

Title: Poetic Becomings: A Sensing of the Good<sup>1</sup>

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt at developing a poetic ontology of the senses through an understanding of poetry, or more importantly the poetic as such, i.e., the movement, temporality, and various antinomies within poetic gesturing which interrupt the logic of closed meaning and totalization. Through a range of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, amongst others, and primarily the poetry of Pessoa and Rilke, the paper investigates how poetry (poetics) may not only show us a path toward a poetic ontology (thus an ontology in correlation with the senses and movements of natural and material existence), but furthermore point us toward the possibility of an ethical becoming which mirrors the movements of poetry, in contrast to following the rigid structures of absolute and fixed meaning. The overall intention in this analysis is not to find a clear, complete, or overarching thought which may point us toward the ethical or the good. The attempt here is to show that ethics is an activity, a continuous becoming (analogous to poetics) that can be sensed through a way of being in the world, and "being-with" the world, as compared to simply understood through cognitive forms of abstract knowledge.

Essay:

Openings Opening - a Preliminary Orientation of Thought:

Meaning and meanings always *emerge* through conceptual and thus differential relations. The relation and relations between concepts allow the *movement* of thinking to begin. Relations in relation thus open a space of multiple and interstitial crossings where thought and meaning may occur. In other words, there is no absolute direction for thought to go while in the midst of a relation. As Rodolphe Gasche states in the introduction to his wonderful study of this topic, "A relation, which is nothing but the trait of being-held-toward-another, is what is only insofar as it points away from an identity of its own."<sup>2</sup> In differentiation to knowledge, where language attempts an equivalency between terms as correlation and identity, relational thinking moves about in variations of multiple crossings of "being-toward" and "pointing away", but all the time from an identity other than its own. In short, a relation sustains itself as relation not only by recognition through similarity, but through the difference of not being the same. Circling around the various openings of thought which occur through conceptual relations, one begins the process of not only finding meaning through the knowledge of

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this essay, along with certain sections of the text, was originally written for a conference at the Camden Philosophical Society entitled "Thinking about the Good" in July 2010. I was unable to get through much of my paper due to a wonderful open discussion between myself and the audience. I am glad to have been able to rework some of this paper for this publication.

<sup>2</sup> Rodolphe Gasche, *Of Minimal Things: Studies on the Notion of Relation* (Stanford University Press; 1 edition, 1999), 9.

the same, but of also sensing the emergence of meanings through the relation of difference itself. The relation between concepts moves the mind toward a space where meaning arrives through the ambiguity of relations as such.

On one level, this is the power of the dialectic in thinking itself. In Hegelian terms it may be understood as the becoming of thinking through the ongoing work of the dialectic process. My interest in this essay will certainly hover around an understanding of dialectics, but my main concern will be to utilize a phenomenology of relation as relation itself. In short, I will attempt to focus on that which emerges in a relation or multiple relations (interstitial) in relation. It is this strategy that I believe allows any meaning to emerge when attempting to approach such concepts as “the good”. It is also the way we discover meaning and new meanings in the movement of poetic language and poetry. Relations as such, thus give a sensibility of poetic becomings, an ontological and phenomenological movement where meanings arrive through ongoing contextual relations. It is in this contextual space of meaning that one can gain a sense of such notions as “the good”, or quite simply a sense of ethical becoming itself. One cannot simply find “the good” and then hold on to this as an absolute, but must continue on in the contextual space of new occurrences as new beginnings for thought. This is the *work* of ethics, or the ethical work necessary in a contextual world hitherto sought through absolutes.

A historical analysis of the breakdown or dissolution of absolutes in Western philosophy can start in many places and take on many directions. For reasons of my affinity for and affiliation with their respective philosophies, I tend to follow or emphasize a “Nietzsche – Heidegger – Deleuze – Derrida – Nancy” trajectory.<sup>3</sup> I suppose one could simply call this a particular trajectory in Continental philosophy, but as I hope to show throughout this essay, this particular lineage of thinking happens to orient itself around not only the dissolution of metaphysics, but also the phenomenological and ontological relations of being in and with the world as such. It is my contention that these thinkers not only dismantle the metaphysics of absolutes, but at the same time, resituate our being in the world, or our relation to the world itself. In other words, by “deconstructing” the world of absolutes, they do not just tear down the world of meaning and leave us without, but open up the world to new possible meanings. This of course is of absolute importance in regard to ethics. It gives us the potentiality to move into the contextual realm (aporetic opening) of finding ethics in uncertainty, as compared to the dogmatic certitude of absolute truth.

