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In the Middle of Love: At the Fringes of Personhood. An Explorative Essay on the Dialogue of I and Thou and the Poetics of the Impersonal

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Abstract: In *Works of Love*, Søren Kierkegaard introduces the idea that God's love is "the middle term." It is a love that manages to be in the middle of all created being. To that extent, love is not just one relation among others, but the "being-in-relation" as such. It is, in Heideggerian terms, "the with" of being-with. This implies, further, that the middle is as inconspicuous as it is ubiquitous. According to Martin Buber, however, there is a privileged relation to the middle in the *I-Thou* relation. It is here that it reveals itself. For Buber, this is so on the strength of two important traits of this dyadic relation: that it is dialogical and personal. It is in dialogue that *I* and *You* are responsive to the word of God; and it is in personal co-presence that the theophany of "the absolute person" may occur. This paper explores these tenets of "philosophy of dialogue" at their fringes. Accordingly, it explores the impersonal in the person and the monologue in dialogue. More specifically, it aims to show how: (a) the impersonal in the person is disclosed in love and angst and how (b) the monologue in dialogue is expressed in a poetics of the impersonal.



Citation: Lysemose, Kasper. 2021. In the Middle of Love: At the Fringes of Personhood. An Explorative Essay on the Dialogue of I and Thou and the Poetics of the Impersonal. *Religions* 12: 435. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060435>

Academic Editor: Claudia Welz

Received: 13 May 2021

Accepted: 9 June 2021

Published: 11 June 2021

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Keywords: love; dialogue; personhood; middle term; Kierkegaard; Buber; Weil; Heidegger; Lispector

Wonderful conversation!

There seems to be no meaning in it.

The one asks in the east, and the other answers in the west;
and yet they say, moreover love understands it,
they both say one and the same thing.

—Kierkegaard (1949, p. 277)

Impersonal love, *it* love, is joy.

—Lispector (2012, p. 85)

1. Introduction

The aim of the present paper is to make a contribution to the philosophy of dialogue as inaugurated by Martin Buber. This contribution will take the form of a deconstruction of two basic traits of the primordial dyad of *I* and *Thou*: that it is personal and that it is dialogical. In Buber's theology, we find a version of the Kierkegaardian idea that God is "the middle term."¹ It is on the strength of this middle term that *I* and *Thou* are in a personal and dialogical relation. The main point of the present paper, however, will be to show that it is on the strength of the same middle term that the personal and dialogical configuration of *I* and *Thou* is also exposed to impersonal forces that disjoins dialogue and uncovers in it a monological dimension of language. In Buber, we sometimes find a polemic against "the impersonal" (particularly directed at Weil) and against "the monological" (particularly directed at Heidegger). If, however, the reading presented here manages to convince, then these opposed notions will turn instead into deconstructive forces at play in philosophy of dialogue itself. Rather than a kind of trojan horse, they should then be considered as forces

issuing from that “middle” (*Mitte*) or “between” (*Zwischen*) which is to be found at the very heart of philosophy of dialogue. This might help recalibrate our understanding of the encounter of *I* and *Thou*. Our relation to the middle—and our relation to each other on the strength of the middle—is never only personal and dialogical, but always also impersonal and monological. Granted, this is a tension. But it is arguably not a tension that should be resolved. Rather, it is a tension that demands our most acute attention (to use Weil’s word).

In order to pursue the aim of such a contribution, this paper is divided into three main sections. In the first main Section 2, the ubiquity of the middle term and the privileged access to it in the second personal encounter is presented. This constellation, which informs Buber’s thinking, is the point of departure for the ensuing deconstruction. In Section 3, it is shown how the middle term exposes the *dispositif* of the person to a deconstructive movement. This movement is double and consists, first, of a movement of love (Kierkegaard) and, secondly, a movement of angst (Heidegger). In Section 4, it is shown how the depersonalization of this double movement suspends our ordinary dialogical use of language and opens an extraordinary relation to language—namely a poetical one. This, again, is presented in two steps. First, we take a hint from two poets—Hölderlin and Novalis. They will indicate a monological dimension of language which is perhaps best expressed as “song.” To arrive at the “peace” which this song “celebrates” (*Friedensfeier*), we then—secondly—join the poet in a venture to the center. In Heidegger’s text “What are poets for?” (*Wozu Dichter?*), we find a concise description of such a venture. And in Clarice Lispector’s *Água Viva*, we find a poetics of the impersonal that seem to carry this venture out in writing. As will be evident here, however, entering into the peace of the center—theologically, the rest (*κατάπαυσιν*) in God (see Heb. 4:3)—does not take place without affliction (to use another word from Weil). Our explorative essay thus ends with a “cry of writing” at the silent threshold between dialogue and monologue. To this, only some brief concluding remarks are added (5).

2. The Ubiquity of the Middle Term and the Privilege of the Second Person

In his metaphorological studies, Hans Blumenberg devotes some attention to what he calls “explosive metaphors” (*Sprengmetaphorik*), particularly in the intricate theological speculations of Nicholas Cusanus (see Blumenberg 2010, p. 123). With metaphors of this kind, Cusanus conveys the infinite idea to finite intuition in a manner that differs subtly from the *via negationis* of apophatic theology. He invites his reader to begin with the imagination of some geometrical figure. Extrapolating a particular feature of this figure, he then draws the imagination of his reader into a process where, at a certain limit, it can no longer follow suit. In this way, it becomes possible not just dogmatically to claim but sublimely to experience—and in this sense also to know—one’s own ignorance. Accordingly, and as Blumenberg notes, Cusanus’ *docta ignorantia* introduces a crucial difference between being mute (*Stummheit*) and falling silent (*Verstummen*) (see Blumenberg 2010, p. 123).² We are not just confronted with the inadequacy of our linguistic and figurative means of presentation. Rather, we are led into this inadequacy in order to comprehend the incomprehensibility of the incomprehensible—and also, as Cusanus emphasizes, in order to praise (*laudare*) that God in this way is revealed to us precisely as incomprehensible (*nobis se ipsum ostendit incomprehensibilem*) (see Cusanus 2002, p. 113).

The perhaps most famous case of an explosive metaphor is a hermetic formula sometimes attributed to Meister Eckhardt: God is an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere (*Deus est sphaera infinita, cuius centrum ubique, circumferentia nusquam est*) (see Blumenberg 2010, p. 124). In order to present a sphere in our intuition, we need to draw its circumference with our imagination. Extrapolating this circumference to the infinite, however, will make it burst such that we must say that the circumference is nowhere. And this, in turn, will leave us with the dizzying sense that the center of the sphere is now everywhere.

In his *De docta ignorantia*, Cusanus shows himself as a true master of this metaphorical procedure. After having deployed the infinite triangle to the (in)comprehensibility of God’s

trinity, he goes on to deploy the infinite circle to the (in)comprehensibility of God's unity and the infinite sphere to the (in)comprehensibility of God's actual existence. We must leave the intricacies of this to the reader of Cusanus. What is of particular interest for present purposes is the notion—emerging from Cusanus' presentation—of God as a ubiquitous middle. "God is everywhere." This pantheistic claim is not foreign to Cusanus' theology. However, it is given a sense that has left scholars uncertain if Cusanus is indeed a pantheist—as he was accused of being in his own day—or if he perhaps offers a way to conceive of God's ubiquity in the world without pantheism (see [Gaetano 2019](#)). His most famous idea here is that of God as the *complicatio* of all created being. However, the idea of God as an infinite circle or sphere whose middle is everywhere also offers a way to contemplate in what sense God can be said to be "in the midst of the world" (see [Nancy 2013](#)).

If God is everywhere, then we must ask: *how*? What is the *mode* of this being everywhere? According to Cusanus, God is not dispersed. Indeed, and as just noted, Cusanus uses the infinite circle to comprehend the (in)comprehensibility of God's unity. He invites us to conceive that God accomplishes this unity by being everywhere *in the middle*. The ensuing question is, what kind of unity does this entail? Is it a unity that transcends what it unites? Or is it a unity immanent to what it unites? This alternative is surely too clumsy to catch the drift of Cusanus' thinking. Instead, we should try to affirm God's transimmanence.³ God is transcendent, then, but this transcendence is not above and beyond all created being. Instead, it takes place in a ubiquitous middle. The very term "middle" indicates an immanence. The immanence at stake here, however, is more immanent than the world itself. It is perhaps not unlike St. Augustine's experience of a God who is closer to Augustine than he himself is: *interior intimo meo* (see [Augustine 1912](#), p. 120).

An opportunity to think such an immanence may present itself if one follows Kierkegaard. For Kierkegaard too, God is ubiquitous. Consider for instance this passage from *Works of Love*:

With what infinite love nature, or God in nature, embraces all the differences there are in life and existence. [. . .] There is no, oh, no difference in the love—but in the flowers, what a difference! ([Kierkegaard 1949](#), p. 218).⁴

It is in the very same book that we also learn that this all-embracing love, in which there is no difference, is to be understood as "the middle term" (*Mellembestemmelsen*). For Kierkegaard, God's love—or, perhaps better, God *as* love—is the middle term for *all* created beings, down to " . . . the least, most insignificant, unattractive, poor little flower, overlooked even in its most immediate environment . . . " ([Kierkegaard 1949](#), p. 218).⁵ Yet, already in Kierkegaard, it is in the interhuman encounter that a *privileged* kind of access to this middle is granted. "Already," since we find the idea explicitly stated later on in a text which is not only clearly influenced by Kierkegaard but also, arguably, the founding text of "the philosophy of dialogue."⁶ I am thinking of Martin Buber's *I and Thou*.⁷

In this 1923 book, Buber distinguishes between two primary words (*Grundworte*): the *I-It* and the *I-Thou*. According to Buber, there is no unifying *I* outside of these word couples and the comportment of the *I*, which enunciates itself in them, is correspondingly twofold (*zweifältig*). Furthermore, the *I* do not use these primary words to signify things outside of them. Rather, their enunciation brings the *I* into existence—either in the realm of *It* or in the realm of *Thou*.

