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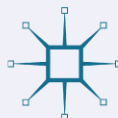
living wrong life rightly

BEN WARE

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Modernism, Ethics and the Political Imagination

Living Wrong Life Rightly

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For my Parents, Bernie & Phil Ware

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

I.

> [I]f a man could write a book about Ethics which really was a book on Ethics
> this would, with an explosion, destroy all the other books in the world.

<div align="right">Wittgenstein, 'Lecture on Ethics'[1]</div>

II.

This book has one simple aim: to explore the possibility of living a right life
in a wrong world and to assess what light modernist philosophy and
literature can shed upon this endeavour. The book does not attempt to
provide a unifying 'theory' of modernist ethics; nor does it seek to furnish
an exhaustive account of modernism's various 'ethical turns' – one might
pity anyone who set out to accomplish either of these tasks. Instead the
work is best understood as an *album of sketches* – to use a description from
the writings of the later Wittgenstein[2] – which seek to map out a number
of hitherto unexamined interactions between modernism, ethics and
politics. In each chapter, the attempt is made to demonstrate how a
particular philosophical or literary text can, once it has been blasted out
of its traditional genre, bring us to a new understanding of an issue (or
constellation of issues) which contemporary radical thought must re-visit:
utopia, repetition, tragedy, critique, absence, negativity, political love.

III.

We live in an age in which the ethical is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. Amazon is currently offering in excess of 127,000 books with the word 'ethics' in the title – everything from *Ethics and Animal Life* to *Ethics on Wall Street*.[3] At the same time, we are bombarded with talk of 'sustainable well-being', 'happiness indices', 'ethical workplace culture', and 'ethical diplomacy'. This new pivot towards ethics can, however, do little to disguise the reality of damaged life under contemporary capitalism: continued environmental degradation, increasing inequality, crippling austerity, the rise of right-wing populism, and permanent geo-political conflict. Indeed, it is no mere coincidence that the modern rhetorical turn to ethics has itself been coterminous with the neoliberal *pensée unique* and the ideological ascendancy of its motto *Es gibt keine Alternative* [There is no alternative]: it is the self, not society, which one must now seek to 'ethically transform'. Given the contemporary appropriations of 'ethics', should we not therefore conclude that what is required on the Left is an overcoming of moral discourse as such and a return to some form of 'pure politics'? The answer here, I think, should be an unambiguous *no*. For conceding the ground is not only bad tactics, it also overlooks the fact that every emancipatory desire is itself *rooted* within the sphere of ethics, within the 'region that from time immemorial [has been] regarded as the *true* field of philosophy',[4] and which takes as its central question 'How should one live?', or better still 'How should *we* live?' All movements aimed at radical transformation begin with the premise (whether acknowledged or not) that there is a 'wrong life' which should be negated and a better one that is worth the commitment and pain of fighting for. This is precisely what distinguishes the revolutionary who is 'not afraid to pass to the act' from the pragmatic-liberal who seeks only to protect his or her beautiful soul.[5]

IV.

What, we might ask, is the difference between the 'ethical life' and the 'moral life', or, more generally, between the terms 'ethics' and 'morality'? Bernard Williams provides a clear first answer to this question: 'By origin, the difference between the two terms is that between Latin and Greek, each relating to a word meaning *disposition* or *custom*. One difference is that the Latin term from which "moral" comes [*moralis*] emphasizes rather more the social expectation, while the Greek [*ethikos*] favours that of individual character.'[6] So 'moral', at least in terms of historical semantics, is the more

socially oriented term; however, as Williams notes, 'the word "morality" has [. . .] now taken on a distinctive content' whereby it 'emphasizes certain ethical notions rather than others' – specifically notions of 'obligation' and 'duty'.[7] Because it evokes the spectre of compulsions and sanctions, we need, according to Williams, to treat 'morality' with a 'special scepticism': it lacks the flexibility of its liberal counterpart 'ethics', which 'can move from one side to another of a given contrast'.[8]

For Williams, then, 'ethics' is the preferred term: it is non-dogmatic and able to accommodate a range of individual positions relating to the good life. This liberal defence of 'ethics' need not, however, be taken as the final word. Writing before Williams in one of his later lectures on 'moral philosophy', Theodor Adorno argues that 'the concept of ethics [is] the bad conscience of morality [. . .] ethics is a sort of morality that is ashamed of its own moralising with the consequence that it behaves as if it were morality, but at the same time is not a moralising morality'.[9] '[T]he dishonesty implicit in this is', on Adorno's view, 'worse and more problematic than the blunt incompatibility of our experience with the term "morality", an incompatibility that at least permits us to extend or otherwise build on what Kant and Fichte understood by the concept of the moral and thereby to arrive at more authoritative and harder insights.'[10] As Adorno thus concludes:

> to reduce the problem of morality to ethics is to perform a sort of conjuring trick by means of which the decisive problem of moral philosophy, namely the relation of the individual to the general, is made to disappear. [. . .] I believe it is better to retain the concept of morality, albeit critically, than to soften up and obscure its problematic nature from the outset by replacing it with the sentimental concept of ethics.[11]

In the current book, I hope that the original social dimension of the term moral can, in certain instances, be re-established; and that this can be achieved through a new emphasis upon the close connection between the moral life and the political imagination. I also aim to demonstrate the contemporary significance of duties, demands and obligations for any radical politics which seeks to move beyond the impasse of liberal 'singularities'. At the same time, however, as the work's title clearly indicates, I do not wish to follow Adorno in banishing the term ethics. We must begin with the debates where we currently find them; and this means continuing to make use of 'ethics' in a variety of contexts. Throughout the book, then, both

words will be retained; and as the reader will discover, what determines their use will be the particular discursive 'landscapes' in which they appear.

V.

In addition to the topics listed at the end of section II (above), there are a number of recurrent themes in this study, two of which can be briefly highlighted here. The first is indicated by an important remark made by Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*:

> The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of [their] inquiry do not strike [people] at all. Unless *that* fact has at sometime struck [them]. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful. (PI, §129)

Wittgenstein's concern with seeing what is right in front of one's eyes brings him into close proximity not only with a number of other modernists (as we shall later see), but also with the writings of Jacques Lacan. In his seminar on 'The Purloined Letter', Lacan uses Poe's tale to illustrate (amongst other things) that psychoanalysis consists not in a process of deep excavation, but rather in the activity of attending to what is already there on the surface: the analysand's verbal detours, slips of the tongue, mislaid signifiers, repetitions, mispronunciations, and silences – the very things which are overlooked precisely because they appear 'too simple, indeed too self-evident'.[12] A number of the chapters in this study will explore what it means to see, or indeed to fail to see, those things (ethical, political, psychological, linguistic, aesthetic) that are hidden in plain sight; and in this respect, the book's concern will be with a variety of double-takes, gestalt switches, (un)disguised psychic treasures, blind spots and duck-rabbits.

A second and related theme running through the book will be the dialectic itself, or more specifically the idea of a dialectical hermeneutics.[13] At its simplest, the dialectic functions, in Fredric Jameson's words, as a 'provocative and perverse challenge to common sense as such'[14]: it is the means by which thought shifts gears in order to come to see the 'un-naturalness' of the most 'natural' aspects of our daily life. Above all, however, the dialectic names a particular process or movement: not, in this case, the old-fashioned progression from thesis through antithesis to synthesis, but rather something like the following: (i) first impression as the 'appearance'; (ii) 'interpretive' correction in the name of some underlying reality or 'essence'; and (iii) back to the *reality*

of the appearance.[15] In Chapter 2 of this study, I elucidate how this movement, along with its ethical and political consequences, might be seen to unfold in the context of Søren Kierkegaard's pseudonymous work *Fear and Trembling*. My readings of Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (Chapter 3) and Henry James's 'The Beast in the Jungle' (Chapter 5) are also informed by an attempt to grasp the works – a late modernist play and an early modernist *nouvelle* – in terms of a series of dialectical movements.

VI.

As the reader will recognize, the book operates with a loose concept of modernism – essays on Kant, Marx and Kierkegaard, as well as Wittgenstein, Beckett and James. The reason for this is quite deliberate, and I hope somewhat refreshing: my aim, through a series of relatively autonomous chapters, is to propose what we might call (after Wittgenstein) a 'family resemblance' idea of modernism (PI, 67). On this view, there is no single element, or set of elements, which all modernist works manifest – no eternal modernist 'essence', so to speak. What we find instead is, in Wittgenstein's words, 'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing' (PI, 66). In this respect, modernism is both an open concept – one which invites us to look for likenesses and relationships instead of a set of necessary and sufficient conditions – and a dynamic one – one which has a built-in capacity for expansion and transformation. It is by thinking of modernism in this way that we might begin the process of 'seeing connexions' (PI, 122) between figures as diverse as Kant and Karl Kraus, Beckett and Marx. I have already suggested what some of the family resemblances between the texts and authors in this study might consist in (and indeed more suggestions will follow); however, the *true* aim of what I am proposing here is to encourage the reader to find these affinities for herself. In the words of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus: '[i]t is [. . .] left to the reader [. . .] to put two and two together, if [s]he so desires; but nothing is done to minister to the reader's indolence'.[16]

VII.

Readers might expect many things from a book on ethics: that it provides prescriptions for correct action; that it assists in solving one's immediate problems; that it directs one towards happiness or at the very least towards a more authentic self. This book makes no attempt to satisfy such demands. If it succeeds at all it is only in reminding the reader that the search for the right form of life, ethically speaking, is inseparable from the search for the right form of politics. Modernism continues to play a key

role here precisely because the world which it hints at – a world beyond exploitative labour and instrumental rationality – does not yet exist. This truth is both our tragedy and our starting point.

NOTES

1. Wittgenstein *Nachlass*, Ts-207,2[2]et3[1]et4[1]et5[1], from Wren Library, Trinity College, Cambridge (Wittgenstein Source Bergen Nachlass Edition. Reproduced by permission of the copyright holders. © The Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge; Wren Library, Cambridge; University of Bergen, Bergen).
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 3rd Edition, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. ix. Hereafter PI followed by a section number in the text. Where a section number is not given, such as in Part II of the book (PI II), a page number will be given.
3. This information is accurate as of 23 June 2016.
4. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2002), p. 15.
5. Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.
6. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.
7. Ibid., pp. 6 & 7.
8. Ibid., pp. 6 & 14.
9. Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), p. 10.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., pp. 10–11.
12. Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', in *Écrits* trans. Bruce Fink (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006), p. 25.
13. This dialectical hermeneutics is central to my earlier study of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. See Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder: Wittgenstein, the 'Tractatus' and Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).
14. Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 4.
15. Ibid., pp. 57–58. The schema presented here follows Jameson, who is himself elucidating a notion of the dialectic found in various works by Slavoj Žižek. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992); *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994); *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997); *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
16. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp. 264–265.

Right in Front of Our Eyes: Aspect-Perception, Ethics and the Utopian Imagination in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*

VISION AND MODERNITY

In an essay entitled 'The Nobility of Sight', Hans Jonas argues that '[s]ince the days of Greek philosophy sight has been recognized as the most excellent of senses'.[1] Seeking to account for the historical elevation of vision over other forms of sensory engagement with the world, Jonas contends that '[t]he unique distinction of sight consists in what we may call the image performance, where "image" implies three characteristics: (i) *simultaneity* in the presentation of a manifold; (ii) *neutralization* of the causality of sense-affection; (iii) *distance* in the spatial and mental senses'.[2] In the case of (i), what distinguishes sight from other senses is the fact that it can give us *both* dynamic and static reality: our eyes can survey a whole field of possible percepts as well as focusing directly upon a fixed object.[3] In the case of (ii), what further marks out vision is that it does not require the perceiver and the object of perception to be *directly engaged* – the 'dynamic' relation between the two is, in Jonas's words, 'neutralized'.[4] And in the case of (iii), seeing's inimitability is also guaranteed by its being 'the only sense in which the advantage lies not in proximity but in distance: the best view is by no means the closest view'.[5] Crucially, for Jonas, the three categories under which he treats vision serve as the 'organic' foundation of a particular set of philosophical concepts. '*Simultaneity of presentation*,' he argues, 'furnishes the idea of enduring present, the contrast between change and the unchanging, between time

and eternity. *Dynamic neutralization* furnishes form as distinct from matter, essence as distinct from existence, and the difference of theory and practice. *Distance* furnishes the idea of infinity'.[6] Jonas's central contention is thus that within the Western philosophical tradition (extending back to Plato and Aristotle) the formation of certain key conceptual categories has been determined by the *intrinsic* 'nobility' of sight. 'The mind,' he writes, 'has gone where vision pointed.'[7]

Leaving aside Hannah Arendt's observation that '[t]he metaphors used by the theoreticians of the Will are *hardly ever* taken from the visual sphere',[8] what is most striking about Jonas's account is that whilst it emphasizes 'the virtues inherent in sight',[9] it simultaneously reduces the visual sense to a set of *a priori* functions and timeless, quasi-mechanical procedures. What such an account consequently leaves out is (i) any reference to the fact that vision has a history and thus that *how* we see is itself embedded in particular social and cultural forms of life; and (ii) any acknowledgement of the complex relationship between vision and language – the image and the word – such that different language games open up what Martin Jay has termed 'different scopic regimes'.[10]

It is, however, debates about precisely these issues that have occupied a central place within twentieth-century philosophical discourse, on both sides of the so-called 'continental' and 'analytical' divide. In his 1938 essay 'The Age of the World Picture', for example, Heidegger probes the historical specificity of the modern hegemony of vision by reflecting upon one of the age's essential phenomena – namely, modern science [*Wissenschaft*].[11] According to Heidegger, what characterizes modern science is the fact that it establishes itself as ongoing, institutionalized research; and '[w]e first arrive at science as research when and only when *truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation*'.[12] Because 'that which constitutes the metaphysical ground of [scientific] research determines first and long beforehand the essence of that age generally', it follows, on Heidegger's view, that the essence of the modern age consists in '[t]he fact that *whatever is comes into being in and through represented-ness*'.[13] 'To represent [*vor-stellen*],' Heidegger writes, 'means to bring what is present at hand [*das Vorhandene*] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself [. . .] and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm.'[14] Modern science, as a systematic striving after objective truth, thus effectuates two simultaneous transformations: (1) the essence of 'man' [*sic*] changes, in that 'man becomes the primary and only real *subiectum* [subject] [. . .] the relational

centre of that which is as such'; and (2) the world ('that which is as such') assumes the character of object [*Objekt*] which man sets in place before himself as picture [*Bild*].[15] This transformation of the world into a picture (or representation [*Vorstellung*]) is, for Heidegger, of singular importance: 'the fundamental event of the modern age,' he argues, 'is the conquest of the world as picture [. . .] [a process whereby] man contends for the position in which he can be the particular being who gives the measure and draws up the guidelines for everything that is.'[16]

For Heidegger, then, a central and defining feature of modernity is mankind's striving to achieve scientific and technological mastery over the world; and this, on his account, goes hand in hand with the emergence of an objectifying eye. As he writes in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*: 'vision [. . .] becomes a mere looking-at or a looking-over [. . .] a gaping-at'.[17] What this signifies is a triumph of 'curiosity' [*Neugier*] over 'wonder' [*Er-staunen*]: a situation in which one sees 'not in order to understand what is seen (that is, to come into a Being towards it), but *just* in order to see'.[18] 'Curiosity,' on this view, 'is characterized by a specific way of *not tarrying* alongside what is closest'; and in not tarrying curiosity concerns itself with 'the constant possibility of *distraction*'.[19] This detached and eternally distracted mode of seeing finds its linguistic correlate in 'idle talk' [*Gerede*], which Heidegger defines as 'the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own'.[20]

Despite the negative tone of Heidegger's pronouncements, they do not however imply that he simply opposes modernity, or that he conceives of its effects upon seeing as wholly restrictive and damaging.[21] In a number of his later works, he points towards a possible alternative to the representational (ego-object) mode of thinking and perceiving – one which involves a transition from 'calculative thinking' and the 'will-to-will' [*der Wille zum Willen*], to 'meditative thinking' and the awakening of 'releasement' [*Gelassenheit*].[22] Such a transition, which Heidegger describes as bringing 'clear vision', is bound up with our establishing a 'free' relation with modern technology, whereby we say 'yes' and 'no' to it at the same time:

> We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher. I would call this comportment

towards technology which expresses 'yes' and at the same time 'no,' by an old word, *releasement towards things* [*Die Gelassenheit zu den Dingen*].[23]

In this respect, what Heidegger calls the 'danger'[24] is not modern technology *per se*, but rather the possibility that the technological understanding of the world (in which 'everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand [. . .] to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering')[25] will completely determine how things are allowed to *reveal* themselves.[26] On Heidegger's view, this danger cannot be countered by means of human thought and action (i.e. ever more subjective *willing* aimed at bringing technology under human control); rather, what is required is a kind of *dialectical vision*. Only by *looking* attentively into the danger itself – that is, by critically reflecting upon the way in which technological 'Enframing' [*Ge-stell*] conceals our originary relation to being – can we finally come to see the danger as harbouring within itself 'the possible arising of the saving power' [*das Rettende*].[27] For Heidegger, the aesthetic blueprint for this conceptual strategy is provided by Hölderlin, in the following lines of his poem 'Patmos': 'But where danger is, grows/The saving power also' [*Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/Das Rettende auch*].[28]

A different (though not unrelated) turn towards the relation between seeing and modernity is taken in the writings of the later Wittgenstein, the figure to whom this chapter now turns. In the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein describes his mode of philosophical composition as akin to that of the visual artist. 'The philosophical remarks in this book are,' he writes, 'a number of sketches of landscapes [. . .] made in the course of [. . .] long and involved journeyings' (PI p. ix). The purpose of these sketches, as Wittgenstein suggests, is to teach a new 'style of thinking'[29] which consists in an ability to see clearly (PI, §§5, 51) the things that are always in front of our eyes, but which 'are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity' (PI, §129). For Wittgenstein, then, philosophy is an activity which involves (in one respect) relearning how to 'look' (PI, §66) at the world. This new way of seeing does not, however, entail searching for what is buried beneath or behind things; rather, it consists in altering one's conceptual focus in order to grasp what is already in plain sight, but, at the same time, invisible on account of it being *always and immediately present*:

The aspects [*Aspekte*] of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice

something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of [their] inquiry do not strike [people] at all. Unless *that* fact has at sometime struck [them]. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.

(PI, §129)[30]

In this chapter, I want to explore Wittgenstein's concern with seeing and vision by focusing specifically upon four questions. First, how do we account for the emphasis which Wittgenstein places upon vision (especially in the later writings); and what does this reveal about his relation to some of the 'ocularcentric' traditions of twentieth-century philosophical and aesthetic discourse?[31] Second, to what extent can Wittgenstein's interest in seeing – and more specifically what he terms 'seeing-as' or 'the "dawning" of an aspect' (PI II, 166ff) – be understood as having an *ethical* point? Third, how might the ethical dimension of the *Investigations* be connected with the work's *modernist* sensibility and, in particular, with its efforts to bring us to see the everyday (PI, §§116, 120) otherwise?[32] And fourth, what are the potential *political* implications of Wittgenstein's (ethico-modernist) notion of aspect-perception? In order to approach these questions, it will first be necessary to open ourselves up to the general complexities of Wittgenstein's engagement with the visual. For as he remarks in Part II, section xi of the *Investigations*: 'We find certain things about seeing puzzling, because we do not find the whole business of seeing puzzling enough' (PI II, 181).

WITTGENSTEIN, VISION AND LANGUAGE

Wittgenstein's preoccupation with seeing and vision is evident throughout his writings, from the earliest to the latest. In the wartime diaries (*Notebooks 1914–1916*), he turns to the subject of the 'eye' and the 'visual field' during the course of an extended discussion of subjectivity and the will:

Where in the world is the metaphysical subject to be found?
    You say that it is just as it is for the eye and the visual field. But you do not actually see the eye. And I think that nothing in the visual field would enable one to infer that it is seen from an eye.[33]

That the eye is not found *within* the visual field is, for Wittgenstein, 'connected with the fact that none of our experience is *a priori*. All that

we *see* could also be otherwise' (NB, 80).[34] Several months later, in the same early notebooks, he begins an examination of the relation between vision, aesthetics and ethics, asking himself rhetorically: 'Is it the essence of the artistic way of looking at things, that it looks at the world with a happy eye?' (NB, 86). This question follows on from remarks made earlier in the same month (October 1916), in which Wittgenstein discusses the aesthetico-ethical gaze in relation to space and temporality:

> The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics.
>   The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside.
>   In such a way they have the whole world as background.
>   Is this it perhaps – in this view the object is seen *together with* space and time instead of *in* space and time? (NB, 83)[35]

These remarks on the eye, space and time, and seeing *sub specie aeternitatis* reappear – albeit in a crucially recontextualized form – in the final version of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922). Extending the visual motif, the book famously sketches the view 'that [a] pictorial internal relation [. . .] holds between language and world' (TLP, 4.014)[36]; and that '[p]ropositions can represent the whole reality, but they cannot represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – the logical form' (TLP, 4.12). Logical form, as paragraph 4.121 of the book puts it, 'mirrors itself in language'.[37] Read in one way, such pronouncements suggest a linguistic version of the 'world picture' outlook which the later Heidegger takes to be an essential feature of modernity. When grasped in the context of the *Tractatus* as a whole, however, these same remarks assume a radically different character. In the notorious, penultimate section of the text (TLP, 6.54), Wittgenstein invites his reader to recognize the book's 'propositions' as 'nonsensical' [*unsinnig*] and thus to discard them once he or she 'has climbed out through them, on them, over them'.[38] The purpose of this activity turns out to be nothing less than a transformation of the reader's vision and with it a dissolving of the very temptation to construct *picture theories* of meaning. Only by *overcoming* the *Tractatus*' sentences, Wittgenstein writes, does one come to '[*see*] the world aright' [*sieht die Welt richtig*] (TLP, 6.54).[39]

These early remarks clearly hint at the central role which ocular meta-phors come to play in the later writings. In the post-*Tractatus* work, such metaphors are, more often than not, the means by which Wittgenstein elucidates his therapeutic (PI, §133), philosophical strategy. In a 1938 lecture on aesthetics, for example, he describes his teaching as an attempt to persuade his students to '*look* at [...] thing[s] in a different way' (*LC*, 27).[40] And in a note written the previous year, he expands upon this remark, giving it an explicitly Kierkegaardian rendering: 'I must be noth-ing more than the mirror in which my reader sees his own thinking with all its deformities and with this assistance can set it in order'.[41] For Wittgenstein, then, as he puts it in the collection of experimental notes now published as the 'Big Typescript', '[u]nrest in philosophy comes from philosophers looking at, seeing, philosophy all wrong'.[42] 'When most people want to engage in a philosophical investigation,' he observes,

> they act like someone who is looking for an object in a drawer very nervously. He throws papers out of the drawer – what he's looking for may be among them – leafs through the others hastily and sloppily. Throws some back into the drawer, mixes them up with others, and so on. Then one can only tell him: *Stop, if you look in that way, then I can't help you look*. First you have to start to examine one thing after another methodically, and in peace and quiet.[43]

Haste and the lack of a methodical approach are not, however, the only reasons why philosophers have a tendency to *see* philosophy 'all wrong'. Another issue Wittgenstein identifies is that which he refers to as 'the phenomenon of staring'.[44] Addressing, in his manuscripts, the claim that philosophy makes no progress and that the same philosophical problems that occupied the Greeks still occupy us today, he writes:

> The reason [why this is the case] is that our language has remained the same and seduces us into asking the same questions over and over. As long as there is a verb 'to be' which seems to function like 'to eat' and 'to drink,' as long as there are adjectives like 'identical,' 'true,' 'false,' [and] 'possible,' as long as one talks about a flow of time and an expanse of space, etc., etc., humans will continue to bump up against the same mysterious difficulties, and *stare* at something that no explanation seems able to remove.[45]

As this remark clearly indicates, the phenomenon of staring is, for Wittgenstein, something which has its roots deep within 'the forms of our

language' (PI, §111). Specifically, we might say that staring arises when we find ourselves 'held captive' (PI, §115) by certain 'pictures' of 'the workings of our language' (PI, §109) – pictures which, over time, have become 'engraved into our language itself'.[46] In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein provides numerous examples of such misleading pictures functioning in a way that 'makes clear vision impossible' (PI, §5). During the course of his critique of Augustine's account of language, for example, he speaks of the 'queer connection when a philosopher tries to bring out the relation between name and thing by staring at an object in front of him and repeating a name or even the word "this" innumerable times' (PI, §38). Such a reified conception of language – which fancies 'naming to be some remarkable act of mind, as it were a baptism of the object' (PI, §38) – is also at work when we try to give 'once [and] for all' (PI, §92) definitions for terms such as 'time', 'language', 'proposition', 'thought', 'experience', 'world', 'word', 'knowledge', 'being', and 'I' (PI, §§89, 92, 93, 95, 97, 105, 116). In such instances, Wittgenstein remarks, 'we feel as if we had to penetrate phenomena [and] describe extreme subtleties' – a task which appears as difficult as attempting to 'repair a torn spider's web with our fingers' (PI, §§90, 106).[47] Tempted by an 'ideal' (PI, §103) of 'complete exactness' (PI, §91) and 'crystalline purity' (PI, §107–108), we repeat to ourselves, over and over, the following anxious thought: 'if only I could *fix my gaze* absolutely sharply on this [particular concept], get it in focus, I [would then be able to] grasp the essence of the matter' (PI, §113).[48]

If, however, we are to make the transition from staring and gazing to the 'rough ground' of clear vision then, on Wittgenstein's account, we need to begin by 'turning our whole examination around' (PI, §108). Although the *Investigations* provides no doctrinal blueprint for such a reorientation of self, it does emphasize the importance of overcoming the illusion that our task is to try 'to grasp the incomparable *essence* of language' (PI, §97), as if what we were looking for was 'hidden from us' 'beneath the surface' (PI, §92). Liberation from this particular urge involves coming to recognize that everything 'already lies open to view' (PI, §§92, 126); and therefore that 'if the words "language", "experience", "world", have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words "table", "lamp", "door"' (PI, §97). 'What *we* do' then, as *Investigations* §116 puts it, 'is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use'[49] – a remark which Stanley Cavell reads as registering the 'idea of returning words to the circulation of language and its (sometimes unpredictable) projects rather than keeping them fixated in some

imaginary service'.[50] It is, as Wittgenstein observes in his lectures of the 1930s, the tendency of philosophers to wholly disregard use, which, more so than any other error, leads them into confusion and blindness: 'If I had to say what is the main mistake made by the philosophers of the present generation [. . .] I would say that when language is *looked* at, what is *looked* at is the form of words and not the use made of the form of words' (LC, 2).[51]

What becomes clear from a consideration of the above remarks is that when Wittgenstein counsels his reader, 'don't think, but look!' (PI, §66), his emphasis upon vision is intimately tied to his goal of conceptual and linguistic perspicuity (PI, §122) and clarity (CV, 16).[52] Far more than a mere empiricist opening of one's eyes, the attainment of such clarity requires an immense and sustained labour – a thoroughgoing 'working on oneself' and the 'deformities' of one's own thinking (CV, 24, 25). Something akin to this process is described by the Viennese philosopher Friedrich Waismann when he speaks of

> the piercing of that dead crust of tradition and convention, the breaking of those fetters which bind us to inherited preconceptions, so as to attain a new and broader way of looking at things [. . .] a new way of seeing.[53]

In the next part of this chapter, I want to connect this 'new way of seeing', which I take Wittgenstein to be advocating, to the ethical point of the *Investigations*. My focus here, however, will be not only on remarks from Part I of the book, but also, and more importantly, on those contained in Part II, section xi, in which the author grapples with the topic of aspect-perception.

WITTGENSTEIN, ETHICS AND ASPECT–PERCEPTION

I.

Although Wittgenstein's canonical remarks on seeing aspects appear in Part II of the *Investigations*, they are explicitly anticipated by a number of passages which occur earlier in the work – in the section of meta-philosophical remarks in Part 1. At *Investigations* §129, for example, we encounter the previously cited remark:

> The *aspects* [*Aspekte*] of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice

something – because it is always before one's eyes.) The real foundations of [their] inquiry do not strike [people] at all. Unless *that* fact has at sometime struck [them]. – And this means: we fail to be struck by what, once seen, is most striking and most powerful.

In speaking of the aspects of things that are most important for us, Wittgenstein, as Steven Affeldt points out, 'is invoking not something different from the things we notice, but some aspects of what we do notice. [. . .] [H]e is not directing us to look elsewhere but to look differently [. . .] he is seeking to transform not the direction but the manner of our vision.'[54] As a general statement about Wittgenstein's methodological orientation, this is certainly correct; however, *Investigations* §129 raises a number of further and indeed more puzzling exegetical questions. *Why* do we routinely fail to see the aspects of things that are 'most important for us'? What are the (potential) consequences of this failure? And what steps are necessary if we are to (re)open our eyes to that which is 'most striking and most powerful'?

The answers which Affeldt provides to these questions are, I would argue, unconvincing; not least because they appear to evoke what Charles Altieri calls 'a timeless philosophical world'.[55] On Affeldt's view, our failure to be struck by what is most important is closely allied with our 'Romantic' inheritance – what he describes as 'our recurrent human failure genuinely to experience our world and to appreciate the significance of (events in) our lives'.[56] 'The simple and the familiar, understood as the ordinary or everyday' are, Affeldt claims, 'not passively overlooked but are actively repudiated' – a tendency which he links to 'the various human drives, cravings, anxieties, fantasies, perversions, [and] wishes' that constitute our present '*human nature*'.[57] The *Investigations*, on this account, is thus taken to show how our inability to see what is most striking and most powerful – like our attraction to various forms of 'philosophical emptiness' – arises out of specific 'aspects of *human nature*'. It is, consequently, the work's repeated 'efforts to afford us *moments of peace* from, or within, *our riven and self-tormenting nature*' which are said to constitute 'its deep moral urgency'.[58]

Nowhere, either in the *Investigations* or elsewhere, does Wittgenstein speak of philosophical problems arising out of an innately inscribed human nature.[59] He does, however, suggest that our various forms of blindness – along with our 'angst' (BB, 27), 'drives' (PI, §109), 'discomfort' (BB, 26), 'torment' (PI, §111), 'obsessions',[60] and 'irresistible temptations'

(BB, 18) – are historically constituted: intimately tied to the problems of modernity. This is what I take him to be referring to when, in the Preface to the *Investigations*, he describes the background against which the work is written as 'the darkness of this time' (PI, x). The phrase 'the darkness of this time' is used here by Wittgenstein as a kind of shorthand for a variety of issues which occupy his later thinking. At the level of culture and politics it refers to the prevailing 'European and American civilisation' which he finds 'alien [and] uncongenial' (CV, 8); it also points to an intellectual environment – one of 'complete darkness' – in which philosophers 'see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer questions in the way science does' (BB, 18).[61] Darkness is, however, also the description of a certain historico-ethical condition: one in which, for example, we fail to discern the *human* in someone (CV, 3),[62] or throw 'dust in [our] own eyes' (CV, 57) when thinking about the problems of everyday life. A clear example of the latter is illustrated in a 1939 exchange between Wittgenstein and Norman Malcolm, which Wittgenstein recalls in a letter of 1944:

> Whenever I thought of you I couldn't help thinking of a particular incident which seemed to me very important. You & I [. . .] had a heated discussion in which you made a remark about 'national character' that shocked me by its primitiveness. I then thought: what is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life, if it does not make you more conscientious than any . . . journalist in the use of the DANGEROUS phrases such people use for their own ends. You see, I know that it's difficult to think well about 'certainty,' 'possibility,' 'perception' etc. But it is, if possible, still more difficult to think, or *try* to think, really honestly about your life and other people's lives.[63]

Malcolm's use of what Wittgenstein here calls primitive and dangerous phrases is indicative of the kind of one-dimensional thinking which becomes widespread during political dark times. Such thinking is, for Wittgenstein, not only self-serving (the 'phrases [. . .] people use for *their own ends*'), it also demonstrates a profound ethical blindness: what he describes as an inability to 'think [. . .] honestly about [one's own] life & other people's lives'. To this we might add that Malcolm's comment – arguing specifically that the British 'national character' is *intrinsically*

'civilized' and 'decent' – is not only politically and morally dubious, but also reflective of a deep-seated desire to see the world from the point of view of homogeneity and fixity, rather than difference and change. It is, however, precisely this attitude that the remarks on aspect-perception in *Investigations* Part II, section xi, are directed against.

II.

At the beginning of Part II, section xi, Wittgenstein asks his reader to consider two uses of the word 'see' which, he says, correspond to two different 'objects' of sight. The distinction Wittgenstein draws is between, on the one hand, what one sees when one says 'I see *this*' (accompanied by a description, a drawing, or making a copy) and, on the other hand, what one sees when one observes 'I see a likeness between these two faces'. Describing the latter experience in more detail, Wittgenstein writes: 'I contemplate a face, and then suddenly notice its likeness to another. I *see* that it has not changed; and yet I see it differently. I call this experience "noticing an aspect"' (PI II, 165).

The '*causes*' of this noticing an aspect are, as Wittgenstein remarks, 'of interest to psychologists'; ('we') philosophers, by contrast, 'are interested in the concept and its place among the concepts of experience' (PI II, 165). Wittgenstein invites us to begin thinking about the significance of the concept of noticing an aspect by introducing an illustration of a geometric shape which, he points out, is seen differently ('here a glass cube, there an inverted open box, there a wire frame of that shape, there three boards forming a solid angle') when it appears in different places in a text book alongside different pieces of accompanying text: '[W]e [. . .] *see* the illustration [. . .] now as one thing now as another. – So we interpret it, and *see* it as we *interpret* it' (PI II, 165).

The best-known example Wittgenstein gives of a picture that can be seen first one way and then another is the 'duck-rabbit', derived from Jastrow (Fig. 2.1).

This figure can be seen either as the head of a duck or as the head of a rabbit; although it is entirely possible, in cases of what Wittgenstein calls 'aspect blindness' (PI II, 182) (a concept to which we will return below), to see it only as a duck or as a rabbit. When we see the figure one way, then another, what takes place, according to Wittgenstein, is not that the figure itself changes, but rather that we 'experience a *comparison*'[64] – we realize, as he puts it, 'an internal relation between [what we see] and other objects' (PI II, 180). In order to be able to experience such likenesses (PI II, 165) what is required is not only prior knowledge – '[y]ou
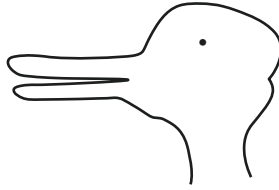
Fig. 2.1 Wittgenstein's image of the 'duck-rabbit'. Joseph Jastrow/Ludwig Wittgenstein, PI II, 166

only "see the duck and rabbit aspects" if you are already conversant with the shape of these two animals' (PI II, 177) – but also 'the mastery of a certain technique' (PI II, 178).

This latter point can be brought out more fully if we consider Wittgenstein's example of the schematic triangle (PI II, 171). The triangle, he says, 'can be seen as a triangular hole, as a solid, as a geometrical drawing; as standing on its base, as hanging from its apex; as a mountain, as a wedge, as an arrow or pointer, as an overturned object which is meant to stand on the shorter side of the right angle, as a half parallelogram, and as various other things' (ibid.). To see all these different aspects of the triangle, Wittgenstein remarks, 'demands *imagination*' (PI II, 177, 181). Imagination, however, as Wittgenstein here uses the term, does not refer (in the Romantic sense) to the generation of 'private impressions' and 'inner experiences'; rather it points to a particular kind of 'voluntary' (RPP, §899), interpretive (PI II, 165) activity: one which requires the skilful application of different 'concepts' (RPP, §961, Z, §505) and therefore a familiarity with the workings of various 'language games' (PI, §7ff). In this respect, seeing something *as* something – for example, seeing the schematic triangle first as the peak of a mountain then as a sculpture which has fallen on its side – implies a certain kind of acquired know-how: it means that 'one is capable of *doing* such-and-such' (PI II, 178) with the figure (or object) which one sees.[65]

The linguistic and social dimensions of aspect-seeing can be further illuminated if we add two additional points. First, as Wittgenstein repeatedly reminds us, imagination and description (seeing and saying) go hand-in-hand (PI, §367): a change of aspect, he remarks, just '*is* the expression of a new perception' (PI II, 167); or, as he puts it elsewhere: 'the

inclination to use that form of verbal expression is a characteristic utterance of the experience' (RPP, §13). Second, when we change the context in which a particular figure or object is placed – when we alter what Wittgenstein calls 'the fiction' (PI II, 179) we surround it with – then we transform how it is viewed. In this sense, there is, as Wittgenstein argues, 'a close kinship' between the dawning of an aspect and 'experiencing the meaning of a word' (PI II, 179).

When dealing with Wittgenstein's remarks on aspect-perception it is important to bear in mind that any account of what he has to say will necessarily run up against certain limits. As Avner Baz reminds us, Wittgenstein's writings on this topic – unlike the numbered paragraphs in the first part of the *Investigations* – do not 'fall together to form [a] unified whole'.[66] The main reason for this is straightforwardly historical: Wittgenstein did not live long enough to carry out the necessary revisions to this part of his text and, consequently, it remains fragmentary and incomplete. However, it is here also worth considering Baz's further point that even if Wittgenstein had managed to work his remarks on aspect-perception into a more organized and completed state, they would still not have presented us with his 'views' on the subject.[67] Evidence in support of this claim can be found if we look at the form which the remarks in Part II, section xi, take and, in particular, if we observe that many of them appear as questions (to or from an imaginary interlocutor), rather than as straightforward philosophical statements. For example: 'Is it correct to say ...?,' 'What is the criterion of ...?,' 'How could I see that ...?,' 'What would it be like if ...?' (PI II, 168, 169, 178, 187). Whilst Wittgenstein's use of question marks can, as Stephen Mulhall argues, be taken to reflect 'the provisional and tentative state of his reflections on his material, his persisting uncertainty about what exactly to say and how to say it',[68] it is also possible to grasp them as part of a more far-reaching and deliberate philosophical strategy. Here as elsewhere, we might argue, Wittgenstein's aim is to get his reader to 'go the bloody hard way'[69] and to arrive not at fixed answers to philosophical problems but rather at 'thoughts of [one's] own' (PI, x). As he puts it in an important manuscript remark of 1948: 'Anything the reader can do for himself, leave it to the reader' (CV, 88).