For some this breakdown of absolutes has been a sign of troubled times, but for myself, and others, it is a time that calls for a new thinking; a thinking first that is not only open to the ambiguities and aporias we confront, but furthermore a thinking which thinks within the aporetic space of thought itself. As Nietzsche says regarding his thoughts on “the old god is dead”: “the sea, *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note here that for Nietzsche the breakdown of absolutes is synonymous with nihilism. This is recognized early on in aphorism 2 of “The Will to Power” where he states: “What does nihilism mean? *That the highest values devalue themselves.* The aim is lacking; “why?” finds no answer.”

such an “open sea”.<sup>4</sup> The act of decision, or ethical responsibility, therefore, must now be made in the “open sea” – the metaphoric space of not only new possibilities, but without the ground of hitherto absolutes as reference. It is a space of uncertainty which thus marks a path forward, an uncertain terrain which opens the opening for new thoughts to emerge. An essential point here (the starting point of being which precedes activity) is that as a society, as individuals, as teachers, workers, fathers, mothers, or what have you, I believe we must first and foremost teach and learn how to embrace ambiguity in our lives – how to bring the always already uncertainty of our becoming into the ontology of our being. Without this, I believe we will have only a world where new absolutes, always at odds with other absolutes, continue to unfold in violent and unethical trajectories of binary opposition. There is no end or synthesis to oppositional thinking in terms of absolutes themselves, for the very nature of absolute thinking exists in the logic of totalization – a totalization always already closed around the logic of the same. This logic either leaves us with a world of opposing absolutes, or even worse, a totalized unity of coming together as an organized or absolute one with no room at all for difference. I believe it is thus of utmost importance to find a way of thinking, being, and expression which resists all forms of totalization itself. We must find as a starting point an opening of thought toward being as nothing other than a continuous becoming. In this sense, we must find and nurture an ontological sensibility of existing in a world without reference to absolute truths – a way of existing, in other words, within a framework of ontological, phenomenological, and ethical uncertainty. This starting point, I believe, opens the space and discussion for a new sense of ethics, a sensing within ethical becoming, and hopefully, therefore, a new way of thinking and acting in relation to a concept such as “the good”. If the relation itself is of utmost importance, as I am suggesting, then we must not only investigate the relation as such, but the terms involved that make up the relation.

### Beginnings Beginning:

A gesture is the beginning of thought. It gives us a beginning, a place to start – a place, however, without place as ground within the fabric of being and becoming. Being a beginning that continuously begins, a gesture exists outside the notion of absolute origin. It exists as a place or beginning for something other. There is no origin, since a gesture incessantly marks the beginning or possibility for difference in thought - the place (non-place) where continuous decision marks an always already opening/closing line in the pure opening of thought itself. A gesture in differentiation to that which it hitherto differed from also opens the space for new origins. Origins thus exist within the movement of beginning, and a gesture gives beginning to origin and trace *at the same time*. A gesture opens the space which allows a sense of origin as the novelty of originality. The trace as simultaneous memory of what was, is, and what may become, holds open the space for the beginning of beginnings. We cannot begin without the mark or trace which always precedes us. A gesture is a medium, (*medio, mitte*, middle, between) *par excellence*. This is the beauty of a gesture in itself. It shows us both what we are and what we are not. It is the re/presentation, thus showing of “being” and “non-

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<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (Vintage; 1 edition, 1974), 280.

being” at the same time, the ontological space of exposure and exposition. A gesture is the continuous something which emerges from the giving potentiality of the pure opening of nothing - the nothing from which without there would be no-thing. We thus have a world as some-thing which shows itself to us through the movement of beginnings beginning again and again. The ontology of thought (and being as such) exists thus not as a presence or even a presencing, but more so as a gesture, an interstitial movement and emergence into the multiple and differential relations of being with a world. It gives (*es gibt* of Heidegger), and in this giving it shows and exposes itself as the movement of difference itself. In other words, a gesture shows itself as medium, the beginning and end at the same time, and therefore gives to and erases both notions of beginning and end again at the same time. It shows the ex-position of ontological becoming through differentiation - the differentiation of what was, is, and will be. This continuous movement through differentiation once again erases presence and gives us nothing other than that of the interplay of an emerging gesture exposing being as such. A gesture shows the exposition, exposure, exposing, and expository nature of being and thinking itself, and most importantly all of these phenomena *at the same time*.

