

## ***Schöne Seele* meets *bête d'aveu* : Confession in Hegel, Foucault, and Ingmar Bergman's *Persona***

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**A**lthough their philosophical and historiographic methods are in the most obvious ways antipathetic, Hegel and Foucault both consider human history not as informed by an unchanging, immutable human nature but in terms of shifts in knowledge and self-knowledge that propel history forward, or elsewhere, through disparate epochs.<sup>1</sup> Both situate the latest—and, for Hegel, the contemporary and last—shift in historical subjectivity with the French Revolution and its aftermath, or at the close of the eighteenth century and dawn of the nineteenth.<sup>2</sup> In each of his major works, Foucault theorized these historical shifts, with particular attention to the changes that occurred during Hegel's lifetime, in terms of different subject matters: madness, the medical gaze, the human sciences, knowledge, punishment, power, and sexuality. What is of interest to me here is the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* in which Foucault focuses on the modern proclivity for secularized forms of confession as a turning of "man" into a "confessional animal" and the "beautiful soul" dialectic of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which Hegel describes (belatedly) reciprocal, atheistic confession as characterizing Geist at the same historical moment. Despite otherwise insuperable differences as historian-philosophers, both Hegel and Foucault arrive at psychologically compulsory, secularized confession as a defining characteristic of subjectivity at the moment of rupture into the modern age, despite their different evaluations of modern confession's functions and value.

This paper brings together Hegel's dialectic of the beautiful souls and Foucault's account of the confessing animal through a reading of the struggle between the two protagonists in Ingmar Bergman's film *Persona*. The portrayal of the confessional relation in this film will be discussed in terms of familiar themes of authenticity, reciprocity, and forgiveness, but also in terms of a relation of power, coercion, silence, the failure or refusal of speech, confession, forgiveness, and recognition of the other. In such a way this paper hopes to show that Bergman's film brings together aspects of Hegel's and Foucault's very different analyses of modern confession, or causes beautiful soul and confessing animal to meet. This unlikely encounter, capturing as it does not only our desire to confess, but perhaps more importantly our desire to hear the confessions of others, and our willingness to confess for them, will lead me to

conclude with some reflections on the ethics of confessing for others and of eliciting their confessions as these themes arise in the writings of Butler, Sartre, Lévinas, and Derrida.

### Confession in Foucault

Foucault's *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* discusses confession primarily from the Council of Trent onwards, or beginning with the Counter-Reformation's response to Reformation critiques of Catholic confession. The response of the Catholic Church was to underscore the importance of confession, to require confessions more frequently than ever, but to clean up the abuses of the practice which had enraged reformists, and, to use Foucault's term, to "neutralize" the language of priests, particularly in their sexual interrogations. What primarily interests Foucault in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* is not auricular confession, however, but the multiplication of secular confessional discourses and the internalization of the coercion to confess such that it is today experienced as a pleasure and a desire. For Foucault, this transformation into desire masks and inverts our intuitions about the workings of power. Foucault is thus concerned with the manners in which the external and internalized compulsion to confess which had developed within Christianity left the confessional and entered not only into the arts, most notably literature, and even into philosophy, but even more insidiously into politics, economics, the sciences, law, pedagogy, and finally into the desires and intuitions of the modern soul.

In the eighteenth century, when the influence of the Church was waning and confessional subjectivity might have diminished with it, the technique of compelling confessions and inculcating a need for them was taken up by other domains. In the modern period "population" became a concern, and with it came new objects of inquiry and control. Scientific inquiries, or incitements to confessional discourse, served the interests of developing demographic, political, and economic concerns with population. If populations were threatened by sterile and non-reproductive forms of sexuality, for instance, a country needed to know the extent and the nature of these threats, and thus took up the task of questioning its people about their private lives. Consequently sciences such as biology, medicine, psychiatry, and psychology developed such that they could inquire into the threats to populations, or could elicit confessions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, therefore, though religion was losing ground, the familiar forms of discourse developed in the confessionals were taken up anew, but both the speakers and the aims of their inquiries had changed. Now the interest in the private lives,

actions, and thoughts of individuals came not from priests but from economists, demographers, scientists, and doctors.

The initial compulsion to confess was clearly external; individuals did not go to their doctors with personal narratives any more than to their priests or to their inquisitioners, but rather demographers, physicians, and psychiatrists, like priests and inquisitioners, first began to ask the persons under their control about their private lives, and developed techniques, or produced threats of divine punishment or risks to health, to extract the confessions that did not come voluntarily. On the one hand, confessants became convinced by the authoritative claims that confessing was good for their spiritual, psychological, and even their physical health, even in penal contexts in which the result of confession was not forgiveness and resolution but punishment, incarceration, and even death. Moreover, insofar as confessions speak of "what we hide," the confessant receives what Foucault calls "the speaker's benefit," or the satisfaction of feeling transgressive and progressive. Once a belief in the therapeutic and liberatory need to confess had been implanted in modern subjects, an external form of surveillance, the extraction of confessions, had been internalized into self-surveillance and "voluntary" disclosures. Caught up in what Foucault calls "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure," confessional speech is now experienced as an internal rather than an external compulsion, while the very fact that confessional speech was coerced, and that coercion became sexualized, came to make confessions erotically desired. The psychic resistance to confess, or our gratifying talk of such resistances, seems an effect of power, and the overcoming of such resistances or repression is experienced as an achievement of freedom. The claim that we feel a resistance to confess becomes an excuse to confess, when in fact the existence of such resistance is undermined by our very pleasure in confessing.

For Foucault, confession is *assujettissement* "in both senses of the word" (HS, 81). In an identity-obsessed society in which identity is produced through confession, modern "man" has become a "confessing animal," and having long since left the confined space of the confessional, the domains of discourse in which this animal confesses are almost all-encompassing (HS, 80). As Foucault writes:

The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's

educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about (HS, 59).

Although sins—particularly sexual sins—interested Christian confessors, and while sexuality remains privileged in the many forms of confession we produce today, it is clear from this passage that we now nevertheless confess to everything to do with the "self," not just our sins and our sex lives. Confession is a privileged tool of disciplinary power, for Foucault, and always occurs within a discursive relation with another. As he writes,

[I]t is also a ritual which unfolds in a relation of power, since one doesn't confess without the presence, at least the virtual presence, of a partner who is not simply an interlocutor but the agency that requires the confession, imposes it, weighs it, and intervenes to judge, punish, pardon, console, reconcile (HS, 82–3).

Confession in Hegel

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes three historical periods or three "selves": Roman personhood, the Absolute Freedom of the revolutionary and terror-stricken French citizen, and the self-certain Conscience of contemporary German philosophy. In the penultimate and ultimate moments of the latter self, Conscience encounters the dilemma of whether or not to confess. As for the Foucault of the *History of Sexuality*, it is the modern subject that is defined by the confessional relation. For Hegel, Kantian moral philosophy represents an initial form of Conscience but maintains an irreconcilable divide, an "insincere play of alternating" between individual nature and universal duty (PS, §633). Because divided from individualized nature, duty in Kant remains empty of content and cannot be lived or enacted. This Kantian "dissemblance" must therefore be superceded such that universal duty becomes recognized by the self as its own, as self-derived, embodied or individualized, thus reconciling nature with duty such that it can have concrete content and be acted upon (PS, §634). Self-certain conscience thus acts upon laws of which it knows itself to be the source. Because this now executed duty is still maintained as universal, however, the self needs to understand this duty not only as its own but as that of all other selves. Conscience needs not only to recognize its concrete duty as its own individual obligation but also to have others recognize it as their own. Expecting this to be so, Conscience has an initial moment of imagined harmony, the performance of its moral duty being individualized in its own recognition, as well as (it assumes) being the acknowledged

universal duty of all others. This moment of apparent resolution, of concrete universalism in which nature and morality coincide, is short-lived. The moment Conscience acts and sees its act responded to, it finds that its morality is not in fact recognized by others as such. Moral duty is defined as being-for-another, yet the moment of action selects some particular other for whom to be, among other others to whose interest the act may not conform. The act cannot ever be towards all others since their interests will conflict and Conscience must always make choices between competing applications of universal duty. Some others, then, will always object that a given act is immoral towards them (PS, §640). Any act, Hegel claims, can be derived from self-generated duty calling itself universal, and any act can be accused of being self-interested, or of being randomly directed toward one particular other at the expense of thirds. No act, therefore, will find the universal recognition of other consciences which the subject requires. Since any act whatsoever is thus flawed, acting upon duty becomes replaced by self-knowledge as dutiful, and recognition is sought in language rather than deeds. The subject's verbal accounts of its duty and intentions will, Hegel claims, replace deeds and find recognition where actions failed. Since any act can be in accordance with duty, what matters is not what is done but how it is thought and spoken about by the subject in its self-certainty of its own dutifulness, the truthfulness of which claims other subjects cannot know (PS, §648). Of this stage, Hegel writes, "declaration is the true actuality of the act," and thus what counts is not what is done, which will always be impure, but what the subject says of it, which will supposedly find the universal recognition it seeks despite the inability of others to confirm its truthfulness (PS, §653). Jean Hyppolite writes:

In response to this passage how can we avoid thinking of a literature which goes from Rousseau's *Confessions* to the 'Confessions of a Beautiful Soul,' by way of *The Sorrows of Young Werther*? What is important is not what the self has realized, for this determinate action is not necessarily recognized, but rather the assurance that the self gives of having acted according to its conviction. It is this inner assurance of the self, in the *Confessions* or in *Werther*, indeed in this whole literature of the I, which shines forth, which emerges and becomes actual (GS, 512).