How, then, does all of this point in the direction of the ethical dimension of *Philosophical Investigations*? There are, I think, a number of ways of approaching this question. First, it is important to bear in mind that the remarks on aspect perception do not *say* anything which might be

construed as explicitly ethical: they do not employ moral concepts, nor do they express moral judgments.[70] This, however, need not preclude them (or, indeed, the text as a whole) from having an ethical point.[71] One way of taking the remarks on aspect-seeing as ethical might be to follow the later Gordon Baker and to argue that they effect – or at least *aim to effect* – a kind of 'conversion': 'a total reorientation of one's style of thinking'.[72] As Baker points out, such a change 'may be impossible in practice for many individuals at many times'; but this is precisely why Wittgenstein wants to emphasize that seeing an aspect and imagining are 'voluntary' (RPP, §899) – that is, 'subject to the will' (RPP, §976, PI II, 182):

> The point of calling aspect-seeing 'voluntary' [. . .] is not to claim that it can be brought about on a whim, but rather that it makes sense to ask somebody to look at things differently, to say that a person has complied with this request, or equally that he has refused to see an aspect which is perfectly visible to others. We might say that changing one's way of seeing things is difficult because it is voluntary, because one has to surrender what one has always wanted to see.[73]

According to Baker, coming to see a new aspect in a figure or object and coming to see 'unnoticed aspects or patterns in "the use of our words"' are closely connected activities.[74] What Wittgenstein strives to change above all, on Baker's view, is our way of looking at our words-in-use or 'our grammar' in order to 'enable us to find our way about in the motley of "our language"'.[75] In this respect, the *Investigations* is understood as a 'creative achievement': one which aims, through 'persuasion' (rather than demonstrative proof), 'to bring it about that another sees things differently'.[76] And it is here – in the struggle to effect a perspectival shift in the reader – that the book's ethical dimension can be located.

Whilst I am sympathetic with the main thrust of Baker's argument, we can I believe delve deeper into the ethical dimensions of the remarks on aspect-perception. It is in this section of the text (inseparable as it is from the author's later philosophical project as a whole) that Wittgenstein opens the door to a certain kind of *modernist ethics*. What is meant by this particular phrase, in this instance, can be summarized as follows: first, it is an ethics which stands in close proximity to the aesthetic, as well as to the linguistic; and second, it is an ethics which opens up a new conceptual space – what I will here call a utopian space – within which a radical reimagining of the everyday can take place. This is not, of course, to

claim that Wittgenstein was himself attempting to formulate any kind of ethico-aesthetic doctrine in the later work, or that he was conscious of that work as having specifically utopian implications. Rather, it is to argue that the remarks on aspect-perception demonstrate an intimate connection between the ethical, the aesthetic and the linguistic (as if these were different fibres spun together to form one thread (PI, §67)); and that we might speak of the *Investigations*' repeated efforts to bring us to see the everyday anew as harbouring a utopian dimension which is shown rather than said. How, then, might these claims be substantiated? And what benefits might we derive from speaking of a specifically Wittgensteinian modernist ethics?

The *Investigations*' Modernist Ethics

One way of drawing out the ethical nature of Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect-perception will be to turn to his (notoriously brief) treatment of the topic of aspect-blindness. In the *Investigations*, he introduces this concept with a series of questions:

> Could there be human beings lacking in the capacity to see something as something – and what would that be like? What sort of consequences would it have? – Would this defect be comparable to colour-blindness, or to not having absolute pitch? – We will call it 'aspect-blindness' (PI II, 182)

For Wittgenstein, the aspect-blind person is not one who simply lacks the capacity to see an object or figure differently at different times – such an individual might well be able to see the duck-rabbit, for example, as a duck, on one occasion, and as a rabbit, on another. Instead, what characterizes the situation of the aspect-blind is that they are not able to see the figure 'jump[ing] from one aspect to another' (PI II, 182): they are unable to demonstrate, through words or actions, that they have experienced 'the "dawning" of an aspect' (PI II, 166). We might thus say that the aspect-blind are engaged in a kind of non-dynamic, 'continuous seeing' (ibid.); and that whilst they are capable of responding to instructions to see figures, objects and words in different ways, this is not part of their ordinary, everyday relationship with the world.

To clarify what he means by aspect-blindness, Wittgenstein goes on to employ an aesthetic simile: 'Aspect blindness,' he remarks, 'will be akin to

the lack of a "musical ear"' (PI II, 182). The linguistic variant of the defect – namely, the inability to 'experience the meaning of a word' (PI II, 182)[77] – is then alluded to in a passage which appears later in the same section:

> The familiar physiognomy of a word, the feeling that it has taken up its meaning into itself, that it is an actual likeness of its meaning – there could be human beings to whom all this was alien. (They would not have an attachment to their words.) (PI II, 186)

The ethical implications of the forms of aesthetic and linguistic alienation which Wittgenstein touches upon here can be elucidated in the following way. Just before he compares aspect-blindness to the lack of a musical ear, Wittgenstein says that 'the "aspect-blind" will have an altogether different relationship to pictures [and words] than ours' (PI II, 182). This remark, as I read it, clearly echoes section 6.43 of the *Tractatus* where Wittgenstein writes that 'the world of the happy is quite different from that of the unhappy'. Bringing these two statements together, then, we might say that whilst the aspect-blind and the unhappy person will see, factually speaking, the same world as the aspect-perceiving and the happy person, their relationship with that world will be '*quite another*' (TLP, 6.43).[78] They will not, in Wittgenstein's words, be able to see that things 'could also be otherwise' (NB, 80); and consequently they will not be able to look 'at the world with a happy eye' (NB, 86).

Does this then mean that the aspect-sighted and the aspect-blind are destined to live (at least, theoretically) in eternally irreconcilable worlds – one group in the light of finely tuned perception and linguistic sophistication, the other in a kind of sensory darkness, divorced from the individual resonances of words? To answer 'yes' to this question would, I believe, be to overlook the dialectical subtleties of the case with which we are presented. When Wittgenstein invites us to imagine 'human beings lacking in the capacity to see something as something', human beings alienated from their life with 'words' (PI II, 186), he is not simply asking us to imagine people who are *wholly other*; rather, and more importantly, he is asking us to reflect upon *ourselves* and our own ways of seeing and speaking. Whilst our aspect-blindness might not be the inescapable condition it is for those imaginary individuals who figure in Wittgenstein's thought experiments, we nevertheless, to varying degrees, at different times and in different

situations, share their affliction. As he puts it: the problem is that 'we fail to be struck' (PI, §129), and so we just 'keep on seeing the same' (Z, §568).

It is then in this respect that I take the *Investigations*' ethical demand to be as follows: 'Find it *new*: see the everyday *otherwise*!'[79] The first of these two phrases can be read as a variation on Ezra Pound's own aesthetic maxim 'Make it new'[80]; however, in Wittgenstein's case, the emphasis is less on creative-literary invention and more on a radical *re-visioning* of the world and words in which we live. Taken generally, Wittgenstein's ethical demand can be understood as urging us to return to the 'hurly burly' (Z, §567) of the ordinary, and to see what we see there (and hear what we hear there (PI II, 181)) *ecstatically* – as if for the first time. It is also a reminder of the need to recognize the 'physiognomy' (PI II, 186) and the 'soul' (PI, §530) of words, and to allow ourselves to be struck by 'the prodigious diversity of [our] everyday language-games' (PI II, 191). By striving to see the everyday otherwise – a task which requires a mobilization of both the will (PI II, 182) and the imagination (PI II, 177, 181) – we work against the routinization of thought and talk signalled by 'the darkness of this time' (PI, x).

What prevents 'see the everyday otherwise' from being a mere ethico-modernist slogan is the fact that, in one way or another, the whole of the *Investigations* attempts to prepare the reader for this new way of looking. Nowhere is this more apparent than at the level of style; and, in particular, in the fictional scenarios which Wittgenstein deploys throughout the text. At different points, he invites the reader to imagine (i) a mouse which comes 'into being by spontaneous generation through grey rags and dust' (PI, §52); (ii) 'having frightful pains and turning to stone' for as long as the pains last (PI, §283); (iii) living among people who are 'automata, lacking in consciousness, even though they behave in the same way as usual' (PI, §420); (iv) a community in which people keep 'beetles' in boxes, but in which 'no one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says [that they know] what a beetle is only by looking at [their *own*] beetle' (PI, §293); (v) and a greengrocer who, when asked for 'five red apples,' 'looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it [. . .] then [. . .] says the series of cardinal numbers [. . .] up to the word "five" and for each number [. . .] takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of [a] drawer [marked "apples"]' (PI, §1). Each of these fictional scenarios (and there are numerous others throughout Wittgenstein's later work) are authentically *surreal*: each utilizes shock and psychic disorientation in order to change our way of looking at our

existing concepts and thus our lives.[81] Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, we might say that the crucial point of these imaginary scenarios is to loosen the grip of fixed seeing 'like a bad tooth'.[82] Leading us from 'the barren heights of cleverness [. . .] down into the green valleys of silliness' (CV, 86),[83] Wittgenstein's scenarios destabilize familiar modes of perception and bring us to a point from where it becomes possible to view the everyday through a dialectical optic. Grasped in this light, it becomes clear that the book's ethical demand is not simply tied to the remarks on aspect-perception; rather, it runs through the work as a whole – the thought experiments in Part I already demonstrating the kind of imaginative seeing described in Part II, section xi.

WITTGENSTEIN AND THE UTOPIAN IMAGINATION

How then might we assess in conclusion the possible political implications of the *Investigations*' ethical demand? Earlier, I suggested that Wittgenstein's modernist ethics is capable of opening up a certain kind of utopian space. In what follows I wish to specify how exactly such a space might be imagined and, indeed, how we might begin to make the transition from philosophical modernism to contemporary politics – one of the crucial concerns of this study as a whole.

Throughout his private writings, Wittgenstein often appears hostile towards forms of utopian thinking. In 1942, for example, he remarks: 'You can't *construct* clouds. And that is why the future you dream of never comes true.' 'Our dreams,' he continues, 'are covered in tinsel like paper hats and fancy dress costumes' (CV, 48).[84] Rather than imagining any kind of collective change, Wittgenstein adheres instead to a version of the salvation-of-the-self outlook.[85] In his manuscripts of 1944, we thus read: 'The revolutionary will be the one who can revolutionize himself' (CV, 51); and in 1946: 'If life becomes hard to bear we think of a change in our circumstances. But the most important and effective change, *a change in our own attitude*, hardly ever occurs to us, and the resolution to take such a step is very difficult for us'.[86] Whilst these pronouncements certainly indicate a thinker who is, on one level, both highly individualistic and avowedly sceptical of human transformative potential, they do not preclude a utopian reading of those sections of *Philosophical Investigations* examined above. Indeed, we might argue that the gap between the 'personal' and the 'philosophical' in the later Wittgenstein (certainly discernible, even if never fixed and absolute) *itself*

provides a model of the gap between the 'actual' and the 'possible' – the 'now' and the 'not-yet' [*noch-nicht*] – which utopian thinking endeavours to explore.

To briefly recap: in the remarks in *Investigations* Part II, section xi, Wittgenstein says that seeing-aspects requires 'the mastery of a technique' (PI II, 178); that it demands 'imagination' (PI II, 181); and that it is 'subject to the will' (PI II, 182). To discover this capacity for seeing the hidden aspects of things is, according to Wittgenstein, as if one 'had invented a new way of painting [. . .] a new metre, or a new kind of song' (PI, §401). Whilst the *Investigations*' ethical demand to see the everyday otherwise is thus shot through with aesthetic significances, it can also be construed as simultaneously political: by striving to see anew what is always in front of our eyes, we also, in the words of Fredric Jameson, initiate a 'reawakening of the imagination of *possible and alternate futures*, a reawakening of that historicity which our system – offering itself as the end of history – necessarily represses and paralyzes'.[87] Understood in this way, seeing the everyday otherwise becomes inseparable from the imaginative activity of *seeing the future otherwise*; and it is this sense of futurity which Wittgenstein touches upon in an important remark from 1929:

> When we think of the world's future, we always mean the destination it will reach if it keeps going in the direction we can see it going in now; it does not occur to us that its path is not a straight line but a curve, constantly changing direction.[88]

Detecting utopian impulses in the 'landscape' (PI, ix) of *Philosophical Investigations* does not therefore mean seeing the author as providing a blueprint for any kind of transfigured future society beyond 'the darkness of this time'. Rather, it means seeing the work as supplying us with a particular *method* [89] – a method which is strictly philosophical, but one which can also assist us in reviving 'unused organs of political, historical and social imagination'.[90] Despite Wittgenstein's own reluctance to imagine collective (rather than individual) transformation, his emphasis upon the task of overcoming the temptations of aspect-blindness can, if resituated politically, suggest a path beyond blocked consciousness regarding future change. That is to say, a path beyond the various forms of cynical reason (both liberal and conservative) which, either implicitly or explicitly, reaffirm the old narratives of intellectual and historical closure.[91]

In a 1964 discussion with Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno remarks that whether they admit it or not, all human beings know deep down that the world in which they live could be otherwise: 'Not only could [people] live without hunger and probably without anxiety, but they could also live as free human beings. At the same time, the social apparatus has hardened itself against people, and thus, whatever appears before their eyes [. . .] as attainable possibility [. . .] presents itself to them as radically impossible.'[92] Breaking what Adorno calls this 'wicked spell' which has been 'cast over the world'[93] is of course the goal of praxis, of political agency which aims to undo the present by forcefully exposing the contradictions and injustices of the existing system. Such agency, however, cannot exist independently of new forms of future-oriented, imaginative thinking; and, as I have argued here, it is precisely this kind of imaginative thinking which Wittgenstein's later work aims to cultivate. The ethical demand to see the everyday otherwise thus becomes a signpost for the journey towards a more liveable future.

NOTES

1. Hans Jonas, 'The Nobility of Sight', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 14: 4 (June, 1954): 507–519 (507).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 508–509.
4. Ibid., 514.
5. Ibid., 517–518.
6. Ibid., 519.
7. Ibid.
8. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), p. 111 (emphasis added).
9. Ibid.
10. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Disintegration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 9ff; Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in *Vision and Visuality*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Bay Publishing, 1988), pp. 3–23.
11. Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), p. 115ff. The other essential phenomena that Heidegger lists are: the growth of technology; art's moving into the purview of aesthetics; the fact that human activity is conceived and consummated as culture; and the loss of the gods. Heidegger writes,

however: 'We shall limit [ourselves] to the phenomenon mentioned first, to science [*Wissenschaft*]' (ibid., pp. 116–117). Importantly, however, *Wissenschaft*, as Michael Inwood points out, 'is applied more widely than "science". Any systematic study of a field is a *Wissenschaft*. History, theology, classical philology, art-history are all *Wissenschaften*.' Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 191.

12. Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', p. 127.
13. Ibid., pp. 127, 130.
14. Ibid., p. 131.
15. Ibid., pp. 128, 129, 132.
16. Ibid., p. 134.
17. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 52. Heidegger's thoughts on the relation between vision and modernity are echoed by David Michael Levin. According to Levin, in the modern epoch vision 'is virtually consumed by the will to power as a will to master and dominate'. This impulse to fix and control what is seen, results, however, in a nihilistic destruction of the visual sense itself: 'instead of clear and distinct perception, blurring and confusion; instead of fulfilment, the eyes lose their sight [. . .] vision [. . .] become[s] a stare'. David Michael Levin, 'Existentialism at the End of Modernity: Questioning the I's Eye', *Philosophy Today* 34:1 (1990): 80–95 (88); David Michael Levin, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 69.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), pp. 216/172. On 'the essence of wonder', see Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz & André Schuwer (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 143–149.
19. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 216 & 172.
20. Ibid., pp. 213/169.
21. There is, however, a strongly anti-modern impulse running through Heidegger's texts, as the following brief examples demonstrate. 'Th[e] circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption is the sole procedure which distinctively characterizes the history of a world which has become an unworld.' Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), p. 107. 'Hourly and daily they [the Schwarzwald peasants] are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them off into uncommon, but often merely common, realms of imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world [. . .] All that with which modern techniques of communication stimulate, assail, and drive man – all that is already much closer to man today than his fields around his farmstead, closer than the sky over the earth, closer than the change from night to day, closer that the conventions and customs of his

village, than the tradition of his native world.' Martin Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking (A Translation of 'Gelassenheit')*, trans. John M. Anderson & E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 48. Despite such remarks, it needs to be stressed that Heidegger's *Kulturkritik* transcends any *mere* call for 'a modern renaissance of the ancients'. Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p. 158.

22. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, pp. 54 & 61. However, as Bret W. Davis points out, Heidegger's 'explicit anticipations of a "releasement" from the will' are problematic, not least because 'certain residues of the will remain in his thought until the end'. Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. xxiii–xxiv.

23. Heidegger, *Discourse on Thinking*, p. 54.

24. Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 28ff.

25. Ibid., p. 17. Heidegger calls this kind of ordering 'standing-reserve' [*Bestand*] (Ibid., pp. 17ff, 20ff). He gives as an example of such ordering, an aeroplane that stands on a runway. The plane, he writes, is not an object with significance in itself; rather, '[r]evealed, it stands on the taxi-strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation' (Ibid., p. 17). In this realm of 'orderability', everything is judged solely in terms of its readiness for use.

26. Ibid., p. 33.

27. Ibid., pp. 19, 28, 32. Here, however, we should be highly critical of Heidegger's account of technology: not only does it rule out any transformation of our political and economic forms of life as the *ground* for a new understanding of technology's social purpose, it also mythologizes technology's essence, in the sense that technological development is not seen to be contingent upon a specific set of productive and social relations, but rather determined by what Gillian Rose calls an 'unknowable law'. See Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-structuralism and Law* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 83.

28. Ibid., pp. 28, 34. Here it is important to note that, for Heidegger, even if we look into the danger and see the growth of the saving power, *'we are not yet saved'* (Ibid., p. 33) (emphasis added). What promises a re-awakening of truth and an unveiling of Being is *the work of art*: our 'decisive confrontation with [technology] must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art' (Ibid., p. 35).

29. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), p. 27.

30. This concern with the importance, not to mention the difficulty, of seeing what is in plain sight brings Wittgenstein into close proximity with a number of other thinkers. In his essay 'The Moses of Michelangelo', Freud describes psychoanalysis as attempting to reveal 'secret and concealed things', but suggests that these things are themselves already on the surface – the waste matter (der Abhub) of our observations, Sigmund Freud, *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 134. Fifteen years after the publication of Philosophical Investigations, in an interview with Bernard Bonnefoy, Michel Foucault points out that his philosophy aims not at 'trying to reveal things that have been deeply buried, hidden, forgotten for centuries or millennia, nor of discovering, behind what's been said by others, the secret they wished to hide'. Instead, his philosophical project is, he remarks, 'simply trying to make apparent what is very immediately present and at the same time invisible […] To grasp that invisibility, that invisible of the too visible, that distancing of what is too close, that unknown familiarity', Michel Foucault, *Speech Begins After Death*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 70–71.

31. Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, pp. 3, 37, 80ff; Martin Jay, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism,' *Poetics Today* 9:2 (1988): 307–326.

32. It should be noted that whilst I speak mostly of the 'everyday', the terms 'everyday' and 'ordinary' are used interchangeably throughout Wittgenstein's later work. I thus make no conceptual distinction between them in this essay.

33. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914–1916*, 2nd edition, ed. G. H. von Wright & G. E. M. Anscombe, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 80 (hereafter NB followed by a page number). Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, German text with an English translation *en regard* by C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 2000), 5.633 (hereafter TLP followed by a proposition number). The first reference to the 'visual field' in the *Notebooks* appears almost two years earlier (see NB p. 3). The discussion of 'picturing' and 'representing', famously developed in the *Tractatus*, begins at NB, p. 7ff.

34. Cf. TLP, 5.634.

35. Further remarks on seeing, which relate to those already noted, can be found in NB, pp. 77 & 86.

36. 'The proposition communicates to us a state of affairs, therefore it must be *essentially* connected with the state of affairs. And the connection is, in fact, that it is its logical picture. The proposition only asserts something, in so far as it is a picture' (TLP, 4.03).

37. As this proposition continues: 'That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent. That which expresses itself in language, we cannot express by language. The propositions show the logical form of reality. They

exhibit it.' Logical form, then, cannot be stated or described in language but can *only* be shown (TLP, 4.1212). According to a large number of Wittgenstein interpreters, these remarks are key to Wittgenstein's articulation of a doctrine of 'showing' in the early work. See, for example, David Pears, *The False Prison: A Study of the Development of Wittgenstein's Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); G. E. M. Anscombe, *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's* '*Tractatus*' (London: Hutchinson, 1963); P. M. S. Hacker, *Insight and Illusion: Themes in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1997).

38. On the significance of 6.54 to an understanding of the book as a whole, see Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder*; Ben Ware 'Ethics', in *Understanding Wittgenstein, Understanding Modernism* ed. Anat Matar (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

39. The first clause of the last sentence of proposition 6.54 reads: 'Er muß diese Sätze überwinden.' Warren Goldfarb suggests translating this clause as: 'He must overcome these propositions' (i.e. the propositions of the *Tractatus*). See Warren Goldfarb, 'Das Überwinden: Anti-Metaphysical Readings of the *Tractatus*,' in *Beyond the* '*Tractatus*' *Wars: The New Wittgenstein Debate*, ed. Rupert Read and Matthew A. Lavery (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 19. This translation is, I think, preferable to those provided by Pears and McGuinness ('He must transcend these propositions...') and C. K. Ogden ('He must surmount these propositions...') in the sense that it emphasizes that throwing away the ladder is an *activity* – one which involves nothing less than an *ethical struggle* with our own philosophical temptations.

40. Added emphasis. Cf PI, §144: 'I have changed his way of looking at things.'

41. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, revised edition ed. G. H von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 25. Hereafter CV followed by a page number.

42. Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Big Typescript,' in PO, p. 195.

43. Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Big Typescript' in PO, p. 197.

44. Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense Data"' in *Philosophical Occasions*, p. 272. In what follows, due to space constraints, I focus only on the *linguistic* dimensions of this phenomenon. Much more, however, can be said on the relation between staring, language and solipsism. As the cited remark reads in full: 'The phenomenon of staring is linked to solipsism.' For an interesting exploration of this connection, see Louis Sass, *The Paradoxes of Delusion: Wittgenstein, Schreber, and the Schizophrenic Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

45. Wittgenstein, 'The Big Typescript', in *Philosophical Occasions*, pp. 185–187. Cf. CV, p. 22.

46. Wittgenstein, 'The Big Typescript' in *Philosophical Occasions*, p. 185.

47. The urge 'to penetrate phenomena' (PI, §90) is clearly connected with a scientific view of the world: one which is preoccupied with *essences* and *explanations*. Such a view is criticized by Wittgenstein throughout his later work. See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), p. 18 (hereafter BB followed by a page number); PI, §109.

48. Emphasis added.

49. The term 'use', in these two remarks from the *Investigations*, is of particular significance. For, as Wittgenstein reminds us throughout the later work: if one wants to know how a word functions, then 'one has to look at its use' – within the multiplicity of different 'language games' (PI, §7) – 'and learn from that' (PI, §340). (Cf. PI, §49, PI II, 187.) Importantly, however, this is not to ascribe to Wittgenstein a use-theory of meaning: the so-called 'context-principle', we might argue, does not attempt to tell us how we must understand meaning in all cases; rather, it serves only as a reminder of how to look – a warning against the dangers of seeking meaning in the psychological realm. For further remarks on the meaning of 'meaning', see also Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), §§1–20 (hereafter Z followed by a section number).

50. Stanley Cavell, 'The Wittgensteinian Event,' in *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 199. The process of 'leading words back' is, of course, no small task – it is part of what Wittgenstein describes as our 'struggle with language' (CV, 13). However, on Cavell's account, such a struggle might well be *without end*, given what he describes as our 'craving for the metaphysical [...] the essential and implacable restlessness of the human' (Cavell, 'The Wittgensteinian Event', p. 195).

51. Emphasis added.

52. As Wittgenstein writes: 'I think I have never *invented* a line of thinking but that it was always provided for me by someone else & I have done no more than passionately take it up for my work of clarification. [...] I believe that what is essential is for the activity of clarification to be carried out with COURAGE' (CV, 16). For recent attempts to connect philosophical clarity with the ethical dimensions of Wittgenstein's later work, see Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Oskari Kuusela, *The Struggle Against Dogmatism: Wittgenstein and the Concept of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

53. Freidrich Waismann, 'How I see Philosophy', in *Logical Positivism*, ed. A. J. Ayer (New York: The Free Press, 1959), pp. 374–375. For a discussion of Waismann's essay, see Gordon Baker, 'A Vision of Philosophy', in

Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects, ed. Katherine Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 179–204. As Judith Genova points out, Waismann's essay launches a 'barely concealed attack on Wittgenstein' and yet, seemingly without knowing it, succeeds in almost exactly identifying the latter's goal in the *Investigations*. See Judith Genova, *Wittgenstein: A Way of Seeing* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 1.

54. Stephen Affeldt, 'Seeing Aspects and the "Therapeutic" Reading of Wittgenstein', in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, ed. William Day and Victor Krebs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 271.

55. See Charles Altieri, 'Cavell and Wittgenstein on Morality', in *Stanley Cavell and Literary Studies: Consequences of Scepticism*, ed. Richard Eldridge and Bernard Rhie (London: Continuum, 2011), p. 76.

56. Affeldt, 'Seeing Aspects', p. 273.

57. Ibid., p. 274.

58. Ibid., p. 288.

59. According to Rush Rhees, Wittgenstein did speak 'of "die Natur" in a man, or of the various natures of different people'; however, this appears to have been Wittgenstein's way of speaking generally about 'character' in the context of thinking about the possibility of lying to oneself or 'living a life that is a lie'. See Rush Rhees, 'Postscript', in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 187. For Wittgenstein, 'character' is historical through and through, as he makes clear in the following remark from 1950: 'There is nothing outrageous in saying that a man's character may be influenced by the world outside him [. . .] we know from experience, men change with circumstances', Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. P. Winch (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p. 84.

60. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932–1935*, ed. Alice Ambrose (New York: Prometheus Books, 1979), p. 98.

61. On Wittgenstein's engagement with questions of modernity and culture, see Ben Ware, 'Wittgenstein, Modernity and the Critique of Modernism', *Textual Practice* 27: 2 (2013):187–205.

62. Stanley Cavell uses the term 'soul-blindness' to describe the inability to see human beings as human beings. See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 378.

63. Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Memoir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 93–94.

64. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol. 1, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1998), § 317 (hereafter RPP followed by a section number).

65. Added emphasis.

66. Avner Baz, 'Aspect Perception and Philosophical Difficulty', in *The Oxford Handbook of Wittgenstein*, ed. Marie McGinn and Oskari Kuusela (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 697.

67. Ibid., p. 698.

68. Stephen Mulhall, 'The Work of Wittgenstein's Words', in *Seeing Wittgenstein Anew*, p. 252. For Mulhall's comprehensive account of Wittgenstein's remarks on aspects, see Stephen Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (London: Routledge, 1990). For another early account of Wittgenstein and seeing-aspects, see Paul Johnston's *Wittgenstein: Rethinking the Inner* (London: Routledge, 1993).

69. Rush Rhees remarks: 'Wittgenstein used to say to me "Go the bloody hard way" [. . .] I remember this more often, perhaps, than any other remark of his.' See Rush Rhees, 'The Study of Philosophy', in *Without Answers* (New York: Schocken, 1969), p. 169. For more on what Wittgenstein intended by this phrase, see James Conant, 'On Going the Bloody *Hard* Way in Philosophy', in *The Possibilities of Sense*, ed. John Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 85–129.

70. The only remark in *Philosophical Investigations* in which the subject of ethics is explicitly discussed is PI, §77.

71. Here one might recall Wittgenstein's famous letter to Ludwig von Ficker in which he states that the point of the *Tractatus* 'is an ethical one', but that this is not explicitly stated in the book; rather, it is delimited 'from the inside', by the book itself. Letter: Ludwig Wittgenstein to Ludwig von Ficker, cited by G. H. von Wright, 'Historical Introduction: The Origin of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*', in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Prototractatus*, ed. B. F. McGuinness, T. Nyberg, & G. H. von Wright, trans. D. F. Pears & B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 14 & 16, n. 2.

72. Gordon Baker, '*Philosophical Investigations* §122: Neglected Aspects', in *Wittgenstein's Method: Neglected Aspects*, ed. Katherine Morris (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 46.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., p. 41.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid., p. 44.

77. For a more detailed account of what Wittgenstein means by experiencing the meaning of a word, see Lawrence Goldstein, 'What Does "Experiencing Meaning" Mean?' in *The Third Wittgenstein*, ed. Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 107–123. (I should point out, however, that I find Goldstein's critical comments on Julia Kristeva's style, which he puts forward in the conclusion of this essay, entirely superficial. When Goldstein speaks of Kristeva's writing as 'typically murky, pretentious, gobbledygook' (p. 120), one gets the sense that what is being carried out is less

a rigorous assessment of Kristeva's style and more an ideological attack on critical theory per se.) Wittgenstein's notion of meaning-blindness is, as has been widely noted, related to William James's notion of mental-blindness. See William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 59.

78. Added emphasis.

79. Cf. PI II, p. 179 ('Ask yourself "For how long am I struck by a thing?" – For how long do I find it *new*?').

80. Ezra Pound, *Make It New* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934). See also Ezra Pound, *The Cantos* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p. 265.

81. As Wittgenstein writes in the notes now assembled as *Remarks on Colour*: 'our concepts [. . .] stand in the middle of [our lives].' Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), §302.

82. Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism – Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,' in *One-Way Street* (London and New York: Verso, 1997), p. 227.

83. Translation modified.

84. Translation modified.

85. I do, however, defend Wittgenstein against the charges of outright philosophical conservatism and explore some connections with the thought of Raymond Williams, in Ben Ware, 'Williams and Wittgenstein: Language, Politics and Structure of Feeling', *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism* 9 (2011): 41–57.

86. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (1984 edition), p. 53.

87. Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia as Replication', in *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 434 (added emphasis).

88. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* (1984 edition), p. 3.

89. Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein's Lectures: Cambridge, 1932–1935*, p. 97.

90. Fredric Jameson, 'Utopia as Replication', in *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 434.

91. One thinks here of Margaret Thatcher's motto 'There is no alternative'; and Francis Fukuyama's proclamation of 'the end of history' in his *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). For a dialectical reading, which interprets Thatcher and other free-market triumphalists as espousing their own form of utopianism, see David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 176–177.

92. Theodor Adorno & Ernst Bloch, 'Something's Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing', in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*, trans. Jack Zipes & Frank Mecklenburg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), p. 4.

93. Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

Johannes de Silentio
and the Art of Subtraction: From Voice
to Love in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*

KIERKEGAARD AMONG THE MODERNISTS

'Take off your shoes, you are standing on holy ground'.[1] Such is the reverence with which a number of modernist authors approach the writings of Søren Kierkegaard. In a conversation with his friend M.O'C Drury, Wittgenstein is noted to have remarked that 'Kierkegaard was by far the most profound thinker of the last century. Kierkegaard was a saint.'[2] In his *Memoir* of Wittgenstein, Norman Malcolm also recalls that the philosopher referred to Kierkegaard 'with something of awe in his expression, as a "really religious man"', even going so far as to confess that he found Kierkegaard's work to be '"too deep" for him'.[3] Despite thinking of Kierkegaard as occupying a higher religious and spiritual plane than himself, Wittgenstein nevertheless 'learned Danish in order to be able to read Kierkegaard in the original'.[4] Clearly baffled by his protégé's intellectual investment, Bertrand Russell wrote to Lady Ottoline Morrell that he was 'astonished' to find that Wittgenstein 'reads people like Kierkegaard'.[5] The connection between the two thinkers is not, however, simply anecdotal. In an essay entitled 'Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy', Stanley Cavell recognizes a strong affinity between their respective philosophical outlooks: 'Both Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard see their worlds as

labouring under illusion. Both see their function as authors to be the uncovering or diagnosing of this illusion, and freeing us from it.'[6] More specifically, as Cavell continues:

> Kierkegaard's diagnosis of our illusion, our illness [. . .] is that we have lost the capacity for subjectivity, for inwardness, and therewith the capacity for Christianity. We [. . .] have stopped *living* our lives in favour of knowing them. Wittgenstein's diagnosis is that we have, in part because of our illusions about language, fixed or forced ideas of the way things must be, and will not *look and see* how they are. Kierkegaard finds us trying to escape our existence and our history; Wittgenstein finds us wishing to escape the limits of human forms of language and forms of life.[7]

Like Wittgenstein, Kafka is a writer very much guided by Kierkegaard's hand. In a diary entry of 21 August 1913, Kafka describes his first encounter with Kierkegaard's writings as signalling the start of an intellectual friendship: 'Today I got Kierkegaard's *Buch des Richters*. As I suspected, his case, despite essential differences, is very similar to mine, at least he is on the same side of the world. He bears me out like a friend.'[8] In a later letter to Oskar Baum, Kafka writes (echoing Wittgenstein) that 'Kierkegaard is a star, although he shines over territory that is almost inaccessible to me.'[9] In his last recorded remarks on Kierkegaard, however, Kafka goes on to articulate a more critical attitude. Writing to Max Brod, in March 1918, Kafka states that 'Kierkegaard is always in my mind these days'; yet he speaks of 'a certain cooling of my sympathy [towards him]'. Commenting upon the 1843 text *Fear and Trembling* (problematically attributed by Kafka directly to Kierkegaard), Kafka remarks: 'his affirmativeness turns truly monstrous and is checked only when it comes up against a perfectly ordinary helmsman. What I mean is, affirmativeness becomes monstrous when it reaches too high [. . .] he doesn't see the ordinary man [. . .] and paints the monstrous Abraham in the clouds.'[10]

Another modernist – or more accurately, anti-modernist modernist[11] – who comes under Kierkegaard's spell is the early Lukács. As one biographer puts it, the young Lukács sees 'in Kierkegaard someone resembling himself'[12]; and Lukács's 1910 essay, 'The Foundering of Form Against Life', emerges (although not uncritically) out of this identification.[13] In the essay, Lukács explores what he terms Kierkegaard's 'gesture': the latter's decision to break his romantic engagement with Regine Olsen barely a year into their relationship. The break involves a specific deception: Kierkegaard

displays a cynical indifference towards Olsen in the hope that she will be induced to end the relationship and so, in effect, will *free herself* from his 'terrible melancholy'. With this act, Lukács writes, 'Kierkegaard [makes] a poem of his life.'[14]

On Lukács's account, however, Kierkegaard's gesture raises an immediate ethical question: 'Can one be honest in the face of life, and yet stylize life's events in literary form? [. . .] The inner honesty of Kierkegaard's gesture of separation could only be assured if everything he did was for Regine Olsen's sake.'[15] Yet, as Lukács notes, Kierkegaard's sacrifice does not aim *exclusively* at saving Olsen; on the contrary, what it preserves (and indeed fuels) is that part of Kierkegaard's own creative life which he prizes above all else – his melancholy: 'There are beings to whom – in order that they may become great – anything even faintly resembling happiness and sunshine must always be forbidden. [. . .] Perhaps [Kierkegaard] was afraid that happiness might not be unattainable, that Regine's lightness might after all have redeemed his great melancholy [. . .]. But what would have become of him without his melancholy?'[16] Equally important on Lukács's assessment is Kierkegaard's view that love must be *absolute*: 'To love [is] to try never to be proved right', which means going beyond the emotional fluctuations and conflicts of everyday human relationships.[17] '[T]here can be constancy and clarity only if the lovers are qualitatively different from one another': 'love is sure and unquestionable only if [one is] never in the right'.[18] As Lukács observes, the only figure who can provide this kind of assurance is God; and in this respect, Olsen is for Kierkegaard 'no more than a step on the way that leads to the icy temple of nothing-but-the-love-of-God [. . .]. [E]ven the deeply loved woman [is] only a means, only a way toward the great, the only absolute, the love of God.'[19]

At the heart of this complex picture, Lukács discerns a tragic paradox. 'Kierkegaard's heroism', he writes, consists in his attempt to 'create forms from life', to 'live in such a way that every moment [becomes] rounded into the grand gesture'.[20] Kierkegaard's 'honesty' is that he pursues, to the very end, the difficult road he has chosen. His 'tragedy', however, is 'that he [wants] to live what cannot be lived'. That is, his gesture aims at giving structure to 'the deliquescent mass of reality', yet such an endeavour is ultimately futile: one cannot impose limitations on a reality in which 'everything flows'; one cannot impose form on life when, in life, 'everything points to more than one possibility'.[21] For Lukács, Kierkegaard should have clearly recognized this contradiction, given that his thought is based on a rejection of systematic thinking. Instead, the latter's denial of

a 'life system' ends up, unwittingly, becoming a system in its own right – one in which 'there is only the separate and individual, the concrete. To exist is to be different. And only the concrete, the individual phenomenon is the unambiguous, the absolute which is without nuance.'[22]

Lukács's remark that 'the denial of a life-system [is] itself a system – and very much so',[23] is intended to highlight a hidden connection between Kierkegaard and Hegel (one which Kierkegaard himself fails to see). For Lukács, however, the difference between the two thinkers is that Kierkegaard is avowedly non-dialectical in his approach: he does not invite one to 'seek "middle ways" or "higher unities" which might resolve [...] "merely apparent" contradictions'; rather, he presents us with a series of possibilities or stages – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious – which are 'sharply distinct'.[24] The main problem with Lukács's reading here is that it is itself undialectical: it conflates the life and the work, and in so doing fails to grasp the full complexity of Kierkegaard's authorship. Specifically, Lukács overlooks three key things about Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works in particular. First, these works are, crucially, *not* written in Kierkegaard's own hand; and we must therefore begin by respecting the autonomy of the pseudonymous authors. Second, the pseudonymous texts undermine the very idea that the aesthetic, ethical and religious spheres are rigidly separate; indeed, as we shall see, the pseudonymous author of *Fear and Trembling* moves freely between the first two of these spheres (aesthetic and ethical) whilst speaking constantly of the third (religious). Third, whilst Lukács suggests that Kierkegaard is undialectical, the latter repeatedly refers to his own philosophical activity *as* dialectical; and he argues that to see this one must be attentive to the particular *forms* which the works take. Not only, however, do the pseudonymous works describe themselves as dialectical in the Socratic sense, they also invite a certain kind of *dialectical reading*, which, as I demonstrate below, can be used to prise open their *political possibilities*. It is, then, precisely Kierkegaard's dialectic which the later Lukács fails to recognize when he argues that Kierkegaard is no more than a founding father of philosophical irrationalism.[25]

RIGHT IN FRONT OF OUR EYES

It is frequently argued that Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* contains a 'secret' or 'hidden' message – one which the book's pseudonymous author, Johannes de Silentio, fails to understand.[26] Such an account is, it is claimed, signalled in the work's enigmatic epigraph, extracted from

a letter by the German philosopher Johan Georg Hamann to Friedrich Nicolai: 'What Tarquin the Proud said in his garden with the poppy blooms was understood by the son but not by the messenger.'[27] In the legend, Tarquin the Proud's son, Sextus, sends a message to his father asking what he should do with the city of Gabii, having secured the confidence of its citizens. Without speaking to the messenger, Tarquin goes about in his garden and strikes the heads off the tallest poppies using his cane. When the confused messenger relates the incident back to Sextus, the latter perfectly understands what he needs to do: eliminate the leading citizens of the city in order to consolidate his power.

