

HEIDEGGER'S PHENOMENOLOGY OF PERCEPTION

LEARNING TO SEE AND HEAR
HERMENEUTICALLY, VOLUME II

DAVID KLEINBERG-LEVIN

NEW HEIDEGGER
RESEARCH

HEIDEGGER'S
PHENOMENOLOGY
OF PERCEPTION

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*Heidegger's Phenomenology of Perception: Learning to See and Hear
Hermeneutically, Volume II*
David Kleinberg-Levin

HEIDEGGER'S
PHENOMENOLOGY
OF PERCEPTION

Learning to See and Hear
Hermeneutically, Volume II

DAVID KLEINBERG-LEVIN

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for works by Heidegger cited or quoted

Abbreviations for translations of Heidegger works cited or quoted

Gesamtausgabe:

- GA 1 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 1. *Frühe Schriften* (1912–1916). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1978.
- GA 2 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 2. *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1977. Also published separately by Max Niemeyer, Tübingen. 1st ed., 1927. The 7th ed. (1953) was used for the English translations.
- GA 3 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 3. *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* (1929). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1991. 2nd ed., 2010.
- GA 4 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 4. *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* (1936–1968). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1981, 2012 (rev. ed.).
- GA 5 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5. *Holzwege* (1935–1946). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1977.
- GA 6.1 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 6, Part 1. *Nietzsche I* (1936–1939). Ed. Brigitte Schillbach, 1996.
- GA 6.2 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 6, Part 2. *Nietzsche II* (1939–1946). Ed. Brigitte Schillbach, 1997.
- GA 7 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 7. *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (1936–1953). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2000.
- GA 8 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 8. *Was heißt Denken?* (1951–1952). Ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando, 2002.

- GA 9 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 9. *Wegmarken (1919–1961)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1976, 1996 (rev. ed.).
- GA 10 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 10. *Der Satz vom Grund (1955–1956)*. Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1997.
- GA 11 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 11. *Identität und Differenz (1955–1963)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2006.
- GA 12 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 12. *Unterwegs zur Sprache (1950–1959)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1985.
- GA 13 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 13. *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens (1910–1976)*. Ed. Hermann Heidegger, 1983, 2002 (rev. ed.).
- GA 14 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14. *Zur Sache des Denkens (1927–1968)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2007.
- GA 15 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 15. *Seminare (1951–1973)*. Ed. Curd Ochswadt, 1986, 2005 (2nd rev. ed.).
- GA 16 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 16. *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)*. Ed. Hermann Heidegger, 2000.
- GA 17 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 17. *Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung (1923–1924)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1994.
- GA 19 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 19. *Platon: Sophistes (1924–1925)*. Ed. Ingeborg Schüßler, 1992.
- GA 20 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 20. *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs (1925)*. Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1979, 1988 (2nd rev. ed.), 1994 (3rd rev. ed.).
- GA 21 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 21. *Logik. Die Frage nach der Wahrheit (1925–1926)*. Ed. Walter Biemel, 1976, 1995 (rev. ed.).
- GA 22 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 22. *Die Grundbegriffe der antiken Philosophie (1926)*. Ed. Franz-Karl Blust, 1993.
- GA 24 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 22. *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie (1927)*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1975.
- GA 26 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 26. *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz (1928)*. Ed. Klaus Held, 1978, 1990 (2nd rev. ed.), 2007 (3rd rev. ed.).
- GA 27 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 27. *Einleitung in die Philosophie (1928–1929)*. Ed. Otto Saame and Ina Saame-Speidel, 1996, 2001 (rev. ed.).
- GA 28 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 28. *Der deutsche Idealismus (Fichte, Schelling, Hegel) und die philosophische Problemlage der Gegenwart (1929)*. *Appendix: “Einführung in das akademische Studium” (1929)*. Ed. Claudius Strube, 1997.