In Rousseau's *Confessions*, the writing of his deeds and declaration of the meaning they had for him, his self-certainty despite all the flawed embodiments of his inner goodness, comes to be more important than the imperfect deeds themselves. The necessary imperfection of what Rousseau did matters less than the convictions that he declares to others

in language and which supposedly find the universal recognition that his actions could not. Of course, this seems wrong, for language, in Rousseau's case as in any, far from finding universal recognition as self-same, or acknowledgment from others as universal, inevitably meets suspicion and doubt, encountering a multiplicity of interpretations, policing, accusation, and scorn. What matters, however, is that the intention of the deed be declared, and declared as morally pure: "But it is essential that he should say so", Hegel writes, or that Conscience not remain silent, for universality is now sought not in deeds but in language (PS, §654). For Hegel, confession emerges as a genre, perhaps even a compulsory genre, but at the close of the eighteenth century one confesses to goodness rather than sin.

The beautiful soul has entered on stage, a subject that must speak (or write) but cannot act extraverbally, tells of its inner goodness and condemns the evil of others, confesses only to its purity and not to its sins. Like the Kantian subject, the beautiful soul cannot express its morality in actions, which are forever impure. The difference between the two is that the beautiful soul, like Rousseau, recognizes its nature as pure and declares it as such in language, while the moral purity of the Kantian subject is cut off from its nature. The beautiful soul has thus superseded the division between nature and moral duty and thus progressed, but it is just as divided from the world or from embodied action, from an "external life," as was the Kantian conscience (PS, §656). It is an "abstraction," "transparent," a gasping for breath to tell of its goodness without lungs to speak or to gasp from: "an unhappy, so-called 'beautiful soul,' its light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air" (PS, §658).

Although the beautiful soul itself seems to have evaporated, the section on the beautiful soul continues. Spirit has had to sacrifice its totality and divide itself in two, a finite and an infinite spirit, or acting and universal consciences. What follows is a dialectic between an acting and a judging conscience. The dilemma is by now familiar: the acting conscience thinks that it acts out of its individual and universal duty and acts in the expectation that the other, the judging conscience, will acknowledge its deed as such. Instead, the judging conscience points out the arbitrariness and possible self-interestedness of the act, deems it evil, and, given this specificity of action, judges the acting conscience hypocritical for its talk of universal duty. The acting conscience realizes that the judging conscience is right: its act was indeed particular. However, acting conscience also notices that the beautiful soul's judgment was itself an act, if only a mental one, and as such is also particular, situating the judging conscience and thus rendering it equally sullied by the very arbitrariness of which it accuses acting conscience.

The acting conscience thus sees the opportunity for mutual recognition: both it and the other have acted in conformity with notions of the universal which immediately turned out to be particular; both have "sinned" despite all good intentions. Seizing upon this opportunity, it affirms the beautiful soul's judgment in the understanding that this acknowledgment will be one half of a mutual recognition between the two. To the acting conscience's surprise, however, the judging conscience does not reciprocate its confession but rather "repels this community of nature" (PS, §666). Against all expectations, judging conscience perseveres in seeing itself as pure, condemning the other without thinking that it implicates itself through the very process of this judgment.

All that the beautiful soul recognizes in the acting conscience's deed is what is particular about it, and not the nobility and universality of the intentions behind it. This insistence on pettiness is compared by Hegel to the *valet de chambre* of a great man, which great man Hippolyte reads as a reference to Napoleon. The *valet de chambre* is correct that even Napoleon's actions have their petty and particular side, but this is not because Napoleon is not a great man but because the valet is petty and cannot see beyond his own pettiness. Although the judging conscience is initially correct in judging the other as evil, the roles quickly trade place: as in the master/slave and noble/base consciousness dialectics, the two subjects switch positions such that the judging conscience, *valet de chambre* that it is, finds itself the evil one.

Hegel claims here that one must act concretely for the act to have any meaning, "for duty without deeds is utterly meaningless" (PS, §664). At the same time, a judgment is a mental act (PS, §665). The judging conscience is thus condemned for refraining from doing anything concretely in the world, and at the same time is guilty because its judgment, though not a meaningful act, is still a particular act which defiles its purity. Condemnation thus has the particularity of an act without its nobility. The judging conscience tarnishes itself by performing a (mental) act, but because it refrained from any concrete action in the world, and moreover from acknowledging its common sinfulness with the acting conscience and humanity in general, it excludes itself from the community of others. It is thus evil at least three times over: for its action (nevertheless merely mental), for its inaction, and for its hard-hearted refusal to grant the acting conscience the recognition it is owed and which it requires. It is poetically just, then, that the beautiful soul should die (again) in a manner appropriate to its disdainful sins; having withheld itself from the world and from the community of other sinners, it is at the point of expiring in solitary anguish, "is disordered to the point of madness, wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption" (PS, §668). Twice dead or on the point of death, it finally "surrenders," its

hard heart "breaks," and it forgives rather than condemns acting conscience (PS, §669).

Hegel takes this forgiveness as a tacit confession, a recognition of similar sinfulness between the two consciences. "Reciprocal recognition" is at last attained through implied acknowledgment of both oneself and the other as sinful. Through this reciprocal realization of universal particularity God is made "manifest" in the "I." In a reversal of the christological movement, man becomes God, and rather than the universal becoming embodied, the embodied reciprocally recognize themselves as universally so. As Foucault has also argued in the *History of Sexuality*, mutual, secular, obligatory confession (the only alternative in Hegel being social alienation and suicide) occurs as a novel event at the close of the eighteenth century and dawn of the modern era. While for Foucault, however, the human being consequently becomes a "confessing animal," for Hegel, the result is a divinization of man.

### Persona

In *Laterna magica*, Ingmar Bergman describes the evolution of his idea for the film that would become *Persona*. He had the idea to make a "little film" about two women seated beside each other on a beach, wearing large hats and comparing hands, a scene that occurs early on in the film. A month later, the women in Bergman's mind were still sitting on the beach, comparing their hands. Then, one day, Bergman realized that one of the women was "mute, like me," and that the other was "talkative, like me" (*Laterna*, 272–3). The two women, eventually to be named Elisabeth and Alma, thus come about as personifications of Bergman's inability to speak and of his loquaciousness, or of his impression of a divided self.

Elisabeth, played by Liv Ullman, is the character who is "mute, like [Bergman]." An actress, she suddenly falls still one day in the middle of a performance. Soon after, she stops speaking and acting entirely, on stage and off, taking to her bed without a word. Having been in bed for three months, she is examined by a doctor and no somatic cause is discovered that could explain her muteness and refusal to move. According to her doctor, nothing is wrong with Elisabeth either physically or mentally, nor is she hysterical. Elisabeth's doctor tells the actress that she understands her decision to cease speaking and acting:

I understand alright. The hopeless dream of 'being.' Really 'being.' At every waking moment alert. What you are with others and what you are alone. The vertigo and constant hunger to be exposed. To be seen through, maybe even wiped out. Every inflexion and every

gesture a lie, every smile a grimace. Suicide? No, that's too vulgar. You don't do things like that. But you can refuse to move. Refuse to talk. At least you don't have to lie then. You can shut yourself in and stop playing games, to show any faces or make wrong gestures. That's what you think. But reality is diabolical. Your hiding place is not water-tight. Life trickles in from the outside. And you're forced to react. No one asks if it's true or false ... if you're true or just a sham. These things matter only in the theater. Hardly even there. I understand why you don't talk or move. Why you have created of apathy a brilliant part to play. I understand and I admire. I think you should go on with it until you lose your interest. Then you can leave it like you've left all your other parts.

Elisabeth's doctor diagnoses in her patient a desire to have been exposed as lying, false, and to have had her true self forced into the open. Yet for the actress this has not happened, and instead she has only received critical acclaim and social success for the roles she has played, both on the stage and in her private life.

As the film goes on to suggest, one of the roles that Elisabeth has been insincerely playing is that of a good mother, and it is perhaps her feeling of inauthenticity in her maternal role that has caused her crisis. This reading finds some confirmation in an early scene in which, still in her hospital room, Elisabeth sees a photo of her son and tears it in half with a defiant look. She thus refuses to be a mother as well as wife, actress, and any of her other prior roles. The doctor sees that her patient's refusal to act and to speak is but a desperate attempt at authenticity, a refraining from the making of flawed gestures by doing nothing at all. Elisabeth is trying finally to "be" rather than to act, even if this pure "being" entails a retreat from all doing, a withdrawal from her family as well as her career. The actress's doctor sees that Elisabeth's silence and immobility are refusals of the compromise, inauthenticity, play-acting, and dishonesty that she has come to realize characterize living. The doctor points out, however, that even her patient's refusal to act is but another act, another role like all the others, no closer to an authentic being than any of her other parts, thus failing to escape the imperfect nature of actions and to be pure. She suggests that Elisabeth will eventually realize this and set aside her silence and immobility, as she has set aside all her other parts, accepting that there is nothing to life but personas. The actress, so the doctor's diagnosis goes, will recognize the universally compromised nature of living and the inevitability of action, where even inaction, even suicide, even silence, is an act, another part that we may only play. In the meantime, the doctor thinks it is best to let Elisabeth act out her latest role of pristine soul, too pure

to degrade herself with actions or words, so that she will exhaust it and move on. She thus suggests that the actress retire to the doctor's own summer house in the company of a nurse, Alma.