One way of relating *Fear and Trembling*'s epigraph to the work as a whole has been to see Johannes de Silentio as a version of the baffled messenger, set up by Kierkegaard to deliver a coded script (to the reader; to Kierkegaard's father; or to Regine Olsen, Kierkegaard's jilted lover)[28] which de Silentio himself does not fully comprehend. On this interpretation, the epigraph points to a gap between the work's surface content and its 'real' meaning; and it is this 'deeper hidden message' which the reader must labour to decipher.[29] Immediately, however, this account runs into a number of exegetical difficulties. First, authorial responsibility rests with de Silentio, not Kierkegaard[30]; and we must therefore assume that it is the former who has placed the epigraph at the beginning of a work which he also describes as a 'dialectical lyric'.[31] Second, if de Silentio has selected the epigraph with the intention of casting *himself* in the role of the confused messenger, then we need to register the clear irony at work here: whilst the messenger in the epigraph remains resolutely silent, de Silentio is, as the work itself attests, fully immersed in the world of discourse and writing – he is a 'poetic person' clearly intoxicated by his own art of communication.[32]

With these points in mind, a more fruitful approach to the epigraph is to see it as having a double function. First, in line with the dialectical character of the work as a whole, it gives prior warning to the reader about the book's method; signposts, specifically, that its mode of communicating will be *indirect*. Just as Tarquin conveys his political message to his son through the symbolic gesture of felling the poppy heads, so de Silentio will relate his religious message to the reader using alternative means: by adopting the persona of the 'poet or speech-maker' who looks upon his hero, Abraham, with *aesthetic admiration* (FT, 49). Second, the epigraph highlights a simple but important epistemological truth;

namely, that the reception of an *act* (in this case the cutting down of the poppy heads) is determined by the particular *aspect* under which it is perceived.[33] For the messenger, whose job is simply to communicate 'facts', Tarquin's gesture is meaningless [*Sinnlos*]; for Sextus, connected with his father through a variety of different language-games, the action has profound (political) significance. Recognizing the radical ambiguity of the act leads us to the very heart of *Fear and Trembling* – a work which explores the biblical story of Abraham's binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) – and specifically to de Silentio's observation that: 'The *ethical expression* for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac; the *religious expression* is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac' (FT, 60). The ethical and the religious thus constitute two opposing ways of seeing the *same act*; and in the contradiction between these perspectives, there lies, as de Silentio puts it, 'the very anguish that can indeed make one sleepless' (ibid).

DE SILENTIO'S DIALECTIC

Rather than looking for a single hidden message in *Fear and Trembling*, we need instead to pay closer attention to the surface of the work: to de Silentio's language, to the form of his narrative, to his repetitions, omissions, digressions, and numerous self-contradictions.[34] This is not to deny that there are concealed aspects within the text; on the contrary, it is to take seriously the Wittgensteinian point that 'the most important things for us *are* hidden', but hidden precisely because they remain right in front of our eyes (PI §129). Where, then, should we begin with the work? The Preface and Epilogue constitute what we might call the book's frame; and it is here that we find preliminary instructions for how to approach it. In the Preface, de Silentio writes: 'Not just in commerce but in the world of ideas too our age is putting on a venerable clearance sale. Everything can be had so dirt cheap that one begins to wonder whether in the end anyone will want to make a bid' (FT, 41). In an age of discounted thinking, in which all ideas are available at a knock-down price, 'nobody will stop with faith' – every 'speculative score-keeper [. . .], every lecturer, crammer, student, everyone on the outskirts of philosophy or at its centre [. . .] all go further' (ibid). What none of these people ask themselves, however, is *where* exactly they are going and *why*? The Epilogue commences with the following words: 'Once when the spice market in Holland was a

little slack, the merchants had some cargoes dumped at sea to force up the price. That was a pardonable, perhaps necessary, stratagem. Is it something similar we need [today] in the world of spirit?' (FT, 145). What has to be dumped at sea is, de Silentio suggests, cheaply acquired 'doubt' (pseudo-Cartesianism) (FT, 42–43) and passionless conceptual thinking – not only Hegel (the philosophical bugbear of *Fear and Trembling*), but also the various 'shareholders' (FT, 43) in the Hegelian System who suppose that 'to go beyond Hegel [. . .] is a miracle, but to go beyond Abraham is the simplest of all' (FT, 62). It is precisely this hierarchy – that places philosophy *above* faith, universality *higher* than the individual – which de Silentio's work seeks to overturn.

Understood in light of the frame, the authorial strategy of *Fear and Trembling* is clear: to inspire in the reader a *horror religiosus* with the aim of *driving up the price of faith*, just as the Dutch spice merchants dumped their cargoes at sea in order to raise their market price. The question, then, is *how* does the work achieve this aim? What methods does its author employ to convince readers that Christianity can't be purchased at a bargain price; and that, spiritually speaking, one needs to work in order to get one's bread (FT, 57)? Here it is possible to see de Silentio operating on a number of fronts. First, he subjects the bourgeois understanding of faith to a series of traumatic reversals: (i) faith is not 'logical' or 'verifiable', but is 'absurd', 'paradoxical' and 'inaccessible to thought' (FT, 85); (ii) faith and ethics are not harmoniously entwined, rather ethics is the 'temptation' that would keep one from doing God's will (FT, 88); and (iii) faith does not bring happiness and well-being, but instead distress, isolation and the 'shudder of thought' (FT, 103). In all of these instances, what de Silentio encourages is a *facing up to sacrifice*: seeing in Abraham's willingness to immolate Isaac a blueprint for the forfeiture of the present self (with its well-ordered account of the ethical and religious life), which is required if one is to make the 'infinite movement of resignation' and then, 'on the strength of the absurd', the final 'movement of faith' (FT, 76).

Whilst many readers might be inclined to take the two previous paragraphs as a summary of *Fear and Trembling* as a whole,[35] here I want to argue that they simply outline the first stage of the book's dialectic – the stage of provocation and shock in which the reader is forced to re-evaluate her own conception of faith in light of de Silentio's

pronouncements. The second stage of the dialectic opens up at a different juncture: when the reader moves from a religious interrogation of the self to a critical interrogation of the author – a shift which is brought about by the realization that things are not quite as they seem with de Silentio's text. Whilst this realization is prompted in different ways, and at different stages throughout *Fear and Trembling*, here we can highlight two specific instances. First, although the work begins in the mode of *Kulturkritik*, it shifts, in its second section ('Attunement'), to fiction ('There was once a man . . .' (FT, 44) and then, in the third section ('Speech in Praise of Abraham'), to a lyrical mode of address ('it is one thing to be admired, another to be a guiding star that saves the anguished' (FT, 54)). Already then, before we arrive at the theoretical substance of *Fear and Trembling*, de Silentio's return to Abraham's story shows itself to be an act of *artistic creativity* which places the question of form centre stage. Second, despite his lyrical 'passion' for Abraham, de Silentio makes two important confessions in the text: first, that he himself is not able to make 'the paradoxical movement of faith' because he lacks 'courage' (FT, 80 & 77); and second, that he finds in Abraham something 'monstrous', something which leads him to feel 'virtually annihilated' and 'constantly repulsed' (FT, 62). For de Silentio, Abraham thus figures as a kind of traumatic Thing [*Ding*]: an absolute and (strictly speaking) indescribable Other who provokes simultaneous attraction and repulsion.[36] This emotional struggle with Abraham must, however, also be placed in the context of a pseudonymous mode of authorship in which de Silentio plays the role of the Socratic midwife, assisting in the birth of a transfigured religious subjectivity.

It is here, then, that we arrive at the third stage of the book's dialectic – the stage which logically follows an interrogation of de Silentio's authorship.[37] Now we come to see that *Fear and Trembling* does indeed attempt to elevate faith over speculative philosophy, but not in the didactic way that was first thought. Faith is not a commodity whose price can be artificially driven up; rather, it has to be understood in terms of an activity of *love* – an activity which paradoxically goes further than modern attempts to 'go further' because it *never* reaches a 'standstill' (FT, 146). In what follows, I approach the topic of love via the topic of the voice: first, the voice that Abraham hears in Genesis 22, which he takes to be the voice of God the Father; and second, de Silentio's own (authorial) voice, and its complex relation to that of its literary and philosophical father, Kierkegaard.

TAKE TABLETS OR BELIEVE: ABRAHAM AND THE VOICE

To begin with Abraham, we need to return to God's promise in chapter 17 of the book of Genesis:

> When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [. . .] Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall [my wife] Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" [. . .] God said, [. . .] Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. [. . .] I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year. (Genesis 17:1–22)

Isaac is therefore, as Lacan notes, 'a miraculous child, the child of the promise. We can easily grasp why Abraham is attached to him.'[38] Abraham's attachment is not simply that of the loving and devoted father; the crucial point is that Isaac is the one through whom God has *promised* to carry on his line. Abraham's identity – his name – and his chance of posterity – 'It is through Isaac that your offspring shall be named' (Genesis 21:12) – both depend upon Isaac's existence. At Genesis 22, we thus run up against a cognitive limit, an ethico-logical void: having promised, through the son, to make Abraham the father of a multitude of nations, God then demands, without warning, that Isaac be sacrificed:

> After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.' (Genesis 22: 1–3)

Here God appears, in the words of Jacques-Alain Miller, simply to '[spit] in the milk of human kindness'.[39] Not only is Abraham being asked to violate all paternal bonds by killing his 'only' child (a not uncommon

event at that particular point in time);[40] he is, more significantly, being asked to accept that God would extinguish all worldly meaning by making a *mere nonsense* of his own earlier promise. As de Silentio thus writes: 'So all was lost, more terrible than if it had never been! So the Lord was only making sport of Abraham! Through a miracle he had made the preposterous come true, now he would see it again brought to nothing [. . .] [T]he blessing on Abraham's lips, this fruit was now to be plucked out of season and to have no meaning; for what meaning could there be in it if Isaac was to be sacrificed!' (FT, 53).

For Abraham it appears self-evident that the one who is issuing the command, the one who requires the sacrifice of Isaac, is none other than God; and, moreover, that what is to be done in response to this demand is itself unambiguous. Here, however, it might be argued that we are faced with a possible question (or series of questions) rather than a self-evident truth. How do we vouchsafe the authority and legitimacy of the voice? What does it mean to *know* that one is being addressed (interpellated)? And how, exactly, should one respond to such a demand?[41] These are questions taken seriously by Kant in a number of his later writings. In *A Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant argues that 'if God should really speak to man, man could still never *know* that it was God speaking. It is quite impossible for man to apprehend the infinite by his senses, distinguish it from sensible beings, and *recognise* it as such.' However, Kant also claims that there are certain situations in which one 'can be sure that the voice he hears is *not* God's; for if the voice commands him to do something contrary to the moral law then no matter how majestic the apparition may be, and no matter how it may seem to surpass the whole of nature, he must consider it an illusion'.[42] To illustrate his point, Kant turns specifically to Genesis 22:

> We can use, as an example, the myth of the sacrifice that Abraham was going to make by butchering and burning his only son at God's command (the poor child, without knowing it, even brought the wood for the fire). Abraham should have replied to this supposedly divine voice: 'That I ought not to kill my good son is quite certain. But that you, this apparition are God – of that I am not certain, and never can be, not even [as] this voice rings down to me from (visible) heaven.'[43]

Significantly, then, Kant does not deny outright the possibility of one hearing a divine voice; rather his point is that in order for it to count as an

expression of God's will, and therefore to be worthy of obedience, the voice must be in conformity with the *moral law* ('*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law*'). The appearance of the voice thus always raises the possibility of epistemic *uncertainty* ('After all, the revelation [has to pass] through the intermediary of human beings and [. . .] it is at least possible that on this point error has prevailed')[44]; and in 'Religion within the boundaries of mere reason', Kant formulates a principle which is intended to guide the subject's response to any supposedly 'higher' call: '*Apart from a good life-conduct, anything which the human being supposes that he can do to become well-pleasing to God is mere religious delusion and counterfeit service of God.*'[45]

A similar ethical approach to the voice is advanced by Emmanuel Levinas. Unlike Kant, however, Levinas focuses upon the conclusion rather than the beginning of the drama in Genesis 22:

> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." He said, "do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me"'. (Genesis 22: 10–12)

According to Levinas, '[t]he highest point of the whole drama may be the moment when Abraham paused and listened to the voice that would lead him back to the ethical order by commanding him not to commit a human sacrifice. That he should have been prepared to obey the first voice is of course astonishing enough; but the crucial point is that he could distance himself from his obedience sufficiently to be able to hear the second voice as well.'[46] Although Levinas does not spell out exactly why, on his view, Abraham's ability to hear the second voice involves distancing himself from his obedience to the first, we might note an ideological move which appears to underpin Levinas's emphasis on this 'second voice'. Following in the footsteps of Kant, Levinas's work shifts the sublime from the religious to the ethical: where Kant argues that the 'veiled Goddess before whom we [kneel] is the moral law [within]',[47] Levinas finds in the face of the human 'Other' an originary form of transcendence.[48] Both authors therefore reverse the traditional hierarchy of the commandments which place love of God above love of one's neighbour (Mark 12: 28–34).

As Levinas writes: 'A you is inserted between the I and the absolute He'[49]; and this mediating Other becomes the only way of protecting against the violence that threatens to break out when 'God is elevated above the ethical order'.[50] Abraham's victory thus arrives when, on hearing the second voice, he turns to the face of the Other – the face of Isaac in whom God reveals Himself by the 'trace'.[51] This (re)turning to the face, signals a recognition that, as Levinas puts it, '[d]eath has no dominion over [. . .] life whose meaning is derived from an infinite responsibility towards others [*autrui*]'.[52] The face of the Other thus speaks the words: 'Thou shalt not kill' (Exodus 20:13).

Setting aside the philosophical blind spots in Levinas's alterity ethics,[53] we can discern a clear connection between the 'second voice' which Levinas emphasizes and Kant's voice of 'conscience'. For the former, conscience is always linked to the face; and more specifically to 'the way the face summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question'.[54] According to the latter, conscience requires the internalization of the pure moral law 'whose voice makes even the boldest evildoer tremble and forces him to hide from its sight'.[55] For both thinkers, it would seem that prior to opening himself up to *the call of conscience* Abraham is behaving in a way that is both immoral (he is on the way to becoming a murderer) and irrational (he is little more than a blind idolater). However, such a view fails to register two things. First, whilst Abraham's ordeal fully depends upon his unfailing love for Isaac (without this love any talk of sacrifice would be meaningless), he also trusts that the ethical order will be restored: he understands that God's demand requires a suspension – one might say a *transfiguration* – of ethical duty rather than its simple negation.[56] As de Silentio writes:

> It doesn't follow, nevertheless, that [the ethical] is to be done away with. Only that it gets a quite different expression, the paradoxical expression so that, e.g., love of God can cause the knight of faith to give his love [. . .] the opposite expression to that which is his duty ethically speaking. (FT, 98)

Second, what guides Abraham is not the superegoic voice of conscience, but rather the uncompromising voice of desire – a voice which aims at the completion of reason rather than its annihiliation. This connection is neatly brought out by Mladen Dolar: 'If human psychic life has not yet quite reached the stage of the dictatorship of reason, it is not because

subjects are swayed by desire instead of listening to reason – quite the contrary, [. . .] they give up on reason because they do not persevere in their desire.'[57] We might thus say that what marks out Abraham as radically ethical is, paradoxically, his *refusal to give way on his desire for the logically impossible* (i.e. the restoration of Isaac).[58] Whilst Lacan famously uses a secular version of this ethical maxim to punctuate a discussion of Antigone and the tragic dimension of psychoanalytical experience,[59] we should note that unlike Antigone – and perhaps, more pertinently, Agamemnon – Abraham is *not* a tragic hero.[60] What distinguishes the latter is that he doesn't simply agree to sacrifice that which he loves for some higher social or political end. Abraham's intended sacrifice is not, as John Milbank Observes, 'a sacrifice to seal the city's future, not at all a foundational sacrifice'; rather, it is (potentially) an 'absurd sacrifice of the one individual who [. . .] bears the future city in his loins'.[61] More scandalously still, and unlike the tragic hero, Abraham is not resigned to his loss: he *fully expects* to get back what has been given up because 'for God all things are possible' (FT, 75). This, then, is the fully rational core of Abraham's faith; a faith which reconnects ear, voice and heart, and in so doing redefines the parameters of the possible.

The Call of the Socratic Midwife

On the strength of the voice alone, Abraham thus reasons 'that God [is] able to raise [Isaac] from the dead'; and 'figuratively speaking' this is precisely what happens (Hebrews 11: 17–19). In the words of the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Abraham's faith 'is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Hebrews 11: 1–2); and this 'evidence unseen', as the notion of resurrection, positions Abraham as an early exponent of dialectical thinking. To use Alain Badiou's phrase: 'resurrection is nothing but the negation of the negation'.[62] The question now, then, is how does Abraham stand in relation to that other practitioner of 'dialectics' (FT, 116), Johannes de Silentio? More specifically, where do we locate the voice that we encounter in *Fear and Trembling* – a voice which announces itself as emerging, quite literally, from 'the silent one'; and how do we define its specific purpose?

Following Gillian Rose, we should begin by highlighting the mistake of 'nonchalantly' attributing the words of *Fear and Trembling* to Johannes's philosophical father, Søren Kierkegaard.[63] This is common practice, even

amongst usually attentive readers. We thus encounter the following gloss in Adorno's *Kierkegaard: The Construction of an Aesthetic*:

> For Kierkegaard, consciousness must have pulled itself free from all external being by a movement of 'infinite resignation': through choice and decisiveness, it must have freely posited every content in order finally, in the face of the semblance of its own omnipotence, to surrender its omnipotence and, foundering, to purify itself of the guilt it acquired in having supposed itself autonomous.[64]

And, again, in the work of Derrida:

> The ethical involves me in a substitution, as does speaking. Whence the insolence of the paradox: for Abraham, Kierkegaard declares, *the ethical is a temptation*. He must therefore resist it. He keeps quiet in order to avoid the moral temptation which, under the pretext of calling him to responsibility, to self-justification, would make him lose his ultimate responsibility along with his singularity, make him lose his unjustifiable, secret, and absolute responsibility before God.[65]

The problem with approaches of this kind is not that they grant too much authority to 'Kierkegaard', but rather that they fail to take him at his word. At the end of *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to 'Philosophical Fragments'* (authored by the pseudonym Johannes Climacus), there appears a short statement, 'A First and Last Declaration', signed by one 'S. Kierkegaard'. Here Kierkegaard formally acknowledges his pseudonymous production (he is the author of *Either/Or* (A, Judge Willhelm, Victor Eremita); *Fear and Trembling* (Johannes de Silentio); *Repetition* (Constantine Constantius); *The Concept of Anxiety* (Vigilius Haufniensis); *Prefaces* (Nicolaus Notabene); *Philosophical Fragments* (Johannes Climacus); *Stages on Life's Way* (Hilarius Bookbinder, William Afham, the Judge, Frater Taciturnus); *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (Johannes Climacus); and three articles in *The Fatherland* (Victor Eremita, Frater Taciturnus)); and he goes on to clarify where exactly he stands in relation to these works:

> My pseudonymity or polynimity has not had an *accidental* basis in my *person* [. . .] but an *essential* basis in the *production* itself [. . .] Thus in the pseudonymous books there is not a single word by me, I have no opinion about them except as third party, no knowledge of their meaning except as a reader, not the remotest private relation to them, since it is impossible to

have that to a doubly reflected communication. A single word by me personally in my own name would be an arrogating self-forgetfulness that, regarded dialectically, would be guilty of having essentially annihilated the pseudonymous authors by this one word. [. . .] In *Fear and Trembling*, I am just as little, precisely just as little, Johannes de Silentio as the Knight of Faith he depicts, and in turn just as little the author of the preface to the book which is the individuality-lines of a poetically actual subjective thinker. (CUP, 625–626)

Whilst it is tempting to read this statement as protesting too much – the forceful repudiation and calculated distancing seem to indicate that these works are in fact *precisely* those which the author of the declaration feels are most personal – we have no choice (if we are to avoid the obvious pitfalls of a psychological reading) other than to take Kierkegaard at face value ('if it should occur to anyone to want to quote a particular passage from the books, it is my wish, my prayer, that he will do me the kindness of citing the respective pseudonymous author's name, not mine' (CUP, 627)). Interestingly, one reader who follows this strategy (almost) to the letter is the pseudonym Johannes Climacus. According to Climacus, *Fear and Trembling* dramatizes an existential collision, at the level of the voice, between lyrical 'passion' and 'absolute silence'. De Silentio is not so much an existing individual as a reflective consciousness, 'who, with the *tragic hero* as the *terminus a quo* [. . .] the interesting as the *confinium* [border territory] and the religious paradigmatic irregularity as the *terminus ad quem* [point to which], continually knocks the forehead, so to speak, of the understanding, while the lyric springs from the recoil' (CUP, 262). Everything in the book, on Climacus's view, turns on the issue of form:

> The contrast of form is altogether necessary for every production in these spheres. In the form of direct communication, in the form of bellowing, fear and trembling are insignificant, because the direct communication expressly indicates that the direction is outward, towards screaming, not inward into the abyss of inwardness, where *fear and trembling* became terrible, which when expressed, can be only in a deceptive form. (Ibid.)

What Climacus is saying here, somewhat opaquely, is that the attempt to communicate a religious truth directly (by way of an explicit doctrine) will be of no great moment: the reader-recipient will simply appropriate the thought as yet another piece of easily digestible knowledge. To move the reader to a new level of inwardness then, to get her

to experience *actual* fear and trembling, requires a new kind of author-ship; and more specifically, *a deceptive form*. What does it mean, in this sense, to deceive? 'It means that one does not begin *directly* with the matter one wants to communicate, but begins by accepting the other man's illusion as good money. So [. . .] one does not begin thus: I am Christian; you are not a Christian. Nor does one begin thus: It is Christianity I am proclaiming; you are living in purely aesthetic cate-gories. No, one begins thus: Let us talk about aesthetics.'[66] At the start of *Fear and Trembling*, we are thus introduced to de Silentio – 'a poetic person who exists only among poets' – who is 'happy that [he] is not himself' the hero (God), happy 'that his love can indeed be [aesthetic] admiration', and who is, 'so to speak, the *hero's* better nature' (FT, 49). Beginning with the aesthetic is, however, part of a dialectical strategy whereby the narrator finds the reader 'where [s]he is' and then attempts to disabuse her of certain illusions of thought:

> The gist of it all can be expressed in *one* word: the method must be indirect. But the development of this method may require the labour of years, alert attention every hour of the day, daily practice of the scales, or patient finger-exercise in the dialectical, not to speak of a never-slumbering fear and trembling. [. . .] One can deceive a person for the truth's sake and (to recall old Socrates) one can deceive a person into the truth. Indeed, it's only by this means, i.e. by deceiving [. . .], that it is possible to bring into the truth one who is in an illusion [. . .] [T]he deception consists in the fact that one talks [about aesthetics] merely to get to the religious theme.[67]

What we thus encounter in *Fear and Trembling* is a repetition of the Socratic method. Like Socrates, de Silentio's aim is to bring the subject to self-awareness: a process which consists in reminding her of something which has been forgotten – namely, the 'honest seriousness' (FT, 145) that belongs to faith. This state of forgetfulness is linked not to a lack of knowledge, but rather to an *excessive investment in knowing*: what de Silentio calls in the Preface the desire to always 'go further' (FT, 41). Enabling the subject to remember what has been forgotten, involves a deceptive or indirect strategy which, beginning with the poetic voice, proceeds by way of subtraction:

> [T]he art of being able to *communicate* eventually becomes the art of being able to *take* away [. . .]. When a man has filled his mouth so full of food that for this reason he cannot eat and it must end with his dying of hunger, does giving food to him consist in stuffing his mouth even more or, instead, in

taking a little away so that he can eat? Similarly, when a man is very knowl-
edgeable but his knowledge is meaningless or virtually meaningless to him,
does sensible communication consist in giving him more to know [. . .] or
does it consist, instead, in taking something away from him? (CUP, 275)

Crucially, what *Fear and Trembling* attempts to subtract from the reader is
not only the fetishistic desire to 'go further', but also *the very idea* that in
order to arrive at faith one needs an authoritative and reliable 'guide'. We
can illustrate the point with a brief example from the text. In the
'Problemas', de Silentio argues that 'Abraham cannot be mediated,
which can also be put by saying that he cannot speak': 'Talk he cannot,
he speaks no human language. Though he himself understood all the
tongues of the world, though the loved ones understood them too – he
still could not talk – he speaks a divine tongue – he "speaks with tongues"'
(FT, 89, 138). This claim is, however, literally false: in Genesis 22
Abraham speaks three times – to God ('Here I am'), to his servants
('Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship
and come again to you'), and to Isaac ('Here I am, my son [. . .] God will
provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son'). It would thus
appear that de Silentio has questions to answer regarding the accuracy of
his interpretation, his fidelity to the Word, and his general reliability as a
narrator. As one commentator questions: 'Can we really expect [de
Silentio's] mode of reading to clarify the true nature of religious faith?'[68]

Might we not argue, however, that de Silentio's unreliability is itself a
vital part of his poetico-philosophical strategy? In the 'Problemata', we
hear the tale of the righteous priest who bases his Sunday sermon on
Abraham without showing any 'signs of heat or perspiration' (FT, 59).
No doubt this priest would be able to faithfully relate the 'facts' of
Abraham's story, but clearly he could have no sense of what was most
important about it: the utter 'anguish' upon which it rests (FT, 58). De
Silentio, by contrast, eschews a positivist re-telling of Genesis 22 in
favour of a rediscovery of its spirit: he puts into practice Lacan's dictum
that truth often takes the form of fiction.[69] More precisely, we can say
that for de Silentio truth resides in (deliberate) inaccuracy, inconsistency
and exaggeration: rhetorical devices which connect him with a number
of twentieth-century dialectical thinkers, most notably the later Adorno.
In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno writes that 'the demand for intellectual
honesty is itself dishonest'; instead 'knowledge comes to us through a
network of prejudices, opinions, innervations, self-corrections,

presumptions and exaggerations'.[70] In a later section entitled 'Keeping One's Distance', he writes as follows:

> While thought relates to facts, and moves by criticising them, its movement depends no less on the maintenance of distance. It expresses exactly what is, precisely because what is is never quite as thought expresses it. Essential to it is an element of exaggeration, of over-shooting the object, of self-detachment from the weight of the factual, so that instead of merely reproducing being it can, at once rigorous and free, determine it.[71]

Read alongside Adorno, we can thus see de Silentio's description of Abraham's silence as one which challenges the falsity of the purely 'factual' account. Distancing itself from the empirically true, the latter's text advances 'by way of extremes' (to use Adorno's phrase about the dialectic); and it is precisely on account of this method that it is able to capture something of Abraham's *excess* – that 'monstrous paradox' which resides at his core (FT, 62).

There is another way in which truth and fiction are related in *Fear and Trembling*. After the Preface, the narrative begins with the 'Once upon a time' story of a child (the narrator) who heard 'that beautiful tale of how God tried Abraham' (FT, 44). Taken as a straightforward guide to faith, the story is clearly confused, focusing as it does purely on the narrator's relation with Abraham, rather than his relation with God. Read as part of a dialectical lyric, however, it assumes an entirely different character, beyond true and false. First, it depicts the narrator's fascination with something terrifying – Abraham's journey and his aborted act; and here the literary form allows him to draw close to this event whilst simultaneously holding it at a distance. Second, keeping in mind the specific mode of authorship, it invites the reader to question the narrator's attachment to Abraham and to interrogate the particular fantasy which the former articulates:

> his soul had but one wish, actually to see Abraham, and one longing, to have been witness to [the] events [on Mount Moriah] (FT, 44)

What is evident in this desire to have been present at the scene is a privileging of curiosity (*Neugier*) over wonder (*Erstaunen*). This detached mode of seeing, what Heidegger terms 'a mere looking at or looking over [...] a gaping at', is, however, as much a feature of modernity as the drive to always 'go further'; indeed, there is an

intimate connection between the attempt to intellectually master the world and the emergence of an objectifying eye. Does this then mean that de Silentio unwittingly succumbs to the very world view he criticizes? The truth, it would appear, is much more interesting. For what the tension points to is nothing less than a fracture running through *Fear and Trembling* as a whole – one which divides expression and form. *What* de Silentio says is repeatedly and deliberately called into question by *how* it is said; and the function of this gap is to drive forward the work's dialectic.

Love, Sacrifice and the Politics of Repetition

I argued in the introduction that to grasp the point of *Fear and Trembling* is to see it in terms of a series of dialectical movements: (i) stupid first impression: the book advocates an irrationalist, divine-command view of the religious life and aims to raise the price of faith; (ii) ingenious correction: the book is a complex 'dialectical lyric' produced by a sophisticated author who we can't simply treat as expressing the views of 'Kierkegaard'; (iii) back to the reality of the appearance: the book does indeed seek to lead the reader back to faith, but not in the didactic way that was first supposed. Rather, we come to understand that, as St Paul puts it, 'faith [works only] through love' (Galatians 5:6). In the conclusion, I want to explore this final stage and to look specifically at how 'the infinite tension of love's activity'[72] plays out in de Silentio's text.

Given my suggestion that de Silentio is a kind of anti-Hegelian Hegelian, it is perhaps instructive to consider the following remark on Abraham and love in Hegel's *Early Theological Writings*:

> Love alone was beyond [Abraham's] power; even the one love he had, his love for his son, even his hope for posterity – the one mode of extending his being, the one mode of immortality he knew and hoped for – could depress him, trouble his all-exclusive heart and disquiet it to such an extent that even this love he once wished to destroy; and his heart was quieted only through the certainty of the feeling that this love was not so strong as to render him unable to slay his beloved son with his own hand.[73]

According to Hegel, Abraham regards the whole world 'as simply his opposite'; this world is perceived by Abraham as sustained by a God who is wholly 'alien to it'; and because it is 'through God alone that Abraham

[comes] into a mediate relation with the world', '[m]astery is the only possible relationship' which Abraham can assume vis-à-vis 'the infinite world opposed to him'.[74] Although Abraham is 'unable himself to make this mastery actual' (it is merely 'ceded to his Ideal' (God)), the desire to subjugate the world nevertheless snaps the bonds of communal life and love. As Hegel writes, love alone (i.e. love outside of obedience to divine authority) is beyond Abraham's power.

In *Fear and Trembling*, de Silentio fully agrees with Hegel that Abraham is supremely alienated ('a stranger to the soil and to men alike', to use the latter's phrase)[75]; however, the two diverge on a vital point regarding Abraham's standing. For Hegel, Abraham's faith is a moment in the unfolding of the human spirit on the way to a more complete form of selfhood (i.e. modern Christianity as a component of *Sittlichkeit*); for de Silentio, by contrast, Abraham is a knight of faith and, as such, is already an ideal representation of authentic selfhood: 'the single individual as the particular is higher than the universal' (FT, 84). Therefore, whilst Hegel regards Abraham's relation to God as 'a direct slavery, an obedience without joy, without pleasure or love',[76] de Silentio takes Abraham's faith to be love's highest possible expression: 'For he who loved himself became great in himself, and he who loved others became great through his devotion, but he who loved God became greater than all' (FT, 50). Moreover, contra Hegel, Abraham's love for God is, according to de Silentio, matched by his love for Isaac:

> The absolute duty can then lead to what ethics would forbid, but it can by no means make the knight of faith have done with loving. This is shown by Abraham. The moment he is ready to sacrifice Isaac, the ethical expression for what he does is this: he hates Isaac. But if he actually hates Isaac he can be certain that God does not require this of him; for Cain and Abraham are not the same. Isaac he must love with all his soul. When God asks for Isaac, Abraham must if possible love him even more, and only then can he *sacrifice* him; for it is indeed this love of Isaac that in its paradoxical opposition to his love of God makes his act a sacrifice. (*FT*, 101)

It would, however, be a mistake to see *Fear and Trembling* as concentrating solely on Abraham's love for God and Isaac; indeed, to do so would be to miss what is, in one sense, right in front of our eyes. De Silentio's aim, broadly speaking, is to get the reader to understand

faith *as* an activity of love.[77] As he puts it at a crucial point in the Epilogue: 'faith is the highest passion in a human being. [...] [A] nyone who comes to faith (whether he be greatly talented or simple minded makes no difference) won't remain at a standstill there. Indeed, he would be shocked if anyone said this to him. Just as the lover would be indignant if someone said he had come to a standstill in his love, for he would reply, 'I'm by no means standing still in my love, for I have my *whole life in it*' (FT, 146–147). To bring the reader to this realization, however, involves an act of love on de Silentio's part – not simply the production of *Fear and Trembling* (itself a patchwork of different love stories), but more specifically offering *himself* up as a sacrifice. It is love, we might say, which motivates not only the narrator's art of deception but also his final self-elimination – a gesture already hinted at in the name 'de Silentio', but which in the text is effectuated by (i) his (repeated) admission that he lacks the courage for faith, and (ii) the (deliberate) tension between the work's form and its content. What the reader is finally brought to see then is that there is no Master-narrator, no subject of absolute knowledge, who can be relied upon to serve up religious truths. One must set out 'not knowing where [one is] going' (Hebrews 11:8) and, following *The Sickness Unto Death*'s Anti-Climacus, find the truth that is true for oneself.

Here, however, it might seem that we arrive at an impasse. Given that de Silentio's sacrifice is part of an attempt to transform the reader's understanding of faith, isn't it, one might ask, bound up with a kind of instrumental logic – the expectation of a 'return' on a particular 'investment'? Isn't the narrator's love, then, finally unable to free itself from the networks of (economic) exchange which it imagines itself opposed to? To read de Silentio's act within the framework of exchange is, I would argue, to fail to grasp its radical character. The narrator's final *self-subtraction* is not a heroic gesture aimed at raising his moral status or securing some other worldly reward (he is no martyr). Instead de Silentio subverts the traditional notion of sacrifice[78]: his gesture simply invites the reader to return his love by, paradoxically, going beyond him. At the end of *Fear and Trembling*, what the reader thus comes to see is that she can demonstrate love for the narrator only by *giving him up*.[79] This act of renunciation has at least two important consequences: first, it ushers in the realization that one must 'begin afresh': 'no generation

can begin other than at the beginning' (FT, 145); and second, it prompts the further reflection that any new beginning will, at the same time, be a repetition: 'no generation begins other than where its predecessor did' (FT, 145). Both of these consequences, clearly spelled out in *Fear and Trembling*'s Epilogue, offer themselves up for a *materialist* interpretation (something quite contrary to de Silentio's own logic, but which the book's dialectic nevertheless invites). In a short text entitled 'Notes of a Publicist', published in *Pravda* in 1924, Lenin writes as follows:

> Communists who have no illusions, who do not give way to despondency, and who preserve their strength and flexibility 'to begin from the beginning' over and over again in approaching an extremely difficult task, are not doomed (and in all probability will not perish).[80]

In a gloss on this important passage, Slavoj Žižek observes that '[t]his is Lenin at his Beckettian best, echoing the last line from *Worstword Ho*: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." Lenin's [...] conclusion – "to begin from the beginning over and over again" – makes it clear that he is not talking merely of slowing down progress in order to fortify what has already been achieved, but precisely of *descending back to the starting point* [...] In Kierkegaard's terms, a revolutionary process is not a gradual progress, but a repetitive movement, a movement of *repeating the beginning* again and again.'[81] Being prepared to begin from the beginning is therefore a matter of both tactics and ethics: it requires, in de Silentio's words, 'an honest seriousness which fearlessly and incorruptibly calls attention to the tasks' (*FT*, 145). But this beginning is also a *beginning again*, a repetition: a movement which has to be continually remade as part of any process of political becoming. It is here then that we encounter a model for militant political love. 'When everything has stalled, when thought is immobilised [...] when explanation returns home in despair',[82] what is required is not the resigned strength to simply 'go on', but rather the resolute courage to declare: '*back to the start*'. It is repetition which opens up the possibility of the radically new; or, as Constantin Constantius (one of Kierkegaard's other pseudonyms) puts it: 'repetition [...] is a task for freedom, [...] it signifies freedom itself, consciousness raised to the second power'.[83]

Notes

1. Søren Kierkegaard. *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 116 (38 II A 772).
2. M. O'C Drury, 'Some Notes on Conversations with Wittgenstein', in Rush Rhees ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, p. 87.
3. Norman Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir*, pp. 59–60.
4. H. D. P. Lee, 'Wittgenstein 1929–1931', *Philosophy* 54 (1979): 211–220 (218).
5. Letter: Bertrand Russell Lady Ottoline, The Hague 20 December 1919, cited in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Cambridge Letters: Correspondence with Russell, Keynes, Moore, Ramsey and Sraffa*, Brian McGuinness & Georg Henrik von Wright eds. (London: Blackwell, 1997), p. 140.
6. Stanley Cavell, 'Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy', in *Themes out of School: Effects and Causes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 217. For further explorations of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, see Ben Ware, *Dialectic of the Ladder*, ch 2; James Conant, 'Putting Two and Two Together: Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and the Point of View for Their Work as Authors', in *The Grammar of Religious Belief*, ed. D.Z. Phillips (New York: St. Martins Press, 1996); M. J. Ferreira, 'The Point Outside the World: Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein on Nonsense, Paradox and Religion', *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 29–44; Genia Schönbaumsfeld, *A Confusion of the Spheres.*
7. Cavell, 'Existentialism and Analytical Philosophy', p. 218.
8. Franz Kafka, *The Diaries: 1910–1923*, ed. Max Brod (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), p. 230.
9. Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family and Editors*, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (London: Calder, 1978), p. 162.
10. Ibid., p. 200. Despite this gulf – similar to the one acknowledged by Wittgenstein – Kafka's penultimate diary entry (written in December 1922, 18 months before his death) reads as follows: 'All this time in bed. Yesterday *Either/Or*'. Kafka, *The Diaries*, p. 423. See, Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1992).
11. For Lukács's famous critique of modernism, see Georg Lukács, 'The Ideology of Modernism', in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, trans. John and Necke Mander (Lonodn: Merlin Press, 1963).
12. Lee Congdon, *The Young Lukács* (Chapel Hill: University of North Caroline Press, 1983), p. 50. This fascination with Kierkegaard's writing persists throughout Lukács's life, as the following anecdote from András Nagy reveals: 'In the studio apartment of György Lukács (1885–1971), overlooking the Danube, in the small room left the same way as it was when he got up the last time to walk to his bed before his death, right behind the writing table, packed with manuscripts, books, notes, and cigars, there is the *oeuvre* of Søren

Kierkegaard, just on the level that is easiest to reach by hand, right as one stands up from the arm chair and turns to the bookshelves. For Hegel one has to bend, for Goethe to walk to the other room, even Marx and Engels are at a distance.' András Nagy, 'György Lukács: From a Tragic Love Story to a Tragic Life Story', *Kierkegaard's Influence on Socio-Political Thought*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 107.

13. This identification is not just intellectual, but also deeply personal. In the relationship between Kierkegaard and Regine Olsen, Lukács discovered what appears to have been a model for his own relationship with Irma Seidler. As Ágnes Heller puts it: Lukács 'created his relationship to Irma Seidler. He created it and recreated it again and again. He created it and recreated it according to the rules of "Platonic" conduct: through the prism of *others*' fates, *others'* works, *others*' "forms".' Ágnes Heller, 'Georg Lukács and Irma Seidler', *New German Critique* 18 (Autumn, 1979): 74–106 (74). See also Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, ch. 2. The young Lukács's debilitating melancholia and his belief that one must choose between life (romantic love) and work (intellectual labour) – and choosing in favour of the latter – are thoroughly Kierkegaardian. Following Irma's suicide in 1911, certain entries in Lukács's diary read like quotations from Kierkegaard's diary following the latter's separation from Regine Olsen. It would be no exaggeration to say that, during the period of *Soul and Form*, Lukács was extracting from Kierkegaard's life and work a precise intellectual and emotional blueprint.

