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"Isn't Art an Activity that Gives Things a Face?" Levinas on the Power of Art

Author: Benda Hofmeyer

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Abstract (E): French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas's thinking on art goes to the very heart of the debate concerning the possibility of "thinking (or expressing/expressive) pictures". Knowing whether or not art can give things a *face* would enable us to ascertain whether images are capable of exceeding themselves - of "articulating" a text, "uttering" a speech, or even "thinking" a thought. In this essay, I attempt to answer this question by way of a critical analysis of two of Levinas's pivotal essays on art: (1) "Reality and its Shadows" (1948); and (2) "The Transcendence of Words" (1949).

Abstract (F): La pensée esthétique du philosophe français Emmanuel Levinas va jusqu'au cour des débats sur la possibilité de penser (ou d'exprimer) l'image. L'interrogation sur la possibilité de l'art de donner un « visage » aux choses, est une façon d'explorer davantage la question de savoir si les choses sont capables d'aller au-delà de leurs propres limites -et partant d'articuler un texte, d'énoncer un acte de langage, voire de penser. Dans cet article, j'essaie de trouver une réponse à ces questions en faisant une lecture critique de deux essais clé de Levinas sur l'art: *La réalité et son ombre* (1948) et *La transcendance des mots. A propos des "Biffures" de Michel Leiris* (1949).

keywords: Radical passivity, the Other, detachment, image, statue

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Article

"Can things take on a face? Isn't art an activity that gives things a face? Isn't the façade of a house a house that is looking at us?" (IOF, 10).

These questions propounded by French philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas go to the very heart of the debate concerning the possibility of "thinking (or expressing/expressive) pictures". In other words, knowing whether or not art can give things a *face* - in the Levinasian sense of the word - would enable us to ascertain whether or not images, beyond merely showing something, are somehow capable of exceeding themselves, of "articulating" a text, "uttering" a speech, or even "thinking" a thought. My attempt to answer this question will consist in a critical analysis of two of Levinas's essays on art: (1) "Reality and its Shadows" (1948); and (2) "The Transcendence of Words" (1949). I shall start with a brief recapitulation of Levinas's notion of the face of the other. The face confronts us with an arresting paralysis, what Levinas refers to as "radical passivity". It is a paradoxical notion that is suggestive of an immobilizing encounter that facilitates authentic action. In this essay I shall attempt to ascertain to what extent art is invested with such power of simultaneous paralysis and empowerment.

What's in a Face?

Let us start by assessing what exactly Levinas means by the face. Set within the context of his ethical metaphysics, Levinas maintains that the face of the other person addresses me and imposes the responsibility I bear towards others. This encounter stops me in my selfish tracks, as it were, and makes me aware of my inherent responsibility towards others in need. How does the face of another succeed in affecting me in this way? According to Levinas, the encounter with the other person coincides with the "epiphany of the face", i.e. the face consists in a manifestation of God. In order to "embody" an expression of this nature and magnitude, the face clearly cannot be reduced to a person's facial expression. Instead, the face is "invisible" - irreducible to a person's appearance or representation (TI, 194/168). Precisely because the other defies all fixating representations it can show itself - "express" itself beyond what is seen or understood. This expression is a confrontation because it interrupts our reductive perception and representation of the other (cf. CPP. 20-21).

Herewith Levinas is countering a common misconception - our tendency to associate "face" with physical countenance i.e. literally a person's face, physiognomy or facial expression and by extension, character, social status, situatedness or context through which a person becomes visible and describable to us. In seeing the face, we assess and inadvertently reduce the other to fit into our own conceptual framework. Levinas's use of the face precisely defies this kind of reductive characterization or representation. It testifies to the fact that the other person never coincides with his/her appearance, representation, image or evocation. The face is that which in the countenance of the other *escapes* our gaze - that which is irreducible to his/her appearing. To be sure, the other is indeed visible but not reducible to what we see of him/her - more than the sum total of his/her parts, in other words (also see E & I, 89-90/85-86 and AE, 87-91/109-115).

As mentioned above, this negative description of the face also has a positive significance. The other can "show" itself precisely because s/he defies all fixating forms and images. It is an expression that is not dependent upon what is visible or comprehensible. The face expresses itself through the gaze and word of the other. Through the gaze of the eye and the sound of the word, the other breaks through his/her plastic form and presents his/her arresting alterity. It is arresting therein that it interrupts our egocentric and other-reductive nature (cf. CPP, 19).

