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Title: On Violent Ground

The naturalization of violence as decision in Heidegger, Jünger and Malick.

Abstract:

This text follows two Heideggerian influenced narratives that can be seen to site violence as the locus for the experience of freedom. Jünger's *heroic realism* perverts Heidegger's metaphysical theory of language and produces an image of violence as an everyday experience for individual autonomy, whilst Terence Malick's film, *The Thin Red Line* works to recreate the image of violence as a ubiquitous and metaphysical territory. In this text I question the status of violence as the normative locale for subjective decision in Jünger's political literature, where violence features as the technology of war, and on the other hand, in Malick's war film, where nature takes on the properties of the ethical experience. From this I continue to analyze the politics of the production and authorship of these narratives, asking if they re-invite the essential transcendental problem around violence and language that Heidegger originally poses.

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What is most thought-provoking, then, could be something lofty, perhaps even the highest thing there is for man, provided man still is the being who is insofar as he thinks, thinks in that thought appeals to him because his essential nature consists in memory, the gathering of thought. And what is most thought-provoking - especially when it is man's highest concern - may well be also what is most dangerous. Or do we imagine that a man could even in small ways encounter the essence of truth, the essence of beauty, the essence of grace - without danger?

What Is Called Thinking?

Martin Heidegger¹

This text follows two Heideggerian influenced narratives that site violence as the locus for the experience of freedom. Here, I examine how Ernst Jünger's *heroic realism* perverts Heidegger's theory of language and produces an image of violence as a natural everyday and yet epic experience through the technology of war. Following this, I look at Terence Malick's film, *The Thin Red Line* as it works to recreate the image of nature as a ubiquitous, violent and metaphysical territory – the jungle of Guadalcanal. In these narratives of non-deterministic and deterministic violence; Jünger's rhetoric of active-nihilism and Malick's manufacturing of a mutually "epic" and naturalized "human nature" and "nature", I analyse the politics of the production and authorship of these narratives. Both manufacture a rhetoric that coincides active and passive conceptions of agency. More to the point, Heidegger's theory of a mutually active-passive structure of decision privileges an aesthetics of violence as the experience of this moment of decision in practice. By considering the work of Heidegger, Jünger and Malick I assess the attempts to negate *a priori* or ontological grounds for subjective decision, where problematically, we see that for example,

Jünger identifies and maintains metaphysics as a technological violence of trauma, and death. Accordingly, this identification of a violent ground proposes the legacy of absolute finitude to be *active-nihilism* - the creation of language as “thing” - and a tool for “becoming”, specifically orientated around negative or violent performances. It is here that I ask if the practices of thinking or aestheticizing transcendence block non-metaphysical avenues of language and thought.² This is key to how we understand decision as contingent and democratic, because if transcendence ends in politics, then we can ask how useful these narratives are to the processes of understanding decision. Specifically, I question if these narratives re-invite the essential transcendental problem around violence and language that Heidegger originally poses.

Heidegger: Being and Appearance

First let us examine exactly how this transcendental problem of violence is manifest in Heidegger’s thinking. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger contests the orthodoxy of a separation between being and appearance theorised in traditional metaphysics. He writes that “being” and “appearance” have “a hidden unity” and that this inner connection is grasped fully “only if we understand being in an equally primordial, i.e. Greek, sense,” for which “authentic being” is rooted in the historical and as such, the “essential”. For the Greeks “appearing is the very essence of being” and from this Heidegger forms a connection between history and authentic Dasein, where this “essential” experience is intrinsically tied to a specifically “noble” form of language. For Heidegger, “being is the fundamental attribute of the noble individual and of nobility” and Dasein is understood through its historical relation: “the supreme possibility of a human being, as fashioned by the Greeks, through glory and glorification.”³

The work of becoming and the understanding of historical permanence are specific to a particular genre of the glorified, noble and heroic individual, in that the daily project of authentic Dasein is fraught with danger and demands the most skilled *techné*. Heidegger’s conception of essence as both a glorified and naturalized discourse poses a problem regarding the understanding of the

relationship between being and appearance and in turn summons an inquiry into the relationship between a specifically noble and lofty poetic language and the experience of being.

For the Greeks glory was not something additional which one might or might not obtain; it was the mode of highest being. For moderns glory has long been nothing more than celebrity and as such a highly dubious affair, an acquisition tossed about and distributed by the newspapers and the radio - almost the opposite of being. If for Pindar to glorify was the essence of poetry and the work of the poet was to place in the light, it was not because the notion of light played a special role for him but solely because he thought and composed poetry as a Greek, which is to say that he stood in the appointed essence of being.⁴

Consequently, for Heidegger, “appearing” is the work of a historical individual, an individual who experiences his/her own rootedness in history, as essential to his/her being in general. And, it is the motif of the hero that is intrinsically linked to Heidegger’s definition of “authentic history.”⁵ Heidegger translates “Glory” through the Greek term *doxa* – “I show myself, appear, enter into the light” wherein the “essence of Being is unconcealment.”⁶ Through identifying this almost primordial connection between authenticity and language, Heidegger identifies a great age of Greek beginnings, a time before a superficial modernism forced a radical disunity between being and appearance. For Heidegger, the Greeks provide the alternative to the work of modernity, in that they lived out this “natural” unity between being and appearance, where “the gods and the State, the temples and the tragedy, the games and philosophy; all this in the midst of appearance, beset by appearance, but also taking it seriously, knowing its power.”⁷

This Greek conception of appearance as essence underscores Heidegger’s theory of historical permanence and endurance. This rootedness gives form to a *techné*, a practice of knowledge in that Dasein acknowledges and lives out his noble existence to “form world”, or to practice the task of appearance. Crucially the work of “forming”, “appearing” and “becoming” are subject to the

techné of both writing history and being subject to it, in itself the task of “forming world”: “History as happening is an acting and being acted upon which pass through the present, which are determined from out of the future, and which take over the past.”⁸ These two conceptions of appearance as language and being as thought are understood as under a precarious unity where, as I quoted above, we must “take appearance seriously” and “know its power,” for it has a legitimacy that exceeds itself as a “superficial” image.