We thus begin with a gesture in the form of proclamation, not a truth: There is no absolute knowledge of the good. The good is a concept, plain and simple, and as a concept it is open to the continuous activity of change, renewal, intervention, invention, dissemination, and so on. This is the beauty of the concept as Nietzsche and Deleuze have wonderfully exemplified in their various philosophies on the concept as such.<sup>5</sup> For the former, concepts and conceptual configurations exist in a constant “will to power” between meaning one thing and meaning something other, and for the latter, creating concepts is nothing other than philosophy itself. Here is not the time to go into detail of their respective philosophies on the notion of “concepts”, but it is important to note that both philosophers accentuate the malleability and the “always-already-becoming-other” nature of the concept itself. In other words, each concept as concept, is always undergoing the process of change – a transformation of meaning/being one thing but also becoming other. Each concept consists thus in being and not-being at the same time. This is best expressed perhaps in a phrase I developed in my book *The Ethics of Uncertainty* which states: “As something is coming to be it is always already becoming something other.”<sup>6</sup> What does this mean for us? First, it shows us that having absolute access to the absolute meaning of a concept is impossible (even if being forced), and furthermore that each concept in and of itself always exceeds totalized unity by existing in a relation of continuous differential movement. How then can we gain access to something which is always in a state of change? How can we find meaning in something which is and is not at the same time – something, in other words, which in becoming has no absolute origin, no fixed or static point of entry? We have a situation where our access to meaning through concepts and conceptual configurations, is perhaps best understood through an activity itself, an activity such as sensing or thinking, as compared to a projection of fixed subject and fixed object through the domain of knowledge. We cannot grasp “the good” as such in totalization, but we may be able to sense and think the good within the opening of the becoming of good itself – the good which is and is not and

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<sup>5</sup> See Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* and Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*

<sup>6</sup> Michael Anker, *The Ethics of Uncertainty: Aporetic Openings* (Atropos Press, 2009), 12.

all the gradations between at the same time. Before we get ahead of ourselves we must first ask: If the good as concept is always already in a state of becoming, what type of thinking allows for a sensing of the becoming of good?

Thinking Toward the Good, or, the Good which Calls for Thinking:

I turn now to a passage from Heidegger.

“What must be thought about, turns away from man. It withdraws from him. But how can we have the least knowledge of something that withdraws from the very beginning, how can we even give it a name? Whatever withdraws, refuses arrival. But – withdrawing is not nothing. Withdrawal is an event.... The event of withdrawal could be what is most present in our present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual.”<sup>7</sup>

In *Was Heisst Denken?* (*What is Called Thinking?*) Heidegger begins, as suggested in the title of the text, with a question – a question concerning not only the state of thinking in modern scientific times, but more so what it means to think in and of itself. In other words, his question asks what is involved in the act and activity of thinking itself. What conditions are necessary (if any) for thinking to occur, and furthermore how does thinking differ from the act of accumulating knowledge? The answer to these questions revolves around the ambiguous meaning implied in the verb “*heissen*”. This German verb can either mean “to be named” or “to be called”, thus *Ich heisse Michael* (My name is Michael) signifies either “to be named” Michael or “to be called” Michael. We can sense here immediately an important difference not only in meaning, but also in terms of phenomenological and thus ontological relations with the world. “To be named” implies an act of being within the name itself – the name given, where as “to be called” suggests an activity of movement toward being itself – being called toward being. In regard to the phrase “*Was heisst denken?*”, we thus have on one hand, the suggestion of “what does thinking mean?”, as in, what is thinking named?, and on the other hand, a question within the realm of being called. The essential question for Heidegger thus becomes “What calls for thinking, or what calls us toward thinking?”