The face, therefore, does not only look at me; it is a face-to-face confrontation. It is face by virtue of the fact that it *speaks* to me, which could be made manifest in factual speaking or otherwise (there are also other forms of speaking as is apparent in Levinas's insistence upon the expressive glance). When the other speaks I am "obliged" to listen. Levinas characterizes the expression of the face in and through the word as "teaching" - not in the form of (Socratic) pedagogics, which makes manifest what one is already latently aware of. The other's word teaches because it introduces something radically new (also see TI, 51/22; 219/194; 69/41; 99/73).

Radical Passivity: the Impact of the Face

The face has direct bearing on Levinas's notion of *radical passivity*. It is well known that the moral of Levinas's philosophy is the necessity to take responsibility for the other person. Levinas claims that taking care of others in need is not a free, rational decision but a fundamental responsibility that is inherently part of being human. When we encounter an orphan begging on the street our responsibility to help him/her is not a question of rational deliberation but an unavoidable duty that is pre-consciously felt. We are passively obligated before we can actively choose to help. Contrary to what one might think radical passivity is therefore not at odds with helping others (with altruistic action) but the necessary condition for ethical action. Levinas believes that we can only act once we have become re-sensitized - awakened through a kind of paralytic shock - paralysed into action, as it were. This paralytic shock is produced when the face of the other person turns to me and addresses me. Levinas argues that the needy other [the orphan, the widow, the stranger] incapacitates our normal selfish ways and this "radical passivity" enables us to recognize our inherent responsibility towards others in need.

Passivity in the radical sense is therefore a paradoxical notion: it precedes the passivity-activity opposition and functions as necessary condition for activity or agency. It is passive with regard to *itself*, and thus submits to itself as though it were an exterior power. Hence, radical passivity harbours within itself *a potentia* - a power or enabling force. In this sense, passivity evokes passion - not knowledge, not the rational realization of responsibility but (pre-conscious) passion - what Levinas (CPP, 62-63, footnote 4) refers to as "the primordial feeling" (cf. Hofmeyr 2007).

What happens in radical passivity might be best explained in terms of George Bataille's fascination with the photograph of the torture of a Chinese man. The image depicts a man being dismembered and disembowelled while being kept conscious with opium. This is betrayed by the expression on the sufferer's face - at once ecstatic and intolerable. What is important in this context is *not the violence* of the image but Bataille's reaction to it, i.e. its impact - something which I cannot explain by using one of Levinas's examples such as the destitute orphan. Over-exposure to street beggars has long since desensitized us. Bataille became obsessed with this image in which ecstasy and immortal pain collide. The excruciating suffering undergone by the vulnerable other caused him to become extremely upset. It distressed him so much that he became delirious, distressed to the point of

immobilization (Bataille 1986: 244). This obsession is the "substance" of Levinas's ethics: involuntary fascination, arresting paralysis that overcomes conscious thought. "One does not merely observe a scene here. For, when the other person is drained of all substance, when his reality *is* his erosion, then the borders between stage and audience are suspended and we are 'involved', 'elected', 'singularized'. The paralysis of the subject is an uncontrollable rapport with the other person that absolves all proper difference between Same and Other. It is an intimacy more profound than sympathy or empathy" (Wall 1999: 54).

Now, it is my contention that art has the power to effect such radical passivity, a contention echoed by Levinas's tentative but provocative proposal that art might be an activity that endows things with a face (IOF, 10). Like the face, I believe that art has the power to address us in a way that stops our indifference and inertia and enables us to act effectively. Moreover, it is the ethico-political responsibility of artistic and cultural producers to come up with strategies to engender others with such em-powering paralysis - a passivity that provokes a "pre-conscious awareness" of the power we have to act in a time in which Western civilization's indifference towards the needs of others is rapidly becoming a global phenomenon. In what follows I shall attempt to buttress this contention by way a critical analysis of Levinas's own testing of his hesitant hypothesis embodied in his essays, "Reality and its Shadow" (1948) and "The Transcendence of Words" (1949).

Putting my Freedom into Action: the Impact of Art?

