

Destruction Loops

Expressionistic Phenomenology and the Ontological Possibility
of Self-Destruction

by

Dustin Zielke

B.A., University of British Columbia, 2007

M.A., University of Victoria, 2010

M.A., K.U. Leuven, 2011

MPhil, K.U. Leuven, 2012

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Peyman Vahabzadeh, Supervisor
Department of Sociology

Dr. Steve Garlick, Committee Member
Department of Sociology

Dr. Nina Belmonte, Outsider Member
Department of Philosophy

Abstract

Destruction Loops uses the guiding phenomenon of self-destruction to begin to develop an ontology that would not be ontosoteriological—that is, it would not cast being itself in a saving role for human being. Beginning with Martin Heidegger’s thought (both early and late), but also relinquishing his ontosoteriology, *Destruction Loops* seeks to explain how people can self-destruct *because of* their insight into the character of being, time, reality, and the world. A pre-theoretical understanding *that* one is self-destructing is often not sufficient for an affective resolve to *stop* oneself from self-destructing. It is not, because one’s pre-theoretical insight into the character of being can be existentially discouraging and result in an affective demeanor of resignation. In this sense, the correlation with being itself does not save, but rather exacerbates the existential conditions for self-destruction. The human being, understood not as *Sorge* (care) or as mortal but as desire for a loved one, is fundamentally non-correlated with being itself because it wants more for this other than being can give. An exposure to this insight is painful—and also difficult: for it then leaves the self alone with a task to build for this other *against* the conditions of being itself. All the while, being can turn the self against itself, by turning the origin of its selfhood (its relationship with a special other) against this endeavor. Instead of building, one can then fall into a destruction loop, where the meaning of the past overcomplicates the need for building the conditions of meaning and love in life.

In the following pages, expressionistic phenomenology—a phenomenology that seeks to express the formal inadequacy of being itself—is expressed through the pseudonymous, intellectual memoir called *Generation Loss*, written by Dylan Errington in the wake of the disappearance of his ex-girlfriend, Christina “Chris” Weston. Dylan’s book iterates, and formally reflects, the need for building and creating works that express desire’s dissatisfaction with being itself.

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Dedication

For C.

*Savannah scatters
And the seabird sings
So why should we fear
What travel brings
What were we hoping
To get out of this
Some kind of moment
Tarried bliss*

*I waited for something
And something died
So I waited for nothing
And nothing arrived
It's our dearest ally
It's our closest friend
It's our darkest blackout
It's our final end*

*My dear sweet nothing
Let's start anew
From here on in
it's just me and you*

*I waited for something
And something died
So I waited for nothing
And nothing arrived*

*Well I guess it's over
I guess it's begun
It's a loser's table
But we've already won
It's a funny battle
It's a constant game
I guess I was busy when nothing came
I guess I was busy...
I was busy...
Busy...*

—Villagers, “Nothing Arrived - Live”

Foreword by Dustin Zielke

I used to practice what Heidegger called dwelling. I would walk into the forest alone and sit down on a rock or a log and just be still, listen, and look. I would go to the beach and sit on the shore and wait... for nothing in particular. I'd just sit there and try to be in the moment. At first, when I sat down with the trees or by the waves, the cares and concerns of the day would crowd my mind. They would distract me from the things around me. And they would make me feel impatient, like I had things I still needed to do and get to. Sometimes this inner stress would make me get up and leave too soon, before I had really visited the trees or seen the waves. But other times, I was able to wait in the Heideggerian sense. In a fictitious dialogue contained in *Country Path Conversations*, Heidegger's Guide distinguishes between awaiting and waiting. Awaiting waits for that which it represents in advance. But as Heidegger's Scholar says, "Waiting has, properly speaking, no object."¹ The Guide summarizes his position, "In waiting we leave open that upon which we wait."² In my case, this amounted to outlasting the worries berating me. And after waiting for what seemed like a long time, I would eventually calm down and feel the peace, stillness, and tranquility of my surroundings infuse me with a sense of rest. I would then have finally found myself *in* the forest or *on* the shore as if I had just arrived. In Heidegger's terms, I had finally been *let into it* even though I had been there for some time. Nothing came. Yet everything arrived.

I no longer make a concerted effort to dwell in this Heidegger-inspired way. After years of waiting on nothing, I began to find that instead of bringing an experience of calm what I found on the other

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 75.

² *Ibid.*

side began disturbing me. Instead of feeling like I had been let into the place, I began to feel that Heidegger's framework was locking me out of a larger understanding—that it was entrapping me.

The surrealist American filmmaker, David Lynch, wrote about an experience he had as a child growing up in Spokane, WA that crystallizes the tone of his so-called Lynchian aesthetic:

It was beautiful old houses, tree-lined streets, the milkman, building forts, lots and lots of friends. It was a dream world, those droning airplanes, blue skies, picket fences, green grass, cherry trees. Middle America the way it was supposed to be. But then on this cherry tree would be this pitch oozing out, some of it black, some of it yellow, and there were millions and millions of red ants racing all over the sticky pitch, all over the tree. So you see, there's this beautiful world and you just look a little bit closer and it's all red ants.³

Even though Lynch situates his anecdote in the so-called American dream, the contrast he draws between the beautiful scene and the ants is close to what I began seeing and feeling while on my lone forest and beach excursions. For the deeper I looked into the flecks and layers of a beach rock or watched the slow dangling eyes of a slug, the more concrete and material the world became in front of me, and the more messy I realized it all was. Everything seemed much more incomprehensible, chaotic, and alien than it had in my first experiences of dwelling. Instead of filling me with rest or a cherished sense of mystery, the deeper and harder I paid attention, the more the things around me filled me with something more like a calm terror. But it wasn't just about the things around me, because it also had implications for Heidegger's "dear, sweet nothing."

Heidegger's poetic thought comes with a certain appreciation for order and quietude. This sometimes shows through in a romantic tone in his writings. In "Overcoming Metaphysics," his so-called shepherds of being are to take note of the following: "The birch tree never oversteps its possibility. The colony of bees dwells in its possibility."⁴ For Heidegger, it is human being, enframed by technology, that steps outside its limits and drives the earth beyond its possibility. The mortal who

³ Greg Olson, *Beautiful Dark* (Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 3.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 109.

dwells, and who steps back into its mortal limits, is then more like the birch and the bees. But after years of trying to reside in this Heideggerian pastoralism, wherever and whenever I truly looked at things, I began seeing Lynch's oozing pitch and red ants everywhere. Of course, I wasn't literally seeing millions of raiding ants. But I was seeing the way things also overstep their limits: hornets and wasps decimating bee colonies, red groves of evergreen dead from the pine beetle, and a coronavirus hopping from bats to humans. Left unchecked, even nonhuman things could (in principle) undermine their own conditions. The growing unease I felt was not just about the stark contingency of things, but also about their capacity to decimate the conditions for their own flourishing. The universe, reality, being, the world—generally speaking, none of these provide guardrails on the mountain highways of existence. Heidegger's work did not prepare me for these phenomena, nor for an understanding of the disquiet I felt encountering them. If I was to stick to the outlines and specifics of Heideggerian dwelling, I would have no way of making sense of this new-found experience or its philosophical significance. For thought out to its depths, it has far ranging consequences for the very meaning of being.

* * *

The calm terror that I was feeling when seeing things outside their limits and which I felt had a larger significance for being could be called *dread*, as long as this term is not taken in the Kierkegaardian sense of *Angest* or the Heideggerian sense of *Angst*—both of which have been translated into English by this term. There are similarities between all of these, but there is also one important difference.

The American author, Orson Scott Card, wrote that dread is the most effective form of fear an author can build in his or her audience. While terror is felt when the intruder is approaching with a

knife, and horror is what is felt when confronted with “the grisly, hacked up corpse,” dread has no direct object.⁵ Card explains:

[Dread] is that tension, *that waiting* that comes when you know there is something to fear but you have not yet identified what it is. The fear that comes when you first realize that your spouse should have been home an hour ago; when you hear a strange sound in the baby’s bedroom; when you realize that a window you are sure you closed is now open, the curtains billowing, and you’re alone in the house.⁶

The aspect from Card’s description that I would like to retain is this sense of foreboding that has no immediate object. In terms of the dread I am speaking about, it is not that the intruder has not *yet* jumped out from behind a door, but something closer to the fact that *nothing in being stops* an intruder from jumping out from behind the door. This is still all very much in line with the existentialist idea of anxiety. In Heidegger’s terms, being itself is not a being, but more like nothing, which is why he once wrote, “Being : Nothing : The Same.”⁷ And like nothing, it cannot stop anything from happening. Natural and cultural laws *amongst* beings stop certain things from happening. But being itself does not stop anything from happening *with* beings. Being is radically free. Like the aforementioned views on anxiety, dread is also oriented to this, but its sense of foreboding also takes it a step farther, for it recognizes that this nothing of being also doesn’t stop the worst from happening within beings. It doesn’t stop them from undermining the conditions for their own capacities. It doesn’t stop them from self-destructing and pulling down others to drown with them. Being is not just radically free, it is also *terribly* free.

The ominous tone of the dread I am speaking about was not simply the result of foreshadowing the arrival of a particular, fearful being like an intruder. Nor was it particularly oriented to any terrible event that might befall beings. It had more to do with an ontological or metaphysical realization. It

⁵ Orson Scott Card, *Maps in a Mirror: The Short Fiction of Orson Scott Card* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, Inc., 1990), 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003), 58.

was not just that being does not stop things and people from overstepping their limits, it was also that being does not stop *itself* from overstepping its limits. It does not stop itself from becoming a trap for beings—especially thoughtful human beings. Heidegger’s dwelling introduced me to this sense of dread, which rebounded back upon my evaluation of his thought. For while I was waiting for nothing, nothing came. Yet the character of this nothing, which he called being, had changed along the way. Dwelling with things like a so-called shepherd of being, and only paying attention to the way that the trees and the waves around me did not overstep their limits, but remained within them, placed limits upon *my* sense of being. This hindered me from not only seeing the way things overstep their own limits all the time, but also from re-thinking being such that it too overstepped its limits. And then, instead of finding it in the promise to reconcile the earth and the human’s place in it, I found being harassing because it filled me with a dread that it was hiding something terrible about itself that I had not yet clarified. Something was wrong with being itself and *it*, in the sense of *es gibt* (“it gives”)⁸ did not *give* in order to heal, but to hunt and entrap. And Heidegger’s thought was the articulated, yet unsuspecting version of its snare.

* * *

Hannah Arendt once wrote a parable about her one-time teacher and lover, Martin Heidegger, entitled “Heidegger the Fox.” Using the allegory of a fox borrow, Arendt implied that Heidegger eventually came to find a captive audience by decorating his hole “beautifully,” when it was actually a trap.⁹ But the interesting thing she pointed out was that Heidegger never denied this, but actually declared it. He put up, she said, “unequivocal signs everywhere on [his burrow] that quite clearly said: ‘Come here, everyone; this is a trap, the most beautiful trap in the world.’”¹⁰ It is not difficult to

⁸ Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), 38.

⁹ Hannah Arendt, *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (Penguin Books: New York, 2000), 543–544.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

understand Arendt's words as a metaphor for what Heidegger considered to be the primal hiddenness of being itself. For him, the reason the meaning of being could be forgotten or left in oblivion was because it was primarily concealed, like a fox's den. Being was a bottomless pit, so to speak, that allowed *Dasein* to fall away from itself or, later on, human being to be waylaid by the will for technological mastery. But this abyss of being, according to Heidegger, was also to be understood as a positive condition for human existence. In his earlier work, it was the freedom for authentic resolve and, in his later poetic thought, the saving power that potentiates dwelling, building, and thoughtfulness. Yet even though Heidegger pointed to the entrapping nature of being, I still felt there was something irreconcilable between the way he declared it to be a trap and the way I was becoming inclined to think of it as a trap. There was something about this dread I was feeling that seemed out of sync with the way Heidegger presented being's dark side. It seemed to me that his avowal that being was a trap was actually hiding the way it was a trap in another, deeper sense.

My previous *promotor*—the Flemish term used for a graduate supervisor in Flanders—once condensed the structure of Heidegger's thought in the following way:

There are at least three elements in Heidegger's writings which one should take into account... [and] none of them follows directly from an analytic of *Dasein as such*, but they all involve a certain articulation of that analytic—a kind of "decision" imposed on it by Heidegger. The three *topoi* I am thinking of are the following: *Dasein flees*; but that from which it flees will always have left a *trace* which can help *Dasein* find its way back to itself; provided it grabs the occasion and pays heed to *the call* which it can, however, always refuse to hear.¹¹

For Heidegger, both early and late, this call and trace back to being itself is pivotal. On the one hand, being endangers by allowing the *Dasein* of *Being and Time* or the mortal of *Vorträge und Aufsätze* to get away from itself. It does not stop this from happening but provides the abyssal conditions for self-loss and technological enframing. Yet on the other hand, whether we are talking about

¹¹ Rudi Visker, *The Inhuman Condition: Looking for Difference After Levinas and Heidegger* (New York: Springer, 2005), 199.

authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) or appropriation (*Ereignis*), being always also provides a line back to itself that the human can follow. As an abyss, being endangers. But it also always throws out a lifeline for human being. In a famous essay from *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Heidegger wrote, quoting the poet Hölderlin, “But where danger is, grows the saving power also.”¹² And in following this trace back to being, the human being re-finds itself. Both early and late, the self becomes adequate to its being by *becoming correlated with being itself*. And this thought helped me understand why I could no longer make sense of my experience through Heidegger’s work. Even though being is always ambiguous for him, and he could also write about confronting the “horror of [its] abyss,”¹³ nevertheless for him being always offers itself as the possibility for an ontological salvation. This was certainly no longer an “onto-theological”¹⁴ salvation offered by the philosopher’s deity. But it was an ontological soteriology, nonetheless. So, I termed this aspect of his thought onto-soteriology and began departing from his work by developing an ontology that would no longer be ontosoteriological.

The dread that I was feeling on my lonely beach walks and forest excursions was about this deceptive sense of being. By presenting being in this redemptive manner, Heidegger’s thought was actually more entrapping than he had declared. Being does not save human being from itself. Being simply does not save. And when it presents itself as such, it oversteps its limits. For by presenting itself as a saving lifeline, *it correlates human being with itself*. For the later Heidegger, to dwell is to let things be from out of being itself—the *it* that gives. Letting be is not just to build things by investing being’s concealment within them, but also to build them by letting being provide its saving power to human being through the things of this earth. The human, thereby, is let back into its mortal, finite limits. But what I was feeling was that this correlation between the concealment of being, the things

¹² Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1997), 34.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 233–234.

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, “The Ontotheological Constitution of Metaphysics” in *Identity and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

I was letting be around me, and the understanding of my own self as being let back into my mortal limits was locking me out of a larger understanding about being, the self, and the world. What I felt and was trying to articulate was that his soteriological moment not only hid a larger truth and so was deceptive, it also endangered because it covered up the way that human being is *non-correlated with being itself*. Being was terribly free because it was not stopping but allowing me to fall deeper into the correlation Heidegger envisioned. And this was more and more locking me out of my understanding of not being correlated with being. Without any desire, on my part, to appeal to any theology, ontotheological metaphysics, or even Emmanuel Levinas' proclamation of ethics as first philosophy,¹⁵ I wanted to think the dread I was feeling with regard to being as indicative of the way there is a structural-ontological incongruence between being itself and human being—an irresolvable non-correlation between being and the human self. The human being is opened up to *more* than being, and its being is *after* this more which being, time, and the world do not accommodate. And because of this, even if we defer (for the time being) a discussion of what this 'more' amounts to, we can posit it without denying any conditions of finitude or venturing into the realms of theoretically orientated religion or ethics.

* * *

Methodologically, I had three considerations in writing the following work—the third of which I will discuss in the next section. The first two considerations had to do with giving topological form to the topics I have just been discussing: an analytic frame that I would impose upon my phenomenological vision so to speak. Since this was supposed to be an ontology, I needed to show the relation of this non-correlation between being and the self, *going both ways*. On the one hand, I needed to show how being sets the conditions for this non-correlation. And, on the other, how the self not only

¹⁵ Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

participates in the conditions set by being, but how this also puts the self at odds with its own being—as a creature that is in some sense incompatible with these conditions.

Because I wanted to ground these ontological considerations in a phenomenological way, I also needed to pick a guiding phenomenon that I felt best reflected the non-correlation between being and the human self. I decided on self-destruction and, more particularly, a lucid self-destruction where someone knows exactly what is happening to them but does not have the affective resources or resilience to stop it. I thought this was a good choice, for a number of reasons. It not only illustrated the way that being is terribly free, allowing people to contribute to their own demise. The lucidity of it also shows the way that being, time, and the world can deceptively undermine the conditions for self-regard. While I was writing, my current supervisor sent me a work of his that helped me understand the way that exhaustion results in an “increasingly noticeable loss of imagining another world.”¹⁶ I thought there was something similar at work in what will later be termed existential self-destruction. Because I was attempting to articulate an ontology with self-destruction as its guiding phenomenon, I needed to explain how the source of this exhaustion was *over* being itself, and how the suffering and futility it stems from are also *over* an insight into the incompatibility between oneself and being. The self lacks resilience for itself because the conditions of being that undermine it are relentless. This direction of thought moves outside-in (so to speak): *from* being, the world, time, things, and others *through* deception and the diminishment of meaning—topics that will be picked up later—*back* to the self. But I also needed to show how the being of the self *is* non-correlated with being itself, others, things, and the rest of the world, from the opposite direction, inside-out.

¹⁶ Peyman Vahabzadeh, “Toward Critical Topology, or How to Act in the Playgrounds of Being,” in *Crossing Borders: Essays in Honour of Ian H. Angus*, ed. by Samir Gandesha and Peyman Vahabzadeh (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2020), 369–386, 371.

I started this Foreword with an epigraph containing the lyrics, “I waited for something/ and something died/ so I waited for nothing/ and nothing arrived.” I began with this song because, for me, it speaks about what is missing in Heidegger’s work: the need to wait upon something or, really, someone that can die. In the song, there is the sense that the vacuous waiting for the “dearest ally” and “closest friend” of nothing, one which gives “our darkest blackout, our final end” and all along has been setting us up with “a loser’s table,”—there is the sense that this defeated turn to nothing results from waiting for something that can die.

On my lonely beach walks and forest treks Heidegger had already laid down the rules of the table to which I was sitting down. He had already distanced me from thinking about thoughtfulness as a way of relating to those others who could die, who I had also departed from to take these lonely journeys and to seek an ontological healing in things. There is nothing wrong *per se* with seeking out solitude or a thoughtful manner with regard to nonhuman beings—far from it. But there is a structural inadequacy in Heidegger’s thought as a whole that I think these lyrics point towards. In the following, the reader will find that the being of the self (insofar as it is opened up to the world) has been termed *desire*, and that this should be understood as desire *for* or *being-for* another—in particular, a *special other*, with whom one has an intimate relationship. The reader will also soon discover that desire is not here offered as a psychological term or presented in a psychoanalytic way. It is discussed as an ontological concept that *links* the self’s openness to being, the world, and the disclosure of truth *to* a particular other. The self can be intimate with more than one special other and in different ways, but in each case, intimacy is exclusive to *this* other. The meaning of being, truth, the world, time, and space is found in what desire wants *for this* other. But the insight into the way all of these contexts will ever refuse fulfilment for desire can be accompanied by disillusionment, pain, and a heightened sense of futility and exhaustion: to the point that one can know one’s letting oneself go, and that one is losing oneself in the midst of those one loves, without the resilience to change course.

* * *

The third consideration I had in mind while writing is that I wanted *the form* of the work to reflect *the content* of the ideas. Specifically, I wanted *the way* the ideas were articulated to reflect the non-correlation with being I had in mind. I found a preliminary theoretical model for this in a statement by one of Heidegger's estranged students, Herbert Marcuse. In his *Aesthetic Dimension*, the critical theorist Marcuse seeks to offer a more sophisticated theory of fiction than the one passed down by Marxist theory. In traditional Marxist circles, fiction was considered to be ideological and to promote false consciousness because it provided an escapism from the hard truths of economic exploitation. While this is certainly sometimes the case, Marcuse also pointed out another critical understanding of fiction. He summarized it this way:

The world intended in art is never and nowhere merely the given world of everyday reality, but neither is it a world of mere fantasy, illusion, and so on. It contains nothing that does not also exist in the given reality, the actions, thoughts, feelings, and dreams of men and women, their potentialities and those of nature. Nevertheless the world of the work of art is "unreal" in the ordinary sense of this word: it is a fictitious reality. But it is "unreal" not because it is less, but because it is more as well as qualitatively "other" than the established reality. As fictitious world, as illusion (*Schein*), it contains more truth than does everyday reality. For the latter is mystified in its institutions and relationships.... Only in the "illusory world" do things appear as what they are and what they can be. By virtue of this truth... the world is inverted—it is the given reality, the ordinary world which now appears as untrue, as false, as deceptive reality.¹⁷

As a critical theorist, Marcuse wanted to show that the fictitious world of art was in fact more true than an institutionally oppressive society. This unreal world of the artist reflected the possibilities of individuals and nature more adequately than the real world where repressive structures and social forces pre-emptively hindered people and things from achieving their full potential. I agreed with Marcuse's logic, but I wanted to transfer this insight into an ontological register and a phenomenological method, so that the world *per se*, the worldhood of being-in-the-world—regardless

¹⁷ Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1978), 54.

of the particulars of a given society—is deceptive and untrue because it undermines the conditions of meaning in life. The world, or the place “*wherein*’ a factual *Dasein* as such can be said to live,”¹⁸ is deceptive when the correlation between self-transcendence and worldhood is taken to be completed by a return to being itself and, through being, a return of the self to itself. In a moment, I will explain how fiction can formally represent this. But first I need to offer a little more theoretical context.

The world is indeed, as Heidegger described it, the field of everyday significance.¹⁹ But he missed a crucial component of worldhood and the kind of meaning in which a self is engaged when he failed to account for love between special others. The ordinary meaning the world provides is underpinned by a deeper level of meaning between loved ones. The being of the self as desire does not come into its own by returning to being itself, locking itself into a correlation of self-transcendence with the ordinary significance of the world. It comes back to itself by returning to the exclusive place a loved one grants *to it*. Yet the correlation with a loved one comes at the cost of an exclusion from the rest of the world. And what desire ultimately wants—for the world to be the place that always expresses this other’s invaluable being—neither being itself nor the world can grant. For the world is constituted as a field of ordinary significance shared by those who do not participate in this exclusive relationship. To truly point the self back to itself, one does not point back to a being itself in which all others share. One rather points to a special other that discloses being and the world as inadequate to what desire wants *for this* other. To reflect these thoughts in a formal or methodological way, I developed what I would like to call a *phenomenological expressionism* as my approach to writing.

Phenomenological expressionism seeks to formally express the self’s non-correlation with being by transposing phenomenological insights into fictional worlds and the mouths of fictional characters. Like Marcuse’s explanation of the motives underlying fiction, phenomenological expressionism

¹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1962), 93.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

seeks to show the inadequacy of being and the world by framing its theory within fictional biographies. In other words, phenomenology is performed by characters in these fictional worlds. However, if we continue to take Marcuse's statement as a guide here for a phenomenological ontology like the one that follows, then there is an added complication. As Heidegger was well aware: in existential phenomenology, "Higher than actuality stands possibility."²⁰ And because of this, the being and world it discusses are already not real or actual, but spheres of essential or existential possibility—that which makes any *Dasein*-existence possible in the first place. So, unlike Marcuse's appeal to the distance between people's potential and the way their socio-political context hinders this, for phenomenological expressionism it is not necessarily sufficient to appeal to fictional worlds as a formal marker for the inadequacy of *a repressive socio-political world*—although this is indeed a fruitful approach as well, one that could perhaps be reserved for a future work. There is a further step that needs to be taken: to have fiction reflect the self's non-correlation with being itself.²¹ Like Marcuse's artworks that highlight the repressed potentials in a given socio-political order, phenomenological expressionism highlights the way that the self is a moment of being for whom being itself is insufficient. It expresses this by *aestheticizing* the existential possibilities under discussion.

Phenomenological expressionism moves into fictional worlds in order to show the inadequacy of being to the self—and it brings theory and the theorist along for the ride, to show an existential frustration that being itself cannot reconcile. The ontologist imposes the topology of a narrative journey upon their phenomenological vision, and by doing so frames the phenomena it explicates

²⁰ Ibid, 63.

²¹ Of course, this does not mean that attending to the material circumstances and the way they can hinder that which a given expression expresses is not an important ontological and socio-political project. As we will see, one of the main contributions the following prepares for is to be able to think of ontic conditions as both hindering and enabling the self's existential relation to those essential possibilities that inherently belong to it, but which do not always appear relevant to the way it lives out its ontic life.

not so much in a systematic way, but in the manner of a plot. By giving phenomenological insights a fictional landscape within which to unfold, and by following the format of a story, the incompatibility between the self and being is attested. The possibilities of being have been submitted to a higher measure than being itself for they have been formatted by the aesthetic demands of a narrative—one with aesthetic considerations in mind. Like Heidegger’s later poetic thought, which takes the measure for thoughtfulness from the poet’s demeanour towards things, phenomenological expressionism takes the measure for doing phenomenology from the story-teller—stitching images, characters, and words into a larger narrative. But unlike Heidegger’s thought, the motivation for this is to demonstrate a dissatisfaction with being. By forming the possibilities of being in this way, the essential or existential possibilities discussed are framed by something other than being: *to that which aesthetics is oriented*. Later on, this will be named *beauty*.

Expressionistic phenomenology frames itself within the aesthetic, enframing being in a search for beauty, and thereby transposing being’s significance into a different register, showing its incompleteness and incapacity to be appropriate to the human being. Yet beauty should not be understood as the fineness of the pretty, the weightiness of the sublime, nor as a placeholder for the Good. Both ‘subjectively’ and ‘objectively’ it is a formal concept.²² ‘Subjectively,’ here designates the self’s ultimate dissatisfaction with what being and the world give by framing them with a narrative of a protagonist’s desire. ‘Objectively’ beauty stands for that within being itself that is opened up to more than being itself without establishing this in anything other than a concrete instantiation of a word, thing, deed, or loved one. In other words, it is not a potentially redemptive transcendental as it was for the ancients or more modern philosophers such as Hegel.²³ In a sense, it uses Heidegger’s

²² I have put these terms in scare quotes because as we will see going forward, the existential analysis of the self that is undertaken (one which derives from Heidegger’s *Dasein*-analytic) is pre-representational. Because of this, it analyzes that which occurs prior to a subject-object split. The relation between the self and its affectedness by its context is prior to a subjective representation of objects singled out in this field.

²³ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

ontological difference (the insight that being is not a being) against being itself. For it is simply a formally negative concept that allows a word, thing, or person to become an expression of one's dissatisfaction with being itself. Through beauty, and its ultimate incompatibility with being itself, the human being opens being up to that which frames it within its own inadequacy. And this is just some small thing, word, act, or person which suffers under the conditions of being.

* * *

This method of doing expressive phenomenology required a more creative approach, which I tried to achieve by writing from the perspective of an imaginary PhD student, Dylan Errington. I cannot stress enough that *I am not Dylan Errington, nor are any of the other characters or plot points based upon people that I know or events I have witnessed in real life*. It would be a massive mistake and a neglect of fictional context to take Dylan's (or any other character's) point of view as my own. This holds even for Christina "Chris" Weston—Dylan's ex-girlfriend who is also a PhD student and the main intellectual force behind the ideas that follow in the coming chapters. In developing these main characters, I had *formal* considerations in mind. I tried to create people whose lives, narrative arcs, and viewpoints reflected the ontological ideas discussed. Dylan, for instance, represents both an extreme tendency of desire and a certain naivety concerning being and truth. Although I do not want to say too much and spoil the plot, I wanted his character development to reflect a disillusionment arc that ultimately reinforces, on a formal level, a departure from Heidegger's ontology. Chris Weston, who is again the main philosophical inspiration behind the ideas that Dylan talks about, is a very different character from him. Neither Chris nor Dylan ultimately speak for me, but I wanted both of them to also formally represent a departure from Heidegger that I have in mind. Chris's experience of losing her father as a little girl and, more particularly, *how* she lost him is the personal background compelling her to depart from Heidegger's work during her university years.

I hope that the reader will have patience with my attempt to write fiction alongside theory in the following. I have tried my best to utilize fictional techniques, but the difficulty of merging theory with fictional narrative in a way that demonstrates a credibility in both forms of writing has proven very difficult. Part of the challenge is that I did not discover any precedents or models from philosophers or authors to accomplish what I was attempting. Fiction has a long lineage in philosophy, from Plato's dialogues, to Berkeley's writings, Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, and even Heidegger's *Country Path Conversations*. The dialogue or monologue format is the predominant form in this tradition, as it provides a focus upon ideas. But the setting and plot in these works is often very minimal and does not usually present a substantial addition to the ideas under discussion. Of course, there are also short novels and plays written by famous philosophers like Sartre's *No Exit* and Camus' *The Stranger*. The play and novella format provides a more robust narrative, but often gives very little explicit theoretical reflection. I wanted to take the strengths of both these approaches and create a fuller narrative while also having a more developed theoretical discussion. So I created a new genre for writing both creatively and philosophically. I borrowed techniques from creative memoir writing and attributed them to a fictional author—Dylan Errington. Because of this, I, Dustin Zielke, am not present and do not intervene as a voice in *Generation Loss*, Dylan's intellectual memoir. However, I have written in my own voice and in more depth about this phenomenologically expressive approach in my Postscript. There, the reader will find an elaboration of this methodology along with a discussion of the theoretical contributions that I believe *Destruction Loops*—my dissertation—makes to hermeneutic, Heideggerian thought. In fact, since there are no narrative spoilers in this Postscript, and since there is also an overview of some of the key ideas discussed in the body of the work there (*e.g.*, love), I suggest that the reader turns to it before diving into Dylan's *Generation Loss*.

I hope that the reader approaches the fictional parts not in terms of their effectiveness to entertain but rather in terms of the way that *in the end* the narrative, events, and character traits will formally reflect the ideas articulated along the way. Even though I have written about concepts in the voices of imaginary characters, I have tried to present the ideas as strongly as I can.

In one sense, this entire work is all just one big thought experiment. But it is one that I have tried to develop as fully and consistently as possible.

Generation Loss

An Intellectual Memoir

in the Wake of Christina Weston's Disappearance

By Dylan Errington

For Chris

Note on a Name

Throughout the body of this book, in which I intend to provide an intellectual memoir based upon Christina Weston's thought, I will not conform to the academic etiquette of referring to Weston by her surname. Instead, I will call her by her nickname, Chris.

I am not doing this to be a stylistic maverick or simply to remind the reader that I knew Chris. I have done this to iterate a central concept in her thought.

To me, Chris was not just 'an other' or 'any other.' For me, she was what she called a "special other."¹

By referring to her in a way only her close friends would, I hope to display, in written form, the exclusivity this concept names.

¹ Christina Weston, *General Others and Special Others: Fürsorge, Desire, and the Revelation of the World* (unpublished thesis manuscript, 2012), typescript.

*Cold bones
Yeah, that's my love
She hides away
Like a ghost
Does she know that we bleed the same
Don't want to cry but I break that way*

*Cold sheets
Oh, where's my love
I am searching high
I'm searching low
In the night
Does she know that we bleed the same
Don't want to cry but I break that way*

*Did she run away
Did she run away
I don't know
If she ran away
If she ran away
Come back home
Just come home*

*I've got a fear
Oh, in my blood
She was carried up
Into the clouds
High above
If you bled, I'll bleed the same
If you're scared, I'm on my way*

*Did you run away
Did you run away
I don't need to know
If you ran away
If you ran away
Come back home
Just come home*

—SYML, "Where's My Love"

Preface

I knew the police would be suspicious when they found out I hid it from her. But I still ended the call without telling Barb that her missing daughter and I had broken up over a year ago.

My cell phone in hand, I sat at my apartment desk, absorbing her news. Late autumn darkness blackened out my window's view of the mountains surrounding the city. Drips of rain or sleet, I didn't know which, slid down the dark glass.

It was jarring to hear Barb's voice at the end of the strange area code. And it was shocking when she started probing me about her daughter's whereabouts. But even as I stalled with vague responses to figure out why she was calling and what was going on, I wasn't surprised that she thought we were still together. Chris, short for Christina, was never close with her mother. They could go years without talking.

Barb thought Chris's pursuit of a PhD in philosophy was an "impractical career choice." I think it reminded her too much of Chris's artsy father, Casey, whom she divorced when Chris was a little girl. Barb didn't approve of me either. She thought her only child could do better.

I was also studying philosophy and not something lucrative like medicine, law, or even web design. She thought I was a bad influence: I apparently "encouraged" her daughter's "immaturity." It's a long story, but it wasn't really about me. It was all about them and Casey. Doctorates and our relationship were just the latest excuses Barb used to vent her frustration that her only child was more like her ex-husband. And Chris avoided her mother, so she didn't have to hear about it.

I put my phone down beside a notepad with a number on it. Even though many people today believe Barb when she said in her police and media interviews that I volunteered to be involved in the investigation, she really did—basically—*make* me write down Detective Avery's contact

information.¹ She—and I emphasize this—*told* me that I should call him once I arrived, because he was expecting me that night. After I hung up with Barb, it was already late. But if I packed light and risked a speeding ticket, I could have caught the next ferry.

From what I remember her saying, when police first called her, Barb told them she was too slammed to travel to the west coast and be the family contact in a missing person case. She was one of the two co-founders of Paradigm PR based out of Chicago, and it was going public in the next couple of weeks. Even if she had the time, I doubt Barb would have dropped everything, fought traffic to O'Hare International, and flown three hours to handle it herself. Even if she wasn't busy, she would've delegated.

To be fair, this was not the first time something like this happened with Chris. It *was* the first time someone involved the police. But it was not the first time we were all looking for her.

A little behind the notepad on my desk stood an unopened bottle of Jameson whiskey I was saving for finishing my first dissertation draft. I picked up my cell, found the contact listed as “Freckly”—an inside joke—and pressed it to call Chris. It went straight to voicemail: an automated voice said her mailbox was full.

Looking back, it's hard to explain to others why I wasn't honest with Barb. The only thing I can say is that over the years in my relationship with Chris I had developed an awkward, but familiar silence in response to the way Barb treated us. And this unspoken familiarity was also the reason I missed how particularly strange it was that the police didn't know or, at least, didn't inform Barb that Chris and I had broken up.

¹ Upon legal advice, I have either left unnamed or changed the names of certain individuals, institutions, establishments, and locations to protect the identities of those involved and also myself from any defamation lawsuits that could be filed against me after publication. I have no desire to hide behind a pseudonym, and Chris's family members' names are already part of the public record. So in the following, myself, Chris, and her family members are the only people named directly.

The whole phone call with Barb was awkward. When it registered that it was her on the other end of the line, I just retreated to my safe space, my silence, saying as little as I needed. She's just hard to deal with. She speaks over others, and she's bossy. So, it was just easier to say very little, let her stay misled and uninformed by her assumptions, and allow the momentum of her instructions to plow through my plans for the next several days. Besides, she would've demanded an explanation, and I didn't want to have to explain myself to her. I didn't owe her anything—especially the recap of a breakup she would gloat over. This was honestly just my innocent, initial response.

When I hung up the phone with Barb, believe it or not, I was actually relieved. I don't deny it. I still loved Chris. But we hadn't spoken in a year. I *wanted* the opportunity to make my feelings known to her. There were events I couldn't make up for. But I hoped that, despite everything, defences had softened, and I could now show her that I still cared—*even if* it was just as friends. That's all I wanted: my old friend back.

But if I told Barb that night, she would've used the case as an opportunity to exclude me, to sever any lingering threads between Chris and me. She would have found someone else for the job.

And this is the other thing I regret from that night on the phone with Barb: I didn't think there was need for alarm. Like I already mentioned, it wasn't unusual that everyone was looking for Chris.

A crystal tumbler sat beside the Jameson whiskey. I tried texting Chris: "Emergency. Where r u? Everyone's looking for u. Call back ASAP!!!"

The text sent but didn't display as "Delivered."

I should've left that night. But I still thought it was all a big misunderstanding. I thought Chris was just being Chris: just off adventuring by herself like always, that her skittish roommate didn't know her well enough, overreacted, and called the cops. If Chris didn't have Wi-Fi or reception, she'd get back to messages as soon as she could. No need for me to rush to catch a late-night sailing.

I grabbed the tumbler and Jameson from my desk, cracked the aluminum seal, and poured.

Sipping the whiskey neat, I watched for the “Delivered” confirmation. I waited that whole first night for it to appear.

It never did.

It was Thursday evening, the thirtieth of November 2017. Chris Weston, my partner for a decade, had already been missing for five days.

* * *

Philosophy *in Situ*

This book is both a memoir of my experiences in the aftermath of Chris’s disappearance and an introduction to her philosophy.²

The morning after my call with Barb, I caught a ferry, expecting to meet with police on the other side and have them appoint me as the family contact in the case. Nothing went as planned.

Even though Chris and I were separated for over a year, her disappearance unsettled me. We shared a decade of a life together. Searching for her brought up past issues and provoked old pain. I had to survey the crumbled ruins of our relationship at the same time that I had to confront the possibility of losing her all over again—perhaps forever. I now realize that while all of this was happening, it was more difficult for me than I understood. My actions were not those of someone

² Writing about Chris’s work has posed a significant scholarly difficulty for me with citation and reference practice. To this day, Chris remains unpublished, making her writings unavailable to larger audiences. I possess electronic copies of various papers from her undergraduate and graduate coursework, her MA thesis, and several chapters of her dissertation, all of which she sent to me for editing and comment. This routine ended when our relationship did, so I do not have access to her latest dissertation drafts from the year before her disappearance. The files I *do* have, Chris shared with me, and she gave me permission to discuss them with others, which I often did. Because of this, I think it is ethical and fair to discuss and quote from them. However, I have never received her consent to share these documents in full or to publish them in any form, either print or online. Because of this, while I can refer to the titles of the works in my possession, I cannot reference any standard pagination. I have cited these documents in accordance with unpublished manuscript referencing, following *The Chicago Manual of Style* (17th Edition). The lack of widespread access to Chris’s thought also poses another problem. It means that others cannot access Chris’s work on their own and evaluate my reading. I acknowledge these scholarly shortcomings, and I ask for the reader’s understanding and goodwill, since, given the present circumstances, I see no other way forward.

who was coping well. I was struggling. I had lost my best friend for the second time. And the earlier ways she had been missing from my life encroached upon my search for her. Mistakes were made.

* * *

We met during an icebreaker in our second-year Existentialism class.

“People either fall in love...,” Professor Lawrence said, standing up at the front of the room in his brown corduroy sports coat when he introduced the exercise to everyone, “... or—they want to rip each other’s heads off.” All the students roared.

Chris and I turned to face each other to start the minute-long stare down: we had to look into each other’s eyes without looking away, while Professor Lawrence timed it.

When he started his stopwatch, I realized she had the lightest brown eyes I’d ever seen. They weren’t amber brown or the grey of blue, but more like the white of creamed honey. Wave tumbled brown seashells on pale beach sand.

I was trying to figure out how I would describe them to the guys in ‘res’ when Lawrence told us to stop. I made sure I was sitting beside her in the next class and each one after that.

Our first date was a study session on Nietzsche’s demon parable and the interpretation of eternal recurrence. I don’t remember much from that day. I just recall sitting with her in a grassy field on a blanket with cherry blossoms in the wind all around us, when she said, “Explain it to me like it’s a story, like he did—but with your own words.”³ Her wavy blonde hair was blowing, and her eyes were focused on the abstract patterns on our blanket. But I knew she was concentrating on my words, because she was calmly caressing the top of her hand with a blade of grass she had picked.

³ Going forward, I will assume that the reader understands that the following pages are a memoir and that, in light of this, I am recalling and representing previous circumstances, events, and conversations to the best of my ability while also trying to show how everything unfolded in the most honest detail. I hope that, in light of this admission, the reader can recognize that I have a fallible memory while also granting me the license to try to portray events as I remember experiencing them *as vividly as possible*. In short, my attributions to the actions, meanings, and words of others should be taken as my own best recollection.

I can't say how I recovered from pretending to know what I was talking about. But the imagery must have been honest enough. By the following summer, we were living together in a dingy studio apartment with a windowless closet our slumlord had converted into a musty bathroom.

After our undergraduate degrees, we moved to an English-speaking international program in Germany to specialize in phenomenological philosophy. We both wrote our MA thesis on Martin Heidegger's thought. From our BAs to our PhDs, we were each other's chief editors and sounding boards. With espresso and jammed croissants in the mornings, red wine and hand-rolled cigarettes in the evenings, we spent our days and nights talking about ideas. Our blessing and our curse, we only ever shared one common love language—a forgotten, ancient 'sixth.'

In graduate school, Chris began departing more and more from Heidegger's thought, developing her own vision of the world. She bounced ideas off me and had me edit her original work. It was clear she was writing from her life and processing her struggles by doing so. I watched her craft concepts and assemble them into articulations of her understanding of existence and reality. But I always considered her thought to be *her* thought. I never tried to understand my own experience through her eyes.

And then it was too late.

After we broke up, and then after she disappeared, she was no longer present to help me make sense of myself or this world. By using her ideas to now reflect on my experiences, I am carrying on an unfinished conversation with a dear friend.

* * *

The theme of loss lies at the heart of Chris's philosophy. But her main concern is not physical absence, like losing a set of keys or the death of a loved one. It's about how people can lose

something, something special *before it's actually gone*. It's about the loss of its meaningfulness even while it's still here. This project stemmed from her life.

Chris grew up watching her father implode. Casey Weston was a once-successful novelist who obsessed over his work and isolated himself from his family. After Barb divorced him, he had custody of Chris and she watched his meth addiction grow until it eventually killed him. It was cataclysmic for her as a little girl. But later, in her intellectual life, it was not the drugs or his premature death that disturbed her the most.

She once wrote, "My father lost his life years before he died."⁴ The loss of meaning in his life, what she called "the existential conditions for his various self-destructive habits," was the impetus for her philosophical project.⁵ She wrote, "he lost his grip on what mattered most to him, even while I was still there to help him find it. And now, a decade later, I dedicate my time to understanding how something this terrible could happen."⁶ What bothered her more than mortality itself was that "it was possible, *in the first place or at all*, for someone to lose their sense of those things that make life worth living."⁷ And what she meant by "those things" were what I will soon introduce as *special others*.

Chris knew Casey loved her. She knew she was the most important person in his life. She wrote, "He loved me. But his love for me wasn't enough to stoke *who he should have been for me*."⁸ She had to witness her father lose the sense of *his own* importance in her life. He loved her, but this couldn't make him love *who he* was supposed to be for her. Chris's mature work tries to understand why people are prone to losing the meaningfulness that loved ones offer them.

⁴ Christina Weston, "To Not 'Find this Mortal World Enough': A Reassessment of the Problem of Finitude" (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2013), typescript.

⁵ Weston, "To Not 'Find.'"

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

* * *

I've lost Chris several times, in different ways, even before she disappeared.

Deep down, I knew our separation was my fault. But I didn't need others to remind me. I made bad choices—never denied it. Thing is, when I chose them, they didn't feel like choices. They didn't feel like free-floating options I could take or leave. They imposed themselves on me—like inevitabilities. It wasn't like deciding, but more like accepting outcomes.

Chris's thought can help me explain why my behaviour, both leading up to our separation and also after she vanished, was not merely a matter of straightforward choice. Before I made the decisions that led to our breakup and to the events that followed her disappearance, I was already to blame for certain acts of omission, for negligence, for *not* doing something. By failing to do these things, I let my heart and mind be led astray into situations where they were already compromised. Circumstances then conspired against me. They undermined the meaningfulness of the possibilities they offered me. In my mind, they undermined my importance in Chris's life. And this, consequently, undermined her significance in mine.

This was all a failure of agency on my part that Chris called "insensitivity."⁹ To be insensitive is to be "numb towards the need to create the conditions of freedom, beauty, and love in life."¹⁰ I will explain these ideas more as my story unfolds. For now, it is enough to point out that my numbness complicated matters for me. It made me insensitive to the trap I was falling into.

Disaster awaited.

⁹ Christina Weston, *Suffering Self: An Existential Phenomenology of Metaphysical Loneliness* (Unpublished dissertation manuscript, 2016), typescript.

¹⁰ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

Introduction: The Demise of Casey Weston

The Biographical Origins of Chris Weston's Philosophy

*Pick it up, pick it all up
And start again
You've got a second chance
You could go home
Escape it all
It's just irrelevant*

*It's just medicine
It's just medicine*

*You could still be
What you want to
What you said you were
When I met you*

*You've got a warm heart
You've got a beautiful brain
But it's disintegrating
From all the medicine
From all the medicine ...*

—Daughter, “Medicine”

An Honest Conversation

Chris was thirteen and living with Casey at their home in Oak Park, IL, when they had the talk that, nearly a decade later, launched the central questions behind her intellectual project.

Barb divorced Casey when Chris was eight. Her parents didn't give her a choice, but she would've chosen to live with her father anyway. Barb only moved a few L-train stops away. Still, Chris rarely spoke or visited with her: “Even during the odd turkey dinner, with my virgin apple cider bought and poured for the special occasion, alongside mother's lipstick rimmed wine glass, between the two

of us, neither feelings nor words flowed.”¹ Barb didn’t find out about her ex-husband’s addiction until the day he died. Child services called to inform her that they had her daughter in their custody and that she needed to schedule a meeting.²

Chris had the conversation with her father in her first year of high school. A boy had just broken her heart. I asked her about the boy once. With a wave of the hand, she said, “It was just stupid young love.” But back when she was a teenager, it hurt her enough that Casey noticed.

She was sitting at their kitchen table “doodling a hangman on her math notebook’s graph paper” when he startled her.³

She was not afraid of her father. Yet she was “only aware of his presence in their house like someone is familiar with the sound of a neighbour’s lawnmower through a window or a postman’s spring up the front porch and hustle back down again.”⁴

The day he startled her at their kitchen table Casey was in the depths of his addiction, and during this time period he didn’t see his daughter every day. She lived on the main level while he worked and lived below on the ground floor. If he slept, he slept downstairs. And if he had to go out for food, cigarettes, or a re-up, he used the sliding glass door that led from the rec room to the backyard. He rarely ventured upstairs, and Chris didn’t like going to the basement. When she needed to, she said, “the stale cigarette smoke wafting off his threadbare jeans and pill wool sweater mixed with what smelt like paint fumes in the air” would make her “nauseous.”⁵ Casey would hand her “crisp sheets of cash from the stash of bills he kept in an envelope taped to the back of his desk drawer” and tell her he had to get back to writing.⁶

¹ Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

After Barb left, he spent his days and nights alone, getting high and pursuing the early success of his first novel, *Unkept Linens: A Haunting*. He had been chasing it for years by this point: through the sophomore flop *Eggshell*, a broken marriage and divorce, the failed comeback *Kites*, and then the face sores and meth mouth.

When Chris jumped, looking up from her graph paper to her father that day in the kitchen, it was not because she feared him. She started because she “was so used to being uninterruptedly in her own head and left alone by him.”⁷

Casey asked her why she was brooding, and so she told him.

His attempt to comfort her was scattered. He tried fatherly bravado, “saying something like, ‘The twig ain’t strong enough to hold you up to the world.’”⁸ When she responded with a quiet stare, he switched to poetic reflections on lost youth: “‘What they don’t tell you,’ he said with a missing incisor on one side and a missing canine on the other, ‘is that time heals all wounds, *except* the one it inflicts on your youth.’”⁹ She didn’t respond, but just kept “observing him, waiting to see his next performance.”¹⁰ He became self-conscious, and the two of them fell silent.

“The only real thing my father said that afternoon,” she wrote, “was when he broke the silence.”¹¹

He turned his back on her, “to grab a Zippo from a kitchen counter drawer,” then turned again to face her, saying “‘Kid, you’ll find that as you get older, the things you love won’t matter so much.’”¹² Then, “he walked towards the basement door and descended.”¹³ She continued, “It was the last time we ever really talked.”¹⁴

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Less than a year later, Chris discovered Casey’s body slumped over on his desk. He had collapsed on his keyboard, and when she found him, “the weight of his torso was still filling the document on his monitor with random repeating letters.”¹⁵ The medical examiner said, “he died of a massive heart attack, triggered by an acute overdose.”¹⁶

Casey’s words that day in the kitchen, about getting older and things not mattering so much, stuck with Chris. No one believed that Casey OD’d on purpose. But in the following years, she took his statement that afternoon “in lieu of a suicide note.”¹⁷ “He did not take his own life,” Chris wrote, “but he stood by and watched his life fall apart. He was too self-aware, sensitive, and insightful—too lucid about it—to not know what he was doing to himself.”¹⁸ With that message, Casey wasn’t trying to comfort Chris or offer her advice: “He was venting. His words explained why he let himself unravel. The things he once loved no longer mattered enough to give his life meaning. So he just let everything fall to pieces.”¹⁹ Explaining how this is at all possible in the first place is the task she set out for herself in her graduate work.

Chris’s intellectual pursuits grew from the questions her father’s demise left unanswered, from the words that he used to force his way through the silence that had encased his life until that afternoon. At the heart of all her original work is a question about how someone can self-destruct and how reality can let it happen. It is not an overstatement to say that she spent her educated years trying to understand her father’s “few, honest words” in their kitchen that day and that the key to unlocking her philosophy can be found in them.²⁰

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Chris often wrote about the meaning of a person's life. However, she was not sermonizing on 'the' meaning of life.

Philosophers and theologians have debated about life's meaning for a very long time.²¹

For millennia, the mainstream Western tradition, canonized in metaphysical philosophy, argued that a spiritual plane gave *all* people's lives meaning. This tradition, which included Ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, the medieval Christian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas, and early modern thinkers like Descartes and Kant, believed that a higher reality, more real and more true than the physical world, lies beyond the senses. Metaphysicians promised that this heavenly world, an eternal, supernatural plane, offered an ultimate purpose to human life. They had discovered, they claimed, the highest meaning of life *beyond* life itself.²²

Developments in philosophy over the past two centuries have sidelined this once-dominant position. Nietzsche's parable of a madman running through the streets, hollering "God is dead," was a crossroads for the Western tradition.²³ After Nietzsche, many philosophers dismissed the spiritual realm earlier thinkers said gave a final homecoming to human existence.

Martin Heidegger interprets Nietzsche's pronouncement about God's death to mean: "the suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics... is at an end."²⁴ This does not mean life is pointless. For both Nietzsche and Heidegger, the end of metaphysics signals that, more than ever before, people are responsible for finding and perhaps even creating meaning

²¹ Julian Young, *The Death of God and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Young offers a helpful overview of this history, from the ancient world to contemporary thought, focusing on developments over the last two centuries and the split between other-worldly and this-worldly orientations.

²² Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 103-440, 156-158. Nietzsche provides a fuller treatment of the paradox, perhaps even contradiction, of seeking a meaning for life beyond life in his critique of European nihilism.

²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119-120, (Sec. 125).

²⁴ Martin Heidegger, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1977), 53-112, 61.

in their lives.²⁵ Postmetaphysical philosophy, a philosophy that contests a universal, spiritual meaning to life, but one that also places the burden on individuals to find meaning *for themselves*, has become the predominant position in contemporary thought.²⁶ Chris (and I) came from this tradition.

When she wrote about meaning in life, she did not mean an ultimate purpose binding for all people. She was speaking about the meaning in someone's life that is *unique to them and them alone*. Her position, on this point, agreed with psychotherapist and Auschwitz survivor, Viktor E. Frankl:

One should not search for an abstract meaning of life. Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfilment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it.²⁷

Chris did not think the source of Casey's problem was that he lacked what Frankl calls an "abstract meaning of life." She explained, "My father did not lose his grip on life because he could not realistically imagine heaven or because he once read Nietzsche's madman proclaim, 'God is dead.' He lost his sense for a meaning meant for him and only him."²⁸ This loss did not happen all at once. It was a process. It took time. Meth was only its "last manifestation."²⁹ It started," she said, "long before the drugs."³⁰

²⁵ Young, *The Death of God*. Young discusses in more depth the tensions between 'creating' and 'discovering' meaning in Nietzsche's and Heidegger's respective philosophies.

²⁶ Ibid. Few postmetaphysical thinkers subscribe to an objective, universal purpose in human life. Young makes the case that the later Heidegger is one such thinker. Since, for Heidegger, human beings do not create meaning, being grants it to them.

²⁷ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1985), 131.

²⁸ Weston, "To Not 'Find.'"

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

An Unhappy Marriage

Before Casey was an addict, he was a workaholic. “I only have memories,” Chris wrote, “of mother’s room upstairs and dad’s downstairs.”³¹ Her father worked obsessively, isolating himself on his floor of the house, becoming withdrawn and distant from his family. “Even back then, it was as if he didn’t live with us—except on Friday nights. He’d never miss a pizza and movie night.”³² But his weekly hangouts didn’t impress Barb. They often argued about his absenteeism in front of Chris:

He justified his absence by claiming it was for us, my mother and me. I remember the time she realized it wouldn’t change.

They were in the kitchen bickering about it. She stood there, a familiar sight for me back then, short but firm like a chisel, knees locked, arms crossed, lips pursed—no Botox yet, and not wearing lipstick at this point in her life. He was using the same excuses. He’d say he was working hard, that writing is hard work, that he wanted the next one to be even bigger, that... it’s hard—but he’s working hard.

Whenever he’d repeat ‘working hard,’ she’d echo back, ‘obsessing.’

He’d continue like he didn’t hear her: the next one would be even better... he’d give us the best life he could. And on and on, he’d go.

This time, something far off caught her attention. She started looking through him towards it.

Then, while he was still talking, she unfolded her arms and walked out of the kitchen.³³

Chris never heard them argue about it again. But she “soon had to stomach the crayon-like taste of waxy smudges when she shared juice with mom.”³⁴

Barb and an old college friend came up with the name Paradigm PR “over lattes.”³⁵ By then, “she didn’t want my father’s promises about being more available to come true.”³⁶ She didn’t have to worry.

Eggshell: Dispatches, Casey’s second novel, is about a successful young man, Dale Chase, who sells his business to retire early and spend more time with his family. The first pet project he decides

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

to take on is to repaint his little girl's room. He and his wife move their daughter into the spare bedroom, and he buys all the supplies he needs. Dale has nothing else to do, and his wife continuously reminds him he needs to finish before her parents arrive the following month, but he can't bring himself to lift a roller.

I've never read it, but Chris told me that Barb was not too scathing when she once said something like, 'By attempting to write himself out of his domestic boredom, he just proved how boring he really was.'

Dale never ends up painting the room.

The novel fizzled, and its immediate failure chased Casey back into his lonely work den.

Around this time, Barb asked Casey for a divorce.

* * *

For Chris, writing about her father was not merely an autobiographical exercise. Casey's downward spiral illustrated broader themes about truth and reality that both fascinated and disturbed her. The trajectory of his life "showed someone, anyone, could lose the meaning love once gave them."³⁷ Love can "deteriorate. By default, it is not eternal. Left to age, it is rusty and brittle. It crumbles away."³⁸

Most people would see Casey's lack of self-regard as an exception to how lives usually unfold and so irrelevant to everyone else. Chris saw it differently. Because it was an extreme instance, it was also a more explicit manifestation of a typically hidden, but troubling tendency in every life: "It inheres in all lives because it is a problem inherent to reality itself."³⁹ Reality, being, the world, the universe—

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid. Chris is here drawing on Heidegger's phenomenological method in which a broken instance of a phenomenon (*e.g.*, a hammer) is actually more revelatory of, say, the hammer itself than its everyday appearance as a tool in circumspective concern. *Dasein* usually glances over its equipment in favour of the system of references it refers to—until

whatever we call “the largest temporal horizon and place where we live our lives and die our deaths, mingled amongst things and others, this expanse opened up by the throw of cosmic dust—is where *the worst* can, and often does, happen. Being is terribly free.”⁴⁰

When the postmetaphysical tradition rejected the supersensual world, it also banished ‘God’ from the philosophical realm, exiling him to the religious sphere. Thinkers, such as Heidegger, pointed out that this is a good thing—even from a spiritual perspective.⁴¹ The philosopher’s god was not the God of faith, but an idol crafted to satisfy the metaphysician’s desire for eternal order, omniscience, and omnipotence. As Western philosophy grew out of this ontotheology, not only did it have to come to grips with mortality and finitude, it also had to grapple with the loss of a providential and sovereign power, watching over and guiding life’s events.

Theodicy, a metaphysical problematic with an ancient heritage, always struggled to reconcile the horrible things that happen in the world with the existence of an all-powerful, benevolent being. When philosophers deposed the philosophical deity from his throne, they were left with the stark recognition that nobody and nothing guides the world from above. Existence is radically free. This is why, even though she did not follow his lead into ‘ethics as first philosophy,’ Chris still often quoted French phenomenologist, Emmanuel Levinas, with approval, when he wrote, “Being is evil not because it is finite, but because it is without limits.”⁴² Of course, neither Levinas nor Chris were

something goes wrong with it. The tool then shows itself as itself. And it also shows that the practical context of concern usually and normally hides the tool itself. Thus, there is an extreme or ‘abnormal’ occurrence that shows a typically hidden feature of the ‘normal.’ This method is also similar to that used by Freud when he used psychopathological symptoms to trace out a general theory of the mind. Using the ‘abnormal’ to understand the ‘normal’ is also well-established in the sciences such as neuropsychology, where the use of studies of pathologies (*e.g.*, aphasia) can yield insights into the proper functioning of the brain and its capacities (*i.e.*, speech). In the above, I have put abnormal and normal in scare quotes to avoid the ethical pitfalls of these terms.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Heidegger, “The Ontotheological Constitution of Metaphysics, 42-74.

⁴² Emmanuel Levinas, *Time & the Other* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987, 51).

claiming that there are no literal limitations upon what can happen.⁴³ Physical laws still govern the universe, and socio-cultural realities still constrain people's thoughts and behaviours. But even they do not stop terrible things from happening. It is the same in the realm of meaning, with non-physical or meta-physical phenomena.⁴⁴ With no philosophical god to anchor the meaningfulness of someone's life, it can all end in shipwreck. Chris was thinking in this tradition when she wrote, "A terrible freedom lets us loose into a runaway momentum, without giving us the brakes to stop ourselves."⁴⁵

For Chris, this troubling link between "terrible freedom" and "the worst" did not primarily concern literal death or bodily suffering. Material disaster and great physical pain are "indeed manifestations of a universe that does not line its highways with guard rails."⁴⁶ However, Chris had something else in mind when she spoke of the worst. For her, it referred to what she witnessed in her father's last days. It articulated "the more unsettling and less evident horror of a 'living death' hurting those we love."⁴⁷

The Ghost of Grandfather

Chris believed that Casey and Barb once loved each other, but that they were never suited for one another. They married young while they were still in college when the pressures of pulling together

⁴³ Dustin Zielke, "Excess and Withdrawal: Critical Phenomenology and Speculative Realism," *Phaenex* 12, no.2 (2018). Zielke provides a phenomenological description of contingency within the limits of 'natural law' that could be seen to be compatible with Chris' thoughts on the topic.

⁴⁴ The term 'metaphysical' had ambivalent usages in Chris's thought. When she spoke of the philosophical tradition, the term referred to the history of the conflation of Being itself with a particular being—that is, filling in the event of Being with a highest being (e.g., God), which she found articulated in Heidegger's critique of ontotheological metaphysics. Following other postmetaphysical thinkers, Chris departed from this Western tradition. Yet, at the same time, in line with the ancient Greek etymology of the word, Chris also used it in a more literal way to designate phenomena that are 'more than physical' or non-physical, such as meaning and sense.

⁴⁵ Christina Weston, "Heidegger's Tale: Onto-Soterio-Logy in the Later Heidegger's Fourfold" (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2014), typescript. As we will see later on, this lack of a soteriological limit in being is the point at which Chris departs from Heidegger's work. Being does not leave a trace that leads back to itself as a saving power that can save us from ourselves. It is rather more like the principle of escalation towards disaster.

⁴⁶ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

rent on the same day of every month, finishing a term paper by a similar due date, and arranging graduation photos at the end of the same year fused their horizons and made them think they had more in common than they did.⁴⁸ They changed a lot in the coming years. “Even if my father was more involved,” Chris wrote, “my parents would not have stayed together. They were just too different.”⁴⁹ What troubled her more than her parent’s separation was *the way* it happened. Casey let himself repeat what he had always feared in his own family history: “My father became the ghost of his father.”⁵⁰

It is no secret that *Unkept Linens: A Haunting* was loosely based on Casey’s childhood.⁵¹ He was nine years old when he had to watch his parents’ relationship fail while Weston Sr. was dying of cancer.

Often, people who know they have a terminal illness say they are grateful that they know. It puts things in perspective, helps them value their time more, and focus on what’s important. They can become closer with their friends and family, make amends, express their warm feelings, or say the things that have gone unsaid for far too long. They can go to the grave, their loved ones around them, regrets mended, in love and peace. This is not what happened with Chris’s grandparents.⁵² Nor does it happen in Casey’s *Unkept Linens*.

In the novel, an oncologist gives the middle-aged protagonist, Arthur Forman, a death sentence. Arthur is a stern and closed man who doesn’t have a good relationship with his wife, Lena. There are hints they once had a son who didn’t survive childhood, and they’ve been sleeping in separate rooms for years. Arthur’s sickness complicates his relationship with Lena even more. Unable or

⁴⁸ Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ James A. McClure, *A Ghost Too Late: Delayed Mourning in Contemporary American Fiction* (Baltimore: Hopkins University Press, 2012), 88.

⁵² Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

unwilling to dredge up the past, silence expands between them, until they barely speak with each other.

Early in the book, Arthur dies in his bed with Lena present, but with no words of comfort or release passed between them. He dies alone even though Lena is right beside him.

The main plot launches when, after he passes, the reader finds him haunting his home. In the novel's supernatural world, Arthur is still a "young ghost," who doesn't yet have the power to make his presence known to the living. He is stuck in the house and has to watch helplessly as the day after his funeral reception, Lena boxes up and donates all his belongings to charity. In the soreness he feels at seeing all the reminders of his life boxed up and given away, the reader finally begins to hear him speak the feelings and frustrations that remained dormant in his years of marriage.

Over the coming chapters, Arthur sees his wife explore her newfound freedom and becomes more jealous of the control he has lost over her. She adopts a stray cat he would have forbidden her to keep, takes on a series of new lovers, and leaves him behind alone in the house, using his life insurance money to buy tickets to travel to the places he always told her were too expensive to visit when he was alive.

All the while, especially during her long trips, his pent-up anger grows, and we, the readers, finally hear him speak "to the echoless void, a space empty of life rebounding, yet full of insulating clutter"—his loneliness, pain, and frustration.⁵³ Even when she's home, no matter how hard he tries, he cannot explain to her how "these hand-hammered brass utensils, these artisan vases and boutique candles, this matching pastel couch and love seat you cherished so much, it's all wrapped in an absorbing foam that ever silenced what I always tried to say to you."⁵⁴ As in life, he remains imprisoned and cursed by his own inability to communicate with her.

⁵³ Casey Weston, *Unkept Linens: A Haunting* (New York: Crescent Books, 1989), 133.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

His suffocation builds into a rage that soon gives him the ability to flicker light bulbs, make rooms frigid, and provoke Lena's cat to hiss at thin air. The more power he gains to affect things, the more she becomes unsettled and afraid of being alone in the old house.

The final scenes of the novel show how unarticulated suffering can erupt in the midst of loved ones.

* * *

In the last few years of his life, Casey knew what was happening to him. The man who wrote *Unkept Linens* to exorcise the harassing flashbacks from his unhappy youth must have known. His talk with Chris the year before he died even shows he knew *why* he was repeating the past. But it is one thing to have a "general awareness" of an insight and quite another to have "intimate knowledge" of it.⁵⁵ Arthur, the "figmentation" of Casey's father, and Casey himself both embody this disjuncture, and its growth from a suffering that loved ones do not mend for each other but intensify.⁵⁶

Intimate relationships and their vicissitudes underpin Chris's philosophy. Intimacy is not necessarily romantic as it can involve all kinds of family and friend relationships. It "is the closeness

⁵⁵ Weston, *Suffering Self*. We will see in Chapter 7 and 8 that for Chris, the distance between awareness and comprehension opens the capacity for the self's participation in truth and untruth. Awareness is an intellectual or perceptual cognizance that does not require "affective weight" to orient the subject. It is grasping something 'at a distance' without the affective involvement of the self. To use traditional phenomenological terms (although in a new way), it is 'unfulfilled knowledge.' Comprehension, or what she often calls intimate understanding or knowing, is 'fulfilled knowledge,' in that "affective weight" 'fills in' the previous cognizance. This affective weight involves the subject in the known, in such a way they are put at stake by this knowledge; but, at the same time, it also grants the subject potentials that were previously closed down. Affect feels the self's exposure to the world, and the released possibilities it can follow. Lacking this affective weight, a subject can know something without 'really knowing it.' This known can be their so-called "unknown known," which leads to insensitivity, even though they "intellectually or perceptively grasp something."

⁵⁶ Weston, *Suffering Self*. I will introduce and discuss Chris's concept of figmentations in Chapter 8. It is a central concept in her phenomenological method and her theory of the imagination, which is the crucial faculty in a person's journey from untruth to truth. Figmentations are the 'objectivizations of affective weight,' that give the self an imaginary path to intimate knowledge, from the ordinary to the expressive.

and distance between loved ones—or special others.”⁵⁷ Even though she recognized that “every individual is singular,” Chris pointed out that intimacy is

based on an *exclusivity* within the singular. Intimacy establishes itself by cutting out and elevating a special and private space that has originated from the universality of all other single persons, but in such a way that *no other than this other*, amongst all singular others, could fulfill it.⁵⁸

Chris understood that every self was singular, but she still differentiated between general others and special others, when she wrote, “Unlike general others, who are objectively irreplaceable but subjectively replaceable for one another, special others are not only objectively, but also subjectively *irreplaceable* for each other.”⁵⁹ She meant that, from the perspective of the self, there are two realms of singularity: “individuality *per se*” and “uniqueness.”⁶⁰ Someone’s uniqueness is not the same as that which all human individuals share in common *as individuals per se*. It is rather a uniqueness that differentiates it from the *per se* difference of all other individuals. There is an exclusivity built into it that is different from the individual difference which all individuals hold in common *as individuals*. For this exclusivity “differentiates it not as an instance of a species, but as a unique someone for whom there are no ‘like others’—not even in the way that everyone is different.”⁶¹ Phenomenologically, a special other “does not come into its own difference through comparison,”

⁵⁷ Weston, *General Others*. In Chapters 4 and 5, we will see that the terms closeness and distance have technical senses that phenomenologically describe the meaning of the temporal-spatial opening up of the world in the movement of intimacy.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Chris is using the terms objectively and subjectively loosely here, for purposes of communication, not for technical precision. We will see in Chapter 2 that the phenomenological basis for this replaceability is the way individuals participate within social roles, from which they are detachable. Another can fulfil the same social office, service, or role. The uniqueness of intimacy is different, as it can only be fulfilled by a specific other.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid; Peter Hadreas, *A Phenomenology of Love and Hate* (New York: Routledge, 2007.) An interesting line of comparison here would be between Chris’s discussion of the incomparability and uniqueness of the special other and Hadreas’s attempt to explain the loved one in personal love. From a Husserlian perspective, Hadreas presents the loved one in such a way that he shows the different operations between personal love and everyday modes of consciousness regarding objects. The upshot for him is that because of this difference, personal love can lead to a form of joy that is of a different kind than the satisfaction of objects. The parallel between Chris’s invaluable as a form of meaning stemming from the loved one’s incomparable being and Hadreas’s discussion of joy would likely be a fruitful path to develop in terms of the affectivity of desire and love.

but by “presenting itself as incomparable.”⁶² General others are, indeed, all unique individuals, and the self can recognize and respect this. But *as* general others, their significance lies in the roles and services they provide, and, because of this, they are ‘subjectively’ replaceable for the self. Only special others are both objectively and subjectively irreplaceable, because only *they* can fulfill their significance and sense in the self’s life.

Every special relationship involves “specific selves,” and neither is “indifferent to the identity of the other. It is *this* other, and *no one else* that establishes an intimate relationship.”⁶³ Intimacy is always unique and unrepeatable, yet a dynamic pattern of closeness and distance shapes it.

In her work, Chris transposed the idea of love from an ethical to an ontological register. It was presented less as a moral demand and more of an existential condition—we might even say *affliction*. She did not deny it can be the source of the greatest satisfaction in life. Her entire philosophy sought to understand how to maintain it and to show its world-revealing potential. However, for her, it was also often “the stem of the worst pain.”⁶⁴ She knew well from her family history, one that Arthur and Lena’s story illustrates, that love is not insulated from, nor does it protect against the terrible things that happen in the world. In fact, “love lays people open to the infliction of a wound it cannot heal—a wound haunting every intimacy.”⁶⁵ Love ultimately reveals the character of the world to be one which undermines its (*i.e.*, love’s) conditions. By giving the world to each other through love, loved ones also expose each other to its degradation and loss.

The technical term Chris used to contextualize intimacy within the arena of reality was *exposure*. For her, this concept captured the inherent danger of being-in or being opened up to the world.⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.” She developed the idea of exposure in counterpoint to Heidegger’s truth of being as “the clearing” or “the opening,” building on these while also rejecting his ontosoteriology (*i.e.*, salvific role of being), and playing on the implied dimension of inherent danger that exposure adds to disclosure.

She wrote, “Special others do not house each other and protect one another from metaphysical danger and suffering. Like unsheltered bodies bared to the unforgiving elements but still braving them for another’s sake, they make each other vulnerable to suffering the terrible truth of being.”⁶⁷ The self “*can suffer truth*”—that is, “it can suffer from *comprehending truth*”—because “exposure implies the disclosure of that which endangers.”⁶⁸

Chris would agree with other existentialist thinkers, such as Heidegger, that the self is not at first an isolated mind cut off from external things and other people. From the beginning, the self is opened up to the world. It is ‘always already’ outside itself, temporally and spatially ecstatic, and self-transcending.⁶⁹ This means that *from the start*, ‘it is made’ to be with others. Even if—so to speak—it is trapped on a deserted island alone, it is never entirely by itself. Physically separated from others, meta-physically, it is still always *with* others.

Yet for Chris, unlike for Heidegger, the world’s disclosure to the self is only possible because of the individual’s capacity for a relationship with a special other. For Heidegger, what Chris called a “general” or “replaceable” other will do. But not for her.⁷⁰ She wrote, “this irreplaceability *in* each other is the condition for the revelation of the exposing world *for* each other.”⁷¹ The capacity for intimacy is world-disclosing and a necessary condition for this revelation. Only special others “fully disclose the depths of being for one another because only they show the depths of vulnerability within being.”⁷² And this depth of vulnerability for which reality, being, or the world provide no ultimate safety-net, this capacity for the most revealing and exposing vulnerability is only given through love. For Chris, selfhood, in its highest sense, “*is* the ability to love another in the world.”⁷³

⁶⁷ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

⁷⁰ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

But, it is “also the potential to default on this love, because what it reveals is hard.”⁷⁴ And so it becomes all too easy to default, to “fail to continue to create the conditions for love in life.”⁷⁵ From this neglect grows insensitivity, thoughtlessness, and the worst. And all of these result from seeking to escape the exposure love implies.

For Chris, there was in the first place, *a need* to create love’s conditions, *because* being and the world continuously undermine it. “The past of one’s exposure through special others haunt every relationship with any loved one,” she wrote.⁷⁶ Her family’s mute ghosts taught, “that the significance of the *past*—and this means the past in every moment (past, present, or future)—is to suffer this vulnerability in the midst of reality’s indifference to what eventually does happen.”⁷⁷ The pain of this lesson and the origin of metaphysical suffering in her work is that love does not “insulate against this, but amplifies one’s exposure to it.”⁷⁸

For Chris, metaphysical suffering occurs when the self understands, with intimate knowledge, how reality and the world facilitate and accelerate love’s decline because of this prior vulnerability *the past as such* implies. She wrote,

The comprehension that love does not heal the wound it is exposed to, that that special person does not save oneself from it—that nothing, in fact, saves from it—that, to avoid the alternative, the entirety of one’s life will be to rebuild, repeatedly, in the loneliness of ever-shortening days, the love that being and time constantly tear down, even just to once again, in the instant before the world distracts away from it, feel the disappointment of love’s exposure before the numbness sets in—this is metaphysical suffering.⁷⁹

Loved ones make each other vulnerable to the wound of reality and time. This wound cannot *not* be recognized, felt, and known. But they can avoid its pain through the distraction the world gives.

If someone flees full understanding of this suffering, then intimacy with a special other, if it still has

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

any meaning, can become the nagging reminder of an affliction one suffers ‘all alone’ without words to express.

* * *

Lena, Arthur’s surviving wife in *Unkept Linens*, grows to fear the presence gaining power in the rooms and hallways of her home. The more Arthur tries to connect with her, the more she becomes scared of the old place. Eventually, after a final confrontation in which Arthur traps her in their bathroom, turning the lock on the door, and then pulling at her clothes—not out of anger, but in a misguided attempt to communicate with her—she breaks a window, jumps through it, and flees to her sister’s house. Unable to follow her through the window, Arthur stands there holding a bloody strip of cloth he tore from her dress as she fled.

Without setting another foot inside, Lena sells the home to escape the spectre that wants to possess and imprison her.

In the final scene, the reader sees a new family on the street in a moving truck. The parents let their young son run ahead with the keys to their new house. Behind the opened front door, the boy finds that all three of the hanging lamps have fallen in the hallway. They lie shattered on the wooden floor. In the final words of the book, the young boy says out loud to himself, “There’s been a rampage.”⁸⁰

According to McClure, a scholar of Casey, with *Unkept Linens*, “Weston laid bare the mind and soul of a man unable to articulate the hidden pain he suffered, even to the one person that shared it with him.”⁸¹ I think it is fair to say that neither in fiction nor in life, would Casey ever again achieve

⁸⁰ Weston, *Unkept Linens*, 203.

⁸¹ McClure, *A Ghost Too Late*, 90.

so much. He only ever came close that afternoon with Chris in their kitchen during her teenage heartbreak.

On Drugs

Casey first used drugs to enhance his productivity while writing his third and final novel, *Kites*. The book is about a trucker and recovering meth addict named Pete Holloway, who overcomes his lingering temptations by renewing his relationship with his young son, Jared. The two reconnect as they construct a kite that Jared uses to enter a flying contest.

Concerning the semi-autobiographical aspects of the text, Chris once put it this way to me: “I never flew kites.”

Casey’s addiction troubles began during the pre-writing phase of *Kites*.

In the first year after their divorce, before the night terrors got worse, if I woke up from a bad dream in the middle of the night, I’d be scared. But the soft glare from all the lights in the basement would reflect off the neighbour’s vinyl siding and fill my room like a nightlight.⁸²

She explained further:

He started with speed, using it to help him work through the night. His agent was putting a lot of pressure on him. *Eggshell* failed, and the publisher had lost faith in him. He had to adjust to writing on strict deadlines to go forward with *Kites*, but he wasn’t good at keeping schedules.... I first noticed the chemical smell coming from the basement during the research phase. I imagine he wanted to write a realistic description of the high. Meth is supposed to be more potent than speed, so I guess it became his new way to kick down his writer’s block.⁸³

Commercially, *Kites* fared no better than *Eggshell*. For the next few years, Casey and his daughter lived off the proceeds from the second edition printing of *Unkept Linens* and a ‘not too small’ inheritance left by his mother’s recent passing.

⁸² Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

⁸³ Ibid.

Casey planned on taking advantage of the new self-publishing boom for his next book, but he never got the chance.

Existential Self-Destruction

Chris believed Casey's addiction stemmed from a deeper and older personal crisis. "The meth abuse was only its last manifestation," she wrote.⁸⁴ "It had revealed itself earlier."⁸⁵ Withdrawing from his family, becoming a workaholic, not even trying to maintain his marriage, watching himself grow into an absentee father, then the drugs, these were all "symptoms of an invisible, crumbling self-regard."⁸⁶ And this collapse of self-esteem is at the core of what she variously called *existential*, *metaphysical*, or *ontological* self-destruction.⁸⁷

Chris differentiated between self-destruction and suicide. "Suicide," she wrote, "is intentionally taking one's own life, either directly or indirectly. ...a woman slits her wrists in a bathtub. A lone gunman walks into a police station and starts shooting cops."⁸⁸ But someone who is self-destructive need not be suicidal.

She also distinguished between self-destruction and harmful habits. An unhealthy lifestyle "damages the body, the brain, and the mind. It erodes the material conditions of one's life and capacities."⁸⁹ Casey's life obviously showed this. Meth took Casey's life, but before that, it destroyed his mind. "They were all loose threads," Chris wrote of the drafts and notes from this period that her father left behind on his computer. "There was some sense in each fragment, but none of them connected, not even thematically like aphorisms. They were all tangents, scattered for a work he

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. Although all of these terms have subtle differences from one another, when Chris used them, she was primarily focusing on the conditions of meaning that allow for self-destruction.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

couldn't start... Near the end, he couldn't write a coherent chapter."⁹⁰ But for Chris, destructive behaviours and habits, like Casey's addiction, are not primarily what she has in mind when she speaks of self-destruction.

For her, existential self-destruction had a broader meaning than suicide or a self-harming lifestyle, "because it can occur in people who are not suicidal and otherwise leading 'normal,' healthy lives who yet undermine the conditions of their own flourishing by having their 'priorities mixed up'"⁹¹ It refers to "self-sabotaging or undermining one's ability to fulfil potentials and meaning in life."⁹² Of course, one can do this by adopting harmful lifestyles. However, there is also a less obvious type because it does not manifest itself in physical harm, nor what the person *does*, but more so in what they meta-physically *do not do*. This form occurs through "neglect, not of the body, but of the acts that must be accomplished to resist the decay of meaning and love."⁹³

Back in their kitchen, Casey's final words to Chris taught her the need for these acts. His life and death presented her with an example of what happens when this need is not met. She wrote, "He was self-destructing long before he started the drugs. And he died long before he overdosed. He was alive, but he was living his death above ground."⁹⁴ Unfortunately, his last testament was to provide her with an example of how not to live her life. And his words to her that day, although honest, were "ultimately mislead by the spell of death, because he had already given up and led the rest of his life 'going gently into that good night.'"⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid. I will say much more about these required acts later.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

The Conditions of Self-Destruction: Psychological versus Ontological

Sigmund Freud also explored self-destruction. He theorized it arose because of what he called “the death drive,” writing, “the aim of all life is death.”⁹⁶ Freud, the relentless materialist, tracked the death drive back to its origins in dead matter, and he presented the flourishing, activities, and care of life as forces “seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new,” the ancient tendency of ashes to ashes and dust to dust.⁹⁷ Some of Freud’s commentators advise that we think of this death drive as “a biological form of entropy.”⁹⁸ Just as all physical systems tend towards disorganization and the dissipation of energy, so too, human life tends towards the inanimate. Life is constituted by and must return to that which is indifferent to life itself.⁹⁹ The death drive, Freud and his followers said, is without purpose and, in the end, it is recalcitrant to the demands of life because the material from which it arose really has no final goal, other than to settle back down into itself.

Even though she was neither a Freudian nor a psychologist, Chris knew Freud’s theory of the death drive well. She also knew one could understand Casey’s ruin with the help of the psychoanalytic theory of a life wrecked by success.¹⁰⁰ She wrote, “To an outsider, my father’s untimely demise after the early success of *Unkept Linens* could be understood as a tragic series of self-inflicted missteps—in the Freudian sense—taking their toll on his life as an unconscious attempt to lash out at his own father.”¹⁰¹ But these Freudian theories ultimately serve better to introduce Chris’s work by way of contrast.

⁹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), 70.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Joel Weinberger and Jeffery Stein, “Drive Theory” in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture*, ed. Edward Erwin (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁹⁹ Paul Moyaert, “The Death Drive and the Nucleus of the Ego: An Introduction to Freudian Metaphysics,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51, Spindel Supplement (2013), 144. Unlike vitalist theories of life, such as those of Bergson, for which life is irreducible to inanimate matter, for Freud, “life is a complication of inert matter,” writes psychoanalyst and Freudian scholar, Paul Moyaert.

¹⁰⁰ Karl A. Menninger, *Man Against Himself* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1938).

¹⁰¹ Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

Compared with Freud's physicalism, Chris's approach was *meta*-physical in the most precise sense of that term.¹⁰² While Freud followed self-destruction back to the inertia and senselessness of dead matter, Chris, who took an ontological approach, traced it back to the "free-fall" of reality or being.¹⁰³ It was not lifeless matter, but "the terrible freedom of being" that Chris found at the origin of existential self-destruction.¹⁰⁴

Ontology is the *logos*, the study or saying, of *being*. Chris learned the ontological difference from Heidegger, the difference between *being itself* and particular, individual *beings*. Being, said Heidegger, is *not* a being. One cannot find it in and amongst beings like mountains, plants, animals, trees, or people. We cannot know it like we can know these things. Because being is not a being, it is 'no thing' in particular. It is more like no-thing than any kind of thing. This is why Heidegger often called it *das Nicht*—or the nothing.¹⁰⁵ But neither is it absolute nothingness. It is 'something,' but it is not a being. It is, rather, "*the event of beings*."¹⁰⁶

Take the analogy of attending a Saturday evening play. If "all the world's a stage," being cannot be found on it like the actors or props. In terms of the analogy, these are 'beings.' Being is more like *the transient event of the play itself* that comes and goes. The event allows the play, actors, actions, props and story to take place. But it is neither identical to the various things and activities that happen in and through it, nor is it absolutely nothing.