It is in this question that we can begin to gain a better sense of what thinking means for Heidegger. It is a “being-called-toward” which opens the space for thinking as such. Thinking is being drawn toward that which one does not know. The not fully known thought as object being thought, both reveals and conceals itself in the activity of being thought of. This partially known and unknown object calls thinking toward it in its withdrawal. It phenomenologically withdraws away from absolute comprehension. As Heidegger states, “Whatever withdraws, refuses arrival”. The thought that exists in thinking “refuses arrival” because its arrival is the detriment to its being as such. By arriving and becoming actualized, the thought is removed from the open space of relational thinking and forced into the concrete and totalized unity of the same. In other words, the thought that once moved in the open and differential space of always becoming potentially other, gets closed down into the domain of absolute knowledge.

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* (HarperCollins, 1976), 8, 9.

The point to be made here, is that thinking, as opposed to knowledge, offers us on one hand a glimpse of a mental activity in correlation with the becoming movement of conceptual transformation itself, and on the other hand a way of sensing the symbiotic movement and relation between thinking and being itself. Thinking moves in relation to the formation of conceptual transformations as being becomes in thinking. Thinking and being thus intermingle. In Heidegger's terms, "Thinking accomplishes the relation of being to the essence of man."<sup>8</sup> This intimate relation – the interstitial relation of thinking, being, and existence, will prove of utmost importance as we continue our thinking toward an understanding or sensing of ethical becoming.

#### Relation of Thinking, Being, and Language:

Thinking begins without an origin or a known destination. It begins within the multiplicity of other beginnings thus picking up and dropping off meaning and meanings within the opening of thinking itself. By thinking about "the good", we are thinking thus within that which is known already about the good, and more importantly that which is also not known of the good. There would be no thinking, whatsoever, about the good, if the good was known to us through knowledge itself. I am reminded here of the very simple yet powerful thoughts of Kierkegaard regarding the notion of faith. For Kierkegaard, faith exists in the space of not-knowing, not being certain, and always in the gap or distance of an unbridgeable phenomenological relation. Using Heideggerian terms, one could say that it is the withdrawing of God which draws one toward faith. It is not knowledge. I am not suggesting here that we should simply have faith in the good (or God) as it withdraws from us in our thinking about it. In fact, I am thinking something quite different altogether. What I am pointing toward is that within the opening given to us by thinking itself, thinking about the good as it withdraws from our grasp of totalized knowledge, we begin to sense the good in terms of its giving. What does this mean? The good as a concept gives itself to us as it simultaneously withdraws from us. In short, it does not become actualized as closed meaning itself, but gives potential in our activity of being toward it each and every moment in its continuous movement of becoming other. The becoming of our being joins the thinking of thought itself. Thought and thinking here are not abstractions, but entities embedded in the physical properties of existence itself. Being as becoming is the embodiment of thinking, or as Heidegger says, "Thinking is of being inasmuch as thinking, appropriated by Being, belongs to Being. At the same time thinking is of being insofar as thinking, belonging to Being, listens to Being."<sup>9</sup> It is here that we see the importance of language, for language itself gives being its immanent relation to thought. If thinking "listens to being" as Heidegger points out, it is language that enables being to show itself in thinking.

In a text devoted entirely to Heidegger's philosophy of thinking and language, Robert Mugerauer states the following: "In brief, thinking means the forming of ideas that represent what is thought. The interior, subjective process re-presents the object of thought. Where this is so, it is naturally important to form ideas correctly, so that the idea

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 217.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

does conform to the object.”<sup>10</sup> Soon after this statement he is quick to point out that “the issue has become complicated in the last several centuries with the debate over whether there is an independent, external reality in addition to our internal ideas.” Here he is of course referring to the many contemporary challenges to the subject/object, mind/body split given to us from Descartes' philosophy in the “Meditations”. Mugerauer then moves on quickly. He even goes so far as to say here that he is not going to be “taking up this particular quarrel.” He does not suggest that Heidegger got caught up in this “quarrel”, but by moving quickly away from the topic he also does not address the fundamental issues at stake in thinking about the subject/object relation as such. Before we move on to a closer analysis of this issue, let's first look back at Mugerauer's quote.

