

Being as Inauthentic as Possible

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I want to address here the theme of thinking in history by focussing on the theme of historicity in Heidegger. I want to do this in order to think about the infamous problem of politics in Heidegger and try and produce what Wittgenstein would call aspect change with the way in which we view Heidegger's philosophical project, at least the early project. But what is the connection between historicity and politics? Prima facie, this seems far from obvious. My clue here is anecdotal. In 1936, Heidegger met with his former student Karl Löwith on a visit to Rome and Frascati. Löwith, for understandable biographical reasons that we do not need to go into, was deeply troubled by Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism in 1933. Apparently, in 1936, a couple of years after he resigned his position as Rector of Freiburg University, Heidegger still sported a swastika lapel badge and was still a party member. Löwith asked Heidegger the question that many of us would have wanted to ask: what could be the connection between his philosophical project of fundamental ontology or thinking of the truth of being and his political commitment to National Socialism. Heidegger's answer was one word: *historicity* (*Geschichtlichkeit*). What can this mean? What is the connection between historicity and politics?¹ Let me try and unpack this question by looking at what Heidegger

¹ See Löwith's essay in *The Heidegger Controversy*, ed. R. Wolin (MIT, Cambridge Mass., 1993). To my mind, the systematic connection between fundamental ontology and national socialism was convincingly established by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in his "Transcendence Ends in Politics", *Typography* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass., 1989) and also at greater length in his *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, trans. C. Turner (Blackwell, Oxford, 1990). The same argument has been stated much more polemically and in extraordinary scholarly detail by Johannes Fritsche in *Historical Destiny and National Socialism in Heidegger's Being and Time* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999). About the discussion of historicity, Fritsche claims, "...Section 74 of Heidegger's *Being and Time* is as brilliant a summary of revolutionary rightist politics as one could wish for" (p.xii).

means by historicity in the 1927 magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit*, in particular Paragraph 74, entitled “The Basic Constitution of Historicity”. What does he say?

Dasein’s authentic anticipation of its death is called “fate” (*Schicksal*) by Heidegger and this is designated as the originary historicizing (*Geschehen*) of Dasein.² (SZ 384) Heidegger’s claim in Division II, Chapter 5, is that the condition of possibility for any authentic understanding of history lies in Dasein’s historicity, which means the self-understanding of the temporal character of being human, i.e. finitude. Contrary to popular belief, the argument of *Sein und Zeit* is very simple: the meaning of the Being of Dasein is temporality, and the meaning of temporality is finitude (SZ 331). Dasein’s authentic self-understanding of finitude is “fate”, and this originary historicizing is the condition of possibility for any authentic relation to history, by which Heidegger means “world historical historicizing” (SZ 19). It is clear that political events, such as revolutions or general social transformations, would qualify as world historical events for Heidegger. Thinking in history means thinking the meaning of historicity, a proposition which is as true for Hegel as it is for Heidegger, though what they mean by historicity is crucially different.

Now, it was established in Division I, Chapter 4 of *Sein und Zeit* that Dasein is always already *Mitsein*. That is, the *a priori* condition of being-in-the-world is being together with others in that world. As is well known, the everyday, social actuality of this *a priori* condition of *Mitsein* is called *das Man* by Heidegger, and this is determined as inauthentic because in such everyday experience Dasein is not truly itself, but is, as it were, lived through by the customs and conventions of the existing social world. Now, returning more closely to the argument of Paragraph 74, if fateful, authentic Dasein is always already *Mitsein*, then such historicizing has to be what Heidegger calls co-historicizing (*Mitgeschehen*, SZ 384). An authentic individual life, Heidegger would seem to be suggesting, cannot be lead in isolation and opposition to the shared life of the community. The question therefore arises: what is the *authentic* mode of being together with others? What is an authentic *Mitdasein* that escapes or masters the inauthenticity of *das Man*? Heidegger writes, fatefully in my view, “*Wenn aber das schicksalhafte*

² *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1927/1979), in English trans. Macquarrie & Robinson *Being and Time* (Harper&Row: New York, 1975). Henceforth this work will be referred to as SZ with page references to the German original.

