance of engagement. The desire for another being the desire to realise responsibility and, in so doing, to bear witness to the condition of the otherwise whilst enabling the possibility of deliverance or flight as a consequence of the same):

Responsibility for the other precedes every decision, it is before the origin... The infinite would not know how to enter into appearance - to become a phenomenon - to become a theme without letting itself be contained, without accepting limits in immanence. This refusal to appear is thus, positively, the very responsibility for the other, anterior to every memorable present, coming from a past that was never present, that was never the freedom of a subject, ordering me to the other, to the first to come along, to the neighbour, without showing itself to me, but entering me by the simple effect of traumatism, by breaking and entering. My responsibility for the other is precisely this relation with an unthe-

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<sup>36</sup> T. DeLio, *Circumscribing the Open Universe*, p. 46.

matizable Infinity. It is neither the experience of Infinity nor proof of it: it testifies to Infinity.<sup>37</sup>

In relation to which, we might also claim two moments of responsibility's 'realisation' and testament within the condition of existence. Facing, of course, is one instance, in the presence of the vital other, that shatters our self absorption and compels an awareness of the responsibility to which we are obligated. The response to the notion of the *il y a* may be another. Here, however, the emanation of the same is always produced in relation to subjective isolation, within each subject's own unique mode of expression, so that we are perhaps never absolutely sure that we experience the same thing, or that the *il y a* is not simply the product within each instant of our own imagining. Such imaginative constructs being, for all that, acts of testament to our own sensing of difference within being. Or that is, in allowing difference a conceivable presence, its realisation may be the consequence of individual imaginative leaps that are both 'witnessings' to our own belief and our own destabilization in the face of such belief. Perhaps we might suggest that the *il y a* is, as a consequence therein, even testimony itself.

We might understand the condition of testimony, moreover, as the improvisational eruption within the subject of the sincerity of Saying:

It is the Saying that, unencumbered by any possessions in being, achieves the extradition of sincerity. No Said recovers sincerity, and none is adequate to it. Saying without said, apparently a talking for nothing, a sign given to the other,

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<sup>37</sup> E. Levinas, *Truth of Disclosure and Truth of Testimony* in *Basic Philosophic Writings*, eds. A.T. Peperzak, S. Critchley and R. Bernasconi, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996. p. 103.

“as simple as ‘hello,’” and, within the Saying, a sign given of this giving of a sign - the pure transparency of a confession - testimony. <sup>38</sup>

The improvisational moment of the generative being an instant within which a past authorisation (as inspiration?) is gathered into the present of being and directed towards a future comprehension. The condition of improvisation originating in an otherwise, but an otherwise that we as subjects must Say:

The glory of the Infinite... commands me from my own mouth... A commandment pronounced from the mouth of the one it commands - exceptional structure, and certainly unique. The very exception to the rule of Being. <sup>39</sup>

Here also, we might note that the condition of responsibility infuses the process of language (and by extension writing), since the taking up of language is always a condition of response. The movement of the same producing an ascription to the self, as it were, in which the ego is set forth through the assertion of the ‘I’ within hypostasis, whilst simultaneously complying with a call to embrace an obligated status in regard to the approach of difference, and which in turn compels a disruption and subjugation of the ‘I’. But how then, in evoking such concern, to most precisely determine the condition of responsibility, or indeed the condition of a musically generative responsibility, as it is operative in relation to the theoretical text? As it is operative here?

In fact, the condition of difference to which we seek to bear witness in the context of the theoretical is the condition of an ‘original’ or ‘source’ text (as itself the bearer of residual difference or trace). In the contingency of each interpreting

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 104.