In the realm of *It*, the *I* has experience (*Erfahrung*) of a world of objects (*Gegenstände*). Persons also appear here. However, they do so only in the third person, i.e., as a *He* or *She* with numerous third personal traits: as woman or man, master or slave, friend or foe, rich or poor, fool or wise and so forth. In the realm of *Thou*, however, the third person and its many traits are strictly excluded (*Ausschließlichkeit*). Here, *I* do not experience *Thou* at all. Rather, there is a relation (*Beziehung*) of presence (*Gegenwart*). In this presence, *Thou* is contemporaneous with *I*, not in the form of any partial traits but in the fullness of being a person. In other words, only the second person is fully a person and only in the relation to the second person does the first person therefore fully come into its own. "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*," as Buber writes ([Buber 1937](#), p. 28).

It is surely no coincidence that Buber's book took its title from only one of the two primary word couples. The inevitability of the *I–It* couple is acknowledged as “... the exalted melancholy of our fate ...” (Buber 1937, p. 16). No interhuman *I–Thou* relation can sustain itself but must turn into *It*. However, it is the *I–Thou* relation which is Buber's main focus. And it is in the explication of this relation that the proximity to Kierkegaard's notion of middle term becomes clear—sometimes by Buber likewise called “the middle” (*Mitte*), at other times “the between” (*Zwischen*). In both cases, however, it is evident that Buber, just like Kierkegaard, understands the middle to be love. This love is not a psychological feeling. It is not an inclination or a preference. Rather, it is a metaphysical—and that is to say, spiritual—event. A plurality of different feelings may very well accompany when it comes to pass. In itself, however, the passage of this spiritual love is one. Granted, the spiritual relation between *I* and *Thou* which is opened in its wake is a kind of primordial *diastasis*.⁸ Yet, this *diastasis* does not amount to a duality of *I* and *Thou* that would risk losing the unity of spiritual love. On the contrary, their relation is a conspiracy, as we might venture to say.⁹ And it is only in this conspiracy that *I* and *Thou* come into the fullness of their essence. Only here do they dwell. In Buber's words:

Feelings accompany the metaphysical and metapsychical fact of love, but they do not constitute it. The accompanying feelings can be of greatly differing kinds. The feeling of Jesus for the demoniac differs from his feeling for the beloved disciple; but the love is the one love. Feelings are “entertained”: love comes to pass. Feelings dwell in man: but man dwells in his love. That is no metaphor, but the actual truth. Love does not cling to the *I* in such a way as to have the *Thou* only as its “content,” its object; but love is *between I and Thou*. (Buber 1937, pp. 14–15).

The gist of Buber's theology is the idea that there is a relation to this *between* itself and that this relation is, again, an *I–Thou* relation. The difference is that the *Thou* in this latter *I–Thou* relation is eternal.¹⁰ However, it is Buber's contention that all other *I–Thou* relations have their cohesion (*Zusammenhang*) in this one *I–Thou* relation. Whereas the realm of *It* has its cohesion in space and time, the realm of *Thou* thus has it, as Buber writes, “... in the Centre [*Mitte*], where the extended lines of relations meet—in the eternal *Thou*” (Buber 1937, p. 100).¹¹

It is by implication of this theology that a privileged kind of access to the middle term is given in the *I–Thou* relation. Admittedly, “access” is probably not the right word, especially not if it implies that the accessing is done by an *I*. We must remember here that there is no *I* outside its relation to a *Thou*. The event of an encounter (*Begegnungseignis*) with a *Thou* cannot, therefore, be initiated by an *I*. It is instead, according to Buber, a matter of grace: “The *Thou* meets me through grace—it is not found by seeking” (Buber 1937, p. 11). This holds true also for the relation to the eternal *Thou*, and perhaps emphatically so since the reason why God cannot be sought is that God is everywhere: “... there is no such thing as seeking God, for there is nothing in which He could not be found” (Buber 1937, p. 80).

Again, “God is everywhere”—but *inconspicuously* so. Alluding to the phrase from St. Augustine, which we have already mentioned, Buber writes that God is “... the mystery of the self-evident [*Geheimnis des Selbstverständlichen*], nearer to me than my *I*” (Buber 1937, p. 79). Finding God is therefore not the reward of a search with the good fortune of having travelled the right path. Finding God is, as Buber writes, “... not the end, but the eternal middle, of the way” (1937, p. 80).¹² In this sense, there *is* no access—because how should it be possible to *access* that which is everywhere? Rather, there is a revelation. There is a revelation of what is secret precisely because it is present everywhere. And the privileged place of this revelation is the *I–Thou* relation. Buber thus concludes his book with the idea of a theophany that “... becomes ever *nearer*, increasingly near to the sphere that lies *between* beings, to the Kingdom that is hidden in our midst, there *between* us” (1937, pp. 119–20).

The privilege of the *I–Thou* relation—and thus of the second person—is made explicit by Buber, when he describes what he calls the three spheres of human life.¹³ He enumerates: (a) life with nature, which takes place on the threshold of speech; (b) life with human beings, which takes place in articulated speech; and (c) life with ideality, which begets speech (see Buber 1937, p. 101). All three spheres can be permeated with the eternal *Thou*. All three are portals into “... the presence of the word ...” (Buber 1937, p. 102). However, Buber claims that: “Of the three spheres, one, our life with men, is marked out ...” (1937, p. 102). This is “... the main portal, into whose opening the two side-gates lead ...” (1937, p. 103). And Buber corroborates this claim by pointing to the dialogical configuration of the dyadic *I–Thou* relation as what marks this portal out. He writes:

Here alone does the word that is formed in language meet its response. Only here does the primary word go backwards and forwards in the same form, the word of address and the word of response live in the one language, *I* and *Thou* take their stand not merely in relation, but also in the solid give-and-take of talk [*festen ‘Redlichkeit’*]. (Buber 1937, pp. 102–3).

It is this idea of the dialogical configuration of *I* and *Thou* as the place where God’s love is revealed as middle term which I find it advisable to seize and to challenge now at its fringes. In other words: how “*fest*” is this “*Redlichkeit*”? Can it withstand the forces of the impersonal? Will it at some point turn into monologue?

3. The Impersonal in the Person and Its Disclosure in Love and Angst

When Heidegger presented being-there-with (*Mitdasein*) as an existential in *Being and Time*, he did so in a polemic against the notion of empathy (*Einfühlung*) which he claimed was “not an original existential phenomenon” (Heidegger 1996a, p. 117). Arguably, this polemic was extended also to contemporary phenomenologists close to himself in as much as his endeavor was not “a correct understanding of the stranger” (*rechtes Fremdverstehens*) but rather the uncovering of its “positive existential condition” (Heidegger 1996a, p. 117). In this regard, the paradigm of intersubjectivity appeared to him insufficient and, accordingly, he shifted to that of being-there-with.

This shift, however, remained itself haunted by an ambiguity which has attracted the enduring suspicion that Heidegger’s analysis falls short of understanding the alterity of “the Other” as well as the community of “the We.” Indeed, the alleged insufficiency of the analysis of being-there-with in §§ 25–27 is often held responsible for the contentious notions of destiny (*Geschick*) and people (*Volk*) appearing in § 74 and other texts later on.¹⁴ Sometimes when the suspicion has been supported by the indignation aroused by Heidegger’s Nazi-involvement, it has even risen to the level of outright condemnation (from Farias to Faye and beyond). Meanwhile, others have tried to accurately pinpoint the ambiguity in question. Jean-Luc Nancy articulates it in the following way:

As much as Heidegger felt with peculiar acuity the necessity of the primordially of the *with* [...] he himself has erased the possibility he opened: namely, the possibility of thinking of the *with* exactly as he had indicated, as neither in exteriority, nor in interiority. Neither a herd, nor a subject. Neither anonymous, nor “mine.” Neither improper, nor proper. (Nancy 2008, p. 11; see also Esposito 2010, p. 97).

Presupposing that this analysis is correct, we can ask what may have prevented Heidegger from maintaining the primordially of the *with*. Nancy relates it to another circumstance that has often been noted: Heidegger’s resounding silence on love (Nancy 2008; see also Agamben 1999 and Schmidt 2005). Indeed, Nancy elsewhere remarks that Heidegger failed to summon love to “... the ontological register” (Nancy 2003b, p. 269). He also attests that this failure is not particular to Heidegger. He observes that the “... keeping of love outside of the general realm of the *with*, whose truth it nevertheless contains [...] is not exclusive to Heidegger but constitutes [...] an axiom for any thinking of the ‘common’ in the whole Western tradition” (Nancy 2008, p. 13). What Heidegger, according

to Nancy, *has* provided for such a thinking, though, is an appropriate level of analysis, i.e., the ontological level of existential analytics (see [Nancy 2000](#), p. 93). Community, in Nancy's view, is situated here. It is "inoperative," as he famously claims, precisely because it is given with existence, well in advance of any project to establish or maintain it (see [Nancy 1991](#), p. 35). His suggestion, however, is that an introduction of love into the existential analysis is called for if the *with* is to be maintained in this primordially.

One particular way to respond to this call is by way of the Kierkegaardian idea of love as middle term. Is it not plausible that such a middle term will create a zone of indistinction precisely between the dichotomies Nancy mentions? Will it not constitute being-with such that it is neither accessible from the exteriority of the third-person nor from the interiority of the first-person perspective? Will it not maintain being-with such that it is neither turned into the fusional immanence of a herd nor ascribed to some underlying subject that transcends it and supposedly "carries" it? Will it not, finally, exempt being-with just as much from anonymity as from ownership, and just as much from the improper as from the proper? These are, admittedly, grand questions which cannot be wholly answered here.¹⁵ Posing them all the same may, however, indicate a direction and provide some orientation as we try to accommodate the issue to something more manageable.