Here we are faced with aesthetics as having a concrete effect in the political and as something that is produced within it. However, Heidegger is keen to remind us that the task of knowing appearance is still to be fulfilled. I think this point is crucial to Heidegger’s thinking and also to this essay, since we are directly presented with the problem of how to know appearance and how to undertake the task of knowledge. It is here that we can ask if this is a philosophical and metaphysical problem; our attempt to think through the problems of appearance, expose the fissure between appearance and reality. In light of this I will discuss the structures by which we understand being and appearance and how the problem, task or passion of/for knowledge is articulated by the various figures of thought produced by Heidegger’s thinking as a philosophico-political rhetoric.

In his text “Transcendence Ends in Politics” Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Heidegger’s philosophical project is intrinsically linked to a political problem of identification. Dealing most specifically with the *Rectoral Address* (at the University of Freiberg in 1933), “The Self Assertion of the German University” he quotes Heidegger:

If there is to be a science, and if it is to be *for us* and *through us*, under what conditions can it then truly exist? Only if we again place ourselves under the power of the beginning of our spiritual historical being (Dasein). This beginning is the setting out (*Aufbruch*) of Greek philosophy. Here, for the first time, Western man raises himself up from a popular base and, *by virtue of his language*, (my emphasis) stands up to *the totality of what is*,

which he questions and conceives (*begreift*) as the being that it is. ("Self Assertion," pp. 471-472)

This extract depicts an essentially Nietzschean inspired language of knowledge as the will to power, where crucially, it is "by virtue of his language" that Dasein achieves essence or power. Heidegger's solution to the problem of finite transcendence for Dasein is therefore based in an experience with language. Lacoue-Labarthe observes that, "This solution...is, as in Nietzsche, paradoxically of a Winkelmannian type: "We must imitate the ancients to make ourselves inimitable"."⁹ Further reflecting upon the political difficulties in Heidegger's historical project, Lacoue-Labarthe concludes that this "invention" or *work as knowledge* required by Dasein to create a "future history" is "the determination of ... (or an imitation of) what has taken place without taking place, of a past that is not past but still to come, of a beginning so great that it dominates every future and remains still to be effected: in short, of an irruption that must be wrenched out of its oblivion or its more-than-millennial reserve through the most extreme violence of combat."¹⁰ This describes violence both as a necessary and functioning tool, an object by which to achieve and identify autonomy, and as a (universal) violence that always already marks Dasein's history and future. Crucially, Lacoue-Labarthe's description of what appears to be both an active and a passive violence sets out the central thematic for this text as laid out in my introduction. In brief, I deliberate the writing of specific identifications of violence which both institutionalize violence as a universal and characterize subjective autonomy with violence. This local critique situates my central question in this text, which takes up the problem raised here by Lacoue-Labarthe: namely, a critique of the violence, force and/or authority by which the identification of violence as autonomy is both assumed and asserted.

Heidegger's particularly violent and heroic motif of Dasein can be seen to delineate a metaphysical experience of or within language, but which retains a refusal to give language an external ontological ground. However, as we see in this text's opening quote, this experience of being to and for language can be seen to bind itself not to language in general, but to specific

realms within language, particularly that of danger and risk. This unstable basis of language, read through Heidegger's philosophy, presents a politics that determines a quasi-transcendental subject, where Dasein's autonomy is related to a use of one's power to think within language, but also in exposing oneself to the risk of the world, fate, spirit and history. This describes violence both as a necessary and functioning tool, an object by which to achieve and identify autonomy, and as a (universal) violence that always already marks Dasein's history and future.¹¹ Significantly, it is violence that characterises the power or essence of Dasein both in the use of language and in this exposure to it. Violence, in Heidegger's philosophy and politics therefore hovers in a dark space at the limits of identifications, *between* the practice of thinking and the representational space of poetry.

Looking at Lacoue-Labarthe's response to Heidegger's *Rectoral Address*, three things are brought into consideration: First, that the act of thinking is deeply associated with combative action, a result of Heidegger's mapping of Dasein's need to enjoy an identification with a transcendental-style history and fate. Secondly, and following from that, what is revealed is the problem of identifying the experience of "essence" with this unknown territory, where accordingly, violence is not only the procedural strategy by which to achieve essence, but violence, risk and danger, in themselves risk becoming representative of the achievement of power. Third; what is raised is the problem of the means, or the authority by which such identifications are made. This in turn raises the problem of the politics of the identifications of such authorities.

Moving from Heidegger's "Rectoral Address" to his later series of lectures collected in *On the Way to Language* Heidegger writes more specifically on what type of language is best identified with approaching essence and also the means by which this experience within language is organised. The motif of heroic Dasein no longer centralizes Heidegger's thinking in this reconstituted ontology. However, again, the language of lofty poetry and ultimates is effective as a space in which links power to autonomy, not because heroic Dasein is "willed" into existence, but moreover because this language of poetry and power now comes close to a passive *ethos* of

“letting entities be.”¹² A quasi-conscious state is now Dasein’s territory of Being. From *On the Way to Language*:

It must remain open whether we are capable properly of entering into this poetic experience. There is the danger that we will overstrain a poem... by thinking too much into it, and thereby debar ourselves from being moved by its poetry. Much greater of course - but who today would admit it? - is the danger that we will think too little, and reject the thought that the true experience with language can only be a thinking experience, all the more so because the lofty poetry of all great poetic work always vibrates within a realm of thinking.¹³

However, the problem of thinking is still present. *If* we are to think within the poetic experience, how can we organise the difference that Heidegger seems to demand? - The difference between *enjoying poetry for poetry’s sake* on the one hand and on the other hand, the self-consciousness of *thinking as an experience* of poetry? In other words, if language can only be “a thinking experience”, how can Heidegger claim to guard the territories of that experience should we unfortunately think “too little”, or “too much”? This notion of language as both an abstract experience and particular text is again raised in *On The Way to Language*;

What is left for us to do is to point out ways that bring us face to face with a possibility of undergoing an experience with language. Such ways have long existed. But they are seldom used in such a manner that the possible experience with language is itself given voice and put into language.¹⁴

In both of Heidegger’s texts, language is dealt with circumstantially and historically, in that Dasein is open to language, *being for* language and also *being towards* language. This complex account of Dasein shows up the problems for taking language to be an object of knowledge, but simultaneously it describes certain circumstances for what that experience may be.

