Vulnerability in the Art of Sophie Calle and the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

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## Contents

**Introduction:** 1

**Chapter One:** 7
An Ethics of Vulnerability in *Otherwise than Being*

**Chapter Two:** 63
Vulnerability in the Art of Sophie Calle

**Chapter Three:** 108
Art Criticism as a Response

**Conclusion:** 131

**Bibliography:** 136
Abstract

This thesis concentrates on the artwork *Double Blind* (1992)—a video artwork made collaboratively by Greg Shephard and Sophie Calle—and on Emmanuel Levinas’ second major philosophical book titled *Otherwise than Being*. Beginning with the ethics of *Otherwise than Being* this thesis undertakes a study which attempts to understand Levinas’ philosophical ‘reduction’ and how this reduction can be a dynamic for contemporary art.

Against Levinas’ ‘suspicions’ of art, this thesis argues that Levinas’ ‘reduction’ can be a way for the artwork to retain a trace of Levinas’ ethics. In *Otherwise than Being* the ‘reduction’ is an ethical language that accommodates the ethics of ‘the saying’. This thesis defines Levinas ‘reduction’ as the *approach* made through the giving of vulnerability. For Levinas the tough task of supporting ‘the saying’ is the job for philosophy. This thesis challenges Levinas’ theory of art and argues that art too can be in the *approach*; that art can retain the trace of ‘the saying’; that art can be an important site for ethics.

*Double Blind* (1992) is offered as an example of an artwork in the *approach*. Through a close consideration of *Double Blind* this thesis argues that Sophie Calle’s overall artistic practice is one that speaks in the *approach*. To emphasise the importance of a Levinas ethics for contemporary art this thesis then considers an *approach* for art criticism. This *approach* is defined— in similar way as it is with Calle—as a way that the objective can hold within it the vulnerability of subjectivity: that the objective judgement can be made in art criticism in a way that retains the vulnerability and uncertainty of making a response.
This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed
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Introduction.

... critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same. A calling into question of the same—which cannot within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics.¹


Signification, prior to being, breaks up the assembling, the recollection of the present of essence. On the hither side of or beyond essence, signification is the breathlessness of the spirit expiring without inspiring, disinterestedness. . . the breakup of essence is ethics. This beyond is said, and is conveyed in discourse, by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath. . . This breakup of identity, this changing of being into signification, that is, in to substitution, is the subject’s subjectivity. . . its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility.²

E. Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 1974.

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas gives voice to the way in which the otherness of the other person is an irreducible otherness which cannot be thematised, or is an otherness that resists being held down as a knowable thing. A driving force behind Levinas’ thinking, and his key contribution to philosophy, is the need to keep this otherness as other still, in defiance of the way this otherness can become all too easily lost and absorbed into a thinking that orders and assembles for comprehension. Levinas defines ethics as the way the otherness of the other person calls the self into question. Ethics is the way this otherness disturbs and disrupts the ordering and maintenance of foundational truths.

¹ Levinas continues: ‘Metaphysics, transcendence, the welcoming of the other by the same, of the other by me, is concretely produced as the calling into question of the same by the other, that is, as the ethics that accomplishes the critical essence of knowledge. And as critique precedes dogmatism, metaphysics precedes ontology’. Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity (1961; repr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne, 2005), 43.
In *Totality and Infinity* ethics is present within the social encounter, ethics is active within social exchange. In this social exchange the face of the other person is a *meaning in pieces*, an *in pieces* as an otherness that is separate from assembled meaning. In Levinas’ ethics assembled meaning is the clarity for understanding. It is the way a language of representation can thematise the otherness of the other person. Assembled meaning orders and assembles a *meaning in pieces* so that the voice of otherness, the criticality of otherness, the ethics of otherness, is reduced to universal values and ideals. In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas’ follow-up book, ethics is not so reliant on the ‘face to face’ encounter. Rather, in *Otherwise than Being*, ethics is always already there within oneself, within experience, within assembled meaning. A problem that can arise in Levinas’ philosophy, a problem that *Otherwise than Being* confronts head on, is how to voice a receptivity to otherness, to ethics, without diminishing that otherness; how to argue for an ethics of otherness without subsuming ethics under assembled meaning, without the argument made for ethics becoming the very thing that dissolves or smothers ethics.

With an awareness of Levinas’ general ‘suspicion’ towards art, a suspicion that the artwork assembles the uncertainty of ethics, or that the artwork is one step removed from ethics, this thesis will argue that the artwork can accommodate a Levinasian ethics—that the trace of the otherness of the other person can be retained within the artwork, rather than the artwork being the very thing that absorbs and assembles such a trace. The thesis will demonstrate how the artwork can retain a Levinasian ethics by examining the film *Double Blind*, an artwork made in collaboration between Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard. It will also argue that a Levinasian ethics is more broadly retained in Calle’s artistic practice. This argument will be based on a close reading of chapter two of *Otherwise than Being*. In this chapter Levinas discusses art and also defines a way that representation accommodates

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3 In this sense subjectivity becomes more the focus of *Otherwise than Being*, subjectivity as an otherness within oneself, a restlessness within one self.

4 ‘This gravity of the otherwise than being shows now, in a still confused way, its affinity with ethics. We have been seeking the otherwise than being from the beginning, and as soon as it is conveyed before us it is betrayed in the said that dominates the saying which states it. A methodological problem arises here’, whether the saying ‘can be led to betray itself by showing itself in a theme... and whether this betrayal can be reduced; whether one can at the same time know and free the known of the marks which thematisation leaves on it by subordinating it to ontology’. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyound Essence*, 7.

5 To say that Levinas has a suspicion toward art refers to Levinas’ early essay on art titled ‘Reality and its Shadow’, and also to his book *Totality and Infinity* where, in both cases, Levinas expresses a concern that art and ‘representation’ are one step removed from ethics.
ethics; a way as a method, a method that is an ethics itself, a way as an ethical method that Levinas defines as a ‘reduction’ that takes place in an ‘approach’. Levinas’ ‘reduction’ as the approach allows for a trace of ethics to remain within assembled meaning—if only for a moment.⁶

One reason why this thesis begins its analysis in Otherwise than Being and does not consider in detail Levinas’ description of art in earlier writings,⁷ is because of Jacques Derrida’s critique of Totality and Infinity in his essay “Violence and Metaphysics.” This is not to dismiss Levinas’ thinking pre-Otherwise than Being but is rather because the question of an artworks capacity to accommodate a Levinasian ethics is answered in part through Levinas’ response to Derrida’s deconstructive critique.⁸ What this means is that this thesis takes the position that Levinas changes his use of language in Otherwise than Being in response to

⁶ In Otherwise than Being Levinas will refer to the way ‘the saying’ can be witnessed through reduction—but for a moment—and Derrida picks up on this in his response to Otherwise than Being which is tilted “At this moment in this work here I am.” That in the ‘work’ the saying of subjectivity that raises up and says ‘here I am’ is witnessed, if only for a moment. Derrida writes: ‘. . .the “at this moment” which determines the language of thematisation finds itself, one cannot say determined any longer, but disturbed from its normal signification of presence, by that Relation which makes it possible by opening . . . it up to the other, outside of the theme, outside presence, beyond the circle of the same, beyond being’. See Jacques Derrida, “At This Moment in This Work Here I Am,” in Re-Reading Levinas, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indianapolis Press, 1991), 24.

⁷ Levinas’ position on art in Otherwise than Being does echo his previously held positions on art particularly the position he takes in Existence and Existents.

⁸ Much is made of Levinas’ response to Derrida’s essay Violence and Metaphysics, that Otherwise than Being is a response to Derrida’s criticism. Within a Levinasian scholarship the argument centres on how much Otherwise than Being is indebted to Derrida. Either Otherwise than Being owes everything to Derrida and Levinas does not accurately give credit, or whilst Levinas is influenced by Derrida Otherwise Than Being maintains common themes that keep reoccurring throughout his philosophy. This thesis aligns with the position taken by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi in their introduction to the book Re-Reading Levinas. This position is that the biggest change in Otherwise than Being is in its use of language and that this change in language is in responses to Derrida’s essay. But also that Derrida’s essay is not so much of a dismissal of Levinas’ ethics but is rather a deconstructive critique where Derrida is conscious of the dangers of language destroying the very ethics it is trying to represent. See Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, “Editors’ Introduction,” in Re-Reading Levinas (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), x-xii. And for a complete analysis of Derrida’s criticisms of Totality and Infinity see Colin Davis, Levinas Introduction (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 63-66.

⁹ A deconstructive critique is what I take Bernasconi and Critchley to mean when they write: ‘Although “Violence and Metaphysics” is one of Derrida’s earliest texts, it offers a double reading of Levinas, which, by following and eventually leaving the path of commentary, shows, on the one hand, the impossibility of escaping from logocentric conceptuality and, on the other, the necessity of such an escape arising from the impossibility of remaining wholly within the (Greek) logocentric tradition. Letting these two motifs interface, Derrida’s essay displays the necessity of these two impossibilities and suspends the critical moment of deciding between them.’ Bernasconi and Critchley, xii.
Derrida. In “Violence and Metaphysics” Derrida argues that whilst Levinas tries to focus on the otherness of the other person as an ethics, he only really reinforces a binary between I and the other because of the way he is reliant on a philosophical language. For Derrida, Levinas uses ontological language to be critical of ontology and Derrida’s criticism challenges Levinas to not be so reliant on the codes of philosophy. Levinas’ response is to maintain a philosophically rigorous argument that allows cracks to form, that allows an otherness to interrupt. An example of this is how otherness for Levinas is corporeal: ethics is of the flesh; it is of the body. In Otherwise than Being Levinas argues philosophically against Husserl’s intentionality and suddenly the descriptive text become flesh-like. What this means is that the body and its sensibility is not referred to through a referent or through a metaphor, the body is not referred to as somewhere else. Rather the words themselves have a sense of being corporeal. The sense of corporeality and sensibility disrupts descriptive language, or language that designates meaning. In this way the language of Otherwise than Being interrupts itself, not as a binary between sensibility and intelligibility, but as an otherness that circulates within the very representation that presents it, a sensibility circulates within intelligibility. Rather than describing an ethics, determining an ethics, designating an ethics, Otherwise than Being attempts to enact the very ethics it is arguing for; it allows ethics to

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10 Totality and Infinity is a book that still maintained an antagonism toward ‘representation’, but all this changes in Otherwise than Being; it had to change as a response to Derrida’s critique. In Otherwise than Being, a certain type of ‘representation’ allows otherness to circulate without being assembled. For this reason, because of this shift in language where otherness circulates within representation itself, questioning the way the artwork can accommodate a Levinas ethics begins from Otherwise than Being. In Otherwise than Being Levinas’ language changes to become the approach, a language ‘out of breath’, a language that works toward accommodating a trace of ‘the saying’. Therefore art too can work toward ‘the saying’.

11 Colin Davis refers to this when he writes: ‘The force of Derrida’s argument is that Levinas sets himself up in opposition to Heidegger, but in fact misreads him so that the refutation actually relies upon and reproduces the thought of the philosopher being attacked. Levinas agrees with Heidegger at the very moment when he believes he is rejecting him.’ And again ‘Levinas’s break with his philosophical sources is presented as a misreading as he continues to rely upon concepts, metaphors and habits of thinking which he seeks to abandon.’ Colin Davis, Levinas Introduction (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 1996), 65.

12 Levinas will give an account of his position against Husserl, this is ‘the said’ of the text, the research, the rigor; and then without warning the text is the flesh of ‘the saying’. This is important for Levinas because ‘the saying’ is not a universal abstraction or a spirituality of the soul, rather ‘the saying’ is concrete and corporeal. The vulnerability of ‘the saying’ is the corporeality of being human, of being in the skin that can be wounded. The saying of subjectivity is within tears, blood, skin, the passivity of being exposed to trauma and pain, and the ‘giving out of signs’ can be the armour that protects the ‘skin laid bare’. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 49. This is the ‘strangeness’ that Critchley speaks of in his book The Ethics of Deconstruction, the strangeness of ‘the saying’ as corporeal. In terms of the strangeness of the language of Otherwise than Being Critchley writes: ‘The language of Otherwise than Being –and no attempt has yet been made to appreciate this book’s strangeness, the disturbance it provokes within philosophical discourse’. See Simon Critchley, The Ethics of Deconstruction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 8.
interrupt.\textsuperscript{13} For Levinas, a rigorous philosophical method allows ethics to circulate within the very language that presents it, and this method is not possible for art. It is this thesis’ argument that in \textit{Otherwise than Being} Levinas constructs a very broad and general understanding of art that misses the importance of art as a possible site for ethics.

Another reason that this thesis concentrates on \textit{Otherwise than Being} is because of a focus on Levinas’ definition of the ‘approach’, a focus that attempts to argue that this \textit{approach} is how art can speak a Levinasian ethics and, in doing so, be a mode of critique.\textsuperscript{14} Following an analysis of what Levinas means by the ‘approach’, this thesis will then argue that \textit{Double Blind} enacts a Levinasian ethics, it retains a trace of an irreducible otherness, an otherness that then chips back at assembled meaning by the giving out of vulnerability, by the ‘expression of exposure’, and by the time of waiting.

After arguing in favour of a Levinasian ethics and that the artwork can retain a Levinasian ethics then so too can a response to art. The final chapter of this thesis considers how an ethics in art criticism can address what is sometimes referred to as ‘a crisis of art criticism’. This crisis is defined as a lack of criticality, not just in art criticism but more generally in art institutions: that criticism no longer takes a position of authority for fear of playing the role of chief designator of meaning, or playing the role of connoisseur interpreter, a role played so forcefully by the pre-postmodernist critics. The position that there is a crisis of critique argues that art criticism today, in wanting to distance itself from the modernist critic that proclaimed judgement, has become instead a criticism as a non-position, a reluctance to take a position, a wishy-washy relativism that never really stands for anything. For critics of postmodernism and post-structuralism this becomes emblematic of a weak relativism. As a counter to both the argument that this is so widespread as to be a ‘crisis’, and also as a counter against criticism that takes the form of a weak relativism, this

\textsuperscript{13} This is how Levinas enacts the very ethics of which he speaks. He takes his position in a rigorous philosophy; he makes an argument against Husserl’s intentionality, and within this argument, allows for the ethics of otherness to interrupt, that is, the uncertainty of the body appears; then the ‘treatise’ returns to the rigorous analysis. This happens over and over again in \textit{Otherwise than Being}. The trace of ethics has to be worked for, as soon as it appears it gets reabsorbed back into the representation of assembled meaning. The important thing to note here is that the ethics is able to appear through a sincerity, an exposure to otherness, and is not referred to through a referent or a metaphor.

\textsuperscript{14} In other words the primary interest for art theory in terms of Levinas should be on Levinas’ ethics and not on Levinas’ philosophising on the nature of art.
thesis will attempt to argue that Levinas’ ethics is a criticality, and that art criticism, like the artwork, can be a criticality through ethics or can be an approach that retains the trace of Levinas’ ethics. In other words, a response to art can take a position, be specific in its critique, and at the same time allow room for the uncertainty of otherness to interrupt. In arguing for an art criticism as one that is in the approach, I will then consider David Rosetzky’s video work titled How to Feel (2011) and attempt to demonstrate this kind of art criticism.
Chapter One

An Ethics of Vulnerability in *Otherwise than Being*

The Ethical ‘Reduction’ that Accommodates the Unstructured Saying within the Structured Said.

A focus of this chapter is to define what Levinas calls a philosophical ‘reduction’, a ‘reduction’ that occurs in the ‘approach’. The ‘approach’ for Levinas is a method, a way of address, where the primacy of ethics is retained. In Levinas’ second major philosophical book, titled *Otherwise than Being* (1974), the ‘approach’ is a type of representation that can allow for ethics to be maintained within assembled meaning. The ‘approach’ hears ethics. It gives voice to ethics. The ‘approach’ bears witness to ‘the saying’. For Levinas this ‘approach’ is undertaken by philosophy; it is the task for philosophy to act in the ‘approach’. However, by analysing the way Levinas discusses art in *Otherwise than Being*, this thesis will argue that art too can be a site for the ‘approach’, that the ‘approach’ is how the artwork can speak a Levinasian ethics.

In *Otherwise than Being* the otherness of the other person is termed ‘the saying’, whilst the assembling force that absorbs this saying into the clarity of thematisation and comprehension is defined as ‘the said’. In *Otherwise than Being* the ‘approach’ is where the trace of ‘the saying’ is accommodated in ‘the said’. The ethics of *Otherwise than Being* is the way this saying chips back at ‘the said’, or reduces back the assembling force of ‘the said’. The ‘approach’ bears witness to the ethics of ‘the saying’ before ‘the saying’ is reabsorbed, or reassembled, back into ‘the said’.

In *Otherwise than Being* there are two levels, or two orders, of understanding the world that do not fully synthesise but rather remain unstable. Levinas names these two orders ‘the said’ and ‘the saying’. ‘The said’ in *Otherwise than Being* is assembled meaning;¹ it is the

¹ The way Levinas terms ‘the said’ as ‘synthesis of apprehension’ is the reason why I have named ‘the said’ as assembled meaning and the ordering for comprehension. In defining the diachrony of the saying Levinas writes ‘For the lapse of time is also something irrecoverable, immemorial, prehistorical. Before the syntheses of
way language can designate meaning into fixed terms for the *ordering of comprehension*. These two terms highlight the action of ‘the said’, an action of assembling and ordering within intelligibility, actions that are for intelligibility. In *Otherwise than Being*, ‘the said’ actively assembles and joins together experience for the clarity of understanding and explanation. The ordering of ‘the said’ operates a ‘putting together’, it synchronises experience and gives a structure for meaning. Opposed to this ‘putting together of structures’ is the passivity of ‘the saying’. For Levinas ‘the saying’ is an ethics where the otherness of the other person is always calling the self into question; a calling into question that is an otherness within oneself, an otherness that is before the world of action and choice. The ethics of ‘the saying’ is always already there as part of subjectivity that does not join into assembled meaning. The *meaning in pieces* of ‘the saying’ is assembled by ‘the said’: in ‘the said’ otherness is diminished for the ordering of comprehension.

Levinas’ ‘the saying’ is a surplus to ‘the said’, it is *other than* ‘the said’, it is more than reason or intelligibility can contain. In this sense ‘the saying’ means that there is more to the other person than the “I” as a oneself can hold down as a knowing, or maintain as a knowledge. ‘The saying’ is a *more than can be contained* as a part of oneself. This ‘saying’ can also be understood in the way that the ‘oneself’ takes its shape from the relational space of communication. In this unnamed territory, ‘the saying’ is the uncertainty of ‘exposure’ and ‘contact’. This is saying as a ‘pure saying’, a saying that is prior to consciousness, prior to ‘the said’. Because of ‘the saying’ the self is not summed up and fixed as a some-thing, a something named and designated in meaning assembled. For Levinas all experience has within it this *meaning in pieces*, and this is because we are always responding to the call of


2 This ‘putting together’ is also why I use terms like *ordering for comprehension* and *assembled meaning* to define ‘the said’. Levinas writes in *Otherwise than Being*: ‘Our task is to show that the plot proper to saying does indeed lead it to the said, to the *putting together* (my emphasis) of structures which make possible justice and the “I think”’. Levinas, 46.

3 In terms of an ethics as *always already there*, John Drabinski writes: ‘I come to myself as already called by the other, already interrupted, already, as I will say in *Otherwise than Being*, traumatised and obsessed. . . My traumatic awakening initiates an account of what comes to be called ethical subjectivity. The Other, we might say, traumatically provokes the *intersubjective reduction*.’ John E Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (New York: State University of New York, 2001), 8.
the other person; a calling as a ‘saying’ that is within us, that makes claims on our autonomy and sovereignty.

Before questioning how, in a concrete way, Levinas’ ‘approach’ bears witness to ‘the saying’ this chapter will first define in greater detail ‘the saying’ and ‘the said’. The definitions of these two terms will give a sense of the importance of ethics for Levinas. It will give a sense of what ‘reduction’ as an ‘approach’ is working against, and what it is trying to work towards. Also a more complete definition of both ‘the said’ and ‘the saying’ will give a sense of the importance of an ‘approach’ for contemporary art.4

The Structure of ‘The Said’

The Said as Intelligibility

Under the subheading ‘Questioning and Allegiance to the Other’, Levinas begins chapter two of Otherwise than Being by attempting to shift, or rearrange, philosophy’s primary concern with the action of ‘questioning’.5 This questioning is the way existence philosophy focuses on the question what does ‘to exist’ mean.6 It is this questioning of existence, as the title of

4 Part of my interest in this thesis is to challenge the way we use the word approach in art. Could approach mean, not the artist method or use of medium, but be rather a way of address that retains the movement of approaching the other person; that to make art is to approach the other person. So that the question of “what is this artworks approach?” Could be a question of ethics? Does the artwork accommodate a meaning in pieces that disrupts the ordering for comprehension without also being deaf to ‘the said’.

5 One of the subheadings of chapter two is ‘Questioning and Allegiance to the Other’. The questioning in the title is not the way that Levinas’ ethics calls into question the ordering of comprehension—an ordering that consolidates an individualism—rather this questioning is one that is the opposite to Levinas’ ethics; it is ‘deaf’ to this ethics, deaf to subjectivity as an ‘allegiance’ in responsibility. It is not the questioning from the otherness within oneself.

6 This definition of existence philosophy, or the idea that Levinas is involved in existence philosophy, I get from attending a lecture series by Mark Hewson that focused on Levinas, Blanchot and art. In lecture two Hewson, going through the introduction of Levinas Existence and Existentes, outlines how Levinas is ‘working in the tradition of phenomenology and the philosophy of existence’. What this means is ‘that the centrality of the word existence in philosophy comes from Heidegger’. So when Levinas speaks about existence he is, in part, responding to Heidegger. Mark Hewson, “Levinas and Blanchot on the Image and Art,” in Melbourne School of Continental Philosophy (Law Building, Melbourne University: 2013).
the book indicates, that Levinas wants to try and think ‘otherwise than’, or think beyond. Along with the priority of ontological ‘questioning’, Levinas also wants to re-think ‘questioning’ more broadly to include any question, or perhaps more specifically to challenge the authority of the question in research that actively seeks to uncover hidden objective truths. This search for truth, or this research for a knowing, is a questioning that shapes itself around the objectivity of the ‘what?’ Here, in this section of *Otherwise than Being*, the authority of the question is put into question by a Levinasian ethical questioning that tries to focus on the ‘whom’, the human otherness, the human touch, rather than a focus centred on the ‘what?’ Levinas challenges the authority of the question by overturning the objective focus of ‘the said’ from the ‘what?’ to include the subjective ‘whom’.

For Levinas there is the trace of the ‘who’ within the authority of the ‘what?’

For Levinas the objectivity of the ‘what?’ in the question, the ‘what?’ that is within ‘what shows itself?’, or ‘what is it?’—the prioritising of the ‘what?’ that drives forward a research question—can mean that questioning remains within what is ‘intelligible’. Levinas’ concern here is that within the ‘what?’, or that within the objective question, is a corporeal human voice that is in response to, and in ‘communication’ with, another human voice, and in the

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7 Levinas’ main concern here is that an existence philosophy prioritises itself around the question of existence and therefore loses touch with the saying of subjectivity—or the call of the other person—as a foundation for subjectivity. This is what Levinas means when he says that the question of existence does not signify the ‘ultimate’. The ultimate for Levinas is the saying as subjectivity and Levinas’ concern is that this saying can be completely absorbed by questioning focused primarily on the question what does ‘to exist’ mean, or by the searching for and expression of truth. Levinas writes that ‘The distinction and amphibology of being and entities will turn out from the start to be important and to be determinant for truth, but this distinction is also an amphibology and does not signify the ultimate’. Levinas, 23.

8 It is the task of *Otherwise than Being* to hear this forgotten voice and to sense the human touch. Levinas writes: ‘The logos as said, a revelation of being in its amphibology of being and entities, lets the “who?” get lost in the “what?” It lets it get lost in it still more evidently in our questioning “who is looking?”’, which does not ask about such a one or other, but the essence of the “who that is looking” in its generality’. Levinas, 27. ‘The saying’ gets lost to generality in the question of existence, ‘the who’ cannot be asked about, or, more importantly, encountered as an interruption within the field of assembled meaning. Levinas’ key concern in *Otherwise than Being* is for the subject, for the self. For Levinas it is subjectivity as ‘the saying’ that can transcend the questioning of Being and be a beyond to rational analysis that wants to be founded to an objective truth. In *Otherwise than Being* it is the saying of subjectivity, or the otherness within oneself, that gets lost within the emphasis of what is intelligible. The ‘oneself’ gets covered over by the broad brush of ‘generality’; the uniqueness of the subject gets lost to the ‘generality’ that governs exploration for explanation.

9 Levinas. 23

10 When Peperzak’s concentrates on *Otherwise than Being* in his book *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* he does not really define how Levinas’ philosophical ‘reduction’ works. The closest he gets to defining a ‘reduction’ is in his emphasis on ‘communication’. For Peperzak ‘communication’ is an important part of *Otherwise than Being*. Peperzak writes: ‘Language is not only and not primarily enunciation, apophansis or expression, but communication’. This is the key for Peperzak, that the author is always addressing a someone;
dominance of the ‘what shows itself?’, this communication, the ‘who’ of communication, can be lost to the ‘what?’11 Without the interruption of the human voice, questioning remains within intelligibility, or never really leaves intelligibility.12 Without the emphasis on the human touch, questioning is a circular movement where the question that ‘seeks’ out hidden truths begins within intelligibility only to end within intelligibility.13 The objective ‘what?’ of the question actively searching to uncover hidden truths can remain fixed in the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’. For Levinas ‘the saying’ is not part of this ‘sphere’.14

Levinas’ ‘intelligible sphere’ is where the question asked is entwined with the answer received, as opposed to the question and the answer being posted at opposing ends.15 The

11 From positioning the questioning of existence as not signifying the ultimate, Levinas then returns back to the opening sentence of chapter two where he declared that ‘A philosopher seeks, and expresses, truth’, by then writing: ‘Let us… stay with what is implied in the general meaning of truth’. Then Levinas writes: ‘what shows itself?’ is put by him who looks, even before he thematically distinguishes the difference between being and entities’. What Levinas means by this is that the ‘what’ of the question, the ‘what?’ of the objective study, is not objective at all, but rather there is the human, the who within the what. So before distinguishing ‘the difference between being and entities’, a distinguishing that Levinas will later term as part of intelligibility, there is the human subject in all their vulnerability; in ‘communication’ with another human being. It is this ‘communication’ that Peperzak highlights as one of Levinas’s key concerns, that the ‘what’ of intelligibility smooths this space of ‘communication’. See Levinas, 23.

12 Levinas places Heidegger’s questioning of existence within this ‘intelligible sphere’. Levinas writes ‘If the question “what?” in its adherence to being is at the origin of all thought… all research and all philosophy go back to ontology, to the understanding of the being of entities, the understanding of essence. Being would be not what is most problematical; it would be what is most intelligible (my emphasis)’. Levinas, 24. For Levinas existence philosophy only really stays within what is intelligible, the question of existence only really remains within the sphere of its own question. This is what Levinas means when he writes that: ‘The “what?” is already wholly enveloped with being, has eyes only for being, and already sinks into being. Concerning the being of what is, it wants to know what it is’. Levinas, 23. And again Levinas writes that the question of ontology ‘…at the same time has a part in the effectuation of the very being it seeks to understand’. Levinas, 24. The exploration within what is intelligible is how Levinas frames Heidegger’s question of existence; that Heidegger’s questioning of Being is only really played out within what ‘appears’. Levinas writes that: ‘The search for truth has to draw being out of appearance’ or within ‘what shows itself’, in the ‘exhibition of being’. Levinas, 24. Levinas’ main opposition to Heidegger seems to be that the answer to the question ‘what is being?’ is one which remains within the field of the question, that is, remains within Being, and Levinas wants to think of a transcendence that is otherwise than the question of being and yet is also not a nothingness. 13 In terms of the language of Totality and Infinity this would mean the same returning to ‘the same’. ‘The same’ can also be thought of as assembled meaning.

14 ‘The other to whom the petition of the question is addressed does not belong to the intelligible sphere to be explored. He stands in proximity’. Levinas, 25.

15 The question—even ‘what is being?’—then questions with respect to being, with respect to what is precisely in question’. Levinas, 23. And then Levinas writes how ‘[T]he question “what?” is thus correlative of what it wishes to discover, and already has recourse to it’. Levinas, 24. This is Levinas’ intelligible ‘sphere’. The intelligible never really leaves the sphere of intelligibility: the ‘what?’ is ‘correlative’ to what it ‘wishes to discover’. Also from the first quote we can see the connection between the questioning of existence and the questioning for a knowing; that both are part of this questioning that is involved only within its own
‘sphere’ of intelligibility, the ‘sphere’ that is there for exploration, is the ‘sphere’ where the answer is shaped by the question, or where what becomes understood as a knowing already had a territory set out for that knowledge to settle into. In this sense Levinas’ ‘sphere’ is an exploration for explanation, a sphere where the action of exploring is shaped by the terms of explanation and is never really disrupted by what does not fit into those terms.16

‘Questioning’ from within this ‘intelligible sphere’ can indeed be a wrestle between a knowing and not knowing, yet it still only remains within ‘questioning’; it still remains within what is intelligible.17 The ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’ is Levinas’ structure of ‘the said’: it is ‘the said’ as intelligibility, an intelligibility that Levinas also defines as consciousness.18

In Otherwise than Being Levinas’ key concern about the ‘sphere’ of intelligibility is in the way that both a philosophy that prioritises the question of existence, and the research question that shapes itself around the objective ‘what?’ in its active search for knowing, are both ‘deaf’ to the human voice.19 The questioning for a knowing and the questioning centred on

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questioning. This connection is evident when Levinas writes ‘even (my emphasis) “what is being?”—then questions with respect to being’. Levinas, 23. The questioning of existence, like the questioning for a knowing, is a questioning where ‘[I]ts quest occurs entirely within being, in the midst of what it is seeking’. Levinas, 24. Later Levinas will write that the ‘understanding of essence’ is ‘what is most problematic’ but also ‘what is most intelligible’. Levinas, 24. Here Levinas is shaping Heidegger’s question of existence as a questioning that does not leave intelligibility. This has a similarity to the way a young Levinas is critical of Husserl’s ‘intellectualism’. In his published thesis on Husserl Levinas writes: ‘…one can reproach Husserl for his intellectualism’, that Husserl ‘may have been wrong is seeing the concrete world as a world of objects that are primarily perceived’. And in favouring instead a Heidegger ‘care’ Levinas asks: ‘Is our main attitude toward reality that of theoretical contemplation?’ Emmanuel Levinas, The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology, trans., Andre Orianne (1963; repr., Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 119.

16 The exploration is shaped by explanation and is not surprised or interrupted by the saying of subjectivity. Or is never interrupted or surprised by the human voice of vulnerability.

17 This tension is different to the tension of ‘proximity’. Levinas writes: ‘The way subjectivity is structured as the other in the same differs from that of consciousness, which is consciousness of being, however indirect, tenuous and inconsistent this relationship between consciousness and its theme “placed” before it may be’. What Levinas means here is that the tension within intelligibility, the tension of wanting to know, is not the same tension is the otherness within oneself. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 25.

18 Levinas shapes the intelligible sphere as consciousness when he writes: ‘consciousness is always correlative with a theme, a present represented, a theme put before me, a being which is a phenomenon’ . Ibid.

19 A ‘deafness’ to the calling from the other person. Within the field of the question to the answer there is no otherness calling. This is what Levinas means when he begins under the subheading ‘Questioning and Being: Time and Reminiscence’ by writing: ‘If one is deaf to the petition that sounds in the questioning. . .everything in a question will be oriented to truth, and will come from the essence of being. Then one will have to stay with the design of this ontology, even if in certain of its implications inflexions of forgotten voices resound. To ontology, the exposition of being in its amphibology of being and entities, belong to time and language, inasmuch as language, assembling the dispersion of duration into nouns and propositions, lets being and entities be heard. In this said, we nonetheless surprise the echo of the saying, whose signification cannot be assembled’. Levinas, 26. Despite this deafness ‘forgotten voices resound’. This quote also gives a good definition of ‘the saying’ that can ‘surprise’ ‘the said’, that calls ‘the said’ into question. ‘The saying’ is there, is
existence are both ‘deaf’ to human vulnerability: they are both ‘deaf’ to the human calling that is in trauma and in love. The way intelligibility never really leaves intelligibility is a dominance where the human voice becomes overshadowed, smothered over, absorbed or ‘forgotten’.\(^\text{20}\) For Levinas the ‘exploration’ within the ‘intelligible sphere’ loses touch with the human and can make the human secondary.\(^\text{21}\) For Levinas subjectivity as saying does not stand within the same ordered structure as this ‘intelligible sphere’. Levinas’ concern in *Otherwise than Being* is that the dominance of intelligibility, the dominance of the ordering for comprehension, is a dominance that assembles ‘the saying’ and reduces its ethics. Before defining Levinas’ saying as subjectivity the next section of this chapter will define ‘the said’ structure as language and time.

\textit{The Said’ as Language and ‘The Said’ as Time.}

Part of the intelligible sphere is ‘the said’ as language. The said structure in language is the way that language works perfectly well in terms of shared understanding, signs can be decoded and meaning can have a clarity and transferability for comprehension.\(^\text{22}\) This transferable meaning is language as a ‘system of signs’, a system put to use to designate part of the intelligible sphere— the forgotten voices resound— and the way that ‘the saying’ disrupts ‘the said’ is because, unlike ‘the said’, it is unassembled. ‘The saying’ is \textit{in pieces} whilst ‘the said’ actively assembles.

\(^{20}\) See above quote for the ‘forgotten voices’ resound and in this deafness ‘the who’ gets lost to ‘the what’.

\(^{21}\) What annoys Levinas about ‘the said’ is an arrogance that the ‘whole of the thinkable passes through human consciousness’. Levinas, 57. And the truth that forgets humanity. Levinas writes: ‘In our days truth is taken to result from the effacing of the living man behind the mathematical structures that \textit{think themselves out} in him, rather than he be thinking them’. Levinas, 58. And the danger of losing the human is that: ‘He runs the risk of taking his desires as realities without realising it, of letting himself be guided by interests which introduce an inadmissible trickery into the play of concepts (despite the control and criticism that his partners or team-members can exercise), and thus expounding an ideology as a science’. Levinas, 58. Levinas’ humanity gets smothered by intelligibility. With the opening dedication of *Otherwise than Being* in mind, do not these warnings of Levinas echo within the famous closing scenes to the episode ‘Knowledge or Certainty’ in the documentary *The Ascent of Man*, when writer and presenter Jacob Bronowski stands outside of Auschwitz and addresses the camera? Defining the victims of the holocaust as victims of dogma, arrogance and ignorance Bronowski separates scientific endeavour from the dogma of pure objectivity by defining science as: ‘a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known; we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgment in science stands on the edge of error, and is \textit{personal} . . .We have to cure ourselves of the itch for absolute knowledge and power. We have to close the distance between the push-bottom order and the human act. We have to \textit{touch people} . . .’ At this point the camera runs out of tape. "Knowledge or Certainty," in *The Ascent of Man*, Jocob Bronowski (BBC and Time-Life films, 1973).

\(^{22}\) I get this idea from Paul Fry’s online lecture series where he talks about the way theory might over exaggerate problems of how we understand each other: that there is an acute sense of understanding that should be acknowledged. Fry says simple: "We actually communicate rather well". Paul Fry, "Lecture 26-Reflections; Who Doesn’t Hate Theory Now?,” in *Open Yale Courses* (2009).
meaning or give a thing a name.\(^{23}\) This sign system,\(^ {24}\) the signifier that points to a signified, is named by Levinas as a ‘system of nouns’.\(^ {25}\) The noun for Levinas is the way language names and declares meaning, identifies and thematises terms within the code of ‘this as that’.\(^ {26}\) The act of designation is, for Levinas, the noun of language.\(^ {27}\)

The noun, the word chosen, is part of assembled meaning. The noun defines fixed terms out of diversity and plurality; the ordering of the said ‘states . . . the same in the diverse’, it is a ‘disclosing’ of the sensible as it passes.\(^ {28}\) What this means for Levinas is that in ‘the said’ the ‘diverse’ becomes assembled meaning, ‘the sensible’ becomes congealed into the noun that designates: representation can shut the door on diversity and pluralism, or ‘the said’ of language frames the ‘surprise of the saying’ within ‘the intelligible sphere to be explored’. By declaring knowledge within the confines of ‘this as that’, subjectivity as saying gets lost to knowledge assembled; the human call is forgotten in the language of narrative and metaphor. This is what Levinas means when he writes ‘[T]he “this as that” is not lived; it is said’.\(^ {29}\)

The ‘intelligible sphere’, this sphere that assembles meaning, also has for Levinas a particular sense of time, or it is framed by a particular experience of time. Questioning as a search to know, and the questioning that prioritises the question of existence, are both

\(^{23}\) That language as a system of signs assembles the ‘dispersion of duration into nouns and propositions’. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 27.

\(^{24}\) The first time Levinas really names structuralism in *Otherwise than Being* is when he writes: ‘contested by structuralism, which is perhaps to be defined by the primacy of theoretical reason. But disinterestedness is beyond essence’. Levinas, 58.

\(^{25}\) Levinas calls this system of nouns a system of signs when he defines the action of the noun as a ‘system of signs doubling up beings and relations’. Ibid., 35.

\(^{26}\) For Levinas this naming of meaning, the ‘this as that’, is the structure of ‘the said’ as thematisation and identification.

\(^{27}\) One place where Levinas seems to mention an influence of Derrida is in his one essay on Derrida titled “Wholly Otherwise.” Here Levinas writes about Derrida’s work: ‘A system of signs is liberated, a language guided by no full meaning, signifiers without a signified. Differance is thus said by way of a dissemination in which presence is deconstructed’. Emmanuel Levinas, "Wholly Otherwise," in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 5.

\(^{28}\) ‘But language is also a system of nouns. Denomination designates or constitutes identities in the verbal or temporal flow of sensation. Through the opening that temporalisation works in the sensible, disclosing it by its very passing, assembling it by retention and memory . . . the word identifies “this as that,” states the ideality of the same in the diverse. This identification is a supplying with meaning: “this as that.” In their meaning entities show themselves to be identical unities’. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 35.

\(^{29}\) Ibid., 34.
centred for Levinas in a ‘presentness’. The ‘intelligible sphere’ is the clarity of the present, and the primacy of an ontological questioning is in the ‘presence of the present’ or is the ‘presentness of the present’. The way of understanding this ‘presentness’ for Levinas is that the time of ‘the said’, the time of assembled meaning, is a presence where the otherness of the past is organised and assembled for a clarity of understanding; where the past is ‘recuperated’ and resurrected into a fully rounded wholeness for the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’.

In the noun of language, ‘the said’ assembles ‘the saying’ actively through designating meaning for the clarity of representation, and this is equally achieved for Levinas through memory. ‘The said’ calls and recalls memory for the clarity of a present, a present framed as assembled meaning. In the structure of ‘the said’ the past is not a past in pieces, but is rather a past that has been actively re-arranged, put back together, and reassembled for a clarity of presence, for a history, for ‘re-presentation’. This ‘re-presentation’ is the past recalled and framed; a past recalled and recaptured for representation, where the past in pieces is ‘synchronised’ and turned into a ‘theme’. This synchrony is the said of time as the

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30 The ‘presentness’ is part of Levinas criticisms of Husserl. For Levinas the time of Husserl’s intentionality is too much in the present, too much in a ‘contemporaneousness which is the presence of the present’. Levinas , 32-33. This contemporaneousness is a clarity of the present understood through the intelligible sphere where the past is ‘recuperated’ as a previously framed present, and the future is another framed present yet to be. For Levinas a ‘consciousness of the present’ in intentionality assembles meaning and fixes a frame to the present through a dominance of ‘re-presentation’. Intentionality for Levinas becomes the ‘objectifying consciousness, the hegemony of re-presentation’. Levinas, 33.

31 This is what Levinas means by the ‘the manifestation of being’ as the ‘primary event’, and that this primacy is the ‘presence of the present’, a clarity of assembled meaning. Ibid., 24.

32 The time of the said is: ‘The past itself is modified without changing its identity, diverges from itself without letting go of itself, “becomes older,” sinking into a deeper past: it remains identical with itself through retention of retention, and so on. Then memory recuperates in images what retention was not able to preserve, and historiography reconstructs that whose image is lost. To speak of consciousness is to speak of time’ and ‘the time that marks historiography, that is recuperable time, the recoverable time, the lost time that can be found again. As the time narrated becomes, in the narrative and in writing, a reversible time, every phenomena is said, characterised by the simultaneity of the successive in a theme. . .the same modified retains itself on the verge of losing itself, is inscribed in memory and is identified, is said’. Ibid., 32.

33 Levinas defines the time of the intelligible sphere, the time of the ordering for comprehension, as the time where: ‘Truth is rediscovery, recall, reminiscent, reuniting under the unity of apperception. There is remission of time and tension without a break, without a gap. There is not a pure distancing form the present, but precisely re-presentation. . .for a representation is a recommencement of the present which is its “first time” is for the second time. . .Time is reminiscence and reminiscence is time, the unity of consciousness and essence’. Levinas, 29. The time of ‘the said’ is within the intelligible sphere, and Levinas wants to argue for a ‘getting out of phase’, against a totality in action where ‘nothing is lost’ in the clarity of the present. Ibid., 29.