Recall that the driving question behind Chris's work was why people self-destruct. When she asked this question, she had underlying motives: she was asking how being—or the nothing—can allow this to happen in the first place. On the surface, this might seem to be a senseless question.

¹⁰² As I have stated above, Chris often uses the term metaphysical to refer to the non-physical or 'beyond- (meta-) the-physical' aspects of existence. There is nothing 'spiritual' about the topics she considered metaphysical.

¹⁰³ Weston, *General Others*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Italics not in the original.

Regardless of someone's moral position on it, whether they think it *should* or *should not* happen, everyone knows that people *can* destroy themselves.¹⁰⁷ It is self-evident *that* this happens, so it is obvious that being *lets* it happen. Furthermore, as I already pointed out above, postmetaphysical philosophy recognizes that there is no highest being above beings watching out and guiding them. Existence is radically free, so we would expect bad things like self-destruction to occur in a radically free world: people make mistakes and accidents happen. Yet, Chris's question was more complicated than it at first appears.

To show *how* self-destruction happens, one must explain how it is possible in the first place and *what reality, being, the nothing, and the world must be like* for it to happen at all. On this, Chris wrote:

It is not sufficient to simply say being is terribly free. One must show the way this terrible freedom *is* the intersection or correlation between the self and the field of meaning that composes its relations with things, others, and the horizon of time—its world. How does the freedom of being work itself out in the world, such that this free world enables, we might even say assists, self-destruction?¹⁰⁸

Even if it is not ultimately incompatible, Chris's thought had a completely different orientation than Freud's. For her, the answer to the question cannot be the senselessness of dead matter, nor even an unconscious revenge, since being is neither matter, nor a psychological impulse. It is the opening up of meaningful arrangements of things, others, time, and place. Because of this, Chris sought to understand how self-destruction finds its existential conditions in the realm of meaning, and how the terrible freedom of being allows oneself to turn against itself amid its exposure to the world. This requires the articulation of an ontology that shows something akin to a transcendental

¹⁰⁷ Weston, *Suffering Self*. As advanced readers will probably have already anticipated, Chris sidelined an ethical approach to this question and focused on the ontological possibility of this 'unethical' phenomenon. She approached it this way as she contended that the relationship between the self and special other is the condition of possibility or (im)possibility for ethics. For a sensitivity or insensitivity towards an ethical plea is prepared for in the way someone deals with their deepest vulnerability towards being through a special other.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

closure within the world. One which not only potentiates the closing down of the self's meaningful life in the midst of an otherwise meaningful horizon of existence, but which also accelerates this closure through the self's own being. In other words, Chris's project amounted to showing how someone's self-regard can find itself diminished in the midst of otherwise meaningful projects. To explain this, Chris sought to show how the self's sense of itself can be lost, and how this serves as, ontologically conceived, the condition of possibility for self-destruction. The name she gave to this transcendental closure (or untruth) was *deception*; and the way it happens through one's self-transcendence to the world she called *generation loss*—a term she borrowed from the field of analog tape recording. The more copies one makes of the original, the more noise builds over the signal. Eventually, the copies will become unrecognizable.

Looking back, I think it's fair to say that Chris's project was not just an attempt to come to grips with her father's life and death, but that it was ultimately a way to forgive him. She wanted to find something of an extenuating circumstance in reality itself, that could help her reconcile the love she always held for him and the disastrous decisions he made in his life. In voicing the ontological conditions of self-destruction and detailing a transcendental closure at the heart of being, she wanted to show that this was a danger posed to *everyone's* life, whether they resist it and live full, healthy lives or resign themselves to it and fall victim to a death in life. For her, being was less like a neutral possibility between these two, and more like the push of a tipping-point already leaning towards deception, loss of meaning, and the distortion it introduces over the signal. This is where I believe her ontology touched on the personal, in such a way that it became an answer to the deepest questions she had about her intimate relationships. For in the context of such an ontology, and such a vision of her own existence, she not only found a way to defy what being had left her, but also a way to beautify it and find compassion for those, such as her father, who had been led astray by the way things tend to fall apart.

The Decisive Moment: A Snapshot of the Movement of Chris's Thought

“To Not ‘Find this Mortal World Enough’: A Reassessment of the Problem of Finitude” is the work where Chris recounted in the most detail her relationship with her parents, and how her father’s life and death influenced her philosophical project. Much existential literature and philosophy after the ‘death of God’ sought to *reconcile* human beings with the understanding of mortality or to at least alleviate the pain, frustration, numbness this insight inevitably brings. But for Chris, there was “something symbolic about defying the unacceptable conditions of finite being.”¹⁰⁹ Chris weaved her reflections on her father’s passing with her argument that “thought should not suppress this defiance, but nurture it.”¹¹⁰ Because being presents itself as “something like the principle of an escalation towards disaster, or at least, an acceleration towards meaning without meaningfulness,” existential ontology should not “simply try to *reflect* being, but *beautify* it, in such a way that it is incompatible with the way it presents itself.”¹¹¹ This act of *doing* phenomenological ontology is not to be taken as “unserious, magical thinking,” or “psychotic delirium,” but as “the higher truth of expressionism.”¹¹² The ontologist, she wrote, “recognizes the distance between reality and the act of beautification, and in this recognition, understands the work they deliver as only a *symbolic* refusal of the ruins of being.”¹¹³ Although beauty can “shine in and through being, it is not of the same order.”¹¹⁴ The beautiful is of a higher truth, “one which discloses the depths of being without dismantling being’s own mode of ‘truthfulness.’”¹¹⁵ Yet, next to the higher truth of beautification, being’s truth is

¹⁰⁹ Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

deception. Ontology defies being “not through outright denial,” but by “creating something that shows the truth of being in the act of rejecting it.”¹¹⁶

Casey’s demise, and his lucidity throughout it, taught her that metaphysical suffering is not so much about encountering reality’s ‘hard truth,’ nor about lacking the words to articulate it, but more so about the exhaustion that follows from the futility of rebelling against it. But “such burn-out is not then proof of inevitable relinquishment, but evidence of the lack of sources for defiance’s renewal.”¹¹⁷ From this statement, Chris did not then U-turn back into traditional philosophical havens,¹¹⁸ such as the metaphysician’s impulse to bypass the crux of mortality with absolute knowledge—a project that uses mathematical precision as the standard for philosophical truth, and which Heidegger already said “undermines the essence of philosophy at its core,”¹¹⁹—a Kierkegaardian leap (of faith),¹²⁰ or even a Levinasian “escape” from being towards the ethical as first philosophy.¹²¹ For her, existential philosophy can be this refuge of renewal when it becomes an “expressionistic phenomenological ontology.”¹²² As we will see later, this is why the imagination and figmentations play such an essential role in her thought. They unite phenomenological fulfilment, affect, and concept in an act of courage that defies the given conditions of being by beautifying it.

Alluding to the well-known last line of Camus’ famous book, *The Myth of Sisyphus*,¹²³ where the French philosopher concludes, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy,” she wrote:

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995, 17).

¹²⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); M. Jamie Ferreira, “Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (New York: Cambridge University Press, 207). I have put ‘of faith’ in brackets, since strictly speaking, Kierkegaard’s Danish speaks of a qualitative leap (Spring), while ‘of faith’ is often added by English translators and readers of his work.

¹²¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, 2.

¹²² Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

¹²³ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955), 91.

Imagining Sisyphus, the man rolling a boulder up a hill that will always fall back down again and again for all eternity—imagining this doomed man happy is one thing.... This statement always struck me as strange, since I couldn't see how such a hyperbolic futility *could be* happy. Then I realized such an act of imagination is different than I was expecting it to be. It is one thing to wish him happy, and quite another thing to imagine *how it is possible* to imagine him happy.... That would be an act of imagination that required a transformation in my own expectations, my own being, and my own ability to think and feel. It would require the unification of concept and affect in such a way that ontology provided rest from the drudgery of an existence I could name and suffer, but not (until that moment) frame. It would require a playfulness I had always known since I was a child but had entirely forgotten as I was writing academic papers.... It was not frivolity or dissociation, but a kind of play that could re-frame the very coordinates of existence—both his [Sisyphus's] and my own.... Truth still needed to speak through this act of doing imaginative ontology, but it needed to be expressed through a courageous defiance, or at least, a convicted lack of concern for the fallout. Only then would the existential imagination, one that united phenomenological fulfilment with affective involvement, provide that renewal in the face of being. Only then could I imagine such utter exhaustion and futility to be met with the blessing of happiness.¹²⁴

As is clear, such an ontological expressionism was not merely about play in the sense of frivolity. She knew truth still needed to speak through it.

Chris and I once attended a conference where she presented “‘To Not ‘Find this Mortal World Enough,’” and this question about play, imagination, and truth arose while we were at a dinner with some of the other conference-goers who had heard her present earlier that day. This was still relatively early on in Chris's graduate days, and she had not yet fully worked out theoretically the ideas she was to put forward in the coming years. Her response that evening took the form of a story, which I still think provides a helpful snapshot into the drama of her mature thought. At the time, she told it by memory, but I have her written version of it from the draft of an unfinished paper she sent me.¹²⁵

* * *

I was a little girl about eight or nine years old. My parents had recently divorced, and I developed night terrors.

¹²⁴ Weston, “‘To Not ‘Find.’”

¹²⁵ Christina Weston, “Ontological Amulet: Theodore and the Existential Imagination” (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2013), typescript.

I'd wake up screaming, in the middle of the night, after a snarling wolf shredded through my bedroom door. In the early mornings, something in my closet bashed around, trying to get out. Even in daylight, outside my bedroom window in the park behind my house, I'd see the faces of dying men petrified into the bark of the ash trees staring back at me.

My dad tried to console me, but he didn't know how to make them stop.

One day, when I was walking home from school, I saw a teddy bear backpack in the window of a toy store. The teddy's furry torso was the pack, and it had a soft head and fluffy appendages sticking out. I knew it would protect me.

I begged my father for it, without telling him why I wanted it. A few days later, I found it sitting upright on my bed. I named it Theodore, and I took him wherever I went. I even slept with him.

The wolves stopped sniffing me out. The closet-thing didn't get angry or try to escape anymore. And the faces disappeared from the trees in the park.

One fall morning behind my home, by myself and with Theodore on my back, I paused at the foot of a path in the woods. The trail led to the place where I had seen ghosts haunting the ash and birch.

It was an overcast morning. Dark clouds threatened downpour, and the earth was still wet from the night's rain. Mist hung on the thorn brambles under the trees. I stood at the bottom of the mulch pathway and inspected its disappearance around a shadowed turn ahead.

I set Theodore down by the edge of the trees and stepped onto the path alone.

The wood smelled like decomposing leaves and moulding soil. Hidden things that sounded bigger than me fussed and rustled in the bushes as I walked by. I kept putting one pink rubber boot in front of another.

Deeper into the trees, I smelt something sickly sweet. There was a commotion off the main path beside me. A black crow flew out of the undergrowth and perched in nearby branches, scolding at me. Ducking under some low-lying limbs, I pushed through the underbrush.

Through stem, twig, and thistle, I peered into a hidden clearing, where I saw the black hole of a cave. In front of it, sat an upside-down milk crate, with cigarette butts all around. Empty picture frames were lying against the outside walls of the cave, and someone had torn up and strewn about sun-bleached photos of a family. A handheld mirror had been smashed against the cave's stones, and its shards were lying on the fallen leaves.

The crow overhead cawed, and large boots crunched down the main path behind me. The footfalls passed, and I pushed my way back to the trail and doubled-back to its head.

When I got back to the edge of the wood, Theodore was gone. Unable to find him anywhere, I returned home without him and never came by him again.

* * *

The art of street photography has a founding concept called *the decisive moment*. It names the photographer's attempt to still the ephemeral essence of a time and place by capturing a split-second motion within it, exhibiting the movement and character of a situation through stillness. Pioneer of

the genre, Henri Cartier-Bresson, popularized the term with works such as *Place de l'Europe Gare Saint Lazare* (1932), which displays a man attempting to leap from a make-shift bridge over a flood in a yard. The puddle is too large, and Cartier-Bresson snapshots the instant immediately before the man's boot-heel breaks the still, reflecting water surface. The photo was taken between two world wars, and there is a sense of gleeful resignation in the man's leap and also in the billboards behind him, displaying a dancing-figure also suspended in mid-air. Yet in the background, a dark clock-tower, black-pointed iron fences, and hazy working-class rooftops harken back to hard times—and, unknown to everyone involved, portend to even darker times to come.

Chris's Theodore story contains a decisive moment that, I think, captures both the movement of her thought and who she was as a person. But before I explain this, let me discuss the billboards, pointed fences, and rooftops of her work a little bit.

We can understand her Theodore story as a whole as an allegory for her philosophy, which opens up a path for its readers. Like Rainer Maria Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo," which ends with the challenge, "You must change your life," this pathway leads Chris's reader towards a decision they always already face, whether they hear it or not. For her, truth was not the correlation between a correct representation and a factual state of affairs, but *a journey* from lower to higher levels of meaning. And, like Plato's famous cave allegory, it involves levels of truth. It is not a physical journey but a non-physical 'movement' that unfolds in the meaning we give to ourselves, things, and others. For Chris, this largely happens in and through our existential imagination. The imagination for her is not the same as fantasy, which suspends disbelief for the purposes of pretending and make-believe. It is rather the faculty that gives meaning to our lives in the real world by synthesizing our own stance with regard to the potentials a special other unlocks for us.

When little Chris set off down the path in the woods, there were loved ones both behind and ahead, to return to. For the older Chris, the recognition of truth, which amounts to *being in* the truth,

and thus achieving it by beautifying it, must be accomplished alone. Whether one achieves it or drops-out along the way, truth and untruth always relate back to a world-giving relationship with a special other. Like the hidden clearing the little girl found with signs of dysfunction scattered about, the truth and untruth of being converge at the lonely place where loved ones expose each other to anguish over the conditions of being which undermine the most meaningful things in life. This is the vulnerability that special others expose one another to, in the place of intimacy, where frames wait to be put back up, cast about, or left behind. Truth is accomplished by continuing to build the conditions of love in life despite the understanding that reality will wear them down. If the self finds the path of truth too difficult, untruth will enable this neglect to the extent that a self no longer recognizes itself. It is then no longer a neutral possibility between finding itself and losing itself. It has already lost itself beyond its existential capacity to find itself.

To build the conditions of love is to construct works on the ground above an underground river that feeds the self, one that finds its source in the special other. For it is this relation that constitutes the self *as a self* in the world—the being of which is not named “being-in-the-world” but “being-for another in the world.”¹²⁶ But this river can quickly become buried by “all the meaning in the world” and the sediment the world lies down over top of it. The tendency of the world is to pave over and to draw the self away from this deeper level that feeds it. So, the self must ever work to express it, in words, actions, and things—what Chris called “works”—to draw a line in the sands of being to help the self remember where it came from.

The Theodore story helped her articulate all this. But she also left something unsaid, both that night with the other graduate students at the conference and in the draft she sent me. And this

¹²⁶ Weston, *General Others*. Chris understood that the hyphen in Heideggerian constructions such as being-in or being-with was an artifact of English translations. But she retained this convention with her term being-for in order to show its derivation from and contrast with a general Heideggerian perspective.

unspoken aspect aligns with what I would call her thought's decisive moment. It captures the essence of not just her perspective as a whole, but also who she was a person and what it was like to be with her. It was when Chris, the little girl, put Theodore down at the foot of the path. Of this, she wrote, "I set him down for two reasons. First, because I wanted to protect him from the danger that I thought might be ahead. And second, perhaps more importantly, deep down, I knew this was a journey I had to take by myself."¹²⁷

Leaving Theodore behind shows how she was. She loved those close to her dearly and spent her time thinking about how to love them better. But her social ontology emphasized the loneliness of the self in intimacy as much as its togetherness with a special other. For her, loved ones deliver the self to a deeper loneliness. As she wrote, "intimacy does not eradicate existential solitude, but amplifies it."¹²⁸ And this is what it was like to love Christina Weston.

Despite all her affection and dedication to learning how to love better, as someone who knew Chris intimately, I would just like to point out: she left Theodore behind.

She put him down and left him.

¹²⁷ Weston, "Ontological Amulet."

¹²⁸ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

Chapter 1: Meaning and Memento

The Revelation of Lost Special Others

*Broken down refrigerators, leaking faucets
All that masking tape is gone to waste
Ceiling tiles are missing, stains adorn the carpet
Some things aren't meant to be replaced
Some things aren't meant to be replaced*

*Light bulbs in your head that might be burnt out
Might be rough around the edges, you barely function
You're too tired, you can't carry all this hurt now
You're more to me than all these broken things
These broken things*

*Why...
Why...
Can't I put you back together?*

—Clarity, "Broken Things"

Introduction: The Past in a Box

The first night I found out Chris was missing, the night Barb called me, I didn't leave my apartment to take the ferry and meet with police. It was a poor decision.

Barb had led Detective Avery to expect me as soon as I arrived that evening, and he knew I had time to catch several sailings. It also didn't help that, under the same day's first impressions, I didn't answer his call or return his message that night.

I think I knew at the time that not rising to the urgency of the occasion would make others feel that I was downplaying their alarm. It would, in other words, single me out. And I understood that the circumstances of the situation, like police involvement, that Chris had not returned anyone's messages for several days, and the fact that—even if from afar—Barb was concerned enough to

manage things—I knew that none of this looked good. But I had nothing to hide. I thought that when Chris reappeared from some backcountry trip the whole truth would reveal itself and show my hesitance in a new light. I was counting on that new light to shine upon me.

So, I sat in my apartment that first night sipping whiskey, expecting that out of all the other texts, messages, and emails, she'd respond to mine. Several fingers into the Jameson, I pulled down a cardboard box from my closet's top shelf. I hadn't seen the things inside it for months.

For our last few years together, we lived in different cities, carrying on a long-distance relationship, while both of us pursued PhDs at separate universities. Academic couples often have to take *a flight* to visit one another, so we were fortunate enough to only be a ferry ride apart. This is how things were when it ended. But for most of our relationship, we lived together: from undergrad to our graduate degrees in Europe. Over the years, we accumulated a lot of stuff. And when we moved back to the Pacific Northwest, we split it up. Before the breakup, my apartment was full of it.

I was ultimately to blame for what happened with us, but I was still devastated when it happened. My heartbreak had a quickened memory: it seemed like everything in my apartment sparked her to mind, echoed with her voice, replayed memories of us together, and projected visions I once had of our future. Kitchenware, art-prints, linens, furniture, clothes, so many things reminded me of her. I worked from home, and it became a problem. I started to find it hard to function, to complete the smallest tasks.

Even during walks to clear my mind through surrounding neighbourhoods, I would expect to see her getting off a bus or read her words at the ding of a notification.

One morning I stopped by a corner store and asked for some empty boxes they could give away. When I got home, I walked around my place with one in hand. Anytime something reminded me of her, I put it in.

I threw away or donated most of it. But there were a few things, a few very special things I couldn't get rid of. I couldn't *throw them away*, but I somehow had to *get them away*. The box I pulled down from my closet contained them.

* * *

Chris's master's thesis, *General Others and Special Others: Fürsorge, Desire, and the Revelation of the World*, was an attempt to show the incompleteness of Heidegger's *Dasein*-analytic in *Being and Time*.¹ It used the phenomena of grief and mementos to show that there were levels of meaning and significance that constitute the self's world, but which Heidegger's analysis did not articulate or exhibit.² Nevertheless, Chris always held his work, both early and late, in high intellectual esteem.³ And her own thought often began with his before departing from it. This is especially the case with her understanding of the self and the meaning that constitutes its world.

Being and Time begins with the description of the worldhood of *Dasein*—Heidegger's colloquial German term for the self.⁴ Unlike much early modern philosophy, such as that of French philosopher René Descartes, who imagined that the individual was an isolated mind projecting its ideas out onto the world, Heidegger's philosophy shows that the self-world correlation is fundamental. The traditional philosopher's detachment is academic scaffolding, built upon a more

¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

² Weston, *General Others*. Chris understood that *Being and Time*'s first division, the "preparatory fundamental analysis of *Dasein*" was not to be conceived as a complete philosophical anthropology, but as a preliminary study that prepared the ground for the question of the meaning of being (a fundamental ontology): "Because of its groundwork status, Heidegger's approach was 'minimalist.' The method did not require full elaboration of *Dasein*'s existence, but only those factors which opened it up to the question of being." Yet, Chris contended that the aspects Heidegger left out, the ones she picked up surrounding the theme of the special other and its loss, are not merely superfluous to the self's openness to being, but grounding for it. And because of this, "there is need for a critical treatment and elaboration of an ontology similar to, but also set apart from that which was put forward in *Being and Time*." If these missing aspects have relevance for the meaning of being, that is, if they influence the character of the resulting fundamental ontology, then this is not just a methodological, but a substantial omission. For it would disfigure the kind of being that is open to being itself.

³ This was true despite her disgust over his personal and political life. Her attitude on this point was much like those who knew Heidegger, such as Hannah Arendt, Herbert Marcuse, and Emanuel Levinas—those who admired the philosopher, but were dismayed with the man.

⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 27.

basic relationship with existence, and so Heidegger designates *Dasein's* being as “being-in-the-world.”⁵ Chris explained it this way: “*Dasein's* everyday existence does not primarily *speculate about* the world *but engages* in it.”⁶ Because *Dasein* is not first an observer but a participant, it does not primarily encounter things as objects to be examined, but as equipment (*Zeug*) to be used.⁷ Heidegger, therefore, distinguishes between objects of scrutiny, the present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), and equipment put to work, the ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*).⁸ Like a fishing reel encased in a see-through display at a store, the present-at-hand is isolated from its “environment” (*Umwelt*), the pragmatic context of day to day life.⁹ Since *Dasein purposefully* deals with tools, signs, and other people that it primarily encounters “at work,”¹⁰ a tacit field of meaning constitutes its existence in the world. Heidegger calls this sphere of meaningful engagements “significance” (*Bedeutsamkeit*).¹¹ But as both this field of meaning and the world itself withdraw away from *Dasein's* attention, remaining in the background out of the way of the job, Heidegger needed to show *how* it becomes apparent in a pre-philosophical way.¹²

Section 16, one of the most celebrated sections of *Being and Time*, describes how the “worldly character of the environment,” as a context of significance, comes into view in the everyday experiences of the “un-ready-to-hand:” a broken or unsuitable tool, something missing, or stuff that gets in the way of the task.¹³ Each description of “the conspicuous,” “the obtrusive,” and “the

⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁶ Weston, *General Others*.

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97.

⁸ Ibid, 98-101.

⁹ Ibid, 95.

¹⁰ Ibid, 156.

¹¹ Ibid, 87.

¹² Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenological Philosophy First Book*, (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1983), 44-45. The necessity I speak of follows from the demands of a phenomenological method which requires showing the pre-theoretical or ‘experiential’ (*i.e., intuitive*) basis for philosophical claims. Though it has been received in different ways, the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, gave this “principle of all principles” its most influential formulation.

¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 102-106.

obstinate” is a little different. Yet, in each case, the usual smooth functioning of significant reference (hammer to nails, nails to a board) gets interrupted. And because of this disruption, the often-implicit background transitions into an explicit foreground. In this section, and in others of *Being and Time*, such as its analysis of anxiety (*Angst*), Heidegger founds his ontological claims about the worldhood of *Dasein* upon the everyday experience of tasks coming to a halt.¹⁴

With a similar methodological move, but with different experiences and, ultimately, a different direction in mind, Chris pointed to grief, and a class of things called mementos as phenomena that reveal layers of meaning which compose the self’s existence in the world, but which were omitted from *Being and Time*. For her, the ordinary field of significance Heidegger describes was not the most basic. There was another, deeper level she called the invaluable, which she said, “is the articulated meaning of a relationship between intimates.”¹⁵ Between the ordinary and the invaluable, she described a middle layer—the expressive. It sets the limits of ordinary significance and symbolizes the invaluable. The loss of a loved one complicates the self’s relationship with the things they have left behind, things she called intrusive items. And she used the division between these and mementos to establish the phenomenological basis for the levels of meaning that constitute the self’s being.

An Alaskan Postcard

Inside the box were various things that, for one reason or another, I just couldn’t throw out.

There was a piece of driftwood she used to carve a little happy birthday message for my 25th. There was also a tattered friendship bracelet she made and gave to me in undergrad just before we started dating. I didn’t have a cassette deck, but she once gave me a tape of her playing a guitar and singing a song she wrote for me. Concert tickets, old photo booth pics, handwritten notes, the many

¹⁴ Rudolf Bernet, “Phenomenological Reduction and the Double Life of the Subject,” in *Reading Heidegger from the Start: Essays in His Earliest Thought*, eds. by Theodore Kisiel, and John van Buren (Albany: SUNY, 1994).

¹⁵ Weston, *General Others*.

things that shared lives collect over the years. Inside the box was also an envelope that contained more cards and photos of her. On my fridge, I used to keep a washed-out, kitschy, vintage postcard she once sent me. I wanted to show it to the police.

I received it in the mail a year or two into our long-distance relationship. It displayed a young woman with beehive hair in a 60s style, two-piece swimsuit standing on a dock overlooking the ocean. She was holding a massive King Crab, and the card's caption read, "Two Alaskan Beauties." On the back, Chris had written, "Call me. I want to tell you about my latest inspiration from the 'Land of the Midnight Sun.' Love you Babe."

When we lived apart, we were both busy with our doctoral work and in our own heads a lot. We could go several days without checking in. Random little, 'solo' trips like this had always been her way of dealing with writer's block, and I often wouldn't learn about them until after they happened. This postcard was how I found out she went up north for a couple of nights. By the time I called, she was already back home.

Chris had little to no supervision growing up. Throughout most of her life, no one had been in a position to notice that she wasn't home. Even when we lived together, she didn't like answering for her whereabouts or even her spontaneous journeys out of town. She would always respond to messages, but by then, she was already gone. It bothered her that it bothered me, and in our early years, it led to a lot of arguments. We eventually worked through it: she would be courteous enough to let me know before she left as long as I agreed to support her independence and not try to stop her from going alone.

Because of *who* Chris was, because of the strong sense of *herself* she had, she often walked lonely paths. And even though her work can be understood as emphasizing the role of others in opening up the self's world, it also has an equally strong emphasis on the self and its aloneness in the midst of those closest to it.

Chris's 'Existential' Conception of the Self

Like many Continental thinkers from the past century, Chris wrote with an existential conception of the self.¹⁶ Up until the 1927 publication of Martin Heidegger's monumental work, *Being and Time*, many philosophers conceived of the self as an isolated mind, self-enclosed, and severed from the rest of the world. From the perspective of a self shut-up on itself, the traditional task of modern philosophy, made famous by René Descartes' *Meditations* (1641), had been to establish a firm and absolute foundation for knowledge—the supposed bridge between the insular representations in the mind and the 'mainland' of external reality. Over the last century, with the widespread influence of existential and 'post-existential' thinkers such as Heidegger, this foundationalist approach mainly gave way to a post-Cartesian perspective on philosophy and the self. As Heideggerian scholar Herbert Dreyfus summarizes:

Since Descartes, philosophers have been stuck with the *epistemological* problem of explaining how the ideas in our minds can be true of the external world. Heidegger shows that this subject/object epistemology presupposes a background of everyday practices into which we are socialized but that we do not represent in our minds.¹⁷

The pre-represented sphere that Dreyfus points towards is what Heidegger understood and refers to in German as *Existenz*, or "existence," and "being-in-the-world."¹⁸ Heidegger's existential analytic was to yield *existentials*, the transcendental structures of the self—those necessary characteristics that

¹⁶ Jack Reynolds and Ashley Woodward, "Existentialism and Poststructuralism: Some Unfashionable Observations," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Existentialism*, eds. Felicity Joseph, Jack Reynolds, and Ashley Woodward (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). Reynolds and Woodward show that, despite the widespread rejection of the existentialist subject in Continental structuralism and poststructuralism, there is quite a lot of overlap between it and the (post-)structuralist subject. They name six areas of similarity: (i) an emphasis on the limits of rationality, (ii) the isomorphism of structure/event and facticity/transcendence, (iii) a limitation set upon scientific determinism, (iv) the rejection of a foundationalist *cogito*, (v) the emphasis placed upon a de-centered subject, constrained by its context, and (vi) an inquiry into the depths of freedom and agency and its limits and complications with regard to ethical discourse. I imagine Chris would have also agreed with this assessment; although, while Reynolds and Ashley are writing very broadly about the existential subject, Chris primarily took her lead from Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*.

¹⁷ Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-world: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 38, 52.

are sufficient for a self to be open to the meaning and question of being.¹⁹ Other than its existence in an actual world, the most basic feature of a self in this respect is that it *transcends itself*. It is not essentially closed in on itself but *opened up by its factual existence*. In *this* sense, and primarily this sense we can call his approach and also Chris's *existential*.²⁰

One of the more important contributions of Heidegger's *Being and Time* was to show that the self, which he calls *Dasein* (a German term for human existence that literally translates as 'being-there') is not closed-in on itself, like a rock or even a Cartesian ego, but that it is fundamentally *self-transcending*. This means that its connection with things, others, and the world is not secondary to its being, but *primary*. It is always already outside itself, standing out of itself, concerning itself with tasks, other people, and living its life out in the world. Its relationship with a meaningful field of objects, engagements, and others is fundamental to who it is. Before any higher-level, artificial break between an isolated mind and outer reality, the self is, at its deepest level, tethered to the world.

Like Heidegger, Chris thought of the world as the largest temporal horizon "wherein the self lives its life."²¹ As she noted, we should not think of it as "the largest sphere of bare existence, which registers merely the 'thatness' of real entities, over and against unreal ones."²² Or put another way, "the world is not the most complete checklist or the largest roll call of existing things. It is not to be operationalized as a cataloguer."²³ Instead, as it correlates with the self's life, tasks, hopes, and

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Mark A. Wrathall, "Existential Phenomenology," in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 31. Chris was aware that Heidegger rejected labelling his work existentialist, a term that became popular in post-World War II Europe with the rise of French existential phenomenology, such as that delivered in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*. She used the term to designate a non-Cartesian view of the self, which generally followed the outline of Heidegger's *Dasein*. For Heidegger, *Dasein* is (i) not a what, but a who, (ii) it is in each case its own, (iii) its being is an issue for it, which it works out *through* existing, and (iv) it is not a self-enclosed mind, but fundamentally correlated with the world (self-transcending). Chris's self generally follows this conception.

²¹ Weston, *General Others*; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93. Chris drew upon the primary sense in which Heidegger uses the term 'world' in *Being and Time*, "as that 'wherein' a factual Dasein as such can be said to 'live.'"

²² Weston, *General Others*.

²³ Ibid.

dreams, the world is a horizon of intelligibility, meaning, and significance. It does not merely indicate “*that* beings are (or perhaps *that* they are not), but *what, how, and who* they are.”²⁴

American author David Foster Wallace began his 2005 Commencement Speech at Kenyon College, entitled “This is Water,” with a parable.

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys, how’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

Wallace sums up his point: “the most obvious, important, ubiquitous realities are often the ones that are the hardest to see and talk about.”²⁵ And his little story illustrates another important point that Heidegger also noticed: *the horizon of our lives, the world, usually remains hidden from our attention.*

As Heidegger explains, even though the world is of crucial importance in understanding and describing *Dasein’s* existence, for the most part, the world itself remains in the background of daily life. It is, in technical terms, “non-thematic” or “unthematic,” and usually goes unnoticed.²⁶ Much like the sky’s horizon, constantly receding and making way for our interactions with concrete things, so too the world primarily withdraws away from our attention in favour of our many preoccupations.

For Heidegger, the hiddenness of the world poses a problem for a philosophy that aspires to a phenomenological method.²⁷ The challenge is to show how *the inapparent* (in this case, the world) *becomes apparent in a pre-theoretical manner.* And to then explain how this experience forms the basis for philosophical reflection and ontological elaboration.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Foster Wallace, *This is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, About Living a Compassionate Life* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009).

²⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 107.

²⁷ Husserl, *Ideas*, 43.

Heidegger solves this by pointing to the phenomena of the un-ready-to-hand. The ready-to-hand and its pragmatic context, which he calls the “environment,” usually withdraw away from explicit attention as a tool refers itself to other equipment.²⁸ For instance, a saw retreats away from our explicit focus as we concentrate instead on the straight line we are trying to cut into a wooden plank. But, Heidegger says, there are occasions when things ‘go wrong’ and interrupt the current task. During such moments, what is usually hidden becomes ‘visible.’ He points to a variety of such occasions. Something becomes “conspicuous” when it is unsuitable for a job—like having a Phillips-head screwdriver, when we need a flat-head—or when we have the right kind, but it is broken.²⁹ Also, stuff can become “obstinate” when it “stands in the way of our concern”—as when we’re painting a room and having to continually move the furniture around to get to the next wall.³⁰ Finally, Heidegger said that things can also be “obtrusive,” meaning that we need them for the job, but they are missing.³¹ In this case, when we are looking for something that we need to do the job, like a hammer when we want to hammer nails, not only does the piece of equipment itself come to attention as what we are looking for, but also the context (the toolbox and workroom) comes into view as to where it might be hiding.

While Heidegger uses phenomena like a missing tool to build towards his explication of the worldhood of the world, Chris used the experience of a lost loved one because she believed this was more revealing than the loss of a replaceable tool. And while Chris never wrote specifically about heartbreak *per se*, my own experience in the wake of our breakup was also a kind of loss that I could never make sense of in the terms of *Being and Time*.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 99.

²⁹ Ibid, 102-103.

³⁰ Ibid, 103.

³¹ Ibid.

Heartbreak (I)

My breakup with Chris was hard on me. It shattered my world, and even though I had no one to blame but myself, it left me heartbroken, not just for what I had done to her, but also for who I had lost.

Heartbreak, the kind suffered because of an unhappy ending to a personal relationship, romantic or otherwise, is the pain we feel when we lose someone dear. There are different ways to lose a loved one, and so there are various ways for hearts to break. We can be heartbroken because of a breakup, disillusionment with someone's character, or a death. In each case, the loss is accompanied by pain. Because we have lost them, we long for them. But at the same time, we know that, for one reason or another, we cannot have them back. The longing becomes agonizing: against the mental recognition of its own dead end, desire continues to deepen its feeling for the absent one. Heartbreak is *suffering through* the 'impossibility' of reunion and wrestling with the time it takes to learn to live without them.

Perhaps the most paradigmatic form of such pain accompanies the death of a family member or a close friend. In such cases, heartache is the same as grief, what psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud refers to as mourning.³² In his famous work "Mourning and Melancholia," he describes it as entailing "profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love," and an "inhibition of all activity."³³ Freud says that while reality demands the griever to withdraw their "attachments" from the lost one, this "arouses understandable opposition" from them. They *do not want* to lose the other, to the point they would prefer to reject the world than accept its new painful

³² Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume XIV* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957). Freud's translator notes that, as in English, the German term *Trauer* can mean both "the affect of grief and its outward manifestation."

³³ *Ibid*, 243. Freud is here talking directly about melancholia, a pathological state for him. But by comparison, he is also talking about mourning: "the same traits are met with in mourning."

state.³⁴ With the absence of the loved one, says Freud of the mourner, “the world has become poor.”³⁵ It is empty without them, and if not entirely meaningless, still lacking a point.

Overcoming this grief is an accomplishment, and it must be achieved through what Freud calls “the work of mourning.”³⁶ As with all work, it is a process. It requires endurance. It takes time. “Each single one of the memories and expectations” which binds the mourner to the lost one “must be brought up” and worked over to accomplish the detachment that reality commands.³⁷ Practicing psychoanalyst and scholar of the Freudian tradition, Darian Leader, summarizes it this way:

Each memory and expectation linked to the person we have lost must be revived and met with the judgment that they are gone forever. This is the difficult and terrible time when our thoughts perpetually return to the one we have lost. We think of their presence in our lives, we turn over memories of moments spent together, we imagine that we see them in the street, we expect to hear their voice when the phone rings... but each time we think of them, some of the intensity of our feelings is being fractioned away.³⁸

It takes time and work to lessen the intensity of the pain of lost loved ones.

There is also another kind of heartbreak that is not as drastic as mourning. It does not arise because of someone’s death, but because of the end of a friendship or romance. This was how I lost Chris the first time. My pain arose not because I lost *her*, in the sense that she passed on, but because I lost *our relationship*. Such heartache could perhaps never be as severe as the mourner’s, since much of their agony lies in sadness *for* the other, the finality of *their* death and life. While heartbreak over the end of a relationship is probably not as painful, since the lost one still lives, perhaps it’s more complicated and, in another sense, actually harder to accept for the very same reason.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 246.

³⁶ Ibid, 246; Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia, and Depression* (New York: Hamish Hamilton, 2008). From a largely Lacanian standpoint, emphasizing the importance of the symbolic in the work of mourning, Leader provides a detailed overview of its differing treatments in the psychoanalytic tradition, while also expounding upon its social foundations.

³⁷ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 244.

³⁸ Leader, *The New Black*, 26.

Loss of the Other as a Phenomenological Reduction

Chris's writings about loss, the loss of someone important to the self, played a similar role in her overall thought, as does Heidegger's "un-ready-to-hand" in *Being and Time*. For the most part, when she spoke about loss, she was talking about the loss of meaning that people give to one another. But she also wrote about literal loss in the stronger sense of *being gone* like abandonment or death.³⁹

In these cases, her point was methodological. She wanted to show the everyday, pre-theoretical basis for making the inapparent world *apparent*. And, by doing so, to elaborate upon the character of the self's "worldfulness"—the term she used as shorthand for the self's fundamental correlation with the world.⁴⁰ For her, these phenomena of broken and lost relationships served as a form of phenomenological reduction: the experiential basis for a methodical transition from a naïve, pre-philosophical mindset into a reflective demeanour.⁴¹ She found her precedent for this in section 16 of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where he discusses the revelatory role of the un-ready-to-hand. But, again, her focus was not on a missing thing, but a missing someone. Treading lightly, she said, "although substantially disparate to, for instance, losing a set of keys, losing someone dear plays a similar formal or methodological role in revealing the meaning that composes the world."⁴²

Although it amounted to a similar move, her *sensitivity* to the difference between lost keys and the dearly departed also indicated something else. She said, "the loss of a special other reveals that

³⁹ Weston, *General Others*; Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁴⁰ Weston, *General Others*.

⁴¹ Husserl, *Ideas*, 60; Bernet, "Phenomenological Reduction;" Weston, *General Others*; Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 17. Chris understood that during his lecture courses and in *Being and Time*, Heidegger broke with Husserl's orientation. As Bernet points out, for Husserl the phenomenological reduction bracketed everyday existence, putting its naïve world-belief into parenthesis, while seeking apodictic knowledge. Heidegger's 'reductions' (the un-ready-to-hand and anxiety) served a similar methodological purpose, but they did not so much 'bracket' the world or being-in-the-world—putting them out of play—but *brought these into perspective from a different interpretive angle*. When Chris wrote about the reduction, she was using it in the 'Heideggerian sense'—although she knew that it also made little sense to speak of a Heideggerian reduction. She understood the difference between Husserl's and Heidegger's 'reductions' to be a consequence of, as she put it, "their differing orientations with regard to the standard for philosophical truth: mathematics for Husserl and existence for Heidegger."

⁴² Weston, *General Others*.

the significance a lost item discloses is not sufficient or exhaustive of the kind of meaning from which the world is built.”⁴³ It is, of course, deeply annoying and disrupting to lose—say—a wallet, but this cannot compare to those profound losses where we do not know how to carry on, even though the world goes on. She wrote:

And this reveals a kind of meaning and web of significance, within which every self is enmeshed, but to which no lost tool could refer and no analysis of worldhood could uncover without first articulating a theory of meaning that follows from and expresses a world-giving relation with an irreplaceable other.⁴⁴

For Chris, the loss of loved ones pointed to an analytic of worldfulness that encompassed, but also outstripped the one put forward by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. For it revealed a level of meaningfulness that he did not explicate. To bring this forward, her analysis did not just focus on the lost other, but the way that this loss affects the one who must learn to cope with the things they have left behind.

Heartbreak (II)

My pain was not as devastating as the griever’s. Nor did I retreat into a bedridden depression or lose all interest in the world. Like they say, ‘life goes on,’ and it continued to place demands upon me. The world continued to call me. As my father said to me on a long-distance call one afternoon, I was still young, and I had my dissertation and future career to look forward to. There was still the possibility of living a meaningful life even without Chris in it. So, I continued to go through the motions. But at the same time, losing her changed everything.

Nights and early mornings were the worst. I found it hard to fall asleep. And when I did, anxiety dreams woke me up. Insomnia followed as memories of her looped in my mind. A hollow feeling

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

in my core made me feel like I was dropping on a roller coaster even though I was lying flat on my mattress.

At the usual time, I'd force myself out of bed. With heavy, burning eyes, I'd brush my teeth or make coffee while rehearsing an excuse to call or email her. I'd go over out loud what I'd say, or how I'd apologize, and try to explain myself, not to justify my actions, but to just—with the right words—make her hear me.

Every child with a good grade school English teacher learns the difference between 'can I' and 'may I.' Perhaps it's this modal difference that overcomplicates this form of heartache and makes it so hard to accept. It wasn't as if I *couldn't* see or talk to her. It was that she *wouldn't* see or speak to me. And somewhere in my mind, because there was nothing as final as—I apologize in advance for the following simile—a cold corpse, I couldn't stop that inner theatre from projecting scenarios that would make her see, and understand, and soften.

Over the grinds at the bottom of my mug, and after crafting the perfect circumstances and phrasing, I'd try to avoid the thought of taking a ferry to see her and get on with the rest of my day. But it soon became evident that my work would not be an escape.

Heritage museums often have fully furnished old houses or homesteads with cordoned off rooms set up for display. Visitors can walk through and see how people lived in the past, seeing all the old items, utensils, tools, and furniture like they would have been. Imagine one of the hosts allowing someone into one of these exhibited rooms with the instruction that they cannot touch anything. Think about how the guest would feel, not wanting to disturb any of the precious antiques around them. This is similar to how I felt in my apartment after we broke up. All the things reminded me of her. It was more like living in an exhibit than my own place. I worked from home, and simple tasks like grabbing a reference from the old oak bookshelf we hauled from a thrift shop in undergrad or making grilled cheese with the ceramic pan we splurged on in Paris, small little activities like these

became unbearable. Everything was a painful reminder of her. Things started intruding on my ability to function. Unlike normal stuff, they did not retreat and blend into my daily tasks. They interrupted my chores and work, reminding me of who I lost. They were haunted by her, and they haunted me to the point that I couldn't get any work done.

I knew I needed a self-intervention. That's when I went to the corner store one morning to grab some boxes.

Dysfunctional and Intrusive Items

Chris used the term "items" to designate all the produced things that populate the world around us.⁴⁵ There are as many different kinds of items as there are different roles for them to fulfill. For instance, tools and signs serve a utility-function, while ornaments and decorations perform an aesthetic-function.⁴⁶ In our day to day lives, depending on how they work (or don't), items can be more or less conspicuous.

Heidegger points out that equipment often *withdraws* from attention to get out of the way. He also shows that, unlike equipment, signs *draw* attention in order to direct it.⁴⁷ A red light, for example, does not hide from an intersection but stands out within it to help drivers avoid collisions. Chris added, "like signs, ornaments and decorations too are prominent, yet not to indicate or give direction but to adorn, attract, and build atmosphere."⁴⁸ She developed this typology to contextualize and

⁴⁵ Ibid. Chris understood that Heidegger chose the term equipment to emphasize the contextual nature of the ready-to-hand. With the term items, which also implies the singularity of instances in a row on a store shelf, she did not mean to negate what Heidegger meant. Yet she wanted to point out the inherent replaceability of things in such a context. For her, the usage of this term should not be understood as a failure to grasp the relationality of equipment or to once again obscure it with an appeal to isolated objects. It should be understood to point to the way that even equipment in a given context is replaceable for the functionality of that context as a whole.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Chris drew a distinction between, on one side, ornaments and decorations and, on the other, mementos and artworks. The difference resides in the levels of meaning each participates within. We will discuss mementos shortly and return to artworks when we discuss her theory of the work in Chapter 7 and 8.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97-98, 107ff.

⁴⁸ Weston, *General Others*.

differentiate a special class of objects she called mementos.⁴⁹ But before elaborating upon these and their unique significance amongst all other things, she set them up by clarifying another kind of un-readiness-to-hand, which she intended to contrast with mementos. She called this mode of un-readiness-to-hand “dysfunctionality.”⁵⁰ Even though regular items are *not* mementos they can mimic them when the self loses someone dear. And this mimicry is dysfunctional.

In the grief of mourning that we have seen Freud and Leader describe, things actively contribute to the mourner’s pain as they evoke memories of the lost one. A mother who has lost a little boy might leave his room untouched for years, like a shrine. A widower might refuse to take his late wife’s voice off their home number’s voicemail greeting message—not because he does not know how to change it, but because he cannot bring himself to do so. Chris was clear that there is nothing wrong with keeping reminders of lost ones. Her point was that “the work of mourning involves making a painful division between regular items and mementos by drawing a line in the kind of meaning they are allowed to evoke for the surviving.”⁵¹ Beyond its psychological functions, drawing this line “amounts to showing the different kinds of meaning the self exists within.”⁵² But before it is drawn, things can be dysfunctional and “overstep their boundaries by inappropriately presenting themselves as mementos.”⁵³ Such things, she named “intrusive items.”⁵⁴

These kinds of items present a type of un-readiness-to-hand that Heidegger did not describe. For the dysfunctionality of intrusive items does not mean things are broken, missing, or just clutter. It is

⁴⁹ Ibid. Mementos were to be understood as different from souvenirs, since she reserved the latter for items collected to remind of a place, time, or event, while mementos reminded of a person. The two can of course overlap, but for purposes of clarity she tried to keep the language distinct.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

not missing, nor is it getting in the way. It is ready to be used at the appropriate time. So, it is not dysfunctional because it is broken or gone:

dysfunctionality is not the same as being damaged, ‘busted,’ or defunct. It is not the opposite of functionality, a privative or deficient mode of operation, as if an item were defective out of the box or through wear and tear. The peculiar thing about intrusive items is that they are often fully functional, in that they *work*. They are not missing. They are not in the way in the sense that they are blocking some other activity. They are *there*, ready to go to work. Yet, at the same time, their connection with a lost, but significant, other overcomplicates their meaning, *stalling* their normal utility.⁵⁵

By dysfunctional she did not mean *malfunctional*. Instead, she used one of the English denotations of dysfunctional, referring to someone’s inability to successfully cope with personal or professional relationships. In this sense, it implies “an overcomplication,” because while “an item’s regular meaning remains intact, another layer of meaning supervenes, disturbing it.”⁵⁶

For Chris, the ordinary meaning of items resided in their capacity to fulfill a function. And if they cannot because they are broken or missing, they are then replaced by another that *can* complete the job. She wrote, “Functionality and replaceability are the significance and sense of ordinary items.”⁵⁷ Speaking about utility in particular (in distinction from aesthetic roles, which required a different analysis), she said *overcomplication* results when instead of withdrawing into the practical task at hand and referring to other tools and utensils around them, items begin to assert themselves against the pragmatic context. They stand out as reminders of a personal history with a lost other. She explained:

Through the event of loss, because these things have contributed to a unique past shared by special others, their everyday sense of being merely replaceable tools becomes, if not completely erased, then overwritten by a higher, we might even say deeper level that

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid; Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1994), 196–197. Although Chris often intentionally avoided technical Freudian language to dodge the impression that she was pre-emptively drawing upon his pre-constructed theories in phenomenological procedure, we could add that a dysfunctional item is “overdetermined” by its association with a significant other.

⁵⁷ Weston, *General Others*.

attests to the irreplaceability of an intimate other. And insofar as they have a capacity to blend into the background this becomes too flat, too painful.⁵⁸

When this occurs, they no longer *simply* function by smoothly referring. Instead, “they *express* something beyond themselves” by interrupting such referrals with painful reminders of someone now gone.⁵⁹ They step over the bounds of everyday life and “*intrude* upon the task at hand.”⁶⁰ They are *intrusive*.

For Chris, this intrusiveness was revelatory. For it showed that not only do items usually operate by hiding themselves but that they also usually work by concealing their connection with a special other.⁶¹ This is indicative, for her, of a world-giving relation: “Although usually hidden by the quotidian, the relationship between the self and the lost one subtends all being-in-the-world.”⁶² She elaborated:

And a level of meaning appropriate to such intimacy, one that outstrips the significance of everyday contexts of equipment and ‘Heideggerian others,’ but which is also vulnerable to being hidden and buried by them—this founds the self’s day to day life as it is constituted precisely by covering over the primacy of this relation.⁶³

What Heidegger calls *Dasein*’s average everydayness, Chris called the ordinary. And she said that intrusive items show that the primary mode of the ordinary is to hide the way that this world-giving relationship with a special other constitutes the self’s being: who it is *for them* and who they are *for it*. While ordinary items usually hide this, mementos express it. And so for her, because equipment usually hides this more basic level of meaning while mementos reveal it, the latter were a more appropriate phenomenon to begin with as the starting point for a new fundamental ontology.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Chris explained that intrusive things need not have *actually* participated in the relationship between special others in order to bring the other to mind. They may only be indirectly related to that history through likeness or resemblance—their general type or a similar feature—that triggers a memory or expectation.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

A Photo on the Beach

While looking through the box for the Alaskan postcard, I came across my favourite picture of Chris. I took it our first summer back from Europe. We were on a camping trip on the Oregon coast. It was just the two of us spending our days and evenings lying in the sun on isolated beaches.

The day I took this picture of her was hot, but there was also a cool ocean breeze blowing over the radiating rocks. The turquoise waves picked up sand in their foamy barrels before rolling and crashing onto the shore in front of us. It was gorgeous. But she was uneasy.

Thick black spiders lived amongst the small beach stones surrounding our sandy patch. As soon as they felt movement or saw a shadow, they'd retreat into the crevices back down into their lairs. But while we sat still on our Mexican beach blanket, they'd creep back out again and perch on the rocks around us.

Chris wouldn't lie down. She sat upright, hugging her knees to her chest, caressing one of her upper arms with a stray pussy willow bud, and using her vantage point like a look-out to scan for intruding creepy-crawlies.

I laid beside her admiring her from behind and how thick and wavy air-dried ocean water made her sandy blonde hair, how soft it fell on her tanned shoulder blades and over the easy-clip of her sea-green bikini top.

Without her seeing, I picked up a straw of field grass lying beside me and used it to brush upwards from the waistline of her bikini bottoms to the small of her back—lightly enough to just tickle the peach fuzz on her sacrum.

She yelped and jumped forward, swiping behind her, quickly realizing why I was laughing. It helped her forget about the spiders and concentrate on payback. A couple of hours later, while I was tanning with my eyes closed, she dumped a thermos of ice water on me.

We often played games like this, then bantered back and forth about them afterwards.

There was another contest between us, one that had been going on for years and one which played out that day on the beach. I had ulterior motives when I asked if I could take a few shots with her dad's old Leica. Using it, I finally got the upper hand. This picture was my proof.

To anyone else, this photo would just be a close up of another pretty blonde—at most a pretty face with unique eyes. When it was framed on my desk, anyone who saw it for the first time would make the same comment that everyone always did when they first met her.

They'd all say, "Those are the lightest brown eyes I've ever seen."

But no one commented on what I could see in this close-up: the sunlit freckles she always denied having.

Chris's Theory of Meaning (I): The Ordinary

Chris's theory of meaning is sophisticated. It requires some explanation since it not only underlies her theory of items and mementos but also the entire architecture of her thought. In general, she uses the term meaning to denote "the purposes the self finds in things and with others, which open up possibilities and horizons for existence, activity, and life."⁶⁴ In this respect, she follows Heidegger's definition of *Sinn*, translated as meaning in *Being and Time*, where he writes,

When entities within-the-world are discovered along with the Being of Dasein—that is, when they have come to be understood—we say that they have *meaning* [*Sinn*]. But that which is understood, taken strictly, is not the meaning but the entity, or alternatively, Being. Meaning is that wherein the intelligibility [*Verständlichkeit*] of something maintains itself.⁶⁵

From this non-epistemological perspective, the meaning things *give* to *Dasein* (or the self) is not separate from their being. It is not merely projected onto them from the outside, from an encased,

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 192-193.

self-fastened mind, like a projector casting an image on a screen. The meaning things have arises from the beings that *they are*. And the meanings they give open up potential projects for *Dasein* to exist within and through. For those familiar with this tradition, Chris’s concept of meaning should be fairly straightforward. But, because of the added dimensionality she introduces, it will quickly become more complicated. For not only is there the realm of *the ordinary*—which is very similar to everyday significance as put forward in *Being and Time*—there is also *the expressive*, and *the invaluable*.

We can think of the word meaning as Chris’s umbrella term for what Heidegger above called the intelligibility of things, while significance and sense are more refined. She wrote, “while significance is in keeping with Heidegger’s presentation of *Bedeutung* in the existential analytic, referring to the ‘for-sake-of-which’ and the ‘in-order-to’ something has with regard to other things, sense denotes the ‘significance’ of that very same thing’s *unavailability within the context of references*.”⁶⁶ Significance is the meaning of something or someone’s *presence* to others, while sense is the meaning of their *absence*.⁶⁷ With this distinction, she pointed out that something’s intelligibility depends not only upon its reference to other things but also upon a sense for its finitude—the meaning of its loss. As the English terms imply, meaning and significance “can be understood as the tension between something’s purpose *in a context* and its importance *on its own*, when its uniqueness comes to the fore *in anticipation* of its loss.”⁶⁸ This was important for Chris because the differences between the

⁶⁶ Weston, *General Others*. Although she used these terms significance and sense in this passage to draw this distinction, in general she did not consistently use these signifiers in strict conformity in all her writings. She often used meaning, significance, and sense interchangeably. What is important here is that she is deliberating not just on the meaning of something’s presence, but also its absence. For the reader going forward, I suggest keeping this point in mind, but assuming the non-technical usage of meaning, significance, and sense in the written word—unless otherwise indicated.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid; Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973). Scheler develops a non-formal (non-Kantian) ethics by developing a hierarchy of values read off

levels of meaning she had in mind were ultimately constituted by the meaning of the loss of those things that composed them.

The first level of meaning, she called the ordinary—which was very similar to the general coordinates of what Heidegger called average everydayness in *Being and Time*. Like everydayness, the ordinary is the self’s default orientation towards itself, things, others, and the world in general. Ordinary significance, whether we’re talking about items or others (in this case what she called general others—which I will explain more fully in the next chapter), is characterized by *functionality*. This aligned with Heidegger’s understanding of significance, when he writes of the referential character of equipment, “the relational totality of this signifying [or system of references] we call significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*].”⁶⁹ In Chris’s terms, an ordinary item’s significance is “its capacity to be used for a purpose,” while a general other’s is “their ability to perform a role or service for others.”⁷⁰ Constituting the sense of the ordinary is “the possibility for an item or general other, *as a general other*, to be replaced by another adequate to the task or service.”⁷¹ Their absence implies replacement. They are replaceable. Chris wrote, “functionality and replaceability, these are the basic meaning of things and others in the run-of-the-mill world.”⁷² But there is another sphere that limits and postpones the day to day, one that, in the midst of the ordinary, establishes the extraordinary.

phenomenologically-intuited things—or in his terms, goods or value-complexes. Chris did not draw upon the disambiguation of meaning, significance (purpose), and sense (importance) to develop an appeal to values, nor to develop a phenomenologically-based ethics from the latter—as did Scheler. She rarely spoke of values, and her use of the term the invaluable is meant to imply the way this level of meaning disrupts any value-system. It disrupts, but she was still aware that it can also serve as the basis for a proper reflection upon how the *is* of importance connects with the *ought* of value. Her use of the term importance and its common-sense association with values should be understood, then, in a proto-ethical way: in the sense that it expresses the grounding of an ontological vision of the revelation of the world—yet one which points to the conditions for any value-system or ethico-political deliberations. For the importance of the invaluable can up-end as much as ground any value or ethical or political system.

⁶⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 120.

⁷⁰ Weston, *General Others*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

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On the beach that day, I didn't take the photo to capture the moment or get another portrait of her.

When the occasion had arisen in the past few years, my phone camera could never catch them. The picture just wasn't crisp or deep enough.

Chris's vintage Leica was passed down to her by her father when he passed away. She only brought it out on special occasions. But she had it that day, and I took this picture with it. It was perfect.

Chris had secret freckles, the lightest kind. The kind that only came out after spending a day in the sun, but then disappeared as soon as her tan began setting in.

When I first noticed them, back in undergrad, and mentioned them to her after a day in the sun, she became shy and looked away, denying that she had "freckles." It was a game we played for years. I'd tell her that she was in denial, and she'd challenge me to point them out in a mirror. But, of course, once we got home, they were already gone, and so she'd accuse of me "making shit up."

When I got the film her dad's camera developed, I showed them to her. She still tried to deny that they were freckles, spouting some kind of nonsense, like, "Those aren't freckles, they're just sunspots."

I framed the picture on my desk in my apartment to provoke her when she visited, but soon the photo came to symbolize so much more.

Chris's Theory of Meaning (II): The Expressive and the Invaluable

The second of the three levels Chris named *the expressive*. It is a middle ground between the ordinary and the final level, the invaluable, and it occurs alongside the normal. It "carves out a place limiting the day to day, pointing beyond."⁷³ She called it the expressive because it *expresses*. In the ordinary, it indicates something extraordinary: invaluable, a dimension of meaning transcending

⁷³ Ibid.

the ordinary, which amounts to the world-giving relation between special others. The expressive can be anything that represents this higher sphere: an action, a word, a thing, a work, a photo or, in Chris's favoured example in her master's thesis, a memento.

The difference between the ordinary and the expressive stems from the different ways that things within these realms signify. Here, she drew a distinction between *reference* and *expression*. She wrote, "Reference, laid out as significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] in *Being and Time*, is the referring of one thing to another in a practical context."⁷⁴ Tools refer to other tools or materials, signs to directions, general others to services rendered. Whereas items and general others *refer*, more meaningful things, such as mementos, *express*. She continued,

that is to say, they symbolize or, rather, *embody* the boundary between the everyday and the invaluable. Their presence interrupts the constant circumference of circumspection. Invisibly they forge the limits of the ordinary and the threshold of the transcendent. This is often mirrored in reality, in physical space, in that they are set apart, set aside from mere items, creating an alcove for remembrance and contemplation. They are not there as decorations but as testaments to lives lived together and apart.⁷⁵

Belgian psychoanalyst and philosopher, Paul Moyaert, has something similar in mind when he writes, "...the things that matter most have the force to separate themselves from the context in which they appear and bring along with them the individual who hears their call."⁷⁶ The expressive draws a line not only between stages of meaning but also between special others and general others, between intimacy and sociality.⁷⁷ With these divisions, expression's core comes to the fore. Its key characteristic is the way it "testifies to intimacy's separation from the general," and this can be seen in the exclusivity it implies.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Paul Moyaert, "Moral Life in Times of Loneliness. Does the Notion of Double Conscience Illuminate Lacan's Understanding of Moral Sensibility?" in *Life, Subjectivity & Art: Essays in Honor of Rudolf Bernet*, eds. R. Breuer, and U. Melle (New York: Springer, 2012), 484.

⁷⁷ Weston, *General Others*. These terms will be introduced in Chapter 2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Flemish philosopher Rudi Visker discusses a phenomenon related to what Chris had in mind when he writes about someone's experience of foreign cultures:

... at any moment in time there will be a difference, for each of us, between what we are able to understand ('externally' [or from 'the outside']) and what we are able to show understanding for, in the sense of to take seriously. One needs a certain sensitivity to see the point... [of another's meaningful things]; and, the reverse side of that sensitivity, however stretched, will always be an insensitivity experienced as an incapacity to 'see something' in what one nonetheless understands.⁷⁹

Like another culture's holy relics or icons, which a foreigner can understand as sacred and show respect for but which will not, for the most part, personally claim the visitor, an expressive thing "is intelligible to those it excludes, without granting them entry into the sphere it expresses."⁸⁰ In some of Chris's other language "excluded others are *aware* of the self's expressive things, without *comprehending* them."⁸¹ To another, these expressions are incomprehensible not in the sense that they are unintelligible, but in the sense that they cannot embody the same meaningfulness for the outsider. They cannot, because this other *does not participate* in that which they express, nor the intimacy they symbolize. To put it very simply, whereas these things are irreplaceable for the self, "they are just stuff, or perhaps even junk, to the excluded other."⁸²

Expressive things symbolize the self's relationship with a special other, thereby embodying this relation's cherished nature. And because of this, unlike ordinary items, their sense is to be irreducibly unique. Chris wrote, "Without being able to substitute for a loved one, who always remains irreplaceable, unrepeatable, incomparable, such things nevertheless reside in their own kind of sense, their own unique irreplaceability, inimitability."⁸³ With their inability to be replaced, these things represent the irreplaceability of a special other, but in such a way that they cannot substitute

⁷⁹ Visker, *The Inhuman Condition*, 7.

⁸⁰ Weston, *General Others*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

for this special someone. They can express the invaluable meaning of this other, but they are not in themselves invaluable like the one they symbolize. And “in their inability to replace him or her, they testify to the self and those it is with, general or special, to another gateway, another higher level of meaning.”⁸⁴ The expressive “symbolizes the invaluable—the theoretical articulation of the meaning loved ones give to one another.”⁸⁵

Conclusion: The Luminous Void

That first night, after pulling everything out of the box, I already had about a quarter of the bottle of whiskey when my phone rang. I snatched it up, eyeing the number, hoping it was Chris returning my messages.

But my caller ID displayed a police department. I didn’t want first impressions with law enforcement to come off with slurred speech, so I let it go to my inbox.

A couple of minutes later, my phone dinged, alerting me to a new voicemail message.

Mr. Errington, this is Detective David Avery calling from the... Major Crimes Unit. It is 10:37 PM, Thursday, November 30th.

Mr. Errington, Barbara Kelly has given me your contact information. She has also informed me that she was in contact with you regarding the missing person file we have here for her daughter, Christina Weston. Ms. Kelly said that you are Miss Weston’s partner but that you currently live across the water in.... She also said that you have agreed to come to represent the family during this inquiry. I was told I could expect you in... this evening and that I would hear from you by phone when you arrived. But I have not heard from you at this time.

Mr. Errington, I’m sure you can appreciate that serious cases such as this are time sensitive. It is imperative that you contact me immediately so that we can begin to address this situation.

He left his number and extension and asked me to return his call.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

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Looking back, I understand why many people, to this day, think I have something to hide. By—*apparently*—hiding facts from Barb, and then also *appearing* to avoid the police, this all made it look like I didn't rise to the urgency of the occasion. I *can* see how this looks suspicious. But to me, *no one*, not even her mother or her roommate, knew Chris as well as I did. Plus, I *really did think* it was all a misunderstanding. I just expected her to come back like she always had before.

Losing Chris the first time was not easy. Without her, I had to re-learn how to experience the world all over, even how to live again in my own apartment. I couldn't have put it into words then, but it was hard to break the spell things had on me, to draw a line between dysfunction and remembrance.

Chris wrote from her life, and when I now read her words in the present day about intrusive items, mementos, and the boundaries between them, I still hear echoes of her voice and the tone and demeanour she had when we would speak about her father's passing. She lost her father young and had to face everything he left behind at an age when things still had the power to haunt. But she eventually taught herself to make the required divisions. For as long as I knew her, the only mementos she kept of him were his old camera and his personal, annotated copy of *Unkept Linens*.

When Chris used the term memento, she reserved it for reminders of special others. They are not mere souvenirs like one might get from a gift shop at the museum. And unlike utility items, they do not blend into a practical context. They set themselves apart. But being set apart is not the same as standing-out within, like a sign or decoration, which draws attention to itself, to 'direct or ornament from inside.' Even if *for others* they are mostly decorative, mementos primarily stand apart from the context *per se*, providing a hiatus. In their appearance, they circumscribe the ordinary, showing the limits of the functional, and pointing towards that which has no purpose or reason for being other than to share time with another.

Losing someone dear disrupts the entire demeanour of ordinary life. All the items that usually cover over and hide their connection with a special other suddenly begin to loop a tune that they once helped us forget, but one they now won't let us forget. Like mementos, intrusive items trigger memories and hopes but turn them into disturbances, like intrusive, unwanted thoughts. With Chris's theory of meaning in mind, we can see why.

The loss of an intimate "is revelatory."⁸⁶ It "reveals levels of meaning deeper than the ordinary, dimensions that are world-giving for the self, but also usually hidden from it by the superficiality of day to day demands."⁸⁷ Insofar as everyday things have participated, "either directly or indirectly," in the relation between special others, they have the impetus to appear as reminders of that lost one.⁸⁸ The person's loss shows things in all the light we usually don't see, and everything begins to reflect it back now that we cannot *but* remember.

Chris had a beautiful metaphor for this. She referred to as "the luminous void."⁸⁹ She wrote,

When I look up at the dark spaces in the sky at night, I often have to remind myself that the blackest parts are actually full of starlight. I just can't see it. If a planet were to rise there, then it would reflect back to me. The void that loss leaves behind is like this. It's not emptiness or absence of light, but a fullness that exceeds us in every way.... We only ever saw it because *they* were already there. And then, after they've sunk back into the darkness, and once the disorientation subsides, populate it with anything you like, however mundane and weathered, and it will all sparkle like crystals we can look at, but will not touch for fear of forgetting again what it feels like to have seen so clearly.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid; Robert D. Stolorow, *World, Affectivity, Trauma: Heidegger and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2011). Chris's analysis of the loss of intimates offers an important systematic contribution to the field of Heideggerian studies on intersubjectivity. Scholars such as Stolorow have sought to expand Heidegger's conception of finitude to include the finitude of loved ones. Stolorow writes, "Authentic Being-toward-death entails owning up not only to one's own finitude, but also to the finitude of those we love" (68). The advance that Chris's approach has made for this literature is that it not only addresses this missing aspect (as does Stolorow), *it also shows the systematic importance* of this phenomenon of loss. Chris exhibits how such loss reveals levels of meaning beyond everyday significance (*i.e.*, the invaluable and the expressive), which constitute the meaning of the self's world through its relation with those who it loves and who can die. And this changes the character of the self's worldhood as presented in *Being and Time*.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Intrusive items are overcomplicated and dysfunctional because they sparkle when they should simply withdraw. They remain what they ordinarily are, but they step out of the everyday, and cross the bounds into the expressive, standing-apart like a memento. Chris said, “Quite literally, though not physically, items can step beyond their bounds and trespass on grounds where they do not belong.”⁹¹

After our breakup, this is what it was like to live in my apartment as if everything was a memento. And for a while, I was complicit. I took my heartache as proof of my love for her, and like letting it go would have been disloyal. But all of this threatened to paralyze me, to pin me to the past, when I needed to live my life forwards. She helped me see:

Not everything can be a memento. For not only would we lose the facility that comes with the ordinary’s superficiality, but also there would be nothing uniquely expressive about such things. However painful, the line must be drawn, and but for a few small things, we must let the light they have shown us retreat away, while remembering that the darkness of that void is still pregnant with the light we sometimes find it hard to see.⁹²

And it was this line I drew when, in my apartment, I walked around with those boxes in hand a couple of months after we broke up.

Even though I was making the necessary division, I still couldn’t bear to see the things I kept. So, I packed them away in my closet and didn’t look at them again until the night Barb called.

When I saw them, they reminded me who Chris was for me. And who I had always been for her—despite my failings. And so regardless of what the coming light held for us, I needed to show her I still cared.

I returned Detective Avery’s call early the next morning to tell him I was on my way.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

Chapter 2: General Others and Special Others

Sociality and Intimacy in Chris' Theory of Intersubjectivity

*It's a new chance, a new day
Avoiding the thought of
you coming over, yeah
I've been drafted into your war
I feel shafted waking up
on your shore once again
I really never let you go, just thought that you should know
Even though you broke my bones your soul
Is where I made my home, my home, my home*

*You were looking for another way out
Tried to fix these broken things
All we had were fragments
You were stumbling a new way down
Falling on your broken wings
All we had were fragments*

—Jaymes Young, "Fragments"

Introduction: A Police Station's Waiting Room

It was dark grey and raining outside when I got to the police station the next day. I sat in an unheated waiting room on cold plastic bucket seats attached to the concrete wall by scuffed-up steal piping. It smelt like ammonia. Cool blue tube lights buzzed overhead like circling flies, and the salmon-coloured linoleum floors were dull with boot prints tracked through a dirty mop's grey watermarks.

The receiving officer hunt-and-peck typed his keyboard. It clicked like the second hand on a clock, pointing out each moment I waited for Detective Avery.

Outwardly, I was calm; but inside, nervous—like I was standing in customs at arrivals, about to smuggle undeclared items.

There's a difference between hiding and withholding. Concealment is deceptive, but someone can withhold and remain honest. I didn't hide our breakup from Barb. I just let her continue in her blissful distance from Chris's life. It wasn't my fault she didn't know what was going on with her own daughter. Besides, I was always going to tell the cops. And I was sure they'd inform her.

But I was also becoming resentful. When it came to my relationship with Chris, I didn't want to have to justify myself to her mother, let alone people I didn't know. Perhaps I was ashamed to explain our story. But it wasn't just that.

Before Chris went missing, none of these people were there for her. I was the *only one* she ever had. Sharing wine and insecurities after bombing an undergrad exam, vapour rub on her chest when she had the sniffles, drying her tears from old scrapes that still hadn't healed, and late-night texts to make sure she was safe when she was off on her own—I was the one who was there through all of this. *Not them.*

But after she disappeared, suddenly, all these strangers had tons of time for, and interest in her. They wanted to pry open our lives, and I was their crowbar: just a mouth to tell them things they would never understand; at most, a body they could detain.

The crucial thing for me during all of this was showing Chris that I still cared. "That's all that matters," I repeated in my head as I waited in the station.

But I could already tell. Something was wrong.

* * *

Before the 20th Century, Western philosophy tended to think of the self in an atomistic way. Leibniz's windowless monad and Descartes' isolated ego were considered to be, at the most basic level, self-sufficient unities that were only *secondarily* related to other people, much like bricks: at first alone, then mortared together. After retreating to the isolation of his cabin and persuading himself "that

there is absolutely nothing in the world: no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies,” Descartes famously argued that the self, reduced down to its core, was a “thinking thing.”¹ And by proving the ego’s existence, he then thought he could use it to deduce the reality of the rest of the world.

Leibniz, another early modern thinker, whose philosophy was very different from Descartes’, held a similar atomistic view of individuality. He declared that the most basic building blocks of physical nature and the soul, the metaphysical units he called monads, “have no windows through which anything may come in or go out.”² For Leibniz, the universe was like a massive Newton’s cradle, with the significant difference that the swinging balls do not physically touch each other as they transfer their momentum. They do not need to connect because, according to Leibniz’s occasionalism, God creates at every moment the spontaneous inner movement required for them to remain in “universal harmony” with all others.³ This is perhaps one reason why Bertrand Russell, a British philosopher from the 1900s, once wrote that Leibniz’s “*Monadology* was a kind of fantastic fairy tale...”⁴

20th Century philosophy saw a paradigm shift in the predominant conception of the self, moving away from an atomistic viewpoint. According to relationalism, the self is not, at first, an isolated unit that only afterwards comes into contact with others. To be a self means, from the very beginning, to be in relationships. The self is fundamentally *intersubjective*. From this perspective, the atomistic individual was “the philosopher’s fable, conjured to satisfy his individualistic fantasy for self-sufficiency in thought and life.”⁵ When Chris wrote, “the self is always *meta-physically* with others,” she was speaking from the nearside of this intellectual shift.⁶

¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 63–65.

² G.W. Leibniz, *Monadology* (La Salle: Open Court Publishing Company, 1993), 252.

³ *Ibid*, 264.

⁴ Bertrand, Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), xi.

⁵ Weston, *General Others*.

⁶ *Ibid*.

Perhaps the most important early contribution to this change of paradigms was Martin Heidegger's "being-with" (*Mitsein*).⁷ To a certain degree, Chris followed his thesis that being-in-the-world necessarily means being-with others.⁸ This "solicitude" (*Fürsorge*)—Heidegger's term for the disclosure of being-with-others-in-the-world—is not merely occasional. It does not refer to a spatial location or physical proximity but a structural element of *Dasein's* being.⁹ Heidegger writes, "Being-with is an existential characteristic of *Dasein* even when factually no Other is present-at-hand or perceived."¹⁰ Even if the self is physically alone, it is still *with* others.

Chris agreed with the metaphysical nature of Heidegger's being-with. However, she argued that neither it nor its modality, which he called "solicitude," was enough to explain the phenomenon of love between special others.¹¹ It was "too formal," because Heidegger's being-with does not show how *Dasein* exists *through* love. His short-coming here, Chris said, "is understandable."¹² For love is not "a factual necessity in a someone's life, but a contingent event."¹³ Yet from a fully thought-out ontological perspective, "love still unleashes the self *to become* who it essentially can be."¹⁴ She wrote, "love is an inherent aspect of the self's capacity to be *in* a world and to be *with* others *at all*. It is not simply an accident, but the coincidence of the self's factual circumstances with its highest potential to be itself."¹⁵ Love "enables being-in" in the sense that it "gives *a point* to the rest of the world—a

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 149ff; Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); K.M. Stroh, "Intersubjectivity of *Dasein* in Heidegger's *Being and Time*: How Authenticity is a Return to Community," *Human Studies* 38/2 (2015). Nancy's relatively recent work, which draws heavily upon Heidegger's thought, illustrates the enduring importance of Heidegger's intersubjective ontology. Nancy uses Heidegger's thought about intersubjectivity to develop an ontology of community, which is not added to the subject, but which preconditions its singular existence. On a similar theme, though in a more exegetical approach to *Being and Time*, Stroh seeks to show how *Dasein* can be understood as fundamentally intersubjective from the perspective of community. Authenticity, for instance, does not isolate *Dasein* from its relations with others. It is rather an authentic return *to* community.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 153–163.

⁹ *Ibid.* In German, solicitude (*Fürsorge*) is a cognate of concern (*besorgen*) for things and care for self (*Sorge*), the three structural existentials through which, as a self in their midst, *Dasein* is opened up to the world of things and others.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹¹ Weston, *General Others*.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

non-physical purpose which coincides with a real person.”¹⁶ This point is at once “an embodied other” and, in another sense, “a deeper meaning for the ordinary that cannot be—strictly speaking—identified with their body or physical presence.”¹⁷ This someone, after all, can die and still provide a world-giving orientation. In distinction from Heidegger’s “being-with others,” Chris said the being of this point of orientation in another, the meaning of which gives the self a unique place in the midst of all that is “could be called *being-for*.”¹⁸

A Police Escort and Being-With Others

After over an hour waiting in police reception, a windowless steel door opened. A woman in a navy-blue uniform, her black hair in a bun, with dark grey rings under her eyes, wearing a black sidearm, called me by my full name with the same tone she’d use to read it off an attendance list.

I followed her through a corridor to an elevator.

Going up, with no expression or words, she looked straight ahead at the red digital numbers flashing on the panel.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 119ff; Julie van der Wielen, “The Magic of Others: Sartre on our Relation with Others in Ontology and Experience,” *Sartre Studies International* 20/2, 2014. Chris’s term being-for should not be confused with Jean-Paul Sartre’s being-for-others because it is not developed to articulate an argument against solipsism nor is it based upon an ontological conflict between self and other. In his analysis of the look, Sartre does not use to his critical advantage the ambivalent senses of objectivity: objectivization (to posit an external referent) and objectification (to treat like an object). Yet his analyses of the self and other rely upon this ambivalence in that his proof of the other’s existence relies upon the self’s recognition that the other objectifies the self, alienating it from its subjectivity as it recognizes itself as an object for the other. As Sartre writes, “Thus for the Other I have stripped myself of transcendence” (352). Chris would surely point out that the vestiges of solipsism structure Sartre’s problematic and that this hinders his readers from seeing the phenomenological mischaracterization from which Sartre’s analyses proceed. Selves do not first experience other selves as objects, but as something closer to subjects. And to objectivate is not necessarily to objectify. Yet in a kind of existential master-slave dialectic that is his analysis of the look, Sartre presents being-for-others as being-for an *objectifying gaze*. Contemporary Sartre scholars like van der Wielen acknowledge that without revisionism, Sartre’s presentation seems to make *inter-subjectivity* ontologically impossible—if not ontically impossible. All of this to say that Chris’s being-for should not be confused with Sartre’s being-for-others because it is not based upon an ontological objectification of the other, but a recognition and following after the other’s self-transcending being. The “for” of Chris’s being-for is not to be taken in the sense of being an object for another, but in the sense of being ‘on the other’s side.’

She ushered me off towards a doorway labelled with an acrylic plate: “Major Crimes Unit (MCU).”

* * *

Once while travelling to visit my father by rail, I watched a complimentary movie that I think illustrates Heidegger and Chris’s ideas about the metaphysical nature of being-with. In the 2000 film *Castaway*, Tom Hanks plays Chuck Noland, a Fed-Ex employee who survives a plane crash in the middle of the South Pacific. Marooned alone on an uninhabited island, Noland must teach himself how to survive the elements with few modern-day tools or luxuries. He is not, however, entirely destitute: several Fed-Ex crates, filled with various goods, have also washed up onshore.

In one of the boxes, Noland finds a Wilson-branded volleyball. Without anyone to play with, it at first seems useless. But quickly, the ball begins to stand-in for those now missing from Noland’s lonely life. He begins to converse with it, talk about plans and projects with it, and address it by name. Wilson, the ball, is soon inseparable from Noland’s side, as it becomes his only friend for the four years he is stranded.

Even though he spends his time talking to a volleyball, at no point do we think that Noland has seriously lost his mind. Throughout the film, including the heart-wrenching (yet retroactively humorous) scene where Noland and Wilson finally part ways, we get the idea that the ball represents not only Noland’s longing for social life but also a *built-in* need to interact with other people.

Even in the absence of real others on the island, Noland is still so much *with* others that he has to create an imaginary friend to find an outlet for the social nature that is essential to his life.

* * *

20th Century philosophy largely moved away from an atomistic view towards a relational perspective on the self. And while Chris agreed with Heidegger that intersubjectivity is a necessary aspect of

selfhood, to the point that even if someone is stranded alone on a deserted island, they are still with others, she also argued that his “being-with” and “solicitude” (*Fürsorge*), *Dasein*’s modes of intersubjective existence, fail to capture the world-disclosing impact of special others. For her, Heidegger’s analysis of being-with was based upon the sphere of general others, those that relate to one another in terms of their functionality within a system. And, because of this, *Being and Time*’s presentation of *Dasein*’s world was “too formal.”¹⁹

“Solicitude,” she wrote, “in all its modes” (deficient, positive, authentic, and inauthentic) “can occur between strangers.”²⁰ She knew that this formalism did not, of course, categorically exclude the possibility of Heideggerian solicitude between intimates. But within the coordinates of his presentation, “love would not really add anything to solicitude either.”²¹ A ‘Heideggerian’ analysis of love would follow one of his few statements on the phenomenon when he writes that it is “joy in the presence of the *Dasein*—and not simply of the person—of a human being....”²² Such a line of thought would, according to Chris, “add the dimension of joy” to his old analysis of being-with. But it would really “just be an extension” of his thoughts on authentic solicitude—freeing the other for their being-in-the-world—“no different in its essential features than what joy adds to an authentic interaction

¹⁹ Ibid; Lawrence Hass, “Dasein and Others: Heidegger’s Ontology of Intersubjectivity,” *Auslegung* 15 (1) (1988); Stolorow, *World, Affectivity, Trauma*; Irene McMullin, *Time and the Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013). Chris’s ‘criticism’ of Heidegger on this point compliments a body of scholarship that has developed in response to, as Hass puts it, “an inadequate characterization of the range of interpersonal life” (81) in Heidegger’s thought—particularly *Being and Time*. For instance, Hass seeks to fill out the formality of Heidegger’s being-with through a phenomenology of “being-questioned”—the way in which “another’s interests, concerns, or behavior make us question and sometimes alter our own interests, concerns, or behavior” (87). More recent scholarship, such as that of Stolorow and McMullin, has also been concerned with the thinness of Heidegger’s description of relations with others and has sought to address this limitation, picking up in the tradition of Hass by focusing on *how the other affects Dasein*. While Chris’s discussion of the loss of intimates reflects Stolorow’s discussion of the way the finitude of loved constitutes *Dasein*’s being, her discussion of affirmation and address also echo the way McMullin presents *Dasein*’s intersubjectivity in terms of *the particularity of mutual recognition*. Later, we will see that Chris also has a fleshed out presentation of McMullin’s contention that Heidegger’s *Mitsein* is “an ontological dimension that is ultimately dependent on ontic encounters” (76). The general atmosphere of this body of scholarship, in which there is a ‘more-than-Heideggerian’ presentation of the ontic other as one who can affect the self to its core, is also key to Chris’s thought.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid; Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1977), 101.

between co-workers or even strangers.”²³ Instead of being “an indispensable moment, irrevocably relevant to the disclosure of the self’s world and the disclosure of being,” love for Heidegger is merely an “accidental factuality of being-with.”²⁴ The problem for Chris was that love was more than just an occasion of solicitude. As she wrote, “if being-in-the-world is open to deeper levels of meaningfulness because of the love given by a special other, then being-with is not sufficient to articulate either the modality of being-with others or the existential meaning of a self in the world.”²⁵ Love is not “just an accidental moment of being-with, but something fundamentally unique given to the self in an exclusive relationship that sets it apart from all others.”²⁶ And because of this, it requires an entirely different analysis than that which Heidegger put forward in his “work-world presentation.”²⁷ For this analysis of love “changes the perspective on the meaning of the self *as a self* by way of a different interpretation of its correlation with being itself.”²⁸

Chris understood that a factual relationship with a special other is a contingent event. But she also argued that the self’s *capacity* for such intimacy is just as integral to *who* it is as it is to the correlation between the self and the world.²⁹ For the self’s worldhood and, thereby, the ontologist’s ability to question the meaning of being, both of these are first constituted in and by an inherent potential to be with a special other. According to her,

Only once we recognize the difference between intimacy and sociality, the contrast between special and general others, and the dynamic tension between the invaluable and the ordinary as spheres of meaning from which the world is composed, only then can we begin to understand the meaning of this event called being.³⁰

²³ Ibid; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 158-159.