Let us begin, then, by asking how love should be situated at all in existential analytics? A suggestion here is: in a manner similar to angst. The pivotal methodological function of angst in *Being and Time* is that it discloses being-there to itself (see [Heidegger 1996a](#), p. 172ff.).¹⁶ It is noticeable, however, that angst does so at the risk of losing the dimension of being-there-with. Angst discloses being-there in its being-toward-death and, as such, in a certain singularization (*Vereinzelung*) (see [Heidegger 1996a](#), p. 243).¹⁷ Love—so the suggestion—has a similar methodological function. It discloses being-there. Investigating this mode of disclosure, however, will perhaps enable us, more rigorously than Heidegger, to maintain the idea that being-there is equally—and just as existentially—pluralized as being-there-with. After all, is the Kierkegaardian notion of the neighbor not precisely a thinking of a being-there-with the excess of which deconstructs all those cohesions (*Sammenhold*) we establish or maintain (see [Lysemose 2020](#))?

It is remarkable how close Heidegger came to this idea—and then, characteristically, avoided it. This is all the more remarkable since it occurs in a context where Heidegger ponders the idea of "the middle." In a passage from *Introduction to Metaphysics*—comprising a lecture course held in 1935—Heidegger speaks about the German people that "lie in the pincers" (*liegen in der Zange*). It is the people "richest in neighbours" (*nachbarreichste*) and hence "the most endangered people" (*gefährdeste*). It experiences itself "standing in the centre" (*in der Mitte stehend*) and, as such, destined to be "the metaphysical people" (*das metaphysische Volk*). Heidegger almost warns his hearers in 1935:

Precisely if the great decision regarding Europe is not to go down the path of annihilation—precisely then can this decision come about only through the development of new, historically *spiritual* forces from the center [*geschichtlich geistiger Kräfte aus der Mitte*]. ([Heidegger 2000](#), p. 41).

These hearers would not be surprised, then, if Heidegger had continued:

It is not the periphery, the community (*Gemeinschaft*), that comes first, but the radii, the common quality (*Gemeinsamkeit*) of relation with the Centre. This alone guarantees the authentic existence of the community (*Gemeinde*). ([Buber 1937](#), p. 115).

Yet, this latter quote is taken from Buber's *I and Thou*. All doxological differences aside, there is thus a common "metaphorology of the middle."¹⁸ For Buber, this middle is love, which, as we have already heard, is not a psychological feeling but a metaphysical fact. Accordingly, he argues that: "Living mutual relation includes feelings, but does not originate with them. The community is built up out of living mutual relation, but the builder is the living effective Centre" ([Buber 1937](#), p. 45). Now, all relation (*Beziehung*) for Buber is spiritual. It is on the strength of relational force (*Beziehungskraft*), therefore, that

we live together spiritually (see Buber 1937, pp. 38–39). This relational force, however, is not something *I* draw from *Thou* or vice versa. Rather, it is drawn from the center, i.e., from the love flowing between *I* and *Thou*—provided, one might add, that this force has drawn us out of ourselves in the first place.

Heidegger, on his part, finds a similar spiritual force of the middle evoked in Hölderlin's hymnal to "the Ister," flowing, as it does, through Central Europe. Hölderlin writes:

Unconcerned with our wisdom
The rivers still rush on, and yet
Who loves them not?

And Heidegger comments in 1942:

Thus there is indeed a belonging to the rivers [*Zugehörigkeit zu den Strömen*], a going along with them [*Mitgehen*]. It is precisely that which tears onward more surely in the rivers' own path that tears human beings out of the habitual midst [*gewöhnlichen Mitte*] of their lives, so that they may be in a center outside of themselves, that is, be excentric. The prelude [*Vorstufe*] to inhering [*Innehalten*] in the excentric midst of human existence, this 'centric' and 'central' abode [*Aufenthalt*] in the excentric, is love. The sphere proper to standing in the excentric middle of life is death. (Heidegger 1996b, p. 28).¹⁹

In a vocabulary which, incidentally, is remarkably close to Helmuth Plessner's, Heidegger here distinguishes between "the habitual midst" and "the excentric midst" of human existence. Human existence belongs to something in the stream—a certain stream-spirit (*Stromgeist*), we are told—that carries existence out of the former and into the latter. *Stopping* their own habitual ways and *standing in* this stream—both meanings are aptly expressed in the word *Innehalten*—human existence thus finds a new abode (*Aufenthalt*). And it is here that we notice one of those rare occasions where Heidegger mentions love. For it is love that leads to this abode—yet, only as a step before its proper sphere, which is death. Never closer to situating love in the middle, Heidegger thus, in the last minute, relegates love to the margin and turns instead towards death as the center from which to draw the "spiritual forces" of "decision" which he had called upon in 1935.

This turn of things is well in line with Heidegger's analysis of angst, being-toward-death and decision already in *Being and Time*. Following our cue from Nancy, however, we must ask whether it is possible to restore love as more than just a prelude. Would it be possible to argue that angst and love are equally indispensable polarities in the disclosure of the *being singular plural* of being-there?²⁰ Would it be possible to say that potentiality-for-being (*Seinkönnen*) is modulated in the field of tension between them—perhaps in a manner comparable to the way the incessant *motion* of the *conatus* is modulated in the *emotions* of sadness (*tristitia*) and joy (*laetitia*) in Spinoza? Angst, then, would contract being-there-with towards the singularity of the "there."²¹ Love would expand it towards the plurality of the "with." And "being" would incessantly take place in this tension.

One of the first things to notice, if we were to probe such a reconfiguration of Heidegger's existential analysis, is a further similarity between angst and love. Not only do they—ex hypothesi—disclose being-there-with. They both do so in the mode of a certain impersonality—although it is not as certain that it is the *same* kind of impersonality. In fact, there seems rather to be a reverse mirroring. In love, there is a becoming-impersonal in the sense that the third person is un-worked by the first and second person. In the dyadic relation between the latter two, all third personal traits are loosened, to use Kierkegaard's term, or even excluded, to use Buber's. In angst, there is also a becoming-impersonal. But here it is in the sense that the dyad of the first and second person is un-worked by the third person. It is as if the third person strikes back here in an impersonal and uncanny form that intrudes on the pure relation (*reine Beziehung*) of *I* and *Thou* from which it has been excluded. Let us look at each movement in turn. And let us attend to the first movement by briefly investigating how love, as the middle term, loosens all third personal traits in Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*.

3.1. First Movement: Love

Kierkegaard makes a distinction: According to worldly wisdom, he asserts, “... love is a relationship between man [*Menneske*] and man.” Christianity, however, teaches us that “... love is a relation between: man—God—man, that is, that God is the middle term” (Kierkegaard 1949, p. 87). This teaching is easily misunderstood, though, since worldly understanding has its own concept of “middle term.” It takes it to be a third thing by which a commensurability between two things can be established. For instance, the renowned meter bar in Paris establishes a commensurability between the Eiffel Tower and Mount Everest in terms of height; and money, it is sometimes claimed, establishes a universal equivalence such that everything becomes commensurable in terms of monetary value.²² This is not what “middle term” means when attributed to love. As Kierkegaard writes: “Earthly understanding does not notice that love is by no means a third thing in itself, but it is the middle term” (1949, p. 210). As middle term, love is rather the incommensurability of all beings, i.e., that on the strength of which each being is equally singular. And love creates this singularity in a call to which the singular being responds and corresponds: “... the single individual corresponds to God as the middle term [*til Gud som Mellembestemmelsen svarer ‘den Enkelte’*]” (Kierkegaard 1998, p. 122).

It is this responsiveness that comes with a depersonalization. A person who, in his daily dealings, is addressed by the middle term—and thus suddenly finds him- or herself *coram deo*—loses what Kierkegaard calls “personal recognition” (*Persons-anseelse*). On this latter notion, he writes:

The one who in cowardice carried on his famous activities within the security of respect for persons [*Persons-Anseelsens Betryggethed*]: he bears the responsibility—that he did not love his neighbor. If such a one were to say: ‘Well, what good does it do to plan one’s life according to such a standard [*Maalestok*]?’ then I should answer: ‘How do you think this excuse will help you in eternity?’ (Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 70–71).

Evidently, eternity has another measure. And it is only by being responsive to the call of this measure—and *not* in terms of personal recognition—that *I* come to mean anything at all. Kierkegaard is quite clear on that point: “... ‘I’ signifies nothing if it does not become the ‘thou’ to whom eternity unceasingly speaks, and says: ‘Thou shalt, thou shalt, thou shalt’” (Kierkegaard 1949, p. 74). The form of the call is a command, as Kierkegaard abundantly emphasizes. There is no doubt, however, that it is, more precisely, the commandment of love. The idea, therefore, is that *Love thy neighbor!* is the measure of the middle term.

How does this measure work? What happens if I turn to the neighbor on the strength of this command and, in loving the neighbor, recall the call that has addressed us to each other in the first place? The answer is that the depersonalization *coram deo* is repeated between us. I do not love in the neighbor, then, any particular quality that could be the object of some preference. Rather, I love the incommensurable equality of the neighbor. This equality cannot be measured by any third term. It can only be measured by the middle term. Indeed, if we confuse things and take our *genus* (*Slægten*) to be the middle term, then Christianity is abolished, Kierkegaard proclaims (see Kierkegaard 1998, p. 122).²³ Every equality measured in this way is an equality of some worldly difference. And this is not changed in the least if we extend the difference to everyone in a humanist kind of universalism. But how then does the middle term measure the unmeasurable equality in question? Kierkegaard’s answers that it makes a “difference without difference.” In his own words:

What love! First, it makes no distinction [*Forskjel*], none at all; next, which is like the first, it makes infinite differences itself in loving the difference [*den uendelig forskjelliggjør sig i at elske det Forskjellige*]. Wonderful love! For what is so difficult as in loving not to make any distinctions; and if one simply makes no distinction, what then is so difficult as to make distinctions! (Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 218–19).

Like the heart, love works in a syncopated beat. In a first beat, it makes no difference. This is why we feel it to be so inconsiderate and disinterested when it addresses us—and rightly so, since it does indeed not take any of our worldly interests into consideration. On the contrary, it strips us of everything in which we might place our dignity and thus causes our indignation. This is also why its hallmark, according to Kierkegaard, is offence (*Forargelse*)—and so much so that if there is no offence, then we can be almost certain that it is not neighbor love (see Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 161–63). Nevertheless, love addresses *something* in us—something which is decidedly beyond any personal recognition.

