

Journée d'études / Expert Seminar

Levinas, nouvelles approches / Levinas, New Perspectives

Le 13 novembre / November the 13th
Université d'Anvers / University of Antwerp
Stadscampus D 017

Programme

- 09.30** **Accueil et introduction / Welcome and introduction by Arthur Cools**
- 10.00** **Structuration subjective, vers la fin du moi avec Levinas et Maldiney
(Flora Bastiani, Université de Toulouse)**
- 11.00** **Levinas, Politics, and the Face of the Other Animal
Caluwé Goedele (University of Essex)**
- 12.00** **The Other Animal. Shame in Derrida's and Levinas' Phenomenology of the
Other
(Geoffrey Dierckxsens, Universiteit Antwerpen)**
- Lunch**
- 14.00** **L'œuvre, le temps et la mort. Bloch, Kosík et Levinas
Jan Bierhanzl (University of Prague)**
- 15.00** **Levinas for Historians
(Anton Froeyman, Universiteit Gent)**
- 16.00** **Resuming Encounters. Sensibility for Asymmetry
Erik Hagoort (Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen)**

17.00 Clôture / Final remarks

Participation est gratuite / Attendance is free

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Structuration subjective, vers la fin du moi avec Levinas et Maldiney

(Flora Bastiani, Université de Toulouse)

Cette communication tendra à ouvrir un dialogue entre la pensée éthique d'E. Levinas et l'analyse de l'existence de H. Maldiney. Si tous deux sont considérés comme des phénoménologues, alors que Levinas s'est consacré à l'analyse de l'état du sujet dans son rapport avec l'altérité, Maldiney s'est tourné quant à lui vers l'altérité impossible à laquelle se heurte, selon lui, les malades psychotiques. Ainsi, tandis que Maldiney se concentre sur les cas cliniques et la psychopathologie, Levinas détaille les modalités subjectives, loin des particularités psychiques, en formulant les éléments d'une éthique théorique. Cependant, aussi éloignées que soient ces deux manières de penser l'humain, cette intervention proposera de les faire se rencontrer sur un thème commun, qui apparaît crucial, celui de l'état critique.

Cette étude considérera que les propositions de Levinas et de Maldiney sont traversées par un questionnement de l'état traumatique. Il s'agira notamment d'évoquer l'ébranlement de l'illusion d'une identité du moi, que le traumatisme engage. Cette démarche prendra sa source dans l'expérience de la rupture du supposé sens du monde et du moi, l'expérience du traumatisme chez Levinas, et celle de la crise chez Maldiney.

Dans l'article « De l'existant », Maldiney évoque ainsi Totalité et Infini : « Rencontrer c'est se trouver en présence d'un autre, dont nous ne possédons pas la formule et qu'il nous est impossible de ramener au même, à l'identité du projet du monde dont nous sommes l'ouvreur ». Cette description précise ce qui unit ces deux philosophies : penser le bouleversement de la rencontre de l'autre, en passant par une réflexion sur la signification de l'humanité. La relation à ce qui ne se laisse pas soumettre, à ce qui ne se laisse pas déchiffrer ni pénétrer – en des termes communs aux deux philosophes : l'événement de l'autre – intervient comme un déclencheur ; et dans les deux cas, crise ou traumatisme, s'en suit une mutation profonde de l'existence subjective.

À travers ce changement impulsé par la venue de l'extériorité se dévoile une humanité fragile, imparfaite, dont les lignes de failles ne se révèlent qu'au moment du choc. Cette humanité est suspendue à l'instant où s'ouvre devant la subjectivité une dimension imprévisible, alors encore indécidée : comme dans une greffe du cœur, à l'instant interminable où les soignants espèrent le premier battement de cette nouvelle vie. De même Maldiney et Levinas s'interrogent face au renversement radical produit par l'événement : que deviendra le sujet ?