This problem of identification and its hegemonic relation aptly takes us back to Lacoue-Labarthe's text where through identifying an unacknowledged and fundamental mimetology at work in Heidegger's thought he asks: "Why would a problem of identification, not be, in general, the essential problem of the political?"¹⁵ Following Lacoue-Labarthe's privileging of a political problem of identification I consider the following problems: First; that the act of thinking is deeply associated with combative action, a result of Heidegger's mapping of Dasein's identification with an immanent history and fate. Second; that through Heidegger's mixture of a productive metaphysics and an onto-theological nihilism we are given a complex account of an ontology that problematises ethical ground on the one hand, and produces it on the other. Third; and resulting from the above points is that the task of Being, for Heidegger, foregrounds a problem of identification that situates the problem that knowing knowledge is quantitatively relative to power. Further, we face the problem that *because* transcendence ends in politics, such a politics is characterised as a totalitarian practice of domination.¹⁶ As a result, a key question for this essay is how the rhetoric of transcendence produces and problematises power. This is important since these narratives paradoxically underscore an implicit difference between "being" and "appearance" through the process of truth claims that attempt to understand their implicit relation. Here, I show that theorising the "being/appearance" relation invites a problem of dominance that is intrinsically linked to representationalism.

I will briefly look at the political literature of Ernst Jünger and also the film, *The Thin Red Line* (1997) directed by Terence Malick. By drawing upon these two Heideggerian influenced narratives I will examine their stabilizing of Heidegger's metaphysics. This introduces two problems. The first is that in producing a violent language and images of horror as the grounds upon which one can achieve or experience power, runs into a deeply problematic politics that fixes decision as violence. The second is that because both employ a language of universals as a natural language of violence, it is difficult to identify these claims as interested, or substantive. In this way, abstract rhetoric draws us away from the motivations of the narrative and actually calls

upon abstract experience. In this way the narratives seem to offer up a particular experience of decision, whilst also ensuring that this territory is kept in the form of an abstraction. To deal with both problems I will concentrate upon a critique of the authority by which violence is inscribed as the aesthetic and ethical ground for the experience of freedom. To briefly recap, my principle questions here are: To what extent the concrete production of an aesthetics of universal violence is useful to understanding violence? And, can an analysis of the formal and political aspects of authority and violence in Jünger and Malick's rhetoric assist in an understanding of both violence's metaphysical character and its political affect?

Jünger's *Heroic Realism*

Ernst Jünger (most prolific in the years between 1930-40) produced writings of his experiences in the First World War; he wrote of dramatic dream-like fantasies, tales of science fiction and also bombastic renditions of what we could call "conventional" or "everyday" life experiences.

Marcus Paul Bullock picks up on Jünger's work as an allegory of Heidegger's ontology noting that Jünger's literature is seen to rhetoricise Heidegger's ethics of "letting things be" in order "to disrupt the standard criteria of academic or professional philosophical language."¹⁷ Here, Jünger perverts Heidegger's philosophy of language and being, and produces a violent political literature where "being towards death" is conceived of as a literal experience, a violent practice of *being towards an image of death*. Jünger translates Heidegger's lofty poetry of heroes and ultimates to that of a concrete and identifiable authentic goal for being: *the violent and cold face of technology and war*. In Jünger's conceptualisation the technological process and industrialisation of the normative or the "everyday" as a heroic territory brings physics and metaphysics together. Jünger's *heroic realism* is described by Jeffrey Herf as "a symbiosis of irrationalism and technics" as Jünger's hero combines "a celebration of total calculation and functionality with its apparent opposite, adventure and dynamism."¹⁸ For Jünger, autonomy is understood through one's ability

to offer oneself up to violence with the aim to rationally rise above it and to control and use it without the encumbrances of a weak humanism. In *Feuer und Blut* he writes:

We have to transfer what lies inside us onto the machine. That includes the distance and ice-cold mind that transforms the moving lightning stroke of blood into a conscious and logical performance. What would these iron weapons that were directed against the universe be if our nerves had not been intertwined with them and if our blood didn't flow around every axle.¹⁹

Jünger's literature not only offers the textual and political aspects of violence and aesthetics as symptomatic of an attempt to incorporate a Nietzschean-style non-transcendental critique; it also includes the Heideggerian question of cognition as an experience within language. What Jünger's *heroic realism* therefore offers is an attempt to organise a political and workable concept of a metaphysical experience of language which is inscribed within language. Here, we can return to the Heideggerian problems outlined above: First, there is the problem that *the logic of aesthetic and political unity is a dominant or totalitarian politics*, and second, that this dominance *is intrinsically linked to the politicising (theorising and practicing) of (a Heideggerian) metaphysics*. With this in mind I consider how Jünger's metaphysical literature navigates a relationship between the rhetoric of metaphysics as a totalitarian politics that unifies the transcendental and the political as a fanatical political literature. This is a question of the whether or not the violence of transcendence as a linguistic and relativistic practice *in the social* produces a transcendental-style domination *of the social*. Do such practices of power invite *another metaphysics*?