Let us note here that it is only *because* love is wholly indifferent that it can differentiate itself infinitely. Granted, love encounters worldly differences. It does not avoid them. Being indifferent, though, it encounters them such that they do not bring love to the end of its power in the concession that: *here is no place for love*. Indifferently—and that is also to say: univocally—love finds a place everywhere (even in relations of enmity, as the prominent case would have it).²⁴ To be addressed by such a love means to be addressed in a place where *I*, the addressee, am not yet in place. In what sense? In the sense, that the ability to respond is exercised by the call of love before *I* come to the scene in order to decide *what I answer for* and *whom I answer to* and *in whose name I answer*. In a way, it is like the call that, when it wakes me up, also exercises an ability to respond. I come too late to decide whether I want to respond or not. I am left only with the decision to get up or stay in bed. Similar in love—only that love does not exercise a particular ability to respond but the whole of my responsive being. Before *I* am in place, *I* find that the place of my being is the scene of an address that calls me into the taking-place of my being.²⁵

It is noteworthy that we are able to illustrate this existential scene of address with such a prosaic event as a call that wakes us in the morning. This testifies to the fact that love's "difference without difference" in a way is recalled in *every* address. This is not to deny that it is peculiar (*ejendommelighed*) to love. Rather, it is to assert that love manages to come along with any address—even if, for the most part, it does so inconspicuously.²⁶ In order to catch a glimpse, it is necessary to be attentive to the depersonalization that occurs in being addressed. Consider here that I am addressed just as much when I am not addressed on the strength of "what I take myself to be"—and sometimes the more so (see Butler 2001). Even when I reply that "I do not answer for this" or "I do not answer to you" or "I do not answer in that name"—even then is it evident, that I come too late. "My" ability to respond has already been exercised before I have had a chance to establish what I will call "my responsibility."²⁷ At that moment, I could be anyone.

In a first beat, then, love makes no difference. In a second beat, however, it makes a difference. This does not mean that the second beat retracts anything from the indifference of the first beat. Kierkegaard is very careful to note that the second beat is like the first ("... next, which is like the first"). Love is able to make its peculiar difference only in syncopation with the first beat. This is why we must insist to speak of a "difference without difference." However, the unavoidable question is, of course: does such a difference make any difference? Indeed, does any work of love make any difference?

It is here that Kierkegaard uses the metaphor of clothing that hangs loosely. He likens all worldly differences to the stage-clothing of actors and observes the necessity, in the theatre, to let it hang so loose that it can easily be changed. This makes it difficult to *not* see through them. Nevertheless, we manage to follow this imperative of the theatre so that we can be deceived and enjoy the play. In real life, it is the opposite. Here, the knot that binds us to the cloth of our worldly differences is tightened to the point of a deadlock (*Haardknude*). We grow together with these differences. This makes it difficult to see through them—but here we fail accordingly. Granted, when we live *in* reality, we do not live *in* truth. Nevertheless, reality should be *of* truth, as Kierkegaard remarks. And yet, we rarely follow the imperative of eternity so that the incommensurable equality may shine through. Usually, we leave it to death to strip us of our worldly clothing.

Alas, in real life the individual grows fast to his differences, so that at last death must force to tear them away from him. Nevertheless, if one is truly to love his

neighbor, he must remember every moment that the difference between them is only a disguise. For, as was said, Christianity has not wished to storm forth to abolish the differences, neither those of distinction nor of humbleness, nor has it wished in a worldly sense to effect a worldly agreement between differences; but it wants the difference to hang loosely about the individual [. . .] When the difference hangs thus loosely, then that essential other is always glimpsed in every individual, that common to all, that eternal resemblance, the equality [*det evigt Lignende, Ligningen*]. (Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 72–73).

What is clear from this brief investigation into *Works of Love* is that there is a certain depersonalization in love. Nevertheless, for Buber, it is only through this depersonalization of all *partial* third personal traits that persons become *wholly* persons. This is why he asserts that the primary word couple of *I–Thou* “ . . . can only be spoken with the whole being,” while that of *I–It*, “ . . . can never be spoken with the whole being” (Buber 1937, p. 3). This can be granted also on Kierkegaardian terms. In love, there is nothing proper to me that remains as *mine* and nothing proper to you that remains as *yours*. Only *I* and *You* remain.

Wonderful! There is a ‘you’ and an ‘I,’ and there is no ‘mine’ and ‘thine’! For without ‘you’ and ‘I’ there is no love, and with ‘mine’ and ‘thine’ there is no love; but ‘mine’ and ‘thine’ (these pronouns of possession) come from ‘thou’ and ‘I,’ and hence it seems as if they must be wherever there is ‘thou’ and ‘I.’ This is also the case everywhere except in the love which is a fundamental revolution [*en Omvæltning fra Grunden af*]. (Kierkegaard 1949, p. 215).

If we choose, with Buber, to ascribe personhood in the full sense only here—in the pure *I–Thou* relation—then we should be very careful not to neglect the deep sense of depersonalization it involves. This side of the coin has perhaps never been asserted more forcefully than in Simone Weil’s last essay, “Human Personality.” In this remarkable piece of writing, Weil declares that what is sacred in a human being is never the person but, on the contrary, always something impersonal (see Weil 2005, p. 74). One could of course try to mitigate between Weil and Buber on this point. And in fact, they do agree that although third personal traits are in some sense still “there” in love, they no longer count in their particularity.²⁸ Weil argues that what stops us from violating any of these traits—for instance, putting the eyes out of another person—is not that the other is a person. He or she would still be a person in spite of such violations. Yet, it is also not the particular traits themselves in which there is something sacred. Rather, it is “the whole” of the human being that is sacred. If Buber decides to attest personhood to this whole, however, while Weil chooses to call it impersonal, it may seem to be a mere terminological difference.

Weil, on her part, would evidently not feel at ease with this solution, though. “Something is amiss with the vocabulary of the modern trend of thought known as Personalism,” she writes and detects that a “ . . . grave error of vocabulary” is here “ . . . the sign of a grave error of thought” (2005, p. 70). And Buber, on his part, was no less skeptical. In a text from 1951 with the title “The Silent Question,” he discusses both Weil and Bergson. In Weil’s impersonalism in particular, he finds not only an exclusion of the third personal traits which belong to the *I–It* relation—this he would agree on—but also an abandonment of the *I* itself and, by implication, a disengagement from the *I–Thou* relation. Buber concedes that it is necessary to distinguish a selfish *I* from the *I* of the *I–Thou* relation and that the former is abandoned in love (see Buber 1956, p. 312).²⁹ As such, it would be possible to grant a half-truth to impersonalism without forgoing what he, in this context, calls “the social principle.” However, Buber is well aware that Weil—as opposed to Bergson—would not even admit this much. With a rather dismissive remark, he therefore sees himself fit to measure the amount of truth in Bergson and Weil in mathematical proportions: “Seldom has it been so evident as in this instance how a half-truth can be more misleading than a total error. (As far as Simone Weil is concerned, it is, indeed, scarcely a quarter-truth)” (Buber 1956, pp. 309–10).³⁰

From both sides, then, it appears that the issue can indeed not be resolved as a mere terminological difference.³¹ Buber is right when he detects a deeper sense of depersonalization in what he takes to be Weil's mysticism. In Weil's text, this sense of depersonalization is called affliction (*malheur*). She distinguishes affliction from suffering which pertains to the person. When we think that a person is violated, we invoke the language of rights. To do the same in the face of affliction, however, is ludicrous. Indeed, affliction comes with the experience of a loss of language. But is it possible, then, to state what is at stake in affliction? To acknowledge its reality, Weil writes, means to be aware that I may lose at any moment anything whatsoever that I possess " . . . including those things which are so intimately mine that I consider them as being myself" (Weil 2005, p. 90). So far, both Kierkegaard and Buber would follow suit. However, whereas Kierkegaard would arguably continue to do so, Buber would hesitate when Weil adds: "To be aware of this in the depth of one's soul is to experience non-being. It is the state of extreme and total humiliation which is also the condition for passing over into truth. It is the death of the soul" (Weil 2005, pp. 90–91). That the "*festen 'Redlichkeit'*" of the *I–Thou* relation is compromised here becomes evident when we also learn what it means to be *with* someone in affliction. Weil continues:

To put oneself in the place of someone whose soul is corroded by affliction, or in near danger of it, is to annihilate oneself. It is more difficult than suicide would be for a happy child. Therefore the afflicted are not listened to. They are like someone whose tongue has been cut out and who occasionally forgets the fact. (Weil 2005, p. 91).

No dialogical or personal configuration of the *I–Thou* relation seems to remain here. For Buber, this means that the relation as such is cancelled. Whether it persists on the impersonal level for Weil is unclear. But it is clear that only love is able to follow affliction into the depths of non-being. She writes:

Only by the supernatural working of grace can a soul pass through its own annihilation to the place where alone it can get the sort of attention which can attend to truth and to affliction. [. . .] The name of this intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous, generous attention is love. (Weil 2005, pp. 91–92)

3.2. Second Movement: Angst

Speaking of love, let us return now to Heidegger. There is a becoming-impersonal in Weil's affliction, which, I would argue, is of the same kind—if it is not indeed the very same—as the one Heidegger detects in angst. Both cases involve an experience of non-being (Weil) or of nothing (Heidegger). It is clearer in Heidegger, though, that the *I–Thou* relation is cancelled on this impersonal level. But then again, this is perhaps due to the fact that Heidegger knows of no love that can give attention here. As we have heard, Heidegger leaves love at the preliminary stage (*Vorstufe*) when entering death as the proper sphere of the "excentric middle." Instead, we are carried away here by a *Stromgeist* that will eventually lead us into "the poetics of the impersonal." But first, let us briefly rehearse some points from Heidegger's analysis of angst.

