

## Part I

# Stagework

### Pre-text

The pre-text is made necessary in order to state what the text is not. It supplements the text by another text, which in augmenting the original, comes to replace it. These two statements make it necessary from the start to supply an abstract to the text. That abstract, drawn out from it, will form a separate text, different from the first two, to illuminate and impersonate both.

The deep interest of the present study lies with the image. Its power is to rent the field of meaning, leaving it other than thought. Language that serves the image through articulation is incapable of dealing with the remainder. Thus, image comes to haunt language, which is to say, dialectics, philosophy, and the contest for truth. The diabolic visitation of the guest that the house would have expelled—derision, mockery, disrespect, and false pretense—can simulate truth. The study takes the premise that the incorporation of the image, through suppression, will remain the hidden source of trauma, a blow delivered to the production of meaning. Image announces its own coming in a shattering of form, at times simulating its own appearance. Although phenomenality is the stage, an a priori, quasi-transcendental backdrop is part of the play. The propos concern the fact that the image is not found in experience but escapes it. This exposes the “power of the false” whose simulations would suspend a truth that image represents, as conceived nearly three millennia ago.

The appropriation of the grammatical “flaw” produced by the image—its susceptibility to a traumatism that is an invention of the other—in Levinas’s ethics must be challenged in light of the image and its operation. In trying to outflank such an inquiry by taking the imaginary

out of play, he neutralizes the image's prerogative and consigns the performative event within the grammar of experience, the *Umwelt*, to the ethical. Ethics owes its preeminence to a usurpation of power.

The sequence of the investigation can serve as a site map by which to graph the events—questions, discoveries, commentary—that unfolded into these meditations, a process that does not evade error. That is a definition of meditative thinking, in the present case, a single and singular line of thought in search of expression. The lack, not yet adequate to constatement, lends it to paradox and hyperbole—the messianic voice. Here the prophetic is also invoked.

The series of meditations or *propos* considers Levinas's work that concerns ethical consciousness and its affects. They follow a passage through the following aspects:

The holy suppression of myth,  
 The trace of the other than language,  
 The action of metaphor or metaphoric action; and  
 The travesty of the sincere.

The investigation represents fruit of several years' study of Levinas's texts and their commentators'. They do not, however, constitute another commentary. Instead, they offer a "close reading" that is mindful of an almost inaudible rumble of an absent presence that is near at hand. When taking to language, they take language to task—and in that way belong to a poetics. Poetics proper counsels voice, the event of enunciating, acoustically or not, and such coaching is directed to the *rhetor*, the one who gives voice. It tells voice how to give itself, to vociferate, and the text concerns an aesthetics of that. Hence its subtitle: "toward a rhetorical aesthetic."

Furthermore, while the exposition doesn't aspire to a specific method or methodology, for instance, a deconstructive one, it does recognize that reading is the free act. As Blanchot notices, the reader has absolute freedom. What is the peculiar event called *reading*? The question gives another key to the sequence of thoughts. They attempt not to propose a theory or structure by which to understand the event, but instead perform it—or at least mime the full performance, whosoever performs it. In some enigmatic way that I note in passing, writing mirrors reading inasmuch as the event of inscription, called "putting it in writing," is a reflection (from a reflective surface) of reading. The exercise accomplishes

by some wherewithal the performance of writing the thoughts that by their thoughtfulness then recur in reading.

### Introduction to the Hypocritical Text

It is perhaps time to see in hypocrisy not only a base contingent defect of man, but the underlying rending of world attached to both the philosophers and the prophets.

—*Totality and Infinity*, 24

Hypocrisy should be conceived as a fundamental ethical category whose value to philosophical discourse lies, for Levinas, in exposing the violence inflicted by ontological totalitarianism—ontology, period. Being enters the world as the world comes to be, through an original act of violence that is not expungeable. Each entity lives through its meaning in the wake of that event. Each identity as totalized and self-enclosed is a memorial to that. A philosophy of peace, if one can be written, must recall the immemorial origin to itself, betrayed in its invincible commitment to being, and attempt to live beyond by means of a work of mourning. What would that mean?—At the very least, a sensitivity to hypocrisy, its gradations, nuances, innuendoes, and multiple castings.