Dasein als In-der-Welt-sein wesentlich im Mitsein mit Anderen existiert, ist sein Geschehen ein Mitgeschehen und bestimmt als Geschick” (“But if fateful Dasein as being-in-the-world essentially exists in being-with with others, its historicizing is a co-historicizing and is determined as *destiny*”). So, destiny is the authentic historicizing that I share with others insofar as my individual fate is always already bound up with the collective destiny of the community to which I belong. Heidegger goes on, “*Im Miteinandersein in derselben Welt und in der Entschlossenheit für bestimmte Möglichkeiten sind die Schicksale im vornhinein schon geleitet. In der Mitteilung und im Kampf wird die Macht des Geschickes erst frei*”. (“The fates are already guided from the front in the being-with-one-another in the same world and in the resoluteness for determinate possibilities. The power of destiny first becomes free in communication and struggle.”. SZ 384). So, the fates of authentic, individual Daseins are “guided from the front” by the destiny of the collective, a destiny that first becomes free for itself or self-conscious in the activity of communication and struggle. Obviously, the word *Kampf* has acquired some rather unfortunate political connotations between the period that saw the publication of *Sein und Zeit* and the present. But that is not the worst of it. Heidegger completes this run of thought with the following words, “*Damit bezeichnen wir das Geschehen der Gemeinschaft, des Volkes*”. (“In this way, we designate the historicizing of the community, of the people”, SZ 384) So, the authentic communal mode of *Mitsein* that masters the inauthenticity of *das Man* is *das Volk*, the people. In my view, it is the possible political realization of a resolute and authentic *Volk* in opposition to the inauthentic nihilism of social modernity that Heidegger identified as “the inner truth and greatness” (“*der inneren Wahrheit und Größe*”) of National Socialism just a few years later in *Einführung in die Metaphysik* in 1935. Despite the utter disaster of Nazi Germany, Heidegger – to the understandable consternation of the young Habermas writing on Heidegger in his first published essay – stubbornly refused to revise his judgement on “the inner truth and greatness” when the 1935 lectures were published in 1953.³

³ See Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (Niemeyer: Tübingen, 1953), p. 152; and Habermas, “Mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger denken. Zur Veröffentlichung von Vorlesungen aus dem Jahre 1935”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 25th July 1953, pp. 67-75.

There is, I believe, a systematic philosophical basis to Heidegger's political commitment, which is due to the specific way in which Heidegger develops the concept of authenticity in Division II of *Sein und Zeit* and which culminates in the concept of *das Volk*. That is, the only way in which Heidegger can conceive of an authentic mode of human being-together or community, is in terms of the unity of a specific people, a particular nation, and it is the political expression of this possibility that Heidegger saw in National Socialism in 1933. In other words, as Hannah Arendt obliquely implied throughout her work, Heidegger is incapable of thinking the *plurality* of human being-together as a positive political possibility. Plurality is determined negatively by Heidegger as *das Man*. Of course, plurality is the multiplicity of the *demos*, and one might link this Heideggerian worry about plurality to his suspicion, voiced in the posthumously published *Der Spiegel* interview, about the value of democracy. What the question implies here is really if democracy is perhaps essentially inauthentic? Or better: rightly inauthentic? However, to my mind, the urgent task of Heidegger interpretation – provided one is not a Nazi and provided one is still in the business of thinking, as I do, that Heidegger is a great philosopher – is to try and defuse the systematic link between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics. I will try and defuse this link in this talk by developing the notion of what I call *originary inauthenticity*, a possibility of interpretation that is available, if somewhat latent, in *Sein und Zeit*.

Let me try and explain myself. The thought behind the notion of originary inauthenticity is that human existence is fundamentally shaped in relation to a brute facticity or thrownness which cannot be mastered through any existential projection. Authenticity always slips back into a prior inauthenticity from which it cannot escape but which it would like to evade. From the perspective of originary inauthenticity, human existence is something that is first and foremost experienced as a burden, a weight, as something to which I am riveted without being able to know why or know further. Inauthentic existence has the character of an irreducible and intractable *thatness*, what Heidegger called above “*das Daß seines Da*”. I feel myself bound to “the that of my there”, the sheer *Faktum* of my facticity, in a way that invites some sort of response.