²⁴ Weston, *General Others*.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* does not show the way that special others give back to each other their own existence in the world, nor the significance of this for a fundamental ontology. A phenomenological ontology that wants to show the being of the self and the way its being is open to the meaning of being must then show how its *being-for* special others is constituted in the exclusivity of intimacy. And this requires showing how this *separates the self from the sphere of general others*—“from being-with ‘in general,’” or what she called *the social*.³¹ As she wrote, “only some others, these few special ones, *set the self apart* from the nation, the community, the workplace, the school, the streets, the group... they distance it from others ‘in general.’”³² Underlying Heideggerian being-with general others, there was a more fundamental mode of intersubjectivity: “*being-for* special others.”³³

MCU

As my police escort and I stepped through MCU's front door, she threw out to the room, “You boys get some shut-eye last night?” Several men wearing loosened ties looked up from their desktops with coffee-stained smiles.

Their faces flattened when they saw me.

One of them, a younger-looking guy with what I guessed was a fake tan and Movember stache, eyed me as he replied, “Davies, you know vampire hunters don't sleep.”

Another man, standing at a cubicle in front of me, stood beside a laptop displaying infrared drone footage above the tops of a forest. He noticed me noticing the screen and shut the lid. As he did, he asked, “Weston case?”

Davies responded with a playful, military inflection, “A-ffirmative.” She then turned to me, her grin already gone, pointing to an empty tabletop: “Leave your bag there.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Stache stood up while stretching his arms and said through a yawn, “They’ve been waiting for him. I’ll take him to the box.” He waved me ahead and said, “Let’s go, buddy.”

* * *

I was left alone with the smell of Stache’s cologne still lingering in a square, grey room—barren, except for a single table, some chairs, and a video camera mounted in an upper corner. There was not even a clock: just plain walls, with shoulder-high, steel ‘kick guards’ all around. I stood still by the door imagining Stache and all the other cops in a dark, adjacent room gathered around a monochrome screen watching me: a slim, point-guard-tall-enough guy with glasses, a lumberjack long-sleeve, and black jeans. And then I imagined all the cops laughing as some linebacker of a cop walked in and choked me out. The box inspired such visions of oneself.

I sat down at the table and tried not to tap my fingernails, or bounce my knee, and give the wrong impression.

I waited for what felt like over an hour. Thoughts about what I was going to say cycled through my head. I wanted to distract myself with my phone, but the room must have been at the heart of the concrete building—either that or there was some sort of jamming tech at work—because I never found a signal.

Abruptly the door opened, and two men walked in. One was in a grey suit, holding a manila folder with a tie hanging too far past his belt buckle. The other was in a starchy uniform, his police cap under his arm, several patches decorating his shoulders. They sat down at the table without saying anything, and the man in the suit, sitting directly in front of me, put on a pair of reading glasses from his inner coat pocket. He then looked down at his opened folder to a sheet he started writing on.

The room and the table were too small for three grown men. I could see the white hairs growing out of the ears of the man across from me. I could smell coffee on the other's breath.

Still looking at his sheet, the policeman in the suit, began, "Mr. Errington—"

I cut him off to try to warm things up: "—You can call me Dylan."

He looked up at me, paused, staring back over the rims of his glasses sitting at the tip of his nose, holding his gaze steady on me for a moment, letting his eye-contact last long enough, and sear just deep enough, so that I felt the air in the room begin to burn the whites of my eyes. He blinked, glanced sideways with a loosened expression, and then looked down to open the folder on the table and continued, "Mr. Errington"

Beyond Basic Intersubjectivity (I): Holding Solicitude's Hand

Chris's work proceeded on the basis of the intersubjective nature of the self. However, as we saw with mementos and as we will see in this chapter and the next, she was primarily interested in *that which sets the self apart* from others in general—from the generality of the intersubjective. Concerning this theme, her point of departure was a fairly straightforward reading of §26 of *Being and Time*.

In this section, Heidegger writes that *Dasein* encounters others through the environment (*Umwelt*), either 'in' the ready-to-hand or in "the public world," "at work."³⁴ He says the ready-to-hand often implies others: clothes suggest wearers, a boat entails someone sailing it, the "field shows belonging to such-and-such a person... the book we have used was bought at So-and-so's shop..."³⁵ But he is quick to point out others do not have the character of either natural things present-to-hand or equipment ready-to-hand; instead, they have the same kind of being as *Dasein*.³⁶ They are in each

³⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 100, 153, 155, 156.

³⁵ Ibid, 100, 153.

³⁶ Ibid, 154, 156.

case ‘mine,’ and their being is an issue that they work out through existing. And since they are different from things and tools, *Dasein* has a different comportment towards them: not concern [*besorgen*] for things, or even care [*Sorge*] for self, but *solicitude* [*Fürsorge*] for others, which is its pre-understood relationality with other *Dasein*.³⁷ Like a nation that has institutions constructed to address the social welfare of its citizens, *Dasein* is ‘pre-built’ to interact with others.³⁸ And just like a government can aid or neglect a population, *Dasein*’s solicitude has both positive and deficient modes.

Heidegger spends little time discussing the deficient and “Indifferent” mode of solicitude, even though he points out that it characterizes “everyday, average Being-with-one-another.”³⁹ He describes it briefly as “passing one another by” and “not ‘mattering’ to one another.”⁴⁰ But he goes to greater lengths developing solicitude’s positive manifestation, explaining that it can be both authentic [*eigentlich*] and inauthentic [*uneigentlich*]. Both of these are similar in that one *Dasein* *helps* another. But they also differ. While inauthentic solicitude “leaps in and dominates,” its authentic form “leaps forth and liberates.”⁴¹ Whereas the authentic type *readies* the other for their dealings, the inauthentic *displaces* them from their concern. Chris wrote,

the meaning of this contrast seems to be similar to the old saying, ‘Give a man a fish, feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime.’ As Heidegger points out, it’s the difference between making someone dependent, and preparing them for independence—with regard to their being.⁴²

Heidegger’s real concern is not primarily pragmatic. It is not really about the way one human being prepares another for a particular task, duty, or job. He does not elaborate very much, but it is clear that such pragmatic dealings are the occasion for, but not the substance of his point. In the way one

³⁷ Ibid, 157-158.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid, 158.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, 159.

⁴² Weston, *General Others*.

Dasein relates to another, the first either undermines or prepares the conditions for the other *Dasein*'s authenticity.⁴³ Chris did not dwell long reading between the lines here. Instead, she wanted to show *the formalism* of Heidegger's being-with so that she could move on to develop the idea of *being-for*. This was, for her, a more pointed explication of the being of the intersubjective self. And she sought to develop it through a thought-experiment.

The Stranger

Preparing to depart from Heidegger's presentation of being-with, Chris asked her readers to:

Imagine an empty sidewalk, except for a young couple walking down it, holding hands.

In front of them, a man about their age steps out from a doorway and begins walking towards them. As he approaches, he notices them, sees them holding hands, and understands this means they are together. Let us say, for the sake of argument, he also finds the woman attractive.

From an outsider's perspective, the couple's hands indicate their affection for one another and an exclusive relationship between them, within which the stranger knows he does not share. Yet being attracted to the young woman, he might want to eye her longer than either she or her partner would be comfortable with. Let us assume this is the case.⁴⁴

Chris goes on to explain that, from a Heideggerian perspective, this stranger can be both authentic and inauthentic towards the couple. He can "check out" the young woman, "eyeing her up and down" in their full view.⁴⁵ In this way, she said, the stranger "intrudes upon the relationship, at least symbolically, signifying with his eyes that he would not only replace the young woman's partner but tell her what he wants regardless of what *she* wants."⁴⁶ In Heideggerian terms, Chris said, this would be an "inauthentic regard," since the stranger leaps 'into' their intimacy, "without permission or consent, and symbolically takes over the young man's place *given to him* by the young woman. He undermines her autonomy by treating her like an object simply to be looked at for his own pleasure,

⁴³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 158.

⁴⁴ Weston, *General Others*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

instead of a full person to be considerate towards.”⁴⁷ But the stranger can also be authentic towards them. “Out of respect for her and the place she has given to her partner,” he can “free them for each other at this moment by withdrawing his gaze... especially before he wants to.”⁴⁸ In this way, “he recognizes and gives back (in the sense of reciprocates)” the young woman’s freedom “as the existential ground for her to be intimate with whoever she chooses.”⁴⁹

The stranger, authentic or not, shows that “his’ self’s being-with is founded through an exclusion that *runs through all others*—through being-with itself.”⁵⁰ The stranger can be both authentic and inauthentic. And because of this, ‘he’ can fully instantiate an instance of being-with. Yet a stranger *as a stranger* cannot instantiate the intimacy shared between intimates. For Chris this demonstrated that Heidegger’s being-with does not adequately account for the difference between “what *any* other means” and “what *this* special other means.”⁵¹ Being-with, as either authentic or inauthentic, is wholly on the other side of a more fundamental line that she wanted to draw. An intimate is “simply *not* a ‘well-known general other.’”⁵² And intimacy is a sphere one either does or does not participate within. This “splits being-with between the different meanings on either side of the line.”⁵³ The self’s openness to being *as such* through general and special others “is not a matter of degree, but a difference in kind, stemming from different levels of significance these differing regions of meaning open up for it.”⁵⁴ As special and general others disclose the world differently for the being of the self, they require different phenomenological articulations that also “fundamentally re-orient the architecture of an ontology that begins with an intersubjective self.”⁵⁵ For the self’s *own* meaning as a

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

being in the world, and the articulation of its own existential capacities, may then “outstrip the admittedly still-endearing call to self-authenticity, even one that is undoubtedly also *-with* others.”⁵⁶

For these reasons, Chris distinguished between Heideggerian being-with and what she called *being-for*.

* * *

The officer in a suit sitting across from me, clicked his pen in and out, as he began saying, “... Mr. Errington, I am Detective Avery, and this is Sergeant Fuller. I am the lead investigator in this case, and Sergeant Fuller will oversee it. He will also be sitting in while we talk.” Fuller leaned back in his chair, staring at me with his head cocked, and arms crossed, while Avery glanced at the checklist on the tabletop.

Avery turned to Fuller and asked his superior, “Should we record?” Fuller nodded, and Avery pulled out a handheld recorder and set it on the table between us, saying, “Nothing to worry about—this is just so we don’t forget anything.” He pressed it on and began speaking towards it.

“Friday, 1st of the month, December 2017. My watch now says 11:57 AM. MCU. Missing person of Christina Weston. Detective Avery interviewing a Mr. Dylan Errington. Sergeant Fuller is present.” He checked a box on his list, then continued, “Mr. Errington, you’re aware that Miss Mikaela Perkins, roommate of Miss Weston, has reported her missing.”

“Yes.”

He slid a couple of portrait photos of Chris across the table and asked me to confirm they were her, checking another box when I did.

Looking up from his document, he looked me straight in the eyes. “Mr. Errington, what is your relationship with Miss Weston?”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

I hesitated. A red light flashed on the camera overhead every couple of seconds in the silence.

I wondered what they already knew, and what Fuller's stare meant, a look as straight and flat as strangers give each other on a packed train at rush hour—except there, that blank look's an etiquette, not asking too much from another tired commuter in cramped quarters. But on him, I thought it might be a false floor: on the surface, sturdy, hard, objectively there, but hiding an arsenal he collected over the years for occasions like this.

I broke the silence, "We were in a romantic relationship for about 10 years."

"*Were?*" Avery responded.

"Don't get me wrong. I still love her."

"Her mother, Barbara Kelly," he went on, seeming genuinely caught off guard, "informed us that you *are* life-partners—long-distance relationship, but partners, nonetheless. You're telling us that's not correct?"

"No, it's not." Both policemen leaned forward, resting their elbows on the table.

Then I told them. I told them about the breakup and the events leading up to it, and I tried to explain why, the night before, I hadn't told her mother about it.

After a long time, after I had finally vented, and they felt they understood the broad outline and timeline of our breakup, Avery turned to Fuller, asking: "Should we take a moment?" Fuller stood up, still without a word, and tucked his hat under his arm as Avery gathered his things and said, "We'll be back shortly."

He shut the door behind them.

Beyond Basic Intersubjectivity (II): Intimacy and Sociality

After using the example of the couple and the stranger to demonstrate the formalism of Heidegger's argument, Chris then used it to explain the difference between general and special others, the social

and the intimate. “The significance of holding hands *to the couple*,” she wrote, “is different than its meaning *to the stranger*.”⁵⁷ *Both* the couple and the stranger understand that this is an expression of the pair’s intimacy. But as with a memento, its meaning *separates* selves. For the couple, it expresses a dimension of meaning “they *participate within together* to the exclusion of all others.”⁵⁸ And while the stranger understands this is *their* intention, he also understands “that *he is excluded from participating* in that which the held hands symbolize.”⁵⁹ The inner region wherein selves participate in a level of meaning exclusive to all others, Chris called *intimacy*. In contrast, the outer region where all excluded others reside, she called *the social*. The dividing line between the two “is based upon the exclusivity presupposed within intimacy itself: that *this* other and *no one else* can fulfil this relationship *for me*.”⁶⁰ Special others populate the sphere of intimacy, while general others inhabit the social, and the self exists in and through both realms, with both kinds of others, “ever always split between them.”⁶¹ The self’s being is to be both a general other amongst general others and a special other for another.

At first, it might seem that Chris was describing what we usually call the division between the public and the private. But she avoided this language because the intimate and the social are not politically established legal realms. They are *metaphysical*—their physical location is not the critical point. For example, public displays of affection (PDA) occur outside of the home, but they express a realm of intimacy between people that cannot be bound by any real-world coordinates. They are *non-physical* realms of meaning that transcend, but “*also potentiate any and every material location*

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. By this, Chris did not mean that the self can only have *one* special other. Her approach was methodologically minimalist in that it often only spoke about the special other in the singular. But this was because one special other is sufficient for unleashing the self for the levels of meaning its existence is essentially open to in the world. Not only did she recognize that the self could have multiple special others, but she was also keenly aware that these plural relationships could be in conflict, putting the self in a difficult position between them. We will discuss this in Chapter 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

insofar as they determine the kind of meaning that can occur there.”⁶² Because of this, they do not always correspond to the codified, legal boundaries between the public and the private. Intimacy and sociality:

...stem from, respectively, the invaluable and the ordinary, and they name articulated (or perhaps unarticulated) dimensions of meaning, that potentiate the significance and sense that things, others, and the self can have in any given situation.⁶³

But because these domains articulate the self’s intersubjective nature, they not only divide up others into intimates and everyone else, they also “split the self’s own identity, such that it is always ever *in the prospect of its existence*, no matter where or when it is, both a special someone for another and a general other amongst all others.”⁶⁴

Recall that for Chris, an item’s significance is its capacity to fulfill a utility, and its sense refers to its ability to be replaced by another similar to it. Analogically, it is the same with general others. They perform services and roles for society, and they can be replaced by others who can also do the job. She wrote, “all things being relatively equal, it does not matter who serves as the checkout clerk at the grocery store, who drives the bus home, or who delivered the mail. The system is independent from and indifferent to those who fulfill its tasks.”⁶⁵ The sphere of general others, the social world, is “impersonal,” by which she did not mean that people cannot be friendly, polite, respectful—in short, personable—to one another. These pleasantries are “indications between strangers that they

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. When she spoke of the self always being split between special and general others, she did not mean to imply that someone must always have both *factual* types of relations—special or general—in their life. Relations with special and general others “are essential in the sense that the self as a self (i) *must* have within itself valence for the kinds of meaning entailed in both regions and (ii) that *to have* both of such valences is *to be a self*—within the confines of an existential conception that we explained above. However, “while every self has such a valence that potentiates every factual time and space for a relation with a special other, the contingent encounter with a special other unleashes the self for the relevance of its participation within these essential possibilities that it had always already had.” The encounter with a special other is not a neutral or indifferent event in its being. This “encounter makes an existential difference to it because like a molecule bonding with another it opens up new possibilities for the self’s relation to the world.” Put philosophically, after such an encounter the self can work out its ontological possibilities *through* its ontic existence.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

recognize there is more than the ordinary between them.”⁶⁶ But the constitution of the social *per se* resides in the ordinary meaning of ‘the other’ and the impersonal, which refers to “a principle of substitutability underlying the generalized relations of social services and roles.”⁶⁷

The only aspect of the thought-experiment that is not indifferent to the replaceability of individuals is the relationship between the couple. It matters to the young man and young woman *who* they are holding hands with. Unlike the social, which only “*singles out* individuals for different activities and roles,” the intimate “*sets selves apart* from all others.”⁶⁸ For in the relation between intimates, there is an implied “no one else”—not in the sense that the self ‘can only have’ one loving relationship with those in its life, but in the sense that the only one who can fulfill *this relationship* is *that special someone*. Neither someone that ‘fits the same general description’ nor one who can ‘perform the same role’ in the self’s life can fulfill the way *this someone* affirms who the self is. Chris said, a special other gives the self back to itself as being set apart from all others. She wrote, “the *affirmation* given by a special other to the self not only sets it apart from all others, but it also constitutes selfhood *as such*—as one who participates in being *for* this other *who* has set it apart from all others.”⁶⁹ Being-with does not articulate this. But *being-for* does, since it means that a special other is “built-into the being of selfhood.”⁷⁰

* * *

They were gone for a long time. My head and limbs were light from hunger when they returned and sat down to continue the interview. They didn’t offer me anything—not even a cup of water. Detective

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Chris understood that the social sets limits upon who can (and cannot) be singled out for a specific role. This is not only the condition of possibility of specialization but also discrimination. She also recognized that the conflation of the individual with their role can often lead to alienation. The passages where she shows an awareness of these aspects of the social deserve their own at-length treatment, which I do not have the space to accomplish here given the methodological bounds of this intellectual memoir.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Avery had his checklist out again, and it took us another hour or so to check off all the boxes and answer their follow-up questions. Most of it is a blur, but a couple of things are impossible to forget.

His recorder beeped on, and the first thing Avery said was, “Mr. Errington, this new information changes the situation for us. We have decided to advise Barbara Kelly that we do not consider you to be suitable for the role of family spokesperson in this case.”

My rhetorical question was very much sincere: “*Who else* is going to do it?”

“*Furthermore*,” he continued, “we are officially requesting that you do not leave the city or return home until further notice.”

I really did want to help them. I truly did. But I hadn’t yet realized *why* they instructed me to stay. So I began explaining that I thought I could help from back home and make trips out when I needed. Detective Avery clicked his pen in and out the entire time I was talking. I tried to explain that I had no place to stay and that I couldn’t afford a hotel. He kept clicking his pen. Once his resistance became obvious, I asked, “Anyways, what’s the point? I’m not the family contact, so why?”

Sergeant Fuller, his decorated breast pockets puffing out behind crossed arms, finally spoke. “We *strongly* suggest that you make it work somehow. It’s in *your own* best interest.”

I was still processing Fuller’s implication, when the detective picked it up, asking, “Mr. Errington, can you account for your whereabouts last weekend, particularly last Sunday evening?” All was now clear.

“Look, I know it’s cliché,” I said, “but I loved her.” Avery clicked his pen. “Even after we broke up. There’s *no* way I could hurt her.” I noticed Fuller, lean farther back in his chair, using the angle to glance down under the table and peek at my legs.

Avery repeated, “Can you recall where you were last Sunday, the 26th of November?”

“I was at home watching movies.”

“All day?”

“I take Sundays off. I go for a long walk, then I go home, make some food and unplug.” But I understood their line of questioning, so I added, “But I live alone.”

“There’s *no one*, no one at all, that can attest to your presence at home that night? Friend you had over? A delivery guy? Neighbour you passed in the hallway? No one?”

“My phone. You can see where my phone was, can’t you?”

“The tech guys can help us with that. Do you have it here?” asked Avery. I slid it over to him.

Fuller waited until the Detective had pulled it to his side of the table before he said, “Your phone isn’t glued to your hand.”

“My laptop then. You can do that, right? See that I was using it, and where I was?”

“Well,” said Fuller, “there’s VPNs and proxies. But you have it here?”

“In my bag out front.”

“We’ll need your passwords.”

They took my laptop and phone that afternoon, ensuring me their technicians wouldn’t need them for long. To this day, I haven’t gotten them back. They call what they found evidence. I call it a coincidence. At most, a misunderstanding.

Founding the Social: The Significance of ‘Intimacy’ Between Strangers

Chris argued that the intimate founded the social and being-for founded being-with. She used both the couple and stranger vignette to make her argument and to introduce the phenomenon of intimacy between strangers.

From the perspective of the couple, *seeing* this other man seeing them holding hands introduces *for them* an outsider viewpoint upon their relationship. They understand what their clasped hands mean for them, but they also understand what it means for strangers. These different vantage points “split the significance of that common action between its uniqueness for them and its generality for

others.”⁷¹ The couple means it to declare an exclusive connection between them that is not identical to others holding hands. But they also recognize that a pedestrian passing by would simply see them as ‘just another young couple in love—like all the other young couples out there.’ Their understanding that there is a difference in meaning between this action *for them* and *for others*, and that they *are subjected* to this surface-level meaning imposed upon them by others, in general, indicates “the phenomenological founding of the social.”⁷² Chris described this as the self’s ability to “‘see itself’ along with its special others ‘through the eyes of a stranger’” and to thereby understand itself and its special others as general others amongst general others, who are all *with* one another in the sphere of ordinary meaning.⁷³ In short, this is the recognition that these others, in general, are not *for* the self intimately. Nor is it *for* them intimately. “Being-with then supervenes on being-for” such that, for instance, holding hands is a symbol that others who are not holding hands can understand without participating in the intimacy it expresses.⁷⁴ The self progresses to the level of the social once it puts the intimate aside and functions in the world as an anonymous role-player, understanding itself from an impersonal perspective, in whatever order or logic that particular social

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid; G.H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* (London: The Open Court Company, 1932), 184ff. At this point in her argument, Chris cited the social psychologist G.H. Mead and his theory of the development of the self. For Mead, the child becomes a social self when it attains to an understanding of “the generalized other”—the ability to understand itself as a role player in a larger system.

⁷³ Weston, *General Others*; Edith Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy* (Washington: ICS Publications, 1989); Christian Ferencz-Flatz, “The Element of Intersubjectivity: Heidegger’s Early Conception of Empathy,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 48 (2015). Chris’s discussion of intimacy between strangers would be a fruitful place to dialogue with the phenomenology of empathy as discussed by Stein and others. Ferencz-Flatz shows that while Heidegger’s idiosyncratic approach to phenomenology and his tendency to dismiss philosophical problems that he believed to be artefacts of subject-object dichotomies and the egological, Cartesian tradition prevented him from engaging in larger phenomenological discussions about empathy in his time, he nevertheless had an interest in the phenomenon itself, especially in his early lecture courses. While Chris would also see the problematic of empathy to be something of a false problem if it was an attempt to articulate the access one has to others and their subjective states, I imagine that she would also welcome a fuller engagement with this topic if it were meant to elaborate (1) the way one can see oneself and one’s own in the other and the other and their own in oneself and (2) the way the ordinary buries this and leads to a disconnect between oneself and general others.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

role requires. And this is how “the social is founded upon the generalization of a deeper level of meaning.”⁷⁵

‘Intimacy’ Between Strangers

Even though Chris drew a line between general and special others, she nevertheless recognized there could be “a certain kind of intimacy amongst strangers.”⁷⁶ For her, this mutual regard, is more than politeness, since it not only “shows respect” but “treats the other like they *embody* one’s own self and one’s personal, intimate relations.”⁷⁷ The occasions where this may occur are numerous. Anyone who has, for instance, relied upon help from strangers after a car accident or some other emergency, knows this kind of connection between people that do not know each other.

To give an example, Chris used an anecdote from British author George Orwell, who travelled to Spain to fight with the Republicans during its Civil War. Orwell writes,

Early one morning another man and I had gone out to snipe at the Fascists.... This time no Fascists appeared, and we stayed too long and were caught by the dawn. We were in a ditch, but behind us were two hundred yards of flat ground with hardly enough cover for a rabbit. We were still trying to nerve ourselves to make a dash for it when there was an uproar and a blowing of whistles in the Fascist trench. Some of our aeroplanes were coming over. At this moment a man... jumped out of the trench and ran along the top of the parapet in full view. He was half-dressed and was holding up his trousers with both hands as he ran. I refrained from shooting at him.... I had come here to shoot at “Fascists;” but a man who is holding up his trousers isn’t a “Fascist,” he is visibly a fellow creature, similar to yourself, and you don’t feel like shooting at him.⁷⁸

According to Orwell, this story doesn’t prove anything, as it’s “the kind of thing that happens all the time in all wars.”⁷⁹ But for Chris, it displayed the way that general others, like ordinary things, can step out of their niche and express a dimension usually hidden in day-to-day life.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ George Orwell, *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Volume II: My Country Right or Left 1940-1943* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 254.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

“The enemy’s partial nakedness,” Chris wrote, “is revealing.” For it shows:

... that which generality, here represented by duty and a uniform, normally covers over. Not just a body, flesh and bone, and not even just the person, who through their nakedness inspires empathy as another’s special other, irreplaceable for their brother, their sister, their mother, their friend, Orwell’s “fellow creature similar to” yourself. But also, reflected in the mirror Orwell holds up, and the implied symmetry between his enemy in crosshairs and he himself in the enemy’s crosshairs, there is a revelation of vulnerability given to us by another. A disclosure expressed by a general other, at most someone else’s special other—that through another, like but also unlike *their* others, each of us finds ourselves naked, bare, and exposed to everyone else through those we hold dear. Just like this one, we only find the depths of our frailty in those few others that expose us to all that is.⁸⁰

I have quoted at length because this paragraph is the culmination of several different lines of thought Chris carried out in response to Orwell’s passage. Her main point was that general others could symbolize a dimension they do not share with the self. This happens when, as she mentioned, we relate to them in the uniqueness they have for another, even if not for us. Though we are not intimate, we feel ourselves and our own in and through them. They express the intimate for us, even though we do not know them or theirs. This shared feeling between strangers amounts to a sense of shared participation in a symbolic intimacy with the other. Yet this *symbolic* relation also presumes a greater distance between an intimate stranger and one’s own special others. In the ordinary interactions between general others in the everyday world, this greater distance comes to the fore. This poignant moment in Orwell’s story displays what the social usually hides: the world of the intimate underlying the impersonal system that both brings together and tears apart.

⁸⁰ Weston, *General Others*. The nature of the enemy or the rival is not one that I believe Chris developed, but one that would be a fruitful investigation here to sharpen the sense of the special other. The soldier on the parapet in Orwell’s story has moved *from* the generality of his uniform, which seems to grant the possibility of shooting without conscience, *to* the specificity of a “fellow creature” whom one does not feel like shooting. And, in doing so, this fellow creature opens up an expression of *being a special other* even though *his* special others are not *one’s* own. This is Chris’s thought process here. Yet the enemy as an enemy can also be more than just an impersonal soldier in a uniform. An archenemy, nemesis, or rival can be just as individual and irreplaceable for the self as a special other. However, in this case, the modality of this antagonist’s uniqueness is not established through desire or love *for them*—“for” in the sense of wanting the world for them, which is key to Chris’s formulation of intimacy, desire, and love. Because of this we might think of the personal nature of the nemesis or rival as a special case of another that is outside the bounds of both the general other and the special other as Chris understood them.

* * *

Sergeant Fuller's voice was low and grating, like a handful of marbles rubbing together, when he asked, "When was the last time you saw Christina with your own eyes?"

I paused, thinking back to leaving her outside the coffee shop that morning. "The day we broke up."

"So, the same as... the last time you spoke with her, which..." Detective Avery had flipped his sheet to the front side and read from a response he had written there, "... was about mid-November of last year. That's correct?"

"Right."

"Others have said," Avery continued, "in the weeks prior to her disappearance, she was acting normal—her usual long walks weren't out of the ordinary—but that she was also telling disturbing stories about strange experiences she had. When you last spoke with her, did you notice any unusual behaviour, mannerisms, or speech patterns? Any unusual stories?"

"Like what?"

The detective leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms, much in the same way as his Sergeant beside him, "Any disorganized speech or logic? Did she talk about any strange interactions she had had with people on the street? Perhaps complaining that someone was following her or after her?"

"No... not that I... No."

Around this point, I told them I was light-headed, so they offered me some water. I then told them only had a small breakfast on the ferry, and I hadn't yet had lunch. They said the best they could do was coffee. Detective Avery paused the recorder, and after he left the room Sergeant Fuller stood in the door frame. Avery came back a minute later with black coffee in a paper cup. They sat down, and we continued.

Both officers hunched forward, leaning onto the table, and Avery asked, “To your knowledge, did Miss Weston have any romantic relationships, with anyone else—any other men—anyone really—while you were together?”

“She wouldn’t do that.”

“Yet,” Avery flipped his page again and read from a note he had made, “You said that you worried about this, and that was part of the reason for your separation.”

“I already answered you.”

“What about afterwards,” the page still flipped in his hand, “after you broke up? Were you aware of any romantic involvements afterwards?”

“How could I be if I already told you I wasn’t in contact with her?”

“Well, maybe...” Sergeant Fuller’s voice started at a high point before levelling off into a low, rumble “... maybe you pulled another stunt—just like you did before you broke up.”

I was furious inside, but I couldn’t show them. I had to remain calm and composed. “I learned my lesson the first time. I wouldn’t make that mistake again.”

“Well, then,” Detective Avery said, “I guess, you didn’t know about Q., did you?”

“*What? Q.?*” I remember letting out a big exhale and leaning forward onto the table. “Who’s Q.? Is that a name?”

“It’s an initial. Someone Christina wanted to keep secret, perhaps to protect him.”

“Why would she want to protect him? From who?”

“Perhaps because she knew who it was but didn’t want to get him in trouble if someone snooped around in her diary.”

“Her journal, you mean. In trouble for what? Who would be looking in her journal?”

“Did you return home the same day you broke up with Chris?” Fuller asked.

“Yes.”

“Can you prove that?”

“I took the ferry.”

“How’d you pay?”

“I don’t remember.”

Fuller said, “Don’t imagine you kept a receipt, did you?”

I didn’t know, but I said, “Even if I did, I don’t think I’d still have it. If I paid on my cards, it might be in my statements.”

“Can you look into that?” Avery asked.

Fuller said, “Just because you paid for a ticket, doesn’t mean you got on.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I didn’t respond.

Avery continued, “So you’re now saying on the record that you didn’t continue stalking her the day you broke up? Just like you had before?”

“No, of course not.” Despite my sure tone, I was struggling to unravel all the implications this line of questioning was revealing.

“So, that’s a hard no?” Fuller asked.

“Yes, it is. I did *not* follow, see, or talk to Chris after the day we broke up.”

“So it’s just a *fluke*? Just ‘airy-fairy...’”—Avery had a sarcastic tone in his voice and put this phrase in air quotes before continuing—“... just *pure* happenstance... that the day after you broke up, the day after she left you due to criminal harassment, which you have already admitted to, *that very same day* ‘someone else’”—again, air quotes—“that she also cared enough to protect starts doing the same thing?”

“I don’t know.... How am I supposed to know? But, yeah—I guess. Because it *wasn’t me*.”

“You informed us she wasn’t acting strange,” Fuller said. “You’re not saying she made this up, are you? Are you victim blaming here, Dylan?”

“It wasn’t me. Look at my computer and phone. I took the ferry back home that same day. Today’s the first day I’ve been back.”

Avery continued on, “So do you know anyone, anyone at all, in her network with the initial Q., or anyone who she might call by the letter Q, even if it’s not their first or last name?”

I honestly thought about it for a moment. “No... I can’t think of anyone.”

Sergeant Fuller responded, “Are you certain? Are you sure? Think about it. It could be a first name, last name, middle name. Could be a nickname. Trust me, you want to give us something here. If you don’t, you know it’s going to look bad for you.”

Now I know what they were doing. They didn’t expect or want me to point the finger. They just wanted to give me the opportunity to fail to do so to make it look like not even I could come up with another suspect. They had a long game they were playing with me. And they were already trying to box me into it. But I hadn’t yet caught on, and I genuinely wanted to help, so I really thought about it. After a while, I finally said, “No, I can’t think of anyone at all.”

And that was the truth at the time—at least until the next week.

The Loss of a Special Other: The Invaluable

The core of Chris’s master’s thesis is a deliberation upon the ontological implications of losing a loved one. She knew that losing some *thing* is not the same as losing some *one*. But, methodologically, the experience of grief played a similar role for her as losing something in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*.

Loss is revelatory because it shows that the meaning which stitches the world together exceeds the kind that Heidegger developed as significance. Mementos that remind us about another, and strangers that come to express the frailty of one’s being-for special others, this is a kind of meaning that outstrips the utility of items and facility of general others. And this level of meaning becomes

apparent when we lose those dear. Freud said that while mourning the world becomes poor.⁸¹ Yet, everything carries on as it did before. It does not become utterly meaningless. A tool still refers to other devices. People still go to work and help others. But “the poverty of this enduring world becomes manifest at that very moment when the world-giving existence of another dear human being is lost.”⁸² What we usually forget in our ordinary, day to day lives, is that “the very meaningfulness of this self-perpetuating world with all its functions, roles, and services—all of this—not in the sense of its continuation, but in the sense of its *point*—depends upon those special ones for whom we exist.”⁸³ Those things, actions, and words that express this truth surpass ordinary significance. For they symbolize *the invaluable*, which is “the articulated meaning of the self’s relation to a special other.”⁸⁴

Loss shows that the meaningfulness an intimate offers the self is of a completely different order than that which constitutes the worldhood of *Dasein*. In grief, the world goes on as it always did. Everything is quite the same as it was before *they* died. But for the griever, “the point of orientation, the one who has given a purpose to it all, has been lost.”⁸⁵ Of course, those left behind can eventually learn to cope, which involves regaining a footing in and facility with the various purposes and tasks that the ordinary world provides. Part of this involves knowing that the lost one would want them to go on both for the surviving one him or herself and for those other loved ones that remain. In this way, loss reveals another dimension of meaning above the ordinary. And the ground of this meaningfulness is another person. The “theoretically precise term” for this world-giving relation “in

⁸¹ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 244.

⁸² Weston, *General Others*.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* Chris is writing hyperbolically here. She understands that there is a purposiveness *within* the ordinary. The loss of another does not negate this level of purposiveness—the world continues to go on. It continues to function. But as ordinary significance is founded upon the being of the special other, through loss the point and purpose of its continuance comes to be if not completely devastated, then at least momentarily disrupted.

light of the sense this other grants is *the invaluable*.”⁸⁶ Chris here quoted Belgian philosopher, Rudi Visker, when he wrote about the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s *le chose* or the thing.

The Thing in Lacan is what comes to block this endless chain of mutual references. Some things have a value of their own that escapes determination in the way described—they are incommensurable and break out of any system which makes them substitutable with others. What gives them such Value cannot be rendered in terms of any of the values present—they are priceless, not that theirs is a price too big to be paid (*contra* ‘anyone has his/her price’, ‘there’s nothing that money can’t buy’) but that they are out of the range of what can be priced. Selling them is to defile them, to betray them.⁸⁷

She then went on to explain that the invaluable is not to be confused with “a class of indispensable or precious things” within the ordinary. She elaborated:

Sometimes, in English, people use the term invaluable to refer to something that is extremely valuable, such as a tool or technique that revolutionizes workflow or a piece of art by a famous painter said to be priceless. In each case, a value can be attached. In principle, it can enter into a general economy of exchange. Its price might be exorbitant, but there is no inherent betrayal in submitting it to a common standard of valuation. This is different from the invaluable I speak of. It is an exclusive dimension within which special others stand with regard to one another thereby granting the limits and purpose of this larger system. Like a memento priceless for a self, but worthless to others, the invaluable has an exclusivity that cannot enter into the field of general reference. It can be acknowledged, but only insofar as it excludes the generality of that reference to it.⁸⁸

The kind of meaning constituting the self’s being finds its pinnacle in someone who gives a point to it all. Loss, grief, and things set apart to express this, “show that the being of the self is not so much being-in but *being-for*.”⁸⁹

Conclusion: On Fallen Sparrows

To help her elaborate upon the way the loss of a loved one reveals the constitution of the self as being-for, Chris referenced an anecdote offered by the contemporary Lacanian psychoanalyst Darian Leader. He writes:

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Visker, *The Inhuman Condition*, 5.

⁸⁸ Weston, *General Others*.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

A woman mourning the death of her mother spoke of a feeling that kept returning to her, despite her unease at its apparent triviality. Although she was immersed in images and thoughts of her mother and her illness, these would repeatedly converge on one simple moment: when her mother would use a nickname for her, ‘Sparrow.’ “I realized,” she said, “that no one would ever call me that again.” This special designation was only used by her mother, and it was this that kept returning, rather than, as one might have expected, her own nickname for her mother.⁹⁰

Leader summarizes the point of the anecdote, saying, “Relationships give us places....” Chris added, “the loss of loved ones shows us the places they have given us.”⁹¹ But they don’t just give us places in the plural. Because this someone has “given us a point of orientation ‘within’ the *per se* world, they have also *given us* a unique place *for* it to unfold.”⁹²

Following up on these thoughts, Chris wrote, “*Who* the self is *is* constituted by *who the self is for*—not partially, but wholly—in the depths of its being. For *this* and *these* relationships outweigh anything else that could ever define or identify it.”⁹³ Its being-in-the-world, its being-alongside things, being-with (general) others, and its being-oneself “all of this is undergirded by a relation between it and a special other.”⁹⁴ “Being-for,” she wrote “subtends being-in, being-alongside, and being-with.”⁹⁵ The meta-physical place or *topos—i.e.*, the dimension of meaning she called the invaluable—this non-physical place from which the self transcends out towards the world is composed from its relation with another, “like metaphorical wings animated for the self by the term of endearment ‘Sparrow.’”⁹⁶ This nickname speaks “so much more than a mere reference” to the one to whom it refers.⁹⁷ It names and thereby “constitutes *the being* of that special someone”—one that as a self, it does not share with any comparable others.⁹⁸ The self’s being is made in and by the place the other gives to it

⁹⁰ Leader, *The New Black*, 145-146.

⁹¹ Ibid, 147; Weston, *General Others*.

⁹² Weston, *General Others*.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

“as this other’s own irreplaceable point of orientation in the world.”⁹⁹ In being reserved for the self, such acknowledgment shows *this* self that it is not just one amongst others. The meaning of being spoken to *as* invaluable in the way the title ‘Sparrow’ conveys, Chris called *address*.¹⁰⁰ Addressing the self this way, the other declares *this one* (yet perhaps not its only one) as its point of orientation in the unfolding world—“that which gives purpose to all its ordinary significance.”¹⁰¹ The other thereby gives the self back to itself as the point of this other’s world by addressing it as someone who could never be replaced. This sets apart ‘to the degree’ that “the self can understand itself as someone who gives a place *for* the whole world *for* that other who has addressed it.”¹⁰² Chris summarized, “Through address, the special other gives the self the capacity to be itself as one who is *for* this other, following after them, unto the rest of the world—the ‘side’ of the world that is excluded from intimacy.”¹⁰³ The self transcends itself not just as being-in, but as being-for.

In constituting the being of the self through address, the other also establishes the self as *a site* of this other’s unfolding world. And the self finds itself in ‘the place’ the other has given to it “as the one who gives *relevance* to the world for this special someone.”¹⁰⁴ The dearly departed mother, who has called her daughter Sparrow, did not single her out as she might single out any other. She set her apart. For there is no one she would ever call by the same name. Such a place of being set apart is singular, irrepeatable, and irreplaceable, because “like the nickname ‘Sparrow’ it is reserved for that person alone—the referent constitutes the sense of the signifier by way of an exclusion of every other ordinary comparable. And so the reference is not literal, but expressive.”¹⁰⁵ The special other has a

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

relationship, and “only *this* self, only *you* can fulfill it for them.”¹⁰⁶ From this fulcrum, the entire world moves. For proceeding from the site where the self finds itself addressed, “unfolds an orientation for the rest of the world.”¹⁰⁷ Not just the given world, but of all possible worlds. Chris explained, “the mother who speaks to her daughter this way testifies that *this one* is *the only one* who could ever give a sense to not just the flight of sparrows in this world, but also to any and all possible skies and any and all possible grounds into and from which sparrows may or may not fly.”¹⁰⁸ From this earthly position the mother has found herself while “watching the drop of a sparrow’s flight.”¹⁰⁹ And by “conferring this metaphorical orientation upon her child,” she introduced her daughter to the place from which special others give the world back to one another.¹¹⁰ Chris called the meaning of this ‘place’ the self finds itself within when it is addressed by a special other, one which also gives a sense to itself as being-for *this other* unto to all possible times and places, unto worldhood *as such*—she called this site *affirmation*.¹¹¹

And the meaning that designates this mutual point of orientation—the invaluable—is constituted by an irreducible relation: “at least two irreplaceable others give the ordinary world back to each other.”¹¹² They do so in such a way that the meaning they share is “different” and “higher” from the meaning available in the rest of the world. It is different “because it is of a different level than the ordinary.”¹¹³ And it is higher (“or deeper—regardless of the chosen metaphor”) “because it grounds the meaningfulness, sense, or point for all the meaning in the world.”¹¹⁴ Special others also give the world back in such a way that *this* world within which they have first encountered one another “sets

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Again, Chris is writing hyperbolically here as she is speaking about a founding level of meaning (*i.e.*, the invaluable) and the detachability of a founded level (*i.e.*, the ordinary) from the former.

a limit upon all the possible places and times they could ever find relevant.”¹¹⁵ *This* world in which they have found one another “not only offers but limits the point of all possible times and places.”¹¹⁶ And so they find each other in *one* world which, unfortunately, and despite all its hidden depths of meaning “they all too often encounter as spectacularly ordinary.”¹¹⁷ Still, “as being-for one another they mutually give each other worldhood. Giving the world to one another from out of the place they have given back, they each find themselves sharing *a* world.”¹¹⁸

* * *

Even back then, I understood why police look into the ex-. But I was frustrated and worried when I was leaving the station. Angry—not just because of their suspicion, but also because of how they talked to me. I get it. There’s a legitimate role for outsiders to play in ‘policing’ intimate relationships. Chris understood this too. She wasn’t romanticizing intimacy. She knew from her own life it can be abusive, and that sometimes someone with more perspective needs to step in to serve and protect.

But *these* cops didn’t reciprocate my honesty with anything close to decency. *I* was the one who lost her. *Not them*. Yet they were worse than indelicate. They were cold and manipulative. I didn’t even ask for a lawyer. I knew I hadn’t done anything wrong. And I wanted to show them that. I think they already knew about the breakup, but they acted like they didn’t. But they still saw me being honest and putting myself on the line. Instead of respecting that, they weaponized my truthfulness and started using it against me. These strangers were invading my personal life, judging me without knowing me, and trying to pry into my relationship with Chris by using my openness as their crowbar. Like I said, I had no problem being honest. So my discomfort with this invasion had little to do with anyone crossing the line between public and private or trespassing beyond any legal boundaries. I

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

wanted to be as forthcoming as possible, to show them I had nothing to hide. What really *did* bother me, though, was the way these people, who didn't know either me or Chris, used their distance from my personal life as a justification for their recklessness.

During that interview, the way they were trying to twist the things I said, it became apparent that they were going to frame my willingness to help not as a sign of innocence, but as a guilty man's attempt to insert himself into their investigation. At least, they tried to make me feel this was the 'stick' they were holding—like they wanted me to know *they knew* 'what I was doing,' even though the whole thing was a charade for the camera. They were planning on portraying me as the jealous, raging ex-boyfriend, who came back to gloat—whether they really believed this or not. This is what really bothered me. Not the fact they were doing their job, but the audacity of the people behind the badge. They were arrogant.

I had *nothing* to do with Chris's disappearance. So when I left the station that day, I *was* angry. But I really wasn't *worried* about Avery or Fuller or even about maxing out my measly credit limit with a cheap motel room. And honestly, I really couldn't have cared less that they were going to tell Barb about all that I had hidden from her. What really worried me, and what started coming into focus when my policewoman escort took me out of MCU, and we stepped onto the elevator with a couple of other uniformed cops, was that it seemed like someone had *actually* been following Chris. That this wasn't all a big misunderstanding. That there was a reason MCU—the Major Crimes Unit—was involved.

In the elevator ride down, the other cops, who were not much older than the college kids I tutor, were joking about citing a guy downtown earlier that morning for 'waking and baking' after he had slept in his car to avoid a DUI when the clubs closed the night before. The exact moment this realization about Chris really hit me was when one of those cops said while the other was already laughing, "When he saw us coming, the dude thought rolling his windows up would hide the smoke."

They both started laughing even harder. I think the difference between his tone and my dread brought it home. My escort was telling me I needed to inform the investigators about my room number at the motel where I was going to stay, *at the same time* the other cops were laughing. I found myself overlaying the mocking cops' insensitivity towards that guy onto Avery and Fuller's callousness towards me.

And then I saw Chris from behind in her seaweed-green bikini sitting on an Oregon beach by herself, looking out over the rolling waves and into the big, blue horizon, alone in her thoughts.

The policewoman had asked me a question like, "Do you understand?"—and I realized I hadn't been listening to her. I just said, "Uh, huh."

When she let me out the steel door that led to the waiting area, the Alaskan postcard I had brought along slipped out of my backpack pocket. I had completely forgotten to give it to them. She saw me pick it up, and asked, "Anything important?"

I said, "It's nothing," and continued walking.

Chapter 3: Buried Signals

Self-Loss, Affect, and Disquiet

*Drifting apart like two sheets, my love
Frozen hearts growing colder with time
There's no heat from our mouths
Please take me back to when I was young*

*When we were in flames, I needed, I needed you
To run through my veins, like disease, disease
And now we are strange, strangers*

—Daughter, “Winter”

Introduction: Alone in a Room

I knew where I was going to stay. I had stayed there before. It was dirty but cheap—and in the lobby, they had complimentary computers with internet I could use. When I used to visit, when we were still together, I'd sleep at her place. She'd leave the key for me under the mat, and I could come and go as I liked. But there was one time I didn't want her to know I was in town. I checked-in to this motel.

Room 2B was dingy, dark, and smelt like wet dog. The light over the bed didn't work, and the desk lamp was dim. Heavy curtains wouldn't open past the edges of the single window. And it was glued shut to keep guests from crawling out onto the roof above the front desk. Rocks plastered to black tar, overlooking a parking lot and busy street.

I hit the bathroom light switch. Its fan clanked on and continued to scrape along.

Reaching for my bag beside the bed, I remembered I didn't have my laptop or phone. A pillow hit the opposite wall.

I was understandably upset. The police had made their suspicion palpable.

Sitting on that thin, polyester comforter, I kept telling myself that they'd figure it out, and clear me. But I also felt I needed to do something too.

The room door slammed behind me as I walked to the stairs. I was heading down to use the computer.

The night before, Barb's assistant emailed me some information she gathered, including the contact details for everyone involved.

I had never met the roommate, Mikaela, and I had no idea what she had heard about me. All I knew was that Chris, unlike her mother, was not the vindictive type. She kept her pain close to her and didn't talk about it often. But it wasn't denial. She'd watch it, dwell on it, and reflect on it in her journals. The deeper the hurt, the more she would write about it, and the longer it would take to surface in conversation. By the time it did, it was no longer personal pain for her, but another layer of depth, perspective, and thoughtfulness.

In the motel lobby, behind the front desk, there was a piece of paper taped to the wall with the words written in black Sharpie, "No public bathrooms. Phone for office use only." Other than hinting at Q., the police had told me nothing. Nothing about Chris, how she disappeared, or anything really. I hoped Mikaela didn't think too badly about me, and that she would fill me in. So, while using the motel's humming, yellowing PC, I wrote down her address and hustled to my car in the parking lot.

Often considered to be a forerunner of existential thinkers, the 17th Century French mathematician and philosopher, Blaise Pascal, once remarked, "All our problems stem from a man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone."¹ The day I left for Mikaela's, he could have been speaking to me.

¹ Blaise Pascal, *Mind on Fire*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1997), 96. Translation modified.

* * *

Self-flight into the safety of others and a consequent loss of self were common themes in existential thought of the 19th and 20th Centuries. In the mid-1800s, Christian philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard argued in *The Present Age*, amongst other works, that the self often deflects its responsibility as an individual beholden to God. It hides from him by seeking refuge in the “levelling” of the public or the crowd.² What especially disturbed Kierkegaard was the way this happens so easily and without notice: “The greatest hazard of all, losing one’s self, can occur very quietly in the world, as if it were nothing at all. No other loss can occur so quietly; any other loss—an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc.—is sure to be noticed.”³ Later that same century, Friedrich Nietzsche lionized exceptional, creative individuals he called *Übermensch* and encouraged them to separate themselves from the cowering mass, with its herd-like mentality, resentful of anything great and unique.⁴ Building on this theme in *Being and Time*, Heidegger spoke of *Dasein*’s inauthenticity [*Uneigentlichkeit*] or its fallenness [*Verfallen*] into its “they-self” [*das Man-selbst*].⁵ For Heidegger, there is a sense in which fallenness into the world of things and others is unavoidable.⁶ It is ‘the way one falls’ that really matters. For inauthenticity is not simply an externally imposed condition: *Dasein* ‘willingly’ flees itself into *das Man* to escape the burden of being-itself.⁷

Chris agreed with Heidegger that the self’s intersubjective existence not only makes it who it is but also endangers it. However, unlike Heidegger, she had a heightened awareness of the way that special others make each other vulnerable to self-loss. In being—at its core—for another, “this other

² Søren Kierkegaard, “The Present Age,” in *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert Bretall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 258–69.

³ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 62–63. Translation modified.

⁴ Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra,” 398–408.

⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 219, 167.

⁶ *Ibid*, 220.

⁷ *Ibid*, 165.

can expose it to a loss of meaning which undermines who it is *as a self*—its being-for that other.”⁸ She called this eroding process, “domestication.”⁹ The domestic, like intimacy and the social, is not a physical or even legally-defined realm, but a metaphysical dimension of meaning that can happen anywhere. “Through the special other,” Chris said, “the self’s place amongst general others comes to take priority over its being-for that special other.”¹⁰ Social roles become more important than the persons themselves.

Domestication is not the same as each intimate *simply and occasionally* relating to one another as a general other, like brothers, both lawyers, who often talk shop. Because every self is also always a part of the social, this is, in a certain sense, *inevitable*. The domestic is instead about “undercutting the ontological conditions of affirmation and intimate address by privileging the viewpoint of outsiders upon the intimate relationship.”¹¹ This not only obscures *who* the self and other are, it also “accumulates an outsider’s insensitivity between them.”¹² It displaces them from being-for *to* being-with.

Every self carries the potential to self-impose the generality of the social upon its own self-understanding as being-for. This is, in fact, “one way in which the self is essentially vulnerable to the special other. For the other is also a self. And it too can understand itself from an outsider’s perspective.”¹³ Since it is neither an isolated individual, nor just one among all others, but essentially *being-for another in the world* “this self-imposition also modulates the other’s being-for, which in turn again modulates the self. Feedback buries the signal.”¹⁴

⁸ Weston, *General Others*.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

For both Heidegger and Chris, there were occasions before anything as extreme as death, either one's own or another's, that disrupt the self's day to day existence and reveal it in a new light. Like Heidegger talked about a tool breaking and showing something about the tool itself, he also envisioned something 'breaking inside' *Dasein* while it is absorbed in the world. And when this happens, instead of being at ease while losing itself in the world, instead of "being-at-home" in the "tranquillized" demeanour of its they-self, it finds itself in the uncanniness of "not-being-at-home," in the unease of "nothing ready-to-hand."¹⁵ He calls this mood *Angst*, often translated as anxiety. Unable to flee into the refuge of others or its various preoccupations, *Dasein* finds itself confronted *with itself* and its decision to be authentic or inauthentic. To choose who it will be *for itself* or to follow who *they* have told it to be.

Disquiet played something of a similar role for Chris. Like *Angst*, it interrupts the self's flight from itself. It "alerts that there is something wrong, but it does not reveal what."¹⁶ And this unknowing "awakens it from the lull of domestic role-playing amongst items and general others unto the loneliness of its desire for another."¹⁷ But this is where the similarity with anxiety ends. Because in showing the self to itself, this:

is not the revelation of a neutral possibility between forgetting itself and remembering itself—even as being-for. It is not awakening to equally weighted potentials of being-for them in intimacy or not being-for them in the domestic. It is rather alarm over all the time that has passed, about how much things have changed, and the distance between who 'I' once was for them and who I have become for them. We feel this self-loss as a resignation to plunging ourselves deeper still into a restless distraction.¹⁸

Because of the discomfort of seeing itself in the mirror, so to speak, disquietude does not stall the self before itself as an undecided alternative. It instead shows the way that "being and time, here in terms of the domestication of intimacy, have accumulated over its being-for so that it is too late to go

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 232-233.

¹⁶ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

back.”¹⁹ And with these layers of history laying down over its relationship with that other, “it feels its distance from itself.”²⁰ Aware that self-loss is “accruing still at that moment,” disquiet then “does not so much stop but accelerate self-flight.”²¹

Chris and Mikaela’s Place

Their apartment was in an old, boxy white stucco building with a red-tiled roof. Once a single-family home, the landlord converted it into tenant housing. The unlocked front door opened into what used to be a mudroom, but where yellow and blue milk crates now served as make-do mailboxes for the different suites.

The door banged behind me.

On the main floor, the old house felt more extensive than it looked outside: cold, dim, and empty. It was late afternoon, but silence and stillness, shade and shadows made it feel like I was alone in a museum after hours.

There was a light switch, but I could see well enough without flicking it.

I took the wooden staircase up to their apartment on the second level. It felt solid, but creaked, each step worn and grooved in two places from decades of climbing and descending.

The stairs kept going up to other apartments, but I stopped on Mikaela’s floor. In the hallway I could see the landlord had built walls and doorways to turn the common area of an entire floor into two self-contained suites. It was amateur work. He didn’t leave enough room between Chris and Mikaela’s apartment entrance and the bannister in the center of the floor. The footway to their door was only single-file wide and too narrow for their bristly doormat, the same one Chris had at her old

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

place. It edged up against the handrail's spindles. Seeing it again made me feel like I could just flip it and use the key underneath to walk in.

I was showing up to Mikaela's unannounced after her roommate had just disappeared, so despite the vertigo it gave me, I backed up against the railing as much as I could before I knocked.

As I tried to explain who I was through the door, my voice resonated down the stairway into the lower levels of the house. I must have said something like, "Barb, Chris's mom... and the police, uh, they asked me to be the family's spokesperson."

Across the landing, a neighbour's yappy dog began snorting and barking at me through a crack under the door of the other apartment on the floor. A woman's voice shushed it, and the door opened. The neighbour, a large, middle-aged lady holding a remote control in one hand and muzzling her growling Mini Pinscher with the other, ventured into the hallway, staring at me. Only then, did Mikaela crack her door.

The neighbour asked, "Everything ok, Sweetie?"

"Yes, thanks Marla, he's working with Chris's mom and the police." The nosey neighbour made the situation awkward, and I felt she had no right to know what was really happening, so I didn't correct Mikaela's semantics.

"Any news?" Marla asked.

Mikaela, still standing behind her door as if she was hiding, looked to me. I shook my head, her expression dimmed, and she responded, "No, doesn't look like it."

"It's going to be alright," replied Marla. "You let me know when she comes back, Hon."

"Of course."

I thought Marla would give us some privacy, but instead of closing her door, she opened it wider, saying, "I'm just going to put up JoJo's doggy gate, Hon. Just a call away if you need anything. You let me know."

Finally stepping out from behind her own door, Mikaela smiled at her neighbour, then turned to me without wiping it away, “Those hipster glasses ... same ones I see in my suggested friends feed.”

She was beautiful. More petite than Chris, but she reminded me of her: the same hair and she looked similar in her sports bra. But she had different eyes: the colour of granite pebbles in a sun-filled stream.

Smiling back, I said, “They’re not even prescription.”

I relaxed a little, and under the impression she was going to invite me in, I took a step forward from the railing towards the doorway. But she didn’t move. And all of a sudden, I was chest to chest with her, stepping on her bare foot.

She flinched backwards and reached down in pain. JoJo started barking again, and I jumped back towards the rail searching for words.

Marla yelled from inside her apartment, “Everything ok?”

“We’re fine,” Mikaela yelled back while bent over, rubbing her toes.

She stood upright again, and I think she could see my embarrassment, because she flipped the attention back on herself, apologizing for her appearance, explaining she was doing Pilates before I knocked. She turned and waved me in.

Domesticated Rabbits: “a Fearful Mystery”

“In a nameless city deluged by constant rain... three rabbits live with a fearful mystery.” This is the tagline of American filmmaker David Lynch’s 2002 miniseries of short horror films, *Rabbits*. The entire series unfolds in a single living room with three actors dressed up in human-sized rabbit costumes. The man rabbit, Jack, wears a business suit. His roommate Suzie wears a pink dress, and the other, Jane, a dressing gown. Even though Lynch apparently called *Rabbits* a sitcom, “we should

classify it as surrealist horror.”²² In typical Lynchian style, the director uses various techniques to unsettle his audience and build a sense of dread. The dark, shadowy living room clashes with the friendly rabbit heads. And the ominous soundtrack drones on underneath moments of pre-recorded applause and laughter mimicking the reactions of a live, on-set audience. The taped cheers and laughing grate against the overall sombre tenor, but they also disorientate. When laughter follows a punchline, Lynch’s real audience has no idea why. All the spoken parts between the characters are a sequence of disconnected one-liners that make sense individually but not together.

In the opening episode, Suzie is sitting on a love seat at the front of the apartment, looking straight ahead as if she is watching TV. Jane irons in a dark back corner of the room. The front door opens, and Jack walks in. Applause follows. Jack sits down beside Suzie on the couch. She slowly turns her rabbit head towards him and says, in a flat, almost robotic tone, “I am going to find out one day.” Jane looks over from behind them and asks, “When will you tell it?” Jack responds, “Were there any calls?” Suzie then turns away from him, again looking straight ahead, and says, “What time is it?” The audience laughs. Lynch’s “narrative minimalism,” his long scenes filled with long pauses, where nothing really happens, and his surrealist techniques “suspend the real audience’s Hollywood viewing demeanour.”²³ And by breaking the “cultural contract” between director and consumer, his work not only shows “the existential conditions of intimate address between loved ones,” but also “the way they make each other vulnerable to self-loss.”²⁴ They do so “by bringing into the relationship the viewpoints and insensitivity of general others towards one another.”²⁵

“With the rest of the world outside its walls,” Chris wrote, “the rabbits’ apartment as a whole represents ‘the space’ of intimacy.”²⁶ Each roommate “gives the other their own place”—a

²² Weston, *General Others*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

metaphorical term for the self's meaning given back to it by an other's affirmation and address.²⁷ From an outsider's perspective, Lynch's disjointed script makes them speak *past* one another. But "the pre-recorded audience who 'gets' the inside joke flags the real viewer's usually advantaged viewpoint."²⁸ We are not "the catered to consumer," who understands—either from the beginning or in the end—the secrets and mysteries of the characters on-screen. We are distanced from knowing them and their lives. While the rabbits do indeed "speak past one another, they nevertheless address something exclusive between them."²⁹ Despite their disconnectedness, they do not speak as general others, but as intimates who, as in many other Lynchian films, are both held together and torn apart by the exclusivity of a secret. They "address a secret they share and may discover together. One that is about them and them alone."³⁰ And apart from the larger haunting mystery that will continue to grow between them, this secret that they address—mostly without direct reference—"symbolizes the place of each self within this intimate setting."³¹ The meaning of this place each one occupies is to be known as one who the other is for and to know another such that it is for them. Or, "to be affirmed and affirm in exposure to all that is."³² "Intimate address," even if indirect (which it most often is), "speaks from and to this exclusive place—like names of endearment, that only two people call one another."³³ And it is from here, this 'place,' that each one ventures out into "the rest of the world"—Chris's phrase for the ordinary world outside intimacy.³⁴

The self's given place, gifted by affirmation and address, is not just situated 'inside' the bounds of intimacy, but also 'inside' the larger world. The apartment walls "not only set the bounds for an

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

inside, but also for an outside.”³⁵ Each rabbit is also one amongst all others. Jack comes and goes. Jane seems to be getting ready to go out. Someone may visit or call. It seems Suzie watches TV. And so, it is not *just* that the self goes forth into the outside world. Each self “carries this outside back into these four walls.”³⁶ Intimates, in this case, good friends, are not just special others for one another. Loved ones can understand and relate to one another in the general modes and roles through which anyone else could relate to them. For Chris, this was not necessarily a problem. Affirmation and address free the self to go out into the rest of the world. Since “intimacy participates in a higher meaning than the ordinary, it is always freedom *for* it without betraying its freedom *from* it.”³⁷ On an existential level, bringing it back home only becomes problematic when special others use it to flee both themselves and one another.

* * *

As I entered Mikaela’s apartment, I started shutting the door behind me. She noticed and immediately stepped towards it, waving her hands in front of her, saying, “No.... I’ve got a guy coming. My friend. He’s supposed to be here soon.” She turned her outstretched hands to show her palms and gave a shrug, as she said, “Might as well leave it open for him... right?”

Their place was old but bright and warm. A diffuser perched on a side table plumed out wisps of pine fragrance. Atmospheric music hummed softly in the background. Big bay windows, with beads of drizzle running down them, overlooked the wet, concrete-dark branches of park trees across the street.

I recognized Chris’s touch. Copper-wired fairy lights hung from upper mouldings on white plaster walls above mahogany wainscoting. The wood panelling had a natural shelf she decorated with

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

various found things: twisted driftwood limbs, smooth beach rocks with exposed layers, and a sun-blached seal skull she probably picked up on one of her long beach walks. She used to ornament our places the same way.

After putting on a loose sweater, Mikaela led me over to an old couch covered by a grey throw. Sitting down, I could feel its cracked vinyl upholstery catch and tear against the woolly blanket. She sat across from me, cross-legged in an armchair with a sagging cushion. They probably adopted both pieces from the side of the road.

We spoke for over an hour. She was polite enough to avoid any mention of my past but thoughtful enough to explain how she and Chris met.

“A few years ago,” she said, “when Chris was still doing course work, we had to do a presentation together. It was on Schopenhauer.” She pointed to their bookshelf. “I think Chris was curious about me, wondering why I was in a program like that. She later told me I surprised her... that I also loved his beautifully dark words. We became friends pretty quick after that. I had never met someone like her, someone as contradictory as *I* felt: smart and put together on the outside, but so... not sad inside—but... unsettled.... Yet so insistent on beautifying that... To change its meaning, if nothing else.”

I knew why Chris was like that, and I wanted to ask Mikaela how *she* got that way, but she was distracted and kept looking towards her door like she was waiting for us to be interrupted. So, I didn't.

She went on, “At first, I was intimidated. Just a first-year MA student. But she disarms so quickly. She's quiet, but you know, so warm when she speaks. You feel her taking your perspective like she's hugging you from behind, looking out at the world *with* you—from *your* viewpoint.” I followed her eyes to a framed picture on a side table. It displayed the silhouette of a young woman from behind overlooking the ocean at dusk. I gathered it was Mikaela and Chris was the one behind the camera.

“God, it must be exhausting to be her,” she said. “You can’t be that perceptive and find people easy, ‘cause most people just aren’t that way. Sure, they might ask how you’re doing, but then you see them zone out as you’re telling them. They just don’t have the imagination to reciprocate. It’d drive you to be alone.”

Her words reminded me of the Alaskan postcard. I pulled it out from my inner coat pocket and handed it to her. She picked up my suggestion and motioned towards a closed door that turned out to be Chris’s room, saying, “But she didn’t take anything... like *nothing*. Not her laptop, her *wallet*, credit card, bank card, *no* clothes, **ID**... nothing for a trip. She didn’t even take her jacket.” She was pointing to Chris’s favourite olive green coat hanging on a rack beside the front door. “She was only wearing her wool sweater. The brown one.”

Anyone who knew Chris also knew the one thing she *always* carried with her. I asked, “What about her journal?”

Ever since she was a teenager, she used the same kind: those Mead composition books with covers that had black and white inkblots like static on an old analog TV. She’d write in it every day, all day, fill it up within a few weeks, then start a new one.

“I told the police about it,” Mikaela said, “but they couldn’t find it. They’re dated, you know. They took the old ones, but she must have had the new one with her. That and her phone, I guess it’s the one thing she *did* have.”

“Did she say anything? Where she was going?”

“She was going for a walk. That’s all. Then, well you know.... I tried texting and calling her the next day and the day after that—”

“—but,” I finished her thought for her, “it went straight to voicemail. And no response.”

Mikaela nodded, letting the implication hang for a moment in the stillness of the room.

At the time, neither she nor I knew anything more than that Chris had left that evening and never come back. A few days later, in a televised plea for public assistance on the local news, the police announced details about her last known whereabouts the night she disappeared. Her cell phone, they explained, last pinged off a cell tower at 9:52 PM that evening in the downtown area, just several blocks from her home. Her phone had not paired with a tower since, indicating that it was powered down or destroyed shortly after that.

What the police didn't say, but I've gathered since is that prior to her phone shutting down, she was speaking with someone who was using a number registered to a pre-paid cell phone. Users of burners are notoriously difficult to trace. Authorities have to track the phone back to the seller to see if they have any records or videos of the purchaser. If he or she paid cash and the store doesn't have surveillance or doesn't keep it for very long, investigators will hit a dead end. I imagine the investigators at MCU hit a similar snag, once they tracked the burner back to the seller. Because on the news that evening, they were asking for tips and for anyone to come forward, who had witnessed Chris that night interacting with someone else. They were looking for people who had found either a composition book "diary" or an old, discarded iPhone 5 with boutique music company stickers on the back. They showed a couple of images of Chris's old journals and a dummy phone with similar stickers to show what these would look like.

No one ever did come forward.

Mikaela broke the silence between us by standing up from her armchair and waving me over to Chris's closed door, saying, "Look."

The Permeability of Burrows and Walls

The rabbits' apartment walls are "metaphors for the separating lines" between intimates and everyone else—the invaluable and the ordinary.³⁸ By constituting an exclusive realm between those who are included, the intimate also "constitutes and relativizes the significance of the excluded."³⁹ 'Inside these walls,' each one is *for* the other. It receives its dignity in being an irreplaceable condition for another's life, while also conferring that same affirmation upon them. This level of meaning is above and beyond. And because of this, it limits but also gives a relative place for the ordinary outside of it. In this way, affirmation and address free each one *for* this excluded field of life and activity: "*Being-for* is also freeing *for* the rest of the world."⁴⁰ And this without any necessary transgression of the bounds of the invaluable.

"Just as Jack comes and goes without losing his ability to return to Jane and Suzie," so too the self can carry itself into the ordinary world as a sphere where it builds who it is for the special other.⁴¹ Each self is a general other, and it is free for the everyday as long "as it does not conflate it with the expressive or the invaluable."⁴² For, the world of day to day life "is where the self begins to build the expressive."⁴³ But in this respect, "everydayness is only 'a somewhere' which will give occasion for the creation of its own limits and the expression of that which transcends it."⁴⁴ The self is free for this act of building within the ordinary insofar as it "relativizes" it under higher levels of meaning.⁴⁵ "The expressive," Chris wrote, "*gives* significance to the everyday as that which is for something higher."⁴⁶ Expression does not derive its meaning from the ordinary. It gives it a point: "the special other for

³⁸ Weston, *General Others*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

whom one ‘travels’ the circumference of the world” and “to whom one’s being returns by transforming some ordinary actions, words, and things *into expressions of that homecoming*.”⁴⁷

But the rabbits’ apartment walls “are not literal spatial boundaries, nor like burrows are they impenetrable.”⁴⁸ The rabbit suits, the gendered clothing, the live audience track, and the constant questions about calls that day—all of these suggest and imply that not only is there a larger social world outside but also that “social roles can come to inhabit the place of intimacy.”⁴⁹ Besides interrupting a mindless viewing demeanour, the phoney audience also embodies the real viewer’s remove from the narrative: “like the walls, it gives a place to the excluded—to others looking in.”⁵⁰ But it is not *just* that outsiders can *literally* peer in or come to visit.⁵¹ Others intruding “is the condition for, but not the occasion for self-loss.”⁵² Special others bring into their relationship this outsider perspective.

Even though it is excluded, an outsider relating to the intimacy of others can, of course, understand and also carry the best intentions for them. But this outsider’s inability to participate “leads to an essential incapacity.”⁵³ They can intellectually grasp and even emotionally extend themselves, “but not in such a way that their own being is at stake *within this relationship from which they are excluded*.”⁵⁴ For they are an outsider, who does not have a stake *in* this intimacy. “And so,” Chris wrote about the self, “this tiered difference in levels of meaning between *its own being-for*, where it is at stake for its own other” and its “being-*with* others for whom it is not at stake *in the same*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid. Here, Chris is referring to the exclusion between general others and special others, not necessarily to the exclusion that occurs between various kinds of special others. We will return to this latter theme later in Chapter 5 when we discuss the repetition of the history of desire.

inclusive way—this difference is the region of *desensitization* from which domestication extends.”⁵⁵

Desensitization, here, does not mean that a self necessarily finds itself *de facto* insensitive, in the sense of being cold, careless, calloused, or indifferent to either general or special others. Someone can be “existentially desensitized at the same time they are warm, kind, and well-intentioned to either a special or general other.”⁵⁶ Desensitization means that someone “can find itself relating *to itself* as being-for special others *from an outsider’s detachment*.”⁵⁷ And by doing so, it is not necessarily that they lose all sensitivity for *their* other. It’s that they “lose their own comprehension,” the unification or “harmony of feeling and understanding” for their own place in that special other’s life.⁵⁸ The prefix of *de*-sensitization refers not primarily to “the self’s loss of orientation towards the place another *gives them*, but to *the self’s remove* from the position of affirmation *it secures for that same other*.”⁵⁹ This then disorients the other from itself as being-for. Or, from the self’s perspective, the other has displaced it from a position of affirmation and address. There is a feedback loop here.

Lynch shows the breakdown of affirmation and address primarily through his characters’ disjointed dialogue.⁶⁰ Each one indeed gives the other their place, “but the space between them is punctuated by a disconnect.”⁶¹ Chris wrote:

The rabbits speak to each other, but they do not respond to one another. They talk, but they don’t communicate. Even though they address one another, they also actively sever themselves from that which is addressed. The clashing tone between the jovial audience and the grimness of the rabbits’ demeanours introduces still another warning. This isn’t a joke. It is serious. And it is about serious things. Don’t trust the laughing track. It’s insensitive to the real issue and pain here. The loneliness is palpable. They are together,

⁵⁵ Ibid. By “region,” here, she meant the same thing as “place” above. It is the topological representation of her theory of meaning. But now with the added dimension of the position of the general other looking-in to the place of intimacy.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. This theme of insensitivity and comprehension will again be addressed in Chapter 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

but alone. And despite the preoccupation with the outside world calling, this disconnect is *not really* introduced by outsiders.⁶²

At one point in *Rabbits'* first episode, Jack abruptly stands up, and then says, "I have a secret." Suzie cuts him short, saying, "There have been no calls today." Canned laughter follows her trivial response. This interrupting reference to being called upon from the outside world while someone dear is expressing something important "shows the way special others can flee one another—and in this way, their own self."⁶³ They do so through *domestication*, "a self-imposed 'inability' to show understanding for this secret in which they share."⁶⁴

When Suzie cuts off Jack's important statement, she "constitutes his place (his meaning) as being less significant than an outsider's call."⁶⁵ She flees him, and herself as *being-for* him, "by finding an escape route through an outsider's vantage point."⁶⁶ Chris summarized it like this:

Even though there were, according to Suzie, no calls that day, the fake studio audience gets the inside 'joke.' It was as if she said, 'there were no calls today, Jack. None for *you*. But I'm still not holding myself to the loneliness of your secret. For a moment, let's put you in *your* place—the place you have *for everyone else*. No one called you today, Jack. No one. But you are still beholden to them because I will hold you to them. Even when no one calls you.'⁶⁷

By constituting him in this manner, she prioritizes his ordinary role and position in a larger system (whatever his business suit represents) over who he is in the secret that only he, she, and Jane know and keep. She collapses him to his social role. And she does so by allowing outsiders to tell her and—*via* herself—him, *who he is for her*.

This is the domestication of intimacy: "special others allow general others to determine the meaning of one another *for* each other."⁶⁸ In this sense, they not only endanger themselves in fleeing

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

from their own being-for, but they also expose their other to endangerment. Because it is constituted by a special other, “the very meaning of the self is vulnerable to the other’s neglectful underdetermination.”⁶⁹ This is the ontological meaning of *neglect*, to introduce in a special other or oneself “*both* the expectation of an underdetermination by others—general or special—*and* the closure of being-for—as the potential for a reciprocation of the invaluable.”⁷⁰

* * *

Mikaela opened the door but kept her hand on the knob, her arm acting like a cordon blocking my entry. “We can look, but Detective Avery said to not go in.” And then the smell coming from Chris’s room and seeing all of her things made my legs feel weak and brought tears to the edges of my eyes.

Not noticing my reaction, Mikaela scanned the room and said, “I guess you’re used to this.” Books everywhere, all opened to a particular page, stacked to save the relevant passages, on the desk, the bed, and all over the floor. A pile of them holding up a guitar in the corner of the room. And close by, a stack of them were holding up a cassette deck she used to record herself. Somewhat of a common graduate school sight. But it was the walls that made Chris’s space distinctive: her process was all over them.

It hurt to see it all again.

Mikaela continued, “The cop with the camera just said, ‘Whoa,’ then started snapping a bunch of pictures. Can’t even tell she’s got flowery wallpaper underneath all that.”

I responded, “Her walls were her canvas.” Pages from her journals, some with faded ink others with fresh writing, were all over them. She’d tear them free, cut them up, or rewrite them on a

⁶⁹ Ibid; Diane Enns, “Love’s Limit,” in *Thinking about Love*, ed. Diane Enns & Antonio Calcagno (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 31–45. Enns discusses the limits of love in way similar to Chris’s treatment of neglect in domestication. For Enns, the other can erode the self’s capacity for love and this suggests the fundamentally relational nature of the self. Chris would agree and also add that neglect erodes not just the self’s capacity for love, but also their capacity to enjoy or relate to the full meaning of the world (i.e., the invaluable and the expressive).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

notepad, and stick them up to organize them spatially, systematically. Only when she was satisfied with their external arrangement did she start typing.

Mikaela pointed to the closet across the room, “There’s her luggage up there. That empty space beside the walk-on is where she kept her old journals.” Then she pointed to a wooden desktop tucked against a wall under the sole window. “You can see the space between the books where her laptop was. Her wallet was lying beside it. Cops took them too.”

Taped beside the window was a photo booth strip of Chris, Mikaela, and a guy I recognized, but had never met. I had seen him and Chris together before we broke up. “Is that you with her in those pictures?”

“Police asked the same thing,” she said. “Actually, they asked if that was you.” I thought they must have also noticed Chris’s cheeks touching his.

“Who’s that?”

“Danny... from school. Different program. Photography student. Rafferty’s... the bar he works at. They rented a booth for Saint Patrick’s Day. Same day as his 25th. You can see the gift she got him.” In the third shot down, Danny was holding up a present in brown, shipping paper, with a white string bow on it.

“What did she get him?”

“Can’t remember,” she said. “A book, I think.” She paused. And after an audible exhale she said, “We all got a print of those photo strips. He wrote a nice note on the back of mine, but I gave it to the cops anyways. Didn’t feel right taking hers down.” We stood there for another moment scanning the room, then she started pulling the door shut, saying, “We should get out.”

Back in the living room, Mikaela’s phone buzzed. She picked it up from an old coffee table covered in melted candle wax. Still looking at her phone, she said, “I’ve got an appointment I have to go to. I need to start getting ready.” We started walking to the front door.

“Something is Wrong”

Throughout *Rabbits*, Jack is preoccupied with someone’s arrival. In the first episode, a nearly inaudible sound comes from behind the front door, either a feeble knock (almost a scratch) or the footsteps of someone in the hallway trying to sneak up to it. Jack turns towards it, saying, “I hear someone.”

He stands up from the couch and goes to see who’s there. The door opens towards the audience, blocking any sight of the visitor. Jack does not offer any words of greeting. He just leans back—as if recoiling. Then, with Jane and Suzie, watching him, wordless, he steps out into the hall, closing the door behind him. Silence follows. A few long moments later, he re-enters the apartment to canned applause, shuts the door, and sits back down on the couch without any explanation. The disjointed dialogue and laughter continue as if nothing happened. The viewer gets the feeling that this nameless visitor, who later comes to be called “the man in the green suit,” represents something horrible. And the rabbits’ “disconnected conversation is all an unsuccessful attempt to forget the horrific event this outsider symbolizes.”⁷¹

Throughout the series of *Rabbits*, Jack, Suzie, and Jane each have an episode-long soliloquy that, like the dialogue, is mostly unintelligible. Yet during their respective monologues, each character emphasizes the same phrase: “Something is wrong.” The audience knows this has to do with the man in the green suit and, also, a demonic gargoyle that appears while they are sleeping, burning a hole through their wall when the lights are out, “cursing the rabbits in a backwards tongue, like Satanic messages in a heavy metal tape played in reverse. But exactly what horrible thing these spectres represent, we never find out.”⁷² Throughout the series, our unease builds, but without ever understanding why. Lynch creates this dread to alert us that something is going wrong here, but he

⁷¹ Weston, *General Others*.

⁷² *Ibid.*

does not satisfy our Hollywood-conditioned need for knowing *what* has gone wrong. All we know is that we feel something is not right.

Unlike the mainstream philosophical tradition, which always had privileged the head over the heart, intellect over affect, for Heideggerian thought, feelings are not merely ‘subjective’ representational states of the outside world. They are *disclosive*, as they are a form of what he called *Befindlichkeit*—“finding oneself in a situation.”⁷³ Like Lynch’s script, “which resists representation, and his narrative which has no melodramatic or moving scenes but which still builds a definite atmosphere, *finding oneself* does not primarily happen through representation or emotionality, but through affect and feeling.”⁷⁴

Rabbits’ viewer finds it difficult to piece together what the rabbits are talking about, what the story is really about, and who or what the ominous visitors represent. Yet, at the same time, they find themselves being affected by the words and characters on-screen. Without analyzing Lynch’s techniques, we cannot say *why* we are feeling what we are feeling. This is, Chris said, “feeling ourselves finding ourselves.” It is like:

walking into a colleague’s office and getting the feeling that something is different, but without, at first, being able to say what has changed. Then we realize it: they’ve reframed the family portrait hanging on the wall behind their desk. Or meeting a friend we haven’t seen in a couple of weeks and thinking something is different about them. Only after a few moments do we see it: they’ve changed their hairstyle. Feeling is *how* the self finds itself before any representational consciousness. Through affect, we find ourselves by feeling ourselves, feeling ourselves being affected by things, others, and the world as a whole.⁷⁵

Lynch’s audience has no opportunity to get emotional over his unfolding story. It is hard to connect with the characters because of their disconnect between each other, and there are no dramatic scenes to watch them undergo. He sets a very understated tone, but one that is also tangible.

⁷³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172. Bruce Baugh, “Heidegger on *Befindlichkeit*,” *Journal of British Society for Phenomenology* 20 (1989): 124.

⁷⁴ Weston, *General Others*.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

We feel this underlying tenor, even though it doesn't provoke emotional overtures from us. The dread "he builds is a Heideggerian *Stimmung*," a term borrowed from the practice of tuning a musical instrument like a piano, which is why along with its usual translation as "mood," it is also often translated as "attunement."⁷⁶ In English, to say someone's moody or that their feelings are hurt can also imply a certain emotionality. But neither moods nor feelings are emotions. Lynch's audience "watches with unease but one that is somehow detached from any kind of emotional involvement."⁷⁷ Still they find themselves oriented to the show *through* affect and feeling. For Chris, a better analogy than emotion for feeling is kinaesthetic balance:

As we go about our day, walking, sitting, looking around us, we hardly ever notice that we keep ourselves balanced, yet we feel it all the time. Even when we do not *explicitly* feel something going wrong with it, like losing our balance or getting dizzy, we still feel it, as it empowers everything we do.⁷⁸

Like embodied equilibrium, feeling *orients* our lives within the broader meaning of the world, reality, and being. Emotions are *reactions* to what we feel: "we can feel emotions, but we also feel much more than just emotions."⁷⁹ As in a Lynchian production, "feelings and moods orient us to what's happening, often without making us emotional or helping us explain what's going on."⁸⁰

The building dread in *Rabbits* is oriented to a mystery that the audience cannot directly represent, and not just any mystery, but a "fearful" mystery. This dark unknown, symbolized by the man in the green suit and the wall-demon, underlies the story as a whole and the relationships between the characters. They are exposed to it together, and they yield one another to it. Jack's secret "not only sets apart his intimates from everyone else, but it also has been underwritten by this larger enigma."⁸¹

His secret exposes them all to it, and them him to it. In this respect, "the stereotypical things they

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

say and do, and how they sever each other from one another, burying Jack's secret under the ordinary, all of this not only covers over the mystery encompassing their lives together. It also allows them to flee the mystery by fleeing each other."⁸² Heidegger writes that moods uncover one's existence, one's having to be. But they do not do this so much from "a direct seeking" but more so "from a fleeing."⁸³ Likewise, Lynch's real audience's dread alerts that this flight is futile. This something, that Jack, Jane, and Suzie all exclaim is wrong, will catch up to them. But what they discover will not merely be "the burdensome character of Dasein...,"⁸⁴ "the 'that-it-is' of its 'there,' which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma."⁸⁵ For "they are not fleeing the lack of an answer to the question of 'why' Dasein is there, and in the face of no answer to this question, the subsequent lack of any direction about *how* they have to be."⁸⁶ "Like Lynch's script," Chris wrote, "there is a deeper, darker mystery that the secrets of intimates expose them to."⁸⁷

* * *

Under Mikaela's apartment door frame, I paused and turned back around to face her. "Need to ask you one other thing." JoJo started growling. "Did you or Chris know anyone called Q.?"

