

(This Is (0) Is When)

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Zero. Zero is. Zero is another word for beginning. From zero the beginning is a seat. No. The beginning is the body; the beginning is the body in a seat. The beginning is the body, my body; the beginning is my body, from zero, sitting in a seat (an aside, a reminder: seat is another word for chair). From zero, zero in. The beginning begins in a feeling, the feeling of my eye, of the eye, turning; I feel the eye turn, zero in on a line: '[a]ll distances in time and space are shrinking.' This. This is zero. And this is how. How Heidegger begins. This is how Heidegger begins a chapter, a chapter called 'The Thing,' in his book *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Where he begins (from zero), I am on my way to Madrid (not zero). To get there I am sitting here, in seat 17F on the 06:55am Ryanair flight from Dublin (Dublin is a zero; Dublin is a beginning), and I am reading Heidegger: 'Man now reaches over-night, by plane, places which formerly took weeks and months of travel.' The flight to Madrid will take me (me equals 'man,' yes, but also, no) a little over two hours (not over-night, hardly over a night, but yes) and give me just enough time to arrive, to sit in on the first lecture in a series of lectures that have been organised in conjunction with *Pity and Terror: Picasso's Road to Guernica*, an exhibit which opened on 5 April 2017 to commemorate the eighty years since Gernika, the bombing of, and *Guernica*, the mural painted by. I am flying in and then, I am flying out, on the same day. I am flying out on the same day I am flying in because all distances in time and space are shrinking; from seat 17F, all distances in time and space have already been

shrunk. Yes, but. More important. I am flying in because for all the times I have stood in front of *Guernica*, I have not seen them. My eye, the eye, has not turned: the eye sees machines. From zero, the eye sees only machines: a machine, next to a machine, next to another machine, and that machine, next to a machine, over and over, the eye sees machines, my eye sees only machines, again and again, from zero until infinity, my eyes do not see them.

‘What is necessary,’ Picasso has said, ‘is to name things. They must be called by their name. I name the eye. I name the foot. I name my dog’s head on someone’s knees. I name the knees...’ To name. That’s all. That’s enough.’ It is 12:30pm on 13 May 2017 and I am sitting, sitting in Edificio Nouvel, Auditorio 200 and I am listening to three women—Juliet Mitchell, Mignon Nixon, and Anne Wagner—speak about Gernika and *Guernica* on a panel entitled ‘The Body, Feminism and Psychoanalysis. Picasso’s Representation of Women.’ I am sitting here because I want to see; I want to see what they see. I want to see what they see, and so I listen, listen as Anne Wagner begins, and she begins by zeroing in on what is necessary: ‘Eight days after the opening of this exhibit,¹ the United States of America dropped the ‘Mother

¹ Text, from the exhibit in the Reina Sofia: ‘On April 26, 1937, the small town of Gernika, the symbol of the liberties of the Basque people, was destroyed by the German aviation service of General Franco. For the first time in military history, an attack was aimed exclusively at the civil population in a deliberate attempt to cause as many casualties as possible. A market day was therefore chosen for the bombing. Apart from especially destructive

of All Bombs' on Afghanistan.' From where I am sitting, time and space—all distances in one and the other—shrink, until they have been shrunk; the distance in time and space between eight days and eighty years becomes negligible, non-negotiable, and the eye turns on the line, zeros in on the words 'mother' and 'bombs.' In the essay '*Mater dolorosa* The Women of *Guernica*' (an essay I read on the flight back to