The present text is framed by that thought. An investigation of hypocrisy, its meaning and significance, but more poignantly, its enactment and performance, takes its cues from Levinas's indication that hypocrisy predates the world. It has already been active before the advent of knowledge that is to receive the being of beings. More specifically, a hypocritical text, as outlined by John Llewelyn, is one that exposes the imaginary. Or, would be an exploration by the imaginary, directed by it, and in some deep way, *mirroring* it, thereby doubling it by adding image, spectral image, to itself, already image, one reversal inverting another. It would expose the play of the imaginary, so that intelligence may grapple with matters of anteriority. Perhaps it is proto-phenomenology in that it takes notes on what will have become phenomena. Those are real (though not Real) even though they are imaginary, fantasy, or fancy as it was called. The important thing is that *to mirror* is a unique event. It is the portal to the world of the double. From then on, everything will have a spectral second.

It is tempting to say that a hypocritical text exhibits a performance of writing that ghosts itself.<sup>1</sup> Equally, it is the ghost of ghost-writing that writes itself, pseudonymously or anonymously. The ghost-writing takes place concomitantly with the text as it is put in writing. It is simultaneous with the inscription that the author writes (named by surname, paterfamilias, professional name, sobriquet.). Or: it would be simultaneous if it could be synchronized, that is, gathered unto the unity of a single moment. Its apparent simultaneity is confused with an accidental juxtaposition but in fact happens to be a break in the sequence that ghosted interruption. Nuanced, the breakage affects the entire semantic field with insecurity. The ghost of ghost-writing hovers over the very words as if a sheath of diacritical marks. They constitute an other language in whose voice the ghost speaks. Having no vowels, no breath, that language is on mute, a track perpetually awaiting the play button's action. Although written above, the diacritical is always below, the cedilla rather than the circumflex. It is below because it actually signifies the hypocritical, which can be topologically placed below intentional consciousness with its strong trait of thematization. The hypocritical, literally, beneath the threshold of critique, critical thinking, and criticism (Crit Lit), is proximate to the *il y a*, Levinas's name for a pre-ontological inferno. It remains inarticulate, forever approaching articulation with a reticence that cannot be overcome. It is a limit-experience of audition, in the family of limit-experiences to which insomnia and fatigue also belong. The hypocritical is similarly endowed with a vigilance that is not conscious—since consciousness is affiliated with intentionality. The sonorous drone of the void—on the verge of saying: it menaces like that.

Llewelyn's thought passes to a lower level where the reduction of reality to discrete chunks is not advanced. That rupture is signified by the Greek root of "critical" (*krinein*), where each break is punctuated as a crisis. In language, for Levinas, the crisis is exposed as the purely vibratory manifestation of essence, its "resonance," as it congeals or solidifies sufficiently to become nominalized, discriminated. Coagulation had been earlier defined as hypostasis, a coming-to-rest from the insomniacal exhaustion of pure being. In effect a primordial *époche*, the retreat or separation produces a beginning, initialization, an *arche*—"a rip in the finite beginningless and endless fabric of existing" (TO, 52). The principle of identity, formalized by Leibniz, is thereby constituted. The entity becomes possible, secure in its place from the ravages of the lack (*manqué*), the presence of absence. A present, time, and history then would

flourish. Consciousness at last can appear at the level of criticality; which before was only an unconscious vigil whose experiential counterpart is the affectivity of sleep-deprived subjectivity. There, consciousness, not yet the self but conscious of itself, introduces the fissure of self-consciousness into the equation. Before this, however, with resonance still terrifyingly murmurous, language is verbal, a dizzyingly eccentric sonic wobble around the verb *to be*. *To be*, but without designation. This vibrant cauldron, matrix of the hypocritical text, would not support language, the language presently in use (or any so-called natural language.) In time before the word, this *in pre-verbum tempore*, the hypocritical voice sounds like cacophony. It is a long way to the text of apology.