Levinas begins his essay "Reality and its Shadow" by expounding upon the customary noble role ascribed to art. The function of art is expression and artistic expression rests on cognition. Artists, whether painters or musicians tell - they tell of the *ineffable*, i.e. they express what is too great or extreme to be described in words. "What common perception trivializes and misses, an artwork apprehends in its irreducible essence". Where common language falls short or gives up, a poem or painting speaks. Thus, writes Levinas, "an artwork is more real than reality and attests to the dignity of the artistic imagination, which sets itself up as *knowledge of the absolute*" (my emphasis). Levinas then goes on to say that "[c]riticism too professes this dogma. It enters into the artist's game with all the seriousness of science". According to him, criticism either seems to lead a parasitic existence by preying on difficult art or it substitutes itself for art: "[i]s not to interpret Mallarmé to betray him? Is not to interpret his work faithfully to suppress it? To say clearly what he says obscurely is to reveal the vanity of his obscure speech" (R&S, 130).

Criticism can indeed seem suspect and pointless. But, writes Levinas, it has its source in the mind of the spectator, listener or reader and is justified by virtue of the fact that it exists as a public's mode of comportment: "[n]ot content with being absorbed in aesthetic enjoyment, the public feels an irresistible need to speak. The fact that there might be something for the public to say, when the artist refuses to say about artwork anything in addition to the work itself, the fact that one cannot contemplate in silence, justifies the critic. He can be defined as the one that still has something to say when everything has been said, that can say about the work something else than that work" (*ibid.*). Levinas proposes - and here he presents as conditional

statement the argument that he would ultimately defend - that criticism would be justified or rehabilitated "[i]f art originally were neither language nor knowledge, if it were therefore situated outside of 'being in the world' ". Criticism would then "represent the intervention of the understanding necessary for integrating the *inhumanity* and *inversion* of art into human life and into the mind" (R&S, 131, my emphasis). Here we catch a first glimpse of what could be conceived as quite a derogatory conception of art - a conception of art that would run counter to any possibility of art aspiring to "face-like" expression.

According to Levinas, the artwork remains essentially disengaged from the world. It remains disengaged because of its completion: "[t]he completion, the indelible seal of artistic production by which the artwork remains essentially disengaged, is underestimated - that supreme moment when the last brush stroke is done, when there is not another word to add to or to strike from the text, by virtue of which every artwork is classical. Such completion is different from the simple interruption which limits language and the works of nature and industry". The artist stops because s/he has to; the work appears to be saturated and refuses to accept anything more. It is "completed" in the sense that it is closed off: "it does not give itself out as the beginning of a dialogue" (*ibid.*).

This completion and resultant seclusion from the world do not necessarily justify conceiving of art as art simply for art's sake, however. We have to come to understand the value of this disengagement. What would be the significance of disengaging oneself from the world? Does it imply going beyond the here and now down-below and to ascend to some higher plane of meaning such as the Platonic realm of Ideas? To go beyond would then entail communicating with ideas, i.e. understanding. Does not the function of art precisely lie in *not* understanding, in remaining obscure, asks Levinas. For him, the event in art has to do with its "commerce with the obscure, as a totally independent ontological event" - independent of understanding and cognition. Art "is the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow" (R&S, 132). Contrary to the classical conception of art, then, Levinas conceives of art as belonging to the order of concealment rather than that of revelation.

The most elementary procedure of art, according to Levinas, consists in substituting an image of the object for the object itself. This image does not suppose a conceptual relationship of understanding to the object, which would make the latter intelligible. Instead the image neutralizes this living conceptual relationship in which the object is grasped (intellectually). The well-known disinterestedness of artistic vision, explains Levinas, signifies above all a blindness to concepts.

Upon closer investigation, artistic vision might not be all that disinterested at all. Disinterest suggests the absence of inducement, personal involvement or inclination. It therefore implies freedom - something which an image does away with. An image does not engender an intellectual insight, nor does it entail Heidegger's "letting be" [*Sein-lassen*]. On the contrary, an " *image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity* " (R&S, 132, my emphasis). Face-to-face with a work of art we are therefore not free but immobilized - held fast by something addressing us. It is not about comprehending what is revealed but about being captivated by that which is precisely incomprehensible. Here Levinas seems to confirm in no uncertain terms our suspicion that an image might be invested with the power to induce radical passivity - the very impact of the face.