Now, and this is where my proposed aspect change begins to kick in, the nature of this response will not, as it is in Division II of *Sein und*

Zeit, be the authentic decision of existence that comes into the simplicity of its *Schicksal* by shattering itself against death (SZ 385). It will not be the heroic mastery of the everyday in the authentic present of what Heidegger calls the *Augenblick* (the moment of vision), which produces an experience of ecstasy (*Ekstase*) and rapture (*Entrückung*). (SZ 338) No, the response to the *Faktum* of my finitude is a more passive and less heroic decision, a decision made in the face of a facticity whose demand can never be mastered and which faces me like a riddle that I cannot solve. As I show in my last book on the concept of humour, such a fact calls for comic acknowledgment rather than ecstatic affirmation.⁴

Dasein is, as Heidegger writes in his extraordinary discussion of guilt, a thrown basis (*ein geworfener Grund*). As this basis, Dasein continually lags behind itself, “Being a basis (*Grund-seiend*), that is to say existing as thrown (*als geworfenes existierend* – another of Heidegger’s enigmatic formulae), Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities’ (SZ 284). In the light of these remarks, we might say that the self is not so much the ecstasy of a heroic leap energized by the experience of anxiety and being-towards-death, as much as a delay with respect to oneself that is perhaps best expressed in the experience of languor or fatigue. Oblomov answers Nietzsche *avant la lettre* by simply refusing to get out of bed. I project or throw off a thrownness that catches me in its throw and inverts the movement of possibility. As such, the present continually lags behind itself. I am always too late to meet my fate.⁵ I think this is what Heidegger might have in mind when he writes of bringing us face to face with, “the ontological enigma of the movement of historicizing in general’ (SZ 389). I want to think about this enigma and un-authentisable kernel of existence historical experience.

It is my hope that if one follows my proposed aspect change from a heroics of authenticity to an ordinary inauthenticity then a good deal changes in how one views the project of *Sein und Zeit* and in particular its political consequences. My main point is that both aspects are available to an attentive reading and this is why the young Habermas was right in his first publication in suggesting that it is necessary to think

⁴ See my *On Humour* (Routledge, London, 2002).

⁵ This line of thought is suggested by Jean-François Lyotard’s remarkable posthumously published text, *The Confession of Augustine* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000), pp. 55-57 & 70-74.

both with Heidegger and against Heidegger (*mit Heidegger gegen Heidegger zu denken*). However, such a reading is a huge task that will have to be postponed to the future, though I'd be happy to hear any suggestions you might have. In the remainder of this paper, I would just like to sketch how we might begin this task by briefly examining three central concepts from Division II: death, conscience and temporality.

Originary inauthenticity I : death

First, I think that the notion of originary inauthenticity places in question what Heidegger sees as the non-relational character of the experience of finitude in the death-analysis in Division II, Chapter 1. You will recall that there are four criteria in Heidegger's full existential-ontological conception of death. It is *unbezüglich*, *gewiß*, *unbestimmt* and *unüberholbar*: non-relational, certain, indefinite and not to be outstripped. It is only the first of these criteria that I would take issue with, as the other three are true, if banal. However, if the first of the criteria falls, then the whole picture changes.

Heidegger insists on the non-relational character of death because for him, crucially, "*der Tod ontologisch durch Jemeinigkeit und Existenz konstituiert wird*" ("Death is ontologically constituted through mineness and existence", SZ 240). Therefore, dying for an other (*sterben für*) would simply be to sacrifice oneself (*sich opfern*) for an other, or to substitute (*ersetzen*, SZ 239) myself for another.⁶ Thus, the fundamental experience of finitude is non-relational, and all relationality is rendered secondary because of the primacy of *Jemeinigkeit*.