The question is what a hypocritical text would look like. Since it lies close to the abyss, it would not communicate by exposition, the breaking of a continuum into units of articulation to compose a communiqué. It would not necessarily rely on a sequential form of display or a linear coding. Its readability (legibility) is impossibly obscure and subject to a radical uncertainty. Such a text is not the disclosure of deeper layers of criticism or of broader conditions for the possibility of critique in general. It has long ago left behind the epistemic ambitions of a Kantian enterprise that philosophy uses as a safe harbor.<sup>2</sup> For one thing, it isn't clear that the undertaking could be discursive. If not a discourse, what then? At the not yet critical level, before things get detailed by their urgency to be, their *conatus*, the well-worn "Greek" terms of philosophy—ground, substance, being, category, sequence—lack a footing. There (if that can be said), the hypocritical text is voiced, come what may—an obligatory voice-over—and its vociferation is the *Leitmotif* of the present study.

To speak of an attunement to the voice of the hypocritical text hints at an unattainable mastery. Not only is there difficulty with legibility, but more acutely, the timing of enunciation is off. Its voice speaks out of turn, in a counter-tempo, out of time with the text that is put in writing, time out of joint with the voice-reading of the text, that is, the present. The hypocritical text lives in an "older" time, anciently terrifying (Blanchot), and its disposition violates the terms of proper discourse. Between the lines and alongside the letters, the text eschews a literal meaning or calls that meaning to task. It falls in between the cracks of discourse and yet is heard—or is it? Strange voice: a bad attunement that raises hairs on the nape of the neck, yet a call to responsibility!

When registered, that voice is relayed as from an acoustic mirror, reflected from that which voices the text of linguisticality. In itself it is

never present. A double voice that includes the voice of the double opens the specialty of the hypocritical text, mimetic philosophy. Mimetic philosophy is not so much a philosophical investigation of *mimesis* as it is an imitation of philosophy, philosophy suspended in the fantasy of doing philosophy, while it believes that philosophy is being done at the moment of total absorption in the mime. To reject Plato's criticism (in the *Ion*) of art, one must not conclude that mimetic philosophy is a lesser philosophy, a degradation or degeneracy or worse, an infancy of critical thought. That judgment supposes a theory of art wherein the artist produces representations, a representation of a representation—and presupposes presence itself. For the time being, mimetic philosophy is constituted by the imaginary; it is of the imaginary, with the genitive moving in both directions. The imagination's philosophy as well as philosophy's imagination.

That the hypocritical voice is caught in the reflection of the voice-reading the text but enjoys no existence in its own right means that it is an absent voice. It is gone, foregone, missing in articulation, never living speech nor living in speech. Since it is a voice of the dead, from the "other side," hypocritical vociferation calls for (after Derrida) a work of mourning. Such work has bearing on ethical responsibility. Pre-dating the existence to which one is delivered, it requires interiorization, memorization, a gleaning of its (impassible) essence in order to be read. A most difficult work. It is the recalling the words, not of the dead, but of the other that never lived, never died, never spoke. An exhumation of a script antedating "the book of the earth," into which the linguistic aptitude of the laryngeal apparatus speaks new life.

The imaginary and the oneiric. Imagination is traditionally lodged in dreaming; or as tradition has us believe, the dream speaks the language of imagination—thus keeps secret a secret language, nameless and without names to denominate things, anonymous and therefore anomic, from *anomie*, rootless to excess, bodiless, lacking substance altogether, and therefore unnamable. The way imagination keeps the secret is by imbuing language with a power to proclaim, a power one can call magical since it produces the naming name by which the named comes to existence. Under the spell, subjectivity forgets the other language. Only a trace remains in the world constituted by kerygmatic language, to interrupt the voice of language, the spell of language that gives life to the voice, brings it to live expression. The interruptive voice is strange and shocking. Neither recognized nor cognized, trauma is the vocalic pitch of the imaginary.

The dream of philosophy has always been one thing: to understand what philosophy really is. It is to dream of an awakening to a recognition of itself. That would be an awakening of reason to a critical and impartial view of self-manifestation. A pure wakefulness suspended in space unobstructed by language so that a perfect transparency, an undistorted vision of what has being. Yet that space or spacing (*différance*) is exactly the site of the word that will produce distinction. Absence keeps the word that disseminates germs of language across phenomenality, like nebulae in a NASA photo. A strange dream that depicts the word-less as word-like, absence as resemblance, the different as the same. A dream-prisoner in the cave of the *logos*, rotting away on a diet of adverbs and locatives.