34 Levinas defines the said as the way that: ‘. . .the diachrony of time is synchronised into a time that is recallable, and becomes a theme’. Ibid., 37.
past ‘recuperated in retention, memory, “tales,” and books’. The ‘recapture or reminiscence’ of the past into the ‘re-presentation’ is the unity of consciousness, a unity in the ‘intelligible sphere’, the same returning back to the same. This unity is found in the past ‘recaptured’ for representation, ‘recuperated’ for a ‘synchrony’ of time that is all ‘punctual’, always assembled and ordered; a punctual that is not the uncertainty of waiting, a punctual that cleans up the mess of life.

The Force of ‘The Said’

Another way that Levinas defines the power, or the assembling force, of ‘the said’ is to say that it ‘operates’ as ‘already said’. The said structure for Levinas is something that we step into, the noun that designates has already been in action, has already previously designated meaning. We find in a doxa meaning already assembled, fixed and set down—within the structure of ‘the said’, experience has a framed representation. This doxa that one is born into, this doxa of the ‘already said’, is part of the intelligible sphere where meaning is an

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35 Levinas., 34.
36 Ibid., 29.
37 ‘...time of what can be recuperated’. Levinas., 34.
38 Levinas., 34.
39 By mess of life I mean the way that ‘the saying’ as a meaning in pieces is the uncertainty of vulnerability, and to also highlight the way ‘the saying’ is witnessed in mess and not in the assembling of meaning. By focusing on subjectivity, Levinas focuses philosophy on the finitude of being human, the finitude in being in one’s own body, the body that is vulnerable in both love and trauma. For Levinas it is this vulnerability, where a subjectivity as a for-the-other can transcend the anonymity of existence and assembled meaning.
40 ‘The designation and resonance are not just added on to a phenomenon from the outside, by the effect of a conventional code which regulates the usage of a system of signs. It is through the already said that words, elements of a historically constituted vocabulary, will come to function as signs and acquire a usage, and bring about the proliferation of all the possibilities of vocabulary’. Ibid., 37.
41 ‘Entities show themselves in their meaning to be identical entities. They are not first given and thematised, and then receive a meaning: they are given by the meaning they have’. Levinas, 36. ‘...the given is held in a theme’. Ibid., 36.
42 ‘...the same finds again the same modified. Such is consciousness. These rediscoveries are an identification—of this as that. Identification is ascription meaning,’ Ibid.
43 This is what Levinas means when he writes that ‘[T]he “identical unities” are not given or thematised first, and then receive a meaning; they are given through this meaning. The “this as that” is not lived; it is said. Identification is understood on the basis of a mysterious schematism, of the already said, an antecedent doxa which every relationship between the universal and the individual presupposes. For this relationship evidently cannot be based on resemblance’. Thematisation and symbolisation can completely smoother the sensibility of living experience and be purely framed representation. Ibid., 35.
already given, and this already given for Levinas has a mystery to it. The ‘already said’ is a ‘mysterious’ doxa. 44

This mystery for Levinas is in the way ‘the said’ is as much an authoritative decree as it is a type of universal divine proclamation of truth, or a consecration of thematisation. Both the authority and the prayer come together to assemble, or smother over, a living corporeal sensibility.45 The ‘already said’ clings onto experience, it attaches to the exposure toward alterity, the already said ‘. . . proclaims and establishes this as that’ like a truth well understood, fixed and maintained.46 This proclamation means that the noun of the said structure ‘is not simply a sign of a meaning’,47 nor is this already said ‘. . . only an expression of meaning’, but more ominously ‘. . . the word at once proclaims and establishes an identification of this with that in the already said’.48

The authoritative and domineering force of ‘the said’ is the way shared understanding acts as an assembling of meaning, as an all-encompassing force, a force that smoothers over diversity and differences.49 No matter how ambiguous the arrangement of signs within the ‘intelligible sphere’ there always remains the desire and need to arrange and decode. This desire and need, that always remains, means that ‘the said’ is both a destructive force, a force of rationalism that acts through the assembling of meaning, but is equally an important form for ‘justice’.

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44 ‘The “this as that,” is not lived; it is said. Identification is understood on the basis of a mysterious schematism, of the already said, an antecedent doxa. . . ’ Levinas, 35.
45 ‘A word is a nomination, as much as a denomination, a consecrating (my emphasis) of the “this as this” or “this as that” by a saying which is also understanding and listening, absorbed in the said. It is an obedience in the midst of the will (“I hear this or that said”), a kerygma at the bottom of a fiat. Before all receptivity an already said before languages exposes or, in all the sense of the term, signifies (proposes and orders) experience, giving to historical language spoken by people a locus, enabling them to orient or polarize the diversity of the thematised as they choose’. By ‘fiat’ Levinas means that the word/language of a doxa comes to us as a demand or as an authoritative pronouncement’. The doxa or fiat means that we are already born into a language that ‘signifies (proposes and orders) experience’; diversity has already been given fixed terms; terms have already been declared like a prayer, or like a divine order. Levinas, 36.
46 ‘Identification is kerygmatical. The said is not simply a sign or an expression of a meaning; it proclaims and establishes this as that’. Ibid., 35.
47 Ibid., 37.
48 Ibid., 36-37.
49 For Simon Critchley Otherwise than Being defines both the negative aspect and the positive aspect of ‘the said’. In The Ethics of Deconstruction Critchley outlines a ‘justified said’ that ‘maintains within itself the trace of the ethical saying’. Critchley, 232. And Critchley writes: ‘The justified Said is a political discourse of reflection and interrogation, a language of decision, judgement and critique that is informed and interrupted by the responsibility of ethical Saying’. See Simon Critchley, The Ethics of Deconstruction (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 233.
Justice for Levinas means that there is a positive aspect of ‘the said’. ‘The said’ structure is not an external force, but is rather a part of us as consciousness and intelligibility, a part of us both mentally and physically.  

50 ‘The said’ like ‘the saying’ is not only part of our body, part of our conscious remembering. The structure and order that is ‘the said’ is the way we make rational judgements, structure our thoughts, make free decisions, have agency, construct a narrative, frame a representation, but also in a very physical way it is how our bodies remember, how we revive the past for the clarity of the present. In *Otherwise than Being* ‘the said’ is how we negotiate our way through the world, not only through language but also through time and space. ‘The said’ is the way we navigate our way through the world of choice and action, of getting from A to B without getting lost and disorientated.  

51 The *assembling of meaning* is actively taking place through us, through our questioning for knowledge and understanding. This is ‘the said’ in the sphere of decision and choice, moral choice and rational decisions. It is a way of recalling how to get from the train station to home, and yet equally how to communicate and share ideas. Levinas’ ‘the said’ is reason and ‘logos’, and an important aspect to *Otherwise than Being* is that there is no getting around this ‘said’.

It is important to understand that in no way does Levinas want to sidestep assembled meaning; rather Levinas’ task in *Otherwise than Being* is to highlight what he sees as the negative effects of this reasoning and rationalism. The major problem of ‘the said’ is how it can override the vulnerability of being human; how the subjectivity of ‘the saying’ can be lost to the ontology of ‘the said’, how the touch of the human can get lost to the ordering of ‘the said’. ‘The said’ is part of us, part of our reasoning, but the vulnerability of being exposed to ethics can be drowned out in the assembling force of ‘the said’. Having outlined the said structure in language, in the authority of the question, in the synchrony of time and as a ‘mysterious’ doxa, let us now try and define Levinas’ ‘the saying’ as the *saying of subjectivity*.

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50 Whilst Guy Debord defines the ‘spectacle’ as ‘not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by image’, he immediately gives the ‘spectacle’ a complex sense of assembled meaning by defining it as ‘a worldview that has actually been materialised, a view of a world that has become objective’. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans., Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press), 7.

51 I am stretching Levinas’ ‘the said’ a little to think of it like the hippocampus. Levinas does not name it this way, but he does name it as a way we remember and that ‘the said’ is consciousness; it is part of our body.
The Unstructured Saying

Levinas’ central theme in *Otherwise than Being* is that there is a something else that is prior to Being, something prior to the authority of the question of ‘Being’, something more important to the question what does it mean ‘to be?’ A something else that precedes assembled meaning, a something else that is of greater significance to the questioning within the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’, that is of a greater height than ‘the said’. This something else, or a *something more*, is of greater importance, or of more significance, than the authority of the question; a something more that can become all too easily smothered by meaning that is assembled. 52 This *something more* is the *saying of subjectivity*, 53 a saying as an otherness that exceeds containment, is *more than* consciousness can hold down, that is not part of the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’, that is not contained within the *ordering for understanding*, or within the conscious interplay between knowing and not knowing. 54 The subjectivity of ‘the saying’ is subjectivity as the other within oneself. This otherness within the same, this otherness within the oneself, Levinas names as ‘proximity’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘diachrony’. The saying of subjectivity is ‘proximity’ and ‘responsibility’ bound to ‘diachrony’. To understand Levinas’ ‘the saying’ as subjectivity let us separately define proximity, responsibility, and diachrony. 55

52 ‘If man were only a saying correlative with the logos, subjectivity could as well be understood as a function or as an argument of being. But signification of saying goes beyond the said. It is not ontology that raises up the speaking subject; it is the signifyingness of saying going beyond essence that can justify the exposedness of being, ontology’. The saying of subjectivity is more than the correlation with ‘the said’, and is not ‘a function or as an argument of being’, rather it transcends, it goes ‘beyond the said’, ‘beyond essence’. In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas defines ‘essence’ as existence. Levinas, 37-38.

53 For Levinas what is ‘otherwise than being’, what rises from the anonymity of existence and reaches a height ‘beyond’ the order of assembled meaning, is subjectivity as the ‘one-for-the-other’. It is within naming the task of *Otherwise than Being* that Levinas names the subjectivity of responsibility as the ‘otherwise than being’. The task for *Otherwise Than Being* is to ‘try’ (my emphasis), with the notion of the saying without the said, to expose such a modality of the subjective, an *otherwise than being*. Ibid., 26.

54 In terms of this saying that exceeds containment Richard Cohen writes of Levinas ethics: ‘There is more to being than being. The surplus of the other’s nonencompassable alterity—not the alterity of horizons—is the way ethics intrudes, disturbs, commands being—from height and destitution. It is the demand made by the very face of the Other in a nakedness which pierces the face that can be objectified’. Richard A Cohen, "Translator’s Introduction," in *Ethics and Infinity* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 10.

55 A technique, or a tactic, that Levinas uses to avoid designating ethics under a single term is to use many different words to describe ethics. For example ‘the saying’ can be understood as responsibility, proximity, diachrony, signifyingness, ethics, approach, exposure. For Paul Davies the use of language in *Otherwise than Being* shows a ‘reluctance to establish and maintain a rigid conceptual framework’. The way Levinas describes ‘the saying’ is not determined under a term. See Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).
‘The Saying’ as Proximity

In Levinas’ first major philosophical work, *Totality and Infinity*, ethics was encountered in the face of the other person: it was the face of the other that carries with it the trace of a meaning in pieces, an in pieces as an ethics that calls the oneself into question. In *Otherwise than Being* all this changes and the focus of ethics is placed more on an otherness within oneself. What this change means is that ethics is not solely located within the approaching other, or around the corner in my next social encounter, or situated somewhere on my future horizon. Rather ethics is within one’s own approaching. In *Otherwise than Being* otherness can, like *Totality and Infinity*, be understood as the face of the other, but this otherness is now something I carry with me, an otherness that is always already there as a responding to the call from the other person. The ethics in the approach is one which brings to the surface, if only for a moment, the otherness within the same, an otherness within totality, a saying that is within ‘the said’, a subjectivity based on an otherness within oneself rather than on the unity of assembled meaning. The ‘other in the same’, or the infinite within the finite, is Levinas’ subjectivity as saying.

In *Otherwise than Being* ‘the saying’ is subjectivity that is separate to and yet bound up within ‘the said’. The separateness of ‘the saying’ is in the way that it is before

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56 In defining the importance of the human face in Levinasian philosophy, Wyschogrod defines the face in terms of ‘the saying’ when she writes ‘the face as a source of meaning is not part of the orderly design of a world pointing to a divine plan but is rather a disruption of the order of the world. Far from manifesting transcendence as presents, the face signifies as being in the trace or track of the One that has always already passed by’. The face is the trace of this meaning in pieces. See Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), xii.

57 ‘The exposure to the other is not something added to the one to bring it from the inward to the outside. Exposedness is the one-in-responsibility, and thus the one in its uniqueness. . .’ Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, 56.

58 Jeffrey Dudiak outlines this in his analysis of *Otherwise than Being* when he writes: ‘whereas *Totality and Infinity* focused on the approach of the other in the face, disrupting the same by evoking responsibility, *Otherwise than Being* will focus on my approach to the other out of a pre-original responsibility. . . whereas *Totality and Infinity* begins with the ego in the present being interrupted by the face calling it to a responsible future, the possibility of this calling affecting the ego is traced, in *Otherwise than Being*, to a deep past in which the ego is already implicated’. Jeffrey Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics: A Reading of the Idea of Discourse in the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 171.

59 Levinas defines subjectivity as an otherness within oneself when he writes that ‘Subjectivity is structured as the other in the same’. Levinas, 25.
consciousness, before ‘the said’. The subjectivity of the saying is shaped by a responding to 
the call of the other person, before any sociality.\textsuperscript{60} The otherness of oneself is already part 
of oneself \textit{before} one steps into the world, before one steps into the world of choice and 
community. This \textit{before} of Levinas’ ‘saying’, the way that ‘the saying’ precedes ‘the said’, 
means that in no way is Levinas’ subjectivity an action of sovereign autonomy free to 
choose, a self shaped by these choices.\textsuperscript{61} The ‘something else that is \textit{prior} to Being and 
consciousness’ is a subjectivity that is before the action of the intelligible sphere, a 
‘something else’ that is \textit{before the question}, before the clarity of the present. ‘Proximity’ is 
one way that Levinas defines this otherness that is ‘prior’ to ‘the said’.

What Levinas means by proximity is that subjectivity has a closeness to the otherness of the 
other person whereby this otherness is bound up within oneself as a tight hold. Proximity in 
\textit{Otherwise than Being} does not mean the physical presence of the face-to-face encounter: 
proximity for Levinas does not mean a nearness in physical space. Rather Levinas’ proximity 
is the very way that the other person is part of me as an otherness before any social 
interaction. It is the subject’s position in proximity that means for Levinas that subjectivity 
does not assemble into the same ordering as the ‘intelligible sphere’. In \textit{Otherwise than 
Being} the otherness of proximity is of a completely different order to the ‘intelligible sphere’ 
and yet there remains a trace of proximity within intelligibility. There is the vulnerability of 
exposure within the authority of ‘questioning’; the trace of ‘the saying’ within ‘the said’. 
‘The knot of subjectivity’ is another term that Levinas uses to define the subject in 
proximity.

Levinas’ ‘knot of subjectivity’ is proximity where there is a ‘knot tied’ between ‘the other’ 
and ‘the same’;\textsuperscript{62} the knot where the other is tied up within oneself. This tied up knot is a 
‘torsion’,\textsuperscript{63} a complexity, a tension, where otherness is without rest, where this otherness is

\textsuperscript{60} This knot of subjectivity is ‘. . . imposed before any exhibition of the other, preliminary to all consciousness’. 
Levinas, 25.

\textsuperscript{61} This can be a good example of how Levinas’ subjectivity can be very distant from an existentialism that 
wants to define subjectivity as shaped through the agency of decisions, choices and actions.

\textsuperscript{62} ‘The knot tied in subjectivity. . . signifies an allegiance of the same to the other, imposed before any 
exhibition of the other, preliminary to all consciousness’. Allegiance is a word Levinas uses to link proximity 
with responsibility. Levinas, 25.

\textsuperscript{63} ‘Asking oneself and questioning oneself does not undo the torsion of the same and the other in subjectivity; 
it refers to it’. Ibid.
a ‘restlessness’. The knot of ‘other’ and ‘same’ is a restlessness where ‘the same is disturbed by the other’. For Levinas this means that when the action of ‘consciousness’ holds within its ordering otherness as a meaning in pieces, this in pieces disturbs the comfort of full knowing. In proximity the ethics in Otherwise than Being is there within the subject; it is an ethics that is always already there. There is a secondary aspect of Levinas’ ethics, an ethics that this thesis is focused on, an ethics as a different ‘approach’, a different language to assembled meaning, an ethics as a continuous struggle to try and pull back assembled meaning, an ethics that tries to pull back ‘the said’ that fully and totally absorbs meaning in pieces. Levinas’ ethics is always trying to hear the rustling, reach the restlessness, allow the restlessness to circulate just a little longer before assembled meaning re-absorbs and reassembles the fragmented self.

64 ‘The other in the same determinative of subjectivity is the restlessness of the same disturbed by the other’. Levinas, 25.

65 Levinas also wants to think of subjectivity as different to Husserl’s intentionality and Heidegger’s ‘Dasein’. Proximity, as different to the actions of consciousness, means that the knot of the other within oneself is not part of Husserl’s intentional structure. What this means is that the ‘plot’, or the base, of the subject is not the noema but is rather this ‘restlessness’ where meaning is in pieces. After defining the knot of subjectivity as ‘the restlessness of the same disturbed by the other’, Levinas then writes that: ‘This is not the correlation characteristic of intentionality, nor even that of dialogue, which attests to essence by its essential reciprocity’. Levinas, 25. Following this Levinas writes that ‘[T]he folding back of being upon itself, and the self formed by this fold, where the effect of being remains correlative with being, also does not go to the crux of subjectivity’. Levinas, 25. What I take Levinas to mean here is that the ‘crux’ of subjectivity is not Dasein; is not ‘the self formed by this fold’. The ‘crux’ of Levinas subjectivity is not based on an origin of a noema, nor formed by its own ‘fold’ into existence. Rather Levinas wants to think of subjectivity that moves ‘beyond’ essence, or rises out from what Levinas defines as the anonymity of existence. This is not towards a non-being, or a transcendence that tries to escape ‘the folding back of being upon itself’. Rather Levinas is looking for a different emphasis, an emphasis on the human in ‘communication’ rather than on intention, or origin, or even the prime focus on the question of Being. Levinas asks if it is possible to look out to a beyond of Being: ‘Moreover, how, if one starts with the notion of the truth, could one place the welcoming of the manifestation of being outside of the being that manifests itself? Can he that looks place himself outside of the Absolute, and the look withdraw from the event of being, by hollowing out the fold of inwardness, in which knowledge is deposited, accumulates and is formulated? But then things would happen outside of being’. For Levinas there is a something else to subjectivity than a ‘folding back of being upon oneself’. Levinas, 27-28.

66 The reason why I define ‘the saying’ as meaning in pieces is because of the way that Levinas defines ‘the saying’ as the ‘signifyingness cannot be assembled’. Ibid., 27

67 In Otherwise than Being ‘the saying’ is heard: ethics is heard. Levinas plays an important role in Martin Jay’s study of what he calls ‘ocularcentrism’. Jay favours a Levinas ‘ethics of blindness’ understanding Levinas’ face-to-face ethics in Totality and Infinity as ‘the summons to hear the Other’s call rather than seeing his or her visage that matted’ Interestingly, in terms of art, Jay names Levinas as an important influence on Lyotard’s approach to art. Jay writes ‘It was . . . in Lyotard’s influential discussion of postmodernism that his Levinas-infected critique of ‘ocularcentrism’ fully came into its own.’ Martin Jay, Downcast Eyes : The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought (Berkeley: Berkeley : University of California Press, 1993), 581.
Levinas shapes proximity and the knot tied of subjectivity as different to that of consciousness. The difference is in the way that consciousness acts within the ‘intelligible sphere’—the way that consciousness acts to assemble, or unify, meaning for the clarity of a knowing that can then be ‘re-presented’ in a theme. For Levinas subjectivity as the ‘other in the same’ is not of the same structure as the action that designates meaning into a fixed term; the restlessness of proximity does not fit into a theme. The way that the saying of subjectivity is different to assembled meaning is expressed also in the way that Levinas is keen to make clear that proximity is not the congeniality of social togetherness; rather subjectivity as proximity is an ethics that disrupts the balance and harmony of social reciprocity. It is within the context of separating subjectivity as proximity from social commonality that Levinas defines the ‘knot tied’ as an ethics, as a ‘restlessness’, where ‘the other disturbs the same’. The ‘same’ here can be understood as shared commonality that is part of assembled meaning. Levinas’ subjectivity is not part of a social contract made in reciprocity and negotiation, rather the constant restlessness of the ‘knot tied’ between two separate forms disrupts the harmony of commonality and balance of reciprocity. For Levinas subjectivity is a ‘knot tied’ between otherness and knowing, not a humanism shaped by smooth relations. It pre-exists the social relation as an underlying disruption.

After defining proximity as not the congenial reciprocity in social dialogue, Levinas then shifts the emphasis on subjectivity from the structure of the other in the oneself to become

68 Levinas writes that ‘Subjectivity is structured as the other in the same, but in a way different from that of consciousness. Consciousness is always correlative with a theme, a present represented, a theme put before me, a being which is a phenomenon.’ By ‘phenomenon’ Levinas links the action of consciousness with Husserl’s intentionality. Also in terms of consciousness acting within the intelligible sphere and being ‘correlative to a theme’ means the saying of subjectivity is not part of thematisation. Within this sentence Levinas gives us a definition of ‘the said’ as not part of intentionality and ‘the saying’ is subjectivity that is not part of this noesis/noema structure; the subject is not a phenomena. Nor is subjectivity part of the structure of the sign, and nor is subjectivity part of the ‘there is’. The saying of subjectivity rises out from the anonymity of existence, is of a different order to intentionalität and transcends thematisation to be the subject bound up as hostage to the call of the other. Levinas, 25.

69 Levinas defines the knot of subjectivity as not congeniality when he writes: ‘Subjectivity is the other in the same, in a way that also differs from that of the presence of interlocutors to one another in a dialogue, in which they are at peace and in agreement with one another. The other in the same determinative of subjectivity is the restlessness of the same disturbed by the other’. Ibid.

70 One of the initial interests in undertaking this research was to question Nicolas Bourriaud’s rejection of Levinas’ ‘responsibility’. On responsibility Bourriaud dismisses Levinas’ ethics by writing: ‘but don’t ethics have a horizon other than this humanism which reduces inter-subjectivity to a kind of inter-servility?’ Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics (France: Le Presses du reel, 2002), 23. Could a better understanding of Levinas’ ethics from Bourriaud have avoided Claire Bishop’s criticism that ‘relational aesthetics’ was to congenial, or without antagonism. See Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," October, no. 110 (2004).
the oneself that is for the other. When defining subjectivity as different to assembled meaning or the intelligible sphere, the structure of the subject is ‘the other in the same’, but when looking for how this subjectivity can be an interruption and a transcendence, to assembled meaning, this structure becomes the ‘same for the other’. This ‘for the other’ means ‘responsibility’, a responsibility that is for the other person, as opposed to a responsibility that is first for oneself. It is here, in this shift from the structure of subjectivity as the ‘other in the same’ to the ‘same for the other’, that Levinas names the otherness within oneself as responsibility.

So far in this thesis ‘the saying’ has been defined as that which chips back ‘the said’. It is a saying as a meaning in pieces that is an interruption within the field of assembled meaning, or it is the restlessness of proximity that is not part of the exploration within the intelligible sphere; that it is the subjectivity as saying that can transcend the question of Being and be a beyond to rational analysis. ‘The saying’, as a surprise, disrupts and interrupts the intelligible ordering for comprehension. Yet how does this happen, how does ‘the saying’ disrupt the force of assembled meaning?

In Otherwise than Being it is the ‘responsibility’ of subjectivity, the oneself as the ‘one-for-the-other’, that disrupts ‘the said’; it is ‘responsibility’ that causes the disruption. The base of subjectivity now as a ‘one-for-the-other’ means that the tie, the bind, the restlessness of the ‘knot tied’ of proximity is a responsibility ‘for the other’, a responsibility within the others ‘command’, a responsibility as a constant ‘commanding’ that is within oneself. This command is not a ruling over from a height but is rather a calling for a response. The

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71 The knot tied in subjectivity. . . signifies an allegiance of the same to the other, imposed before any exhibition of the other, preliminary to all consciousness. . . This allegiance will be described as a responsibility of the same for the other, as a response to his proximity before any question. In this responsibility the latent birth of consciousness itself as a perception or listening in to being, can be surprised, and dialogue based on questioning’. Before this quote subjectivity was structured as ‘the other in the same’. Here the ‘knot tied in subjectivity is an ‘allegiance of the same to the other’. The word allegiance links ‘proximity’ with ‘responsibility’. The knot tied now includes a ‘responsibility of the same for the other’. Levinas, 25-26.

72 Having defined what subjectivity is not Levinas looks to define the crux of subjectivity as the one-for-the-other. Levinas writes: ‘Being signifies on the basis of the one-for-the-other, of substitution of the same for the other.’ Ibid., 26.

73 ‘. . .the other commanding the same’. Ibid., 25.

74 The other way that Levinas defines the knot of subjectivity, or proximity, as a ‘restlessness’ is that otherness overrides containment and fulfilment so that the subject, prior to consciousness, is ‘for-the-other’ to the point of being ‘hostage’ to the other. This ‘for-the-other’, that is before oneself, Levinas terms as the structure of proximity, allegiance and substitution. The Knot is tied: the subject is wrapped up in a ‘restlessness’ whereby the same has been ‘substituted’ for the other. This substitution is part of Levinas’ ‘restlessness’ of subjectivity
calling as a command is Levinas’ ethics; an ethics that is always already there where otherness calls into question the self-maintenance of knowing and in doing so makes claims on the freedom and sovereignty of the “I” as individual free agent. This responsibility as a command is the base, the ‘plot’, of subjectivity, a pre-consciousness, a ‘before the questioning’, a ‘saying’ that is before the said’. For Levinas it is from this ‘for-the-other’ of responsibility that subjectivity arises from the anonymity of existence, and it is to this responsibility that the ordering of assembled meaning is ‘subordinate’.

‘The Saying’ as Responsibility

In Otherwise than Being Levinas names the otherness within oneself as ‘responsibility’. The subject, for Levinas, is fractured or decentred because it is in a ‘responsibility’. What this means for Levinas is that the base of subjectivity, the base from where the ‘oneself’ arises, is a responsibility that is for the other person. As the base of subjectivity, responsibility for the other is ‘the saying’ that is before the ‘oneself’, before the ‘presentness’ of the ‘intelligible because an otherness keeps calling. For Levinas there is always the other’s voice restlessly making demands and claims on the sovereignty of the ‘oneself’, a substitution from which there is no escape from, no respite. In this sense Levinas’ ethics of alterity, which is otherwise than being, is a tough goodness.

75 And this responsibility as a before questioning means responsibility is bound to diachrony. Levinas writes: ‘Both being and the vision of being refer to a subject that has risen earlier than being and cognition, earlier than and on this side of them, in an immemorial time which a reminiscence could not recuperate as an apriori. The “birth” of being in the questioning where the cognitive subject stands would thus refer to a before the questioning, the anarchy of responsibility, as it were on this side of all birth’. Levinas, 26.

76 Levinas writes: ‘. . . my responsibility for the other, this response preceding any question, this saying before the said.’ Ibid.

77 Levinas writes that the task of Otherwise than Being ‘. . . does not begin by running up against the finitude of the subject devoted to the relativity of a forever unfinished science. Instead, in this very finitude, taken as an outcome of the-one-for-the-other structure characteristic of proximity, we already catch sight of the excellence, the height and the signification, of responsibility, that is, of sociality, an order to which finite truth—being and consciousness—are subordinate’. Ibid.

78 Judith Butler is influenced by Levinas’ ethics of responsibility. As ‘rebut’ to the critics of post-structuralist subjectivity Butler argues for ‘a theory of subject-formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can work in the service of a conception of ethics and, indeed, of responsibility. If the subject is opaque to itself, it is not therefore licensed to do what it wants or to ignore its relations to others. Indeed, if it is precisely by virtue of its relations to others that it is opaque to itself, and if those relations to others are precisely the venue for its ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject’s opacity to itself that it sustains some of its most important ethical bonds’. See Judith Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself," Diacritics 31, no. Number 4 (2001): 22.

79 ‘Being and cognition together signify in the proximity of the other and in a certain modality of my responsibility for the other, this response preceding any question (my emphasis)’. Levinas, 26. And Levinas’ responsibility, that is for another, is the ‘saying prior to anything said’. Levinas, 43.
sphere’. It is in a different order to freedom and autonomy. Responsibility is not part of the clarity of free choice; rather the saying of subjectivity as responsibility is before choice, before consciousness. It is responsibility as the saying of subjectivity that Levinas’ ethical reduction is trying to reach.

In Otherwise than Being Levinas’ responsibility is not the responsibility for oneself. It is not a taking charge of oneself; it is not a full responsibility for one’s own actions. Rather Levinas’ responsibility is a complete responsibility for the other person. This ‘for-the-other’, a responsibility that is shaped by ‘proximity’, is what makes Levinas’ responsibility an otherness, a responsibility where meaning is in pieces. Keeping the importance of taking full responsibility, Levinas maintains the societal value of taking responsibility for one’s own choices and one’s own actions, but he reshapes this value, or reverses this value, turning it around to be a responsibility that is completely for the other. Responsibility for oneself is in the action of justice, the action of assembled meaning, the action of ‘the said’. A complete responsibility for the other person speaks a different language to intelligibility; it speaks rather a language of passivity as exposure, a passivity as meaning unassembled. This passivity of ‘responsibility’ is Levinas’ ‘saying that is without the said’, a passivity, a ‘pure saying’, that does not measure or calculate its relation with the other person, that does not place limits and boundaries on this ‘responsibility’, that does not place ‘responsibility’ within the limits of thematisation or within the circular and unified wholeness of the ‘intelligible sphere’.

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80 Fabio Ciaramelli names this responsibility as Levinas’ ethics in Otherwise than Being: ‘The thought of Emmanuel Levinas presents us with a most unusual conception of ethics as based on the radical asymmetry of a responsibility which is mine even before my freedom.’ Fabio Ciaramelli, “Levinas’s Ethical Discourse between Individuation and Universality,” in Re-Reading Levinas, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 83. And again: ‘For Levinas . . . ‘ethics’ means an anarchical assignation of the particular subject to morality by the appeal of the other’. Ciaramelli, 85.

81 ‘But one can go back to this signification (my emphasis) of the saying, this responsibility and substitution’ Levinas, 44. ‘It is the reduction to signification, to the one-for-the-other involved in responsibility’. Levinas, 45.

82 The sovereignty of the oneself is interrupted, the assembled meaning of ‘the said’ fractured, by the in pieces of responsibility. Responsibility is not assembled within the sign structure, and it is not based on a known signified, nor the wholeness of the noema. The responsibility for the other person, the strangeness, the surprise of responsibility is of a different order to assembled meaning.

83 This saying as responsibility is a ‘passivity of exposure to another’. Levinas, 47.

84 Ibid.

85 To maintain that the relationship with a neighbour, incontestably set up in saying, is a responsibility for the neighbour, that saying is to respond to another, is to find no longer any limit or measure for this
What makes ‘responsibility’ an ethics for Levinas, what makes ‘responsibility’ a restlessness that disrupts assembled meaning, is the strangeness of this ‘responsibility’. The strangeness of this responsibility, its uncertainty, its otherness, what makes it an in pieces, is in the way responsibility ‘for-the-other’ is for all others, for other people I have not yet met or will never meet. As responsibility for all others the ‘oneself’ falls short of its responsibility. The call to be responsible can never be fully answered. Levinas gives this shortfall a sense of corporeality by naming it as a pain, the pain of a passivity, a ‘deficit’ that is a pain, a pain as a vulnerability and as an exposure. The way responsibility is tied to ‘proximity’ also contributes to its strangeness. As a proximity responsibility is a calling that calls me forward, calls me to answer, calls me ‘to be’; a calling as responsibility when I never called it. This calling that never ceases, and yet can never be fully answered or wholly and fully finalised with a response, means for Levinas that the subject, the “I,” is always in ‘deficit’.

Responsibility for the ‘neighbour’ in the saying is a passivity because it is without limit or measure. Levinas., 47.

86 The saying of subjectivity as ‘affected by the other whom I do not know and who could not justify himself with any identity, who as other will not identify himself with anything. This allegiance will be described as a responsibility of the same for the other, as a response to his proximity before any question. In this responsibility the latent birth of consciousness itself as a perception or listening in to being, can surprised, and dialogue based on questioning’. Ibid., 26.

87 For the editors of Re-reading Levinas’ responsibility has been overlooked by philosophy. Bernasconi and Critchley write: ‘The self finds itself put in question by and obliged to respond to the Other. The obligation to respond amounts to a responsibility that cannot be evaded, but that has been ignored or dissimulated within the philosophical tradition’. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, "Editors' Introduction," in Re-Reading Levinas(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 11.

88 Uniqueness is before conscience, not part of ‘knowing’ or a ‘certainty that falls back on itself’, or the certainty of a knowing maintained, uniqueness is a ‘deficit, a point of pain’. Levinas, 56.

89 In one essay Adriaan Peperzak defines this passivity as: ‘The core of human subjectivity is the extreme passivity of someone who always comes too late to accept his task and autonomy.’ Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, "Presentation," in Re-Reading Levinas, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 62.

90 ‘From the amphibology of being and entities in the said we must go back to the saying which signifies prior to essence, prior to identification, on the hither side of this amphibology. Saying states and thematises the said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbour, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that born by words in the said. This signification to the other occurs in proximity. Proximity is quite distinct from every other relationship, and has to be conceived as a responsibility for the other, it might be called humanity, or subjectivity, or self’. Levinas, 46.

91 The restlessness of the otherness within oneself, ‘the subject in responsibility’, it is not something one chooses but rather in responsibility one is ‘chosen or required’. Ibid., 56.
The calling of responsibility overflows; it is too much to be contained and this ‘too much to be contained’ is ‘the saying’ as a meaning in pieces, a ‘saying’ as a painful ‘deficit’.  

The other layer of strangeness in this responsibility is that I am responsible for the other person’s responsibility. The emphasis here for Levinas is that in my relations with the other person I hold one responsibility more, and this for Levinas means that our relations with each other are asymmetrical. The asymmetrical relation is through responsibility. It is through responsibility that our relations with each other are not within the intelligible sphere, our relations are not formed through the known. Through responsibility there is a lingering and hesitation within a meaning in pieces, or a passivity of waiting just a little longer within a relational space, within a yet to be named territory, without immediately and promptly returning back to the order of assembled meaning. This asymmetrical relation through responsibility Levinas defines when he writes that:

The knot of subjectivity consists in going to the other without concerning oneself with his movement toward me. Or, more exactly, it consists in approaching in such a way that, over and beyond all the reciprocal relations that do not fail to get set up between me and the neighbour, I have always taken one step more toward him—which is possible only if this step is responsibility. In responsibility which we have for one another, I have always one response more to give, I have to answer for his very responsibility.

The ‘reciprocal relation’ is in assembled meaning, and this assembling has its own force; the reciprocal relation does not ‘fail to get set up’. Yet there is ‘a way’, an approach, ‘a way that’ will consist in an ‘approaching’ that is ‘over and beyond’ this reciprocal relation, that is otherwise than, and an interruption to, assembled meaning. However this interruption, this interruption where the self is ‘over and beyond all the reciprocal relations’, only happens in

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92 The word ‘pain’ is used very specifically to indicate, not the pain suffered to oneself, but rather the way in which responsibility is too much to be contained: responsibility cannot be fulfilled, and this for Levinas is the subject always in ‘deficit’, a debt Levinas defines as a pain. Levinas writes: ‘The exposure to another is distinterestedness, proximity, obsession by the neighbour, an obsession despite oneself, that is pain. Pain must not be interpreted right off as an action undergone but assumed, that is, as an experience of pain by a subject that would be for itself. Pain is a pure deficit, an increase of debt in a subject that does not have a hold on itself, does not ‘join up the two ends’. The subjectivity of the subject is precisely this non-recapture, an increase of debt. . .’. Levinas, 55.

93 Ibid., 84.
the strangeness of responsibility, the strangeness where ‘I have to answer for his very responsibility’. In this strangeness the ‘oneself’ always has ‘one response more to give’, in this strangeness the oneself can take ‘one step more’, can be in an asymmetrical relation.

In Levinas’ definition of subjectivity, it is the calling of responsibility that defines the subject as unique.94 This is not uniqueness as universal wholeness; rather the individual rises from the otherness of responsibility, arises from the responsibility in pieces, from the responsibility that is not mine to own. For Levinas the uniqueness of the individual is because of the otherness, the strangeness, of responsibility. This responsibility as a restlessness gives rise to the unique individual; it is not the destructive force that destroys the ‘oneself’ as unique. Levinas’ responsibility as ‘saying’ means simultaneously the breakdown of individualism and the formation of ‘uniqueness’.95 In Otherwise than Being the oneself rises up from the very disruption of individualism; the unique self arises ‘despite oneself’.96

The simple reason that Levinas gives for this is that we are ‘hostage’ to responsibility.97 The calling in responsibility is one’s own; the saying as responsibility cannot be side stepped, denied, or handed over on to someone else. One cannot turn ones back on responsibility, or get someone else to stand in and take one’s place.98 Responsibility ‘assigns’ oneself to be.

94 ‘Uniqueness signifies through the non-coinciding with oneself, the non-repose in oneself, restlessness. It is the reverse of certainty that falls back on itself; it does not identify itself and does not appear to knowing’. The otherness within oneself is ‘non-coinciding’, the uniqueness of the self ‘signifies through’ the otherness within oneself, through ‘restlessness’. Uniqueness in Levinas’ sense is not a certainty that falls back on itself’, it is not maintained through ‘knowing’. Levinas, 56.

95 ‘One must show in saying, qua approach, the very de-posing or desituating of the subject, which nonetheless remains an irreplaceable uniqueness, and is thus the subjectivity of the subject.’ Levinas, 48.

96 This self as unique despite itself will be defined at the end of this chapter.

97 ‘...he is the persecuted one for whom I am responsible to the point of being a hostage for him... I am then called upon in my uniqueness as someone for whom no one else can substitute himself’. Ibid., 59.

98 On so many occasions in Otherwise than Being Levinas defines the uniqueness of the subject through responsibility as due to the fact that responsibility is mine and mine alone. Levinas writes that in responsibility there is an ‘impossibility of slipping away and being replaced’. Levinas, 56. That in responsibility ‘[I]am then called upon in my uniqueness as someone for whom no one else can substitute himself’. Levinas, 59. And again, responsibility for Levinas means ‘an exposedness to the other where no slipping away is possible’. Levinas, 50. And this exposure is where one is ‘chosen or required’, means responsibility is ‘traumatic’, the call to respond to the other person is a calling as a ‘persecution’. Levinas, 56. A persecution because there is no escaping responsibility as an infinite responsibility. The ‘oneself’ is ‘assigned’ to the unfulfillable duty of responsibility for another, a duty that not only cannot be fully achieved but equally cannot be fully evaded. This appeal: this incessant demand is one’s own; responsibility is a calling that is always already there; that cannot be passed on to anyone else. Hence for Levinas the subject is unique. Levinas writes: ‘it is a someone who, in the absence of anyone is called upon to be someone, and cannot slip away from this call. The subject is
Through responsibility, the oneself is ‘assigned’. The uniqueness of the saying of subjectivity is that the subject is chosen, called to be, called to respond, chosen before the world of choice. In Levinas’ subjectivity we are not contemporary with ourselves as one unified whole in a particular moment of a now, rather the subject is bound to responsibility, and, like the way that there is no side stepping the ‘intelligible sphere’, there is equally no getting away from the other person who ‘calls my name’.\(^9^9\) The oneself is ‘chosen or required’, called ‘to be’, within proximity/responsibility. The otherness within oneself is also described by Levinas as ‘diachrony’, the saying as responsibility is bound to ‘diachrony’.\(^1^0^0\)

‘The Saying’ as Diachrony

What Levinas shapes as different to the time of ‘the said’—‘the said’ that is in synchrony, what Levinas describes as separate to the assembling of the past through recollection and ‘reminiscence’—is the saying of subjectivity that is bound to the time of ‘diachrony’. The time of ‘the saying’ is defined by Levinas as a time that has no structure. This without structure is for Levinas the time of the past, a past that is part of oneself as an otherness, a past that is unassembled, a past that has not been brought forward for the clarity of the present but is rather a past in pieces.\(^1^0^1\) This ‘diachrony’, this past as a meaning in pieces, disturbs the ‘intelligible sphere’, unsettles and disrupts assembled meaning, interrupts the clarity of ‘presentness’ because of the way this past remains attached to oneself as broken or fragmented. This flux of time in ‘diachrony’, ‘the saying’ time without structure, is a time in pieces because of ‘proximity’ and ‘responsibility’, because the self is shaped by otherness.
The *in pieces* of ‘diachrony’ is the memory of others who have come and gone, a memory of those previous relations that attaches to us as past encounters that cannot be fully assembled, that cannot be fully brought back to a present or framed into a representation that has a duration, a past that remains unassembled, a past *in pieces* that circulates within consciousness.

Different in order to intelligibility, forgotten or lost to the present, what is ‘otherwise than being’, or of greater significance than questioning within consciousness, is the shadowy enigma of a past as a *something more, a something more* that remains *in pieces*. Levinas defines ‘diachrony’ as:

> A past more ancient than any present, a past that was never present and whose anarchical antiquity was never given in the play of dissimulation and manifestation, a past whose other signification remains to be described, signifies over and beyond the manifestation of being, which thus would convey but a moment of this signifying signification.

Within this one sentence a number of key concerns of Levinas can be pulled apart such as ‘the past’, ‘being and consciousness’, as well as ‘the saying’ that is in ‘the said’, and ‘reduction’. For example by ‘dissimulation and manifestation’ Levinas means a ‘play’ between a not knowing and knowing, a ‘play’ that is within the ‘intelligible sphere’. For Levinas, there is a past as a ‘diachrony’ that is separate from this ‘sphere’, a past ‘whose anarchical antiquity was never given in the play of dissimulation and manifestation’.