Jünger's war aesthetic

In the aestheticisation of war that Jünger identifies a collective moral experience. War was transformed into a "gigantic labour process."²⁰ In Jünger's book, *The Storm of Steel*, a diary of his service on the battlefields of the Great War he writes regarding his expectations of war:

We had grown up in a material age, and in each one of us there was the yearning for great experience, such as we had never known. The war had entered us like wine. We had set out in a rain of flowers to seek the death of heroes. The war was our dream of greatness, power, and glory. It was a man's work, a duel on fields whose flowers would be stained with blood. There is no lovelier death in the world.²¹

However, war was not restricted to the battlefield. "Blood, tradition and race were seen as metaphysical rather than primarily biological ideas,"²² and Jünger's radical aestheticisation of both the subject and the world at large construed a dramatic space for everyday activities. This aestheticisation of the symbolic forces of war and idealism at work in everyday life, whether it be the battlefield or the factories, was Jünger's attempt to rescue society from the overarching power of commodity relations.

This "universal reality" of violence is confirmed in the status of violence in Jünger's work as a means and ends. He writes on war: "It is the song of life devouring itself. To live is to kill."²³ Jünger's heroic renditions of the war experience confirm violence as a foundational underpinning to his work and underscore the experience of autonomy in the ongoing struggle of war. In the novel *The Lost Outpost* Jünger describes a lone soldier who fights without any prospect of rescue and of no knowledge whether the war is continuing or not. A similar sentiment is evident in Jünger's reactions to the losing of the Great War, where he identifies the loss of life and war as equal to the "success" of winning, for it is in the violence of the combat itself that Jünger seeks and finds redemption.

The aesthete

For Jünger, it is in the experience of war that the subject experiences "essence". However, crucially, it is the "artistic" or "sensitive" aesthete who can reinvigorate this violent experience of *thinking as experience within language* in the everyday, through the facility of representation. This

language is violence, and the ubiquitous nature of the forces that characterise agency are now represented in the manner of war, technology, speed, steel and capitalist energies.

Herf identifies Jünger's interest in aesthetics to be always correlative to the act of "coolness" or distancing from the horrors of "real life" death and war, describing how it would be through the mastery of aesthetics that Jünger's subject would discover power (precisely through the admitted difference between the plastic artificial aesthetic image and the "real thing"). Jünger associates power with the ability to "aestheticize", as is demonstrated in the book, *The Dangerous Moment*, where images that "enable" the heroic realist are documentary photographs of disasters. Through the "mechanical eye" of the photograph Jünger identifies images such as plane crashes and other disasters as emblematic of and also acted as a "piece of the real", the "moment of danger" the capturing of the "actual". As Herf points out, this produced a world that was "frozen at the level of conscious perception to avoid subconscious traumatic encounters".²⁴

This "openness" to the image of violence, poses the question of how "a world frozen at the level of perception" can avoid such "subconscious traumatic encounters." This is because on the one hand, the *image* of violence is asked to be experienced as *actual* violence, whilst on the other hand, the subject is asked to retain a rational position from which to separate the image of violence from "real" violence. As such, Jünger theorizes control and power ultimately in the task of being able to make rational distinctions. Jünger asserts that despite having an experiential encounter upon looking at images of real life crashes and disasters in all their documentary evidence, or their evidence as documents, our power is exercised through a rigorous mental control. Here, Jünger demands the expert - and perhaps more-so the "daring" expert, a romanticized literary and aesthetic equivalent of the philosopher. Perhaps most importantly, this power in the face of violence seems to be enabled precisely through the knowledge that this is an *image* of violence, that it is not real despite its documentary-style or unmediated aesthetic proximity to it.

Consequently, Jünger crafts an “everyday violence”, which is always reliant upon the mental control or “rationality” of the subject who can face this “moment of danger”. By taking part in the poetizing of the world around him/her as violent the subject accepts that this “world of violence” is in itself a fiction that ultimately is separate from the subject.

Crucially, it is the aesthete who is prepared and able to manufacture and undergo an experience with the violence and mysticism of technology and war to ultimately (and rationally) rise above it. The characters depicted in Jünger’s fictions perform a patient complicity, or a calm acceptance. However, the agent at work here is the aesthete, the reader, or the writer of such narratives whereupon there is a sense of “thrilled tranquility” in exposing oneself to the violent experience.²⁵ It is in **the** subject’s ability to expose oneself and yet remain separate from the event that Jünger asserts at the basis of his critique of violence:

I must reach a point from which I can observe things in the way I can fishes on a coral reef or insects in a meadow or even the way a doctor contemplates a sick man...There is still weakness in my disgust, still too much participation in the real world. One must unravel the logic of violence.²⁶

Importantly, it is the subject’s acknowledgement, identification and willed participation within this *ethos* that allows Jünger’s project of *heroic realism* to be practiced.

Accordingly, Jünger’s central premise - to close down the antinomies of reason and unreason upholds and insists upon the same formal structure that separates them. Jünger’s determination to manufacture a subject whose autonomy is situated in immersive linguistic experiences still relies upon a subject that can separate thinking from language. It is this strategy that highlights the problematic element to Jünger’s dialectics, since at bottom, despite Jünger’s interest to combine a rational *and* a self-representing subject, the *heroic realist* cultivates self as the rational by-stander. By merging with history and the cosmos the *heroic realist* grants (him)self a God’s

eye view - not exempt from death but able to face it as an equal. Consequently, Jünger's conception of thinking within language as the expression of "being/appearance" invites the practice of force *over* language. Now we are left to consider the contingency of such convictions.