Alma, the character who is "talkative, like [Bergman]," played by Bibi Andersson, introduces herself to the unresponsive and "apathetic" Elisabeth in her hospital bed. She tells the actress that she is twenty-five, engaged to be married, and has been a nurse for two years. As the nurse speaks, Elisabeth frowns and keeps her face turned to the wall. The second time Alma is in Elisabeth's hospital room, however, the actress begins to be more responsive. Alma turns on the radio for her patient, and a radio-play is being broadcasted. A woman's voice is heard melodramatically pleading: "Forgive me darling, oh you must forgive me. Your forgiveness is all I crave. Forgive and I...." At this point, to Alma's surprise, the silent Elisabeth begins to laugh out loud. The voice on the radio then cries, "What do you know about mercy? What do you know? What do you know about mercy?" Now Elisabeth ceases to laugh, and frowning suddenly turns off the radio, taking Alma's hands into her own in the same movement, and holding them on her lap on the bed as the nurse sits beside her. As if to soothe her, Alma tells Elisabeth that she admires artists and feels that they help "people with problems." Elisabeth acknowledges Alma for the first time, meeting her eyes and smiling at her, apparently pleased by the compliment.

Because Bergman never provides the viewer with either an authorial or a first-person account of the events leading up to Elisabeth's decision to withdraw from life, we can only take up the interpretations given by her doctor and nurse. In the doctor's account, Elisabeth has come to realize for herself the contradictions between her ideals and her actions, the falsity of the roles she plays, and Alma will later suggest that the most troublingly false of these roles is Elisabeth's experience of maternity. Hegel's beautiful soul similarly comes to realize a contradiction between her acts and her moral principles. However, while in Elisabeth's case the actress apparently came to perceive these contradictions herself, and was further aggravated by the fact that no one around her seemed aware of her falsity, in the case of the beautiful soul, inauthenticity is only realized through exposure and accusation by the other. Seemingly unlike Elisabeth, the beautiful soul initially believes that her acts and beliefs coincide perfectly and, far from wanting to be unmasked, wants and expects other people to provide recognition for this perfection. The beautiful soul is thus astonished by the reaction of the other, the revelation of her own falsity, while Elisabeth, if the doctor is correct, desires such a revelation and is dismayed that everyone believes in and commends her for the roles she plays.

Nevertheless, we could believe that the doctor's interpretation of Elisabeth is wrong, and in fact the actress became distraught when someone else exposed her inauthenticity while she herself wanted to believe in the goodness of her acts. This more Hegelian reading finds confirmation in the fact that Elisabeth, like the beautiful soul, does crave moral recognition from the other, as we see when Alma first sits by her bed and tells her that she admires artists, and Elisabeth in particular, because they "help people with problems." This admiration from the nurse for the supposedly moral dimension of Elisabeth's acting, or of her acts, makes Elisabeth's apathy disappear for the first time and she smiles at Alma where previously she had ignored her, showing that ethical approbation from another person is meaningful to her, just as it is desired by Hegel's beautiful soul. Elisabeth, then, like the beautiful soul, does not in this scene want to be unmasked by the nurse, but to receive her moral approval. Indeed, it is with this moral esteem from Alma that Elisabeth begins to improve.

Whether on her own or through the mediation of another, Elisabeth has become aware, like the beautiful soul, that all her actions will be impure, an "insincere play of alternating" between her ideals and their manifestations, a "dissemblance," and has thus withdrawn from all action. While this initially seems to be some form of solution to the problem, the result is that Elisabeth, like the beautiful soul, can have no "external life." Her purity can have no concrete expression, is necessarily an "abstraction," "transparent." Hospitalized, bed-ridden, unable to continue with her career, to raise her child, or to be with her husband, Elisabeth for all her purity is "an unhappy, so-called 'beautiful soul.'" She is called "apathetic" within the film, and were this state of affairs to have continued we might have expected her to vanish "like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air," eventually given up on by the doctors and by her family, for all practical purposes dead, forgotten by her public and by those formerly closest to her (PS, §658). Like the beautiful soul, however, with her removal to the countryside Elisabeth undergoes a partial resuscitation just before the moment of total social dissolution. Recognized and morally approved of by her nurse, she is taken away from her life in the city and all her former roles. Here, the actress comes back to life and grows friendlier towards the flattering Alma, her apathy disappears, and she participates in activities such as long walks, gathering mushrooms, cooking, and reading on the beach with the nurse, although still refusing to speak.

Despite her silence, when Alma talks to her, chattering away as if undisturbed by the fact that she is never answered, Elisabeth listens attentively and communicates with nods and smiles. As Alma tells Elisabeth, growing up with seven brothers, and always being surrounded

by men, no one has ever really listened to what she has had to say. Alma is clearly moved by the fact that Elisabeth, a famous actress, listens to her reflections on life with apparent interest and sympathy, a friendship forming between them, even if she will not respond verbally. At several points, Alma expresses the pride she feels in being acknowledged by the actress by telling Elisabeth that they are in fact alike, that they look alike, that if she tried very hard she could be like Elisabeth, whereas Elisabeth could easily be Alma. Elisabeth seems to reciprocate this self-recognition in the other, at least insofar as she initiates a comparison of hands (in the scene for the film that Bergman first conceptualized), and a comparison of their faces in a mirror (a scene that Alma will remember repeatedly), while throughout the film, in delusional moments of dream, nightmare, and emotional frenzy, Bergman will blur the two women's faces into one.

Isolated from the rest of society, the actress and nurse form a dialectic of acting and judging consciences. While Elisabeth continues to refrain from action, and especially from speech acts, Alma does all the acting, caring for Elisabeth and speaking incessantly, a Foucaultian "confessing animal." One thing she speaks of is her ideals, the pure life she is living and about to embark on, and her involvement in multiple caretaking or ethical roles: her impending marriage, her altruistic career, the children she will have. As Alma initially presents herself, her life is all good, all conformity to moral principles; her soul is quiet, she has no reason to worry. Like the acting conscience, she starts out thinking, or lying to herself and to the other, that she is entirely good. Later, however, she confesses to contradictions between what she believes in and how she has behaved, to guilt, compromise, and a guilty conscience.

As becomes clear, Alma expects reciprocation of her confessions, and thinks that her self-exposure will draw the actress out of her silence in order to respond. One evening, for instance, Alma tells Elisabeth about her first love affair with a married man. The scene cuts to Elisabeth's bedroom where the women are drinking a liqueur, Alma still speaking and Elisabeth listening from the bed. Alma says,

'I've been told that I'm a good listener. It's strange, isn't it? No one has ever bothered to listen to me, like you do now. You really listen to me. You're the only person who has ever listened to me. It can't be very interesting for you. It's awful the way I rattle on. It's so nice to talk. It feels so warm and nice.'

Alma then confesses to Elisabeth that she does not love her fiancé: "I like Karl-Henrik a lot. But you know, you only love once. But I'm faithful to him." Only a little later, however, Alma provides a detailed account of

an incident in which she was unfaithful to her fiancé, when she and another woman, a stranger, had sex with two young boys whom they noticed spying on them as they sun-bathed naked on a secluded beach. Alma tells Elisabeth that she realized soon after that she was pregnant and, aided by her medical student fiancé, who assumed the child to be his own, had an abortion. At this point in her story, Alma starts to cry and says that she has a bad conscience, that she feels she is two people. Alma had spoken earlier to Elisabeth about nurses who never marry and retire to a home for spinster nurses, and describes her admiration for these women who devote their entire lives to caring for others, remaining true to an unchanging ideal over many years. She says she thinks that one should be true to one ideal throughout an entire lifetime, as she has failed to do.

As Alma cries over her two selves, the one that is faithful to Henrik and feels her whole life, the children she will raise for him and the good life they will have together, is already contained within her, and the one that basks in the spontaneity and abandon of having sex in the sun with strangers while her fiancé is away, she mourns the discrepancy between her ideal and her actions. As she cries, flinging herself beside Elisabeth on the bed and blowing her nose, the actress strokes her hair, an amused but affectionate smile playing on her lips. Still later the same night, Alma exclaims: "Think about talking non-stop. I've been talking all the time. How boring for you. You can't possibly be interested in my life. I ought to be like you." Although encouraged to confide by Elisabeth's attentive listening and friendly gaze, Alma almost immediately feels self-conscious, wondering if she ought to have been as silent as her companion.

The long confessional scene cuts back to the kitchen, where it is almost morning and the women are now drinking wine. Alma puts her head on the table, clearly drunk. Elisabeth's back is to the camera, and so we cannot see her lips, but we hear an unfamiliar voice say: "You must go to bed or you will fall asleep here." This is presumably Elisabeth's voice, which we have not yet heard, and yet it sounds disembodied, ethereal, strange, and so we also suspect it is Alma's drunken imagination that we hear. Alma lifts her head, looks at Elisabeth in surprise, returns her head to the table, lifts it again and, apparently concluding that it was her own thoughts and not Elisabeth's voice that she heard, repeats them out loud, saying: "I must go to bed or I will fall asleep here." Once Alma is in bed, a ghost-like Elisabeth in a white nightgown appears to visit her, embraces her, running her hand through her hair, comparing their faces in a mirror, and touching her lips to the nurse's neck, but once more we suspect this is merely Alma's fantasy. In the morning, walking on the beach with the actress, the clearly troubled



nurse asks Elisabeth if she had spoken to her the night before. The actress shakes her head, looking at the other woman quizzically. A moment later Alma asks her if she had come into her room the previous night, and once more Elisabeth shakes her head. Elisabeth, who said nothing the night before, walks peacefully on the beach, while Alma, who talked "non-stop," is tortured and confused. As Foucault will write of confession, "the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is [s]he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing" (HS, 62).