instant, however, absolute fidelity to the same remains an impossibility (interpretation, however precise, functioning always as a process of approximation, always in relation to a contingent cultural-historic horizon). And yet it is the very condition of such failure, somewhat perversely perhaps, that elicits the ethical inclination in relation to the same. That is, in the event of interpretation as, we might say, 'invention' or generative eruption of improvisation, we structure a position in relation to a source that is inevitably at a remove. And such remove instills (an ethically inclined) sense of or for the unassimilable. Such 'failure' then, as a moment of ethicality, could even be allowed a prerequisite of the interpretive text, a 'built-in' component or commentary that acknowledges its own inadequacy, its own appropriative intent, and yet in so doing indirectly propounds an appreciation of, and the exercising of responsibility for, the difference pertaining to the source material. Responsibility thereby having import not perhaps strictly in terms of fidelity to meaning as such, but the ungraspable condition of difference that remains extraneous to interpretation. The ethical condition being effected not through wilful disregard, but a reflexive focus that acknowledges the impossibility of absolute accord, whilst in turn facilitating the source as presence in absence which, in its generative state of continuous becoming, is rendered both identical with, and different from, itself.

Operative here, moreover, are conditions of witnessing that might be read through the hinged condition of 'reading' (as a process of reception and a process of dissemination). The first a testimony of dumbfounding in the face of difference, which functions in terms of an uncomprehending receipt, the second a rationalisation of such dumbfounding, that in turn is a comprehension and interpretation opening to assertion. The process of reading thereby functioning as a

'musically' derived condition that pursues both reception/listening (as incomprehension/rationalisation) and 'playing'/performance (as improvised representation/assertion) within each instant, whilst also bearing witness through an inflected propensity, as suggested, to the 'original' thought, as a pulsating underpinning that constitutes a particular condition of trace.

The responsibility attaching to such testimony being itself formulated, additionally, in relation to a specific condition of rhythm or indeed recurrence and repetition that, in its generative mode of production, intimates the sense that responsibility is without limit:

Responsibility is the way alterity touches me, has afflicted me from the start in a movement of unending appeal. Responsibility is the contact of the I with a dimension of Infinity. This character of responsibility too can be seen in the movement of language - in which the last word is never yet said.<sup>40</sup>

In association with which the generative compulsion to move forward, from instant to instant, calls for an emphasis of presence, of being inside the unfolding of the moment, rather than at a position of exteriority, or within the durational, which foster the assimilatory. Through the condition of responsibility, we might contend therefore, we are in fact summoned to observe the continuity of Saying in order that we should avoid conclusion and the petrification of difference within the condition of the definitive.

And yet, the realisation of such movement's continuity as it is framed in relation to theory, it should be observed, is in fact an impossibility. Or an impossibility in

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<sup>40</sup> A. Lingis, *Translator's Introduction* in *Levinas, Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. p. xxiii.

absolute terms. The conditions of Saying and Said are effectively written through each other, so that the moment of Saying will inevitably yield to the condition of the Said, which is itself in turn interrupted by the continuous assertion of the new as Saying. No condition of the Said is indeed imaginable without an accompanying condition of the Saying since every text implies a performative address, and no Saying can function at length without being 'repaired' within the fabric, as it were, of the Said, as itself the inclination to apply definitive meaning.<sup>41</sup>

Here then, both emerge and give way within the instant. The rhythmic movement of the same evoking perhaps a notion of respiration, where 'the rhythm of the Saying and Said, the rhythm that the text is trying to perform, to improvise... is the rhythm of breath. The outgoing of breath, and the intaking of breath'.<sup>42</sup> Each inhalation, as a condition of reception, constituting the uptake, we might say, of Being, exhalation the condition of assertion, the rationalisation of a life played out.

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<sup>41</sup> Levinas has, of course, himself employed the metaphor of knots along the length of a thread as indication of a continuously interrupted Said (see E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: Or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, p. 170).

<sup>42</sup> S. Critchley, in an interview conducted at Chelsea College of Art, June 2008.

*A reader might always bear in mind that his/her own reading, as interpretation, is a move to writing. The condition of facing within such a context is therefore always informed by the proximity of a third.*



### **Bam Boom**

Card Room, Chelsea College of Art & Design, November 2007.

3 minutes 32 seconds.

Disc 2 track 6. Please press play.