When it comes to images, then, it would be more appropriate to speak of interest than disinterestedness. "An image is interesting, without the slightest sense of utility, interesting in

the sense of *involving*, in the etymological sense [inter-esse = between-be(ings)] - to be *among* things which should have had only the status of objects" (R&S, 133). The subject is among things *as a thing*, as part of the spectacle - as in a dream.

Levinas conceives of this power possessed by images to "involve" or effect a "hold over us" in terms of musicality. Rhythm, according to him, does not so much designate an inner law of the poetic order as the way the poetic order affects us. Poetry's effect upon us can be described as an imposition upon us without that imposition being assumed - a passive being affected or a participation. "where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away. a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity" (*ibid.*, pp. 132-133). One is caught between consciousness and unconsciousness: stripped of one's power and prerogative to assume and yet present and aware: "a waking dream". This, Levinas maintains, is the captivation or incantation of poetry and music. For him, also images are musical therein that it possesses the same power: "*they impose themselves on us without our assuming them*". In this context then, rhythm and music(al) represent the reversal of power into participation.

For Levinas sound is the quality most detached from an object. In listening we do not call to mind or apprehend a "something" but are without concepts or associations. Images are musical in this sense, i.e. in the sense that they can effect a detachment from an object. Images are capable of invoking sensation free from all conception. Sensation is the hold that an image has over us. This is why both classical art - i.e. realist and representative art and therefore attached to objects - and modern works, which claim to be pure music, pure painting or pure poetry because they drive objects out of the world of sounds, colours and words, convey the true essence of art because they both break up representation. A represented object, according to Levinas, by the simple fact of becoming an image, is converted into a non-object. An image therefore brings about a dis-incarnation of reality (R&S, 134).

This detachment that the image effects from reality or the object, which Levinas insists upon, does not however mean that he somehow disavows the obvious resemblance with the represented object. An image differs from a symbol, a sign, or a word precisely by the very way it refers to its object: resemblance. A sign is "pure transparency" because it opens our eyes to what is signified, whereas the image is opaque. Resemblance supposes that thought stops on the image itself, which consequently supposes a certain opacity of the image. Levinas insists that resemblance is not to be understood as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, "but as the very movement that engenders the image" (R&S, 135). That would make reality not only what it is, but also its double, its shadow, its image. Being (what is) is not only itself, it is also the surplus that escapes itself. There is always a "more", a remainder that cannot entirely be absorbed or enclosed by what one is. "which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face, alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness" (*ibid.*). According to Levinas, then, the *face* is equivalent to that *remainder* that shadows one's being; the face thus fulfils the same function as the *image* - as reality's shadow. There is thus a duality in a person, in his/her being. "It is what it is and it is a stranger to itself, and there is a relationship between these two movements". The person is both him/herself *and* his/her image (face). An image, then, can be understood an allegory of being in the sense that it reveals or captures the hidden meaning, the remainder that evades the concrete features.

It is at this juncture that we start detecting a different, more disparaging tone in Levinas's conceptualization of art. When it comes to art, he explains, our consciousness of the representation lies in knowing that the object is not there. The image of an object (in a painting, e.g.) does not serve as a symbol and in the absence of the object does not force its presence, but by its presence insists on the object's absence. The image fully occupies the object's place to mark its removal, "as though the represented object *died*, were *degraded*, were *disincarnated* in its own reflection" (R&S, 136, my emphasis).

Every image, according to Levinas is in the end a statue - a stoppage of time, or a delay behind itself. A statue realizes the paradox of an instant that endures without a future. Within the life, or rather death of a statue, an instant endures infinitely. "the *Mona Lisa* will smile eternally. Eternally the smile of the *Mona Lisa* about to broaden will not broaden. An eternally suspended future floats around the congealed position of a statue like a future forever to come. The imminence of the future lasts before an instant stripped of the essential characteristic of the present, its evanescence. It will never have completed its task as a present, as though reality withdrew from its own reality and left it powerless" (R&S, 138). In this situation the present can take on nothing; as such it is an impersonal and *anonymous* instant.

It is not that the artist failed to give the statue life. The life of an artwork quite simply does not go beyond the limit of an instant. The artwork would be flawed or unsuccessful if it did not contain that aspiration for life - but it is only an aspiration. "The artist has given the statue a lifeless life, a derisory life which is not master of itself, a caricature of life.. [It] does not hold in its own hands the strings of the puppet it is" (R&S, 138). A statue is tragic because it embodies its eternally suspended future - the power of freedom congeals into impotence. a nightmare!