"Police asked me that too. What's that all about?" I didn't want her to associate me with this like Avery and Fuller had, so I dodged her question.

"An initial, anything?" JoJo was barking at me now.

"I already told them. They didn't say why."

Just then, Marla appeared in her doorway again, yelling over her dog, "Guess there's no news, huh?"

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 175.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

“What did you tell them?” I asked Mikaela, but she was already peeking out over my shoulder to make eye contact with her neighbour.

“No, not that we’ve gathered.”

Marla was picking up JoJo when I said to Mikaela, “I don’t know the city very well. Chris used to be my guide. Any chance you could point out some good workspaces?” She gazed back at me with unblinking eyes and took a little too long to respond. “I mean,” I continued, “the cops took my laptop, but I could use the internet at the hotel. Just wondering if you could recommend....” She cut me off while crossing her arms.

“—Wait.... Why would they take your computer?”

I looked at Marla. She stood there, muzzling JoJo again, breathing through her mouth, not even trying to hide she was listening for my response. “Just standard procedure,” I said, “to rule people out.”

Mikaela just responded, “Oh,” but by her tone, I knew it was time to leave.

I wanted to make her feel comfortable with me. So, when I grabbed the doorknob, I asked, “Should I close it or leave it open for your friend?”

Again, she missed a beat and looked confused. Her expression said, ‘For who?’ Without honestly having figured it out yet, I continued, “He’s quite the late one, huh?”

“Oh... yeah...,” her arms now uncrossed, “he’s always like that,” she said while rubbing her upper arm with a free hand. “Better leave it open for him.”

I was on the way down the stairs, Marla gave her neighbour a quick nod of the head, then removed the doggy gate and closed her door. Mikaela stood in her doorway, watching as I continued to descend.

When I was on the next landing out of her sight, I paused and listened. Her door latched, and her lock bolted softly.

* * *

As I was exiting the main foyer of the house, an older man entered without seeing me. As he came through the door, in his long grey coat streaked by raindrops, he leaned forward, shaking his bald head while using his hands to get the beads of rain off. He was massive. And he carried himself and bent over with a familiar stiffness, like he was used to bending with a holster and badge on his belt—like a cop.

After wiping his head, he stood upright and finally noticed me. I'd never seen him before. He wasn't at the station earlier that day. But when we caught eyes, I could tell he knew who I was. He quickly looked away and set his sight on the staircase behind me. I stood still as he strode past without a word. When he began mounting the stairs, I took a few steps to act as if I was heading out, but as soon as he disappeared around a turn, I stopped and listened. I wanted to hear him identify himself to the women upstairs. JoJo barked, and I thought I heard a light knock. But there was no yelling through the door. There was a short silence, which Mikaela interrupted by saying, "He was just here...," a "Shh," then her door latched again.

I stood there in the empty foyer uncertain of myself and what I was doing there. Chris was gone. And I didn't know anyone else in the city. I didn't know where to go. I *had* nowhere to go. All I could do was stand there in the darkness of that main floor, listening to the sounds of the old house and the rain coming down outside. It wasn't that I couldn't move, or that I couldn't imagine things to do.

Nothing invited me.

While I stood there, without anywhere to go, the feeling that something was out of place, something I could feel but not yet put my finger on, as though in a shadowy corner at my periphery down one of the black hallways of the main floor, the dark outline of a figure I hadn't yet noticed, but one I could already feel staring back at me—this feeling something was wrong without being able

to say what slowly undermined my sense of what I was doing there. It was like a tide drifting in, softening the sand under my feet.

“Johnny’s a Good Heideggerian:” Fear, *Angst*, *das Nichts*, and Radical Freedom

In his supernatural horror, *House of Leaves*, novelist Mark Z. Danielewski relays an episode of anxiety, while also referring to “a few arcane sentences on existence penned by a former Nazi tweaking on who knows what.”⁸⁸ His self-professed unreliable narrator, Johnny, is feeling anxious at work, and so he steps into an empty hallway to be alone, trying to figure out what is wrong with him. To communicate what he was feeling, Johnny writes:

To get a better idea try this: focus on these words, and whatever you do don’t let your eyes wander past the perimeter of this page. Now imagine just beyond your peripheral vision, maybe behind you... something is quietly closing in on you, so quiet in fact you can only hear it as silence.... ..try to imagine how fast it will happen, how hard it’s gonna hit you, how many times it will stab your jugular with its teeth or nails.... ..it felt exactly as if in fact I had turned and at that instant caught sight of some tremendous beast crouched off in the shadows, muscles a twitch from firing its great mass forward, ragged claws slowly extending, digging into the linoleum.... ..except that when I finally do turn... I discover only a deserted corridor... this thing, whatever it had been, obviously beyond the grasp of my imagination or for that matter my emotions, having departed into alcoves of darkness, seeping into corners & floors, cracks & outlets, gone even to the walls.⁸⁹

Danielewski’s description of Heideggerian *Angst*, Chris wrote, “is brilliant not so much because it is accurate, but more so because it’s pedagogically *inaccurate*.”⁹⁰ It purposefully conflates fear of something—like a stalking fanged-beast—with anxiety in the face of *das Nichts*—the Nothing. And in doing so, it shows us in an underhanded way that anxiety is about something being wrong, without anything, in particular, going wrong.

Danielewski knows that *Angst* is not fear and that Heidegger distinguishes between moods ‘in general’ and a special class he calls fundamental. Heidegger reserves the latter for anxiety, profound

⁸⁸ Mark Z. Danielewski, *House of Leaves* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000), 25.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 26-27.

⁹⁰ Weston, *General Others*.

boredom, and joy.⁹¹ Fear, along with alarm and terror, although perhaps pervasive in human existence is not, for him, of this fundamental kind.⁹² Fundamental attunements are oriented to something that, when compared to real things, is no-thing, more like nothing. They are attuned to the world *as such*, and so they do not have a particular object.⁹³ Fear *does*. In fear, we fear something—a wasp, a mugger, a werewolf. And when it comes too close for comfort, we flee from it. Instead of disclosing *Dasein* to be amid beings as a whole, fear focuses on one thing so that it can avoid it. Escaping the fearsome, it also then misses a confrontation with something that is more like nothing.

Shortly after the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger delivered a lecture, which would eventually become one of his best-known but also most ridiculed works, entitled “What is Metaphysics?” Chris was not like others who too quickly criticized him for placing *das Nichts* at the centre of this work, accusing him of a performative contradiction when he spoke about nothing as if it were something.⁹⁴ She was familiar with the classical precedents for his line of thought, which established the philosophical consistency for speaking about *mē on* (i.e., or *non-being*) as a difference opposed to a negation.⁹⁵ But she also found that “this Nothing was just the opening act of a larger story.”⁹⁶

“Johnny’s a good Heideggerian,” she wrote, “because he only uses this wolfman to help him explain that anxiety is the feeling that something is wrong without confusing this with being afraid of something in particular.” He very quickly points out that if he tried to specify *what* was actually wrong, he couldn’t. The hallway was empty. What he was anxious over wasn’t *in* the shadows, corners,

⁹¹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 101–102.

⁹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 179–182, 228–235.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 232.

⁹⁴ Rudolf Carnap argued this in his “Overcoming Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language.”

⁹⁵ Plato, *Theaetatus • Sophist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 259–459; Heidegger, *Four Seminars*, 58.

⁹⁶ Weston, *General Others*.

outlets, and tiles. It wasn't *in* the walls. It was all over the hallway, everywhere. It was "hidden by it, but not like it was something actually behind it."⁹⁷ It had "seeped" into it. "It *was* the hall, without *really being* the hallway."⁹⁸ There was something wrong, but there was actually nothing to be afraid of.

French existential philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, drawing upon both Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and comparing anxiety to vertigo, explains that *Angst* is really about freedom:

Kierkegaard is right: anguish is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself. Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over.⁹⁹

Sartre's dramatic scene points to the connection between Heidegger's *das Nichts* and freedom. The nothing, "because it is nothing, *does not stop* anything from happening."¹⁰⁰

Kierkegaard and Sartre's point that anxiety is *about* freedom "is granted."¹⁰¹ The problem is that "in Johnny's hallway, there's no cliff to jump over."¹⁰² The freedom he is anxious about is not to be identified, purely and simply, with *his* freedom. "However concrete the hallway is with all its tiles and walls," this same empty hallway "does not stop anything from going terribly wrong—and this not necessarily in the sense that it will stop a ferocious animal from actually tearing Johnny to pieces inside it."¹⁰³ There is no actual drop off and there are no literal fangs in this corridor—nothing he could jump away from or into. But the hallway itself is, so to speak, "falling freely in a shaft like an elevator whose sheaf has broken."¹⁰⁴ And Johnny is falling along with it. There's something wrong

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 65. Italics added.

¹⁰⁰ Weston, *General Others*. Chris explained further, "This, of course, does not mean that causality or relations amongst beings, natural or social, no longer limit what can happen with them. It means that nothing else sets a limit upon the possibilities these ontic limitations provide. There is no sovereign power limiting these possibilities." She was here drawing on Heidegger's *The Principle of Reason* as it drew a line between ontic causality amongst beings and ontological meaning. The latter is not a ground, but an abyss.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

“with *the very relation* between himself and, *via this hallway*, the rest of the world.”¹⁰⁵ Like Heidegger said, “That in the face of which one has anxiety is *Being-in-the-world as such*.”¹⁰⁶ It discloses “not just that we can throw ourselves over a cliff, but also that *in this world there’s nothing* stopping us from doing so in *any* situation.”¹⁰⁷ It shows “the radical freedom of being itself.”¹⁰⁸

“It’s interesting,” Chris wrote, “that Danielewski has Johnny leave work when he starts feeling ill at ease because Heideggerian anxiety is less like throwing oneself into preoccupations and more like a paralysis while confronting *it all*.”¹⁰⁹ This is why Heidegger characterizes it not just as “a peculiar calm”—nothing emotional—but also as *Angst* over “nothing ready-to-hand.”¹¹⁰ Anxiety is *like* ‘the paralysis’ we feel before the ordinary, when we’re confronted with too many options:

It’s *like* wandering around hungry in a fully stocked grocery store, overwhelmed by all the choices on display, unable to decide what to put in our basket because we only have twenty euros in our account until next week. It’s *like* the beginning of summer break, when we find ourselves with too much free time, unable to decide what to do. But it’s not *just* that. There’s nothing wrong with hesitating before all the possibilities confronting us. What’s troubling is not that there are too many options. It’s that nothing (both out there and in our self) stops us from making the wrong decision.¹¹¹

In the examples of a grocery store or holidays, this wrong decision is often trivial. And, in any case, the wrong decision is “not really one amongst others.”¹¹² Anxiety stalls us “before *all decisions*, to show us that there is, outside of ethical deliberations, ultimately no wrong path *except for that which we have not intentionally chosen for ourselves*.”¹¹³ And, when an episode of anxiety erupts, what we really feel is going wrong in a grocery store, on a ledge, in an empty hallway, or dark foyer “is that

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 230.

¹⁰⁷ Weston, *General Others*.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 231.

¹¹¹ Weston, *General Others*.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

nothing, not even the entire world, stops us from losing who we are in the choices we inevitably make.”¹¹⁴

Anxiety is about the radical freedom that being or *das Nichts is*. It’s the feeling that someone can actually lose their self along with the discomfort of feeling that nothing will stop this from happening.

* * *

I was still standing in the dark of the building’s entrance when the rain stopped.

For a moment, I couldn’t bring myself to leave. The white noise of downpour gave way to soft tapping drips. It was like I was alone in an indoor pool in the deep end, holding myself up on the concrete lip, hearing the lapping waters as they reflected against the tiles and walls around me. I just wanted to stay in that moment for a very long time.

A minute, maybe two later, outside the front door, I saw the sun break through the clouds. It broke my spell and beckoned me to one of the last places I had ever seen her.

* * *

It was happy hour on a Friday afternoon. Chris and Mikaela’s apartment was just a couple of blocks away from her old place. And I knew the area. It was only a few minutes’ walk to the best indie liquor store in town. Then just a few more to our favourite beach spot.

The downtown streets were buzzing with toasting colleagues. And rowdy with shots between students drinking off their latest midterm marks, tying an early one on with a “cheers,” in anticipation of the finals to come.

I picked up an overpriced six-pack of cheap beer that came with a doggy bag full of pre-sliced lime wedges. Then I headed to the jetty.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

To get there, you have to walk down a dirt path that leads through a dark stand of shadowy pine. On the other side, the point juts out into the Pacific under an endless canopy. On spring and summer afternoons, the beach between the grove and its inner curl is full of tanning bodies, blankets, umbrellas, and coolers. Kids play with blow-up water toys in the kindergarten waves.

But on autumn evenings, looking out from the edge of the trees, the point is wild. Breakers crash against its rocks. Waves splash up high in the inner bay against the ledge of the treeline. And out over top of the point, winds blow tall field grass sideways in crisscrossing patterns. Decades of gusts have bent the oak and cedar standing there.

On its wind-protected inside, twenty-something couples huddle together, keeping their view over the white-capped, dark blue ocean beyond. It's a hike from the road, and unless residents in the neighbourhood call authorities because they smell burning driftwood, police or firemen don't bother those imbibing.

We used to sit over there together, watching the setting sun, smoking hand-rolled cigarettes and talking about ideas under a wool blanket until we shivered. Then we'd pack up under the flashlights shining from our phones and walk back to the warmth of her bed.

On the footway down to the beach that led to the point, some young lovers hushed themselves as they hurried past me. I sat down on a rock on the edge of the grove a few steps away from the path, and cracked a beer, squeezing lime into it. Some gulls resting on boulders in front of me eyed the green wedge as it disappeared into the mouth of the can.

From this vantage point, you have to straighten up, almost stand up, to peer over the rocks where the seagulls perch to see where she was sitting on the breakwater that night.

A breeze picked up, and a chill started cutting through my coat. I again filled my mouth with tart beer.

The last time I had been there, on an evening just like this, sitting in the same spot—that was the night I began stalking her.

Angst and Disquiet go to a Swimming Pool

In his short story “Forever Overhead,” David Foster Wallace relates the angst a young boy feels on his thirteenth birthday as he stands in line for a diving board at a local pool. The reader gets the impression it is a high dive—one the boy has never tried before, but which he’s attempting for the special occasion. Very quickly, we realize he’s quite uneasy about this rite of passage. Wallace narrates the boy’s thoughts while he waits for his turn, “relaying them in the second person as if his little protagonist is being told what to think.”¹¹⁵ Hearing these dictated thoughts, we get the sense that the boy’s reservations are about much more than the drop itself.

A woman is in line in front of him. It’s her turn and his next. She steps up to the end of the board and jumps.

Listen. It does not seem good, the way she disappears into a time before she sounds. Like a stone down a well. But you think she did not think so. She was part of a rhythm that excludes thinking. And now you have made yourself part of it, too. The rhythm seems blind. Like ants. Like a machine.

You decide this needs to be thought about. It may, after all, be alright to do something scary without thinking, but not when the scariness is the not thinking itself. Not when not thinking turns out to be wrong. At some point the wrongnesses have piled up blind.... When it all turns out different [from what you thought it would be] you should get to think. It should be required.¹¹⁶

The boy’s angst about becoming a teenager interweaves with his distrust of the adults, norms, and world into which he is progressing. Unease alerts him to the way *she*, the woman in front of him, lost herself. To the way they have *all* lost themselves. And “to the way *he* could lose himself in the lineups

¹¹⁵ Weston, *General Others*.

¹¹⁶ Wallace, David Foster, “Forever Overhead,” in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 1999).

and social etiquette of years to come.”¹¹⁷ He is hesitant about how easy it is to become one of the thoughtless adults around him. Like a woman mindlessly jumping off a diving board, disappearing into “a time before she sounds, like a stone down a well” nothing is stopping “nor anything usually flagging this fall away from oneself.”¹¹⁸ This drop is what Heidegger called *Verfallen*—*Dasein*’s falling “away *from itself* as an authentic potentiality for Being its Self....”¹¹⁹ The boy, “he too can lose himself in a world that has no time for thoughtfulness.”¹²⁰ He too could just acquiesce to the machine’s blind rhythm, like his thoughts were narrated to him in the second person, getting lost and “Being-lost in the publicness of the ‘they.’”¹²¹ He too, could lose himself under *das Man*’s “dictatorship” and “domination.” “Just by,” Chris wrote, “standing in line for a dive without ever having thought about it.”¹²²

But in losing himself, it wouldn’t be ‘them’ in particular, the others around him, his parents and other pool-goers who subjected him.¹²³ For it is neither ‘them’ nor the great mass of people around him in his suburb, city, and nation that submits him to self-loss.¹²⁴ It is not even a mythological world-spirit working out its own goals through people’s oblivious actions in history. It is *Dasein*’s own “they-self.”¹²⁵ *He*, the boy, Wallace says, has “made himself a part of it.” Fallenness in the they-self is a way

¹¹⁷ Weston, *General Others*.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 220; Weston, *General Others*. As Chris writes, “It is important to not misunderstand Heidegger’s usage of the term fallenness. He does not mean a fall from a higher, pure state, like a fall from grace, or Lucifer and his rebellious angels being cast out of heaven into the depths of hell in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Nor does he mean it to carry an immoral connotation, as it does in religious lexicons. He does not think *Dasein* falls from innocence and perfection, as from a philosophical Garden of Eden into sinful depravity. And he does not propose some kind of return to an original, pure state of being. For Heidegger fallenness refers to the way that *Dasein* is proximally and for the most part, in its average everydayness, always already and, we could even say, somewhat irreversibly absorbed and entangled within things, others, and the world. So, it is not a matter of going back to or recovering some romanticized human essence that has somehow been lost by *Dasein*’s worldliness and which it could re-achieve by departing from the current world for another, ‘higher’ world.”

¹²⁰ Weston, *General Others*.

¹²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 220.

¹²² Weston, *General Others*.

¹²³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 167.

that *Dasein misses itself* and covers *itself* up.¹²⁶ Swiss scholar Rudolf Bernet explains what Heidegger means: the they “is one of Dasein’s modes of existence that is ruled by conformism, commonplaces, and conventional outlooks.”¹²⁷ Or to put it in more contemporary terms, it is the socialized *moment of the self*, which, *without self-reflection*, reflects back to others what they have always already expected from it.

The role *Angst* plays in this story (both Wallace’s and Heidegger’s) is “to *stall the Dasein* in the little boy before himself in front of the un-ready-to-hand world.”¹²⁸ So that, like “the questioning young boy he is and hopefully remains in the future, no matter how old he grows, he will remember to *give himself* a moment to think and decide for himself who he really is without letting them tell him who he should be.”¹²⁹ Still, Chris wrote, “when we look at Wallace’s story, nothing actually stops.”¹³⁰ “The line keeps going,” and instead of stepping out of it, instead of removing himself, “he keeps putting one bare foot in front of another.”¹³¹ And while this is technically compatible with the existential paralysis of a Heideggerian “nihilation” of the everyday meaning of the world in *Angst*,¹³² Heidegger’s description also “leaves much unsaid.”¹³³ For certainly, in anxiety, “ordinary meaning breaks down in the sense of its ability to provide cover for one’s own self-flight.”¹³⁴ Chris explained, “Spotlights are thrown upon us. And we ask ourselves *why* we are doing what we’re doing.”¹³⁵ But, she continued, while “anxiety rejects the answer that ‘everyone else is doing it too,’ *Angst* is not the proper name for the experience of feeling *this* while also feeling compelled to continue on—as if we

¹²⁶ Ibid, 168.

¹²⁷ Bernet, “Phenomenological Reduction,” 262.

¹²⁸ Weston, *General Others*.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 105. Nihilation is not annihilation of the world—as if the world disappeared in anxiety. It is rather that it’s taken for granted meaning, comes to no longer be taken for granted. And so what was ready-to-hand becomes unready-to-hand. Our sense of familiarity with the world turns to unfamiliarity.

¹³³ Weston, *General Others*.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

don't have a choice."¹³⁶ She wrote, "despite this 'step back,' everything's still functioning—all of it, including the *Dasein* of the self."¹³⁷ And this "worldly insistence that Wallace was aware of" but which Heidegger, in his elaboration of the experience of anxiety, "did not provide a theoretical vantage point upon, makes all the difference in the world."¹³⁸ For that which the boy's unease discloses is not just everything un-ready-to-hand in his own self-uncertainty. His hesitance shows "the underhandedness of *all that* which will continue to insist and eventually separate him from his ability to choose who he is because of all that has already happened along the way."¹³⁹ And then, suddenly, he will be like them. "Not just an essential possibility towards himself," but the "existential possibility" of someone "too distant to take seriously the boyhood's neutral choice between authenticity and inauthenticity."¹⁴⁰ As Wallace wrote, the "wrongnesses have piled up blind."

The boy's hesitance could equally be called the uneasiness of anxiety or disquietude. For in both *Angst* and disquiet, unease interrupts mindless self-flight by holding up a mirror to it. Both moods show that it can lose itself in the world with 'them,' in its preoccupation with things. Anxiety's unease stalls before nothing ready-to-hand. It does not annihilate but *nihilates* everything and anything before it by stalling the self in its midst. In anxiety, the broken self is not broken because it cannot literally or physically engage with items or others. It is the same with disquiet. The world is still there—*everything*—people, places, all things. The boy is still standing in line for the first time under the highest diving board at his local pool. But, even still, "cannonballing into a freefall that no one hears until it is too late," this "does not seem good...."¹⁴¹ "Its point is unclear."¹⁴² And "this lack of fluidity between himself and the blinking people and hard things around him, interrupts if not his steps,

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

then any self-assured understanding about *why* he keeps walking toward this plank.”¹⁴³ Anxiety discloses the self to itself in a sense that it can never ultimately lose itself, while disquiet reveals the self in the capacity for a meaning that it can lose over time. For the ‘how’ of self-transcendence towards the world can not only effect but effectively change the self’s existential nature in its being-for another.

Disquietude is not just the feeling about the way one can lose itself in the wrongness of the world. It’s also the feeling that “no matter where we stand in this line, ‘the wrongnesses have *already* piled up blind.”¹⁴⁴ Unease and uncertainty no longer *stall* in the feeling of anxiety. They “propel forward in the restlessness of disquiet. They seek distraction.”¹⁴⁵ For on top of there being no way to stop the machine-like line that drives forward with nowhere to retreat, there’s already a desensitization to this ant-like cadence in ourselves. As Chris wrote, “a hesitant foot on a rung soon turns to hands around tucked knees carelessly bum dropping.”¹⁴⁶ Being a self in the world “accumulates not just the wrongnesses, but the blindness, and not just the fall, but its acceleration—and this to the degree that the self *is* the *descent* to a splashing point of no return.”¹⁴⁷ While anxiety reveals falling, disquiet reveals “*free falling*”—the “existential acceleration of a finite creature losing itself *and its ability to re-find itself* over time.”¹⁴⁸ It is about the essential downward trajectory of the self’s sense of itself in the world. One that it lives as the decline of its own meaningful self-regard in relation to those special others that make its life worth living.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

The nothing disclosed in anxiety is “not just about freedom, but a fearful mystery, a terrible freedom that Heidegger never discussed.”¹⁴⁹ Heideggerian *Angst*, even with all its stasis, nihilation, and hesitance of foot before all the meaning in the world, “still hides more than it reveals.”¹⁵⁰

For in the Heideggerian questions about how one stands in aisles or in a line, about whether we should or should not throw ourselves off a diving board or over a cliff, about coming home or leaving, about the emptiness of holes—rabbits’ or foxes’, we have not yet considered *the point* of finding or losing ourselves.¹⁵¹

When the self is conceived as being-for, someone special gives these alternatives meaningfulness in the first place. Yet in the essential vicissitudes of desire, love, and time, the self can lose this point of orientation. And this to such an extent, that questions about authenticity or inauthenticity appear if not childish, then pointless. Not only does nothing stop us from losing ourselves, “it also does not stop us from speeding away from any intervention with ourselves.”¹⁵² Disquietude points to the self’s capacity to lose its orientation in another such that when confronted with itself, it already feels “too far gone from where it could, in an authentic way, choose who it really is.”¹⁵³ And so just as quickly as disquiet alerts, it propels the self forward into a free fall, falling faster still into the loss not only of itself but those it holds dear. “The dreaded mystery,” is that we can live a life “neglecting, diminishing, and undercutting those who have given us our being.”¹⁵⁴ To the point that “we can’t see this anymore because we’ve lost our ability to see it. We can just feel it as not wanting to face ourselves or that special someone in the lunge towards distraction.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Weston, *General Others*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion: This “Dreaded Mystery” of Time

There are moments in life when we cross a line. And then, sooner or later, suddenly find we can't get back to where we were.

For years, I tried to live with her gone. Even when she was in the same room, writing in her journal or blue-tacking its pages onto our walls, she was 'there,' but not really. We would speak and share time and long talks. But I often felt like our relationship was her favourite petri dish. A way for her to test her ideas, to check their viability. During intimate conversation, I often got the feeling that, in her head, she was already translating our words into her jargon, already off elsewhere exploring its applicability to the *nth degree*, getting ready for a presentation on her work—like her writer's block trips to nowhere... anywhere.

I knew she loved me. But this nagging feeling that our relationship was increasingly becoming material for her work, and that my voice and place in her life was less important than her ability to explain it to others made me feel vulnerable to her. I don't mean to point fingers or even make excuses for myself. But after feeling left behind for so many years, I found myself de-sensitized towards her place in my life and, more so, mine in hers.

There was a time—a period of years actually—we thought I had grown supportive of her lonely paths. But ultimately, for me, there were just too many lonesome nights, especially when we lived apart.

She would always respond. But she was also often short. She was busy. Writing. Or getting ready to go out. Getting ready to go see someone.

I'd also go out with friends from my program. But I'd always return home to a quick flurry of “good night” messages that were never enough. Then, the next morning the same predictable cycle would start again.

I soon stopped trying.

I couldn't understand why she didn't feel the distance as much as I did. And so, a suspicion grew there was someone else keeping her from feeling it. Someone stopping her from seeking me as much as I sought her.

It was a Friday when I couldn't sit in my apartment anymore, took the ferry, and checked into a motel. I knew where she'd be that evening. She always started her weekends at the jetty.

* * *

Chris once wrote,

for the rest of us, there's no green man knocking. There's no demon that appears in our walls at night. There's just this dreaded mystery of time. It doesn't just bury our connection with that which matters most. It can, if we fail to resist it, irreversibly sever and disconnect us from both ourselves and those we try to hold onto as our pole of orientation during its unfurling thrash.... It's not that people just pass or even grow apart. That's inevitable. It's that people despite themselves also fall apart—freely, yet terribly.¹⁵⁶

There were reasons I felt vulnerable to her comfort with distance. There were many explanations I could give for feeling that she wasn't protecting me but instead exposing me beyond my capacity to protect myself. And there were moments on the ferry when I knew I *might* regret what I was about to do. But I had no explanation, not even any feeling for the question, about why I felt so uncomfortable with the sliver of space she presented between me and that brink. Or why I found myself on that ferry, and then later on, peeking over those boulders towards the one person who had ever taught me to love the sensitive and warm feelings I carried within. I didn't have an answer because I was being held captive by others who really had nothing to do with her and I. At the time, I couldn't even have posed the question to myself like this. Much of this will become clear as my story unfolds.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

We had shared not just a history together, but histories we brought to share with each other. And we didn't just bring these pasts to one another in the plural, but more so *a* history in the singular, one that was, above and beyond us, always already torn with or without us. *That* history, despite being beyond us, was already between us and within us before we ever met—or had even been born.

But before I try to excuse myself with time, I should talk about desire.

Chapter 4: The Loneliness of Following After

The Cost of Being-For as Desire and Love

*Just like I told you I would
I'd love to always love you
But I'm scared of loneliness
When I'm, when I'm alone with you
But all that's left is my perspective, broken and left behind again*

—London Grammar, “Rooting for you”

Introduction: Walking the Streets

A week went by without a word from Mikaela, Barb, or the police. It rained all day, every day. To pass the time, I wandered the streets alone, reminiscing about walking them with her.

Cascadian November days are mild but damp and dark. Pedestrians hide under black or navy-blue umbrellas, drivers and passengers behind foggy rain drop windows, and soaked brick buildings drip from above, spouting runoff waterfalls from awnings overhead. The white noise of tires driving by on wet asphalt and drips and streams crashing to concrete muffle the usual city sounds. People on the sidewalk don't talk.

The day I saw her, my canvas jacket's hoodie protected my earphones playing cascading piano runs over an electronic bass drum. The thump buzzed and rolled, a little muddy, a little heavy. Like the yellow glare of storefront windows lining the streets and the wool sweater wrapped around me, there was just enough movement inside to warm me up to being comfortably alone.

I was walking without purpose, just to follow the feeling that around every corner, under every bus stop shelter, behind the breath on every window, I'd see her. There was always the feeling that something would happen.

I had walked these streets with her, sat in these breakfast joints and cafés, window-shopped after hours, and seen our reflection holding hands in them many times before. And so it seemed that Chris would reappear beside our favourite Taco food-truck, or cutting through the rent-a-car parkade we used as a short cut to the bus station.

I stopped at a dripping chain-link fence and gazed through a large hole cut into it. On the other side, at the end of a short alley, streetlamps flashed on for the evening. The rainwater on the road under them was red from a wall of brake lights.

Then, there Chris was—walking past the end of the alley corridor in her olive-green coat, disappearing again before I could call out. I slipped through the fence's hole, and its jagged links scratched at my jacket and jeans. On the other side of the alley, I caught sight of her down the street, ducking into a doorway.

When I reached the big wooden doors with brass bar handles, I realized I had been to this pub before. Not inside but watching her and him from outside.

I followed in after her.

* * *

Phenomenology, the philosophical tradition Chris and I were trained in, originated as a study of consciousness, or what is known as intentionality. Intentionality is the idea that conscious activity is always consciousness *of* something. It is always directed *at* something. For instance, action acts *on* something. Thought thinks *about* something. Wishes wish *for* something. And this is the case with *all* intentional acts: such as perceiving, remembering, anticipating, imagining, willing, hoping—the list could go on.

The study of intentionality has a long history that reaches back to the ancients, such as Aristotle, and to medieval scholastics like Aquinas, and, more recently, modern thinkers such as Descartes.

The link between this lineage and the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, was his teacher Franz Brentano.

Brentano was a German philosopher and psychologist in the 1860s caught up in the many successes of the scientific revolutions of his day. He once wrote, “the true philosophical method is none other than the natural sciences.”¹ Wanting to give psychology a scientific and philosophical basis, while also distinguishing it from disciplines like physics and chemistry, Brentano employed the concept of intentionality to secure the difference between *physical things*, like rocks and stars, and non-physical, intentional phenomena like *psychic experience*, which he nevertheless wanted to dissect scientifically.²

Husserl, who began his career as a mathematician, inherited his teacher’s emphasis on intentional acts but departed from his naturalist orientation. The pupil’s early works attempted to *save* ideal objects, like mathematical axioms or logical coherence, from relativization in what he termed psychologism or historicism.³ The way he did so not only differentiated him from Brentano but also forged the foundations of a new philosophical method he eventually called phenomenology. As his project extended beyond the philosophical foundations of math and logic and began to encompass rigorous analytics of lived-experience [*Erlebnis*] like perception, memory, anticipation, and time-consciousness, Husserl’s work soon attracted more attention and followers. Many of his students and assistants, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Edith Stein, Roman Ingarden, Eugene Fink, and Emmanuel Levinas, became important philosophers in their own right, often adopting their teacher’s work in

¹ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 20. Brentano’s original quote was quoted by Heidegger.

² *Ibid.*, 27.

³ Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy: Philosophy as Rigorous Science, and Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1965). Husserl’s point was that the truth of, say, 2+2 equalling 4 or the law of non-contradiction, does not depend upon the brain state or the historical context of the one who may or may not grasp it. In other words, *regardless* of whether they are correctly or incorrectly apprehended, these truths are absolute, and they hold in *all* times, places, and possible worlds. To demonstrate this, as he attempts in works such as *Logical Investigations*, Husserl attempts to show how intentional acts can intend absolute objects.

ways that left him perplexed or disappointed.⁴ This was perhaps never more so than in the case of his one-time assistant Martin Heidegger.

Surprisingly, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which he considered to be a contribution to phenomenology and which he initially dedicated to Husserl, speaks very little of intentionality.⁵ In this work, Heidegger seeks to radicalize his mentor's method and transplant its root away from intentional acts of consciousness and into the ground of *Dasein's* there-being. Instead of speaking of the acts of an intentional subject, he speaks of *Sorge*, translated as care, as the basic structure of *Dasein's* being. Such a Heideggerian *existential*, in the technical sense, is a theoretical elaboration of the possibility of *Dasein's* openness to being and worldhood.⁶ It specifies the necessary aspects of being opened up to being and world. And so *Sorge* is a mode of existence *before* the differentiation between an intentional subject and the objects of its intentional acts.⁷ Much like Heidegger changed Husserl's problematic around the theme of intentionality, Chris also modulated Heidegger's existential problematic on the topic of care.

For her, the self's primary existential mode is not care, but desire. By desire, she did not necessarily mean physical attraction or romantic love. She said the phenomenon she had in mind could be illustrated by what she felt for her father after he died:

⁴ David Carr, "Translator's Introduction," in *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Edmund Husserl (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), xv-xlii, xxv.

⁵ As is well known, because his mentor was of Jewish descent, Heidegger retracted this dedication in later publications after the Nazi's came to power in Germany.

⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 33.

⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶9-¶10; Fred R. Dallmayr, "Heidegger on Intersubjectivity," *Human Studies* 3 (3) (1980), 240, 243. Like Dallmayr, Chris was aware that Heidegger's *Dasein* should be interpreted as "pre-egological" (240) or prior to the subject-object dichotomy, a pitfall that develops when one seeks to interpret his work in line with its Husserlian sources and Husserl's notion of intersubjectivity. As Dallmayr put it, "...care and solicitude in their different forms are not synonyms for intentionality... but rather structural attributes of *Dasein*..." (243). Like Heidegger's version of intersubjectivity, Chris's desire also points to a relation between the self and other that is pre-cognitive and prior to any positing of an object-person appearing over against a subject. It is the condition of possibility for the appearance of an other.

Even though I knew he was gone, I still ‘wanted the world’ for him. I still wanted it to be the place he found fulfilment in his life. The depth of the pain from losing him was directly related to the intensity of the longing I had *for* him in this regard.⁸

But we do not need to lose loved ones for desire to reveal itself. She also wrote, “It can be seen in a parent’s hope for their child’s happiness and success in life. They want the world for them—‘want’ understood as shorthand for the longing of desire.”⁹ In this sense, neither longing nor want should be confused with either a wish or a need. For desire is not primarily “for the special other him or herself *like thirst is for water*.”¹⁰ It is rather an existential that shows the possibility of the self’s openness to the world.¹¹ Desire is, in this way, primarily “*for them* in the sense of wanting the world *for them*.”¹² It is for them, in terms of “supporting their existence, in affirmation and address, while being ‘on their side,’ as they discover the world as the field where they will unfold their life.”¹³ We want them to be there in this world. But we also want this world to be for them as one where they can unfold who they are.

Chris’s turn away from *Sorge* towards desire as the animating origin of the self’s existence mirrored, to a certain extent, Heidegger’s own *Kehre* or *turn* from his early work, encapsulated in *Being and Time* (1927), to his later, ‘poetic’ thought, somewhat systematically presented in his 1954

⁸ Weston, “To Not ‘Find.’”

⁹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 70-71. Chris was drawing on Heidegger’s distinction between an existential and a traditional category. Categories theoretically articulate the conditions of *objects* or “a ‘what,’” while *existentialia* articulate the conditions of *Dasein* or “a ‘who.’” The difference between the two has to do with the difference between an interpretation based upon predication and one based upon self-transcending existence. An object either has a predicate or not. The leaf is red or not. An existential does not proceed with such an affirmation or negation. It rather presumes the logic of privation because it speaks of potentials or possibilities. For instance, the being of *Dasein* can be termed *care* at the same time that a particular *Dasein* manifests its privation in recklessness. This would be a contradiction in traditional categorical logic. But *Dasein* is a self-transcending who, not a what. And so existentials are more adequate to articulating the meaning of its being than categories.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

collection of papers, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*.¹⁴ In both periods, the human self, represented early on by way of *Dasein* and later on as *mortal*, finds its initial orientation in the world *through things: das Zeug* (equipment) in the existential analytic and, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” *Bestand* or “standing-reserve.”¹⁵ But whereas the younger Heidegger used the ready-to-hand as a launchpad to zoom out and ascend unto the meaning of being *as such*, one which would transcend any given entity (since being is not a being), the older thinker *incorporates* the methodological implications of the ontological difference, assimilating it, so that his task now becomes one of *deepening* the meaning of things, by circumscribing their scientific objectification and technical calculation within a more thoughtful, poetic, and broader-ranging regard—what he calls letting-be.¹⁶ This new path of thought, which seeks to delimit objectification and enframing, does not pass over things so quickly but seeks to dwell with them.¹⁷ *Das Ding*, or “the thing,” is not just *the site* of thoughtfulness, to be recovered after scientism and the will to mastery buried it. It is also *the culmination* of a mortal’s building, dwelling, thinking—Heidegger’s later terms for thoughtful existence in the world.

Once let-be, the thing, in turn, gives back to the mortal *Dasein* the richness of the world.¹⁸ *Dasein* no longer stands at the center of its self-transcendence. *Das Ding* displaces it so that *Dasein*’s transcendence unto worldhood now depends upon a prior *thing-world* relation.¹⁹ Heidegger speaks

¹⁴ Ibid; Martin Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000). *Vorträge und Aufsätze* remains untranslated into English as a volume. However, each one of the papers has been individually translated into English in various other publications, primarily in collected translations of his later work such as *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*; *Poetry, Language, Thought*; and *Early Greek Thinking*. Heideggerian scholar Rudolf Bernet has noted that out of the three collections of his later essays Heidegger published, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* is the only one whose selections are not in chronological order. The papers of *Pathmarks* and *Off the Beaten Track* are ordered by date of delivery or first publication. Unlike these collections, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*’s arrangement suggests—Bernet has said—a systemic order.

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97; Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 17.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 37.

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 147.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 178–179.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *On Time*, 37.

of the mortal as being “be-thinged,” meaning that “we have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness.”²⁰ In *Being and Time*, *Dasein*, too, was conditioned by its ontic facticity.²¹ But the way Heidegger set up his earlier project, *Dasein*’s self-transcendence towards an intelligible world was not existentially (in the strict sense of this term) dependent upon any other being. It was only to be founded by way of explicating *Dasein*’s self-understanding of the meaning of being *as such*. The clarification of this pre-understanding of being in the world was the goal he sought to exhibit *through the existential and temporal analytics*. What *Being and Time* called care, for instance, is the “structural totality” of *Dasein* such that it is opened up to its own meaningful projects amongst things and others in the world.²² It allows *Dasein* to encounter anything *as meaningful* in the first place because it involves the *understanding* of other beings’ potentials and *Dasein*’s own self-projection amongst them—“what its Being is capable of.”²³ There is no ‘one’ being that gives *Dasein*’s “transparency” to itself as a project in-the-world, for it receives this self-insight not through any particular being or region of beings, but by focusing on “Being as such” with a kind of “sight related primarily and on the whole to existence... a full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world *throughout all* the constitutive items which are essential to it...”²⁴ This is different from being be-thinged in Heidegger’s later work, which requires dwelling with a single thing to transcend unto the world it gives. And it is much different from desire in Chris’s thought.

“Desire,” she wrote, “is not for some ‘thing’—not even *das Ding*. Desire is *for* another. But *not* just any other. It is for *a special other*.”²⁵ Being-for *as* desire is to be understood as perpetually following after that other—unto the world this other gives through *their own* self-transcendence. The

²⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 179.

²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 82.

²² *Ibid*, 238.

²³ *Ibid*, 184.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 198-187. Original italics.

²⁵ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

special other does not just give the invaluable. It also gives “the rest of the world”—as the most encompassing horizon excluded by intimacy—the horizon of general others and ordinary things.²⁶ But such a gift also comes at a cost. For by opening up the self to a world of general others, the special other also introduces a gap between the self and its relation to the world. It introduces an irresolvable distance between what the self wants (for the other) and what an ordinary world as a sphere including general others can provide. It introduces into self-transcendence a non-correlation between the being of the self as desire and what the world can ultimately accommodate.²⁷ Finding oneself in this non-correlation introduced by a special other is what Chris called metaphysical loneliness.

“The Spot”: A Confession

It was November, so I knew I had to get to the point fairly early, just before the sun went down. Chris was already there, but she didn’t know I was—at the foot of the grove of trees—watching her on the rocky point. She’d start every weekend with the same routine: by dressing warm enough to face the chill on the jetty, cozy up on the rocks with a blanket, drink herbal tea from a thermos, and peer out over the ocean waters towards the setting sun. I could see her, but I didn’t want her to know I was there.

I texted her, “hey babe! good day? what u up to tonight?” She took her phone out, read the message, then started typing.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ An interesting comparison here might be Søren Kierkegaard’s idea about the incommensurability of the individual as described in many of his works, such as *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* or *Fear and Trembling*. However, Kierkegaard’s theological positions would immediately present the main contrast between his view of the incommensurable individual and Chris’s understanding of the self’s non-correlation with being. For Kierkegaard, an individual’s inwardness is higher than its externalization (e.g., an ethical practice) because it presupposes faith—a relation with God. The individual’s incommensurability is established through this God-relation. For Chris, there is no theological dimension at play. The self’s non-correlation with the world is established through its relation with a special other without the need for faith or some kind of relation to God.

A minute later, there was a ding on my phone. “adequate. actually mediocre. 100ish good words. rest of day worrying not enough. usual. you”

“samesies. not enuff. quote running thru my head. not sure who. a writers someone thinks that writing is more difficult than other people do. nyc self-soothing.”

After reading this, she put down her phone and flipped through the pages of her journal.

I texted back, “tonight?”

“the spot. then drinks with a school buddy.”

“nyc.” I knew what I was doing when I sent another, asking, “Have I met her?” If I had been back home, worried about setting off another long-distance silent treatment, I would’ve worded it differently. She hated implications like these. No matter how innocently I tried to ask them, to her, they felt like accusations, and she received each one like an errant fishing hook to her skin.

She read it, and then let her phone fall out of her hand onto the blanket.

To act like we were going through the old familiar motions, I texted back, “lemme guess: loudest passive-aggressive silence until tomorrow” She looked down at her phone, pressed something, then continued looking out over the ocean.

A middle-aged couple was sitting in lawn chairs on the beach below her. Chris zoned in on them, crawled down the rocks, spoke with the woman for a moment, and then began mounting the rocky slope again, careful not to drop the lit cigarette the woman had just given her.

It was like I expected. I sat there for another hour watching her sip while writing in her journal. Like so many other times, she wasn’t going to respond. If I was home, I would’ve been fighting myself about texting again. Trying to convince myself to not make it worse. But this night, because I could watch, I wasn’t worried.

I saw her packing up just after dusk and left to find my car I had parked on a street out of the way. I knew that after leaving the point, she’d head back home to drop off her things, have a snack,

and wait for her ride. Her place was walking distance from the city core. But on weekend nights, when there were no classes the next morning for drinking college dudes to attend, she always took a cab.

A couple of grad-school friends and I used to joke about the paint job of my early 2000s hatchback. From what we could tell, it used to be the colour of fresh lime peel, but the years had dried it out and faded it. My friends called the colour puke green. I called it washed-out avocado. In either case, we all agreed it stuck out, yet not just because of the coat. On a quiet evening, you could also hear it from a couple of blocks away. When I first bought it online for a couple hundred bucks, its muffler was blown out. But the car just kept running, so I never got that fixed.

Once I got to the top of her block, I pulled over far enough away that she wouldn't see or hear my car, but close enough that that I could see her yellow cab arrive. When it did, and she hopped in, I began following them, trying to stay as far back as a I could without losing them.

Downtown, the cab stopped at the end of a street. Chris got out. I swerved into the empty space beside a fire hydrant and watched. After paying the cabbie, she entered a pub.

I circled the blocks for parking on a busy Friday evening and found one a few intersections away.

* * *

Across the street from the bar Chris entered, was a dimly lit coffee shop. I slid in and, after buying a dark roast, found a stool at the shadowed edge of its big front window. I wanted to watch out for her and catch her coming out, so I could escape back to my car and, hopefully, have enough time to make it back to the fire hydrant before they hailed another cab.

But it just so happened I could see them from where I was. They were sitting directly across the street from me at the front window of the pub: Chris and a guy I had never met.

Into the Dark: The *A Priori of Care and Desire*

Vanessa Lowe, creator and host of *Nocturne*, a podcast that “explores the night, the landscape of the unseen, and how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours transform in the dark,” tells a story, in the episode “Into, Under, Through,” about walking into the woods alone at night, along a trail in Point Reyes National Seashore, a national park in northern California. Leaving her car behind in a poorly lit parking lot, and using only a flashlight to find her way, she heads through the conifers towards a cove on the shore, walking by herself deeper into the moonless dark.

She has brought a voice recorder to document her thoughts, feelings, and—most of all—*her fear*. As she wrote in the blurb for the episode, that was the point: to discover what you will find “when you choose to walk straight into the darkness... both outside in the shadows and deep inside yourself.”

As she walks, she speaks about how she is getting more and more scared, worrying less about mountain lions and more about ill-intentioned people. The whole time we can hear how strained she is to sound calm.

After walking the path for what seems like an excruciatingly long time, she explains to her listeners that she’s almost at the shore, declaring with pure relief, “frogs.” In the background, we can hear them croaking and, farther away, ocean waves.

Her steps quicken on the crunchy path. Then, suddenly, we hear her footfalls stop. A silence follows. One that every moment grows all the more silent and eerie because she’s no longer narrating.

After a few moments, very quietly, but with audible exhales and an aching in her voice she explains, “Ok, I’m seeing the eyes of an animal in the distance, and I don’t know what animal it is.” Trying to catch up with what is happening, the listener gathers that her flashlight is only powerful enough to reflect the eyes looking back at her and not the form of the creature behind them.

She doesn't know what to do. She can resist her fear, hope the animal is harmless, and go forward to reach the beach. Or, she can turn back, hoping the animal doesn't prey upon her and attempt to make it to the safety of her car.

I have not relayed this story to tell the ending but to make a point. When Heidegger speaks about care, and Chris talked about desire, these terms were *both* to be understood *a priori*—before any given circumstance such as a woman walking alone in the woods at night; or even a young man stalking his loving partner.

* * *

For readers of the English translations of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, it is (understandably) easy to miss the inherent connection between *Dasein's* concern, solicitude, and care. For German speakers, the words themselves plainly indicate that *Besorge* (concern) and *Fürsorge* (solicitude) are cognates of *Sorge* (care). And this is not just a clever wordplay. It signifies their *necessary interconnection* in the structural whole of *Dasein's* being. Not just etymologically, but also ontologically *Sorge* is at the root.²⁸ Being-in-the-world *always* implies *Dasein's* 'concern' for things, 'solicitude' for others, and as "an entity for which, in its Being, that Being is an issue," it also entails care.²⁹ In every and all cases, *Dasein's* self-transcendence unto things, others, and the world is an act of care. The main pitfall readers of his translated works fall into is to identify *Dasein's* care with the usual way this term is used in English. Care should not be understood as a form of *carefulness*, or self-care, or taking care that should be contrasted with being careless or reckless. Not putting out a candle when leaving the house would be careless, while snuffing it out would be taking care. Yet this is not what Heidegger means. He writes, "Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' every factual 'attitude' and

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 235-237.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 236.

‘situation’ of *Dasein*, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them.”³⁰

Heideggerian *Sorge* refers to the possibility of being careful or reckless *at all*—along with every other possible demeanour or activity.

In other words, we should not think of care as the same as carefulness nor as the opposite of carelessness. Instead, it specifies the fundamental connection between *Dasein*’s self-transcending being, its openness to the world, and the understanding of existence that makes any comportment, attitude, or encounter within the world *possible in the first place*. Only ‘something’ like *Dasein* that is already open to the world can, in any given situation, be careful or reckless. *Sorge is* this prior openness that allows for careful or careless acts or, for that matter, any acts whatsoever. For any act stems from *Dasein*’s own being an issue for itself in *any* kind of relation it has with other beings, things or others.

Heideggerian care is not, in the case of a young woman alone in the woods encountering the eyes of an unknown animal that may or may not be a predator, taking care and heading back to the car. Nor is it contrary to pressing on despite the peril she might face. It is instead *the openness* to being posed with these alternatives in the first place. Only because this young woman has already transcended herself in an intelligible way, making possible both careful and careless acts with herself, only because of this is she able *to know* that she’s involved in this encounter with an unknown animal. And only because of this prior opening of *Sorge*, can she then react to this predicament. Only after this response can others say she was careful or reckless, depending on the decision she makes. Care is the openness that allows any of this to happen, regardless of any careful or careless actions that eventually follow.

³⁰ Ibid, 238.

Eyes on Them at the Pub

He had a long-lensed camera beside him on the bar that ran along the pub's front window. Some might call him handsome. A full dark beard and thick dark hair combed to one side above buzz cut temples. Colourful tattoo sleeves cuffed his forearms. He wasn't beefy, but muscly.

They'd sip their beers, shoot short comments back and forth, glance at people walking down the sidewalk, then smile at each other as they took another drink. Every time they giggled, he'd laugh too hard and pound the table with the pad of his fist. But then he caught himself, became self-conscious, and had to force his unclenched hand to lay flat on the tabletop surface. He still couldn't help himself. The next time, instead of hitting the table with his fist, he open-palm slapped it.

I didn't like the boyish, full of 'butterflies' vibe he was giving off. And I couldn't stand how long he looked at her when he did.

Then the tone of their conversation changed. They weren't smiling anymore, and although she watched him attentively as he spoke, he wouldn't look at her. He just stared out the window, his eyes shifting, without blinking, looking like he was about to cry.

But he didn't. He crossed his arms, leaned back on his stool, then raised one hand up to his forehead, rubbed it, and soon returned it to the table, his shoulders heaving up and down as he did.

They were silent, watching the pedestrians pass by. Then he looked downwards and started running his fingers along the tabletop. Chris looked over at him brooding.

His hand came to a rest, and she put hers on top of his. He looked over to her, but neither of them said anything. He just kept staring into her eyes.

It was brief, but it happened.

She pulled her hand away, and they both became shy. They looked away from each other and started looking out over the street. But as they stared without words, he left his hand in the place she had touched it.

C'mon. The whole thing felt like a hug lasting too long between two people who are just supposed to be friends. It's the end of the night, last call was like an hour ago, and everyone else already has their jackets on, ready to go home. But now they have to wait for these so-called buddies to unlatch.

I remember actually being nauseous. There was also a burning in my upper chest and shoulders, similar to the numbed heat of getting hit in the ear with a basketball on a freezing day.

A skinny server, with long dark hair, tall like she played at the net on a volleyball team, came with two shots, placing the glasses down in front of them. Open-mouth smiles reappeared on their faces as they looked up to her. She put one slender hand on his shoulder, saying something, but he immediately shrugged it off and gripped her thin upper arm, pulling her towards him. She backed up, letting her arm hang from his hand, pretending to pull away, waving her tray at him with her other free hand. Everyone around them was looking but without concern. I think the shots were on the house and it was all a display of phoney protest.

The server eventually walked away like nothing had happened, and Chris and the guy huddled together again. They laughed, gave a toast, then slammed the liquor back.

* * *

This was the first and only time I ever saw Chris at this bar. But I didn't know its name until a year later. I then came to learn it was called Rafferty's, because on a rainy day a couple of weeks after Chris disappeared, I followed her olive-green coat into its big wooden doors.

As I was walking into its entranceway, I couldn't see the person I followed in. But as I walked through its small waiting area towards a big bouncer dressed all in black, I started putting some of the pieces together.

Back in Chris's bedroom, I recognized the guy in the photobooth strip on her wall, because he was the guy I saw with her at this bar the year before. Mikaela mentioned his name was Danny and he worked at a bar—at this bar, Rafferty's.

The Desire of a *Stalker*: Desire's Unfulfillable Nature

Andrei Tarkovsky's 1979 film *Stalker* takes its title from the occupation of its main character, who remains unnamed throughout. Stalkers, the viewer learns, are black market guides that lead paying customers into a government-restricted area called the Zone. To do so, they need to navigate their followers through military forces that guard its borders and, once inside, through deadly, booby-trapped terrain.

Stalker, the 'name' of the protagonist, leads his buyers—the Writer and Professor—into the Zone. In its lush fields, he tries to navigate their course by throwing bolt-nuts wrapped in medical gauze ahead of their steps—as if testing for land mines. He is guiding them through this outlawed territory towards a bunker named the Room, which has been said to grant the deepest wish of anyone who enters it. A stalker's job is to get customers *to* the Room, but not to protect them from its consequences.

In one scene after they have entered the Zone, while the Stalker is off planning their path forward, we learn that the legal control of this area appears to be just as much for the interests of the repressive state authorities as for the good of infringers.

Discussing the danger that accompanies reaching the Room, the Professor tells the Writer that the Stalker's teacher, called Porcupine, "One day returned from here and got rich overnight. Fabulously rich."

The Writer barbs back, "You call *that* punishment?"

And the Professor explains, "A week later, he hanged himself."

It is rumoured that upon reaching the Room and returning to their normal lives with their deepest desires met, trespassers commit suicide.

* * *

Amongst those who have studied desire, it is a truism to say that it remains, as Chris wrote, "perpetually unfulfilled."³¹ French phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas captures this when he writes, "The true desire is that which the desired does not satisfy, but hollows out."³² Although different thinkers treat this theme in various ways, there is an underlying commonality. Chris summarized this, saying, "desire cannot find final fulfilment in *what* it desires, because then there's no longer any need *to* desire. It would terminate itself."³³

Hunger and fantasy *end* in satisfaction. Both "consume themselves as much as their object."³⁴ "Happily, ever after," is actually a more polite way of saying, 'the end.'³⁵ If desire was synonymous with needs and wishes, then it would also complete itself in possession. But then, "we would have to search for another term for the self's potential for any possible fulfilment, unfulfillment, or transition between the two."³⁶ For there is, Chris said, something we have to call "the self's ability to find itself

³¹ Renaud Barbaras, "The Phenomenology of Life: Desire as the Being of the Subject," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology*, ed. Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 38. Weston, *Suffering Self*.

³² Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity," in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 47-60, 57.

³³ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

in *all* circumstances: hungry *or* full, yearning *or* satisfied, plus every state in between and beyond.”³⁷

If the self is the kind of being that transcends itself and any given moment unto the rest of the world, “this something we would call its being” cannot end in the gratification of any one object or even a series of others like it.³⁸ “For any terminal possession or arrival would extinguish this something” that we need to designate as its being.³⁹ And this would “undermine its capacity to extend itself to that which it does not possess, to others not like this object, to the rest of the world, to worldhood and the openness of being *as such*.”⁴⁰ It would “collapse its self-transcendence.”⁴¹

While Heidegger reserved the term *Sorge* for *Dasein*'s being, Chris, reserved the term desire for the self's being. Just as we must think of care as distinct from particular acts of carefulness, we should also think of desire as different from specific needs, wants, wishes, and urges. And, just like care is not the opposite of recklessness, desire is not the opposite of repulsion. It is not contrary to any of its privatives: disgust, dislike, or even hate, for it gives them their own possibility. It is the name of the self's openness to being in a world. And so, it makes thirst, fantasy, repulsions, recklessness, neglect, and even obsession—amongst all other comportments—possible in the first place.

For Chris, *Stalker*'s scene about Porcupine's fate illustrated the danger of confusing desire with wishes. She wrote:

To identify desire with a wish that can be fulfilled and satisfied by something we can possess, something a genie in a bottle—as it were—could hand to us overnight, like enormous wealth, confusing these two is to enter into dangerous territory. It is to suffocate the origin of meaningfulness in the world—which is not an object that can fulfill desire, but someone who can unleash it for us *unto the rest of the world*. The film expresses this with the ominous threat of suicide, implying that the end or completion of desire with possession of an object entails the end of one's life.⁴²

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

The film's characters have made the greatest mistake one can make. By collapsing the animating origin of their life and world into a fantasy that one day they could have, they undermine *that* within them, which makes anything meaningful in the first place. And upon receiving it, they are lost to themselves and no longer have any reason to live. For the source of their own meaning in the world, their desire to be in the world, cannot find fulfilment in such things. Chris thought it was appropriate to speak about desire as that which opens up the self to the world, because of its perpetually unfinished nature.⁴³

An Unexpected Encounter

Inside Rafferty's, it was dim and loud. The large bouncer with a buzz cut, wearing all black, threw up a flat palm at me, while looking behind him towards the tables.

It was happy hour on a Friday. Tieless collars and buttoned shirts, pantsuits and heads of Balayage buzzed in darkened booths and crammed tables.

In the horizontal mirror that ran along the back walls, silkscreened with unreadable Gaelic script, I could see myself standing alone from every angle.

Then, a group of what I took to be undergrads looking for a drink after the last week of classes, *all* with backpacks, piled into the entranceway behind me. I didn't feel comfortable getting any closer to the bouncer, so I took a couple of steps to the left, towards a guy who looked too young to be bald. He was sitting at a cocktail table packed with five other grown men, and I think I must have nudged him because he looked back at me with an unimpressed expression and shuffled his chair a little towards the window. Then he turned his attention back towards one of his buddies, who was talking about "incompetent officiating."

The bouncer yelled to the students at the back of the line, "Shut the door!"

⁴³ Ibid.

A young guy who was with the others and was peeking his head in from outside, asked, “How long’s the wait?”

“Twenty to thirty—not sure.”

When the student who asked heard his response, he and another by his side started pressing their way in, bunching up against their friends, pushing everyone forward, making them take a step closer, displacing me again between the doorman and the bald guy.

I wasn’t that many years advanced from talk of whether Professor so-and-so would actually make all the True or False, false. I wanted to separate myself from them in the big guy’s mind. So, I asked him, “Is Danny working?”

He looked at me strangely, saying in a matter-of-fact tone, “No one goes by that name here.” His breath was warm and stale, like a whiff of compost. Then, he yelled over my shoulder, “Some of you are going to have to wait outside.” One straggler stepped out, but not the other. The entranceway was still too crowded, and the door wasn’t closing.

He was still concentrating on how he was going to get them to close the door without making a scene, when I said, “I’m looking for someone, but I can’t see her. Can I leave my ID with you and take a look?”

“She expecting you? ‘Cause we’re over capacity.” The bald guy with the scarf I was previously bumping into now kept looking over his shoulder at the bouncer, who was repeatedly bumping his chair. But the doorman didn’t care. His focus was still on the students, and he yelled again, this time in monotone, “*Close... the... door!*”

“I think she saved me a seat.”

“Give it here,” he said while holding out his hand.

I walked to the back of the pub, past several clinking pints, towards a back corner I couldn’t see from the entrance.

Mikaela was sitting by herself at a tiny table with a free chair... as if she was waiting for me.

***It Follows*: On Turns—from Care to *das Ding* and then Desire**

David Robert Mitchell's 2014 supernatural horror, *It Follows*, begins when a date goes horribly wrong. Jay—the film's teenage protagonist—and her new boyfriend, Hugh, have sex in the backseat of Hugh's car. Afterwards, while Jay is still vulnerable, Hugh overpowers her and drugs her with chloroform.

Jay wakes up tied to a wheelchair in an abandoned building, and Hugh begins to explain himself. As he is speaking, a naked woman appears at the other end of the floor and slowly treads towards them, zombie-like. He was, he says, being stalked by a shape-shifting entity that can take the form of any person, but that no one else can see. Jay can see it now because *now* it's hunting her. If it catches her, it will kill her, and then it will again pursue Hugh. The only way Jay can stop it from following her is by having sex with someone else and passing it on to them. Hugh unties her, and the two escape just before the thing catches up. The rest of the film follows Jay, her younger sister, and friends as they try to help her flee, while she struggles with the moral dilemma of giving it to someone else.

The suggestive plot has inspired many different interpretations, most of which understandably focus on teenage angst about sex, STDs, the uncertainties of contemporary intimacy—and, of course, mortality. Mitchell, the creator of the film, has said, "I made the film intentionally to be open to lots of different interpretations."⁴⁴ But he also points out, "We're all here for a limited amount of time, and we can't escape our mortality... but love and sex are two ways in which we can—at least temporarily—push death away."⁴⁵ While this helps summarize the overall theme of the film, Chris

⁴⁴ Ibid. Charlie Lyn, "*It Follows*: 'Love and Sex Are Ways We Can Push Death Away,'" *The Guardian*, February 21, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/feb/21/it-follows-teen-horror-movie>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

said “it still leaves its interpretation underdetermined.”⁴⁶ Because, for those trying to escape the entity, “love and sex are not necessarily the same.”⁴⁷ Jay refuses to pass it to someone she loves, opting instead to give it to strangers. And when it comes to what ‘*it exactly is*, it is not as simple as labelling it a metaphor for death. “It is not as straightforward,” Chris wrote, “as the chess-playing Reaper pursuing the Knight in Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*.”⁴⁸ Not only has Mitchell said it came to him in an anxiety dream when he was very young around the time his parents divorced, but he also said, “I’m not personally that interested in where ‘it’ comes from. To me, it’s dream logic in the sense that they’re in a nightmare, and when you’re in a nightmare, there’s no solving the nightmare. Even if you try to solve it.”⁴⁹ Chris added, the ‘it’ that follows Jay “does not *end* her life, nor does it end in her waking life. It is, in a certain sense, endless.”⁵⁰ It gives, instead, something closer to “a death in life, one where desire for the special other can become the occasion through which destruction ever follows after the other.”⁵¹

Chris wrote “Heidegger’s Tale” early in her PhD to break away from the overall tenor of his later thought. And she used Mitchell’s film to illustrate her point. The problem with Heidegger’s mature work, she said, was not so much its poetic character nor that it reads like a cautionary tale about the will to mastery. The real problem, for her, was his *ontosoteriology*—“the way he gives being a salvific role in the story he tells.”⁵² There is “no fairy-tale-ending in *It Follows* as there is in Heidegger’s later poetic thought.”⁵³ ‘It’—or *being*—has the “logic, *logos*, or gathering of something close to a

⁴⁶ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Ben Rawson-Jones, “Exploring the Horror of *It Follows*: David Robert Mitchell Interview,” *DigitalSpy*, August 3, 2015, <https://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a633564/exploring-the-horror-of-it-follows-david-robert-mitchell-interview/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

nightmare.”⁵⁴ It cannot be solved, nor can the traces it leaves behind help us trace ourselves back to a saving power: “a mystery, yes. But a fearful mystery, nonetheless.”⁵⁵ She continued:

‘It gives’ (*es gibt*) a world only insofar as *it* follows us into it and lays to waste what we build to keep it at bay. It follows us into our very being and, through us, unto those we follow after in the desire of love....⁵⁶

By overlaying Mitchell’s ‘it’ ovetop of a non-ontosoteriological *es gibt*, Chris was trying to illustrate two things about desire’s link between being itself and the openness of the world. She would agree that the ‘it’ of being gives the world, but she would not say that it reconciles the self with this world as it does in Heidegger’s work. In the self-transcendence of following after the other unto the rest of the world, ‘it’ puts the self at odds with the world. Desire introduces a gap between what the self wants and what the world—*it gives*—can accommodate. Desire wants the world to be the place that expresses the invaluable nature of the special other. But the world is rather the place where time undermines the conditions of meaning and love in life. And because of this, because desire self-transcends unto the world by following after another, it can also become the vehicle through which destruction follows after a special other. In this mode, disparity between the ordinary and the invaluable thereby becomes less the condition of possibility for love and more so the condition of possibility for entrapping the other—or what Chris called possessiveness—a term we will discuss in the next chapter.

* * *

“Hi, Mikaela.” She looked up from her phone.

“Oh, Dylan,” she said, “Hi,” then she shifted in her seat. “What are you doing here?”

⁵⁴ Ibid; Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), 60–65. Chris is drawing on Heidegger’s reading of a Heraclitus fragment where he uncovers the meaning of logos as gathering-together and letting-lie-before.

⁵⁵ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

I wanted to sit down next to her in the empty chair, order a drink, and avoid the tough question I needed to ask. But I didn't.

"Why are you wearing Chris's coat?" She tilted her head, staring back, puzzled.

After a moment, and with a little bit of attitude, she said, "*Uh*, we share each other's clothes *all* the time. She would want me to wear it."

Then I felt a heavy palm land on my shoulder. The top of his hand had a Bengal tiger's head tattooed on it, and the furry torso and tail ran up the forearm. It looked like the same stencil-job I've seen in adds on model's arms while scrolling through my feeds. I immediately realized it was the same that I saw on his cuff when I was watching him and Chris from the coffee shop across the street.

Mikaela looked over my shoulder and exclaimed, "Danny!"

"He bothering you?"

I turned to look back at him, and he slowly moulded a smile.

"Danny, *this* is Dylan."

He was wearing a bar tender's apron around his waist, and he had a white dish towel thrown over his shoulder. His hand remained on me when he responded, "Who's Dylan?"

"*Remember...* Chris's old boyfriend."

He squeezed the muscle above my collarbone twice, then offered a shake while saying, "Nice to finally meet the guy I heard so much about." His tone wasn't kind, but I reciprocated with a shake.

"Yo," yelled a short, young woman with a plaid skirt holding a tray with double shot glasses filled high. Danny looked back, and she asked, "You on or off?"

"*Off.*"

I took the opportunity to sit down on the empty chair beside Mikaela. She immediately shuffled hers away.

"Then *where the fuck is Liam?*"

“I don’t know,” Danny responded. “But just because he covered for me for Sunday Night Football a couple of weekends ago, doesn’t mean I’m covering for him now. I’ve had his back too many times, and I’ve got plans.”

Keep in mind that had Chris disappeared two Sundays before this. And regardless of the fact Danny had denied this to the police, I absolutely heard him say that Liam covered for him during “Sunday Night Football a couple of weekends ago.” Not “last weekend,” or “Sunday Night Football last weekend,” but *definitely* “Sunday Night Football a couple of weekends ago.”

After the server paced off, he looked back to us, saw me sitting in the chair, and crossed his arms. Mikaela tried to explain, “Dylan, Danny just got off, and we have plans for a couple of drinks.” It was stupid of me, but I didn’t get it. All I felt at the time was tension and didn’t understand the meaning of the chair I was sitting in.

She tried again, “Dylan, I wasn’t expecting to see you here, I was saving—”

I interrupted to try to bring us back to what I thought was the point: “—I saw Chris’s coat. Followed it here. Why do you have it?”

Danny leaned over the table, laying his open hands on it, spreading his full weight over it like a bartender does, and then answered for Mikaela, “She *gave* it to her.”

“No, Danny, don’t,” Mikaela said. “I already told him. You don’t have to—”

He cut her off, “—What are you trying to do here, bud?”

He was no longer even attempting to seem friendly, so I ignored his question and turned back to Mikaela.

“I’m glad I ran into you,” I said, “I wanted to chat about a few things in the investigation.”

She didn’t respond, but looked away, back to Danny.

Just then, the server reappeared with another chair, setting it at the table. Danny nodded, saying, “Thanks, but he’s not staying.” Danny took the seat anyways, sitting down on the other side of

Mikaela. I didn't notice that at that point he must have also given his co-worker an alerting look or tone.

"*Actually*, Dylan," Mikaela said, "they've asked us to not speak with you."

"Who has?"

"Look, bro," Danny said, gavelling the pad of his fist against the tabletop for emphasis, "you *clearly* can't take a hint. So here it is—*straight up*." He hit the table again. "*The cops*, dude—*the cops* told us not to talk to you. But you know *what?*" He stopped for an overly dramatic pause, and I literally watched his fist flatten into a palm as he tried to restrain himself from slapping the ceramic too hard. Then he said through a forced hush, "*We* don't want you around." He held out a hand to Mikaela, and she took it. He continued, but now in a louder voice, "This is your last warning, man. If I ever catch you *creeping* around her again, the cops will be the least of your worries."

When he said this, he hit a sore spot. A bit too loudly, I threw back, "I wasn't creeping. *She* has Chris's coat." The people around us were now looking.

"*Sure*, bro. You did it to Chris, now you're doing it to her." He pointed at me, "why don't you go Google 'stalker,' buddy."

The bouncer approached our table right then, saying, "*This* guy. There a problem here, Quinny boy?"

I looked over to Mikaela, and asked, "They call him Quinny?" Then I looked to Danny. "Is your last name Quinn?"

"Get him out of here," Danny said as he stood up, pulling up Mikaela by the hand, and pulling her to the side so that the big dude had a clear path to me.

While the bouncer was grabbing me by the arm, saying, "Let's go," at first, I didn't resist. I just asked Mikaela again, "Do the police know they call him Quinny?"

"C'mon," the doorman yanked harder.

Now I was pulling my arm back, and the next question cost me a hand-shaped bruise on my inner bicep: “Did you tell them he’s Q.?”

“Got nothing to say to you,” Quinn said, emphasizing his last word, “*creep*.” I felt it deep, but I didn’t lip-off in return. Not yet. Quinn continued to his workmate, “Get him the fuck out of here.”

I’m a little small, but I can be quick and slippery. It’s what made me a sneaky point guard in high school. So, I acted like I was going along with the big guy, let my arm un-tense for a moment, and waited to feel his grip loosen in response. As soon as it did, I ripped out of his hand and went back at Quinn, standing and yelling right in his face so everyone would hear, “You’re not Danny, you’re Q. Cops are looking for Q. Are you a suspect, bro? You’re a suspect, *aren’t you bro?* Who’s the fucking creep, bro?”

Then a bear hug from behind lifted me off my feet. I was defenceless. And by the look on Quinn’s face, and after embarrassing him at work in front of everyone, I thought for sure he was going to take a free shot at my face. I could see he wanted to.

But he didn’t. Instead, he turned to the wall and punched it. His towel flew off his shoulder, and he immediately grabbed his punching-hand with his other and crumbled to his knees in pain.

The last thing I saw before the bouncer literally turned and carried me out of the bar was Quinn doubled over and Mikaela speaking softly into his ear, rubbing his shoulder blade.

Being-For as Following After: Desire as Love

After passing ‘it’ on to several strangers, Jay returns to the safety of her home and friends, retreating to her bedroom to be alone. There is a knock at her door. She opens it and lets in Paul—a younger, adoring friend who’s been helping her all along. She closes the door behind them and secures it with a chair under its knob. They sit down together on the floor beside her bed.

Jay says, “It’s going to get here sooner or later.”

Paul responds timidly, “You could pass it on. You did once.”

She says, “Shouldn’t have.”

Paul stutters, “I could....”

Jay looks him in the eyes and says, “No.”

About this scene, Chris wrote, “Jay draws a line between sex as a physical act and her love for Paul.”⁵⁷ Her affections grow for Paul throughout the film, but she does not want to give ‘it’ to him because she cares for him too much. This illustrates “her agency to distinguish between her body and the meaning she gives to its acts.”⁵⁸ But it also expresses “the difference in significance between those she has already invited to touch her and Paul who, out of love, she denies.”⁵⁹ This shows the boundary between what Paul means to her and everyone else—“the difference between what she shares with him and the rest of the world.”⁶⁰ Despite the rejection, he has always, as he says, “liked” her. And although he can’t see ‘it,’ he continues to “follow after her unto the rest of the world, so he can help build obstacles between her and the thing.”⁶¹ This is “desire *as* wanting the world for the other” or—for short, “*following after*”—in the following way.⁶²

Paul provides a safe place for Jay; from which she can leave the bedroom and go wherever she needs to go. He will follow after her, seeking to build obstacles between the thing and Jay, trying to slow it down so she can escape. Like this, the self also frees the special other for “*the rest of the world*—the phrase for that which is excluded from intimacy, but which its exclusivity implies.”⁶³ Of course, Chris did not mean the self seeks to pass ‘it’ on to strangers as Jay must, nor that Paul has to build literal obstructions between it and her. For Chris, these themes represent the way “the self

⁵⁷ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

gives a place for the other to transcend unto the ordinary as the field where the self will build the conditions for this other's meaningful life."⁶⁴ It builds "by expressing through things, words, and actions that this other is *in* the ordinary, but not *of* the ordinary."⁶⁵ On this point, she quoted Holocaust survivor and psychotherapist Viktor Frankl when he wrote,

No one can be fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By his love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.⁶⁶

Desire as following after, as being-for the other—in short, as love—enables the self to see 'more' in the special other than others can see. For through intimacy, "the self knows the other in the depths of its irreplaceable life such that this other is affirmed and addressed as a condition for the self's relation to the depths of its own being and truth."⁶⁷ And "recognizing and knowing this other as the ground of one's own self-transcendence unto the rest of the world" amounts to "freeing this other *for* the rest of the world to which, in its depths, the self transcends *as following after*."⁶⁸ The invaluable other takes priority in terms of who gives who the world. But intimacy still allows the self "to enable the other to become who they are within the ordinary."⁶⁹ 'Becoming who they are' is to be understood as *not being of the ordinary*. For in building, the self preserves the other's participation in the invaluable. Following after as love enables the other to become who they truly are.

Like Paul, who continues to accompany Jay, the self also follows after the other *unto the rest of the world*. For "its desire for the other has been sparked and drawn forth by them."⁷⁰ And so, it too

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid; Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, 134.

⁶⁷ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

crosses the line between intimacy and the ordinary. Yet again, like Paul and the rest of the friends who construct barriers between ‘it’ and Jay, the self is not merely along for the ride.

In a harebrained scheme to defeat ‘the thing,’ Jay, Paul, and the others lure it into an indoor swimming pool after hours. Jay stands in the water, waiting for it to come through the entrance, while the others position themselves along the concrete edges. At the feet of her friends are numerous plugged-in, electrical devices: lamps, toasters, TVs, blenders, and irons. They plan to throw these in the water once Jay hops out of the pool, and the thing is still swimming after her, electrocuting and killing it. Nothing goes right. When it shows up, only Jay can see it. And it doesn’t jump into the pool but instead starts picking up the appliances and throwing them at her in the water.

Like her friends, the self crosses over into the ordinary to build the conditions of love within it, thereby limiting the everyday and “transforming parts of it into an expression of *the one* who brings everyone together.”⁷¹ Following after “gives *back* the world to this other as the place where they can express who they are.”⁷² But at the same time, while the other is existing in the ordinary, the self is challenged to continue to build “a metaphysical distance of meaning between this other and the rest of the world.”⁷³ This “span of disparate meaning” frees this special someone for the ordinary world “without diminishing their affirmed and addressed being.”⁷⁴ Yet, still ‘it’ follows.

The household items Jay’s friends have lined up along the edges of the pool “are expressions of their love for her.”⁷⁵ And while these things “slow it down in its direct path towards her,” they do not stop it.⁷⁶ Instead, they “enrage” it.⁷⁷ Chris explained, “*It* does not come for the ephemera, but for that which the ephemera symbolize. ‘It’ comes through *das Ding* towards the one who the friends

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

gather around.”⁷⁸ “‘It’ (*es*) gives (*gibt*),” she continued, “only insofar as it provides *the occasion* not for some ‘thing’—not even the most durable—but *someone* that gathers a world.”⁷⁹ It remains for those that love this person to ever set up things, actions, and words to hinder ‘it’ from diminishing their meaning. But they must be ever vigilant. For it will ever follow even through these things they set up to hinder it.

‘It’ (*es*) has not given to Paul his love for Jay. Nor is that which has brought them together, precisely speaking, the it (*es*) of this predicament they find themselves within. The shape-shifting issue they mutually address, what “some might designate in the old German words such as *thing* or *dinc*,”⁸⁰ understood as “an affair or matter of pertinence,”⁸¹ this matter is “perhaps the occasion for but not the true origin for their being together.”⁸²

For Paul ‘who has always liked Jay,’ neither ‘it’ nor any thing sparks and draws forth his desire for her. It is *she* who is “the point of orientation in his unfolding world.”⁸³

She brings him and their friends together. She gives the stakes to the dilemma they find themselves within. And she relativizes the meaning of every *thing* that stands between ‘it’ and her.⁸⁴

Jay is not an ‘object’ of Paul’s intentional act, constituted by his constituting subjectivity. For “he receives his place in the world *from* her.”⁸⁵ Nor is she simply a mortal given to him by ‘it’—even through the things that protect her from it. *She* is the one that “*initiates* his being in the world.”⁸⁶ Through her own self-transcending being she discloses the world as the place where it follows her, and where he finds himself exposed to the danger it poses *through* the desire she evokes from him.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 172.

⁸² Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

She is *a priori*, “the one who comes before.”⁸⁷ But not because she is elder. For Paul, as for the self, regardless of age or seniority, a special other is *a priori* in the order of truth and the various levels of meaningful being. His self-transcendence into the world is opened up and drawn forth by her.

Conclusion: Desire and Loneliness

French existential philosopher Albert Camus once wrote in a personal correspondence with his mistress, Maria Casares, “I know there is, in everyone, a part of loneliness that no one can reach. This is the part I respect the most, and when it comes to you, I have never tried to touch nor annex it. But in all the rest, I also know that there is not one of your pains or joys that I cannot share.”⁸⁸

Chris would agree. Because the self’s being as desire is correlated with the ordinary world as a field that *this other gives to it*, its own selfhood as a self-transcendent being is always already interrupted by a gap between the invaluable and the world the other gives. There is never a complete compatibility between the world of general others and the intimacy shared with a loved one. Desire for this special someone follows this other into a world that does not match or correspond to desire’s fundamental meaning. Desire wants this world to be the place that expresses this other’s invaluable being. But because both the self and the other are also always general others amongst general others, the world cannot accommodate what desire wants. Being and the world will never fully match either what the self wants for the other, nor the deepest level of the self’s being as following after. There is no onto-soteriological denouement to this dilemma in Chris’s thought. There is just the disparity in the self’s own sense of itself between what it can give and what being gives. And while this gap between what the self wants and what the world can accommodate is the condition of possibility for desire’s perpetually unfulfilled nature, it is also felt as separation between oneself and the other who draws it

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Albert Camus and Maria Casarès, *Correspondence (1944-1959)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), December 14th, 1949.

forth. Chris thought the self feels itself in this gap as a metaphysical loneliness—one which love does not extinguish but deepens. For the self finds itself in a striving after the other towards a closeness with them that the very conditions of being perpetually undermine. The self is in a world that will never adequately correspond to the self's deepest meaning. And inhabiting this gap between itself and the world, it feels itself in the loneliness of an unbridgeable distance—even from those it holds most dear *in* the world.

But there is also another complicating factor that deepens this predicament. Through following after the other, 'it' also follows after them too. The special other draws the self forth unto the world, thereby exposing the self to 'it.' Yet in following after, desire also becomes a vehicle through which 'it' can follow after this other. "It," Chris wrote, "follows the other through the self's desire for them."⁸⁹ The self "exposes them to 'it' *in one's potential to neglect building the conditions of love for them.*"⁹⁰ This vulnerability imposed by the self's transcendence "unto the rest of the world is not, truly speaking (that is in the order of truth), exposure to death."⁹¹ It is "susceptibility to the worst—a living death."⁹² Chris here quoted German filmmaker Werner Herzog's vampire, Nosferatu. In a scene where he looks longingly upon a young woman he at once wants to love and prey upon, he says, "Death is not the worst." Chris explained, the worst is rather "a desire that feeds upon and, thereby, undermines that which it longs for."⁹³ 'It' is the self's ability, either as a self or a special other, to lose its existential capacity to recognize its own neglectfulness and the way this undermines that other's ability to be itself in the world. In other words, it is the self's facility to introduce the abyss of 'it' into desire's distance between itself and the other. This 'it' is not the self *per se*, nor literal harm or death, but the self's capacity to expose the other to a loss before death. One that is both temporally

⁸⁹ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

and ontologically prior since it betrays and occludes the depths of the invaluable for both the self and special other.

* * *

After the big guy threw me out of Rafferty's, I went back to my hotel to get my car, then went straight to the police station. Partly, I needed to tell them what I learned about Danny Quinn. But I was also still defensive and angry because he called me out in front of Mikaela. I wanted to hurt him like his words hurt me. I wanted to show Mikaela that he wasn't who he was pretending to be. I wanted the police to turn their suspicions from me to him.

Detective Avery, again wearing a tie that went too far below his buckle, received me in the box with a recorder, folder, and pen, just like he had before, but this time, without Sergeant Fuller. I told him about Danny's nickname at work and how Liam covered for him the night Chris disappeared. He didn't seem impressed.

"That's it?" he asked.

I was disappointed with his reaction and a little confused. And then I was really caught off guard by what he said next. "If that's all, Mr. Errington, I was about to call you in, as new evidence has come to light. I'd like to ask you a few more questions—just following up on our last discussion."

I agreed, and although he didn't say this in so many words, I discovered during this interview that the police were going to formally label me a suspect.

He told me they found videos of Chris when she was alone and unaware that I was watching her, and also clips of her and Danny at Rafferty's the night I followed her. That wasn't a surprise to me, and I wasn't that worried about it. I had already told them about my suspicions and activities back then—why we ultimately broke up.