In "What is Metaphysics?," Heidegger writes:

We "hover" in angst. More precisely, angst leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves—we humans who are in being [*diese seienden Menschen*—in the midst of beings slip away from ourselves. At bottom [*im Grunde*] therefore it is not as though "you" or "I" feel ill at ease [*unheimlich*]; rather, it is this way for some "one" [*"einem" ist es so*]. (Heidegger 1977b, p. 101).³²

Clearly, it is neither *I* nor *You*—neither the first nor the second person—who is in angst. Nor is it precise to say that *We* are. Angst leaves us hanging so that not only the totality of beings slips away but so that we, as part of this totality, slip away with it. This implies that we in a certain sense slip away from ourselves, including the sense in which we know

ourselves to be first or second persons. We—*You* and *I*—are no longer at home in the place that is arguably most intimately ours, the “there” of our being-there-with. And thus, it suddenly becomes uncanny (*unheimlich*) the only place it can truly become so: at home.

“What” is uncanny and “who” is there to experience it? In trying to answer these questions, we get into linguistic troubles. “Angst robs us of speech,” as Heidegger remarks (Heidegger 1977b, p. 101). And following Émile Benveniste’s investigation on “The Nature of Pronouns,” we can understand why. As Benveniste points out, *I* and *You* “... cannot exist as potentialities; they exist only insofar as they are actualized in the instance of discourse” (Benveniste 1971, p. 220). Linguistically speaking, they refer only to the one who presently utters a discourse (*I*) or the one who is presently addressed by a discourse (*You*). With these linguistic shifters, language thus holds a place open where *I* can become *I* and *You* can become *You* in so far as we are enveloped in dialogue. When, however, *I* and *You* slip away, there is no one to utter or to be addressed and, by implication, language cannot get instantiated in dialogue. Yet, there are other linguistic ways to work around this predicament, even if they turn out rather peculiar.³³

Heidegger has recourse to the phrase “‘*einem*’ ist es so.” In this manner, *it* (*es*) answers the “what” question and *one* (*einem*) answers the “who” question. But this, of course, only re-poses both questions, because who is *one* and what is *it*? Heidegger is careful to put *one* in square quotes. This indicates that *one* is neither me or you nor anyone else in particular that might be determined at some point. *One* is someone that will in principle—*im Grunde*, as he writes—remain indefinite. And indeed, linguistically *one* is an indefinite pronoun. If we then ask what it is that is uncanny to this *one*, then the phrase will have it so that it is *it*. Again, since the whole of beings has slipped away, there is no being for this third person pronoun to refer to. So, what is *it*? Heidegger informs us that *it* is nothing. And this is precisely what is uncanny: *it* has no reference. As opposed to fear, we have nothing to be afraid of. Linguistically, *it* functions here as in “it rains.” There is no subject or substance—no person or thing—that does the raining. The verb “to rain” is therefore a so-called *verbum impersonale*. And likewise here: when *it is uncanny*, then the event, designated by the verb “to be” (here in the form of “is”), becomes impersonal. This is why Heidegger goes on to consider being as event (*Ereignis*) in the guise of “it gives” (*es gibt*) (see Heidegger 1972). Much has been written on this issue and it is probably advisable, therefore, to remind ourselves of the specific focus here: the impersonality which angst and love reveals in different ways in their co-disclosure of being-there-with. As we have just noticed, this brings along with it some linguistic troubles. And that, in turn, prompts us to ask now: what happens here to the dialogical configuration of the *I–Thou* relation?

4. The Monologue in Dialogue and Its Expression in the Poetics of the Impersonal

In a paper on “Martin Buber and Martin Heidegger in Dialogue,” Paul Mendes-Flohr offers a thoroughly researched account of the events and conversations that preceded a conference on language with Buber and Heidegger as its main speakers. The conference never took place as intended. However, scrutinizing writings, letters and other testimonies, Mendes-Flohr manages to delineate a dialogue between Buber and Heidegger so vividly that one almost feels as if it did.

From the point of view of Buber, Mendes-Flohr can rely on a number of publications, in which Buber has made his critique of Heidegger available. For instance, in a text discussing “the doctrine of Heidegger”, Buber conveys Heidegger’s being-there (*Dasein*) as abstracted from all anthropological reality. He acknowledges that this “chemical purity” is a methodological choice on Heidegger’s part but points, nevertheless, to its shortcomings (see Buber 2002, p. 194): (a) Being-there has only an inessential relation to things, namely a technological-pragmatical one. To this, Buber opposes the relation to things in art. (b) It has only an inessential relation to others, namely a solicitous one. To this, Buber opposes a relation to others in love. (c) And it has no relation at all to God—which, for Buber, is what distinguishes Heidegger from Kierkegaard (see Buber 2002, pp. 210–13). Hence, there remains in being-there only a relation of the self to the self—and a self-relation, Buber

asserts, cannot amount to a genuine relation. As opposed to the other three relations, there is no essential relation corresponding to a self-relation (although Buber, in a noteworthy parenthesis, discusses—and dismisses—poetry as a candidate).³⁴ Buber concludes that “... Heidegger’s ‘existence’ is monological.” He grants that “... monologue may certainly disguise itself ingeniously for a while as dialogue,” such that it leads to the delusion that there is a real experience of “calling” and “hearing” in self-relation (Buber 2002, p. 199). In truth, however, “... everyone can essentially only speak with himself” on Heidegger’s terms. And this is essentially no dialogue (Buber 2002, p. 204).

From the point of view of Heidegger, some deeper textual excavation is required. It is therefore of particular importance, when Mendes-Flohr draws our attention to a letter that Heidegger wrote to his wife just after having read Buber’s paper on “Hope for this Hour.” This led Heidegger to comment:

... there remains a question of whether we mortals address our eternal Thou (B. means God) *through* our mortal Saying-Thou to one another, or whether we aren’t brought into correspondence to one another only through God’s address. The question remains whether this “either-or” is sufficient at all or whether both the one and the other have to be prepared even more primordially, a preparation which of course again requires the [divine] address and its protection [*Geheißes und seines Schutzes*]. (Mendes-Flohr 2014, p. 23).

Is it through the relation to another person that we also address the absolute person? Or is it the absolute person that brings us into relation to other persons in the first place? This is already an intriguing question. Nevertheless, Heidegger goes one step further. He asks whether there is a primordial preparation before this alternative even arises. It is likely that he asks this question because he thinks so. We may therefore wonder what kind of preparation could precede the dialogical engagement of *I* and *Thou*, regardless if it involves absolute or non-absolute persons? Heidegger asserts that there is still a kind of address here, and even a divine one. This implies something like an impersonal relation with God. He also asserts that this address is in some sense protected. This may imply the “peace” or “salvation” at the divine center to which the poet, according to Heidegger, ventures (as we shall see in a moment). But if we take these hints toward a “poetics of the impersonal,” will we end up, then, in a monologue of the kind Buber has in mind when he misses a true appreciation of dialogue in Heidegger? Or will we perhaps end up suspending the line of demarcation between monologue and dialogue altogether?

4.1. Monologue in Dialogue: The Song of Peace

Is dialogue the only mode of language? At the face of it, this may seem a strange question. Obviously, we know of many non-dialogical ways that language can be enacted—both in speech (for instance, giving an order without discussion) and in writing (for instance, this text which may perhaps never find a reader). On second thought, though, is not all language, at least implicitly, addressed to some addressee—real or imaginary, present or future? And, if so, does this not already make dialogue the essence of language? “Sprache ist Gespräch.”³⁵ This was arguably the founding idea of the hermeneutics of Gadamer who was fond of retelling that Heidegger, during their last meeting, concurred: “You are right” (see Malpas 2005). Yet, Heidegger, in a 1934-lecture on language, stated that this idea was ambiguous (*Zweideutig*) and worthy of question (*Fragwürdig*). And he pointed, in the same passage, to poetry as a mode of language that attests to the fact that it is at least not language as a whole—and therefore, perhaps, also not its essence—that appear in its ordinary dialogical use (*Umgangssprache*) (see Heidegger 2009, pp. 22–23).

Let us ask two poets, then, about the essence of language. In a famous line in his “Celebration of peace” (*Friedensfeier*), Hölderlin confirms not only that language is dialogue, but also that we—as “animals that can speak” (*ζῶον λόγον ἔχον*)—have *been* this dialogue for a long time. “Have been,” because Hölderlin announces that an undercurrent of song is meanwhile about to transform us.

Man has learned much since morning,
 For we are a conversation, and we can listen
 To one another. Soon we'll be song.
 (Mitchell 2004, p. 36).³⁶

What does “song” mean here? There is a sonorous quality to language which goes through the person. A person is perhaps precisely that: a *per-sonare*.³⁷ In dialogue, this sonorous quality is vocalized in an articulated manner—phonetically, morphologically, syntactically, semantically and so forth. This is how we learn so many things when we listen to one another. This grammatical articulation, however, also entails that the sonorous quality of language travels underground. We presuppose it—and suppress it—in our propositions. It is therefore unheard when we listen to one another. But perhaps it can be vocalized otherwise? Perhaps it can be elevated from the ground and be heard? If we suspend the articulation that we give it in dialogue, will it not then break out in song? Arguably, that is what song is: the celebration of a peace that can only be attained when song itself suspends dialogue. Granted, we then no longer learn many things (*Vieles*). But perhaps we experience, instead, a certain peaceful unity? Still, even if that is the case, who would be able to suspend “the dialogue that we are”? What would happen to the person who does it? And what kind of language could bring language out of its ruts towards the threshold of song? Let us ask another poet, this time Novalis. In a text which, significantly, has the title *Monologue*, Novalis writes:

One can only marvel at the ridiculous mistake people make when they think—that they speak for the sake of things. The particular quality of language [*das Eigenthümliche der Sprache*], the fact that it is concerned only with itself, is known to no one. (Novalis 1997, p. 83).