When it comes to the non-plastic arts such as music, literature, theatre and cinema, the same rule applies: the time apparently introduced into the images that appear in these non-plastic arts do not alter their predetermined fate. The characters in a book are committed or is it *condemned* to the infinite repetition of the same acts. They can be narrated because their being resembles itself, doubles itself and immobilizes. Concepts, on the other hand, cannot be contained within such a fixity. They initiate life, offer reality to our powers, invite a dialectic. The characters in a book, however, are shut up, captives forever. Their history is never finished; it continues without advancing. They are condemned to act out their fate despite their freedom (R&S, 139).

According to Levinas, the fact that humanity has provided itself with art reveals in time the uncertainty of time's continuation and something like a death doubling the impulse of life. The artist's world's great obsession - captured in the petrification of the instant in the heart of duration - is the insecurity of a being which has a presentiment of fate (R&S, 140). For Levinas, the eternally frozen instant accomplished in art is "the meanwhile", never finished, still enduring - something *inhuman* and *monstrous*.

Criticism: Art's Salvation?

Art, according to Levinas's conceptualization, is therefore essentially disengaged. As such it constitutes in a world of initiative and responsibility, a dimension of evasion or escapism. Levinas is herewith aligning himself with the most general and commonplace experience of aesthetic enjoyment. He explains that this commonplace experience precisely underlines the value of art: "[a]rt brings into the world the obscurity of fate, but it especially brings the irresponsibility that charms as a lightness and grace. It frees" (R&S, 141). It frees us from the effort required by science, philosophy and action.

Apart from a value, Levinas also associates this disengaged and escapist nature of art with *irresponsibility*. From this point of view, the value of the beautiful becomes relative. "There is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of *feasting during a plague* " (R&S, 142, my emphasis). For Levinas, then, art is not committed by virtue of being art. Precisely for this reason it cannot ever constitute the supreme value of civilization.

There is one way to rectify this, according to Levinas. What he calls "philosophical criticism" is capable of integrating the inhuman work of the artist into the human world. Criticism already detaches it from its irresponsibility by envisaging its technique. It treats the artist as a person at work. By tracing his/her influences, criticism links the disengaged artist to real history. It goes deeper than that, however. Criticism also addresses the artistic event as such i.e. the obscuring of being in images, that stopping of being in the meanwhile. The artist moves in the world of shadows, as though he lacks the force to arouse realities. The immobile statue has to be mobilized and made to speak. The task and value of criticism is to link the fixed world of art to the intelligible world - to reintroduce life and time into art.

For Levinas, that which introduces true time and significance is the relation with the other person - a relation which is no longer limited to artistic or aesthetic categories but that constitutes ethics (R&S, 143). In short, criticism has the power to re-engage art because it signifies a primordial relation with the other person.

While in "Reality and its Shadow", the image immobilizes its object - eternally stultifying it in the meanwhile - another essay of Levinas's entitled, "The Transcendence of Words" written one year later, qualifies the particular effect of art in terms of silence: "[b]y creating beauty out of nature, art calms and quietens it. All the arts, even those based on sound, create silence" (ToW, 147). This silence is not neutral and harmless, however. It "might be the result of a bad conscious, or it may weigh heavy, or cause dread". It is therefore accompanied by the need to enter into a relation with someone - what Levinas calls "the necessity of critique".

Levinas cites the example of the stranded Robinson Crusoe, who finds himself "in a magnificent tropical landscape, where he has continued to maintain civilization through his tools and his morality and his calendar." Despite all of this "he still finds in his encounter with Man Friday the greatest event of his insular life. It is the moment when finally a man who speaks replaces the inexpressible sadness of echoes" (p. 148). To really hear a sound, we need to hear a *word*. Pure sound, for Levinas, is therefore, the word (ToW, 148).

Levinas qualifies the relation with someone as "critique" because the other does not confirm my world but interrupts it. Levinas explains that sound and "the consciousness termed hearing" break with the self-complete world of vision and art. Because of its disruptive force, Levinas conceives of sound as "a ringing, clanging scandal". In vision form is wedded to content in such a way as to appease it, but in sound the perceptible quality overflows so that form can no longer contain its content.