The first sentence brings us to the notion of form and forming. What does it mean to form something through the process of forming? How do we “form” an idea, and what is a “form” in and of itself? If I look at the book on the table in front of me now as I stop a moment in my writing, what takes place, what gives, what shows, what occurs in the relation between mind and book? Of course we may never know all the intimacies and intricacies that occur in this phenomenological space, but we can, as Jean-Luc Nancy would say “sense” the relation as such. In other words, we can sense the book and get a sense as meaning of the book at the same time. The form is thus given to us through a simultaneous moment of meaning and sensing. I sense the various angles of shapes and silhouettes which organize themselves in coordination with my memory of image through imagination. This is the form of the book given through the object's relation to my senses. I also gain the form of the book through sense as meaning. I make sense (meaning) of it being a book, meaning a book, a book means such and such, by forming the idea of it through recollection. What is also of importance here is that the phenomenological relation works both ways; they work together in a space where form makes sense and sense makes form.

We see here already that the relation of subject/object is not one of a clear split. The activity of thinking occurs in fact only when the split itself is dismantled. Realizing that correlation need not be thought as a relation of absolute demarcation is of utmost importance for the process of thinking itself. Meaning (sense) does occur through a temporary unity/form, but it must also stay open to the transformations of difference in order to stay in the realm of thinking. Any attempt at totalized meaning through the closure of itself as itself and nothing other, shuts down thinking by simply becoming dogma. The dangers in this type of “thinking” as non-thinking are quite obvious. I am reminded of a title of an exhibition and a book entitled “Thinking is Form: The Drawings of Joseph Beuys”. Long ago, this title stimulated my mind. It stayed with me for many years, and it wasn't until recently, that I discovered why. I have realized, as this title suggests, that all thinking is forming, and that all form is in some way or another, a temporary holding together of differences - a momentary unity of meaning as meaning within the fabric of a world at play in differentiation. The key here is not only to sense this in thinking, but by sensing it, also always therefore allow the temporary unity of thought to open itself and stay open to difference. Difference in relation to organized unity gives possibility to new unities as meaning “to come” (Derrida). One could say that

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<sup>10</sup>Robert Mugerauer, *Heidegger's Language and Thinking* (Humanities Press International, 1990), 67.

this process in itself is the giving and event of novelty itself. In short, there is nothing new, will be nothing new to come, without the differing and deferring (the *differance* of Derrida) movement of the same in relation to the other. This is perhaps the “*es gibt*” of Heideggerian thought. The question remains for us, however, how language works to form thought, and furthermore how being in relation to thought (the listening of being as mentioned earlier) shows itself through language.

In a brief and very insightful essay entitled “Letter on Humanism”, Heidegger states the well known (at least in philosophical circles) phrase: “Language is the house of being.” In a pedagogical manner (as a professor of philosophy to undergraduate students) I utilize this phrase many times to emphasize the importance of language in the shaping of one's identity. This of course points primarily to the intimate relation of being as existence to language itself, or the correlation between linguistic articulation and a sense of self. In other words, I emphasize how language *gives* - how a new word gives not only a new understanding in the realm of knowledge, but more so a new sense, sensibility, and opening of being into the world as such. A hitherto unknown word thus opens the world as an entrance upon which the self finds itself and thus furthermore makes way for the self it is also becoming. It is here that I attempt to show that language has the potential to both give and take away. It gives by giving a new sense of self, and takes away by simultaneously releasing this self into the opening of the “to come” of transformative becoming. By teaching the formation of an identity through language, I thus at the same time teach the dissolution of a fixed identity. Once again we can sense here a relation of unity to difference. This relation continues to give us a sense of ethical becoming which exists neither in totalized unity nor in the realm of pure difference. The former is a closed system without the allowance of the other as other, and the latter points to a void where no meaning exists at all. It is between these two, in the ongoing relation as relation itself that we can perhaps not only find meanings such as the good, but also create new meanings which continue in the opening of thinking – the opening where language, thinking, and being as becoming intermingle.

I am quite aware that Heidegger's understanding of Being is in many ways different from this analysis of its relation to language. For Heidegger, being is Dasein; not existence, identity, self, or becoming. Here is not the place to attempt a thorough analysis of Being as Dasein, but I will mention that in many ways, and through many of my past works on this topic, I have discovered in Dasein an intimate relation to all the above mentioned terms. In particular, I have discovered through an analysis of Dasein an essential link to an ontology of what I call the becoming of being, especially in conjunction with the Heideggerian term “Mitsein” (being-with). It is the “there” of being in correlation to the “with” of being which gives us the temporal and spatial sensibility of incessant becoming. Perhaps this activity is best summarized by Jean-Luc Nancy when he states that “Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence.”<sup>11</sup> We are, thus, by being with, and it is the movement and “circulation” in the “with” with others, which gives us the open space for thinking and becoming. Language can thus offer itself as a continuation of this circulation, or as an attempt at closing this down by a promotion of absolute truths. The