Metaphysics as politics

The problem of "choice" that Jünger offers his "powerful" subject is reflected in Heidegger's *Being and Time*:

If Dasein, by anticipation, lets death become powerful in itself, then, as free for death, Dasein understands itself in its own *superior power*, the power of its finite freedom, so that in this freedom, which "is" only in its having chosen to make such a choice, it can take over the *powerlessness (Ohnmacht)* of abandonment to its having done so, and can thus come to have a clear vision for the accidents of the Situation that has been disclosed.²⁷

What we can see here is precisely the difference between Jünger's literature and Heidegger's ontology. Jünger clearly takes up "anticipating Dasein", and in doing so demonstrates the problematic element of Heidegger's conception of "being/appearance". Namely, the status of being open to the experience of language when understood as the route to "being" is translated into a *pro-active passivity*, or a *willed surrendering*. In this, Jünger's project illustrates the consequences and the political impact of our desire to philosophise, wherein the will to *knowledge* as power that Heidegger demarcates is quickly interpreted as the will to the *image* of power as violence. Further, this image of violence is construed as a literal path to "being" and is acted upon as having such a power. As such, Heidegger's attempt to draw up a project where destiny can be kept free by communicating and struggling is perverted in Jünger's literature as a narrative of destiny as violence. Here, autonomy is understood through one's ability to offer oneself up to violence with the aim to rationally rise above it and to control and use it without the encumbrances of a weak humanism.

Consequently, the political problem of Heidegger's philosophy (in that destiny is thought - or even, the notion of a figure is presented, even if this is without actual figure) is clearly demonstrated in Jünger's literature, and is again highlighted as a problem of identification, namely in the inability to identify the difference between the agency or thinking required in the forming of the world and the thinking of passivity required in letting world happen. In grounding Heidegger's philosophy as violent literature Jünger creates a space in which Heidegger's "lofty poetics" are not only something whereby we undergo an experience with language. This theory also aims towards language in order to have that experience. Consequently, Jünger's translation and practice of Heidegger's ontology underscores violence as a specific genre. This is no longer the dark place of the Heideggerian real, the place *between* poetry and thinking. Here, Jünger ties the "heroic" experience of the "being/appearance" relation to the aesthetics of an "everyday epic", where he locates metaphysics in the excessive rhetoric of a perverse kind of realism. As such, borne out of Jünger's desire to collide reason and unreason and poetry and thinking is a subject who is distant from community and civilisation. Instead of forgetting the task of metaphysics, Jünger forgets the political altogether. It is here that we can consider if metaphysical theories are inherently unhelpful or even immanently dangerous to the everyday workings of politics.

As I have shown, Jünger's interpretation of Heidegger's theory restates the problem of identifying and experiencing the space between poetry and thinking as an *aesthetic violence*, and as such takes us to a question of the practices of particular authorities that theorize violence as a ubiquitous force, and/or manufacture violence as success. This is because Jünger's theory requires an impossibly split subject and very much so a subject that appears to be a portrayal of a highly romanticized self-portrait. This is a mixture of the rational scientific thinker who's extreme intellect can scrutinize violence from a distance, together with a notion of the "artistic" or "sensitive" aesthete as the subject who can give oneself up to the irrationalism of violence in order to experience thinking as experience *within* language.

Accordingly, Jünger's theory can be seen to formally reproduce the logic of violence that it seeks to unravel, in the name of the aesthete. In this it requires a cultic investment in the rhetoric of one's own subjectivity. This demands a private sacrifice of one's subjectivity to violence as "image", which in turn dislodges any essential or totalizing public or social affect. Jünger's territory of the modern everyday world as violent is mediated as a fictional literature, distanced from the social politics, but always ready to be put into use by them. Its direct political enterprise is instead situated in a cultic and marginalized readership induced to fictionalize power through a decadent fantasy in the made-up unpolitical world of Jünger's literature. Consequently, Jünger's disinterest in partisan politics, juxtaposed with his absolute engagement in producing a metaphysical experience as the normative, paradoxically emphasizes the metaphysical as a fragmentary and contingent experience.

In light of this, we can view Jünger's realism as something that fails to "represent", or even, we can say that his realism shows the failure of representationalist theories for politics. Here, realism shows reality to be a linguistic tool and illegitimate object. In other words, although Jünger wants to represent a de-stabilized ethic as contingent to our decision making, he still calls upon a higher reality. Therefore, his representationalism may avoid all the insignificant and fickle self-interests in the world of politics but it still insists upon an ethic. As we can see, Jünger's project undermines its own universality because it is a literary fragment of abstract and poetic violence. However, the stabilizing of Heidegger's quasi-transcendental violence in Jünger's literature invites yet another violent question, this time situated within the very task of writing.

Now, the stabilizing of Heidegger's immanent quasi-transcendental violence in Jünger's secularized and subjectivized literature turns us towards another question, this time situated around the politics of contingency in narratives that that claims a notion of a *de-subjectivized* authorship as key to a description of "world". I now make a closer examination of the uses of transcendental and foundational metaphors in narratives of violence, which move to support violence as a ubiquitous and naturalized phenomenon.

The Thin Red Line: Violence as the universal.

The Thin Red Line (dir. Terence Malick, 1997) seems the most suitable place to continue this critique. As a war film it has all the traits of a “traditional” narrative from the war genre. Malick does not so much re-make the typical war narrative, but attests to its tradition by accepting certain rules of drama, such as the heroic (sacrificial) death, the fight against all odds (the suffering of humanity at its own hand), and a hierarchical and moral clash of personalities revolving around those in charge and those who are not.

Nature as “the ethical” can be seen to act as the central motif of the film, read as one thread interwoven throughout the script. However, the points in the narrative that are starkly symbolic moments demand particular interest. More to the point, it is in the inclusion of these tropes that we are offered the experience of a Heideggerian notion of “letting things be” and simultaneously, “forming world.”²⁸

This double aspect is reinforced through the ambiguity of time and place that is played out throughout the film, despite being told what year the film is set and where - Guadalcanal, November 1942. Also, Malick’s use of multi-layered narratives and voice-over evacuates any possibility of making specific associations with any individual character. The film loses time, in that it presents us with the persistent space of being neither before nor after the event. We are unaware of the locations of these voice-overs and from what time they are being spoken. They float ephemerally above the film, hardly heard, and yet within and through the soundtrack, often taking the place of the voices of the characters that we see on the screen. They act as hypnotic and poetic lyricism, giving the action an unreal quality, equaled by the saturated colours of Malick’s cinematic “nature”, seen in expansive subject-perspectives of panoramas of the long grass and the unceasing movement and sound of the wind through it. Here, the documentary-style realism of recording action, in all its slowness, patience, and uneventful dialogue is eclipsed by its “other worldly” rendering. In this sense the voice-over can be seen to occupy the

Heideggerian realm between thinking and poetry, offering a sensation where the voice is active, or present and yet it is also out of reach, inconsistent, unlocatable and apparently without any specific interest or direction.