Now, I just think this is wrong. It is wrong empirically and normatively. I would want to oppose it with the thought of the *fundamentally relational character of finitude*, namely that death is first and foremost experienced in a relation to the death or dying of the other and others, in being-with the dying in a caring way, and in grieving after they are

⁶ Levinas responds directly to this passage in a remarkably sane and measured paper given at the hysterical height of the Heidegger affair in Paris in 1987, "Mourir pour...", which translates Heidegger's "Sterben für", in *Heidegger. Questions ouvertes* (Osiris, Paris, 1988), pp.255-64. The theme of enigma is obviously central to Levinas work, in particular his 1965 essay "Enigma and Phenomenon", in *Emmanuel Levinas. Basic Philosophical Writings*, eds. Peperzak et al (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996), pp. 65-77.

dead. Yet, such relationality is not a relation of comprehension, the other's dying is not like placing an intuition under a concept. It is rather a non-subsumptive relation, in Kantian terms a reflective and not a determinate judgment. In other words, the experience of finitude opens up in relation to a brute *Faktum* that escapes my understanding, or what Stanley Cavell's Wittgenstein would see as being beyond the reach of my criteria.

Deliberately twisting Heidegger's words, I would say that the fundamental experience of finitude is rather like being a student of pathological anatomy where the dead other "ist ein *lebloses* materielles Ding" ("a *lifeless* material thing", SZ 238). With all the terrible lucidity of grief, one watches the person one loves – parent, partner or child – die and become a lifeless material thing. That is, there is a thing – a corpse – at the heart of the experience of finitude. This is why I mourn. Antigone understood this well, staring at the lifeless material thing of her dead brother and demanding justice. Authentic Dasein cannot mourn. One might even say that authenticity is constituted by making the act of mourning secondary to Dasein's *Jemeinigkeit*. Heidegger writes, shockingly in my view, "We do not experience the death of others in a genuine sense; at most we are just "there alongside" (*nur 'dabei'*)" (SZ 239).

A final thought here: if death and finitude are fundamentally relational, that is, if they are constituted in a relation to a lifeless material thing whom I love and this thing casts a long mournful shadow across the self, then this would also lead me to question a distinction that is fundamental to Heidegger's death-analysis. Heidegger makes the following threefold distinction:

1. dying, *Sterben*, which is proper to Dasein; which is the very mark of Dasein's ownness and its possibility of authenticity;
2. perishing, *Verenden*, which is confined to plants and animals; and
3. demise, *Ableben*, which Heidegger calls a *Zwischenphänomen* between these two extremes, and which characterises the inauthentic death of Dasein. (SZ 247)

Now, although one cannot be certain whether animals simply perish – as Wittgenstein said, "if a lion could talk, we could not understand him" – I have my doubts, particularly when one thinks of domestic pets and higher mammals. Thus, I think one should at the very least

leave open the possibility that certain animals die, that they undergo *Sterben* and not just *Verenden*. I also doubt whether human beings are incapable of perishing, of dying like a dog, as Kafka's fiction insistently reminds us. And what of those persons who die at the end of a mentally debilitating disease, or who die whilst being in what is termed "a permanently vegetative state"? Do they cease to be human on Heidegger's account? I see no other option. But, more importantly, if finitude is fundamentally relational, that is, if it is by definition a relation to the *Faktum* of an other who exceeds my powers of projection, then *the only authentic death is inauthentic*. That is, on my account, an authentic relation to death is not constituted through mineness, but rather through otherness. Death enters the world for me not through my own *timor mortis*, but rather through my relation to the other's dying, perhaps even through my relation to the other's fear, which I try to assuage as best I can. It is this notion of an essentially inauthentic relation to death that both Blanchot and Levinas have in mind when reversing Heidegger's dictum that "death is the possibility of impossibility" into "death is the impossibility of possibility" (SZ 262). I have power neither over the other's death nor my own. Death is not a possibility of Dasein, but rather describes an empirical and normative limit to all possibility and to my fateful powers of projection. My relation to finitude limits my ability to be (*Seinkönnen*).

Originary inauthenticity II : conscience

Once this relational picture of finitude is in place, then the picture of conscience would also have to change significantly. I have come to think – through an experience of teaching and against some long-held prejudices about Division II – that the discussion of conscience is potentially the most explosive and interesting part of *Sein und Zeit*, and we have already had occasion to discuss certain passages above. Of course, the analysis of conscience follows on logically from the death analysis, being the concrete ontic-existential testimony or attestation (*Zeugnis*, SZ 267) for the formal ontologico-existential claim about death. Death is ontological, conscience is ontic. Indeed, the word testimony might detain us more than it has done in the reading of *Sein und Zeit*. Testimony evokes both a notion of witnessing as testifying to something or someone, and also expresses a link to evidence and veri-

fiction, where Heidegger is seeking in conscience the concrete ontic evidence for the formal ontological claim about death, a question which resolves itself relativistically in the key concept of “Situation” (SZ 299-300).