L'œuvre, le temps et la mort. Bloch, Kosík et Levinas

Jan Bierhanzl (University of Prague)

Nous proposerions dans cet exposé de suivre le parallèle entre, d'un côté, la critique que fait Kosík du concept de souci chez Heidegger et du rapport entre le temps et le travail que cette critique implique, et de l'autre, la critique que fait Levinas de la façon dont Heidegger pense le temps à partir de la mort. Il n'est pas sans intérêt pour notre propos que la tentative levinassienne de penser la mort à partir du temps (et qui se réfère explicitement à Ernst Bloch et à sa pensée de l'utopie concrète) s'achève par le concept d'œuvre. Dans la mesure où la temporalité de l'œuvre, qui signifie un renoncement à être le contemporain de l'aboutissement, implique une sorte d'exterritorialité par rapport à la mort, nous serons également amenés à poser la question du sacrifice (l'œuvre comme être-au-delà-de-ma-mort chez Levinas, „Le jeune homme et la mort“ de Kosík, le „héros rouge“ chez Bloch: la seule „espèce d'homme qui s'engage sur le chemin de la mort sans s'encombrer de quelque forme de consolation que ce soit“).

The Other Animal. Shame in Derrida's and Levinas' Phenomenology of the Other

(Geoffrey Dierckxsens, University of Antwerp)

Throughout history philosophers have often examined the question of shame. For example, Plato argues in the *Charmides* that shame (*aidos*) is typically human (160e, 3-5). In *A Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume, to give another example, thinks of shame in terms of a moral sentiment. More recently, philosophers argue in favor of the intrinsic moral nature of shame. In analytical philosophy in particular, such theories as Nussbaum's (Nussbaum 2001) or Deonna, Rodogno, and Teroni's (Deonna, Rodogno and Teroni 2011), investigate the nature of shame and its moral qualities. In my paper, I will draw on Derrida's and Levinas' ideas of shame. I will not raise the question whether and to what extent shame is part of our (moral) human nature, but instead whether and to what extent shame is an affect we feel exclusively toward human beings or, alternatively, also toward other animals?

This question turns up in particular in Derrida's and Levinas' analyses of shame. In *The Animal that Therefore I Am* Derrida opens the first chapter with a peculiar experience (Derrida 2008). As Derrida recounts, he cannot help feeling ashamed when standing naked in the bathroom when his cat walks in, and when being suddenly exposed in his nakedness to the gaze of this animal. Derrida uses this example to introduce his critique of Levinas that the animal is, like our neighbor, an "Other" who has an ethical significance and calls for responsibility. Although he suggests here that we feel shame toward non-human animals, Derrida does not elaborate explicitly on the question whether or not we feel shame toward animals. In fact, when Derrida engages in his critique of Levinas on the ethical relation to the other in a later chapter of his book, the question of shame has completely disappeared. Levinas, on the other hand, has elaborated in his early work on the subject of shame in relation to the Other (Levinas 2003). Yet he does not treat the question of animals as such. The question arises however when John Llewelyn ask Levinas in an interview whether the other is exclusively human or also possibly another animal (Levinas 1988). Levinas admits that he 'cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called "face" and that he does not know whether animals have a face. Moreover, it is not immediately clear from Levinas' analysis of shame in *On Escape* whether the Other is our neighbor, another human being, or the Other with capital 'O,' i.e., the otherness or transcendence of being as such. Indeed, who is the other toward which we feel ashamed? Is he or she necessarily a human being, or also possibly another animal, or rather the otherness that is the anonymity of being, as Levinas suggests in his analysis of shame? In my paper I will examine these questions, and investigate in particular Levinas' phenomenological analyses of shame in *On Escape* and in *Totality and Infinity*, and whether these analyses reveal that the other to whom one feels ashamed is strictly human.

Levinas, Politics, and the Face of the Other Animal

Caluwé Goedele (University of Essex)

Levinas's philosophy is humanist; the Other is expressly human. Recently, Levinasian scholars have tried to argue that this need not be the case and have tried to open up the space in Levinas's ethics for an ethical obligation towards non-human animals. One of the ways this has been done is by demonstrating that other animals have a face in the Levinasian sense of the word.

In this paper, I will discuss two such accounts: one by Peter Atterton and one by Barbara Jane Davy. I will then discuss Diane Perpich's critique of such accounts in general, namely that they presuppose a direct link between the encounter with the face of the Other and an ethical obligation towards that specific Other. She criticizes them for not taking into account what Levinas calls politics. Rather than showing that other animals can be said to have a face, Perpich argues that the inclusion of other animals in Levinas's ethics should be approached as a political question within an already established human society.