Can the imaginary operate so insidiously? Is the history of a search for self-transparency and presence-to-self (*presence-de-soi*) the history of the play of imagination? An imagination that would go to great lengths to conceal its own operation from view? So that its purpose and function remain undecided and therefore more fully achieved. So that voice remains a happy prisoner, well secured in the dream of being, that there literally is a world present at hand!

Of equal importance is another point that supervenes. The present text is intended for Emmanuel Levinas, in return for his generosity to thought, for his spirit in exposition of deep metaphysical questions through contestation. Excessive spirit, he would say, expresses itself in sincerity: in his terms, a face-to-face accomplished without affectation. Such is the conceptual center of his thinking.<sup>3</sup> It would signify the spirit purified, stripped (in the hands of a Socrates) of pretensions and rendered (rent) as pure being that suffers no modification when disclosed to the light of truth. The return of the gift, however, is made problematic by a consideration of some depth, offered by Levinas himself. "*The Work*," he says, "thought radically is indeed a movement from the Same toward the other which never returns to the Same" (TOT, 348). To give in return must not complete the circle or arrive at the beginning by surpassing the end. This would be to give the same in return for the same, assimilation of the second work by the first. "To the myth of Ulysses returning to Ithaca, we would like to oppose the story of Abraham, leaving his homeland forever for a still unknown land and even forbidding his son to be brought back to the point of departure" (ibid.). Thus, to return the gift of sincerity requires a performance of otherwise than sincerity, namely, hypocrisy.<sup>4</sup> In the shadow of a deep enigma, one must behave hypocritically in order to show gratitude to the face of generosity. Hypocrisy would

satisfy a future condition of return and provide a gift to the other. The gesture must, moreover, avoid being flawless, as the work of the other is, and be without debt incurred by receiving such work.<sup>5</sup>

It is the mimetic imagination that produces the fake. Knockoffs, counterfeits, phony versions, hoaxes, worthless copies, pretend things, parodies, bad jokes. The fake extends to truths, propositions, worlds, reality. Nothing is immune to fakery, even the fake. De Chirico's renown comes from producing fakes of his own fake paintings.

Hypocrisy is a production of the mimetic imagination when it replicates sincerity and postures as sincere in attitude and intention. It plays at sincerity, puts on the sincerity act, and performs a staged version of same. It mimes it in every detail but real substance since it is truly not sincere and wishes to demean sincerity by demonstrating how vulnerable sincerity is to fakes, mountebanks, *poseurs*, and so forth—and to make the additional point that the susceptibility is occluded in the gift of sincerity itself. Hypocrisy attempts to demean the semantic purity of sincerity by mirroring its appearance and passing itself off as the condition that “sincerity” represents, namely, that intentionality does indeed aim at the object toward which it apparently is directed.

The last subreption causes considerable collateral damage. In the intention to subvert intentionality itself, hypocrisy wields the power to dissolve philosophy's dream of self-transparency and self-knowledge, as Levinas's epigram intimates. An agreed upon commitment to veracity in speaking—the primordial “yes” of a language user—is a general condition for language use.<sup>6</sup> If users of a language cannot concur that the normal course of communication necessitates saying what one believes to be the case, then the pragmatic basis of meaning collapses in shambles. In the absence of a strong convention of truth-telling, however conceived, all other linguistical agreements are up for grabs. While intentionality is not solely concerned with truth, the intentional object for Husserl is in exemplary form a representation, and representation brands truth. The distortion of representation by hypocrisy would be a fatal flaw in a mirror which then would imprint itself on each and every image. It is irreparable.

Hypocrisy is known to produce faulty texts, texts whose truth-bearing standards have been intentionally subverted. Where the prime condition of user-friendly language is rendered inoperative or inconsistently operative, violence necessarily is part of putting it in writing. The intention to communicate signification as constituted by the differential system of signs is abused. The abuse of language is at odds with Levinas's



message of peace and the suspension of the *polemos*, the Heraclitean clash of opposites that the reign of ontology inaugurates.<sup>7</sup> A flawed, hypocritical text, rife with violence: how is it possible to think such a work appropriate to return with gratitude the gift of Levinas?—only by a gesture otherwise than gratitude, namely, ingratitude, can the work of the other (other to Levinas) be met face-to-face. Only then is the remainder, the saying incapable of correlation with the said, prevented from re-assimilation by the same. Derrida remarks on the fine risk: “[T]he more you obey him in restituting nothing, the better you will disobey him and become deaf to what he addresses to you.”<sup>8</sup>