It was the internet thing that really began weighing on me.

The police techs contacted my service provider and requested a log of my online activities and locations for the periods both before and after Chris went missing. They discovered that the night she disappeared, there was a 14-hour window from around 6 PM that Sunday to 8 AM the next morning with no internet activity on either my phone or computer.

He said my calendar app, and I later confirmed this through the cloud, was empty for that day, so he wanted me to confirm once again that I didn't have any alibis for that day and evening. I still couldn't.

It's not unusual for me to take Sundays off and unplug. I go for long walks, and when I get home, instead of opening my laptop and seeing all my words in front of me, I binge-watch a TV series on my flatscreen. Make a home cooked meal. Then I pass out.

That's what I was doing that night. I'm sure of it.

But as my lawyer explained later, the police now had motive, evidence of prior stalking behaviour, and opportunity. They'd point to the 'convenience' of not having an alibi and then show the videos. And they'd use them to call into question my character, portraying me as a jealous ex-boyfriend.

Even at the time, I knew it wasn't good. So when I finally left the station, I was discouraged and tired. But the last thing I wanted was to be alone in my motel room.

I hadn't smoked since I returned from Europe several years earlier. That night felt like a good time to start again. So I picked up some cigarettes from a store along with a six-pack of beer, and went to look for a place to sit and think about what I would do next.

Chapter 5: Destruction Loops

Time-space, Ghosting, and Desire's History

*It's your fault
When your pride grows thicker than your skin
It's burning up like oxygen
As the rhythm of your body's overthrown
And you overdo it, everybody knows
She's got a glare in her eyes
And she makes everything she touches turn to stone
Used all the things that you made up
In your mind to get you home
When you finally reach the place
And realize there's nothing there*

*In your heart, in your mind
Between the walls that you had made
Between the thoughts you've created*

—The Franklin Electric, "In Your Heart"

Introduction: Before Silence

The night before Chris broke up with me was the night I followed her and saw her and Danny in the window of Rafferty's.

I would've continued following them, but I lost them when they left the bar and grabbed a cab out front. Yet I still wanted to confront her, so I drove back to her house, sat in my car, and waited for her to return home.

With fogged up windows and music playing softly in the background, memories from my youth kept looping in my mind.

* * *

As far back as I can remember, they had always fought. But when I was really young, before I was even in preschool, I hadn't yet learned to stay out of it.

One morning, they faced off at the kitchen counter, arms crossed, lipping off back and forth. Karyn, my older half-sister my mom had before she met my dad, had already retreated to her room and closed the door.

When I interrupted their bickering, I was repeating a line I heard on a Saturday morning kid show. I thought it would turn out for me as well as it did for the spunky cartoon character.

Looking up at them from knee level, I threw up my pointing, jellybean-sized finger, and yelled, "You're both wrong!"

There *was* a pause as they looked down at me, word struck. But it didn't last as long as on TV. And their faces didn't soften with visible blue tears welling up in their eyes, ashamed of themselves, as they looked at what they were doing to their only son. And the dad's real-life version didn't put a hand on the mom's shoulder to comfort her, because she didn't have any tears to cover with both of her palms.

I was already looking forward to the next scene at a stone-studded picnic table, sitting with mom, dad, and Karyn, while I enjoyed pink and blue bubble gum ice cream in a waffle cone too big for a child my age.

But my finger was still raised at them when, two beats later, as if they rehearsed, they both yelled back in unison, "*Shut up!*"

That was the day I learned I needed to protect myself from those I loved. I needed more than good intentions and a sense of moral authority. I needed a force field.

If you don't say too much if you hide what you're thinking and how you're feeling, people that are supposed to care for you can't use your words and feelings against you. They can't use your love against you.

You can hide from that vulnerability.

That day, silence became both my shield and my weapon.

* * *

Perhaps the most common way to think about time and space in the Western world is to “liken them to empty containers with things and people existing inside them.”¹ Space, from this viewpoint, is like a massive box. And time like a series of such boxes in a row—either the same one, or a column of them, shuffling from present to past, and future to present. Stars, planets, mountains, trees, velociraptors, sparrows, and people exist or live their lives, from generation to generation, inside these otherwise empty containers. In this way of thinking, time is just another coordinate of space, its fourth dimension, which establishes (at least minimally) the difference between the same place at different points along a timeline. Yesterday's bus-stop is not the exact same bus-stop today, nor is yesterday's void the exact same void today. Thinking of time as a coordinate of space is close to what we nowadays call, in a loose and inexact way, space-time—this four-dimensional, ‘cosmic fabric’ of which time is just one measurement added to the manifold of space. Yet when Chris talked about time-space, she did not mean space-time. She meant “the origin of *the meaningfulness* of time and space.”² Such that, “there could first of all be *a meaningful difference* between the presence and absence of a special other.”³

¹ Christina Weston, “Destruction Loops: Ghosting, Time, and William Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops*” (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2014), typescript.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

She built upon the idea of time-space she received from Heidegger, who showed in both his early and later work that the predominant view of time and space, which is closer to space-time, emerged from a theoretical demeanour, informed by the natural sciences.⁴ In *Being and Time*, for instance, Heidegger shows that the scientific approach to things abstracts away from circumspective concern (*i.e.*, pragmatic dealings). It does so according to the mathematical projection or mathematical ‘blueprinting’ of nature and the physical universe.⁵ From this point of view, a hammer’s heaviness becomes, in our mind’s eye, so to speak, a unit of mass occupying a position in abstract space with a certain quantified weight.⁶ Its appropriateness or inappropriateness for a particular job becomes irrelevant. Heidegger says that in this way, we “overlook not only the tool-character of the entity we encounter, but also something that belongs to any ready-to-hand equipment: its place.”⁷ Its ‘place,’ or its relationality within a context of significance with other tools, becomes “a matter of indifference,” meaning that it “becomes a spatio-temporal position, a ‘world-point,’ which is in no way distinguished from any other.”⁸ In this way, space and time have come to be understood like abstract, empty containers.

Heidegger thinks there is a form of temporality and spatiality more original than these derived notions. In his later thought, this can be seen in the way he speaks of *das Ding*. Unlike Immanuel Kant’s thing-in-itself, Heidegger’s thing is not at first an “unknown X” that, through the synthesis of intuition and understanding, comes to have represented “perceptual properties” and a relational

⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, ¶69(b); Heidegger, *Poetry*, 151-154; Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 11-14; Martin Heidegger, “Art and Space,” *Man and World* 6, (1973): 3-8. The following characterization of this perspective follows the general outlines of Heidegger’s critique of space and time articulated in theoretical, scientific, and technical spheres of exact measurement and mastery. A pointed quote from Heidegger’s “Time and Being:” “Time-space as commonly understood, in the sense of the distance measured between two time-points, is the result of time calculation. In this calculation, time represented as a line and parameter and thus one-dimensional is measured out in terms of numbers. The dimensionality of time, thought as the succession of a sequence of nows, is borrowed from the representation of three-dimensional space,” 14.

⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 413-414.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 413.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

context “read into it.”⁹ *Das Ding* first gathers together the world, time and space. Only afterwards does a theoretical, scientific, or technical demeanour abstract away from the “wealth of relations” it first gives.¹⁰

Chris followed Heidegger in this line of thought, distinguishing between “abstract space-time” and “sensuous time-space.”¹¹ The former referred to the ordinary conception of time, where points and coordinates are, as Heidegger says, “in no way distinguished from any other.”¹² Sensuous time-space “lays the foundation” for abstract space-time as it is a world-giving dimension.¹³ The latter abstracts away from former. Yet for Chris, the most profound meaning of sensuous time-space or “given time” emerges not so much from things, but from a special other.¹⁴ This encounter, and “its *articulated* meaningfulness—the invaluable—” first opens up the difference between the ordinary and the expressive things that compose the world. The self finds itself in sensuous time “in the wake of a special other, whom it follows after unto the rest of the world.”¹⁵ And as it follows the other into the ordinary, it finds itself with the capacity to build. To build is “to express in actions, words, or things the invaluable other who first orients the self to the rest of the world.”¹⁶ Time-space is not just sensuous, but “meaning-laden space and time given by the special other.”¹⁷ Its significance “makes possible the meaningfulness or lack thereof of *all given times and places*.”¹⁸

⁹ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 151.

¹⁰ Heidegger, *On Time*, 38.

¹¹ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

¹² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 413.

¹³ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

¹⁴ I am aware that French philosopher Jacques Derrida also used this term given time and the term following after. Chris was also aware of this difference, but to my knowledge she never wrote about Derrida’s work or his usage of these terms. A comparison between Chris’s thought and Derrida’s is beyond the scope of this memoir, but it may provide a fruitful conversation in the future.

¹⁵ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

As the arrival of the other opens up the self to the invaluable, the expressive, and the ordinary, it also “puts desire on a path of truth or untruth.”¹⁹ The other “expands the being of the self to have valence” for a depth of meaning in time and space.²⁰ But this other also thereby exposes the self *to itself* in such a way that it “can resist the change this other gives.”²¹ For the meaning which orients desire towards itself, the other, and the rest of the world is not ‘in time and space.’ It is not an inner-temporal and inner-spatial thing that naturally changes along with everyday circumstances. Its meaning “has emerged *from* time and space (the arrival of another), but it is not *in* time and space.”²² This metaphysical character of time can *overcomplicate* (or, like the added associations of dysfunctional things, add a complicating layer over) desire’s current orientation towards the loved one. For instead of following after *this* other into the future *they* give, it may follow after them from out of its *history with past special others*. Desire’s truthful and untruthful modes, *constancy* and *possessiveness*, are both oriented to “the past *as such*—the history of following after special others carried into every moment.”²³ But while the constancy of love allows *this* other to open up “the future *as such*—the possibility of building in every moment—thereby reframing the self’s past,” possessiveness closes *this* other’s capacity to reorient the self to its past.²⁴ Desire then becomes “a ghost of its history as it gets stuck in the time-loops of the past *per se* despite how things change along the way.”²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

The Night my Father Lost

It was in grade six. After-school ball went late that day, and by the time I got back to our apartment, Karyn had already closed her bedroom door. My parents had been drinking while watching TV. I was starving, so I went to the kitchen. But I could still hear them in the living room, going back and forth like they were chucking darts at one another.

I was acclimatized to both their usual coldness and also the heat when they fought. They'd usually yell, insult one another, and throw stuff around. It would all predictably end with my dad slamming the front door on his way to the bar, and my mom on the phone giving attitude to the building manager, Dean, when he called about the neighbours' newest noise complaints. This time, it wasn't as dramatic. It would've been easy to miss, and I almost did as I was busy scraping the sides of a pot for ketchup-doused mac n' cheese.

She was ridiculing his burnt nose again. She never let him hear the end of it. The poor man. No matter how high SPF he wore hunched over on all fours, eight hours a day, all week troweling through the twine and floss of begonia and pansy root, to lay or repair sprinkler lines in city garden and park beds, he couldn't escape paying for her rhinestone nail art or her new pink velour tracksuit, without her also telling him that his red, peeling nose was "gross."

My dad walked over to the apartment door and opened it. Our door didn't open into a hallway, but onto the building's second floor walkway, which overlooked the parking lot below. Without taking his eyes off my mom sitting on the couch, he stood under the doorframe and pulled out a cigarette. I could smell the smoke wafting in on the cool breeze as he stood there, not yelling, but clearly at the end of his patience with my mom. And I'll never forget my mother's reaction to what he then said to her.

“Well,” dad said, “ya know what Brianne, ya know *what?*” He threw his just-lit cigarette out the door over the railing to add emphasis. “I’ve *never* really loved you anyway.”

He had said mean things before, but I had never heard him say something so harsh. He’d go back and forth with her, but it never seemed like he didn’t love her—the total opposite.

He had always defended her; from his brother and buddies who kept telling him she wasn’t worth it, to leave her and take me with him; from the strata notices about mounting complaints of the skunky smell coming from our apartment; from Mr. Peterson when he came upstairs and knocked on our door to have a man-to-man conversation with my dad about the lipstick covered butts and filters falling on Mrs. Peterson’s Lincoln Town Car. Everyone knew he loved her. He wanted to be with her. He might not have known how to show it, but everyone knew it. The reason he *did* argue with her so much was *because* he loved her so much, because he was frustrated by how much he still wanted her when she seemed to care so little for him.

So that night, standing in the doorway, I think he was taking a chance, throwing down his last bluff, trying to wrestle back not just his self-dignity but also his control over their relationship by saying something he didn’t mean. And I think he really thought he’d get a different reaction, one more similar to her tantrums when he threatened to cut off her allowance.

But he lost that night, and he knew it too when as soon as he finished saying he never loved her, she just started laughing at him.

He walked out, leaving the door gaping behind him.

Given Time: Sensuous Time-Space

Andy Goldsworthy is a Scottish land artist whose work puts the drama of time and transience on display. He often uses found materials from the natural environment, and spends hours, days, months building structures that will fall apart in the elements, while documenting the results in

photography or film. For one work, he spent an early winter morning, before sunrise, building an intricate ice statue made of icicles he melded together with his breath. It began melting shortly after the sun rose. On a calm afternoon with heavy winds in the forecast, he constructed an ornate web of twigs and leaves hanging from a tree branch. When the wind picked up, it blew it apart. For a Holocaust memorial installation in Washington, D.C., he has planted saplings in boulder-like pots with a hole too small for them. As their trunks expand, they will slowly, inevitably suffocate on their own growth.

For one of his most iconic works, which he iterates in different places on different beaches, he will build a stone cairn below the high tide line. As the waters come in, they begin to envelop it, softening the sand around it, slapping against it, then swallowing it up. He builds these often, and while one might survive the first advance and remain standing once the waves recede, the seas will eventually topple it.

In the documentary *Rivers and Tides*, Goldsworthy reflects on the way his work sometimes baffles people who can't understand why he creates things like the cairn to be wrecked. He says,

... I haven't simply made the piece to be destroyed. The work has been given to the sea as a gift. And the sea has taken the work and made more of it than I could've ever hoped for.

When he offers his works to the rising sun, the winds, and the waves, the elements not only have the opportunity to show their own kind of agency, but they also display what we usually take for granted, which often remains hidden. Not just the “vibrant” activity of so-called inanimate things,²⁶ but also “the passage of time *in and through them*.”²⁷ They transform the artist's work into symbols that

²⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁷ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

express something the artist could not represent in the pieces themselves. “They, and not he, appoint the works,” Chris wrote, “to exhibit *given time*.”²⁸

A melting statue, a fragile structure blown to pieces by the wind, a stack of rocks undermined and beaten by the incoming tide *do not show* abstract space and time. Goldsworthy’s works may display something that is usually hidden because it is so basic and obvious. But they do not unveil this as “an empty, barren field, existing ‘out there’ like the universe’s grid-paper that only afterwards comes to have things like oceans, clouds, structures and viewpoints drawn and mapped onto it.”²⁹ Likewise, when Chris wrote, in a fairly abstract way, that space and time are:

fields of transcendence, space being the lack of immanence between things, the openness between them, so that they can move towards or away from each other; and time being the lack of instantaneous simultaneity between them, such that past may remain past, future future, and the present a transcending away from past and towards future...³⁰

she did not mean that time-space is something existing ‘out there’ apart from the things existing ‘inside it.’ Space and time are not themselves things, they are the names we give to the most general relationships between things. Abstract space-time is “an abstraction *away from* the things that *give* time and space in a sensuous, living way.”³¹ It is “a theoretical superstructure” imposed upon the original experience of given time.³² Things as concrete as the elements and Goldsworthy’s artworks constitute the materiality of time-space. They *give* it. But they give it as a material landscape of potential that unfolds *through* time, “the existential circumference of which is anticipated in the understanding of self-transcendence.”³³ From the materiality of time-space emerges the meaning of time-space, which “outstrips any *de facto* material situation and makes possible the meaningfulness

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

of all given times and places.”³⁴ And so Goldsworthy’s work displays not just transience *per se*, but the transience of time-space—“the anticipated meaning of the loss of those things that give meaning to the world of everyday life.”³⁵

Because of this, Chris does not present the self as existing within space and time *before* its encounter with either things or special others. This would be to present it in the manner of a constituting subject instead of one that *finds itself in being exposed*. The self is instead constituted by the sensuous time of the world that things and others give to it. As with the viewer of Goldsworthy’s artworks, in given time-space, the self finds itself existing *after* that which gives it time and space. And like Heidegger’s mortal, it too finds itself in a world, which an ancient Greek temple, Van Gogh’s “A Pair of Shoes,” bridges, cabins, and jugs—amongst many other things—have *gathered together*.³⁶ Yet, for Chris, all of this is only an *expression* of the deepest level of given time. She wrote, “time and space become coincident with their highest meaning when they are shown to be given to the self by a special other.”³⁷ Self-transcendence unto the world proceeds *in and through* following after ‘into’ the time and space that another has opened up for it. Desire “finds itself constituted in being-for the other.”³⁸ And *as* this other is the enabling condition for the transcendence of the self in its deepest sense, desire follows after, in, and through them unto the time and space of the world.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry*.

³⁷ Weston, “Destruction Loops.” In the context of this passage, she was playing with the double meaning of coincident, emphasizing it does not necessarily imply temporal and spatial location, but an agreement of meaningfulness. Furthermore, the mixture of metaphors between deepest and highest may confuse the reader. This was an artifact of the way Chris understood the special other in terms of a non-vicious hermeneutic circle (a departure-return dynamic). The special other was the origin of the meaningfulness of the world. They ground its meaningfulness in the sense that they open up the possibility of its purpose for the self. But through the circuitous route of the ordinary, through which the self follows after, the special other is also the goal. From the perspective of the self, they are *who* the ordinary is for. They ground such meaning and therefore are the origin of the possibility of its meaningfulness (its deepest possibility for purposiveness). But they are also, from the perspective of the journey from untruth to truth, the *telos* to be reached and therefore the highest meaning for ‘it all.’ This logic can also be found in classical thought where the first cause is also the final cause or when Christianity presents God as the Alpha and the Omega.

³⁸ Ibid.

“Every time you go away...”

My father left us on a sweltering August day. Karyn had just moved away for college the week before, and I was still only 13, looking forward to grade 8 tryouts. After practicing 3-pointers that afternoon, I returned home to find all my dad’s stuff packed in the back of his friend Ray’s pickup. My mom said dad was waiting for me in my room.

Back then, he still had a thin, chestnut-coloured moustache he’d rub his fingers on to concentrate as he talked. His dark, brown hair was slicked back, sprayed with super stronghold, and he wore the royal blue tracksuit with amber stripes running down the sleeves and pant-legs that Karyn and I bought for his birthday.

In my Supersonic green and yellow, I sat on my bed beside him. He didn’t ask anything of me, and I didn’t say anything. He just touched his moustache and every so often broke the silence with different words, but still the same message: “you don’t understand how much we really love you.”

The whole time I was trying to imagine what she had done to finally make him leave. And I wanted to ask how he could wait for his stepdaughter to graduate, but not his only son... his only child for that matter. But I didn’t.

I had always taken his side. *Always*. But after that, I couldn’t talk to him. I even refused to get on the phone with him on my 16th when he called to wish me a happy birthday from his apartment in Boston. My mom held up the phone to my closed door while it was on speaker. I could hear him sending me well-wishes, but I didn’t respond.

The day he was leaving us, I followed him down to the parking lot and watched him get into Ray’s truck. I was barefoot and had to stand in the shade of the apartment stairwell so that my feet wouldn’t burn on the heatwave concrete. My mother was right in front of the pick-up, smoking a spliff in her pyjama pants and a halter top. She had one pink flip-flop placed on the stop block at the head of

their parking spot with her arms crossed. She'd lift the joint to her mouth occasionally while she continued to stare at him. It was as if she was miming, "just you wait and see, Dale. You don't know how good you had it. Just you wait and see what's out there waiting for you."

Ray backed the truck out from their stall, then stopped. He gave my mom a look through his open window and turned up the stereo loud. His shot speakers crapped out, blaring as he sang along with the song, hitting my dad on the back, trying to make him join in the chorus to "Every Time You Go Away." My dad didn't play along at first, so Ray started driving towards the street. But by the time they got to the stop sign at the end of the parking lot, Ray had him howling the lyrics too.

Auden's Longing: The Lover's Body, Distance, and Closeness

Despite her misappropriation of one of its lines for a paper title, Chris loved W.H. Auden's 1940 poem, "Lullaby." Abridged, it reads:

Lay your sleeping head, my love,
Human on my faithless arm;
Time and fevers burn away
Individual beauty from
Thoughtful children, and the grave
Proves the child ephemeral:
But in my arms till break of day
Let the living creature lie,
Mortal, guilty, but to me
The entirely beautiful.

...

Beauty, midnight, vision dies:
Let the winds of dawn that blow
Softly round your dreaming head
Such a day of welcome show
Eye and knocking heart may bless,
Find the mortal world enough;
Noons of dryness see you fed
By the involuntary powers,
Nights of insult let you pass
Watched by every human love.

The lovers are not far apart but lying in bed beside one another. Yet the poet is still full of longing for him. His desire follows after his forbidden love, opening up this tender, quiet moment.

Intimacy's distance is not a separation of any measurable span. While following after, "the self discovers temporality and spatiality as the lack of immanence and immediacy between itself and its loved one."³⁹ But, Chris wrote, "The distance between them, which allows for the poet's yearning, is not the inches between their bodies, nor can the poet cross it with a hand caressing his lover's back."⁴⁰ Although following after "can manifest in seeking to be near-by and touching," it is not wholly identical with a physical movement through space, over time.⁴¹ The time-space of following after is not reducible to any given space and time of the world. It is "its deepest meaning."⁴² For it "animates and opens up" time and space as meaningful horizons—as those wherein the invaluable, the expressive, and the ordinary are "possible meanings for any given place or moment."⁴³ Following after *is* the "'movement' between these levels of meaning in given time."⁴⁴ It is the self's response to finding itself in the wake of an intimate who has opened up the difference between these tiers for its existence in the world. Time-space is emergent from given time, but in such a way that it reframes the meaning (or lack thereof) of all possible times and places.

A special other unleashes the self for this 'motion' because the special other is ultimately unattainable. Chris said, "... corresponding to the unattainable nature of the special other is desire's perpetual longing."⁴⁵ She also called this "desire's inability to have."⁴⁶ This inability to have (as the result of the other's unattainable nature) offers desire its capacity to long, yearn, and want *for* the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Weston, "Destruction Loops."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

other. But the distance through which longing must reach towards the other is neither, strictly speaking, a material nor cultural barrier.

In “Lullaby,” which many believe Auden wrote for his gay lover, Christopher Isherwood, this “inability to have coincided with social taboos.”⁴⁷ Cases like these may “present the occasion” for the distance of intimacy.⁴⁸ But, metaphysically speaking, “there is no case where overcoming any physical distance or unjust restrictions would amount to *having* the other.”⁴⁹ No self can have another like it can have a thing. It cannot because the other is a self-transcending being who cannot be contained even by an intimate moment. The inability to have reflects “a metaphysical distance between the self and the other.”⁵⁰ And the ‘separation’ of this distance, again, “cannot be closed by sharing the same sheets.”⁵¹ From the perspective of the self, this distance that allows for its desire results from the way the other, within itself, is “both a special other for other loved ones and a general other for everyone else.”⁵² They are “split” between their invaluable and ordinary meaning in the world.⁵³ Time-space, the most encompassing horizon of a meaningful life in the world, opens up “*through* the inability to have the other who transcends beyond intimacy unto the rest of the world.”⁵⁴ The distance over which desire longs, yearns, and wants for them is “impossible to cross.”⁵⁵ For it wants the time and space of the ordinary world to express that other’s invaluable person.⁵⁶ But as a sphere of ordinary significance, “the entire or most encompassing field of temporal-spatial life wherein the self, its special others, and everyone else lives their lives—*it cannot accommodate this.*”⁵⁷

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Intimacy's distance and closeness, from which and for which desire follows after, can be seen not so much in Auden's longing for his lover's body, but more so in "his aching benediction, his blessings and hopes *for* his sleeping lover."⁵⁸ The loved one's body "indeed gives sensuous time."⁵⁹ But his lover's temporal-spatial being is not contained within the space of his body's presence. Even as they lay together, "the candlelit sheets, the darkened bedroom, and the coming dawn shedding light on the bohemian apartment above the streets," the space they inhabit and the place they give to one another "is already 'in' a larger world."⁶⁰ Even though he sleeps, his embodiment is already transcending away. Borrowing a term from Heideggerian influenced psychology, Chris wrote, "the lover is already bodying-forth beyond the bed."⁶¹ And while the time and space of the world his body gives is indeed physical, the meaning of this giving "is really *more than physical* as it offers a 'point' of significance around which time and space can unfold as meaningful, meaningless, relevant, or irrelevant, and all the shades between."⁶²

For the poet, the lover's self-transcending being opens up the horizon of the ordinary world as a field that cannot contain the meaningfulness of the lover himself. The closeness and distance of intimacy, then, are not to be understood as literal presence and absence. "These are only metaphors."⁶³ The poet's longing for the other transcends unto the *whole* world, and all possible places and moments—regardless of whether or not he is physically there or gone. For in transcending himself, the poet finds himself following after the other into "*an ordinary world* that does not adequately express the meaningfulness the lover gives."⁶⁴ The poet responds, following after with

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid; Medard Boss, *Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology*, (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1979), 102-103. Boss used this term to distinguish between a natural scientific view of the body as an enclosed physical object and an existential view of the body, which is an inherently self-transcending materiality through which the self transcends unto the world.

⁶² Weston, "Destruction Loops."

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

benedictions that articulate the distance of the world and the longing for its capacity to express his closeness with him. His desire “hails the world for his loved one” as “a sphere where he can want *for* his lover: where ‘nights of insult will pass,’ and ‘winds of dawn will blow softly around his sleeping head’ under the ‘safekeeping of all those who truly know how to love.’”⁶⁵ In his hope and desire for his lover, the poet comes to also be a special other to the lover, affirming him and addressing him, providing a safe place for the other’s movement out unto rest of the world. The poet’s following after *is* this freeing of the other for the rest of the world—regardless of the world’s inadequacy to his lover’s being. For the lover follows after to build expressions of the loved one’s invaluable nature in the ordinary things of this world.

The “unattainable distance” of longing “stems from the unclosable difference between the invaluable and the ordinary.”⁶⁶ And the “impossible closeness” that desire wants “is for the rest of the world to be a place that always expresses that other’s invaluable being.”⁶⁷ Because the world contains disparate levels of meaning, and because it will never fully reciprocate, the self is ultimately left with the task of making this transformation for the other on its own.

* * *

Once my dad and Ray were out of sight, I followed my mom back to the apartment and watched her throw herself onto her spot of the couch where our only fan was always pointing. She picked up the stereo remote, and I heard multi-disc trays rotating. I turned my back on her to go to my room. When I got under my door frame, I flinched from a smash on the wall just to my right. I looked down to the floor: by my feet two generic yellow AAAs, a battery cover, and the remote she had just used were scattered on our brown carpet.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

“Look,” she said, using her joint between two fingers to point to where his speakers used to be. “Empty space... just like him.”

I wanted to say something to damage her. But I didn't want her to know she could hurt me by degrading him. And I also knew that if I saved it for a time when she really needed me, I could make it hurt a lot more. So, I held it in. But I still needed to vent, so I left the apartment.

As I was rushing out the front door, I remember her saying, “Yeah, you go ahead and run away too.”

The back of our apartment building had an emergency stairwell that was always empty. Nobody ever used it because it led nowhere, other than a door opening onto a high wooden fence and a T-junction going in both directions to the parking lot at the front of the building. The front stairs could take you there quicker. To everyone but the youth of the building, the back stairs were an abandoned and forgotten place.

A month or so prior, the apartment building had renovations, but the property management cheaped-out the wrong contractors before they were finished. Us kids had already torn down all of the poly-sheets they left hanging from green painter's tape. But most of us had resisted the temptation to deface the still exposed drywall.

Just a few days before my dad left, the Petersons' grandson, David, came to stay with them while his mom was on a work trip. He was the first one to dare. The day he arrived, using a sharp pencil, he carved his tag, “Mistral,” in the bottom corner of one of the unfinished walls. It was hardly noticeable, but he bragged about it.

After leaving my mom with the broken remote, I visited the backstairs. No one was there, and the drywall was still pristine... until I let out my frustration on it.

A couple of days later, I saw the notice posted in the elevator by the building's management. They explained there had been recent “vandal activity” in the back stairs and “fist-sized holes punched

through the drywall.” The perpetrator had been identified and reported to the police. But they wanted to remind residents that any further property damage would carry a hefty fine, an eviction notice, and possible criminal charges.

It didn’t name David, but we all saw him in the back of a police car and knew he had been blamed because of his tag.

An Otherworldly Arrival: Desire and its Limits

Roadside Picnic, a novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, and the inspiration behind Andrei Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker*, begins after mysterious alien spacecraft have departed from earth. World authorities have cordoned-off the surrounding areas where the massive ships touched down, as they contain priceless technologies that both governments and black-market sellers want to obtain. But like the movie adaptation, these outlawed places are also ambushed with deadly booby-traps, making the extraterrestrial treasures inside almost impossible to fetch. The narrative follows Red, a ‘stalker,’ who has become known for maneuvering through one of the zones and bringing back its prized objects. Tarkovsky’s theme of suicide helped Chris clarify the danger of confusing unfulfillable desire with fulfillable needs. And the Strugatsky brother’s premise of an “otherworldly arrival” helped her explain how a special other unleashes the self’s capacity for the expressive and the intimate.⁶⁸

Neither intimacy nor its articulated meaning, the invaluable, are physical places like the alien zones in *Roadside Picnic*. Yet, “it is still helpful to think of them as having a kind of dimensionality and bounded topology, one which has emerged because of an out of the ordinary encounter.”⁶⁹ “This boundary,” she wrote,

is not a spatial limit, but a coherence of meaning, following from the differences between the ordinary and the invaluable. And the extraordinary event that unlocks the

⁶⁸ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

dimensionality of the latter is of course not ‘first contact,’ nor the items left behind that express it, but *an unexpected encounter* with a special other.⁷⁰

Like a site that has become notable or sacred after something important happened there, the self needs to meet a special other for the invaluable to open up as a relevant mode for its self-transcendence. Before this, it only potentially—in the most ‘abstract way’—resides ‘in’ it.⁷¹ Every self holds this as an essential capacity within itself, as it is “the kind of being that has valence for this level of meaning.”⁷² But it cannot unlock it as a worldly potential for itself. It needs another to affirm and address it so that this can unfold as a potential it *exists through* in the ordinary world. The depths of truth and untruth only open up as a journey wherein the self is *at stake*, once this special other arrives.

In a different context, Chris explained this difference between essential and existential possibilities by referring to a little parable told by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his short paper, “*Immanence: A Life*.”

A disreputable man, a rogue, held in contempt by everyone, is found as he lies dying. Suddenly, those taking care of him manifest an eagerness, respect, even love, for his slightest signs of life. Everybody bustles about to save him.... But to the degree that he comes back to life, his saviors turn colder, and he becomes once again mean and crude.⁷³

With this vignette, Deleuze points to his central idea: a neutral, indefinite potential, the potential of *life itself*, or—in his terms—the virtuality of ‘a life,’ that anonymously subtends any given individuality. Chris thought that Deleuze finding something demanding respect in even the most despicable man, was “beautiful.”⁷⁴ And she did not want to undercut his point. But she also said, “the townspeople’s ability to acknowledge bare life in this man only arises *because* he has fallen ill.”⁷⁵ For them,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 28.

⁷⁴ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

honouring it only becomes a “worldly possibility or *relevant* to their lives when they find themselves in the potential to recognize it.”⁷⁶ And this only emerges because of the old rogue’s sickness. This coincidental event unlocks their capacity to fail or to measure up to that which demands respect. For an existential possibility to emerge for a self, “contingent circumstances need to unleash its involvement in that which had always been essentially possible.”⁷⁷

Desire as following after is *a priori* both as an essential and existential possibility.⁷⁸ It has both modalities. While the “unleashing encounter of an other’s arrival is contingent” and must occur in real-time, “the ‘before-ness’ of the one who desire follows after is not necessarily temporal.”⁷⁹ The self can exist in the world prior to meeting a special other. It can even be in the world without ever having met a special other.⁸⁰ But in this case, it has not then “had the occasion to *find itself at stake* in a journey of truth” between the ordinary and the invaluable.⁸¹ It can “intellectually grasp” itself *as*

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Theodore Kiesel, *The Genesis of Being and Time* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); McMullin, *Time and the Shared World*; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. These terms essential and existential possibility were Chris’s way of seeking to cut through the scholarly sedimentation that had built up over the phenomenon of essential possibility in the reception of Heidegger’s thought. As McMullin indicates with her exegesis of Heidegger, and in line with path-breaking scholarship by Kiesel about Heidegger’s novel conception of the *a priori* in his work prior to the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger’s existentials were not meant to be taken in a Kantian vein as unchanging categorial forms housed in a transcendental subject. His existentials are rather essential possibilities that are hermeneutically read off phenomena and articulated *as the possibilities through which Dasein* exists with other beings in the world. Unfortunately, the predominance of the Kantian tradition in transcendental philosophy and its hold over the heritage of terms such as *a priori* and the transcendental often seem to imply an idealist dichotomy between the conditions of possibility of experience and experience itself, between the *a priori* and the empirical. As McMullin points out (77), for those coming from an egological tradition, as was the case with Sartre’s Cartesianism, Heidegger’s terminology would then appear to reinforce the division between the abstract ontological ‘categories’ of *Being and Time* and ontic life. So much so that Sartre could then accuse Heidegger of not being able to account for ontic relations between the self and a concrete other (*Being and Nothingness*, 332–335). By developing the distinction between essential and existential possibilities, Chris was trying to show the way that concrete encounters between the self and special other unleash a more immediate participation in essential possibilities in given, contextualized worldly life—which may have previously been locked up in the self in the absence of a special other. Heidegger never put his ideas in these terms, but in general Chris would think of her articulation as being compatible with his—with the added dimension that love for the special other brings to a conception of the meaning of the self’s worldhood.

⁷⁹ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

⁸⁰ Ibid. For Chris, “Socialization is not sufficient for the presence of intimate others, since one can be socialized without intimacy.”

⁸¹ Ibid.

such.⁸² But the self's potential "to express itself as being-for *this other*; to build for someone requires an out of the ordinary arrival."⁸³ Through affirmation and address, the special other unleashes the self to find itself in a new way. It can then *find itself* as one who must not only "maintain the boundaries between the ordinary and the invaluable," but also as someone who must "ever follow after the other who has departed—metaphorically or physically."⁸⁴ Time and space now have a moment within them from which higher and deeper levels of meaning and selfhood have emerged. This is given time: "one which begins not with essential possibilities, but existential contingencies which are the conditions for the former to be relevant to a lived life."⁸⁵

Chris uses the term valence in this context and although she does not draw the analogy out in her writings (that I know of), the field of this term's origin can be helpful in explaining what she means here. Like an atom that has valence to take on a chemical bonding with other atoms, the self is necessarily being-for a special other even in the absence of a special other in its life.⁸⁶ And just like prior to bonding with these other atoms the lone atom's potentials are restricted to its current chemical form, so too for the self without a special other the relevance of *being-for* remains detached from their current worldly encounters and interactions. When another atom arrives and joins a chemical bond with the first atom, it not only makes this essential possibility immediate, it also transforms the chemical potentials of first atom itself. A special other not only unleashes the self for its essential possibilities, it also transforms the self by making these essential capacities relevant to its existential situation. It is a generative encounter because it puts the truth of the self *at stake* in its existence.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ The analogy breaks down when one considers that physical atoms have a fixed number of valences. To my knowledge, Chris never argued that the self has a limited or predetermined capacity for special others.

Selfhood thereby finds itself most deeply not just in an intersubjective world, but a world that another has first given by unexpectedly arriving. Because of this, the most basic meaning of time and space is granted “by this encounter that has happened in the ordinary world, which the ordinary world (and any abstraction that would seek to be adequate to its generality) cannot comprehend.”⁸⁷ For the self, the meaning of the past, present, and future are measured by an arrival and history with a special other. In following after, “the before-ness of the other is coincident with an actual past the self and other share together.”⁸⁸ On the one hand, “the past *as such*, does refer to this material past.” But on the other, “the past *as such* is *not* the past of yesterday, nor even transience *as such* (the passing of every moment) but the essential and existential prior-ness of the other that one follows after *in every moment*: past, present, or future.”⁸⁹ Yet, unfortunately, as we will shortly see, there is still another sense. Because the meaning of the past resides in the place special others, singular or multiple, have given the self, the self can also get lost in the past in its transcendence unto the world. And so there is another “sense of the past *as such* that overcomplicates and misleads the self either through its history with *other* special others or its history with *this* special other.”⁹⁰

In *Roadside Picnic*, there is an otherworldly arrival and departure that ignites the plot. Chris read these extraterrestrial visitors who leave earth and “go back to their intergalactic ways *as* the ‘*other-worldliness*’ of the special other.”⁹¹ In earthly terms, this is “not about aliens leaving, but about special others transcending intimacy unto the rest of the world.”⁹² Simply put, it is a metaphor for the other’s self-transcendence. And so, the departure of the alien visitors is neither about “E.T. going home,” nor is it necessarily about the special other “literally going away.”⁹³ It is the expression of the different

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

levels of meaning that the other leaves in its wake *for the self*. Meeting them, opens up the possibility “to differentiate between the ordinary and invaluable in the actual sites of the world.”⁹⁴ It “leaves” the self in the capacity “to distinguish between the ordinary and its sincere longing to transform it, setting a symbolic boundary on it to express its being-for this other.”⁹⁵ For the loved one who transcends unto the rest of the world leaves the self “in the distance between” the invaluable and the ordinary.⁹⁶ And between these two, in its perpetually unfulfilled longing for the unattainable other, “it finds itself at stake *as* either the constancy or neglect of expressing who the other is for it.”⁹⁷

The other who has already departed leaves the self with the ability to differentiate between those things that symbolize it and the other itself. This departure “leaves it with the capacity to separate *who* it longs for and *what* they have left behind.”⁹⁸ She continued:

The degree to which these things *symbolize* is also the degree to which they *expand* the passage longing must cross to remain close.... This distance must span the detour of *all that is*. For the other who unleashes the self for its disclosure to the world is always a contingent being in the ordinary. Said otherwise, the worldly or existential conditions for desire’s distance and yearning is the difference between *that which*, or strictly speaking *they who*, the expressive symbolizes and the ordinary where the self first encountered this special one.... The other transcends unto the rest of the world, and desire is the response to the way this loved one splices it open, freeing it for all these different distances of meaningful life through which it can follow after them.⁹⁹

Part of the other’s worldly being is to be a general other amongst general others. Because desire finds itself in the inability to have this unattainable other, the meaning of whose arrival underpins every physical time and place, “the self also *finds itself* in the awareness that it *cannot* make every real place and time an expression of its love.”¹⁰⁰ While it wants to limit the ordinary for the other, to truly respect the unattainable in them, it must also just let them be a ‘regular’ person in the world. In this

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

way, the self finds itself *as* an unfulfillable desire. One whose being “as desire for the other is limited by the ordinary world as the enabling and restraining field of meaning that first granted this encounter.”¹⁰¹

Our Last Night

The night I followed Chris and saw her and Danny Quinn in the window at Rafferty’s I tried to follow them. But it all happened too fast. They stood up from the table together and before I realized they were leaving, they walked out of the pub doors and hopped in a cab that was already waiting in front of the bar. I hustled out of the coffee shop, but the taxi quickly disappeared around a corner.

I got my car and for an hour or two, I drove aimlessly up and down the city streets looking for them on the sidewalk, in bar windows, and on apartment patios with millennials out for their weekly social cigarettes. But I couldn’t find her, so I drove back to her apartment and waited in my car, thinking about my past, getting more and more upset.

It was about two in the morning when her cab pulled up.

I cut her off at the front steps. Most of what happened next is a blur.

She thought I had ferried over that evening after our flurry of text messages, and so she was short with me and already getting ready to go inside without inviting me. But then I got accusatory and started asking loaded questions about her relationship with the guy she was out with that night. When she started shutting down, saying the talk was over, and turned to head up the stairs, I tried to reign her back in, telling her I saw her, “holding hands with him at the bar.”

She was already a few steps above me when I said this. Hearing it made her stop and pause with her back to me. That’s when it all clicked for her.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

She turned and looking down on me, said, “Oh my god. How did you know where I was and who I was with?” It wasn’t really a question. It was her speaking her own dawning realization that there wasn’t enough time for me to ferry over between our text messages and her drink with Danny at the bar. She was realizing what I did.

Thinking back to that night, what pains me most was that, at least for a moment, she wasn’t angry but hurt. After speaking those words, she put her hand over her mouth and looked at me with tears filling up in the corner of her eyes. Then after a brief pause, she lowered her pretty hand and just said with such tender disappointment, “Dylan.”

Her softness at that moment stopped me in every way. And I finally began to realize what I had done to her.

Without another word, I watched her mount the steps slowly and walk into her building, closing the door behind her. I didn’t say anything. I couldn’t say anything. Not because I wanted to stay silent, and not because I wanted to weaponize it, but because silence overtook me. I had betrayed her, and I could no longer address her in the way she deserved to be addressed.

* * *

After a text from her early the next morning asking to meet “in a public place,” I paid my hotel bill and met her at a café that served bitter lattes. Her demeanour had changed. She was cold and short, and she firmly explained she no longer felt comfortable with me. Our relationship was ending because she no longer trusted me. She asked me to not phone or email her anymore, to respect her wishes and her boundaries because she was sure: it was over.

I knew she meant it, and my shame again left me with very few words.

Then we parted ways.

At the time, I consoled myself thinking that if I gave her space, it would just be a ‘break.’ Soon I was fighting myself, trying not to call or email her. Weeks and then months passed. A year went by, and then Barb called.

Regardless of the statements made by police and the many hundreds of pennies chucked into the fountain of many words by all the true crime bloggers out there, it’s true. That morning over coffee was the last time I ever saw or spoke with her.

Destruction Loops: Basinski’s *The Disintegration Loops*

William Basinski’s 2002 album *The Disintegration Loops* is a digital recording of old tape loops that the American musician made in the 1980s. A tape loop is a strip of tape—reel to reel, or cassette—that has been spliced into a loop so that it plays back endlessly. They can be various lengths, but they’re usually about 5 to 30 seconds long. One day in the early aughts, Basinski was transferring his old tapes into the digital domain and realized that they were slowly disintegrating as he played them back. Analog tape is composed of a metal-based magnetic layer glued onto a thin plastic ribbon. The plastic film is just a base for the adhesive, and a tape machine plays back music stored in the magnetic material stuck to it. But over time, the glue holding the ferrite to the plastic begins to dry out. When the tape is dragged over the metal play-head, tiny pieces of the storage layer shed away. The next time the same spot of tape plays back, the stripped parts result in lower sound quality and audio dropouts. On a conventional full-length album, the degradation of the playback quality would not be very noticeable, because any one segment of the tape only passes over the transport mechanism once per listen. But because Basinski’s tapes were short loops (about 5–10 seconds long), and the same spots on the tape were constantly repeating, the listener can hear the degeneration of the recorded material in a relatively shorter time frame.

“dlp 1.1,” the first of two tracks on *The Disintegration Loops*, is a short loop of an instrument that sounds like a French horn. It is accompanied by some other brass-sounding instruments in the background, which were not part of the original loop, but Basinski added to provide some contrast between their clarity and the building noise of the original instrumentation. All of it repeats a very basic melody again and again. Over the hour, the audio degradation and dropouts become increasingly apparent. Three-quarters into the track, there is not much of the original melody left—only an audible hum coming from the tape machine and pops of sound as if someone was using their hand to hit a live mic amplified in an empty auditorium. The listener hears these overtop of the digital arrangement Basinski has provided in relief. The disintegrating loop continues to fade away until the end of the track.

Chris referred to *The Disintegration Loops* to help her explain how the self loses itself *over time, through the history of its desire*. She thought that the listener’s experience of this album mirrored the way someone can lose its “current orientation” in a special other by way of its past orientation for another.¹⁰²

Basinski’s “dlp 1.1” is “mesmerizing because it’s so repetitive and long.”¹⁰³ The musical phrase is straightforward. It’s quick and easy to orient oneself in its loop. But after hearing it repeat over and over, it’s just as easy to zone-out, let the mind drift to other concerns, and forget to listen. Yet even as the mind wanders, “the ear continues to hear the original loop regardless of how it has changed.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Weston, *Suffering Self*; John K. Meyer and Brenda Bauer, “Transference,” in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003). Chris was aware that Sigmund Freud also talked about personal history with significant others as a way to explain resistance and transference (of love) in therapy. Freud’s commentators explain, “Every human being has formative experiences [with significant others (e.g., parents)].... [And] each individual transfers to new situations ways of responding based upon past experience. [Transference refers to] these characteristic ways of believing, feeling and reacting, created out of formative experiences....” While Chris understood Freud’s work on this point, she did not feel the need to develop a theory of childhood or development. Her approach could be characterized as philosophically minimalist, in the sense that she only needed to show the ontological possibility of self-loss in desire’s repetition of the past. In other words, to show how the exposure to the world through special others amounts to, over time, a closure in an existential self-understanding.

¹⁰³ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

And so without attention, “the shifts build up and then suddenly, when the listener re-focuses, she finds herself in a completely different aural landscape.”¹⁰⁵ It carries the same tune, but somehow and at some point, “despite what she thought she was hearing—everything has transformed along the way.”¹⁰⁶ Chris summarized, “It’s not uncommon to find oneself outpaced by the subtleties of Basinski’s tape. That is perhaps part of the point.”¹⁰⁷

The core of this listening experience is “an echo” that continues to hear the past and does not hear how things have changed.¹⁰⁸ Chris called this a “ghosting effect.”¹⁰⁹ She clarified this by contrasting it with another kind of ghosting that happens in analog tracking.

Hysteresis is a phenomenon that occurs when tape has been hit too hard by recording levels. Because the gain has been too high while recording, the magnetic particles on the tape align themselves too strongly. So much so that it becomes too difficult to return them to a blank state. A tape machine’s erase-head will erase most of the material on the tape, but the loudest parts of the previous track will remain. Someone can still record onto the same tape and add new layers of novel material, but they cannot erase the repetitions of earlier recordings. They continue to sound in the background. The ghosting effect of hysteresis is “instructive,” but it is different from that of *The Disintegration Loops*.¹¹⁰

When someone listens to a tape or a loop on which hysteresis has occurred, the old clashes with the new. It stands out “like a floating figure under a sheet that we might see in our hallway at night.”¹¹¹ The ghosting effect of *The Disintegration Loops* is not as obvious. In technical terms, “it is *pre-*

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid; Basinski released *The Disintegration Loops* shortly after 9/11. The album artwork was taken from a picture he took from his apartment deck in New York city, during the attacks. There was a before and after to this event. Even though everything eventually ‘went back to normal,’ nothing was ever the same again.

¹⁰⁸ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

*representational.*¹¹² Because of the subtlety of the minuscule dropouts, the listener does not hear how things have changed on a loop-by-loop basis. Yet they continue to hear the same tune overtop of the changes that do, in fact, occur and layer. Chris said, “she hears *through the past* what she now hears in the present.”¹¹³ The difference between the tune echoing in her mind and the actual sound of the loop itself is the ghosting effect of “dlp 1.1.” And it expresses not only the arrow of time but the history of desire. For “the self is prone to hearing its past in the present despite how things have changed.”¹¹⁴

Basinski’s destruction loops gave Chris a way to illustrate how the self’s worldly interactions with special others can affect desire and, thereby, the meaning of time and space *per se*.¹¹⁵ Listening to “dlp 1.1.,” “the ear has to learn *how to hear* the subtle cut-outs, distortions, and changes in timbre that accrue in almost every loop.”¹¹⁶ The present loop allows the listener to hear the same melody. But it also offers the chance to hear how it differs from its past sound and how those to come will also change. With the original echoing in the background, the subtleties of the changing tape quality actually “give the ear *more valence* for hearing the intricacies to come.”¹¹⁷ For Chris, this ‘ear to hear’ was symbolic for what she called *constancy*—desire’s truthful mode. Just like the attentive ear, which continues to hear the tune and the way it changes loop by loop, “desire’s constancy follows after the past *as such into* the future *as such* without hearing the former *over* the latter.”¹¹⁸ Constancy can

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ When Chris wrote of the past *per se* or the future *as such*, she did not mean to imply a conceptual or systematic distinction between the *per se* or *as such*. She was using these terms to refer to the meaning of the past, present, or future (*as such* or *per se*) and to differentiate these meanings from any given instance of past, present, or future. Both terms (*per se* and *as such*) refer to this difference. She used them interchangeably for terminological variety.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

“hear’ the difference in the loops—so to speak.”¹¹⁹ It can hear “how *it itself* needs to change and differ to truthfully build” for the other who it is ‘currently’ oriented towards.¹²⁰

Recall that the primary sense of the past *as such* is the prior-ness of the one which desire follows after *through all possible spaces and times*. Because the self often has multiple loved ones, “the larger sense of this past is *the history of desire*.”¹²¹ The way the self has followed after others in the past can leave it relatively open or closed, oriented to truth or to untruth in its comportment towards *this* other.

In constancy, the self hears the future *as such* as that which the ‘current’ other gives. The future *as such* “reframes the past *as such* (in all its senses) and, thereby, gives the actual present and future as occasions for building for this other.”¹²² *This* special someone gives the future *per se* as “the potential in every given place and time to build the conditions of meaning and love in life for *this* other.”¹²³ Building is to limit the presence of the ordinary by expressing the meaningfulness of that which transcends it: the past *as such* and the future *per se*. The present *as such* is, therefore, “the interface” between the meaning of the past and future.¹²⁴ Constancy is “‘the ear that can hear’ how every given moment is (at least) the opportunity to build anew in the way *this* other deserves to be affirmed and addressed.”¹²⁵ In doing so, the self does not stop hearing its history, as if it supersedes it. Instead, it lets the future this other gives be the opportunity to “reframe this history.”¹²⁶ To reframe

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. I have put this term in scare quotes to indicate that Chris was discussing the meaningfulness of time and space as given by a special other. As I mentioned before, there is a certain methodological minimalism at work here. So, this does not mean that the self cannot have multiple special others in its life at one time or across time. All it means is that constancy does not conflate the way one special other gives the world to the self with the way another gives the world to it, nor the way it must then build differently to affirm and address this other. What she talked about as the past *as such* and its history of desire includes the possibility of making this conflation—though it is less like an intellectual mistake and more like ‘a felt center of gravity,’ one which tips desire from a truthful into an untruthful mode.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

is “to *acknowledge* the difference between one’s history and the before-ness of *this* other and build from out of this difference.”¹²⁷ The past *as such* ‘in’ this intimate comes to take priority over desire’s own past. Acknowledgement makes this transition “through the act of building for this other, integrating one’s past under the direction of being-for this other.”¹²⁸ In expression, or building for the other in things, words, actions, the self’s realignment towards pastness through this other still retains its history. But now finding itself properly in the past *as such*, it also implicitly finds itself in “a self-acknowledgement of its own proneness to not hearing the future in this other.”¹²⁹ And from this, it testifies that it can fail to give a more open, truthful ear to *this* loved one.

The usual way someone hears “dlp 1.1” is representative of what Chris called *possessiveness*—desire’s untruthful mode. Like the listener under the spell of the ghosting effect, who hears the original melody *over* the current loop and does not really hear how it has changed along the way, “one is possessed when one hears its own past more than this other’s present and future.”¹³⁰ Chris put it bluntly, “the history of its desire *possesses* it.”¹³¹ The self is not just possessive, it becomes possessed by the ghost of its own past because it “gets stuck” in the meaning of its personal history.¹³²

Like a loop it keeps hearing over and over despite its subtle shifts, desire can get stuck in the past and fail to transcend towards the future *because it is oriented to the meaning* of time-space. Yet all the while, time and space will continue to proceed and unfold. The self thereby loses its orientation to itself as one who follows after *this* special other because its history with *other* special others overcomplicates the sense of the past *as such* for it. Chris wrote, “like the ear can carry the original melody to the detriment of hearing present and future loops, the ‘for’ of *being-for* can carry this past

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

with others into its present intimacy.”¹³³ Desire can lose its orientation in the past as *being-for this other* by residing in the meaning of its own history that *other* special others gave to it. Then, like the ear continuing to hear the original melody and not realizing how things have changed, the self can repeat this past in a present relationship despite the future *this* other opens up. This is possible, Chris explained, because the past *as such* is an ‘aspect’ of the meaning of time and space. It is “an ‘echo’ or ghosting effect that has arisen from an objectively contingent constellation, but one that has formed a personal and existential valence over time.”¹³⁴ Although it emerges through *actual* time and space, it is not an inner-temporal or inner-spatial thing that naturally changes along with everything else. Like the *per se* present and future, it is a “metaphysical component” of the very sense of time-space from the perspective of the self.¹³⁵ Desire can then get stuck in its history to the detriment of the meaning of the present and future for *this* special other.

Conclusion: The Ghosts of my Past *as Such*

Thinking back, I can see that it’s a stop sign red thread in an otherwise bland tapestry. But even now, it’s difficult to disentangle. My relationship with silence changed over time. But its inception in my youth as a way I could protect myself had long-lasting effects—disastrous consequences.

Special others expose one another to the inherent danger of the world. But this danger is, of course, not necessarily physical. Intimacy *exposes in that it makes the self vulnerable* to the world that the special other opens up for it. Domestication—the neglect of the self by a special other—happens to the self through the other. But there is also a danger that follows the special other *through the self’s desire*. Generally speaking, it—this danger—*always* follows in and through desire because the terrible freedom of being and the overall transience of the existential conditions of *being-for*

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

come to be unleashed upon the special other through their relationship with the self. But *it* also follows *more specifically* when desire is possessed by its own history and finds itself captured within a destruction loop as it follows after *this* other. The vulnerability of previous neglect compounds upon desire's following after, such that it becomes increasingly difficult to find the future over a repetition of the past despite the way things have changed.

Like the history of desire *per se*, the history of my desire developed out of real-time encounters with my parents and Chris. My mother softened as she grew older. And my father eventually built the city worker's version of a successful life for himself and his new family. Old wounds slowly healed. By the time I graduated from undergrad, Karyn was able to host a mostly civil conference call between all of us to celebrate. Yet I continued to carry within me the ways they had made me vulnerable and the ways I tried to defend myself as a child—especially in my relationship with Chris.

The night I didn't tell Chris I was in town, the night I followed her without her knowing, I thought it was curious that the memories of my parents were replaying in my head as I sat in my car outside her apartment. At the time, I noted that it was strange but didn't think it was strange enough to really think about it. I clearly didn't understand myself. I had memories without remembering, and flashbacks without insight. I was unaware of the place in which I was putting myself, yet all the while I continued to insist on what I was about to do. I didn't want to find myself there, where I had put myself, because then I would've had to come to realize that I was haunted and damaged. And then, to really find myself, I would have had to find myself in that moment in such a way that there was a disparity between my self-assured justifications and what I was actually doing. I would have had to feel the humiliation of accepting that I was out of control. And that wasn't something that I was willing or able to feel right then.

My past *as such*, the history of following after my parents, overcomplicated the way I then followed after Chris. In my youth, I learned to protect myself from humiliation by keeping my

thoughts and feelings to myself. But then I began using it as a way to entrap everyone else I held dear—to shield myself so that I gave myself the opportunity to play the last, most devastating move if I needed. The one they—whoever they were—could never laugh at.

For many years, my past affected our relationship. But as we grew together, she taught me to open up and talk more about where my defensive ways were coming from. Then we lived apart, and it was too hard for me. I fell back into old insecurities, and it made the last years of our time together complicated.

I didn't understand that I was being possessive. Even the secrecy of watching her was, in my mind, completely acceptable. I thought I might catch her doing something that would hurt me, and this would justify my actions. It was all my way of trying to set up a situation where I could ensure I was protected. Feeling this *need* to defend myself and imagining that I *could* forge the conditions in which I was ultimately able to guard myself, this was what Chris called the ghosting effect of the past in me. And she would say my love for her had tipped into the untruth of possessiveness.

I don't deny Chris wrote in her journals, "He wanted to confine me and hold me hostage. His possessiveness, the way his desire built limits in the ordinary for me, did not seek to *free me for it*, but to *free himself from me*."

I am not named in this quote, and it may very well have been Q. that she was speaking about. The police have not released the entire passage, but only taken fragments out of context for their media releases. Yet, even if it was about me, she did not mean what it sounds like.

I neither literally wanted to confine her, nor did I actually want her to go away. When Chris wrote of possessiveness, confinement, and wanting to get rid of the other, she did not necessarily mean these in a literal sense. Like truthful desire, possessiveness seeks to express by building limits in the ordinary. It's just that it does it differently and with different motivations.

Constancy frees the other for the ordinary by limiting it with the expressive. Constancy finds its outer limit in the ordinary world, and “this opens up its own possibility to follow after.”¹³⁶ For the difference between the expressive and the ordinary which constancy asserts, “presents the distance through which the self longs for closeness with the other.”¹³⁷ From this longing, the self can then build for the other in the time and space of the world. The boundary between the ordinary and the invaluable ultimately frees the loved one (and the self) for the ordinary as the place where they can continue to build.

Like constancy, untruthful or possessive desire also follows after the other. And it “also builds in the ordinary.”¹³⁸ But instead of creating a limit for the ordinary over which the other can transcend into the everyday, freeing the self for the meaning available there, “the self builds walls around the other.”¹³⁹ And it does so to confine their meaning and, thereby, *to protect itself from exposure to the world*. By framing the ordinary within the narrative of its ghosts, “the self seeks to hold this other’s love hostage within the diminished meaning of the past *as such*.”¹⁴⁰ It builds in the ordinary out of its “deprived sense of history,” not out of the future *this* other gives.¹⁴¹ The ordinary thereby becomes the expression of the self’s own self-insured security. And it seeks to build this security by erecting self-constructed boundaries for the meaning of the passage of time the other gives to it. Within these constructs, the self also then gives its desire a self-imposed internal limit. One that inflects the meaning of time, and any given place, such that despite the differing circumstances, the self is always looking for a way to delimit the other’s freedom for the world.

I understand all of this.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Yet I can't emphasize this enough: *the cage possessiveness seeks to construct around the other is not then necessarily physical. More often, it is a form of meaning.*

I was just trying to irritate her, and I didn't really mean it at the time. But a good example of the confinement she was talking about is the text I sent Chris the night I was watching her at the jetty, the one that provoked her silent treatment. I implied that her buddy she was going to see that night *should* be a she not a he. And I was insinuating that to have a guy friend was somehow to already have betrayed me. She should just have girlfriends. Like this, most often the walls of possessiveness seek to decrease the field of meaning available to the other in the ordinary. This confines them existentially in terms of the range of projects available to them there, but not usually physically.

Possessiveness usually only wants to rid itself of the other *metaphysically*. It does not want the other to go away. It still wants them. But it wants *the way this other exposes them to the world* and the vulnerability this implies to go away. This is why Chris said that "instead of freeing the other for the world, possessiveness wants to *free itself* from the world."¹⁴² The other's self-transcending being exposes the self to the place where it can suffer neglect at their hand. So, the self tries to protect itself from this felt exposure by limiting the field of meaning this other can find itself within. It seeks to limit the self-transcendence of the other not literally, but in terms of attempting to close the kind of distance—which, again, encompasses the entire world—this special someone's being is open to.

I admit it. *This* is what I did. But this is *all* I did. So, if Chris was talking about me in those passages, it was because I sought to 'confine' her and 'hold her hostage' *only in a metaphorical sense*. When I followed her, I was only trying to set up a situation to protect myself from her potential betrayal. I was trying to prove to myself that I was not being humiliated like my mother had always humiliated my father.

¹⁴² Ibid.

I'm ashamed of it. I truly am. *It*, the worst—or, living a life hurting those we love—followed Chris through me. I was its vehicle. And it damaged her by way of my love for her. It cost me the person I have loved most in the world. But this is *all* I'm guilty of.

I would never actually hurt her. Never.

Guilt is too strong of a word anyways. Even when I followed her, I didn't break the law. Nor was it as simple as being morally wrong but doing nothing illegal. Even Chris knew this. For she knew that circumstances can be deceiving. And sometimes people are drawn into depths they cannot fathom. The world had tipped me over into possessiveness because it had already entrapped me in its tendency to let things fall apart.

Then, later on, my involvement in the investigation into her disappearance had nothing to do with me “wanting to insert myself”—as the police have phrased it. The most honest thing I can say is that I was hoping that when we found Chris, she would see my contribution and extend to me the same graciousness she once offered to her father. She sketched out a whole philosophical system so that she could discover an extenuating circumstance in the fabric of being itself to help herself forgive him. I hoped that when we found her, she could see me in the same light.

That's why I was there, in her city, still following after her. I wanted to find her, perhaps more than anyone else.

Chapter 6: Generation Loss

Untruth, World Deception, and the Unknown

*Hell to the liars
Here's to you and me
Hell to the best of us
Here's to you and me*

*Hell to the righteous ones
Here's to them
The grey-suited walkers
Prestigious men*

*Here's to the things you love
Here's to those you find enough
Hell to the rest of us
Here's to the things you love
Here's to the things you love*

*Those who are born with love
Here's to your triumph
And I know better than those I judge
With all my suffering*

*Hell to the liars
Here's to you and me
I look way above us
Seeing no one free*

*Here's to the things you love
Here's to those you find enough
Hell to the rest of us
Here's to the things you love
Here's to the things you love*

—London Grammar, “Hell to the Liars”

Introduction: A Knock at My Door

A knock on my hotel room door woke me up to a sharp, shooting pain in my head and a burning in my chest and throat. After getting kicked out of Rafferty's and going to the police department, I found a corner store and bought a six-pack of cheap beer and a pack of cigarettes. I hadn't smoked since I returned from Europe. Yet learning I was the prime suspect in a missing person case seemed like the perfect time to get reacquainted.

But something happened. And because of it, I actually didn't have the chance to drink or smoke very much at all before I got back to my hotel later that night.

There was another bang on my motel room door. I could see from my watch that it was a decent hour in the morning, but my late-night adventures and the thick blinds covering the window made it seem like it was still the middle of the night. Again, there was a heavy pounding. I yelled, "hold on." As I got out of bed, I stepped on an empty beer can. My shirt was on the chair, but not my jeans. I couldn't find them anywhere. I looked under the bed and in the bathroom, but they weren't there.

Through the door, a man called "Dylan Errington?"

"Coming." I wrapped the hotel's blanket around me, then opened the door to Stache from MCU.

Through a grin showing whitened teeth, he said, "Rough night?"

I didn't respond, so he began telling me that the documents he was handing over were restraining orders. He continued on, explaining that Mikaela and Danny went to the police to complain the night before because of what happened at Rafferty's. I went to the police station the night before too, after getting kicked out from the bar, to report Danny's last name to Detective Avery. But they must have come after me, because I never saw them. On the carbon pages Stache handed to me, I could see their signatures in black ink at the top along with Avery's.

“Looks like you made quite the impression,” he said, again with a smirk. “I need you to sign on each of them here, here, and... there.” He pointed underneath all the paragraphs of fine print to a line at the bottom of each page, continuing, “and I’m required by law to tell you that you *can* and *will* face criminal charges if you break the terms of these orders.”

I hesitated before signing, acting like I was reading them. But my head was hurting too much to focus, so I just asked, “Do I have a choice?”

“To sign?” He crossed his arms. “Technically, you can refuse. But if you do, I’ll have to ask you to come with me.” He pointed to a paragraph on the page, saying, “Really, you don’t. *Because* they’ve made harassment reports *against you*—”

I cut him off “—for what?”

He looked at me and continued, maintaining his tone very deliberately, “—*because* they’ve made harassment reports against you, they are completely within their rights to request these orders. And we are required to enforce them. They go into effect with or without your consent. In fact, they’re already in effect. Your signature is just a formality.” He uncrossed his arms and looked at his watch as he said, “But I still need you to sign it.”

“So, I can’t read through them before I sign?”

“Of course, you can.” He again crossed his arms but then started using the toe of his shoe to pick at the peeling paint on the hallway floorboard beside the door to my room.

My head was pounding, so I just scanned them, acting like I was reading when I really wasn’t.

He looked back at me and pointed to the page, “These sections lay out the terms. No contact, in-person or electronic. That includes phone, messaging, and any online activity. There’s a 100-foot no-go zone around any place you could reasonably expect to encounter them—their houses, places of work, bars, schools, things like that. You get it, right?”

I signed on the lines, and he left.

The room was dark, so I opened the curtains. My pants were hiding behind them on the window ledge. I had forgotten that when I got back to my room that night, I put them there. I couldn't open the window, but I had hoped the morning light would help dry them out.

It had been a long night. But now I knew that Danny was Q. And I could prove it too.

* * *

Ever since the beginning of Western thought, philosophers and theologians have sought to differentiate between appearance and reality. The ancient Greek Plato likened uneducated life to being held captive in a cave, where prisoners mistake shadows on a wall for the things casting them. Nearly 2000 years later, this same dichotomy between illusion and reality found expression in the French thinker René Descartes' *Meditations* (1647). In an effort to doubt all that he could until he discovered a truth that no one could ever question, he capped off his skeptical method by proposing to depose any "supremely good God" at the origin of creation and replacing the deity with an "evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me."¹ He continued: "I will regard the heavens, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things as nothing but the bedevilling hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares for my credulity."² This theme, which Chris called *world deception*, has a long and varied history, and it has even filtered down into popular culture in films such as *The Matrix*.

Still, Chris's writings about world deception will probably be the most misunderstood aspect of her work. For if we interpret her on this topic in keeping with the traditional and common-sense notions of truth and falsity, framing them within the dichotomy between illusion and reality as passed down through the centuries, then one would have to label her a global skeptic—someone who does

¹ Descartes, *Meditations*, 62.

² *Ibid.*

not affirm the existence of the world. But far from arguing for the falsity of things, others, and the world, Chris's theory of deception *presumed* their existence. She was not a skeptic or a metaphysician in the classical senses of these terms. For deception happens *through the things we encounter in this world*. "The world we live in," she clarified, "is not an epiphenomenon of another more real, and more true, higher world."³ So when she wrote "being and the world are fundamentally deceptive," one has to understand these comments within the context of her theory of untruth, which she developed in conversation with Heidegger's later concept of *lethe*—concealment.

Deception, her own keyword for untruth, is a technical term that is not the opposite of correctness.⁴ It is not only *compatible with the correct*, it "occurs *through* it."⁵ It is closer to withholding than falseness since it "hides a larger truth behind partial truths."⁶ Yet the larger truth she was after was not 'another world' beyond this one, but a register of meaning for *this* world which also outstripped it—the invaluable. Truth is the journey from the ordinary to it. But there is, first of all, a need for this journey because, through the self's repeated attempts to position itself accurately amongst items and general others, it becomes trapped in a limited sense of truth and, with this, a deteriorating sense of meaning.

Chris used the phenomenon of generation loss as a metaphor for the effect world deception has on the self. Before the days of digital file-sharing, people used to share movies and music by recording onto blank cassettes and passing them on to friends and acquaintances. One friend's copy would then be a master for another friend, and so on and so forth. But copying analog copies

³ Christina Weston, "Generation Loss: *Lethe*, Untruth, and World deception" (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2013), typescript.

⁴ When Chris used the term deception, she did not mean to imply an intentional agent behind it. Appearances, whether those stemming from intentional or non-intentional sources, can be deceptive. They are so because they hide the truth. But hiddenness or concealment was not a strong enough word for her because they do not necessarily involve an aspect of untruth or being misled. Deception is here is untruth through hiddenness, but there is no 'Great Deceiver' behind the scenes.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

introduces increasing infidelity into subsequent duplications. This degradation is technically known as generation loss. Yet, Chris pointed out, unless one compares the copy with the original or unless the quality of the picture or sound has degraded too much, the quality loss will go unnoticed by the viewer or listener. “There is just,” she wrote, “the show.”⁷ For her, generation loss symbolized the way the world “captivates and entraps the self within a lower level of meaning.”⁸ It does so by covering up the degradation of meaning that occurs in the self’s transcendence from the invaluable to the ordinary. Like generation loss, which does not signal to the audience the loss of higher fidelity, the world’s deception leaves the self in self-obscurity as to who it truly is while offering it ‘all the meaning in the world.’

An Unforeseen Note

After Stache left me with copies of the documents, I had to rethink the plan I had come up with to prove that Danny was Q. I had a massive nicotine hangover and wanted some coffee. So, I popped some pain killers and walked to a café down the street from the hotel.

The restraining orders were unexpected. And the legal implications changed the stakes of my strategy. I could now be charged with criminal harassment for what I was about to do. But, I thought, if I was careful, the plan didn’t need to be changed, just modified. I just had to be more cautious so that no one saw me.

With my coffee in hand, I returned to the old computer in the motel’s lobby to search for some local stores that sold pre-paid cell phones. There were several in the neighbourhood. But seeing the red tags on the map around my location made me realize that it was a better idea to drive out of town

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

and look in person instead of leaving an online search history behind me. At this point, my head was still hurting, and I wanted to give the pills a little longer to kick in, so I checked my email.

Sometimes circumstances conspire against you. Other times, they throw you a lifeline. I didn't know it at the time, but I was already drowning that afternoon. And yet, in front of that yellowing, humming computer, something nearly miraculous happened.

Later on, this note would save me from all that I had put myself through searching for Chris. I got an email from an old friend I hadn't seen or spoken to since the summer after high school graduation. She had recently heard from mutual friends that we lived not just in the same city but even in the same part of town, and she wanted to re-connect.

As I was preoccupied with my scheme, I didn't respond to her. Yet receiving it, reading her words, and hearing a little about her life after high school, brought back old memories and feelings. And these started to remind me of a fondness for her that I had always carried within me. One that was 'pre-Chris.' One that had very little to do with her. And one that was much less tortured because of this.

Thinking back to this moment now, it's incredible that I didn't just give up and stop what I was planning on doing. That's what I should have done.

But thankfully, even though we were really only together once, my old friend Danielle would ultimately have more understanding for me than most in the fallout of those dark days.

She had always understood me.

* * *

The bed jerked, and I woke up.

My left arm was hours past the pins and needles stage. It felt like I was waking up after its amputation, and all I could feel was the phantom limb left behind.

The night before, as we laid beside each other falling asleep, Danielle's long auburn hair and side-swipe bangs on her forehead had the fragrance of cantaloupe. I didn't want to wake her by pulling my arm from under her. So I dozed off watching the globes under her eyelids shift back and forth, her mascara eyelashes flickering as she discovered new invisible vistas distant from the cares and concerns of our senior high school year.

Then summer morning sunlight beamed through slits in the closed venetians. Caleb's parents were returning from Mazatlán that afternoon, and through the open window, I could hear beer cans clank and bottles clink as he bagged them.

Danielle was sitting up stiff in bed, her back arched like a startled cat, staring at the display of her brand new, 2nd Gen iPhone. Her peach bra matched the colour of the nails on her fingers, which were holding her buzzing mobile.

Her father, a cop with a shaved dome, neck rolls, and the word "Saved" tattooed as the horizontal beam of the cross on the inside of his wrist, gave the phone to her earlier that summer as a high school graduation gift. Even though I served him a six AM Pike three or four times a week, with him saying 'thanks bud' in the exact same inflection every time, he didn't know who I was or that his daughter and I were in the same grad class.

"Who is it," I asked Danielle, rubbing my freed arm. She hushed me, jumped out of bed, and paced naked waist-down to Caleb's parents' *en suite* bathroom. The phone was still vibrating in her hand when she threw the door shut. Taps and faucets opened up all the way. She was wrapping herself in white noise.

Danielle and I had always been friendly and flirted. For a dare at a Grade 8 party, we once kissed. But nothing ever came of it until the summer after graduation. Even though there were hints between both of us that it one day could happen, it was one of those friendships that you don't want to mess up by making it romantic. Then we graduated, and we were both moving away to different cities for

college. That night at Caleb's, I guess we both figured it was our last chance to see if we could make it work even if that meant we'd have to continue it long distance.

By this point in time, my mother was a born-again Christian. Her conversion didn't make her any warmer, but it did make her stricter. The families in her church also had kids in my high school. They weren't in my group of friends. But gossip spread quick. If it got back to her, she'd let me know it was reflecting badly on her image. She knew I didn't care about her new 'made-up rules,' but she also knew how to keep me in line. I didn't have my own car. So, she could take away her car keys from me.

My mother knew I was staying at Caleb's, but she didn't know that his parents were out of town. If she knew we were unsupervised, she would have asked a lot more questions, insisted on a curfew, and if she found out what we eventually got up to, I would've been bussing to work and parties for the rest of the summer. Like many kids with strict parents, I already intuitively knew what I would eventually read in one of Chris's papers years later: "There's a way to tell the truth without being truthful, and a way to be untruthful while still telling the truth." Once his parents left for Mexico, Caleb asked me to help him plan the party. I soon decided it was easier to avoid lying to my mom by simply withholding.

Danielle obviously couldn't tell her Bible-thumping cop of a dad that she was spending the night at Caleb's, so she told him that she was staying at Jen's house. Unfortunately for us, he ran into Jen's mom getting groceries that morning we were in bed together.

Danielle reappeared from the bathroom, flushed and flustered, pulled on her jean shorts and tube top and left with a rushed kiss.

I helped Caleb wash his parents' bedding and put their room back in order. Then I went home.

⁹ Weston, "Generation Loss."

When I walked through my apartment door, the first thing I saw was my mother standing at an open window in the kitchen smoking a menthol cigarette. She flicked it out the window onto the street below and repeated the same line she always did when I caught her: “the one demon Jesus hasn’t delivered me from yet.”

Changing the subject, she asked, “How was Caleb’s?”

“Good,” I said as I walked past her to my room, shutting the door behind me.

For the next few days, Danielle’s phone went straight to voicemail. Jen, her best friend, told me her dad had grounded her and confiscated her phone. To regain his trust before she left for college, she agreed to spend the remaining summer weeks volunteering as a councillor at a kid’s Bible camp down south.

By the time we did talk again, she was already gone. We wished each other all the best at college, and then that was it—until I got her email in the motel lobby that morning.

The same day Stache placed me under arrest.

Untruth as Deception

The medieval Christian metaphysician, Thomas Aquinas, sums up the traditional Western understanding of truth when he writes, “*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*,” or “truth is the adequation [or correspondence] between thing and intellect.”¹⁰ More simply, he writes: “A judgement is said to be true when it conforms to the external reality.”¹¹ An inner, mental representation is correct, one might say, when it *matches* outer reality. To this day, truth as adequation, correspondence, or correctness remains the Western world’s predominant understanding. But Chris argued that “despite its undoubted intellectual validity and practical

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Basic Writings*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 114-141, 120-121.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

benefits for survival and power over the world when applied in practice and technology, truth as accuracy hides more than it reveals.”¹² It is, in fact, as we will later see, “the primary way that the world deceives and entraps the self.”¹³

This is why instead of calling this viewpoint truth as correctness or correspondence, she more often called it “truth as *accuracy*.”¹⁴ She wrote,

I prefer the term accuracy over correctness because it more clearly indicates that the self has already had to re-adjust and re-position itself to conform to the object’s requirements. Just as the shooter must take care to adjust his aim by adjusting his physical position so that he falls into the line of sight the target requires, so too with truth as accuracy the subject must adjust its metaphysical position so that its subjectivity conforms with the objectivity of the object—or more to the point, the ordinary significance of things.¹⁵

In everyday existence, truth as accuracy sets the grounds for deception by making the self unaware about how *it has already put itself in a position of conformity* with everyday items and general others. Although she is talking about conformity here, her main concern has less to do with the way objectification rebounds on the subject (*i.e.*, an alienating objectification) and more to do with the way deception makes self-loss possible. The “adjustment of the shooter is analogous to the self’s movement from the invaluable unto the ordinary.”¹⁶ The world imposes the conditions of ordinary life upon the self as ‘price of entry.’ Yet “the world does not disclose the non-correlation between the depths of the self’s being in the invaluable and the horizon of life it offers to it.”¹⁷ In requiring a metaphysical adjustment from the self so that it aligns itself with the world’s ordinary meaning, the world misleads and entraps it. To clarify this, Chris’s view of deception needs to be differentiated from untruth as falsity.

¹² Christina Weston, “A Journey into Truth: *Lethe, Aletheia, and Paideia* in Heidegger’s 1931–32 Lecture Course *The Essence of Truth*” (Unpublished paper manuscript, 2012), typescript.

¹³ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

¹⁴ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The traditional view of truth as correctness presumes a congruent theory of untruth. The ancient skeptic, Sextus Empiricus, summarizes this perspective when he wrote that a viewpoint “is true when it is in accord with the object presented, and false when it is in discord with it.”¹⁸ The predominant tradition, Chris wrote, “identifies untruth with falsehood or incorrectness.”¹⁹ She elaborated, noting, “falsities are inaccuracies that do not match the state of affairs they aim to represent.”²⁰ But for her, just like the Heideggerian tradition she came from, untruth, the being of untruth, is deeper and darker than error.

Chris learned from Heidegger that, as she put it, “untruth can be *compatible* with truth as correctness.”²¹ She quoted him on this point: “... the correctness of the untrue which remains concealed *as such* is at the same time the most uncanny thing that can occur in the distortion of the being of truth.”²² This is not to say that falsehoods are true in the sense of accuracy. She understood that errors, such as delusions, perceptual and intellectual mistakes, hallucinations, miscalculations, misremembering, and misjudgements, can surely misdirect. But, for her, there is a more disturbing kind of untruth because it misguides *through* the truth of correctness. She called this type *deception*, and she considered it to be the more primal form. And so, “one should not completely identify untruth with falsehood, because a more primal *untruth can also mislead through correctness and accuracy*.”²³

To establish the difference between deception and falsities, she asked her readers to consider the difference between being deceitful and lying. An “outright lie,” much like the one my high school friend Danielle told her father about staying at Jen’s place, “misleads through *fabricating*

¹⁸ David Marian, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 28 May 2015, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>.

¹⁹ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 100.

²³ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

*falsehoods.*²⁴ Deceit is different. When I withheld from my mother that Caleb’s parents were out of town, I did not lie to her. But I didn’t tell her the whole truth either. I hid the entire truth behind a partial truth. Chris summarized her thoughts, writing, “deception misleads by hiding a larger truth behind partial truths, which are accurate, but which *still obscure* something that would change the significance of ‘the whole situation.’”²⁵ “Untruth as deception,” she continued, “is *closer to withholding than fabricating.*”²⁶

For Chris, “the being of untruth is *to mislead.*”²⁷ Being *as no-thing* (less of a barrier from something happening and more of a free fall allowing the worst to happen), does not stop the self from being misled—even by truth, or we might say: half-truths. The special other that draws it forth unto the rest of the world also exposes and releases the self into “the trap of the world,” where it can be led astray in various ways about its being-for that other. There is a “larger deception going on here,” she wrote, that “no amount of correctness or accuracy will disclose.”²⁸ No amount of accuracy will disclose it because it takes “a kind of truth operating outside of the circumference of the referentiality of the ordinary to show it.”²⁹ It takes the *intervention* of the expressive, which presents the conditions for the self to re-adjust itself. In order to realize its entrapment, the individual must “reposition itself, so that the reference of ordinary significance, which has displaced the person out of the sphere of intimacy, no longer dominates the self ‘in truth.’”³⁰ Part of this repositioning involves realizing the shortcomings of accuracy.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Being sets the conditions for untruth in the sense that “being itself *is the inexorable decline* of meaning from the invaluable to the ordinary.”³¹ In following after unto the rest of the world, the self’s place with regard to this other can get lost. For “rather than building, it can try to accurately position itself with regard to *other* others (general or special)” instead of *this one*.³² Things, others, and the world *per se* thereby “bury the site of affirmation *this* other has given it.”³³ Because “the invaluable is *in* the world, but not *of* it,” truth as accuracy cannot help the self find its way back.³⁴ The path from the ordinary to the invaluable does not occur through “verities”—her term for verifiable states of affairs.³⁵ One does not ‘remember’ the way back through accurate representations that match the real world’s outer circumstances. Nor does one find oneself by ‘remembering’ oneself as such a representing subject. Instead, one finds the way back by “interrupting the ordinary, by intervening in it—before it is too late.”³⁶ That is, by building. For “true remembrance is the recognition of the past *as such* as the path left by *this* other for one’s being to follow.”³⁷ It is the framing of one’s self-world relation within the potential to build for this other in any given instance. This expressionism is not a factual truth that can be verified in the world. It is “the re-*potentiation* of the self for *this* special other in any given place and moment.”³⁸ Yet, putting oneself on the journey of truth first requires waking up to the way the world entraps—not primarily through falsity, but through deception. For in entrapment, one becomes obscure to oneself as being-*for* this particular other.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid; Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis*, 52; Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 71. In this passage, Chris is drawing on Husserl’s idea of sedimentation and Heidegger’s idea of oblivion, both of which lead to a kind of unawareness about what has been lost.

³⁴ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

³⁵ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Visitations

The first thing most people would do after walking out of a police department having learned they were the main suspect in a missing person's case would be to call their family or a close friend. That wasn't an option for me, for reasons that I think should already clear. I had never needed my family before and imagining myself asking for help made me feel empty inside. Chris was the only one I ever had, but she was now gone, so I needed to figure out what to do on my own.

My computer and phone didn't give me an alibi for the night she went missing. And the police claimed the newly acquired videos from my hard drive, the different clips taken of Chris unaware over a span of years, were evidence of an obsessive, stalking pattern.

I knew I needed to get a lawyer. But I wasn't going to find one at that hour on a Friday night.