14. György Lukács, 'The Foundering of Form Against Life', in *Soul & Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 47.

15. Ibid., p. 48.

16. Ibid., pp. 49–50.

17. Ibid., p. 50.

18. Ibid., pp. 50–51.

19. Ibid., p. 52.

20. Ibid., pp. 56–57.

21. Ibid., pp. 56, 47, 57.

22. Ibid., p. 48.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Georg Lukács, *The Destruction of Reason*, trans. Peter Palmer (London: The Merlin Press, 1980), pp. 243–305.

26. Ronald M. Green, 'Deciphering *Fear and Trembling*'s Secret Message', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (March, 1986): 95–111; Ronald M. Green, 'Enough is Enough! *Fear and Trembling* is Not about Ethics', *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall, 1993): 191–209; Ronald M. Green, '"Developing" Fear and Trembling', in *The Cambridge*

Companion to Kierkegaard, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 257–281; Michelle Kosche, 'What Abraham Couldn't Say', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, LXXXII (2008): 59–78.

27. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 39. Hereafter FT in the text, followed by a page number. Where other translations are referred to details will be given in the notes.

28. The idea of *Fear and Trembling* as a message to Regine Olsen is suggested by, amongst others, Alastair Hannay, *Kierkegaard: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 191.

29. Ronald M. Green, 'Enough is Enough! Fear and Trembling is Not about Ethics', 203. Green also suggests that we might read *Fear and Trembling* as a secret message to Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard, Søren's father.

30. For a more detailed exploration of the pseudonymous mode of authorship see the section entitled 'The Call of the Socratic Midwife' in this chapter.

31. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition: Kierkegaard's Writings VI*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna N. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 1.

32. Ibid., p. 243. On an early title page de Silentio is described as 'a poetic person who exists only among poets'.

33. For a detailed discussion of the significance of 'seeing aspects', the reader is invited to refer back to Chapter 2 of this study.

34. This is to say that what *Fear and Trembling* presents us with is the difficult work of *interpretation*. The idea of a single hidden message suggests that there is the possibility of a shortcut through the text, through the maze of de Silentio's language.

35. For a reading of *Fear and Trembling* which takes the work's aim to be one of 'driving up the price of faith', see John D. Caputo, 'Instants, Secrets and Singularities: Dealing Death in Kierkegaard and Derrida', in *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity*, eds. Martin Matuštík and Merold Westphal (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 216–238.

36. For a more detailed discussion of Lacan's notion of *Das Ding* (the Thing), which is being alluded to here, see Chapter 6 of this study.

37. The schema I am applying here is the one described in the Introduction and suggested by Fredric Jameson in his essay 'The Three Names of The Dialectic'.

38. Jacques Lacan, *On the Names-of-the-Father*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 84.

39. Jacques-Alain Miller, 'The Non-Existent Seminar', *Symptom* 11, Spring 2010. <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache: WhcIjSA_Tv8J:www.lacan.com/symptom11/%3Fp%3D26+&cd=1&hl= en&ct=clnk&gl=uk> [accessed 30/07/2016].

40. See, for example, the list of biblical references to child sacrifice in Jean-Luc Marion, 'Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Sacrifice', in *Jean-Luc Marion the Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

41. Here we can recall Martin Buber's remark that 'the problematic position of the decision of faith is preceded by the problematic situation of the hearing itself'. Martin Buber, 'The Suspension of Ethics', in *Four Existentialist Theologians*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 251. For a history of religious and philosophical voice hearing, see Simon McCarthy-Jones, *Hearing Voices: The Histories, Causes and Meanings of Auditory Verbal Hallucinations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pt. I & II.

42. Immanuel Kant, *A Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), p. 115. For a more detailed discussion of Kant and the moral law, see Chapter 5 of the current study.

43. Ibid.

44. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 180 [AK 6:187].

45. Ibid., p. 166 [AK 6:170–171].

46. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Existence and Ethics', in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Jonathan Rée and Jane Chamberlain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 34–35.

47. Immanuel Kant, 'On a Newly Arisen Superior Tone in Philosophy', in *Raising the Tone of Philosophy: Late Essays by Immanuel Kant*, ed. Peter Fenves (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 71.

48. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 184–219; Emmanuel Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 82–83. See also Levinas's remarks on the face in the interview in Robert Bernasconi & David Wood eds, *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 168–180.

49. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Enigma and Phenomenon', in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1996), p. 77.

50. Levinas, 'Existence and Ethics', p. 33.

51. For an exposition of the trace, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Ethics*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Springer, 1991). For a wider discussion, see Emmanuel Levinas, *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God: Essays on the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. Jeffrey Bloechl (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

52. Ibid., p. 34. We should note, however, that this responsibility for the Other does not, for Levinas, go all the way down, certainly not where political issues are concerned. In a radio interview broadcast shortly after the massacres of hundreds of Palestinians at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Israeli occupied Lebanon in 1982, an interviewer asks Levinas, 'Emmanuel Levinas, you are the philosopher of the "other". Isn't history, isn't politics the very site of the encounter with the "other," and for the Israeli isn't the "other" above all Palestinian?' To which Levinas answers:

> My definition of the other is completely different. The other is the neighbor, who is not necessarily my kin but who may be. But if your neighbor attacks another neighbor, or treats him unjustly, what can you do? Then alterity takes on another character, in alterity we can find an enemy, or at least we are faced with the problem of knowing who is right and who is wrong, who is just and who is unjust. There are people who are wrong.
>
> ('Ethics and Politics', *Levinas Reader*, p. 294)

Here, then, we might recall Alain Badiou's remark (which appears in the context of a robust indictment of Levinas's ethics of alterity) that 'this celebrated "other" is acceptable only if he [or she] is a good other'. See Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans Peter Hallward (London: Verso, 2001), p. 24. Commenting specifically upon Levinas's remarks in the radio interview, Slavoj Žižek writes of the 'shift from high theory to vulgar common-sense reflections. What Levinas is basically saying is that, as a principle, respect for alterity is unconditional (the highest sort of respect), but, when faced with a concrete other, one should nonetheless see if he is a friend or an enemy. In short, in practical politics, the respect for alterity strictly *means nothing*.' Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 106–107.

53. For a trenchant critique of Levinas's ethics, see Slavoj Žižek, 'Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence', in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Alain Badiou, *Ethics*, pp. 18–30.

54. Levinas, 'Ethics as First Philosophy', p. 83.

55. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 68 [AK 5:79–80]. Kant's views on conscience are most clearly articulated in Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 160–161 [AK 6:400–401] & pp. 188–191 [AK 6:438–441].

56. See, for example, FT, 98.

57. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), p. 100. Here we might also note the following observation made by Terry Eagleton: 'For Saint Anselm, reason is itself rooted in God, so that one can attain it fully only through faith. This is part of what he means by his celebrated assertion "I believe in order to understand" – a proposition which in a different sense could also apply to believers like socialists and feminists'. Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 120.

58. The kind of desire being spoken of here is quite obviously different from desire under the rule of 'the flesh' which, as John Caputo points out, is locked into the 'cycle of prohibition [law] and transgression'. Abraham initiates a whole new order, Caputo writes, in which desire 'has become pure love and pure affirmation beyond having'. John Caputo, 'Postcards from Paul: Subtraction versus Grafting', in *St. Paul Among the Philosophers*, ed. John Caputo and Linda Martin Alcoff (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 5.

59. Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psycholanalysis 1959–1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 392. Hereafter, Lacan SVII followed by a page number.

60. In this respect, there is an interpretive problem with Marcus Pound's claim that 'Lacan's reading of Antigone gives us a clue to Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. Instead of situating the work in terms of Kierkegaard's developmental schemes or stages, one should simply substitute Antigone for Abraham.' Marcus Pound, *Theology, Psychoanalysis and Trauma* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 111.

61. John Milbank, 'The Sublime in Kierkegaard', in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Phillip Blond (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 144.

62. Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 65.

63. Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 8–14.

64. Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 107.

65. Jacques Derrida, 'Who to Give to (Knowing Not to Know)', in *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, p. 157.

66. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 40–41.

67. Ibid., pp. 38–41.

68. Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance & Originality: Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 373.

69. Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, pp. 376, 625, 684.
70. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 80. On the topic of exaggeration in philosophy more generally, see Alexander García Düttmann, *Philosophy of Exaggeration*, trans. James Phillips (London: Continuum, 2007).
71. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, pp. 126–128.
72. I borrow this useful phrase from Michael O'Neill Burns, *Kierkegaard and the Matter of Philosophy: A Fractured Dialectic* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), p. 187.
73. G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 187.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., p. 186.
76. For Hegel, true alienation-negating love – that is, love beyond *mere* obedience to law – is expressed through the life of Jesus Christ: 'This spirit of Jesus, a spirit raised above morality, is visible, directly attacking laws, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is an attempt, elaborated in numerous examples, to strip the laws of legality, of their legal form. The sermon does not teach reverence for the laws; on the contrary, it exhibits that which fulfils the law but annuls it as law and so is something higher than obedience to law and makes law superfluous' (Ibid., p. 212).
77. On the connection between faith and love in Kierkegaard, see, for example, John J. Davenport, 'Faith as Eschatological Trust in *Fear and Trembling*', in Edward F. Mooney ed. *Ethics, Love and Faith in Kierkegaard* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), pp. 196–233; Sharon Krishek, *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Clare Carlisle, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (London: Routledge, 2010).
78. On the topic of sacrifice, see, for example, Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *The Mark of the Sacred*, trans. M. B. Debevoise (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation* of the World, trans. Stephen Bann & Michael Metteer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987); *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1977); Henri Hubert and Marcel Maus, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W. D. Halls (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1964); Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 1992); Žižek, *On Belief*.
79. The reader will note that this is a paraphrase of a remark made by Ellen Olenska to Newland Archer in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*: 'I can't love you unless I give you up'. Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), p. 172. For an excellent Lacanian exploration of romantic love which takes this remark as its title see, Renata Salecl, 'I Can't Love You Unless I Give You Up', in *(Per)versions of Love and Hate*

(London: Verso, 2000), pp. 6–33. One is here also reminded of Lacan's remark: 'I am not [here], in the final analysis for a person's own good, but in order that he love.' Jacques Lacan, *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), p. 15.

80. V. I. Lenin, 'Notes of a Publicist, On Ascending a High Mountain; The Harm of Despondency; The Utility of Trade; Attitude Towards the Mensheviks, Etc.', *Pravda*, no. 87, 16 April 1924, in *Lenin's Collected Works*, Vol. 33. 2nd ed. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 204–211. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1922/feb/x01.htm [Accessed: 30/07/2016]. Cited by Slavoj Žižek, 'How to Begin from the Beginning', in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas & Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), p. 210.

81. Žižek, 'How to Begin at the Beginning', p. 210.

82. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/ Repetition*, p. 212.

83. Ibid., p. 324.

Tragic-Dialectical-Perfectionism: On Beckett's *Endgame*

FORLORN PARTICULARS

Trying to understand Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* as an ethical work might present itself as a difficult, if not an impossible, task. Where should one begin to look for ethical meaning in a play punctuated by acts of cruelty and violence, in which one of the characters – a starving, legless human, confined to a trashcan – famously remarks: '[n]othing is funnier than unhappiness'?[1] If ethics is, as the philosopher Bernard Williams claims, always bound up with the Socratic question 'how should one live?',[2] then we might ask, following Theodor Adorno: how is it possible to ascertain ethical significance in a work in which 'humankind continues to vegetate, creeping along after events that even the survivors cannot really survive, on a rubbish heap that has made even reflection on one's own damaged state useless'?[3]

Questions regarding the ethical nature of Beckett's work are necessarily bound up with the broader issue of the relationship between his art and philosophy.[4] In his essay, 'Trying to Understand *Endgame*' ['Versuch, das "Endspiel" zu verstehen'], Adorno probes this relationship only to conclude that 'Beckett shrugs his shoulders at the possibility of philosophy today, at the very possibility of theory'.[5] For Adorno, the type of philosophy that Beckett's writing specifically turns its back on is an 'outmoded' existentialism which clings to the notion of a stable and self-identical subject. Beckett's texts, Adorno writes, 'deal with [. . .] the dismantling of the subject'[6] – a highly concrete historical reality effectuated by the

catastrophe of Auschwitz and the culture industry's colonization of every-day life. In the play, '[t]he individual himself is revealed to be a historical category, both the outcome of the capitalist process of alienation and a defiant protest against it, something transient himself'.[7] Stressing Beckett's fundamental departure from existentialism, Adorno continues: '[t]he catastrophes that inspire *Endgame* have shattered the individual whose substantiality and absoluteness was the common thread in Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Sartre's version of existentialism'.[8] Beckett's dialectical move, then, in the game of post-war European philosophy is, on Adorno's account, to pick up existentialism 'which has been standing on its head and put it back on its feet'.[9] He does this by stripping existentialism of its doctrinal and universalist pretensions. Whereas thin-kers such as Heidegger and Camus transfigure meaningless into meaning through the concepts of 'thrownness' (*Geworfenheit*) and absurdity, Beckett resists entirely this kind of metaphysical impulse. As Adorno observes, rather than attempting to turn absurdity into a worldview [*Weltanschauung*], Beckett simply 'takes it literally'.[10] In the context of *Endgame*, this surrendering to absurdity *without* philosophical intentions has striking consequences:

> The absurd turns into forlorn particulars that mock the conceptual, a layer composed of minimal utensils, refrigerators, lameness, blindness, and the distasteful bodily functions. Everything waits to be carted off to the dump.[11]

According to Adorno, it is this fidelity to the ordinariness of objects – an engagement with them in their concrete particularity – that signifies most clearly Beckett's *materialism*; and it is this which allows him to return *actual materialist content* to the 'staples of existential ontology': 'histori-city, the human condition, Heidegger's *Befindlichkeiten* [states-of-being] and Jaspers's "situations."'[12] By refusing to grant doctrinal significance to these ideas – by treating them instead as part of the actual 'history of the subject's end' [*Endgeschichte des Subjekts*] – Beckett is able to express 'the *real* absurdity of all culture, including existential philosophy, after World War II'.[13]

In a number of rare interviews given in the 1960s, Beckett speaks about his work in a way that coheres with Adorno's analysis. To Gabriel D'Aubarède (in *Nouvelles Littéraires*) he states that he 'never' reads the work of 'contemporary philosophers' because he 'never understand[s] anything they write'. Asked by D'Aubarède whether 'the existentialists'

problem of being' might provide a 'key' to his works, Beckett replies: 'There's no key or problem. I wouldn't have had any reason to write my novels if I could have expressed their subject in philosophical terms.'[14] In conversation with Tom Driver, Beckett goes even further in distinguishing between his own artistic-literary concerns and the intellectual preoccupations of modern European philosophers:

> When Heidegger and Sartre speak of a contrast between being and existence, they may be right, I don't know, but their language is too philosophical for me. I am not a philosopher. One can only speak of what is in front of one, and that is simply the mess.[15]

What, then, should one make of Beckett's modernist revival of the ancient 'quarrel' between literature and philosophy?[16] Does it indicate that Beckett's texts – and *Endgame*, specifically – are resistant to philosophical (and therefore ethical) modes of interpretation?[17] For Adorno, the answer to this question is paradoxically both yes and no. As he puts it: 'Interpretation of *Endgame* cannot pursue the chimerical aim of expressing the play's meaning in a form mediated by philosophy'; at the same time, however, the play's 'enigmatic character calls for interpretation'. 'One could almost say', Adorno writes, 'that the criterion of a philosophy whose hour has struck is that it prove equal to this challenge'.[18]

This chapter might thus be read as an attempt to pay heed to the *call for interpretation* which Adorno here identifies. My aim in what follows will be to explore the ethical dimensions of *Endgame*, in spite of – indeed, *because of* – the play's apparent negation of all positive talk of human value and community. In the first part of the chapter, I examine Stanley Cavell's suggestion put forward in his Carus Lectures of 1988 that Beckett's play can be read as a work which embodies and develops the idea of Emersonian moral perfectionism.[19] While this suggestion is never fully substantiated by Cavell himself, it is, as I hope to demonstrate here, possible to provide an account of what a perfectionist *Endgame* might look like by drawing on a range of Cavell's texts, from his early essay on *Endgame* through to his recent study *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life*. In the second part of the chapter, I turn the tables somewhat. After demarcating some of the *social* limits of Cavell's ethical outlook, I then ask what it might mean to rediscover perfectionism in a more *politicized* form – something which I attempt to do via an exploration of the tragic dimensions of Beckett's play. While retaining

some important features of Cavell's 'thematics of perfectionism', this approach aims at the same time to move beyond it, in order to grasp how *Endgame* might, in Beckett's own words, provide 'an inkling of the terms in which our [human] condition is to be thought again'.[20]

TO HELL WITH THE UNIVERSE

In his 1969 essay 'Ending the Waiting Game' (an essay which predates his first published thoughts on moral perfectionism by almost two decades), Cavell describes *Endgame*'s 'discovery' as 'not the failure of meaning (if that means the lack of meaning) but its total, even totalitarian success'.[21] Cavell reads Hamm (the play's main protagonist) as a literary surrogate for the biblical Ham (Noah's son); he interprets the shelter in which the play is set as the ark; and locates the time of the action as 'sometime after the flood'.[22] Hamm's strategy, Cavell claims, is 'to perform man's last disobedience': to secure fruitlessness and to empty the world of justification and meaning, because '[o]nly a life without hope, meaning, justification, waiting, solution [. . .] is free from the curse of God'.[23] Cavell's crucial point, however, is that Hamm '*can't do*' – can't *really* accomplish –[24] what he intends; and one of the reasons for this is that the desire to 'undo' entails an immediate paradox. While Hamm clearly longs for an end to the world, to life and to meaning, he cannot, logically speaking, bring these things about without at the same time bringing an end to his own game of ending. In this respect, even though the time for ending has arrived, Hamm refuses to end – refuses, that is, to give up the task of purposely undoing which is *his purpose*:

> 'Enough, it's time it ended [. . .] and yet I hesitate, I hesitate to . . . end. Yes, there it is, it's time it ended and yet I hesitate to – [he yawns] – end'. (93)

As Nietzsche reminds us in *The Genealogy of Morals*, the human will '*must have a goal*', even if that goal is '*nothingness*'[25]; and what this entails, in Hamm's case, is endlessly acting out the 'Old endgame' (132): everyday the same 'routine' (107), the same 'dialogue' (120). For if one is not acting then, as Cavell puts it, one is 'not in control [. . .] then anything can happen, in particular the most anguishing thing of all, that [one] may *change*. [. . .] But if I change, I am no longer intact; I die to my world. I would rather die.'[26]

Although Hamm's desire to secure fruitlessness and undo meaning might be seen, in one sense, as an attempt to avoid the everyday and therefore to deny the burdens and responsibilities of leading a human life,

such avoidance and denial are themselves, on Cavell's view, *perfectly ordinary*. As he remarks in *The Claim of Reason*: 'Nothing could be more human [than] the power of the motive to reject the human'[27]; and in an interview with James Conant: 'a certain drive to the inhuman [is] somehow itself the most inescapably human of motivations'.[28] Implicit in this human drive to the inhuman is a sense of 'disappointment with the world as it is'[29] and at the same time a 'desire for a reform or transfiguration of the world'.[30] Towards the end of 'Ending the Waiting Game', Cavell describes Hamm's attitude as 'hung between': suspended between hope and despair, salvation and damnation, an imagined world and the real one. This acute self-division points, however, to nothing more and nothing less than the fact that Hamm is condemned to a human life 'on earth'; and as the play puts it 'there's no cure for that' (118, 125).

How, then, might Hamm's desire to undo meaning (and the paradoxes which this effort to undo entails) be construed as ethical? In a 1985 address, 'Hope Against Hope', Cavell provides a clear, if indirect, suggestion. In this short text, Cavell turns to Kant's 1794 essay 'The End of All Things' which explores the implications of the human effort to think the end of the world. In his essay, Kant argues that the notion of an apocalyptic end of the world is theoretically inconceivable because the end of all things implies the end of time; but thinking, which is always *about* something (even when it is concerned with the world's annihilation), can itself 'take place only in time'.[31] To try to imagine the end of all things is, therefore, for Kant, a failure on the part of reason to understand its own limits. Importantly, however, such thinking is not *meaningless*: it is, as Kant puts it, 'frighteningly-*sublime*'[32] and indicative of a significant ethical aspiration:

> [I]n the moral order of ends [the *end of all things*] is at the same time the beginning of a duration of just those same beings as *supersensible*, and consequently as not standing under conditions of time; thus that duration and its state will be capable of no determination [*Bestimmung*] of its nature other than a moral one [. . .] [T]he possibility of [moral] contentment [. . .] can [be thought] only by supposing that the *final end* will at some time be attained.[33]

Elucidating the full ethical implications of Kant's point, Cavell writes:

> Our moral and religious natures *must* aspire to the perfection for which they were created, and they *must* understand themselves as capable of changing

in the direction of perfection and this perfection has in view the goal and end of moral struggle. Moral struggle, however, cannot end within time, in which change is called for; so the human being is bound to conceive in some way or other of an end to change and an end to struggle, and hence in some way of an end to time. But for Kant this moral struggle is an inner one of each soul with itself, in its fallenness, so that any apocalyptic end must be taken as an allegory or figure of that struggle.[34]

Applying Kant and Cavell's theologico-ethical analysis to *Endgame*, then, we might say that Hamm's desire to undo meaning and arrive at a final 'end [. . .] a bang' (130), is centred on a struggle 'with the soul', which has as its (perhaps unconscious) ethical goal the 'end of moral struggle' – an end which cannot be imagined in time. This is what Hamm appears to be gesturing at near the end of the play, when he imagines arriving at a point of perfect silence and stillness: 'If I can hold my peace, and sit quiet, it will be all over with sound, and motion, all over and done with' (126). As Kant reminds us, however, the task of un-creating the world, of bringing an end to all things, is one that can only be accomplished by God. In this respect, it would appear that a *true* ending for Hamm (which would also be a true *human* ending) would be one that finally ends the desire for ending itself – an ending, that is, which eschews the temptations of *false ascent* (the desire to become God) and instead embarks upon a *real descent* back to the self, to one's life with language, and to a sense of one's own *real* possibilities.[35] For Cavell, it is only via such a mode of returning that one can hope to find within the 'actual' everyday the seeds of the 'eventual' everyday: 'The direction is not up, at any rate not up to one fixed morning star; but down, at any rate along each chain of a day's denial'.[36]

ENDGAME AND MORAL PERFECTIONISM

We can begin to situate *Endgame* as a work which embodies and develops the idea of Emersonian moral perfectionism by foregrounding (i) Hamm's 'sense of disappointment with the world'; (ii) the (possible) ethical impulses behind his desire to 'un-create' it; and (iii) the ordinariness of what Cavell calls a persistently 'divided self'.[37]

Cavell's thoughts on moral perfectionism are given their first and most sustained articulation in his 1988 Carus Lectures, reprinted as *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism.* Here Cavell argues that perfectionism is to be thought of not as an ethical

theory (in competition with other such theories), but rather as 'a dimension or tradition of the moral life [. . .] embodied and developed in a set of texts spanning the range of Western culture'.[38] This dimension of the ethical is concerned with 'what used to be called the state of one's soul' or self; and it places 'tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society'.[39] For Cavell, 'there is no closed list of features that constitute perfectionism', only what he calls 'an open-ended thematics [. . .] of perfectionism'[40] which might include (but is in no way limited to) the following criteria: (i) a 'disgust with or a disdain for the present state of things so complete as to require not merely reform, but a call for a transformation of things, and before all a transformation of the self '[41]; (ii) a 'search for intelligibility [. . .] in what seems a scene of moral chaos, the scene of the dark place in which one has lost one's way' (ibid., xxxii); and (iii) an openness to the figure of the exemplary other or friend 'whose conviction in one's moral intelligibility draws one to discover it, to find words and deeds in which to express it'.[42]

Importantly, on Cavell's account, moral perfectionism 'specifically sets itself against any idea of ultimate perfection': there is, as he puts it, 'no question of reaching a final state of the soul'.[43] Rather, this approach involves 'endlessly taking the next step to what Emerson calls "an unattained but attainable self" – a self that is always and never ours – a step that turns us not from bad to good, or wrong to right, but from confusion and constriction toward self-knowledge and sociability'.[44] The goal here, then, is not the moral life traditionally conceived – understood as guided by either the principle of duty (Kant) or the principle of utility (Mill) – but rather an ethics of self-transformation and self-realization. This coming to self-knowledge is, according to Cavell, neither an elitist nor an individualist pursuit, but rather one concerned with 'the imagination of justice',[45] which finds expression in the vision 'of a new reality, a realm beyond, the true world, that of the Good'.[46]

As will no doubt be clear from this brief outline, some features of the perfectionist narrative are missing from *Endgame*.[47] There are, for example, no 'exemplary' characters in the play who might be said to be 'representative of a life the other(s) are attracted to'.[48] Also, neither Hamm nor Clov succeeds in completing the journey out of the 'dark place' in which the self remains 'enchained' and 'fixated'. Despite this, *Endgame* clearly embodies Cavell's vision of *modernist perfectionism* – not only through its dramatization of Hamm's 'disappointment with the world' (a disappointment which presents itself, at different times, as boredom and as an (unarticulated) ethical desire to un-create the universe); but also through its dogged faithfulness to

the human form of life that is *talking*. This plays out on a number of levels. First, whilst *Endgame* is strewn with fantasies of silence, efforts to defeat meaning, and illustrations of the apparent impossibility of human communication, what is ultimately shown is that there is nowhere else to go beyond everyday language, however indeterminate or restricted this medium at times appears to be. As Cavell puts it: we 'have to talk, whether we have something to say or not; and the less we want to say and hear the more wilfully we talk and are subjected to talk'.[49] That one cannot (to paraphrase Pascal) just remain quietly in a room,[50] is a theme that the play returns to time and again: in Hamm and Clov's looped repartee, in Nagg and Nell's nostalgic reflections (91–102), and in Hamm's attachment to his 'chronicle' (121) – the biographical narrative which he spends the play composing. 'Hamm, the artist', Cavell observes, 'still hopes for salvation through his art; hopes to move his audience to gratitude, win their love through telling his story'.[51]

Second, *Endgame* can also be seen to open up a possible perfectionist transformation in the *reader's* own relationship with language. Cavell speaks of Emersonian perfectionism as requiring us to 'become ashamed in a particular way of ourselves'; and the ethico-linguistic implications of this point are neatly drawn out (independently of Cavell) by Adorno. As the latter remarks: 'Just as after an intensive reading of Kafka alert experience thinks it sees situations from his novels everywhere, so Beckett's language [in *Endgame*] effects a healing disease in the sick person: the person who listens to himself talk starts to worry that he sounds the same way.'[52] On Adorno's reading, *Endgame* thus works by shocking the reader (or viewer) into a wholesale reassessment of the kinds of language games in which he or she participates. The banal chatter and absurd interchanges which make up the play's 'dialogue', serve as humiliating reminders that this too is how we on occasion (or, indeed, all too often) speak. It is, then, only by becoming 'ashamed in a particular way of ourselves'[53] that we might finally find the courage to change our modes of talk, and, more importantly still, the forms of life upon which they are grounded.

The Ethico-Political Limits of Emersonian Perfectionism

Although Cavell's thematics of perfectionism suggests important new ways of approaching the ethics of *Endgame*, it also runs up against a number of problems. Here I wish to highlight just one of these problems – a particular

political stumbling block for Cavellian perfectionism – as a way of clearing the ground for the approach to the play that I will develop in the second part of this chapter.

We might argue that Cavell's perfectionism is underpinned by a notion of 'magical voluntarism'[54] – the view that one can transform one's outlook, and indeed one's life, through the sheer force of individual will. Throughout the Carus lectures, Cavell makes numerous references to 'becoming what one is' (Nietzsche), and having the 'courage to be what we are' (Emerson).[55] He also speaks (in a distinctly heroic tone) of individuals leaving behind lives of 'quiet desperation' (Thoreau) and 'silent melancholy' (Emerson) by *choosing* to overcome intellectual 'imprisonment [and] voicelessness'.[56] Whilst this perfectionist discourse has clear intellectual groundings in the nineteenth-century liberal tradition,[57] it also sails strikingly close to a strand of Foucauldian thought which asks why everyone's life can't become an authentic work of art.[58] The answer to such a question is, however, a simple one: the lives of most people are constrained in innumerable ways – by a lack of access to productive resources; by the demand that they sell their labour power in order to survive; and by the general hollowing-out of everyday social and political life. The problem is not, therefore, as Cavell suggests, that individuals *choose* to guard themselves against the kinds of intellectual and aesthetic awakenings which perfectionism entails,[59] but rather that '(re)claiming one's voice',[60] 'becoming intelligible to oneself',[61] and changing what Foucault calls one's 'style of life' would, for the majority, necessarily entail a wholesale change in *political and economic reality*: a transvaluation of the everyday neoliberal values which condemn so many to a life which does not live.[62]

Endgame, Tragedy and the Tyranny of the Beautiful Soul

While much more could be said about the political blind spots of Cavellian perfectionism,[63] here I want to move in a different direction. Specifically, I want to examine how the perfectionist account of *Endgame* can be developed (and Cavell's insights extended), in such a way that hitherto unseen ethico-political aspects of the play can be brought into clearer sight.[64] Three interrelated questions will provide the frame for this approach. How does our ethical and political view of *Endgame* change when we: (i) shift our focus from Hamm to Clov; (ii) move the centre of critical gravity from the textual referent to the relationship between the

spectator and the theatrical spectacle; and (iii) view the play as concerned not with any particular character's perfectionist-heroic struggle against the world, but rather with the consequences and possibilities of everyday existence played out in a tragic key.

In arguing for *Endgame*'s relation to a certain kind of tragic thinking, it should of course be noted that Beckett is not – or at least not in anything like the traditional sense – a tragic author. Despite his description of *Waiting for Godot* as a 'tragi-comedy', it is in one sense the very grandeur of tragedy which Beckett's work sets itself against. As Terry Eagleton puts it: 'If tragic heroes meet with a fall, Beckett's figures fail to rise to a height from which a fall would be possible.' Instead, such figures 'fluff their big moment, fail to rise to their dramatic occasions, cannot quite summon up the rhetoric to ham successfully and are too drained and depleted to engage in colourful theatrical combat. It is not just that epic actions are a thing of the past, but that action itself is over.'[65] And yet, as Ruby Cohn argues, there might still be a way of seeing Beckett's 'vision' as tragic – 'tragic', that is to say, 'in its pain at human suffering, its dismay at life's brevity, in its frustration at absurdity'.[66] This view of the tragic fits neatly with Raymond Williams's claim that tragedy can entail, as well as the death of princes and the wretched fate of kings, something utterly 'ordinary': 'a mining disaster, a burned out family, a broken career, a smash on the roads'.[67] And alongside these kinds of events, experiences less measurable but no less painful: 'the deferment and corrosion of hope and desire [. . .] a widespread loss of the future'.[68]

I would argue that it is here, in the context of what we might call *everyday tragedy*, that we can begin to probe the ethical dimensions of *Endgame*. There is no doubt that the play repeatedly undercuts the pathos of classical tragedy: 'Can there be misery' asks Hamm, yawning, 'loftier than mine?' (93). Yet, it is the general state of affairs – the fact that, in Dominic Fox's words, the characters remain trapped in a 'cold world [. . .] voided of both human warmth and metaphysical comfort'[69] – that *is* tragic. 'The lives of the poor', writes John Berger, 'are mostly grief'; and '[f]rom time to time despair enters into [such] lives [. . .] despair fills the space in the soul which was [once] occupied by hope'.[70] Berger's words here provide a fitting description of the *un*life world of Clov. Clov is, of course, Hamm's adopted son ('I was a father to you'/'Yes [. . .] you were that to me') (110), his partner in an always about to end relationship ('You're leaving me all the same' [. . .] 'I'm trying' (95)), but also, and most importantly, his slave: a wageless, domestic servant whose inner 'light [is] dying' (98) after a lifetime of punishment and ritualistic exploitation. Although Beckett said of Hamm

and Clov that they were *Godot*'s 'Didi and Gogo at a later date, at the end of their lives',[71] their relationship is often much closer to that between Pozzo and Lucky, determined as it is almost entirely by structures of power and domination.[72] These relations of power are, however, far from absolute: 'Hamm', Beckett comments, 'is a king in this chess game', but the game is 'lost from the start'.[73] One of the central critical questions which the play thus raises is why Clov remains in Hamm's service, given the fragility of the latter's authority. In what ways does power continue to be exercised once its original legitimacy has been 'extinguished'? (112)

One straightforward answer to the puzzle of why Clov doesn't leave is to point out that his remaining in the shelter is determined by the *logic of inaction* which the play itself explores. Just as Hamm cannot 'end it', so Clov cannot 'exit'. Both 'hesitate'; and hesitation here is not a temporary, subjective state, but rather an ontological condition imposed upon the players by an author who describes his own literary practice as an 'exploration' of human 'impotence'.[74] Clov's inability to leave is also, in this respect, intimately tied to the (logical) 'impossibility [. . .] of the [play] ever coming to an end'. In a letter to the director Alan Schneider, Beckett states that he derives his interest in this kind of paradoxical thinking from the pre-Socratics, and, in particular, from Zeno of Elea, whose arguments, according to Beckett, 'disprove the reality of movement'.[75] Here, however, Beckett appears somewhat confused: the paradox *actually* referred to by Clov at the beginning (and Hamm at the end) of *Endgame* (93, 126) is not one that deals with the impossibility of movement; rather, it is the 'sorites' (or 'heap') paradox, first formulated by Eubulides of Miletus, which deals with the problem of vagueness.[76] When Beckett says to Schneider that the paradox of the heap is used to 'disprove the reality of mass', and that it can be attributed to Protagoras,[77] he is thus mistaken. Despite this philosophical mix up, thinking about the play in relation to the sorites paradox can itself be conceptually intriguing. While traditional sorites paradoxes ('how many grains of sand would we need to add to one grain in order to get a heap?') might be easily (dis)solvable (one merely needs to recognize that predicates such as 'is a heap' do not function with strict boundaries), they become much more difficult to fathom when applied to the moral life. It is unclear, for example, at what point the drip, drip of torment and suffering, such as that experienced by Clov, crosses the human threshold and comes to be judged as '*enough*'.

A second way of accounting for Clov's inability to leave the shelter is to shift our attention from logic to the subject of language. Philosophically speaking,

one way of situating 'the dialogue' in which Clov and Hamm participate is in terms of Heidegger's notion of 'idle talk' [*Gerede*]: a mode of groundless and inauthentic discourse – a discourse of 'the they' [*das Man*] – that 'communicates [. . .] by following the route of *gossiping* or *passing the word along*'.[78] Idle talk, however, as Paulo Virno has argued using Heidegger's phrase against Heidegger, is not simply 'vacuous', 'not a poor experience [. . .] to be deprecated', but rather a scene of 'social production' whose end product is itself.[79] As Virno puts it, idle talk is an informal mode of communicative activity whose 'lack of foundation authorizes invention and the experimentation of new discourses. [. . .] [I]nstead of reflecting that which exists, [it] itself produces states of things, unedited experiences, new facts'.[80] Whilst both Clov and Hamm, throughout *Endgame*, participate in acts of creative linguistic labour, this 'virtuosity', to use Virno's term, is underpinned by continuing asymmetries of power, and consequently cannot lead to a state of linguistic equality between the speakers. Throughout the play, Clov is subjected to various forms of linguistic violence: he is instructed when to speak (106), his language-use is corrected (108), and, more generally, the *only* words which he has at his disposal are those which have been 'taught' him by Hamm:

> CLOV: I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Whilst the limits of Clov's language are very much the limits of his world, he nevertheless engages in acts of linguistic resistance and subversion, employing strategies of literalization (111), repetition (95) and deliberate vagueness in order to explicitly undermine the hidden contextual conventions of ordinary language games:

> HAMM: What time is it?
> CLOV: The same as usual. [. . .]
> CLOV: Your dogs are here. [*He hands the dog to Hamm, who feels it, fondles it.*]
> HAMM: He's white isn't he?
> CLOV: Nearly.
> (94, 111)

What the play as a whole makes clear, however, is how unsuccessful these tactics are in enabling Clov to liberate himself from his subjugated state. As if providing a textbook illustration of the limits of linguistic disobedience

without a counter-hegemonic programme, we see that even Clov's most forceful protests end up as questions addressed to his blind master:

CLOV: Do this, do that, and I do it. I never refuse. Why? […]
CLOV: There's one thing I'll never understand. [*He gets down.*] Why I always obey you. Can you explain that to me?
(113, 129)

Perhaps the most explicit example of Clov's inability to escape the prison-house of Hamm's discursive world is given in the following exchange:

[CLOV *stoops, takes* NELL's *hand, feels her pulse.*]
NELL: [To CLOV] Desert!
[CLOV *lets go of her hand, pushes her back into the bin, closes the lid.*]
[…]
HAMM: What was she drivelling about?
CLOV: She told me to go away, into the desert.
HAMM: Damn busybody! Is that all?
CLOV: No.
HAMM: What else?
CLOV: I didn't understand.
(103)

According to Clov, Nell here instructs him to 'go away, into the desert'; however, what she *actually* seems to be urging him to do, as he takes her hand, is to desert (i.e. *abandon*) the shelter. Either Clov (as he himself suggests) simply cannot understand the meaning of the word 'desert' in this particular context; or he can, but the structures of domination are such that he refuses to allow it to register. Both situations are equally catastrophic: an old world is dying, but a new one cannot yet break through, for what this requires is not only new words and new concepts, but also a changed relationship with existing words – an overcoming of what the later Wittgenstein calls 'meaning-blindness'.[81]

In reflecting upon Clov's inability to leave Hamm, I wish to suggest, in addition to those already mentioned, a third explanation: one which moves the centre of critical gravity from the textual referent to the relationship between the spectator and the theatrical spectacle. Throughout the play, Hamm strives to present domination and containment as the natural order of things, imposing upon Clov the idea that he (Clov) 'can't leave' (110)

and that 'outside of here it's death' (96). Towards the end of the perfor-
mance, however, this simple master-slave narrative takes a more complicated
and, indeed, a more troubling turn, one that forces us as spectators to
interrogate our *own* complicity in the acts of violence on stage. Such a
turn is, I take it, initiated by the following set of stage directions: Hamm
'*tears the whistle from his neck*' (the whistle being the device which he has
used throughout the play to summon Clov) and '*throws [it] towards [the]
auditorium*', uttering the words: 'With my compliments' (133). This part-
ing gesture is, it would seem, ethically loaded. It is not just that the
spectator is, in an obvious and trivial sense, the very *condition* for the cruelty
onstage – there is, as Rancière reminds us, no theatre without spectators.[82]
Rather, it is that here he or she is explicitly being invited to take over
Hamm's role, to actively participate in his regime of domination. Such
collaboration between spectator and oppressor has, we might argue, been
hinted at throughout. Near the beginning of the performance, following a
series of violent and physically exhausting orders from Hamm, Clov turns
his telescope on the auditorium and espies 'a multitude . . . in trans-
ports . . . of joy' (106). When, shortly afterwards, Clov states that he will
'leave' the shelter, Hamm abruptly replies: 'You can't leave *us*' (110).[83]

   To read *Endgame* as *affirming* a simple connection between oppressor
and spectator would, however, be to mistake the bait for the hook: that is,
to mistake the very ideas which the play places under scrutiny for those
which it endorses. Rather than pointing towards any straightforward
alignment between Hamm and the audience, Hamm's offer of the whistle
at the end of the play, should instead be taken as an *ethical provocation*, as
a reminder of the dangers of imagining that one can take up a position
wholly outside the situation of suffering that is right in front of one's
eyes.[84] The belief that one can preserve a domain of inner, moral purity by
looking at damaged life from sideways on is the belief of Hegel's 'beautiful
soul' (*die schöne Seele*).[85] For Hegel, such a figure, whilst avowedly moral,
'lives in dread of besmirching the splendour of its inner being by action
[. . .] and in order to preserve the purity of its heart, it flees from contact
with the actual world'.[86] The beautiful soul, Hegel suggests, is a kind of
ethical solipsist – one who '*does not act*', but who instead seeks to demon-
strate her moral rectitude by cultivating an 'inner' beauty and 'by uttering
fine sentiments'.[87] This unity of high moral sensitivity and resolute inac-
tion becomes, however, a form of indirect participation in the status quo.
For what the status quo requires is that 'moral self-consciousness' does not
find actualization in 'agency': one must, in the words of a conservative

sounding Adorno, strive to 'rise above' 'the bestiality of the involved' and keep one's distance *as a pure spectator*.[88]

In this respect, the play can be seen to raise an important ethico-political question: How might a fully *engaged* spectator respond to Clov's situation?[89] Such a response needs to go beyond seeing Clov as a figure requiring the 'fine sentiments' of sympathy or pity, and seeing him instead, to adopt a phrase from Terry Eagleton, as a symbol of 'humanity's [. . .] own shitlike negativity' – and thus dialectically as 'a negative image of utopia'.[90] According to Eagleton, it is not, as Lear warns Cordelia, that 'nothing will come of nothing', but precisely the opposite, 'that something will come *only* from nothing': '[o]nly less can become more; only humanity at its nadir can be redeemed, since if what is redeemed is not the worst then it would not be a question of redemption. This is why the dispossessed are [a] sign of the future' (ibid). Recognizing Clov as a *sign of the future*, then, involves opening up a new *tragic perspective* on the world – a perspective which acknowledges that in order to stand any chance of future flourishing, life must first pass through suffering, loss, dispossession and failure.