In the next scene, Alma, having recovered her spirits, is leaving the house to run errands, and is given a letter by Elisabeth to mail. While driving into the town, Alma notices that the envelope is unsealed, and that the letter is addressed to Elisabeth's doctor, Alma's employer in the city. She pulls the car onto the side of the road and reads the letter. Elisabeth has written: "I would like to live like this always. To reduce your needs, to feel your soul's right side coming out. Alma is taking good care of me, spoiling me. I think she is quite fond of me, even a tiny bit in love in a charming way. Besides, it's really funny studying her." At this point Alma looks up from the letter and stares into the distance, and her expression is pained. After a moment she returns to the letter, which continues: "Sometimes she cries over past sins, an orgy with strangers and later the abortion. She claims her ideas of life don't match with her acts."

The fact that Elisabeth writes a letter to her doctor describing the emergence of her soul's "rightness" affirms the Hegelian interpretation that the actress seeks moral approval and recognition from others, and demonstrates that the doctor's interpretation that Elisabeth wishes to be exposed in her duplicity is wrong. Rather, following the more Hegelian reading, the actress actively seeks recognition and moral approbation from both the nurse and the doctor. The "rightness" of Elisabeth's soul is meaningless unless the nurse and doctor bear witness to it. Correspondingly, as shall be seen, Elisabeth's state of mind degenerates again when Alma's opinion turns. Like the judging conscience, therefore, Elisabeth depends on the recognition of another whom she herself nevertheless views with condescension.

From the letter we see that Elisabeth feels that her soul is purified by her refusal to act and speak. She has not recognized the doctor's insight that silence and inaction are but another role she plays, despite the fact that, as with the mental act of the judging consciousness, Elisabeth's very act of writing, of casting judgment, is itself an act, and is as such a compromise of her supposedly pure inactivity. Indeed, the letter reveals the discrepancy between Elisabeth's inner thoughts and the manner in which she has made herself appear to Alma, between what she thinks

and how she has acted, between her silent judgments and her compassionate gazes. Nevertheless oblivious to her own duplicity, feeling herself cleansed by her retreat from speech and life, Elisabeth casts judgment on Alma for the contradictions between the nurse's actions and ideals, exploiting the other woman's confession, presuming herself safe in her own silence. Elisabeth judges Alma's inconstant position between the devotion to an ideal and the unideal actions which she has admitted as "funny," failing to sympathize with Alma's plight or to recognize their commonality, or the resonance with her own proclaimed purity and impure deed.

Alma had confessed to Elisabeth in the hope of recognition or identification between the two women. She had even fantasized that Elisabeth spoke to her, if only to say it was time to go to bed, and identifies with her, even if it is only to come into her room and compare their faces in a mirror. Alma is willing to take any word, any gesture at all, even a banal or an erotic one, as reciprocation and identification, but in the morning she realizes that she has had to invent them. Elisabeth shakes her head, she did not make these gestures, she did not speak, she did not come to her. Worse still, Alma, who thought she was pure, even pure in her confession of guilt since it was meant to help the other woman, finds herself condemned by Elisabeth and learns that Elisabeth sees herself purified, different from the nurse, uncompromised, the beautiful soul that must nevertheless speak (or write), but only to claim her goodness and not her guilt.

If Alma is scarcely Napoleon, Elisabeth is the *valet de chambre* who does nothing herself but feels superior because she judges the other's dirty laundry when Alma conveniently airs it. At this point, Alma ceases to admire Elisabeth and realizes the other woman's guilt, that she is "rotten," that her silence and the letter she has written were acts, and moreover cruel acts, base, ungenerous and unkind. If Elisabeth will not admit these faults herself Alma will expose them for her. Alma has admitted that her acts have compromised her, but at least she acted, and at least she admitted to the compromise. Elisabeth, she now sees, whom before she had esteemed, is in fact the baser of the two consciences because she also acts, but accomplishes nothing because her acts are mere judgments, and hence they withdraw her from the goodness of life and from community without removing her from life's impurity. In her retreat into authentic being remote from doing she has in fact retained all that is impure about actions while rejecting all that is noble in them: communion with other people, the possibility of good deeds. In the scenes that follow, Alma becomes frenzied trying to force Elisabeth to admit her implication in the flawed nature of existence, as if



her own sanity depended on the other's admission of their shared and flawed humanity, of their similarity.

Returning to the house, a distraught Alma begs Elisabeth to speak, to say one word to help her. She acknowledges that this will be a sacrifice for Elisabeth, a sacrifice presumably of the actress's purity, but begs her to utter some word for Alma's sake nevertheless:

Will you please do me a favour? I know it's a sacrifice but I need your help. I'd like you to talk with me. We can talk about anything. We can talk about what we are going to eat, or if we think the water is so cold we can't swim. We can talk only for a few minutes. For one minute. You can read to me aloud from your book. Say a few words! I must try not to be angry. I need you to talk with me now. Please, just say one word.

Yet Elisabeth remains silent. Alma says, "I knew you would refuse. You can't know how I feel. I always thought that artists are compassionate. That they create out of compassion. But that was stupid." Although Alma has just withdrawn her initial compliment which so pleased the actress in her hospital bed, Elisabeth takes a paper knife and indifferently cuts open the pages of the play she is reading, unmoved by the other woman's pleas. Alma begins to walk away, but turns around and cries: "You have used me for something I don't know! You don't need me anymore so you throw me away! Oh yes, I know how it sounds, how false it is: 'You have used me and now you are throwing me away.' It has come to that. Every single word." Because Elisabeth does not speak, Alma finds that her own words sound false to her, ridiculous, a "funny case" even to herself. She is forced to hear every word she speaks resonate in silence and besiege her. Alma cries: "You made me talk and tell you things I never told anybody. What a study, eh? ... Now you will talk ..." and she begins striking Elisabeth, struggling with her until the actress slaps her, causing blood to flow from her nose. In response, Alma takes a pot of boiling water from the stove and is about to throw it at Elisabeth, but the actress screams, "No, don't!"—speaks, at last, and this makes Alma stop. She is not consoled, however, as the actress has only spoken out of fright, not out of compassion, and Alma accuses her, even in the midst of their struggle, of memorizing her gestures, her expressions, as interesting aspects of the actress's case study of her. Alma asks her: "Does it have to be like this? Is it really important not to lie, to speak the truth with real intonation? Can one live day by day without prattling? Without lying, quibbling and making excuses? Isn't it better to be blunt and lax, mendacious?" In asking these questions, Alma seems to have realized the doctor's interpretation of Elisabeth's silence,

that the actress is refusing to speak because to speak is to lie; it cannot be "the truth" spoken sincerely, but is always a compromised, imperfect act. But she asks the actress if these compromises are not after all necessary, if, as the doctor has also suggested, it is possible to be entirely pure and truthful. But while the doctor thinks Elisabeth will come to recognize this for herself, Alma concludes, "No, you don't understand. People like you can't be reached. The doctor said you are sane. I wonder if your madness is the worst kind. You act sane. You do it so well that everybody believes in you. Everybody except me. I know how rotten you are."

At this, Elisabeth storms off onto the beach. Alma follows, crying to her for forgiveness. She says:

That awful letter.... I was so disappointed. You encouraged me to talk. You looked so kind and understanding. I was drunk. It was so nice to talk about everything. I was also flattered because a great actress bothered to listen to me. Somehow I thought that maybe things I said would help you. But it is so awful. It's sheer exhibitionism. Elisabeth, I want you to forgive me. I like you so much. You mean so much to me. I've learned from you. Let's not part like this.

Elisabeth stops and looks at her, but in the end says nothing and walks away, refuses to forgive her, to utter any word at all which Alma could take as an act of sympathy, of forgiveness and hence of understanding. Alma cries: "You are too proud to forgive me. You will not condescend. You think it's not needed. I will not! I will not!" and falls sobbing onto the rocks. Her words show that she thinks Elisabeth's utterance of any word at all would have been an act of humility, of condescension, that any word whatsoever could be taken as forgiveness, an act of generosity but also of comprehension and implication. As in Hegel's dialectic, there is an assumption in Bergman's film, at least on the part of Alma, that the granting of forgiveness can be taken as an admission of guilt, requiring a forsaking of Elisabeth's pride. Forgiveness, as for Hegel, is understood as entailing an acknowledgment of mutual guilt, and this is the reason Elisabeth will not forgive.

Elisabeth's refusal to forgive, the judgment that this refusal implies, are acts, however—heartless acts, denying the other the recognition she requires, and thus compromise the judging conscience in her very claim of purity. At this point we may recall that listening to the woman begging for forgiveness on the radio play Elisabeth hears in her hospital room at the beginning of the film, the actress surprises her nurse by laughing out loud. This seems to foreshadow the similar scene in which Elisabeth is

unmoved, even mocking, coolly cutting open the pages of her book, when Alma pleads with her to say anything at all that could be taken as forgiveness, to talk even about the weather, and later cries: "Elisabeth! Elisabeth, forgive me!" In the radio play the pleading woman does not receive a verbal refusal of forgiveness: we hear no other voice but that of the woman begging for forgiveness. Whomever the radio play actress is pleading with does not answer, just as Elisabeth's refusal of forgiveness comes not even as a "no" but as a more devastating silence.