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102 This past as part of oneself is a scattering of moments that cannot be assembled, while the ‘presentness of the present’ is the order of assembling for the clarity of understanding.

103 Cat Power seems to evoke this diachrony in the song *Manhattan* when she begins by singing: ‘Hotel room to the street below, people come and people go, all the friends that we used to know, ain’t coming back’. Cat Power, "Manhattan," in *Sun* (Matadorrecords, 2012).

104 Rather than being assembled for intelligibility; responsibility is in the time of diachrony, a ‘time without a beginning’. Levinas writes: ‘It (responsibility) is thus in a time without beginning. Its anarchy cannot be understood as a simple return from present to prior present, an extrapolation of presents according to a memorable time, that is, a time assembled in a recollection of a representable representation’. Here Levinas is separating the past *in pieces* from the experience of time as a framed present, that the past is a previous present and the future is a yet to be present. Levinas, 51.

105 Ibid., 24.

106 Intelligibility and the primary focus on the question of Being does not have the surprise of otherness, does not have the surprise of diachrony. Rather ‘manifestation’ is merely within the field of question and response. Levinas, 25. And by the ‘anarchical antiquity’ Levinas means a piece of the past that does not really have an...
‘past that was never present’ is Levinas’ ‘diachrony’ as a past that still remains in pieces, a past that has not been assembled for the present, a past that has not been brought into the ordering of comprehension, a past as a saying that cannot be held down as a term or named in thematisation, a past as a saying that is yet to be congealed into a noun and designated as a term, a past as the face of the other who just passed by. This past yet to be named is for Levinas a transcendence, a beyond the anonymity of existence and an otherwise than intelligibility. A past in pieces ‘signifies over and beyond the manifestation of being’ and as the base of the subject is a past before ‘the said’, a past ‘more ancient than any present’. It is in ‘reduction’ that this saying in ‘diachrony’ is conveyed to us, but for ‘a moment’.

‘The saying’ for Levinas is a ‘signifyingness’ that is ‘not absorbed in the signification said’, a signifyingness that is an expression of exposure, a sign without a signified.107 ‘Diachrony’ is a something more than the play of ‘dissimulation and manifestation’, and yet this manifestation holds within it, for just a glimpse, or for just ‘but a moment’, this ‘signifying signification’. As ‘a past that was never present’ means for Levinas that ‘the saying’ passes by without being assembled, the face of the other person was never fully present, the face of the other was never part of assembled meaning, the face of the other does not settle into the ‘intelligible sphere’.108 Rather ‘diachrony’ passes. This passing, the way a meaning in pieces passes by, is not for Levinas a passivity that is a ‘weakness of memory’,109 a passivity origin or a beginning point. Its beginning, the surprise of the others face, is not framed within duration. The ‘ancient’ as an ‘anarchical antiquity’ is in the sense that diachrony has no birth point and no end point. Diachrony is not a past that follows into a progression, a past followed by a present followed by a future. Rather diachrony is the past as a scattering of events, an array of instants. A past without a beginning is what Levinas means when he says ‘anarchical’. In terms of a subjectivity in an ethics of alterity, Levinas will use the phrase ‘anarchy of responsibility’. It can be confusing to say ‘diachrony’ is before ‘the said’ because diachrony is wrapped up in ‘the said’, at the ‘instant’. So by before Levinas can mean of greater importance: that ‘the saying’ precede ‘the said’.

107 ‘If saying is not only the correlative of a said, if its signifyingness is not absorbed in the signification said, can we not find beyond or on the hither side of the saying that tells being the signifyingness of diachrony? Behind being and its monstration, there is now already heard the resonance of other significations forgotten in ontology, which now solicit our inquiry’. Levinas, 38. For Colin Davis this signifyingness means for Levinas that ‘the saying has its own meaning, quite separate from anything that might be communicated by the Said’. Davis, Levinas: An Introduction, 77.


109 Levinas makes it clear that the loss of time is a past as a meaning in pieces and not due to a failure to accurately remember when he writes: ‘. . .something irrecoverable. . . something unrepresentable, immemorial, prehistorical. Before the syntheses of apprehension and recognition, the absolutely passive “syntheses” of ageing is affected. Though it time passes. The immemorial is not effected of a weakness of
as an inability to remember, but is rather a passivity that does not assemble meaning for the ordering of comprehension, a passivity that leaves meaning unassembled, a passivity where a meaning in pieces is able to remain a passivity that disrupts the ordering for comprehension. 110

Levinas’ ‘diachrony’ is the past that is not assembled for the comfort of reminiscing, or ‘resurrected’ and revived for memory; it is a past that calls me when I never called it. 111

Within our past as recalled, within the said as synchrony, there is attached to memory a something more than consciousness can contain, a more which is given its shape by

memory, an incapacity to cross large intervals of time, to resuscitate pasts too deep. It is the impossibility of the dispersion of time to assemble itself in the present, the insurmountable diachrony of time, a beyond the said. It is diachrony that determines the immemorial; a weakness of memory does not constitute diachrony.

The time of ‘the said’ is this ‘syntheses of apprehension and recognition’ and the past as a meaning in pieces is ‘the impossibility of the dispersion of time to assemble itself in the present’. Then Levinas writes that this diachrony of subjectivity is of a different order to thematisation as the sign structure: ‘For such a signification what is signified would not be a “something” identified in the theme of the said, a “this as that” illuminated in the memorable time of essence’. Levinas, 51.

The time of ‘the said’ within the ‘immemorial time’ of essence is ‘assigned’. Levinas, 51. The ‘loss of time’ as a lapse has a positive sense for Levinas in the way that it is separate from the ‘active ego’. The lapse of time is not part of consciousness as ‘free commitment’, it is not ‘the work of the subject’ within the ‘intellegible sphere to be explored’. Levinas writes: ‘Temporalisation as lapse, the loss of time, is neither an initiative of an ego. . .The loss of time is not the work of a subject’ Levinas, 51. However, ‘not being the work of the subject’, and ‘bypassing’ the active ego, means, more importantly, that the in pieces of ageing, the diachrony as the weariness and deterioration of ageing, is not part of the synthesis of assembled meaning that retains and maintains a ‘first for oneself”; a first for oneself in clarity of presence. Responsibility in diachrony means for Levinas a subjectivity not shaped by the oneself as autonomous free agent, but rather shaped from the deterioration of ‘ageing’, a deterioration where time has slipped away, where the past remains within oneself as a in pieces, as a ‘non-synthesis’, and as a ‘restlessness’. Levinas defines ageing in the way that ‘It breaks up under the weight of years, and is irreversibly removed from the present, that is, from re-presentation. In self-consciousness there is no longer a presence of self to self, but senescence. It is as senescence beyond the recuperation of memory that time, lost time that does not return, is a diachrony, and concerns me’. Levinas. 52. In ‘ageing’, and in ‘the lapse’, the in pieces remains, it has not been assembled for a knowing that maintains the self as autonomous. Within the time that is lost, in the past as unassembled, before memory recalls for presence, the loss of time, the diachrony that is before, and not part of, the ordering for comprehension, is from where the oneself is ‘assigned’.

The saying of subjectivity is in an ‘immemorial time’ that ‘reminiscence is a cannot ‘recapture’ as an origin of truth for re-presentation. Levinas writes that ‘Being signifies on the basis of the one-for-the-other, of substitution of the same for the other. Both being and the vision of being refer to a subject that has risen earlier than being and cognition, earlier than and on this side of them, in an immemorial time which a reminiscence could not recuperate as an a priori’. Levinas, 26.
'proximity' and 'responsibility'. Within our past people have come and gone, not as a clean linear progression where one encounter is followed by another, but rather as a scattering of moments or random events, a variety of instances and encounters with the other person that cannot be isolated and pinned down like an object under analysis.

The Correlation of 'The Said' and 'The Saying'

The ‘reduction’ for Levinas, the philosophical reduction, or an ethical language that can accommodate the trace of the saying as subjectivity, occurs in the correlation of said/saying. For Levinas there is a meaning in pieces attached to experience, or a trace of ‘the saying’ that remains. The said/saying correlation is conscious experience; our conscious experiencing of the world, our understanding, our agency. In correlation ‘the said’ is the dominant authoritative force that overrides ‘the saying’. ‘The said’ takes up ‘the saying’, absorbs ‘the saying’ into correlation, so that ‘the saying’ becomes ‘forgotten’. And yet for Levinas within this correlation ‘the saying’ is not completely absorbed; ‘the saying’, through the correlation, keeps returning, keeps coming to the surface only to recede back again. A forgotten saying calls for ‘reduction’ within the correlation.

112 Although opposite to the time structure of assembled meaning, diachrony is entwined within the synchrony and the order of ‘the said’. The past in pieces, the past that was never present, is very much attached to consciousness as the subject’s restlessness. The previous saying, ‘the saying’ as always already there, is tied into ‘the said’; the past that was ‘never present’—forgotten or absorbed—leaves its trace in assembled meaning.

113 ‘Language has been in operation, and the saying that bore this said, but goes further, was absorbed and died in the said, was inscribed’. Levinas, 36. Language that has been in operation is the ‘already said’, and ‘the said’ absorbed ‘the saying’. Whilst ‘the said’ remains, is reconfirmed and maintained, ‘the saying’ keeps returning only to recede back again under the dominance of ‘the said’. Levinas, 36.

114 ‘In correlation with the said (in which saying runs the risk of being absorbed as soon as the said is formalised), the saying itself is indeed thematised. . .’. Levinas, 46. And ‘As soon as saying, on the hither side of being, becomes dictation, it expires, or abdicates, in fables and in writing’. Ibid., 43.

115 ‘The identity of entities refers to a saying teleologically turned to the kerygma of the said, absorbing itself in it to the extent of being forgotten in it. It refers to a saying that would be correlative with the said, or that would idealise the identity of entities’. Ibid., 37.

116 In this correlation ‘the said’ is important because it can hold ‘the saying’ so that it can in fact be heard.

117 In Otherwise than Being there seems to be two sayings; one before correlation and one in correlation. Levinas writes: ‘If saying is not only the correlative of a said, if its signifyingness is not absorbed in the signification said, can we not find beyond or on the hither side of the saying that tells being the signifyingness of diachrony? Behind being and its monstrosity, there is now already heard the resonance of other
In ‘the said’—in language as a system of nouns assembling meaning—there is, despite the embrace of ‘the said’, a trace of ‘the saying’. The saying is not completely exhausted in thematisation, or lost to the ‘already said’, rather ‘the saying’ ‘imprints its trace on the thematisation itself’. In correlation, ‘the saying’ leaves its trace as it passes; the passivity of exposure is not completely ‘exhausted’, in the said/saying correlation there is a trace as the ‘echo of the saying’. In ‘Being and consciousness’, in ‘the said’, in the intelligible sphere, there is the hint of ‘the saying’, a trace of ‘the saying’ that rises, if only for a moment. Levinas’ correlation between the said/saying means that ‘the saying’ circulates within assembled meaning: within the fixed term ‘resounds’ a meaning in pieces. In communication, within sociality, within expression, there is a surplus that assembled meaning cannot fully contain: within the act of comprehension lives a passivity.

In correlation the problem for Otherwise than Being is to name subjectivity as an otherness within oneself without diminishing or assembling this otherness—to name that which is before thematisation, to bring the saying of subjectivity into the thematised, without designating it as another theme to be decoded. Once the ‘resonance’ of ‘the saying’ is heard, once represented, once ‘the saying’ is named, it becomes reabsorbed back into the sameness of ‘the said’, assembled into the ordering for comprehension. Levinas writes ‘As soon as saying, on the hither side of being, becomes dictation, it expires, or abdicates, in fables and in writing’. Following this Levinas then asks the question: ‘But is it necessary and is it possible that the saying on the hither side to be thematised, that is, manifest itself, that it enter into a proposition and a book?’ And Levinas’ answers to this question is that yes ‘It is necessary’.

significations forgotten in ontology, which now solicit our inquiry’. That reduction can find the trace of this saying that is before correlation from within the correlation. Levinas, 38.

118 ‘The plot of the saying that is absorbed in the said is not exhausted in this manifestation. It imprints its trace on the thematisation itself…’ Ibid., 46-47.
119 ‘To ontology, the exposition of being in its amphibology of being and entities, belong time and language, in as much as language, assembling the dispersion of duration into nouns and proposition, lets being and entities be heard. In this said, we nonetheless surprise the echo of the saying, whose signification cannot be assembled’. A saying as an echo perhaps because of the way that ‘the saying’ circulates within ‘the said’, ‘the saying’ as heard, or perhaps because of the way ‘the saying’ despite being absorbed by ‘the said’, always returns again, like the person who just passed by. Levinas, 27.
120 Ibid., 43.
121 Ibid. Also, to the importance of this word necessary, Derrida, in this essay “At This Moment in this Work Here I Am,” puts emphasis on this it is necessary. One example is when Derrida writes: ‘The present work makes a present of what can only be given outside the book. And even outside the framework’. Then Derrida
This ‘it is necessary’ is an important part of Levinas’ ‘reduction’, and it is an important part of the way in which this thesis will try and link Levinas’ ethics of reduction to contemporary art through the art of Sophie Calle — that ‘the saying’ needs ‘the said’. For ‘the saying’, despite being assembled in ‘the said’, ‘it is necessary’ for a correlation of said/saying: the *in pieces* of subjectivity calls out for assembled meaning. What this means is that it takes a particular type of assembled meaning, a particular type of representation, to accommodate the trace of ‘the saying’. An important way of thinking about Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is that Levinas does not want to do away with the rigors of a philosophical language, afraid that such a language would fail in its attempts to express ‘the saying’, afraid it would destroy or assemble the very otherness it is trying to argue for. Rather Levinas wants philosophy to work. That is, that a rigorous philosophical language is the very site that can hold ‘the saying’: that a philosophy can philosophise ‘the saying’. In *Otherwise than Being* ‘the saying’ is in need of philosophy, but it is a certain type of philosophy, one that keeps ‘the saying’ on edge before it tips over and ‘congeals’ into a designated term; a philosophy that *allows for* ‘the saying’ to linger a little longer in uncertainty, for uncertainty to shimmer, before being ‘congealed’ into a noun. ‘The saying’ entwined in ‘the said’ leaves its trace and calls for a response, calls for philosophy. Thus it is in ‘reduction’ that Levinas wants philosophy to

writes: ‘... the series is always complicated by the fact that the inextricable equivocation, contamination, soon it will be called “hypocrisy,” is at once described and denounced in its necessity by “this book,” by “the present work,” by “the thesis,” and in them, out of them, in them, but destined in them to an outside that no dialectic will be able to reappropriate into its book. Thus (I underline it is necessary, it was necessary)’. Jacques Derrida, “At This Moment in This Work Here I Am,” in *Re-Reading Levinas*, ed. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).


123 ‘To expose an otherwise than being will still give an ontological said’. Levinas, 44.

124 In *Otherwise than Being* there is no trying to get around ‘the said’, or trying to side stepping around the way language works well at enabling understanding, rather ‘the said’ becomes an important position for ethics.

125 ‘But one has to say that the gratuity nonetheless required of substitution, that miracle of ethics before the light, this astonishing saying, comes to light through the very gravity of the question that assails it. It must (substitution) spread out and assemble itself into essence, posit itself, be hypostasized, become as eon in consciousness and knowledge, let itself be seen... Ethics itself, in its saying which is a responsibility, requires this hold. But it is also necessary that the saying call for philosophy in order that the light occurs not congeal into essence, and that the hypostasis of an eon not be set up as an idol. Philosophy makes this astonishing adventure — showing and recounting as an essence — intelligible, by loosening this grip of being. ... for the saying is both an affirmation and a retraction of the said’. Ibid., 44.
work. An ethical language as ‘reduction’ names the self as chosen before the world of action and choice.

**Language, Art and ‘Reduction’ as the ‘Approach’**

Having defined ‘the saying’ and ‘the said’, we can now define specifically what Levinas means by ‘reduction’. However in order to re-think Levinas’ philosophical ‘reduction’ as an ethics for art we need to first consider how Levinas defines language in *Otherwise than Being*, because it is from a theory of language that Levinas outlines his theory of art.

**Language**

From defining a ‘system of nouns’ as language that names and designates meaning, Levinas wants to think of languages as being more than this role of naming and designating. The way in which Levinas does this is to define language as having two aspects. One aspect of a word is the *noun*, the naming as designating, the other aspect of a word is the *verb*.  

Language for Levinas is shaped as a noun/verb combination; the actual word itself is the noun/verb entwined.

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126 For Levinas even the word itself holds the verb. The word itself is the noun/verb correlation.

127 The noun/verb correlation is made for Levinas through sensibility, not through the intelligible sphere. The way that Levinas shapes the noun/verb correlation as different to the ‘intelligible sphere’ is by distancing it from Husserl’s intentionality. The difference between the verb heard through sensibility and Husserl’s ‘intentionality’ is mainly a difference in unassembled time and assembled time. A difference in time that is, for Levinas, within a difference between sensing and sensed. For Levinas, Husserl’s intentionality is guilty of fixing and determining sensibility too tightly within consciousness, too tightly within the intelligible sphere. The intentional structure of the noesis/noema does this by *identifying* (my emphasis) the sensing, it identifies the ‘sensorial’ into consciousness, turning the corporeal sensation of *sensing* into the *sensed* of intelligibility. Levinas writes: ‘. . . that its nature is exhausted in intentional functions of welcome extended to the qualities called sensorial, in the view of identifying them’. Levinas, 31. Through the structure of Husserl’s intentionality the *sensing*; the sensing that is attuned to the ‘verbalness of the verb’, becomes ‘congealed’ and fixed into an identified *sensed*. For Levinas the identification of *sensing* into the *sensed* through intentionality means that corporeal sensation becomes merely an ‘abridged version’ of experience. Levinas writes: ‘One can very well attribute to sensing an intentionality that identifies colours and objective sounds, still it is itself an abridge version of these colours and sounds. It “resembles” the sensed.’ Levinas, 32. For Levinas the way intentionality *identifies* the sensible so that *sensing* congeals into the *sensed* means that intentionality puts sensibility into the ‘recuperated time’ of ‘the said’. Levinas writes ‘In Husserl the time structure of sensibility is a time of what can be recuperated’. Intentionality is not surprised, or pulled up short, by the ‘irreducible diachrony’. Levinas, 34.
The verb for Levinas is existence: it is the verb ‘to be’, or the verb ‘to exist’.\(^{128}\) For Levinas existence has a cold fact-ness to it that is impersonal.\(^{129}\) The anonymity of existence is neither an absence nor a full presence and yet there is a weight to existence, a weight that is somewhere between presence and absence, an absence that still has a presence, an absence as a weight, a weight as the bare fact of existence, an existence that is just there.\(^{130}\) More prominently in one of Levinas’ earlier books, *Existence and Existents* (1947), and also at times in *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas terms this bare fact of existence as the ‘there is’.\(^{131}\) The ‘there is’ for Levinas means that existence has an anonymous or impersonal neutrality to it. The bare fact of existence is an anonymous ‘there is’. Existence is just there with or without us.\(^{132}\) In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas uses descriptive terms such as the ‘murmur of silence’, a ‘mute resonance’ and the ‘verbalness of the verb’ to describe this ‘there is’ of existence.

The project of *Existence and Existents* was to move away from the anonymity of the ‘there is’ to an ‘instant’ where the individual subject, despite being bound to existence, rises out from this anonymity, from this ‘silence that resounds’, to be an individual subject. This movement to the ‘instant’ of the human ‘I’ is the movement from existence to an existent.\(^{133}\) *Otherwise than Being* mirrors this task by trying to show how a subjectivity in

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\(^{128}\) ‘But being is the verb itself. Temporalisation is the verb form to be’. Levinas, 35.

\(^{129}\) Levinas writes in *Existence and Existents*: ‘There is, in general, without it mattering what there is, without being able to fix a substantive to this term. There is is an impersonal form, like in it rains, or it is warm. Its anonymity is essential. The mind does not find itself faced with an apprehended exterior.’ Emmanuelle Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans., Aiphoon Lingis (1947; repr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 53.

\(^{130}\) Levinas writes: ‘A presence of absence, the there is . . .’ See Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 60. And again: ‘The darkness into which consciousness plunges, which has put out every glimmering of light in being, is also understood as content. The fact that it is a content obtained through the negation of all content of remains unconsidered. But this is just what is new in this situation. Darkness, as the presence of absence, is not a purely present content. There is not a “something” that remains. There is the atmosphere of presence, which can, to be sure, appear later as a content, but originally is the impersonal, nonsubstantive event of the night and there is. It is like a density of the void, like a murmur of silence. There is nothing, but there is being, like a field of force.’ Ibid., 59.

\(^{131}\) In translations of Levinas’s work, and in research papers on Levinas, this term for existence is often left in the French as *il y a*.

\(^{132}\) In terms of a link between *Existence and Existents* with *Otherwise than Being* Bernasconi writes in a forward to *Existence and Existents* ‘To move beyond identity was a major motivation of Levinas’s analysis, one which links Existence and Existents with his essays from the 1930s, as well as with the later essays that culminate in *Otherwise than Being*. Robert Bernasconi, “Forward,” in *Existence and Existents* (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2001), xiv-xv.

\(^{133}\) In *Existence and Existents* Levinas names this movement as the ‘hypostasis’.
responsibility raises out from the ‘murmur of silence’, raising out to where the saying of subjectivity can then say ‘Here I Am’. The ‘I’ in Levinas’ ‘Here I Am’ is the saying as subjectivity, that raises from the ‘there is’, not to be separate from existence but rather to be ‘otherwise than being or beyond essence’.

The verb in the noun/verb correlation means for Levinas that the said structure of language, the noun that designates ‘this as that’, is not separate to existence. The noun does not refer to existence through intelligibility. It does not refer to existence through a system of signs from a distance, nor does this system absorb fully the question of existence in a comprehensive knowing. Rather existence is there within the noun, within the very word used to designate meaning. In this sense of residing within the noun, Levinas does not want to refer to existence through a metaphor. Rather the time of existence, the anonymity of the ‘there is’, resides unassembled within the noun as a flux of time, a fractured or fragmented time attached to designated meaning. The ‘there is’ is not separately named by language. Rather the time of existence resides within the noun that names and gives understanding. This something more that the noun has attached to it is a stretching of existence time, ‘temporalisation’ stretches out from the noun; attached to the noun is a ‘shimmering’ of the ‘flow of time’, a time which is ‘unthematisable’.

The ‘system of the nouns’ is the very rational ordering that absorbs the ‘rustle’ of existence, that assembles the fractured time of existence, and yet in Levinas’ noun/verb correlation the word used to designate meaning holds with it the rustling of the ‘there is’. In the noun

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134 For Levinas language should not refer to existence from a distance through the sign because the sign structure only smoothers over existence, rather Levinas wants to think of existence as an already there within language. This is what Levinas means when he writes that: ‘To suggest the difference between Being and entities, and the strange temporal itch, a modification without change, one resorts to metaphors taken from the temporal and not from time—such as process, act of being, or effectuation of being, or its passage. But being is the verb form to be. Language issued from the verbalness of a verb would then not only consist in making being understood, but also in making its essence vibrate’. Levinas, 35.

135 The verb of existence means that a thing or an object has an existence through time, an object is ‘temporalized’ not just fixed in a present.

136 The flow of time as temporalisation is the verb to be. The flow of time is the time of existence that is different to recoverable time. Levinas writes: ‘Rather than being a metaphor taken from the movement of waters in a river, would not flowing be the very temporality of time and the “science” of which “consciousness” is made? To speak of time in terms of flowing is to speak of time and not in terms of temporal events’. This ‘flow of time’ is more than recoverable time can keep hold of, it is in pieces, it is a ‘flow of time’ time that is un-thematisable. Levinas, 34. In a footnote Levinas questions if this non-thematisable time can be found ‘by reduction from the said?’ (footnote 18 p 188). And later Levinas writes that ‘But being is the verb itself. Temporalisation is the verb form to be’. Levinas, 35.
existence ‘reverberates’ even though the verb does not play the role of designating meaning. This rustling of the ‘there is’, this ‘reverberation’ that stretches out from the noun, Levinas calls the ‘verbalness of the verb’. Language as a noun/verb correlation is where even the rational ordering of the noun that designates ‘this as that’ in a ‘system of nouns’, holds the restlessness or rustling of the ‘there is’. The noun of thematisation carries with it the ‘verbalness of the verb’. The verb as the impersonal fact of existence resounds within language; in a noun/verb correlation existence can be heard.

For Levinas a method of communication that holds the verb to the noun is an ‘apophansis’. The ‘apophansis’ keeps active the time of existence. It is through the ‘apophansis’ that essence is not referred to as a referent reliant on the sign structure; it ‘does not double up the real’. In the noun/verb correlation language is not a science or ‘only a code’, or not primarily coded. Nor is language purely abstract and general, devoid of

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137 ‘And yet a verb perhaps comes into its very verbalness by ceasing to name actions and events, ceasing to name. It is here that a word “has its own ways,” unique of their kind, irreducible to symbolisation which names or evokes. The verb to be tells the flowing as though language were not unequivocably equivalent to denomination, as though in to be the verb first came to function as a verb, and as though this function refers to the teeming and mute itching of that modification without change that time operates. This time . . . can be recuperated in retention, memory, “tales” and books’. Levinas, 34.

138 ‘Essence is . . . the verbalness of a verb’. Ibid.

139 ‘In the verb of the apophansis, which is the verb properly so called, the verb to be, essence resounds and is heard’. Levinas, 41.

140 The way that Levinas structures the apophansis is through the logic that, as the noun, ‘A is A’ but is equally ‘AA’s’. What I take Levinas to mean by this is that the formula of ‘A is A’ is language as designation, the usage of words or signs to designate ‘this as that’. It is language as ‘identification’. ‘AA’s’ means that this designation also has within it the verbalness of the verb. So the apophansis is the modality of ‘AA’s’ within the fixed substance of ‘A is A’, within A is A is the AA’s, or within the thematised said is the verb of existence. Levinas also uses the term ‘predicative statement’ for the term apophasis. For Alain Toumayan this formulation of ‘A is A’ refers to Heidegger; that ‘identity is a characteristic of Being, that it has to do with the manner of Being of a being’. Alain Toumayan, Encountering the Other : The Artwork and the Problem of Difference in Blanchot and Levinas, Artwork and the Problem of Difference in Blanchot and Levinas (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2004), 14.

141 Levinas writes ‘Time and the essence it unfolds by manifesting entities, identified in the themes of statements or narratives, resound as a silence without becoming themes themselves. They can, to be sure, be named in a theme, but this naming does not reduce to definitive silence the mute resonance, the murmur of silence, in which essence is identified as an entity. Once again for the “listening eye” a silence resounds about what had been muffled, the silence of the parcelling out of being’. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 38.

142 ‘To affirm that this mutation in the amphibology of being and entities is an amphibology of the logos, that it is due to the status of the said, is not to reduce the difference between being and entities to a frivolous play of syntax. It is to measure the pre-ontological weight of language instead of taking it only as a code (which it is also)’. Levinas, 43.
specific meaning. Rather the ‘apophansis’ is both the noun and the verb.\textsuperscript{143} It is a language that can designate meaning and still maintain the ‘verbalness of the verb’.

However the loss of the verb to the ‘system of nouns’ is not Levinas’ main concern. Rather Levinas’ concern is that the assembling forces of both consciousness in the present and the noun designating meaning absorbs ‘diachrony’.\textsuperscript{144} By stating an ‘apophansis’, by arguing that the noun that designates meaning can do so without smoothing over the ‘murmur of silence’, Levinas is laying the ground work for his main thesis that the thematised said does not completely absorb the subjectivity of the saying. If the apophansis is a noun/verb correlation then this allows space for Levinas to think of a said/saying correlation where ‘the said’ is not given priority over ‘the saying’.\textsuperscript{145} If the noun that designates holds the absent presence of essence, then so too can ‘the said’ hold the subjectivity of the saying. The noun/verb apophansis is undertaken by Levinas in order to lay the ground work for a saying/said correlation. If essence can vibrate within the noun that designates meaning, then Levinas wants to state that it can be equally true that there is a said/saying correlation—that within ‘the said’ there is always the trace of ‘the saying’; within experience there is this always already there responsibility as a meaning in pieces.

\section*{Art}

\textit{Art and the ‘Apophansis’}

In \textit{Otherwise than Being} the more lengthy consideration of art and the language of art occurs under the subheading ‘The Amphibology of Being and Entities’. For Levinas art is not the ‘apophansis’, whilst the study of art, a responding to art in the form of research, in the form of the exegesis, is the ‘apophansis’. It is from his own understanding of art, and from his definition of the ‘apophansis’, Levinas then shifts to the philosophical language of ‘reduction’—a ‘reduction’ not in the ‘apophansis’ but rather as an approach. In Levinas’

\textsuperscript{143} Language as a noun/verb correlation, one that is ‘issued from the verbalness of a verb would then not only consist in making being understood, but also in making essence vibrate’. Levinas, 35.

\textsuperscript{144} Levinas wants to free sensibility from being ‘recuperated’ and assembled for the intelligible sphere, not necessarily to keep attuned to the verb but rather to keep sensibility within ‘diachrony’.

\textsuperscript{145} ‘…to not give priority to the said over the saying’. Levinas, 43.
definition of ‘reduction’ the ‘apophanasis’ changes to become the ‘approach’. The ‘reduction’ is not the noun that maintains the verb but is rather ‘the said’ that retains ‘the saying’.

If ‘the said’ structure of language means that language works only as a noun, if this is true, then it must be equally true, or for Levinas it must be ‘with as much right’, that a language can function only as the verb; that there is a language that is pure verb without the noun. This for Levinas would be a language that does not designate meaning but rather ‘exposes the silent resonance of the essence’. The best example of this language for Levinas is art. Art can separate itself from the thematised said, expose essence, hold the verb that is on the verge of becoming a noun. Levinas defines art in *Otherwise than Being* as language that is first and foremost the language of the verb. In Levinas’ analysis this can be understood as a positive definition. Art is able to cut through the coded language of signifier to the signified. As the verb art can cut through representation as narration, art has the capacity to break away from this designating role of language and through sensibility be the form, colour, line and shade that exposes us to the ‘murmur of silence’. However, art as the verb is predominantly a negative for Levinas because of the way a ‘verbalness’ can be distant from justice and politics in assembled meaning, and be isolated from ethics, isolated from the saying as subjectivity.

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146 ‘But also, and with as much right, language can be conceived as the verb in a predicative. . .’. Levinas, 40.
147 Levinas writes: ‘Language qua said can then be conceived as a system of nouns identifying entities, and then as a system of signs doubling up the being, designating substances, events and relations by substantives or other parts of speech derived from substantives, designating identities—in sum, designating. But also, and with as much right, language can be conceived as the verb in a predicative proposition in which the substance breaks down into modes of being, modes of temporalisation. Here language does not double up the entities, but exposes the silent resonance of the essence’. Ibid.
148 Levinas writes: ‘And the search for new forms, from which all art lives, keeps awake everywhere the verbs that are on the verge of lapsing into substantives.’ And ‘. . . in the said, the essence that resounds is on the verge of becoming a noun’. Ibid., 41.
149 Following from ‘language qua said’ as ‘designating’ Levinas writes ‘But identical entities, things and qualities of things, begin to resound with their essence in a predicative proposition not as a result of psychological reflection about subjectivity and the temporality of sensation, but out of art’. Ibid., 40.
150 This Maintains Levinas criticism of art in *Totality and Infinity* and “Reality and its Shadow”. For an analysis of Levinas’ position toward art before *Otherwise than Being* see Eaglestone’s Chapter 4. ‘Cold splendour’: Levinas’s Suspicion of Art. Robert Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism: Reading after Levinas* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997). Interestingly Eaglestone also does not define how ‘reduction’ works. Also For a comprehensive analysis that looks closely at examples of where Levinas’ attitudes towards art is contradictory, and how this can show that the artwork can in fact lead ‘us to the other for whom I am responsible’. See Jolanta Nowak, “Out from Behind the Shadows: Levinas and Visual Art,” *Philosophy Today* 54, no. 3 (2010).
In Levinas’ theory of the artwork as ‘pure verb’, Levinas is very broad and general in his discussion on what art is. Levinas does not give us a comprehensive analysis on how to value art, nor is there any attempt whatsoever to consider contemporary attitudes, styles and theories around art at the time of his writing. Rather art is defined as if it is just one thing. The reason why Levinas gives such a broad definition of art is because he is trying to define a core foundation—that fundamentally art speaks the verb. What Levinas is trying to do here is make use of art as an example in order for him to display an aesthetics that speaks the verb without the noun; to show an opposite to the ‘noun system’. Art is used in Otherwise than Being to display or give an example of his theory that a language can be all verb. If there is a noun that dominates over the verb, and there is a verb that is distant from the noun, Levinas then asks: Is there not also an ‘apophansis’ that can be a noun/verb correlation?

Despite Levinas’ overall generalised account of art, we can understand him to be speaking quite specifically about the language of abstract painting, or becoming abstraction (as in cubism), or what he might term as modern art. Understanding Levinas to be speaking of abstraction helps us understand what Levinas means by a language of only the verb that exposes ‘essence’. Levinas’ descriptions sound very much like painting that deals with a language of abstraction when he talks about art as ‘[T]he palette of colours (my emphasis), the . . . meandering of forms (my emphasis). . . all these modal notions—there is resonance of essence’. A secondary source of evidence that Levinas is discussing the language of abstraction comes not from Otherwise than Being but rather from Existence and Existents. In Existence and Existents Levinas makes very specific references to Cubism as the art that exposes us to the ‘there is’; that the Cubist style functions as the window to the ‘there is’. From both the way that Levinas describes painting in Otherwise than Being and particularly in the way that Levinas puts emphasis on Cubism in Existence and Existents, we can understand that Levinas is referring specifically to work that is moving away from figuration towards abstraction as the language of the pure verb without the noun; the language that

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151 Levinas also put emphasis on music and poetry, the full quote is: ‘The palette of colours (my emphasis), the gamut of sounds, the system of vocables and the meandering of forms (my emphasis) are realised as a pure how; in the touch of colour and pencil, the secrecy of words, the sonority of sounds—all these modal notions—there is resonance of essence’. Levinas, 40.  
152 Levinas could be critical of abstraction because he is reluctant to praise representative art but also not wanting the abstract painting to be the representation of the face of the other.
exposes the ‘murmur of silence’ or the anonymity of the ‘there is’. As the ‘pure verb’ the abstract painting becomes Levinas’ ‘listening eye’. The ‘eye that listens’ is attuned to the verb, the abstract painting, reveals the ‘silent resonance’ which was otherwise ‘muffled’ by the noun that designates. The language of art exposes ‘the murmur of silence’; art is the ‘listening eye’ attuned to the ‘there is’.

In Levinas’ analysis, art is able to expose essence because it is always in ‘search for new forms’. For Levinas this always ‘searching’ is art’s core, art’s primary function. It is within art’s searching that art keeps the ‘verbalness of the verb’ active. It is in this searching that art is able to keep ‘awake everywhere the verbs that are on the verge of lapsing into substantives’. In Levinas’ definition this searching and renewal is art’s primary movement. Art is always renewing itself; just when it is about to become ‘the said’, just when art is about to be designated into a term, art finds different forms for it to be the language of existence.

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153 The abstract painting for Levinas is the sensibility of the ‘eye that listens’ because it is through corporeal sensibility that the verb is heard. It is through corporeal sensibility that the verb is in this correlation with the noun, it is corporeal sensation that keeps us in touch with the ‘temporal flow’, the correlation of noun/verb as an ‘ambiguous unity’ is allowed through sensibility. Levinas writes: ‘sensation is the ambiguous unity of the temporal flow of the lived element and the identity of being and events, designated by words’. Levinas, 32. The ‘reverberation of the verb’ is not ‘heard’ through rational reasoning, or through the active assembling played out in the system of nouns, the verb it is not heard through the ‘intelligible sphere’, or through the past assembled for a framed present, rather the ‘verbalness’ of existence is heard through sensibility or as sensibility. To hear the temporalisation of existence through sensibility is what Levinas means by the ‘eye that listens’.

154 Levinas writes: ‘Once again for the “listening eye” a silence resounds about what had been muffled, the silence of the parcelling out of being’. Levinas, 38.

155 Ibid.

156 ‘Poetry is production of song, of resonance and sonority, which are the verbalness of verbs or essence’. Ibid., 40.

157 As quoted above in footnote 161. ‘And the search for new forms, from which all art lives’. Ibid., 41.

158 Following from the quote: ‘And the search for new forms, from which all art lives. . . ’ Levinas writes: ‘In painting, red reddens and green greens, forms are produced as contours and vacate their vacuity as forms. In music sound resounds; in poems vocables, material of the said, no longer yield before what they evoke, but sing with their evocative powers and their diverse ways to evoke’. The important part of this quote is that the abstract painting only exposes essence (or the time of existence), ‘the red reddens’, and ‘no longer yield (my emphasis) to what they evoke’. This not yielding could be the way the abstract painting does yield to language as a coded system, but in doing so can also becomes deaf to ‘the said’. Ibid., 40.

159 ‘In the inexhaustible diversity of work, that is, in the essential renewal of art, colors, forms, sounds, words, buildings—already on the verge of being identified as entities, already disclosing their nature and their qualities in the substantives that bear adjectives—recommence being. There the essence they modulate is temporalized. The palette of colours, the gamut of sounds, the system of vocables, and the meandering of forms are realised as a pure how; in the touch of colour and pencil, the secrecy of words, the sonority of sounds—all these modal notions—there is resonance of essence’. Ibid.
understanding of self, or that a Rothko painting gives a spiritual transcendence, would be, for Levinas, a ‘misleading anthropomorphism or animism’!\(^{160}\) This can make Levinas sound like the formalist critic arguing “just let the forms be forms.” However Levinas is not endorsing the ‘rhythm’ of form, the movement of colour, the arrangement of composition ahead of content. Rather he is arguing for a position that does not lay universal truth values over the top of art, for this would miss what Levinas sees as arts core value. This would miss arts ‘verbalness’. This would over run the way that art makes ‘audible’ the ‘murmur of silence’.

Whilst art exposes Being, whilst the abstract painting is the ‘listening eye’, or whilst the artwork hears the verb of the ‘apophansis’, it does so in complete ‘isolation’. Art for Levinas goes too far: it ‘fails to recognise the said’, it loses touch with the noun. Without ‘the said’, art for Levinas has its own capacity to square itself off from the world and become ‘exotic’ and be ‘without a world’.\(^{161}\) In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas’ concern is that art can be completely self-absorbed and distant.\(^{162}\) It is in this failure that art is not the ‘apophansis’; it only hears the verb, *only* speaks a ‘verbalness’.\(^{163}\)

After defining art as the language that attempts to separate itself from ‘the said’, Levinas argues that writing on art, or a response to art, brings the artwork out of its isolation. Just the mere fact of talking about the artwork can bring it back into an ‘apophansis’. The response to the artwork, the response which the art work itself calls for, that can be the

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\(^{160}\) This quote is an intriguing part of Levinas’ analyses on art and is one which gets attention because Levinas does seem to momentarily reveal what he might, and what he might not, favour as art. However this is only momentary because Levinas does not in any way want to give a specific judgement on what makes for a better artwork, he merely want to prove that there is a language that is all verb. However from this quote we can think of Levinas favouring a way of thinking about abstraction as not a representation of self, or as a transcendental religiosity, but rather to experience the work as purely the verb. Levinas., 41.

\(^{161}\) ‘But it does so in isolation: every work of art is in this sense exotic, without a world, essence in dissemination’. Levinas, 41. This sense of art being exotic and in isolation is a definition of art that Levinas makes in his early essay “Reality and its Shadow” and also in *Existence and Existent*. This distancing from the tough work of ethics is the reason why Robert Eaglestone writes that Levinas has an ‘antipathy to art’. Eaglestone, *Ethical Criticism*, 99. And that for Levinas: ‘All art is idolatrous for Levinas, unable to achieve the transcendence that is sometimes ascribed to art. Art is constituted by idols, ethics by icons’. Eaglestone, 119.

\(^{162}\) ‘Art is the pre-eminent exhibition in which ‘the said’ is reduced to a pure theme, to absolute exposition, even to shamelessness capable of holding all looks for which it is exclusively destined’. And that through art ‘[T]he said is reduced to the Beautiful, which supports Western ontology’. Levinas, 40.

\(^{163}\) It is interesting to consider how Levinas feels about the verbalness at times it can be positive, to have the sensibility to hear the murmur, and at other time the verbalness sounds like only a nonsense, a babble, that is without the justice of ‘the said’.
More particularly, for Levinas, it is the study, the exegesis on the art work, that has the ability to be the ‘apophansis’. The ‘exegesis’ can be a study and a research on the artwork and also not lose what Levinas sees as art’s main function. The art work calls for the extension made by exegesis, the extension back into ‘the said’, and in answering this call, the written response can take the shape of an ‘apophansis’; the shape that is both logos and the verb, the shape of the ‘verb said’.

When outlining how the exegesis can bring the art work out of the ‘murmur of silence’ and be the apophansis, Levinas is describing art as art about itself; art that is deaf to ‘the said’. Isolated from the noun means for Levinas that art is deaf to the call of justice. He writes:

> To fail to recognise the said *properly so-called* . . . in the predicative propositions which every artwork—plastic, sonorous or poetic—awakens and makes resound in the form of _exegesis_ is to show oneself to be as profoundly deaf as in the deafness of hearing only nouns in language.