TRAGIC-DIALECTICAL-PERFECTIONISM

It is here in a roundabout way that we return to Cavell. Not, however, to his Emersonian perfectionism which imagines the soul on a journey upwards, but rather to a tragic and repoliticized revisioning of perfectionism,[91] which takes impotence and dispossession as its inevitable starting point. In his list of 'the good books' which embody the perfectionist outlook,[92] Cavell places alongside *Endgame* Marx's 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction'. Whilst Cavell distances himself politically from Marx and uses this work only to suggest the need for *inner* change,[93] he does cite the following important passage:

> Where, then, is the *positive* possibility of German emancipation? Our *answer*: is the formation of a class with *radical* chains, a class in society that is not of civil society, an estate that is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no *particular right* because no *particular wrong* but *unqualified wrong* is perpetrated on it; a sphere that can claim no *historical* title but only a *human* title; a sphere that does not stand partially opposed to the consequences, but totally opposed to the premises of the German political system; a sphere, finally, that cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all the

other spheres of society, thereby emancipating them; a sphere, in short, that is the *complete loss* of humanity and can only redeem itself through the *total redemption of humanity*.[94]

Here Marx's politically perfectionist point is, as Raymond Williams notes, 'inescapably tragic'[95]: the struggle for emancipation must go by way of the negative. Only those who have been made 'nothing', who have suffered a 'complete loss of humanity', can one day become 'everything' and redeem themselves through a 'total redemption of humanity'.[96]

This connection between dissolution and renewal is one that is also registered by Beckett. In 1945, the latter volunteered to help the Irish Red Cross establish a hospital in the Normandy town of St-Lô, which had been devastated during the D-Day invasions. On arrival Beckett found, as he put it to his friend Thomas McGreevy, 'just a heap of rubble [. . .] and a sea of mud'.[97] Writing about his experiences in a short piece for radio, 'The Capital of the Ruins' (1946), Beckett spoke of a 'vision of humanity in ruins' but at the same time alluded to '*an inkling of the terms in which our [human] condition is to be thought again*'.[98] Here then, for Beckett, the total devastation of humanity opens up a dialectical space in which the future of humanity can be imagined otherwise.

Endgame, we might argue, presents us with a similar case. The play depicts what Adorno calls 'the dismantling of the subject',[99] humanity in its 'death throes'.[100] However, precisely because of its unsentimental 'depiction of [human] regression'[101] – because of its refusal to provide anything beyond a mimesis of what Beckett calls 'the mess'[102] – it simultaneously holds out the promise of 'happiness' to come.[103] This, of course, is no empty promise. Once the wheels of *Endgame* have passed over us, there is no longer any chance of being at peace with the world, and it is this 'deep disquietude' (to use a phrase from the later Wittgenstein) which constitutes the first step towards a transformed ethical and political outlook.[104] The problem here, however, is that any move towards the scene of politics proper, any pursuit of radically emancipatory change, will, as Williams reminds us, always entail its own kinds of tragic experience: not only the risks of new forms of disagreement, disorder and alienation, but also 'the discovery in ourselves, and in our relations with others, that we have been more effectively incorporated into the deepest structures of this now dying order than it was ever [. . .] our habit to think or even suspect'.[105] With this comes the realization that there is no ontological guarantee that the future we imagine will ever come to light

and thus the temptation arises to stay put with a 'familiar world, however inadequate'.[106] We are back, once again, with Clov.

Here I do not mean to advocate a relinquishing of all attachments to political hope – the 'contempt for futurity' encouraged by T. J. Clark.[107] Rather my point is simply that political perfectionism of the kind I have touched upon here will need to begin with an acceptance of the unavoidable connection between emancipation and tragedy, liberation and loss. Alongside this, it requires an acknowledgement of the fact that any idea of the *collective* 'next self' (to redeploy Cavell's phrase) can be but a 'wager'[108] based on an unverifiable faith in a redeemed future. That glimpses of such a future are possible for those whose humanity has been systematically worn down – and, indeed, *because* it has been worn down – is, I take it, what a dialectically perfectionist *Endgame* might show. When, half way through the play, the central characters decide to 'pray to God', Hamm becomes quickly frustrated at what he takes to be a lack of response: 'Sweet damn all! [. . .] The bastard! He doesn't exist!' (119) Clov's reply, by contrast, is as simple as it is difficult to comprehend, ambiguously poised between theological disappointment and utopian anticipation: 'Not yet' (119), he says. The phrase is left to hang in the air. Can the empty space to which Clov's remark alludes be occupied by the dispossessed? In the words of the narrator of the *Unnamable*: 'While there's life there's hope'.[109]

NOTES

1. Samuel Beckett, *Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber & Faber, 2006), p. 101. All references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text.
2. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 1.
3. Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 1, Rolf Tiedemann ed., trans. Shierry Weber (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 244.
4. Beckett's relationship with a host of twentieth-century European philosophers – from Heidegger to Habermas – is explored in the collection *Beckett and Philosophy* ed. Richard Lane (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). For a discussion of how Beckett's writing intersects with more recent work in critical theory, see Andrew Gibson, *Beckett and Badiou: The Pathos of Intermittency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
5. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 1, p. 244. For readings of Adorno's *Endgame* essay, see Jay Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge: Adorno in Beckett', in *Philosopher's Poets* ed. David Wood (London: Routledge,

1990); Simon Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge: 2004), pp. 165–212; David Cunningham, 'Trying (Not) to Understand: Adorno and the Work of Beckett' in *Beckett and Philosophy* ed. Richard Lane (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

6. Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, Rolf Tiedemann ed., trans. Shierry Weber (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 90.

7. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 249.

8. Ibid., In her essay '"In Love with Hiding": Samuel Beckett and War', Marjorie Perloff takes issue with this interpretation, arguing that 'Adorno's reading of the Beckett text as symptomatic of a doomed capitalist culture – a culture inevitably culminating in Auschwitz and the atomic bomb [. . .] is [. . .] too universal to be useful'. Marjorie Perloff, '"In Love with Hiding": Samuel Beckett and the War', *Iowa Review* 35: 2 (2005): 76–103. This summary and criticism of Adorno's essay is itself, however, *too simplistic* to be useful.

9. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 253.

10. Ibid., p. 251.

11. Ibid., p. 252.

12. Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's 'Aesthetic Theory': The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 154.

13. Ibid., pp. 152 & 154 (added emphasis).

14. Lawrence Graver and Raymond Federman eds, *Samuel Beckett: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 217.

15. Ibid., p. 219.

16. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates insists upon a strict division between philosophy and poetry (literature), famously calling for poets and dramatists to be banished from the just city. The paradox here, however, is that Socrates' condemnations of literature employ strikingly poetic imagery. In this respect, rather than reading Socrates as simply calling for poetry, drama and literature to be excluded from his ideal state we might instead take his remarks as an indication that poetry is an *essential* element of philosophy's republic. Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd edition, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2003), Bks. II–III & X.

17. On this question, see Simon Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing*, pp. 165–212.

18. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 244.

19. Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p. 3.

20. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose: 1929–1989* (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. 278.

21. Stanley Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading of Beckett's *Endgame*' in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge

University Press, 2003), p. 117. In a recent biographical snapshot entitled 'On Meeting Stanley Cavell', the art historian Michael Fried recalls his first encounter with Cavell's *Endgame* essay:

So finally he [Cavell] went to his desk and brought me a hefty type script on (what I remember to have been) yellow paper; the title, on the top of the first page, was 'Ending the Waiting Game: A Reading of Beckett's *Endgame*.' Stanley then left to go to his appointment and I sat in his living room as the afternoon went on and read that remarkable essay from first page to last. Naturally I was stunned: just as a brief encounter with Anthony Caro's abstract steel sculpture Midday (1960) in the courtyard of his house in Hampstead in the fall of 1961 had sufficed to convince me that he was one of the major artists of our time, so a first read of 'Ending the Waiting Game' completed the revelation of Stanley's genius. (Michael Fried, 'On Meeting Stanley Cavell,' *MLN* 126: 5 (October 2011): 937–942 (941))

Fried's exuberant praise for Cavell's essay – his invocation of 'genius' no less – has been tempered somewhat by other critics. According to Simon Critchley, Cavell's essay is 'characteristically associative, occasionally flaky, often madding [. . .] but genuinely insightful' (Simon Critchley, *Very Little . . . Almost Nothing*, p. 207). And yet, Fried is surely correct to describe 'Ending the Waiting Game' as 'remarkable', given the way in which the voice of the text weaves its way in and out of the discourses of philosophy (both continental and analytic), theology, politics, musicology, psychoanalysis and literary criticism, in order to construct a reading of Beckett's play which, like Beckett himself, has the potential to slip through the fingers of even the most sophisticated critic. Jay Bernstein, for example, misreads Cavell's essay when he argues that it 'recruits Beckett' to Cavell's own anti-theoretical position which claims that it might be possible to just 'sit still' and 'acknowledge the facts of life' (Jay Bernstein, 'Philosophy's Refuge', p. 184). And Critchley himself, whilst certainly correct in emphasizing Cavell's claim that meaninglessness (nothingness) in Beckett is a task rather than a given, appears to pass over the even more important point that, for Cavell, what *Endgame* demonstrates is the 'infinite difficulty' – one might say, impossibility – of such a task (Stanley Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game', p. 120).

22. Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game', p. 137.
23. Ibid., pp. 140, 149.
24. Ibid., p. 149, emphasis added.
25. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic: By Way of Clarification and Supplement to My Last Book, Beyond Good and Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 71.
26. Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game', p. 158.

27. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, p. 207.
28. Richard Fleming and Michael Payne eds, 'An Interview with Stanley Cavell', in *The Senses of Stanley Cavell* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1989), p. 50.
29. In the Introduction to his study *Cities of Words*, Cavell writes: 'The sense of disappointment I find in the origin of the moral calling of philosophy is something that I have derived principally from my reading of Wittgenstein, most particularly his *Philosophical Investigations*', Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 4.
30. Ibid., p. 2.
31. Immanuel Kant, 'The End of All Things', in *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and ed. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 226 & 333.
32. Ibid., p. 221.
33. Ibid., pp. 221 & 227–228.
34. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp. 131–132.
35. Stephen Mulhall, *Stanley Cavell: Philosophy's Recounting of the Ordinary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 164.
36. Stanley Cavell, *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures After Emerson After Wittgenstein* (Albuquerque, NM: Living Batch Press, 1989), p. 46.
37. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, p. 2.
38. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp. 2, 4.
39. Ibid., p. 2.
40. Ibid., p. 4.
41. Ibid., p. 46.
42. Ibid.
43. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, pp. 3, 13.
44. Ibid., p. 13.
45. Ibid., p. 14.
46. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 7.
47. Cavell notes, however, that within the works he cites (*Endgame* included) 'only a fragment [. . .] may be pertinent to the issue of perfectionism' (Ibid., 5).
48. Ibid., p. 6.
49. Cavell, 'Ending the Waiting Game', pp. 126, 161.
50. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin, 1995), §136.
51. Cavell 'Ending the Waiting Game', p. 151.
52. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 1, p. 262.
53. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 16.
54. David Smail, *Power, Interest and Psychology: Elements of a Social Materialist Understanding of Distress* (Ross-on-Wye: PCCS, 2005), p. 7.

55. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 16.
56. Ibid., p. xxxi.
57. For an insightful discussion of this historical connection, see Andrew H. Miller, *The Burdens of Perfection: On Ethics and Reading in Nineteenth-century British Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).
58. Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984* Vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 261–262.
59. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, pp. xxx–xxxi.
60. Ibid., pp. xxxvi.
61. Ibid., pp. xxxi.
62. On the attempt to make neoliberal values part of a new, everyday rationality, see, for example, Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neo-liberal Society*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2013); Philip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown* (London: Verso, 2013). This kind of transvaluation, it seems clear, would involve going beyond the mere criticism of 'democracy from within', which, for Cavell, is the political horizon of Emersonian perfectionism. The aim of such a transformation, one might venture, would be (in the first instance) to restore that which 'liberal' democracy (in its ideal as well as its actualized forms) relegates to the intellectual, ethical and political margins; namely, collective ideas of the good life.
63. Some of these political criticisms can take the form of questions. For example: Doesn't the failure to specify any concrete political content leave open the possibility that perfectionism can (quite easily) take a negative (reactionary) as well as a positive (progressive) turn? Isn't it the case that Cavell's 'romantic' vision results in an aestheticization of the political at a time when what is required is precisely a re-emphasis on the primacy of the political? To what extent are the social, historical and ideological underpinnings of Cavell's Nietzschean-liberalism obscured by Cavell's implicit suggestion that perfectionism (of the kind he describes) is, in essence, a timeless ethico-philosophical struggle?
64. I take it that Cavell's open-ended thematics of perfectionism does not in any way rule out the version of perfectionism that I am putting forward here. Cavell speaks, for example, of 'other perfectionisms' (Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 59.)
65. Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 67.
66. Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 11.
67. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), pp. 13–14.

68. Raymond Williams, 'Afterword to Modern Tragedy', in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 96.
69. Dominic Fox, *Cold World: The Aesthetics of Dejection and the Politics of Militant Dysphoria* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), p. 4.
70. John Berger (2008) 'Afterword', in Andrey Platonov, *Soul* (New York: NYRB), pp. 310–311.
71. S. F. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 42.
72. Lionel Abel suggests that the Hamm–Clov relationship 'is an analogue of the relationship between the young Beckett and the old, blind, Joyce'. See Anthony Easthope, 'Hamm, Clov, and the Dramatic Method in *Endgame*', in Bell Gale Chevigny ed., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of 'Endgame'* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), p. 62.
73. Ruby Cohn, *Back to Beckett* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 152.
74. Graver and Federman, *Samuel Beckett the Critical Heritage*, p. 148.
75. Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider, *No Author Better Served: The Correspondence of Samuel Beckett and Alan Schneider*, ed. Maurice Harmon (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 23.
76. See, for example, Timothy Williamson, *Vagueness* (London: Routledge, 1994). 'Soros' is a Greek word for 'heap'. The paradox might be outlined as follows. (i) One starts out with a heap of sand (100,000 grains, for example, assuming that the grains are suitably piled up rather than spread out); (ii) one then removes one grain (leaving 99,999); (iii) what remains is still a heap; (iv) one takes away another grain (leaving 99,998); (v) still one has a heap; (vi) however, if one continues counting down the numbers, one ends up with the result that one grain of sand (or even zero grains) is a heap; (vii) this is patently absurd; (viii) at what point did the heap cease to exist? The argument also works from the point of view of addition. (i) One grain of sand is not a heap; (ii) two grains of sand is not a heap; (iii)...a million grains of sand is not a heap...a trillion grains of sand is not a heap; (iv) (assuming the grains are suitably piled up) this is patently absurd, so at what point did the heap materialize? The argument works for a variety of predicates, including 'bald', 'adult', 'rich', 'red' and so on.
77. Ibid.
78. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), p. 212.
79. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2003), p. 90.
80. Ibid., p. 90.
81. Wittgenstein, RPP, §§ 189 & 202.
82. Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 2. Rancière calls this the 'paradox of the spectator', but he criticizes the

negative views of the spectator which it traditionally entails; namely, that being a spectator is bad because it 'is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act'.

83. Emphasis added.

84. It is the search for such an 'external' perspective – in one's thinking about both language and ethics – that, I take it, Wittgenstein is criticizing in both his early and later work.

85. On the history of the beautiful soul, see Robert E. Norton, *The Beautiful Soul: Aesthetic Morality in the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). On the importance of this figure to the literary imagination (especially that of Goethe) see Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of our Ancient Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

86. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 400.

87. Ibid. For a discussion of Beckett and the beautiful soul, see Drew Milne, 'The Beautiful Soul: From Hegel to Beckett', *Diacritics* 32 (Spring 2002): 63–82.

88. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 363–364. A scathing ironic critique of the beautiful soul (or 'aesthetic individual') is offered by Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, pp. 243–376.

89. The kind of theoretical response I outline here could, of course, go hand in hand with other kinds of practical response which aim at short-circuiting the very logic of Hamm's 'game'. As an example of actively engaged reception, one might consider Lois Weaver's description of what took place when she attended a performance of David Hare's *The Secret Rapture* with Peggy Shaw:

'Then, near the end in Act 2, Scene 3 the heroine's obsessed and rejected lover manages to get into her flat. He produces a gun. We, the collective viewer know something bad is going to happen. We, the over-sensitised and theatrically jaded feminist theatre-makers know that He is going to rape Her or kill Her or both. He puts the gun on the table near where she is standing and steps back. The gun is easily within Her reach and yet we all know She's the one who will die. At this point Peggy shouts, literally raises her voice above the sea of the well behaved, and shouts, "pick up the gun and shoot the bastard!" There is a collective but silent intake of breath; nothing moves except the hairs on the backs of necks.'

Lois Weaver, 'Foreword: A Rapture Kept Secret', in Helen Freshwater, *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. x.

90. Terry Eagleton, 'Tragedy and Revolution', in *Theology and the Political: The New Debate*, ed. Creston Davis, John Milbank, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 12.

91. This is not, of course, to suggest that Cavell's perfectionism isn't political. Beginning in part as a response to Rawls, and touching on authors such as Mill and Arnold, it clearly is. However, what I am suggesting here is a *politically reloaded* perfectionism which moves beyond Cavell's heroic individualism. This kind of perfectionism might be seen as seeking out the kind of 'egalitarianism' advocated by Rawls (see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971)); yet it recognizes that *true* egalitarianism cannot be achieved within the existing political and economic framework.

92. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, p. 4.

93. Ibid., pp. 110–113.

94. Karl Marx 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', in *Early Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 69.

95. Williams, *Modern Tragedy*, p. 77.

96. Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', pp. 67 & 69.

97. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p. 345.

98. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Short Prose*, p. 278.

99. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 2, p. 90.

100. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 1, p. 275.

101. Ibid., p. 248.

102. Graver and Federman, *Samuel Beckett the Critical Heritage*, pp. 218–219.

103. Adorno, *Notes to Literature* Vol. 2, p. 90.

104. Wittgenstein, PI, §111.

105. Williams, 'Afterword to Modern Tragedy', p. 98.

106. Williams, *Modern* Tragedy, p. 77.

107. T. J. Clark, 'For a Left with No Future', *New Left Review* 74 (March–April 2012), 53–75 (54).

108. Lucien Goldmann, *The Hidden God: A Study of Tragic Vision in the 'Pensées' of Pascal and the Tragedies of Racine* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), pp. 300–302.

109. Samuel Beckett, 'The Unnamable', in *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979), p. 306.

Living Wrong Life Rightly: Kant avec Marx

Good Life?

In section 18 of *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, Theodor Adorno writes as follows: '*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen*' ('Wrong life cannot be lived rightly').[1] Whilst this statement should certainly be read as a piece of exaggerated late-Adornian rhetoric, designed to provoke contemplation of reality in 'its estranged form',[2] it also leaves us with a pressing contemporary question: given that our own ethical and political life is clearly 'damaged', is it still possible, or even desirable, to speak of leading a 'right life' or a 'good life' in either an individual or a collective sense? Put another way: need we accept, sixty-five years after the publication of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's 'melancholy' conclusion that the notion of the good life has now passed over into the domain of ideology, concealing 'the fact that there is life no longer'?[3]

When thinking about this issue, we run up against three immediate problems. First, ideas of the good life would now appear to have been reduced to a set of banal catchphrases embodying the superegoic injunction to 'enjoy'[4]: 'just do it', 'because you're worth it', 'live better' and so on. Whilst these slogans appear to promise a life of infinite enjoyment, their function, as Slavoj Žižek observes, is in fact to control and regulate *jouissance* through a kind of obligatory, consumerist hedonism.[5] Second, the notion of the good life has, in recent decades, become increasingly bound up with the idea of 'wellness' – the ideology of cognitive and

physical self-improvement.[6] This new moral imperative to be happy and healthy is what Alenka Zupančič has termed 'bio-morality':

> Negativity, lack, dissatisfaction, unhappiness, are perceived more and more as moral faults – worse, as a corruption at the level of our very being or bare life. There is a spectacular rise of what we might call bio-morality (as well as morality of feelings and emotions), which promotes the following fundamental axiom: a person who feels good (and is happy) is a good person; a person who feels bad is a bad person.[7]

Third, while contemporary political discourse all but excludes talk of the collective good, certain critics of neoliberalism also attack what they perceive to be outmoded attachments to the good life. Lauren Berlant, for example, argues that in an era characterized by 'precariousness', all 'ends-oriented' political projects requiring 'clarity and consensus' are themselves mere 'good-life fantasies' which act as obstacles to one's own 'flourishing'.[8] Do these recent linguistic and ideological shifts thus mean that we are no longer in a position to articulate any kind of canonical map of the good life? Is contemporary society so lacking in the right forms of institutions and social practices that we are now deprived of even the framework within which a fully coherent ethical life might be imagined?

In the context of ancient Greek ethics, the question 'What is the good life'? admits of a relatively straightforward answer: the good life is a complete human life lived at its best and in conformity with virtue.[9] However, as Raymond Geuss reminds us, for the Ancient philosophers, the virtuous person ('man') is the one who fulfils his 'function' or achieves 'excellence' in terms of his 'participation in given social practices'. One thus leads a virtuous life – a good life – if one follows existing social rules and accommodates oneself fully to the established social order. In this respect, there is a close connection between classical virtue and 'successful processes of socialization and normalization'.[10] If we apply this idea of virtue to our contemporary situation, we see the kinds of problems which can potentially arise: I am living a good life – a virtuous life – if I submit myself to the demands of the 'market'; if I demonstrate a willingness to become an 'entrepreneur of the self'; if I understand 'freedom' in terms of 'choice'; and if I assume full 'responsibility' for my own security, happiness and well-being. There is clearly little scope here for any kind of human flourishing off the balance sheet, or indeed for collective projects which strive to imagine the political otherwise. Is there, then, a way out of this

contemporary ethico-political impasse in which becoming a good or virtuous subject appears to close down future possibilities for both self and society?

In this chapter, I sketch one possible answer to the question of how one might lead a right life in a wrong world; an answer which begins with the injunction, *Back to Kant*. Such a move will require taking a new look at Kant's notion of the good which, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he says consists in the good will doing its duty for duty's sake. Kant's moral philosophy is often criticized for, amongst other things, being overly 'abstract' and for issuing 'impossible' ethical demands. Here, however, I argue that it is precisely these perceived weaknesses that constitute its subversive core; indeed, it is Kant's rigorism which brings us face to face (albeit indirectly) with the ethico-political limits of capitalism as such. My aim, though, will not be to provide a wholesale endorsement of Kant's ethical position; and consequently the argument will move through a further stage. In the second part of the chapter, I contend that any true realization of the ethical point of Kant's philosophy – which I take to be exemplified by his Formula of Humanity[11] – will require a rediscovery of Kant via Marx; and more specifically a transformation of Kantian 'pure morals' into the practice of *radical critique*. The journey undertaken here will thus be one from moral law to the politics of language.

Laying Down the Moral Law

Kant is the first philosopher to invite us to think seriously about the concept of moral duty. In the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he argues that the only thing that can be considered good without limitation is a 'good will' (AK 4: 393). Whilst traditional moral qualities such as courage, resolution and perseverance, talents such as understanding, wit and judgement, and gifts of fortune such as health, power, and riches, are all undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes, they can also be put to harmful use. A good will, by contrast, can be regarded as 'absolutely good': it 'is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is a good in itself' (AK 4: 394). For Kant, good willing is equivalent to acting from *duty* – duty being the good will operating under 'certain subjective limitations and hindrances, which [. . .] far from concealing it [. . .] bring it out

[. . .] and make it shine forth all the more brightly' (AK 4: 397). Whilst it is possible to act in *conformity with duty* rather than *from duty* (one might, for example, give money to charitable causes hoping that this will enhance one's business reputation, or one might be inclined towards helping others because this is something one enjoys), it is only actions performed *from duty* that, on Kant's view, have 'genuine moral worth' (AK 4: 398). What gives actions performed *from duty* their special moral character is that they are undertaken with '*respect for law*': '[o]nly what is connected with my will merely as ground and never as effect, what does not serve my inclination but outweighs it or at least excludes it altogether from calculations in making a choice – hence the mere law for itself – can be an object of respect and so command' (AK 4: 400). Going on to ask 'what kind of law can [it] be, the representation of which must determine the will, even without regard for the effect expected from it, in order for the will to be called good absolutely and without limitation?', Kant derives the following maxim (the so-called Formula of Universal Law): 'I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law' (AK 4: 402).[12]

Here we arrive at the cornerstone of Kant's practical philosophy: the formulation of the categorical imperative. During the course of his articulation of this '*supreme principle of morality*' (AK 4: 392), Kant makes a striking and provocative claim. He says that the categorical imperative is nothing more than what 'common human reason' already agrees with and always has right before its eyes (AK 4: 402). 'Common human reason', Kant goes on, 'knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty. [. . .] [T]here is [thus] no need of science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, or even wise and virtuous': an intrinsically good will 'already dwells in natural sound understanding' (AK 4: 404/397). Kant is not here advocating a return to the 'healthy, old, rustic virtues of the peasant', as Adorno at one point suggests[13]; rather, he can be seen to make two points. First, goodness is not a matter of elite education or specialist training – it does not require the expertise of a moral big Other or the guidance of a ruling social strata like Plato's philosopher kings. What one needs to know, morally speaking, is already in plain sight. Second, moral wisdom *does*, however, still require philosophy for its correct determination. For there arises within the individual a natural

propensity to cast doubt upon the moral law – an internal pull against the commands of duty – which only philosophy can protect against. Consequently,

> common human reason is impelled, not by some need of speculation [. . .] but on practical grounds themselves, to go out of its sphere and to take a step into the field of *practical philosophy*, in order to obtain there information and distinct instruction regarding the source of its [supreme] principle and the correct determination of this principle in comparison with maxims based on need and inclination, so that it may escape from its predicament about claims from both sides and not run the risk of being deprived of all genuine moral principles through the ambiguity into which it easily falls (AK 4: 405).

What is discernible here, then, in the *Groundwork*, is something like a three-stage dialectical schema. Stage one: derivation of the categorical imperative within common human reason; stage two: a metaphysics of morals, in which the 'supreme principle' (categorical imperative) is articulated philosophically; and stage three: a final return to practical cognition in which we find the categorical imperative used.

'KANT AVEC SADE' REVISITED

In order to assess the potential political implications of this imperative, we need first to consider something paradoxical about Kant's coupling of duty and the law. According to Kant, moral duty should 'put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations' (AK 4: 400–401). Here Kant appears to lay the foundations for an ethics that is at once brutal and sublime: my moral actions should not be based on any feelings of compassion or sympathy for the other, nor should I be concerned with any satisfaction or rewards which my actions might bring; for this, as Kant says, represents a 'pathology' of reason.[14] The moral imperative, Kant writes, 'has to do not with the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but with the *form* and the principle from which the action itself follows' – namely, '*pure duty*' (AK 4: 416/406).[15] According to Freud, Kant's moral law gives philosophical expression to

the 'harsh, cruel, and inexorable' super-ego; and as such it is 'a direct inheritance from the Oedipus-complex'.[16] In his 1959–60 seminar on the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, and in his later essay 'Kant Avec Sade', Lacan takes Freud's argument to the next dialectical stage, claiming that one finds in the Marquis de Sade's *Philosophy in the Boudoir* the unconscious 'truth' of Kant's ethics – 'the former', Lacan writes, 'completes the latter'.[17] For Lacan, Sade does not figure as a corruption of Kant – he does not represent a regression of reason as he does for Adorno and Horkheimer.[18] On the contrary, Sade shows 'the secret unthought animating Kant's entire system'[19]; namely, that it is possible on the categorical imperative to will *anything* (including absolute cruelty) as a universal law.[20] Thus, according to Lacan, one can consistently and rationally 'adopt the opposite of all the laws of the Decalogue', leaving one with something like the following Sadean maxim: '"Let us take as the universal maxim of our conduct the right to enjoy any other person whatsoever as the instrument of our pleasure."'[21]

Lacan's coupling of Kant and Sade is suggestive on a number of fronts. First, it brings to the fore what Kant's practical philosophy passes over in silence: the possibility of a fully 'rational' ethics which is entirely at odds with traditional morality. Second, it casts light on what we might call the 'Sadistic' element in Kant: the fact that the moral law demands that the subject act (on occasion) against her inclinations, thus producing in herself 'a feeling that one could call pain [*Schmerz*]'.[22] Lacan's aim is not, finally, to endorse Sade (psychoanalysis, he remarks, reveals that the 'moral theory' of perverse pleasure is always destined to fail),[23] but simply to demonstrate that 'Sadism' is one possibility in a world in which the guidance of moral sentiment has been eliminated and one lives solely according to strict duty: 'it is enough for *jouissance* to be a form of evil, for the whole thing to change character completely, and for the meaning of the moral law itself to be completely changed'.[24]

Despite its provocative insights, the key weakness of Lacan's thesis is clear: its rhetorical force depends upon a somewhat caricatured presentation of Kant.[25] Lacan fails to register, for example, 'that Kant's examples of agents who act out of respect for duty without any sympathetic inclinations at all are *thought-experiments* designed to help us correctly identify the fundamental principle of morality, and are not intended to offer a complete picture of human virtue'.[26] Moreover, we do indeed, according to Kant, 'have a duty to cultivate love, sympathy, and other inclinations that make our duties easier to do'.[27] As Kant clearly puts it in the

'Doctrine of Virtue' of the *Metaphysics of Morals*: 'while it is not in itself a duty to share the sufferings (as well the joys) of others, it is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate; and to this end it is thereby an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principle and the feeling appropriate to them' (AK 6: 457).[28] In this respect, Žižek is correct when he argues that 'Sade is not the truth of Kantian ethics, but a form of its perverted realization [. . .] Sade [is] what happens when the subject betrays the true stringency of [. . .] Kantian ethics [. . .] [A]t its most radical, Kantian ethics is not "sadist" but precisely what prohibits assuming the position of a Sadean executioner.'[29]

KANT AND THE CAPITALIST DRIVE

Building upon Žižek's point, we might say that what finally *uncouples* Kant and Sade is politics. While Sade's programme culminates in a libertine republicanism which remains stuck in the loop of transgression and law,[30] Kant is able to offer an affirmative challenge to bourgeois ethico-political reason – a challenge which comes from his Formula of Humanity. In Section II of the *Groundwork*, Kant articulates this formula as follows: 'Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means' (AK 4: 429). What this statement conveys, according to Kant, is that a human being 'is *not a thing*' (ibid.). Speaking on the same point later in the *Groundwork*, Kant remarks that a human being has '*dignity*' and not a '*market price*' (AK 4: 434). Commenting upon the Formula of Humanity in 1945, Lucien Goldmann writes: 'Kant succeeds in concentrating into a few words the most radical condemnation of bourgeois society and in formulating the foundations of any future humanity.'[31] In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno affirms Horkheimer's judgment that the phrase 'never simply' [*niemals bloss*] in Kant's formula 'is one of those majestically sober turns of speech designed not to spoil utopia's chance of realization'.[32]

In order to bring out the contemporary significance of Kant's formula, we might examine it in relation to Fredric Jameson's suggestion that there are certain ethico-political demands which are 'unrealizable' within the context of the existing system and which therefore 'dramatize everything non-functional about [the system's] structure'.[33] In an essay entitled

'The Politics of Utopia', Jameson illustrates this point by turning specifically to the issue of full employment. As he writes:

> '[I]f I ask myself what would today be the most radical demand to make on our own system – that demand which could not be fulfilled or satisfied without transforming the system beyond recognition, and which would at once usher in a society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way, from the psychological to the sociological, from the cultural to the political – it would be the demand for full employment, universal full employment around the globe.'[34]

Leaving aside the possible circularity of this demand (i.e. whether the system would already have to be transformed, in advance, in order for full employment to be implemented), we might see it as working in two ways: first, as a rhetorical gesture revealing a gap between the empirical present and a possible future; and second, as a kind of diagnostic device which casts new light upon the 'dark spots and pathological dimensions' of a society which is unable to accommodate the productiveness of all of its citizens.[35]

Like Jameson's call for 'full employment around the globe', Kant's Formula of Humanity also demonstrates its unrealizability within the present (socio-economic) framework; and precisely on account of this fact, it brings our attention back to the nature of capitalism as such. What the impossibility of the Formula reveals is, I would argue, not a vague 'immorality' at the heart of the system, but something much more specific: no less than capitalism's dirty little secret which Marx explores in volume 1 of *Capital* when he asks us to follow him into capitalism's 'hidden abode':

> The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. [. . .] [However, if we], in company with the owner of money and the owner of labour-power, leave this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, and follow them into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'. Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is itself produced. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare.[36]

The secret of profit-making is, however, simply *exploitation*: the profits of capital, as Marx goes on to detail, depend upon the extraction of surplus

value from waged-workers. In this respect, exploitation is based on a *relation* between exploiter (wage-owner) and exploited (possessor of labour power). This relation is not an aberration within capitalism, but is instead *structural* – part of the normal workings of a system of generalized commodity production. As Marx puts it: the worker brings 'his own hide to market and [. . .] has *nothing else to expect* but – a tanning'.[37] Given this, any possibility of Kant's '*never simply* as a means' is ruled out *a priori*: for the money-owner the possessor of labour-power can *only ever* be a means, although this process of exploitation is hidden behind the façade of free and equal exchange.

We might speak of the process whereby the individual is treated always as a means and never as an end in herself as bound up with capital's *drive* [*trieb*]. Drive is, as Žižek writes, 'that which propels the whole capitalist machinery, it is the impersonal compulsion to engage in the endless circular movement of expanded reproduction'.[38] Thus construed, capital's drive is its ceaseless, repetitive force; that which compels its perpetual push to accumulate. In *Capital*, Marx sketches a vivid picture of this continuous movement:

> Use-values must therefore never be treated as the immediate aim of the capitalist; nor must a profit on any single transaction. His aim is rather the unceasing movement of profit-making. This boundless drive for enrichment, this passionate chase after value, is common to the capitalist and the miser; but while the miser is merely a capitalist gone mad, the capitalist is a rational miser. The ceaseless augmentation of value, which the miser seeks to attain by saving his money from circulation, is achieved by the more acute capitalist by means of throwing his money again and again into circulation.[39]

Following Marx, then, we can distinguish between the *goal* of capital's drive and its *aim*. The goal of the drive is the interminable 'task [of] accumulation'[40]; or, alternatively stated, the goal of the drive is the object around which the drive circulates[41]– namely *money*. As Marx writes in the *Grundrisse*: 'Money is [. . .] not only *an* object, but is *the* object of greed [*Bereicherungssucht*]. [. . .] Greed as such [is] a particular form of the drive.'[42] The aim of the drive, by contrast, is simply the uninterrupted circulation of capital itself: 'the circulation of money as capital is an *end in itself*'.[43] In this respect, what matters ultimately for the drive is not the object (mere profiteering), but rather the maintenance of capital's circuit.

There is, we might say, nothing beyond the drive's own blind momentum; no horizon beyond its infinite re-production; no satisfaction other than in the activity of repetition. In order for the movement of circulation to continue, however, what is required is an *endless* supply of exploitable labour – the human being reduced to a mere thing.

<div align="center">FREEDOM AND REVOLUTION</div>

It would thus seem that Kant's Formula of Humanity brings us face to face (albeit indirectly) with the limits of capitalism as such. It presents a demand – that one doesn't instrumentalize the rational nature of others – which the system, ceaselessly compelled to treat others as mere 'objects', cannot accommodate.[44] For Kant, the issue of treating persons as ends in themselves is, importantly, metaphysical as well as moral: it is only through the adoption of the humanity principle that we come to know ourselves as *free*. 'Freedom', Kant writes, 'is [. . .] that capacity which gives all other capacities infinite usefulness, it is the highest degree of life, it is that property which is a necessary condition that underlies all perfections.'[45]

Kant opens section three of the *Groundwork* by distinguishing between two conceptions of freedom: negative and positive. On the negative conception, '*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of any causes *determining* it' (AK 4: 446). In this respect, a will is free if its actions are not determined by any external forces. On the positive conception, freedom involves self-legislation: 'what, then, can freedom of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the will's property of being a law to itself?' (AK 4: 447). This leads Kant to conclude that 'a free will and a will acting under moral laws are one and the same' (ibid.): freedom (autonomy) *just means* morality (acting on universalizable maxims).

This conclusion, however, raises a further and perhaps obvious question: what grounds do we have for regarding ourselves as free in the first place? Kant begins an answer by saying that all rational beings act '*under the idea of freedom*' (AK 4: 448). 'Reason', he continues, 'must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of alien influences; consequently, as practical reason or as the will of a rational being it must be regarded of itself as free, that is, the will of such a being cannot be a will of his own except under the idea of freedom, and such a will must in a practical respect thus be attributed to every

rational being' (AK 4: 448). Kant is here, however, only *presupposing* freedom as a necessary property of the will of rational beings. While he *does* think that we have strong metaphysical grounds for regarding ourselves as free,[46] in the last analysis, freedom is not a concept of experience (only an *idea of reason*) and therefore its objective reality cannot be proven theoretically (AK 4: 455): 'reason would overstep all its bounds if it took it upon itself [...] to explain *how freedom is possible* [...] [W]here determination by laws of nature ceases, there all *explanation* ceases as well' (AK: 4: 458/459).