In the radio play the woman's voice, met with no response, abruptly shifts from begging for forgiveness to accusing the silent other of being merciless and cruel. Likewise, Alma rapidly moves between the positions of guilty conscience admitting her guilt and asking for forgiveness, to accusing the other woman of hard-heartedness and rottenness, of implication in similar sins. Elisabeth remains composed during Alma's petitions for forgiveness, unmoved when it is merely a matter of the other's needs, but just as she angrily shuts off the radio when the shift from pleading to accusation takes place, so she reacts in indignation and flees when Alma moves from penitent to plaintiff. She can remain indifferent to the other person's longing for recognition, but when accusation threatens her own self-understanding and the other's recognition of her as morally good, Elisabeth must leave the scene or silence the play.

As hours pass and night falls Alma remains seated on the rocks where in her initial despair she had flung herself. Inside, Elisabeth lies down on a bed and picks up a book as if to read, but a copy of a photograph falls out of the book. Elisabeth places the photograph under a lamp and lies on the bed staring at it. It is a well known photograph of a young boy about to be shot by Nazi soldiers. As Elisabeth's eyes move from corner to corner of the photograph, the camera focuses on detail after detail, pausing for long moments on the boy's sobbing, frightened face, the concentrated faces of the soldiers, the horrified faces of the women and children in the background, the exchanges of terrified and cold glances, the gun, the boy's raised hand, the boy's face again. This scene also recalls an earlier one in the hospital in which Elisabeth, in horror, watches news footage on television in which a man is burned alive during a political riot. Together, the two scenes suggest that it is not just the imperfections of her own words and actions that Elisabeth is trying to remove herself from in her withdrawal from life but the massive imperfection of life on a larger, historical and political scale. If Elisabeth is "mute, like [Bergman]," one is also reminded that Bergman himself had been a young exchange student in Germany during the rise of Hitler, and had become an enthusiastic member of the Nazi Youth along with the other children in his host family, dreaming of the nazification of

Sweden when he returned home, only to retreat in disgust from politics during the rest of his life when the facts of the concentration camps became known. Horror-stricken, like Elisabeth, by images such as these which testified to evil in which he had been complicit, Bergman retreated, if not from life itself then from political life, becoming politically inactive and silent in response to the realization that he could say and believe desperately flawed claims.

In the next scene, the power relation between the two women seems to be reversed. We wonder if we are once more in a delusional fantasy of Alma's imagining, for, no longer drunk or dreaming, the nurse, returning to the house, may have gone mad. Now it is Elisabeth who appears vulnerable and Alma who has become uncompromisingly severe. Elisabeth is sitting at a table, looking at another photograph. Alma enters the room, and although Elisabeth tries to cover the photo with her hand, the nurse insists on seeing it. It is the picture of the actress's son which she had earlier torn in two. Alma says: "Tell me now Elisabeth. Or I will do it for you." As Elisabeth remains silent, staring at the nurse with fearful eyes, Alma proceeds to "do it for her," providing for Elisabeth the confession that the actress has for so long refused to give.

Alma then tells Elisabeth that Elisabeth has never loved her child, that she has wanted it to die, that she tried to miscarry it, and that she is cold and indifferent, that she is "rotten." If indeed Elisabeth has wanted her young son to die, as Alma suggests, the previous scene in which she stares at the photo of another young boy whose death is desired by adults, the child about to be shot by Nazi soldiers, takes on new meaning. That the two scenes come back to back and that both involve photos of boys of the same age seems to support such an interpretation, in which case the separation between the imperfection of history and of Elisabeth's own private life, between the inhumane acts of the Nazis and the lovelessness of her own motherhood, at least as it is being construed, take on a distant resonance.

Elisabeth initially tries to reject the confession, shaking her head, but as the confession goes on, she seems to be drawn into it, accepting it as her own. The whole scene is replayed a second time, this time with the camera on Alma's face instead of Elisabeth's. Not only is the confession repeated in its entirety, but there are repetitions within the speech itself: Alma says to Elisabeth, for instance, "you wanted the child born dead. You wanted a dead child." Elisabeth is as if hypnotized listening to "her" confession, stops shaking her head after the first few moments, stops looking away, learning it, accepting it, internalizing the words. While in the drunken scene Alma had told Elisabeth that she herself has a bad conscience, she now tells Elisabeth, "You were afraid and had a bad conscience." Alma has also told Elisabeth that she has had an abortion,

and now she tells Elisabeth that Elisabeth wanted the child she was pregnant with to die, had tried to abort or miscarry it, and did not love the child that insisted on surviving, thus projecting a confession similar to her own onto the other woman. We might also think here of Bergman's prolific but irresponsible and perhaps loveless paternity, and think that it is *his* confession which is being projected onto both women, or onto both his mute and talkative selves. At this point, to the clash of a dissonant soundtrack, the two women's faces merge.

Bergman provides no flashback from Elisabeth's own perspective nor any authorial interpretation of his own to confirm the truth of Alma's "confession" for Elisabeth, and thus we cannot know whether it in fact corresponds with Elisabeth's past or with her thoughts before Alma spoke for her. We do not know whether Alma is correct that Elisabeth's inability to play the role of mother with sincerity is the cause of her disgust with the inauthenticity of social roles and action in general, or whether we should think that Alma is simply projecting her own causes of bad conscience onto the other woman, offering an interpretation of Elisabeth's silence that the other woman refuses to give, but which is in fact merely autobiographical on Alma's part. As seen, Alma had wanted to think she could become like Elisabeth, and thought that Elisabeth could easily be like her, had longed for a kind of identification with the other woman, and as such a reciprocation of her confession. Perhaps when she told Elisabeth of her own compromised actions, she had hoped that Elisabeth would break her silence and admit to the same faults and disappointments. Alma told Elisabeth that she had thought her own confession would "help" the other woman, perhaps believing that in recognizing that the nurse had had the same experiences, the same inability to fulfill her roles of faithful lover and loving mother, Elisabeth would find relief through commiseration and be given the strength to make a similar and therapeutic confession of her own. Like the acting consciousness, Alma may have expected and hoped for recognition of her own confession from the actress, but instead, to her surprise and sadness, she was only met by the other woman's continued silence. Worse still, Alma also found herself the object of an unsympathetic judgment for her confessed faults in Elisabeth's letter to the doctor, in which Elisabeth simultaneously claimed that the "right side" of her own soul was coming out, just as the judging consciousness refuses to identify with the acting consciousness's confession but merely condemns it. Desiring and anticipating reciprocity in her confession, Alma is instead met with cold silence and a condescending indictment from Elisabeth who, refusing to identify with Alma as the nurse had expected, congratulates herself instead on her own moral "rightness." Finding that her confession has done nothing to make Elisabeth form a bond of

commonality with her—that, in Hegel's words, Elisabeth "repels this community of nature"—Alma has tried confronting Elisabeth with her hypocrisy (PS, §666). Now we see that the doctor's interpretation of Elisabeth was indeed wrong. The actress does not crave that someone reveal her inauthenticity and force her true self out into the open. Rather, like Hegel's beautiful soul, like Rousseau, she wants only the other's commendation and not her accusations, and will not even acknowledge the blatant truth of these accusations when they come. While in Hegel's dialectic the beautiful soul, at this point or after a bit more wasting away, will break and forgive acting conscience, thus implying for Hegel that she is equally guilty and forming a bond of recognition with the other, Elisabeth maintains her silence even as she sees that this mentally devastates the other woman. That Alma is destroyed, goes mad and loses herself, suggests, with Hegel, the extreme importance of recognition, such that subjectivity will dissolve in its absence. It suggests an ethical and psychological requirement that one forgive when the other asks for forgiveness, a requirement that philosophers such as Lévinas and Derrida will problematize.<sup>3</sup> But for Alma as for Hegel, forgiveness is recognition, and recognition is required for the subject to survive. The quasi-erotic intimacy between the two women in their first days at the summer house thus becomes a struggle for survival and sanity when an initial sense of mutual recognition demands to be made explicit and is refused.

Fighting for her sanity, Alma needs Elisabeth's confession and thus, if the other woman will not give it, she is willing to "do it for her," to *take* it, invent it, force it onto the other person's psyche, and the confession she will provide for the other woman will be her own. At this point, the film has gone beyond Hegel's predictions of human psychology. He thinks that both beautiful souls will break or die before this point is reached—the judging conscience because cut off from humanity, the acting conscience because starved for lack of recognition—and thus, to avoid such a catastrophe, the judging conscience will have no choice but to forgive and thus save both lives. In Bergman's film, however, the will to survive without compromising in both cases perseveres. In *Persona* the judging conscience will fail to perish in her self-enforced solitude, and acting conscience does not merely need to suffer temporarily in the silence of the other but must eventually realize that this silence, if the other is left free, will be interminable and deadly to her, and that she must therefore respond in a manner and to a situation which Hegel does not describe.