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<sup>11</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

former is shown through the various nuances of poetry or poetics, whereas the latter attempts a language equivalent to absolute meaning itself. Poetry shows by either not showing the thing as thing itself, or by showing the thing as thing, but always already as another thing in becoming. Poetic language, in other words, does not attempt meaning through a fixed relation of language, meaning, and thing, but as a relation at play in the movement and becoming of the world. Poetry, or poetic gestures themselves, show us not only relations in the world, but more importantly point us to a sense of relation as relation, i.e., the “being-in-relation” of being itself. We perhaps get a sense of this when we read the poetry of metaphor, simile, semblance, allegory, paradox, etc., for the meaning is always in a “movement-toward”. The meaning is thus always in transit between being itself and being other.

There are numerous examples of this in poetry but here I will simply offer one by the great poet Rainer Maria Rilke from “The Book of Hours”. It goes as follows:

“I am too alone in the world, and not alone enough  
to make every minute holy.  
I am too tiny in this world, and not tiny enough  
just to lie before you like a thing,  
shrewd and secretive.  
I want my own will, and I want simply to be with my will  
as it goes towards action;  
and in the silent, sometimes hardly moving times,  
when something is coming near,  
I want to be with those who know secret things  
or else alone.  
I want to be a mirror for your whole body,  
and I never want to be blind or to be too old  
to hold up your heavy and swaying picture.  
I want to unfold.  
I don't want to stay folded anywhere,  
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.  
And I want my grasp of things  
true before you. I want to describe myself  
like a painting that I looked at  
closely for a long time,  
like a saying that I finally understood,  
like the pitcher I use every day ,  
like the face of my mother,  
like a ship  
that took me safely  
through the wildest storm of all.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke [Paperback]* (Harper Perennial; New edition edition, 1981), 25.

This poem immediately brings us to a type of paradoxical thinking – being too alone in the world, and yet also at the same time not alone enough - too tiny in this world, yet also again not tiny enough. The desire is to be so inconspicuous as to simply facilitate a reflection (I want to be a mirror for your whole body) back to the loved one. But also in the almost nothing of his being his desire is to unfold, a metaphor for the becoming of his being *with* the loved one. The unfolding can only occur here through description (“I want to describe myself”) thus language gives sensibility to his being, his being “like a painting”, “like a saying”, “like a ship”, etc. Through all of this his being folds and unfolds through a series of relations – the relation to the loved one which brings forth first a desire to be nothing other than a mirror for the reflection of the other, and to the outward movement of becoming something through descriptions of safety. It is a coming-to-be through a relation, and the relation is navigated through the descriptive language of metaphor. Being is thus not found, but opened to the unfolding of existence.

There is another type of poetry which differs slightly in the sense that its meaning does not exist in transit from one thing to another, but exists primarily as a relation to itself as such. Instead of being a relation toward, it is a relation within. Its poetic gesture bring us to the thing itself, but the thing in itself is always already other than its original self. I do not have the time here to fully articulate this type of poetics, but for now will simply call it a type of realist sensibility of the object for consideration. Much of Fernando Pessoa's poetry, I believe, functions in this manner but for now I will simply share one.

From *Poesia*:

“Countless lives inhabit us.  
I don't know, when I think or feel,  
Who it is that thinks or feels.  
I am merely the place  
Where things are thought or felt.

I have more than just one soul.  
There are more I's than I myself.  
I exist, nevertheless,  
Indifferent to them all.  
I silence them: I speak.