We use language to impart many things that concern us. But this use does not correspond to the peculiar drift of language itself. Language is concerned with itself. Following *this* drift, “the animal that can speak” acquires, as Novalis writes later in his text, a subtle sense of the “rhythm” (*Takt*) and “musical spirit” (*musikalischen Geistes*) of language. And this, he states, is the essence and function of the poet: to follow this drift. To the question “who,” we can therefore answer with Novalis: the poet. And to the question “what kind of language,” we can answer with Novalis: a poetical and—going by the title—monological language. But what happens to the poet here? More specifically, what happens to the person?

4.2. Poetics of the Impersonal: The Cry of Writing

In his text “What are poets for?,” Heidegger describes the venture (*Wagnis*) that is specific to the poet. At this point, Heidegger considers all beings as part of the venture of being. As what is ventured (*das Gewagte*), each and every being are cast free from (*losgelassen*) and drawn to (*gezogen*) the center of everything (*Mitte*) due to a gravitational force (*Schwerkraft*) that issues from this center. Everything is in the draw of the center. The center itself, though, is in the draw of nothing, but regains itself perpetually. Heidegger develops this idea in an interpretation of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* (*Duniser Elegien*). Here, Rilke writes specifically on the center:

Center, how you draw yourself
 out of all things, regaining yourself
 even from things in flight: Center, strongest of all!
 (Heidegger 1971, p. 102).

And Heidegger—who notices that Rilke elsewhere calls it “the unheard-of-center” (*die unerhörte Mitte*)—elaborates:

It is the ground (*Grund*) as the ‘medium’ (*Mit*) that holds one being to another in mediation (*mittelnd das eine zum anderen hält*) and gathers everything in the play of

the venture. The unheard-of center (*Mitte*) is ‘the eternal playmate’ (*Mitspielerin*) in the world-game (*Weltspiel*) of Being. (Heidegger 1971, p. 102).

Let us interject that this version of a “metaphysics of the middle” does not seem so far removed from Kierkegaard, although, as per usual, we do not find the notion of love in Heidegger. Nonetheless, to recognize Kierkegaard’s middle term as that which “*mittelnd das eine zum anderen hält*” does not seem far off the mark. After all, is a middle that manages to be the middle everywhere not a kind of copulation (if one may use this term) such that everything is joined in the play of an excessive neighboring or being-there-with?—At any rate, Heidegger goes on to develop the human relation to this middle (still following Rilke). As opposed to plants and animals, human beings are not simply in the middle of the world-game opened by the middle. They are not immediately *in* the open (*das Offene*). Rather, they are *in front* of it and, as such, also outside of it—cast freer than any other being. From this position (*Stellung*), it becomes possible to produce (*Herstellen*) and represent (*Vorstellen*). Such a position does not come without a great danger. Yet, following Hölderlin’s famous words, “... where there is danger, there grows also what saves [*das Rettende*]” (Heidegger 1971, p. 115). Salvation, in other words, is not a question of escaping the greater venture, human beings find themselves in, but of going along with it—venturing deeper into it. And this is where we arrive at the poet.

The poet is, writes Heidegger with a phrase from Rilke, “more daring by a breath” (*um einen Hauch wagender*). Thus spirited, the poet is not only the more daring, but also the more saying (*die Sagenderen*). How so? What is it that the poet dares? Heidegger’s answer is concise: the poet dares language (*Sie wagen die Sprache*) (see Heidegger 1971, p. 129). It is true, he concedes, that human beings as such—not only poets—are venturesome. And it is also true, that it is in this capacity that they are in a position to produce and represent beings in language. It is thus that they are “animals that can speak” (see Heidegger 1971, p. 134). However, the spirited poet has a surplus of breath which the poet uses to sing. It is in this sense, that the poet is “more saying”: “The saying of the more venturesome which is more fully saying is the song,” writes Heidegger and quotes Rilke:

To sing in truth is another breath.

A breath for nothing. An afflatus in the god. A wind.

(Heidegger 1971, pp. 135–36).

Let us appreciate again here that it is language which the poet puts at risk in the venture to the center. And let us ponder the stakes of this risk. For “the animal that can speak,” it involves nothing less than a letting-go of its abode. It involves *not* inhabiting the folds which language holds upon for it—in particular the first and the second person. It means therefore, in a certain sense, to lose the ability to speak—to become *im-personare*. “In a certain sense,” because this letting-go is *also* the way in which “the animal that can speak” is no longer in the grip of its defining potentiality. It is no longer captivated by its own *genus*. And in *this* sense, letting-go is not only a loss but also the way for “the animal that can speak” to master its own potentiality. It is the way for it to overcome itself and exceed its *genus*. Song expresses the joy of this overflowing *generosity*. It arises when the poet draws from the “pure forces” (*reinen Kräfte*) that issues from the center—pure, yes, but also dangerous, since these forces come without a direction. Accordingly, the task of the poet is two-fold. It is the task of the poet to follow his *genius*—or *Stromgeist*—into the center in order to draw “pure forces” from it. But it is also the task of the poet to give these forces a direction, i.e., to put them into language while preserving a sense of the “rhythm” and “musical spirit” of language.

Agamben—who wrote his as of yet unpublished *laurea* on Simone Weil—is very much aware of what could be called “the poetics of the impersonal.” He describes it in the following way:

Suppose the ego wants to write—not to write this or that work, but simply to write, period. This desire means: I (Ego) feel that somewhere Genius exists, that there is in me an impersonal power that presses toward writing. But this Genius,

who has never taken up a pen (much less a computer)—has no inclination to produce a work. One writes in order to become impersonal, to become genial, and yet, in writing, we individuate ourselves as authors of this or that work; we move away from Genius, who can never have the form of an ego, much less that of an author. [. . .] The life that maintains the tension between the personal and the impersonal, between Ego and Genius, is called poetic. (Agamben 2007, pp. 13–14).

The poetics of the impersonal is presented here as a mode of life. This mode of life situates itself in the tension between the impersonal and the personal, the genius and the ego. A poet follows the drift of his *genius*. This *genius* is without interest in producing any work—and so much so that following this drift will un-work language for the poet. The poet, however, does not abandon himself wholly to this drift. Rather, he manages to draw forces from its un-working which he then invests in an act of creation—sometimes resulting in “a work of art.” In this way, the poet is someone who conquers language anew—and someone who may accordingly renew language. This, at least, is the depiction Agamben conjures (see also Agamben 2017). Much has been written, both prior and after, about the un-working (*désœuvrement*) it involves; a little less so about the becoming-impersonal.

Weil was concerned with the impersonal, as we have seen, but also with the question as to how the impersonal and inaudible cry of affliction that “arises from the depths of the human heart” could be brought into language (Weil 2005, p. 72). This task demands poets of “the very highest genius,” and Weil stresses that they are a rare breed. In fact, she knows only of a handful: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Racine and a few others (see Weil 2005, p. 87). To this list, we can perhaps add the Brazilian—but Ukrainian-born—writer Clarice Lispector. One would be hard pressed to find another contemporary writer who so vehemently carries the impersonal into language. In order to attest that the poetic mode of life alluded to here is not just a theoretical construct, it seems appropriate, therefore, to end this little explorative essay with a pointer to an author who seems, in fact, to have lived it (see Negrete 2018).³⁸

The initial title of one of Lispector’s last works, which I shall limit myself to here, was *Beyond Thought: Monologue with Life*. In this “monologue with . . . ,” we already detect that dialogue and monologue enter into a zone where we will not be able to decide which one it is—and perhaps it is only thus that we will be taken “beyond thought.” Eventually, however, Lispector opted for the title *Água Viva*, which literally means “living water,” but in ordinary use refers to a jellyfish. This may imply that the living water—vitalized, let us say, with Hölderlin’s *Stromgeist*—will take us toward something that is living but decidedly impersonal. At any rate, Lispector opens her book with the pronoun that we have seen to be the linguistic marker *par excellence* for the entry of the impersonal into language. The very first sentence reads: “It is with such profound happiness.” This “it” will reappear throughout Lispector’s text.³⁹ Let us focus on the writing of the “it.”

What is a writer? In line with the above, could we say: someone who has lost the ability to speak? Someone who has lost his voice? Someone who has become *im-personare*? The writer in Lispector’s text, who speaks in the first-person singular and often addresses the reader in the second-person singular, reveals herself to be a painter as well. And painting, we learn, is more impersonal and closer to the nature of things than writing. Its gestures may be extended into writing but writing, nevertheless, tends towards introducing the *I*.

I write in signs that are more a gesture than voice. All this is what I got used to painting, delving into the intimate nature of things. But now the time to stop painting has come in order to remake myself, I remake myself in these lines. I have a voice. (Lispector 2012, p. 17).

Lispector’s writer thus attest: “I write because I so deeply want to speak” (Lispector 2012, p. 6). Importantly, this implies that writing is not speaking. Writing is what someone

does because of a desire to speak. We may therefore ask, why a writer desires to speak? Is it not enough to write? What pushes this act of creation beyond itself? The writer writes:

Creation escapes me. And I don't even want to know so much. That my heart beats in my breast is enough. The impossible living of the *it* is enough. [. . .] But my heart's beating. The inexplicable love makes the heart beat faster. The sole guarantee is that I was born. You are a form of being *I*, and *I* a form of being you: those are the limits of my possibility. (Lispector 2012, pp. 59–60).

A creator knows of no reason to create—and does not want to. It is enough to have a beating heart. The beat of a heart, however, does not amount to an act of creation. The beat of a heart is simply “the impossible living of the *it*.” Still, even though this is enough, the beating heart exceeds it. It beats faster on the impulse of a love that is inexplicable. And this acceleration seems to give birth to the *I* which, at the same time, is the form of the *You*—and vice versa. *I* and *Thou* is thus born out of a beating heart. Speech accomplishes and affirms this dyadic form. However, it does not transcend it. To do so will be beyond the limits of the possibility of the *I* who is born into this dyadic form.