In this passage, Levinas opens up two different ways of being deaf, with each form of deafness being as bad as the other. There is always the danger that language can be deaf to the verb or deaf to the noun. The response to the art work, the response that brings the artwork out of its ‘verbalness’ and back into the world of ‘the said’, would want to be a response that is not deaf to the verb. In other words the writing about the artwork as the apophansis is deaf neither to the essence that the art work exposes, nor deaf to language that designates meaning. This is what Levinas means when he gives us a formation of the exegesis by stating that ‘the exegesis is not something laid on to the resonance of essence of

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164 In terms of what a response to the artwork might be, Levinas is thinking of a study or research made in the form of an ‘exegesis’. However Levinas includes, more broadly, any form of writing that is about the art work like ‘the preface, manifestoes, title for the works, or aesthetic canons’. Levinas, 41.

165 Levinas writes: ‘It is this call for exegesis and presentation of artworks in the form of prefaces, manifestos, titles or aesthetic canons—a non-eliminatable meta-language. It is this call, bringing the modality of the essence said in the work back to the depth of the essence _properly so-called_, such as it is heard in the predicative statement, that is justified by the notion of world’. Levinas, 41.

166 Ibid., 40.

167 The crime of the text that responses to the artwork as one that easily fits into fixed terms, or easily fits into the codes of language as a sign structure, commits the same crime as the abstract painting that is only the ‘verbalness of the verb’.
the artwork’; the exegesis does not muffle over the essence exposed by relying on codes to
signify and verify meanings or greater truths.\textsuperscript{168} Rather Levinas favours an exegesis as an
‘apophansis’, one whereby ‘the resonance of essence vibrates within the said of the
exegesis. In the verb of the ‘apophansis’, which is the verb properly so-called, the verb to be,
essen
tce resounds and is heard’.\textsuperscript{169}

Art criticism can be this ‘apophansis’ that holds both the noun and the verb; that both
designates meaning and also retains within it the ‘there is’. The response to the art work can
be the ‘eye that listens’ but equally be a response that ‘recognises the said’. It is from this
formation of an exegesis as an ‘apophansis’, from this response to art, that we rise out of
the anonymity of essence to become the ‘Here I am’ of individual subjectivity. The
responding to the art work is, for Levinas, the movement towards the ‘I’ in ‘Here I am’,
toward the existent. Levinas’ definition of the art exegesis in \textit{Otherwise than Being} becomes
the ‘hypostasis’ of \textit{Existence and Existent}ts.\textsuperscript{170} The same project in \textit{Existence and Existent}ts is
played out in \textit{Otherwise than Being}, the project that looks for a movement away from the
‘murmur of silence’, toward a saying which would become a ‘Here I am’. The exegesis as an
‘apophansis’ makes such a movement.

When Levinas defines the reduction there is a shift from the ‘apophansis’ to the ‘approach’:
the ‘apophansis’ becomes the ‘approach’, the approach to the other person. By defining a
method of communication as the ‘approach’ Levinas is shifting the focus from the
‘apophansis’ that hears the verb and yet is not deaf to the noun, to the \textit{approach} that hears
‘the saying’ and yet is not deaf to ‘the said’. The movement from the ‘apophansis’ to the

\textsuperscript{168} This is what Levinas meant earlier in writing that the art as the verb ‘no longer yield before what they
evoke’. Levinas, 40. And in part by the ‘misleading anthropomorphism or animism’. Levinas, 41.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} As with Levinas’ hypostasis, the apophansis in \textit{Otherwise than Being} makes the same movement of
existence to the existent. The apophansis moves away from the verb, from the anonymity of existence, to ‘the
said’ but in a way that still holds with it the ‘verbalness of the verb’. This is what I take Levinas to mean by ‘[A]ll
the attributes of individual beings, of entities that are fixed in or by nouns, as predicates can be understood as
modes of being; such are the qualities of which the entities make a show, the typical generalities by which they
are ordered, the laws that regulate them, the logical forms that contain and deliver them. The very
individuality of an individual is a way of being. Socrates socratis,

Socrates is. Predication makes the time of essence be heard.’ Ibid.
‘approach’ portrays a shift from the noun that holds the time of existence to the noun that holds the corporeal saying as subjectivity.\textsuperscript{171}

The main point Levinas wants to make clear in his definition of language is that the ‘murmur’ of the ‘there is’ can all too easily be ‘muffled’ by the noun that designates, and Levinas wants to argue that the same thing happens to the saying of subjectivity in the intelligible sphere. If there is an ‘apophansis’ then there can also be a ‘reduction’ in an approach. Ethics in Levinas’ philosophy turns away from a focus on existence, or the question of existence, to shift the focus onto retaining ‘the saying’ that resounds and circulates within the noun that designates. The ethics of reduction is to accommodate the \textit{in pieces}, the \textit{in pieces} that is for Levinas where the subject rises as the ‘Here I am’.

\section*{Reduction}

A good way to understand Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is to be clear about what ‘reduction’ is not. Levinas wants to make it clear that ‘reduction’ is not put in place by the ‘active ego’; rather the ‘reduction’ takes place as a passivity.\textsuperscript{172} The ‘active ego’ for Levinas is the way that we assemble meaning within the ‘intelligible sphere’; the way the past is recalled into a clarity of the present; the way time can be thought of as linear and the way meaning can be designated under fixed terms. A key aspect of Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is that there is a past that is a part of us, part of our subjectivity as ‘diachrony’, which refuses to be assembled.

\textsuperscript{171} Levinas expresses this move from ‘apophansis’ to the approach in reduction when he writes that whilst the ‘echo of the saying’ gets absorbed into the noun that designates the ‘apophansis is still a modality of saying. The predicative statement \ldots stands on the frontier of a dethematisation of the said, and can be understood as a modality of approach and contact. Over and beyond the thematisation and the content exposed in it. \ldots the apophansis signifies as a modality of the approach to another. It refers to a saying on the hither side of amphihbology of being and entities’. The ‘apophansis’, now ‘understood as a modality of approach and contact’, now understood as an ‘approach’ to the other, is on the front line of ‘reduction’. It is the first to be able to reduce the thematisation of ‘the said’ in order to hear the ‘echo’ of ‘the saying’. Not by holding the time of existence to the noun that designates, but rather by being a ‘modality’ that which ‘refers to’ (my emphasis) ‘the saying’ from ‘the said’. Levinas, 47.

\textsuperscript{172} ‘The temporalisation of time, as it shows itself in the said, is indeed recuperated by an active ego which recalls through memory and reconstructs in historiography the past that is bygone, or through imagination and prevision anticipates the future. \ldots’. The ‘active ego’ assembled diachrony. And continuing Levinas writes: ‘\ldots and, in writing, synchronizing the signs, assembles into a presence, that is, represents, even the time of responsibility for the other’. Levinas writes ‘even’ because in the ordering for comprehension everything becomes assembled, \textit{even} diachrony. Ibid., 51.
Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is a passivity that keeps this past in pieces; that allows the in pieces to pass.

Whilst Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is not the action of recollecting a past for the clarity of a present, the ‘reduction’ is also not a way of diminishing one order and replacing it with a new order. ‘Reduction’ is not the replacement of a false truth with a better truth. It is not an act of setting things right, or a passage towards discovering a ‘more real world’. In this sense reduction does not seek to explain. It is not an action in the exploration for explanation, it does not seek out a unified meaning that was once hidden, and now, though ‘reduction’, is revealed as a something uncovered, a something now ‘. . . truer or more authentic’. This would be more the action of assembling, the action of a digging that never really leaves the order of comprehension, remaining rather within the language of ‘the intelligible sphere to be explored’.

If Levinas’ ‘reduction’ is not an action that attempts to seek to uncover some form of greater truth that was before hidden, then what form does ‘reduction’ take? If the ‘reduction’ is not a digging out of meaning by the free sovereign self, then how, in a concrete way, is the ‘reduction’ made? For Levinas the answer to this question is that reduction works through passivity, patience and vulnerability. The giving of vulnerability speaks a different language to the ‘giving out of signs’. Vulnerability given from assembled meaning allows for the vulnerability of ‘the saying’. We bear witness to ‘the saying’ through vulnerability.

173 ‘The reduction, the going back to the hither side of being, to the hither side of the said, in which being shows itself, in which the eon is hypostatized, could nowise mean a rectification of one ontology by another, the passage from some apparent world to a more real world’. Interestingly Levinas does use the word utopia to describe the human that reduction is to ‘. . . the utopian, of the human’, but this is to highlight an ethics that priorities otherness of the other person through their touch, through their call. Levinas, 45.

174 ‘The reduction nowise means to dissipate or explain some transcendental appearance’. ‘The structures with which it begins are ontological’. ‘Reduction’ begins in ‘the said’ and is not mystic. Ibid.

175 ‘The hither side of or the beyond being is not an entity on the hither side, an essence, that is truer or more authentic that the being of entities’. Ibid.

176 In terms of not seeking, Levinas also does not define reduction in terms of Husserl epoche, the reduction is not a movement coming from one’s own actions, or from one’s own sovereignty as an act for understanding in consciousness. ‘The reduction could not be effected simply by parenthesis. . . it is the ethical interruption of essence that energises the reduction. . .’. However Levinas does term reduction as a ‘phenomenological reduction’. I think this is more in the sense that the approach is a method that reveals something as always already there. Ibid., 44.
The Approach as Sincerity and the Giving of Vulnerability

Under the subheading ‘Saying as Exposure to Another’, Levinas defines ‘the saying’ as in vulnerability when he writes:

To say, is to approach a neighbour, “dealing him signifyingness.” This is not exhausted in “ascriptions of meaning,” which are inscribed, as tales, in the said. Saying taken strictly is a “signifyingness dealt the other,” prior to all objectification; it does not consist in giving signs. The “giving out of signs” would amount to a prior representation of these signs, as though speaking consisted in translating thoughts into words and consequently in having been first for-one-self and at home with one-self, like a substantial consistency. The relationship with the other would then extend forth as an intentionality, out of a subject posited in itself and for itself, disposed to play, sheltered from all ills and measuring by thought the being disclosed as the field of this play. Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a condition for all communication, as exposure. Communication is not reducible to the phenomenon of truth and the manifestation of truth conceived as a combination of psychological elements: thought in an ego—will or intention to make this thought pass into another ego—message by a sign designating this thought—perception of the sign by another ego—deciphering of the sign. The elements of this mosaic are already in place, the non-indifference to another, which is not a simple “intention to address a message.” The ethical sense of such an exposure to another, which the intention of making signs, and even the signifyingness of signs, presuppose, is now visible. The plot of proximity and communication is not a modality of cognition. The unblocking of communication, irreducible to the circulation of information which presupposes it, is accomplished in saying. It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other. It is in the risky uncovering of one-self, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to trauma, vulnerability.177

To quote this paragraph in full gives us the opportunity to consider many of Levinas’ key terms, to consider closely Levinas’ main philosophical concerns and, more importantly, to define in a concrete way, how ‘reduction’ works as a giving of ‘vulnerability’ rather than a ‘giving out of signs’.

177Saying is ‘Exposure to Another’. What I think Levinas means by exposure is that the meaning in pieces is an uncertainty, it is not the clarity of the assembled, the assembled as the fixed term. Exposure to otherness is without the protection of certainty, and this for Levinas is a sincerity. Levinas, 48.
From the beginning of this quote Levinas positions ‘the saying’ within ‘approach and contact’; ‘the saying’ is within approaching the other person. 178 ‘The saying’ is within the ‘to approach’; it is within the approach and is not a comment on the approach. This ‘to say’, this saying as ‘signifyingness dealt the other’, a saying in the ‘to approach a neighbour’, is not completely absorbed into assembled meaning. 179 In the action of representation ‘the saying’ leaves its trace; it is not ‘exhausted in “ascription of meaning”’. Rather an ‘echo’ of that which is ‘prior to all objectification’ remains within objectification. ‘The saying’ in the approach is within the relational space between people, in ‘communication’, as the uncertainty of being in an ‘exposure to another’; a space that is not yet named; a communication as a meaning in pieces which remains within assembled meaning, remains attached to representation, attached to the ‘ascriptions of meaning’.

From the above quote we can also see that this trace of a meaning in pieces is not retained by any ‘approach’. It is only retained by a particular approach; an approach as a philosophical reduction. Levinas’ approach is particular because the approach in reduction ‘does not consist in giving signs’; the ‘giving signs’ is not the approach. If the reduction in the form of the approach is an ethical language that allows for the trace of ‘the saying’ to chip back at the assembling force of ‘the said’, then the opposite to this approach is the ‘giving out of signs’. So what does Levinas mean by the ‘giving out of signs?’

The ‘giving signs’ or ‘the giving out of signs’ is the ordering for comprehension, it is the said structure of language and framed representation, it is the ‘system of nouns’ that smothers over or assembles ‘the saying’ of ‘responsibility’ in order to make way for an ordering of comprehension. It is this ‘giving signs’ that Levinas’ reduction needs to reduce in order to bear witness to ‘the saying’. Levinas shapes the ‘giving out of signs’ as the way meaning can be transferable for interpretation; transferable as a wholeness; intact and maintained through an arrangement; an arrangement that is given in order to be assembled and

178 This sense of approaching is present in Totality and Infinity when Levinas writes: ‘To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression, in which at each instant he overflows the idea a thought would carry away from it. It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity.’ Emmanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity (1961; repr., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne, 2005), 43.

179 ‘Signifyingness’ it is not the sign given toward a metaphor for interpretation; the passivity of responsibility is not the signifier toward a solid well rounded signified, and it is this ‘signifyingness’ that is not exhausted.
decoded for understanding. The transparency of the sign, the transparency of ‘thoughts into words’ where meaning can be decoded is, for Levinas, a consolidation of individualism. The transferral of fixed solid meaning—meaning assembled in the ‘intelligible sphere’—consolidates, establishes, and maintains a ‘first for-oneself’ that is ‘at home with oneself’, covering over and absorbing Levinas’ subjectivity of the ‘for another’.  

As part of the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’ the ‘giving signs’ is the way of trying to transfer over a solid, well rounded, unified meaning, from one ego over to another. The transparent meaning transferable through ‘deciphering the sign’— the way that ‘thought in an ego; will or intention to make this thought pass into another ego; message by a sign designating this thought; perception of the sign by another ego—deciphering of the sign’— is for Levinas, the foundation for an insular individualism because of the way that meaning is not disrupted by a meaning in pieces. Rather the in pieces is assembled through decoding. In this sense the ‘giving out of signs’ is the comfort and protection of a knowing maintained. In ‘the giving of signs’ the metaphor given points outward towards a something else, and no matter how ambiguous the arrangement, the sign given returns back to ‘the same’, remains within the ‘intelligible sphere’, returns back to be deciphered. On the other hand, Levinas’ ‘signifyingness dealt the other’—the approach that has in it ‘exposure’— is not part

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180 Levinas reduction is not within the ‘giving signs’ ‘It is not due to the contents that are inscribed in the said and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other’. Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 48. Reduction is not the way of ‘discovery’. Levinas, 47.

181 Levinas aligns ‘the giving out of signs’ with Husserl’s intentionality. For Levinas the ‘saying as exposure to another’ that ‘unblocks’ communication, is also ‘the saying’ that breaks through Husserl’s noema. Following from the above quote Levinas writes: ‘Saying approaches the other by breaking through the noema involved in intentionality, turning inside out, “like a cloak,” consciousness which, by itself would have remained for itself even in its intentional aims. Intentionality remains an aspiration to be filled and fulfilment, the centripetal movement of a consciousness that coincides with itself, recovers, and rediscovers itself without ageing, rests in self-certainty, confirms itself, doubles itself up, consolidates itself, thickens into a substance. The subject in saying approaches a neighbour in expressing itself, in being expelled, in the literal sense of the term, out of any locus, no longer dwelling, not stomping any ground’. Levinas, 48-49. For Levinas the ‘at home with oneself’ in intentionality is the self ‘posited in itself and for itself . . . sheltered from all ills’. What I take Levinas to mean by this is that the intentional structure of the noesis and the noema, as with the sign structure of the signifier to the signified, has a protection from the mess of life, intentionality is a centred movement only within oneself. The noema accommodates no meaning in pieces, rather experience is finalised into a knowing, a comfort of knowing that maintains a ‘first for-oneseif’. In the ‘giving out of signs’ the subjectivity of the subject ‘rests in self certainty’. Through the ‘giving out of signs’ the transparency of thought over to the other person never involves the mess of exposure, never allows ‘the saying’ to disrupt. Whilst subjectivity as vulnerability is the subject as ‘being expelled. . . no longer dwelling, not stomping any ground’. Levinas, 49. The interiority of the self is maintained in a knowing, the noema is fully formed, a self is isolated ‘sheltered from all ills’.

182 Meaning that a self is first shaped by a maintenance of what is held as a knowing; a knowing that is never challenged by ethics.
of this ‘intention to address a message’. To be in exposure is not communication through a metaphor. The expression of exposure in communication does not try and refer through the ‘giving of signs’ to a something else. It just is the exposure to the other person. This ‘expression of exposure’ is what Levinas means by sincerity.

For Levinas ‘communication’ is not this transferal of meaning. It is not the ‘simple “intention to address a message”’, a message open to be decoded. Rather communication is ‘an exposure to another’. The approach involves ‘an exposure’ that does not fit into the transparency of an idea fully assembled, or into the arrangement of symbols to be decoded. Vulnerability speaks a different language to assembled meaning. Communication for Levinas is founded through proximity, founded on the restlessness of the knot tied between otherness and oneself. This is what Levinas means by ‘[T]he plot of proximity and communication is not a modality of cognition’. The ‘unblocking of communication’, whereby communication allows for this exposure, ‘is accomplished in saying’, ‘the saying’, or ‘exposure to another’, which is allowed for, chips back the ‘intelligible sphere’.

The sign given as transparent and transferrable ‘congeals’ meaning, ‘blocks’ up communication, holds no approach, covers over the trace of ‘the saying’, assembles the meaning in pieces. The unblocking of communication’ is not achieved in the ‘giving out of signs’, but rather is ‘accomplished in saying’. This ‘unblocking’ that is ‘accomplished in

183 The sincerity of exposure to the other is that the face is not a metaphor, the meaning in pieces is not there to be decoded in the ‘intelligible sphere’. Derrida, in his response to Totality and Infinity, writes: ‘... the face does not signify. It does not incarnate, envelop, or signal anything other than self, soul, subjectivity, etc. Thought is speech, and is therefore immediately face. ... The other is not signalled by his face, he is this face’. Then Derrida quotes Totality and Infinity: ‘Absolutely present, in his face, the Other—without any metaphor—faces me’. And later Derrida writes: 'The face is not a metaphor, not a figure'. See Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas," in Writing and Difference (London: Routledge and kegan Paul Ltd, 1981), 100.

184 A vulnerability of exposure does not fit into an assembled signified. The vulnerability of Yoko Ono’s Cut Pieces (1964) speaks a different language to assembled meaning, and yet its exposure and uncertainty of vulnerability is not deaf to ‘the said’; it has a structure, it has a duration, a limitation, and within the boundaries of her performance the vulnerability circulates uncontrolled. Made well before Otherwise than Being, Cut Piece as an approach allows for a meaning in pieces. Yoko Ono, Cut Piece, single-channel digital video transferred from 16mm, 1964, Performed by the artist, Carnegie Recital Hall. In terms of feminist art Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock speak of a feminism in intervention where ‘there has to be a struggle not only about the content of representation but about the signifying systems which are points for the production of definitions, meanings and positions for subjects’. Does the uncertainty of vulnerability speak a different language to these systems? Rozika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Introduction: Art, Politics and Women,” in Art and the Women’s Movement 1970-85 (London: Pandora Press, 1992), 92.

185 The blocked communication is where meaning congeals into a transferrable transparency.
saying’ is an unblocking not achieved through ‘the contents that are inscribed in ‘the said’ and transmitted to the interpretation and decoding done by the other’. Rather ‘the saying’ is allowed for through vulnerability. ‘The saying’ that accomplishes the unblocking ‘is in (my emphasis) the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to trauma, vulnerability’. The meaning in pieces unblocks, or breaks up, the fixed term, breaks through the ‘intention to address a message’ and this saying that can unblock the ‘intelligible sphere’ does not come to be through the ‘giving out of signs’, or the action of ‘giving signs’ but rather through vulnerability. To allow the trace of ‘the saying’ to linger a little longer within assembled meaning is to give vulnerability. If the ‘approach to a neighbour’ is first and foremost in the ‘giving out of signs’, then this language of signs and metaphors absorbs the trace of ‘the saying’. However, if the approach has with it a giving of vulnerability then vulnerability accommodates ‘the saying’. ‘The saying’ that is in the ‘risky uncovering of oneself’, that is in vulnerability, is ‘the saying’ that then unblocks communication. The reduction itself does not unblock communication; rather this is achieved through ‘the saying’ that reduction accommodates.

Otherwise than Being, in a very concrete sense, offers us ways for the artwork to either bear witness to the trace of ‘the saying’ or cover over this trace. Levinas’ ethics is in vulnerability: the vulnerability given in the artwork allows for the vulnerability of ‘the saying’. It is ‘the saying’ that is in vulnerability which does the reduction to the subject. It ‘uncovers’ back to the saying of subjectivity; back to the ‘who’ that gets cut off from the intelligible sphere; back to the saying as responsibility. For Levinas ‘the saying uncovers the one that speaks’.

Vulnerability as ‘reduction’ is also in the uncertainty of waiting. The time of ‘reduction’ is the passivity of waiting.

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186 Because the ‘giving out of signs’ covers over the trace of ‘the saying’, it holds no approach.
187 The only reason it emphasis this is to note that the reduction is from ‘the said’.
188 In Eaglestone’s book Ethical Criticism, Eagleston does not really define how the reduction works but only states that: ‘The reduction is the way in which Levinas aims to uncover the saying in the said’. Eaglestone, 148.
189 Levinas, Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence, 49.
Reduction as the Passivity of Waiting

Under the sub-heading ‘The Reduction’ Levinas writes that ‘[T]he reduction of this said unfolds in stated propositions, using copulas, and virtually written, united anew into structures; it will let the destructing it will have operated be’. What I take Levinas means by this is that there is a passivity needed in order to accommodate the passivity of ‘the saying’; that there is a movement of passivity that allows for ‘the saying’. If reduction is not the setting things right, not a naming or describing otherness, then ‘reduction’ is made more through passivity. The ‘reduction’ is a passivity. Reduction takes the form of a passivity that accommodates ‘the saying’. It allows for ‘the saying’ to ‘be’ and it is then ‘the saying’ itself that chips away at ‘the said’. The ‘reduction’ is not in a binary between passivity and action, but is rather an act of passivity; a passivity within an action. Hence through the act of withdrawing— a ‘withdrawing without disappearing’— ‘the saying’ that chips back at ‘the said’ is allowed to ‘be’.

From Levinas’ account we can consider forms, or modes, that this passivity might take for the reduction. On two separate occasions, still within the subheading of ‘The Reduction’, Levinas uses the description of ‘breathlessness’, or ‘out of breath’, to describe the moment when, in reduction, the ‘echo’ of ‘the saying’ is heard. Levinas also describes his own approach, his own writing, as retaining a sense of being out of breath (that in his use of language there is a breathlessness in the approach toward ‘the saying’). The breathlessness in the reduction, in the reduction that bears witness to ‘the saying’, can be thought of in two different ways. One way of thinking about ‘breathlessness’ is that it designates ‘reduction’ as a difficult task; that there is ‘a fine risk’, a ‘risk worth taking’, in trying to reduce the all-embracing said for the ‘glory’ of ‘the saying’, which only morphs back into the *ordering*

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190 ‘It will let the destructing it will have operated be. The reduction then will once again let the otherwise than being be as an eon. As the truth of what does not enter into a theme...’ Levinas, 44.
191 ‘The said, contesting the abdication of the saying that everywhere occurs in this said, thus maintains the diachrony in which, holding its breath, the spirit hears the echo of the otherwise’; and ‘[T]he unsayable saying lends its self to the said, to the ancillary indiscretion of the abusive language that divulges or profanes the unsayable. But it lets itself be reduced, without effacing the unsaying in the ambiguity or the enigma of the transcendent, in which the breathless spirit retains a fading echo’. Ibid.
192 ‘But a fine risk is always something to be taken in philosophy’. Ibid., 20.
for comprehension, leaving the author well out of breath.\(^{193}\) Ethics in Levinas’ philosophy is not within the comfort of knowing; rather it is within an uncertainty that must be constantly sought, constantly fought for.\(^{194}\)

Another way of thinking about being ‘breathless’ is in the sense of ‘reduction’ as passivity; a passivity that allows for ‘the saying’, involves some inaction, a withdrawing from action. This passivity could be thought of in the sense that ‘the saying’ has already passed by, and we, bearing witness in reduction, hold our breath—or more accurately in terms of ‘reduction’—holding our breath allows for ‘the saying’ to pass by, or allows ‘the saying’ to be. Then, with ‘the saying’ past, and still in pieces, we breathe again; back into the world of action and choice, back into assembled meaning. To combine both these ways of thinking about breathlessness, ‘reduction’ becomes a withdrawing oneself—withdrawning into the tough task of being in the uncertainty of exposure—but not a withdrawing that means the disappearance of self, but rather a withdrawing, or a drawing back, that allows for the oneself as the ‘despite oneself’.

Levinas’ saying as subjectivity is defined in Otherwise than Being as the self that is ‘despite oneself’. By defining subjectivity as the self ‘despite’ the ‘oneself’, or the saying of subjectivity as the self ‘despite itself’, Levinas is defining the saying of subjectivity as one of passivity.\(^{195}\) The ‘despite’ in Levinas’ ‘despite (my emphasis) oneself’, is a passivity through both ‘the saying’ as diachrony and ‘the saying’ as responsibility. The ‘despite oneself’ is not the action of choice. It is not the self shaped by its own choices and actions. It is not the self formed through its own sovereignty and autonomy, but is rather the passivity of the self bounded up into otherness, into a bind: the self as a knot tied; the self bounded up with an

\(^{193}\) In reduction the risk worth taking is the risky uncovering of oneself, the risk of vulnerability, the risk of the expression of exposure.

\(^{194}\) In terms of this risk that needs to be undertaken Paul Davies writes: ‘We have seen that Otherwise than Being is a book under a sort of threat. It is always about to be fragmented, always about to come undone. It handles that threat not simply by warding it off, but by continually transforming it into an obligation, the obligation to continue.’ Paul Davies, "A Fine Risk: Reading Blanchot Reading Levinas," in Re-Reading Levinas (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 223.

\(^{195}\) 'It is a disjunction of identity where the same does not rejoin the same: there is non-synthesis, lassitude. The for-oneof itself is now no longer for itself. The identity of the same in the ego comes to it despite itself from the outside, as an election or an inspiration, in the form of the uniqueness of someone assigned. The subject is for another; its own being turns into for another, its being dies away turning into signification. Subjectivity in ageing is unique, irreplaceable, me and not another; it is despite itself in an obedience where there is no desertion, but where revolt is brewing’. Levinas, 52.
otherness of responsibility and diachrony. In terms of responsibility this passivity is the way the oneself is called ‘to be’ by the demands of responsibility. Called not through any choice but rather called before ever making a choice.\textsuperscript{196} The self in responsibility is chosen before the world of choice;\textsuperscript{197} called ‘despite oneself’; called before the correlation of said/saying; called before assembled meaning; called by the strangeness of an infinite responsibility which for Levinas ‘cannot be declined’.\textsuperscript{198} This responding to an ‘appeal’ is Levinas’ self ‘despite itself’, and this response comes out from a time in pieces; out from time as ‘diachrony’.\textsuperscript{199}

In terms of diachrony the self is ‘despite itself’ through a time of waiting and hesitation; a ‘passivity of time’.\textsuperscript{200} In the ‘despite’ diachrony becomes a ‘passivity of patience’; a past in pieces not through a loss of time but rather as a ‘lapse’ of time; a lapse where the saying of subjectivity is in diachrony.\textsuperscript{201} The ‘oneself’,\textsuperscript{202} without the ‘despite’, the opposite to the ‘despite oneself’, is the self as the ‘active ego’—or the ‘thematising subject’—that

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\item['Chosen without assuming the choice!'] Levinas, 56.
\item On responsibility Levinas writes: ‘here unique means the impossibility of slipping away and being replaced, in which the very recurrence of the I is effected. The uniqueness of the chosen or required one, who is not a choosers, is a passivity not being converted into spontaneity. This uniqueness not assumed, not subsumed, is traumatic; it is an election in persecution’. What I think Levinas means by persecution is that the demands or the commands of otherness cannot be declined. Ibid., 56.
\item The saying of subjectivity ‘… is someone who, in the absence of anyone is called upon to be someone, and cannot slip away from this call. The subject is inseparable from this appeal or this election, which cannot be declined’. Ibid., 53.
\item The calling to respond; the assignation; the persecution happens in diachrony. ‘The passivity of the one, its responsibility or its pain, do not begin in consciousness—that is, do not begin. On the hither side of consciousness, they consist in this pre-original hold of the good over it, always older than any present, any beginning. This diachrony prevents the one from joining up with itself and identifying itself as a substance, contemporary with itself, like a transdental ego’. Levinas, 57. ‘It is in the form of the being of this entity, the diachronic temporality of ageing, that there is produced despite myself the response to an appeal, direct like a traumatising blow’. Levinas, 53. Levinas gives this passivity of the ‘despite’ a corporeal sensibility by describing it as a ‘traumatising blow’. In responsibility the inability to fully respond to the demands of responsibility is a suffering, a trauma, a painful point, whilst the passivity of patience is given a corporeality by being defined as ageing when Levinas writes ‘… or in patience of a subject that lies as it were on the underside of the active ego, is the patience of ageing’. Levinas, 54.
\item The ‘lapse’ of time is not Intentionality, is not representational activity, the lapse is in the time of patience. ‘The diachrony by which the uniqueness of the one has been designated, is the fact that the one is required, on the hither side of essence, by responsibility, and is always wanting with respect to itself, always insufficiently divested, in deficit, like a painful point. This diachrony of the subject is not a metaphor. The subject said as properly as possible. … is not in time, but is diachrony itself. In the identification of the ego, there is the ageing of him that one will never “catch up with there again”’. Ibid., 57.
\item The uniqueness of the saying of responsibility is not a unified wholeness contemporary with itself, whilst the ‘oneself’ without the ‘despite’ is within itself, for itself. ‘Uniqueness is without identity. Not an identity, it is beyond consciousness, which is in itself and for itself’. Ibid., 57.
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assembles the diachrony for the clarity and ordering of a framed present. In the ‘passivity of patience’, the self ‘despite (my emphasis) itself’—the saying of subjectivity—allows the in pieces to be; allows the in pieces to pass.

If ‘the saying’ is based on the ‘passivity of patience’, and if ‘the saying’ is in vulnerability, then waiting and hesitation can also accommodate the trace of ‘the saying’. The saying of subjectivity is in waiting and hesitation. Having defined the subject as unique—a uniqueness in responsibility—a uniqueness that is a passivity, Levinas speaks of a way to describe such a subject, to name such a subject in representation, when he writes:

The subject then cannot be described on the basis of intentionality, representational activity, objectification, freedom and will; it has to be described on the basis of the passivity of time.

One way of thinking about this sentence is that the base of the subject—the base of the subject that is in responsibility, that is prior to ‘objectification, freedom and will’—is ‘the passivity of time’; a time that Levinas later defines as the ‘passivity of patience’. This sense of time as a passivity is important because patience is the way Levinas separates the subject of responsibility from that of intentionality. Levinas’ subject is in the ‘time of

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203 In ‘the passivity of its patience’, against intentionality, the saying of subjectivity is ‘the inverse of a thematizing subject: a subjectivity in ageing which the identification of the ego with itself could not reckon on, one without identity, but unique in the unexceptionable requisition of responsibility.’ Levinas, 53.

204 Ibid.

205 ‘The temporalisation of time, the lapse irrecoverable and outside of all will, is quite the contrary of intentionality...Temporalisation is the contrary of intentionality in the passivity of its patience’. Ibid.

206 The ‘passivity of patience’ is the way in which Levinas distinguishes his definition of subjectivity from Husserl’s intentionality: ‘The subject then cannot be described on the basis of intentionality, representational activity, objectification, freedom and will; it has to be described on the basis of the passivity of time. The temporalisation of time, the lapse irrecoverable and outside of all will, is quite the contrary of intentionality...Temporalisation is the contrary of intentionality in the passivity of its patience. In it what is a subject is the inverse of a thematising subject: a subjectivity in ageing which the identification of the ego with itself could not reckon on, one without identity, but unique in the unexceptionable requisitions of responsibility. This requisition signifies as unexceptionable in the form of its...effort is an undergoing, a passive form of the self in “that comes to pass”’. Ibid. And Robin Durie writes: ‘But the signifyiness of the subjectivity of the subject is that which cannot be experienced as an intentional object. It is precisely as before this possibility that the signifyiness of the saying affects me, surprises me. Thinking this surprise requires going to the hither side of ontology, toward the otherwise than being, and to move in this direction, to think the subjectivity of the subject, requires that we think ethically’. See Robin Durie, “Speaking of Time. . .Husserl and Levinas on the Saying of Time,” Journal of British Society for Phenomenology 30, no. 1 (1999): 53.
passivity’; the time of patience and not the time of action; not in the time of the ‘intelligible sphere’. The ‘passivity of patience’ is of a different order to intentionality. Its time is not that of the active ego, or the ‘oneself’ (without the ‘despite’) that is in the activity of representation; the activity that assembles meaning. Rather the saying of subjectivity, ‘. . . cannot be ‘described’ through ‘intentionality, representational activity, objectification, freedom and will’. The subject of responsibility is rather in the ‘time of patience’; in a time that is in pieces and is unassembled, a time that separates it from the ‘active ego’ or the ‘thematising subject’. This first reading of the above quote has the ‘passivity of time’, or the ‘passivity of patience’, as ‘the saying’.

Another way of understanding this sentence is to focus in on the word ‘described’, and to think of the ‘passivity of time’ as not specifically ‘the saying’ but as rather in the said/saying correlation. In this reading Levinas is speaking of the method of ‘reduction’, that for Levinas there is a particular said that can retain the trace of ‘the saying’ and that this said is ‘the said’ of ‘reduction’, or the approach. If the approach holds with it ‘patience’ or the ‘passivity of time’— if the approach is one that waits, that hesitates—then the subjectivity of the saying, the self as ‘despite itself’, can then be ‘described (my emphasis)’. The approach, from ‘the said’, retains the trace of ‘the saying’. It can ‘describe’ the subject as the saying of responsibility; in the approach ‘the indescribable is described’. This is a description that ‘representational activity’ fails to achieve. To bring these two

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207 For John Drabinski: ‘. . . in Levinas’ hands, phenomenology will forgo the violence of describing the Other as such in the name of describing the subject subjected to the interruption of the Other’. See John Drabinski, Sensibility and Singularity (Albany, U.S.A: State University of New York Press, 2001), 8.

208 Levinas, 53. And in a radio interview Levinas does not want to think of the face of the other in terms of phenomenology. Levinas says: ‘phenomenology describes what appears’ and the face is not the look because the ‘look is knowledge, perception’. For Levinas rather the ‘access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the colour of his eyes! When one observes the colour of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relationship with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that’. The passivity of Levinas’ ethics is to allow the meaning in pieces to pass as unassembled. Emmanuel. Levinas and Philippe Nemo, Ethics and Infinity, trans., Richard A Cohen (Pittsburgh, U.S.A: Dupseysne University Press, 1985), 85.

209 ‘In it’, in the diachrony as ageing, ‘what is a subject is the inverse of a thematising subject: a subjectivity in ageing which the identification of the ego with itself could not reckon on, one without identity, but unique in the unexceptionable requisitions of responsibility’. Levinas, 53.

210 ‘One has to go back to that hither side, starting from the trace retained by the said, in which everything shows itself’. Ibid.

211 ‘The movement back to the saying is the phenomenological reduction. In it the indescribable is described. The subject is described as a self, from the first in the accusative form, (or under accusation!)’.Ibid.
separate readings together would mean to interpret the above quote as meaning that *if patience is allowed for in the reduction, the reduction that starts from ‘the said’, then this patience, this ‘passivity of time’, can help retain the trace of the saying of subjectivity, or the approach that speaks through a waiting allows for a glimpse of ‘the saying’. This double reading of the word patience as being both in the ‘pure saying’, that is without ‘the said’, but is also in ‘the said’ of the *approach*, means that though waiting, through patience, through a hesitation, the self that is ‘despite itself’ can be ‘articulated’,\(^{212}\) can be brought to the surface; ‘proximity’ and ‘responsibility’ can be referred to through a method of ‘reduction’.\(^{213}\) Proximity is in patience. When the *approach* is made with hesitation and waiting ‘the saying’ that *is in* waiting chips back ‘the said’ to reveal the self ‘despite itself’. This passivity that resists being assembled, that ‘cannot be taken up’\(^{214}\) by ‘representational activity’, is a passivity for Levinas that is not a passivity in the sense of ‘...a language that speaks without a subject’, but is rather a passivity that is ‘... a offering oneself that is a suffering, a goodness despite oneself’.\(^{215}\) Here Levinas outlines this passivity in ‘the saying’ as not a lack of action, not a loss of authorship; the passivity of ‘the saying’ is not in the way language is not owned by the self, but rather the passivity of the subject is in the difficulty, the tough goodness, the ‘suffering, of the expression of exposure.’\(^{216}\) This exposure is a

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\(^{212}\) This idea appears again when Levinas writes ‘In the patience of senescence what is unexceptionable in proximity is articulated’. And again another way to read this sentence is that the ‘patience of senescence’ is in the reduction that begins in ‘the said’ and is able to articulate the subject of responsibility. Levinas, 53.

\(^{213}\) And for vulnerability Levinas writes ‘Our analysis will have to show that. It will examine the proximity which vulnerability signifies’. Ibid., 54.

\(^{214}\) ‘The self is characterised by a passivity that cannot be taken up’. Ibid.

\(^{215}\) Ibid.

\(^{216}\) Here I have interpreted suffering as the restlessness of diachrony and proximity. In suffering Levinas gives a corporeal sensibility to the ‘self despite itself’: ‘The “despite” cannot be decomposed into a will contraried by an obstacle. It is life, ageing of life, and unexceptionable responsibility, saying. The subjectivity of subjection of the self is... suffering in the offering of oneself. Subjectivity is vulnerability, is sensibility’. Levinas, 54. And later ‘In the form of corporeality... the passivity of signification, of the one-for-another, is not an act, but patience....’. Levinas 55. The suffering of the ‘despite’ is mainly through the way that Levinas describes the inability to fully answer the ‘command’, the ‘assignation’, the subjection of responsibility as a ‘pain’ ‘This passivity is, to be sure, an exposedness of the subject to another, but the passivity of the subject is more passive still than that with which the oppressed one determined to struggle undergoes. The most passive, unassumable, passivity, the subjectivity or the very subjection of the subject, is due to my being obsessed with responsibility for the oppressed who is other than myself’. Levinas, 55. A pain of deficit that Levinas also describes as an ‘obsession’; that in passivity we are bound to the calling of responsibility in a very physical way. Subjectivity is the ‘subjection’ on the subject that is always there, always tugging at fulfillment of knowing or of clarity, an otherness that just won’t quit. The call is both an ‘impovishment’, there is a short fall as pain and vulnerability, but also a ‘goodness that demands’. Ibid., 57.
sincerity that is not sheltered by the action of the noun system, but is rather in the uncertainty that takes ‘one step more’ through responsibility.

‘Forget Your Perfect Offering, There is a Crack in Everything... That’s How the Light Gets In’.

The artwork as the approach is not ‘deaf’ to ‘the said’, it begins in assembled meaning. It begins in the said/saying correlation. In this correlation ‘the saying’, despite the all-encompassing force of ‘the said’, leaves its mark, leaves its trace. From ‘the said’ the approach accommodates the trace of ‘the saying’ and it is this trace that reduces back ‘the said’ to the saying of subjectivity. Once witnessed ‘the saying’ is reassembled by the ordering of comprehension. In the ethical approach the artwork is an open work because it accommodates a crack; a crack that threatens the very framework that holds it. The crack from the approach is not created through the ‘giving out of signs’. The giving out of signs covers over this crack. Rather a crack is accommodated through the giving of vulnerability and the ‘expression of exposure’. Vulnerability and exposure speak a different language to assembled meaning; vulnerability allows a crack to form.

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218 ‘The structures with which it begins are ontological’. Levinas, 45.
219 Levinas correlation is: ‘In which saying runs the risk of being absorbed as soon as the said is formulated’. Ibid., 46.
220 ‘It is the reduction to signification, to the one-for-the-other-involved in responsibility... It is reduction to restlessness in the literal sense of the term, or to its diachrony, which despite all its assembled forces, despite all the simultaneous forces in its union, being can not eternalize’. Ibid., 45.
221 ‘It is Levinas’ son Michael who refers to his father as a ‘philosopher of cracks’. In a biography of his father Michael says that in his father’s philosophy there is a ‘kind of instability in the elaboration of a concept... in the conceptualisation that really expresses the crack in the concept. This goes well beyond something dialectical, it belongs to the order of the fissure. The concept is in the process of being born and it is put back into question at the very moment in which it is formulated’. Salomon Malka, Emmanuel Levinas: His Life and Legacy (Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2006), 262-264. As a personal note Michael recalls his Fathers advise as: ‘Sometimes the thing suffices in its incompleteness’. For Michael the incompleteness is our own incompleteness; the crack for Michael is the vulnerability of being human. For Michael the crack is ‘essentially the humanity, or the body, or the shame of the body. He calls this the face... The crack—that’s the face’. Malka, 265. Also Hagi Kenaan speaks of this crack when he writes: ‘The presence of the face creates a crack or a breach in the frontal order of the things that appear.’ Hagi Kenaan, The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and The Contemporary Gaze (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), xx.
222 ‘...exposure has a sense radically different from thematisation’. And this expression of exposure is an ethics ‘a hyperbolic passivity that disturbs the still waters’. Levinas., 49.
The artwork that accommodates a crack through the approach is not the open work that is open for interpretation, open and free to be interpreted through decoding the signs given. Rather the openness of the approach stands separately to the ‘intelligible sphere’. The openness of the approach is a passivity, a waiting, a vulnerability that allows for ‘the saying’ to break through and crack assembled meaning. From this crack, ‘the saying’ is glimpsed. A passivity that allows for ‘the saying’ ‘to be’ is the approach as the open work. The crack from the approach is the crack where the ‘indescribable is described’; where the unnameable meaning in pieces is glimpsed. As an approach the artwork makes its statement, the artwork has a frame, has a parameter and yet, ‘with as much weight’, uncertainty as ‘approach and contact’ circulating within it.