Key to this aesthetics of aporia is that it is made up of a generic and recognisable filmic style. When watching the film, we can say that we are *always already* aware of Malick's presence, through what I bluntly refer to as the "universal" of Malick's directorial style.²⁹ We know it is a "Terence Malick film". To underscore this point, the magazine *Vogue* produced a fashion shoot entitled "Badlands" wherein models were depicted wandering through lakeland, woods and dilapidated farmland absolutely reliant upon our recognition that this is symbolic of Malick's filmic style.³⁰ Through this we can clearly see that Malick's authorship is already in the cultural loop, a signature style of a romantic realism made up of dusty epic expanses of nature and wayward characters. This not only demonstrates that Malick's personal signature style is available for *any* cultural use, but that in general Malick's style has reached an iconographic point in the work of images. His personal affects are also public and generic; they are expected by the audience and are engrained as traditional aspects of the "Malick" narrative – an accomplished aesthetics of paradox.

Malick's "complicit" authorship

The heightened aestheticisation of the territory of violence in *The Thin Red Line* is understood as a necessary and immersive space. Here, Malick's imagery of violence as "natural", whether it is the actions of the soldiers at war or of the awesome power of nature, is heavily conditioned upon our cultural associations of "nature" as a category of the paradox of the representable–unrepresentable. Here, Malick contradictorily employs heavily personally coded imagery in order to deliver nature as emblematic of an earthly and yet unknown force. This proves problematic because an aesthetics of subjectivity (as interested) is equated with something that is de-subjectivised and disinterested. It is here we could say that *The Thin Red Line* on occasion contradictorily reads like a "wildlife documentary" or is simply a narrative pause in order to view

the beauty of nature. Small moments are arrested within the soldiers' passage through the jungle where Malick shows us isolated short sequences of "nature". Here we see "personally coded" vignettes of the ocean, forest and jungle act as deliberate, albeit attractive unwieldy metaphors of the natural and transcendental forces within life that we cannot control, namely, the force of the other. Malick uses hand held camera angles and shows parrots sitting in trees almost as if these images were a personal record of the location during the filming of the movie. Such passages in the film depict a wonder and a proximity to nature, a particular use of nature as a trope of childlike innocence as the camera inspects its surroundings as if in a Jüngerian-style fascination; a wish to unravel its impossible logic.

Malick's apparently less-subtle/over-theorised camera shots exemplified in many of his nature images shows nature "as it is", in a documentary-style real-time effect. However, the images Malick produces are the work of an auteur director; scenes are dramatically lit and the timing of the shots and camera angles are carefully chosen. Here, Malick shows nature in all its force, apparently as *it is*. In this realism, Malick's film delivers *itself* as a performance of a belief in the philosophical theme of knowledge.

The lonely coconut

It is directly through the use of such abstract metaphors that the film's intentions seem to be brought rather too sharply into focus. This representationalism upsets the balance of knowledge within the film (between audience anticipation and directorial intention), where Malick's over indulgent handling of nature as a traditional symbol of a quasi-transcendental is explicitly forced home. This imbalance is produced by feeling that as the audience we understand only *too well* the director's intentions while at the same time we are treated as if we need to be told them nevertheless. This is for me, most obviously depicted in the final image of the film, the contemplative image of a lone coconut on a beach, half submerged in the gentle tide of an expansive ocean. The coconut has a tender fresh sprout of life emerging from it.

Here, the coconut *image* seems to be forced into taking on a metaphor it cannot hold, whilst at the same time, the use of or choice of the coconut as the metaphor for nature, humanity and the rest of it, seems to be taken on as if it is in-itself a natural vessel for that meaning. In this final poignant image, the coconut represents abject life; it grows without regard. However, it is in this solemn poignancy that we are offered the point at which the coconut stops being a coconut and becomes nature as world. Within Malick's direction, the specific becomes the general. Moreover, it seems that the film reads the specific as the general, that within these small experiences we can live out a transcendental moment; a place for understanding that is motivated by this object. To end the film on this "small thing" smacks of a far fetched aesthetics, or the bad rhetoric of a "little bit of the real" that we are privy to in this particular coconut, which appears, for Malick, so much *more real* than any generic contemplation of nature seen in other parts of the film.

The rhetoric of authority

Despite the more subtle mastery of the rhetoric of violence as the normative that Malick employs over Jünger, in that he chooses the rhetoric of nature over the rhetoric of technology, we are still subject to the experience of a specific force of aesthetics. Here, Jünger's aesthetics of violence falls into a marginalised literature or the prospect of totalitarianism because violence is always redemptive. Malick's violence, on the other hand, falls into a fateful relationship that gives rise to a problematic tolerant liberalism. For example, Malick's scenes of nature illustrate the point that death is a part of life. Here "this war in the heart of nature"³¹ is reflected not only in the ensuing war, but conflict is also made natural and embodied shown in the fact that characters contest each other freely. With this, Malick's scenes of natural conflict provide us with a comforting sense of equilibrium and community - it's natural or even necessary to disagree in particular circumstances – because violence is a part of life. However, a larger sense of nature frames these temporal disagreements. Here violence and death are not so much a part of life but something that looms over it - nature written as the inevitability of death is universal - made tangible through Malick's use of metaphor.