## Conclusion as Introduction.

### A Prayer.

This is a conclusion. That it is adjunctive to the dissertational text, or texts, and can in fact be read (as with preface or abstract) as antecedent, postscript or moment of simultaneity, means that it also functions extraneously to, or as overview of, the same work. Such distance establishing it, moreover, as perspectival take upon the 'main' text, whilst yet conceding that it is of course the progeny of such text... But to understand it in such a way is to acknowledge that a conclusion is not an ending in any case, and that the designatory movement of interpretation is merely a beginning. An opening. A conjecture. What 'conclusions' are we then to draw about the theoretical text, and its relation moreover with a condition of performativity or reading (or, indeed, practice)?

The research project here considers most pointedly in fact the philosophic notion of rhythm as it occurs in the work of a particular philosopher (the reluctance to name the same constituting both a continuation of the dissertational denial of assimilatory propensities and, in its relation to the process of 'facing' presented through the textual address, the wilful undecidability of addressee. Are 'you' author of source text, reader of this text, or do we simply talk to ourselves?).<sup>1</sup>

With such consideration being afforded particular emphasis in relation to the

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<sup>1</sup> The philosopher referred to, of course, is Emmanuel Levinas, and this dissertation is perhaps a response most directly to his 1947 work *Existence and Existents*. The process of naming here within a footnote (it is perhaps necessary to allow) conceivably determines the same, at least in the context of this work and the abstract aside, as the very particular moment of final assimilatory inevitability within the formulation of the text.

presentation of the 'instant' as (we might argue) a generative condition of being, and the particular application of the same in relation to the theoretical.

The contention being that ethics within such a context might be underscored by an aesthetic condition (of generative musicality), in fact, that must in turn throw into question particular readings of the aesthetic as well as the nature perhaps of ethics per se. In relation to which, the dissertational concerns divide broadly into three areas: (1) rhythm as metaphysical concern (read most specifically in relation to the notion of the 'instant'), (2) rhythm as generative continuity/discontinuity in music, and the relationship of the same as it might be applied in terms of the theoretical, and (3) the implications of the rhythmic 'instant' as an ethical moment of language and text (including the relation to the notion of 'trauma' as a condition of witnessing, and the possible impossibility of evasion within the philosophic text).<sup>2</sup> The question perhaps ultimately at stake here laying with the meaningfulness of such a rhythmic condition as it might be framed in relation to the exteriority of philosophical discourse... Does such rhythm, it might be asked, really afford access to the 'beyond' of the discursive (as we would like to suggest) in any significant sense? And if so, how might we understand (or, perhaps more appropriately, 'mis/understand') this? The formulation of the text here, in relation to such, aiming at the assessment and effectuation of precisely that position.

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<sup>2</sup> The condition of 'bearing witness' in fact occurring across a number of processes configured through the instant's realisation within the theoretical. Witnessing occurring here in terms of testament to an original text, testament to our own condition of incomprehension in the face of such work (as well as the rationalisation of or testament to such incomprehension), and testament to an anticipation of difference. And equally, the notion of 'bearing' is played out in the sense of 'responsibility to' or 'responsibility for' (an original text and reader) and the conditions of 'conveyance' (between original text and reader) and 'burden' (of or for such responsibility).

And in specifically focusing upon a notion of practice in relation to the research, moreover, it is important to comprehend that a musical overlay obliges a specific contiguity between theory and practice, between textual receipt and textual production (or interpretation), between the notions of text as 'score' and textual 'performance' (notions of the constative and the performative). With the practice of 'playing' (in relation to text) signalling a continuous attempt at interruption of textual propensity for closure. Such 'playing' constituting an attempted articulation of the condition of the immateriality of the *il y a* or 'nothingness' (as we might determine it) that could be said to exist both within and beyond the text (and to which we would seek to ascribe the condition of difference to which aesthetic production in fact attempts to ultimately bear witness).