The meaning in pieces—‘the saying’ as the mess of life—is not heard through the clarity and transparency of the ‘giving out of signs’. Rather the in pieces is received by the uncertainty of vulnerability. The ‘perfect offering’—the artwork as the well rounded and assembled address—that directs signs to be decoded, can all to easily cover over the crack that is there in the correlation of the said/saying: the crack that is there ‘in everything’, whilst the approach in vulnerability allows for this crack where the light of ‘the saying’ can be glimpsed.

222 Also for Umberto Eco ‘openness’ should not mean an openness to decoding the pre-prescribed signs. Eco writes: ‘The reader of the text knows that every sentence and every trope is ‘open’ to a multiplicity of meaning which he must hunt for and find. . .However, in this type of operation, ‘openness’ is far removed from meaning ‘indefiniteness’ of communication, ‘infinite’ possibilities of form, and complete freedom of reception. What in fact is made available is a range of a rigidly pre-established and ordained interpretative solutions, and these never allow the reader to move outside the strict control of the author’. Umberto Eco, “The Poetics of the Open Work” in Participation (London: MIT Press, 2006), 25.

224 My original influence for thinking of Levinas’ philosophy as being the passivity that reveals the crack in ‘everything’, or that the artwork could accommodate a crack where ‘experience itself is silently revealed’, is when Derrida, discussing Levinas’ ethics of the encounter with the face, writes of Totality and Infinity: ‘Without intermediary and without communion, neither mediate nor immediate, such is the truth of our relation to the other, the truth to which the traditional logos is forever inhospitable. This unthinkable truth of living experience, to which Levinas returns ceaselessly, cannot possibly be encompassed by philosophical speech without immediately revealing, by philosophy’s own light, that philosophy’s surface is severely cracked, and that what was taken for its solidity is its rigidity. It could doubtless be shown that it is in the nature of Levinas’s writing, at its decisive moments, to move along these cracks, masterfully progressing by negations, and by negation against negation. Its proper route is not that of “either this . . . or that,” but of a “neither this . . . nor that.” The poetic force of metaphor is often the trace of this rejected alternative, this wounding of language. Through it, in its opening, experience itself is silently revealed’. Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas,” 90.
Chapter Two

Vulnerability in the Art of Sophie Calle

This chapter will challenge Levinas’ theory of art. The next chapter of this thesis will consider art criticism from within a Levinasian frame. In *Otherwise than Being* art is denied ethics: art cannot be in the method of the *approach* simply because art functions purely as the window into the anonymity of existence. Art for Levinas is one step removed from ethics because its language speaks ‘the verb’.  

A ‘verbalness of the verb’ is arts core essence; an essence that means art is ‘deaf to the noun’, ‘deaf’ to ‘the said’. The first chapter defined how this ‘verbalness’ in painting is the language of formalist abstraction. If, for Levinas, the language of abstraction is ‘exotic’, cut off from both ‘the said’ and ‘the saying’; if Levinas’ main criticism of art is aimed at an art that is for art’s own sake (*l’art pour l’art*), then can we not think of the artwork as retaining a Levinasian ethics if it is not primarily in the language of abstraction or a formalism? If an artwork does not primarily speak a language of form then is it not possible for the artwork to speak a Levinasian ethics within Levinas’ own definition of the *approach*?

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1 The idea that abstract art speaks the time of existence can be found within the very way that abstract painting was discussed. One example is an interview with Jackson Pollock where the interviewer, William Wright, asks “[W]ould it be possible to say that the classical artists expressed his world by representing the objects, whereas the modern artist expresses his world by representing the effects the objects have upon him?” And Pollack answers “Yes, the modern artist is working with space and time, and expressing his feeling rather than illustrating.” Jackson Pollock, “Jackson Pollock Interview with William Wright,” in *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood(Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 584.


3 This is a criticism of a theory of art which takes as its primary focus the language of composition, colour and form; a criticism of a language as pure form that makes art an interiority; that the formalism of the late 1950s and 1960s was so tied up in arts own language of form that it was ‘deaf’ to feminism, ‘deaf’ to race riots, ‘deaf’ to the Vietnam war. Then, and in consideration of conceptualisms position against such interiorities, can we not think of the conceptual artwork in terms of Levinas’ philosophical ‘reduction’?
This chapter will argue that the artwork can enact a Levinasian ethics. By taking the position that the artwork can be in the *approach*, that it can, in other words, retain the trace of ‘the saying’ within assembled meaning, this chapter challenges Levinas’ theory of art as being one that is too broad and too general. By defining art as ‘the verb’ Levinas misses an opportunity for the artwork to be a site for ethics. In arguing that an artwork can enact a Levinasian ethics, it is not enough to argue that art should simply leave the language of abstraction in favour of a language that hears ‘the said’. To argue against the universal language of abstraction in favour of an art that hears injustice and politics swelling around outside the walls of the gallery does not, in itself, chip back the assembling forces of assembled meaning. To hear only ‘the said’ rather than only hearing ‘the verb’ would replace one assembled meaning for another assembled meaning.4

Rather than criticising Levinas’ definition of art, a definition which I believe he only really makes in order to justify and/or reiterate his own philosophical position, the composition of the artwork as *approach* needs to be considered via his thoughts on ethics, rather than his thoughts on art itself. In terms of Levinas’ theory of art, this means bracketing his ideas on the ‘apophansis’ to focus instead on his definition of the *approach*.5 To argue that the artwork enacts a Levinasian ethics by being in the *approach* means that the artwork retains not only ‘the saying’ but also an aspect of assembled meaning. For ‘the saying’, assembled meaning may only be replaced by a straightforward ‘one-liner’ art that sees its chief role as the designator of meaning for the ordering of comprehension: a role of declaring “this means that,” a role that never really leaves the ‘intelligible sphere’. Both abstraction and a ‘one-liner’ art are in danger of being forms of assembled meaning. Jan Verwoert in a lecture series “Why are Conceptual Artist Painting Again,” puts emphasis on how conceptualism of the 1960s has morphed into a type of art where ideas are transparent: where the audience has an immediate sense of the artist’s intentions. From this Verwoert argues for a thinking in the act of making, rather than the artwork being the portrayal of a fixed idea—an art of ‘inspiration’ rather than of ‘intentions’. Jan Verwoert, “How to Drill a Hole into a Hole,” (2008).

Rather than thinking of an artwork as an ethics not by arguing that the artwork can be the ‘apophansis’ that hears both ‘the noun’ and the ‘reverberation of the verb’. Rather, it is to argue that the artwork can be Levinas’ philosophical *approach*. That the artwork, through ‘the said’, can hear the trace of ‘the saying’. 

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4 In other words the insular universalism of abstraction might only be replaced by a straightforward ‘one-liner’ art that sees its chief role as the designator of meaning for the ordering of comprehension: a role of declaring “this means that,” a role that never really leaves the ‘intelligible sphere’. Both abstraction and a ‘one-liner’ art are in danger of being forms of assembled meaning. Jan Verwoert in a lecture series “Why are Conceptual Artist Painting Again,” puts emphasis on how conceptualism of the 1960s has morphed into a type of art where ideas are transparent: where the audience has an immediate sense of the artist’s intentions. From this Verwoert argues for a thinking in the act of making, rather than the artwork being the portrayal of a fixed idea—an art of ‘inspiration’ rather than of ‘intentions’. Jan Verwoert, “How to Drill a Hole into a Hole,” (2008).

5 This means to think of an artwork as an ethics not by arguing that the artwork can be the ‘apophansis’ that hears both ‘the noun’ and the ‘reverberation of the verb’. Rather, it is to argue that the artwork can be Levinas’ philosophical *approach*. That the artwork, through ‘the said’, can hear the trace of ‘the saying’. For a sense of Smithson’s ‘verb’ within the ‘noun’ see Robert Smithson, “Incidents of Mirrors-Travel in the Yucatan,” in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California, 1996). And also Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, *Swamp*, 1969.
meaning ‘is necessary’. The trace of ‘the saying’ calls out for a type of frame, a type of structure that, as an approach, allows ‘the saying’ to pass without being assembled; a framing that allows ‘the saying’ to be. To explore this hypothesis this chapter will argue that the work of the French contemporary artist Sophie Calle offers an example of a Levinas approach operating within the artwork.

Rather than naming a variety of different artworks as being in the approach, this chapter will concentrate on the film work Double Blind (1992)—made collaboratively by Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard—as an example of an artwork that accommodates Levinas’ ethics. If my analysis is successful, If there is an approach in Double Blind, then the ethic of Double Blind is Double Blind’s alone; it is Double Blind’s own calling. A concentration on Double Blind also lays the ground for a further analysis of Calle’s overall artistic practice as one in which a Levinasian ethics is enacted.

This chapter will begin with a study of Double Blind, and then it will draw on two art theorists, Iwona Blazwick and Luc Sante, to consider Calle’s art more broadly as an approach. Having attempted to define Calle as enacting a Levinasian ethics, both specifically in Double Blind and more broadly throughout her artistic practice, this chapter will then conclude by considering how Calle’s art is thought of as not being in the approach; how Calle’s art can be thought of as being the direct opposite to a Levinasian ethics. This will be done by challenging the hypothesis that Double Blind is in the approach through a review of Double Blind written by Robert Beck, that makes its interpretation through a very different emphasis than my own.
Double Blind

(Double Blind) (1992) is an artwork that takes the form of a narrative based road movie. Like many of Calle’s artworks, Double Blind is able to hold together what is ordered with what is uncertain. What this means specifically in this artwork is that the film’s raw footage—its fragmented scenes of chance moments and random encounters—act as documents of a road trip that Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard undertook across the United States. Yet, through the final editing process, the film forms the structure of a clear linear narrative. This linear narrative, a narrative which begins in New York City, stumbles and trips its way through to Las Vegas where the couple get married in a drive-through chapel, and then ends with a messy relationship breakdown in California as the film’s finale, functions as the artworks frame. Double Blind has a duration; it has the structure of a road movie, but the relation between two people, a relationship which the artwork portrays, is not held down as

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6 Double Blind was the originally titled No Sex Last Night. For the catalogue of the retrospective Sophie Calle: Did you see me? Held at the Pompidou Centre in 2003-2004, No Sex last Night is described as: ‘We hadn’t been living together for more than a year, but our relationship had worsened to such an extent that we had stopped talking to one another altogether. I dreamed of marrying him. He dreamed of making movies. To get him to travel across American with me, I suggested that we make a film during the trip. He agreed. Our absence of communication gave us the idea of equipping ourselves with separate cameras, making them the sole confidants of our respective frustrations and secretly telling them all the things we were unable to say to each other. Having established the rules, on January 3, 1992 we left New York in his silver Cadillac and headed for California’. Sophie Calle, ”No Sex Last Night “ in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me? (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 325.

7 In giving a glimpse of how heavily edited Double Blind is there is an interview where Calle describes the process of editing as ‘I’ve never worked longer on anything in my life to result in just a little tape at the end—eleven months non-stop’. See Sophie Calle and Greg Shepard, ”Double Blind Interview,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 65. And again when confronting the question of dividing between truth and fiction Calle answers: ‘Take the movie No Sex last Night (1992) that I made with my then husband Greg Shephard: We lived together for one year; we filmed 60 hours; of those 60 hours we chose just 90 minutes. We could have made 20 movies, all saying different, even opposing things. We chose to put the emphasis on me and my solitude and him and his car, whereas we could have chosen to speak only about food, or only about cross-country, or only about the disgust we had for each other, or only about the beautiful moments we shared. So any one version is never ‘true’, it just works better than another. But I can say that it did happen. True? No. It happened’. Louise Neri, “Sophie’s Choice,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 153-154.
a theme, or held as a thing that has a duration; a theme that can be commented on from a distance. Rather the relation itself flickers in and out of the artworks parameter.

The primary focus of this artwork is on the relationship between Calle and Shephard. This relationship is a difficult one. The two bump up against each other, and there is a continual open friction and restlessness between the two of them as the relationship deteriorates as the journey continues. Through open and honest intimacy Shephard speaks of the depression he is suffering; a depression that means he feels no sexual desire for Calle. For Calle this means she feels very much alone and unwanted. One of the recurring motifs of the artwork is the still image of the different motel beds the couple share. Accompanying the image of an unmade bed Calle reports each day, as in a document or record of events, that there was “no sex last night.” Another recurring theme in the film is that the car is unreliable. Throughout the trip Shephard’s Cadillac convertible continuously breaks down, and the car that won’t start becomes emblematic of a relationship stuck in a bind of growing bitterness and distrust.

This road trip that forms the linear structure of *Double Blind* is paradoxically dominated by interior spaces. The American landscape is virtually absent. Instead, there is a focus on the interior space of the car, the interiors of roadside diners, roadside motels and the inside of automechanics. One of the dominant themes of *Double Blind* is its focus on the private interiors of Calle and Shephard’s personal thoughts, recollections and anxieties. Both authors have their own video cameras and they both speak to their respective cameras like diary entries. What this does is frame *Double Blind* around *his* private thoughts verses *her* private thoughts. However this structure of two cameras/two authors is not only for internal

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8 Part of the bind between fragmentation and a linear narrative could have been formed in the way that both authors seem to think very differently about the films influences. In an interview for British Art Monthly Shephard thinks of *Double Blind* in terms of the American road movie like *Easy Rider*, whilst Calle names *Le Jetee* by Chris Marker as her influence. Lynne Cook, “Double Blind: Interview with Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard”, British Art Monthly 163 (1993).

9 The title *No Sex Last Night* was the title for the artwork when it was shown in the public cinema. Writing a review of *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me*, Morgan Falconer begins by writing: ‘In her native France Sophie Calle is an artistic phenomenon. Her style might be photo-conceptual, but her public image is more that of an impulsive movie heroine in an art-house film romance’. Morgan Falconer, “Sophie Calle,” *The Burlington Magazine* 146, no. 1213 (2004): 275.
reflection; it is also a structure that allows for chance and uncertainty. As well as the direction of two different perspectives there is also whatever happens to happen in between. Between his private reflections and her private thoughts the mess of life circulates—there are random encounters with strangers that come into the narrative unannounced; there is the unpredictability of the trip itself, along with the uncertainties and tensions of their own relationship.

The interiors of Double Blind do not pin down the relationship between Calle and Shephard as a relationship understood through a narrative. Rather the frame of the narrative holds together a dynamic. This means that between two people there is meaning as a relation, a meaning as a meaning in pieces. Chance and uncertainty are part of Double Blind’s portrait of a relation circulating and ‘reverberating’ throughout its frame. Within the interior of an edited narrative, the uncertainty that can be experienced in a close relationship is given the space to remain as uncertain—a relation as a meaning in pieces is glimpsed as a meaning in pieces. This is Double Blind’s approach—it has a structure and it has a linear narrative with reoccurring motifs, but this narrative is held in such a way that the uncertain, the unpredictable (that which is irreducible within our social encounters, communications and relations with each other) is kept as irreducible; is kept as uncertain.

One of the complexities of Double Blind is the way that it is both in control and out of control at the same time.\(^\text{10}\) The ‘in control’ and the ‘out of control’ are entwined.\(^\text{11}\) Through the two-camera structure of Double Blind Shephard uses his camera to confide in us his reactions and feelings toward both Calle and the trip, reactions that he does not feel he can tell Calle; and Calle confides to her camera her own responses to Shephard that she feels she could never tell him. Within this two cameras/two voices frame, Double Blind is a portrait of a relation that does not exclude the interior of the private diary account but

\(^{10}\) To be both in control and out of control is something that Calle refers to in terms of how her work is first outlined by a parameter or set limit. In answering one of Christine Macel’s questions that involves the question of control and ceremony, Calle answers: ‘I like being in control and I like losing control. Obedience to a ritual is a way of making rules and then letting yourself go along with them’. Macel Christine, “Biographical Interview with Sophie Calle,” in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 75.

\(^{11}\) Nigel Saint speaks of this combination when he writes ‘[C]hance in Calle’s project provides the unexpected, but is also part of a system of rules, choices and combinations’. This combination is Calle’s approach. An a approach that is made through the ‘risky uncovering of oneself’. Levinas, Otherwise than Being, 48. See Nigel Saint, “Space and Absence in Sophie Calle’s Suite Venitienne and Disparitions,” L’Esprit Createur 51, no. 1 (2011): 126.
equally does not exclude the exterior uncertainties of random encounters over which neither has full control. In this sense, the portrait of a relation between two people entwines both the interior and exterior together; the out of control circulates within what one can control.\textsuperscript{12} The frame of his diary account at one end and her diary account at the other end is continually broken down; punctured and interrupted by footage that no one is in control of.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Double Blind} begins with a Sophie Calle voice over. In her address— which is both personal and factual—she informs the audience as to how she met Greg and the reasons why she is about to undertake a road trip with him. Like so many of Sophie Calle’s artworks, this opening address carves out a specific boundary—a boundary in which the artwork is allowed to begin, a boundary that functions as a beginning. This prior information that Calle gives us is not only a way to start a project. Rather this information also sketches out a framework for the audience to think this artwork through. What I mean by this is that whilst \textit{Double Blind} allows room for the unexpected—and while this art work flickers in and out with random moments that were unpredicted or unplanned—it also sets up a parameter. Rather than a relation unfolding before us, Calle, in a sense, gets in first. She declares not just that a road trip is about to start; she also fills us in on some of the dramas and failings which meant that this road trip almost never happened. Before we even begin Calle declares her position; through Calle we are given a sense of Shephard’s ‘character’, and this can predetermine how we as the audience think about Shephard or how we think about Calle’s attitude towards Shephard. Calle’s opening remarks can frame a way we think through the rest of the artwork.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12} To speak in the \textit{approach} means to hold the \textit{meaning in pieces} within meaning itself: or to speak in the \textit{approach} is the passivity within action. \textit{Double Blind} is a road movie that is not the story of a rugged individualism. As well as the \textit{mess of life} giving shape to a relation portrayed, both Calle and Shephard are bound to each, hostage to each other. Shepard is hostage to Calle because he literally has no money, whiles Calle becomes hostage to the \textit{mess of life}— the car that keeps breaking down (or trapped to his in ability to prepare the car for the trip). Both are trapped to the trip, and there is the tension of being trapped to each other as the restlessness that reverberates.

\textsuperscript{13} What drew me particularly to Calle is the idea that she likes to be both “out of control and in control,” as if they are of equal value, or that the out of control is a separate order to the in control, and yet both are entwined in Calle’s art. Or that the out of control, the \textit{mess of life}, circulates within the thematisation.

\textsuperscript{14} I want to argue that Calle’s ‘rules of the game’, the set down parameters, the said structure of her work are an important part of Calle’s \textit{approach}.
The image that supports Calle’s voice-over is the image of a small peephole or a pinhole in the centre of the screen.15 This pinhole image can be thought of as another aspect of Double Blind that represents a common theme in Calle’s art; the theme of Calle as the sleuth who likes to delve into other people’s private details. However, this opening scene can be interpreted differently to Calle as the artist who invades people’s privacy.16 The pinhole in the opening scene of Double Blind is a detailed image of a busy car mechanics’ shop. The opening scene of the film as the interior of a car mechanics represents the way that the film is centred around the car; that most of the footage is taken inside the car; that the car always breaks down, or that the film is centred around the unpredictable, the unreliable and the unplanned. However this pinhole image is an abstraction. As the opening scene it is not clear that this image is a car mechanics; the image is not a direct referent to a theme. With our main attention fixed to the information Calle is delivering to us as the voice over, the pinhole image is a detail, a detailed image as an abstraction. The imagery is moving too quickly, the detail too compressed for the audience to fully comprehend what it represents, the noise too muffled or incoherent to gain a clear picture of what’s being portrayed. Here the specificity of a detail is an abstraction that can be thought of as similar to looking up close to a figurative or landscape painting where the close up detail results in the loss of the overall representation. Whilst the pinhole image acts as the small detail, it is also an abstraction in the sense that we cannot really see what’s going on in this detail; it is not the detail as detailed analysis that attempts to give the full picture. This opening sequence combines the detail of information (Calle’s voice over) with the detail of abstraction (the colour and the sound that we can only glimpse).17 At the same time that Calle begins Double Blind by saying “this is what happened to me,” the detailed abstraction announces to us that this artwork is going to be a detail as a fragment: that despite the pre-given structure of the

15 This pinhole image bookends the artwork with Shephard’s voice ending the video with the same pinhole image.
16 Calle is thought of as the artist who invades people privacy because of artworks like The Address Book (1983) where Calle found an address book and contact some of the people in the address book and ask them about the owner. Calle writes: ‘through them, I would get to know this man’. This for Calle would be a portrait of the owner, a portrait which Calle published in a French newspaper. See Sophie Calle, “The Address Book,” in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 97. In one of her more famous works Suite Venitienne (1980) Calle follows a man in Venice, photographing him without his knowledge and recording his movements. And in The Hotel (1981) Calle worked as a chambermaid and photographed the room she was assigned to clean and record in detail what she found in each room. See Sophie Calle, “The Hotel,” in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 157.
17 There is an information/abstract composition in so many of Calle’s work.
artwork—despite the emphasis in takes in the final editing process—detailed abstractions are going to flicker in and out within the set down structure. The opening pinhole image tells us that in the detail of Double Blind there is never going to be a full picture of the relation between Calle and Shephard; only a fragment as a detail.

What I am proposing as an unfolding of Levinasian ethics in Double Blind is that it does not pin down a relationship between two people as a knowable thing. Rather this relation circulates as a restlessness; as an interruption within the constructed narrative that holds it. This artwork is in no way trying to break down the codes of representation. Through the format of diary entries, the individual’s voice is not dismissed in an attempt to be true to the relational space. In Double Blind the narrative—the narrative as the edited story line; the narrative of two authors perspective— is not side stepped. As an ethical approach Double Blind is not deaf to ‘the said’, and yet this narrative is spoken in such a way that it accommodates a relation between two people as a meaning in pieces. This accommodation is the Double Blind approach. The way in which Double Blind is able to be both a structured, linear narrative that has a beginning, a middle and an end, and also maintains, within this frame, a relational space as an undetermined territory—as an ethics—is through a giving of vulnerability, through the sincerity of ‘exposure’; through the ‘death of the other’ and through the time of hesitation and waiting. It is the pain and loss from the death of a loved one and the uncertainty of being forced to wait that makes the time of Double Blind the time of Levinas’ ‘diachrony’.

The Death of a Friend

The death of one of Calle’s friends is part of the otherness of Double Blind. The death of the other person is part of the ‘diachronic’ time of Double Blind; part of its fragmentation; part of its ethics. At its very beginning the film starts with a dedication which reads:

We dedicate this story to the writer Herve Guibert who died of AIDS, in Paris, the afternoon of December 27, 1991, seven days before the trip began.
During the opening voice-over Calle also tells us that part of the reasoning for the trip is that she feels a need to commemorate her friend’s death in a meaningful way because she will miss his funeral back in France. If the trip was in danger of not going ahead at all because of a falling out with Shephard, Calle tells us that “even if this is going to be a disaster, we’ll go. At least far enough to bury Herve by the sea.” 18

From its very beginning as a dedication, followed then by Calle’s own memorial and remembrance, *Double Blind* could be thought of as Calle’s personal journey with grief. Part of *Double Blind*’s fragmentation—the way it stumbles and restarts; the way chance encounters rise and fall away—is in the way that it does not represent a death, it does not try to represent Calle’s grief, or Guibert himself, through a referent. Rather it speaks of loss through Calle’s own personal pain; through Calle’s own ‘exposure’ to the tragic death of a loved friend from AIDS. An example of this is the scene of Calle’s personal memorial.

The scene where Calle makes a memorial to Guibert begins when Shephard, fulfilling a promise made to Calle, drives her to a seafront location where there is a lone pier that can act as the site for Calle to perform her ceremony; a ceremony where she can say goodbye to her friend by placing a dedication into the ocean at roughly the same time as Guibert is being buried in France. 19 For this scene Calle is alone. It is her private farewell. The ceremony itself, or how it is represented to us, is an expression through exposure to pain and loss; an expression of ‘sincerity’. What I mean by this is the scene is spoken through chance and uncertainties. By allowing the scene to be fragmented into abstract details it speaks through grief and loss rather than trying to represent or comment on grief and loss.

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18 One of the purposes of Calle’s opening dialogue is to inform us that there is already a friction between herself and Shephard. In the opening scene Calle tells us that “We were to leave January 1st, a few days after my arrival. But instead of meeting me at the airport, I found him asleep in his apartment. He hadn’t left for a week. Nothing had been done. The car was not ready, the cameras not purchased, he had lost his driving license, not said goodbye to his friends, not cleaned the trunk, any excuse would do. I knew he didn’t want to leave anymore, but, to protect my trip, I organised everything. Even if this is going to be a disaster, we’ll go. At least far enough to bury Herve by the sea.” Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard, *Double Blind*, Video, 1992.

The site for the ceremony, despite being so important to Calle, is not chosen by her. Rather it is Shephard who chooses the location.\(^{20}\) The location chosen has no specific fundamental reason, the site is not a metaphor of Calle’s relationship with Guibert, nor is the dedication that she sends out to the ocean a representation of their relation. Calle informs us that the dedication holds flowers, but she could not find the ones that Guibert liked. Also there is a picture of ‘Saint Sarah’ which is included for no specific reason. Placing the dedication into the water Calle calls out to her friend: “I don’t know why this picture of Saint Sarah?”\(^{21}\) The other abstract detail is the way Calle withdraws information, or only allows for so much information. We hear a recording of Guibert’s voice briefly on the telephone answering machine and Calle recalls a distant memory she has of him. The memory recalled and the sound of Guibert’s voice are fragments; detailed abstractions. Calle’s sincerity in being exposed resists a representation of her friend, or a representation of their relationship. Through uncertainty and a passivity that hesitates the past is not assembled for the clarity of a ‘re-presentation’.

Much later in the artwork— much later into the journey; without warning; as if the memory called her rather than she calling it— Calle, as part of her diary entry to camera, speaks again of Guibert. This time she recalls a simple memory of how she would cook for him on Sunday nights. This snippet of information is our glimpse, our abstract detail, of the life that was shared between them. In retelling this memory Calle retracts. She immediately acknowledges the danger of assembling the past; of thematising the past for the clarity of a present; of memorialising; of losing the ethics of ‘diachrony’; of naming ‘the past that was never present’. She withdraws so that the relation between her and Guibert remains an abstract detail; so that the memory remains as an interruption.\(^{22}\) Calle withdraws in order to

\(^{20}\) Waiting by the pier Calle says “Greg promised to have me by the water at 9am. It is the first promise he’s kept.” But then on leaving Calle comments “Of all the places to bury him, why here?”

\(^{21}\) Placing her dedication into the water Calle calls out to her friend “You like peonies, I could not find them. And I don’t know why this picture of Saint Sarah”

\(^{22}\) An interruption so the relation remains ‘other still’. I get this ‘other still’ in part from Derrida’s essay “The Deaths of Roland Barthes,” a piece of writing where Derrida is mourning the death of his friend. There is a wonderful passage in this essay where Derrida expresses the dangers of reducing the difference that is within a relation by attempting to describe and re-present it; especially when the other person can no longer respond. Derrida recounts that the most time that he spent alone with Barthes was ‘while travelling (Derrida’s emphasis)’, whilst in transit either on a train or plane ‘sometimes head to head, I mean face to face (for example on the train from Paris to Lille or Paris to Bordeaux) and sometimes side by side, separated by an aisle (for example in the trip from Paris to New York to Baltimore in 1966)’. What is important here is the ‘space in-
keep Guibert as other to her in his absence by saying: ‘I mustn’t let my memory betray him. I’ll keep his number in my address book, his picture on the wall and one of his books always open by my bed. I’ll carry the African beads and the bad luck piece he gave me. And on every Sunday. . .’ Calle’s voice then fades away under Shephard’s. Calle’s memory of Guibert fades back into the fragmentation of *Double Blind*. Through Calle’s withdrawing back into the fragmented detail, the narrative of *Double Blind* does not represent Guibert in death, the artwork is not used to speak for Guibert in his absence or speak for the relation between Calle and Guibert. Rather his relation with Calle is retained as an otherness.

The death of the other person is part of *Double Blind*’s fragmentation, it is part of the way chance, randomness, and the un-planned encounter flicker in and out of the linear narrative, it is part of the way the restlessness of Levinas’ ‘proximity’ is not assembled in *Double Blind*.

**Vulnerability and the Time of Waiting**

Hesitation and the time of waiting are also part of *Double Blind*’s fragmentation. Waiting is part of the time of *Double Blind*. *Double Blind* is an artwork that moves along as a perpetual waiting, or moves from one scene of waiting to another scene of waiting. From the very start Calle tells us that she is tired of having to wait for Shephard. That having to wait for him is putting the trip in jeopardy of never beginning in the first place; that this road trip as an artwork may never start because he is not organised and she is still waiting—the main cause for having to wait, the main cause for the artwork itself to be a waiting—is the car. So many of the scenes in this artwork involve Calle and Shephard forced to wait—waiting in road side diners, waiting in motels, waiting at the auto mechanics for the car to be repaired.

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23 As an otherness that calls me. Is this what Levinas means when he writes in *Otherwise than Being*: ‘...we can have a responsibilities and attachments through which death takes on a meaning. That is because, from the start, the other affects us despite ourselves’? Levinas, 129.
There is also the time of waiting within the tension of their relationship: a tension where we as the audience can feel we are stuck between the two of them; waiting for them to get on with it; waiting for them to talk to each other rather than confine through their camera to us the audience.

Calle herself is always waiting for Shephard’s affection; for his depression to release its hold; waiting for intimacy. This time of waiting—a time of not being in control, a time where the unplanned completely disrupts and interrupts all plans, a waiting as a time in pieces, as a ‘diachrony’, as the time of the mess of life— is a time that is amplified in the artwork’s penultimate scene where Shephard and Calle get married, in their car! In this scene it is not the car that causes the prolonged waiting but Shephard’s own hesitation. He is not sure if he wants to get involved in a Sophie Calle artwork: he is not sure if he really wants to get married; and his hesitation, this sense of being unsure, drags out. We as the audience again get pulled into waiting, waiting for Shephard’s answer, waiting for Shephard to decide, and at this moment of waiting, the narrative program of Double Blind is put on hold.

It is the unexpectedness of having to wait, the way in which waiting is forced upon Calle and Shephard, that makes waiting a fragmented time that disrupts. By making waiting the time of the narrative, by editing Double Blind so that it is in the time that waits, Double Blind forms as a passivity. The artwork waits, and this allows uncertainty to circulate within this waiting. It is the passivity of waiting and hesitation that holds Guibert’s death as a meaning in pieces, it allows the death of the other to pass through without being assembled. It is the passivity of waiting and hesitation that allows the relation between Calle and Shephard to be glimpsed as a meaning in pieces.24 Another passivity of Double Blind that retains a trace of a Levinasian ethics is the giving of vulnerability. In Double Blind vulnerability given is prioritised ahead of a narrative or message to be decoded; vulnerability is prioritised ahead of the ‘giving out of signs’.

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24 This calling of an artwork to wait: to think of hesitation as an agency for making art, is something Jan Verwoert speaks of when he argues in favour of the ‘I can’t’ against the pressure to perform. Verwoert writes: ‘How could we restore dignity to the ‘I can’t’? How could we avoid becoming backed into a corner where the ‘I can’t’ would merely be perceived as a passive-aggressive stance of denial? In other words: can we embrace the ‘I can’t’ without depriving ourselves of our potential to act? Could we unlock the ‘I can’t’ as a form of agency?’ See Jan Verwoert, Tell Me What You Want, What You Really Really Want (Rotterdam: Sternberg Press, 2010), 19.
The giving of vulnerability is part of this artwork’s very structure. *Double Blind* is an artwork that begins only to stop and then start again. It is a storyline based on an old car that won’t start and a relationship that only grows in tension and bitterness. It is a narrative where two authors use their cameras as confidantes to express openly their own, very personal vulnerabilities and intimacies. The giving of vulnerability in *Double Blind* is given jointly by both the authors: from both Calle and Shephard there is an openness toward being ‘exposed’. Whilst Calle and Shepherd give vulnerability, there is not a mutuality of vulnerability; not in the sense that Calle and Shephard give vulnerability equally. Rather the dominate vulnerability of *Double Blind* is the vulnerability of the relation itself. This is specifically felt in Shephard’s depression, which is expressed openly as a vulnerability for both Shephard and Calle. However the vulnerability of *Double Blind* is not only within his perspective and her perspective. Between Calle and Shephard other voices appear and recede; other voices ‘circulate’ and ‘reverberate’. The structure of *Double Blind* is one that allows a crack to form; allows the light of ‘the saying’ to be glimpsed. It is the vulnerability expressed by both authors that then allows for the uncertainty of vulnerability to ‘circulate’ and ‘reverberate’ within *Double Blind*.

The ending of *Double Blind* is composed in the same way as its beginning, except this time the pinhole image at the end—the abstract detail—is supported by Shephard’s voice who tells us his version of how the relationship between he and Calle ended. Through his own failing his attempt to making this film with Calle was an attempt “to try and tell a honest story.” The narrative of *Double Blind* is bookended by her beginning as the account of how the journey/relation began and ends with his perspective of how the journey/relation ended. The pinhole image that both begins the artwork and ends the artwork tells us that what happened between her beginning and his ending was a fragmented detail: an abstract detail; a detail that cannot be pinned down and held as a known thing through representation but is rather a detail as a *meaning in pieces*, part of a relation between two people. Through this frame of her account as the beginning and his account as the end, a frame given through vulnerability and waiting, *Double Blind* is an artwork that accommodates a *meaning in pieces*; an *in pieces* as an otherness that calls for a response.
‘Dramatic Collisions’ in the Art of Sophie Calle

A reoccurring approach in Calle’s art is the way vulnerability is retained within a language that usually overpowers the uncertainty of vulnerability. What this means is that the personal, the intimate and the vulnerable is framed within language as a factual report; or language as evidence, like in a police report, or a compiled list of facts. Through this language Calle draws out a parameter for the artwork. Yet this boundary does not frame experience as a theme; rather the uncertainty of vulnerability is able to circulate as a meaning in pieces within a set parameter, within a set of rules. This approach is achieved—this approach that is not deaf to ‘the said’ nor deaf to ‘the saying’—through Calle’s own giving of vulnerability. Vulnerability is there as part of the artwork’s frame. This is evident in one of Calle’s earliest works titled *The Sleepers* (1979).25

One way that Calle composes the personal within the language of factual evidence is through the artwork beginning in the form of a proposal.26 In *The Sleepers* this took the form of an invitation—an invitation given to both people she knew and complete strangers—to sleep in her bed for a specified time frame.27 Calle then documented the response by photographing the willing participants (as if to simply say this was one person

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25 In undertaking this project Calle did not really first think of it as an artwork. She says this in a talk she gave for the European Graduate School. Sophie Calle, "Art, Biography and History," in *European Graduate School* (2004). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CVRmLbcI8

26 Calle describes the work: ‘I asked people to give me a few hours of their sleep. To come and sleep in my bed. To answer questions. To each participant I suggested an eight hour stay . . . I contacted . . . [P]eople I didn’t know and whose names were suggested to me by common acquaintances . . . I intended my bedroom to become constantly occupied space for eight days, with sleepers succeeding one another at regular intervals. . . Breakfast, lunch, or dinner were served to each depending on the time of day. Clean bed sheets were place at the disposition of each sleeper. I put questions to those who allowed me; nothing to do with knowledge or fact-gathering, but rather to establish a neutral and distant contact. I took photographs every hour. I watch my guest sleep’. Calle, *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me?*, 145.

27 In Jean Baudrillard’s essay on Calle’s he speaks of the way people are willing to say yes to her strange requests. But importantly for this thesis there is a submitting to the ‘absurd’ because Calle herself also submits to the ‘absurd’. Baudrillard writes: ‘We are very willing to consent to anything, provided it be absurd — we are very willing to submit ourselves to anything, as long as the request is irrational. It is because Sophie, herself, submits to an absurd task, because she prostitutes herself, as it were, to a senseless enterprise that requires more patience, servitude, boredom, and energy than any amorous passion, that she effortlessly obtains from others this irrational complicity that no consideration for her well-being could ever have inspired. It is to the challenge that the people respond; it is the absurd that they obey’. Jean Baudrillard, "Please Follow Me," in *Sophie Calle: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 21.
who took up my invite), and records in a short text what took place. Both text and image together as the final artwork reveal how Calle greeted her guests with a meal when they awoke, had some pre-set questions for them to answer, and how a variety of different circumstance arose between Calle and her guests. Setting a specific framework at the start gives the event/artwork a parameter, a specific outline, yet what occurs within this framework is undetermined.

In her introductory essay for the 2009 Whitechapel retrospective of Sophie Calle’s work, an essay titled *Sophie Calle: Talking To Strangers*, gallery director Iwona Blazwick reads an ‘unlikely fusion’ taking place in *The Sleepers*. For Blazwick, *The Sleepers* is a fusion where ‘two radically opposed artistic traditions collide’.\(^{28}\) One of the artistic traditions that Blazwick feels is present in *The Sleepers* is the tradition of figurative painting, the other is the more recent tradition of performance art. In Blazwick’s interpretation, *The Sleepers* is an artwork which is able to hold together both these different frameworks. To define figurative painting more specifically Blazwick points to the way that *The Sleepers* maintains the tradition of ‘the reclining nude’,\(^{29}\) and then in a more general sense, she names this artistic tradition as ‘the figure in a picture’.\(^{30}\) In contrast to the body represented as ‘the figure in a picture’, Blazwick gives a general term – ‘a body in space’—for Performance Art of the 1960s and 70s.\(^{31}\) For Blazwick the term ‘body in space’ is a definition of Performance Art that developed out of Conceptualism and Minimalism and is a term that encompasses the artwork as involving the body of the performer, the body of the audience and the shared space between performer and audience.\(^{32}\)

\(^{28}\) ‘What happens when two radically opposed artistic traditions collide? Take the work of art as the reclining nude, a figure in a picture. Its subject is passive, the aesthetic object of the artist’s gaze, part of a pictorial tradition that dominated painting from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Now take the work of art as a body in space. Its subject is the artist’s body and that of anyone entering the space of the work transformed into active participant. Here we recall the radical proposition of performance art of the 1960s and 1970s. It is an unlikely fusion of these traditions that characterises Sophie Calle’s paradigmatic work of 1979, *The Sleepers*. It is also why we can regard her work as a new figuration, one that offers social interactions’. See Iowa Blazwick, “Talking to Strangers,” in *Sophie Calle: The Reader* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 8.

\(^{29}\) Ibid.

\(^{30}\) Ibid.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Blazwick’s definition of the body in space allows for Minimalism to be included in this definition, that art through Minimalism is moving away from the narrative to be decoded and involving instead a corporeal encounter, an encounter that so worried Fried. Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” *Artforum* 5, (1967).
The main dichotomy that Blazwick wants to test is the distinction made between the ‘figure in a picture’ and the ‘body in space’. Blazwick wants to test this binary opposition where one form of representation is passive and the other is active. The ‘body in space’ is the active body not only because the artwork is the body performed but also because the live event of the artwork means that the shared space between artist and audience—a space as an undetermined zone—makes the audience the potential participant. The ‘body in space’ is involved and interacting, it is a participatory body as the corporeal presence of experience, the sensibility and corporeality of ‘being there’, whilst ‘the figure in the picture’ is the passive body, chosen by the artist to be read, it is the body as ‘aesthetic object’; the aesthetic object selected by the artist and presented for interpretation. As passive, ‘a figure in a picture’ is the body to be thought of for interpretation; an interpretation that requires a measured distance between viewer and art object.\(^{33}\) The collision that Blazwick finds in *The Sleepers* is a collision where the rational binary between active and passive is dismantled to become a ‘new kind of figuration’: a figuration where the active and the passive are not separated as binary opposites but are rather co-joined to form a dynamic mix. In this mix the passive can include participation, and the active need not dismiss the art object.

Blazwick does not state this outright but the specific reason why the combination of these two different ways of representing the body is described as a dramatic collision is because ‘a figure in a picture’ and ‘a body in space’ are so violently opposed against each other by feminism. In a complex way Blazwick is reading *The Sleepers* as a collision between, on the one hand, a masculine language of narration that objectifies the female body through a language of signs given for decoding, and on the other, a feminist critique of such objectification that looks for a different language through the sensibility or corporeality of the body performed.\(^{34}\) Instead of focusing here on whether this is true or not, rather than focusing on whether or not *The Sleepers* holds together such radically opposed feminist positions—that *The Sleepers* holds together women as passively objectified with women as

\(^{33}\) This binary between passive and active can also be thought of as the separation between absence and presence. A presence in absence is a theme throughout Calle’s practice. In works like *Last Seen* (1991) Calle asks gallery staff members to record their memories of lost or stolen artworks. Sophie Calle, “Last Seen,” in *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 401.