Kant's idea of an innate, *internal* freedom also underpins his idea of *external* freedom – what he calls a 'right to freedom' – within the political domain: '*Freedom* (independence from being constrained by another's choice), insofar as it can co-exist with the freedom of every other in accordance with a universal law, is the only original right belonging to every man by virtue of his humanity' (AK 6: 237). Such a position explains Kant's (cautious) enthusiasm for the French revolution articulated in *The Contest of Faculties*: 'the revolution which we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people may succeed, or it may fail. [...] But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm [...]. It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race'. The 'moral cause' motivating the French 'experiment', Kant says, relates to the fact that 'there is the *right* of every people to give itself a civil constitution of the kind that it sees fit, without interference from other powers'. A morally right constitution – that is, 'a republican one' which, crucially, is 'disposed to avoid wars of aggression' – can provide 'the human race, for all its frailty, [with] a negative guarantee it will progressively improve or at least that it will not be disturbed in its progress'.[47]

While revolution functions here as a '*historical sign*'[48] of both human freedom (mankind as *cause*) and natural, human progress, Kant's view, examined over time, is much more ambivalent.[49] For although he sounds a note of support for the Jacobin moment in *The Contest of Faculties* (1795), two years later, in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797), revolution is denounced in the harshest of terms:

[A] people cannot offer any resistance to the legislative head of a state which would be consistent with right, since a rightful condition is possible only by submission to its general legislative will. There is, therefore, no right to

sedition (*seditio*), still less to *rebellion* (*rebellio*), and least of all is there a right against the head of a state as an individual person (the monarch), *to attack his person or even his life* [. . .] on the pretext that he has abused his authority (*tyrannis*). – any attempt whatsoever at this is high treason (*proditio eminens*), and whoever commits such treason must be punished by nothing less than death [. . .]. The reason a people has a duty to put up with even what is held to be an unbearable abuse of supreme authority is that its resistance to the highest legislation can never be regarded as other than contrary to law, and indeed as abolishing the entire legal constitution. For a people to be authorised to resist, there would have to be a public law permitting it to resist. (AK 6:320)[50]

How, then, do we account for the disparity between these two attitudes towards revolution? The first thing to say is that there is, in Kant's work, an irreducible gap between revolution as contemplated from the position of the ('enlightened', 'sympathetic') *spectator* and the *act* of revolution itself. Reworking terms recently utilized by Badiou, we might say that while Kant is able to approve of the Idea of Revolution (revolution taken as a 'sign' of human freedom and progress), he denounces the Revolutionary Event (that which threatens to transform existing state relations), describing it as 'a crime from which the people cannot be absolved', a 'suicide' of the state, a 'deed' that is 'worse than murder' (AK 6: 323).[51] This tension points not only to a fear of revolutionary activity spreading across the Rhine into Germany, but also and more philosophically to an unresolved conflict between the political and the moral at the heart of Kant's system – 'a conflict between an "evolutionist" commitment to gradualism', on the one hand, 'and a "creationist" commitment to discontinuity [. . .] and a fascination with ex-nihilo beginnings', on the other.[52] While *political* change can be 'carried out only through *reform* [. . .] and therefore not by *revolution*' (AK 6: 321–322), within the *moral* domain, change is effectuated in precisely the opposite way:

If a man is to become not merely *legally*, but *morally*, a good man [. . .] *this* cannot be brought about through gradual *reformation* so long as the basis of the maxims remains impure, but must be effected through a *revolution* in the man's disposition [. . .] He can become a new man only by a kind of rebirth, as it were [through] a new creation. (AK 6: 47)[53]

A Bearded Kant?

Setting aside, for the present moment, this conflict between the political and the moral in Kant and returning to his Formula of Humanity, it does indeed seem possible to discern a 'family resemblance' relation (to use Wittgenstein's phrase) between Kant and Marx. It is this relation which is taken up by Kojin Karatani in his study *Transcritique*. Turning to the concept of freedom, Karatani argues that ethics is for Kant 'less a question of good and evil than of being *causa sui* and hence *free*, and this compels us to treat other people as free agents' and thus as ends in themselves.[54] If Kantian ethics is underwritten by the imperative 'be free!', then what 'pushes us into the dimension of freedom' is, Karatani claims, the 'necessity to respond to others':

> When one says the other, it does not have to mean existing others. The others – those who do not share a common set of rules – are not only those in outside communities, but also include those who do not exist in the here and now – future humans as well as the dead. [. . .] Generally speaking, ethics takes only living beings in consideration, while Kantian ethics, that sees the others as the thing-in-itself, takes hold of *the others who have been and who will be*.[55]

Karatani finds in Kant's ethics not only a Benjaminian 'secret agreement' between past, present and future generations, but also the idea of communism itself, 'the regulative idea of superseding capitalism': 'Communist society [. . .] must be a society where others are treated *as an end at the same time as a means*; and communism is possible only by reorganizing the social system where people are treated as a means. [. . .] If we think about it, from the very beginning communism could not have been conceptualized without the moral moment inherent in Kant's thinking.'[56]

Whilst Karatani is certainly correct to see a thread of Kant's thinking 'lurking behind' Marx (specifically, as we shall see, in relation to the latter's reformulation of the *categorical imperative*), he fails to grasp the relationship between the two thinkers in its full dialectical sense. That is, he fails to see that in order for Kant's principle of humanity to become *actual* what is required is in fact a *break* with Kantian (legalistic humanist) ethics; and more specifically a transformation of the discourse of 'pure morals' into the practice of *critique*. In this respect, one can see Marx as taking up a position *beyond* the register of traditional ethics; but this, paradoxically, is the place where ethics – in the proper sense of the term – finally begins.

Beyond the Language of Morals

In his *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, Marx agrees with Hegel's general appraisal of Kant's ethics.[57] According to Hegel (who provides Lacan with a clear theoretical frame for his remarks on Kant and Sade), the 'merit' [. . .] of Kant's moral philosophy [is] that it [. . .] emphasise[s] [the] significance of duty'[58]; however, when we arrive at the question '*what is duty?*', Kantian ethics fails to determine a 'particular content' for moral action: 'This is the very question that was put to Jesus when someone wished to know what to do in order to gain eternal life. For the universal aspect of good, or good in the abstract, cannot be fulfilled as an abstraction; it must first acquire the further determination of particularity.'[59] For Hegel, then, Kant's ethics 'cling[s] [. . .] to a *merely moral* point of view',[60] and consequently offers little beyond 'an *empty formalism*' or 'an empty rhetoric of *duty for duty's sake*'.[61] It fails to make the transition from 'universal' to 'particular'. The categorical imperative would, Hegel argues, all be 'very well if we already had determinate principles concerning how to act'; however, Kant's principle is 'defective' precisely because it has to either smuggle in a set of cultural presuppositions '*from outside*' (e.g. 'property and human life should exist and be respected'), or it has to proceed on a purely formal basis, in which case 'there is no criterion within [the] principle for deciding whether or not this [or that particular] content is a duty. On the contrary it is possible to justify any wrong or immoral mode of action by this means.'[62] Hegel's solution to these difficulties consists in a cognitive 'reconciliation' of Kantian deontological morality (*Moralität*) and modern institutionalized ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*); or more precisely, the dialectical realization of *Moralität* within the *Sittlichkeit* of a well-ordered society.[63]

While Marx affirms Hegel's judgment regarding the 'abstract' nature of Kantian morals (*Moralität*), he also criticizes Hegel's 'illusory' picture of the state, which presents it as subordinate to, rather than a determining influence upon, ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*).[64] This critique of Hegel dovetails with Marx's early criticisms of 'rights' (*Recht*) in his 1843 essay against Bruno Bauer, 'On the Jewish Question':

> None of the so-called human rights [. . .] goes beyond the egoistic man, beyond man as member of civil society, namely withdrawn into his private interests and his private will, separated from the community. Not only is man not considered in these human rights to be a species-being, but also

species-life itself, society, appears to be a context external to the individuals, and a restriction of their original independence. The only tie that holds them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the conservation of their property and their egoistic person.[65]

It would be incorrect to see Marx here as providing a *general* indictment of rights.[66] Instead, his criticisms are directed towards a particular discourse of rights: freedom-oriented, liberal rights as they are articulated within the context of a property-owning society ('the practical application of the human right of freedom is the right of private property').[67] The key point for Marx, then, as he argues more fully in the later 'Critique of Gotha Programme', is that '[r]ights can never be higher than the economic form of society and the cultural development which is conditioned by it'.[68] Rights, we might say, are always *internally* related to specific modes of production. Precisely on account of this, however, Marx leaves open the possibility of transcending 'the limited horizon' of bourgeois rights and establishing a new form of *right-ing being* – revolutionary equality – within the sphere of communism:

> In a higher phase of communist society, after the subjection of individuals to the division of labour, and thereby the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has disappeared; after labour has become not merely a means to live but the foremost need in life; after the multifarious development of individuals has grown along with their productive powers, and all the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the limited horizon of bourgeois right be wholly transcended, and society can ascribe on its banner: from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs![69]

Just as Marx's view of rights is much more dialectical than it might at first appear, so is his general conception of ethics. In the *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels do indeed consign 'morality', along with religion and metaphysics, to the domain of 'phantoms formed in the human brain', that is, to 'ideology'[70]; while in the *Communist Manifesto*, '[t]he law, morality [and] religion' are described as 'so many bourgeois prejudices behind which lurk in ambush so many bourgeois interests'.[71] A number of exegetes have taken these remarks as evidence not only of Marx's general hostility to ethics, but also of an 'underlying inconsistency' at the heart of his thinking. According to Eugene Kamenka, while Marx bitterly opposes

any attempt to base a socialist programme on abstract moral demands, he is, at the same time, committed to the 'moral superiority' of socialism over all other systems.[72] One way of resolving this perceived conflict is suggested by Norman Geras when he remarks that 'Marx did think capitalism was unjust but he did not think he thought so'.[73] A similar view is put forward by Terry Eagleton who contends: 'Marx made the mistake of defining morality as moralism, and so quite understandably rejected it.'[74] While it is certainly correct to see Marx as a thinker who rejects *moralism*, it is less clear why one would have to take his general position on ethics as confused or lacking in self-awareness. Focusing attention, specifically, upon the stylistic and methodological dimensions of Marx's writings can, I would argue, yield a different perspective on this issue.

First, it is important to note that when Marx does engage in outright rejections of morality, it is often in polemical works (*German Ideology, Communist Manifesto*) aimed at bringing about a transformation in the outlook of the reader/recipient. There is thus a kind of avant-gardist brusqueness at work in the language of these texts; a language which plays an integral part in the very struggle it announces. This is especially true in a work such as the *Manifesto*, which does not merely describe capitalist realty, but, through its own intervention, strives to create a new political subject liberated from the moral, metaphysical and religious 'illusions' of the 'old society'. Second, despite his condemnations of morality, Marx's works, both early and late, remain intrinsically ethical; what he rejects, however, is the *language of morals* – the language of moral predicates, maxims and propositions. Such a rejection can itself be seen as ethical, to the extent that the ethical is always-already enveloped within the folds of the political. In a society in which the '[a]ccumulation of wealth [is] [. . .] at the same time the accumulation of misery, [. . .] torment [. . .] [and] brutalization',[75] conventional moral talk (about virtue, the good will and so on) becomes, quite simply, *empty* – 'obsolete verbal rubbish', in Marx's phrase.[76] In *Capital* we thus see the cultivation of a distinctively ethical mode of expression, but one which sidesteps traditional moral discourse:

> [W]ithin the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour are put into effect at the cost of the individual worker [. . .] they distort the worker into a fragment of a man, they degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, they destroy the actual content of his labour by turning it into a torment; they alienate [*entfremden*] from him the

intellectual potentialities of the labour process in the same proportion as science is incorporated in it as an independent power; they deform the conditions under which he works, subject him during the labour process to a despotism the more hateful for its meanness; they transform his life-time into working-time, and drag his wife and child beneath the wheels of the juggernaut of capital.[77]

This passage performs a radical ethical gesture at the level of style.[78] Not only does it immerse the reader in the 'misery [. . .] of the active army of labour' in the manner of Victorian literary realism, but also, and more importantly, the sheer relentlessness of the writing – the disorienting power of the descriptive sequence itself – embodies capital's own ceaseless drive. In this respect (in a way not dissimilar to the *Manifesto*), Marx's text comes to inhabit the very process which it describes. However, it does so in a way that uses the force of the drive against itself: to provide a vivid and compelling description of capital's 'vampire thirst for living labour'. What further adds to the effectiveness of the passage is that it occurs within a work which weaves together a variety of different styles and registers. Part 2, Chapter 10, for example, makes use of statistics and reports which 'raise the veil just enough to let us catch a glimpse of the Medusa's head' hidden behind the existing modes of production.[79] But here again it is the text's *excess* – report after report after report, misery piled upon misery upon misery – which performatively re-enacts the repetitive nature of the drive:

> The potteries of Staffordshire have, during the last twenty-two years, formed the subject matter of three Parliamentary inquiries. [. . .] From the report of the Commissioners in 1863, the following: Dr J. T. Arledge, senior physician of the North Staffordshire Infirmary, says: 'The potters as a class, both men and women, represent a degenerated population, both physically and morally. They are, as a rule, stunted in growth, ill-shaped, and frequently ill-formed in the chest; they become prematurely old, and are certainly short-lived; they are phlegmatic and bloodless, and exhibit their debility of constitution by obstinate attacks of dyspepsia, and disorders of the liver and kidneys, and by rheumatism. But of all diseases they are especially prone to chest-disease, to pneumonia, phthisis, bronchitis, and asthma. One form would appear peculiar to them and is known as potter's asthma, or potter's consumption. Scrofula attacking the glands, or bones or other parts of the body is a disease of two-thirds or more of the potters [. . .]

The manufacture of matches, on account of its unhealthiness and unpleasantness, has such a bad reputation that only the most miserable part of the working class, half-starved widows and so forth deliver up their children to it, their 'ragged, half-starved, untaught children'. Of the witnesses examined by Commissioner White (1863), 270 were under eighteen, fifty under 10, ten only 8, and five only 6 years old. With a working day ranging from 12 to 14 or 15 hours, night-labour, irregular meal-times, and meals mostly taken in the workrooms themselves, pestilent with phosphorous, Dante would have found the worst horrors of his inferno surpassed in this industry.[80]

Mid-way through this litany of suffering Marx switches registers once again, this time aiming directly at the reader's gut, feeding her some of what he describes to Engels as 'the whole shit' of capitalism.[81] Importantly, however, the surplus of detail which characterizes the passage mimics the drive to accumulate which the book elsewhere describes:

Englishmen, with their good command of the Bible, knew well enough that man, unless by elective grace a capitalist, or a landlord, or the holder of sinecure, is destined to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, but they did not know that he had to eat daily in his bread a certain quantity of human perspiration mixed with the discharge of abscesses, cobwebs, dead cockroaches and putrid German yeast, not to mention alum, sand, and other agreeable mineral ingredients.[82]

In the Preface to the First Edition of *Capital*, Marx defines 'the ultimate aim' of the work as attempting 'to reveal the economic law of motion of modern society'; however, 'it can neither leap over the natural phases of its development nor remove them by decree. But it can shorten the birth pangs.'[83] What Marx is suggesting with this final remark on 'the birth pangs' is that the book can indeed hasten social transformation, or at the very least the process whereby society is no longer seen as a 'solid crystal, but [as] an organism capable of change'.[84] This cannot be achieved, however, by any kind of straightforward *moral condemnation* of capitalism – an attack from *without*. Rather, what is required is the cultivation of a certain *art of writing* which performs the dynamic movement of capital itself with the aim of shorting its incessant circuit *from the inside*.[85] This, as the work's subtitle indicates, is to be understood as an activity of *critique*; and, returning to Kant, we might say that one of *Capital*'s principal ethical moves is to implicitly urge a transformation

of Kantian pure morals into the practice of critique – a conceptual and imaginative activity which is already a form of revolutionary praxis.[86]

It is here, then, that we come to grasp the dialectical relation which holds between Marx and Kant. Whereas Kant's Formula of Humanity aims to effect a revolutionary transformation within the realm of morals, Marx shows how the *true* realization of this formula depends upon a double movement: first, a *rediscovery* of the language of critique – a literary-materialist-political reworking of Kant's critical project which lays bare the 'blood and dirt' of capital; and second, the transition from bourgeois humanism to class humanism – the proletariat's realization that it is the 'the *de facto* dissolution of [the existing] world order'.[87] Contra the Marburg neo-Kantians of the early twentieth century, it is not that Kant might supply Marx(ism) with a moral justification; rather, Kant is *already* a silent partner in much of Marx's work, providing a kind of invisible ethical backdrop for his theory of revolution.[88] What Marx identifies, however, is a gap between Kantian philosophy and the actual world – what we might describe as a gap between the 'ideal' and the 'real'. In order for this gap to be transcended, a new conception of philosophy will need to be arrived at: not only a new way of *doing* critical philosophy as we find in *Capital*, but also a new understanding of the relation between philosophy and the proletariat. As Marx famously writes: 'philosophy finds its *material* weapons in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its *spiritual* weapons in philosophy [. . .] The *head* of [the] emancipation [of man] is *philosophy*, its *heart* is the *proletariat*. Philosophy cannot be actualised without the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of the proletariat; the proletariat cannot be abolished without the actualisation of philosophy.'[89] For Marx, philosophical and political emancipation are therefore one and the same: the realization of (moral) philosophy requires the self-abolition of the proletariat; at the same time, the proletariat requires the tools of philosophy in order to become conscious of its universal role. Within this context, the categorical imperative is no longer *merely moral*; instead it becomes, in Marx's words, 'the *categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions* in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected [and] contemptible being'.[90]

THE DESTRUCTIVE CHARACTER AND THE STYLE OF NEGATION

Marx thus turns Kantian moral philosophy on its head. While Kant's Formula of Humanity aims at providing an antagonistic society with a rational moral foundation, for Marx the material force of Kant's practical philosophy can only be realized through a determinate negation of

existing conditions – through what we might call a *creative will* to begin again from the beginning. This process starts, crucially, with a return to critique – what Marx describes in a letter to Arnold Ruge as '*ruthless criticism* of all that exists, ruthless both in the sense of not being afraid of the results it arrives at and in the sense of being just as little afraid of the conflict with the powers that be'.[91] As Marx continues in the same letter: 'we do not attempt dogmatically to prefigure the future, but want to find the new world only through criticism of the old'; a task which involves 'enabling the world to clarify its consciousness [by] waking it from its dream about itself'.

In conclusion, then, I want to raise the question of how we might read Marx's comments today. What role does critique have to play in the context of contemporary damaged life? And how might this relate back to our original concern with the possibility of living wrong life rightly? In order to place these questions in even clearer focus, I want to consider them through the lens of philosophical and literary modernism.

First (inverting Kant), we might say that critique should never be treated an *end in itself*, but always simply as a *mere means*. Its purpose is to assist intellectually in *clearing the ground* for new forms of collective political life. Here we can draw a connection with Walter Benjamin's 1931 essay on 'Der destruktive Charakter' ('The Destructive Character'). According to Benjamin, 'the destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. [. . .] Where others encounter walls or monuments, there, too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined [means]. [. . .] What exists he reduces to rubble – not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.'[92] Clearly, then, destruction is not here to be equated with *unqualified destructiveness* ('abstract' or 'indeterminate' negation, as Hegel would put it); rather, destruction is 'invested with a positive force'.[93] 'Demolition sites', as Benjamin notes in the *Passagen Werk*, are 'sources for teaching the theory of construction'.[94] How, precisely, should this relation between destruction and construction/ production be understood? Although Brecht is commonly taken to be Benjamin's model for the destructive character, I would suggest that we can also see the destructive-productive dialectic at work in the figure of Karl Kraus. In his long essay on Kraus, Benjamin unearths

the following political fragment from a 'vanished edition' (November 1920) of the former's journal *Die Fackel*:

> What I mean is – and now for once I shall speak plainly to this dehumanised brood of owners of property and blood, and to all their followers, because they do not understand German and from my 'contradictions' are incapable of deducing my true intention . . . – what I mean is, Communism as a reality is only the obverse of their own life-violating ideology, admittedly by the grace of a purer ideal origin, a deranged remedy with a purer ideal purpose: the devil take its practice, but God preserve it as a constant threat over the heads of those who have property and would like to compel all others to preserve it, driving them, with the consolation that worldly goods are not the highest, to the fronts of hunger and patriotic honor. God preserve it, so that this rabble who are beside themselves with brazenness do not grow more brazen still, and so that the society of those exclusively entitled to enjoyment, who believe they are loving subordinate humanity enough if they give it syphilis, may at least go to bed with a nightmare! So that at least they may lose their appetite for preaching morality to their victims, take less delight in ridiculing them![95]

Kraus's 'noble work' of destruction, as Benjamin terms it, goes beyond his stated declaration that the possibility of communism should be preserved as a 'constant threat', hanging over the heads of the ruling class. Instead it consists in the fact that his mode of immanent critique is *itself* unleashed like a destructive force upon the 'dehumanized' world of 'property and blood', at the same time as its *expression* hints at the possibility of an awakening from the 'nightmare' of capitalism's 'life-violating ideology'. Benjamin thus speaks of Kraus's 'sober language which bases its dominance on permanence'; and it is precisely this language which 'intrudes destructively' into the material reality of bourgeois life, menacing those preachers of 'morality' who 'lovingly' exploit the poor. Whilst Kraus is certainly no advocate of communism (describing it in the above passage as a 'deranged remedy'), Benjamin nevertheless finds in his 'polemical procedure' – oriented around the art of citation – a new ethico-revolutionary method which stands in opposition 'to the work of the dilettante luxuriating in creation':

> In the quotation that both saves and punishes, language proves the matrix of justice. It summons the word by its name, wrenches it destructively from its context, but precisely thereby calls it back to its origin. [. . .] In citation the

two realms – of origin and destruction – justify themselves before language. [. . .] Only when despairing did [Kraus] discover in citation the power not to preserve but to purify, to tear from context, to destroy; the only power in which hope still resides that something might survive this age – because it is wrenched from it.[96]

The second thing to say about critique – and here again Kraus provides the link – is that critique will need to be *a critique of language*; that is, in Jameson's words, 'an exploration of the ideological connotations of various formulations, the long shadow cast by certain words and terms, the questionable worldviews generated by the most impeccable definitions, the ideologies seeping out of the most airtight propositions, the moist footprints of error left by the most cautious movements of righteous arguments'.[97] Kraus's critique of language, Benjamin writes, manifests itself in the struggle against the journalistic 'empty phrase': 'journalism being clearly seen as the expression of the changed function of language in the world of high capitalism'.[98] 'How was it possible', Kraus asks, 'that in days when clichés were already bleeding and surrendering their last life to death they were still able to serve as window decoration at a bawdyhouse of liberalism?'[99] Kraus goes further than any other modernist in exploring how the language of the press – propagating 'free' trade and 'just' war under the banner of 'progress' – plays a role in the production of new subjectivities: '[the reporter] has produced in mankind that degree of unimaginativeness that enables it to wage war against itself'.[100] What Kraus is speaking of here, then, is a process of subject-formation (Althusser's interpellation) *through language*; a process in which the subject comes to be *spoken by* the language which he or she speaks. Kraus's clearest example of this occurs in his play *The Last Days of Mankind*, in which the 'opinions' of a character named Optimist reveal themselves to be nothing more than a mundane recycling of newspaper war propaganda:

OPTIMIST: In war, one cannot avoid having subordinates overreact when it comes to law and order. That's unfortunate, but in times such as these every consideration must give way to the single thought of winning the war. [. . .]

OPTIMIST: '[War] strengthens those who are forced to face death; it lifts them to higher spiritual levels [. . .]

OPTIMIST: Good people become better, and bad ones good. War purifies.[101]

Importantly, however, the linguistic universe which Kraus depicts in the play is far from closed. The verbal opponent of Optimist is Grumbler who calls into question the former's pseudo-judgments through various acts of linguistic creativity. At different points in the dialogue, for example, Grumbler completes the sentences of Optimist in such a way that their intended meaning is inverted:

> OPTIMIST: [. . .] Man no longer lives only for material gain but also . . .
> GRUMBLER: . . . for medals. [. . .]
> OPTIMIST: There will always be bread. But we also live by hope in the final victory, which is never in doubt, and for which we . . .
> GRUMBLER: . . . will all starve to death [. . .]
> OPTIMIST: The nations will learn from this war . . .
> GRUMBLER: . . . how to wage more wars in the future.[102]

Grumbler thus undertakes a critique of language which adopts, in Guy Debord's words, 'the style of negation' – an '*insurrectional style*' which extracts the subversive potential from political platitudes which have congealed into 'respectable truths'.[103] He waits for Optimist to make the first linguistic move, and then intervenes in order to ideologically *reroute* the remark. The point, then, is not to attempt to take up a position *outside*, but rather to enter fully into the official language-game – the language of so-called 'public opinion' and 'common-sense' – in order to subvert it from within. This strategy, already hinted at by Marx in his letter to Ruge, involves, in the former's words, developing 'new principles' out of the world's 'own principles' and, in so doing, creatively transforming 'consciousness which is unclear to itself'.

If the quest for right life essentially means the quest for the right form of politics, then we should say that the latter will always entail a linguistic dimension. Specifically, 'real' political struggles (as Marx refers to them) will be inseparable from various creative acts of negation, insurrection and demystification carried out at the level of language. Such linguistic interventions will need to begin by formulating new strategies of counter-identification, or counter-interpellation, aimed at refusing or reappropriating certain forms of discourse.[104] The 'good' subject – one who consents to assume the socially preferred image of the self – will therefore need to become a 'bad' subject – one who defines herself through her own active refusal to identity with the dominant discourse; a refusal

marked by various forms of grammatical and discursive virtuosity.[105] The problem here, however, is that such efforts at counter-identification, no matter how sophisticated, threaten to remain *merely oppositional*: resistance becomes dependent upon that which it rejects; the Other dictates the horizon of one's political desires. Unshackling oneself from this logic will, then, as a necessary *final* step, require a recognition of the fundamental trauma underpinning all contemporary political conflict – the trauma of class struggle; and an incorporation of this reality into the fight over words. The two strands are indeed inseparable, as Louis Althusser already reminds us:

> Why does philosophy fight over words? The realities of the class struggle are 'represented' by 'ideas' which are 'represented' by words. In scientific and philosophical reasoning, the words (concepts, categories) are 'instruments' of knowledge. But in political, ideological and philosophical struggle, the *words are also weapons, explosives or tranquillizers and poisons*. Occasionally, the *whole class struggle may be summed up in the struggle for one word against another word*. Certain words struggle amongst themselves as enemies. Other words are the site of an *ambiguity*: the stake in a decisive but undecided battle. [. . .] [P]hilosophy, even in the lengthy works where it is most abstract and difficult, fights over words: against lying words, against ambiguous words; for correct words. It fights over 'shades of opinion'.[106]

NOTES

1. Theodor Adorno, *Mimima Moralia*, p. 39.
2. Ibid., p. 15.
3. Ibid.
4. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), p. 3. Hereafter SXX followed by a page number.
5. Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View*, pp. 309–310.
6. See, for example, Carl Cederström & André Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (London: Polity Press, 2015). Also, Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979).
7. Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), p. 5.
8. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), esp. Introduction and ch. 7.
9. Still the most lucid account of virtue in Greek philosophy is Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985).

10. Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 88.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 38 (AK 4: 429). Hereafter all references to this text will appear in the body of the chapter using the standard method of citing passages from Kant's work (except for the *Critique of Pure Reason*). AK 4: 429 says that the passage quoted is on page 429 of Volume 4 of the Standard German Academy edition (AK) of Kant's works.

12. A second and subsidiary formulation, Formula of the Law of Nature (FLN), runs as follows: 'Act as if the maxim of your actions were to become through your will a universal law of nature' (AK 4: 421).

13. Theodor Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 86. Adorno is here clearly gesturing towards a parallel between Kant's idea and Heidegger's claim that 'the silent call of the earth' 'vibrates' in the body of the peasant. See Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 159.

14. See, here, Kant's remark: '[L]ove as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty – even though no inclination impels us to it and, indeed, natural and unconquerable aversion opposes it – is *practical* and not *pathological* love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in principles of action and not in melting sympathy; and it alone can be commanded' (AK 4: 399).

15. Added emphasis.

16. Sigmund Freud, 'Economic Problems of Masochism' in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 422.

17. Jacques Lacan, 'Kant avec Sade', in *Écrits*, p. 646.

18. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the cruel perfection of the Kantian moral law embodies the essential dialectic of Enlightenment: reason regresses to absolute unreason because of its attempt to expel everything 'pathological' – everything 'non-rational' – from itself. Sade thus figures as the barbaric truth of Kant: Sade's Juliette, Adorno and Horkheimer write, is 'by no means fanatical [. . .] her procedure is enlightened and efficient as she goes about her work of sacrilege [. . .] Juliette embodies (in psychological terms) neither unsubliminated nor regressive libido, but intellectual pleasure in regression – *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the pleasure of attacking civilisation with its own weapons. She favours system and consequence. She is a proficient manipulator of the organ of rational thought.' Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 94–95.

19. Rebecca Comay, 'Adorno avec Sade . . . ' in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* vol. 17, 1 (2006): 6–19 (7).
20. Lacan here appropriates one of Hegel's criticisms of Kant. See, G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), § 135.
21. Jacques Lacan, SVII, p. 97. Cf. Lacan, 'Kant avec Sade', in *Écrits* p. 648.
22. Lacan, SVII, p. 98.
23. Ibid., pp. 4–5.
24. Ibid., p. 233.
25. Lacan's reading bears more than a passing resemblance to the *mis*reading of Kant famously satirized by Friedrich Schiller:
    Scruples of Conscience
    I like to serve my friends, but unfortunately I do it by inclination
    And so often I am bothered by the thought that I am not virtuous.
    Decision
    There is no other way but this! You must seek to despise them
    And do with repugnance what duty bids you
    Cited by H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy*, (London: Hutchinson, 1947), p. 48.
26. Paul Guyer, *Kant's 'Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals'* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 54.
27. Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 29.
28. Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 210.
29. Slavoj Žižek, 'Kant and Sade: The Ideal Couple', *Lacanian Ink* 13, 1998. Accessible at http://www.lacan.com/zizlacan4.htm [accessed 30 July 2016].
30. We should note here the mutual co-dependence of transgression and the law. As Saint Paul remarks: 'Where there is no law, there is no transgression'; indeed, the 'sinful passions' are themselves 'aroused by the law' (Romans 4: 15 & 7: 5). We can thus see how a full-blown Sadean world would be an impossibility: if everything is permitted, there is nothing to transgress, and therefore one is denied the possibility of using the law as a means of exciting *jouissance*. The paradox of Sadean anti-morality is therefore that it requires conventional morality as its eternal 'other': in this respect, it is totally beholden to that which it seemingly rejects.
31. Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 176.
32. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 257–258.
33. Fredric Jameson, *Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 148–149.

34. Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* 25 (Jan–Feb 2004): 35–54 (37). Certain politicians, economists and journalists now claim that the UK is approaching 'full employment'. Here we should note two things: first, what 'full' employment means, in macroeconomic terms, is an unemployment rate of approximately 5%; second, among those classed as 'fully' employed are those on zero-hours and short-term contracts (approximately 4% and 11% of the workforce, respectively), part-time workers (19%) and those placed on 'workfare' (compulsory labour in return for benefit payments). In this light, the idea of the UK as heading towards a situation of *full* employment begins to look absurd.

35. Ibid., 38.

36. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin/ New Left Review, 1990), pp. 279–280.

37. Ibid., p. 280.

38. Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 61.

39. Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, pp. 254–255.

40. Ibid., p. 231.

41. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 1964*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage, 1998), pp. 161–169. Hereafter SXI followed by a page number.

42. Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981), p. 222.

43. Marx, *Capital,* Vol. 1, p. 253.

44. There are, to be sure, arguments in certain (business management) circles for an ethical Kantian Capitalism, which run along the following lines: the worker makes a rational decision to enter into the labour contract; therefore, as long as he is 'respected' by the boss he is not treated merely as a 'means', as both worker and boss are pursuing their own 'mutually beneficial' 'ends'. Norman E. Bowie, 'Kantian Capitalism', *Wiley Encyclopaedia of Management Vol. 2, 'Business Ethics'*. The simple reply to this kind of argument is, of course, 'go back and *actually* read *Capital*!'

45. Cited in Guyer, *Kant's 'Groundwork'*, p. 12.

46. In the *Groundwork*, Kant's transcendental idealist case for freedom runs as follows. Merely presupposing freedom (for example, in the quotation cited above in the body of the text (AK 4: 448)) seems, Kant says, to lead us into a kind of circle: 'We take ourselves as free […] in order to think ourselves under moral laws in the order of ends; [but we also] think ourselves as subject to these laws because we have ascribed to ourselves freedom of the will' (AK 4: 450). We escape this circle, on Kant's view, by returning to a distinction drawn in the *Critique of Pure Reason* between a *phenomenal* world of sense and a *noumenal* world of understanding. Applied to the self,

this distinction, Kant writes, provides the individual with 'two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions'. *First*, insofar as the individual belongs to the (phenomenal) sensible world, he operates under laws of nature (cause and effect); *second*, however, as a being belonging to the (noumenal) world of understanding (the intelligible world), he operates under laws which are independent of nature and grounded in reason. As a rational being, moreover, 'the human being can never think of the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for, independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (which reason must always ascribe to itself) is freedom' (AK 4: 452). Here Kant takes himself to have provided an independent reason for regarding ourselves as free: put simply, we are free because we belong to the world of understanding (at the same time as belonging to the world of sense), and thus we are able to act independently of sense impressions and to use our reason to author our own ideas and choices. The circle previously alluded to is, Kant thinks, now broken.

47. Kant, *Political Writings*, pp. 182–183.
48. Ibid., p. 181.
49. On this ambivalence, both in Kant's work and in that of German philosophy more generally, see Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), ch. 1.
50. This remark is consistent with Kant's earlier denunciation of revolution in his essay 'What is Enlightenment?': '[A] public can only achieve enlightenment slowly. A revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking. Instead, new prejudices, like the ones they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking mass.' Kant, *Political Writings*, p. 55.
51. These remarks appear in a footnote to this section. (*The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 98.)
52. Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 2010), p. 27.
53. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, trans. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 68.
54. Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique: On Kant and* Marx, trans. Sabu Kohso (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), p. vii. Here I focus only on the parts of Karatani's work which deal specifically with ethics. For a more detailed critical exploration of his book as a whole, see Slavoj Žižek, 'The Parallax View', *New Left Review* 25 (January–February 2004): 121–134.
55. Ibid., p. 125.
56. Ibid., pp. 129 & viii.

57. On Hegel's appraisal of Kant's ethics, see Ido Geiger, *The Founding Act of Modern Ethical Life: Hegel's Critique of Kant's Moral and Political Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

58. G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), §133.

59. Ibid., §134.

60. Ibid., §135 (added emphasis).

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid., §§ 141–258. See also Allen W. Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 23–27.

64. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 108.

65. Karl Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', in *Early Political Writings* trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 46.

66. Such a view is taken by, for example, R. G. Peffer, in his *Marxism, Morality, and Social Justice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), ch. 8.

67. Marx, 'On the Jewish Question', p. 45.

68. Karl Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', in *Later Political Writings*, trans. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 214.

69. Ibid., pp. 214–215. For important discussions of Marx and rights, see Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, trans. Dennis Schmidt (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Costas Douzinas, '*Adika*: On Communism and Rights', in *The Idea of Communism*, ed. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 81–100.

70. Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 47.

71. Marx, 'Communist Manifesto', in *Later Political Writings*, p. 11 (translation modified).

72. Eugene Kamenka, *Marxism and Ethics* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1970), p. 5.

73. Norman Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', *New Left Review*, 150 (1985): 47–85 (70).

74. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 144.

75. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1, p. 799.

76. It should be noted, however, that in his *Inaugural Address* of the First International, Marx does make use of overt moral language. Interestingly, though, as Paul Blackledge points out, Marx's use of ethical vocabulary here does not demonstrate a shift in position, but rather 'his unsectarian approach to building the most powerful possible international socialist movement'. Marx was thus 'making a concrete analysis of the balance of

class forces'. See Paul Blackledge, *Marxism and Ethics: Freedom, Desire and Revolution* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), pp. 69–70.

77. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 799.

78. On the literary dimensions of *Capital*, see Stanley Edgar Hyman, *The Tangled Bank: Darwin, Marx, Frazer and Freud as Imaginative Writers* (New York: Atheneum, 1962), pp. 121–150.

79. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 91.

80. Ibid., pp. 354–356.

81. Cited in Hyman, *The Tangled Bank*, p. 138.

82. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 359.

83. Ibid., p. 92.

84. Ibid., p. 93.

85. In the Postface to the Second Edition of *Capital*, Marx writes as follows: 'the mealy-mouthed babblers of German vulgar economics grumbled about the style of my book. No one can feel the literary shortcomings of *Capital* more strongly than I myself' (Ibid., p. 99). This, I would argue, is an inaccurate assessment by Marx of his own, quite extraordinary, literary achievement.

86. The very early Marx already signposts his distance from Kant in the third stanza in his poem 'On Hegel':

    Kant and Fichte soar to heavens blue
           Seeking for some distant land,
    I but seek to grasp profound and true
           That which – in the street I find.

    Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), p. 577.

87. Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', p. 69.

88. On this connection, see Philip J. Kain, *Marx and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) Ch. 1&2.

89. Marx, 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction', pp. 69–70.

90. Ibid., p. 64.

91. Letter: Karl Marx to Arnold Ruge, Kreuznach, September 1843. First published in *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, February 1844. Accessible at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm [Accessed 30 July 2016].

92. Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character', in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 1931–1934, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 541–542.

93. Irving Wohlfarth, 'No-Man's-Land: On Walter Benjamin's "Destructive Character"', *diacritics* (June 1978): 47–65 (53).

94. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 95 [C6a,2].
95. Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, Part 2, p. 456.
96. Ibid., pp. 453, 456, 454, 455. For an interesting discussion of Kraus, which is indebted to Benjamin, see Theodor Adorno, 'Morals and Criminality: On the Eleventh Volume of the Works of Karl Kraus', in *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
97. Fredric Jameson, 'Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 403–408 (403).
98. Benjamin, 'Karl Kraus', p. 435.
99. Karl Kraus, 'In These Great Times', in *In These Great Times: A Karl Kraus Reader*, ed. Harry Zohn (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1984), p. 82.
100. Ibid., pp. 78 & 80.
101. Kraus, 'The Last Days of Mankind', in *In These Great Times*, pp. 167 & 185–186.
102. Ibid., p. 168.
103. Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), pp. 144–145.
104. See Michel Pêchaux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*, trans. H. C. Nagpal (London: Macmillan, 1983), Ch. 12.
105. Examples of such linguistic virtuosity might include, for example, grammatical re-emphases – '*Your* democracy'; 'Politics as *you* imagine it' – or outright ideological overturnings – 'the truth of what you say can be revealed by placing a negation sign at the beginning of your remarks'; 'the victory of which you speak never took place'.
106. Louis Althusser, 'Philosophy as Revolutionary Weapon', Interview conducted by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2006), pp. 8–9. Emphasis added.