The rain that was falling on me after I was kicked out of Rafferty's had stopped by the time I left the police station. So after picking up some drinks and a pack of smokes, I drove to a parking lot by the jetty. It was always empty after dark. Sitting on a concrete curb under a streetlamp with an orange light, I opened a beer and lit a cigarette. The old, familiar head rush made me buzz, and that helped me envision all the consequences that were about to unfold in my life.

Avery just didn't like me. He had tunnel vision. Despite the evidence pointing to Danny, he thought I was Q. And he was going to pursue me for it. I realized that no matter what I did, I couldn't convince him on my own.

But, I thought, Fuller wasn't in the interview room that night. And Stache seemed more personable than either of them. If I could bring new evidence to one of those two, then maybe they'd help me convince Avery to look into Danny.

I remembered that when Mikaela showed me Chris's room, she said Danny signed the back of her photo booth strip. The police had Mikaela's print, but Chris's was still there. It was taken *at* his

work *on* his birthday. I thought he might have signed it as Quinny. If he did, and I could get my hands on it, I could show it to Fuller or Stache.

But this meant I'd have to explain to Mikaela why I wanted it. At this point, I didn't know they were in the process of filling out restraining orders against me. But even still, I highly doubted she'd do me any favours after embarrassing her boyfriend at his work.

Then a memory of the key Chris used to leave for me under her bristly doormat flashed to mind. Her and Mikaela used that same doormat, and I was thinking they might be in the habit of leaving a key under it for guests.

I looked at my watch. It had been a while since I got thrown out of Rafferty's. But it was 9:00 PM on a weekend. I thought there might be a chance she was still out.

I flicked the half-butt away and left the nearly full beer on the curb, got into my car, and started driving towards her apartment.

* * *

Across from her building was a dark park.

I stood under a tree that was still dripping from the rain that fell earlier, scanning their windows for any signs that someone was home.

On the drive over, I had remembered JoJo's snorting and yapping and almost turned around to go back to my hotel room. But then I thought I might as well take a chance. I had nothing else to do. Perhaps Marla was out for the night too. I'd also be able to see her window from the park.

Looking out from under that tree, I realized I had an opportunity. The tenants a story above were home, but both Mikaela's and Marla's apartments were unlit. Not even the flickering of candles or a TV screen on their walls.

The people upstairs carried half-empty glasses of wine, and there were about four or five of them mingling together. It looked like a small dinner party. Enough of an event to distract them, but intimate enough that I'd still have to be quiet.

I started walking towards the entranceway.

* * *

After closing the building's front door very softly, I found it darker and more silent inside than I remembered it. Only the streetlamps were shining through the windows. I couldn't even hear the party upstairs. Just drips from gutters hitting the windowsills and concrete steps outside.

I could hardly see where I was going, but on a wall beside the stairs, there was a beaming red light. Beneath it was a light switch with a small hand-written stickie note above it: "Stairs and hallways." I almost flicked it but then stopped myself. I couldn't risk turning them on and alerting anyone that I was there. Instead, I placed my hand on the cold wooden railing and used it to guide myself quietly up to Mikaela's floor in the dark.

When I got to the landing below her level, I stopped and listened. I could now hear floorboards creaking and the muffled voices of the people upstairs. But nothing was coming from Mikaela's and Marla's floor. No voices, no thump or drone of music behind a wall, no water running through pipes, nothing.

I continued up and noticed another red glow with a light switch under it on their hallway's wall. Again, I thought better of flicking it.

When I finally stepped onto their floor, I half-expected to hear a burst of little dog nails skating across wooden floor-panelling just before JoJo starting snarling and barking from behind Marla's door.

But I didn't. JoJo was out too.

I rounded the bannister, took a few more confident paces towards Mikaela's doormat, and knelt down. It was dark, but I could feel its rough bristles. I was about to turn it over when there was a bang downstairs. I froze.

A moment later, the lights flashed-on over top of me. And soon, there was the sound of heavy feet clunking up the stairway.

Then I heard a woman's voice, not so much speaking but cooing.

It was Marla talking 'baby' to JoJo.

My first reaction was to hide inside Mikaela's place. So, I flipped the mat over to get the key and had to take a second look. It wasn't there. I tried the door handle, but it was locked.

The only way I could get that photo strip *now* was if Mikaela trusted me. Yet there was no way she would if Marla told her I was lurking around with the lights off. So instead of letting Marla discover me, I decided to quickly sneak up the stairs before she saw me.

Halfway between her floor and the upstairs, there was a small landing. I stood there silently and waited, all the while hoping JoJo wouldn't sniff out the cheap cigarettes I had been smoking.

A Lit Candle 'Constituting the Entire Universe'

The 19th Century American psychologist and pragmatist philosopher William James presents a thought experiment to demonstrate the idea at the centre of his chapter, "The Perception of Reality," from his famous work *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). Taking his lead from the early modern philosopher Spinoza, who once constructed a similar scenario involving a boy and a horse with wings, James asks his readers to "suppose a new-born mind, entirely blank and waiting for experience to begin."³⁹ And, when it begins, it does so "in the form of a visual impression of a lighted candle against a dark background, and nothing else, so that while it lasts, it constitutes the entire universe known to

³⁹ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 287.

the mind in question.”⁴⁰ James then requests his readers to suppose that the candle is only imaginary. He then asks rhetorically, “Will this hallucinatory candle be believed in, will it have a real existence for the mind?”⁴¹

Those who have been following his argument will know to answer in the affirmative. The young mind, James explains, will not only apprehend, but also *hold to* the reality of the candle, because unlike onlookers who know it to be imaginary, the new-born has no other experience of reality, and so no reason to doubt the candle’s existence. Chris explained, “Unless there is something that contradicts or conflicts with this primal ‘belief’ or assent, it will remain intact.”⁴² This is James’s larger point: while this default belief is at the origin of this hypothetical mind’s experience, it is also the headspring of all real experience for actual minds. Following Husserl, who called this default attitude world-belief, Chris called it “primal belief” or “primary assent.”⁴³

I cannot remember its source, but I recently saw a nerdy joke on social media written as if the early 20th Century founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, had an Instagram account addressed @dathangsthemselfs. One post pretended Husserl wrote the following: “Just bumped into a mannequin & said ‘Sorry.’ Then said, ‘Oh I thought you were a person.’ Then realized I was still talking to a mannequin.”

The Husserlian theory behind the punchline is very similar to James’s position. Husserl scholar Robert Sokolowski explains his idea of belief:

The basic character, the default mode of our acceptance of the world and things in it, is one of belief or, to use the Greek term, *doxa*. Our belief is correlated with the being of things, which first and foremost is simply accepted as such.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Weston, “Generation Loss.”

⁴³ Ibid; Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45.

⁴⁴ Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology*, 45.

Like James, Husserl thinks that such belief is primary and underlies all experience, including higher-level doubts about perceptual mistakes. Someone mistaking a mannequin for a person, for instance, at first just believes it to be someone else. Doubting that ‘the person’ is really a person, because of its rigidity and coldness upon being bumped, and then, upon further observation, realizing that it is only a mannequin that one can joke about still talking to—all this only comes *after* this original assent. Belief is built-into our perception and engagement with the world.

Both James and Husserl are pointing to a primal belief at the foundation of all experience, which we should understand as being pre-cognitive in nature because it is prior to any doubt, skepticism, or what psychologists call, following Sigmund Freud, reality-testing—“the capacity to judge whether one’s ideas conform to reality.”⁴⁵ Doubting or questioning are *founded upon* this originary assent, and (as James points out) these critical perspectives first emerge when this belief is discovered to be dissonant with other experience or knowledge. Chris was referring to all this when she wrote, “We could say, then, that *in principle* the correct is *a verified form* of this original belief, while the incorrect is that which *has been falsified* through these discerning attitudes and practices.”⁴⁶

The 2016 documentary *Team Foxcatcher* relays the story of the wealthy heir of Du Pont Chemical, John E. du Pont, and his private, Olympics-aspiring wrestling team. Throughout the film, the audience watches the multi-millionaire team owner suffer from what his lawyers would later claim was undiagnosed paranoid schizophrenia. As the viewer watches the story unfold, du Pont’s behaviour becomes increasingly bizarre and eventually results in tragedy. But before the disastrous ending, one of his illness’s apparent symptoms was an insistent complaint that the trees surrounding his estate were mechanical props planted by some undercover agency to spy on him. He suffered

⁴⁵ Lee, Grossman, “Reality Testing,” in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture*, ed. Edward Erwin (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁴⁶ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

from delusions, or false beliefs, about being persecuted and perhaps even had hallucinations confirming this in his own mind, throwing him and those depending on him over the edge.

As with others who suffer from such serious illnesses, evidence to the contrary may not have been enough to diminish Du Pont's certainty.⁴⁷ Yet for those who are not subject to such severe paranoia, delusions like this, in one way or another, could be shown to be false. Although perhaps the last resort and an extreme measure for someone more competent, examining the trees would demonstrate such claims to be fabrications of an unwell mind. "In principle," Chris wrote, "falsities like delusions, hallucinations, and perceptual mistakes are falsifiable, and they are the opposite of verities which, again in principle, can be corroborated or verified to be accurate."⁴⁸

To understand what Chris means by deception, we cannot think of it as occurring through falsities like illusions or mirages. It is not shown to be a deception by uncovering anything like these. Unlike falsehood, "deception is not a phenomenon that emerges, nor does it disclose itself *as such*, through the negation of an otherwise misplaced belief in a thing or world."⁴⁹ Deceptions are not discovered by a higher-level falsification (perceptual, intellectual, or institutional) of primal assent because they are not, strictly speaking, fabrications. They are rather compatible with verifications and accuracies. In fact, "they often mislead *through these*."⁵⁰

The Unexpected Visitor

I stood still and quiet on the landing above Marla's apartment, hoping the boards underfoot wouldn't creak. The upstairs neighbours were toasting to someone, and Marla was getting closer.

⁴⁷ Darian Leader, *What is Madness?* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

⁴⁸ Weston, "Generation Loss."

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

She was speaking in the same high voice adults use when talking to a baby, “You did such a good job, JoJos. Such a big boy job, my little man.” The stairway lights were on above me, but I couldn’t see down towards her and she couldn’t see me because of the angle.

From the closeness of her voice, I guessed she was just a few steps from her floor when there was another bang from the building’s front door. JoJo growled, then started barking.

Raising her voice again, Marla asked, “Who’s *that* JoJos? Who’s *that*?”

I was both relieved and a little panicked. Marla wouldn’t be able to tell whether the dog was barking at the newcomer or me, but if this visitor was coming to the party above, I’d be trapped. To make matters worse, Marla didn’t continue on to her suite. She was waiting to see who was coming up.

Whoever it was, they were big. Hearing them mount the staircase was like hearing the sound of movers pulling up a fridge on a hand-truck one step at a time.

The dog’s barking got more intense.

When the visitor got close enough, Marla must have muzzled him with her free hand because all I could hear was snorting before she sang, “Oh *hi*, Bill! Hello! We just walked in. What are *you* doing here?”

“Evening, Marla.” His voice was deep and guttural. “Stopping by for Mikaela. She in?”

“Don’t know. Now, what’s this about, dear?”

The man cleared his throat, then said, “Excuse me.” I heard the structure of the second-floor crack as he stepped up onto it. “Nothing important.” JoJo seemed calm now. “I just need to check-in. Hoping I might catch her.”

“Any news?”

“Not of consequence,” he said as he made his way to Mikaela’s door.

Then there was a knock.

Marla continued, “She said something about going to Danny’s cabin. You know, to get away from everything? Said they both need some ‘space to breathe.’ Her exact words. ‘Space to breathe’ or something like that. But I think she said they were leaving tomorrow.”

“Michael and Tammy Quinn’s Cabin? Daniel’s parents’ place?” Bill asked.

“But maybe they decided to go tonight. I can call her if you want. Tell her you’re here.”

“No, that’s not necessary. I’ve already tried.” I heard Bill’s heavy steps make their way back to the staircase. “Sounds like there’s a party upstairs. Perhaps she’s visiting?”

“At Kevin and Samantha’s?” Marla responded. “No. You’ve talked to them. You know. After all that nonsense with the renovations, Sam and Mikaela don’t even say hi anymore.”

“I remember.”

“Besides, I was just up there for a cocktail before taking JoJo for his bedtime walk. It’s an intimate group. Samantha’s 35th.”

“Well, I won’t disturb them then. Thank you for your help, Marla.”

“If I see Mikaela, I’ll let her know to call.”

“That’s fine. Goodnight.”

“Let me know if you hear anything else, dear. You know how.”

“Night, Marla.”

Bill made his way down the stairs, and Marla walked to her apartment.

I had to time my escape so that Marla didn’t catch me hiding if she went back upstairs. But I also had to be quiet enough that Bill wouldn’t hear me following him down.

As soon as Marla took her hand off JoJo’s snout to open her door, he started barking louder and more desperately than he had before. I think he was trying to alert her to my presence. But Marla said, “Oh, stop it, *tough guy*. You know Bill,” and she closed her door behind them.

While JoJo howled behind the door, I tiptoed past her floor, and made it out of the building unnoticed.

* * *

When I got to my car beside the park, I just so happened to see the same bald-headed man I saw at Mikaela's the first day I visited her. This time, he was distracted, sitting in a long beige sedan across the street with the interior light on, on the phone. But his lips weren't moving.

I got into my car and watched him, thinking this must be Bill. I wondered who he was and what his business was with Mikaela and Danny. He spoke like a cop, but the familiar tone Marla took with him made me think he wasn't an officer. There were no official markings on his car, and I couldn't see any give-aways inside it, like a monitor attached to the dash or plexiglass separating the backseat from the front, suggesting he was law enforcement.

He used the phone to make a few more calls but never started speaking.

Soon, his car pulled out of the parking spot, and he disappeared around a corner.

I decided to call it a night and started driving back to my motel. But at the first red light I hit, Bill passed through the intersection right in front of me.

I waited a moment to allow some separation between our cars, then took a right to follow him.

Emperor Ashoka's Facade

Buddhist tradition tells a terrifying legend about the unconverted Emperor Ashoka. Prone to committing massacres against his enemies, his advisors suggested he distance his public image from such outbursts of violence. In response, the emperor built a prison that looked like a palace from the outside, surrounded by lush gardens and filled with private baths and all the luxuries and delights royal wealth afforded. Onlookers not only marvelled at its beauty but also wished to enter so they could enjoy the grounds and facilities. Yet behind the appealing exterior hid a terrible truth. Inside,

waiting for newly arrived prisoners, was an executioner whose sole purpose was to design elaborate tortures. Some suffered under his hand interminably. Even if the ‘kindness of death’ were to visit them, the stories say, his victims would be reborn so that he could torture them again. Besides serving as backstory for Ashoka the Cruel’s conversion to Ashoka the Benevolent, this tale also illustrates Chris’s theory of deception and its related ideas of *the facade* and *the trap*.

“All facades,” Chris wrote, “are untrue, because they present an exterior that hides their truth—yet not all do so in the same way.”⁵¹ Some only conceal “a lack of depth,” like “a street stage of an old Western frontier town on a movie set.”⁵² The facade of an old saloon only mimics the real thing. It is a false appearance because it does not fulfill what it presents itself to be. “But,” she continued, “we also speak of a facade as something that misleads by hiding ulterior motives. In such cases, it does not conceal a lack of depth, but a hidden depth, like a trap door.”⁵³ And, in fact, when she spoke of facades, she usually meant it in this second sense: as the ‘true,’ yet misleading layer of a trap. Elsewhere she wrote, “the facade is the bush we walk into unsuspecting we are walking into an ambush.”⁵⁴

To those outside its gates, Ashoka’s hell looked like a palace. There was nothing unreal about the gardens and baths the onlookers could see. Their “perceptions were not false but accurate.”⁵⁵ But this beautiful exterior also concealed the dungeons, the executioner, and the muffled tortured screams of his victims. If the gates opened and the outsiders walked in, they could venture down into its lairs and learn its terrible revelations. And “discovering the inner side, the interior hidden by the exterior, this would change the significance of the outside.”⁵⁶ The visitors could now understand that

⁵¹ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁵⁵ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.

the external beauty hid a torture chamber. The grounds were a trap set not so much for its inhabitants, who knew its truth all too well, but “one set for the outsiders, their perceptions, their expectations, their credulity.”⁵⁷ This reflects the way Chris described entrapment: “the luring facade does not *entrap* with fabrications that lack depth but rather with real things and accurately conveyed states of affairs that, for the unsuspecting, *change significance along the way*.”⁵⁸ This statement is actually deeper than it at first appears. In a sense, it is Chris’s own trap for the ‘uninitiated,’ though she would roll her eyes at my wording since—despite her Heideggerian background—she was not given to academic esoterica. So please allow me to explain.

On the surface, her statement seems to reiterate what I have already said several times in different ways. For her, deceptions mislead by hiding larger truths behind partial truths. This is not a difficult thought. Even the legal system presumes this when it requires witnesses at trial to place a hand in the air and swear to tell the whole truth. But as Chris outlined, in its general features, the Western tradition has not handed down conceptions of truth and untruth that can help us think this deeply, such that it transforms our understanding of the world and helps us get a better sense of our place within it. If one were to stop here, thinking that what Chris meant by deception can be understood as finding larger truths behind partial truths, like an investigator finds out details left out by a bribed witness, or like someone discovers another’s ‘true colours’ after they appeared to be friendly, then this would betray a superficial understanding.

There is nothing to be falsified or subtracted in her sense of deception. Getting to the truth is a matter of *more to be added* so that the full meaning of previous half-truths comes forth. But in

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

existential or metaphysical deception, the kind that Chris was talking about, “there is nothing to be pointed to behind the facade. There is nothing behind the curtain.”⁵⁹

So while they are helpful, Chris’s usage of the phenomena she lists to communicate her idea of deception also threatens to undermine its key sense. For in ordinary cases of deceptive withholding, facades, ambushes, and traps, the withheld specifics, the hidden depths and layers, the larger truth to be unearthed is just another detail, accuracy, or what we’ve seen her call a “verity”—her term for correct or potentially *verifiable* truths.⁶⁰ To put this in technical terms, one does not discover ontological deception by uncovering an ontic undercover. There is no real or physical context to discover behind the facade. For entrapment is a metaphysical deception that occurs in *transformations of meaning* and, more to the point, the self’s position with regard to these. In the true sense of the term, to mislead is not to hide states of affairs behind others, but to hide a register of meaning underneath another and, thereby, entrap the self in self-obscurity concerning a special other. As we will shortly see, this is the burying of the invaluable and the expressive under the ordinary. This can happen because the ordinary is not a meaningless realm but *full* of meaning. The everyday world draws the self into it, giving it projects to fulfill, but it doesn’t give it the resources to recognize *how there’s been a change of significance along the way*.

Into the Forest

The highway out of town was busy enough to stay several cars back from Bill’s car. I could keep sight of him by his sedan’s red, oval-shaped rear lights. But the farther away from the city we got, the thinner the traffic became. When he finally took an exit with no gas station or restaurant ‘ahead signs,’ there were no cars between us anymore, so I slowed down to let more distance grow.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

When I finally turned at the same stop sign at the end of the exit in the same direction he did, I was relieved to see his lights accelerating down the long country road.

Soon there were no streetlamps. But through the clearing clouds, a bright moon had started peeking through. I opened my window, and over the wind, I could hear my broken muffler booming in the dark conifers covering the hills on either side. There was too much space between his car and mine for him to hear it over his own engine.

We weaved in and out of dark turns under forested mountains. Almost every time I came around a corner, I'd catch a glimpse of his red brake lights before he rounded another.

Eventually, after rounding another corner, the road straightened again. But no matter how far ahead I looked, there was no longer any sign of his taillights.

I slowed down to peer into the many lanes, driveways, and dirt roads running off the highway. Some of them were lit by cabin lights. Others, overgrown by evergreens, were darker than the night sky above.

There was no sign of his car.

And then, suddenly, after cresting a small incline, his sedan appeared in my headlights. It was parked at the foot of a gravel driveway off to my right, with its lights turned off.

Resisting the urge to speed past and, by doing so, draw more attention to myself, I continued at a steady pace.

As I drove by his car, farther up the driveway a dark figure triggered motion-sensor lights, which illuminated the front of an A-frame cabin. Bill's lineman shoulders were silhouetted against the front of it. He must have heard my muffler because I saw his shadowy shoulders turn so he could take a look at me passing. A moment later, my view of him and the cabin was cut off by the trees. I was hoping he wasn't rushing back to his car to tail me.

A few hundred feet down the road, there was a stop sign, so I had to slow down. After a rolling stop, I accelerated, expecting to see his headlights show up in my rear-view mirror. I didn't have a phone and didn't want to get lost in back mountain roads, so I continued driving in a straight line. But I also didn't want him to see me if he came looking. To play it safe, I pulled into a lane behind a closed convenience store that had sun-bleached beer ads taped up to its front windows. I smoked a cigarette or two while I waited until it felt safe to backtrack.

* * *

Bill's car was gone when I got back to where I had seen him. I slowed down so I could peer into the driveway. The exterior lights had turned off, and there were no lights on inside either. I couldn't see any other vehicles.

My muffler was echoing loud in the quiet of the forest, and if anyone was home, I didn't want to disturb them. So I kept driving down the road a little longer, then parked on the shoulder. I got out of my car. Clouds were beginning to cover the moon, but there was still enough light to guide my steps back to the cabin.

Metaphysical World Deception

In Ingmar Bergman's 1958 film, *The Magician*, Vogler's Magnetic Health Theatre, a troupe lead by its lead magician, Albert Vogler, claims to have supernatural powers. Leaving the city behind, Vogler and his companions travel to the countryside, entering a town. The townspeople are captivated by the mysterious aura of the enchanter and his entourage. But authorities are skeptical and have heard rumblings of strange disturbances following the theatre group abroad. They require a private show before allowing a public performance.

When the occasion comes, with the town authorities, their wives, and servants in the room, a bell rings several times to start the show. Vogler begins his enchantment. He stands over the sheet-

covered body of one of his assistants and raises it hip-high without touching it. While it levitates, the audience tries to contain their giggling and snickering. Unable to control himself any longer, one of the men in attendance walks over to the stage and rips open its curtain. Behind it, one of Vogler's other assistants holds the lever of a pulley used to elevate the body. The backstage assistant fumbles the handle, and the body falls to the ground. The audience's giggles turn to unrestrained laughter. "Unlike the magician's sleight of hand," Chris wrote, "with metaphysical deception, there is nothing behind the curtain, no one pulling the strings, so to speak, which one can point at to break the spell."⁶¹

When Chris spoke of *world* deception, she did not imply something like a supernatural force, such as the veil of Maya, or someone equivalent to Descartes' evil genius working behind the scenes.⁶² Discovering world deception is not then like whistleblowing about a cover-up or exposing the "greatest trick the devil ever pulled," which the 1996 movie *The Usual Suspects* said was "...convincing the world that he did not exist." Nor did she think of herself as a Morpheus-figure, Neo's guide in *The Matrix*, played by Lawrence Fishburn, who leads him out of his simulated reality into the real world—where the last free human beings are pursued by evil A.I. She did not think of her writings as the equivalent of a red pill to swallow, allowing her readers to wake up in another world. And she certainly did not position herself the same way the 20th Century religious writer C.S. Lewis did for his short work *The Great Divorce*.

In Lewis's story, the main character is swept up by a flying bus, which soon arrives in a new country he has never been before. The reader comes to realize it must be heaven because as he steps off the bus's steps, the protagonist notices that the "grass did not bend" underfoot, nor were

⁶¹ Weston, "A Journey into Truth."

⁶² Ibid.

the dewdrops on its blades disturbed by walking.⁶³ Everything in this new world was “made of some different substance,” the character explains, “so much solider than things in our country that men were ghosts by comparison.”⁶⁴

Otherworld tropes in metaphysical philosophy and contemporary fiction highlight what she referred to as “the scale of reality and truth.”⁶⁵ Despite the specifics of the story or theoretical orientation, the standard device of thinkers and authors in this tradition is to nest the apparent world of everyday life within another hidden yet higher reality. Doing so “*does not so much negate but relativize* the reality and truth of the apparent world,” since it is deemed to be “a mere emanation of a more encompassing level of existence.”⁶⁶ Plato, who likens philosophy to moving from a shadowy cave into the full light of day, captures this gradation, and the positive correlation between being and revelation, when he says, “there more unhiddenness [*aletheia*], here more being.”⁶⁷

Chris was not a ‘classical metaphysician’ in the sense that she sought to discover a higher reality beyond earthly existence. In this respect, she came from a *post*-metaphysical line of thinking. So, for her, unveiling world deception was not the same as divulging another, more real world ‘behind’ this one. Yet it *was* a matter of disclosing the scale of reality and truth. For “truth is a journey, from lower to higher levels,” one which “does not move from one world to the next, but one that deepens the meaning of *this* existence.”⁶⁸ Ultimately, exposing world deception results in showing how everyday life “entraps the self in lower levels of meaning, making it obscure to itself as someone whose being is opened up by the invaluable.”⁶⁹ And so unmasking this deception “does not take one into another

⁶³ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1946).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory and Theaetetus* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 25. Heidegger is here quoting Plato.

⁶⁸ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

world or another set of everyday circumstances.”⁷⁰ All it does is show another level of meaning “for the exact same world” or “same set of circumstances.”⁷¹

A Cabin in the Woods

As I was walking down the highway towards the cabin, incoming clouds blocked the moon. It got darker.

Standing at the foot of the property, I still couldn't see any cars, lights, or stirring inside. I wanted to take a closer look, but there was a bend in the drive around a large tree, so I couldn't see the entire frontside. Plus, it was a gravel driveway. If there was someone home, and I wasn't careful, they'd hear me approaching. But I couldn't resist.

After walking as silently as I could and passing the bend, I could see the whole front side of the cabin. The clouds above began showering, and the white noise from the raindrops all around me emboldened my steps.

When I got to the edge of the front deck, motion-sensor lights flicked on. Now that I was in them, they seemed much brighter than when I saw them from the road shining on Bill.

I stepped back towards the dark treeline at an angle from the cabin's front left corner. Drips from low-lying cedar branches hit the hood of my jacket.

The exterior lights must have been on an 'away' security setting because activating the front ones triggered all of them around the house's entire perimeter. The whole cabin (front, sides, and back) was lit up with bright light.

It wasn't a log cabin, more of a modern style. Its front and back sides weren't walls, but windows and glass sliding doors. From where I was standing, I could see straight through it to the back deck.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. I should add she said it also shows a difference between the being of the self (as being-for) and the being of the world (as an inability to accommodate what the self wants for the special other).

It was one level and had an open concept, with what looked like a fireplace and a rock chimney as the centrepiece.

In the lighted bushes around me, I could see much evidence that the cabin had just been built. I saw a few half-used bags of concrete mix under the branches and brush, discarded cuts of white PCV piping, lumber tips, and mounds of sawdust tinged red from the rain.

The A-frame's frontside had several log beams framing its windows and sliding doors. On the beam closest to the front door, was hanging an engraved wooden nameplate that read, "The Quinn's." The style looked like memorabilia from the family's old hut.

Because of the light and glass exterior, I could even see into the bedrooms on the far side of the cabin. Their doors were open, and the lights outside their windows were bright enough to show the outline of flat bed tops inside. No one was home.

I started walking towards the front deck, careful to listen for approaching cars.

* * *

It was now pouring rain again, but I could still smell the front deck's freshest coat of paint.

The front sliding door displayed a security company sticker. And inside, on an interior wall, there was an alarm panel with a blinking red light.

I put my hand up to the window to block the glare from the lights and peeked inside.

Because of the brightness from the bulbs along the exterior, I could see everything. The kitchen was to my left. Its counter and appliances ran along a wall that ended at a large dining area with a big wooden table standing in the back-left corner.

There was a fire pit at the centre of the cabin with an overarching brushed-steel hood to suck up the smoke into the river rock chimney above. The concrete between the oval stones of the smokestack still had the brilliant grey of freshly dried cement.

Some other couches were facing the drywall between the main area and one of the bedrooms in the back-right corner. There was no TV mounted, but it looked like it would eventually become the entertainment area.

The entire far right wall separated the living area from the two bedrooms, the doors of which were open.

The ash-themed, vinyl flooring sparkled. Even the cushions on the couches had that brand-new stiffness to their corners. The whole scene was so suspiciously immaculate: I actually thought I could smell bleach through the glass doors.

Wanting to investigate more, I walked around to the cabin's right side to look into the bedrooms' windows.

There was nothing significant in the first room: a made bed, a side table with a clock and lamp on it, a closed closet and a nondescript dresser. Just from the look of it, I could tell it was all newly built.

Then I walked over to the window of the second room.

I could tell it was the master bedroom because there was more character. A collage of family photos showed one picture of a mother and father with their hands on the shoulders of a little boy wearing an orange life vest, who held a fishing rod in one hand and something not much bigger than a minnow in the other.

Other than a few endearments, the master bedroom was the mirror image of the guest room: a made bed, a bland dresser, a closet closest to the backside of the cabin, and a nightstand with a lamp and clock on it.

And that's when I saw it.

I almost didn't believe it when I did.

Not because I didn't think I would find anything, but because I couldn't believe it was just lying out there in the open like a trophy on display.

On the nightstand, under the lamp and beside the clock, was a journal—the same kind of composition book Chris used. The ones with the black and white ink blots on the cover that looked like the static people used to see on their antenna-TVs.

And then, I really realized what I was seeing.

On the front of the book, on the lines for someone to write the subject they were studying or the title of the story they were penning was the same simple inscription Chris used to use... “Journal.”

Then I began to weep, because she had written it. It was *her* handwriting.

And it was her missing journal. The one that the police had not recovered because she had it with her when she disappeared.

I was holding onto the ledge of the window, hanging my head and hyperventilating when I caught my breath with the thought that I could smash the glass and grab it. But then I remembered the security sticker.

Avery would say I planted it. I couldn't let him do that and deflect away from Danny.

So I walked back to my car in the rain and chain-smoked the entire way home while trying to decide how to tip off the police.

Back in the day, it was just a quarter away to an anonymous call. But there are no payphones anymore.

I had to figure out another way to let them know where to look.

And at the same time, I was trying to build a narrative about what happened, to help them see what I was seeing.

Shades of Unknowing

In September of 2002, during a White House press briefing before the second Gulf War, Secretary of Defense and ‘illustrious public intellectual,’ Donald Rumsfeld, blundered through the ins-and-outs of knowing and unknowing while addressing the likelihood of Iraq’s stockpile of weapons of mass destruction. He distinguished between three shades of knowing and not knowing, saying there are “known knowns,” or “things we know we know,” “known unknowns,” “that is to say we know there are some things we do not know,” and “unknown unknowns,” “the ones we don’t know we don’t know.” Regardless of his political intentions, in all three cases, Rumsfeld reinforced the idea that knowledge, the faculty of truth, is that which, in principle, *can be* verified. And correspondingly, he assumed that not knowing amounts to *as yet* unverified truths, which are again knowable *de jure*—in the sense of verities. When Chris wrote about unknowing, she had something else in mind. And we can see this if we consider the last combination Rumsfeld omitted from his speech: the unknown known—what *we don’t know that we know*.

Acclaimed director Erol Morris took the name from this omission for his 2013 documentary, *The Unknown Known*, which investigated Rumsfeld’s role in spreading false pretences for going to war in the Middle East in 2003. Through historical record and new interviews, including those conducted with a legacy-anxious Rumsfeld, Morris masterfully uncovers the Bush administration’s undeclared geopolitical motivations underpinning its Defense Secretary’s rhetorical justifications for the invasion of Iraq. The filmmaker’s implication is that hidden beneath all his self-declared good intentions, Rumsfeld’s actions to this day demonstrate a disowned understanding of the insidious economic objectives guiding the part he played in misleading the American public and the rest of the world about Saddam’s alleged connections with Al-Qaeda and his secret arsenal of WMDs. And this is Morris’s point. On a certain level, Rumsfeld knew what he was doing, even if back then and

later on, he was unable or unwilling to admit to others or himself that this hidden agenda compelled him to spread misinformation. This disavowed knowledge, this unknown known, drove his foreign policy.

Psychoanalytic theorist, Slavoj Zizek, interprets Rumsfeld's occluded category as a kind of political unconscious, haunting the fallout of the American occupation of Iraq, and the embarrassment of Abu Ghraib, when he writes:

If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the 'unknown unknowns,' that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal shows that the main dangers lie in the "unknown knowns"—the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values.⁷²

Political, psychological, or both, the unknown known lends itself to be treated as the unconscious, a psychoanalytic term for the repressed portion of the mind, its fenced-off reservoir for shameful desires and traumatic memories, real or fantasized, too horrible to allow into consciousness. A Defense Secretary instilling public paranoia about a foreign dictator's unimaginable designs, or a national and personal unwillingness to face a dark side that drives behaviour, in the case of Rumsfeld, Morris, Zizek, and the psychoanalyst's unconscious, no matter how much it is hidden, in all these cases the unknown still refers to something that can be pointed to, identified, described, remembered, documented, treated—in short, *falsified* or '*verified*.'⁷³ In all such examples, the unknown known should be designated as an ontic truth. And this is how they differ from what Chris called unknowing. For her, unknowing can never modulate from either a known unknown or an unknown known into a known known. It is, you could say, the principle of *not* knowing in human

⁷² Slavoj Zizek, "What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib," *In these Times*, 21 May 2004, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/what-rumsfeld-doesn-know-that-he-knows-about-abu-ghraib>.

⁷³ Edward Erwin, "Experimental Evidence, Freudian," in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture*, ed. Edward Erwin (New York: Routledge, 2003). Of course, critics of Freud's doctrine of the unconscious might say that it is not falsifiable through experimental evidence and so not truly scientific psychology. Even though Freud rejected the need for experimental evidence of the unconscious, he also meant his case studies and cultural references to provide scientific evidence for the existence of the unconscious.

existence—an unmendable tear and a gaping open at the heart of every self-understanding concerning its correlation with the world.

“Unknowing,” she wrote, “stands outside the traditional dichotomies between *doxa* and *episteme*, belief and knowledge, faith and facts.”⁷⁴ It is also more basic than the subject/object duality, which is:

the theorist’s ideation, reflectively based upon the subjective and objective poles of pre-reflective primal belief—a polarization blueprinted and mapped out onto the self’s experience to give it a discerning disposition, a capacity for knowledge, which can yield the kind of verities this schematic has always already aimed at.⁷⁵

And, in fact, she also argued that this unknowing was more primary than James’s and Husserl’s originary assent: “for unknowing, in the first place, gives it the possibility of erring. And this possibility is what constitutes it as belief and not knowledge.”⁷⁶ Not knowing is the condition for primal belief, experimentation, hypothesis, and so forth. Yet unlike *doxa*, one does not overcome it through verities. To think of oneself as a subject of knowledge, practical or theoretical, and not a being of unknowing “*is the most far-ranging effect of world deception.*”⁷⁷

Conclusion: Generation Loss

Generation loss is a phenomenon that occurs when reproducing analog recordings by making copies from copies. One friend who has a copy of the original might record onto a blank tape for another, and this friend with the second copy might record it for someone else, and so on and so forth. As this process unfolds, the quality of the copies degrades. The tapes being used could be brand new, but the practice of using a duplicate as a master introduces inaccuracies that, if contrasted with the original, would be perceived as audio-video distortion. Yet, for the most part, the everyday

⁷⁴ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

experience of generation loss leaves “no explicit trace of the phenomenon itself.”⁷⁸ The loss of quality, which has already accrued along the way, is still adequate to yield the song or show. And even though the infidelity determines everything that unfolds, unless the artifacts are extreme enough to interrupt, it will not break the audience’s attention. Besides the most ‘loss-ful’ iterations, in most cases, “the difference between the original and one’s intention of it through a copy, *this is not on display*.”⁷⁹ “Like a bootlegged production,” Chris continued, “paraded in front of a captive audience, the world does not show how self-transcendence is un-correlated with what it presents.”⁸⁰ For her, generation loss was a metaphor for the way world deception happens through desire.

In following after the other unto the rest of the world, the self is oriented to the ordinary through both the distance and closeness of desire. The difference between the invaluable and the ordinary opens up the distance desire needs for longing. Wanting the world for the special other, the self wants the world to be the place that expresses the invaluable nature of that loved one. But as the most encompassing horizon wherein the self and other live their lives, a sphere that also includes those who are excluded from intimacy, the world cannot ultimately accommodate what desire wants. The invaluable cannot be shared with general others because they do not participate in it. Both the self and other will ever remain general others amongst all other others, and both will ever remain split between the invaluable and the ordinary. In the very movement of self-transcendence, then, “the world places a condition of disparity upon one’s being.”⁸¹ In formal terms, this amounts to providing the conditions of possibility for desire’s perpetually unfulfilled nature.⁸² On the side of the self, the distance between what the self wants and what the world gives “aligns with its inability to

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

have.”⁸³ And, on the side of the special other, “this amounts to their unattainability as a self-transcendent being, which the world does not truthfully comprehend nor adequately express.”⁸⁴ The self follows after the other into the world to build so that it can be the place where things, actions, and words express their invaluable nature. But along the way, “like a viewer unaware of the difference between the original film and the degraded copy they are watching on VHS, unbeknownst to the self the world shifts the ground under its feet.”⁸⁵

The distance between the invaluable and the ordinary opens up the span desire needs for its longing. Yet by drawing the self forth, the world also diminishes the meaningfulness of this distance by “lowering the standards for its presentation and fulfilment.”⁸⁶ It shifts the meaning of self-transcendence along the way, failing to show “the true distance back to the place from which one first accedes unto the world.”⁸⁷ World deception happens in this undeclared downshift in meaning. It captures the self in its correlation with the ordinary: in the social roles it performs. Because of the functional basis of roles, they can be considered to be *for* the other. And on the level of the ordinary, this is true. They can even be understood as an expression of one’s being-for that other. General others can understand this expressive nature of working hard and sacrificing for those one loves. Yet “this kind of expression, one which facilitates the self’s involvement in the ordinary,”⁸⁸ hides more than it reveals. For Chris, the expressive’s true significance is not to facilitate the self’s involvement in the ordinary, but to intervene in it. And to do this, “expression must reflect the form of desire as a distance between what the self wants and what the world gives.”⁸⁹ We will see how Chris develops this later, but for now, we can point out how she thought world deception happens.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Like a degraded copy of a film that does not show the loss of quality between the original and itself, the world deceives by not presenting the opportunity for a self to comprehend its distance from the invaluable. The ordinary world does not give “the tools, words, or symbols, to adequately speak, act, or build in a way that expresses who it is and who it is for.”⁹⁰ Having “the knowledge of a knowing subject, and even the pragmatic know-how for its role, it does not have a true comprehension of itself as being-for.”⁹¹ As we have seen, even an interruption of the un-ready-to-hand within the sphere of the ordinary does not point beyond it but simply offers a different way back into it. Chris wrote, “the self-world correlation is deceiving because, by default, it hides the self’s non-correlation with the world.”⁹² Discussing the congruence between an “uncomprehending experience of generation loss” and “the self’s incomprehension of the levels of meaning that potentiate it for disparate ways of being unto the world,” she termed the latter *non-correlation*.⁹³

Like generation loss, world deception happens in the shifting of a frame of reference from selfhood unto the world: “In the unknowing and self-obscurity of this non-correlation, the world begins closing the self’s existential capacity to be itself for this other.”⁹⁴ A deteriorated movie or track does not displace us from our being. But the world does, by failing to offer a default, everyday position within it that expresses our non-correlation with it.

* * *

Even though it was still raining, the windows on my car were wide-open as I sped back to town through the night on the highway. A cold wind rushed in the open driver-side window, and slushy raindrops pelted my shoulder and ear, but all I could really think about was what he had done to

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

her. The stinging of my ear and the numb skin under my wet clothes were ways of coping with my thoughts. It was a way to distract myself from what I realized must have happened.

Danny had always been a thwarted lover, both before and after we were together.

When he found out we broke up, he thought it was because of him and that she would naturally come his way. When she didn't, his infatuation turned to obsession.

He started following her.

But he was careful enough to only ever appear in the benefit of the doubt he knew she would always give him. He wasn't just 'a random dude' showing up not so randomly on her walks or calling from an unknown number she had never seen before. He was her schoolmate and her friend. Chris was too perceptive to fail to realize he had a thing for her. Yet because of Mikaela's interest in him, she would've been careful.

As always, her journals would be her refuge. Just in case her roommate read over her should one day, or her composition book fell open on the floor in front of Mikaela, Chris tried to save her from any uncertainty about Danny. And so, she just referred to him by his last initial: Q. For the same reason, she would've agreed to meet with him alone to talk on a Sunday evening without telling her roommate where she was going.

I was freezing, wet, and heaving as I took the offramp towards my hotel. I threw a soaked, singed nub of a filter out the window and reached again for my pack and lighter. There were tears in my eyes, but the stiffening cold and sting of rain coming through the window on the highway exit were the comforts I needed to think the next thoughts.

Somehow, willingly or not, she ended up back at the Quinn's cabin at a time when the last boards and concrete were still being laid over soft ground.

He could not handle her rejection. He couldn't let a young woman tell him the way it was going to be. No matter what colour her hair, and no matter whether she was a co-worker waving a tray at

him or a friend turning him down, he couldn't take it without grabbing and pulling on something too hard. He couldn't stop the pad of his palm from hitting something. He just couldn't stop it.

After he tidied everything up, he was still that child that needed to keep a trophy no matter how small the minnow. He needed something to hold on to, to prove to himself that they shared something intimate. So instead of getting rid of her journal—which didn't after all name him directly—he kept it as a memento.

As I pulled into my motel parking stall and pulled up the emergency brake, I had the outlines of a plan in mind. The police needed to know. But even though all of this happened before Stache showed up with the restraining orders, I didn't want Avery to know it was me tipping them off. If it came from me, he'd use it as an excuse to interview me again and, because of his tunnel vision, try to discredit the info because of its source.

There wasn't time for that. Marla had said Danny was taking Mikaela to the cabin the next day. He'd surely hide it from her and get it out of sight.

I grabbed my pack of smokes and beers, got out of my car, and walked up to my hotel room in soaking wet clothes, going over in my mind the best way to direct the cops to Danny Q.

Chapter 7: “Painting the Incomprehensible onto the World”

The Journey of Truth (I): The Need for Repositioning

*Falling back to grieving
Are they disappearing
Or are they someone else
Pull you back to breathing
Are you suffocating
Or are you someone else?*

*Are we all someone else
Are we undetermined?
Are we all someone else?
Are we undeserving?*

*Corner all your stirring
Is it all returning
Or are you somewhere else?*

*Gather all your evenings
Is this what you're feeling?
Or are you somewhere else?*

*Are we all someone else
Are we undetermined?
Are we all someone else?
Are we undeserving?*

Or are we you?

In a sense we are

—Lissom, “Doppelgänger”

Introduction: My Plan

After Stache left me with the restraining orders in my motel room, I had to reconsider the plan I had come up with the night before when I got back from Danny Q.'s cabin.

I assumed him and Mikaela were at the police station quite late the night before, so I hoped they wouldn't be travelling to the cabin until later in the morning. Chris's missing journal would still be on the nightstand and I wanted to get there before Danny had a chance to hide it so that I could take a picture of it. But, after closing Danielle's email and leaving the humming computers in the motel lobby behind, I couldn't go straight there because I didn't have a camera. My old phone had one, but the police had that. And because of the restraining orders, I couldn't leave an electronic trail that led back to me. So after taking out some cash from an ATM, I drove out of the city in the opposite direction of the cabin to find a store that sold pre-paid cell phones.

It took me longer than I thought. I had to stop at several convenience stores and get three or four referrals before finding a burner with a good enough camera. Once I did, I started my journey back to the Quinn's cabin.

The night before, on the drive back to the hotel, I wrote down directions for myself on the back of a receipt. I followed these while thinking about how I'd hand off a photo of the journal to the police. My tip *really* had to be anonymous now. It wasn't just about Avery's tunnel vision anymore. He'd surely charge me if he found out I broke my restraining orders, so I had to be extra careful.

A few quick searches at the motel that morning showed it wasn't difficult to strip the image file of all the metadata police would try to use to track the phone back to its seller—and then me. Once I had the picture and deleted the metadata, I planned to create a fake email account and send it to the police, explaining that it was a journal fitting the description of the one they showed on TV and that the handwriting on the front also matched the one shown on the news. Then I'd have to tell them where they could find it. I was hoping to hear about Danny's arrest by the end of the day.

I soon took the exit to the cabin.

I knew I was still taking a risk. Everyone would know it was me, even if they couldn't prove it. But the vision of Chris sitting on an Oregon beach, looking out over the waves in silence flashed before

my eyes, and all the things I still wanted and needed to say to her started repeating in my head. The realization that these mostly apologetic words would ever be silenced because Danny was unable to control his slapping hand—*that* drove me forward. Even a minor record would be worth seeing him in cuffs.

It was cloudy but bright out when I got near the cabin. I thought someone might see my car if I pulled off the side of the road, so I pulled onto a turn-off leading up into the forest with an amber sign warning about logging trucks. There was a place to park far enough away from the highway that no one driving by would see avocado green amidst the spruce, fir, and pine.

I started walking to the cabin.

* * *

Reading Chris’s original work is like reading a story. The ‘main character’ is the self, and there is an element of drama in it, stemming from her understanding that truth, in the sense of *aletheia*, unfolds like a journey.

When Plato wrote his famous cave allegory, he was trying to show the path from transient truth to the eternal, from “the world of becoming” to absolute “reality.”¹ Plato’s cave prisoners, chained so that they could just see shadows on a cavern wall, only knew the passing images of things. The one who was unshackled and who had to be dragged out of the cave because the outside light was too bright and hurt his eyes, *only he* came to know how things actually were in the constancy of direct sunlight. Plotinus, writing in the Platonic tradition, captured this ambition for the timeless when he said, “There is, of course, no difference between being and everlasting being.”²

¹ Plato, *Republic Volume II: Books 6-10* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 121.

² Plotinus, *Enneads III, 1-9* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 315.

Despite its eternalist trappings, Chris retained one of the main points of this classical allegory. The soul's (*psyche*'s) education (*paideia*) does not happen when knowledgeable authorities simply deposit correct information into unknowing minds.³ "*Paideia*," Chris wrote, "is the capacity, inherent in every soul, to *re-orientate* itself, such that it—borrowing terms from another classical tradition—has 'ears to hear' or 'eyes to see.'"⁴ She continued, "Education is the self *repositioning* itself, no matter how much it hurts to readjust its eyes so that it is first of all capable of receiving truth."⁵ For her, *accepting* one's self-obscurity played a key role in this transition out of untruth. World deception and unknowing thereby become enabling conditions for a journey towards self-understanding. But unlike Plato's allegory, this would not be a path from the transient to the eternal, nor one that would banish unknowing through the acquisition of absolute knowledge.

In his 1932 lecture course *The Essence of Truth*, Heidegger reinterprets Plato's cave allegory from a postmetaphysical position, reading it not with *the eternity* of being but with *the finitude* of being in mind. As I've mentioned previously, in this tradition, being should not be understood as a being. It cannot be possessed or grasped—even intellectually. Because it is more like nothing, or we could say more like the transience of time, as with gripping sand, it constantly slips through the hands. For Heidegger, *a-letheia* is the human effort to de-conceal (*Ent-bergen*) beings from the perspective of the insubstantiality of being "and its limit in nothingness."⁶ Heidegger does not then seek absolute knowledge to fix and fasten changing things by way of their unchanging schemata.

From Heidegger's reading of Plato, Chris learned that truth (*aletheia*) is not best understood as the correct correlation between a proposition and a state of affairs. It is better understood as the "transitional movement" between concealment (*lethe*) and unconcealment (*a-letheia*).⁷ "To be in

³ Plato, *Republic*, 121.

⁴ Weston, "A Journey into Truth."

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, 53-57. Quote taken from pg. 57.

⁷ Weston, "A Journey into Truth."

truth,” she wrote, means that someone is “*in transit* between this transition from *lethe* to *a-letheia*.”⁸ And it means that “the journey and not the destination is the truth of the matter.”⁹ Especially in Heidegger’s later work, where concealment is more primordial than unconcealment, truth is “primarily *the process* of un-concealing and not the stability of that which is revealed through this process.”¹⁰ The latter is already too ossified to be living truth. It is the truth of “an artifact in a museum.”¹¹ For “the journey itself is where the individual finds that they, down to the depths of their being, are at stake between untruth and truth.”¹² Who they will be in life will be decided by the way they walk its paths. And the first step on this journey is to reposition oneself so that one finds the unknown not as something to be replaced with practical or theoretical know-how, but rather as an unknowing that will ever limit ordinary life.

When Chris used the expression “painting the incomprehensible onto the world,” she used it with regard to a work by Carl Fredrick Hill (1849–1911), a Swedish artist, who started his career as a landscape painter but became best-known for the bizarre artwork he made after the onset of schizophrenia in his late 20s. Shortly before his mental breakdown in January of 1878, he lived away from home in France, where he created two paintings, which starkly contrasted with the serene settings and apple blossoms of his earlier period. “The Cemetery” (1877) is a dark and lonely piece, depicting a man standing by himself beside a snow-covered grave on an overcast day. The other major work from this time, the posthumously named “Sister Anna,” also features a solitary subject.¹³ Behind the lone woman standing in a field is a dark void. And as we’ll see later, for Chris, this

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Karin Sidén, *Carl Fredrik Hill* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2000). Despite the title of the painting, the young woman is not in fact Hill’s sister Anna, who died in 1875. This title was given to the painting by scholars after Hill passed away. Hill’s letters to his family, in which he describes the painting, suggest that it is an anonymous figure.

represented an artist's attempt to show his viewers the need for a change of position in their own perspective on the world.

The Smell of Bleach

From the road, looking up to the Quinn's driveway, I could see part of the front frame of their cabin. But I couldn't see all of it. The front door itself is a little bit off-centre, closer to the kitchen on the left, and hidden by some large jutting trees that make a bend in the driveway. There were no vehicles visible, and I didn't see anyone inside, but I knew I shouldn't walk straight up the driveway anyways. If they *were* there, they'd see me coming in the overcast light.

The evergreens at the foot of their property to the right of the driveway still held on to drips of rain from the night before. I walked towards the trees there, and the ground was moist, soft, and spongy underfoot. Taking this route, I didn't have to worry about them hearing or seeing me approach, so I ducked into the bushes and trees on the bedroom side of the driveway and started picking my way through the underbrush.

About halfway from the road to the cabin, I was disappointed to hear Danny and Mikaela's voices over clanking dishes. I took a few more careful steps to find a viewpoint.

There was a forest-green jeep parked on the far side of the lot close to the concrete bags I saw the previous night. The sliding front doorway was wide open and only guarded by a bug screen. The two of them were washing dishes in the kitchen. Disheartened Danny had beat me there but wondering if he hadn't had the chance to move the journal yet, I decided it was nevertheless a good opportunity to check if it was still on the nightstand. I began flanking wider under low lying evergreen limbs towards the bedrooms.

When I was almost in line with the front of the cabin, I stopped to listen and make sure they were both still at the sink.

I heard Mikaela say, "That smell still hasn't gone away."

Danny responded, "I opened everything up. You sure?"

"What do you think?" There was a muffled slap and giggles.

He said, "I guess I'm just used to it."

"To the smell of bleach?"

"It's not that... everything in here is straight from the factory. You're probably just smelling that new smell. Or maybe the PH chemicals I put in the hot tub when we got here."

The sounds of the dishes had stopped. "Smells like Clorox to me," she said.

I thought I should continue on while I had the chance, but then he said, "I'll close the back door while we're out."

"No, don't do that. Keeping it open will keep the air moving through."

"While we're gone?" he asked, taken off guard. "There's like twenty-grand of brand-new stuff in here." I could tell from their voices they were getting closer to the front door. Quietly, I moved farther back into the bushes so they wouldn't see my shoes when they came outside.

"Danny, the smell's making me nauseous. Bring your camera then. But there's nothing else to steal. You don't even have a flatscreen yet."

"People can still vandalize."

"There's no one even around, Danny."

"Fine," he said as he opened the screen door to walk outside, "but I get to take some pictures of you in the hot tub tonight."

Mikaela chuckled and said, "We'll see. But I'm definitely picking the wine." She then stepped onto the front deck and asked, "Did you grab the list?"

I heard his heavy boots on the deck's wooden planks. He closed the sliding door, and there was a beep before he said, "Yep."

“Need your ID?” she asked.

“Nope. The Keller’s, the owners—you’ll meet them—they’ve known me since I was a kid.”

Mikaela made a brrr sound, saying, “It’s chillier than I thought.”

“I can’t believe you didn’t bring a heavier coat. Want to wear my hoodie again? It’s in the bedroom closet.”

“No, we won’t be long. I’ll be fine.”

A couple of moments later, they were in the jeep and then turning onto the road.

I waited till I couldn’t hear them anymore, then darted out of the bushes towards the bedroom window where I had seen Chris’s journal the night before.

Just before I reached the side of the cabin, there was the sound of a vehicle on the road. I thought it probably wasn’t them. From my drive the night before I was pretty sure that the closest store was at least a ten- to fifteen-minute drive away. But I stopped to listen just to be safe, in case they forgot something and had turned around to come back and get it.

The car or truck, whatever it was, was coming from the direction they would. It eventually slowed at the stop sign, didn’t turn, and then kept heading straight on towards the freeway. Once it had passed, I continued on to the bedroom window, which was open with just a screen in the frame, and peeked in.

Down on the bedside table, the lamp and clock were still there. There was also now a water bottle. But Chris’s journal was gone.

I couldn’t see it anywhere.

Danny must have hidden it so that Mikaela didn’t see it. But they arrived together, so he wouldn’t have had time to hide it very well. That realization gave me some hope. Scanning the rest of the room, I looked for places he could have quickly put it: perhaps in the dresser or the closet—maybe under the bed.

Mikaela's pale-grey bag had peach highlights, and it was smaller than Danny's big, black duffel. Hers was still by the bedroom door. But his was half-unzipped, on the floor, directly underneath the table where the journal had been the night before. I thought he might have quickly stuffed it in his bag to hide it from her.

A memory of Stache handing me the restraining orders flashed in my mind. But then, once again, I remembered seeing Chris from behind while she sat on an Oregon beach looking out over the rolling waves.

Danny and Mikaela were gone, and they left the back door open. This memory of Chris was all the motivation I needed to head to the back deck and take advantage of the situation.

Entrapment: The Ordinary World as a Facade

The Quay Brother's short documentary, *De Artificiali Perspectiva* (1991), shows Emmanuel Maignan's 1642 fresco, "Saint Francis of Paola," painted in a monastery corridor. Looking at it head-on, from the centre of the hallway, it displays a typical, early modern landscape: rolling farmlands, a town and its ports, and all the townspeople going to and fro about their business.

If the viewer is not too absorbed in its mundane scenes, they will notice large incomprehensible shapes interrupting the ordinary affairs on display. Keeping an eye on the fresco and its amorphous figures, the viewer can step back deeper into the hall's wing, moving a little to the side, and look at the facade askew. Then they'll come to discover another image, hidden by the first, yet superimposed on top of it: the town and all its people are swallowed up in a full-body portrait of Saint Francis praying under a tree.

Anamorphosis, the technique used by Maignan, allows artists to layer viewpoints in the same painting, offering different images from different angles. For early modern viewers, this perspectival shift from the town to the saint would have indicated his spiritual vigil over the land and its people.

The worldly scene would point to a higher, other-worldly truth. The documentary's narrator explains:

Anamorphosis is a most powerful device for controlling understanding. [It] can provoke or instruct. An image grasped too quickly might not leave a lasting impression. To lead the eye slowly through incomprehension and then to offer a resolution, *that* is insight.

Chris often used this short film to explain her theory of truth, which was not to be understood as the correspondence between a mental image and outer reality, but as the transition from lower to higher levels of meaningful being in the world. For her, Maignan's fresco symbolized this journey.

The scene of the town is, of course, symbolic of the everyday world. Perhaps someone walks by it for the first time and just sees "another wall mural."¹⁴ Or, having once truly seen it, "after habituation and walking past it every day, they forget the true meaning of what it once showed them."¹⁵ Or even perhaps after having paid to see it and have a tour guide explain it to them, "they take a couple of pictures and think they have *really* seen it."¹⁶ There are "various capacities for being entrapped by the facade the painting presents" and, more to the point, "the ordinary world it represents."¹⁷ But in all cases of the many shallow demeanours one can take towards it, the world deceives the self "not by restraining it, drugging it, or throwing a sack over it—but *primarily by drawing it forth*."¹⁸ It entraps it "*in its self-transcendence... in the way it opens it up*."¹⁹ Like the surface-level images of the town and its people, "the world entraps by offering a *positive*, fulsome experience of its superficial meaning—all of its fields, occupations, things, towns, cities, and others."²⁰ To find itself,

¹⁴ Weston, "A Journey into Truth."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

the self will need to readjust itself because, like the viewer of Maignan’s painting, the self grasps “the fresco of the world and its busy distractions all too quickly.”²¹

Yet the real world is even *more* deceptive than the surface-level of the fresco. The ordinary usually doesn’t provide blob-like hints *that* the self can follow back to its deeper meaning. If possible, “the complete analogy with the world would be more like an anamorphic painting *without* the amorphous shapes hinting at another level—like a painting that hides but does not hint at another painting underneath it.”²² Even the hints the world usually offers, such as broken tools, missing items, or episodes of anxiety, are deceptive and entrapping. These “just highlight the ordinary from a different angle instead of establishing another level of meaning beyond it.”²³ One day, the world will indeed become the place that shows its poverty concerning this higher level of meaning. But then it will be too late. Chris wrote, “what primarily *shows* the lack of sense, deception, and entrapment of the ordinary world is the loss of a special other. *But then it is too late.*”²⁴ She continued, “for only in great loss and grief, does the world finally display its poverty in the absence of that loved one who gave me my being unto it. And then, in mourning, I no longer am in the world, but desperately lost to it.”²⁵

Mementos, art, and their appreciation show all this. But because they are also *in* the ordinary, the world also always already undermines what they show. All too quickly, the place of appreciation loses its point of view, because its viewpoint happens in the very sphere of a realm that undermines its meaning. “Like those who work in the monastery and walk by Maignan’s fresco every morning, afternoon, or evening, who are drawn past it by other cares and concerns,” or perhaps even those who had their tour guide explain it to them, and “who took a picture and moved on,” the self’s ability

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

to find itself within the appreciation of such expressions “is fleeting.”²⁶ The self needs “perpetual reminders of those incomprehensible shapes that limit the ordinary and point back to the invaluable.”²⁷ But the so-called incomprehensibilities presented by the ordinary world inevitably direct it back to its entrapment as they are presented as curiosities to be explained away by platitudes immediately understandable to anyone and everyone. Because the everyday does not disclose it, “the world constantly needs an intervention inserted into it and this incomprehensibility must split the self within itself to drive deep enough towards a distance from everything and everyone.”²⁸ She meant here that every self must participate in intervening in the ordinary on an ongoing basis. As she put it, “One must reposition oneself so that one always remembers to paint the blobs of unknowing onto the world and thereby first give oneself the ability to recognize the need for this journey of truth—most especially after we’ve grasped this.”²⁹

In My Hands

When I got to the back deck, I walked past the hot tub without noticing any overwhelming chemical smell. It wasn’t until I got to the back screen-door that I caught the scent.

Mikaela was right. The smell was coming from inside the house, and it was more like bleach or some kind of cleaning agent than chlorine. Someone cleaned very hard... too hard.

The screen opened smoothly, and I took off my shoes so that I wouldn’t track mud onto the spotless floors.

Inside, the cabin felt big and empty. To my left, past several panes of floor-to-ceiling windows, there were a couple of couches still covered in plastic, facing a blank wall that separated the master

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

and guest bedrooms from the rest of the main room. There was no TV, but I imagined this was where the Quinns would mount a flatscreen.

The entire place smelled like a bleach jug's spout. Mixed with the smell of toast still lingering in the air from their brunch, it was all too sickening. I just wanted to get a picture of the journal and get out.

On my way to the bedroom, I thought about taking the journal with me once I found it, but then decided that was a bad idea. I needed the police to find it on *Danny*. *Not* on me.

Inside the room, I went straight to Danny's bag and unzipped it. Being careful to not disrupt his packing job too much, I felt all around, between layers of pants, sweaters, undergarments, and balls of woolly socks. But it wasn't there. Through the open window, I could hear another car in the distance. But it was still too soon to be Danny and Mikaela. So, I continued looking.

The journal wasn't in the bedside table drawer.

I kneeled down to look under the bed, but it was a solid box frame that didn't have any space underneath it. Without disturbing the bedding, I lifted the mattress on each side, but still nothing.

The closet had a mirror on it, and its single door could slide into a gap behind the wall. It was surreal seeing myself in its reflection in this strange room surrounded by other people's things. I opened the closet to take a look inside, but it was also bare except for a series of hangers and a large hoodie hanging from one of them.

Then I turned to the dresser. Something looking like a small white card was sticking out of one of its top drawers. I pulled it open and saw that it was a price tag attached to a new spare blanket. The blanket was a little untucked, and when I lifted it, I found Chris's missing journal.

From close up, I definitely recognized her handwriting on the front of it—just her simple, “Journal.”

I was about to weep like I had the night before outside, but that's when I realized that the car I had been hearing through the open window did not pass by. It was already crunching up the gravel stones towards the cabin.

With the journal in my hand, I approached the bedroom door to peek out.

A forest-green jeep appeared around the bend in the driveway. Danny and Mikaela forgot something and came back early.

I really had no choice about what to do. I didn't have time to slip and slide in my socks to the back door. They would have seen me through the front glass windows as I tried to run out. I was trapped.

The jeep came to a stop at the edge of the front deck. Mikaela jumped out and ran up to the front door of the cabin. I stepped back from the bedroom doorframe so she wouldn't see me and listened. There was a beep, and the cabin's front door slid open, and then I heard her voice yelling outside, "Anything else?"

Danny yelled from the jeep, "Nope."

When I heard this, I decided I should try to hide. I was hoping she wouldn't have to come into the bedroom, but if she did, I thought I could avoid being discovered by hiding in the closet. Still holding Chris's journal in hand, I snuck over towards its mirrored doors, closing the dresser drawer quietly as I passed by.

I was standing in the closet doorframe when I heard her walk over to the kitchen. Then I heard papers shuffling. A moment later, there was a honk from outside.

She soon yelled out the front door, "Got the coupons. Where's your card again? Outside pocket of your duffle or...?"

And just as I was about to close the closet door, I heard Danny yell back, "My hoodie—in the closet."

I immediately ducked underneath the hangers and reached over to the hoodie's handwarmer. If it had been there, I had just enough time to plant it on the floor so that it was lying between the bag and the closet. But the hoodie pocket was empty.

I slid the closet door shut in front of me and tried to stay as quiet as possible.

Pleasure Island: World Entrapment and Self-Loss

I remember even as a teenager seeing, for the first time, the Pleasure Island sequence from Disney's 1940 *Pinocchio*, and being disturbed. But for Chris, who wrote about this part of the movie, it was not just unsettling because of the dark scenes that unfold but more so because these express something unnerving about reality *per se*. "Like all good traps," she wrote, "the world does not show itself as a trap as such."³⁰ And furthermore, "a deceptive context such as the ordinary world" not only hides its entrapping nature, it also "*changes* the self's existential capacities along the way."³¹

In the children's movie, the Coachman convinces Pinocchio, the wooden puppet that wants nothing more than to be a real boy, to accompany him and all the other rowdy youngsters packed onto his carriage to Pleasure Island, where there's no school, no cops, and kids can do whatever they want. After a short ride on the buggy, everyone boards a steam-liner that sails out into the night. Soon the ship slips into a black cave at the base of a rock face. Once it docks, all the kids rush into a gated theme park with the Coachmen yelling, "It's all free boys, it's all free."

Along the journey, Pinocchio has befriended another boy named Lampwick, and the two of them go about enjoying the park's exhibits together: the Rough House, where they can pick a fight for no reason; Tobacco Row, where they can smoke all the cigars they want; and the Model Home for Destruction they can vandalize and demolish without getting in trouble.

³⁰ Weston, "Generation Loss."

³¹ Ibid.

Jiminy Cricket, Pinocchio's sidekick and guide, has been searching for his companion throughout the sea journey and then all the many amusements of Treasure Island, when he discovers something horrible. With all the children distracted, the Coachman, now with a devilish grin, instructs a host of black monsters with slanted yellow eyes to close the park gates, locking the boys inside.

Jiminy also soon stumbles upon a shipping area, where the Coachman's black minions corral donkeys wearing kids' clothing into crates. Speaking in a boy's voice, one of the donkeys pleads with the Coachman, saying he doesn't want to be a donkey and begs him to let him go back to his "mommy."

In the meantime, the unsuspecting Pinocchio and Lampwick are playing pool, smoking, and drinking in a hall. Those who have seen the film will recall the alarming scene of Lampwick's transformation. As if straight out of a horror film, the audience watches his shadow on a wall as the boy morphs into a donkey, his hee-hawing voice crying for someone to help him through the whole experience. Pinocchio watches in terror, looks traumatized, and then soon notices that his own ears are growing and that he has spouted a tail. Jiminy finds him just in time and helps him escape the enchanted island before he completely turns.

Putting aside the moralizing tenor of these scenes, designed to frighten young children into obedience, they can also help us understand the danger of self-obscurity in Chris's thought as they indicate the way a deceptive context can transform the self's capacities.

Pleasure Island is a trap, but like the entrapping nature of the everyday world, it does not show itself to be one. Of course, in the cartoon, the island is a literal place inside the larger world with a dungeon where little boys are transformed into animals. But the ordinary is not physical, nor is its entrapment so obvious. It is a level of meaning that infuses the entire world—the most encompassing horizon of the self's existence, where it meets things and others. Like water for fish, the world *as world* is generally unthematic. It gets out of the way to be the medium of the self's engagements and

encounters. Because of this, “the first way the world hides its trap-like nature is by hiding itself *per se*.”³² The “locus or place of deception then transfers” from the world *as such* to the things and others the self relates to within it, “*to the very relation between the self and everything else*.”³³ “Accomplices in setting the trap,” Chris wrote, “the pool tables, cigars, and Lampwicks of the world not only hide it *per se*, but they also hide its entrapping nature—all the while (usually) presenting themselves accurately.”³⁴ Taken from the perspective of ordinary meaning, they, therefore, *actively* deceive the self. Ordinary entities, human or nonhuman, are not passive bearers of a subject’s misled projections but active participants in deceiving the self prior to the subject/object split.³⁵ The very correlation between the self as a self-transcending being and its projects in the ordinary with various things is entrapping.³⁶

Without moral constraints or authorities to hinder them, Pinocchio and Lampwick have all the theme park’s pleasures at their disposal. Despite the rambunctiousness, magical characters, and shapeshifting, it was not complete chaos. Chris wrote:

There was still the regularity of reference (*i.e.*, the significance of items referring to one another). A cigar still referred to a match, and then to one’s mouth. A brick referred to an antique stain glass window, then to the resulting shards on the ground. Like this, the ordinary world draws the self into it as an expanse offering ‘all the meaning in the world’ while hiding the true significance of what is happening along the way.³⁷

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid; Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 17. Chris found this thought prepared for her both in Heidegger’s thoughts on untruth as *lethe* and in his discussion of *Bestand* or standing-reserve. Technology (which is a dispensation of the history of being/truth and not a technique, or technical apparatus—as Heidegger put it, “nothing technological” or we might say, nothing technical) does not enframe primarily through a theoretical split between subject and object. It enframes through *Bestand*—which is the colorless appositive of *das Ding*. (In *Four Seminars*, Heidegger characterizes enframing [*Gestell*] as the “photographic negative” of appropriation [*Ereignis*], pg. 60.) *Bestand*, such as a plane on a runway, is not primarily—Heidegger says—an object. Its very being stands ready for take-off, for the “possibility of transportation.” By way of *Bestand*, the human is enframed before it presents itself as a subject standing over against an object. As Chris would put it—although admittedly without the attentiveness to the historicity of being’s various dispensations—the very correlation between the self and the ordinary is entrapping. Regular things actively participate within deception and always already entrap the self within the ordinary. She called this “thing deception.”

³⁶ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

³⁷ Ibid.

It is important to realize that as it opens up interactions with items and general others, the everyday does not first present itself as meaningless, absurd, lacking significance, or even *as*—and this is her key point—a lower level of meaning. It just opens up a seemingly limitless horizon of activity, where the self can go from one endeavour to the next ‘without end.’

This theme is perhaps better illustrated by a later version of the Pinocchio story. In Disney’s version, Pinocchio only visits Treasure Island for an evening before he escapes. But in 1978’s *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, which was based more faithfully on the original folk tale, Pinocchio and his companions are in Toy Land for months before there’s any hint that something is wrong. Like the older version of Pleasure Island, the ordinary simply presents itself as the place where the self lives out its life. Even the interruptions of broken tools, missing items, and the nihilation of anxiety just thrust the self deeper into this expanse of meaning-bearing existence. And so, Chris wrote, “there needs to be an intervention of a different kind to show that in following after the special other unto the rest of the world the self risks losing itself as being-for that other who first draws it forth.”³⁸ This “other kind of interruption”—one which is beyond those ‘phenomenological reductions’ of *Being and Time*—“has to *do more* than just limit the ordinary.”³⁹ By way of expression it must also “show that everyday life hides a still deeper level of being, one where the self and the ordinary are not correlated, but are ultimately incompatible.”⁴⁰

The Thing ‘Out There’

I had this recurring dream during this time we were all looking for Chris. Usually, in the dream, it was Chris and me. But the night after I went back to the A-frame the second time, after I returned

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

for a picture of Chris's journal, and later that day was arrested—the dream was different. I was with Danielle again. And we were still young.

We are deep in the middle of an Oregon forest, in a log cabin. It's small and there's no bedroom. The bed is in the main room up against a far wall under a big bay window on her side that looks out into the forest. It's a quiet night. Dishes drip on a drying rack in the unlit kitchen. The fire's embers are dim, giving no light to the dark living room. Several bright candles burn beside us on the bedside table as we kiss and rub one another's inner thighs. I can see our reflections on the window on her side of the bed from the candlelight.

Then I notice that our reflections on the window are frozen together, looking out of it into the dark forest night. We're in each other's arms but stiff, staring out into the night, trying to see through the glare on the window as if we had seen someone peeping in on us. But I can only see our image, petrified, reflecting back.

We blow the flames out, hold each other under the covers, and listen.

At first, I can just hear the white noise of the wind moving through the swaying evergreen and the two of us inhaling and exhaling.

Then I hear it. She clasps me tighter.

I can't describe the exact sound, but I want to say it was the sound of a woman moaning in the bushes outside the window.

In my dream, I'm already out the door with a flashlight. And I'm belatedly realizing the danger I'm in, because I've already pushed her hand off my shoulder, insisting it's no more than an injured raccoon. I'm starting to feel myself alone, because of the way I've tried to be brave for her.

I get to the shivering bush. Now, there's more like a growl coming from behind the stems and leaves, but still I push my way through.

There, in the dirt beside the base of the bushes whose limbs I have pushed back, I see a man, naked, on all fours smeared in mud, his eyes rolled back in his head, gnashing his teeth at the air like a dog trying to catch a fly.

Danielle is at the window, looking down at us, and when she sees me pull the branches back and uncover this monster, she screams.

I feel like I'm suffocating, and my limbs go weak. As she shrieks, this thing lunges at me. I don't feel it grab me. I just feel myself falling backwards.

And then before I hit the ground, or feel it clutch onto me, I wake up.

* * *

In Disney's version of *Pinocchio*, Jiminy Cricket helps his puppet companion escape Pleasure Island before he completely turns into a jackass. But in 1978's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, which was based more faithfully upon the original, darker story, Pinocchio does not escape. The older fairy tale is more unrelenting and unforgiving: he completely transforms into a donkey, and then he is sold to a circus. Half-heartedly jumping through a hoop, Pinocchio-the-donkey falls and sprains his leg. Because he is unable to perform, the ringmaster decides to sell him to a drum maker who plans to skin him and use his hide for a drumhead. But first, his new owner must slaughter him. So he throws the donkey into the ocean to drown. But when the instrument maker seeks the carcass on the shore, he only finds a living, wooden puppet, who then explains that the fish ate all the donkey skin off of him. This darker version allowed Chris to explain how, without the device of a *deus ex machina*, the self can lose its capacity to be for the other in the trap of the world.

Just like Pinocchio, who runs enthusiastically into Toy Land, the self participates in its entrapment. Because it is a self-transcending being, one that follows the special other unto the rest

of the world, “the self must walk through the gates of Pleasure Island, so to speak.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, things and others also lure the self into the ordinary, and like the Coachman and the park’s facilities in the children’s film, they do not disclose entrapment. The correlation between the self and the world as a field of ordinary significance “is deceptive and entrapping *as such*.”⁴² For it hides the way that “the deepest being of the self is *not correlated* with the field of everyday life regardless of its authenticity or inauthenticity.”⁴³ And so:

with the closing of a gate, the significance of the context changes while the unsuspecting self is involved within it. The reference of one thing to another, to another and another, so on and so forth, amounts to a kind of significance that hides a world-giving relation which could never find its fulfilment in the referentiality of that which it excludes—for it is constituted by this very exclusion.⁴⁴

Because the ordinary presents itself as a limitless field of activity, an expanse never to “fully interrupt the self’s distraction,” it does not point towards this deeper meaning that “at once escapes it and draws its boundaries.”⁴⁵ Instead, it further obscures the transformations that are taking place in the meaning of the world around it. But also in the self itself.

The boys’ metamorphoses into donkeys “represent the most extreme morphing of the self in its capacity to be for the special other.”⁴⁶ In the story, the children who have changed plead for their parents. But their “capacity to be seen, heard, and recognized has been lost.”⁴⁷ For Chris, this symbolized how the self loses its orientation to itself—as *being-for* this other. In finding itself fulfilled by the ordinary, the self loses “its sense and capacity for expressing the invaluable.”⁴⁸ It begins to

⁴¹ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid. In this passage, Chris was drawing on the way that even the phenomenological reduction of *Angst* and its disclosure of *Dasein* as being between authenticity and inauthenticity (*i.e.*, choosing its way of existing for itself or failing to choose this for itself) is not sufficient for disclosing the self as being-for the special other. It is a further ensnarement without the articulation of the deeper levels of its being that neither *Being and Time* nor Heidegger’s poetic thought provide.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

merge into its social roles. And so “like the little animated children who have lost their connection with their parents, the self can lose itself as being-for.”⁴⁹

In this context, when Chris wrote about losing one’s capacities, she did not mean essential possibilities. The self is *essentially* being-for, even when there is no special other in its life or when it has lost itself with regard to this loved one. However, “if we start with life itself, if we begin with existence, then phenomenologically prior to essential possibilities are existential possibilities.”⁵⁰ The ontic presence of a special other unleashes the self for the depths of its essential being. To put it simply, “it makes these abstract, essential possibilities *relevant* to the existing self—whether it can articulate these theoretically or not.”⁵¹ So when the self transforms ‘from a boy to a donkey,’ it does not lose its essential capacity as being-for, nor its *essential* ability to express, but its *existential* capacity to express who it is for this other. This kind of loss, Chris explained, “is like losing a childhood language or the fingertip callouses which used to enable playing an arpeggio on a guitar.”⁵² It is “not the loss of an essential capacity,” but “a loss of the conditions *that* allowed that essential possibility to be alive and *affectively* fulfilled *during* one’s life.”⁵³ More to the point, it is the recognition of one’s distance from where one began, but also, and more importantly, the lack of feeling for the need to get back, because of all the ways time and the world have shifted as they set it adrift.

Like the fairy-tale where the shapeshifting communicates that all is not as it appears to be, Chris thought that there needs to be “a drastic intervention or interruption” within the ordinary: “not one that simply discloses the kind of meaning at work there. But one that shows an excess of meaning beyond it.”⁵⁴ One which helps the self remember *why* it transcends to the ordinary in the first place.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Chris is here using the term existential in a different way than she did when she commented on Heidegger’s existentialia in *Being and Time*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

But unlike the children's story, this must happen before it is too late: "before the little boy or little girl within us turns into a donkey."⁵⁵

What was hidden from the puppet was the effect this bewitching place was having upon him—until it was too late. Like the entrapping theme park, world deception entraps the self in *self-obscurity*, the term Chris used to designate "the deceptive mode of unknowing."⁵⁶ Such a self-understanding and correlation with the world is misguided because it has lost its feeling for the way *this* other has given it the world. And by losing its feeling for this one, it also loses its ability to express its orientation in the invaluable. The depths of the self's being becomes obscure to it. Yet, at the same time, its self-understanding is still positively correlated with the ordinary world. Through the flight of distraction, "the self falls deeper into the domestication of its social roles."⁵⁷ But this free falling does not show itself as a loss, but as gaining the entire world. For it is not a literal loss. Instead, it is the "*loss of a metaphysical sensitivity* for a level or two of meaning from which the world can be given."⁵⁸ A metaphysical sensitivity is "a feeling for the way higher levels of meaning, both within the self's own being and its correlation with the world, affect the self."⁵⁹ To lose such is to free-fall into a metaphysical insensitivity *for what has been lost*. With this in mind, Chris cited Milton's Lucifer in *Paradise Lost* as a paradigmatic example: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Losing one's sensitivity for these higher levels allows the self's being "to not just settle but rush headfirst into the ordinary world."⁶⁰ When the sensitivity for these has been lost, "even having access to the lowest level of meaning feels like radical freedom—or walking through the gates of Toy Land."⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

To intervene before it is too late, the self must preserve its facility for expressive acts. To prepare the ordinary for such acts of building, the self needs to “paint the incomprehensible” both onto itself and the rest of the world.⁶² That is, “onto the correlation between itself and the world.”⁶³ This is how it begins to reorient itself, to readjust itself outside the bounds of the ordinary. Self-understanding *through* expressive acts that lead to self-obscurity and unknowing can then turn from “entrapping deceptions into conditions for revelation.”⁶⁴ For “curating the unknown with regard to oneself and then unto the rest of the world allows for the development and cultivation of a metaphysical sensitivity” for hidden levels of being and truth the world does not disclose.⁶⁵

Trippin’

I was stilling some metal hangers from clanging together when Mikaela walked into the bedroom.

As she stepped in, I heard her whisper to herself, “duffle or closet,” and I was relieved that the bag was between her and me.

But then she audibly shivered with a “brrr,” and as she did so, she stepped over Danny’s duffel and threw open the closet door, seeing me cringing in its dark corner.

Two things happened at that instant, both of which were a tragedy of miscommunication because of the shocking fear between us that no words had time to arrest. By the moment my vocalized meaning would have registered, it was already too late.

First, Mikaela saw the light of day shine upon a dark figure in the corner of the closet, clutching some dark object close to his chest. And when she did, she screamed as loud as I’ve ever heard someone cry out.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

To hear someone so scared of me was terrifying. But regardless of what Avery and the prosecutors have said, when Mikaela screamed, I did not push her. You couldn't even say I lunged at her.

I do remember metal hangers clanking together as I jumped upwards because of her shrieking. And that was, in fact, when I used two hands to thrust Chris's journal from my chest out toward Mikaela while pleading, "He did it! It's Chris's journal!"

I never touched Mikaela. I was just trying to show her Chris's handwriting. Yet it all happened too quickly. The words, the journal, and me standing in the closet—it all happened before any higher meaning could register. And that's when the second part of the tragedy came about.

I didn't push her. Not even in the slightest. But when she saw me un-clutch this dark object from my chest and push it towards her, she took a step backwards and tripped on Danny's duffle bag.

The instant was larger than I could speak or than Mikaela could understand. For while I was telling her who the real suspect was, she was also falling backwards.

She tripped on Danny's bag, and that was the reason she hit her head on the corner of the dresser.

Metaphysical Insensitivity: Self-Loss while Knowing 'Exactly What We're Doing'

Steven Soderbergh's acclaimed TV series *The Knick* is a fictionalized account of the early days of New York's famous Knickerbocker Hospital in the early 20th Century. It follows the brilliant yet tortured Dr. John W. Thackery, played by Clive Owen. Obsessed with finding success for his medical research and recognition from his peers, over the course of the show's two seasons, Thackery isolates himself from all his meaningful relationships and develops a workaholic lifestyle fuelled by a cocaine and opium dependency. His addiction eventually leads to an inflammation of his intestine, which requires surgery to survive. Despite the danger to his health, Thackery believes that his upcoming procedure presents him with the opportunity to demonstrate one of his new operating techniques.

The show's climactic scenes take place in an old-fashioned medical theatre, with doctors and specialists from all over the region, sitting on wooden viewing benches, waiting to observe the operation—as was common practice at the time. In the middle of the room is an empty operating chair with nurses and junior doctors standing around it. The theatre's doors swing open, and Thackery steps into the room, high and manic from the drug he injected before entering. After a brief introduction, he sits down in the chair, looks into a mirror, and asks for a scalpel. To the horror of the spectators, who realize that the other doctors are only there to assist, Thackery begins making incisions on his lower abdomen. He folds his skin back, securing it with forceps, pulls out his bowel and carries on narrating about the cuts he is making as he slices up his own intestinal tract.