A text meant *for* Levinas that is neither for or against him. A text that, following Blanchot, conforms to a relation of the third kind, a relation that manifests as friendship. An improper text, inappropriate in matters of gratitude, a text not appropriable, that takes germs in Levinas’s work and brings them to a dehiscence, to use a word of Reiner Schurmann. The result yields a voice broken and throttled, speaking at once in different directions and modes (Derrida somewhere says that *otherwise* is a “modality without substance”), producing an acoustic scatter (or scat) of meaning. Improperly different, not comprising a chorus, symphony, order, or harmony to any degree, the vocalization could be named a murmur and could become as emotionally forbidding as the *il y a*.

### On the Propos

This text will have to be woven of different voices, affiliates on a national network that is now a monopoly broken. It will have to be polyphonic, a conclusion that Derrida draws from a different ruse, or more precisely, polyvocal. It could not have the voice of Levinas (or “Levinas”), that is, of sincerity, or else the circle would be unbroken. It must be a voice otherwise than sincerity in order for hypocrisy to successfully conceal its lack of truth, or rather, its truth is that it lacks truth. In the present text, a few voices are incomprehensible or not audible, even though all are enunciated and all are acoustically registered phenomena. Articulation is the problem. Imagine listening at a keyhole to a conversation with the task of transcribing it, and the result may be a text similar to the present one. Segments would contain various vices in production of clarity. The segments’ arrangement is, in the present text, not accidental. They chart the passage from an expository voice to a hypocritical one,

from exposition to hypocrisy. The transformation from one to the other text is not linear but oscillatory, a repeated crossing of a limit, limn, or line—interrupted repeatedly by shocks that befall it out of nowhere.

The passage from exposition to hypocriticality is a blurred and blurring event. Even though the marks cannot be clear (the intent of the one is to pass for the other), it is here where the true markings lie. *The hypocritical text is there only in the mirror of exposition.* Parasitic on the host vociferation, it survives only in the reflection of a body of resonance that proclaims the event, that is, only in the kerygma of voicing. It is related to the acoustical double put on mute while reading the text as it is put in writing.

Levinas's text contains the gift that gives place to the other. It is a place that had been his (Levinas?, "Levinas?"), but now exchanged for that belonging to alterity . . . everything including its identity or non-identity, lack of identity, perpetual crisis of identity. In contrast to pure appropriation, the other in return gives the gift that shatters existence before it comes in an advent whose "glad tidings" are to destroy what marks the order of things. Miraculously, the ruin of identity has not dispelled the need to respond to the call to obey. Who *could* respond responds to a degree of responsibility that individuates without identification. The gift offered for exchange (the gift of death) is irreplaceable, irreplaceability itself. The gift that the present text offers to Levinas ("Levinas," the author of *Otherwise than Being*), however, contests that giving in the first place. It attempts to elucidate, to the extent possible, an order of meaning that would shipwreck the good intention underwriting the entire Levinasian text, sincerity. This does not mean that what it puts in writing is insincere, denying value in sincerity, or "mouthing empty words and meaningless phrases"; it would be a travesty of textuality to do so. On the contrary, writing in return for his work produces an ineffaceable excess that destroys the license of user-language, throttles its voice of dialectic, and disquiets the waters of that safe harbor. The occurrence of textual gibberish—language slack, unable to do its job, *désœuvré*—is an outbreak where text surpasses thought by the inclusion of the otherwise. An overabundant excess to the point of denuding excess, excess excoriated by its own hand, residue of the unexpungeable. There exist pockets of unsaying where the thought-density is so great that it has the counter-effect to saying: deletion, effacement, erasure. As a result, whole segments of the text must be placed *sous rature*.

The propos are recodings of Levinas's thought. They put his considerations in a new register, off-key relative to his, so that if played together, a dissonance would result. Possibly, they are studies of excess, of how an excessive emphasis on a single element leads along a pathway different from his to conclusions withheld from his vision. As if his line of thinking regrouped in some unpredictable way and produced out of textual elements forms concealed in the texts themselves, monsters of a fabulous bestiary. This would amount to opening the text to what is not contained in it. The tain of the text, its de-containment.