explosives, anti-personnel and incendiary bombs were also used, killing more than 1,600 people and injuring nearly 1,000 others according to official reports at the time. The town centre was completely devastated, with more than 70 percent of its buildings destroyed. Three days later, Franco's army entered the town with General Emilio Mola at its head. Information on the bombing quickly spread abroad [insert by me (this is zero), of Heidegger's text: '[a]ll distances in time and space are shrinking (insert by me, in Heidegger's text : even then, especially then)] thanks to the international correspondents who were in Bilbao at the time of the attack. Pablo Picasso saw pictures of it all in the newspapers he read every day [insert by me, from zero, zero in: the eye turns on more Heidegger —'...instant information... of events which he (insert by me, in Heidegger's text: not Picasso specifically, but 'Man') formerly learned about only years later, if at all], like *L'Humanité*, *Ce Soir*, and *Paris-Soir*. The Labor Day demonstration of May 1, 1937 became a massive expression of repulsion at the attack on Gernika, and it was joined by Spanish intellectuals and artists living in Paris, Picasso among them. The first preparatory drawing for *Guernica* is dated on that very day.'

Dublin, a flight back on the same day on which, in when—much earlier—I flew out) Wagner discusses the bombing of Gernika, how news of it reached Picasso, two days later, in a report from the Paris daily *L'Humanité*. This report was accompanied by a photograph of the

corpses of two female victims lying in a street. Not, however, a street in Guernica: the photo records an attack on another Spanish city. The reader is not told which one. Yet when death is made placeless, its victims become ciphers... '*Ci-dessus, quelques femmes—des mères sans doute—abattus en cours d'un bombardement.*' *L'Humanité* cites no source for its assertion, perhaps because none is needed. In other words, female victims were mothers '*sans doute.*' How could it be otherwise, when the baring of children served to define women's role? At a moment when the damage wartime violence inflicted on its innocent victims became a Republican leitmotif, women are assumed to be mothers, and mothers cannot —should not—die alone.

Bombs and mothers, mothers and bombs. Sitting here, I listen to the women on the panel discuss Pope Francis' condemnation of the bomb dropped in Afghanistan, the mother of all, condemning the linking of ('a mother gives life; this one gives death... and we call this device 'mother'); I listen to the women discuss the question —'how do mothers and bombs go together'—and I listen to each one address Picasso's anticipation of this metaphor, the expression of it in *Guernica*, the arrival of death; in *Guernica*, the metaphor is the expression of death's arrival—death in the how, and for whom. Picasso's *Guernica* is an aftermath; in *Guernica*, there

are machines that give death (bomb, after bomb, after bomb, over and over, again and again) and there are machines for suffering (mothers, givers of life, lay dead in *Guernica* or, they are dying). Looking at my notes on the panel, just after the panel, on the day I flew in and out of Madrid, there is an important point I have written down, about ‘seen-ness’: ‘Picasso’s metaphor zeros in on the ‘never-before-seen-ness’ [I cannot remember which of the women on the panel used this term] of war, and death; the ‘never-before-seen-ness’ of it carries the weight of a wish, of ‘wishing to have not seen,’ and yet, having seen, it turns itself into something one cannot [will not] forget.’ I want to see what they see. I want to name things. So: here I am (again), standing in front of *Guernica* (again); from here, I begin (again). The beginning is a feeling, a feeling of the eye, of the eye turning; feel the eye, feel it turn. Now, zero in.

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Zero. Zero is. Zero is another word for beginning. From zero, the beginning is. The beginning is a memory and a photograph. No. I do not know which one came first, the memory or the photograph but I remember. I remember being there, and the photograph, of how the photograph came to be, it being, of the photograph being taken. And I begin. Begin, again. The beginning is a memory, and a photograph, and a memory of a photograph being taken; the beginning is me, my sisters, and two cousins, us standing in front of orange trees and lemon trees in the front yard of my aunt’s house in my father’s village. The beginning is

of lemon trees and orange trees covered in snow, of snow in my father's village; the beginning is a village in Southern Greece, of snow there, of snow then, in a village in Southern Greece on 7 March 1987. From the age of nine until the age of twenty-one, zero was the memory. Now, zero is the photograph of the memory. What is necessary is to name things and this is. And this is not. This is not much, not so much about the snow, but about the trees, the orange ones and the lemon ones, and between them, the orange ones more, more than the lemon (I will recall lemons elsewhere); this isn't much, not so much about trees, except I carried the thought of the orange ones with me, when we moved back to Canada, I carried them with me, inside my child's mind (this was zero, from then up to and until), and they were a marker—a marker of place, a marker of time; of a place, in time (zero in) and of place, in a time (zero in).