This unforgettable scene is at once grotesque and tragic. But it is also symbolic of the kind of self-destructive, self-dissection that can accompany those driven by a search for knowledge, one which does not find its limits in unknowing.⁶⁶ Thackery, the man of science and medical techniques, is so dissociated from himself that he treats himself as a patient. And even though “his audience is also composed of medical researchers, involved in the same quest for knowledge, through their disgust, they testify that he has gone too far.”⁶⁷ Chris continued:

We could say they recognize that he has ‘short-circuited’ himself, constituting himself as operating subject and operated upon object, leaving no room for himself to be the living human being who suffers and for whom the anonymity and privacy of remaining unknown to the spectators preserves his distance and dignity from their objectifying gaze.⁶⁸

While not every self is a medical doctor searching for scientific or technical knowledge, Thackery represents how any self can lose the depths of its being in the ordinary. For “in the search for knowing

⁶⁶ Weston, “Generation Loss.” Chris did not mean this to be an anti-intellectualism or anti-scientific statement. She simply meant that any search for knowledge must find its limits in a kind of unknowing that is not the lack of knowledge, but an essential condition of finite being.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

how to fulfil one's social roles," the self can lose its feeling for higher levels of being and truth.⁶⁹ "Every self," Chris said, "can short-circuit itself by losing its metaphysical sensitivity."⁷⁰

Thackery's horrified audience shows he had "lost his sensitivity for something they could see in him, but he could no longer see in himself."⁷¹ Their shock indicates that "his dignity resides in something he should have deprived them of, something they should be excluded from—not just as medical researchers, but also as general others."⁷² This excluded level of being is, of course, the invaluable, which "grants the difference between the patient as an object of knowledge and as a living being who can suffer and die amongst intimates."⁷³ Yet, despite his staff and onlookers' reservations, Thackery remained unembarrassed, self-assured, and excited as he performed this new procedure as if he didn't realize what was happening. Chris wrote, "He knew what he was doing, without really knowing what he was doing."⁷⁴ This "self-obscurity," she said, "does not result from a lack of knowledge, but from a misunderstanding of one's relation to that knowledge."⁷⁵ It is "a self-understanding that is really a self-misunderstanding" because it does not comprehend the depths of one's own being. And it results from a failure to cultivate a feeling for one's being with regard to the journey of truth. This insensitivity towards oneself can first of all arise because "there is a difference between awareness and comprehension."⁷⁶

Traditional phenomenological philosophy showed that there is a difference between fulfilled and unfulfilled intentions. Historian of phenomenology, Herbert Spiegelberg, explains that "direct intuition" is "the source and final test of all knowledge, to be incorporated as faithfully as possible in

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

descriptions.”⁷⁷ Unfulfilled claims or statements do not (yet) have such an intuited basis, while fulfilled ones do. One must *see* it before it can be considered true insight. Chris had no problem with this way of speaking about philosophical truth. But she also pointed out that there is a difference between the intuitive fulfilment of sight (perceptual) and that of affect or feeling. Both are ultimately necessary for the self to have insight into itself and the world. One needs “intellectual cognizance”—her term for intellectual and intuitive grasping—“along with affect.”⁷⁸ Otherwise, “feeling and affect are ‘blind’ and will result in mere enthusiasm or perhaps unrestrained emotionality.”⁷⁹ Yet because of the difference between intellectual and affective fulfilment, there is also a problem with “having cognizance and no feeling.”⁸⁰ The problem here is not a failure to grasp or perceive oneself as a being in the ordinary world. It does not result in “intellectual or practical blindness, a general lack of awareness of one’s situation and one’s involvement within it,” but rather in “*a lack of self-awareness*, at least in the depths of one’s being.”⁸¹ For without affective fulfilment, “the self cannot find itself ‘in’ the world... in the truth of being-for.”⁸² Because of this, Chris differentiated between *awareness*—“an intellectual or perceptual cognizance that does not require affective weight to orient the subject...,” “a grasping at a distance”—and *comprehension* —“fulfilled or intimate knowledge, where affective weight fills in and orients cognizance, involving the self in the known *such that its deepest levels are activated*.”⁸³ Without affective fulfilment, the self can know something without really knowing it because it has lost its orientation to its higher being.

⁷⁷ Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1960), 6.

⁷⁸ Weston, “A Journey into Truth.”

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Thackery was certainly frenetic and frantically engaged with his medical show. But nerves and emotions are not affect or feeling. His nervous excitement actually covered up his self-occlusion. It thrust him forward into his procedure. “He had lost,” Chris wrote, “his sensitivity for higher levels of meaning and, thereby, the deeper levels of himself.”⁸⁴ He was fully aware of what he was doing to himself. And he still had all his practical and technical know-how. But he was also lost to understanding himself and his actions from out of the exclusions of intimacy. Such self-obscurity results from a metaphysical insensitivity for the self’s deeper layers. It “is *not* simply the lack of affective fulfilment,” but the “lack of a feeling *for the need* to seek affective fulfilment.”⁸⁵ And this amounts to “a short-circuit” between oneself and the rest of the world, “cutting off the other side of the self from itself.”⁸⁶ Because of this non-correlation in its own self-relation, “the self is at once convinced of itself in its own way forward and dissociated from understanding who it is in this way forward—with often disastrous consequences.”⁸⁷

“What did you do?”

Watching blood pooling behind Mikaela’s head as she was lying on the floor, I was in utter shock. So much so, that I was still stuck in the same position, standing in the closet, holding the journal out in front of me with straight arms when Danny ran into the room. I thought he was going to attack me. But I couldn’t move. I couldn’t separate myself from the things that were happening around me or understand myself as someone who could respond to them.

⁸⁴ Weston, “Generation Loss.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Anyone who had meant to do this wouldn't have stayed in that room. They would have tried to escape and run away. They would have run out the back door before the boyfriend got there, through the woods, and on to their getaway.

But I was still there when Danny was heaving his shoulders up and down in front of me, with tears already in the corner of his eyes, and in a cracking voice, not so much asking but demanding over and over, "What did you do? What did you *do*?"

I was still there because I actually didn't do anything. Nothing *at all*. And I admit that was my greatest fault. That I did nothing. Nothing to save my relationship with Chris. Nothing to stop myself from always re-creating the same silent, safe place from which I could pounce if I needed to protect myself. Nothing to build my understanding of the world so that I would finally realize that this same hole I had always dug for myself was actually just a naïve belief in the world. Not just a belief, but a bond—a metaphysical Stockholm syndrome. For I never thought my words would ever fall on deaf ears. Nor did I think that after preserving that quiet place for so long, the world would one day fail to drag me out into a final moment of revelation so that everyone else would finally understand who I always was. I believed that everything would crystallize in just the right way and shine on me at just the right angle so that everyone else could see and immediately understand my best intentions. This was the deeper reason I remained in that room. Not only because I did nothing wrong, but because I thought the world would be able to see me for who I was.

So, I was still there when, instead of hitting me, Danny was on his knees, speaking into Mikaela's ear.

Seeing him bent over Mikaela's body reminded me of Chris's journal. I looked down at it, opened it, and started flipping through. But instead of seeing lines full of her handwritten notes, there was just sheet after sheet of empty paper.

Danny yelled something at me like, "How could you do this?"

I kept turning the pages, frontwards and backwards. But they were all blank.

Then I turned to the very first one, the one after the cover. When I opened it, a photobooth strip fell out from behind it onto the floor. It was the same print I had seen in Chris's room. The one showing her, Mikaela, and Danny on his birthday at Rafferty's. The one that also showed the book-shaped gift Chris gave him as a present. And there on the first page, I saw a note in Chris's handwriting, and all became clear:

Dear Danny, may this small gift and its cheap, 'tearable' pages ☺ find you in the depths of creative blockage when you want to say more to her but can't find the words to express. Happy 25th dear friend. —Chris.

After I read this, I realized where I *truly* was, where I had always been. I was still there in that room because my place had always been there. Not because I was actually guilty of hurting Mikaela. It's true. Danny found me there because I had always wanted to save Mikaela from him, just like I wanted to save Chris's memory from him. But I had also forever been there, even before Danny and Mikaela. I had been there, standing just a step outside that closet, ever since I was a child—ever since I learned to stay quiet, to punch holes in walls and let others be blamed. I had always been the guy in their closet, always the monster in the bushes, always the misunderstood one that words, occasions, and circumstances failed to reveal.

I think it was the third time Danny yelled at me, "do something," that I started zoning back into the emergency of the situation. By that point, Mikaela was speaking, saying something about the hot tub and pictures. Danny was hushing her, telling her to just rest, that he was there beside her, to "just be still,"—I specifically remember him saying these words.

I threw the journal on the bed and took the phone out of my pocket, dialling 911. The dispatcher wanted Danny to follow instructions to help Mikaela, so I handed the phone off to him and walked out of the room.

Conclusion: Painting the Incomprehensible onto the World

When Chris wrote about “painting the incomprehensible onto the world,” she was writing about the painting “Sister Anna,” by the Swedish artist, Carl Fredrick Hill (1849-1911).

With a daylit town far in the distance behind her, a young woman stands alone and still in a field beside a well-trodden path or stream—it is hard to tell which—that runs towards the bottom of the canvas. The viewer cannot see where the trail or creek leads, but the shadowed wood and shades around the foot of the painting leave the impression that wherever it is, is dark. If it is a path, she is not standing *on* it but *beside* it in the grass, looking over in its direction. Yet it is almost as if she is not really looking at the path or stream but instead listening for something over her shoulder. Under her own feet are less travelled tracks that lead back behind her and draw the viewer’s eye towards the painting’s dark, central form. Hill-scholar Karin Sidén calls it an “anthropomorphous bush” because it looks as much like a shaded shrub as a darkly phantom stalking the young woman.⁸⁸ Perhaps the most unnerving thing about this black hole in the middle of the scene is that despite standing in the same direct sunlight, the woman’s body casts a shadow, but the bush does not. It does not cast one, Chris wrote, “for it *is* a shadow incarnate on the canvas.”⁸⁹

In his painting, “Hill suggests the subtle identity of the woman and the shadow not only by placing it *directly* behind her, in line with her own tracks but also by giving it anthropic form.”⁹⁰ Because of this “symmetry *and* proportionality, it could seem that as she stepped away from it... stepping into the field and the rest of the world, she, in fact, stepped out of the void, leaving a dark hole behind in the place she once was.”⁹¹ The “insubstantial, shadowless character of the bush perhaps hints that it is to be taken symbolically,” as an expression of something about the anonymous woman, or the self

⁸⁸ Sidén, *Carl Fredrik Hill*.

⁸⁹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

in general.⁹² Yet its depicted relationship to her, as something that follows her and that hides in the landscape around her, something that she feels is there but cannot single out, let alone unmask, still unsettles because “even if it *is* her, it remains unknown to her.”⁹³

Remember the incomprehensible shapes and patterns interrupting the landscape and town in Maignan’s “Saint Francis of Paolo.” The eye can avoid them, letting them blend into the background of the scene, or concentrate on them and allow them to lead it to another, higher vision. The narrator from the Quay Brothers’ film explains, “If anamorphosis is the art of delaying access to deeper meaning, then we must learn to wait for revelation.” So too with Hill’s bush. Chris presented it as a portrayal of unknowing, and “the relationship between the woman and the bush as a topological representation of the self’s relation to its own self-obscurity.”⁹⁴

Those with the benefit of hindsight might find the amorphous bush behind the woman to be a visual expression of the mental illness creeping up upon the artist’s mind. And this would be “a very fair perspective to take.”⁹⁵ Unfortunately, it is the case that “the mentally unwell are also often the most sensitive amongst us.”⁹⁶ One could perhaps take this line of interpretation. Yet we cannot approach this work as a whole only as a symptom of the artist’s deteriorating mind. For then, “we would not have put ourselves in the proper position to see the truth it displays.”⁹⁷ By “painting the incomprehensible onto and into the world, Hill reveals more than the instability of his own personal intentions and biography.”⁹⁸ He inserts “a challenge on the canvas for every self,” all those anonymous others who will ever see his work.⁹⁹ He intervenes in the landscape of his scene,

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

challenging his viewers “to find themselves affected by it and so repositioned out of the predominant modes of seeing and knowing in ordinary life.”¹⁰⁰ The lesson for the self is that it must learn to curate, create, and express the incomprehensible in the midst of the ordinary so that it can begin to trace its way back to the other who gives it its being.

To throw the paint of incomprehension upon the world requires imagination and courage. But doing so is the first step on the journey of truth as it opens up a feeling for higher levels of meaning and the deeper side of the self.

* * *

After I left Danny and Mikaela in the room, I don’t remember many details about what followed. I was sitting outside the cabin on the front deck in my socks when a local officer arrived with his hand on his holster. I don’t think I responded to his questions before he went into the cabin.

By the time the paramedics came, I was in the back of the first cop’s cruiser with handcuffs on. My knees were bunched up against the metal divider between the backseat and the front seats.

They wheeled Mikaela out on a bed, and Danny got into the ambulance with them before they left with sirens blaring.

Hours of waiting passed as more police arrived, and they began setting up a perimeter around the cabin.

Bill and Stache showed up at almost the same time, closely before dark. I remember them shaking hands and Bill patting Stache on the back like he knew him.

The local cop eventually pulled me out of his car with one hand over my head and the other on my shoulder, while asking Stache if he had his own “bracelets.” I was still in my socks.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Stache wasn't smirking when he handcuffed me and formally placed me under arrest. I asked for my shoes, but he just shook his head.

The slightest light of day had already slipped away when he put me in the back of his unmarked car. He said to Bill, "Cloaky's retirement party... the 18th ... you gonna be there?"

Bill responded, "Planning on it."

"Didn't you guys make detective the same year?"

"That's right. He always had more of a stomach for it, though."

"Five more years, huh? That's a lot, especially for the pay."

"At least it's consistent. Few can afford me these days."

Then Stache closed the car door, and it was muffled, but I thought I heard him ask Bill, "Is she meeting us at the station?"

Chapter 8: “Let this Darkness be a Belltower”

The Journey of Truth (2): The Existential Imagination and the Beautiful Act

*You lie in your weeds
This dead bird is beautiful
When they found her at peace
She has my eyes
A golden glow that glowed all night
Don't you say she was weak
I'll carry her, because she breathed I breathe
Hell won't come into my house
Not when you're around*

...
*You were the victim
You wouldn't let her up until she kissed you
Now she's the villain
There's no walls in heaven*

*A golden armoured sky will carry her
But I'll always have her eyes
All will carry her
But I'll always have her eyes*

—*Lost in the Trees, “This Dead Bird is Beautiful”*

Introduction: A Night at the Station

After leaving the Quinn’s cabin that night, Stache took me back to MCU and put me in the box, and then left me there. I asked him about Mikaela, but he said he didn’t know how she was doing.

Avery came in and asked me, “How are you, Dylan?” He grinned when I stared at him with a blank look and didn’t respond. He knew that I wasn’t going to answer any of his questions. But he sat down and asked them anyways for the camera.

He asked about the videos of Chris they found on my computer and phone. They were made on different days, over a period of years, and he claimed they showed I made more than one trip to stalk her. Instead of explaining that she knew I was in town those times and that she also knew I often made candid videos of her, I just stayed silent.

Then Avery asked why I disparaged Barb in our first interview by claiming she didn't care about her daughter. He went on to say that Barb's been one of the most concerned and cooperative parents of a victim he has ever worked with. She even went above and beyond and offered to assist the police department by hiring the most expensive private investigator in the city. I guessed he was referring to Bill.

I didn't have to request a lawyer a second time. As soon as I did, Avery smirked again and then started packing up his things. Before he left the room, he asked if I had an attorney in mind or anyone I wanted to call. I said no. So, he said they would find me a public defender. When he was stepping out the door, I asked him how Mikaela was. He heard me, but he didn't respond before shutting the door behind him.

About an hour later, Stache entered the box and told me they couldn't find a lawyer so late on a Saturday. I'd be staying overnight in the station as they were still waiting to hear about Mikaela's condition. He said I should hope she pulled through.

A uniformed officer led me down to the department's basement, and I spent the night in a holding cell wearing wet, muddy socks.

* * *

Chris reserved the term imagination for what she called the existential or metaphysical imagination, which she developed from two 20th Century traditions, Martin Heidegger's later thought and

psychoanalysis.¹ Like Heidegger's poetic imagination, which does not produce "mere fancies and illusions,"² she distinguished it from Sigmund Freud's conception of phantasy, which he opposed to reality.³ The existential imagination is "not a faculty for daydreaming, pretend, make-believe, or wish-fulfilment."⁴ The poet's imagination provides a better comparison. For Heidegger, the poetic imaginary offers the "visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar."⁵ It invests concealment in things to give a richer and more robust world than the one offered by technological enframing. By preserving the unknown within something, poetic dwelling transforms it from standing-reserve (or a mere object) to *das Ding*: Heidegger's imagination was not understood as a representational faculty that presents unreal image-projections either before or after reality-testing. It is instead the reflection of being as *lethe* (concealment) within the mortal's regard for things and the world. Chris's thoughts on this point are similar but ultimately different because hers is not ontosoteriological.

In almost every way, her conception of the existential imagination was closer to Heidegger's than the psychoanalytic version.⁶ For her, like Heidegger, the imagination is not primarily an image or fiction-producing faculty.⁷ She clarified, "It *can* express itself *through* fantasy, but it is not itself

¹ Weston, "Ontological Amulet."

² Heidegger, *Poetry*, 223.

³ Allen Esterson, "Fantasy (Phantasy)," in *The Freud Encyclopedia: Theory, Therapy and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ Weston, "Ontological Amulet."

⁵ Heidegger, *Poetry*, 223.

⁶ Weston, "Ontological Amulet;" Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973). Chris's existential imagination should not be confused with the existential imagination Heidegger developed in his hermeneutic reading of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Heidegger interprets Kant's schematism to show how the existential imagination forges the ecstasies of temporality. Although not bereft of considerations about time, Chris's existential imagination focuses on the levels of meaning that give time its orientation in a special other.

⁷ Darian Leader, *Introducing Lacan* (London: Icon Books, 2000); Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (New York: Verso Books, 2008); Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso Books, 1989). For instance, for those following in the line of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's formulation of the imaginary for the purposes of ideological critique, such as Lois Althusser, Judith Butler, and Slavoj Žižek, the Lacanian imagination performs a fundamentally ideological function, in that it yields a *mis-recognition* of the subject and its social situation. Granted their differences, for Althusser, Butler, and Žižek, the imagination serves to hide the limits of both the subject and its situation within ideology. In all these cases, imagination serves to cover over the limits and excesses of phenomena, in order to preserve their apparent wholeness. Here, Althusser, Žižek, and Butler only disagree on the extent to which the imagination is effective in this regard. This is clearly much different from the Heideggerian imagination that we have described above. From Heidegger's perspective, instead of the imagination serving to hide the limits or concealment within things, it rather displays them.

fantastical because it concerns the depths of reality and truth.”⁸ In any particular situation, and with regard to either the real or the unreal, the existential imagination allows the self to understand the different levels of meaning she spoke about. It offers the potential for the meaningfulness *per se* of any given or possible scenario. But its *primary work* “is to etch out the difference between the invaluable and the ordinary so that the self can build an expressive work—something that makes words, actions, or things symbolic of what the other has given.”⁹ While this presentation is closer to Heidegger’s analysis than psychoanalysis, her theory also differs from his in a crucial respect.

Heidegger’s poetic imagination is the mortal’s correlate of the saving concealment he found in *Ereignis* or appropriation. Appropriation, he says, is “waking up *from* the oblivion of being *to* the oblivion of being.”¹⁰ Chris pointed out that this amounts to recognizing “an onto-soteriological power in this hiddenness.”¹¹ For Heidegger, the step back to the ancient origin of both art and technology (as modes of truth) allows poetic thought to delimit technological enframing within a larger, broader, more encompassing dispensation of being. “The poet’s images and language match this saving aspect of *lethe*,” Chris wrote, “investing it in things so that they give a richer world than *techne*.”¹² This is the crucial point of difference between Heidegger’s poetic imagination and Chris’s existential imagination. For her, “the existential imagination does not correlate the self with the saving power of being.”¹³ Instead, it “decouples the two, emphasizing the non-correlation between the self and being—or the so-called ‘it’ that gives.”¹⁴ By sketching the difference between the invaluable and the ordinary, and in opening up the distance of desire, it not only provides the possibility of building

⁸ Weston, “Ontological Amulet.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, 30.

¹¹ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*; Weston, “Ontological Amulet.”

¹⁴ Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

works, but it also “exposes being to something incommensurable with it: the beautiful.”¹⁵ And in finding itself correlated with beauty, the self also finds itself non-correlated with being and time. Torn between what it wants for the other and recognizing what the world can ultimately provide, the imagination allows the self to beautify things in a frail expression of who it is for.¹⁶

A Holding Cell

The next morning, a public lawyer came to visit me in the holding cell. He was middle-aged, had short grey-hair, and he wore scuffed up runners under his suit pants.

The first thing he said to me was, when he saw me looking at his shoes was, “Don’t worry, I’ve got my loafers in a locker down the street—between here and the courthouse.”

He then noticed my socks. Once I explained, he said that my shoes would be in evidence. And after I mentioned that I didn’t have any others at the motel, he said he could arrange for alternate footwear.

He then asked if I wanted to contact anyone, like family—perhaps they could provide a nicer pair. I said no because I needed to handle the situation before I talked to my mother and father about it. He then began updating me on Mikaela’s condition.

She was in intensive care. The night before, doctors thought she would need surgery for the cerebral contusion she suffered. They didn’t think it was just a brain bruise but feared it might be bleeding too. After running some tests and monitoring her through the night, they ruled out any

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Although theoretically Chris’s imagination is closer to Heidegger’s, this non-correlation and division between the imagination and being provides a dim echo of the psychoanalytic opposition between phantasy and reality. However, it would be a mistake to conflate them, since Chris’s is a metaphysical ‘faculty,’ so to speak. It is the ‘active agent’ in presenting the intelligibility and levels of significance of all things, real or unreal. It founds the differences and relation between the invaluable, the ordinary, and the expressive. It cannot, then, be limited to a psychological faculty of wish-fulfilment. It rather provides the field or medium of meaningfulness *per se* for self-transcendence and desire to follow after the other.

procedures. By the morning, she was well enough to do a police interview. In fact, Avery was interviewing her as we were speaking. Then the Detective wanted to talk to me.

I was obviously relieved. Not just because she was in stable condition, but also because I thought she would clear things up and tell them I didn't push her, that she just tripped.

Sure, I shouldn't have been there. So I'd take the ding for the lesser charges. But I didn't want a violent offender label to follow me around for the rest of my life. After hearing my story, and my assurances that I didn't attack her, my lawyer said something like, "Let's hope she remembers it the same way."

He then said he had to go meet with another client but that he'd be in the interview room with me later that morning.

* * *

About an hour later, a uniformed officer brought me a pair of large slippers he said he found in the lost and found. I put them on and they fit, so he escorted me up to the box. My lawyer was already there.

Once I sat down, he pointed to the camera in the top corner of the room and said anything we discussed was privileged. It couldn't be used against me.

Then he said there was both good and bad news. But he didn't give me a choice about what I wanted to hear first.

Mikaela had continued to improve. That was the good news.

The bad news was that, other than recognizing me, she claimed she didn't remember anything about the encounter. All she recalled was me lunging towards her, like a cornered animal. He said those were her words, "like a cornered animal."

It got worse. Danny had given a statement to police claiming I had been stalking Mikaela, and that I threatened him a couple of nights before at Rafferty's when he tried to intervene. He said his co-workers could attest to this too. The P.I., Bill, confirmed he witnessed me at her house. And because of all of this, Mikaela's family agreed with the police that they should throw the book at me. So, my lawyer explained, I was being charged with criminal harassment for breaking my restraining orders, trespassing, breaking and entering, and third-degree assault.

He explained that the assault charge meant that I could do time, "years, in fact."

I remember being at a loss as he tried to guide me back to the present circumstances. "They're trying to build a case here." I noticed the camera's light wasn't flashing. "But it's not the one you think." The room seemed bigger, with only two people in it. "It's not really about Mikaela." He pulled out a folder and opened it up. "The case they're building against you is about Chris."

"Wait," I said, "they don't even know what happened to her."

"Right." He turned his notes to another page. "I just got called in this morning. So, I don't know much about that case. I know you mentioned it in the holding cell. But I only just reviewed the file." I glanced under the table, and he was now in his dress shoes. "I'm only a public defender," he continued, "but I've been doing this for a long time. What's happening here, what you really need to know, is that they're using this case to build the Weston one. They've got a long game." He was flipping through the pages of his file, and he said off the cuff, "You know they can prosecute without a body, right?" He then backtracked, saying that this wasn't his specialty and that I would want to hire someone who had worked with missing person cases before.

I was stunned, and he could see it.

He said, "Just don't say a thing," as he pointed to the empty chairs on the other side of the table. "When the Detective gets here, don't open your mouth or even offer an expression on your face. Look willing and attentive but let me do the talking. I'm not out of my league here. I've dealt with

serious cases before. And I know David—uh, Detective Avery. I’ve sat across this table from him many times before.” Then he pointed to the camera, saying, “The golden key here is to look like you’re willing to help, but don’t give them anything. Look them in the eyes, look attentive to what they’re saying and asking, but don’t respond. Let *me* represent *you*. I know how judges and juries think. They need to see you’re trying to cooperate. But the trick is to *only* let them see that you’re cooperating. That’s it. Don’t give them anything else, and I mean this, *anything*. Not a word, not a gesture, not tears—not even a smile. They don’t have to like me. I mean, they will, but for all intents and purposes right now,” again he was pointing up at the camera, “they just have to understand that I’m doing my job. But they need to like *you*. So look responsive without responding.”

“Let this Darkness be a Belltower”: Building and Works

Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus* contains a passage that translates into English as:

Quiet friend who has come so far,
feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a belltower
and you the bell. As you ring,
what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn yourself to wine.
In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.
And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.¹⁷

Rilke’s poem is “a work in the deepest sense.”¹⁸ It provides “an intervention in the ordinary by using words to transform things into expressions of that in which they do not share.”¹⁹ In doing so, the poet

¹⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, “Sonnets to Orpheus (II, 29),” translated by Joanna Macy and Anita Barrows, *On Being* 8 December 2016, <https://onbeing.org/poetry/let-this-darkness-be-a-bell-tower/>.

¹⁸ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

gives the tired, broken friend a source of renewal. For his friend “is no longer just a self, but now a belltower ringing out into the world.”²⁰ And, then, instead of finding himself “exhausted and cut off from his deepest being by the drag and pull of day to day life,” his friend “finds a way back to the resounding depths that he *is*.”²¹ A work gives the special other the capacity for their own expression, such that “they too can intervene, speak stillness to the waters, and movement to the motionless earth.”²² For the work leads back to the relation between the self and other, one which “the world as a sphere of ordinary life cannot accommodate.”²³ And speaking the impossible reflects this disparity. Both the poet and the friend find themselves “with a license to change the things of this world into symbols of their non-correlation with it.”²⁴

The existential imagination is not primarily an image-producing faculty. Its main activity is to “open up the requisite distance desire needs to follow after the other.”²⁵ Once again, this is not a physical distance. But a difference in levels of meaning, “the separation between the ordinary and the invaluable.”²⁶ And this gives a path for desire to follow. Longing for one another not only brings each to “the threshold of everyday existence, but also a step or two beyond... towards higher spheres of meaning and fulfilment.”²⁷ Special others find themselves together in a love that outstrips everyday significance, one which builds itself in an expressive affirmation of the other against the ordinary. For “affirming and addressing a special other in this expressive way, truthfully reflects the distance between the other *in* the ordinary and their invaluable nature.”²⁸ Yet, of course, “both truly long for each other, only insofar as they free one another to be in the world.”²⁹ The imagination builds

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Weston, “Ontological Amulet.”

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

expressive works and speaks the impossible to help friends, family, lovers, sisters and brothers memorialize and preserve both the self's and the loved one's distance from ordinary life. More precisely, it "draws the lines that make such a work possible, for it gives desire the field of its transcendence as split between the ordinary and the invaluable."³⁰ Chris summarized:

Building (i.e., the true workmanship of the imagination) is not just the making of works but the laying down of contour lines onto the topography of the world.... [T]hrough these, desire expresses itself for the loved one such that works can at all be made. For by these metaphysical lines that it traces out over concrete things it can distinguish between their referential and symbolic meanings.³¹

Building presents "the most encompassing world—that which includes the general and the special within it—as inadequate to what desire wants for the other."³² In laying down different tiers and levels in the depths of the self and the other's being, "it introduces a non-correlation between desire and the place of its transcendence—the world."³³ Such a non-correlation "not only refers to the unfulfillable nature of desire but also to the world's inability to provide the closeness desire longs for."³⁴ Recall that such closeness is not necessarily within a hand's grasp. The "impossible closeness" desire wants is for "the world to be the place that always expresses this other's invaluable being."³⁵ Whether the loved one is in the world or not, whether they are gone or still here, "it will never fully express who they are."³⁶ The utility of items and the generality of the social are not mere options to be taken or left once and for all. They are necessities and also "the very concrete ground of expression."³⁷ They are not "founding in terms of their meaning," since being-for founds the ordinary through the invaluable.³⁸ But they are indeed "*the occasions* for founding any meaning at all."³⁹ They

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

enable an emergent, outstripping, more profound meaningfulness than they can contain, one which establishes their own diminished significance. Building “implicitly knows this” and frees the self and other for the ordinary as its condition. But it does so primarily “by showing the everyday from the other side of a boundary to which it has given way.”⁴⁰ Imagination will only ever find the sources for its expression “in the very same world it does not negate but transforms to express itself *in* this longing for an impossible closeness.”⁴¹

In the perpetual inability to have the unattainable other, “desire does not hit a dead end nor necessarily fall into the infinite loop of its own past.”⁴² By the other’s self-transcendence, it is gifted the world “in relief” from its own entrapped selfhood.⁴³ A special other gives the world “as an everyday sphere framed in a longing for something beyond it.”⁴⁴ The world, things, others, and even time and space *per se* “are material for expressing this.”⁴⁵ And so, Chris wrote, “with these belltowers, wines, flowing waters, and still soil, the existential imagination can build an expression of what it wants for the other in defiance of what the world gives.”⁴⁶ Building finds the unattainable in the other so that “some chosen things can reflect the other’s unattainability.”⁴⁷ These things “serve as boundaries standing up to time, but they are also eventually toppled by its tides.”⁴⁸

Avery’s Interview

Detective Avery marched into the room and threw down his folder onto the table.

My lawyer said, “a bit cliché, huh?”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Avery scoffed, sat down, then began asking many questions. How did I know where the Quinn's cabin was located? How did I know the alarm was not on and the backdoor was open? What did it feel like to be scared when Mikaela opened the closet door? He asked about the journal too, and why I felt the need to steal it. I looked him in the eyes as he asked. Yet, every time my lawyer heard the upwards inflection of a question mark in the Detective's voice, he inserted himself, saying in different ways, "How many times do I have to explain to you Detective that *I* have instructed my client to not respond." Many times, my lawyer added something like, "he told me he wants to answer you. He has nothing to hide. But," he would continue, "Detective you know as well as I do that we're doing our jobs here. *You* know. This is my job, *right?* Even though I'm a public defender—by choice, I'd like to add—I'm good at it. We're not responding to your questions until you've given us enough time to review the files." Avery would stare at him over his glasses and wait for him to finish. "And so," my lawyer would continue, "while my client has nothing to hide and has told me he wants to help as much as he can, you simply have not given us the opportunity to fully address your questions. For God's sake, I just got called in this morning."

After one version or another of this bounce-back message from my lawyer, Avery would pick up his line of thought. He recognized he was just performing for the camera, and that his questions were really for the people on the other side of the lens. But that was enough for him. He was counting on me to not defend myself against his implied accusations, so he could make me look guilty on-screen when I didn't respond.

The Detective went on to lay out his version of events, and to make me look as bad as possible. According to him, I was stalking Mikaela and jealous of Danny, so I followed them from Mikaela's to the cabin. Once they left to go to the local store, I saw the journal in the bedroom and wanted to make sure Chris hadn't written anything damning about me in it.

During Avery's monologues, my lawyer would make loud exhales and use his hands to reach in the air before he leaned back in his chair and locked his fingers behind his head. And then when the Detective took a pause, my council would interrupt with a question in the most ungentle tone, while looking at his watch, "You done, yet?"

Avery would continue. I was in the bedroom checking the journal when I was caught by Mikaela. And I tried to cover it up by attacking her "like a wild animal... like a wild animal." But even though I was vicious, I was small—much smaller than Danny. So when he trapped me in the room, and I realized I was out-muscled, I was smart enough not to fight or run. Instead, like I apparently always do when I'm caught, I acted like it was all a big misunderstanding.

The whole interview only lasted for about twenty minutes. Avery closed his folder and stood up. But instead of walking out of the room, he asked, "So I don't suppose that your client cares enough to meet with a victim's mother, does he?"

My lawyer was clearly caught off guard. He just asked, "who?"

"Barbara Kelly? The mother of the missing young woman, Christina Weston—the case we briefed you on earlier? Mikaela's roommate? *You* know, her best friend and Dylan's partner for almost a decade? She's here. Just got here from Chicago yesterday. And she's just a few doors down in another room. She wants to speak with Dylan, and the Perkins family have given Barbara their blessing to do so. In fact, they've asked me to ask Dylan to meet with her." Then Avery turned to me, asking directly, "Dylan, are you willing to meet with Chris's mother?"

My lawyer realized the situation's stakes, so he placed a hand in front of me on the metal tabletop to indicate I shouldn't respond. He then asked the Detective to speak with me in private.

Once Avery was out of the room, he asked who Barb was, about our background, and whether I could face her without any kind of reaction. He explained, "I've been talking about the importance of first impressions for viewers of that video up there. They've got him asking you to meet with her

on camera. Turning down the mother of Mikaela's missing best friend, your ex-, when the Perkins have asked you to meet with her—that would look bad. They'd use it against your character. But if we do meet with her, any kind of outburst from you would look worse." He was flipping through his file without really looking at it. "You know these people better. You know yourself better. And so, it's ultimately up to you what you want to do."

I crossed my arms and leaned back in my chair thinking about it before he said, "Really, what I should be advising is that you meet with her to show your willingness to face her, but only if you promise yourself and me that you'll be a stone—just like you were with Avery. Let me redirect her remarks. Remember, I can look like a professional, but you can't look like a bad guy."

I wanted to meet with Barb anyways, and so after I nodded, my lawyer exited the room to inform the detectives that she could come in.

A Flowering Tree in a Cave: The Role of Figmentations

In 1877, a year before the onset of schizophrenia, Swedish artist Carl Fredrik Hill painted "*Det blommande fruktträdet*" ("The Blooming Fruit Tree"). The piece displays a fruit tree in pillowy, white bloom standing in a field with blue sky above. It was characteristic of the landscape paintings of his earlier years. Sometime after he fell ill, he used charcoal to sketch a work called "Flowering Fruit Tree in a Cave." The subject of both works is a blossoming tree. But the tone and feeling could not be more different. While the earlier work captures springtime's renewal and openness, the sketching entombs a similar flowering tree in a black cave. Outside, on the crest of the hill housing the cavern, "there are leafless, thinly etched tree-trunks and limbs that look more dead than out of season."⁴⁹ From the perspective of the artist, "represented by the black lake at the foot of the tree reflecting it back to itself, we could perhaps understand the charcoal image as a metaphor for his

⁴⁹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

own self-regard.”⁵⁰ Chris continued, “Once flourishing in his career and life, now suffering under the burden of his illness,” the later work seems to be an expression of “what he wanted to give back to the world suffocating under a mound, buried alive within him.”⁵¹

For Chris, Hill’s charcoal drawing showed how the existential imagination can build with *figmentations*—a figment (image, persona, or world) that has the status of a work. Unlike a memento, a figmentation is not a real thing.⁵² Yet like Chris’s childhood teddy bear, Theo, it can have a material support.⁵³ Whether it does or does not have such a material basis, it attains to the status of a work because the existential imagination builds it, not mere fantasy. It is not simply there for make-believe or pretend. It is “an imaginary intervention in the ordinary, which ultimately shows the untruth of the world.”⁵⁴

Unlike the figments of fantasies, figmentations are not merely unreal projections. They have no real referent in the world (beyond a possible material support). And they do not refer within the ordinary. But their truth does not lie in the negation of their reality. Chris wrote, “A tree blooming without sunlight in a cave is impossible. But to use the artist’s mental illness to explain away this image would be more untrue than the sketch itself.”⁵⁵ It would be “dissociation from the viewpoint upon the world a blossoming tree in a cave provides.”⁵⁶ Such a surface-level demeanour would not find itself in “*the meaningful lack* of a world where trees cannot bloom in tombs, and artists express themselves but, for one reason or another, no one hears them.”⁵⁷ It would not find itself in the non-correlation with the world the figmentation expresses.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Weston, “Ontological Amulet.”

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

A figmentation's non-correlation with reality is not to be understood in the same way as that of fantasy with the real. The truth of a fantasy-figment is to be found "in the negation of its realness."⁵⁸ Chris understood that the meaning of these "can be traced back to psychological, cultural, and ideological contexts."⁵⁹ In this sense, fantasy-figments can be symbols of psychological tendencies, cultural aspirations, and ideological oppression. The negation of its realness shows the true motivations of those individual and social sources that have constructed it. But a figmentation's distance from reality is "not that of a mere negation which leads back to the ordinary and to the self within a psychological, social, or critical framework."⁶⁰ Instead, a figmentation's distance from the real "opens up the existential distance desire needs for truth to happen."⁶¹ Through it, the existential imagination sketches out the distance between the invaluable and the everyday. The truth of a figmentation is to be found in how it discloses the self's non-correlation with the untruth of the world. A figmentation's "non-correlation with the ordinary adequately expresses the self's non-correlation with being."⁶² And like a work, a figmentation shows being's openness to more than being itself.

The Victim's Mother

Barb walked into the box, wearing a navy-blue pantsuit, carrying a piece of paper in her hand. It had been years since I last saw her in Europe. She came to visit and took us out for seafood. We didn't have to wait because she knew the owner. As he walked us to our table, Barb asked Chris if the shoes I was wearing were the best I had. I don't think I said many words to her over shellfish that evening. And I think the most we ever talked after that was on the phone when she called about Chris's disappearance. But all these years later, as she was approaching me in a police station's interview

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

room, she looked straight in my eyes and smiled, and at that moment, I felt like she was the only person that had ever smiled at me I didn't reciprocate, but for the first time, I realized that Chris had her mother's lips. Not her eyes, but her lips and also the shape of her face. Everything within me wanted to stand up, round the table, and embrace and hold Barb.

While she was still standing beside her chair, she held out a hand to my lawyer over the tabletop, and he stood up, taking it in two of his. I think he was also caught off guard by her warmth. She didn't offer me her hand, but she nodded and said, "Dylan."

I responded, "Barb."

She sat down, placing the piece of paper she was holding in front of her on the table and covering it with her two hands, and then she began explaining why she was there.

"Christina is not here," Barb began, "and I think we can all agree that someone needs to speak for her. Not, of course, to replace her voice, but to give her back the voice that she doesn't have in the current circumstances." My lawyer was worried I'd take offence to the implication that Barb was going to speak for Chris, so as she was speaking, he unclasped a hand from the other and swiped it towards me on the tabletop as if to say, "Not a word." Barb continued. "Dylan, after Christina disappeared, you volunteered to come here to represent her family." I wanted to jump in, saying something like, "Volunteered?" But I refrained. "Even though you were not forthcoming with me about your current relations with her," she said this with what seemed like a genuine expression of understanding, "I can still empathize with your need to find her. You were willing to represent her when very few others would or could. To follow her even though she had already asked you to never follow her again." My lawyer's flat hand on the table swiped towards me again. "So I want to thank you for that," Barb said. "For trying to give my daughter a voice despite your dishonest ways."

He finally cut her off, "Is it Mrs.?"

Barb responded, "I'm not married if that's what you're asking. Is that what you're asking?"

My lawyer turned his straight mouth into a smile and said, “No, certainly not. I was just inquiring after the title I should use to address you.”

“Well, this isn’t the 1950s,” she said in an ironic tone, “so Ms. seems appropriate. Don’t you think?”

“Of course.” Then he immediately followed this up with another volley to try to cut off the larger point he thought she was trying to make. “My client is not on trial here, Ms. Kelly. We agreed to this meeting in good faith as we have nothing to hide. But we’re not going to sit here and have you accuse him by implication. He is willing to try to help you find your daughter, and we sympathize with your pain, but now I see that you’re trying to find someone to blame. Because of your insinuations, we’re walking out.” My lawyer grabbed my elbow and stood up as he said these last lines pulling me up with him. But I felt like he was clutching onto someone else’s arm because, as he did so, he continued, “Derek is not the one to blame.”

Barb was all smiles as she said in the most inviting tone, “Please, please sit down. Please. I have nothing else to say. I would just like to read something that Chris wrote before she disappeared. It’s just a mother wanting Dylan to know what the last few days before she disappeared were like. He loved her. He needs to know what was happening to her. She wasn’t herself.”

My lawyer, now red in the face, realizing what he had done, deferred by looking over at me. I nodded to Barb, and we sat back down.

She took her hands off the piece of paper she had and began reading.

An Album for a Mother: The Beautiful Act

In 2012, the American band, Lost in the Trees, released an album called *A Church That Fits Our Needs*. The lead singer and songwriter, Ari Picker, said he wrote the album to make sense of his mother’s suicide in 2008. Picker’s mother, Karen, struggled with mental illness throughout her life,

and her sickness meant that, in his own words, Picker grew up with many “emotional obstacles” that his “body and mind... adapted to in some way.”⁶³ When he found out his mother had committed suicide, he used his music to work through all this. *A Church That Fits Our Needs* was the result. In an interview, Picker said he “imagines the album as an earthly refuge for his mother’s troubled spirit.”⁶⁴ He explains: “I wanted to give my mother a space to become all the things I think she deserved to be and wanted to be, and all the beautiful things in her that didn’t quite shine while she was alive.”⁶⁵ Chris found Picker’s album, especially the lyrics to the track “This Dead Bird is Beautiful,”—included in the epigraph of this chapter—to be an example of a *beautiful act*. A beautiful act intervenes in the ordinary’s coordinates not just as an expression of the self and other’s depths but also as a *beautification* of the conditions of its meaning. Like Picker’s beautification of his lost mother built in the figmentation of “this dead bird,” Chris thought the beautiful act reframes being, time, and the world within the truth of desire.

Picker used symbolic lyrics to help him work through the emotional obstacles that life with his unwell mother had normalized. For Chris, his lyrics were figmentations used as “a way to acknowledge the barriers that accrue between the self and loved ones.”⁶⁶ The “burden of broken lives lived together” can lead to metaphysical insensitivity or “numbness.”⁶⁷ Such blockages are not intellectual. Loved ones grasp that they literally anchor the point of the world for one another. They are cognitively aware of this. But “the complications of the past *as such*, in its various modes, accrue on the relationship.”⁶⁸ Destruction loops, domestication, generation loss—in each case, “the way these

⁶³ NPR Staff, “Lost in the Trees: A Golden Memorial of Orchestral Folk,” *NPR* 25 March 2012, <https://www.npr.org/2012/03/25/149226471/lost-in-the-trees-a-golden-memorial-of-orchestral-folk>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Weston, “Ontological Amulet.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

affect one's history with *this* other amounts to making this relationship its own kind of impediment for metaphysical sensitivity.⁶⁹ So while each one can understand the significance of each other in their lives, "their history overcomplicates, and so hinders the affective release for finding oneself in the truth of this comprehension."⁷⁰ The self's potential to build for this other is then "overly burdened by an inability to feel the need for it."⁷¹ There is then the necessity for a repositioning, one that works and figmentations can provide.

One of the aspects of "This Dead Bird is Beautiful" that Chris found to be formally appropriate to the truth-building role of figmentations was the confusion of viewpoints within it. In the song, the second person "you" sometimes seems to refer to the dead bird itself and sometimes to those who would call it "weak." Chris wrote, "The multiplicity of the points of view in this song represents the self's discoordination within its own being because of the affective sedimentation that has built-up upon its relationship with a special other."⁷² Picker "paints' the incomprehensibility of his own position with regard to his mother onto the world... so that he can discover his own truthful viewpoint."⁷³ Chris explained:

After so long blaming this fallen bird that has his eyes for its frailty, but also now wanting to relinquish this self-protective demeanour so that he can speak about its loss truthfully, Picker used his lyrics to find the affective release that would allow him to say and give back to his mother all the things neither he nor the world granted to her while she was still living... Like his lyrics, figmentations open up a path to the place from which one can first feel and, thereby, *comprehend* oneself as being-for this other.⁷⁴

Figmentations provide imaginary sketches mapped onto the world to help one trace the past and its blockages, which continue to hinder affective fulfilment. They provide an acknowledgment of these while also presenting a passage from existential numbness to sensitivity.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Tragically, for Picker and his mother, he found the fullness of his voice for her after she passed. “But for the rest of us,” Chris said, “Picker shows us a way to the place of truth, which is a comprehension that manifests in a beautiful act.”⁷⁵ Like finding a dead bird to be the strong protector of one’s home, “the beautiful act affirms and addresses a special other by giving them more than the world.”⁷⁶ From the exclusivity of the intimate, it finds the loved one to be more than others can see in them. For the special other is “not the sum total of their history,” but the potential to be, “as Picker put it, ‘all the beautiful things’ that do not shine through them unto rest of the world.”⁷⁷ Through the figmentation of this bird, Picker frees himself *from* the generality of others for whom his mother’s life would “amount to a biography.”⁷⁸ His music is not denial or magical thinking. For he continues to represent the darkness that afflicted her. Yet, he “finds himself beyond an ordinary account, in the freedom of expression.”⁷⁹ And from there, “he gives back to his mother that which neither the rest of the world nor everyone else could accommodate except by respecting the boundary he sets for them.”⁸⁰ A beautiful act expresses who the other is by holding being, time, and the world to a higher measure of truth—the beauty of a small, fragile thing. And these small things reflect the truth of being in a more adequate regard because their embodiment highlights the way a special other displaces being itself from the origin of truth. The truth of being is the way it undermines one’s relation to a special other. Beauty does not overcome the undertow of being. But it displays in finite, small things the way the self as being-for is non-correlated with being itself in its desire for the invaluable other.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

Q. (I)

“To those I will ever love,” was the first line of the page from Chris’s journal Barb read to us in the box. Since then, Barb and the police released this note to the media, and so everyone who knows about this case today now knows about it. But back then, the police hadn’t released any information about it yet. In the box with Barb was the first time I heard these words.

Barb continued, “It’s Chris. Just me.” Barb’s voice broke, so she took a pause and held up a fist to her mouth as she cleared her throat. She then lowered it and continued.

“I know *you* know I usually don’t write this way: addressing those who *I know* will never see this journal. But someone will eventually find me. Maybe later, rather than sooner.

And so whoever you may be, you need to know: I’m being followed.

You’re not in danger because of me.

But when you read this, you should know he’s always there.

I still see him everywhere.

Popping up in my feeds, in a window across the street, behind a tree trunk surrounding the places you and I will visit together.

You might notice me looking for him on the opposite side of the street while having breakfast at a hostel on the Mediterranean; or, perhaps, in a far cove along a coral beach down under, seeing him peering at us from a dark rockface as we enjoy the waves and their clinking withdrawal.

His name could be in any given universe, spoken into any mist of stardust that we might eventually find common and solid beneath our feet, the initial of a question I cannot fully answer. One you will probably and eventually ask about why I’m silently walking away from you, everywhere we seem to go.

I won't call him by his real name. This is too easy. I'll call him Q. Because of my love, he follows both of us.

Yet this, I promise you.

I will forge any dust or coral beneath our feet, so that wherever you lead, and whenever you might find me shadow dancing, once again by myself, it will always be in the distance between you and him.

This is more than good luck.

This is the opposing shore where you will always and ever find me for *only you*.

—Chris.”

* * *

There was a moment of silence in the box after Barb read the note. Looking at Chris's words as she put the sheet of paper down on the tabletop, she looked up at me. Her expression had changed. She now had a cold, straight face, and I could tell I needed to brace myself for what she was about to say.

She said, “I don't know what you did, Dylan. But you did this to her. *You* did this to her.”

My lawyer grabbed my arm again and pulled me up, saying, “This is preposterous. We're not here to face your unfounded accusations. The document doesn't even name him.”

Barb continued pinning me with questions, “What did you do to her, Dylan? What did you *do*?”

My lawyer continued pulling me to the door while repeating, “Don't answer her. Don't say a word.”

Then we left.

Conclusion: Q. (II)

Barb was right. Not in the way she meant it. But she was right. I did do that to Chris. Yet what Barb didn't understand, and that the police, the media, and even my family and friends still find very

difficult to understand today, is that I'm not *literally* Q. People don't get it because they don't understand Chris's philosophy. I wrote this book to clear this up so that people can see what she was actually talking about in that letter.

I admit, she wrote about Q. *because* of me. But I am not Q.—at least, not literally. She was not, as the police have said, using this anonymous title to protect me. Why would she do that? She had no reason to care about protecting me. Q. is based upon me, but 'he' is not literally me. Q. is a figmentation of me that Chris used to acknowledge and work through the issues our relationship left her with. My biggest regret was that, because of my past, I didn't allow myself to trust her, and because of this, I didn't really understand myself when I followed her. But it happened. And it hurt her. So much so that even after our relationship ended, she was using Q. as a figmentation to help her heal from the wounds my betrayal caused. She wanted to proactively work through it all so that she could love those she cared about without the affective anchor I tied to her. In Chris's note, it's very clear that Q. stands for "the initial of a question." Q. was her way of *questioning* and interrogating the affective burden I left her with. She was questioning how our past relationship might affect her future relationships.

Because of what I actually did to her, the *one* time I followed her, it wouldn't be difficult to imagine she was worried about developing trust issues with those close to her—especially in future romantic relationships with those who would "eventually find" her. Many amateur sleuths use this passage to say she thought she was in danger, that I would eventually hurt her, and that her body would have to be found by someone. This is absurd. It all presumes that her note was talking about someone literally following her. And this is not the case. She was speaking about the way she carried her past with me into her future relationships with others. She was trying to ward off any kind of destruction loop in her life so that she wouldn't allow my betrayal to become an expectation of betrayal by her future loved ones. In her note, we can see her anticipating scenarios like travelling to

the Mediterranean or Australia with someone she loves yet being distant from them in intimate moments. But we should not interpret this as being in fear of someone who was literally stalking her. It would be better interpreted as her tendency to process things alone in her head. Chris was anticipating that she would be dealing with Q. in these coming relationships. She would be distant and silently walking away ‘everywhere they seem to go,’ not because I was literally following her, but because that’s who she was. The young woman who wrote this note was still the little girl who put Theo down at the foot of the forest path before she walked into it alone.

A figmentation like Q. was Chris’s attempt to intervene in her past and re-configure the ground of her future relationships. By projecting me into a figment, she would have been able to externalize this past and thereby acknowledge it and work on the issues it might cause. But this wasn’t merely a daydream about how it could affect her behaviour and interactions and how these might manifest in her behaviour and relationships. It wasn’t like the intellectual equivalent of free association. Q. was a product of the existential imagination. Because of this, it had the status of a work: both in the sense that it set a limit upon the ordinary and in the sense that it sought to create the conditions of meaning for her future relationships.

By figuring Q. into the landscape of the ordinary world, Chris would allow herself to remember the difference between her past with me and her future with another. Q. represented her past with me but in such a way that it would help her remember to put distance between the past *as such* of her future relationships and the past *as such* from our previous relationship. By remembering to watch for me ‘following her’ in the world around her, she would remember to not allow her feelings for me to interfere with her feelings for *this* other she was now with. In this way, she would frame her experience of the world within the existential imaginary. Q. would be her constant reminder of the hidden ways the world would entrap her in self-obscurity. He would be the continuous way she flagged her correlation with the world and to help her remember the generation loss that would

undermine her steps as she followed after this other. For Q. following after her would guard against an unbeknownst and unarticulated repetition of mistrust. By allowing this unreal Q. to be real and truthful and show that being, time, and the world hide more than they reveal, she would be creating the conditions for truthfully following after the ones she would eventually come to love. By allowing Q. to distance her from the world, she could be in it, yet not of it. She could then promise that despite her past, she could be found “on the opposing shore” where these others would ever find her following after *them* from out of the difference between them and me.

Q. was not me. He was Chris’s way of avoiding any destruction loops that our relationship might have brought upon her. And in this, she was better than me. So even though Barb didn’t know what she was really talking about that day in the box, she was right. Because I was caught in my own self-destructive loops, both during my relationship with Chris and in the aftermath of her disappearance, I did it. I did to Chris what she wrote about in that note. It was me who did that—in the way I’ve just laid out above.

But I have no idea what actually happened to her.

Afterword: Onto-Soteriology and The Ontological Possibility of Self

Destruction

*Shadows settle on the place that you left
Our minds are troubled by the emptiness
Destroy the middle, it's a waste of time
From the perfect start to the finish line*

*And if you're still breathing, you're the lucky ones
'Cause most of us are heaving through corrupted lungs
Setting fire to our insides for fun
Collecting names of the lovers that went wrong*

*We are the reckless, we are the wild youth
Chasing visions of our futures
One day we'll reveal the truth
That one will die before he gets there*

*And if you're still bleeding, you're the lucky ones
'Cause most of our feelings, they are dead, and they are gone
Setting fire to our insides for fun
Collecting pictures from a flood that wrecked our home
It was a flood that wrecked this home*

*You caused it, you caused it
...*

*And if you're in love, then you are the lucky one
'Cause most of us are bitter over someone*

—Daughter, “Youth”

To this day, Chris has never come home. Neither her nor the things she had on her the night she disappeared have ever been found. There's many theories floating around, but no one really knows what happened to her.

Some say she ran away and started a new life so that I could no longer follow her. But of course, I wasn't following her. Someone may have been. But it wasn't me.

Others say I did something horrific to her and that the authorities just haven't yet discovered her remains. This is categorically untrue. I had nothing to do with her disappearance. I wasn't even in the city the night she disappeared.

Still others say she was mentally unwell and so she hurt herself. They think she walked into the woods to get lost or swam out in the ocean and was swept out to sea. But Chris would never commit suicide. She loved life too much. I don't see anything in the parts of her journals released by police to suggest she was mentally unwell.

And I just couldn't imagine her willingly running away to start a new life either. Her education and career were too important to her. Plus, there were things like her dad's old camera and his personal copy of *Unkept Linens* that she *never* would have left behind.

Often, when I shoot down these theories, people then ask what I think *did* happen to her. I think there's two likely scenarios. And both of them, I admit, are the saddest possibilities.

Chris could indeed be very spontaneous and adventurous. Even on a dark, cold November night, I could see her walking into the forest or going for an impromptu dip in the ocean by herself. I *do* think it's unlikely that she drowned. Her body would have washed up from the current and tides, and her journal and phone would have certainly been found where she left them on the shore. But it's certainly possible she accidentally got lost in the woods, fell down a crevice, and didn't have cell service or the wherewithal to get help.

Unfortunately, I think she was either hurt accidentally or someone hurt her on purpose. The fact that she was speaking to someone who used a burner, and that this person has never been identified makes me fear the worst.

That said, no one knows for sure. I sure don't. I wish I did, but I don't.

I have never been charged for anything in relation to Chris's disappearance. Despite their insinuations, the police could not gather enough evidence against me *because I didn't do anything*

to her. But the fallout has cost me dearly. Not only have I lost my best friend—most likely forever. The legal and reputational consequences of being labelled a suspect have wrecked my hopes for an academic career and taken their toll on my social life.

Mikaela ended up being fine. In fact, within a couple of weeks, she was well enough to fly out of country, to get away with Danny. Although, generally speaking, the media has respected her privacy and allowed her and Danny to remain anonymous, the networks often show clips of her apartment and the Quinn's cabin. Yet neither her nor Danny have ever made any public statements against me. They gave the police their statements—then they just wanted to be left alone.

Without Mikaela suffering life-altering injuries, the authorities were willing to negotiate. My new lawyer, who always remembered my name, managed to talk them down to a lower assault charge. But to get the deal, I had to plead guilty to everything: harassment, trespassing, breaking and entering, and common assault. I only pled to avoid the chances of going to prison. But it was all still disastrous for me. My sentence included months of mandatory community service and thousands of dollars in fines. Even with my father's help with legal fees, this put me in a position where I didn't have the time or the money to finish my degree. I doubt anyone at the university would have been willing to work with me anyway. Avery and Barb's press conferences not only announced my convictions, they also reiterated in no uncertain terms their belief that I was responsible for Chris's disappearance. Whenever Avery implies that he just needs one more tip or one more piece of physical evidence before there's an indictment, everyone knows he's talking about charging me. Many of the true-crime blogs and websites also follow his lead, trying to frame my guilty plea as proof of my involvement with what happened to Chris. So now, if anyone like an interviewing employer or new acquaintance searches my name online, they'll see link after link directing them to online forums full of accusations against me.

Throughout all of this, I've learned the importance of old friendships and the need to protect them dearly—especially from myself.

Danielle, my old high school friend, recently told me that the first time she saw me since that summer morning in Caleb's parents' bedroom was after I was arrested, during my perp walk on the news in handcuffs. I've seen the images myself, but I don't remember being paraded past cameras when Stache transferred me from the back of his car into the police station after getting back from the Quinn's cabin. She followed my story and watched the updates on my prosecution unfold in her feeds and let some time pass before she reached out to me again. When she did, we soon reconnected and rekindled. She knew me well and believed me.

Part of the reason I have written this book is because Danielle encouraged me to process everything that's happened by having a conversation with Chris. For this, I will ever be grateful. I owe both Chris and Danielle my understanding of how I brought this upon myself and a promise that it will not happen again. I owe it to both of them to give to Danielle what I failed to provide for Chris: to tear down the walls that I have all too often built up around my loved ones to try to protect myself. To tear down the barriers and obstacles that disconnected me from the place where I can find myself exposed to both the joy and pain of loving someone in this terribly free world.

Recall that I mentioned in my introduction that I believe Chris's entire philosophical project was an attempt to forgive Casey. Not only did she want to understand why he let his life fall apart, she also wanted to find an extenuating circumstance in reality itself that could help her explain how his self-destruction was less of a choice and something closer to an imposed condition. In her latest dissertation drafts that I have access to, she called this ontological mitigation *transcendental closure*.¹ Being itself, which *is* this transcendental closure, “closes the self to its deepest being.”² Yet this

¹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

² *Ibid.*

closure “is not cognitive unawareness, but an affective blockage.”³ The self knows its being is for another, yet the capacity to find itself in the truth of this has been waylaid by being over time. Someone can know that their life and existence, their encounters with things and engagements with others are inadequate to expressing who they are for those they love. Yet “being aware of this and finding oneself in the unleashed potential to express this inadequacy with a beautiful act are two different things.”⁴ Her father showed Chris that someone can know they are getting lost without having the felt capacity to re-find oneself. And if she was still with us, I used to hope that with time, she would have extended the same thoughtfulness towards my actions both before and after she disappeared.

* * *

For Chris, “the so-called human condition is one of metaphysical suffering.”⁵ Metaphysical suffering is not pain from physical affliction. It is rather “affective anguish over insight into the character of reality.”⁶ The non-correlation between desire and the world and the recognition that there is no deliverance from this amounts to a painful insight into the self’s relation with its own existence. It is true that “the unattainable nature of the special other is a condition of possibility for following after.”⁷ But it is also true that “the world’s incapacity to always and ever express the invaluable nature of the other is also a condition of possibility for desire.”⁸ One does not have to experience very long this disjuncture between the invaluable nature of the other and the world’s diminishment of their meaningfulness before coming to the insight that “this non-correlation is not simply occasional, but

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

constitutive.”⁹ Such a perception into the nature of reality hurts in the depths of one’s being—for *to be* is to suffer the pain of such a realization.

While love is, of course, one of the greatest joys in life, it is also constituted by this suffering. And because of this, loved ones do not escape it through their intimacy. Instead, love “intensifies existential loneliness: the feeling of being alone in this non-physical suffering, *with-in* one’s unfulfilled longing for the other in the world.”¹⁰ To love is to find oneself exposed to the world so that one also finds oneself lonely for those one loves. The world’s perpetual denial of what desire wants allows the self to find itself in a loneliness which accompanies it even into the midst of intimacy. And by suffering this loneliness, in “*suffering self*” as Chris called it, the self discovers itself in its deepest being as non-correlated with being itself. The side of the self that is not correlated with being itself is opened up to something beyond being. But she did not intend that which is beyond being to provide another metaphysical ground or final goal for thought or life. It, too, is ultimately frail, transient, and undermined by the finitude of being.

Freud once wrote a short work called “On Transience,” in which he writes of a summer trip he took with a friend and a “young but already famous poet” into the countryside.¹¹ Many scholars believe that the friend was Lou Salome and the young poet was Rainer Maria Rilke. Freud wrote that the poet’s response to the “smiling countryside” surprised him. He explained:

The poet admired the beauty of the scene around us but felt no joy in it. He was disturbed by the thought that all this beauty was fated to extinction, that it would vanish when winter came... All that he would have otherwise loved and admired seemed to him to be shorn of its worth by the transience which was its doom.¹²

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, “On Transience,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: Volume XIV* (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957), 305.

¹² Ibid.

Freud was perplexed by the poet's reaction because it undermined this young man's ability to enjoy it while it was still here. Thinking back to this experience, the psychologist in Freud proceeded by proposing two typical responses to "the proneness to decay of all that is beautiful."¹³ One can become despondent like the poet. Or one can rebel against it and live in denial, demanding immortality. Freud did not want to dispute the transience of things, but he did "dispute the pessimistic poet's view that the transience of what is beautiful involves any loss of its worth."¹⁴ Freud proclaimed transience is "scarcity in time," and "limitation is the possibility of enjoyment."¹⁵ The impermanence of the beautiful *increases* its worth, and so Freud implied that instead of remaining despondent, the poet should rather enjoy the countryside scene *while he could*. "With all due respect to his theoretical aims," Chris wrote about Freud's paper, "this simplistic presentation concerning the poet's demeanour isn't much more sophisticated than the folk wisdom often attributed to Dr. Suess: 'Do not cry because it's ending, smile because it happened.'"¹⁶ For Chris, the young poet was on a metaphysical journey to the beauty of the scene, one which Freud could not see because it was happening on the "'inner side of the world'—in the non-physical sphere of intimacy."¹⁷

Like Freud's young companion, Chris did not deny the transience of the beautiful or seek to establish it as an immortal, redemptive metaphysical principle. For her, beauty happens in the small things of this earth. She used Rilke's comments on the angel of his *Duino Elegies* to help her explain

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Weston, *Suffering Self*; Freud, "On Transience." Weston was aware that Freud's purpose in this short work was to raise the question of why people mourn and why overcoming loss is so difficult. Freud notes that to laymen, mourning is "natural," but to psychologists "a great riddle" (306). Chris argued that the reason it is a great riddle for psychologists like Freud was because of the metaphorical substructure of his theoretical superstructure. The language of libido, attachment, detachment, cathexis, and replacement are taken from the realm of the mechanics of physical objects. Chris wrote, "Imposing the physics of objects upon the phenomenon of human love will create awkward theoretical problems and models. ... However much its occasion is found in physical things and bodies, love itself is not a purely physical relation. It is a meta-physical capacity that emerges from a physical existence, but one which unleashes that same physical layer for a meaning that it cannot contain. For love, however frail, outstrips all physical times and places and gives an orientation to any possible time and place—actual or not."

¹⁷ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

this. Many are familiar with the early lines of the poem: "... For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure, and we are so awed because it serenely disdains to annihilate us. Every angel is terrifying."¹⁸ Rilke's angel is not a spiritual being. It is the poet's angel—or a metaphor for a truth he wants to communicate. According to him, the *Duino Elegies'* angel "is that being who guarantees the recognition in the invisible of a higher order of reality," which Chris read as the depths of meaningfulness of *beings*.¹⁹ The angel is terrifying, Rilke continued, "because we, its lovers and transformers, still cling to the visible."²⁰ Chris understood the angel as "representing the difficulty of travelling from a superficial viewpoint upon beings, to the depths of their meaning."²¹ Like a poet, despondent about the beauty of the summer bloom in front of him because it would one day perish, such a journey begins with a distance from beings and their immediacy. But "the point is not to end in this despondency and detachment."²² It is instead to "re-find the true meaning of their beauty in *this world* as something granted to us by *a being and yet undermined by being itself*."²³

For Chris, the self is non-correlated with being because it is correlated with beauty. However, beauty is not a metaphysical principle for her, and beautification (as it happens in a beautiful act) is not the earthly sign of a salvific role that beauty will ultimately play. She explains:

Beauty is not beyond being because it transcends being like a higher plane of existence. There is no beatific vision or redemption arc provided by beauty. It is rather beyond being because it is *in* being, but not *of* it. ... Beauty is the meta-physical (*i.e.*, non-physical) counterpart to the projection of a want. It is the philosophical expression of the self's desire for the other, and a longing for the world to be the place that accommodates their invaluable nature even though one knows this will ever remain unfulfilled.²⁴

¹⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xv; Weston, *Suffering Self*.

²⁰ Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, xv.

²¹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

The beautiful happens *in* beings (things, actions, words), and it happens *for* a being (the special other). It is expressed through these. Yet because of the undertow of the world, the meaningfulness of setting things apart, such as mementos and expressive poems and stories—these are “only a consolation.”²⁵ They are only “the equivalent of the momentary relief of Sisyphus’s boulder at the top of the hill, just before it rolls back down again.”²⁶ Beauty is *in* being, and so it is transient. It does not provide an ultimate fulfilment, ground, or resting place. But this does not mean it cannot “perpetually serve as the negative demarcation of the self’s incompatibility with being.”²⁷ Like Rilke’s angel, which expresses the distance between mortal beings and the invisible, Chris’s concept of beauty signifies the self’s distance from being itself. And in this sense, while it is *in* being and expressed through beings, it is not *of* being. It is instead the concept that articulates “desire’s longing for more than being can provide.”²⁸ Chris concluded, “This is what Freud did not allow for in his article.”²⁹ She explained:

As the poet’s demeanour indicated, there is a way *to be* in relation to the transience of that which we love, which is neither a childish wish for immortality nor the immediate delight in the perishable. One can anticipate the literal or symbolic loss of the beloved without forcing a smile. Dissatisfaction’s despondency is not the same as dissociation. It is the fullest recognition of the way one’s being is incompatible with being and the world. And one can assert this without also projecting a *deus ex machina* that promises to save us from where we love.³⁰

This metaphysical insight into how being, time, and the world undermine the most meaningful conditions in life is painful not just because of the expectation of looming disappointment but also because it leaves each self alone in this unfulfilled sense of its being. It hurts because it separates the self from those it loves even while they are still present. And this lonely suffering cannot be healed

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

by becoming more adequate to being itself. In this sense, Chris was at her most anti-Heideggerian. Unlike his work, for Chris, transcendental closure does not correlate the self with being. Instead, it hides the way the self is *never finally appropriated*—in the sense of *Ereignis—to being*: “Heidegger’s presentation of the hiddenness of being hides, on a deeper level, how the self cannot ultimately find fulfilment for its being in being—not even in reconciliation with being itself.”³¹ Yet, as should be clear by now, neither does this mean she wanted to discover an onto-soteriology on another metaphysical ground such as the beautiful. The important point for her was declaring this inadequacy of being without postulating some kind of philosophical soteriology that would eventually fulfil it.

* * *

Chris wrote “Heidegger’s Tale: Onto-Soterio-Logy in the Later Heidegger’s Fourfold,” as the culmination of a parting of ways with the character of his philosophy.³² For her, the tone of Heidegger’s later thought was that of “a cautionary tale transposed into a conceptual register.”³³ As he warned about technological mastery’s search for excessive control, which “like Icarus strives beyond any earthly bounds,” Heidegger advised that enframed human being re-find its mortal limits in a poetic regard for the things of this earth.³⁴ “There is an ontological soteriology at work here, an ontosoteriology,” Chris wrote. She continued:

Despite stripping thought of its ontotheological origins in Western metaphysics, Heidegger retained the conviction that being could provide a salvific moment for the human being. The so-called “saving power” he spoke of most assuredly was no longer grounded in a highest being. His gods of the fourfold were not spiritual beings but principles of concealment that measure humanity with regard to its mortal limits... Yet, deposing the metaphysician’s god from the throne of being as ground and goal of existence and populating the world with the poet’s gods *does not go far enough*. For while this resists the temptations of logic and its attempt to account for beings as a whole,

³¹ Ibid.

³² Weston, “Heidegger’s Tale.”

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

it does not defy the truest temptation of ontotheological metaphysics—to be a guarantor against the meaninglessness of human suffering.³⁵

Chris thought that the experience of suffering underlying the lineage of theodicy in Western thought provided the appropriate existential context for understanding the significance of Heidegger's critique of ontotheology. She thought that Nietzsche, whose Zarathustra warned of the spirit of revenge "against time and its 'it was'" in Western metaphysics, had a better grasp on this than Heidegger.³⁶ She wrote, "following upon Nietzsche, Heidegger's contribution was tracing out the finitude of being and, thereby, un-grounding it from the tradition's highest being... decoupling it from the principle of sufficient reason and the search for a first cause."³⁷ In other words, through Heidegger's line of thought, we could say, quoting as he did from Angelus Silesius, "The rose is without why."³⁸ In this sense, Heidegger's post-metaphysical thought was perhaps non-ontotheological. Nevertheless, Chris said it remained onto-soteriological. "He did not extricate," she wrote, "the true role God filled in Western thought from his approach to being."³⁹ Nietzsche implied this ultimate metaphysical function when he wrote, "If we have our own *why* of life, we shall get along with almost any *how*."⁴⁰ Chris explained, "the deity's function was not simply to provide a first cause but to provide a final cause that could serve as the redemptive horizon for human suffering."⁴¹ It was to save human being by giving it the metaphysical resources to frame its suffering within an ultimate purpose. And despite Heidegger's departure from ontotheological metaphysics, his writings retain "the nostalgia for an ontosoteriology—even a non-theistic one, where being took over the role of

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 252.

³⁷ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Principle of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 35.

³⁹ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, 468.

⁴¹ Weston, "Heidegger's Tale."

saviour.”⁴² “Not only was his a cautionary tale,” Chris wrote, “it was also a philosophical redemption story.”⁴³

Chris argued that despite the different projects of Heidegger’s early and later thought, this ontosoteriological moment, wherein “being would always provide a lifeline for the dangers of self-loss or technological enframing,” was the “uniting characteristic of his work as a whole.”⁴⁴ In both his early and later periods, human being—whether characterized as *Dasein* or mortal—becomes adequate to its being by finding itself correlated with being itself. There is “indeed a transcendental closure in *Being and Time* and *Vorträge und Aufsätze*—but in both cases it is deceptive.”⁴⁵ In the early period, “*Dasein* finds itself saved from inauthentic being through the Nothing, the mystery of being, or being’s lack of an answer about *how Dasein* should live its life.”⁴⁶ In realizing that nothing in being determines who it will be and, thereby, in acceding to its own freedom to be who it will be, *Dasein* is appropriate to its being. In the later work, human being becomes appropriate to the hiddenness of being itself when it doesn’t overstep its finite limits. Instead, “the mortal preserves the hiddenness of being itself by allowing concealment to remain in the things of this world.”⁴⁷ In both cases—*Dasein* and mortal—human being is saved by becoming correlated with being itself—either in the authenticity of existential freedom or in letting-be. For Chris, both modes of Heidegger’s transcendental closure were deceptive because of being’s salvific role. For her, there is no correlation with being itself that provides such a redemptive moment. As she wrote, “to be correlated with being is to fail to recognize the way the self remains non-correlated with being itself because being itself cannot fulfil the self’s being.”⁴⁸

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

In the last writings that I have access to, Chris worked towards articulating her version of the transcendental closure in terms of a dynamic between *exposure*, *suffering*, and *stuckness*. Exposure was her term for truth as disclosure—except with the added dimension of the inherent danger of being opened up to a terribly free world. Because the self’s being is constituted by a longing for that which the world cannot accommodate, “being opened up to the world is commensurate with suffering.”⁴⁹ Desire longs for the beautiful as an expression of what it wants for the other. Yet the projects and opportunities the ordinary afford do not provide a framework for fulfilling or articulating this. Even accomplished expressions of beautiful acts fade with time. While “the distance between being and the beautiful draws the self forth and offers the condition of possibility for the duration and continuance of desire over time, the recognition of the transience and fragility of the beautiful along with the world’s inability to accommodate it leads to a non-correlation between the self and its world.”⁵⁰ The self is ever unfulfilled in its being. And the recognition that being and the world will never be adequate to the self results in “a constitutive suffering within the being of the self.”⁵¹ This is what disquietude feels. The disquieted self flees the loneliness of this insight, and the world provides its escape route while simultaneously closing the gates behind it. Stuckness results when the past *as such* becomes a barrier within the self to itself. The self remembers where it came from, but it cannot feel any opportunity to get back to it.

Stuckness is the name of “transcendental closure in the self’s affective life.”⁵² The world “abets disquiet and locks it into ordinary potentials and projects.”⁵³ In locking it into its roles and ordinary significance, it also “*locks out* the self’s existential potential to build—the need or relevance for

⁴⁹ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

building.”⁵⁴ Such a locking out is not intellectual. The self is aware of what is happening. But not in such a way that it has “the affective capacity to unlock or unleash itself for building.”⁵⁵ World entrapment does not leave it with the affective conditions or grounds to retrace its steps back to its deepest being. Instead, that which has passed acts as a barrier or obstacle: “there is sight of distance, but not longing for closeness.”⁵⁶ This is stuckness: the past *as such* takes priority over the future *as such*. The existential possibility of building “closes down because the present is closed off from the truth of the future and entrapped in the meaning of the past.”⁵⁷

In her papers on desire and time, Chris talked about several different senses of the past *as such*. The primary sense of the past *as such*—the meaning of the past in any possible moment—is the *a priori* of the special other.⁵⁸ The meaning of the past for any given spatio-temporal situation is the self’s following after the special other. This is a past that is in all moments—past, present, and future—regardless if the other is present or absent, ‘here’ or ‘gone.’ In this respect, the present is the interface of the past *per se* and the future *as such*—the potential to build in the present for the special other. The present is essentially open to the future’s meaning: creating the conditions for following after and inserting the expressive into the world. But we also saw that Chris said that there is another sense for the past *as such*, which occurs in the ghosting effect of destruction loops.⁵⁹ One’s history with other special others can overlay on top of desire’s following after *this* special other. At this point, the future *per se* gets lost because, in possessiveness, the self does not build for the other but constructs walls around them to protect itself from the way *this* other also exposes it to suffering and loneliness. In these early papers, Chris wrote about stuckness in the sense that one gets stuck in the past because

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Weston, “Destruction Loops.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

following after other special others intrudes upon following after *this* special other. The present becomes the opportunity to follow after the former instead of the latter—to the neglect of *this* other. In Chris’s dissertation drafts, she transposed this more limited idea of stuckness into a general feature of transcendental closure. In this later work, the stuckness of destruction loops and possessiveness was only *one* mode. There was a more general form of stuckness that arose from a *still another sense* of the past *as such*, one which forms the basic model for all forms of self-loss and, thereby, self-destruction.

In her dissertation, *stuckness* is her term for being stuck in the past *per se* such that one does not build the conditions of love and meaning in life. It does not have to manifest itself in the ghosting effects of a history with other special others, nor in a possessive regard towards *this* special other. For “the closure of the future *as such*” (the need to build for the other to truly find oneself) “does not need any other source than the history of desire with *this* special other.”⁶⁰ The basic intuition here is that the history of the relationship between the self and other becomes a barrier to itself—that is, to the ‘connection’ between them. Those involved have found the origin of the world and its point in each other. But “in various ways, time accrues, and obstacles pile up between them.”⁶¹ Like “intrusive things left behind by the departed that haunt ordinary meaning with an overcomplicating meaning, a relationship can have a complicating layer that acts as a barrier—not to its functionality, but rather to its intimacy.”⁶² The relationship between special others can become its own kind of artifact that that overcomplicates the meaning between them. Regardless of the various ways the relationship can become such an obstacle to those involved, “formally it results in a closure of the future *as such* because of the metaphysical insensitivity this past brings into the meaning of the

⁶⁰ Weston, *Suffering Self*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

relationship.”⁶³ Despite knowing exactly what is happening, numbness or the affective inability to find the path back to oneself undermines the self’s existential ability to build and express for the other. The future *as such* closes down, and any given moment is found in the meaning of this third sense of the past *as such*: “the unresolved unfulfillments in one another.”⁶⁴ This is transcendental closure: “the closing down of the potential to build the conditions for meaning (as the invaluable) and love (as desire) in the being of the self—at least affectively and existentially—in the unfulfilled moments of time past.”⁶⁵ This is a loss prior to any literal loss. For it is a loss of the meaningfulness of one’s place as being-for the other. And this loss of one’s sense of oneself *as being-for the other* is the ontological condition for existential self-destruction.

Casey Weston exemplified this for Chris. She found in his life and demise the expression of a man who was perceptive enough to understand the inadequacies of the world and their contradiction with the meaning he wanted to give to it. And he became tired of the prospect of continually rebuilding even though he knew his daughter was counting on him to do so. For Chris, self-destruction—existentially conceived—is “an affective insensitivity to one’s place in a special other’s life.”⁶⁶ One does not so much forget but finds it difficult to feel one’s point with regard to them. For this someone is severed from the affective place (of affirmation and address) the other has given. And because of this, “they can get lost from the deeper sense of their self-transcendence unto the rest of the world.”⁶⁷ It is not so much that one doesn’t know the way back, but more so that “the obstacles that have accrued make the way back feel insurmountable.”⁶⁸ The feeling for the place from which one builds for the other is lost in resignation. Disquiet and restlessness follow, “chasing the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

self back into the ordinary, repeating the past, stuck in its loop.”⁶⁹ Yet the world aids and abets this neglect by offering a seemingly endless horizon of distraction. Nothing saves the self from forever falling away from a special other. Nor does being, time, or the world hold out the promise that the burden of being-for another will ever become lighter. The ontological possibility of self-destruction is found in the way “the terribly free world allows the self to numb its suffering by seeking endless distraction in the many ordinary streets, avenues, and lanes it provides.”⁷⁰ Along the way, the self gets stuck and locked in, thereby losing its existential capacity to feel its way back to the true meaning of the past, present, and future. Being, time, and the world “tip the self away from itself.”⁷¹

* * *

Danielle often asks me what I would say to Chris if she ever returned. After asking her what happened and where she’s been, I’d want to ask her for her forgiveness—but in a way that showed I truly understood what I was asking for.

She extended to her father the recognition that a transcendental closure undermined the conditions of his own ability to be for her. I know that if I explained to her, the way I have in these pages, how my history with my family unfairly affected my relationship with her, she would understand. I began writing this book simply as a way to reconcile myself with her, even in her absence. But now that I find myself at the end, I realize that I always asked too much of her. It would not be my place to ask for the kind of forgiveness she could extend to her father. Both of us, Casey and I, failed her. But his neglect was at least kinder than mine. For his self-isolation and distance from her was a way to protect her from the disaster of his life. I didn’t have the same decency. In so

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

many ways, she put me down at the foot of a path, yet in just as many ways I insisted on following after her. And through my insistence, something else followed her.

Even after she disappeared, through me, it continued to follow those she loved. My search for Q. was partly motivated by my unresolved feelings of jealousy for Danny, feelings that stemmed from my own personal past. Something, *something nebulous* that does not show itself until it is too late used my weaknesses to overtake me and everyone else around me. It found my personal history used it as a locus to manifest itself without me feeling that I was letting it in. Once it was too late, it showed itself standing over all that was around me as I cowered in a closet while Mikaela lay bleeding on the floor. *It*, this ‘it’ that follows all and everyone, only ever shows itself in the most extreme situations. Of course, *it* is the terrible freedom of being—that which gives, but also that which allows disaster to occur. In ordinary life, it just presents itself as freedom, allowance, and letting. But in its depths, it dwells and hunts in the undeclared distance between the possibility of life *per se* and someone’s life history. It does not show itself in beautiful moments. It only presents itself in tragedy, where it offers no grounds for adjournment or appeal.

Looking back, through all that *it* has let happen, I think I now know how I would properly ask for Chris’s forgiveness.

My plea would include apologies for what I had done to her and to her friends. And I would accompany these with stories from my childhood about my troubled relationships with my family. But after she saw that I could say this all out loud and articulate it in her own words and ideas, I’d then let silence once again expand between us. Like that last night of our relationship outside her house on the steps, I would want this silence between us to say more than I ever could. But now, it would show that I finally understood who she was and what she meant. This would not be just another overture for creating a new circumstance I’d use to somehow entrap her again. I’d just let her walk away without another word.

I would even walk away.

I think that the greatest way to show her that I really understood what I was asking when I asked forgiveness from her would be to leave her alone. But then also, perhaps if she one day cared enough to check-in, to let her see that I went about building for someone else in the interim. Then she might see me being-for Danielle, the way I should have been for her. And then she would know that I finally understood what she had always tried to teach me.

So in the absence of my best friend and in the departure—whatever that means—of Christina Weston, I will turn back to those I love who still remain and sing a line from a contemporary song: “the emptiness is just a lesson in canvases.”

Postscript by Dustin Zielke

Imaginative First-Person Writing

The main reason I did not write *Generation Loss*—Dylan’s memoir—in my own voice was because I wanted to write in the first-person about my experience of the world *without writing about my life*. Like Chris Weston, I wanted to think *from* my life, but unlike her (or Dylan) I did not want to write *about* my life. Much of this desire to avoid autobiography stemmed from my reluctance to write about my personal relationships. The themes that I wanted to develop would require quite intimate and sometimes quite dark reflections, and so I was not willing to engage in what sociologists call autoethnography or what we might call ‘auto-theory.’ I did not want to subject myself or others to this kind of exposure. One might then ask why I did not simply write theoretically in the usual mode. Is not hermeneutic phenomenology a way to write about the issues, concerns, and ideas that stem from one’s life *without* foregrounding biography itself? Certainly. I could have just taken the theoretical parts of *Generation Loss* and developed them without explicit reference to my experience. But then there would be a kind of theoretical detachment at work that cuts against the very sense of the hermeneutic thought I wanted to engage in. For I wanted to point to how ideas emerge from a life-story and also develop an approach that reflected *in form* the existential roots and motivations for thinking this way. And this required showing how these ideas were embedded in a biographical narrative.