Writing, however, is not speaking. It may very well be that *the I* writes in order to speak—but for *the writer*, it is different: “ . . . writing for me is frustrating: when writing I'm dealing with the impossible” (Lispector 2012, p. 65). The *I* has its being in speech (as we also saw in Benveniste). Accordingly, if the *I* writes, it is because the *I* wants to attain this being. The *I* wants to be born. A writer, however, is someone who resists this desire to be born in order to attest to the “impossible living of the *it*.” (“My life is a hesitation before birth,” as another writer famously stated).⁴⁰ This implies that the writer must become impersonal. It implies that the writer must write from outside of the dyadic form of *I* and *Thou*, which is very frustrating since this will bend language out of shape. It amounts to the attempt not just to say something that is outside of language but something that is outside of language *only inside language and nowhere else*. As the writer writes: “I can't stop living. In this dense jungle of words that thickly wrap around whatever I feel and think and live and transform everything I am into something of mine that nonetheless remains entirely outside me” (Lispector 2012, p. 60).

From the “outside” of *I and Thou*, the writer reports that there is solitude and silence. Consider for instance the dyadic form as embodied by mother and child in breastfeeding. The writer asks: “What is the first element?” And answers: “Immediately there must have been two to have the secret intimate movement from which milk gushes.” However, the writer is someone who un-works the dyadic form and thus declares “ . . . I know *it* things about breastfeeding a child” (Lispector 2012, p. 24). More specifically, the writer knows the following: “Milk is a ‘this.’ And no one is *I*. No one is you. That is what solitude is” (Lispector 2012, p. 28). There is no *I* or *you* who are solitary, but there is a solitude to be found in the milk that gushes between *I* and *you*. In this solitude, the writer also knows silence. “For now there's dialogue with you. Then it will be monologue. Then the silence” (Lispector 2012, p. 40). This is why the writer not only writes: “I write because I so deeply want to speak,” but immediately adds the experience peculiar to the writer: “Though writing only gives me the full measure of silence” (Lispector 2012, p. 6).

How does one measure silence? With a cry? Perhaps, but is there a cry in writing? In an act of writing, the writers asks:

What am I in this instant? I am a typewriter making the dry keys echo in the dark and humid early hours. For a long time I haven't been people. They wanted me to be an object. I'm an object. [. . .] But I don't obey totally: if I must be an object let it be an object that screams. There's a thing inside me that hurts. Ah how it hurts and how it screams for help. But tears are missing in the typewriter that I am. I'm an object without destiny. I am an object in whose hands? Such is my human destiny. What saves me is the scream. (Lispector 2012, p. 78–79).

We have here the scene of writing: The lone writer sitting in a chamber, typing on a typewriter. But this familiar scene develops. The writer becomes the type writer, becomes

it. And from this, the writer finds salvation only in a cry.⁴¹ Such a cry could therefore very well be described as “chamber music”, which the writer in fact does: “Chamber music has no melody. It is a way of expressing the silence. I’m sending you chamber writing” (Lispector 2012, p. 40).

It appears that there *is* a cry in writing. Perhaps it is this cry that expresses the otherwise inaudible cry of affliction, which Weil pointed out? Merely expressing it, though, is already an act of resistance. The cry therefore never *only* expresses affliction. It also saves. In this respect, the cry of affliction reaches an atonal joy inside *it*: “My only salvation is joy. An atonal joy inside the essential *it*” (Lispector 2012, p. 85). But is there someone to hear this cry? As we saw, love alone can be attentive to the cry of affliction, according to Weil. A reading that hears the cry of writing—if there is such a reading—must therefore be of love. What would that imply? It would imply that reading follows writing outside *I* and *Thou*, into *it*—into the core, that is, of “the unheard-of-center.” And it would imply, that reading listens here to the cry of writing with nothing but the silence which this cry measures and expresses. From one silence to another, then, would be how “... the chant of *it* never ends” (Lispector 2012, p. 86). As the writer writes to the reader:

My voice falls into the abyss of your silence. You read me in silence. But in this unlimited silent field I unfurl my wings, free to live. So I accept the worst and enter the core of death and that is why I’m alive. The feeling core. And that *it* makes me quiver. (Lispector 2012, p. 49).

5. Conclusions

Even if the present essay has been more explorative than conclusive in nature, let us try to summarize its meandering ways into some main points. We have been occupied with two tenets of philosophy of dialogue: that the dyad of *I* and *Thou* is personal and dialogical. We have witnessed a deconstruction of both tenets. This, however, has only been a true deconstruction if it is on the strength of *the same* principle (*archē*) that these tenets are constructed *and* deconstructed. We found this to be the case with the middle term. Hence, it is on the strength of the middle term that *I* and *Thou* are given to each other in the fullness of being persons and in their pure dialogical relation. This is what Buber asserts. We have, however, seen that the same middle term comes with a drift towards the impersonal. In love, as presented by Kierkegaard, we saw a depersonalization with regard to all third personal traits. And in angst, as presented by Heidegger, we saw a depersonalization with regard to the first and second person, i.e., with regard to *I* and *Thou*. Since language, in its ordinary dialogical use, is tied to the *dispositif* of the person, this drift towards the impersonal was not without linguistic troubles (which both Weil and Heidegger clearly note). At the same time, however, an extraordinary relation to language was opened, namely a poetical one. The poet’s venture to the center, as described by Heidegger, and the poetics of the impersonal, as attested in Lispector’s writing, has given us some important insights into the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* of this extraordinary relation.

What is the significance of our findings in the broader perspective of a philosophy of dialogue? Perhaps the following: that in every personal and dialogical encounter, there are impersonal forces at play, which takes dialogue towards a monological dimension. Granted, such forces are a threat to the “*festen ‘Redlichkeit’*” of *I* and *Thou*. But they may also provide a chance. Being attentive to these forces means to be attentive to the impersonal absence out of which our personal presence emerges. Our chance to emerge anew therefore depends on it. According to Weil, attention follows affliction into the deepest of all absence—into death itself. In the silence of this absence, the cry of the afflicted resounds: *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*? Weil therefore writes: “The unity of God, wherein all plurality disappears, and the abandonment, wherein Christ believes he is left while never ceasing to love his Father perfectly, these are two forms expressing the divine virtue of the same Love, the Love that is God himself.” (Weil 1951, pp. 126–27). It is thus the tension between absolute presence and absolute absence which love as the middle term ultimately holds. But on a

seemingly lesser scale—in ordinary dialogue—we find the very same tension. Absence never ceases to un-work our mutual presence in various ways. Yet, we may also find that even if the one asks in the East and the other answers in the West, then love nevertheless understands—across this absence—what none of us understand: that we say the same thing or, perhaps better, sing the same song. If we can learn to be attentive to this song, then that is perhaps no small thing. In any case, we can conclude now by repeating the epigram from Kierkegaard: “Wonderful conversation! There seems to be no meaning in it. The one asks in the east, and the other answers in the west; and yet they say, moreover love understands it, they both say one and the same thing.” (Kierkegaard 1949, p. 277).

Funding: My research was funded by the Aarhus University Research Foundation, which finances the collective research project “Epistemological Aspects of ‘Dialogue’: Exploring the Potential of the Second-Person Perspective” (2021–2023, AUFF Starting Grant awarded to Professor Claudia Welz & team).

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not Applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not Applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not Applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ “The metaphysics of the middle,” as one might call it, is thus not restricted to Kierkegaard but can in fact be observed in a number of authors and texts. In addition to Buber, we will have occasion to highlight different versions of it in Cusanus and Heidegger. The Kierkegaardian version will be elaborated when we turn to Kierkegaard’s notion of neighbor love in Section 3.1.
- ² The translator translates with “silence” and “silencing”.
- ³ I borrow this term from Jean-Luc Nancy, who defines it as “... the transcendence of an immanence that does not go outside itself in transcending, which is not ex-tatic but ek-sistant.” (Nancy 1996, pp. 34–35). As for Cusanus, Blumenberg rightly remarks: “The coincidence of immanence and transcendence is Cusanus’ great theme ...” (Blumenberg 2010, p. 125).
- ⁴ By pointing out this similarity, I do not, of course, wish to deny that many crucial differences remain.
- ⁵ It could be argued with some weight that the middle term is not an ontological term, describing how things *are*, but a normative term, describing how things *ought* to be (I am indebted to Bjørn Rahbjerg for pointing this out to me). However, and as I have tried to corroborate elsewhere, it is my contention that Kierkegaard’s notion of the neighbor and of neighbor love implies a suspension of the usual distinction between “is” and “ought” (see Lysemose 2020, pp. 12–19). In this respect, I find Kierkegaard’s thinking to be a fleshed out (but different) version of what Heidegger indicated with the term “originary ethics” in his “Letter on ‘Humanism’” (see Nancy 2003a). It would be out of place to reiterate my argument here, so let me just point to the instructive case of “upbuilding love.” To upbuild love does not mean to bring something into being that previously only had ought to be—like a potentiality that becomes actual. Rather it means to presuppose that love is already there—neither in potentiality, nor in actuality, but in the ground (see Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 169–81). In other words, to “fulfill the law” means to live in the faith that it is already fulfilled (see Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 75–109).
- ⁶ For a “state of the art” with regard to philosophy of dialogue, see the volume edited by Paul Mendes-Flohr (2015).
- ⁷ Welz points out that: “In understanding God as perennial middle of human love relations, Buber comes overly close to Kierkegaard’s model of the God-relationship” (Welz 2015, pp. 130–31). For a comparison between Kierkegaard and Buber, highlighting some differences, see Welz (2017). In particular, Welz stresses that “... even a so-called upbuilding discourse remains a meaningless monologue,” if there is no one to read it, and further that—as opposed to the *I–Thou* relation in Buber—“... writing and reading take place during two separate sequences of action without the writer and the reader meeting each other in a shared present at all.” (p. 374). I shall return to the question of dialogue and monologue and of the relation between writer and reader.
- ⁸ I borrow the term *diastasis* from Bernhard Waldenfels who defines it as follows: “I designate the temporal shift (*Verschiebung*) which emerges from the antecedence (*Vorgängigkeit*) of pathos and the deferment (*Nachträglichkeit*) of response, dividing the homogeneous dialogue into a heterogeneous dia-logue, as *diastasis*, that is, as an originary splitting which produces a context (*Zusammenhang*), albeit a broken one.” (Waldenfels 2011, p. 31). Waldenfels’ responsive phenomenology shares Buber’s dyadic point of departure, but introduces an alienation (*Fremdheit*) which Waldenfels misses in Buber’s dialogical co-presence of *I* and *Thou*. Waldenfels’ critique of Buber on his point is akin to that of Emmanuel Levinas (see Levinas 1998, pp. 150–51).
- ⁹ Like Waldenfels’ responsive phenomenology, Sloterdijk’s spherology also shares Buber’s dyadic point of departure. In a reflection on God’s act of creating Adam, Sloterdijk stresses that this was not only an act of form giving but also—and more crucially—of breath giving. An axiom in the breath science, which Sloterdijk is characteristically keen to inaugurate, is the following: “The breath is hence conspiratory, respiratory and inspiratory from the outset; as soon as breath exists, there are two breathing. With

the number two at the start [*wo die Zwei am Anfang steht*], it would be misguided to force any statement about which pole began in the interior of this dual. [. . .] Breath science [*Hauchwissenschaft*] can only get underway as a theory of pairs." (Sloterdijk 2011, p. 41). Buber similarly states: "In the beginning is relation." (Buber 1937, p. 18).