Consequently, in Malick's representational (and more crude) visions of nature as ground, the Heideggerian space between poetry (the representational force of nature) and thinking (the force by which nature is represented) is not exposed - we do not seek nor are shown anything "more real" or "further beyond" these images, despite perhaps Malick's wish that we do so. Malick's poetry does not therefore produce a ubiquitous conception of reality as violence. Instead the poetry aims towards itself reproducing more interpretations that point us to "meaning" precisely through the facility of their communication. Violence as the quivering and yet constant ground produced in such overbearing clichés eschews the rhetoric and the force of a deeper universal reality, but nevertheless redelivers this as the force of an ideological universalizing vision. It is in the process of manufacturing this mutually active and passive moment that we are shown the *techné* of this rhetorical project as *interested*. And despite the more subtle mastery of the rhetoric of violence as the normative that Malick employs over Jünger, in that he chooses the rhetoric of nature over the rhetoric of technology, we are still subject to the experience of a specific force of aesthetics.³²

Naturalized Dualities

Both Jünger and Malick attempt to show and to understand the notion of the subject as immersed and participating within the territory of violence by *forcing* what they define as the universal aspects of violence into existence. This attempt to reject metaphysics, however, does not produce a situation wherein Dasein can organise a relation to itself, because in order to offer violence as a universal in these narratives, the subject is at some point required to stand outside of this universality. Accordingly, the politics of a Heideggerian philosophy, albeit as a language that keeps metaphysics in mind, undermines any absolute existential fatalism that is understood within the theory because these narratives do not supply any such recognition of finitude from which to act. To put it another way, the process of identifying Heidegger's philosophy as a theory for action (Jünger) or as a description of "world" (Malick) may articulate a subject that is intrinsically active *and* passive, where these two terms are no longer able to be judged discreetly.

But, it does not do this by redelivering Dasein as capable of acting upon history as a means to a future, or by differentiating poetry from language.

Thus, Heidegger's dually "active" and "passive" Dasein, which combines a person-centred theory of combative action with an equal measure of violence, shown in the sacrificial move of a giving up or surrendering of one's power to language, is problematised as soon as it faces the necessity of practice – the practice of surrendering or of giving up one's reason. This impossibility of splitting the subject, foregrounded here through Heidegger, is underscored in the work of both Jünger and Malick in different ways although both utilise a realism that directly exposes the performative force of such abstract categories, in that they show the contingency of being appropriated by knowledge whilst putting knowledge to use.

Crucially, what this demonstrates in both cases is that in the process of identifying Heidegger's philosophy as a theory for action (Jünger) or as a description of "world" (Malick), Dasein is re-delivered as *intrinsically active and passive*, where these two terms are no longer able to be judged discreetly. Accordingly, the rhetoric of violence - understood in terms of language having no relationship to the real as such, but rather a relationship to power and autonomy - unaccomplishes any existential fatalism but the force of abstract languages as a claim to reality are powerful, legitimate and pervasive. As a result, what we can turn to finally are the problems of power relations and their correspondence to their advertisements in rhetoric. Here the aesthetico-political subject defines a problem of representing transcendence and, as I have already stated, points us to the ways and means by which these are orchestrated, acted upon and understood.

Significant to the aesthetico-political subject, or, a dually active and passive notion of subjectivity as contingent within language, is that this notion of subjectivity does not produce absolute violence. Ultimately, the language by which violence is interpreted and described through Heidegger, Jünger and Malick underlines violence as something that is constant, natural and traditional *as a specific genre*. Following from this, the language of violence as grounds for

decision, coupled with the impossibility of ultimately separating “being” and “appearance”, or of defining limits to those faculties (as we have seen most explicitly through Malick), in no way proposes the totalitarian violence vis-à-vis a Jüngerian active-nihilism laid out at the beginning of this text. Nor does such rhetoric aim towards a universally agreed upon notion of the consequence and use of powerful codes. As such, transcendence written as a violent power draws us towards a problem of performance, use, and the consensual legitimation of these codes. With this we avoid the political melodrama of a naive realism and philosophical foundationalism, but the rhetoric of philosophical ontology is not postponed. It is here that we can see that Jünger’s de-politicised theory and Heidegger’s de-theorised politics are brought very closely together.

As I have shown, the language by which violence is interpreted and described underlines violence as a genre for decision, and this universalising language appeals to constancy, nature and tradition. This is brought home especially, in the irony that images of freedom, because of their claim to universality, are taken seriously. However, by considering the immanence of violence to decision, as I have done here, it can be seen that although Malick and Jünger seek to render a universal violence in image form, it is precisely the manifestations of these universals, as representationalist illustrations that allow us to identify these narratives as substantive claims. Key to this, I have argued that these narratives show that the space between real and the representational language is rooted in another substantive claim that also hinges upon violence. This quickly becomes a problem of a force that theorizes and represents freedom, whether it is the right wing conservatism of Jünger, or the liberalism of Malick. In both of these narratives, the force of rhetoric invites greater consideration as to the politics of the author who uses violence. This invites, of course, its own “violent” question.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, Harper and Row, 1972, 51

² This question is drawn from Joanna Hodge’s *Heidegger and Ethics*, Routledge, 1995, 68 Here, she refers to Heidegger’s scepticism of metaphysics declared in his response to Ernst Jünger’s

essay "Über der Linie" (Over the Line). Heidegger's response, subtly re-phrased as "Über 'der Linie'" (On the Line) argues that such basic metaphysical concepts are unhelpful to non-metaphysical critique.

³ Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale University Press, 1980, 103

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For further discussion of the (metaphysical) Nietzschean and Kantian influences regarding Heidegger's thought see Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics," from, *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy*. Harvard University Press, London, 1989, 298.