Foucault, in his study of confession in the *History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, does consider the scenario that Hegel does not, a scenario which in fact was not novel at all in 1807, although at that moment it

was rapidly taking on new forms. Of the situation in which, despite all moral pleas and psychological pressures, the threat of social ostracization and the loss of love, the other will not confess, Foucault observes: "one confesses—or is forced to confess" (HS, 59). Alma says to Elisabeth, "Tell me now Elisabeth. Or I will do it for you." As Foucault remarks, the confession is not always spontaneous, it may also be extracted:

When it is not spontaneous or dictated by some internal imperative, the confession is wrung from a person by violence or threat; it is driven from its hiding place in the soul, or extracted from the body. Since the Middle Ages, torture has accompanied it like a shadow, and supported it when it could go no further: the dark twins. The most defenseless tenderness and the bloodiest of powers have a similar need of confession (HS, 59).

From the tenderness of the scene of Alma's drunken confession, from the charming infatuation of which Elisabeth's letter shows that she is aware, Alma awaits the reciprocal confession that she desires, and will transform the relation of caretaking and friendship between the two women into a struggle for power in which blood is shed when it is not given. Forcing the confession of heartless maternity onto Elisabeth's soul, the suspicion that Alma has gone mad seems confirmed in the following scene in which she babbles and screams words such as "Us, we, no, no. Many words and then nausea. The incredible pain!" Saying "us, we," Alma flails in her desire for community with the other woman, to be able to speak of "us" and "we" and their common sins, but has not received the recognition of this commonality, and so cries, "no, no," there is no "us" or "we." She has spoken "many words," telling the other woman that "It's so nice to talk. It feels so warm and nice," that she has "never been so in the mood," discovering the erotic pleasures of the confession which Foucault describes, the reciprocal spirals of pleasure in which the reciprocity is nevertheless unbalanced and unpredictable, an erotic mutuality that may not manifest itself in equal words, a "warmth" which almost immediately becomes "incredible pain," which is in fact, in Foucault's words, psychological domination on the part of the one "who listens and says nothing." Only moments later, faced with the other's silence, Alma wonders if she has not spoken too much, "non-stop," if she should not have been quiet like Elisabeth. The next day, Alma must face the sober realization that she has spoken alone, that she has only fantasized Elisabeth's reciprocation, and that the pleasure that Elisabeth received from Alma's confession was not found in confessing herself, nor in being helped by the other's confession, nor even in a similar form of sexual arousal, but lay in an erotically charged voyeurism that the actress would

share in her letter with the doctor, and moreover in a feeling of superiority and purity derived from the other's confession of guilt. Then the "nausea" came. As Alma screams, "us, we," Elisabeth, abused and now almost broken, mouths words back, but still does not speak. Alma attacks her, striking her repeatedly, drawing blood.

In the conclusion of the film, Elisabeth leaves the country house, apparently picked up by a car. Alma covers the furniture with sheets and stacks the pillows, closing up the house before waiting for the bus that will take her to the city. Elisabeth has not escaped Alma by returning to the city, however, nor the words that she must eventually speak. She has returned to her hospital bed, to her apathy, to the state she was in before going to the country, withdrawn and alone, the beautiful soul once more wasting away. In a final, delusional scene, Alma goes into her hospital room in her nurse's uniform and awakens the actress, saying, "Try to listen to me. Repeat after me. Nothing. Nothing. No, nothing." Alma forces the actress to sit up, and Elisabeth says, "Nothing." Alma says, "That's it. That's the way it shall be," and allows her to lie down again, shattered. In this scene in which she succeeds in making the actress speak, Alma finally achieves the counter-confession that she, like the acting conscience, desires. Alma has gotten Elisabeth to speak and this has been a "repeating after me," a repetition of and synthesis into the same, an abolition of the other and a case of the confessing subject aggressing the other to say what she wants to hear. There is perhaps "nothing" left of Elisabeth in what is finally said.

### Confessing the Other

Waiting in vain for God to speak to him, Augustine fills God's silence with words, with pleas that the other should speak. He asks in the *Confessions*, "You see this, Lord, but you are very patient and look on silently.... Will you always remain silent?" In his "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King Jr. also describes the pain of waiting for a silent other to speak, noting of the clergy in whom he had placed his hopes that they "have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of the stained-glass windows. In spite of my shattered dreams." Elizabeth Smart, describing the silence of her lover in *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept*, writes: "I cannot hear him, and silence writes more terrible things than he can ever deny." In Sartre's *No Exit*, Inez tells her companions in Hell: "Your silence clamors in my ears," and thus refuses their pact of silence, speaking and speaking again. In "Cartographies of Silence," Adrienne Rich writes:

This was the silence I wanted to break in you  
 I had questions but you would not answer  
 I had answers but you could not use them  
 This is useless to you and perhaps to others.

What each of these authors expresses is the pain in which the silence of the other is experienced, and the feeling of powerlessness and despair in which it is lived. The destruction of Alma in Bergman's *Persona* is another evocation of the desire for the other's recognition, and is a poignant portrayal of the anguish of living with the other's silence. Whatever conclusions this may lead us to draw about the one who remains silent, the beautiful soul whom Hegel calls "evil," in the remainder of this paper I want to focus on the ethical dilemma of the one who speaks but receives no recognition in return, and whether she can elicit the other's confession or speak for her.

In the case of Bergman's *Persona*, I have been stressing the violence of Alma's demand for Elisabeth's confession, as well as the violence of Elisabeth's refusal to speak. Despite the uneasy specter of torture, the "dark twin" of confession to which Foucault refers and to which the incitement of another's confession gives rise, the expression of desire for a confessional response from the other is today frequently couched in ethical terms, for the counter-confession of the other is viewed as necessary for mutual recognition and forgiveness. As in Hegel's dialectic, the subject is understood as requiring the other's confession as recognition of their shared humanity, to feel forgiven by the other, and moreover to forgive her. The other's forgiveness and one's own opportunity to forgive are both deemed necessary for the subject's peace of mind and for community. Confession and counter-confession as giving rise to a bond of humanity, to community, and to reciprocal forgiveness and psychic peace, present the expectation of the other's confession as an ethical demand. Nevertheless, it will be argued that the demand that the other confess, or that she reciprocate a confession and counter-confess, is a violent one, and that it is necessary neither for community nor for forgiveness.

Nancy K. Miller's article, "Reading Spaces," provides an example of the manner in which the desire to hear the other's confession may be couched in ethical terms. In this essay Miller is responding to charges of "nouveau solipsism" and "moi-ism" directed against herself and other academics who have engaged in academic autobiography (RS, 422). In her defense, Miller argues that "the writing autobiographical subject ... always requires a partner in crime. Put another way, it takes two to make an autobiography, to perform an autobiographical act" (RS, 422–3). Miller claims that autobiographies are always written in a "relational

mode," or concern not only the autobiographer herself but her relations with others. As she writes, memoir writing is "not about terminal 'moi-ism,' as it's been called, but rather a rendezvous ... with the other" (RS, 422). For Miller, autobiography is always about human relations, and this makes autobiographical writing ethical.

The majority of Miller's article is not about the relationality of confessional writing, however, but about confessional *reading*. Miller attempts to explain not only why we *write* so many autobiographies, but why we *read* so many, and why they sell. Miller argues that the "relational mode" extends not only to writing memoirs but to reading them, and we also read confessional texts out of a desire to meet the other. As Miller describes it, however, this rendezvous is not an encounter with alterity but a means of identifying with the other, no matter how exotic one's taste in memoirs is, or how unlike one's own life the memoir may appear. Miller calls this "allo-identification" (RS, 430). As she writes, "what seems to be going on between memoir writers and their readers is a relational act that creates identifications" (RS, 423). Accordingly, "When you read the lives of others, you can't help but remember your own: your parents, your love affairs, your ambitions" (RS, 424). Miller suggests that memoir reading is an aide-mémoire, a means of remembering one's life, and calls this "collective memorialization." Apparently assuming American autobiographies, she claims that reading memoirs provides "building blocks to a more fully shared national narrative" (RS, 424). What is assumed in advance is a collectivity, a shared narrative. This is not "navel-gazing" since the navel is shared; one is gazing at other people's navels to see how much they are like one's own.

Miller explores in depth memoirs by two women who, like herself, grew up in New York in the 1950s as examples. These are autobiographies by women writers who lived within blocks of Miller and went to the same New York schools and universities, and Miller describes moments in reading when she could scribble in the margins "Keith Gibbs! ... I knew him too! I dated his brother!," and "we both shopped at the same store in the East Village" (RS, 425–9). Nevertheless, Miller also claims to identify with the memoirs of writers to whom she is less obviously connected. For instance, she describes reading Maxine Hong Kingston's description of growing up Chinese-American and poor in post-war California in the following terms:

Maxine Hong Kingston puts the problem this way: 'when you try to understand what things in you are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, to insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is

Chinese? What is Chinese tradition and what is the movies?' How, I ask myself in translation, can I separate the story of my life from that of any nice Jewish girl who grew up middle-class in New York in the 1950s? (RS, 423).

According to Miller, memoir reading does not function like a mirror, but as "translation," and so in her example we see her "translating" Chinese-American into Jewish, California into Manhattan, and poor into middle class (RS, 430). This is not a very accurate translation, since poor and middle class, for instance, mean very different things. Memoir reading, for Miller, is thus a process of transforming another person's life into one's own experiences in such a way that Kingston's descriptions of being Chinese-American and poor are written over, and instead are the reader's own notions of middle class and Jewish. Miller writes: "however hellish the lives told in memoirs, they give you just what your unrecorded history lacks ... a narrative through which to make sense of your own past" (RS, 430). One's life is remembered, and comes to make sense, through comparisons with the other, of paths taken and not taken, through identifications and disidentifications. In either case one reads the other's life to think about one's own. Miller writes that one reads oneself "across the body or under the skin of other selves" (RS, 430).