\(^{34}\) Blazwick does not cite specifically a feminist position in performance art. But is the difference between the objectification of women through the art object and the criticism of this objectification through performance art what she means by a collision between radically opposed artistic traditions? Is this not why she uses words like ‘radically’ and ‘collide’? Blazwick, 8.
actively criticising such objectification—I want to focus instead on how Blazwick defines *The Sleepers* as holding a dynamic mix of passive/active; a mix that unsettles a direct opposition between the passive body (the reclining nude) and the active body (in performance). The importance here for Blazwick is that a passive/active correlation is one where the art object as representation maintains with it the mess and uncertainty of not speaking on the other person’s behalf: that mess and uncertainty can still remain within the confines of the artwork, or, in a Levinasian sense, the passivity of proximity can remain as a *meaning in pieces* within the ‘action of representation’.\(^{35}\) The fusion of *The Sleepers* is that within ‘a figure in a picture’ is ‘a body in space’ (a presence of the body remains within *The Sleepers*, even though this artwork is not a live event), or the capacity for uncertainty and unpredictability when ‘talking with strangers’ can still circulate within the artwork as an art object.\(^{36}\) This is how I have interpreted Blazwick when she states that through the combination of ‘a figure in a picture’ (or the body in the image) with ‘a body in space’ (or the body present) *The Sleepers* forms a ‘new kind of figuration’; a figuration that *in itself* then ‘offers social interaction’.\(^{37}\) Here I am interpreting Blazwick’s ‘new kind of figuration’ as a Levinas approach. *The Sleepers* is a ‘figuration’ that ‘offers social interaction’, that accommodates Levinas’ ethics.\(^{38}\)

Blazwick’s figuration does not dismantle representation in preference for ‘social interaction’. Rather Blazwick is arguing that Calle gives us a type of representation; a type of frame, that holds within it ‘a body in space’. The social interaction on ‘offer’ from this figuration is not the presence of experiencing a live event, but rather comes from within representation itself; a representation—a ‘new kind of figuration’—that accommodates the possibility of uncertainty and irreducibility that social interaction can give. It is important here to make clear, and Blazwick does this, that the ‘social interaction’ which is on offer

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\(^{35}\) ‘Take the work of art as the reclining nude, a figure in a picture. Its subject is passive, the aesthetic object of the artist’s gaze, part of a pictorial tradition that dominated painting from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Now take the work of art as a body in space. Its subject is the artist’s body and that of anyone entering the space of the work transformed into active participant’. Blazwick, 8.

\(^{36}\) Here I am thinking of Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* and trying to argue for a Levinas ethics that involves some sense of control. An ethics that is not in the live event of the physical encounter and exchange but rather that the artwork; the art object; the thing; the installation; the thing that has a frame; can accommodate the trace of ‘the saying’. In essence I am arguing for some sense of control from the artist, but a control that also withdraws.

\(^{37}\) Blazwick, 8.

\(^{38}\) And as the *approach* is neither deaf to ‘the said’ nor to ‘the saying’
within Calle’s work is quite a specific type of social interaction. The social for Calle is the unpredictability, the uncertainty, the chance, failures, danger, intimacy, and risk in vulnerability that can be involved in being together.  

The Sleepers, despite its documentary style, does not speak on the other persons behalf, but rather unpredictability is kept alive within the representation. The question that arises from Blazwick’s ‘new kind of figuration’ is how does Calle do this? How does this work? How does the directness and the matter-of-factness of the aesthetic—where both the black and white photograph that is accompanied by the text acts as factual evidence—not smother over the uncertainties that can be a part of social interaction or the restlessness of Levinas’ subjectivity as a ‘proximity’? In what way does Calle bring together ‘a figure in a picture’ with ‘a body in space’? How does this ‘fusion’, this figuration, then from itself offer social interaction? A key way to understanding how this fusion happens is in the verb ‘offers’, or in the action ‘to offer.’

To Offer Vulnerability.

Blazwick’s initial answer to this question of how The Sleepers is a ‘new kind of figuration’ is to say that this figuration echoes another collision occurring in Calle’s art. The Sleepers, as with many of Calle’s works, is able to combine the personal and intimate within a language that is more usually associated with the compiling of facts. From Calle’s style of image and text/ black and white, intimacy and uncertainty speaks from within the language of data management and fact gathering, or from the language of the document as factual report. In Calle’s art the rational holds with it the irrational; the unclaimed space of the social encounter circulates within the very language usually used to claim knowledge and understanding about such relations. With The Sleeper’s aesthetic of factual reporting

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39 The emphasis on the unpredictability of the social encounter is a highlighted in the essays title which is also the title of the retrospective: Talking to strangers. Blazwick’s ‘figuration’ is not one that fits easily together, rather Blazwick defines it as a collision. This collision can also be thought of as a restlessness; a restlessness, not only in the way the composition is formed as no comfortable join, but also a restlessness that is against meaning being assembled. The social interaction that is offered is the social encounter whereby meaning is in pieces, or yet to be assembled. A meaning in pieces is the structure of the new figuration, and it is also what is offered by the figuration.
Blazwick names the people involved, the volunteers to the project, as ‘participants’. Participation in this sense means that despite the photo/text style that acts as proof or evidence, there is a passivity in Calle’s framework whereby the participants remain as active participants. Despite Calle setting down the framework for the project she does not speak on the participants’ behalf. Although she sets a specific framework for a project or proposal, she allows for whatever happens within that framework as a matter of chance and uncertainty. Calle takes this approach throughout her practice. In a more complex sense Blazwick incorporates this participation in The Sleeper’s to be one of mutual vulnerability; that there is an equal sense of participation because both artist and volunteers are involved together in a shared vulnerability. Calle is herself vulnerable by inviting people she does not know to occupy her bed; and the participants are vulnerable in saying “yes” to the strange request.

Vulnerability is positioned by Blazwick as an important aspect to The Sleepers; it is ‘social interaction’ as vulnerability that is being offered. Blazwick’s focus is predominantly on the way in which this vulnerability is one that is shared; shared between both the artist and participant. This mutual vulnerability is defined by Blazwick as a ‘pact of trust’. A mutuality of vulnerability—the pact that is made between artist and participant as one of trust—is for Blazwick the ‘political and ethical dimensions’ of Calle’s work. However could

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40 ‘The black and white photographs of The Sleepers are interspersed with short written accounts of each volunteer and Calle’s exchange with them. They can be regarded as models in the classical sense—they recline and they are pictured. Yet Calle’s images of them are neither aesthetic nor erotic they appear documentary, like evidence compiled by a detective or a psychologist. Each subject is also a participant’. Blazwick, 8.

41 Following from the above quote Blazwick writes: ‘Each subject is also a participant. Although the artist asks them to make a work, her invitation requires only that they rest’. Ibid.

42 ‘The Sleepers offers a paradigm for understanding Calle’s future oeuvre: making a proposal that triggers a sequence of unpredictable events, and involves a degree of risk even danger; bringing strangers temporarily into the realms of intimacy; and documenting the consequences through text and image . . . ’. Ibid., 9.

43 This shared intimacy ‘facilitated’ is spoken of in Morgan Falconer’s review of the retrospective exhibition held at the Pompidou Centre in 2003-2004 titled ‘Sophie Calle: Did You See Me?’. Falconer writes that Sophie ‘walks into the lives of strangers—and lets them walk into hers—with extraordinary alacrity, facilitating fleeting intimacies of all kinds’. Falconer, “Sophie Calle,” 275.

44 On the vulnerability of The Sleepers Blazwick writes: ‘They’, the participants that accept Calles invitation, ‘act by agreeing to enter the intimate space of the artists bed with all its connotations of the body in sickness and in health. There is a fisson of sex, the taboo of hygiene. To be horizontal is also to be vulnerable, incapacitated’. Blazwick, 8. Then later Blazwick writes ‘Both Calle and the sleepers are vulnerable: she is sharing her bedroom with strangers. They are asleep in the bed of a women they do not know. Each has made a pact of trust’. Blazwick, 8/9.

45 Blazwick states that in The Sleepers and in her work more broadly ‘… Calle enters into temporary agreement with strangers that require mutual trust. It is this aspect of her work that suggests a political and ethical dimension’. Ibid., 9.
this ‘ethical dimension’—a ‘dimension’ that for Blazwick is one of trust formed in a social reciprocity—be thought of differently? Could ethics in Calle’s ‘new figuration’ be thought of as the challenge and the restlessness of receptivity rather than ethics through a moral code where social contact means a social contract?

A different way of thinking about Blazwick’s mutuality of vulnerability is that the giving of vulnerability is part of Calle’s approach. Calle offers vulnerability and receives vulnerability in return. In terms of a Levinasian approach this means that it is the vulnerability offered that then ‘triggers’ the unpredictable, the intimate, the uncertain, the vulnerable. Vulnerability allows for vulnerability, and the fusion now formed, the new figuration as a restless tension, in itself, ‘offers’ vulnerability. Through vulnerability the active and passive have become intertwined; fused together in a new type of ‘figuration’. As an approach the ‘giving out of signs’ is still there, ‘a figure is in a picture’. However through vulnerability, the sign offered in The Sleepers becomes less important: the ‘giving out of signs’ becomes reduced; the ‘figure in a picture’ as a decoding of a sign from a designated distance becomes less significant. Blazwick’s shared vulnerability and ‘mutual trust’ is the ethical approach that triggers the ethical. An approach that accommodates a Levinas ethic would be The

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46 In the introduction to the book *Critical Communities and Aesthetic Practices*, and in commenting on Calle’s personal involvement in her work for the 2007 Venice Biennale project titled *Take Care of Yourself*, the editors put emphasis on how there is not so much of a tension between fact and fiction in Calle’s work, but rather that what is important in Calle’s work is her own personal involvement, an involvement that allows ‘something to emerge’: ‘What does matter is that the ‘personal’ origin of Calle’s work enables something to emerge which could not have been without it; the collage of voices, performances and texts exhibited as ‘Take Care of Yourself’ can only be because of the personal; however ‘real’ or not, this may be’. Francis Halsall, Julia Jansen, and Sinead Murphy, *Critical Communities and Aesthetic Practices*, Contributions to Phenomenology, vol. 64 (London: Springer, 2012), 2.

47 Blazwick writes: ‘making a proposal that triggers a sequence of unpredictable events, and involves a degree of risk, even danger; bringing strangers temporarily into the realms of intimacy; and documenting the consequences through text and image’. Blazwick, 9.

48 And for Blazwick ‘social interaction’ is offered. A sense of Calle giving vulnerability and this vulnerability offering a space for the complexity, or the unnamed territory, of ‘social interaction’, is given by Shirley Jordan. After describing Calle’s installation *Exquisite Pain* (1984-2003) as a ‘soft monument’, Jordon concludes her essay by writing that the installation is ‘[R]ichly diverse in testimony and with prospective/premonitory as well as retrospective dimensions, *Douleur exquise* provides a sustained illustration of Calle’s rapt receptivity to the other and of her alertness to our common vulnerability. In it, there is a space for us all’. Shirley Ann Jordan, “Exhibiting Pain: Sophie Calle’s *Douleur Exquise*,” *French Studies* LXI, no. 2 (2007).

49 From the ‘new figuration’ the ‘body in space’ is no longer the action of performance, nor the ethics of participatory art, the ethics of ‘being there,’ but is rather the uncertainty, and the risk, in the vulnerability of social interaction.
Sleepers ‘political and ethical dimension’ because Levinas’ ethics is a criticality; one that chips back at the assembling force of assembled meaning.

Specifically through Calle’s work titled *Antoli* (1984), Blazwick makes a link between Calle’s offer of social interaction with Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*. Blazwick writes that in Calle’s presentation of *Antoli* the artist ‘invites her viewer to act as witness: to the private language of a love letter, to a personal encounter in a train and to translate these personal relations into the public sphere’. This invitation to ‘act as witness... to a personal encounter’ is the way that Blazwick links Calle’s overall practice to Bourriaud’s theory of ‘Relational Aesthetics’. Blazwick writes, in reference to the presentation of *Antoli*, that ‘this is to engage in what Nicolas Bourriaud, a decade later, identifies as ‘relational’ art’. Blazwick then quotes Bourriaud in order to define relational art as ‘an art that takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interaction and its social context, rather than the assertion of an autonomous and private symbolic space’. However is not Blazwick’s ‘new kind of figuration’ the way that Calle can fuse together the ‘sphere of human interaction’ within the ‘autonomous and private symbolic space?’ Rather than naming Calle a precursor to relational art, is it not more accurate to say that Bourriaud misses the Levinasian ethics; the ethics that is in Calle’s invitation for us to ‘act as witness’?

Blazwick has already outlined in her essay how Calle’s *approach* is different to Bourriaud. In Blazwick’s ‘new kind of figuration’, Calle’s ‘social interaction’ is offered within representation, or within the document: within the image/text aesthetic, within the frame of language as factual evidence. This would mean, in ‘Relational Aesthetics’ terms, that the ‘sphere of human interaction and social context’ is offered from within ‘the autonomous and private symbolic space’. Calle does not replace one for the other, or favour one ahead

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50 Blazwick, 11.
51 *Antoli* is an artwork where Calle documents the way she shared a small compartment on a train journey with a stranger. Calle describes the project as ‘I boarded the Trans-Siberian in Moscow, on my way to Vladivostok. It was October 29, 1984, 2:20 p.m. I was in car 7 compartment 6 (first class, for two), berth number 3. The other traveller was in berth 4. I sat down and waited for him. At 2:30 he walked in. a man in his sixties—who glares at me, surprised, and shouts. He speaks in Russian. I tell in French that I don’t understand’. Sophie Calle, “*Antoli,*” in *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me* (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 310.
52 Blazwick, 11.
53 In a study of Calle’s work the *Birthday Ceremony* (1980-1993) (where Calle displays birthday presents from friends behind glass cabinets with the names of the gift giver etched into the glass), Susanne Kuchler considers the way Calle’s art can hold the personal, and the relational, in the object and in the ethnographic study. Kuchler writes ‘Before we know it, we find ourselves drawn into an interpersonal encounter, as the cabinets
of the other. Rather Calle’s Levinasian approach maintains the art object, but in a way that offers, from a set framework, vulnerability, contact, sensibility, ‘the sphere of human interaction and its social context’, and this vulnerability offered allows space for a vulnerability received to then chip away at the structure of ‘autonomous and private symbolic space’. \(^{54}\) Missing this ethical approach Relational Aesthetics has a binary that favours presence ahead of absence, and this leaves it open to being criticized for being too congenial; a congeniality and harmony that smothers over a Levinasian ethics.

The Out of Control Within the In Control

A third collision—after a ‘new kind of figuration’ and the aesthetic of the factual report that speaks of human vulnerability—is one where Calle as artist is both in control as well as being out of control. Blazwick quotes Calle as saying ‘I like to be in control, and I like to be out of control’. Blazwick seems to understand this quote to mean that in some artworks Calle as author is more in control than in others. However, as I have defined in my interpretation of Double Blind, this quote can be better understood as another one of Calle’s collisions; that Calle is the artist that is both in control and out of control at the same time. \(^{55}\) Is not a good

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\(^{54}\) Helle Brons speaks of how Calle’s art sets a framework which allows unpredictability ‘to be handled’. Brons writes ‘an attempt to tackle the chaos of the world. Confronted with life’s terrifying unpredictability and meaninglessness, Calle sets out the framework for an individual, limited game, in which she can let go and allow the rules to take control—a sort of downsizing of unpredictability, allowing it to be handled. A condensation of life into art. The process could be said to describe the creation of any work of art: systems are set up and broken, and out of those formal rules, failings and coincidences, meaning appear’. Helle Brons, "Sophie Calle: ‘Ou Et Quand?’,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 159.

\(^{55}\) In interview with Calle in 1993 Bice Curiger asks: ‘In the situations you put yourself into, do you feel you’re in control or do you feel vulnerable?’ And Calle answers ‘I feel both.’ Calle then follows this by saying that if she sets up a ‘situation’, or if she has ‘set rules’, then she feels ‘obliged’ to provoke an ‘extreme situation’. Bice Curiger, “Sophie Calle in Conversation,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (1993; repr., London: Whitechapel, 2009), 56.
example of this the way that the participants help shape the artwork? Part of Calle’s control is in the final edit, yet the outcome of the artwork is given its very shape by the participants, by the response given by others. Calle begins the process with the proposal and documents the outcome; yet what happens from the initial enquiry is as much in the hands of the participants as it is with the artist. This is true for *The Sleepers* and even more so in the work that followed titled *The Bronx* (1980).

*The Bronx* was part of an exhibition of contemporary French photography in New York and Calle found herself allocated a gallery in the Bronx, outside the main hub of Manhattan, and decided to make a new work that was more responsive to the location she found herself in. The proposal for *The Bronx* ‘was to stand outside the gallery and ask passers-by if they could take her somewhere that was ‘of their choice’; somewhere special to them that they would like to remember, or return back to, if they were ever to be able to leave the Bronx’.  

Whilst the vulnerability of *The Sleepers* is in the invitation to the artist’s bed, the vulnerability of *The Bronx* is that it leaves the interior of the apartment to follow someone else to their choice of location. Outside of her apartment, *The Bronx* could be thought of as the artist doing field work. However *The Bronx* is not ‘artist as ethnographer’. The reason for this is predominantly in the way that the people Calle meets, like in *The Sleepers*, speak for themselves; each is given, or offered, their own voice.  

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56 Calle describes the project as: ‘In November 1980 the Fashion Moda Gallery asked me to do a project in connection with the district where it is located, the South Bronx. I decided that I would go to the area every day from 2 to 5 p.m. and get people I stopped in the street to take me to a local spot of their choice. The night before the opening, an unexpected collaborator broke into the gallery and covered every available surface with graffiti’. Sophie Calle, “The Bronx,” in *Sophie Calle: Did You See Me* (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 305.

57 In an article on Calle, Robert Storr seems to question the authenticity of Calle’s name. Calle is the artist where wisdom (Sophie) is on the street (Calle). Storr writes: ‘In the disguise of the first person narrator, the artist who calls herself Sophie Calle has given herself the license to do many thing. Most of them are questions of slyly transgressing the norms of bourgeois conduct’. Storr, “The Women Who Wasn’t There, in Sophie Calle: The Reader (2003; repr., London: Whitechapel, 2009), 104.

58 Here I am thinking of Hal Foster’s criticisms of the artist as ethnographer.

59 Robert Pincus for an article for “Art and America” in 1989 questions this ethic of allowing the other to speak for themselves because the art work is not really in conversation. Pincus suggests that the aesthetic of image and text in *The Bronx*’s can make Calle distant from the people that she meets; that Calle does not really share with her audience her response to what these strangers tell her, and that the aesthetic of image and text can feel more like a ‘anthropologist’ study rather than communication. ‘Yet’, Pincus asks, ‘is Calle actually as detached as her presentation might suggest? And Pincus answer is ‘I think not?’ His reasoning for this answer is not so much in *The Bronx* but rather in later works where Calle uses the same format of image and text but to ‘evoke her own intimate memories’. Robert L Pincus, ”Sophie Calle: The Prying Eye,” in *Sophie Calle: The Reader* (1989; repr., London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 31.
social science, Blazwick describes Calle’s language as more an ‘observation’ than an ‘investigation’. The proposal is not employed by Calle for an understanding, or as the representation of an exploration for explanation; there is not the placing of signs or a reinforcing of a prior knowing. 

Rather, as with The Sleepers, the set proposal ‘triggers’ a social interaction. However in The Bronx, the involvement of the participants seems more pronounced: they decide the location, they decide how they would like to be photographed. Calle is present—she is in the proposal, in the style of image and text, and in the final edit—but, from the given proposal, it is the other person who takes the lead. In The Bronx Calle steps back; this time she is the guest in her own artwork. As with the ‘new kind of figuration’, and the intimate within the document, Calle’s authorship is an act, but an act more as a listening; an approach as ‘a way of withdrawing. . . of drawing back without disappearing’. Here in The Bronx Calle is out of control and, in equal measure, Calle is in control.

As in The Sleepers, Blazwick notes the ‘risk’ involved for Calle in making The Bronx. To define the risk involved in both The Sleepers and The Bronx provides an opportunity to align Calle’s risk in vulnerability as an approach to Levinasian ethics. The risk for Calle in these two works is the openness toward otherness; an openness that is the passivity of risk rather than the

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60 In terms of holding both the objective and the subjective, Robert Storr, writing in 1991, writes that Calle ‘shifts constantly between objective inquiry and subjective musing, just as she may at any point shift roles from that of the watcher to that of the person being watch’. And Storr aligns the rational with the emotional by describing Calle’s artistic practice as one where ‘Calle became a geographer of displacement and an anthropologist of intimacy achieved or failed’. Robert Storr, “Sophie Calle,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (1991; repr., London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 42.

61 To understand Calle’s proposals as holding a passivity helps us to understand what Blazwick means when she later defines Calle’s approach as the way that Calle has ‘. . . used the terms of an enquiry to offer a framework for interaction’. Blazwick, 9. For Blazwick, Calle’s proposal is an enquiry, and it is this enquiry that then offers ‘a framework for interaction’. Calle’s proposal function as an open questioning that invites interaction, a framework is offered rather than a laying down of what is to be done, or a laying down of what is to be achieved. Whilst the parameters are set by the proposal, the framework is not a solid foundation, rather it is one that allows for chance.

62 Levinas, Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence, 28.

63 The combination of in control/out of control, of action/passivity, of rules and chance, of the objective/subjective as Calle’s approach is termed by Johnnie Gratton as ‘experimental experience’. Gratton writes that ‘Calle also typically lays herself open to the advent of the aleatory within the situation established by her own ground rules. What I have called ‘experimental experience’ often results from striking interactions of choice and chance’. This is Gratton’s approach, his order and vulnerability. Johnnie Gratton, “Experiment and Experience in the Phototextual Projects of Sophie Calle,” in Womens Writing in Contemporary France (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 162.
activity of risk taking. What I mean by this is that Calle’s risk is not the action of risk, like the act of ‘take care of yourself’, take a chance, get out of bed, chance your arm and hell to others. Calle’s risk is in the approach towards the other person without relying on a return back to oneself; or is an approach that is towards the other person without reliance on a maintained knowing. The risk of making oneself open towards a Levinasian ethics is the risk of leaving oneself open to that which wounds; not being ‘sheltered’ by the ‘giving out of signs’.

An ‘Ethical Condition’

In concluding her essay Blazwick’s writes that:

Calle adopts multiple identities as author, performer and character. She invents or invites games and rituals to pass the time and initiate social exchange that in turn beguile and entrance her audience. Behind the artifice of the mask and the arbitrary structure of an instruction, lies the messy emotional truth of loss, disappointment, or frustrated expectation. The catalyst and consequence of many of her investigations is failure. Yet her unswerving application to following the rules of her own protocols and the remarkable responses that she elicits from her protagonist, suggest what should be a necessary, ethical condition of social life.  

The ‘games’, the proposals, ‘initiate social exchange’, and the way this is achieved is through the offering of risk in vulnerability. From an ‘unswerving application’ (Calle does not baulk) there is the ‘remarkable response’. The offer of vulnerability is also an act of Levinas’ ‘reduction’. Behind representation—‘behind the artifice of the mask’, behind the proposal, or behind the ‘structure of an instruction’—lies the mess of life, lies the social exchange, ‘lies the messy emotional truth of loss. . . ’ The ‘structure of an instruction’ does not smother over the mess of life; it does not assemble the meaning in pieces. Rather within the ‘structure’ is a crack; a crack formed by the ‘giving of vulnerability’. Through the ‘giving of vulnerability’ ‘the saying’ chips back the thematised. Blazwick’s ‘new kind of figuration’ is

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64 Blazwick, 15.
not ‘the saying’ overflowing , or a nonsense, or a beauty in abstraction, nor is it the fusion of active/passive, or the calculable signs arranged for meaning, but is rather an approach that allows a crack to form in the framed representation; an ‘ethical condition’ where ‘the remarkable responses’ are held within ‘her unswerving application to following the rules of her own protocols’. A crack has formed in ‘the figure in the picture’ because of vulnerability offered, and this crack, in turn, gives a glimpse of the mess of life.

In both a ‘new kind of figuration’, and also in Calle’s own style of the personal within the factual, Calle’s approach is neither deaf to ‘the said’ nor deaf to ‘the saying’. Whilst the uncertainties of vulnerability are not absorbed into a clarity of meaning, assembled meaning is not completely discarded. Calle’s art is framed within the most rational of languages, and, through a giving of vulnerability, an otherness that resists being held down as a theme is able to circulate within this frame. Through collisions Calle is not looking for a way around the codes of representation, but rather within these codes a meaning in pieces is able to pass. In Calle’s art there is the ‘breathless’ task—the ‘fine risk’ of allowing for an ethics to interrupt— if only for a moment.

**Luc Sante and Sophie Calle’s ‘Principle’ of Uncertainty.**

In an essay published for an issue of Parkett that was, in part, dedicated to Calle’s work, Luc Sante also defines Calle’s practice within the terms of an ethical approach. In his essay ‘Sophie Calle’s Uncertainty Principle’ Sante names ‘Information’ as the rational language that frames Calle’s projects. For Sante, Calle’s work acts as a critical disruption of the assembling force of ‘information’ because, in Calle’s own hands, information retains the ‘principle’ of uncertainty.

Sante begins his essay by describing Calle’s approach as one that ‘manipulates’ information. Although Calle’s aesthetic is one that is photobased and structured on a relation between image and text, Sante wants to liken this ‘manipulation’ to being like that of a ‘sculptor’.

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65 ‘Like a sculptor of a past century, Sophie Calle in her art manipulates and reconfigures a commodity central to the economy of her time. This commodity does not happen to be bonze or marble, however, but information, the elusive stuff that circulates incessantly between consciences, document and cyberspace. It is a maddening imprecise and unquantifiable commodity, having between somewhere on the border between
What Sante means to emphasise here is that information is Calle’s medium, and within her hands, Calle is able to keep and maintain information as uncertain and ‘elusive’. For Sante this elusive uncertainty is at the core of information and yet this core is forgotten in a corporate economy that seeks out the reliability and the saleability of certainty by rationalising experience. Information held solely within the clarity of commodity is a dangerous delusion for Sante because it distances information from the messiness of being human.

In his essay Sante defines ‘information’ as the recording of data, the collecting of facts, the ongoing attempts to factually record events. This factual recording can become detached from the human experience and be purely the black and white rationality of information collected. This is information treated as holy and ‘infallible’, pinned down as specific fact or a solid thing: that within ‘information’ the randomness of experience is assembled into fact, into a piece of information; nothing is left unknown. Rather everything that needs to

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66 For Rosalind Krauss Calle’s medium is ‘the journalist’s report’. Krauss writes that ‘[M]any of Calle’s works are a search for affect, for emotion, as represented by the “Unhappiness” that is Exquisite Pain or by the excited exhibitionism of The Shadow. Having chosen the journalist’s report as her medium, her work expresses itself as paradox: her medium not only unable to support, but contrived as well to deaden, the feelings she is looking for. That these feelings are able to surface, as in The Shadow, despite the deadpan nature of her chosen support, endows her medium with the special resonance that propels it into visibility for the audience of her art’. Rosalind Krauss, "Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition," October 116, (2006): 62.


68 ‘But information nevertheless strives for certainty, or rather its purveyors do, wether quixotically or disingenuously. The police tipster, the industrial spy, the political clairvoyant, the highly place source—all are in the business of pretending infallibility. And their commerce, once a small-time traffic, is in the process of becoming ever more institutionalised, increasingly central to the global economy as it moves from nocturnal alleys to glass-walled offices. Tremendous financial decisions are made on the basis of lore—consumer profiles, focus-groups questionaries, extrapolations of trend curves—that are about as reliable as divinations of bird entrails. This metaphor is not idly chosen: the commerce of information is descended in part from that of the augurers who advised military leaders in antiquity. It has merely been dressed up with technological and soft science for the benefit of contemporary rationalists’. Sante, 78.

69 Ibid.
be known is held as knowledge within data collected. The rationalism of bureaucratic data collection is also painted by Sante as the foundational support for a corporate driven economy. Through a corporate power relying on the stability and accuracy of data, ‘information’ can become transformed into a state of reliable commodity. There is a link in Sante’s argument, though not made by Sante directly, between the rationalism of bureaucratic data collection and information that supports a corporate driven economy, with a more general and more complex sense of meaning being assembled. For example one of Sante’s chief concerns is that a guiding rationalism all too easily filters through into our everyday human experience. By keeping information as uncertain—despite the very force of fact finding wanting to assemble meaning—Calle’s aesthetic, for Sante, acts as a critique of information as capital or, in a more general and a more complex sense, of ‘information’ as the setting down of certainties.

The criticality for Sante is in the way that Calle accommodates chance and uncertainty—the way Calle is able to keep uncertainty alive—within the very formula that is used to assemble uncertainty. Keeping uncertainty active within the aesthetic of the ‘dossier’, within the aesthetics of data collected, can undermine the way that corporate forces are driven to override every sense of being uncertain. Holding uncertainty with information is Sante’s ‘uncertainty principle’ or the principle of uncertainty given priority. The importance of Calle’s criticality is that she does not distance facts assembled from the undetermined and the unpredictable. Rather Calle is able to highlight the way that information, rather than

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70 ‘Uncertainty, in short, is the footprint of truth. It is the only aspect of any piece of information that can always be relied upon, and, of course, it is the aspect that diminishes information’s value as a commodity. It is nearly always inconvenient; it is unproductive and inefficient; it is often dangerous. And that is why it is so beautiful, as Calle repeatedly demonstrates in her work’. Sante, 78.

71 Following the above quote Sante writes that: ‘Calle’s work is to a certain degree a parody of this trade’. In his essay “The Paper Tigress” Yve-Alain Bois speaks of chance as Calles material, a material that she ‘cans’, when he writes that Calle does not flee ‘…the arbitrariness of the real. . . and replacing this real, this materiality, with an idealised and perfectly focused unreal, Calle transforms chance itself. . . into her best ally, her prize material, her cure. Sure, this chance that she cans is dealt with at a remove for it governs the life of others, never her’. Never hers? See Yve Alain Bois, “The Paper Tigress,” in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me?(Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 38.

72 Sante, 78.
being the reliable commodity, is based on the vulnerability of being human; or, more particularly for Sante, based on the principle of being uncertain.  

From Sante’s essay the interest for this thesis, as with Blazwick, is the question of how Calle’s work can have the aesthetics of accumulated data, can have the look of a ‘police investigation’ or a ‘dossier’, through the language of image/text, and yet keep information itself as uncertain, or maintain at its core the ‘uncertainty principle’. The answer found in Sante’s essay is in Calle’s approach; an approach that is both sincere and vulnerable. Let us first think of vulnerability—or what Sante calls ‘risk’—through the text and then consider sincerity. From defining vulnerability and sincerity in Calle’s approach we can then define an authorship of sincerity in vulnerability. In Sante’s essay he does not use the words vulnerability or sincerity. However in thinking of Calle’s approach as one that maintains the ‘uncertainty principle’ Sante needs to show how Calle retains information as uncertain within a ‘medium’ that absorbs and assembles uncertainty in search of order, clarity, reliability and saleability. For Sante this is achieved through a layer of personal risk, and also through a language that does not comment on personal adversity from a distance through symbols that designate meaning.

**Risk as Vulnerability**

Sante aligns Calle’s ability to work within the style and the confines of record keeping and then make use of this aesthetic as a critique of the forces of assembled meaning, with

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74 Information in assembled meaning wants to be certain and this is a delusion Sante wants to emphasise that despite the corporate power, despite the ‘spectacle’, despite bureaucratic ordering, information in itself is fundamentally uncertain. Uncertainty is at its core, and to think of information as a way of shoring up facts is a dangerous delusion that distances the fact from human experience whereby human experience can all too easily form into definitive fact—manipulating information so that it retains uncertainty, and that this approach can undermine bureaucratic recording, the ordering, assembling and rationalisation.

75 Sante writes: ‘. . . suggests the forensic process during a police investigation: she assembles clues, descriptions, guesses, allusions, and pieces them together into an approximate rendering takes the form of a dossier’. Sante, 77-78.

previous techniques or tactics employed by both Surrealism and Conceptualism. The links made here by Sante are mainly with Conceptualism; that Conceptualism employed the technique of ‘data accumulated for their own sake’. What this means is that the action of collecting information, within a more playful or less direct way, can shift the emphasis on purposefulness. Sante notes how, for both Conceptualism and Surrealism, this technique of employing bureaucratic accounting, held both a fascination and also a concern about the overriding powers of rationalisation. The way that Sante wants to differentiate Calle from both the Surrealists and from Conceptualism is through the idea of ‘risk’. For Sante what makes Calle’s work successful—the way Calle is able to manipulate ‘information’ retains uncertainty—is through an added ‘layer’ of risk. This risk can be thought of as vulnerability; that Calle exposes herself to personal risk, an exposure that is a risk both physically and emotionally. This argument by Sante is not dismissive of riskiness undertaken by former art movements that tried to undermine the forces of rationality through the very bureaucratic techniques of rationality. Rather the emphasis Sante wants to make is that in a very personal and intimate way Calle involves her own self into information and it is this involvement—this very expression—that keeps information tied to the body, and therefore bound to uncertainty.

Sante wants to highlight this knot of ‘information’ to personal flesh, personal loss, and personal pain as particular to Calle’s manipulation of ‘information’. Sante writes about Calle’s work The Sleepers that ‘[H]er first work, The Sleepers, resembles straightforward conceptual bookkeeping but with an added layer of sexual risk, at least by implication’. This layering of physical and emotional risk—a layering that folds into the aesthetic of ‘data accumulated’—has an importance in Calle’s approach which Sante expands slightly by defining Calle’s art as one that has ‘been assembled not in spite of but through adverse

77 ‘Calle is not the first artist to work this medium...The Surrealists probably were the pioneers, notably in their fascination with opinion polls’. Sante, 74.
78 The full quote reads: ‘data accumulated for their own sake, the relentless documentation of the most boring processes—these are traits associated with various phases of conceptual art, which pursued the sublime through several disciplines’. Sante, 74/ 76.
79 Sante writes that ‘[T]he Surrealist and conceptual approaches to the management of information as a medium in itself could be said to represent in their different ways the mingled fascination and horror inspired by the looming triumph of bureaucracy. The surrealist responded with bemusement and savagery, the conceptualist with Zen, which is not identical to complacency’. Sante, 76.
80 Ibid.
How I think we can interpret Sante here is that whilst there is the aesthetic of the correlation between image and text in Calle’s work, there is also a correlation in content; a correlation between ‘adverse conditions’ and the straightforward language of information transcribed (or book-keeping). The two coexist; both are dependent on each other. Calle’s work does not form against ‘adverse conditions’, or does not form as a commentary on personal adversity from a distance. Rather Calle’s works are ‘assembled’; the correlation between image and text is composed; the correlation between personal risk and facts gathered is made ‘through (my emphasis) adverse conditions’. It is the ‘through’ which is important here.

The style of book-keeping, or the aesthetics of a dossier report, is not a comment on physical and emotional risk. Rather the layer of risk forms within the representation; the rational and emotional are not separate. The layer of risk is there in the information, and the information is there in the layer of risk; both are entwined like a knot. This means that information does not record an event, distancing itself from the event; it does not comment on adversity as if it happened over there. Rather the rational holds to the uncertainty of vulnerability; the cold aesthetic of facts gathered is there within the flesh, within the doubt. The effect of this is that representation formed as information retains a trace of corporeal vulnerabilities. This is the way Calle ‘manipulates’ information with her own hands like a sculptor; this is the way she expresses the ‘uncertainty principle’. Calle keeps uncertainty active within the very formula that wants to assemble uncertainty ‘through’ a layer of risk; risk as human vulnerability.

Sincerity as Vulnerability

As mentioned earlier Sante does not use the word vulnerability in his essay, but there is a link between ‘uncertainty’, adversity and ‘sexual risk’ made when Sante writes: ‘Uncertainty

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81 Here Sante is referring specifically to the early work titled Anatoli (1984) where the personal adversity was a ‘lack of common language’. Sante, 77. But Sante wants to think of this as a ‘common thread’ in Calle’s practice. That the way the art work as image/text is assembled, the actually way that the art work comes together, is through personal adversity and not distant from adversity. This may be a particular difference that Sante wants to make between a conceptual aesthetic of ‘data collected for its own sake’ and the manipulation of information that is made by Calle through personal risk.
is an inevitability when it comes to information; information is uncertain in the same way that humans are mortal’. This quote can be understood in two ways. The first is that Sante is linking information to being human, to the mess of life, and that it is dangerous to distance information as purely factual and separate from us. Rather information is part of us; there is always human desires and reasoning for accumulating information in particular ways. Another way of thinking about this quote is in terms of Calle’s aesthetic of image/text and how Calle keeps uncertainty alive by tying the factual within the vulnerability of being human; the vulnerability of being uncertain; the vulnerability of being exposed. It is vulnerability that gives Calle’s work its criticality. Through vulnerability her work speaks a different language to assembled meaning. It keeps a crack within the image/text correlation so that even the most rational language can hold a trace, a glimpse of a meaning in pieces.

The second way that Calle maintains information as uncertain is through sincerity. This is to understand sincerity as an expression where the referent is not employed as a specific signifier to the general signified, or that the artwork does not function chiefly as symbols to be decoded. This sincerity is expressed for Sante through a passivity: a passivity in a certain ‘plainness’, or simplicity, that allows room for uncertainty to rise and shimmer along the surface of the artwork. This sincerity is part of Calle’s approach.

In defining Calle’s approach as one that speaks through an image/text correlation Sante is thinking in terms of this sense of sincerity when he writes that ‘[T]he objects that stand in for epochal incident in the artist’s life . . . possess a weight of their own; the referent is almost beside the point’. What Sante means by this is that the objects in Calle’s images do not function as specific references; they are not direct metaphors designating meaning. In Calle’s correlation of image/text the referent, the object in the photograph, is there in the artwork designating meaning but ‘it is almost (my emphasis) beside the point’. This ‘almost’ is Calle’s approach. Calle is not trying to navigate around the framing of representation. The referent is there, but it is indirect; it suggests toward experience rather than being a direct referent of this experience. The referent, the signifier, is not the point, it is not the

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82 Sante, 78.
83 Ibid. Here Sante is referring to the work Calle’s work The Graves (1990), but I think Sante leaves this open for us to think more broadly in terms of Calles overall practices.
84 For Sante Calle’s approach of allowing her work to assemble through personal adversity means that her aesthetic of image and text does not function as a commentary on top of an experience. This is reinforced by
pointer, the role of the sign in Calle’s image/text correlation is not to point specifically and
directly towards a known signified. Rather the signifier is beside, or otherwise to, this sign
structure so that it points in a way that is indirect, it holds incompleteness— it points to a
meaning in pieces rather than to a meaning signified and assembled. By not being the direct
referent the object retains uncertainty. By not playing solely the role of “this means that,”
the object within the frame still retains a trace of experience; it has a ‘weight of its own’.
The sincerity of the indirect referent is not concerned with ignoring or trying to get away
from the failure of representation, a failure because there is a gap between referent and
experience, that this gap makes representation lesser or that the framing of image and text
is always one step removed from the actual experience. Rather, for Sante, the correlation
of image/text in Calle’s work speaks of ‘gaps’, or allows for ‘the poetry of gaps and lapse’ to
rise as moments of uncertainty; moments that rise if only for an instant.

As well as allowing for uncertainty, allowing for the gaps to break through, Calle’s language
of photo/text is a correlation that is within its own gap; it is one that remains within a
between space, an unnamed zone. Through its sincerity Calle’s language speaks from a
space which is neither the clear designation of meaning nor a complete unknown-ness given
over to chance, but rather involves the two. This way, this approach, is not representation
as an ambiguity—one that bounces back and forth between two binary positions—but is
rather an ‘enigma’ where designated meaning allows uncertainty to circulate within it. This
gap, or this opening, is one where Calle does not try and avoid a strict framing device. It is
rather an approach that holds a frame that also allows for a crack; a crack from which
emerges a glimpse of that which cannot be held within representation. To allow for the
crack is Calle’s approach.

the way that Calle’s representations do not work as direct reference to an experience but rather alluded to, or
suggest, the experience. Here Sante describes how early works like The Blind (1986) and The Bronx (1980) ‘... employs hearsay in pursuit of the ineffable, in effect constructing a work of art that is only alluded to and not represented by the objects on the gallery wall’. Sante, 77.

85 ‘If one were to hear or read a description of Calle’s work and try to reconstruct it on that basis without
actually seeing it, it is possible that one might imagine its theme to be the poverty of language or of image, the
insufficiency of second-hand experience’. Sante, 78.

86 Instead of Calle’s correlation being about ‘the poverty of language or of image’, Calle’s work rather
continually stresses the beauty of imprecision, the poetry of gaps and lapses’ and this ‘beauty of imprecision’
Sante aligns with Impressionism. Ibid.