The presence of the other person (the Other/ *Autre*), Levinas explains, is a presence that teaches us something; this is why the word, as a form of education, amounts to more than the experience of reality - it adds something that was not there before, that cannot be deduced as if an inherent part of reality. The use of the word wrenches experience out of its aesthetic self-sufficiency. Criticism as the word of a living being speaking to another living being brings the image in which art revels back to the fully real being. The language of criticism takes us out of our dreams (ToW, 148).

"The act of expression", according to Levinas, "makes it impossible to remain within oneself (*en soi*) or keep one's thought for oneself (*pour soi*) and so reveals the inadequacy of the subject's position in which the ego has a given world at its disposal. To speak is to interrupt my existence as a subject and a master". The subject who speaks does not situate the world in relation to himself, nor situate herself at the heart of her own spectacle like the artist. Instead s/he is situated in relation to the Other (*Autre*). "This privilege of the other person ceases to be incomprehensible once we admit that the first fact of existence is neither being in-itself (*en soi*) nor being for-itself (*pour soi*) but being *for the other* (*pour l'autre*)" (ToW, 149). Put differently, the spoken word directed towards the other person produces transcendence by shattering his/her world of self-sufficiency dominated by egocentric pursuits. For Levinas, the artist - situating herself at the heart of her own spectacle - is firmly entrenched in this egoist and therefore inadequate existence. This is what makes critique essential.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to return to the link I have tried to establish at the beginning of this essay between "thinking (or expressing/expressive) pictures" and the Levinasian conception of the face.

As we have seen, Levinas does indeed suggest that art can take on a face as is evident in the quotation cited on the first page: "[c]an things take on a face? Isn't art an activity that gives things a face? Isn't the facade of a house a house that is looking at us?" Having posed what

could easily be considered as rhetorical questions, Levinas immediately sows a seed of doubt, by backtracking on his own intuition without giving much by way of explanation: "[t]he analysis conducted thus far is not enough to give the answer. Yet, we wonder whether rhythm's personal gait - fascinating, magic - is not art's substitute for sociality, the face, and speech" (IOF, 10).

Taking on a face effectively implies the ethical address - the way of speaking that is a teaching, an interruption of the self-enclosed world of the addressee. That is the way in which criticism supplements art - drawing it out of its self-enclosed world of escapist beauty into the real world of engagement. At first, Levinas seems to confirm my own hypothesis that art is potentially more than just that, that it can - by itself - bring about a radical passivity: "[a]n image marks a hold over us rather than our initiative, a fundamental passivity" (R&S,132). It became clear, however, that aesthetics or art as such in Levinas is inferior to ethics. In fact, for Levinas everything is subordinate to ethics; ethics is *first* philosophy. The face in Levinas belongs to the realm of ethics. Art, on the other hand, is something horrible, "something inhuman and monstrous [*quelque chose d'inhumain et de monstrueux*]" (*ibid.*, p. 141) because it is powerless, because it cannot go beyond, because it cannot end. Art is disengaged, self-enclosed and therefore irresponsible. For Levinas, criticism is art's only possible source of rectification. This might be a productive course to investigate if we separate it from the ethical significance it has for him and take it in a strictly ontological sense. In this regard, Boris Grois (2007: 77) argues that artworks lack vitality, energy and health: "[t]hey are genuinely sick and helpless - in the museum a spectator has to be led to the artwork, as hospital workers might take a visitor to see a bedridden patient. It is no coincidence that the word 'curator' is etymologically related to 'cure'. Curating is curing. The process of curating cures the image's powerlessness, its incapacity to present itself. The artwork needs external help; it needs an exhibition and a curator to become visible". In an analogous fashion, it could therefore be argued that criticism in Levinas fulfils the same function as curating in Groys. Left to its own devices, therefore, art will not fulfil its inherent potential of engaging with the world, perhaps even changing it.

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After having completed her PhD on the work of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Emmanuel Levinas at the Radboud University Nijmegen (NL), Benda Hofmeyer conducted research at the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht (NL) on the political dimension of art and cultural production. Her current post doctoral research at the University of Pretoria (ZA) is focussed on the conditions of possibility of ethical agency in Levinas and Kant. She is the recipient of numerous prestigious scholarships and awards (the most recent of which is a Veni-grant) and has published in a variety of fields including contemporary Continental philosophy, political and moral philosophy, art and cultural production.