This seems like an egocentric reading practice, and yet Miller describes it as ethical because it involves a relationship between self and other, even if the other is merely a path back to the self and her difference is only an opportunity for comparison with the reader. As Miller writes, "I inserted myself into the memoirs of others for a good cause," and "Memoir paradoxically is the most generous of modern genres" (RS, 430–2). Yet one might respond that not all relations with others are ethical: to take two obvious examples, rape and murder are always inter-relational but few would say that this makes them inherently ethical acts. Moreover, it might not be generous to the other to identify with her, particularly when this identification means obliterating all that is particular to her and replacing it with one's own life, as when Miller "translates" Hong Kingston's sentence by erasing everything that makes it specific to the other. Hong Kingston might well feel that far from having been read or rendezvoused with generously, Miller has missed her point, has refused to read her, obliterated her difference, assimilated her into the same, and has not responded to her ethically or otherwise. What Hong Kingston has been trying to describe has been erased, and her uniqueness has been subsumed into the life of the reader through a violent series of identifications which obscure the specificity of the other.

The confessional subject, which Miller acknowledges that she herself is, desires the confessions of others, as was also seen in the case of

Alma. Nevertheless it seems that she desires them as occasions to reflect on herself, or in order to spark further confessional self-reflections, just as Alma desired Elisabeth's confession as a repetition of and identification with her own. Foucault's "confessional animal" does not only want to confess, but also wants to hear confessions, however the confessing animal does not necessarily want to hear the confessions of others out of a genuinely ethical or generous interest in her, but, as Miller shows, out of a sustained interest in herself. Even our voyeurism is narcissistic. This explains the market for the memoir biz, or the desire for a proliferation of confessions on a cultural level, for talk shows, reality television, and literary confessions. However, beyond this diffuse desire for confessions which fuels the market, we also expect and solicit confessions in a more immediate way, as direct responses from the person in whom we have ourselves confided. We thus confess in intimate conversation and then await the other's reciprocation, not in all cases because we are interested in her life, but because the other's response recognizes our own confession and allows us to go on confessing. We frequently listen to the other's confession for an opportunity to say "me too" or "not I," and then to elaborate on this identification or disidentification, to confess again.

In *Troubling Confessions*, Peter Brooks notes the manner in which confession becomes a manipulation of the other in an expectation of reciprocation. He writes: "Confession on this account turns into a subtle act of aggression, a demand for self-judgement and counter-confession on the part of the interlocutor, a demand for a kind of common transparency in the assumption of generalized guilt" (TC, 165). Brooks discusses the manner in which Clamence, in Camus's *The Fall*, confesses in order to invite the other to do the same, to have the other "go one better" (TC, 145). Clamence tells his confessor: "Do try. Be assured that I will listen to your own confession with a great feeling of fraternity," thus assuming in advance that the confession of the other will be a brotherly one, a counter-confession in which Clamence will recognize the other as akin.

Jean-Paul Sartre calls the person who demands confessions from others "the champion of sincerity" (EN, 99). In the example that Sartre explores, the champion of sincerity asks a friend to confess that he is a homosexual. The friend who has had homosexual experiences but has not confessed that he is a homosexual is in bad faith because he thinks that his past has nothing to do with himself, that he is "not a homosexual ... in the sense in which this table is not an inkwell" (SPS, 158). Yet the champion of sincerity is also in bad faith because he wants his friend to admit that he is a homosexual in the sense that an inkwell is an inkwell, to admit to homosexuality as an in-itself identity. As Sartre realizes, the champion of sincerity is asking the other to fix himself in an



identity that would deny his transcendence. In the end, the champion of sincerity provides his friend with the confession that the other refuses to make, stating: "He's just a pederast." As Sartre writes of such confessions made for others:

Who cannot see how offensive to the Other and how reassuring for me is a statement such as, 'He's just a pederast,' which erases a disturbing freedom with one sweep and which aims at henceforth constituting all the acts of the Other as consequences following strictly from his essence. That is actually what the critic is demanding of his victim—that he constitute himself as a thing, that he should entrust his freedom to his friend as a fief, in order that the friend should return it to him subsequently—like a suzerain to his vassal ... he demands that freedom as freedom constitute itself as a thing. We have here only one episode in that battle to the death of consciousnesses which Hegel calls 'the relation of the master and the slave.' A person appeals to another and demands that in the name of his nature as consciousness he should radically destroy himself as consciousness (SPS, 159).

Demanding a confession of another is thus a request that she should deny her freedom for my peace of mind. In being the champion of the other's sincerity I ask that she destroy herself to satiate my desire for recognition and mastery.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler argues that while it is in fact ethical to ask the other "Who are you?," we cannot expect the other's answer to provide us with a notion of her identity as something fixed or knowable. Butler writes:

As we ask to know the other, or ask that the other say, finally or definitively, who he or she is, it will be important not to expect an answer that will ever satisfy. By not pursuing satisfaction and by letting the question remain open, even enduring, we let the other live, since life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it (GA, 43).

As we kill desire by satisfying it, we kill the other if we make her fulfill our need to know her once and for all. For Butler, as for Sartre, if we seek the fulfillment of our desire to know the other, we would be willing that the lack, alterity, and thus the freedom or vitality of the other be extinguished. The ethical relation, for Butler, is thus a desire to know the other, to ask, as Augustine repeatedly asks God, "Who are you?," but

without expecting a response or a fulfillment of one's desire, as Augustine goes on loving a God who never does reply.

Although Sartre considers the confessional relation in terms of the master-slave dialectic, it is in the beautiful soul dialectic that Hegel himself describes the life and death struggle between a confessing subject and a subject who resists reciprocating. In "To Forgive," Derrida criticizes this analysis of confession and forgiveness in Hegel as "a sort of narcissism," and as a "logic of identification with the other that is assumed by the scene of forgiveness" (TF, 41). In Hegel's discussion of the beautiful soul, it was seen that the acting conscience confesses only because she has realized that the judging conscience is also guilty, and thus assumes that her confession will be reciprocated, that the two will co-confess and recognize one another as the same. She thinks that her confession is also a confession for the other person and that she is speaking of their mutual guilt, despite the fact that the other person does not consent to this confession and initially refuses to make it for herself. For Hegel, it is only because the agent believes she can include the other person in her confession that she confesses at all. Confession and forgiveness thus only take place as a means of identification, of subsuming the other into the same, even if this is a sameness of mutual singularity. Moreover, Hegel assumes that one would only forgive the other if one realizes one is similarly guilty. If the beautiful soul forgives, Hegel believes that this is a tacit confession that she is also guilty, and so one only co-forgives just as one only co-confesses.

Although, for Hegel, the beautiful soul will eventually surrender and admit that she is like the other, or will forgive her, which for Hegel is the same thing, what is interesting is the moment when the other does *not* provide the confession that is expected of her, and what the subject does in this situation. So long as the beautiful soul does not confess, Hegel thinks that she, like Elisabeth, will waste away in her isolation, estranged from others, and that she is thus socially compelled to confess. If she repels the community of nature, the community will repel her, exerting pressure on her to confess to achieve readmission into the community, which is the function of Alma in the film. The confession of the other must be had, and will be extracted through social and psychological pressure if not through physical torture. In Derrida's analysis of Hegel, this expectation of confession as co-confession occurs as a violence to alterity and moreover cannot allow for true forgiveness since it is situated in an economy of exchange: your confession for my granting you social reintegration.

In a talmudic reading entitled "Toward the Other," Lévinas makes explicit the argument that one cannot confess for another person and cannot even solicit her confession. Lévinas is discussing excerpts from



the Mishna and Gemara that consider Yom Kippur, the day "when faults committed against God are forgiven" (TO, 15). Trespasses are divided into faults against God and faults against other people. While faults that are against God need only be forgiven by Him, faults against neighbors must be forgiven both by the persons offended and by God, for the Gemara states: "If a man commits a fault toward another man and *appeases him*, God will forgive" (TO, 19). God forgives crimes against other people only if forgiveness is sought from the offended persons directly. Lévinas's reading underscores the radical impossibility of both confession and forgiveness without openly avowed contrition by the person immediately responsible made face to face with the person harmed. A story from the Gemara illustrates this point: Rab has been offended by a butcher. At Yom Kippur, he waits for the butcher to ask for appeasement. When the butcher does not come, Rab decides to take the other man's responsibility onto his own shoulders by going to the butcher to offer him the opportunity to confess. On his way to the butcher, Rab encounters one of his students, who tells him he will commit "murder" in offering the butcher the opportunity to confess. Perhaps this "murder" refers to the murder of the other person's responsibility to decide to confess for himself, or perhaps it is a murder of his alterity, including his assertion of alterity in not confessing when Rab would have him do so. Rab goes to the butcher despite this dire warning. The butcher refuses to confess but continues about his work, and hammering on an ox head is killed by a chip of bone lodging in his throat. Lévinas writes that this is not a story about a miracle performed by God but remains a lesson within the interhuman regarding the "enormity of the responsibility which Rab took upon himself" when trying to force confession and forgiveness on the other (TO, 23). The point of this story, according to Lévinas, is that there can be no "reversal of obligation": the offended cannot forgive the other if the other has not confessed, and no one can take on the responsibility of the other's confession, even by trying to incite it, however good one thinks this confession will be for the other's soul and whatever desire one may have for that confession oneself (TO, 22–3). Lévinas writes in *Otherwise than Being* that we are "accused of what the others do or suffer, or responsible for what they do or suffer" (OB, 112). In this later work, it seems that there is no problem with "reversals of obligation" from other to subject, nor with taking on the "enormity of the responsibility" of the other, of taking on his obligation of guilt, of being guilty for what he does. In Lévinas's talmudic reading, however, it seems we nevertheless cannot take on the responsibility of confessing for other people, of inciting their confessions, or of forgiving them without their confession. For Lévinas, to confess for the other person would deny the freedom of the other not to say what is expected of her. If it were the

case that we could speak for others, and even for groups of others as in mass confessions and pardons, we universalize confession and forgiveness despite the freedom and resistance of some persons being confessed for and on the part of whom forgiveness is being offered, and thus deny the interhuman and the face-to-face, the very possibility of ethics for Lévinas.