My point here is simple: if death is non-relational for Heidegger, then also *a fortiori* conscience is non-relational. Heidegger writes, in italics, “*In conscience Dasein calls itself*” (“*Das Dasein ruft im Gewissen sich selbst*”, SZ 275). That is, although in conscience it is as if the call of conscience were an alien voice (*eine fremde Stimme*, SZ 277) that comes *über mich*, such a call, although it is not planned, really comes *aus mir*. As Heidegger insists in differentiating his concept of conscience from the “vulgar” one, what is attested to in conscience is Dasein’s ownmost or most proper ability to be (*eigenstes Seinkönnen*, SZ 295). Authentic Dasein calls to itself in conscience, and it does this not in the mode of chattering to itself, but rather in discretion (*Verschwiegenheit*) and silence (*Schweigen*). This behaviour is what Heidegger calls resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), which is then defined as the “*authentic Selfhood*” of Dasein (SZ 298). Heidegger completes this train of thought in a slightly troubling fashion by claiming that when Dasein has authentically individuated itself in conscience, “...it can become the “conscience” of others (*zum “Gewissen” der Anderen werden*). Only by authentically being-their-selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another...” (SZ 298).

This brings me to my question: is conscience non-relational? It would seem to me that Freud, and I am thinking of the essay on Narcissism (1914) and “Mourning and Melancholia” (1915), would have one or two interesting things to say here.⁷ The Freudian thought I would like to retain is that of conscience as the imprint, interior mark, or agency, for a series of transference relations to the other: ego ideal, paternal super-ego, maternal imago, or whatever. Conscience is the *Über-Ich* that stands *über mir*. It is fundamentally relational. Furthermore, it is this place that the analyst has to occupy if the analysis is going to work. Conceived in this way, the appeal made by conscience would not be Dasein calling to itself or even the voice of the friend that every Dasein carries within it (SZ 163). If that were so, then Dasein would have to be its own best friend, which is a rather solipsistic, indeed sad, state of affairs. Even worse, I would want to avoid the sug-

⁷ See Volume 11 of the Penguin Freud, *On Metapsychology* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984).

gestion that I can become the conscience of others in some sort of presumptuous and potentially dominating way.

On my picture, conscience would be the ontic testimony of a certain splitting of the self in relation to a *Faktum* that it cannot assimilate, the lifeless material thing that the self carries within itself and which denies it from being fully itself. It is this failure of autarky that makes the self relational. The call of conscience is a voice within me whose source is not myself, but is the other's voice that calls me to responsibility. In other words, ethical relationality is only achieved by being inauthentic, that is, in recognizing that I am not the conscience of others, but rather that it is those others who call me to have a conscience.

It would here be a question of reading Freud's concept of narcissism, as a splitting of the self into conflictual agencies (the division of ego, super-ego, and id in the second topography) back into *Sein und Zeit*. If authentic Dasein cannot mourn, because its fundamental relation to finitude is a self-relation, then I think this is because, to put it in psychoanalytic terms, it has not effected the relationality of the transference. Transference is a relation to an other whom I face, but whom I cannot completely know, whom my criteria cannot reach. Such a relation is described by Levinas with the adjective "ethical". Of course, *Mitsein* is being-with-another, but it is standing shoulder-to-shoulder with those others in what Heidegger calls in one passage "*eigentliche Verbundenheit*" ("authentic alliance or being-bound-together", SZ 122). Such alliance might well be said to be the camaraderie that induces the political virtue of solidarity, but it is not a face-to-face relation and as such, in my view, is ethically impoverished. I sometimes think that *Mitsein* is a little like being in church, it is a congregational "being-together-with-others" where we vibrate together as one body in song and prayer. Pleasant as it doubtless must be, such is not the only way of being with others.