Absence, Perversion and the Ethics of Psychoanalysis Revisited: A Reading of Henry James's 'The Beast in the Jungle'

The book has thus far dealt with a number of ethical, philosophical and political themes: aspect-perception and the utopian imagination; love and repetition; moral-perfectionism and the dialectic; duty and the praxis of critique. In this final chapter, I want to weave together a number of these ideas through a close reading of Henry James's late *nouvelle* 'The Beast in the Jungle'. At first blush, this might seem like a strange place to end a book on ethics, given that the tale appears to deal primarily with stalled time, passivity, narcissism and a profound moral uncoupling of the individual and society. In this respect, James's text seems only to provide an object lesson in living wrong life *wrongly* – a finely wrought example of ethics at a standstill. At the same time, it is too much of an exegetical shortcut, not to mention an ideological oversight, to suggest that the moral deadlock which the story depicts is in some way resolved or transcended at the 'higher' level of James's own late style.[1] While one achievement of this remarkable late style is to open up the reader to the 'minute change[s] in tone, pace and emphasis of the mind engaged in self-reflective discourse, every bend and turn in the stream of consciousness essentially intelligent and coherent',[2] James's intensely refined rhetoric does not itself constitute an ethics. Indeed, as Fredric Jameson points out, whilst the Jamesian narrative aesthetic (exemplified in the technique of point of view) 'comes into being as a protest and a defence against reification, [it] ends up furnishing a powerful ideological instrument in the perpetuation of an increasingly subjectivized and psychologized world, a world whose

social vision is one of a thoroughgoing relativity of monads in coexistence'.[3]

How, then, to begin with James's 'Beast'? Here I want to suggest a way of reading James's tale which treats as central to its ethical and political import the *emptiness* or *absence* which resides at its centre. This void or hole is, I will argue, not only the *cause* of the narrative and that which confers meaning and structure upon the lives of its characters, but also a dialectical empty space which opens up new ways of thinking about the concept of *negativity*. In the second part of the chapter, I take a different but not an entirely unrelated turn. First, I examine the dynamic between the two protagonists in James's tale in relation to the economy of perversion sketched out by Lacan in a number of his Seminars; second, I look at the structural congruence between perversion and the discourse of the analyst which Lacan constructs in his Seminar XVII. By taking this approach, I aim to bring the reader to an entirely new understanding of James's short text: the story is not 'about' a missed romantic encounter between two isolated individuals; rather, it dramatizes the relationship between an analyst and an analysand – a relationship that brings to the fore a complex range of ethical and political questions which lead the reader well beyond the confines of the psychoanalytic clinic.

Waiting, Watching and the Discourse of the Jungle

James's 'The Beast in the Jungle'[4] was written in 1902 as part of a collection of tales for the publisher Methuen, which James himself described as being of 'a biographical sort'.[5] The novella tells the story of John Marcher and May Bartram, a man and a woman who encounter one another during a visit to an English country house (Weatherend). The two, we are initially informed, have met on a previous occasion, although Marcher mistakes the details and May Bartram is forced to correct his narrative:

> It hadn't been at Rome – it had been at Naples; and it hadn't been eight years before – it had been more nearly ten. She hadn't been, either, with her uncle and aunt, but with her mother and her brother; in addition to which it was not with the Pembles *he* had been, but with the Boyers, coming down in their company from Rome – a point on which she insisted, a little to his confusion, and as to which she had her evidence in hand. (428)

As the pair fall into conversation, May Bartram reminds Marcher of something which he confessed to her during their earlier meeting; something, she says, she has 'never forgotten' and which 'again and again has made [her] think of [him]':

> You said you had from your earliest time, as the deepest thing within you, the sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen to you, that you had in your bones the foreboding and the conviction of, and that would perhaps overwhelm you. (431)

Marcher says that he still has this 'belief' and that the thing he expects 'hasn't yet come' (432). Going on to elaborate on '*the* thing' that 'haunts' him, Marcher speaks of something he will 'have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life; possibly destroying all further consciousness, possibly annihilating me; possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences' (432). Assuring Marcher that she does not think him 'out of [his] mind', May Bartram agrees to 'watch' with him – for a period which ends up spanning the rest of her life (and the rest of James's story) – to see how this singular event, this encounter with the 'beast', will play out (435).

In his book *Cities of Words*, Cavell situates James's tale within the framework of moral perfectionism, seeing it as concerning 'a man who feels stopped or lost in his life, as if unfinished or paralysed, who is awaiting some form of omen or signal or experience that will free him or show him a fate beyond the stance he has achieved in the world'.[6] For Cavell, the story can be read as providing a systematic commentary on Emerson's essay 'Experience'; and specifically the first sentence of that essay: 'Where do we find ourselves?'[7] Marcher's predicament demonstrates, as Cavell writes, the difficulty and painfulness 'of taking one's existence upon oneself', 'of acquiring one's own experience or say the freedom of one's experience', and of 'meeting' perfectionism's 'demands for transformation, for changing one's life and (hence, however invisibly in the moment) the life of the world'.[8] Marcher's moral outlook is, in this respect, a difficult one to pin down. All too often he appears straightforwardly egotistical: 'pulling May Bertram into his

idiosyncratic orbit of self-fascination'[9] and then imagining that her 'services' can be 'compensated' with birthday gifts, outings to the opera, and his company at late-night suppers. As we read in the text:

> [Marcher] had kept up, he felt, and very decently on the whole, his consciousness of the importance of not being selfish, and it was true that he had never sinned in that direction without promptly enough trying to press the scales the other way. He often repaired his fault, the season permitting, by inviting his friend to accompany him to the opera [. . .] It even happened that, seeing her home at such times, he occasionally went in with her to finish, as he called it, the evening, and, the better to make his point, sat down to the frugal but always careful little supper that awaited his pleasure. (441)

From this point of view, Marcher clearly fails the test of the Kantian moral law: he instrumentalizes May Bartram's friendship, treating her always *merely* as a means and never as an end in herself. However, Cavell suggests (incorrectly, I think, considering the arguments advanced in the previous chapter) that the categorical imperative *cannot* fully apply to Marcher given that his consciousness of May Bartram is 'false' from the beginning, that he is not sufficiently clear regarding the course of his conduct, and that he doesn't intend to do anything other than simply 'wait': 'He doesn't know why he has chosen May Bartram for his ultimate confidence, and she is his only route to finding out why.'[10] Thus, Cavell concludes, Marcher's perfectionism is not 'morally debased', but is rather based on a kind of 'metaphysical mistake': 'He wants another to say for him what only he himself can say – in effect wants another to *be* him, which is the perfect negation of the perfectionist quest to become oneself. He has avoided the question that would have forced him to recognize in what sense his beast is May Bartram, namely why it is she whom he has singled out to tell of his singularity.'[11]

What Cavell provides in his essay in *Cities of Words* is not so much a complete reading of James's tale as a series of speculations which lead back, ultimately, to the topic of language. James's prose, Cavell suggests, 'is a maze', and 'to follow its thread is an act of seduction designed to have us "watch" with its characters (as May Bartram contracts to do with John Marcher early in the story), in which case we are warned that our (reading) lives depend upon our not missing something'.[12] For Cavell, this stylistic strategy invites a certain ethics of interpretation: 'To respond to the tale seems to require matching, or

competing, with its prose'[13]; however, it is also possible to read this investment in *observation* more dialectically. For Jameson, what characterizes James's late style (both in 'The Beast in the Jungle' and elsewhere) is its privileging of the scopic drive: 'the deeper drive in James, which illuminates almost everything, is that of voyeurism'.[14] In this respect, the stylistic 'hesitations and elaborate over-qualifications, the interjections and parenthetical clauses are not rhetorical' (in the traditional sense), but are instead part of a strategy aimed at implicating the reader in a certain process of *looking*.[15] In the hands of a writer less sophisticated than James, this strategy could no doubt prove problematic, leading back to the debased mode of seeing which Heidegger describes in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* as 'a mere gaping at'.[16] As Jameson points out, however, James's own awareness of this possibility allows him to draw back from it, 'within the formal elaboration itself', and the result is something altogether more radical – an anticipation of what Nathalie Sarraute will later call sub-conversations: 'our sensing of the positions of the other, our subtle readjustments and silent renegotiations of our own quasi-physical stances and *gestus*, the kind of strange circling with friendly or hostile others that more visibly characterizes animals' behaviour with their own and other species, rather than what can be seen from the outside in the exchanges of human speakers'.[17] While this does not quite constitute an ethics of writing, it certainly points to the 'discovery of a whole layer of human relations that are not unconscious but which the literary apparatus had hitherto been too primitive to register'.[18]

The reference to James's late style as enacting a strange *animalistic* mode of behaviour is particularly apt in the case of 'The Beast in the Jungle' where the work's title already hints at the broader historical and cultural context from which it emerges.[19] What has been termed the 'discourse of the jungle'[20] comes to prominence at the beginning of the twentieth century, cognitively constructing capitalism as the 'natural' human expression of animal instincts ('man is a wolf to man'), at the same time as representing organized labour in increasingly 'beastly' terms. To provide just one cultural example, a 1902 cartoon from the New York *Herald*, entitled 'Roosevelt's Biggest Game', shows President Roosevelt shooting down an apparently savage wild animal (a wolf) – the image depicts the end of the Pennsylvania coal strike led by the United Mine Workers of America union.[21] The simple 'moral' of the cartoon (which perhaps sums up the views of the press more accurately than Roosevelt's own) is that violence against certain apparently 'non-human' groups (in this case the organized working class) is a necessary part of the survival of the system: it is by finding the 'animal within' that the

President has succeeded in saving (capitalist) 'civilization' from the (militant) 'beast' which threatens to devour it.[22]

This discourse of the jungle is, however, only the culmination of a much longer running narrative – extending back in the modern era to Hobbes – which reduces the 'citizen to the beast, and the originary community of men [sic] to an animal community', whilst simultaneously imagining the sovereign as a kind of absolute animal, who is 'simply stronger and therefore capable of devouring those he commands'.[23] As Derrida reminds us, though, 'this absolute sovereignty is [...] anything but natural; it is the product of a mechanical artificiality, a product of man, an artefact; and this is why its animality is that of a monster as prosthetic and artificial animal, like something made in the laboratory [...] [I]f sovereignty, as artificial animal, as prosthetic monstrosity, as Leviathan, is a human artefact, if it is not natural, it is deconstructable, it is historical; and as historical, subject to infinite transformation'.[24] How exactly James's tale intersects with these debates – how, that is, *the spectre* haunting Marcher is to be read both ethically and politically – is a subject to which we will return in the second half of this chapter. First, however, the logical, epistemological and metaphysical details of the story will need to be mapped out in further detail.

FIGURING ABSENCE

In an essay on the art of James's short-fiction, Tzvetan Todorov speaks of an essential 'absence' which is the motivating force and organizing principle of many of these works:

> [T]he secret of Jamesian narrative is [...] the existence of an essential secret, of something not named, of an absent and superpowerful force which sets the whole present machinery of the narrative in motion. This motion is a double and, in appearance, a contradictory one [...]. On the one hand he deploys all his forces to attain the hidden essence, to reveal the secret object; on the other, he constantly postpones, protects the revelation – until the story's end, if not beyond. The absence of the cause or of the truth is present in the text – indeed, it is the text's logical origin and reason for being. The cause is what, by its absence, brings the text into being. The essential is absent, the absence is essential.[25]

Todorov points to four distinct types of absence: (i) a natural or relative absence: the nature of the secret is such that its truth can be penetrated; (ii) the absolute and supernatural absence of a ghost; (iii) an absence

which is both absolute and natural: *death*; and (iv) an absence centring on the work of art itself. For Todorov, 'The Beast in the Jungle' can be read as a metaphysical variant of (i): a metaliterary tale in which the essential secret is simply that there is *no* secret – a truth which Marcher penetrates at the end of the story when he flings himself, sobbing, onto the grave of May Bartram: 'Everything fell together, confessed, explained, overwhelmed; leaving him most of all stupified at the blindness he had cherished. [...] he had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. [...] he flung himself, face down, on the tomb' (461). Marcher could, according to Todorov, have avoided his failure *to be* anything, avoided a life spent merely waiting, had he 'paid a different kind of attention to May Bartram': 'loving her would have let him escape the moral despair which overwhelms him at the sight of the truth. May Bartram had understood this: in loving him she had found the secret of her own life; helping Marcher in his quest was her "essential thing."'[26]

While Todorov is certainly correct to designate absence as the motivating source of the narrative, his general reading of the story remains somewhat conventional: (i) Marcher is the one who is in possession of the essential secret; (ii) a benevolent woman, May Bartram, finds her 'reward' assisting the narcissistic man; and (iii) love – conceived of as the Two becoming One – is that which potentially allows for the overcoming of existential-moral despair – what Peter Brooks terms Marcher's 'abyss'.[27] The first problem with this kind of romantic-moral reading – a reading adhered to in one way or another by many of James's exegetes[28] – is that it is simply *not* borne out by a close analysis of the tale itself. With respect to (i): while it is generally accepted that the 'secret' of the Beast is *entirely* Marcher's, and that he confesses this to May Bartram during their first meeting in Italy, we might argue that the situation is in fact precisely *otherwise*: it is May Bartram who brings Marcher's beast to life, who *fictionalizes* the narrative concerning the unknown event that will occur in his life. In the first part of the story, we thus read that Marcher '*really* didn't remember the last thing about [May Bartram] [. . .] He would have liked to invent something, to get her to make-believe with him that some passage of a romantic or critical kind *had* originally occurred. He was really almost reaching out in imagination – as against time – for something that would do.' But Marcher fails to make any meaningful connection with the past, and so May Bartram decides 'to take up the case and, as it were, save the situation', reminding Marcher of the thing *she* has 'never forgotten': 'What I allude to was what you said to me, on the way back [from

Sorrento], as we sat under the awning of the boat, enjoying the cool. Have you forgotten?' (428–429). Marcher has indeed forgotten ('I try to think – but I give it up'), and he goes on to ask May Bartram: 'What, exactly, was the account I gave – ?' It is therefore May Bartram (not Marcher) who puts into words Marcher's 'sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen' – a revelation to which Marcher at first responds with only the most 'helpless' of 'exclamations': 'Oh!' (431–432).

This, then, opens up an entirely new approach to the story; an approach which in the first instance can be seen to pivot around three interrelated themes: (i) the epistemology of forgetting; (ii) the ontology of lack [*manque*]; and (iii) language as the cause of *the thing*. First, how do we account for the fact that Marcher appears to remember nothing about his earlier meeting with May Bartram, or indeed about the secret he is meant to have confided in her? This forgetting appears to be more than a straightforward case of 'repression', as Freud would have it.[29] Marcher shows no resistance to May Bartram taking up the issue; on the contrary, he (at first) accepts 'her amendments', enjoys 'her corrections' (428), and (later) finds himself 'lost in wonder' at her 'sweet' tasting 'knowledge' and senses a 'new luxury' at her being 'in possession' (430–431). It might thus seem that Marcher has more in common with the Nietzschean figure for whom wilful forgetting is an essential good, a crucial part of one's *going on* in the world: 'Cheerfulness, the good conscience, the joyful deed, confidence in the future – all of them depend [. . .] on the existence of a line dividing the bright and the discernible from the unilluminable and the dark; on one's being just as able to forget at the right time as to remember at the right time [. . .] [W]ith an excess of history man [. . .] ceases to exist.'[30] But this still doesn't seem quite correct, as, far from enjoying the plenitude of forget*ful*ness, Marcher, from the very beginning of the story, is constantly nibbling at the past. May Bartram's face, we are told, is 'a reminder, yet not quite a remembrance [. . .] It affected him as the sequel of something of which he had lost the beginning. He knew it, and for a time quite welcomed it, as a continuation, but didn't know what it continued' (426–427). We might therefore conclude that for Marcher, quite simply, *something is missing* – something at the level of the signifier; and this is accompanied, on his part, by a desire for what might fill in or close this gap, what might absent the absence. The first thing that presents itself to Marcher in this regard is May Bartram herself; or more specifically, the

latter's *voice*: 'As soon as he heard her voice [...] *the gap was filled up*' (428). Here it is not anything which May Bartram *says* specifically, but simply her voice as object (*objet petit a*) which supplies Marcher with what he takes to be 'the missing link'. Marcher then, almost immediately, proceeds to add in another object – the gaze: 'Her face and her voice all at his service now, worked the miracle' (ibid.).[31] All too quickly, however, this 'thunderstorm' of verbal and visual excitation passes; after which, as the narrator remarks, 'there didn't seem to be much of anything left'. Sensing Marcher's 'lack' (429), May Bartram thus takes it upon herself to save 'their actual show'; and she does this by placing herself in charge of Marcher's fate. Not only does she bring to life, through the signifier, *the thing* which 'haunts' (432) him, she also provides an interpretation of its possible *meaning*: 'Isn't what you [sic] describe perhaps but the expectation [...] of falling in love?' (432). When Marcher declines to accept this interpretation (love isn't 'what *my* affair's to be'), May Bartram then suggests that what might await him will be a kind of 'catastrophe', and she asks him three times the same question: 'Are you afraid?' (433). The repetition of the word 'afraid' has a profound effect, such that by the end of the first part of the tale Marcher has completely surrendered (432) himself to May Bartram: he begs her not to 'leave [him] *now*' (433) and requests that she 'watch' with him for 'the crouching beast in the jungle' (436) – the sublime and terrible 'thing' that lies in wait for him.

What's in a Hole?

In opposition to the conventional romantic-moral reading, then, we might make the following points. (i) It is May Bartram, not Marcher, who is *responsible* for the secret; crucially, we never hear Marcher's version of the story, only his somewhat confused attempts to elaborate upon May Bartram's initial articulation of his 'truth'. (ii) Marcher places May Bartram in the position of subject supposed to know (*subjet supposé savoir*): she is the one, he believes, who is in possession of the hidden meaning of his singular fate ('You know something I don't. [...] You can't hide it' (447)); and May Bartram, for her part, continues to fuel this belief through her enigmatic interventions: 'Then something's to come? [asked Marcher]. She waited once again, always with her cold sweet eyes on him, 'It is never too late' (449). (iii) In making herself indispensable to Marcher's 'search', May Bartram hopes (or at least *appears* to hope) that he will come to see what is right in front of his eyes: that *she* is *the thing* for whom he has been

waiting, that their union will itself be *the event*; and at times she goes as far as to make this explicit: 'I'm with you – don't you see – still [. . .] I haven't forsaken you' (448). However, her earlier talk of Marcher's 'terrible' and 'prodigious' fate has opened up a new horizon for the latter: specifically (and to put the point in Lacanian terms), May Bartram's words have torn open a hole in the symbolic order, which has created a new (and indeed obsessional (433)) will to *jouissance* on Marcher's part. The obvious initial puzzle then is how to explain Marcher's investment in the phantasmatic 'Beast' which emerges vis-à-vis the void: why does he choose this absent 'thing' over May Bartram herself?

In order to approach this complex question, we might first turn our attention to the nature of voids, holes and absences – all of which pose something of a philosophical quandary. In the context of modernist philosophy, one of the most striking explorations of the topology of the hole is to be found in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. In section 5.633 of the book, during an extended discussion of subjectivity, Wittgenstein writes as follows:

> *Where in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be noted?
>   You say that this case is altogether like that of the eye and the field of site. But you do *not* really see the eye.
>   And from nothing *in the field of sight* can it be concluded that it is seen from an eye. (5.633)

For Wittgenstein, then, the eye is a hole in the visual field: it is the point that *cannot* be included within the field itself. And yet this hole determines precisely what *can* be seen: it dictates the very horizon of our reality. While the hole in Wittgenstein's example is occupied, in physical space, by an actual entity – the eye – the kinds of holes to which we conventionally refer are those that appear to result from the absence of matter (the hole in a doughnut, for example, or holes in cheese, or more uncannily, the holes in the nostrils of a glove puppet). But what exactly are such holes? Are they simply immaterial entities?[32] Or should we say that the hole *is* the hole-lining – the material stuff surrounding the hole?[33] Perhaps a more useful approach is to begin by focusing upon the interplay between holes and their hosts – between void and matter, absence and presence. It is this relationship which is taken up by Heidegger in his 1950 essay 'The Thing'. Here Heidegger raises the question 'What is a thing?', and he gives the example of an artisanal jug. Heidegger first refers to the jug as

matter, a vessel, 'something self-sustained, something that stands on its own'; he goes on, however, to speak of it as a *void*: 'The jug's thingness resides in its being *qua* vessel. We become aware of the vessel's holding nature when we fill the jug. The jug's bottom and sides obviously take on the task of holding. But not so fast! When we fill the jug with wine, do we pour the wine into the sides and bottom? At most, we pour the wine between the sides and over the bottom. [. . .] The emptiness, the void, is what does the vessel's holding. The empty space, this nothing of the jug, is what the jug is as the holding vessel.'[34] In making the jug, therefore, the potter 'shapes the void':

> From start to finish the potter takes hold of the impalpable void and brings it forth as the container in the shape of the containing vessel. The jug's void determines all the handling in the process of making the vessel. The vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but *in the void that holds*.[35]

In Heidegger's example, then, the jug is constituted around an essential emptiness: the void, or lack, is what makes the vessel (w)hole. But this only opens up another series of questions. If the jug's 'thingness' resides in the void, then how do we account for the impossibility of separating this absence from the presence of the clay? Shouldn't we instead say that the void is the void only by virtue of the way it contrasts with the matter surrounding it; and therefore that the relationship between presence and absence is a dialectical one? Moreover, if an essential emptiness is constitutive of the jug as a (w)hole, then it would seem, paradoxically, that the jug is *never empty*: without water or wine the jug remains *full of nothing*. What happens, then, when something is poured into the jug? Is the void cancelled out or does it persist? As a way of looking more closely at this relationship between void (hole) and content (substance), and framing it now specifically within the context of human subjectivity, we can turn to Lacan's explorations of *das Ding* (the Thing), in his 1959–1960 Seminar VII, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

Lacan begins the ninth lesson of this seminar with a number of remarks on Melanie Klein's 1929 text 'Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse'. In the second part of her article, Klein turns to a work entitled 'Empty Space' by the analyst Karin Michaelis, which gives an account of the development of the latter's

friend, the painter Ruth Kjär.[36] Although beautiful, rich and independent, Kjär is at times subject to fits of deep depression, which Michaelis describes as the 'one dark spot in her life. In the midst of the happiness which was natural to her, and seemed so untroubled, she would suddenly be plunged into the deepest melancholy. A melancholy that was suicidal. If she tried to account for this, she would say something to this effect: "There is an empty space in me, which I can never fill!"' Glossing over the full (Kleinian) details of the case, the rest of the narrative, outlined by Michaelis, runs as follows. (i) Kjär marries and the couple's home becomes a gallery of modern art, the walls furnished with the paintings of her brother-in-law (himself a famous artist). One day one of the paintings he has loaned to her is sold. (ii) The empty space left by the picture appears to 'coincide with the empty space within her', and Kjär sinks into a profound sadness. (iii) As the empty space '[grins] hideously down at her', Kjär herself decides to paint. After her first successful work, she is 'on fire, devoured by ardour within. She must prove to herself that the divine sensation, the unspeakable sense of happiness that she had felt could be repeated.' The artistic activity is repeated numerous times – her works eventually gaining critical and public acclaim – and, in Michaelis's words, Kjär's 'empty space' is 'filled'.

Although Lacan has numerous 'reservations' about this story,[37] he sees it as providing useful information regarding the 'phenomena of sublimation' in its relation to *das Ding*.[38] Simply stated, *das Ding* is the unfathomable emptiness at the centre of the real; or in the context of Heidegger's essay, the 'void' with which the potter begins. As Lacan puts it: 'the Thing is not nothing, but literally is not. It is characterized by its absence.'[39] Topologically speaking, *das Ding* is paradoxical in the sense that it is both an 'exterior' thing, 'something strange to me' [*entfremdet*], and at the same time a centre, something that 'is the heart of me'. Lacan coins the term 'extimacy' [*extimité*] to designate this exterior centre.[40] This paradox is also evident at the level of language: the Thing resists and eludes the grasp of the symbolic and yet is that around which the whole movement of language turns; it is 'the beyond-of-the-signified', but also 'that which in the real [. . .] *suffers from the signifier*'.[41] In attempting to speak about *das Ding*, it would seem that we are always-already positioned at a distance from it, as if by some invisible field of force. That is to say, we cannot define it directly, but are instead obliged to endlessly detour around it – to encircle the hole or absence – in order to conceive of it at all. What maintains this distance is, for Lacan, the pleasure principle: the law

which 'fixes the level of a certain quantity of excitation which cannot be exceeded without going beyond the limit of the *Lust/Unlust* polarity'.[42] This law is, crucially, a symbolic law – *a law of language* – that acts to maintain a state of 'homeostasis', prohibiting access to *das Ding* and thus safeguarding against full *jouissance*:

> The function of the pleasure principle is, in effect, to lead the subject from signifier to signifier, by generating as many signifiers as are required to maintain at as low a level as possible the tension that regulates the whole functioning of the psychic apparatus.[43]

It is part of the nature of *das Ding* that it will always be represented by what Lacan calls 'the Other thing', by 'something else'[44]; and here we encounter, in the process of sublimation, the 'elevation' of an object to the 'dignity' of a thing.[45] But this thing is, importantly, not the Thing (*das Ding*), but merely a placeholder for the Thing, a stand-in [*tenant-lieu*], marked by the Thing's fundamental lack. As Lacan puts it: the 'Thing will always be represented by emptiness, precisely because it cannot be represented by anything else – or, more exactly, because it can only be represented by something else'.[46]

In Lacan's later work, the object which represents the Thing emerges as *objet petit a* – object-cause of desire. While *objet petit a* is a highly polyvalent concept, variously defined in Lacan's seminars between the 1950s and 1970s, here, taking our cue from his Seminar XI, we can grasp it in a twofold sense. First, object *a* is the object which 'fills the gap' of the subject inaugurated by the signifier[47]; that which, we might say, temporarily (and indeed creatively) 'corks' the hole in the symbolic structure.[48] Second, object *a* is the (little) piece of the Real that persists, or insists, within the symbolic: 'the object that cannot be swallowed, as it were, that remains stuck in the gullet of the signifier'.[49] Drawing out these two aspects vis-à-vis the difference between *objet petit a* and *das Ding*, Žižek writes as follows: '*das Ding* is the absolute void, the lethal abyss which swallows the subject; while *objet petit a* designates that which remains of the Thing after it has undergone the process of symbolization. The basic premise of the Lacanian ontology is that if our experience of reality is to maintain its consistency, the positive field of reality has to be "sutured" with a supplement which the subject (mis)perceives as a positive entity, but is effectively a "negative magnitude"'.[50] *Objet petit a* is then a 'something which stands for nothing': it is the *object-cause* of desire, the

jouissance object, stopping up the originary void. At the same time, however, and paradoxically, the object *a* is *nothing but a void*, an absence, a lack (of an object), which has acquired a specific form for the subject. As Lacan puts it: 'Object *a* is no being. Object *a* is the void presupposed by a demand, and it is only by situating demand via metonymy [. . .] that we can imagine a desire that is based on no being [. . .] "That's not it" means that in the desire of every demand, there is but the request for object *a*.'[51]

THE PARADOXES OF THE EXTIMATE BEAST

Before returning to James's tale – and specifically to the issue of Marcher's investment in the 'empty' beast – it will be useful to briefly highlight some of the conceptual affinities between Lacan and Kant on the object and the subject.[52] To take the latter first: In the Paralogisms of Pure Reason (*Critique of Pure Reason*), Kant undertakes a critique of the Cartesian project along with a systematic critique of rational psychology. According to Kant, Descartes' *cogito* involves the hypostatization of a substantial self: 'The "I think" is [. . .] an empirical proposition, and contains within itself the proposition "I exist"' [B 422, note]. It therefore appears that 'the Cartesian inference, *cogito, ergo, sum,* is really a tautology, since the *cogito* (*sum cogitans*) asserts my existence immediately' [A 355]: to say *I think* is already to say *I am*. For Kant, unlike Descartes, the 'I' of the 'I think' does not entail a substantial subject, but only an 'empty' representation, what Kant terms '*bare consciousness* which accompanies all concepts'.[53] As he continues: 'Through this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks, nothing further is represented than a transcendental subject of the thoughts = X. It is known only through the thoughts which are its predicates, and of it, apart from them, we cannot have any concept whatsoever' [A 346]. This 'X', the empty logical subject of knowledge, can then be seen as an early version of the Lacanian subject ($, in Lacan's mathemes), the subject of the signifier. However, while a fundamental emptiness (lack) is constitutive of the 'I' for both Kant and Lacan, an important distinction nevertheless remains: for Kant, the subject is empty *per se*; whereas for Lacan the empty subject, which *is* the subject constituted in relation to the signifier, emerges only 'when a key aspect of the subject's *phenomenal* (self)experience (his "fundamental fantasy") becomes *inaccessible*, or "primordially repressed"'.[54] It is therefore, on Lacan's view, the *unconscious* (structured like a language) which prevents the subject from ever substantializing itself, from pronouncing the *ergo sum*: 'Such is the impossible movement

that constitutes the horror of the relation to the dimension of the unconscious; everything is allowed to the unconscious except to articulate: [. . .] "therefore I am"'.[55]

On the topic of objects, we can make three key points regarding Kant's position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. (i) All experience depends upon *a priori* conditions of consciousness: the pure intuitions of space and time and the pure concepts. It is the *synthetic unity* of these *a priori* categories, through the imagination, that allows the flux of our sensible intuitions to become manifest as objects. (ii) These objects are, however, 'only representations, which in turn have their object – an object which cannot itself be intuited by us, and which may, therefore, be named the non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = x' [A 109]. (iii) The transcendental object, 'which in reality throughout all our knowledge is always one and the same', therefore provides the transcendental *ground* of appearances, but is that of which we can have *no cognition*.[56] Importantly, however, we should not think of the transcendental object as any kind of inaccessible entity which causes given representations or appearances (this, for Kant, is always an empirical concern); rather, the transcendental object is 'the cause or ground of the "matter" of human cognition *taken as a whole*'.[57] In this respect, the transcendental object is best viewed as a (logical) concept rather than as an object (strictly speaking): 'it stipulates how an object must be considered, if it is to function in a transcendental account as "something corresponding to sensibility viewed as receptivity." As such [it] does not bring with it any ontological assumptions about the real nature of things or about a super-sensible realm.'[58] Thus understood, the link back to Lacan is relatively clear. The transcendental object does not, contra Žižek,[59] correspond to the *objet petit a*, but rather to the Real qua *absent cause*: that 'x' which provides the epistemic condition for desire as such, but which is, at the same time, in Lacan's words, 'the impossible' – impossible to cognize and impossible to integrate into the symbolic order.[60]

We are now on a secure enough philosophical footing to return to Marcher's 'beast'. The first thing to say about the beast, in line with the above analysis, is that it is quite clearly the 'undigested' remainder of the Real, the hole in the symbolic universe, which sets desire in motion. In this respect, it is the *objet petit a* par excellence. Throughout the tale, the beast is variously named as '*the* thing', 'the law', 'mysterious fate' and, simply, 'danger'; all of which suggest an *exterior* thing, something *strange*. At the same time, however, the

beast is *at the very heart* of Marcher, an intimate and essential part of his being: 'his old obsession [. . .] casting the long shadow in which he [. . .] lived' (445). In his essay on Lacan's concept of '*extimité*', Jacques-Alain Miller writes that '[e]xtimacy is not the contrary of intimacy. Extimacy says that the intimate is Other-like, a foreign body, a parasite',[61] what is 'in you more than you'.[62] For Miller, the extimate is the undigested kernel of the Real within the symbolic – the object *a*; that which, without necessarily existing, produces its *effects*. In Marcher's case, what the beast-as-foreign-body produces is a strange admixture of fear and fascination, terror and curiosity: 'What', he asks May Bartram, making reference to the beast, 'do you regard as the very worst that at this time of day *can* happen to me? [. . .] I appear to myself to have spent my life in thinking of nothing but dreadful things [. . .] [T]ell me if I shall consciously suffer' (446, 448). In his eleventh seminar, Lacan designates the object *a* as the paradigmatic object of the drive: 'this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive – that is to say, the object around which desire turns'.[63] Following Marx, Lacan draws an important distinction between the *aim* of the drive and its *goal*: while the goal is the object or thing around which the drive circulates, the aim is, simply, the continuation of the circuitous movement itself.[64] Žižek neatly illustrates this distinction via the figure of Sisyphus:

> It is Sisyphus [. . .] who bears on our interest here. His continuous pushing of the stone up the hill only to have it roll down again served [. . .] as the literary model for the third of Zeno's paradoxes: we can never cover a given distance *X*, because to do so, we must first cover half this distance, and to cover half we must first cover a quarter of it, and so on, ad infinitum. A goal, once reached, always retreats anew. Can we not recognise in this paradox the very nature of the psychoanalytical notion of *drive*, or more properly the Lacanian distinction between its *aim* and its *goal*? The goal is the final destination, while the aim is what we intend to do, i.e., the way itself. Lacan's point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive's ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, [. . .] the real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit.[65]

While Marcher's beast might not, strictly speaking, *exist*, it nevertheless *functions*; and it does so by providing Marcher with an empty centre around which drive can circulate. There is, then, an enjoyment (*jouissance*)

which is derived from the endlessly looped movement of language back to the mysterious thing – an enjoyment to which Marcher is riveted: 'Evidently now too again *he liked to talk of it*, "I don't think of it as – when it does come – necessarily violent. I only think of it as natural and as of course above all unmistakable. I think of it simply as *the* thing"' (432).[66] Even the perceived limits of language provide the occasion for further talk about the '*the* thing': 'I can't name it. I only know that I'm exposed' (440). Through talking, through his life in language with May Bartram, Marcher thus manages not only to conjure something out of nothing but also to transform his failure into success: the 'threatened' appearance of the beast is what comes to constitute the 'real truth about him'; what separates him from the 'unintelligent' world around him; and what marks him out as 'heroic', as a 'man of courage' (436–445). To have this 'truth' evaporate would, as he himself recognizes, be the ultimate failure; indeed, the *only* failure: 'It wouldn't have been failure to be bankrupt, dishonoured, pilloried, hanged; it was failure not to be anything' (445). What Marcher fails to see, however, is the Kantian truth of the situation: he has *already* failed to *be* anything precisely because he has failed to realize his (noumenal) freedom by acting in accordance with laws which he prescribes to himself and by opening himself up to an ethical life with others. Marcher's subjective outlook is wholly determined by what Kant terms in the *Groundwork* 'alien causes'; at the same time, he refuses to countenance any form of life beyond the one he has 'afloat' (434) with May Bartram, away from the devouring 'crowd', 'the others', who are simply 'too stupid' to penetrate to any kind of 'truth' about the world (426–427). What this produces, then, is a paradox of the imagination: while the beast as poetic stand-in for the void can certainly be read as an intriguing example of human creativity linked to the unconscious (the object-choice, we might say, is determined within that region of the subject which constitutes the subject's blind-spot), it also, and more significantly, represents a closing down of the imaginative faculty: a recoiling from the abyss of freedom as that which provides the ontological foundation for imagining the everyday *otherwise*.

Marcher and May Bartram: The Perverse Couple?

Conceived of in one way, Marcher might be seen to embody a certain strand of psychoanalytic ethics: he refuses to give way on his desire for absolute singularity. He asserts the logic of the One over the many, and,

like Antigone, he pursues this to an extreme end. Moreover, he connects his passion for the beast with a desire to know ('I am not afraid of knowledge' (448)), a desire, that is, to liberate himself from blindness and illusion ('He wanted the knowledge he lacked' (446)). To take Marcher's commitment to singularity and self-knowledge at face value would, however, be to overlook the most important and indeed the most problematic aspects of his character – what we might call his *real* twin passions: the passion for authority and the passion for ignorance. These features of Marcher's psychic life emerge most vividly in the final three sections of the story, and their significance is most effectively elucidated via a close examination of the role played by May Bartram.

What, we might begin by asking, actually attracts May Bartram to the somewhat 'colourless' (435) Marcher? Marcher himself indirectly puts this question to May Bartram during a conversation which the pair have early on in the story: 'I see what you mean by your saving me [...] Only what is it that saves *you*? [...] [D]oesn't it sometimes come to you as time goes on that your curiosity isn't being particularly repaid?' (438–439). May Bartram replies that her reward is simply to be 'interested' in Marcher's life, to watch with him for the emergence of the beast ('If I've been "watching" with you, as we long ago agreed I was to do, watching's always in itself an absorption'). Quite clearly, however, this answer sidesteps the full truth of the situation. As I argue earlier in the chapter, May Bartram is no passive observer of Marcher's 'fate': she is responsible for setting his 'secret' in motion and, as the story progresses, her structural role in Marcher's life becomes increasingly complex. Specifically, the first thing to note is that by authoring the beast, May Bartram is able to control it, to determine when and where it will 'pounce'; and in this respect, she is able to achieve a kind of mastery over Marcher. In sections III and IV of the story, faced with Marcher's increasing anxiety about whether the beast has been no more than a 'vain imagination', May Bartram encourages Marcher to 'go on' with his idea: 'Whatever the reality, it *is* a reality' (449). Having led Marcher to believe that 'something's to come' (449) – something of which *she* has intimate knowledge – she then, at the end of part IV, makes two new moves in their discursive game. First, she tells Marcher that she is 'too ill' (450) to tell him what this thing to come actually is; second, she turns upside down Marcher's whole concept of temporality: the thing is no longer the thing *to* come, but the thing that '*was* to' have come (450).