Zero out, on Heidegger: 'What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us. Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness.' What was it that was near, what kept the oranges near to me, when my body was not? Zero in: the memory (I remember), the photograph (I am looking at it), and the memory of the photograph being taken (I see my mother, her face obscured by the camera). And then. And then, just like that, I am, I was twenty-one. As far away from nine as I could ever be when we went back, not to stay (not again), only visit (I write only what is, and what it is necessary to, and it is necessary to name things, to know

the difference between the zero of not staying and the zero of only visiting). I was twenty-one when I went back to my father's village, twenty-one when I realised what it is that I had done. It sounds silly, to make such a big deal, such a big deal about orange trees, but—zero out. Zero in: and almost as much as eating, I was looking forward to seeing these trees again, curious if they still bore fruit, excited and looking forward to the smell of them, for the smell to bring me back, back to being nine, again, but—zero out. Zero in: at the age of twenty-one I stood in place in a place where, in when, I once was, in the place those trees once were (in where, and in some when before) but—zero out.

There are machines for taking one far away, and there are machines to cut things down. In November 1988, we took a plane to Canada. Meanwhile, some when between then and me back in place in a place at the age of twenty-one, someone—my aunt, my uncle, one or the other of my cousins—had cut them down. The trees, they were gone. In that moment, all the distances between time and space, they shrink until they have shrunk; I am me, and I am also my father, leaving Greece in 1972, returning in 1986, and leaving again in 1988. When he goes back, he does not stay; now, he only visits. And time. Time moves on. There is no claim one can put on it, to keep time in place, nor a place, no claim, to keep it in time. There is no claim, only the mind playing tricks, a distortion. But also. Zero in: a distortion is a distortion until it is not. From my notes, a few days after I have returned from Madrid, this: '*Guernica* is not a recording of war. It is a recording of the aftermath, of what happened when, when the bombs—zero out. Mothers and

bombs, bombs and mothers. In *Guernica*, Picasso is painting the effects of war, and in so doing, Picasso zeroes in, becomes ‘the other’ (the woman); he paints, and, at the end of each day, he pulls back, zeroes out, puts distance between himself and what he has painted so that he can see, what it is, what has been created. It is distortion.’ Zero in: a claim on a place, in time, from far away, a claim, to bring it near, from far away, does not shrink the distances between. It distorts—a place in time, and time, in a place are distorted when one tries to claim them. And yet. What is necessary is to name things, to name them is to know when a claim can and cannot be made. Because. Some distortions have a name; some distortions must be named. And so. Begin, again, from zero: zero is a memory, a photograph, and the memory of a photograph being taken, of trees, no longer there, of them when, and then, of them no longer, and of me, when, and then, no longer there, of me, then, no longer there, then, too (I did this; I did it to myself). OK. Good. Now, begin, again, from zero: a claim is a distortion, it distorts—it distorts a place in time, and time, in a place, until it is not, no longer, because it never was not, never not a—zero in:

Gestapo Officer, to Picasso, about *Guernica*: Did you do this?

(It is necessary to name things)

Picasso: No. You did.

(This is zero).