Originary inauthenticity III : temporality

If we begin to hear thrown projection as *thrown* projection, and factual existence as *factual* existence, then I think Heidegger's claims about temporality – the very meaning of being – would also have to be revised, away from the primacy of the future and towards the primacy of the past. To recall, Heidegger's claim in his discussion of temporality

is that there are three “ecstases” of time: the future (*Zukunft*) that is revealed in the anticipation of death, the past or “having-been-ness” (*Gewesenheit*) that is opened in the notion of guilt and resoluteness, and the present or “waiting-towards” (*Gegen-wart*) that is grasped in the moment of vision (*Augenblick*), or taking action in the Situation. The claim is that Dasein *is* the movement of this temporalization, and that this movement *is* finitude: “*Die ursprüngliche Zeit ist endlich*” (‘Primordial time is finite’, SZ 331).

Now, although Heidegger insists that the structure of ecstatic temporality possesses a unity, the primary meaning of temporality is the future (SZ 327). As Heidegger writes, “*Zeitlichkeit zeitigt sich ursprünglich aus der Zukunft*” (‘Temporality temporalizes itself primordially out of the future’, SZ 331). That is, it is the anticipatory experience of being-towards-death that makes possible the *Gewesenheit* of the past and the *Augenblick* of the present. For Heidegger, the *Augenblick* is the authentic present which is consummated in a vision of resolute rapture (*Entrückung*, SZ 338), where Dasein is literally carried away (*ent-rückt*) in an experience of ecstasy.

Rapture is a word that worries me, not the least for the way in which *raptus* seems like a plundering of the past, some sort of rape of memory. To hear the thrownness in the throwing off, and the facticity in existence would, I think, establish the primacy of the past over the future. This past is one’s rather messy, indeed often opaque, personal and cultural history.⁸ In my view, it is this personal and cultural thrownness that pulls me back from any rapture of the present into a lag that I can never make up and which I can only assemble into a *fate* on the basis of a delusionary relation to history, and into a *destiny* on the basis of a congregational interpretation of that delusion.

On the contrary, from the perspective developed in this paper, the unfolding future always folds back into the experience of an irredeemable past, a past that constitutes the present as having a delay with respect to itself. Now is not the now when I say “now”. My relation to the present is one where I am always trying – and failing – to catch up with myself. As such, then, I do not rise up rapturously or affirmatively into time, becoming as Nietzsche exclaimed on the verge of madness, “all the names in history”. No, I wait, I await. Time passes. For Heidegger, this is the passive awaiting (*Gewärtigen*) of inauthentic time.

⁸ On this topic, see Paul Ricoeur, “La marque du passé”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Janvier-Mars 1998, No.1.

Of course, this makes me fatigued, sleepy even. As such, in my fatigue, the river of time begins to flow backwards, away from the future and the resolute rapture of the present, and towards a past that I can never make present, but which I dramatize involuntarily in the life of dreams. True, I can always interpret my dreams or, better, get another to interpret them for me. But what Freud calls the navel of the dream, its source, its facticity, always escapes me, like an enigma.

If the theme of thinking in history is thought philosophically, that is, if it becomes a matter for thinking, as Heidegger would say, then what is essential is a thinking of historicity as the ontological condition of possibility for historical happenings, events and so-called “facts”. In this respect, Heidegger is right: our approach to history is dependant upon inherited and unanalysed concepts which must be submitted to a process of *Destruktion* or *Abbau*, deconstruction if you like. Seen in this light, any objectivist conception of history will be drawn back to its existential or transcendental conditions of possibility. However, where Heidegger is mistaken is in prioritising a notion of authentic historicity which is built upon the concept of authenticity that is at the heart of the existential analytic. This is what causes him all his political confusions and explains his response to Karl Löwith with which I began this talk. If this notion of authenticity is loosened up and rethought from within, as I have tried to begin to do in this talk, then a different conception of historicity might offer itself which might lead to a different approach to thinking in history. If we seek to be as inauthentic as possible, and I would like to exhort you all to be persistently joyously inauthentic, then a different approach to history might offer itself. James Joyce remarks somewhere that history is a nightmare from which we are all trying to awake. This is true. But it is not just a nightmare, it is a slaughterhouse, a place of trouble, tribulation, silencing and violence. Before we wake up, I think it is incumbent upon us to think through the meaning of that nightmare.