I will argue against Perpich that even if we approach the inclusion of other animals as a political question, this does not in itself invalidate the argument for animal faces. Nonetheless, I will show, we cannot ignore Levinas's account of politics if we want to make sense of animal others, due to the importance of human concepts and language in the situation of Levinasian politics.

Levinas for Historians

(Anton Froeyman, University of Ghent)

In this talk I will investigate what it means to think of a Levinasian way of writing history. Levinas did not think highly of writing history, calling it (among others) an activity that prefers the external appearance of actions over their inner meaning, and a form of judgment that condemns the other by means of a trial in absentia. Nevertheless, he also refers to the other from the past as 'the third' (similar to the absent other in politics or jurisprudence), and states that we can establish a genuine relation with the other from the past through the other's 'traces' in the present. Hence, Levinas' objections against the writing of history are not based on an a priori argument about the status of the other from the past, but rather on a contingent situation, namely on what Levinas believes that historians do.

In the remainder of this talk, I will present the argument (based on my book in press, *History, Ethics and the Recognition of the Other*) that it is indeed possible to think of a Levinasian way of writing history, a way that does justice to the ethical nature of our relationship with the other from the past. Furthermore, I will also claim that such a way already exists, namely in the form of 'microhistory'. Microhistory is a current in history-writing that arose in the second half of the 1970's, and that has known considerable popularity in the 80's and 90's. Microhistory focused on small events, and particular, unique individuals, rather than on the large-scale structures or the famous people of history. I will argue that the way these historians write about the people from the past shows quite a lot of Levinasian traits. They are distrustful of general structures and explanations, and assert the uniqueness and freedom of the individual. They also recognise the otherness of the other, by refusing to put the people they write about into conceptual or epistemic straight-jackets, and by letting the other retain a sense of mystery. Finally, they also display a great amount of care and concern for the other: their histories are engaged histories, in which they engage with the people from the past rather than merely describe them. In this talk, I will illustrate this by using a number of quotations, showing how microhistorians use several different literary techniques to evoke a sense of concern and connection with the people from the past, while at the same time taking care not to reduce the other from the past to these literary 'tricks'.

Resuming Encounters. Sensibility for Asymmetry

(Erik Hagoort, KASKA)

Through my doctoral research in the arts I explore the artistic potential of one of the main terms of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas: asymmetry. His philosophical term serves as the trigger for my artistic research. During this seminar I will explain my findings and will discuss how Levinas's term asymmetry can have a critical as well as a constructive role for art of encounter.

My work forms part of a recent strand of art practices, in which encounters are central. In these social practices artists work with form, content and direction of encounter. They do so in ways, that express their basic ideas and presumptions of what an encounter is and how an encounter works.

Reciprocity is such a basic presumption. Not only in the sense of mutuality (do ut des = I give so that you give back), but also in the sense of an "economy" of reciprocal relations in which we are caught up (do quia mihi datum est = I give because I am given to). By strategically applying this reciprocity artists try to transform the conventional, hierarchical separation between the artist who gives and the audience that receives, into a situation in which, in the words of Michael Brenson, the participants are all at once giver and receiver, producer and consumer, artist and audience, or in the words of the representative of relational aesthetics Nicolas Bourriaud, the artwork embraces the whole situation. Through this reciprocity the contributions by the participants to such a social art work can resonate and correlate.

My effort is to sense what does not fit in this all embracing, correlating dynamics of the reciprocal art work. Levinas articulates how in an encounter a truly adventurous (although not necessarily comfortable) asymmetry can occur. I may stand in for you or I may turn my back on you, but this movement from me to you or away from you doesn't have to correlate with your movement to me, or away from me. This asymmetry occurs within, but is not consumed by reciprocity. Asymmetry makes an opening possible in reciprocity.

Other than Levinas, for whom asymmetry primarily has a moral weight, I am interested in the artistic dimension of asymmetry. How can asymmetry produce unforeseen ways to encounter, speak and act? In my work I invite others to join me in conditioned conversations on the basis of motives that are free adaptations or modulations of Levinasian asymmetry.