5. Zero. Zero is. Zero is another word for beginning. From zero, the beginning is a machine. The machine is, and there is a machine for, and another machine to, a machine that shrinks the distances, the distances between: the machine pressed down, on me, like a bomb, and I am, I become distorted. From Wagner's essay:

The list of deformations goes on. Finally, and most fatally, consider what happens to the breasts of the stumbling woman, which as she rushes forward are fully exposed. Like several of the mothers in Picasso's preparatory drawings... she too comes possessed of one last deformation, the shockingly robotic, or perhaps machinic, mutation of her breasts [insert by me: zero in on the words 'deformation' and 'mutation' and see this as just another way to describe distortion; the machine presses down on my body and my body is not my own, anymore]. Their newly denatured [insert by me: and still, another word for it] suggests that once sensate flesh has been remade as metal fixture—a trigger, or a stopper, perhaps, but in any case, nothing sustaining life... What to call this strange new deformation of the body? Shall we label it the 'rivetted nipple' for want of a better term?

4. Zero in: In a letter to Lorca, Dalí writes, 'I am convinced that in poetry our efforts only make sense when they lead us to evade the ideas our intelligence has forged artificially, and give things their exact, real sense.' I name the body: I have no claim on it. I am cut down. Zero in, on the breast in a machine: the breast is an orange.

3. Zero. Zero is. Zero is another word for beginning. From zero, you; from zero, me. From zero is when. When we. We. Begin: from zero I did not, I did not know, know you, you, you then, you then when, in or on when, did not know, not you, not then, not when, not then when, did not know, not until, not until then, when, when you, and then, when you, that was when, then, and then, I knew; and you, you did not, did not know me, not me, not then, not when, not before, you did not know, not then when, no not then, you did not, not when, not in or on when, not in or on, not me, not then, did not, did not know, know me, not until, until then, until then when, when you, and then, again, when you, that was when, and then you, you knew, knew me, me, you knew me then. Zero. Zero is. Zero is then, and then when; zero is when you know and I know, and then, zero is when, when we, when we know, and then, when we know, zero is when, then, zero is when.

2. Zero is when, is when it is, zero is when it is necessary, and when it, when it is, it is, and it is necessary to name; zero is when it is necessary to name things. I name the body. I name my body, I name yours. Your body on my body (I name the weight). My body on your body (again, I name the weight). I name your hand. I name your fingers, your fingers, your fingers (I name each one, and the thumb). I name my breast. I name your fingers on my breast, the circles, I name the little circles. I name the bees (of your fingers and your thumb, from zero, I name each one). I name all the distances in time and place shrinking, I name the distances, I name them machine (pressing down on my breast) and fingers,

your fingers (on my breast, pressing down, I name the little circles) and silence. I name the silence. I name it mother (*ta mère, sans doute*) and then, I name it, again ('I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine'). I name the breast (not orange, now, but peach), I name the taste (the taste of peach, I will bring it to your mouth). I name your mouth. Your mouth, your mouth makes the shape of zero. And zero. Zero is. Zero is when. Zero is when I name love.²

1. Elsewhere, in another letter, Dalí writes to Lorca about breasts: 'an edible white, the metallic white of a stray breast (you know that there are also 'stray breasts,' just the opposite of flying breasts, for the stray one is at peace without knowing what to do and is so defenseless it moves me).' *Guernica* is a representation; it is Picasso's attempt to represent what is un-representable (from Wagner's essay, again: 'within this obscene conception [insert by me: see previous reference to the 'riveted nipple'] lurks the specter of a fully weaponized fertility—the mother as bomb'). Mothers and bombs, and bombs and mothers. From zero. From zero, what is necessary is to name things. Yes, but. Dalí, to Lorca, in another letter: 'Let the things themselves decide where their shadows fall!' From zero, then, zero in. From zero, begin, again. Zero. Zero is. Zero is another word for a beginning. The beginning is the end. The end is here. Here I. Here I am. I am here, again.

2 I name love: Zero is when I love you. (You were supposed to have been a light thing, in the beginning. But. Mother. Fucker. From the beginning, there was light. See essay 'We Cannot Be Trusted Which Chairs' in *gorse* no. 8 for more).

From here, the beginning is a feeling, a feeling of the eye, of the eye turning. I want to see, see what they see, zero in, see myself in. Zero. Zero is the breast, my breast—

0. —a bag of milk, an edible white.

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