The crossing urges of what  
I feel or do not feel  
Struggle in who I am, but I  
Ignore them. They dictate nothing  
To the I I know: I write.”<sup>13</sup>

This poem offers us a glimpse into the multiple beings within one being, or the more than self which gives us the future selves we may or may not become. This is not an “I” that

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<sup>13</sup> See bilingual edition here:

[http://www.poetryinternational.org/piw\\_cms/cms/cms\\_module/index.php?obj\\_id=7082](http://www.poetryinternational.org/piw_cms/cms/cms_module/index.php?obj_id=7082)

senses the unfolding in relation to other others, but a relation to the other selves within the self that is always already becoming other. Once again we also get a sense of paradox in the line “There are more I's than I myself”. We can perhaps sense what this means, but what exactly does this mean? The meaning does not arrive through knowledge, but through a gesture of letting the mind move with the ambiguity – in relation to the ambiguity. The relation of the plural I's to the imaginary I on one hand creates the introspective sense of confusion and struggle, but on the other hand, it also creates the desire for decision. In the end, it is once again through language, the “I write” that the author finds being in relation to becoming. The author moves forward through the decision of writing to the I that is known to the I at that particular moment in time. It is a strategy of finding the I of being in the I's of becoming.

There are of course other ways to show how poetic gestures create manifestations of meaning, however, the point to be made here is that poetic language (if it is to be called poetry or poetics), never looks to form meaning through absolute unity and thus totalization of the subject and object at hand. It always, through its various means and ways, opens the space for possible meanings to emerge – a place where meanings come to be in the interstitial space between being something, being other, and thus being and not-being at the same time. Poetry always shows itself as a poetic becoming – a gesture in sync with our being as a becoming. We can see here the importance of poetry for being and being for poetry. In one way poetry can teach us the becoming of being, and in another way, a sensibility of being as becoming, can open us to an “ethics of uncertainty”<sup>14</sup> - an ethics situated within a contextual realm as compared to a dogmatic realm of rigid absolutes. It is here that philosophy can also learn most from the words of the poet-philosopher Paul Valéry when he says that “the most authentic philosophy lies not so much in the objects of our reflection as in the very act of thought and its handling.”<sup>15</sup> It is not so much therefore what we think, but how we think. This makes all the difference when it comes to ethics.

### Conclusion:

In the opening passage of an essay on cinema, Alain Badiou says the following:

“Philosophy only exists insofar as there are paradoxical relations, relations which fail to connect, or should not connect. When every connection is naturally legitimate, philosophy is impossible or in vain.”<sup>16</sup>

Philosophy happens for Badiou when a relation fails, or when the relation lacks an absolute connection in and of meaning. As suggested, we find ourselves in this realm when we encounter a paradox. A paradox is nothing other than a relation which cannot absolutely connect. It occurs in thinking when we cannot make absolute sense of the meaning at hand. A relation without absolute connection brings us toward thinking,

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Anker, *The Ethics of Uncertainty: Aporetic Openings* (Atropos Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Valéry, *The Art of Poetry* (Vintage, 1958), 77.

<sup>16</sup> “Alain Badiou, “Cinema as a Democratic Emblem”,”  
<http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2009/badiou050609.html>

because it lacks easy resolution or solution via hitherto knowledge. In other words, a paradox brings us to a relation between meanings - a place in thinking where thinking not only begins, but must continue because the exit is difficult to find. This is why many people fear paradoxical thinking. Quite simply, it is much easier to live in a world with clear answers – answers, in other words, which close down the between space of paradoxical relations. But what does this attempt accomplish? In my mind, it accomplishes nothing other than gradations of unethical being in the world. I am not suggesting here that such things as strong opinions, convictions, or a fidelity to certain ideas implies a necessary correlation to unethical being. I am suggesting, however, that if these ideas close themselves around a cloak of absolute truth, they most certainly will fall quickly into the violence of totalizing thought. What I mean to say here is that if I or anyone else were to imagine absolute access to “the good” in and of itself, i.e., the good in relation to and in direct correlation to knowledge, it would immediately shut down the space for not only thinking but discussion itself. The beauty of discussion itself is the acknowledgment of the other. In fact, discussion by its very nature moves in the between space of meanings – the space we discussed earlier where thinking, language, and being intermingle. Discussion, if done correctly, follows the ebbs and flows of poetic language and poetic becoming. Through discussion one can thus literally and figuratively change one's mind, and changing one's mind not only occurs through the three terms mentioned, but also opens the space for a new thinking, a new use of language, and a new sense of becoming in the world. This opening is the opening for ethics - an ethics not of absolute truths, but of being in the opening of thinking and becoming itself. It is here, in this space of thought that we can discuss and perhaps gain a sense of not only the concept of the good, but more importantly how we may also sense our being in relation to this concept. In my mind this relation should stay paradoxical through and through, for then thinking as thinking and discussion as discussion will continue.