It is here that Buber also speaks of God as an "absolute person" (see Buber 1970, p. 181). As Welz points out, there is a paradox in the idea that God is both personal (and hence individualized as distinct from other persons) and ubiquitous (such as the notion of middle term suggests) (see Welz 2016, p. 62). Instead of resolving this tension, Welz convincingly suggests that we preserve the paradox and acknowledge both personal and im- or transpersonal traits of God. For Buber, it is in dialogue that persons are wholly persons. In line with this idea, Welz highlights prayer as a distinct form of dialogue with God (see also Welz 2019). The *address of prayer* is a form of *speaking to* God in which God is genuinely experienced as person. The *concepts of thinking*, on the contrary, is a form of *speaking about* God that cannot account for God's personhood but should, according to Welz, remain obligated to this mode of revelation (see Welz 2016, p. 78). Although Welz argues for the need of both first, second, and third person perspectives, there is thus a prevalence of the second person. I would like to counter-balance this prevalence a bit by pointing out that if God has both personal and impersonal traits, then we might not only have personal but also impersonal relations with God—and that these latter relations are perhaps no less important. It is true that our best linguistic option to convey them is to *speak about* God in the third person. This, however, does not entail that "impersonal relations" should be taken to be relations of the kind scientists (allegedly) has to the objects of their particular science. This is already clear when considering Levinas' notion of *illeity* (which Welz references (Welz 2016, p. 69)). Rather, in the same way that *prayer* is the form in which we enter into a personal relation with God, I would suggest that *literature* is the form in which we enter into an impersonal relation with God—provided that "literature" is understood here in an emphatic sense which I shall aim to elucidate with "the poetics of the impersonal."

"*Zusammenhang*" is translated into "context." I have opted for "cohesion" instead.

The same idea can be found in Heidegger's notion of "underway" (*Unterwegs*), which has the structure of *to . . . in*, e.g., *underway to thinking in thinking*, or *to language in language* (see Heidegger 1968, p. 45 and Heidegger 1977a, pp. 397–98). This implies a structural impossibility, namely that of *arriving* where you already are, and it is this impossibility that accompanies every step of the way as its eternal middle. This is also why the metaphor of the "middle" is often associated with the metaphor of a "ground" or a "source" from which everything arises or flows but which, itself, remains in the ground or at the origin and cannot by the force of any potentiality be brought into actuality. It is in this sense "impossible". We shall have occasion to return to this impossibility in the guise of Lispector's "impossible living of the *it*."

The second person perspective is privileged also by Welz, stating that "a second-personal approach to God has an added value" (Welz 2016, p. 80, see also Welz 2015, p. 132). For a defense of the irreducibility of the second person standpoint to that of the first person, see Darwall (2009). For a challenge to the second person from the third person and the impersonal, see Esposito (2018). Esposito's book provides a valuable overview of and commentary to central texts on the impersonal from Weil to Deleuze. It seems to me, though, that Esposito, in his broad critique of philosophies of the second person, is not sufficiently attentive to the fact that the experience of depersonalization is not foreign to the second person encounter (as the presentation of Kierkegaard's notion of love as middle term in this paper aims to show).

The commentary literature on the issue is vast and growing. To single out an attempt at recalibrating Heidegger's analysis, see Vogel (1994).

For an attempt with respect to the issue of the improper and the proper, see Lysemose, "The (Im)proper Community. On the Concept of *Eiendommelighed* in Kierkegaard." (Lysemose Forthcoming).

On the methodological function of angst in Heidegger, instructively compared to Husserl's methodological concepts, in particular *epoché* and reduction, see Merker (1988, pp. 153–93).

"*Vereinzelung*" is translated into "individualizing." I have opted for "singularization".

When comparing thinkers, we tend to assess whether they agree in their explicit statements and not so much whether they concur in the implicit metaphorical horizon, within which the questions arise to which their statements answer. Metaphorology, as conceived by Blumenberg, is the attempt to attend to this "substructure of thought" (Blumenberg 2010, p. 5).

The translator has opted for "excentric" rather than "eccentric", presumably to preserve the idea of standing *out* from the center. I shall do likewise.

I am alluding here, of course, to Jean-Luc Nancy's eponymous book.

Etymologically, the word "angst" is related to a Proto-Indo European root designating something that is narrow, tight, contracted and painful.

Money functions as a kind of universal equalizer, which Kierkegaard, throughout *Works of Love*, is careful not to mistake for the equality of love, whose universality is of a different kind (the kind, namely, that prohibits us from speaking of "kinds").

The translator translates "*Slægten*" with "human race".

This is why the unity, or univocity, of love is not opposed to multiplicity but, on the contrary, is the only way to not merely have finite differences but infinite differentiation.

There is a significant asymmetry here. *I* am too late to decide whether to respond or not, when *I* am called by God. On the strength of my responsive being, *I* find myself already to be there (the *hineni!* of Abraham). When *I* call God, though, *I* cannot force God to be there. On the contrary, to call for God is to cry out into an unfathomable absence (the *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?* of Christ). Perhaps this cry is also the cry of literature (which we will return to).

- 26 The etymology of the term which was adopted to designate Christian love, ἀγάπη, suggest an “affectionate greeting,” just as its
 27 Latin equivalent, *caritas*, can be recognized in the English term “dear” or the French “cher,” commonly used to address someone.
 28 This is why “responding to existence,” as Nancy calls it, implies a measureless—not to say irresponsible—responsibility (see
 29 Nancy 2003c).
 30 One could perhaps say that love entails a kind of *epoché* which, like in Husserl, does not mean that anything is lost—the world is
 31 still there—but rather that an attitude is changed.
 32 Kierkegaard makes a similar distinction (see Kierkegaard 1949, pp. 15–20).
 33 One may of course wonder how the mathematics works here. If a half-truth equals a total error, how much error does a
 34 quarter-truth then merit?
 35 This parting of the ways at the juncture of the concept of person is also theologically reflected since, for Buber, God is an “absolute
 36 person,” whereas for Weil, God is “impersonal” (see Buber 1970, p. 181 and Weil 1951, p. 179). In the same texts, however, Buber
 37 admits that: “The concept of personhood is, of course, utterly incapable of describing the nature of God; but it is permitted
 38 and necessary to say that God is *also* a person.” (p. 181). And Weil, for her part, concedes that: “The love of God ought to be
 39 impersonal as long as there has not been any direct and personal contact; otherwise it is an imaginary love. Afterward it ought to
 40 be both personal and impersonal again, but this time in a higher sense.” (p. 200). The investigation of the intricacies which these
 41 latter remarks invites must be reserved for another study (see, however, also note 10 of the present essay).
 42 The use of “anxiety” in the translation is replaced here by “angst”.
 43 This is extensively demonstrated by Inger Christensen in her great poem *It* (see Christensen 2005). As its title indicates, this poem
 44 revolves around *it* and thus around the third person which—as opposed to the first and second person—“... is indeed literally a
 45 ‘non-person’,” according to Benveniste (1971, p. 221). We will return to “the writing of *it*,” not in Christensen, though, but in
 46 Clarice Lispector.
 47 For Buber, poetry remains dialogical (see Mendes-Flohr 2014, pp.19–20). It is also noteworthy, though, that Buber’s “*ursprüngliche*
 48 *Einsicht*” into the principle of dialogue occurred in a theatre, and here in an oscillation between “the genuine spokenness of
 49 speech” and its being shattered by “‘noble’ recitation” (see Mendes-Flohr 2007, pp. 108–9).
 50 In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer writes, “... language has its true being only in dialogue.” (Gadamer 2004, p. 443).
 51 I impart also the original which more clearly contraposes “*Gespräch*” and “*Gesang*” with an “*aber*” that has been lost in translation:
 52 Viel hat von Morgen an, Seit ein Gespräch wir sind und hören voneinander Erfahren der Mensch; bald sind wir aber Gesang.
 53 Etymologists usually relate “person” to the semantics of “mask” and “false face.” It is also suggested that the word derives from
 54 “sounding through,” but this has not been settled, nor has it been settled whether the two meanings are somehow related. From
 55 the point of view of conceptual history, the trajectory of “person” is immense. Consider, for instance, its meanings and uses in
 56 grammar (as designating an important subset of pronouns), in jura (as bearer of rights and duties) and in theology (as translation
 57 of ὑπόστασις and, as such, operative in the interpretation of the trinitarian dogma).
 58 One does not need to know the person behind the works, as it were, in order to make this assessment, given that Lispector only
 59 lived when writing, as she once declared in the sole TV interview she ever gave (the interview was given to TV Cultura in São
 60 Paulo in 1977).
 61 Lispector wrote in Portuguese, which does not have this personal pronoun. Accordingly, she chose to use the English term “it” in
 62 her text.
 63 I am alluding, of course, to Kafka (1948, p. 210).
 64 Yet another title which Lispector had considered for her book was *Objeto gritante* (“screaming object”).

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