Here the notion of musicality overlaps with the philosophic in relation to time (duration), rhythm, silence and so on, with these things being foregrounded as particular formations embraced by both conditions of music and literature.<sup>3</sup> In relation to which it is perhaps important to emphasise that in propounding a musical overlay for the research project, we have sought to ultimately preclude a theoretical exteriority. Theory does not exist here as an overarching schema in relation to the practice but is, rather, both the second part of a condition of musical reception (a rationalisation that follows an initial 'dumbfoundedness') and a designating 'score' to be interpreted or played by another in the same way that we 'play' the score of the first (the processes of rationalisation and performance being played out in the condition of 'reading' which functions as the hinge between musical reception - a dumbfoundedness followed by comprehension -

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<sup>3</sup> The dissertation also prompting the question of where music, in fact, may begin and end. Might we not understand a score as itself music, or already music? And is the condition of musical reception (of reading) not itself a playing or performance of music?

and performance as assertion).<sup>4</sup> So that reading, as aesthetic process (indeed, as instant), is at once unknowingness, rationalisation, designation and facilitation. Practice within such a context (of reading) then, constitutes a realisation of, or perhaps more specifically a bearing witness to the realisation of, essential dumbfoundedness (in the face of the incomprehensible) and the postulation of a view that is in turn rendered available for another to read (or indeed misread). The move to writing (as the designatory mode of reading) prescribing an ethical bent in its generative repetition (saying the same thing in different ways), and in its condition of 'scored' assertion - which in turn facilitates inflected reading for another.

In essence, then, the condition of 'practice' embraces, or is written through, the process of theorisation. The notion of distance or distinction occurring between the moments of 'unknowingness' and 'knowingness' as they take place via the instant's realisation within the theoretical text. The condition of unknowingness itself being literally framed (within the research) in terms of video's propensity for the repetitive 'bursting forth' of incessant novelty. That is, in terms of the successive filmic frames which insist always upon the sense of their own 'nowness', and which constitute the initial stage of incomprehension in the process of interpretation, there occurs an eruption of the consistently new (as the response of unknowingness) that moves to a position of rationalisation (or know-

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<sup>4</sup> The sense here of 'dumbfoundedness' being taken from Jean Francois Lyotard's reading of the condition (J-F. Lyotard, *Presence in The Language of Art History*, ed. S. Kemall and I. Gaskell, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. pp. 26-27) triggering artistic response (which itself parallels the Kantian response to the sublime), and which could be aligned with the view of listening to music propounded by Morton Feldman, amongst others, for whom we employ a process of uncomprehending hearing that is followed immediately by rationalisation or comprehension. Listening, in that sense, constituting a memory or witnessing of the initial moment of incomprehension.

ingness), and that in turn becomes the vehicle or score for another's inflected reading.

In effect, the musicality of the instant gives rise to the conditions of Saying and Said within the theoretical, with such processes being repeated in subsequent readings ad infinitum. Practice here being most ostensibly determined, through a musical consideration of video work (in its interlaced status with the text), as the 'uniquely recurring' moment of dumbfoundedness that gives way to rationalisation (within the text) - which in turn itself becomes the designatory moment as vehicle for dumbfoundedness and rationalisation elsewhere. The moments of 'recurrence', it should be emphasised however, are unique and also volitional, or at least generatively responsive (inasmuch as they are 'obligated' responses, whilst being formally undeterminable), but give way to a condition of comprehended existence in the 'rebounding' moment of rationalisation.

Framed within a somewhat apposite notion of the filmic then, the theoretical might be regarded finally through the notion of the unrelenting zoom-in and the telescoping withdrawal of the zoom-out. From the furthest distance it appears a contained or even ossified formation. Move a little closer and it separates into pulsations of the comprehended and the non-comprehended. Closer still to the latter and a further division between the 'thing in itself' and the presence in absence of that to which the same bears witness. Move back, towards the distant limits, and it solidifies, becoming then the object of the designatory. Yet further still, and it shatters. At once assertion and, in its taking up by another, vehicle again for incomprehension and the indeterminable.

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Dr. Simon Glendinning (Reader in European Philosophy at the European Institute at the London School of Economics, and Director of the Forum for European Philosophy). Interview conducted at London School of Economics, November 2008.

Professor David Toop (musician, author and visiting Research Fellow in the Media School at London College of Communication). Interviews conducted at his home in North London, June and November 2007.

**Disc 1.**

## Disc 2.