87 Christine Macel thinks of Calle’s authorship, or the way that she maintains her authorship, very differently to
the approach. In the opening essay for the catalogue of Calle’s retrospective at the Pompidou in 2004 Macel
wants to distance Calle’s authorship from Derrida and Barthes, particular from Barthes essay “The Death of the
An important way that sincerity functions in Calle’s work is through passivity. Sincerity accommodates a crack through passivity; a passivity of holding back, of withdrawing without completely withdrawing; a passivity where the image/text correlation has a certain ‘plainness’ to it; a sincerity through a simplicity that Sante defines as an authorship where ‘. . .enough air is admitted in the form of indeterminacy to prevent any agent including Calle from having full control of the drift’. 88 Calle’s passivity is this ‘indeterminacy’: an indeterminacy that can be an action, a withdrawing; that allows space for ‘drift’; that allows space for uncertainty. Note how in this quote the ‘indeterminacy’ prevents any agency, not only the complete agency of Calle the author. This suggests that this is a passivity that is separate to assembled meaning, or speaks a different language which interrupts assembled meaning. Note also how the act of passivity does not prevent control but rather ‘full (my emphasis) control’. This indicates that Sante is also aware that Calle is not trying to navigate around control but rather work within it; that ‘out of control’ circulates within ‘control’; that Calle’s art works as an approach.

When defining the referent in Calle’s work as ‘almost beside the point’, Sante is referring specifically to Calle’s work The Graves (1990). 89 However Sante does leave room for this analysis to be applied more broadly within Calle’s overall practice. One example of this referent that is ‘almost beside the point’, is a moment in Double Blind when Calle tells us the viewer that she has received bad news of the death of a ‘lover’ who died in a bull fighting

Author.” For Macel those that follow the idea of the ‘death of the author’ reduces Calle’s autobiographical style to an art that is self-centred and ‘egomanic’— who suffer from ‘me-me-ness’. For Macel the idea of the ‘death of the author’ removes the human from the art work and therefore Calle’s autobiographical approach becomes for Macel a welcome return back to the authorship. However Barthes in his essay does not mean the death of the author, rather Barthes is calling for the death of a particular type of authorship. If we can argue that Calle is in the approach, then could we not also argue that Calle speaks the different type of authorship that Barthes is looking for? In other words— like Derrida and Levinas— in trying to retain a trace of ‘the saying’ in the structure of ‘the said’, Calle’s approach is acting out a Barthes ‘multiplicity of writing’. To see Macel’s argument that this is not what Calle is doing, that Calle’s authorship is against a post structuralism, rather than, as I am trying to argue, that Calle’s approach is post structural see Christine Macel, “The Author Issue in the Work of Sophie Call. Unfinished,” in Sophie Calle: Did You See Me? (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2003), 17-18. And for Barthes ‘multiplicity of writing’ that ‘refuses to fix meaning’ see Roland Barthes, “Death of the Author,” in Image, Music, Text (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 147.

88 The rest of the quote continues: ‘Uncertainty, in short, is the footprint of truth. It is the only aspect of any piece of information that can always be relied upon, and, of course, it is the aspect that diminishes information’s value as a commodity. It is nearly always inconvenient; it is unproductive and inefficient; it is often dangerous. And that is why it is so beautiful, as Calle repeatedly demonstrates in her work’. Sante, 78.
89 For The Graves see Sophie Calle: ‘Did you See Me’ (Munich: Prestel, 2004), 245.
Calle relays this ‘information’ to us is through the still shot of a sparse, clean, domestic interior where our attention is drawn to the telephone placed very specifically on the floor in the centre of the room. Accompanying this image is Calle’s voice. As the voice-over to the image Calle tells us the ‘information’ we need to know; she tells us the information that defines the image. Through the voice-over, Calle shares with us the viewer, the viewer as her confidante, that she is in pain and mourning because she has just heard the news of a lover’s death. Here, at this moment in the film, the telephone acts immediately as a direct reference—the bad news was delivered via the telephone, the emptiness and the ‘plainness’ of the room signifies the loneliness and loss of the loved one’s death so far away. However Calle’s approach, her use of both image and text, enables the referent to hold more than what it tells us directly. The referent is able to hold a trace of the loss that cannot be named: it is able to be ‘information’ and yet be also what ‘information’ usually absorbs, if only for a moment. The key to this is the sincerity of being incomplete; by a holding back that allows uncertainty to pass.

Through the composition of text/image, the referent of the telephone is information and yet is also more than ‘information’. The main interest of this thesis is to show how Calle’s approach holds both. In no way does Calle try and leave the signifier that refers to a something, the phone has the literalness of ‘information’ as fact, and yet Calle carries with this direct signifier a trace of vulnerability that is expressed in exposure to a friend’s death. This vulnerability is not commented on. Rather through sincerity and passivity, space is allowed for vulnerability and uncertainty—the phone has its ‘own weight’. The simplicity, the ‘plainness’ of the image, allows the expression of vulnerability to remain as an expression of vulnerability. The pain of loss is not absorbed by information; rather information remains uncertain through the pain of loss. This may seem like a fine balance, but with Calle it is specifically the sincerity, the sincerity of an abstract detail, a passivity that allows for the trace of uncertainty to remain. This uncertainty remains despite information given as if functioning as the factual record of what really took place. The ability of the

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90 Like a double bind there is always the truth or lie, but this is also a double as a knot, a correlation.
91 This is different to saying that within representation something is implied. Nothing here is implied, rather we are told everything through information directly and yet this straightforwardness has a plainness, it holds a incompleteness through plainness. The plainness, through vulnerability, allows room for that which does not fit in to directness.
image to hold more than the specific, direct, reference means that the picture of the phone in the sparse room is not a transparent referent— not primarily the ‘giving out of signs’, or clearly stated metaphor—rather it holds with it the pain of loss; a loss that cannot dramatized.

To ‘allow air’, to allow ‘drift’, is Calle’s approach where a crack, or bits of ‘imprecision’, are accommodated within the very language usually used to cover over cracks. This approach where ‘the referent is almost beside the point’, means that uncertainty is not referred to or commented on from a distance; rather uncertainty for Sante ‘dapples’ the surface of the pictures. For Sante, Calle is the sculptor that manipulates ‘information’ through her own personal adversity. A manipulation through both vulnerability and sincerity allows for uncertainty to flicker in and out of her work in a way that is both controlled and uncontrolled.

**Sophie Calle as ‘Parannoying’.**

In the reception of Calle’s work there is also an opposition to what I have defined as an ethical approach. This opposition defines Calle’s work as being self-centred and self-enclosed; that we only really experience her artworks through her own perspective; that her work brackets out the voices of others, only to be parading to its audience an annoying paranoia, or performing a ‘parannoying’. The next part of this chapter will consider this opposition through a review of *Double Blind* by Robert Beck. Whilst Beck’s art criticism does not name Sophie Calle as being self-absorbed, it does define *Double Blind* as a ‘giving out of

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92 As well as the sculptor Sante names Calle as the impressionist painter. For Sante the ‘beauty of imprecision, the poetry of gaps and lapses’ makes Calle for Sante a ‘kind of impressionist’ in the sense that Calle is able to allow for uncertainty. Uncertainty shimmies if only for a moment: ‘She is, in other words, a kind of impressionist. Uncertainty dapples her pictures the way the sun’s rays spatter the leaves and splash the grassy swards . . .But that’s not all there is to it’. Sante, 78.

93 ‘Parannoying’ Storr tells us is a word he overheard that was used to describe Calle’s work. Storr uses the term to express how Calle’s art can be intrusive to other people’s privacy and how this intrusiveness can be annoying. At the beginning of this essay Storr is questioning Calle’s presents in these project, that Calle in the art work is a mere character, but later in the essay where Storr suggests that this ‘parannoying’ is ‘by design’, and what Storr sees as a mask, a character, means that Calle is able to ‘ . . . proceed without respect for boundaries, not only of quotidian discourse but all aesthetic discourses that pretend to be matter-of-fact, or claim to supply us with slices of life, a sense of reality caught on the fly’ —that Calle’s tactics undermines the ‘claim to supply us with a slice of life’. Or as Calle would say: “Its art”. See Robert Storr, “The Woman who Wasn’t There,” in Sophie Calle: The Reader (2003; repr 2003., London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2009), 106.
signs’, and in doing so misses a disruptive Levinasian ethics by centring *Double Blind* around individual agency.

Beck, in his 1993 essay “Paranoia by the Dashboard light: Sophie Calle and Gregory Shephard’s” *Double Blind*, 94 interprets *Double Bind* as an active critique of ‘normalised’ heterosexual gender difference, or as an artwork that attempts to destabilise the cultural and societal codes that normalise specific roles for gender. Beck’s interpretation that *Double Blind* centres around gender difference and focusses specifically on a critique of gender roles means that his reading of *Double Blind* diametrically opposes my own attempts to place *Double Blind* within a Levinasian ethics. For Beck, *Double Blind* is first a ‘giving out of signs’ rather than being first a giving of vulnerability.

Beck’s main focus is to interpret *Double Blind* as a narrative between two opposing stories; that *Double Blind* is an artwork that holds within it two different perspectives. These stories are wrapped up to form the one artwork. This bind that for Beck means that the title *Double Blind* can be read as a ‘Double Bind’, 95 is one that he interprets as being formed through competing interests, that the bind between Calle’s story and Shephard’s story is a bind of two different authors competing against each other.96 By interpreting *Double Blind* as a tension formed by competing interests, Beck misses a Levinasian ethics where this tension is the otherness of a relation. Beck does not think of *Double Blind*’ ‘Double Bind’ as the portrait of a relation; a relation in all its mess, in all its restlessness and its tensions. He does not think that *Double Blind* is an approach where a specific relation can be retained as a restlessness that circulates within the confines of the narrative. Rather, Beck focusses his analysis on individual interests. For Beck, the restlessness, the tension, of *Double Blind* is a clash between two individuals competing for the legitimisation of their own desires, their own fantasies, their own narratives.97 By focussing his analysis on individual interests, by defining the narrative of *Double Blind* as structured around a tension between his narrative

94 Which featured in the Parkett edition that was devoted in part to Calle’s work.
96 ‘Double Blind is the story of two artists... who drive cross country at cross purposes—her aim is to marry him, his aim is to make a movie. Armed with small-format video camcorders, the two take aim at each other’. Ibid.
97 Beck shapes the competing narratives through both having different desires and fantasy’s. Beck write: ‘Both want to enunciate a narrative of a fantasy that persists, an image of themselves as desirable to the other—hers of womanliness in wedlock, his of manliness in moviemaking’. Ibid.
verses her narrative, Beck interprets *Double Blind* as a critique that attempts to ‘destabilise’ a male/female dichotomy. However by understanding *Double Blind* as a specific critique on societal customs and norms that define gender roles, or as a specific critique on ‘just how compulsory heterosexuality is’, Beck is forced to focus his attention on Calle. It is Calle who plays the active role in the artworks critique, and in doing so Beck misses a mutual vulnerability; a vulnerability given by both Calle and Shephard.

There are two ways Beck understands *Double Blind* as a critique of normative gender roles. One is through Calle’s active participation—that Calle’s voice as author destabilises the male gaze of mainstream cinema. The second critique is the way *Double Blind’s* narrative heads toward the union of marriage only so it can be critical of such a union from within. This for Beck is *Double Blind’s* dishonesty; a dishonesty as a critique. Beck cannot see the marriage of Calle and Shephard as a sincerity. Rather marriage is put into play by the narrative as a critique of social constructs.

In Beck’s interpretation, one of the chief roles of the structure and the narrative of *Double Blind* is to ‘destabilise’ a male/female binary that is portrayed and ‘maintained in mainstream cinematic narrative’. The penultimate scene that best represents this, or the moment when this destabilising actually occurs, is the scene where Shephard and Calle are involved in an argument about trust and privacy. The scene shows the two, sheltered from the rain and cold, seated in their car, she in the passenger seat, he in the driver’s seat. In this scene, which bounces back and forth between her inquiry and his response, both point their camcorders at each other and we, the audience, are caught between them: caught

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98 ‘The difference between his story and hers is the story the tape has to tell, which places Double Blind in a somewhat of a narrative double bind. Struggling to negotiate the sexual difference of these two very uneasy riders—who do not drive so much as they are driven in flights towards opposing fantasies—Double Blind dramatizes just how compulsory heterosexuality is’. What Beck means by ‘dramatizes just how compulsory heterosexuality is’ is that *Double Blind* is a critique of social norms that formulate the doxa where the codes of defining a male role and a female role are set as truths. *Double Blind* is a narrative that is critical of heterosexual normality, that *Double Blind* is a critic of heterosexual codes. Also this sense of *Double Blind* being driven by personal desire and fantasy is very different to my reading of *Double Blind* as stumbling and tripping along through the time of death, the time of waiting and very personal vulnerabilities. What Beck means here is that the journey represents her fantasies of a ‘womanliness in wedlock, his of manliness in moviemaking’. Beck, 109.

99 For Beck *Double Blind* is a ‘gender-bender’ simple because Calle has her own voice. That she too is part of the ‘protracted conflict between the protagonists’ and therefor ‘a women’s place is clearly no longer in the home’. For this reason, for Beck, *Double Blind* is a ‘gender-bender’. Ibid., 111.

100 Beck writes: ‘With each author participating in the production of the video—both as subject behind the camcorder and as object before it—the male/female binary, at least as it is maintained in mainstream cinematic narrative, is destabilised here’. Ibid., 110.
within an argument and faced with either an image of Shephard pointing his camera directly at us/and Calle, or Calle pointing her camera directly at us/and Shephard. The destabilising of the mainstream narrative binary of male/female occurs here for Beck simply because of Calle’s involvement. The binary of ‘mainstream cinematic narrative’ is held together— is maintained—by a male voice, a males perspective, a male’s dominance that portrays women as objects of his own male desires and fantasies. This male gaze is broken in *Double Blind* because Calle points her camera back at Shephard. The ‘normative gender’ roles, or the male gaze, is broken down in *Double Blind* because Greg (the male author) points his camera at Sophie (the female author) only to find her camera pointed back at him. This is particularly true in the camcorder stand-off scene because both are at the same time under the camera’s gaze and simultaneously constructing the camera’s gaze. Both Calle and Shephard are locked into a looking that is at the same time being ‘looked at’. Beck also expands the cinematic binary being broken down here from the male/female binary to include the active/passive binary.

A video still from *Double Blind* has been removed for the ‘open access’ version.

101 Beck describes this scene best ‘. . . in a scene in which the two confront one another, camcorder to camcorder, like a pair of Cyclops spawned by SONY. Simultaneously recorded and recording they each strangely mirror the other in their shot/reverse-shot battle’. Here sexual difference does not really fold into one—the masculine’. Beck, 110.

102 Beck writes that: ‘His gaze does not hit the side of her face but the lens of her camcorder, which she trains on him in objection to her objectification’. Beck, 110.

103 ‘And because both look and are looked at, male/female does not conveniently correspond to active/passive’. And Beck expands this through a Lacan reference. Ibid.
From arguing that this scene literally breaks down male/female, active/passive dichotomies, simply through Calle’s involvement as the female voice, Beck then argues that *Double Blind* actively goes about ‘reinforcing’ the binary between male/female along with ‘other dualism’—that the male/female binary is something that the artwork actively maintains.

What divides the narrative so strongly for Beck is the way that *Double Blind* is structured through a ‘split’ between his camera and her camera; a split between their own conflicting private accounts; their own diary entries. Rather than thinking of Calle and Shephard’s use of the camera as a private diary for the expressions of vulnerability and sincerity, Beck interprets the way the artwork allows space for private accounts to be an expression of paranoia— that the structure of his thoughts to his camera, and her thoughts to her camera is a tug-of-war between each other’s own paranoia whereby both Calle and Shephard compete against each other over whose account of the event is legitimate; over who is more overtaken with their paranoia; over whose private accounts to camera is a more accurate understanding of their relationship. The critique here for Beck is that these ongoing divisions and tensions is the way we perform our gender, that Calle and Shephard are only really driven by their own private fantasies and desires and the unity of marriage is superficial and illusionary.

For Beck it is the marriage scene, the couple’s wedding in a Las Vegas drive-in chapel, that dissolves the ‘dualisms’ that *Double Blind* sets up. Beck writes:

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104 Beck writes: ‘As the cherished dichotomy of male/female teeters, the artist scramble to secure it, reinforcing other dualism throughout the tape’. Is this my point of difference with Beck? Because for me the whole video is an *approach* through vulnerability, exposure and sincerity. It is here that Beck also thinks that the voice to camera, the camera as diary entries, are not vulnerable intimacies but rather internal paranoia’s being given air. Beck., 110

105 ‘As perhaps the most drastic division of narrative cohesion, the seamlessness of the soundtrack is split between his thought and hers, whispered in betrayal of their exchanged words and actions.’ This for Beck is the narratives ‘. . . gendered bifurcation’. Ibid., 111.

106 Early in the essay Beck writes about the tensions of *Double Blind* as being expressed in the private accounts, and that this division between his thoughts and her thoughts is the driving binary of the narrative, Beck writes: ‘Symptomatic of this near breakdown, and enhanced by tee shot/reverse-shot system, is the latent paranoia the couple experiences at points along the way’. Ibid., 110. And then later Beck writes: ‘Reading from diaries logged daily throughout the trip, or spoken spontaneously in often mean spirited retorts, their conflicting voice-over commentaries ultimately contest the verisimilitude of their life together through a viewfinder. Each fights for his or her story as fact, the other’s as fiction’. Ibid., 111.

107 One of Becks readings of *Double Blind* is that the artwork performs gender in a Judith Butler sense. Beck writes that: ‘Repeating the narrative means repeating the role— once more with feeling. . . “being” is the affect of “doing” gender, an encore performance in the compulsion to repeat’. Ibid., 112.
Inverting the codes of the traditional road movie, the artists’ flight is not an escape from suffocating social order but one moving toward it via marriage. What Beck means by this is that *Double Blind* inverts the codes of the ‘traditional road movie’ not only by allowing the female author the action of speaking for herself, to point the gaze back at the male author, but it also inverts the codes of normative behaviour from within these very codes – it heads towards marriage only to then expose ‘... normative gender as the ruse that it is’. As with the argument scene where the camcorders face off against each other, marriage equates to the artwork’s binaries fusing together in a formal sense: ‘the convertible roof down, camera fixed at a distance, and ... thought becomes action with the words, “I do”’. But also, and perhaps most importantly for Beck, the binaries ‘all but disappear’ in the scene of wedlock because both have reached a ‘desired destination’—both have reached their own personal desires. For Shephard, who embarked on making *Double Blind* with Calle because he wanted to make a movie, the standard cinematic narrative of the two in wedlock in an American style road wedding means that he now has the narrative drama of a film, and in the wedding narrative she has reached her desired marriage, even if both the film and the wedding is not their perfect ideal. The critique through marriage comes for Beck in the way that the couple’s break-up follows so quickly after the roadside wedding.

Soon after having reached the destination of the wedding scene, the narrative soon shifts to explain why the relationship broke down. For Beck this shift—or this marriage as momentary—is deliberately represented, or set up, as a specific critique of marriage itself as the primary model for gender roles. Beck’s main evidence for this critique is a comment

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108 Beck, 111.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 ‘With the ring she is... This is the “primal scene” of *Double Blind* the couple’s desired destination’. Ibid.
112 ‘With unhappiness following the couple’s happily-ever-after so closely, the tape exposes normative gender as the ruse that it is—promised by the ritual of marriage yet never inhabitable as husband and wife’ (This becomes a Judith Butler performance of gender that needs to be repeated). Beck, 111.
113 This essay feels dated in the way marriage is coded for heterosexual social conduct, but in a more important way Beck seems to set up his own binary when constructing a critique of binaries that marriage equates to ‘the compulsory heterosexuality’, whilst to be outside of marriage equates to a critique of social codes. Is marriage really so one dimensional? Beck writes that: ‘Inverting the codes of the traditional road movie, the artists’ flight is not an escape from suffocating social order but one moving toward it via marriage.’ Here Beck seems to be reinforcing his own binaries that marriage equals suffocating social orders, and non marriage, we can
made by Shephard to Calle shortly after the wedding scene. While driving Shephard gives voice to a thought: “Just the fact that we were married...made me want to take you. And not for one second did I want to ask, or need to ask, or feel I should ask. I just felt I wanted to take you. I’m getting an erection just thinking about it.” And Calle’s response, a response to the audience not to Shephard, a response edited into the artwork is: “That’s the first thing marriage has given me.” For Beck this is a critique of the misogyny and masochism that can become ‘sanctioned’, and banally every day, under the ‘institution of marriage’. Whilst this is true, that Calle’s responses can be read as a critique of marriage, that marriage has given her the desire so previously lacking from Shephard but is now, through marriage, a desire expressed through a violent misogyny. However cannot Shephard’s blunt, clumsily expressed, honesty be thought of as a vulnerability? For example the tension of Double Blind has, up until the point of marriage, been based on Shephard’s depression and his lack of desire for Calle, that now, through the institution of marriage, Shephard feels wanted; he now knows that Calle wants him.

The way Beck understands Shephard as pure misogyny, without a consideration of his vulnerability, highlights the way Beck’s analysis of Double Blind is focussed on Calle and not Shephard— that it is Calle, in this combined authorship, who is actively undertaking a critique of ‘normative gender’ codes; it is Calle’s critique of marriage, of misogyny; it is her voice that critiques domesticity; it is her actions that leave the audience ‘stranded without the classical cinematic compass of male/female’. Another example of the way that Beck does not see Shephard as vulnerable is when, in Beck’s conclusion, he understands Shephard’s final words in the film—the final words where Shephard declares to us that his goal in making Double Blind was ‘To try and tell an honest story’— not as the ‘expression of exposure’, a

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114 ‘And, with sexual difference portrayed as a protracted conflict between the protagonists, a women’s place is clearly no longer in the home. If a genre has a gender, then as a melodramatic road movie, Double Blind is a gender-bender.’ Beck, 110.

115 Beck does not agree that his focus is on Calle as chief critic. Beck states that he understands both Shephard and Calle as ‘Poking holes in the romantic narrative at the level of cinematic enunciation’ that both ‘the artists denaturalise gender uniformity, which they respond to reciprocally at the level of fantasy. Standard without the classic cinematic narrative compass of male/female, the spectator’s identification must be redirected along the routes of active/passive’. Ibid., 112.
sincerity or a vulnerability, but rather an expression of ‘ambiguity’; that this final word is not Shephard’s own vulnerability but rather a signifier to the narrative’s ‘dishonesty’. Beck understands Double Blind’s dishonesty as the artwork’s ‘dramatic failure to fortify identity on the foundation of heterosexual norms’. In other words, it is a dishonesty that is part of Double Blind’s critique of heterosexual norms; that Double Blind heads towards marriage only to be critical of it. Shephard’s final words of wanting to be honest are interpreted by Beck, not as an expression of sincerity, but as part of the artwork’s ‘giving out of signs’; part of the artwork’s critique.

The reason why Beck understands Double Blind as a critique of ‘normative gender’ codes—the reason why he interprets Double Blind as the ‘giving out of signs’ to be decoded—is because he reads Double Blind through the lens of individual desires: he focusses his analysis on the individual; that the drama of Double Blind is based on a tug-of-war between individual interests. This focus becomes centred on the role of the individual ego rather than the ‘ethics’ of a relation that interrupts the maintenance of such an ego. What this means is that Beck interprets the way Calle and Shephard share their private thoughts to the camera as undertaking a specific action of searching for meaning; they are both following a desire they want to fulfil. This leads Beck to read the artwork as undertaking a specific search for meaning; a search that can be decoded, that can be assembled as a critique of ‘normative gender’ codes.

Although I disagree with Beck that the underlying tension of this film is centred on gender, although I do not agree with Beck’s focus on gender difference as the dramatic tension within Double Blind, my main objection to Beck’s analysis is his own search for a specific meaning; a search that can become Beck’s own assembling of meaning. For Beck there is a narrative structure to be decoded in Double Blind, and by means of this decoding, we the audience can then read, along with Beck, a clear narrative that is critical towards

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116 Beck, 112.
117 This dishonesty for Beck is due to way Beck feels that the narrative of Double Blind heads toward marriage only to be critical of it.
118 In referring to Calle and Shephard’s individual psyches that are continuously at odds Beck writes: ‘Both want to enunciate a narrative of fantasy that persists, an image of themselves as desirable to the other—hers of womanliness in wedlock, his of manliness in moviemaking. As the organising principle of the tape, the shot/reverse-shot metaphorically exemplifies the couple’s opposing desires, representing the struggle for narrative that endlessly wages between them’. Beck, 109
heterosexual normative relations, or critical of the borders and barriers that encompass and define heterosexual relations.\textsuperscript{119} My argument and my position against Beck is that whilst a narrative structure exists in \textit{Double Blind} its main purpose, and this is a difficult and risky purpose that leaves both authors ‘well out of breath’, is to portray a relation. In this sense I am arguing against Beck by interpreting \textit{Double Blind} as not a commentary on relationships, on intersubjectivity, nor a commentary on performing gender, but rather that the artwork itself is an expression of exposure, that \textit{Double Blind} is made in such a way that it holds, retains, accommodates and allows for, the mess, the unpredictable, the chance, the otherness, that can be part of our relations with each other. As an \textit{approach Double Blind} succeeds because it is an artwork that can hold the uncertainty of a relation, without diminishing, or suffocating, or assembling this uncertainty. In other words, \textit{Double Blind} is in itself an otherness that calls for a response.

The final chapter will consider art criticism as an \textit{approach}; a criticism as a response to art that can accommodate a Levinasian ethics. If Beck interprets \textit{Double Blind} as a specific critique on gender roles, could Beck not also have questioned his own position, or have his position put under question, by the uncertainty of vulnerability that \textit{Double Blind} offers? Or is my own interpretation of \textit{Double Blind} too focused on vulnerability and therefore missing the specific critique against assembled meaning? The next chapter will question how the response to the artwork can be in the \textit{approach}.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{119} ‘The title \textit{Double Blind} may suggest... in its metaphorical reference to a blindness experienced by both artists, that the passage through the original drama to the sexual difference of its denouement may not be so dissimilar for boy girl’. Beck, 112

\textsuperscript{120} Rather than questioning Levinas on how art criticism can act as the ‘apophansis’.
Chapter Three

Art Criticism as a Response.

To continue the hypothesis that a Levinasian ethics is of importance to contemporary art, this final chapter will attempt to define a way for art criticism to also speak in the *approach*. First this chapter will consider the contemporary debate that art criticism is in crisis. The ‘crisis of art criticism’ is thought of as a loss of criticality; that art criticism has lost its critical edge because it withdraws from playing the role of designating meaning through judgement and interpretation, becoming instead a weak relativism that is reluctant to take up a position. The terms of this debate will be framed around an essay by Hal Foster and a talk given by Tom Morton. After outlining their responses to the ‘crisis in criticism’ debate, this chapter will then offer a Levinasian *approach* for art criticism as one that makes its statement through judgement; declares its reading of an artwork, but at the same time retains a sense of uncertainty and vulnerability.

After making an attempt to define art criticism as being in the *approach*, this chapter will conclude by attempting to write such a criticism specifically by questioning an artwork on the grounds of its ‘ethics’. For example, if *Double Blind* is an art work that bears witness to the ‘ethics’ of ‘the saying’, then what would be an example of an artwork that does not do this? What would be an artwork that is too much within the ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’ to hear the voice of ‘the saying’? Could a criticism be critical of an artwork because it reduces ‘the saying’, or reduces the opportunity for ‘the saying’? In an attempt to answer this question this chapter will conclude by writing a critical response to a video artwork titled *How to Feel* (2011) by Australian artist David Rosetzky.
Hal Foster and the ‘Post Critical’

In recent years there has been a continuing debate that art criticism is in a form of crisis. The debate has intensified and receded in attention, only to re-intensify again. The sense of crisis can be thought of as a crisis of relevancy: that art criticism today primarily plays the role of placating to the authority and the role of art institutions and legitimatising the art market. It can also be thought of as a crisis of identity. If contemporary art criticism wants to distance itself from the role of handing down authoritative value judgements and designating meaning through interpretation then what becomes the role of the art critic. The link between the crisis of relevancy and the crisis of identity is a lack of criticality, or a loss of critical debate. This loss of debate is thought of as not just within art criticism but also within art more broadly. What this means is that galleries and art institutions favour values such as entertainment, beauty, wonder, participation and inclusivity ahead of critique. A lack of critical debate can mean that art criticism that no longer holds tightly to a critical position ends up supporting and affirming the position taken by the gallery, which in turn is necessarily determined by commercial interests. For art theorist Hal Foster a withdrawing from critical debate—a reluctance to take a critical position—is a weak relativism, a relativism that permeates through art as a ‘post critical’ condition.

In his essay Post-Critical, Hal Foster outlines three divisions in contemporary art criticism: divisions that are between ‘critical thinking’, a ‘conservative commentator’, and a ‘post-critical’ position. For Foster there is currently a stalemate in art criticism because of the way ‘critical thinking’ has become sidelined and replaced by a ‘post-critical position’. This post-critical position is one which lacks commitment to what Foster sees as a real critique, and this lack of commitment allows room for a conservatism to take the upper hand. Without ‘critical thinking’ Foster sees the problems that faces art criticism today as being in the way

1 Writing in the ‘afterword’ for a book that recorded a forum on art criticism titled Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism, held in Canada in 2010, James Elkins writes ‘In the last year there were at least five international conferences on art criticism. On the weekend the Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism I was at another conference on art criticism in Copenhagen. A few months before, in October 2008, there had been yet another conference on art criticism in Bogota, Colombia, and in summer of 2010 there was a large, four-day conference on the subject in Beijing. . .’ James Elkins, "Afterword," in Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism, ed. Jeff Khonsary and Melanie O’Brien (Vancouver: Artspeak and Fillip, 2010), 155.
2 Foster’s position here is that whilst the ‘post critical’ wants to distance itself from the heavy handiness of declaring meaning through value judgements, this reluctance to take a position means that it is no match for a conservatism that assembles meaning.
that both ends of an argument—that both the ‘conservative’ and the ‘post-critical’—have morphed together to become one. On one side of the divide conservatism wants to maintain criticism as a way of assembling meaning into universal truths by declaring value judgements, while the dominant opposition to this—the ‘post-critical’ position—only replies with general abstractions. For Foster both the ‘conservative’ and the ‘post-critical’ are guided by universal principles. Foster’s primary concern here is that the ‘post-critical’ only allows space for corporate sponsorship to fully take over and direct our largest national galleries and institutions. To understand better what this means—to understand what might be meant by declaring a crisis in art criticism—Foster defines the different terms, outlining why he feels there is a lack of ‘critical debate’ in the ‘post-critical’.

Initially Foster gives an art historical context for why the ‘post-critical position’ is one that turns away from critique, or would have doubts and concerns about the role of art criticism. The first reason given is the ‘rejection of “judgement”’. Foster defines judgement as ‘the moral right presumed in critical evaluation’. The second reason is ‘authority’—that the position of the critic to make judgements is ‘the political privilege that allows the critic to speak abstractly on behalf of others’. A post-critical position is one that distances itself from the declaration of authoritative judgements. The third reason given by Foster is ‘scepticism about distance’. This is a doubt about the critic’s ability to be able to speak about a topic when really they are quite removed in the critic’s armchair. These three positions all make truth claims, truths that are assumed to be universal. Lost in an arrogant forthrightness,

3 What this means is that a ‘post-critical’ in no way wants criticism to be the gate keeper to truth by revealing hidden meaning for a passive audience to receive, and yet without commitment to meaning becomes the very universality that it is critical of. That in a sense art theory has only itself to blame— that a conservatism is a shared target, and that the real divide in art criticism is between critical theory, or critical thinking, and post-critical.

4 When ‘sensibility’ ‘affect’ and entertainment become valued by the art institution a criticism falls by the wayside. In the past the critic did hold power in what was valued as art, but if the critic is sidelined then critique, in Fosters analysis, is needed more than ever. For Foster capitalism wants a settled order without disruption and it is affirmation, rather than critique, that suits the galleries corporate sponsors who enjoy the relativist manta that anything can be art especially keeping the audience entertained. In Claire Bishop’s book Artificial Hells her concern is that art that focuses on participation and an ethics of inclusivity losses the ethics of criticality—that as an art critic she cannot criticise if the sole role of the artwork is to be inclusive; either it succeeds in this inclusivity or it does not. Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London: Verso, 2012).


6 In Fosters words, the post-critical has scepticism ‘about the cultural separation from the very condition that the critic purports to examine’. Hal Foster, “Post-Critical,” October 139, no. Winter (2012): 4.
these critics never really question their authoritative position to make such truth claims.\(^7\)

The historical critic who makes clear, outright, authoritative judgements is what Foster means by ‘conservative commentators’.\(^8\) Whilst it is clear to see why the ‘post-critical’ position would want to be distanced from a more ‘conservative’ position of authoritative judgement, the distancing of the ‘post-critical’ from ‘critical theory’ or ‘critical thinking’ is a little more complex.

After giving a definition of a more historical critic, Foster shows briefly how the critical theory of art criticism today has its roots in a 1980s criticism that formed around deconstruction and identity politics. To do this Foster broadly frames this period of art criticism as ‘the critique of representation’ and ‘the critique of the subject’.\(^9\) For Foster these two forms of critique were misconstrued or ‘changed with unintended consequences’.

The ‘critique of representation’—in abandoning the truths that governed authoritative judgement—was accused of lacking any real commitment and, was instead, promoting a ‘moral indifference and political nihilism’.\(^10\) ‘The critique of the subject’ with ‘its demonstration of the constructed nature of identity’ became all too easily assembled into a consumerist multiculturalism.\(^11\) Within this short essay Foster is using general terminology to get across an historical context for the existence of the ‘post-critical’. What Foster is basically outlining is that during the Eighties and Nineties, those on the ‘right’ were clearly opposed to pluralism that bases experience on diversity and difference; but equally on the ‘left’ feeling had waned in support for postmodernism because it was felt that it had all too

\(^7\) Foster writes that ‘critique is driven by a will to power, and it is not reflexive about its own claims to truth’. For Foster this can be because of ‘a concern about the critic as “ideological patron” who displaces the very group or class that he represents’. Here Foster refers to Walter Benjamin’s the “Author as producer,” that the ‘critic as ideological patron’ can be the one who ‘displaces the very group or class that he represents’. Foster, 4.

\(^8\) The conservative critic is one that defines an underlying essence to experience being in binary terms, and this would understand conservatism as maintaining and seeking assembled meaning. Within Foster’s terminology, and also keeping in mind Levinas’ ‘saying’ and ‘said’ correlation, the opposite to this conservatism would be a ‘critical thinking’ that is in ‘critical debate’, a critique that speaks for pluralism, or accommodates a meaning in pieces, in a way that does not try and side step assembled meaning.


\(^10\) This can also be thought as the argument against postmodernism, that the loss of binary terms as truths means that we cannot really protest anymore. Ibid.

\(^11\) The way in which Foster words this is that multiculturalism becomes ‘repackaged as “The United Colors of Benetton.”’ Ibid.
easily been co-opted into an ‘expression of neoliberal capitalism’.\(^\text{12}\) Foster is not arguing whether these claims are true or not, but rather that it is from here that a ‘post-critical’ position is formulated: that the post-critical is not just a break from authoritative judgement but is equally a break from critical theory.\(^\text{13}\)

If the ‘post-critical’ is a form of art criticism that emerges following art discourses of the 1980s and 1990s, or if the ‘post-critical’ is a distancing itself from the concerns of critical theory in the 80s and 90s—with no desire to return to the historical critic that passes authoritative judgements—then ‘what’, asks Foster, ‘are the options on offer? Celebrating beauty? Affirming affect? Hoping for a redistribution of the sensible’? Trusting “in the general intellect”? What does the ‘post-critical’ offer in return? Foster defines the post-critical within these ‘options on offer’ and names it as a weak relativism rather than a commitment to diversity and difference. This is what Foster means when he writes that: ‘The post-critical condition is supposed to release us from our straightjackets (historical, theoretical, and political), yet for the most part it has abetted a relativism that has little to do with pluralism’.\(^\text{14}\)

From this quote we can understand Foster to be favouring a relativism that has everything ‘to do’ with pluralism; that a ‘critical debate’ can argue specifically for the diversity and difference of pluralism. The problem of the ‘post-critical’ for Foster is that it is more abstraction than critique: it is more the general and the formal than the specific and the conceptual.\(^\text{15}\) An abdicating of the critical response means for Foster that ‘criticism in art’ today has an ‘out-of-dateness’ to it, and the art world ‘couldn’t care less’. Neither the ‘conservative’ critic, nor the ‘post critical’ critic, ‘care’ about what Foster would see as real critique.

\(^{12}\) The example that Foster gives of how the left turns away from the postmodern because of the way it is linked to capitalism is that ‘as neoliberalism deregulated the economy, so postmodernism deregulated the culture’. Foster, 4.

\(^{13}\) This is also what Foster means when he begins his essay by saying that: ‘Critical theory took a serious beating during the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s, and the 2000s were only worse’. Foster, 3.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) With ‘beauty’, ‘affect’, and the ‘sensible’, Foster is arguing that the trend in ‘post-critical’ criticism that follows the philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Ranciere is only really a return to an abstract formalism that values an artwork based on sensibility and its affect, putting the specifics of ideas and content second to the a material of the thing in itself.
For Foster the problem of too little critique is a problem for both art criticism and the art works themselves. An art that lacks critique is what Foster means by ‘affect’. This art as ‘affect’ is more atmospheric than critical. For Foster art as ‘affect’ is an art that lacks criticality because it favours beauty, wonder and the corporeal sensation of experience ahead of ‘critical thinking’. Foster argues that ‘affect’ is too abstract and general: that an art in the post-critical position has no specific content or critique and therefore leaves no room for the critic to make critical judgements. Two artist’s Foster names as the art of ‘affirming affect’ are James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson. In the paragraph that discusses art as ‘affect’, Foster makes a complex argument around phenomenology and labels the affect as ‘fetishistic’.

What Foster means by fetish is that the material, or the atmosphere, of an artwork becomes treated ‘as a quasi-subject’. This means that in works by artists like Turrell or Eliasson the ‘affect’ has its own subjectivity. This becomes for Foster the ‘near-reverse’ of the ‘phenomenological experience’, or encounter, of the minimalist installation that puts the emphasis on the subject’s position in relation to the work. Now it is the ‘atmosphere’ or affect that does the perceiving on our behalf. The artwork that has as its key a focus on experience in sensibility is a fetishisation because it is bestowed with its own agency. Foster writes that now the ‘installation or the building, . . . seems to do the perceiving for us’. Foster’s main concern in defining ‘affect’ art as fetishistic is that the reception of such work can only really leave its audience in ‘appreciative amazement’.

This appreciation that is in amazement is also what Foster means by a contemporary ‘demand for affirmation’. Affirmation is the response without criticality. The art of ‘affect’ and sensibility gives affirmation, and the ‘post-critical’ affirms without critique. Affirmation just says ‘yes’ to everything. It celebrates the artwork as made; it merely writes of the artwork’s ‘uplifting experience’. Foster use of the word ‘affirmation’, and the growing ‘demand for affirmation’, makes a link between ‘affirmation’ as an affirming of life—an

16 That Turrell frames the sky for us.
17 In terms of the subject being put into question Foster seems to be favouring the minimal installation, however it is difficult to understand how ‘affect’ or the atmosphere of the installation could not also be the putting of the subject into question.
18 Foster, 7.
19 ‘Under George W. Bush, the demand for affirmation was all but total, and today there is little space for critique even in the universities and the museums’. Foster, 3.
enjoyment of life—with a conservative confirmation of something solid and already established. This means that the affirmation that is an ‘appreciative amassment’ is also tied in with the conservative consolidation of what is already established, or maintained as a knowing.

If the ‘post-critical’ is merely a weak relativism that withdraws from ‘critical thinking’, then what does Foster ‘offer’ as a possible critique? If not the sensible or affect, then what does Foster offer as ‘critical thinking’ against the ‘demands for affirmation’? After naming affect art as fetishistic Foster calls for an ‘antifetishistic’ critique, the art of James Turrell and Olafur Eliasson calls for an ‘antifetishistic’ response. For Foster this is a critical response against art as ‘affect’; against art that prioritises corporeal experience and anoints this experience ‘as a quasi-subject’. This ‘antifetishistic’ critique also replaces the broad and the general with a type of criticism that has real agency; one that does not offer its own ‘fetish’. Foster’s ‘antifetishistic’ critique is one that offers an agency that comes with making judgements.

As well as an agency that offers more than abstraction and more than mere ‘appreciative amazement’ and affirmation, we can understand more fully what Foster’s ‘antifetishistic’ critique means by looking closely at the introductory paragraph of his essay:

Critical theory took a serious beating during the culture wars of the 1980s and the 1990s, and the 2000s were only worse. Under George W. Bush the demand for affirmation was all but total, and today there is little space for critique even in the universities and the museums. Bullied by conservative commentators, most academics no longer stress the importance of critical thinking for an engaged citizenry, and most curators, dependent on corporate sponsors, no longer promote the critical debate once deemed essential to the public reception of advanced art. Indeed, the sheer out-of-date-ness of criticism in art world that couldn’t care less seems evident enough.  

From this introduction we can try and question if Foster’s ‘antifetishistic’ critique means the importance of an ‘engaged citizenry’. In terms of engagement Foster has chosen his words carefully because he would not want ‘engaged’ to mean that the audience was once passive and is now, thanks to the unveiling of meaning, is now actively engaged. Rather than

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20 Foster, 3.
passive, Foster is aligning engagement with ‘critical debate’. This means that an agency in critique need not mean telling an audience about ‘advanced art’ to aid in its ‘reception’; it would rather mean debate as engagement. In another part of this essay Foster outlines the fear that historical criticism as an ideology ascribes ‘scientific truth’ to art theory, but then questions: ‘such fears are not misbegotten, but are they reason enough to throw the baby out with the bathwater?’ In other words to argue for saving the audience from judgement, does that in itself not treat the audience as passive?