My solution was to imagine voices different from myself and those I know and write in the first-person in an ‘as if’ modality. As I emphasized in my introduction to *Destruction Loops*, none of these characters or the events that take place are based upon real life. Each character has a very different story than myself or anyone else that I know. Chris and Dylan indeed articulate ideas that

I am experimenting with and which ultimately stem from my attempt to make sense of my own experience of the world. But the narrative background that motivates *their* adherence to these ideas is much different from my own personal background. Whenever I wanted to discuss the ideas I had been thinking about, I had to first distance these concepts from my own life and motivations and make them consistent with the voicings and characterizations of Chris and Dylan. This distancing allowed me to write *from* my life without writing *about* my life.

In his book, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, Italian postmodern thinker, Gianni Vattimo, reflects on the nature and significance of first-person writing in hermeneutic philosophy. While confessing that he does not like writing about his personal life (even though he often used autobiographical elements in his book on his Christian faith),¹ he points out that thoughtfulness begins in the first-person. He writes, “one always feels blocked at the start... and hermeneutics helps one get over it by making an explicit theme of precomprehension, the act of setting down clearly what one already knows about the theme one wishes to address....”² He reflects further upon this, drawing a larger point, saying that thoughtfulness is “primarily and predominantly [about] the problem of the beginning... [and those] first foundations that bear the weight of the whole system of second-order modes of knowing.”³ In other words, hermeneutic thought is really about one’s experience and understanding of everyday life or what Husserl called the life-world: “the world we ordinarily take for granted, the pre-scientific, experientially given world that we are familiar with and never call into question.”⁴ Vattimo concludes:

¹ Gianni Vattimo, *On Belief* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

² Gianni Vattimo, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 103.

³ *Ibid*, 104.

⁴ Søren Overgaard & Dan Zahavi, “Phenomenological Sociology: The Subjectivity of Everyday Life,” in *Encountering the Everyday: An Introduction to Sociologies of the Unnoticed* ed. M.H. Jacobsen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 97.

From this perspective, writing in the first person is often just an inflection of the problem of beginning, just a way to render explicit the arbitrary (personal?) and at the same time necessary (suprapersonal?) nature of what gets said and how it gets said.⁵

The significance of first-person writing is that it introduces the writer's position to its search for the beginning—the place *from which* s/he writes and *for which* s/he writes. What I find interesting about Vattimo's discussion is that this understanding of first-person writing encompasses the potential for both personal and extra-personal forms of writing such as fiction. Like a novel, which is the product of a single author's imagination, but which also expresses themes and events that others can share in from their own vantage point, *hermeneutic thought can incorporate a private viewpoint as the vanishing starting point for a shared vision*. From the beginning, I put myself in the position of the projectionist in a theatre and asked my audience to pay attention to the story and the ideas on screen. In this way I could express myself without drawing attention to myself. So, before I conclude this dissertation by highlighting some of the theoretical contributions I think *Destruction Loops* has made to Heideggerian thought and social and relational ontologies of the self, I would like to reflect upon the contribution it has made to hermeneutic methodology with what it calls phenomenological expressionism.

Ontological Apertures: Sociological Impressionism and Phenomenological Expressionism

Vattimo once called his hermeneutic thought *sociological impressionism*.⁶ Identifying it with what Michel Foucault called an “ontology of actuality,” Vattimo said that a sociological impressionism “attempts to clarify what Being signifies in the present situation.”⁷ He was well aware that both the terms ‘being’ and ‘the present situation’ are underdetermined, so he continued to explain. For him,

⁵ Vattimo, *The Responsibility of the Philosopher*, 104.

⁶ Gianni Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 3.

⁷ *Ibid*, 3-4.

attending to the actuality of a situation or its sociological facts methodologically reflects that being is not a stable presence but an event.⁸ Being is not an object, but an “aperture within which alone man and the world, subject and object, can enter into relationship.”⁹ Yet unlike traditional metaphysical thought, philosophy today “cannot (should not) discuss its own subject matter in a suprahistorical light.”¹⁰ For despite the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and technology, being signifies *differently* depending on the historical situation or actual position of those who witness it. Sociological impressionism attests to this multiplicity of perspectives, which have originated from different backgrounds and situations—different first-person or collective perspectives.

It is interesting that Vattimo uses the metaphor of an aperture to represent being. This is an apt analogy, because following Heidegger we would say that being is not a thing, but more like an opening through which light or revelation (truth) can be shed. In Vattimo’s words, it sheds light on the relation between the human self, things, and the world. And, furthermore, as each individual self finds itself in a different situation, being shines and shades differently upon one’s given circumstances. For Vattimo and other Heideggerian thinkers, instead of portraying being as a grounding substance, subject, or “ultimate referent” that assimilates and occludes difference,¹¹ pointing to the multiplicity of historical and cultural situations from which one thinks about being displays its non-foundational nature. Drawing upon Vattimo’s sociological impressionism and Reiner Schürmann’s Heideggerian-influenced political phenomenology, Vahabzadeh develops these insights and points to autobiography as the basis for a new interpretive sociology. Such a hermeneutic sociologism “adopts the genre of autobiography” partly because “in autobiography, referentiality is specific but not

⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, 60.

¹¹ Peyman Vahabzadeh, “Ultimate Referentiality: Radical Phenomenology and the New Interpretive Sociology,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35 (2009).

ultimate.”¹² While proceeding from common ground with Vattimo and Vahabzadeh’s historicism, I would like to add two advances. First, the basis for a hermeneutic approach need not be a historicism based in autobiography. As I will show below, it can be fictional—more of a phenomenological expressionism where the writer displaces his or her own viewpoint and plays with ideas in imaginary worlds and experiences. I will address this after discussing another advance that I would like to make: the reconciliation of essential and ontic levels of analysis.

Essential and Existential Apertures

Destruction Loops makes a distinction between essential and existential possibilities (Chapter 5), which is a distinction I drew on the basis of the difference between the ontological and ontic. In a Heideggerian sense, *the ontological* refers to a level of analysis that attends to being itself. Because being is not a being or substance, discourse about it will differ from that about actual facts or things—*the ontic*. Traditionally, the ontological was articulated through the essential (necessary and absolute through which something is what it is) and the ontic was understood as the empirical (contingent and relative facts about existence). Yet both were conceived according to the metaphysics of presence *on the model of stable objects*. In *Being and Time*, however, Heidegger’s analysis was concerned with the being of a *who* (i.e., *Dasein*) and not the being of a *what* (i.e., a rock, a tree). Because of this, he exhibited the essential (which he called *existentialia*)¹³ not as *a stable what* but as *a transitive how*. Many other commentators, such as Emmanuel Levinas, have pointed out the way Heidegger presented the essential and ontological “taken verbally,” that is, in *Dasein*’s “way of being.”¹⁴ We could summarize this by saying that Heidegger’s display of the essential structure of *Dasein* displays

¹² Ibid, 463.

¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 70.

¹⁴ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001), xvii. This quote is technically taken from Levinas’s English translator, but this insight is peppered throughout Levinas’s own writings on Heidegger. In fact, it forms one of the main premises of his entire philosophy.

it in the modality of the *adverbial*. Yet, at the same time, Heidegger insisted that *Dasein*'s being does not get worked out anywhere else than in its historical, everyday existence.¹⁵ Thus, *Dasein* transitively exists and *lives through the ontic details of its life*. In *Being and Time*, the essential (ontological-existential) and the ontic (empirical detail) are compatible. Yet while much post-Heideggerian thought has developed as hermeneutic interpretivism on the basis of his work, the role of the essentialist side of his thought has been sidelined. This partly has to do with the fact that Heidegger himself did not clarify the relationship between the ontological and the ontic in a way that does justice to the enabling and constraining factors of a given historical situation.

Take, for example, George Orwell's statement from his review of Bertrand Russell's book on power, "It is quite possible that we are descending into an age in which two plus two will make five when the Leader says so."¹⁶ Other than being prescient of current events in the USA, Orwell's statement can help us see how essential truths can be, on the one hand, liberatory within repressive material circumstances and, on the other, vulnerable (in terms of their relevance) to these very same material conditions.

Reductive essentialism can be understood as the problematic form of essentialism. Anne Phillips explains that social theorists' discomfort with essentialism stems from essentialism's tendency to be ontologically (and epistemologically) reductive.¹⁷ In attributing characteristics to "everyone subsumed within a particular category" not only does this not leave room for those who do not fit in narrow categorizations, this very process of attribution also often naturalizes and, thereby, obscures the social construction of this category.¹⁸ Now the distinction between types of essentialist propositions, the

¹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32–33.

¹⁶ George Orwell, "Review of Russell's *Power: A New Social Analysis*," *The Bertrand Russell Society Quarterly*, May 2006, <https://www.lehman.edu/faculty/rcarey/BRSQ/06may.orwell.html>.

¹⁷ Anne Phillips, "What's Wrong with Essentialism?" *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 11 (2010), 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

specific standards for each type's validity, and the socio-political and cultural usages of essentialist positions (whether they are valid or not) is not a discussion I can take up here. However, Phillip's explanation is helpful since it shows that the main anxiety about essentialism is the way it obscures historical difference (either ontologically or epistemically) with absolute propositions. But if one begins from a Heideggerian position and considers essences as essential possibilities instead of as stable categorial forms, then this already goes a long way to alleviating the problems with reductive essentialism. For then we are not dealing with stable categories that necessarily bind beings, human or nonhuman, into historical straitjackets.¹⁹ Essential truths can free beings from potentially repressive and oppressive ontic conditions.

Think again of Orwell's statement. Like essentialist propositions, mathematical formulas are apodictic or self-evident. On the level of mathematics, the equation held by Orwell's repressive authorities that $2+2=5$ is absolutely false in *all possible* and *all given worlds*. But instead of being reductive and denying the experiential truth of this repressive world, this absoluteness can be conceived as liberatory. Instead of closing down possibilities it opens them up for oppressed subjects. The absolute truth that $2+2=4$ actually unlocks and frees social actors from full integration and conformity with the socially constructed falsehood that $2+2=5$. The true equation potentiates deluded and oppressed citizens not just for the truth of the equation but also for their freedom of thought from the repressive order. If restricted to their legitimate range, apodictic and essential truths can hold this liberatory potential for human actors and societies. But, of course, even this kind of liberatory essentialism can be detached and out of touch if it is not supplemented with a sociologically inclined impressionism. For it is one thing to assert the absolute truth of $2+2=4$ and quite another to

¹⁹ Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts*, 17. Heidegger himself did not align the essentials of *Dasein* with mathematical axioms. In fact, in a clear challenge to the original motivations of Husserl's early phenomenology, Heidegger contested the idea that mathematical truth should be the standard for philosophical truth. I am using this mathematical example simply to illustrate a point.

attend to *what it is like* to live in a deluded, repressive world where $2+2=5$. In other words, *while essential possibilities and truths do not lose their absolute truth even when social actors incorrectly relate to them, the relevance of essentialist positions can become problematic in relation to the lived conditions of historical existence*. Both essential and ontic possibilities are enabling and constraining for human existence.

Because essential possibilities of the self are necessary and universal, they are *possibilities* for every self. Yet we should not understand such essential possibilities in a categorical way. Their modality of truth is not akin to categorial attributes which are affirmed or negated on the basis of whether they *are* or *are not* present in a given object. Instead of a logic of negation, they have a logic of privation. So, a self can participate in an essential possibility without manifesting it much like a human being or animal participates in the natural possibility of sight, even if they are blind. They are the kind of being that has the potential for sight otherwise there is no literal sense in calling them blind. However, just like I understand that pointing to the truth of $2+2=4$ is different from living under a regime where there are real world consequences for denying it equals five, I also understand that ontic or factual circumstances can affect the relevance of essential possibilities for one's historical existence. Essential possibilities, at least in their relevance to historical existence, are vulnerable to ontic circumstances without losing their apodeictic status. But not only can ontic circumstances diminish the relevance of these essential possibilities they can also increase it.

In Chapter 5, with regard to my claims about the essence of selfhood, I tried to explain this with the illustration of chemical valence. Like a chemical atom has valence for bonding with other atoms and thereby transforming its chemical potentials, so too human selves have the capacity for being transformed by ontic circumstances that change their worldly capacities. Before this transformation, these essential capacities are rather distant and abstract. But given the right set of circumstances, they become very relevant to the self as these ontic details set them in motion and put them at stake. In

the dissertation, essential possibilities refer to those ontological capacities that are necessary but also relatively more abstract or immediate depending upon one's ontic circumstances. And existential possibilities are those historical factors that can diminish or unleash the relevance of essential possibilities for one's worldly existence.

One should not misunderstand this previous discussion of culture and history as an attempt to sidestep the transcendental status of *Destruction Loops*. It is well known that Heidegger's *Being and Time* was a work that sought to show the necessary, universal elements of *Dasein's* being. Both Chris's project and my own do not discard such a transcendental aim. The goal was indeed to show the conditions of possibility for selfhood from out of essential and existential possibilities. But in doing so, both Chris and I have departed from the Heideggerian articulation. By pointing to the way that ontic circumstances and existential possibilities can tip the self away from *the relevance* of its essential possibilities in terms of the meaning and potentials they open up for one's life, I have shown that specified ontic circumstances can make these essential possibilities if not completely invalid, then relatively *irrelevant* to the self's life. For instance, from this perspective, there would no longer be a Heideggerian *neutral possibility* between *Dasein* remaining fallen in its they-self and its return to its authentic self. Ontic circumstances and existential possibilities can make this return to oneself more or less likely, because given circumstances can tip one away from one's authentic self—as Chris and Dylan discussed in Chapter 3. This analysis discusses the conditions of possibility through which the self exists and the way that ontic existence can diminish one's capacity to find oneself in a way that Heidegger never articulated. My appeal to culture, history, and contingency (which are necessary moments of historical existence), should not then be understood as an underhanded attempt to sidestep a transcendental project. It is precisely *an advancement within transcendental thought*.

Painting the Invisible: Impressionism and Expressionism

One blunt way to differentiate between the artistic movements of impressionism and expressionism is to point to their differing emphases. Impressionistic paintings tend to focus on brief, passing sensations about the way light illuminates a certain scene. Expressionistic art tends to downplay the realism of its subject and move towards forms that evoke and relay the artist's interiority. There is of course an aspect of subjectivity involved in impressionism, but in expressionism there is a qualitatively different kind of freedom from the form of the object or its link with the artist's eye. Compare, for instance, the softened realism of Claude Monet's "Waterlilies and Japanese Bridge" to the abstract shapes and free-flowing forms of Wassily Kandinsky's or Paul Klee's abstract paintings. Because Kandinsky's art followed from the aesthetic theory he developed, his work in particular is a helpful example to dwell upon for a moment.

In his theoretical writings, Kandinsky distinguished between the external and internal characteristics of phenomena.²⁰ Scott Davidson, the English translator of French phenomenologist Michel Henry's book on Kandinsky, explains, "While the external appearance of a phenomenon refers to how the phenomenon is seen, the internal refers to the invisible tonality of a phenomenon, or how it is felt."²¹ Traditional painting caters to the externality of the painted scene by aligning the eye of the painter with an attempt to mimetically represent it. Even impressionistic painting like Monet's, which softens the aspirations of imitation by introducing a subjective element, still ultimately reinforces the relation between the eye and the depicted object. It ratifies the externality of the artist and his subject. By contrast, "Kandinsky's abstract art overturns our conceptions about

²⁰ Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky* (New York: Continuum, 2009). The following relies upon the summary of Kandinsky's theory offered by Michel Henry's English translator, Scott Davidson, in his introduction to Henry's book.

²¹ *Ibid.*, x.

painting and art in general, because it seeks to express the internal aspect of phenomena... to paint the invisible.”²²

Yet painting is a visual art. How then does one paint the invisible without making it visible? According to Davidson, Kandinsky envisioned freeing his painting *from* the visible *for* the invisible by pointing to *the unity of the means and content* of painting.²³ Davidson explains this through the example of the artist’s choice of colour.²⁴

In traditional styles, the painter’s choice of colour was explained by their apparent attempt to choose the best match for the external object’s colour. But as Davidson points out, this is not a very helpful explanation since most paintings are about events the artist did not personally witness, as with much religious art.²⁵ Painters of the Adoration of the Magi, for instance, were not there, nor do they have any mimetic reason to paint a Magi’s robe in one colour or another. Davidson says that Kandinsky helps us understand that an artist’s choice of colour relies upon a source other than external facts. It relies upon the invisible character of colours, their *felt character*. Kandinsky explained that each colour has a dynamic, felt quality: “yellow moves towards the spectator and gives the impression of attacking, while blue moves away from the spectator and gives the impression of rest.”²⁶ Davidson summarizes:

Kandinsky tears the laws of composition away from the objective world and situates them in the pathos of subjective experience. Colors are selected not on the basis of their resemblance to the external world but their internal emotional power.... That is to say that the impression of a color or form is no longer understood in terms of what it represents, instead the impression is described in its own terms, solely as an impression.²⁷

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ He also explains it through the artist’s choice of forms, shapes, and lines, but for our purposes a summary of colour will suffice.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, xi.

²⁷ Ibid.

Although Davidson does not tie his thoughts back to what he earlier called the unity of means and content, I think we can now see how the painter can be said to paint the invisible.

The artist who uses colour and form as expressions of his or her personal affective state represents the invisible on the canvas. The invisible here corresponds to the act of painting, the choice of colour and form, and the way these, at the time of painting, convey what the artist feels. What eventually comes to take shape on the canvas disappears with the work's accomplishment, attesting to itself in the content of the painting but vanishing in the completion of the work. Once the work is framed, hung, or transported to another location for display, its non-realist and non-representational aspects will continue to exhibit this now invisible act for its audience. Indirectly, it will show what has vanished. Before connecting these thoughts back to the fictional aspects of this dissertation, I would like to draw attention to the institutional context of its authorship.

The Modern Research University

Destruction Loops is a dissertation written within the institutional bounds of what Heidegger called the modern research university.²⁸ In general, such a context for knowledge-production seeks to secure its procedure by pre-representing its area of investigation as a sphere of objects. The objectivity of empirical facts or the rules which govern these come to be the standard for such a procedure. "Methodology," Heidegger writes, "through which a sphere of objects comes into representation, has the character of clarifying on the basis of what is clear—of explanation."²⁹ Explanation "accounts for an unknown by means of a known."³⁰ In other words, the key standard for standing in a field of research or scholarship is to identify and then fill a gap in current knowledge,

²⁸ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, 118-124.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 120-121.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 121. Heidegger also points out that the unknown (in its explanatory connection with the known) "verifies" the known—it attests to its explanatory power.

thereby making an empirical or conceptual contribution to the given area of study. My goal with this dissertation was not to present it within the context of Heideggerian scholarship in this regard. It was not aiming to make itself a part of this, but to write its way out of it. Scholarship as a form of research, which is at work in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities, takes its point of departure from the sciences as spheres of organized, systematic knowledge. Gianni Vattimo captures this general atmosphere when he writes that in this academic context, “in order for philosophy to be ‘sane,’ it must cooperate with empirical science and actually have a general *wissenschaftliche* [systematic knowledge] approach.”³¹ It is largely this atmosphere of research into empirical states of affairs or texts that I have sought to undermine in my work by way of a phenomenological expressionism.

Sociological Impressionism and Phenomenological Expressionism

While Vattimo’s sociological impressionism would be a form of qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) research, it would still be a form of *research*. Sociologists call the method of using one’s biography as a source for sociological research *autoethnography*. The goal is to connect one’s experiences of a given social situation, context, or culture to larger social, cultural, and political trends and explanations. Of course, one researcher’s autoethnography might be more creative than another’s: they might use it to develop a descriptive or explanatory concept in the absence of adequate ideas in the current literature they are drawing upon. Without wanting to undercut the validity or importance of autoethnography or Vattimo’s sociological impressionism, I would like to use Kandinsky to help me explain the differences between it and phenomenological expressionism.

³¹ Gianni Vattimo, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 30. This quote occurs in the context of Vattimo’s discussion of the debate between Jacques Derrida and John Searle which arose over the former’s interpretation of John L. Austin’s concept of “speech acts.” However, Vattimo himself generalizes Searle’s viewpoint as being representative of the geo-cultural hegemony of a realist approach in the American research university, particularly in its philosophy departments, 35–36.

For phenomenological expressionism goes one step further in throwing off the ethos of the modern research university from its method.

Like impressionism, expressionism includes the artist or author's impressions about its topic. Monet's paintings and an autoethnographer's description and reflections upon its subject matter contain their impressions of it. But expressionism radicalizes this. Instead of representing an external state of affairs, set of facts, or given actualities, it starts with the artist or author's affective life.

As I explain in Chapter 3, affect is not to be understood as emotion. It is closer to the feeling of orientation or bodily balance, because it orients us to our existential or meaning-laden position in the world. Think for instance of walking past a soccer ball lying on a gym-floor. There is no emotional reaction to the ball, but there can be (especially for former soccer players) *a pull* to kick the ball. There's no game being played, but there's just this impulse to kick it. This feeling of being pulled towards kicking the ball is affect—the feeling of worldly potentials. And ideas or concepts are ideations or condensations of the potentials that affect feels.³² Theoretical or hermeneutic expressionism harnesses the unity of the affect the creator feels, the concepts that articulate this, and the tools the imagination uses to develop an expression of this vanishing starting point.

Expressionism does not then begin with the external and then shade or soften it with impressions. It rather begins with a blank canvas or page and projects a world from the affective resources of the one who projects it. Because of this, the goal is not to represent the actual—even in the softened tones of an interpretivism, but to create the possible as a reflection of the disappeared point of view

³² Zielke, "Excess and Withdrawal," 117. I draw this thought out more precisely in my essay on phenomenological realism: "An idea *with regard to the real* is not an inner representation in an encapsulated mind. This is a hypostatization and reification of what an idea really is. An idea is rather the condensation of a potential—in this case, the condensation of a real potential. Or, more pointedly, it is a condensed sense that indicates a temporally extended potential within the real/universe to follow out and actualize (or not). It is a condensed sense in that it grasps, from a present moment, the temporal-spatial unfolding of a materially limited potential of the real. With regard to the real, human intentionality is guided by such ideas of the real; it is the grasping of potentials in and of the real as they are in the process of unfolding (or not)." The link between what I have written in this essay and what I am writing in this conclusion is that through affect one can project such felt potentials and ideas into unreal or possible worlds.

of the artist or writer's affective life. In *Destruction Loops*, this is one interpretation of Chris Weston's absent presence: she reflects in form the absence of the expressive author to his or her audience. Like Kandinsky's colours and lines, the theoretical expressionist's tools are imaginary voices, situations, and narratives. And concepts are the filters through which the imagination projects a context that harnesses the affective feelings of the theorist and unleashes them as ideated potentials of possible worlds. The author creates a narrative form that reflects the content of the ideas under discussion. Unlike Vattimo's sociological impressionism, phenomenological expressionism does not need to attend to the facts of an actual situation to investigate what Being signifies. Instead, it creates what I have Chris call *figmentations*—imaginary works of the existential imagination.³³ But before I explain this, allow me to discuss another important point.

What is the measure for truth in hermeneutic or phenomenological expressionism? Following artistic expressionism one would have to begin by saying that it would be a truthful presentation of the thinker's affective life insofar as it reinterprets and conceptualizes being-in-the-world from their own point of view. Now, the key component of figmentations is not that they are merely figments conjured by fantasy or that they are simply unreal projections (see Chapter 8). Their truth is not found in negating their realness and tracing the act of their creation back to the factual social and psychological circumstances of the author's life in the manner of a biographical explanation of a literary text. Their truth is rather found in the way they reflect the affective potentials of their creator's life. In Chapter 7 and 8, I develop this as a journey from lower to higher levels of meaningful existence, from what I call the ordinary to the invaluable. This constitutes the *positive* sense of the

³³ I develop the existential imagination (which is not the same as fantasy or pretend) in Chapter 8. The existential imagination can use fantasy to produce fictions, but this is not its key factor (as it is with fantasy). For fantasy can be active without the use of the existential imagination as occurs when the former reinforces (in an as if mode) ordinary meaning and ways of thinking. The existential imagination re-thinks and, thereby, re-potentiates factual existence by giving it new meaning. The existential imagination can also be active without fantasy, as it can build new meaning for *real* events and things.

truth of figmentations. For me, at least, they provide a journey to remembering or preserving the point(s) of orientation in one's life that I call special others. But there is also a negative or critical truth to figmentations as well.

In my introduction to *Destruction Loops*, I drew upon Herbert Marcuse's critical theory of fiction to use as an analogy for the fictional component I developed. Recall that for Marcuse the imaginary holds within it an inherent critique of the "mystified... institutions and relationships" the author encounters in their historical existence.³⁴ And, in response, the author projects his or her repressed potentials into an imaginary world, which now appears more true than the given, ordinary world. In my introduction, I quickly extended these thoughts towards an ontological equivalent: a non-correlation with being itself. This is one critical import of figmentations. They aestheticize being itself and frame it in a search for beauty (Chapter 8 and Dylan's Afterword). But there is also another 'negative truth' here that we can see if we connect Marcuse's thoughts, phenomenological expressionism, and figmentations to the context of the research university.

In their creation, the hermeneutic thinker takes a further step out of the research ethos of the modern university. Because the author's biography remains absent, and because it does not attend to any actual or empirical circumstances, it cannot as easily be coopted and appropriated to the imposed standards for empirical data or explanatory power in knowledge-production. One might then ask, what's the point of such a theoretical endeavor if it is not to provide the sciences or humanities with explanatory concepts or a field for progressive knowledge? The short answer is nothing. And that *is* the point. To expand, the act of denying the research university an easy 'translation' of such a method is an intellectual act that seeks to preserve a space for thoughtfulness outside the bounds of technical and scientific applicability. In other words, phenomenological

³⁴ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 54.

expressionism tries to preserve a space for thought without practical purpose within the bounds of the academy. Thoughtfulness for thoughtfulness sake is not an empty endeavor. And, in fact, generalized to our contemporary professional culture of hyper-productivity, phenomenological expressionism can be a bulwark of insistence for leisure and play in the academic context.

Topical Contributions to Hermeneutic Thought

Framing my Contributions through Different Modes of Writing

As I have mentioned in my introduction and earlier in this postscript, the characters' voices should not be confused with my own. Yet the present format and the ideas I am here putting forward as contributions may add some confusion here. Am I not here conflating my own perspective with that of Dylan and Chris by now taking the thoughts discussed in the body of the dissertation as straightforwardly my own? Did I not just finish saying that throughout this work I was attempting to write and think outside of the modern research university and its contribution-based forms of productivity? It would be understandable for the reader to be somewhat perplexed here. But I believe some of this confusion can be cleared up if we take both the experimental form of *Generation Loss* and the itinerate nature of writing and thinking into perspective. For, as an author, I am thinking and speaking in different modalities, which are not ultimately incompatible, but each of which can take momentary precedence over the others.

From my perspective as a writer, *Generation Loss*—Dylan's memoir—had *and still has* the status of *an extended thought-experiment*. The thought-experiment *per se*, or the imaginary construction of a hypothetical situation used to test or think out the consequences of a particular proposition or principle, is a well-established technique in academic work. *Generation Loss* is also a thought-experiment that has been given the format of a plot. I wrote both its fictional and its theoretical parts

in the mode of *perhaps* or, in scientific language, the mode of a *hypothesis*. I do not want this to come off as if it was a trivial endeavor. Although above I called it a space for play which allowed me to experiment with ideas, writing in this mode still involved a serious theoretical project.

Thoughtfulness, the way I understand it, having been influenced by Heidegger in this respect, is a facility for following out a line of thought, while also remembering the path one takes along the way. Such a direction of thinking does not necessarily arrive at something like a definitive academic contribution. Of course, one can become more convinced of an idea the more one travels with it. The opposite can also occur, but this does not discredit the process itself. For the phenomenological tradition, a method which perpetually puts thinkers back at the beginning, the measure of thoughtfulness is not necessarily found in its applicability within a given systematic domain. It is rather found in the process of throwing off the apparent self-evidence of pre-given theories and ideas in order to attend to the original intuition lying behind them in phenomena themselves. One can surely engage in this kind of philosophical self-responsibility—as Husserl called it—by re-activating *for oneself* the original, intuitive establishments which lie behind the “garb of ideas” inherited from great thinkers of the past.³⁵ Digging beneath the scholarly sediment one can then *repeat* the original intuition, much like re-intuiting what Heidegger meant by anxiety instead of just talking about what he and his scholars say about it. Starting with the phenomenon, one can then offer an intervention in a body of literature. All of this is the well-known and well-established method of phenomenology and phenomenological research. But what if, as is the case with my own background in Heidegger’s thought, one finds the fundamental coordinates of such a body of scholarly research which has been grounded within the thought of a seminal source—what if one finds these coordinates lacking? Then one has to depart from it. And because one is no longer speaking from within the coordinates of the

³⁵ Husserl, *The Crisis*, 51.

ground from which one has departed, there is need for differentiating one's ideas and one's intuition of phenomena from that previous thinker's orientation. This requires a more creative usage of these *original intuitions* as it involves creating a system of thought that reframes them in a new and different way.

As I noted with the help of my former supervisor in my introduction, in a systematic presentation of phenomena, there is always an imposed articulation of an analytic—a topology which contextualizes the place and the significance certain phenomena have within this larger vision. The various *topoi*, the relations between them, and their relative purpose or function in thought as a whole is not itself based upon a phenomenological method. They are more like decisions used to organize. They may find their motivations in a life and a biography, but the metaphysical coordinates themselves are synthesized *by* the existential imagination which potentiates the field of phenomena and frames them for certain potential meanings.

From my personal point of view, the process of writing required me to leap away from the circumstances of my own life and re-imagine the ideas in a different, imaginary context. In this process, I started with half-thought-out ideas that stemmed from my experience of things, others, and the world that I wanted to make as coherent as possible without reference to the background of my own life. To do this, I had to transfer them from the context of my own experience into the imaginary narrative. This entailed situating the concepts in relation to Dylan and Chris's particular motivations so that the reader could see *why they* would hold them. By transposing the ideas into this fictional context, it allowed me to avoid writing about my life, yet develop the concepts in relation to the affective substrate from which these ideas arose and which they also address. The writing phase of *Generation Loss* was a constant process of creation and refinement in the attempt to achieve as credible, consistent, and coherent of a viewpoint as I could. Through the process of writing, the ideas I was developing became less tentative in my mind. This was especially the case once I

completed *Generation Loss*, began reflecting on what I had accomplished, and then framed it as *Destruction Loops*—my, not Dylan’s work—in my Introduction and Postscript. It was only afterwards, after having completed *Generation Loss* that I came to a more convinced position with regard to its main theoretical thrust. The act of completing the manuscript subjectivized me as its author. Presenting it as a dissertation in an academic context also then required me to speak in an authoritative, assertive voice that would have been largely feigned with regard to the ideas I wanted to convey prior to writing this work.

The experimental nature of *Generation Loss* relinquished as its goal the modern research university’s pressure to foreground a demonstrated result instead of a mere hypothesis. Yet, afterwards, after writing it and reflecting on it, and also finding myself in the need to defend it in such an institutional context, I can honestly say that I stand by the theoretical positions I have listed below and offer them up as points for conversation going forward.

* * *

Destruction Loops is a critical-hermeneutic interpretation of Martin Heidegger’s philosophy, both early and late. It asks how love would transform the coordinates of his thought and seeks to explain this through a topology of meaning: the ordinary, the expressive, and invaluable. As Dylan explains in Chapter 1, *the ordinary* corresponds to what Heidegger calls everyday significance in *Being and Time*—the meaningful context of assignments that constitutes *Dasein*’s worldhood. The next two levels of meaning outstrip that put forward by Heidegger. *The expressive* is that kind of meaning that limits the referentiality—and the functional basis—of everyday significance. Mementos of a lost loved one are taken as the primary example of the expressive for they do not facilitate the everyday but put it on pause in remembrance of someone dear. The other main example of the expressive is called a work—words, actions, or things that the self builds to help it remain oriented to its being-for

another. The expressive limits the ordinary by pointing to the deepest or highest (whichever spatial metaphor one prefers) level of meaning: *the invaluable*. The invaluable is the theoretically articulated level of meaningfulness that intimacy or love grants. Through the special other (an intimate), the invaluable fulfills the expressive and grants a point or purpose to the continuous functioning of the ordinary. The loved one is taken to be the origin of the meaningfulness of the world.

This intervention in Heideggerian thought, which attempts to speak about love in order to move beyond the limits of Heideggerian philosophy, does in fact presume the gendered history of that thought. Perhaps one of the reasons there is very little discussion about love in Heidegger's work is because of the tendency of male philosophers to relegate this topic to the private domain, which has historically been associated with the feminine in the Western world.³⁶ I was aware of the gender dynamics at work here when I was writing *Generation Loss*. By having Chris be the main intellectual force in the dissertation, I was trying to point out the way that a woman might be more culturally predisposed to intuitively see what was missing in Heidegger's work—namely, the selfhood-constituting nature of love. Because modern Western thought and culture has had the tendency to house the topic of love in the domestic sphere, women who have also traditionally been expected to be more oriented to this domain than their male-counterparts may be more sensitive to the absence of discussions of love in traditionally male-dominated spheres, such as academic philosophy.

³⁶ There are, of course, many examples of male philosophers discussing love throughout the history of Western thought. Of particular relevance here is Max Scheler who was one of the most prominent phenomenological philosophers in Germany while Heidegger was writing *Being and Time*. Scheler was a Christian and love was an important theme in his work. The omission of any in-depth discussion of this topic in Heidegger's writings is then all the more shocking when one considers that Scheler heavily influenced Heidegger. However, when we take the methodological limits and originality of Heidegger's project into consideration, this exclusion may be more understandable—if not ultimately justifiable. Heidegger's ontological orientation largely sought to sidestep Scheler's project of providing a phenomenology of values as the non-formal (in the sense of being a non-Kantian) ground for a new ethical system. Furthermore, Heidegger's personal and professional attempt to distance himself and his thought from his Catholic and theological background may have also made him uncomfortable with discussing such a central topic from the Christian tradition. In 1927's "Phenomenology and Theology," published in his collection *Pathmarks*, Heidegger argued that philosophy (which was based upon questioning) and theology (which was based upon faith) were fundamentally incompatible.

Sociologists, feminists, and social philosophers, such as Simon de Beauvoir, have often pointed out that gender is not the same as sex. Sex (not to be confused with sexuality or sexual orientation) refers to one's reproductive function in the species, while gender refers to the social norms and expectations that accompany the feminine and the masculine in the social world. Gender is socially constructed, which means that these gender norms are different from culture to culture and that they can change over time in a given society. A woman's other identifying factors such as their socio-economic position, race or ethnic background, sexual orientation, religious and political identification—all of these affect this woman's experience of being a woman. Womanhood in the Western world is not a monolithic experience. Yet because of Western society's tendency to associate discussions about love with the sphere that it has also traditionally carved out for women, *generally speaking* this could give a woman (such as Chris or a real woman) the eyes to see more clearly what Heidegger's masculine background made more opaque to him. By no means do I mean to reinforce or justify hegemonic gender roles with this statement. I am trying to clarify the way a historical situation (just or unjust) can attenuate or enhance one's vision and transcendental thoughtfulness.

Heidegger's own androcentric perspective and the male-dominated context of academic philosophy within which he was working made it easy enough for him to avoid any self-reflexivity about the cultural factors that may have made his phenomenological vision and hermeneutic leanings more obscure and limited than he thought. For him, the analysis of *Dasein* was that of an *a*-human essence, because it was simply meant to be a description of the fundamental features of a being (any being) whose own mode of being was not indifferent to it.³⁷ Because he was seeking to designate

³⁷ In this sense, it aims to conceivably include all forms of advanced life, although he would distinguish between different forms of life on the basis of their relative openness to the disclosure of the world as he does in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Nevertheless, he is clearly thinking of something more like human, cultural, and language-based life in the existential analytic than other forms of animal and plant-life.

Dasein's essential nature, he spoke of a "peculiar neutrality" in the analysis and character of *Dasein*'s being.³⁸ And this is due to the fact that this interpretation is carried out "prior to every factual concretion"—or any specification of a given ontic particularity.³⁹ The ontic *is* necessary for *Dasein*'s existence (who only exists by working itself out *through* its existence), but only formally so. Heidegger does not need to specify the ontic in any particularity to include it as a necessary component of *Existenz*. For instance, he states that *Dasein* is "neither of the two sexes," that it is sexless.⁴⁰ We could add that it is also genderless. And one might note that I made Chris's analyses of selfhood reflect this same neutrality. But there is an important difference between Heidegger's thought and what I had Chris accomplish, which I have now been trying to explain as a contribution of mine.

Heidegger did not need to specify ontic particulars in order to argue for its necessity for *Dasein*'s existence. So too, neither Chris nor myself would need to specify a factual concretion of the self in order to articulate the way such historical-cultural situations can *a priori* affect the relevance of transcendental conditions for these factual contexts. The capacity to argue this point formally without a necessary reference to a given historical fact, shows that this argument is happening on the level of the transcendental and that it is not simply an insight from an empirical position. Methodologically, this preserves the systematic difference and levels of analysis of this contribution *for both transcendental thought and empirical investigation*. From a philosophical perspective, it is sufficient to discuss these formally, as Chris did during the dissertation. A social scientist investigating a specific sociocultural case, topic, or issue can use this same insight in more factual studies—specifying the limiting features of that factual concretion. In *Destruction Loops*, I used the narrative to do this in a different way than an empirical investigator. I put these ideas in the voice of an imaginary woman

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *The Heidegger Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 63.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

philosopher. And by doing so, I was symbolizing that the ontic or factual features of a self (in this case its gender) can relativize *not the validity, but the relevance* of essential, *a priori*, and transcendental possibilities. This is much more sophisticated than the critique of reductive essentialism often carried out in critical theory circles. For my position does not use the essential to deny or occlude historical difference, but nor does it throw out the transformative potentials of the essential in its critical move. Existential possibilities can obscure the relevance of essential possibilities (without invalidating them), yet essential possibilities can still hold historical situations open for liberatory or transformative potentials.⁴¹ One's existential situation in a given society or area of thought (such as Heidegger's), may dim a clear sight into that which is essential—such as the selfhood-constituting nature of love. By making Chris the author of these thoughts, I was showing that due to Heidegger's own historical situation and blinders when it came to gender, the relevance of the essential nature of love in the constitution of the self may have been more unclear to him than it might be for a woman philosopher.

Nevertheless, one might look at the examples of women characters in *Generation Loss* and wonder about some of the problematic aspects of representation that these might raise. Fiction, amongst other endeavors, would be impossible or, at least, it would put writers in an impossible ethical position if imagining and writing about the experience of others unlike oneself was deemed to be necessarily problematic. Because of this, the problem of representation in general, such as the way that I (a male theorist) was writing about and in the voice of woman characters, must be further specified so that one allows for both problematic *and* unproblematic types of representation. That said, there are two problematic types of gender representation that I do not think *Destruction Loops* falls into.

⁴¹ This is not to deny that essentialism can be used for suspect, oppressive ends. It is simply emphasizing a fuller, more complete perspective.

The problem of appropriation occurs when a member or group of the socio-political majority coopts a cultural resource that had previously belonged to a socio-political minority. This is a large area of discussion, which involves various dimensions of problems, and so I would like to limit myself here by instantiating it as the potential problematic nature of a theorist who identifies as a man writing in the voice of a woman. Aside from the issue of reinforcing traditional stereotypes and biases (which I will address below), I am aware that doing this can exacerbate the traditional lack of diversity in theory and philosophy circles. Men writing in the voice of women characters does run the danger of misrepresenting the experience of women by replacing an actual feminine viewpoint with an imagined feminine viewpoint. Yet for the sake of engendering empathy towards women in men, I still think it is important for little boys and grown men to try to imagine what life must be like for women *even while admitting that they ultimately cannot*. Extending themselves while also recognizing their own limits can go a long way towards creating a more thoughtful and safe space for women in society and social institutions. Despite some of its cultural manifestations which tend to reinforce problematic gender stereotypes, helping men be more thoughtful about women is one progressive aim that fiction can provide. A further problem with a man writing in the voice of a woman specifically *in an institutional-academic context* is that it can also give the appearance of diversity while crowding out those who actually live their lives as women in the often male-dominated academy. In response to this, I would say that the theoretical positions I have tried to articulate are friendly to creating the conditions for more diversity within the academy. The position that I have pointed out above in terms of a contribution that shows the possibility of factual specificities (including gender) that can limit or unleash transcendental thought can also be seen as a tool for critique when it comes to the link between philosophy and socio-political conservatism—just as I have pointed out with a nuanced perspective on Heidegger’s male-centered viewpoint.

The problem of representation can also be manifest when authors reinforce negative stereotypes with their characters. I was aware of this problem when I was writing the narrative portions of *Generation Loss*. And while there is some problematic writing about women characters, I intentionally put these characterizations into Dylan's, the author's, mouth. In case the reader is reading this postscript prior to reading the body of the dissertation, I do not want to say too much more here to avoid any spoilers. But I also do not want to seem like I am dodging an account by hiding behind Dylan. What I will say is that there is an important difference between authors who use problematic characterizations strategically *in order to expose them* and those who do so obliviously or for more nefarious discriminatory purposes. Besides those who have more vicious intentions, an oblivious author might unknowingly reinforce and celebrate problematic representations. The consumption of this work will generally not then lead to a more thoughtful position—perhaps quite the opposite. Conversely, an author who uses these problematic representations to flag the credibility of those characters who are imposing them within the narrative is also trying to indirectly communicate to the reader that these *are* problematic—especially in the real world.

Perhaps with the exception of Chris (who is not perfect), none of the characters in *Destruction Loops* are straightforwardly good characters. They all have flaws and they are all morally ambiguous. Furthermore, all the characters are presented through Dylan's representation of them. Dylan's character was *supposed* to have mother-issues that affected his relationships with other women. Nevertheless, there are small, subtle moments in which the narrative was also supposed to escape Dylan's control. I hoped that if the reader could see past Dylan's presentation, they might find some humanizing moments for some of the otherwise flatly presented female characters. For instance, in Chris's reflection about her mother standing in a kitchen arguing with Casey about his non-availability, I hoped the reader could see past Dylan's resentment for Barb and notice the impossible

position of an intelligent, educated woman who had been left to take care of the household and her daughter by her absentee, workaholic husband. And in a scene where Dylan's self-protective silence makes him short with his mother, Brianne, after she asked him about his time at a party, I was hoping the reader could see that even if she tried to take some new-found interest in her son, her son was still holding the past against her by keeping to himself. All of these characters, male and female, were developed to try to illustrate some of the issues, complexities, and pitfalls that come with the phenomenon of love.

The Phenomenon of Love

A hermeneutic phenomenology does not begin with a pre-given concept but takes its starting point from the phenomenon itself. And so in writing this book, I did not begin with a pre-given concept of love but with a pre-theoretical sense of the phenomenon of love. I also wanted to bracket the ethical and moral dimensions that various cultural traditions place upon the idea of love and develop it as an ontological condition, which is vulnerable to the conditions of finitude. So I focused on it as *a form of meaning* instead of as an ethical command or as a value. People can default on love, and *Destruction Loops* is in fact an attempt to understand its finitude by taking the guiding phenomenon of self-destruction as one way love does not continue to bind special others together. In trying to understand how self-destruction can happen, it thereby seeks to exhibit love's finitude and the ontological factors that can diminish it. But in doing so, it also presents the phenomenon itself as being prone to such diminishment. The description that results included four formal features of love that I worked out and became more and more aware of over the course of writing *Generation Loss*, four features that still seem to me to be inclusive of all forms of love.⁴² These are: purposiveness in

⁴² The possibility of what Christianity calls neighbourly love and what exactly this entails in the affective life of the self is beyond the scope of this work.

the special other, reciprocated affirmation, desire or wanting the world for the other, and exposure or vulnerability to the world through the other.

What was most obvious to me in the beginning stages of writing *Generation Loss* was that love has a teleological structure, grounded in but also aiming at a special other.⁴³ Love is the name of the point of orientation a self takes from some (one or multiple) finite being(s) as the origin for the meaningfulness of that self's world. The world can indeed be full of ordinary meaning in the absence of a loved one. There is indeed what Heidegger called an in-order-to structure to everyday significance.⁴⁴ So there is of course a kind of goal-oriented level of meaning in the ordinary. But such ordinary purposiveness is prone to being encountered as meaningless or futile if it is not grounded in someone that matters—a loved one. Appealing to grief's detachment from the world in the wake of a lost loved one (in Chapter 1) was meant to exhibit that there was a deeper level of purposiveness (than that of the everyday) which grounds the meaningfulness of the ordinary. In love, the self itself is not the origin of this purposiveness, which is founded by another. The self receives the meaning of ordinary purposiveness back from the other who it is for. As I had Dylan point out, even for the griever who has lost someone, the world does not lose all meaning. There is still a stable in-order-to structure. But *the point* of its meaning seems to have disappeared along with the lost one. Socially designated periods of mourning, in which someone is not expected to or even allowed to participate in their ordinary duties or roles, acknowledge this. Love for a special someone grounds (or disrupts) the point or purpose of it all.

⁴³ Because both the self and other are not objects but self-transcending beings there is a kind of existential-hermeneutic circle here (a departure-return dynamic). Finding its own meaning grounded in another, who is opened up to the world, the self must traverse the world the other opens up for it (in terms of its meaning) in order to aim at or return to this other whose being is not contained by its corporeal dimensions. The other's self-transcendence unto the world is the sphere into which the self must transcend, building for the other and preserving the conditions which allow it to remain oriented in the other's invaluable being.

⁴⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 97.

The second formal feature of love is that it is also the name of a reciprocated relationship between special others. *In its fullness*, love is a relationship in which the individuals involved are irreplaceable for one another. In other words, each affirms and addresses the other in their incomparability with all other others. Furthermore, each self wants the world for the other. They want the world to be the place where the other fulfills their self and can recognize themselves as the invaluable individual that they are. There are surely, however, situations where love remains unreciprocated, cases of what we might call *one-sided love*. For instance, we might think of a man whose romantic love for a woman has been thwarted. Or we might imagine a little girl who adores her parents that neglect her terribly. Before addressing the one-sided nature of examples such as these, it is important to distinguish between *attachment* and *love*.

I suggest that we think about this difference between attachment and love in terms of a different phenomenal-topological orientation between the two. Attachment is about the self needing something from the other, either an object or the other *as an object*, so that the self can imagine itself with a sense of self-security.⁴⁵ In attachment, the other is akin to an object or a distributor or provider of objects that the self thinks it needs. By contrast, love concerns the self's desire *for the other*, who is a self-transcendent being. Love is about affirming, addressing, and preserving the other's invaluable

⁴⁵ Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary*. This idea of attachment is a phenomenological construction, but it has initial similarities with Lacan's idea of demand—epitomized in the child's demand for objects provided by parents, which are supposed to (impossibly) represent the parent's love back to the child. There are also similarities between Lacan's ideas of love and desire and those which I speak about in the coming sentences. Throughout *Generation Loss*, there were occasional references to psychoanalytic thought, including Freud's and Jacques Lacan's theories. In Chapter 4, I had Dylan point out that Lacan was a recognized source in the discussion of desire that transpired. Lacan's understanding of desire as lack is, in certain respects, close to my understanding of love as desire. However, I did not explicitly draw on Lacan for a number of reasons, the foremost being that I believed that I could accomplish a phenomenological presentation of the phenomenon without a contrast with his work. Lacan's idea of desire is a psychological concept that was developed for clinical purposes in the psychoanalytic tradition. Because of this, it presumes a whole host of theories outside the methodological limits of this phenomenological study. Each of these psychoanalytic concepts would require phenomenological demonstration before including them, which was not the point of this work. That said, I could briefly state the main difference between Lacan's theory of desire and my own in the following way. The phenomenal vision I am building here does not require a reference to an explanatory theory of lost objects from parental relations in childhood. It is more general than this and it can stand on its own intuitive basis.

being in the midst of a world that undermines its recognition. In any given case, there can of course be a mixture of both attachment and love but, essentially, they are different. Attachment is self-oriented, while love is other-oriented. The aim of attachment is *for the self*, while the aim of love is *for the other*. Yet included in wanting the world for the other is the self *wanting itself* to be for the other.

The self wants *to be itself, to be a self* in being-for the other. And it wants to build to preserve the invaluable nature of the other in the world. But if the other does not recognize itself in these built works, because it is not intimate with the self, then the works do not accomplish what the self has set out to do. The self's ability to be itself, in its highest sense, is thus given back to it in affirmation and address from the other. The metaphysical position from which the self transcends unto the world to build for the other is prerequisite upon the other's recognition of the self as its special other. It is primarily through love, but also being-loved, that one achieves selfhood in its highest sense—as being-for. For now the self can accomplish the preservation of the other's invaluable being in a way in which the other recognizes itself in these built works like no other can.

One-sided love has as its goal reciprocated love, so unreciprocated love should not necessarily be confused with attachment. Needing someone to be oneself is not the same as becoming oneself by existing for another. I mention this because what it helps us put into perspective is that *one-sided love will always have as its implied goal a reciprocated relationship* with the special other *for the sake of the other*. Clearly a rejected lover and a neglected child want their love to be returned. In the cases of thwarted love and a child's love for neglecting parents, the goal for the one who loves is always a reciprocated relationship, yet still for the sake of the other—even if it will not come to pass. Theoretically, we can now see why. The ability for the other to find its own invaluable nature preserved in that which the self has built for it requires the other to recognize that they have been affirmed and addressed in that which has been built for them. The hope of returned love is also for

the self to be loved but it is primarily hoped for so that the special other can receive and recognize *their self* within the compass of the love given to them.

This second feature of love's reciprocated nature integrates with the third feature: the fact that love as desire is akin to *wanting the world for the other*. The self wants the world to be the place where the other fulfills itself and, furthermore, where it recognizes its invaluable nature preserved in the things, actions, and words the self builds for it. I had Dylan and Chris explain in Chapter 4 and 5 that love is the self-transcendence of desire for a special other or intimate. But "for a special other" is not to be understood as wanting or needing them like an object (craving or need) since the other is also a self-transcending being. Love as desire should be understood as being closer to *wanting the world for the other*. Longing for them is then (i) longing for their fulfilment in the world and (ii) longing for the world to be the place wherein their invaluable nature is recognized and preserved. Love is not for the other as an object. It is for the other as a self-transcending being. The other is not limited to their corporeal coordinates or the present moment. In Chapters 4 and 5, closeness and distance do not express spatial or temporal proximity or displacement, but the formal dynamics of the meaning of intimacy—and, thereby, the grounding point of the world. Love as desire follows after the other unto the rest of the world, crossing the boundary between the invaluable and the ordinary, to build expressions of the other's invaluable nature. Yet love can be and often is undone by the world. Being undermines it, without providing the soteriological resources to save love from this undertow.

The final feature of love that I wanted to emphasize was its finitude for it seemed obvious to me from the beginning that love does not always hold people together. People fall apart and lose their love for one another all the time. Love's finite limits can be seen in a number of respects, which can be divided into two broad types: on the one hand, love's vulnerability and, on the other, love's non-durability or its transience.

First, love does not vanquish that which threatens to undermine it from without. It is essentially vulnerable. Loved ones are exposed to the pain of loss and, along with this, the unmooring of the point of the world through the special other's demise. Either in anticipation of loss or its wake, love for the other exposes them to an insight into the character of being and the world, from which being itself—arguably—does not save. On this theme, one of the things that writing this dissertation has allowed me to articulate is the possibility of a different response to this insight than the one Heidegger prescribes in his work. To ask someone to be reconciled with the finitude of being (in appropriation) and, by extension, the loss of a finite loved one is to have already decided upon a response to this situation: namely, that reconciliation with the conditions of being is the appropriate(ed) response. Heidegger's appropriation (*Ereignis*) asks the mortal to depart from traditional metaphysics by overcoming (not by superseding, but by healing from) the pain the demise of the metaphysics of eternal presence has left in its wake.⁴⁶ Yet what if a more authentic response, authentic stripped of its Heideggerian sense, and taken in the sense that this response more adequately expresses the self's love and longing for the other—is not to seek healing from this wound, a wound that will in fact never heal, but rather to use the wound as a catalyst to highlight the disparity between—on the one side—being itself (which is not a being) and what Heidegger told us 'it' gives and—on the other—the love that passes between mere beings. This would not of course be a delusional rejection of the conditions of being. It is a rejection of the privilege Heidegger gave being itself and the idea that it can save one from the suffering to which loving in its midst exposes one. If this is plausible, then we then have the possibility of an ontological-existential position that is post-Heideggerian in the sense that it has developed from, but also beyond the basic coordinates of his thought.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy*, 84.

Love is also subject to the terrible freedom of being, which allows love itself and those who participate in it to be undermined from within. We can here speak of the non-durability or transience of love itself. Declining any of its romanticized characterizations, we can then see how there is a tragic constitution of the self-world relation which perpetually threatens to undermine the self-special other relation. This internal undermining was described in a number of ways in the dissertation. As Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 explain, in self-transcendence unto the ordinary, the self abstracts away from the exclusivity of intimacy to engage and understand itself as a general other or role-player in the social. The price of admission for self-transcendence to the rest of the world—the world of general others—is a facility for sidelining the invaluable as the articulated point of origin for the world’s meaningfulness. As I mention in Chapter 3 and elsewhere, this is not necessarily a problem, but it can become one. For Chapter 3, 6 and 7 show that the ordinary world can sediment over the self’s self-understanding as being-for. The self can become obscure to itself and lose its orientation in the special other. Ordinary circumstances can change its existential capacities and lead it away from its special others. Furthermore, in Chapter 5 I had Dylan present his own family history as the basis for a discussion of what Chris called the history of desire. One’s love relationships can conflict with and undermine each other. It is quite clear that certain loving relationships can be in external conflict. A mother might disapprove of her son’s choice of partner. Or a child’s divorced parents might continually place the child in an impossible position by forcing him or her to pick a side. But there are also internal conflicts to someone’s history of desire that might accrue over time. Repeating patterns of love from one’s youth is one such example. And existential self-destruction, in which someone has lost their sense of orientation in the other, is another. Failing to build can lead to overcomplications in which these conflicts are not acknowledged and not worked on, and these omissions can accrue upon one’s sense of oneself ultimately undermining one’s love for a special other.

As I have mentioned, this formal description of love that has resulted from the process of writing *Destruction Loops* is meant to be inclusive to all kinds of love between intimates. In the narrative, the primary example of love is romantic love, Dylan's love for Chris. Because it is being described from Dylan's perspective it may appear that the conceptualization of love is limited to this.⁴⁷ However, its presentation is meant to include other forms of non-romantic love between friends, parent and child, and other family members.

In romantic love the dependency between loved ones is mutual. But in filial love there is an asymmetry at work: the child is materially dependent on the parent. In Chapter 5, I discuss how love is in fact always asymmetrical. Being-for the special other as desire is always *following after* the special other. The other is *a priori*—the one who comes before. Yet this priority or 'beforeness' is not necessarily physical, temporal, or material as it concerns the meaning of love—the existential potential it unleashes for those who participate in it. A parent definitely precedes their child temporally and physically. And the child is certainly materially dependent upon the parent for its physical survival. Yet love as a form of meaning, as the name of the meaning-giving relation between special others *is that which potentiates the meaningfulness of any of these physical and material provisions provided by the parent*. Non-loving surrogates can provide the same material conditions for the child, but they will not then have the same meaning. This is why in terms of the idea of love developed in this dissertation, we could say that in a metaphysical or non-physical sense, that is in an existential sense (as it concerns the meaning of material-historical potentials), *the parent is actually dependent upon the child*.

⁴⁷ Iain Thomson, "Thinking Love: Heidegger and Arendt," *Continental Philosophy Review* 50 (2017); Diane Enns, *Love in the Dark: Philosophy by Another Name* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Susi Ferrarello, *The Phenomenology of Sex, Love, and Intimacy* (New York: Routledge, 2019). To fill in this formal presentation of love, going forward I would like to also begin specifying the differences between the different kinds of love: romantic, Platonic, filial. Thomson's, Enns's, and Ferrarello's studies provide fruitful groundwork on the phenomenology of romantic love and the role of eros in existence and life.

Usually, we think of parents coming before their children and providing a safe and nurturing environment for them. But articulated from the perspective of love, if we are indeed speaking of a loving parent-child relationship, it is actually the child that comes *a priori* and before the parent. It is not hard to imagine a loving parent placing the child's interests and safety before their own interests and safety. But to add a more mundane dimension to this phenomenology of filial love, to show how it potentiates the ordinary worldhood of the parent we could also point to the priority of the child in the way the child *gives* the parent its world anew. The arrival of the child actually transforms the way the parent understands and interacts with their environment. Think for instance of child-proofing a home. For many new parents, the dangers awaiting a toddler in their home are unimaginable until they actually see the toddler bumping around, pulling at things, and falling over inside it. The toddler gives the parent the eyes to see, so to speak. Or, In Heideggerian terms, the child's activities give the parent the "circumspection" (or environmental sight) to see and understand the significance of things anew.⁴⁸ And this vision is granted because the parent *wants the world for the child*. The parent longs for the world to be the place not just where the child survives, but also where it can flourish, fulfil itself, and be recognized for the irreplaceable being that it is. The father or mother wants the material and cultural circumstances of the child's environment to reflect the child's invaluable nature. Its material dependence upon the parent thereby follows from the child's metaphysical (beyond the physical) priority over the parent because the child's arrival reveals the meaning of the world in a new light. We could also turn the example around and describe it from the point of view of the child.

In thinking about this, I suggest we keep the difference between attachment and love in mind. For while I am not here proposing a theory of development that explores the relation between the

⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98-99.

two in psychological individuation, it is phenomenologically evident that there is a conceptual difference between these two even if they overlap in given cases. On top of this, the interrelation between the two will most likely change as the child grows older. In any case, it is imaginable that both a young or grown child could be attached to their parent without loving them. The young child can be materially and affectively dependent upon the parent or caretaker without loving them—either in a single instance (needing to be fed or acknowledged at some point) or at all (not loving the parent at any point in time). Furthermore, children can be socialized by their parents or institutional caretakers without there being a loving relationship between them. The relational expression of love itself (i.e., the way it is shown or neglected) is something that parents or caregivers can also socialize children into. Keeping this mind, we can trace out the way that children can love their parents given the four formal characters listed above.

Assuming we are talking about a child's *love* for its parents, then we can understand the child's socialized imitation of their parent as being grounded in the purposiveness granted by the special other (in this case, their parent). Furthermore, we can see this as being motivated not by what the child gains, but rather from what they give to the other in doing so. Psychologists and sociologists have long pointed to the developmental importance of the child's mimicry of their parent's behavior or the cultural influences the parent introduces to the child. A young boy might put on his father's work hat and pretend to be his father. Or a young girl might put on a cape and pretend she is Superwoman in front of her parents. Actions such as these can be seen from two different perspectives. In terms of socialization, role-playing which either copies a parent's behavior or a role-model that the parent has introduced to the child serve to introduce the child into the parent's ordinary world, where s/he performs certain social roles or behaves according to certain culturally relevant ideals. But in terms of these socialized behaviours *being expressions of love*, we would be talking about the child's *motivations* for this performance. All of this falls under the compass of

socialization, but because one can be socialized in the absence of a loving relationship, there needs to be a distinction between motivations which stem from attachment and those which stem from love. In the case of attachment, the meaning or purpose behind the imitation is found in seeking the parent's approval. But love can also be a motivating factor during psychological development and beyond. It can be a motivating factor for children their entire lives. In this case, love for the parent is the point of orientation in the self's imitation of roles and their eventual grown-up involvement in the ordinary. Because of this, such engagement is not simply about seeking approval, but about making the parent proud. The two might be very similar in effect, but the motivation for love is to do something *for the parent*. It is to give them the gift of being a good parent who has the opportunity to find themselves fulfilled by watching their child succeed and live a full life. In this sense, the purposiveness of the child's ordinary projects is founded upon the child's giving to the parent.

There is of course also a reciprocating element in child-parent love as well. The child wants the parent to acknowledge them as a good child who has made them proud. But, again, as with love in general, this has as its deepest motivation the desire for the parent to recognize their own invaluable position in the love the child shows through their actions and behaviors.

The third feature of love, wanting the world for the other (*i.e.*, the parent) can be seen in the child's relationship with their parents in different ways. In childhood, it can be seen in the way the child idealizes their parent as, for instance, "the smartest woman in the world" or "the strongest man in the world." There may be elements which overlap with the needs of attachment here. For instance, fantasies like this may just as much be about the child feeling secure as it is about their parent's omniscience and/or omnipotence. Yet we can also phenomenally distinguish between this and the way that a loving child would genuinely want the best for their parent. The grounds for this fantasy can be found in desire as the child wanting, in an admittedly childish way, the parent to actualize their potentials and projects to the nth degree. Later on, when the child is older and they have

outgrown these childhood fantasies about their parents, the tenderness for the parent's growing fragility, the empathy they feel for the parent's failures and shortcomings, and the eventual devastation when they die, all of this is grounded in the child's wanting the world to be the place where the parent flourishes.

Fourth, the child is also vulnerable to the world through the parent. This, of course, is self-evident when it comes to the material and cultural circumstances into which the child is born. But it also occurs in different ways. For instance, psychoanalysts have pointed out that child-parent dynamics can follow the child into their adulthood, where they then repeat these with authority figures and significant others. Dylan referred to the Freudian idea of transference (the repetition of this dynamic in the clinical context) when I had him speak about Chris's idea of the history of desire. Minus the psychoanalytic baggage and its theoretical problems which I did not want to address, since the phenomenon could be described without the many detours this would entail, the history of desire names something similar. It is not necessarily grounded in the parent-child relationship. It need only be a history of different relationships between the self and several special others over time—which need not include a loving relationship with a parent. Patterns of affective orientation to the meaning one has in an intimate relationship can evolve or devolve without there having been a loving relationship with a parent. However, in cases such as Dylan's and Chris's, the narrative did explore how past parent-child relationships can complicate present relationships. Chris's sometimes unfair expectations for independence from Dylan's concern for her was an artifact of her growing up in a household without supervision. It was a problem throughout her relationship with Dylan, but it eventually came to a crisis point when they were living apart, especially because it exacerbated difficulties Dylan had with vulnerability. Dylan's own self-protective silence and manipulative if not controlling nature, was meant to ward off the vulnerability his troubled relationship with his parents

introduced to his later relationship with Chris. These are fictional examples, but ones that we might also see in the real world.

Whether instantiated in real or imagined contexts, these four formal features of love seem broad but also specific enough to account for a general theory of love. And it is this view of love that I think is also key to understanding the contributions I would like to point to in the understanding of the intersubjective or relational self.

A New Understanding of the Intersubjective Self

One of the main contributions I would like to offer here has to do with the intersubjective or relational nature of the self. Talk about the self often presumes the history of discourse surrounding individuals and intersubjectivity. The traditional way to problematize the relation between the self and others is to think of the self as an individual and the collective as an aggregate of individual selves. As I point out in Chapter 2, Heidegger went a long way to presenting a view of selfhood that was fundamentally intersubjective and ontologically relational. From this perspective, there is not at first an isolated ego or individual that only subsequently aggregates into a collective or community. Through *Existenz*, and the background practices into which *Dasein* is socialized, the social world infuses selfhood from the beginning.⁴⁹ Yet it is indeed the case that phenomenology and phenomenological sociology have often emphasized the individual over its relation to others.

Social theorist Nick Crossley has criticized the Husserlian-inspired phenomenological sociologist Alfred Schutz for his prioritization of the individual over the impersonal system of the social world. Crossley writes, “Schutz tends to stick to the sort of relationship which an individual takes to other individuals or groups at the expense of a consideration of the relationships, practices and processes

⁴⁹ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 3.

viewed from the trans-individual position of the systems which they form.”⁵⁰ In other words, Schutz’s focus is always upon the individual’s role in participating within the intersubjective and does not explain the way the social functions as an impersonal system that perpetuates itself apart from the individual’s intentions. Schutzian commentators, Overgaard and Zahavi, respond to Crossley’s criticism and defend Schutz by pointing to the *a priori* status of the individual subject within any intersubjective realm. They write, “there is no society without individual subjects....”⁵¹ By virtue of being a system composed by intersubjectivity, there necessarily must be individual subjects that compose it. While this is certainly a valid point, I think Overgaard and Zahavi’s response to Crossley really dodges the crux of the issue here in a couple of ways.

The Self beyond Individuality: The Relational Constitution of Being-For

First, by taking the problematic back to the logical argument about the necessity of individual subjects within the intersubjective, Overgaard and Zahavi reinforce the traditional view of the self as an individual. As I just mentioned, I think this is a valid point. However, I also think it is somewhat beside the point. For the topic of individuality is probably not the best way to situate Crossley’s intervention or to frame a discussion of the self *as a who*. As my character Dylan explains in his Introduction, there is phenomenal distinctness between *individual difference* and *uniqueness*. The human self is *not simply an individual*. Individuality is a topic that covers both human selves and non-living objects. There are individual rocks just as there are individual human selves. A collectivity of selves necessarily includes individuals just like a collection of rocks necessarily includes individual rocks. But the way that rocks are collected together is completely different than the way human selves

⁵⁰ Nick Crossley, *Intersubjectivity: The Fabric of Social Becoming* (London: Sage Publishers, 1996), 98.

⁵¹ Overgaard and Zahavi, “Phenomenological Sociology,” 112.

are together because selves are not whats but whos. And so while I ultimately agree with Overgaard and Zahavi's point, I think we need to take it further to explain the intersubjective nature of the self.

In Chapters 1-4, I develop the self's being as *being-for*. This is, in one sense, a radicalization of Heidegger's being-with. In Chapter 2, I explain how Heidegger's existential analysis of *Dasein* overcame the traditional Cartesian view of the self as an isolated ego. Being-with is not an occasional or accidental feature of selfhood, but a constitutive moment. *Dasein* is pre-built to be with others and so even if it is physically alone, it is still always with others. Yet for Heidegger, as for Husserl and other phenomenologists such as Schultz, there is a *methodological* priority when it comes to selfhood. The phenomenologist begins with the self, taking it as 'the center' for intersubjective analysis, and then through the self and *from its perspective* addresses the ways it is with others. It should be noted that *this methodological priority does not necessarily imply an ontological priority*—as if an isolated self was the fundamental building block for a phenomenological understanding of intersubjective existence.

As I point out in Chapter 2, Heideggerian authentic solicitude (*Fürsorge*)—the existential that names the authentic modality of being-with—assumes the ontological priority of the other in the revelation of the world. In authentic solicitude, the other has ontological priority because its self-transcending perspective is privileged as the starting point for *Dasein's* own perspective. This is assumed in freeing the other for their own *Dasein*—which is Heidegger's formulation of authentic solicitude.⁵² Yet, I still see a problem here because this privileging of the other's perspective in the revelation of *Dasein's* world is not presented as necessary moment for *Dasein's* being from the beginning or as a whole. While being-with others is a *necessary* structural feature of *Dasein* disclosed by virtue of being-in-the-world, the *ontological priority* of the other for this revelation of *Dasein's*

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 75.

world is not. The priority of the other for the revelation of the world is an occasional feature of *Dasein's* regard and it is not structurally connected to *Dasein's* perspective upon the world from the beginning or as a whole. To correct this, one would have to show how the other is ontologically prior to the self in the revelation of its world. The self can still provide the methodological starting point. But its own perspective on the world will then be shown to be constituted by the other's perspective.

In Chapter 4 and 5 of this dissertation, I try to make an advance here by making the special other necessarily constitutive for the being of the self *and* for the revelation of its world. The being of the self is primarily being-for as metaphysically and existentially following after the other.³³ And the revelation of the truth of the world (as discussed in Chapter 6–8) requires following after the priority of other's being. In Chapter 5, I explain how desire 'constitutes' the meaning of time and space from the perspective of the priority of the other. As I discuss there, the material circumstances of a life require the arrival of a special other to unleash the self for its deepest meaning. The self can only be a self in the highest sense through its relationship with a special other. The relation itself, which is called intimacy or love, is not simply an additional layer, but constitutes the selves involved. It constitutes the selfhood of each *through the relation*. The analysis is still given from the first-person perspective of the self, but in such a way that the other has priority for the self's being and the revelation of its world.

Some social theorists might wonder whether there is still a kind of ontological solipsism at work here and if this is a radical enough view of intersubjectivity. It is true that throughout this dissertation,

³³ Throughout the dissertation, I have used metaphysical in two ways. First, I use it 'pejoratively' to represent the history of metaphysical philosophy that Heidegger said conflated being itself with a being. Second, I use it in an 'endorsing way' to represent the difference between physical phenomena and non-physical phenomena. For instance, metaphysical loneliness or metaphysical suffering are not necessarily physical aloneness or bodily pain. One can be lonely in the presence of others and one can suffer anguish over intellectual insights (i.e., transience) in full health. In this sense, metaphysical connotes the non-physical *meaning* of phenomena. While I use existential to refer to the unity between ontic facts and worldly potentials, the term metaphysical points to the sphere of meaning that first gives intelligibility and, thereby, potentiates the significance of any such facts or potentials. In this context, following after is both metaphysical (it is non-physical as it constitutes the meaning of the self's world in desiring after the other) and existential in that the self transcends itself unto the world of ontic life through its desire to build for the special other.

like much phenomenological work, I have methodologically placed the self's perspective at the center of analysis. However, as I have just explained, this is not to privilege the self over the other in an ontological fashion. Being-for is following after the special other. The priority of the other is assumed, but it is described from the perspective of the self that follows behind—so to speak. Furthermore, I do not agree with the attempt to *ontologically dissolve* or reduce the self through an intersubjective or relational approach. Even though love can be self-sacrificing, love does not undermine selfhood. An act of loving self-sacrifice would be a freedom for oneself as being-for the other. Love does not dissolve individuals but frees singular selves *for their self* in following after another.

The Impersonal or Non-Intentional Nature of Social Systems: The Region of Self-Obscurity in the Self

Returning to Overgaard and Zahavi's response to Crossley, there is a second problem that is instructive for our discussion. Arguing for the logical necessity of individuals in an aggregate seems to me to dodge the real problematic Crossley is pointing towards. As I understand it, the problem Crossley is getting at is not whether there *are* or *are not* individuals involved in the constitution and perpetuation of a social system. The problem rather concerns the way the structure of such a society maintains itself through these agents *unintentionally*.

To help explain this, think for instance of the phenomenon of structural, systemic, or institutional racism. An agent of an institution (say, for instance an American police officer) racially profiling a member of a minority (such as a young black man) may not do so intentionally or on purpose. That is, while the officer may notice this young man is African American and take steps to approach and question him for no reason other than he seemed to be acting suspicious, the officer's intention may not have been to racially profile or harass. If accused of doing this prejudicially, most agents of

institutions deny it and claim they were ‘just doing their jobs.’ Yet as statistics of police disproportionately killing young black men in the USA tragically show, such actions have real-world effects and, sometimes, disastrous consequences for minorities. Racism as a structural feature of a society affecting the lives of minorities can be perpetuated *despite the intentions of individual actors*. This is just one example, but it points to the way that social theorists have tried to understand the impersonal reinforcement of social systems through unintentional mechanisms. And this impersonal aspect of social systems would be hard for phenomenologists (such as Schutz) to explicate when they rely upon intentionality as their fundamental unit of analysis.

Over the past century, many social theorists turned to psychoanalysis’s concept of the unconscious to help explain how this impersonal social system interfaces with the unintentional aspects of individual agency.⁵⁴ A socially inflected unconscious can help explain the relation between the individual subject and the perpetuation of an impersonal system since in psychoanalytic terms the unconscious itself is disavowed by the ego. However, psychoanalysis comes with its own theoretical baggage such as Freud’s physicalist determinism.⁵⁵ To avoid the problems that come with adopting psychoanalytic terms and to instead seek to remain with the phenomenon of the impersonal aspects of social life, I think it is better to take Heidegger’s existential analysis as a starting point.

Heidegger provides a good starting point for understanding this problematic because (1) the sphere of *Existenz* is pre-representational and pre-cognitive⁵⁶ and (2) because of the anonymity of

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). The examples are many but take for instance Judith Butler’s use of Freud’s work to theorize how contemporary American culture often refuses to mourn “homosexual attachment,” leading to denial and gender melancholia.

⁵⁵ Medard Boss, *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis* (New York: Dacapo Press, 1982); Moyaert, “The Death Drive.” Heideggerian psychiatrist Medard Boss argues that Freud’s entire project was undermined by a fundamental fracture between his theoretical determinism and the practical freedom he emphasized in his therapeutic model. Boss—a co-founder of existential psychotherapy—thought that Heidegger’s *Dasein*-analysis presented a better theoretical foundation for understanding the human self. Yet it is also undoubted that his emphasis on personal freedom and the actualization of one’s potentials perhaps goes too far the other way. As Moyaert discusses, one of the strengths of the Freudian perspective is its ability to explain how the past can close the future through its repetition.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 86–90.

Dasein in relation to the they (*das Man*).⁵⁷ *Dasein*'s engagement with the world is pre-representational in the sense that *Dasein* primarily engages with the world before building a representation of it. Because of this, and as Heidegger discusses in terms of *Dasein*'s fallenness in its they-self, through socialization, mimesis, and habit it can reinforce social meanings and activities without intending to do so. We do not need to postulate an unconscious that has its own determinative motivations that have been disavowed by the ego to explain the impersonal way a social system perpetuates itself. We need only point out that it is perpetuated in a pre-cognitive way and often without an understanding on the part of its actors and agents. In self-transcendence, there is a forgetfulness or self-obscurity in the self's relation to the world. And this region of self-obscurity is where the social as an impersonal system can perpetuate itself. I expand on these thoughts in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 by showing the way the self and other accede to the social by abstracting from intimacy—understanding oneself and one's special others as general others.

However, I am not saying that Heidegger was a very advanced sociologist. There are limits to the relevance of his thoughts here for a social ontology. One of the main problems (at least with his early work) is the lack of a sophisticated way to understand the restraint that material conditions place upon the self's possibilities. As I mentioned above, I tried to improve upon this by developing a more sophisticated relation between ontological and existential possibilities. Taking this insight into the current discussion, we can see how I operationalized this in the dissertation.

The Vulnerability of the Invaluable to Ontic Accumulation

Throughout *Destruction Loops*, I took this Heideggerian idea that self-obscurity was built into self-transcendence as my starting point. But I also tried to improve upon it by showing how *ontic details can weight it in one direction or another* to the potential detriment or truth of the self as being-for.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 163-168.

Generation loss—a term taken from analogue tape duplication—(Chapter 6) was my metaphor for indicating *that this happens by default* in self-transcendence *without the world flagging or showing that it is happening*. In acceding to the world (by following after the other), the self enters into an ordinary realm that undermines its own highest meaning in the invaluable. In other words, self-obscurity is not a practical or intellectual loss of know-how or facility with the ordinary (Chapter 7). It is rather *a lack of understanding of oneself in relation to this worldly know-how*. Nor is one necessarily fully oblivious to this lack of self-understanding. One can know it is happening, without really knowing how to change it (Chapter 7). Rather than being a fault of the intellect it is an affective barrier to re-finding one's orientation in the invaluable. It is an affective insensitivity (Chapter 7). The world abets this insensitivity by tending to lock the self and its self-understanding in the ordinary (Chapter 6-7).

In abstract terms, by transcending to the world the self always has *the essential possibility* to build or neglect to build the conditions of meaning and love in life. To build these conditions is to build expressive works that help one re-find one's orientation in a special other (Chapter 8). This is the same as intervening or building limits into the ordinary by way of the expressive, whether we are talking about real things (e.g., mementos—Chapter 1) that put its functionality on hiatus or imaginary works (e.g., figmentations—Chapter 8) that interrupt its functional basis by signifying with unreal things. In both cases, the existential imagination (Chapter 8) takes the same ontic or material circumstance and re-potentiates it or re-purposes it by splitting its meaning between the ordinary, the expressive, and the invaluable. This imaginary division or topology is the possibility of building in any given real-life, worldly situation. At this point, the analysis is still in a kind of *neutral possibility* between self-loss and self-achievement. In comparison with *Being and Time* and its divide between authentic and inauthentic existence, or technological enframing and salvific dwelling, we have not made an advance on how *different ontic circumstances can tip the self one way or the other*. I try to

add this inflection to this essential possibility by showing how existential or ontic conditions can make such a possibility less relevant to the self and, thereby, make its participation in its highest being more and more unlikely. There are a number of ways I tried to explain this.

The first was to develop a sense in which the revelation of the world as the ordinary accumulates into a deceptive and entrapping ontic context. This was the purpose of the concept of world-deception and world entrapment (Chapter 6). I went to great lengths to point out that ontological deception does not imply another, more real world ‘behind’ this world—as in a spiritual or virtual world of which our world is merely an emanation. There is nothing behind the curtain of deception so to speak. However, there is a level of meaning (i.e., the invaluable) that has been occluded by the ordinary. And this level of meaning is that from which the self has at all first transcended itself into the world (Chapter 1). Deception does not hide another world or another ontic state of affairs, but it does hide the self’s relation to the invaluable—the articulated meaning of its loving relation with a special other. Entrapment (Chapter 6, 7) occurs when the self loses its affective sensitivity and orientation in the invaluable. In this respect, its self-obscurity amounts to not understanding from where (the invaluable) it is relating to its worldly know-how. And its existential imagination fails to build and produce expressive works to help it find its way back (Chapter 8).

There is another way in which I tried to show the accrual of the ontic such that it results in what I called a transcendental closure (Dylan’s Afterword). This has to do with the way that the past can take priority in the self-transcendence of the self. In *Being and Time*, and in accordance with the ‘in-order-to’ structure of worldly significance, Heidegger privileged the future in *Dasein*’s temporal ecstasies.⁵⁸ But in *Destruction Loops*, especially in Chapter 5 and the Afterword, I tried to show how the past can come to close down the existential possibilities of the future. Desire, the being of the

⁵⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 378.

self, has its own personal history with *other* special others. And this history with other special others can come to close down its relation to *this* special other. Instead of participating in the future through building for *this* other, it can get stuck in its past. Building for the other not only opens up the future *as such* (the principle of the future in every moment) it also displays the genuine form of love: to free the other for the world and to follow after them, building works to preserve their invaluable nature in the world. This genuine form of love is called constancy (Chapter 5). But the self can also get stuck in the past *as such* (the principle of the past in every moment) because the meaning of the past with special others is not a temporal thing that naturally changes with time (Chapter 5). Stuckness (Chapter 5 and Afterword) is the term that expresses this repetition of the meaning of the past in a relationship with *this* special other to its detriment. Stuckness can manifest in an active possessiveness (Chapter 5), in which the self tries to protect itself by building walls around *this* special other.³⁹ But it can also manifest in a resigned neglect (Chapter 3 and Afterword) of building.

The accrual of the ordinary and the past *as such* can build up and tip the self away from its affective orientation in a special other. This is what the dissertation calls transcendental closure (Dylan's Introduction and Afterword). Although self-recovery is always possible, presenting this essential possibility as a neutral possibility can appear to be out of touch. While it is true, one's ability to find the relevance of this truth in one's life can be hindered by the accumulation of time and circumstance. This insight into the nature of the passage of time and the way the world tends to go is at the heart of what was called metaphysical suffering—a suffering that is not physical, but one that is in anguish over the conditions of being and time (Dylan's Introduction and Afterword). Anguish over the need to continually rebuild can lead to a sense of futility and exhaustion. Resignation may

³⁹ Although I did not develop this in the dissertation, I would see various forms of violence and abuse in intimate relationships as a form of possessiveness, since the undercurrent of violence and abuse is a degradation of the other's selfhood as a transcending being. Violence and abuse treat the other like an object, to be possessed by the degrading actions or meanings directed towards them. In other words, there is an implicit act of objectification in violent and abusive behaviour that degrades their being.

result. And in this resignation, there is a neglect of the place of oneself in a special other's life. Existential self-destruction—which is not necessarily a physical self-destruction (Dylan's Introduction)—follows from the loss of the sense of oneself in being for and it stems from the neglect of building the conditions of meaning and love in life.

Destruction Loops sought to elaborate upon the way that being undermines the being-for of the self. The ordinary and the absence of works in one's surroundings contribute to this, changing the self's existential capacities—its affective orientation. In a Heideggerian framework, the self would only have to return to being itself to find itself saved from the deleterious effects of inauthenticity or the will to mastery. This dissertation rejects this ontosoteriology. Desire is not correlated with being because it wants what being and the world cannot accommodate—for the world to be the place where the special other's invaluable nature is preserved and recognized. Because being hands the self over to the ordinary world and the world includes the sphere of general others who do not participate within intimacy, being, time, and the world cannot grant this. In fact, through their concealment, the self finds itself in the world in such a way that it is already tipped away from itself—both from the beginning in its default state and away from the essential possibility of finding itself. One does not have to deny the conditions of finitude to remain un-Heideggerian in this regard. Nor does one have to veer back into traditional metaphysical and religious pursuits for the infinite. Using works and small things, which admittedly are undermined by being, time, and the world, to yet point to a defiance towards these very conditions for the sake of a special other is enough. This is what beauty points to in this dissertation (Chapter 8). It points to an unfulfilled desire that being cannot satisfy and remains unfulfilled. Beauty is not a transcendental here. It is simply the name of the kind of meaning that accompanies those works that express the invaluable in such a way that the self's being will not be correlated with being itself. There is no need to then project a principle, end point, or

horizon of redemption that would be the objective fulfilment of such small works. In themselves, and in their perpetually unfulfilled, yet unresolved nature—they say enough.

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