### Conclusion: Speaking of "us"

If we conclude with the claim that we cannot confess for the other or even elicit her confession, and take Bergman's film as a portrayal of this impossibility, what do we make of the two problems that arise for the subject who desires the other's confession, which is also testified to by Bergman's film in his portrayal of the destruction of Alma through Elisabeth's silence? On the one hand, the subject may need the other's confession to forgive her, as is suggested by Lévinas, for whom confession is impossible without the other's contrition, and thus for whom the other's confession is necessary for the subject to have reconciliation herself. On the other hand, the subject may need the other's confession for recognition, as in Hegel's dialectic of the beautiful souls.

With respect to the first question, we might follow Derrida, contra Lévinas, and deny that we need the other person's confession in order to forgive her, and in fact we may argue that in the case where we exchange our forgiveness for her confession we are not forgiving at all. In "To Forgive," Derrida suggests that we must "make silence the very element of forgiveness, if there is such a thing" (TF, 47). It is in the silence that makes forgiveness impossible that forgiveness may actually take place. It is in the silence of the other's failure to confess, and in our refraining from confessing for her, that forgiveness may occur, if forgiveness can exist at all.

With respect to the second question, we may turn to another article by Derrida, "*Le parjure*," perhaps, which once more considers the possibility of confessing for others. This essay deals with the 1964 novel by de Man's friend Henri Thomas, *Le parjure*, which was inspired by de Man's having been accused of perjury in the 1950s. The novel tells the story of a professor of literature named Stéphane Chalier who, like de Man, worked on Hölderlin and abandoned a wife and children when he emigrated from Belgium to the United States. Stéphane, like de Man, would later marry another woman in America without having divorced his first wife in Belgium, thus bringing about a perjury case which threatened a prominent intellectual with disgrace. Thomas's novel is narrated by a close friend of Stéphane Chalier. Witnessing his friend's situation,

the narrator tries to intervene with the committee investigating his case, which leads the committee to request a written confession. Stéphane, confronted by this demand for a confession, asks the narrator to write the confession for him, suggesting that his friend is responsible for writing the confession since it is his interference that provoked the demand. The narrator's response to being asked to write a confession for another person, and moreover being deemed *responsable* for it, is initially surprise and refusal. Slowly, however, he accepts the idea and begins drafting ideas for the other man's confession in his mind, thinking that as friend, acolyte, and witness, as the one who has interfered, he is responsible for speaking for the other man after all. At the same time he comes to feel guilty and "is constantly tormented by a disturbance of identification. He wonders at what moment and even whether he will ever have had the right to say 'us'" (LP, 186). Derrida considers the narrator's guilt. It does not arise from having committed bigamy himself, but perhaps for "having wanted to defend [his friend], of having intervened in his favor, of having been a witness for the defense, a witness for him, and for having thereby provoked the demand for a confession on the part of the committee..." (LP, 187).

The parallels between the narrator's interference for Chalièr and Derrida's interference for the de Man affair are apparent, and Derrida tells us that we "are free to make all the transpositions possible between the protagonists of the 'Chalièr affair' and those of the 'de Man' affair," in which Derrida was of course a protagonist (LP, 187). It is Derrida who, with others, decided to make public the information about his friend's wartime journalism, thus provoking the outcry for a confession report. Derrida asks whether the perjury to which the book's title refers is not the perjury involved in writing the novel itself, the perjury of the friend's confessing for another man. Derrida, in turn, in telling de Man's story would also feel guilty of perjury, of speaking for another, of disavowing him even while intervening for him, of speaking of an "us" in defending his friend, as Derrida does when he writes in "Typewriter Ribbon" of "*our* common innocence" and of "the best intentioned of all *our* machinations" (TR, 160). Here, Derrida writes of a commonality between himself and de Man, as if they were a "we," accused together, the perjurer and his acolyte, the acolyte who perjures himself in speaking for his friend.

In "*Le parjure*," perhaps, Derrida seems to suggest that confessing for the other is impossible, but only in the way that all confession is impossible, anacoluthonic, perjurous. The narrator in *Le parjure* does not in the end write the confession report, but he does go on to narrate the story we read in *Le parjure*, and so he does not leave things alone either. Similarly, Derrida intervenes in telling stories about de Man, publishing documents and bearing witness for him, confessing and excusing him,

defending his innocence as well as putting forth the evidence of his guilt, just as the narrator never doubts that his friend is, of course, guilty.

At the end of *Le parjure* the narrator says, "if I don't leave things there, that's because I am not Chalièr, merely someone close to him, and because I can offer an explanation to the extent that my situation is not altogether his—it will thus be only an approximate explanation" (LP, 192). He then exclaims, "How right Chalièr was when he said that it was my responsibility to write the report!" The confession is not written because it is impossible, and yet this impossibility grounds the responsibility to write the impossible confession. Likewise it is impossible for Derrida to confess for his friend, and yet it is also his responsibility not to "just leave things here." He must speak for the other, take responsibility for him, and speak of an "us," and yet, Derrida makes clear, this is not the Hegelian "us": "This *us* will never be the *us* reached by a phenomenology of mind in the figure of a knowing-itself of absolute knowledge" (LP, 196). The "us" Derrida speaks of when he says that he and de Man are commonly innocent, and when the narrator of *Le parjure* says "Now I can say 'us,'" depends on the realization that knowing the other is not knowing oneself, that I am not the other for whom I am responsible, and though I am responsible for his confession, it will only ever be an approximate explanation and not his own. The anacoluthonic moment of perjury is here not a subsumption of the other in the same, as would worry both Derrida with respect to Hegel and Lévinas with respect to all confessions made for others. Rather, this anacoluthonic perjury is a taking of responsibility for the other, which is grounded in and made possible by the realization of not being him, of there being no Hegelian "us." Anacoluthon is not a synthesis of pronouns, but is an interruption of syntax, a self-consciously perjurous substitution. Accordingly, it is perhaps not wrong of Alma to long for an "us" with Elisabeth, or even to try, tentatively, responsibly, to speak for her. What was wrong was the attempt to make this speaking an assimilation of the other into the same, to force a Hegelian "us" on the other such that the two women's faces would, in Bergman's film, merge into one. If we follow Lévinas's account of the face as expression of the other's alterity, such a merging of two faces into one will always be of a violence antithetical to ethics.

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## Notes

1. I would like to thank Rebecca Comay, Matthias Fritsch, and Amy Mullin for their instructive comments on this paper.

2. Compare, for instance, an excerpt from a speech by Hegel at Jena and a passage from Foucault's *The Order of Things*: "Gentlemen! We find ourselves in an important epoch, in a fermentation, in which Spirit has

made a leap forward, has gone beyond its previous concrete form and acquired a new one. The whole mass of ideas and concepts that have been current until now, the very bonds of the world, are dissolved and collapsing into themselves like a vision in a dream" (Hegel, Lectures at Jena of 1806, final speech). "The last years of the eighteenth century are broken by a discontinuity similar to that which destroyed Renaissance thought at the beginning of the seventeenth; ... a discontinuity as enigmatic in its principle, in its original rupture, as that which separates the Paracelsian circles from the Cartesian order" (Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 217). For Hegel, the shifts he describes between ancient Greece and Rome, medieval feudalism and the Renaissance court, French enlightenment, revolution, and terror, and German philosophy, are all strides of progress, despite repeated falls on the part of Geist into utter and seemingly insurmountable despair; each crisis leads to an improvement on the previous moment, and Hegel's own age is the final era, the end of history. For Foucault, on the contrary, one age, one epistemology, and one form of power is no better than another. Nor is our age the last age, for Foucault, who writes that "that table is now about to be destroyed in turn, while knowledge takes up residence in a new space" (*The Order of Things*, 217), and imagines new forms of power that are neither exerted over death nor disciplinary manipulations of life.

3. Lévinas argues in "Toward the Other" that the other is not required to grant me forgiveness, and my forgiveness remains in the other's hands. See *Nine Talmudic Readings by Emmanuel Levinas*, trans. Annette Aronowics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12–29; readings originally published in French as *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968) and *Du sacré au saint: cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977). We may be ethically obliged to respond to the other, for Lévinas, but this need not come in the form of recognition. In "To Forgive," Derrida argues that when forgiveness takes place as an economic exchange of any sort, it is not true forgiveness.