As ‘antifetishistic’ Hal Foster’s critique has an agency in judgement. But this agency is not one that declares meaning by acting as an authority, or a judgement that does not question its own position. Rather Foster’s ‘critical thinking’ is one within the community of ‘critical debate’; one that argues for the engagement in debate; a ‘critical thinking’ that means ‘engaged citizenry’. Specifically Foster’s agency in critical judgement is an argument for the diversity of pluralism, a pluralism that is within the field of ‘critical thinking’; a pluralism that means ‘critical debate’. This criticality would be an argument for diversity and difference; an argument that constantly needs to be reinvigorated and reignited when faced with the always rising ‘demands’ for the maintenance of assembled meaning.

The Artwork that Calls for a Response and a Response that Retains the Artwork’s Call.

A definition of art criticism as a Levinasian approach can be defined following Foster’s definition of a criticism that takes a position specifically for pluralism. Could art criticism as an approach be one that declares a critical response and that has agency in declaring its position, but equally retains the vulnerability and uncertainty of trying to make such a response to an artwork? Could the vulnerability and uncertainty of this response be understood as generated from being part of a community involved in ‘critical debate’? What this means is that art criticism as an approach does not avoid the agency of declaring a

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21 Foster, 4.
22 In relation to Foster’s criticism that argues for pluralism, or ‘the saying’ that needs to be retained, Jorg Heiser calls for the way that a ‘true heterogeneity needs to be distinguished from a faux heterogeneity’. See Jorg Heiser, “Torture and Remedy: The End of –isms and the Beginning Hegemony of the Impure,” e-flux journal, no. 11 (2009): 12.
critical position, but rather retains with its analysis the vulnerability and uncertainty of responding. In art criticism to speak through the approach would be to allow a crack to form in the analysis, a crack that can be formed through the uncertainty of vulnerability and hesitation; a crack that puts the analysis under question from the position of a Levinasian ethics; a questioning that comes from the artwork and from the reader. In art criticism the vulnerability of hesitation is in the uncertainty of waiting for the artwork to call.²³ As an approach art criticism can keep the artwork’s call active by retaining a sense of this initial vulnerability and hesitation within the criticism’s final response.

Tom Morton is one art critic who defines art criticism in terms of this vulnerability. In Morton’s contribution to a forum on the crisis of art criticism, a forum titled Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism held in Canada in 2010, he spoke of this vulnerability as a series of intimacies. For Morton, art criticism is based on a ‘set of intimacies’ that are ‘between the writer and the work, the writer and the art, the writer and the reader, and the writer and him or herself’.²⁴ This ‘between’ space of intimacy is within the act of responding.²⁵ To respond to the artwork means for Morton the intimacy of being uncertain; the intimacy of the critic’s own involvement with the artwork. Such intimacy means exposing oneself to a community that is in ‘critical debate’, and the intimacy of being exposed to failure. In Morton’s definition of art criticism, intimacy does not replace judgement: rather intimacy is what precedes judgement. This pre-judgement—this intimacy—is in the uncertainty of communication: it is an intimacy that falls in an undetermined between space; an intimacy that is of greater importance than the judgement that follows.²⁶ To retain this intimacy is of great importance for Morton; to hold this intimacy is a critique. A key aspect of this critique is not to diminish the subjective role, but rather to maintain the trace of the artwork’s intimacy, or retain the subjective within the objective analysis. As a Leavinasian approach this would mean that the uncertainty and intimacy in the initial encounter with an artwork can be retained within the critical response or critical analysis.

²³ The complexity of the artwork is the encounter that calls your name, that calls you into question, that calls you to respond.
²⁴ Morton writes: ‘Criticism is, it seems to me, an endeavour that turns on a set of intimacies: between the writer and the work, the writer and the art, the writer and the reader, and the writer and him or herself’. Tom Morton, "Three or Four Types of Intimacy," in Judgment and Contemporary Art Criticism, ed. Jeff Khonsary and Melanie O’Bien(Vancouver: Artspeak and Fillip, 2010), 33-34.
²⁵ For Morton ‘even established critics are always auditioning, stepping nervously onto the stage’. Ibid., 38-39.
²⁶ Morton writes: ‘What is important is not judgement . . . but the intimacies that precedes it’. Ibid., 33.
The intimacy of art criticism for Morton is the vulnerability of responding through one’s own commitment and involvement. For Morton there is ‘human frailty’ in all art criticism; a ‘frailty’ that gets forgotten when it is absorbed by privileging objectivity over the subjective. By shaping objectivity as a falsity Morton favours instead the mess of uncertainty, the messiness of personal involvement as the possible site for the subjective response as a ‘critical activity’. Morton writes:

To get down and dirty with art, to feel its grain and let it feel yours, is subjective sure, but it is also the most meaningful critical activity I can imagine. To refuse this is to refuse the fact that all of us cast a shadow and that it will sometimes fall across a work of art, not only obscuring it but also, and paradoxically, making it in a strange way whole. Only vampires, after all, posses no shadow, and a vampire is something a critic should never aspire to be.

The mess, ‘to get down and dirty’, is a shared intimacy where one’s own involvement in an artwork through the act of responding — an involvement that allows a shadow to ‘fall across a work of art’ — can make the artwork speak again, not on its own but rather now in the community of critical debate; ‘making it in a strange way whole’.

The intimacy and uncertainty of personal involvement also involves for Morton the risk of failure. Intimacy—or what I would call vulnerability—opens the possibility of failing to respond to the artwork’s call, of failing to retain the artwork’s calling, of assembling its meaning in pieces, a failure not of retaining the original ‘heat and intimacy of a first

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27 In terms of having one’s own voice Morton speaks of a distrust in argument against value judgement that says that the critic is in danger of merely speaking about themselves, that this not speaking about oneself suggests some mythical super critic. Morton writes: ‘. . .it’s hard to think how this might be avoided—we have nothing but our better or worse selves through which to process the world. There is, after all, no possibility of a super critic, producing super text or super writing. Discontented as some of us may be with human frailty, we cannot transform the shambling journalist Clark Kent into superman’. In terms of intimacy Morton seems to be favouring here the messy Kent ahead of the clean and always right super critic. Morton, 35.

28 Against the criticism that the art magazine that he writes for (frieze) is ‘belletrist’ and always in the affirmative Morton defines objectivity as fake unnatural response when he writes: ‘. . .the appearance of objectivity is, in the end, precisely and only that’. Ibid.

29 Morton in arguing against the idea of an ongoing crisis of criticism, also seems to favour Foster’s criticism that argues for pluralism when he writes: ‘If the critic is willing to ask where is freedom and adventure, and what does it mean to be awake, there remain messy, plural answers to be found’. Ibid., 36-37.

30 Ibid., 38.

31 Morton speaks of this vulnerability when he writes that: ‘. . .the most wakeful of them are always aware of the beautiful, maddening failure of their project, which is to say the failure of language in the face of anything but itself’. Morton, 40. And when Morgan writes: ‘As with all writing, what matters here is honesty, along with the hope that one might communicate against the odds’. Ibid., 40.
encounter’; of diminishing that intimacy through interpretation. To retain the intimacy of the ‘first encounter’ means to retain the chance of failure; to retain the question of failure; to retain a doubt and hesitation that always questions one’s own authority, or allows space for the call of the artwork to interrupt. To retain the intimacy and uncertainty that is prior to and more important than judgement—to retain this intimacy within the judgement itself—means to retain the intimacy of the artwork’s call. This also means retaining the uncertainty, the diversity, the complexity of a readership or a community in ‘critical debate’. To accommodate this complexity—rather than sucking the life out of an artwork by designating it with meaning—is, for Morton, a ‘critical authority’ as a ‘mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves’.

The intimacy of the between space for Morton is not just between artwork and critic, critic and reader, but is also between ‘the writer and him or herself’. This indicates a bind between the objective critique and the subjective voice: that ‘critical activity’ can be one

32 Morton, 42.
33 In his essay “Criticism v Critique”, an essay that responded to the debates around the ‘crisis in art criticism’, and also specifically as a response to the forum Judgement and Contemporary Art Criticism, JJ Charlesworth agrees with Morton’s analysis. A key point for Charlesworth is that judgement does not need to be purely understood as a positioning of objective authority, but rather that judgement can be the site of subjective experience and the participating in dialogue. Charlesworth also shares this sense of intimacy in the response that is part of a community in critical debate. In a radio interview that discussed his essay Charlesworth talks about a desire to speak of criticism and the possibility of judgment as “a space of evaluation which forms community around a particular work, that judgements are not objective but form though . . . discursive practice.” And again this time separating judgement from an authoritative voice Charlesworth says: “Obviously it is true if you have a division of power between people who make judgements and people who receive them then there is something authoritative (about) judgement, but if judgement is some form of practice that occurs between people then that gives it a different shape.” A shape for me as a vulnerability and intimacy. This positions the agency of making a judgement, of taking a position within the diversity of community, as opposed to criticism reducing meaning down to a maintained knowledge or theory used for a unified comprehension, or criticism as a descriptive ‘telling’. Here for both Charlesworth and Morton the agency in taking a critical position can be the expression of an intersubjectivity. See JJ Charlesworth, “Criticism V Critique,” British Art Monthly, no. 346 (2011). And for the radio interview see: www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/category/talk-show.

34 ‘Most writers who have visited an exhibition with the purpose of reviewing it will have felt the flickering presence of the future reader at their elbow, chiding them not only to look and think harder, but to do so with an eye and mind that are not quite their own. This is more difficult than the dubious notion of critical objectivity assumes. While it’s clear that the reviewer cannot approach a show as a viewer . . . neither can he or she approach it as the viewer . . . Caught up in the wobbly magnetic field generated by these two poles, they must develop a mode of address that is true to their subject matter, their readership, and themselves—one that evokes the absent exhibition rather than merely describe it, and one that evaluates it in terms broader than those provided by personal preference. . . If anything still signals critical authority. . . It may be the ability to do this’. Morton, 39-40.
that allows for the subjective response to circulate with the objective. This ‘critical activity’ that would find itself under question by both the artwork and the reader is a hesitation without completely withdrawing—an *approach* with the risk of failure—where the ‘oneself’ is still present; a presence through the mess, uncertainty and intimacy of responding to an artwork’s call. If an intimacy is retained, then this intimacy as doubt or hesitation, as the mess of uncertainty and vulnerability, allows for the trace of the saying of subjectivity. A mess of vulnerability allows for the ‘here I am’ to rise, if only for a moment.

Rather than attempting to name examples of art critics who retain Morton’s intimacies or Foster’s sense of ‘engaged citizenry’, the conclusion to this chapter will instead attempt an art criticism as an *approach*, but an *approach* from a specific emphasis on some of the questions and concerns of this thesis. For example, can art criticism be critical of an artwork for not accommodating a Levinasian ethics? If this thesis names *Double Blind* as an artwork that speaks in the *approach*, can an artwork be criticised for not allowing for the saying of subjectivity? The next part of this chapter will be a response to the video artwork *How to Feel* (2011) by David Rosetzky.

**David Rosetzky’s *How to Feel***

*How to Feel* (2011) is a video artwork by contemporary Australian artist David Rosetzky. It was first commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in 2011, and was an important part of his retrospective that toured Australia that was titled *True Self: David Rosetzky Selected Works*.³⁵ *How to Feel*, like much of Rosetzky’s work, centres on questions of identity and subjectivity. Another consistency in Rosetzky’s art is a polished, composed, ordered and clean aesthetic. This polished and refined aesthetic gives *How to Feel* a sense of wholeness and completion; a sense that it has been ordered and arranged in detail. The dangers of this aesthetic is that *How To Feel* acts as a commentary on subjectivity: a

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³⁵ In 2011 the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art’s major commissioned project was a video work by Australian artist David Rosetzky titled *How to Feel*. The video was projected across the kunsthall style space at ACCA with bean bags provide to assistance visitors during the duration that runs for nearly two hours. More recently *How to Feel* was part of a retrospective of Rosetzky’s work which was titled *True Self: David Rosetzky Selected Works*. This exhibition toured throughout Australia. In 2013 the Centre for Contemporary Photography staged this retrospective for Melbourne.
commentary that is not surprised by Levinas’ saying of subjectivity, a commentary that
invites the audience to partake in a decoding of the signs, to partake in the actions of
assembled meaning. Rosetzky’s commentary on subjectivity can be one that remains firmly
within Levinas’ ‘intelligible sphere to be explored’. However there is a moment in this
artwork when the otherness of the other person’s call cracks through assembled meaning,
breaks down this aesthetic of the clean, completed image and language as commentary.
This break is a moment when the artwork is not a commentary on subjectivity, but is itself
an exposure to subjectivity as still in question.

*How to Feel* begins with a cinematic tracking shot that smoothly follows a young woman
riding her bike through the back streets of an inner-city suburb of Melbourne. The soft
winter light of morning tells us that the artwork begins at the start of the day, and a non-
intrusive soundtrack gently accompanies the movement of body with bicycle. Her
destination is a small converted warehouse in Fitzroy, but more generally the location could
be thought of as being in any other western city art hub or gallery district.36 The interior of
this warehouse space has the clean polished grey floor and pristine white walls that would
suit an art gallery or rehearsal space. We know that this interior’s open sparseness is not a
complete neutrality but rather is a space prepared for performance so we wait for what
might unfold.

What will occur in this clean empty space becomes less clear when more people arrive. The
group ends up to be an even number of six—three women and three men—who gather to
begin the day. The people in this artwork— the characters in this video—are similar in
appearance. They are about the same age; they wear similar casual clothing; no one person
wears attention grabbing colours; no individual stands out from the rest.37 It is in their
similarities— the way that no one individual is distinct—that makes this group at home in
the clean fresh start of a performance space.38

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36 I give both the specific site and a more general feeling for the location, because the interior is a space that
has the dual quality of being a specific referent, but also holds a sense of open neutrality.
37 When writing for the ACCA catalogue that accompanied *How to Feel* Dominic Eichler refers to the works
general indistinctiveness when he talks about the characters as being an ‘assembled adult cast, three men and
three women, embody characters without names or particular distinctiveness’. See: Dominic Eichler, "Between
You and Me," in *David Rosetzky/How to Feel* (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2011), p39
38 Rosetzky aesthetic is often put into play as a referent to commodification, or the aesthetic mirrors the
glossy fashion magazine; the crisp cleanness of image is not only about surfaces, but is also in the way that
Once all have arrived, this grouping of people— together and on the same plane—act out a sort of self-help workshop or group therapy session on the question of identity. The workshop is without jargon and it doesn’t offer straightforward solutions to complex human emotions. Instead it brings to the surface questions or doubts about identity, self-autonomy and inter-subjectivity. In the first of these sessions the group speaks together as if collectively answering the one question: “How would you define yourself?” In response to this question they mimic each other and finish each other’s sentences so that the group participates together rhythmically in the one answer. Their shared response hesitates towards a definition that ranges from the extroverted to the self as self-reliant; from the content to the overly competitive. This all-encompassing answer gives the group’s response a general universality and meaninglessness that undercuts the guiding premise that one can seek a definitive answer to the question of identity.

The rest of the dialogue in How to Feel revolves around the courage to initiate change, the clash of personalities and social anxieties and the ridiculous self-help prophecy that seeks out eternal positivity. This dialogue is then offset by descriptions of violent fantasies about power. Another aspect of the dialogue is the constant change in role play that is used to indicate identity as ‘interchangeable’. The ‘interchangeability of subjectivity’ is a common theme in Rosetzky’s work. In How to Feel the surprise of the inter-changeable is a reward for those who stay with the artwork through to the next loop and find that a story, there is no clear delineation between one person and another, or between person and object. This can be part of Rosetzky’s commentary.

39 This happens specifically when one of the members of the group says ‘I had a friend who put blue dots all over the house and every time he saw one he had to have a positive thought, just . . . just couldn’t work for me I mean you’d be in the bathroom looking in the mirror and there would be the blue dot there I just laughed when I saw the dot thinking I am meant to be thinking a positive thought but I just can’t’. David Rosetzky, How to Feel, 2011.

40 In talking about his video portrait of Cate Blanchett, Rosetzky says that ‘I knew I didn’t want to present the portrait as a definitive representation of Cate Blanchett— but rather an exploration of shifting identities and inter-changeability’. From this quote we can see easily what Rosetzky wants to mean by being inter-changeable. This quote was used in: Christopher Chapman, “Being Cate,” in True Self: David Rosetzky Selected Works(Melbourne: Centre for Contemporary Photography, 2013).

41 Writer, theatre director, and performer Margaret Cameron, who worked with Rosetzky in How to Feel, seems to understand identity in the same way when she tells Eichler for the ACCA catalogue that: ‘All the performers did all the texts in every combination so that familiarity and inter-changeability became second nature. . . It was a very lucid process, shifting identity again and again. . . ’ See: Dominic Eichler, "Between You and Me." In David Rosetzky/How to Feel (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2011), 40.
or personal reflection, that was given by one of the members of the group, is now retold by someone else. Each loop repeats in every detail except that the roles have been changed around. This can have a heightened moment of surprise, or disruption to the narrative, when the gender roles are interchanged. In *How to feel* the ‘interchangeable’ not only involves a fluidity of self, but also involves finishing each others’ sentences or the taking up a story that is being told by someone else. The sharing of the one story can mean that no one personal account, recollection, or even definition of identity, belongs to any individual. In this sense ‘inter-changeability’ dilutes and dissolves the personal into the universal. This diluting of one’s own voice occurs in the group session on identity and could be thought of as part of the artwork’s commentary on the way an attempt to define identity can congeal into broad and general universal values.

Interspersed between these group sessions on identity are performative dance routines. Here the body in motion—performed either in pairs or by the whole group participating—is choreographed to express the same dynamic of inter-relations; the same language of exchange and encounter present in the dialogue. The sensibility and corporeality of bodies in movement, the body without words, the body in performative dance, is the body that picks up where words have reached their limit. The choreographed body takes up the same conversation, but in a different form of expression. However part the completeness of *How to Feel* is in its organised and clean aesthetic, which is spoken in this language of choreography. What this means is that even the human body is choreographed without mess and uncertainty. Bodies are entwined in dance, there is a wrestle between more violent gestures and bonds of togetherness, but these two opposed forces only really ebb and flow into one another and form together into a composed routine of rhythm and harmony. In the ‘choreographed body’ there is a ‘different mode of expression’. It is a

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42 This gender role change happens throughout *How to Feel*

43 This theme of Inter-changeability is presented differently in *How to Feel* than it is in a previous video work titled *(Heart) Forever* (2010). In the video work *(Heart) Forever* we follow a young couple on a road trip and on this journey the protagonists keep changing on us. We are on the same road trip, the smooth progression of the journey never alters, except that the two people we follow keep changing. When the scene cuts and begins again we find that we are with a different couple.

separate language to the organised script but, despite some of the more violent gestures, it still mirrors and accompanies the clean and composed aesthetic rather than being a disruption to it.

On *How to Feel*’s choreographed stage there are no clangers. *How to Feel* does not risk the uncertainty of failure. It is an artwork that never stops to apologise and start all over again; it never trips over itself. Unlike *Double Blind* it never breaks down. *How to Feel*—and this is true for all of Rosetzky’s work, is deliberate, composed, spotless, measured. It is this *controlled in detail* that says to the audience ‘this art work is finished’, any mess has been cleaned up, the artist’s arrangement has been made, the signs have been put in place. A stylised aesthetic that speaks of completion is the first signifier that Rosetzky puts into play. No matter how ambiguous, no matter how scattered the signs, the cleanness of image— its overall completion— encourages meaning to be assembled.

Part of *How to Feel*’s organised and clean aesthetic is in the transparency of Levinas’ ‘giving out of signs’. The way a signifier points to a signified is the format for *How to Feel*’s commentary on subjectivity. An example of the ‘giving out of signs’ in *How to Feel* is the way the arrangement of the group session that focusses on the question of identity can refer directly to the ideologies of the self-help philosophy. Another example of the ‘giving out of signs’ is the way the staged dialogue seems to endorse a personal autonomy, or an agency, that undertakes the task of self-analysis and self-awareness; as opposed to a loss of agency that can occur when devoting oneself to others. Within the choreographed stage what is set up as a meaning to be assembled is a division between a sovereign self-reliance and an overly open accommodation for other people. Within this dynamic Rosetzky poses the problem that being overly accommodating towards others can leave oneself a mere ‘spectators’. 45 To partake is a commitment to the tough task of self-awareness; to be a

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45 In one of the scene in *How to Feel*, after the whole group breaks apart from their circle, the cameras attention is on a smaller gathering of three that have come to sit together around a table, perhaps taking a break from the previous session. Whist one seems to play a space invaders game on her ipad, another wishes to continue the discussion on identity, as if inspired from the previous class sitting. This time the dialogue concentrates on being assertive and the problems and difficulties of finding a balance between being “firm but fair.” This problem is described through a wanting to “accommodate people” that is off balanced by an equal desire to “prevent people from taking me, or my things for granted.” The result of being overly, and unquestioningly, accommodating, or being too fair, is that “throughout my life I have kind of always let people walk over me. I’ve kind of let that happen, it’s like I’m not existing in myself anymore, I’m a spectator, I can see someone just totally walking over me.” It is here that a concern for a loss of self in being overly accommodating toward others comes to the fore.
spectator is to aimlessly drift along with others. The value given to self-autonomy, repeated in the dialogue within the clean calculated aesthetic, can make this artwork feel like a confined individualism.

An example of this is when in one of the group sessions a member of the group says:

So I think I can be a bit relentless. I think I can be a bit of a relentless type of energy to be around sometimes. On the flip side of that though when I can reign everything in I can. . . I am pretty calm about things. Actually I am a happy person when it is not about me. It’s interesting if I am listening to you, or whatever is going on, it is almost like running. I can go with that, rather than it being about a self-generated type of experience where I am thinking about what I am doing or talking about what I am doing. So this is hard, this sort of sticks now. Arghhh. I think I am that kind of person but of course I am fascinated by why that is and that it happens, and ummm. . .

Then, as part of the group discussion on identity another member of the group responds:

I think it is happening now.

And the response back:

I am getting into a tighter and tighter coil where I am sort of talking about talking about stuff rather than talking about who I am.

In this dialogue, the difficult task is not ‘listening to you’ because ‘actually I am a happy person when it is not about me’ and ‘I can go with that’. Yet this happiness can become a ‘talking about talking about stuff’, rather than being the tough task that can be to ‘talking about who I am’.

**The Self to be explored**

Rosetzky places a lot of weight on the structure of the sign as his way of communicating to his audience. This becomes clear in an interview he gave to the two curators of the *True Self* retrospective; an interview that formed part of the catalogue for the exhibition. The particular question that is of interest for this thesis is when the curators ask Rosetzky whether or not there is a binary formed in his work between the stylised aesthetic that
speaks the language of ‘commodity fetishism’ and, on the other hand, ‘felt experience’.

They ask:

Your work has a refined and attenuated aesthetic. It is populated with beautiful, youthful subjects often associated with the language of commodity fetishism. This suggests a dichotomy between beauty and felt experience. Does this inform your work?  

This question contains within it my main concern with Rosetzky’s mode of address; a concern that arises particularly because Rosetzky’s art speaks so directly about the question of subjectivity. In the curators’ question, the overall aesthetic of Rosetzky’s art is described as ‘refined and attenuated’, and the content— the ‘beautiful’ and ‘youthful subjects’— is at one with this aesthetic. The characters, along with the overall style of Rosetzky’s video, speak to the ‘language of commodity fetishism’. The question suggests a dichotomy in Rosetzky’s art; that the ‘language of commodity fetishism’ is put into play by the artist as a commentary on how this language absorbs ‘felt experience’. Rosetzky’s commentary highlights the way that ‘felt experience’ is lost to ‘commodity fetishism’. Opposed to this tactic is a Levinasian approach. An approach would instead be an expression of ‘felt experience’. Through the offer of vulnerability ‘felt experience’ could be expressed from within the artwork and this expression that speaks a different language than ‘commodity fetishism’ would, in itself, chip back at the assembling force of ‘the language of commodity’.

Rosetzky’s answer to the curators’ question is to deny that there is this dichotomy taking place in his work. Instead of a dichotomy he wants to speak of his work as being more about the complexities of being human. However, in his denial, he immediately declares a

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46 Cass and McFarlane, 8.
47 In this quote Rosetzky is particularly talking about his early video work. The full quote is: ‘In a number of my works the subject is cast as a signifier of a commodified global culture. Almost like animated cut outs from the pages of glossy lifestyle magazines. These earlier works— Justine, Luke, Commune and so on, are in one way aimed to encourage audiences to consider their relationships to images from TV, advertising, fashion, and cinema and ask how they may influence and inform their lives, and their sense of self. Earlier in my practice, I
reliance on the dichotomy between the signifier that points to a signified: he immediately
incorporates a language where a signifier refers to ‘a commodified global culture’. Rosetzky
answers the curators:

In a number of my works the subject is cast as a signifier of a commodified global culture. Almost like animated cut outs from the pages of glossy lifestyle magazines. . .But I honestly
don’t consider my work being about a ‘dichotomy’. It’s just complex being human. My work
tries to reflect that on some level.  

When the artwork relies so heavily on acting as a referent towards something else outside
itself—and particularly when a subject, a person in the artwork, is put into play as the
signifier—the artwork can lose its ability to speak of human complexity; to speak a
subjectivity as one that is still in question. To give a commentary on subjectivity through the
‘giving out of signs’ is in danger of fully absorbing the very complexities of subjectivity that
the artwork is trying to ‘reflect’. The main danger here is in the way a commentary explores
subjectivity. The ‘exploration of subjectivity’ through the ‘giving out of signs’ remains held
within Levinas’ ‘intelligible sphere’. Despite the ambiguities of a push and pull dynamic that
makes its inquiry into the nature of identity, the artwork based on the language of a signifier
that points to a signified expresses a transparency of meaning; a meaning that is there to be
decoded; a decoding that remains entrenched within ‘the said’ as intelligibility.

A number of art writers, responding to David Rosetzky’s work, have described his art as one
of exploration; that through the medium of video Rosetzky is ‘exploring subjectivity’. Other
descriptive terms of action such as ‘investigation’ and ‘examination’, have also been

was concerned with how consumer culture informed our identity and the way we looked at, or read, one
another—in everyday life. In a number of my video, such as Weekender there are accompanying voice overs,
which seem to provide us access to the inner most thoughts of the screen protagonists who in turn, describe
their general difficulty or inability to communicate with one another despite an overwhelming desire for
intimacy and connection. But it is important to me that these personal statements are not fictional but are
derived from interviews with the cast and are wholly honest accounts. They are documents of actually events
and represents personal opinion. Obviously they are mediated in a way: the transcripts if the original
interviews have been edited and then recorded so, in effect, the subjects are performing themselves. But I
honestly don’t consider my work being about a ‘dichotomy’. It’s just complex being human. My work tries to
reflect that on some level’.

48 Cass and McFarlane, 8.

49 One example of this is when the joint curatorial team at CCP begin the True Self catalogue by writing “One of
Australia’s finest video artist David Rosetzky creates intensely beautiful lens-based works exploring identity,
subjectivity and relationship.” See: Naomi Cass and Dr Kyla McFarlane, “Looking Both Ways,” in True Self:
used as ways to define Rosetzky’s art that questions subjectivity. Exploring subjectivity seems on the surface an important activity for the artwork to be doing; to explore is to ask questions. However exploration holds with it the action of uncovering. The act of exploration— the action of examination and investigation—can mean that there is some sort of searching taking place, a digging as a search and find. The question here for the act of exploration is whether subjectivity needs to be explored. Or the more important question is whether the action of exploration actually kills off the very subjectivity that it is trying to uncover.

If the complexity of a fractured self is the self that is being uncovered in the act of exploration, then why not let the artwork be the very expression of this fractured self? Rather than metaphors and references being the artist’s tools that give a commentary, why not let the artwork be an ‘expression of exposure’ that speaks this subjectivity; that allows the artwork to be the in question? The difference between the expression of vulnerability and an ‘exploration of subjectivity’ can be the difference between being called into question and the action of assembling meaning for the ordering for comprehension: it can be the difference between the in question remaining as an in pieces, or the in question becoming actively assembled and congealed, fixed as a designated term.

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50 Rosetzky language as one that ‘investigates’ the self as inter-changeable is in Eichler’s catalogue text for ACCA. And also in the other essay for the ACCA exhibition of How to Feel, the gallery curator Charlotte Day, in her opening paragraph, describes Rosetzky work as one that has ‘continually examined the ethos of ‘just be yourself’, to interrogate whether identity is determined from within or through the eyes of others. He has done this by considering the contradictory pressures of buying into a lifestyle that will reflect the ‘real you’’. And again Day continues this language of interrogation and examination in the next sentence: ‘Rosetzky has examined the idea of the one ‘self’, by consistently and determinately emphasising the heterogeneity and fluidity of identity over a singular perspective that can be ‘dangerous and debilitating’. Although not overtly political, Rosetzky’s practice has political implications, reflecting upon the effect of the shift from collectivism to a self-centred culture’. See Charlotte Day, “The Pursuit of Happiness,” in David Rosetzky/How to Feel (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2011).

51 I am yet to find Rosetzky use this word exploration as a way to describe this works way of thinking about subjectivity, he tends to prefer terms like ‘consideration’. One example is in the artist interview with Cass and McFarlane when responding to a question that his work showed ‘gentleness, grace and comfort between the Character’, Rosetzky seems quick to respond that ‘I’m not sure I agree that the relationships between my characters are characterised by gentleness and comfort. I’ve always tried to work with a range of emotions. My videos often consider (my emphasis) the underlying impulses and interior thoughts that exist below the surface of seemingly benign, everyday interactions’. See Cass and McFarlane, p7.

52 This action of exploration, this searching and uncovering, is an aspect of Rosetzky work that is not usually criticised but rather is seen more as the works greatest asset.
Someone Calls Your Name

Despite *How to Feel*’s exploration of subjectivity there is a moment in *How to Feel* when all this changes; when *How to Feel* withdraws from its commentary. The final dialogue in *How to Feel*— the final scene to this artwork— does not act in the ‘giving out of signs’. Rather the final scene primarily stays within this artwork’s closed circle. If all previous dialogue acted primarily as a referent, or a signifier, to a something else, the artwork’s conclusion refers back to all previous dialogues. The final scene in *How to Feel* is not a metaphor— it is not the re-enactment of a workshop on the question of identity—rather it is the sincerity of exposure to vulnerability.

In this concluding dialogue two members of the group sit still, side-by-side, facing the camera directly. This is the first time in the artwork that we as the audience are addressed in this way. Speaking directly to the audience each tells their perspective of an unnamed trauma or relationship break down. The telling is shared in a way that their versions join together, so that although there is an exchange between the two characters they also combine as one. This interchangeability is not a congenial bond; rather the shared telling of the story emphasises an interchangeable self based on being in a relation, or a subjectivity based on a Levinasian ‘proximity’. This scene is distinct from all previous scenes because the ‘oneself’ begins from a calling; it begins with a question from the other person. The final dialogue is as follows:

Character 1 (in one loop this character is male and in another loop the same role is played by a woman, without a change in the dialogue):

> She says I am really sorry for all the things that I said that makes things hard for you now and then I would be able to say I know that you did your best I don’t think I would be angry at all it would be compassion and understanding and then I would say you did your absolute best in the situation that you are in and then she would say

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53 This artwork that began in the morning and ends following one of the members leaving at night on their bicycle.
Character 2 (in one loop male, in another female):

That you were trying your best. We both were trying our best with what we had at the time.

Character 1:

And then she would say.

Character 2:

What was it like?

Character 1:

That is the key thing she would . . .

Character 2:

Say what was it like for you?

Character 1:

And I would just talk her ear off and I would just start shovelling through all the backlog and it would be like pulling a stopper out of a balloon and letting hot air escape and I would just talk and talk and talk and talk and talk.

This final dialogue is based on an acceptance of doing one’s best. This ‘doing your best’ is the ‘compassion and understanding’ that is the artwork’s conclusion; a conclusion to the overall push and pull dynamic between self and other that, in conclusion to How to Feel and in the face of this unnamed trauma, ‘we both were trying our best with what we had at the time’. With this final understanding comes the opportunity to achieve what the artwork had been looking for— to ‘uncoil’ and do the tough work of talking about oneself. This opportunity comes from answering the ‘key’ question proposed by the other person: ‘what was it like for you?\(^{54}\) The capacity to uncoil from the ‘talking about talking about stuff’, and

\(^{54}\) My emphasis
to undertake the tough work of ‘talking about who I am’, comes from the other person’s questioning; the question of ‘what was it like for you?’ It is from this moment—this crack in the ordering of comprehension, a crack in the refined aesthetic of completion—that Rosetzky’s interchangeable self is based on a being called ‘to be’; a calling that came before the action of choice. The crack that forms within the closed circle of *How to Feel* is where the ‘oneself’ is ‘despite oneself’; where the ‘oneself’ arises from the other person’s call.

Conclusion

This thesis began with two quotes from Emmanuel Levinas. The first came from Totality and Infinity; the second came from his subsequent book Otherwise than Being. In both these quotes Levinas speaks of an ethics as critique: a critique that is a calling from the other person, a calling that interrupts assembled meaning. The challenge for this thesis was to think of some examples of how the artwork can retain this calling; how the artwork can retain a meaning in pieces; how an act of critique can be in the approach.

In the opening quote from Totality and Infinity, ethics is a ‘calling into question of the same’ which is ‘brought about’ by the ‘presence of the other’. The ‘strangeness’ and the ‘irreducibility’ of the other person is a ‘calling into question of my spontaneity’. What Levinas means by this is that the difference and diversity of community— the irreducibility of the other person who calls my name— can be an interruption not only to the self as free and autonomous, but also to the way this autonomy can be engaged in the assembling force of assembled meaning. The ‘presence of the other’— the voice that is heard— is more than a questioning of my own freedom and ‘spontaneity’. Ethics also ‘calls into question the exercise of the same’. In other words, ethics calls into question—or allows it to be in question—the assembling force of assembled meaning. Ethics for Levinas is the way the strangeness and diversity of community—the irreducibility of the other person’s call— can bring into question the certainty of truths maintained.

The second quote, from Otherwise than Being, speaks of an ethics that ‘breaks up the assembling, the recollection of the present of essence’. This ‘break up’ is where ‘subjectivity’, in all its ‘vulnerability’ and ‘susceptibility’, breaks through the ‘assembling’

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1 The quote from Totality and Infinity reads: ‘Critique does not reduce the other to the same as does ontology, but calls into question the exercise of the same. A calling into question of the same—which cannot within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics. The strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics’.

2 This interpretation of Totality and Infinity thinks of ‘presence’ in terms of the ethics of Otherwise than Being, that is, not as the surprise of the physical encounter with the other, but rather as a ‘proximity’, as a calling, a calling that is always already there.
that absorbs and smothers the interruption of ethics. In this quote from *Otherwise than Being*, to allow for the saying of subjectivity to ‘breakup’ the assembling force of assembled meaning involves a ‘discourse’ that is ‘out of breath’. The saying of subjectivity can be ‘conveyed in discourse’, but this is achieved ‘by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath’. What I take Levinas to mean here is that ‘the saying’ is ‘protected’ by a passivity, by a withdrawing; a withdrawing that does not completely withdraw, but one that allows the ‘saying to pass’ without being completely assembled. This withdrawing can allow for the saying of subjectivity in all ‘its susceptibility’, in all ‘its vulnerability’, to speak a different language to the assembling force of assembled meaning. For ‘the beyond to be said’, or for the trace of ‘the saying’ to be retained within the structure of the said, ‘the saying’ needs uncertainty, ‘vulnerability’, hesitation, ‘susceptibility’.

In considering how an artwork can retain a Levinasian ethics, this thesis has concentrated on *Otherwise than Being*. The first chapter outlined Levinas’ ‘reduction’, the ‘reduction’ that retains a trace of the ethical saying within the said structure; the reduction that operates in an approach through the giving out of vulnerability. For an artwork the approach means that it retains ‘the saying’ but, equally, it is not ‘deaf’ to ‘the said’. In *Otherwise than Being*, the ‘reduction’ to ‘the saying’ begins from assembled meaning, and one of the focuses of this thesis—through the example of Sophie Calle and the argument for an approach in art criticism—was to highlight the way that ‘the saying’ is witnessed as part of ‘the said’.

Following Levinas when he says that the saying ‘is in (my emphasis) the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure

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3 The quote from *Otherwise than Being* that began this thesis was: ‘Signification, prior to being, breaks up the assembling, the recollection of the present of essence. On the hither side of or beyond essence, signification is the breathlessness of the spirit expiring without inspiring, disinterestedness...the breakup of essence is ethics. This beyond is said, and is conveyed in discourse, by a saying out of breath or retaining its breath...This breakup of identity, this changing of being into signification, that is, in to substitution, is the subject’s subjectivity...its susceptibility, its vulnerability, that is, its sensibility’.

4 The idea of protecting ‘the saying’ is an idea I get from my supervisor Dr Jan Bryant.

5 What Levinas means by beyond the said is subjectivity, that the saying of subjectivity is otherwise than being, otherwise than the time of existence and otherwise than the rationality of the intelligible sphere.
Chapter one also involved a careful consideration of a number of Levinas’ other key terms such as ‘the said’ and ‘the saying’. This was undertaken not to give a clear definition of ‘reduction’, or to outline and determine a specific method for an artwork to be the ethical voice of ‘reduction’, but rather this study was undertaken to give a clear awareness, through a Levinasian frame, of the dangers of art speaking on behalf of others; to appreciate the dangers of acting within assembled meaning, or encouraging the audience to actively partake in the decoding of meaning. The definition of the said structure also gives a sense of the force of assembled meaning and the difficult task that is ahead—or the risk, the breathlessness involved—in the attempt to retain the saying of subjectivity. For an artwork, a Levinasian ethics is one that retains the difficulty of this task: to ‘protect’ ‘the saying’ leaves one well out of breath. It is only this sense of failure, this sense of uncertainty, of vulnerability, of susceptibility, of being out of breath, of mess, that accommodates the trace of ‘the saying’. The mess of uncertainty retains a Levinasian ethics. On the other hand, an artwork that is the ‘perfect offering’ and an art criticism that never hesitates are primarily in the ‘discourse’ of assembling meaning.

After defining in chapter one Levinas’ ‘reduction’ as both the approach and the giving of vulnerability, chapter two considered the work of French artist Sophie Calle within the frame of a Levinasian ethics. Double Blind—a collaborative work between Sophie Calle and Greg Shephard—was offered as an example of an artwork that primarily speaks through the uncertainty of vulnerability. As the approach, Double Blind has a structure: it has a linear narrative that is heavily edited, and through the giving of vulnerability, the uncertainty of vulnerability is able to circulate within the artwork’s limitations. Like many of Calle’s works, Double Blind is an artwork where the ‘out of control’ and the ‘in control’ are entwined. Chapter two went on to consider Calle’s art more broadly as speaking through the approach via an analysing of the response of Blazwick and Sante to Calle’s artistic practice. The

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6 The emphasis of ‘is in’ is my own, not Levinas’. Whilst I have argued in this thesis for the importance of vulnerability to Levinas’ ethics in Otherwise than Being, it is worth noting that the word vulnerability appears only once in Totality and Infinity.

7 The importance for art is the way that the approach is a dynamic, a dynamic that holds both ‘the said’ and ‘the saying’, a dynamic that allows for ‘the saying’ without being deaf to ‘the said’.

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conclusion to this chapter also acknowledged the way Calle’s work is also read in opposition to this Levinasian ethics.

The final chapter tried to align art criticism with the approach that is made through the giving of vulnerability. In the Levinasian approach, art criticism can make its judgement, declare meaning—not be ‘deaf’ to the said—and yet in its final analysis retain the very vulnerability and uncertainty that can be part of one’s response to an artwork. This chapter defined the vulnerability of art criticism within the very act of contributing to the diversity of a community in debate. For art criticism, the vulnerability of the approach could be one that tries to retain this diversity in its judgement. Chapter three argued that this could be achieved by retaining a trace of the initial hesitation and uncertainty experienced by the art critic within the initial encountering with an artwork. Of major importance to this chapter was the attempt to link Calle’s control/out of control with Morton’s objectivity/subjectivity. In the approach, through the uncertainty of vulnerability, the subjective circulates within the analysis. One of Morton’s ‘intimacies’ that comes from responding to the artwork through art criticism was the risk of failure. The risk here is that the doubt and uncertainty experienced in the initial encounter with an artwork will not be retained within the final analysis. In a Levinasian sense, the importance of art criticism, the importance of responding to an artwork and giving it life in a community of critical debate, is a ‘fine risk’, a ‘risk worth taking’.

The final chapter has also tried to show the ethical difference between an artwork that can accommodate a meaning in pieces compared to an artwork that assembles this ethics within the intelligible sphere. This is the difference between speaking through a subjectivity in question rather than acting as a commentary on this self; the difference between Double Blind and How to Feel. However, in this chapter’s final analysis, this difference was not so clear cut. Instead, the final response to How to Feel was shaped by the crack in the artwork; a crack formed by a response to the other person’s call.

Sometimes an artwork calls you forward, it calls you to respond, it calls to you when you least expect it. This call is not the artwork as a subjectivity of the saying. Rather the artwork
can retain a trace of ‘the saying’. My hope is that this thesis has given a sense of the importance of a Levinasian ethics to art. Through Levinas’ definition of ‘the saying’ and ‘the said’ art can determine the danger of assembled meaning that ignores the uncertainty of vulnerability. The approach that is made through a passivity and a vulnerability allows the irreducibility of ‘the saying’ to chip back the assembling forces of assembled meaning, if only for a moment.

\[8\] In *Otherwise than Being* retaining this trace through reduction is for Levinas how ‘... the indescribable is described’. And for Derrida, writing in "Violence and Metaphysic," it is how ‘... experience itself is silently revealed’.
Bibliography