It is worth looking at these two moves in closer detail, signalling as they do a turning point in the narrative as a whole. Importantly, these

discursive junctures are themselves preceded by a silent exchange between Marcher and May Bartram which concludes with what the text conveys as an explicit discharge of the latter's libidinal energy – *la petit morte*, which prefigures her literal death (*grande Mort*) shortly afterwards:

> [H]er wasted face delicately shone [. . .] it glittered almost as with the white lustre of silver in her expression. [. . .] [T]hey continued for some minutes silent, her face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing, and his stare all kind but all expectant. [. . .] [Then] [s]omething else took place [. . .] which seemed to consist at first in the mere closing of her eyes. She gave way at the same instant to a slow fine shudder [. . .] turned off and regained her chair. [. . .] She had touched in her passage a bell near the chimney and had sunk back strangely pale. (449–450)

It is immediately following this episode that May Bartram announces to Marcher that she is 'too ill' to tell him what 'the thing' is. Although we know at this stage that May Bartram does indeed have a serious illness – 'a deep disorder of the blood' (443) – her action here can also be read as distinctly perverse (in the psychoanalytic sense): she has spent the entire story calling forth Marcher's desire, simply, it would seem, in order to *refuse* to satisfy it.[67] We might thus say that by this point in the narrative May Bartram has found *a new mode of enjoying*: one which consists in gloating over Marcher's lack, in toying with his fantasy. A more extreme (and indeed unpleasant) version of this same mode of behaviour occurs in a scene in David Lynch's film *Wild at Heart*, when Bobby Peru (Willem Defoe) threatens and menaces Lula (Laura Dern) prompting her to say the words 'Fuck me'. In response to Lula's linguistic giving way, Bobby Peru jumps back, flashes an obscene grin and says: 'Someday, honey, I will. But I gotta get going. Sing, don't cry.'[68] May Bartram's 'I'm afraid I'm too ill' can be read as *logically equivalent* to Bobby Peru's 'I gotta get going': both statements are used to demonstrate a cynical mastery over the other; a mastery which consists in withdrawing from the scene at the moment at which the other's fantasy has been stirred. While both characters therefore *require* the other, they at the same time treat the other as a mere means, as no more than an exchangeable 'object' which enables them to obtain *jouissance* through the exercise of a certain sadistic power.[69]

Another twist occurs, however, several lines later when May Bartram states that the thing to come is the thing that '*was*' to come. In case

Marcher has failed to understand this point, May Bartram reasserts it unambiguously during their meeting the following day: 'I'm not sure you understand. There is nothing to wait for more. It *has* come' (452). Marcher is initially all at sea: 'Really? [...] The thing that, as you said, *was* to? [...] You mean it has come as a positive definite occurrence, with a name and a date? [...] But come in the night – come and passed me by?' May Bartram responds, first of all, with a kind of concealed pleasure (a 'faint strange smile'), but then goes on to demonstrate her authority, to speak with 'the true voice of the law [...] on her lips':

> It has done its office. It has made you all its own. [...] So utterly without your knowing it. [...] It's enough if *I* know it. [...] What I long ago said is true. You'll never know now, and I think you ought to be content. You've *had* it. (452)

Here, once again, the narrative switches gear: May Bartram steps forward as the Absolute Master – she is in charge not only of the beast, which is to say of Marcher, but also of time: 'Before, you see, it was always to *come*. That kept it present' (453). May Bartram thus informs Marcher that the thing he hoped for is now 'past [...] it's behind', that his 'light [has] failed', while at the same time making him aware that *the* event of his life is something *he* can never come to know – the secret knowledge, which of course is that there is *no* secret knowledge, belongs entirely to her:

> [Marcher] how can the thing I've never felt at all be the thing I was marked out to feel? [...]
>   [May Bartram] You take your 'feelings' for granted. You were to suffer your fate. That was not necessarily to know it. (453)

Given that Marcher is by this point mourning 'the absence of everything', should we conclude that May Bartram is punishing him for having failed to see what has been right in front of his eyes, namely, the love of a 'good woman'? Do her enigmatic language games, which refuse to satisfy Marcher's demand for knowledge about 'the thing' now passed, indicate that while she still perhaps wants his love, she has now simply lost patience with his narcissism? To accept this interpretation would again be to follow what I have been calling a standard ethical-romantic reading of the story. More interestingly, I would argue, May

Bartram is here (as in the previous 'I'm afraid I'm too ill' episode) demonstrating that perversion can itself be a solution to the impossibility of the sexual relation.[70] Unlike the neurotic, the pervert is not haunted by the anxious question 'What does the other want from me?'; a question which involves taking seriously the *question* of the other's desire. Rather, the distinctive feature of perversion is that it is based upon a disavowal (Freud's *Verleugnung*) of the other's desire.[71] This does not mean, however, that the other is simply absent from the universe of the pervert; on the contrary, the pervert, and more specifically the sadist, must know what the other desires in order that they might accomplish their aim of provoking the other's anxiety. As Lacan puts it: 'The anxiety of the other party, his essential existence as a subject in relation to this anxiety, is precisely the string that sadistic desire means to pluck.'[72] It is, then, by feeding on the anxiety of the other that the sadist comes to derive libidinal satisfaction. A striking example of this behaviour occurs at the beginning of Part V of James's tale:

> she kept him a while at bay, left him restless and wretched during a series of days on each of which he asked about her only again to have to turn away, she ended his trial by receiving him [. . .]. [I]t was she herself [. . .] who brought him back, took him up, before she dismissed him [. . .]. 'I'm not sure you understood. You've nothing to wait for [. . .]. It *has* come' [. . .] May Bartram had her strange faint smile. (451–452)

In his Seminar X, Lacan argues that what lies concealed behind the sadist's search for the other's anxiety is, specifically, the search for the other's *objet a*.[73] In the case of James's story this is complicated by the fact that the beast-as-object is itself originally summoned-up by May Bartram; however, it is clear that Marcher's anxiety becomes most acute when he knows that his treasured object is about to be lost: 'He had in this later time turned nervous, which was what he in all the other years had never been, and the oddity was that his nervousness should have waited till he had begun to doubt' (446). Whilst the full realization of this loss is endlessly postponed, May Bartram's stepping forth as legislator – 'You've *had* it' – puts Marcher under a new law, one which he himself names: 'I Suffer' (453). Here, though, we should refrain from seeing Marcher as simply the *victim* of the law of May Bartram's desire and attempt instead to grasp the final episodes of the story in their full dialectical complexity. First, in the penultimate section of the tale, May Bartram puts herself in the position of *objet a,*

replacing the Beast ('the thing'). While this initially serves to disorient and distress Marcher, it finally grants him another occupation: deciphering the enigma of May Bartram herself, against the ticking clock: 'It sprung up sharp to him [...] the fear that she might die without giving him light' (450). Second, in the final part of the tale, following the death of May Bartram and the disappearance of the Beast, Marcher at first believes that he has lost everything which has hitherto provided him with meaning and indeed pleasure: 'the Jungle had been threshed to vacancy and [...] the Beast had stolen away', bringing about 'the extinction in his life of the element of suspense [...] the effect resembled [...] the abrupt cessation, the positive prohibition, of music' (455). Once again, however, Marcher finally manages to conjure something out of nothing, meaning out of absence: it is May Bartram's tomb, 'the barely discriminated slab in the London suburb' (457), which comes to function as the new object around which his drive circulates: '[He wandered] round and round [the tomb] [...] whose seat was his point, so to speak, of orientation [...] dependent on it not alone for a support but for an identity' (458). Paradoxically, however, while the engraved slab representing death gives Marcher new life, it also cements May Bartram's absolute authority: not only is the tomb an 'open page' (authored by Bartram) in which Marcher can 'lose himself', but, as he circles around it, May Bartram's 'eyes, turning with his revolution, never ceased to follow him' (458). In death, then, May Bartram becomes a divine presence (the still point in the turning world) under whose gaze Marcher 'settled to live'. But to live, for Marcher, turns out to be nothing more than a 'last sleep' in which he recollects that under May Bartram's law 'he once *had* lived' (458).

If Marcher's settling to live at the foot of May Bartram's tomb signals the culmination of his passion for authority, then the story's melodramatic final scene also demonstrates his enduring passion for ignorance. Whilst visiting May Bartram's grave, Marcher encounters a stranger who, the text informs us, he recognizes straight away as 'deeply stricken – a perception so sharp that nothing else in the picture comparatively lived' (459). The 'raw glare' of the other's grief seemingly has a profound affect upon Marcher: it illuminates the 'void of his life', prompting the realization that '*she* [May Bartram] was what he had missed':

This was the awful thought, the answer to all the past, the vision at the dread clearness of which he grew as cold as the stone beneath him. Everything fell together, confessed, explained, overwhelmed; leaving him most of all

stupefied at the blindness he had cherished. The fate he had been marked for he had met with a vengeance – he had emptied the cup to the lees; he had been the man of his time, *the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. That was the rare stroke – that was his visitation [. . .] The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived.
(460)

On one reading, this passage indicates Marcher's having finally arrived at a point of true clarity: he comes to see what has been hiding in plain sight, although the tragedy is that this truth-event arrives too late.[74] On such an account, divine justice thus prevails: having been punished for his egoism, our protagonist is finally gifted a sublime, moral revelation: 'The escape would have been to love her; then, *then* he would have lived'. Might we not argue, however, that what Marcher comes to see at this supposedly pivotal juncture is precisely *nothing*? That his truth-event is merely the semblance of an event; his revelation simply a further (self) deception, a continuation of his old 'cherished' blindness. For what we appear to encounter here is, as Robert Pippin puts it, nothing other than 'one more turn of the same screw'[75]: Marcher is, he believes, still '*the* man' with a 'rare' fate; but now it is this mythical fate – rather than any failure on his part to *act* – which has made him the man to whom nothing on earth was to have happened. Moreover, May Bartram is still the envelope of truth ('*she* had seen it [the Beast] while he didn't, and so she served at this hour to drive the truth home' (460)); however, Marcher now, according to his own account, sees what she (once) saw, knows what she (once) knew, 'knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze' (460). This is knowledge which an 'enlightened' Marcher now attempts to 'fix' and to 'hold': 'he kept it there before him so that he might feel the pain', and this pain, 'belated and bitter', has 'something of the taste of life' (460–461). Pain and life: the narrator's words here are both troubling and revealing, for they point to the intimate connection between Marcher's taste for authority and his passion for ignorance. It is his desire *not to know* which enables him to *live* precisely by allowing May Bartram's *law* to continue to function. Marcher's final move then – perverse, masochistic, servile – is to reduce himself to nothing (to a mere object), as he revives, in all its glory, their original drama, now appropriately staged upon a grave:

He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was

to settle him. His eyes darkened – it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down, on the tomb. (461)

THE ETHICS OF PERVERSION AND THE ROLE OF THE ANALYST

What we appear to be left with here, then, is nothing more than an ethical void: a toxic mix of ugly feelings and cynical behaviours carried out in a world without others. And yet, it would seem that in a final dialectical twist we might add something further to our readings of both Marcher and May Bartram, before staging a final return to the theme of absence. Beginning with May Bartram: it doesn't appear too much of a dialectical leap to find a certain utopian dimension beneath the façade of her sadistic language games. This picture emerges much more clearly once we begin to imagine May Bartram in the role of the analyst. According to Bruce Fink,

> [t]he analyst attempts to get the analysand's desire into motion [. . .]. The analyst attempts to arouse the analysand's curiosity about every manifestation of the unconscious, to bring the analysand to wonder about the why and wherefore of his or her life [. . .] and by getting the analysand to throw things into question, the analyst makes the analysand want to know something, find out something, figure out what the unconscious is saying, what the analyst sees in his or her slips, dreams, and fantasies, what the analyst means when he or she punctuates, scands, and interprets, and so on. The analyst, by attributing meaning to all these things, becomes the cause of the analysand's wonderings, ponderings, ruminations, dreams, and speculations – in short, the cause of the analysand's desire.[76]

The analyst thus operates as object a while the analysand is a (divided) subject ($\$$) who wants to know. The upper level of Lacan's formula of the discourse of the analyst, set forth in his Seminar XVII, expresses this as follows: $a \rightarrow \$$.[77] Given arguments made about May Bartram in the previous section, we should note here the striking similarity between the discourse of the analyst and the structure of (sadistic) perversion: in both cases the agent puts herself in the position of object a with the aim of dividing – disorienting, as I previously put it – the other. How, then, should we distinguish between the analyst and the pervert? First, in relation to knowledge, the pervert (and specifically the sadist) is, as I have

already suggested, *one who knows*: she knows perfectly well what the other lacks and this allows her to believe that she *really* can be the object of the other's jouissance – object *a*. The analyst, by contrast, never claims to know anything, despite being positioned by the analysand as subject supposed to know (*subjet supposé savoir*). In this respect, the analyst recognizes that she is only a *semblance* of the object *a*: she manoeuvres herself into the position of the analysand's object-cause of desire (*a*) in order to allow the *real* work of analysis to begin – the work of transference. Second, in relation to ethics, the pervert plucks the strings of the other's anxiety in order to derive libidinal satisfaction; in this respect, the other is for the pervert always a mere means. The analyst, on the other hand, attempts to shake the very foundations of the other's psychic life, bringing her to the truth of her own subjective position. While this can – and indeed *should* – generate anxiety, this is only a stage on the way to the emergence of the possibility of *new possibilities* for the analysand. Therefore, whilst there is something conformist about the pervert who remains forever stuck in the loop of transgression and law, the analyst, much more radically, *transgresses transgression* by opening up a new space 'outside the limits of the law' in which, as Lacan puts it, 'a limitless love [might] emerge'.[78]

Returning to some of the Wittgensteinian terminology used in chapter two, we might thus say that it requires nothing more than a 'change of aspect' to see May Bartram in the role of the analyst and thus as demonstrating love in the sense described above – a love which aims, ultimately, at transforming the other's life with language. This is not of course to insist that one *must* read May Bartram thus; indeed, perhaps an even more interesting approach (taking the duck-rabbit as its model) is one that sees May Bartram as occupying the position of both the pervert and the analyst at different times, in the event of different instances of reading. However, continuing on our current track (May Bartram as analyst), the standard reading of James's text is, we might say, partially correct – May Bartram does indeed love Marcher – but this reading fails to look again at the 'reality of the appearance'.[79] May Bartram is not a woman who waits patiently for her man, but a practitioner of dialectics whose love is expressed through her attempt to assist the other (Marcher) in overcoming certain illusions of thought. In this respect, May Bartram has a great deal in common not only with the later Wittgenstein – whose aim is to free his readers/interlocutors from the multitude of philosophical pictures holding them captive – but also with Kierkegaard's Johannes de Silentio.

Like de Silentio, May Bartram traffics in fictions and provocations; she also uses an indirect method to encourage Marcher to begin the process of interrogating his unhappy passion, the lurking Beast. Such a strategy, as Kierkegaard himself points out, using the case of the impulsive lover, is one that requires humbleness, tact and patience:

> [T]ake the case of a lover who has been unhappy in love, and suppose that the way he yields to his passion is really unreasonable, impious, unchristian. In case you cannot begin with him in such a way that he finds genuine relief in talking to you about his suffering and is able to enrich his mind with the poetical interpretations you suggest for it, not withstanding you have no share in this passion, and want to free him from it – if you cannot do that, then you cannot help him at all; he shuts himself away from you, he retires within himself…and then you only prate to him.[80]

Understood as analyst, May Bartram is no mere good-natured humanist who loves Marcher simply 'for himself', as he believes is the case at the end of the story. Rather, her enigmatic language games are open invitations to him to *truly* love her by, paradoxically, *going beyond her* – the end of the transference, we should remind ourselves, is marked by the falling away of the subject supposed to know. What May Bartram hopes to bring Marcher to see is thus that there is no Absolute Master, no subject of total knowledge, who can be relied upon to serve up fundamental truths (about the self, the world, or in this case the Beast in the Jungle). One must instead set out 'not knowing where [one is] going' (Hebrews 11:8) and find the truth that is true for oneself.

In a 1906 letter to Carl Jung, Freud writes that 'psychoanalysis is a cure through love'.[81] According to Jonathan Lear, what Freud's remark signals here is 'that psychoanalytic therapy requires the analysand's emotional engagement with the analyst and the analyst's empathetic understanding of [the] patient'.[82] In James's tale, it would thus appear that Marcher emerges as the troublesome analysand who prevents the analytic relationship from getting underway due to his refusal, or perhaps inability, to acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the exchange. In this respect, Marcher misses the *possibility* of May Bartram's words, demonstrating a form of 'meaning blindness'. Looking more dialectically at Marcher's case, however, might we not also ask whether it is possible to detect in his sad passion (his attachment to the Beast) – and his dogged refusal to give it up – a certain utopian impulse, such that the thing's 'cure' would consist not

in its total disappearance (cutting off the head of the Beast, so to speak), but rather in its rearticulation within a different, and much more radical, discursive register? How might such a linguistic and cognitive transformation be imagined, and what might its ethical and political implications be?

BEYOND NARCISSISM: THE BEAST AS COLLECTIVE

Marcher is certainly, as is remarked at the end of the story, a 'man of his time' (460); but once again this is not in the way that *he* thinks. More exactly, he is an example of what Christopher Lasch has called 'the psychological man' of the twentieth century: 'the final product of bourgeois individualism'.[83] 'The new narcissist,' Lasch writes, 'is haunted not by guilt but by anxiety. He seeks not to inflict his own certainties on others but to find a meaning in life. [...] He extols cooperation and teamwork while harbouring deeply antisocial impulses. [...] [H]e lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire. The narcissist has no interest in the future because, in part, he has so little interest in the past.'[84] As Lasch further argues, the narcissist divides the world into two (Nietzschean) groups: on the one hand, great, rare and noble individuals; on the other hand, the common herd, the mediocre mass, the crowd.[85] Marcher's principal fear throughout the story (and one which becomes intimately bound up with his fear of losing the Beast) is the fear of being lost in the *crowd* (426), of becoming *common* (457).

The first thing to say about this devotion to absolute singularity is not only that it is always-already a mode of conformism (and thus that it undermines the very uniqueness that it celebrates), but, more importantly, that it is a wholly manufactured passion. For Althusser, ideology famously consists in '"constituting" concrete individuals as subjects'[86]; however, following Jodi Dean, we might say that Althusser in fact gets the issue backwards: the *actual* function of ideology is 'the interpellation of the subject as an individual'.[87] As Warren Montag notes: 'individuals are picked from an undifferentiated mass, singled out, removed from it and endowed with a unique identity, as if such a singling out or separation of individuals were necessary to the functioning of the economy'.[88] There is thus nothing natural or given about the individual form: it emerges historically as 'a product of European modernity, the form through which collective economic force is politically secured'[89]; while ideologically the individual is produced through a never-ending process of coercion, separation and capture: 'the individual form encloses into a singular bounded body collective bodies, ideas, affects,

desires, and drives'.[90] The produced individual is, however, always an 'unstable product', precisely because 'the collectivity enclosed within the individual' forever threatens to reappear. In this respect, the process of interpellation is never complete: there remains, always, a surplus which cannot be 'subjectivized', an excess which resists symbolic 'individuation'; and this because the human being is first and foremost a social being, a collective being, a being whose life is a life with language.

It is not too much of a leap, then, to suggest that in James's tale it is the 'Beast' (as signifier) which goes proxy for the ineliminable 'collective'; and in this respect, the spectre haunting Marcher is a (misrecognized) reminder of a fundamental *commonness*. Following our previous arguments regarding the Beast as object *a*, we might say that 'the collective' is already there at the heart of Marcher, it is part of his most intimate self; yet he sees it only as something alien, strange and incomprehensible. This opposition allows us to add a materialist dimension to our earlier remarks on the divided subject: the split occurs not just as the product of the functioning of language; more specifically, it is the outcome of a real tension between the social form of life, grounded in language, and an ideologically commanded individuality which attempts to (re)construct the human around the solitary 'I'. It is in the gap between these two modes of being that Marcher emerges. As previously noted, it is the Beast which guarantees Marcher's 'distinction'; and, assuming we grant a correspondence between Beast and collective, Marcher might be seen to have a vague inkling of Marx's point that '[t]he human being [. . .] can *individuate itself only in the midst of society*'.[91] Becoming individual in any meaningful sense, for Marx as for Kant, requires participation in collective forms of life: it is commonness not uniqueness which is key. Ultimately, however, Marcher fails to grasp the relation between self and society dialectically: he sees the Beast only as confirming his individuality – not as something which already hints at the obsolescence of the individual form – and thus he remains stuck in the language game of 'difference' (457). What is required, ethically speaking, is for Marcher to find a new way of going on with words – one which acknowledges that what is in him more than himself is the collective. However, he is blocked, condemned to repeat:

> A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. (PI, 115)

Connecting the Beast with the collective is of course no mere speculative link. It is, as I point out in section II of this chapter, a central component

of the discourse of the Jungle which emerges at the beginning of the twentieth century. The connection is also made during the same period in the work of various European theorists of 'the crowd'.[92] Gustave Le Bon, for example, whose ideas in *Psychologie des foules* (1895) were the starting point for Freud's work on group psychology, remarks that '[as] part of an organised group, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilisation. [. . .] [I]n a crowd, [man] is a barbarian, that is, a *creature* acting by instinct.'[93] In his study *Penal Philosophy*, Gabriel De Tarde also expresses a critical attitude towards collective formations (he is explicitly concerned with the link between imitative behaviour, crowds and criminal activity), and he makes the link between the 'mob' (*foule*) and the beast in even more explicit terms:

> [I]t is especially in the great tumultuous assemblages of our cities that [the] characteristic force of the social world ought to be studied. The great scenes of our revolutions cause it to break out, just as great storms are a manifestation of the presence of the electricity in the atmosphere. While it remains unperceived though none the less still a reality in the intervals between them. A *mob* [*foule*] is a strange phenomenon. It is a gathering of heterogeneous elements, unknown to one another; but as soon as a spark of passion, having flashed out, from one of these elements, electrifies this confused mass, there takes place a sort of sudden organization, a spontaneous generation. This incoherence becomes cohesion, this noise becomes a voice, and these thousands of men crowded together soon form but a single animal, a *wild beast* without a name, which marches to its goal with an irresistible finality.[94]

Despite his general hostility, Tarde cannot disguise his fascination: the Beast as collective force *Marche(r)s* unstoppably towards its goal.

THE POLITICS OF MISRECOGNITION

There is a crucial point towards the end of the story when Marcher is granted the possibility of seeing things otherwise, of recognizing himself in the collective (or indeed the collective in himself), and therefore of transforming the narrative of the Beast into an alternative discursive register. At the foot of May Bartram's tomb, he has a glimpse of himself as '*nothing* [. . .] for anyone, *nothing* even for himself' (458). Into this empty space – this 'void' (560) – steps the figure of the stranger (a fellow mourner), whose 'grief' forces Marcher to 'wonder in pity what wrong,

what wound it expressed, what injury not to be healed. What had the man *had*, to make him by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?' (459). Here Marcher is 'directly confronted' (459) with the suffering, needy, mortal other: 'he caught', as the text puts it, 'the shock of the face', which put out 'a signal for sympathy' (459). The stranger thus figures, in one sense, as an emblematic instance of the modern subject in pain; however, the lack of any detailed physical description of the figure, along with the fact that he appears to Marcher in the form of a spectre, when the latter is consumed by mental and physical exhaustion, is significant. The stranger could indeed be anyone, anywhere, or, more significantly, not the 'one' but *the many*. Equally crucial is the fact that the stranger is not *entirely* weakened: he looks at Marcher 'with an expression *like the cut of a blade*' (458).[95] This fleeting episode is, I would argue, a key moment in the story's conclusion: the symbolic wound inflicted upon Marcher is that which dialectically speaking opens up the space for his potential liberation. The other-as-collective makes an *ethical cut* – an act of love not violence – which signifies a point of rupture and thus raises the possibility of new possibilities for the protagonist. Marcher is, quite literally, invited to look at what is there inside himself.

Of course Marcher cannot embrace his wound, cannot love his assailant as himself, cannot grasp the truth that 'nothing can be sole or whole/[t]hat has not been rent',[96] cannot see that *actually* absenting the absence (the 'void of his life' (460)) requires *being-with-others*.[97] And yet, in a final shift of the interpretive gears, can we not say that Marcher's failure to recognize the collective in the stranger (or indeed the Beast in the stranger) is itself a kind of dialectical first step: an instance of misrecognition which is internally related to the possibility of (future) knowledge?[98] If Marcher had *immediately* seen the stranger or the Beast *as* the possibility of his own *being-in-common*, then there would be nothing for him (potentially at least) to 'work through', no illusion for him to 'overcome' in any movement towards truth. We might therefore say that we do not see things otherwise without first having seen them only one way, or perhaps not even at all: insight requires (initial) blindness; knowledge goes by way of misapprehension. To use a phrase from Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', '[w]e must start out with error and convert it into truth [. . .]. [O]ne must find the *path* from error to truth.'[99]

An example from contemporary politics can, in conclusion, serve to bring out the wider implications of this point. As the consequences of the global economic crisis of 2008 continue to unfold, we now appear to have

entered a new age of discontent. As anger and frustration builds among large numbers of people, so too does the desire to name the enemy, what we might call the new Beast. This new Beast is variously named: 'immigrants', 'the liberal elite', 'globalisation', 'the establishment', 'the 1%'. Here we should make two observations. First, each of these terms, whether reactionary or more progressive, point to a broader set of anxieties about a range of issues: falling living standards, stagnating wages, increasing inequality, and, more generally, a disappearance of any real sense of the future. Second, the terms partake of a deeper ideological unity: they take the 'cause' of 'the problem' to be a separable, corrupting influence – a mere *negative element* within the natural structure – rather than the profit system as such. By failing to name the *actual* Beast, the terms align themselves with different forms of (rightist and leftist) populism – the antagonistic struggle of 'us' versus 'them' – and in so doing exclude the possibility of actual class struggle.

While we should of course (tactically) support all instances of progressive, left-populism, we need, at the same time, to recognize their limits: they are moments of *political misrecognition* which imagine that the ethical void at the centre of contemporary capitalism can be negated or overcome by a 'radicalization' of existing liberal democracy.[100] Importantly, these instances of misrecognition always imply the realization of certain truths: 'elected representatives' fail to represent the actual interests of the people; existing democracy refuses to tolerate any real opposition; governments are little more than technocratic management committees acting in the interests of capital. The problem with such 'truths', however, is twofold: first, the 'pathological' symptoms which they claim to identify are in fact only evidence of the 'normal' functioning of the system as such; second, the 'forces of opposition' which strive to 'cure' such symptoms – new reformist parties of the so-called 'radical left' (Syriza, Podemos), along with rejuvenated old social democratic parties (the UK Labour Party) are *structurally* incapable of doing anything other than adapting themselves to that which they (ostensibly) oppose, toning down their 'unrealistic demands' in order to make themselves 'electable'. As with Marcher's Beast, then, understanding must move beyond the naive first impression and begin anew along a dialectical path. In our own moment of political crisis, in which new forms of ideological and ethical disorientation are rapidly emerging, such a movement can, as I have been arguing in this study, pursue a fourfold strategy: (i) a reactivation of the powers of the utopian

imagination; (ii) a willingness to begin again at the beginning, and, if necessary, to 'fail again [. . .] fail better'; (iii) a renewed awareness of the force of negativity; and (iv) a re-turning to the praxis of radical critique. Such a strategy will be for nothing if its end is not a *limitless political love* grounded in new forms of collective life. We must continue to search amongst modernism's ruins for discreet signs of how to realize this goal.

Notes

1. A version of this argument is put forward by Jane P. Tompkins when she argues that 'there is greater depth and intensity of feeling in one of [James's] novels than many people experience in their whole lives. This intensity of feeling [. . .] manifests itself in his style.' Jane P. Tompkins, '"The Beast in the Jungle": An Analysis of James's Late Style', *Modern Fiction Studies* 16 [1970]: 185–191 (185).

2. Dorothea Krook, *The Ordeal of Consciousness in Henry James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 390. On the late style, Eagleton also makes the following insightful remarks: 'The convoluted later style, with its bafflingly intricate syntax and extraordinarily mannered mode of expression, is among other things an attempt to refine language to the point where not a particle of experience or wisp of implication can be lost to it. It is a way of trying to see an object from all angles simultaneously, weaving a linguistic web so close-knit and fine-grained that it allows no scintilla of meaning to escape. It is a style which tries to capture an idea or sensation in the very moment of its formation, registering it in all its irreducible density. James's prose presses the syntax of everyday experience to a point where it only just fails to come apart in his hands.' Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 223. For a detailed discussion of James's late style from the point of view of stylistics and linguistics, see Seymour Chatman, *The Later Style of Henry James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972).

3. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 210. A similar argument is put forward by Žižek at the beginning of his essay 'Kate's Choice, or, the Materialism of Henry James', in Slavoj Žižek ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 288–289.

4. Henry James, 'The Beast in the Jungle' in *Selected Tales* ed. John Lyon (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 426–461. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the body of the chapter.

5. Henry James, *A Life in Letters* ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 373. The title of the original Methuen collection is *The Better Sort*.

6. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, p. 389.

7. Ibid., 389 & 392. For Emerson's essay see Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Experience', in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature and Selected Essays* ed. Larzer Ziff (London: Penguin, 2003) pp. 285–312.
8. Cavell, *Cities of Words*, pp. 407 & 389.
9. Ibid., p. 391.
10. Ibid., p. 392.
11. Ibid., pp. 407–408.
12. Ibid., p. 394.
13. Ibid.,
14. Fredric Jameson, 'Remarks on Henry James', *The Henry James Review* 36:3 (Fall, 2015): 296–306 (299).
15. Ibid., 300.
16. For a more detailed discussion of Heidegger and vision see Chapter 2 of this study.
17. Fredric Jameson, 'Remarks on Henry James', 301. See also Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms* (London: Calder, 1967). For an exploration of Serraute's work see Ruby Cohn, 'Nathalie Serraute's Sub-consciousversations', *MLN* 78:3 (May 1963): 261–270.
18. Jameson, 'Remarks on Henry James', 302.
19. Here we should briefly mention a number of other fictional works, written around the same time as James's tale, which utilize the idea of the jungle: Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), *The Second Jungle Book* (1895) and *Just So Stories for Little Children* (1902), and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906).
20. Michael Lundbland, *The Birth of the Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U. S. Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1ff.
21. The 1903 Coal Strike, also referred to as the Anthracite Strike, was initiated by the United Mineworkers of America over working hours, wages, and trade union recognition. The strike was suspended after Roosevelt's intervention: after threatening to send in troops to quell the strike Roosevelt managed to secure arbitration for the dispute with participants from Federal Government, organized labour and mine management. The strike never resumed as the miners received a 10% pay increase and a reduction in working hours from ten to nine hours a day. They did not, however, receive trade union recognition; and the mine owners received an increase in the price of coal. The cartoon references the President's widely recognized fondness for big game hunting. With the strike threatening to lead to winter coal shortages its defeat is therefore seen by the newspaper as being of the utmost urgency. The size and apparent ferocity of the slain 'beast' indicates a profound anxiety in ruling class circles as to the danger of letting such a beast run amok.
22. In the year after the 1903 Coal Strike a circus elephant named Topsy, housed in Lunar Park, Coney Island (NY) was publicly executed using a

combination of cyanide, electrocution and hanging. Her 'crime': failing to be a 'complicit' and 'manageable' worker. Topsy refused to pull amusement rides and to haul construction materials which were being used at the park. While presented as mere entertainment, the spectacle of Topsy's execution also served as a sinister warning to the 1500 working-class people who attended the event: insubordination *will* be punished.

23. Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), p. 11.
24. Ibid., p. 27.
25. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), p. 145.
26. Ibid., p. 177.
27. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and Modes of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 173ff.
28. Even accomplished interpreters often end up following a version of what I am calling the 'standard reading' of James's story. See, for example, Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 278–280; Robert B. Pippin, *Henry James & Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 92–105.
29. For Freud's remarks on repression and forgetting, see Sigmund Freud, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. Alan Tyson (London: Ernest Benn, 1966), Ch. I–III & VII.
30. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 63–64.
31. Here it should be noted that for Lacan the gaze is not on the side of the *subject*, but, rather, on the side of the *object*: 'When the subject looks at an object, the object is always already gazing back at the subject, but from a point at which the subject cannot see it.' Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 72. Cf. Jacques Lacan, SXI, pp. 67–119.
32. See, for example, Stephen Barker & Mark Jago, 'Being Positive About Negative Facts', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85:1 (2012): 117–183.
33. David Lewis & Stephanie Lewis, 'Holes', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48:2 (1970): 206–212.
34. Martin Heidegger, 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 166 & 169.
35. Ibid., p. 169.
36. See Jacques Lacan, SVII, pp. 142 ff. For Klein's original article, see Melanie Klein, 'Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse', *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 10 (1929):

436–443. I base my own summary on Klein's essay, rather than Lacan's remarks about it.

37. Specifically, what Lacan objects to is the Kleinian doctrine which situates the mythic body of the mother at the central place of the Thing (*das Ding*) and locates the phases of all sublimation there.

38. Lacan, SVII, p. 145.

39. Ibid., p. 77.

40. Ibid., pp.87–88. Lacan speaks of 'the intimate exteriority or "extimacy," that is the Thing', Ibid., p. 171. The theme of the 'foreign body' also has obvious connections with Freud's notion of *Unheimlich*. See, Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII (1917–1919): *An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 218–252.

41. Lacan, SVII, pp. 65 & 146 (added emphasis). Lacan also writes: 'the Thing only presents itself to the extent that it becomes word, hits the bullseye, as they say'. Ibid., p. 66.

42. Ibid., p. 71.

43. Ibid., p. 147.

44. Ibid., p. 146.

45. Ibid., p. 145.

46. Ibid., p. 160.

47. Lacan, SXI, p. 270.

48. Jacques Lacan, SXX, p. 35.

49. Lacan, SXI, p. 270.

50. Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 81.

51. Lacan, SXX, p. 126.

52. I take the issue of subject and object to be the one on which Kant and Lacan have most in common. The usual point of contact is Kant avec Sade. However, in the previous chapter (chapter 5), I argue that this essay is based on a somewhat inaccurate reading of Kant by Lacan.

53. Emphasis added.

54. Slavoj Žižek, 'The Cartesian Subject without the Cartesian Theatre', *The Subject of Lacan: A Lacanian Reader for Psychologists*, ed. Kareen Ror Malone & Stephen R. Friedlander (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 40.

55. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIV: The Logic of Fantasy,* 1966–1967. Unpublished typescript. Translated by Cormack Gallagher. (16/11/1966). http://www.valas.fr/IMG/pdf/THE-SEMINAR-OF-JACQUES-LACAN-XIV_logique_du_fantasme.pdf [accessed 30 July 2016].

56. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), A 109–110.

57. Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defence* (revised ed.) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 70. Emphasis added.

58. Ibid.

59. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 18; Žižek, *The Parallax View*, p. 18.

60. Lacan, SXI, p. 167.

61. Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Extimity', *The Symptom* 9 http://www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=36 [accessed online 30 July 2016].

62. Lacan, SXI, p. 263 ff.

63. Ibid., p. 243.

64. For a discussion of Marx and the drive, see Chapter 5 of the current study.

65. Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 5.

66. Added emphasis.

67. I return to the subject of perversion in more technical detail below. Here, however, I should note that my thinking on this topic has been greatly assisted by the following: Jacques-Alain Miller, 'On Perversion' in *Reading Seminars I and II: Lacan's Return to Freud* ed. Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink and Maire Jaanus (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 306–320; *Perversion: Psychoanalytic Perspectives/ Perspectives on Psychoanalysis*, ed. Dany Nobus & Lisa Downing (London: Karnac Books, 2006); Dany Nobus, *Jacques Lacan and the Freudian Practice of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. Ch 1.

68. *Wild at Heart*, Dir. David Lynch (The Samuel Goldman Co., 1990) [film].

69. On this perverse economy, see Jacques Lacan, 'Kant Avec Sade', in *Écrits*, pp. 645–668. For a detailed and insightful discussion of Lacan's essay, see Dany Nobus, 'Lacan's "Kant with Sade"' (unpublished typescript). My own view of the theoretical limits of Lacan's essay are, however, articulated in Chapter 5 of this study.

70. As Lacan writes: 'It seems that the subject calls (*se représente*) inanimate objects to mind as a function of the following – that there's no such thing as a sexual relation. It's only speaking bodies, as I said, that come up with an idea of the world as such. The world, the world of being, full of knowledge, is but a dream, a dream of the body insofar as it speaks, for there's no such thing as a knowing subject (*il n'y a pas de sujet connaissant*). There are subjects that give themselves correlates in object *a*, correlates of enjoying speech qua jouissance of speech (*parole jouissante en tant que jouissance de parole*). Lacan, SXX, pp. 126–127.

71. For a discussion of the mechanism of negation – disavowal – within the structure of perversion, see Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian*

Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 66–69. As Fink notes, 'in psychoanalysis "perversion" is not a derogatory term, used to stigmatise people for engaging in sexual behaviours different from the "norm"' (Ibid., 166). This follows Freud's early assertion that any sexual activity engaged in, other than for the purpose of reproduction, is perverse. For psychoanalysis, perversion designates a specific clinical structure that marks it out from neurosis and psychosis. Perversion is thus not to be viewed as a stigma but rather as a structural category.

72. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety, 1962–1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 104.

73. Ibid., p. 177.

74. For a conventional ethical reading of the final section of James's tale see, for example, Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Michael Coulson Berthold, 'The Idea of "Too Late" in James's "The Beast in the Jungle"', *Henry James Review* 4 (1983): 128–39. For a reading which radically departs from this heterosexual narrative, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'The Beast in the Closet', in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). According to Sedgwick, Marcher is a figure haunted by homosexual panic – there is indeed a beast, *in the closet*.

75. Robert B. Pippin, *Henry James and the Modern Moral Life*, p. 104.

76. Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, pp. 52–53.

77. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, 1969–1970*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007), p. 29.

78. Lacan, SXI, p. 276.

79. Here the reader is referred back to the dialectical schema proposed in the Preface and utilized in the reading of *Fear and Trembling* in chapter 3.

80. Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, p. 28.

81. Freud, Letter to Jung, 6 December 1906 in Sigmund Freud & C.G. Jung, *The Freud/ Jung Letters: The Correspondence between Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 12–13.

82. Jonathan Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 27.

83. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism*, p. xvi.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., p. 84.

86. Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), p. 262.

87. Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 79 ff.

88. Warren Montag, *Althusser and his Contemporaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 104. Cited in Dean, *Crowds and Party*, p. 79.
89. Dean, *Crowds and Party*, p. 86.
90. Ibid., p. 80.
91. Marx, *Grundrisse*, p. 84 (added emphasis).
92. For an engaging set of essays dealing with the politics and theory of the crowd, see *Crowds* ed. Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiews (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), especially sections 2, 3 and 8.
93. Gustave Le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), p. 19 (added emphasis). Freud cites this passage, describing it as an 'important consideration for helping us to understand the individual in a group'. See Sigmund Freud, 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', in Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation, Society, Religion*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 103–104.
94. Gabriel De Tarde, *Penal Philosophy*, trans. Rapelje Howell (Boston: Little Brown & Company, 1912), pp. 322–323 (added emphasis). Like Le Bon, Tarde is deeply sceptical of collective activity. In the section of his study from which this quote is taken, Tarde looks at 'the tendency towards imitation', arguing that men might assemble 'out of pure curiosity' but that the fever in the minds of some soon reaches 'the minds of all' arousing a 'delirium'. This delirium, according to Tarde, was a feature of both the events of 14th of July, 1798, and certain incidents which took place in the Paris Commune (p. 323).
95. Added emphasis.
96. W. B. Yeats, 'Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop', in *W. B. Yeats: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 139.
97. This of course is not to say that a life characterized by *being-with-others*, rather than mere *being-for-oneself*, would be one in which absence was *eliminated*, which would be to suggest that desire too would be eliminated. As I indicate earlier in the chapter, all symbolic structures, under whatever political circumstances, will find that they are organized around an essential absence or void. However, the kind of absence I am suggesting would be overcome, would be an *ideological absence* linked to modern forms of commanded individualism. The desire would no longer be for uniqueness, or, more specifically, would no longer be for uniqueness *as mere individuals*.
98. A not dissimilar concern with the relation between misrecognition and knowledge is touched upon by Lacan. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954*, trans. John Forrester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 167.
99. Wittgenstein, 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*', in *PO*, p. 119.
100. See, for example, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2014).

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