⁶ *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, 105

⁷ Ibid., 105-6

⁸ Ibid., 44

⁹ Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics", From, *Typography, Mimesis, Philosophy*. (Harvard University Press, London), 1989, 299

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Like Lacoue-Labarthe's "Transcendence Ends in Politics," Hodge's *Heidegger and Ethics*, also cites Heidegger's essay "Vom Wesen Des Grundes," 1929, in order to establish Heidegger's problematic conditioning of ethical and moral practices upon metaphysical and ontological theories. Hodge writes: "In this essay Heidegger makes the claim: "freedom is the origin of the principle of sufficient reason", and the essay concludes "For in transcendence, the essence of the finitude of Dasein discloses itself as freedom for reasons." In this way Heidegger definitively rejects any separation between, on the one side, ethical and moral aspects of freedom and, on the other, ontological and metaphysical aspects." (142) Hodge also remarks that: "Heidegger still uses the terminology of transcendence to capture an ontological capacity to detach oneself from the given and to set up a relation to oneself." (141) This capacity to detach oneself from the normative and thus form self is especially pertinent to Jünger's detached and cool *heroic realism*.

¹² Frederick A Olafson's *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics, A Study of Mitsein*, [Cambridge University Press, 1998, 4, n.5] discusses Heidegger's moves through subjectivism. Olafson writes: "it is difficult to see [Heidegger] as unqualifiedly repudiating the concept of a subject." Olafson comments further on Heidegger's attempt to de-subjectivise decision moving through his "Letter on Humanism" as a highpoint on the attack on traditional humanism, to his attempts to avoid subjectivism and a pre-established ethics altogether. Here, Olafson queries Heidegger's formulation of ethics and ontology: "But then if "letting entities be" is the only way to avoid subjectivism, we would have to give up the active life altogether and adopt a wholly passive stance as satellites of being. If this were accepted, it would seem to obviate the need for anything like an ethic; but Heidegger also wants to claim that the kind of "thought that thinks the truth of being as the initial (*anfänglich*) elements in a human being as an ek-sistent is in itself the original ethic." ("Letter on Humanism"187) As such we can see that Heidegger produces an ethical ontology that it remains as something the subject has to prepare for. However, we could also say that Heidegger's conception of "letting entities be" points to a naturalized and unstable ethic that does not undermine subjectivity in the way that Olafson imagines (i.e., the subject is not "passive" because, in this later work Heidegger does not provide clear grounds upon which to identify the subject as "active".) As such, by navigating an unstable and embodied law, Heidegger's theory could threaten and destabilize the locus of institutionalizing powers. It is this path between the identification and non-identification of a realist ethic that I situate here.

¹³ Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Herz, (Harper and Row, New York), 1971, 69

¹⁴ Ibid., 59

¹⁵ Lacoue-Labarthe, "Transcendence Ends in Politics," 300

¹⁶ Hodge refers to the problem of the distinction between metaphysics and politics in Heidegger's work as a problem of violence: "The moment of violence would be [...] the moment at which the conceptions holding in place the distinction between politics and metaphysics are disrupted. The results of this disruption are to be seen in globalization, the actualization of metaphysics and the de-restriction of ethics, and in the spread of technology throughout the world." 134. From a similar understanding of a distinction between metaphysics and politics in Heidegger's philosophy, I take up Jünger's actualization of metaphysics in order to submit this violence to critique.

¹⁷ Marcus Paul Bullock, *The Violent Eye, Ernst Jünger's Visions and Revisions on the European Right*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1992, 323

¹⁸ Jeffery Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 78, Here Herf also comments on Christian Graf von Krockow's description of Jünger's *heroic realism* as discovering "pure adventure in the heart of functionality" in, *Die Entscheidung: Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger*, Stuttgart, 1960, 86

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Feuer und Blut: Einer Kleiner Ausschnitt aus dem grossen Schlacht*, Berlin, 1929; reprint, Stuttgart, 1960, 81

²⁰ Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 90

²¹ Ernst Jünger, *The Storm of Steel, From the Diary of a German Storm Trooper on the Western Front*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1929, 1

²² Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 86

²³ Bullock, *The Violent Eye*, 61, cited from *Der Kampf* VII 42.

²⁴ Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, 99

²⁵ Bullock, *The Violent Eye*, 248

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 155

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Trans John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Blackwells, 1962, 436

²⁸ This is picked up by Stanley Cavell in *The World Viewed*, where he writes in the introduction regarding Malick's Heideggerian influence by interpreting Malick's previous film *Days of Heaven*, as a direct reference to the aesthetics of this "inbetweenness"; a timeless realm given up to nature, *between* heaven and earth. Also, Simon Critchley's essay "Calm – On Terence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*" in the on-line journal *Film-Philosophy*, Vol. 6, No. 38, December 2002, foregrounds Malick's Heideggerian influence.

²⁹ By this I mean that the film resembles his other movies, *Days of Heaven* (1978) and *Badlands* (1973), not only through style and imagery but also in script and "philosophical" motivation.

³⁰ "Badlands" photographer Justine Kurland, narrative artist, John Kelsey, *Vogue*, Conde Nast Publication, August 2002, 148-159

³¹ I'm quoting here from the character Private Witt, one of the central characters of the film.

³² In "Calm – Terence Malick and *The Thin Red Line*", Simon Critchley remarks that "Malick's art demands that we take seriously the idea that the film is less an illustration of philosophical ideas and theories [...] and more a form of philosophising, of reflection, reasoning, and argument." 6. However, the notion of pinning down the act of philosophising calls into question how Critchley manages to construct such a hierarchy when both terms are identified through the processes of representational aesthetics. For Critchley, Malick is "doing philosophy" because his film is seen to ponder upon the meaning of life and death. However, these ruminations on death are hinged upon the performative force of the interpretation of *philosophical* themes. My point here is that particular scenes of nature in *The Thin Red Line* are rhetorical and forceful displays of philosophical paradigms. With this we are left with an abstract symbolism and the singular force of Malick's vision that consists of an aesthetic of paradox, disagreement and reflection. Certainly, Malick's aesthetics of difference, played out through the characters, shows a more subtle representation of philosophical themes but crucially these are framed by a univocal inscription of nature as a universal force. In this case I won't distinguish between philosophising and philosophical example, but rather, because we recognise philosophising as bound to certain rhetoric, we are faced in the end with the act of philosophising as politics.