- GA 29–30 *Gesamtausgabe*, vols. 29–30. *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit* (1929–1930). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1983.
- GA 31 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 31. *Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit. Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1930). Ed. Hartmut Tietjen, 1982, 1994 (rev. ed.).
- GA 33 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 33. *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Θ 1–3. Von Wesen und Wirklichkeit der Kraft* (1931). Ed. Heinrich Hüni, 1981, 1990 (2nd rev. ed.), 2006 (3rd rev. ed.)
- GA 34 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 34. *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit. Zu Platons Höhlengleichnis und Theätet* (1931–1932). Ed. Hermann Mörchen, 1988, 1997 (rev. ed.).
- GA 35 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 35. *Der Anfang der abendländischen Philosophie: Auslegung des Anaximander und Parmenides* (1932). Ed. Peter Trawny, 2011.
- GA 36–37 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 36–37. *Sein und Wahrheit* (1933–1934). Ed. Hartmut Tietjen, 2001.
- GA 39 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 39. *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien” und “Der Rhein”* (1934–1935). Ed. Susanne Ziegler, 1980, 1989 (rev. ed.).
- GA 40 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 40. *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935). Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1983.
- GA 41 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 41. *Die Frage nach dem Ding. Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen* (1935–1936). Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1984.
- GA 42 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 42. *Schelling: Vom Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809) (1936). Ed. Ingrid Schüßler, 1988. Redacted version published separately by Max Niemeyer, Tübingen.
- GA 43 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 43. *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst* (1936–1937). Ed. Bernd Heimbüchel, 1985.
- GA 44 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 44. *Nietzsches metaphysische Grundstellung im abendländischen Denken: Die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (1937). Ed. Marion Heinz, 1986.
- GA 45 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 45. *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte “Probleme” der “Logik”* (1937–1938). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1984.
- GA 46 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 46. *Zur Auslegung von Nietzsches II. Unzeitgemäßer Betrachtung “Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben”* (1938–1939). Ed. Hans-Joachim Friedrich, 2003.

- GA 47 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 47. *Nietzsches Lehre vom Willen zur Macht als Erkenntnis* (1939). Ed. Eberhard Hanser, 1989.
- GA 48 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 48. *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus* (1940). Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1986.
- GA 51 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 51. *Grundbegriffe* (1941). Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1981, 1991 (rev. ed.).
- GA 52 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 52. *Hölderlins Hymne "Andenken"* (1941–1942). Ed. Curd Ochwadt, 1982.
- GA 53 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 53. *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"* (1942). Ed. Walter Biemel, 1984.
- GA 54 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 54. *Parmenides* (1942–1943). Ed. Manfred S. Frings, 1982.
- GA 55 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 55. *Heraklit* (1943, 1944). Ed. Manfred S. Frings, 1979, 1987 (rev. ed.).
- GA 58 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 58. *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (1919–1920). Ed. Hans-Helmuth Gander, 1992.
- GA 60 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 60. *Phänomenologie des religiösen Lebens* (1918–1921). Ed. Matthias Jung, Thomas Regehly, and Claudius Strube, 1995, 2011 (rev. ed.).
- GA 61 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 61. *Phänomenologische Interpretationen zu Aristoteles. Einführung in die phänomenologische Forschung* (1921–1922). Ed. Walter Bröcker und Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, 1985, 1994 (rev. ed.).
- GA 63 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 63. *Ontologie. Hermeneutik der Faktizität* (1923). Ed. Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns, 1988.
- GA 64 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 64. *Der Begriff der Zeit* (Vortrag 1924). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2004.
- GA 65 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 65. *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* (1936–1938). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1989, 1994 (rev. ed.).
- GA 66 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 66. *Besinnung* (1938–1939). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 1997.
- GA 67 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 67. *Metaphysik und Nihilismus* (1938–1939, 1946–1948). Ed. Hans-Joachim Friedrich, 1999.
- GA 69 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 69. *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (1938–1940). Ed. Peter Trawny, 1998, 2012 (rev. ed.).
- GA 70 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 70. *Über den Anfang* (1941). Ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando, 2005.
- GA 71 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 71. *Das Ereignis* (1941–1942). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2009.

- GA 72 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 72. *Die Stege des Anfangs* (1944). Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann.
- GA 73.1 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 73.1. *Zum Ereignis-Denken* (1932–1970s). Ed. Peter Trawny, 2013.
- GA 73.2 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 73.2. *Zum Ereignis-Denken* (1932–1970s). Ed. Peter Trawny, 2013.
- GA 77 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 77. *Feldweg-Gespräche* (1944–1945). Ed. Ingrid Schüßler, 1995, 2007 (2nd rev. ed.).
- GA 79 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 79. *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. 1. *Einblick in das was ist: Bremer Vorträge 1949. Das Ding—Das Ge-stell—Die Gefahr—Die Kehre*. 2. *Grundsätze des Denkens: Freiburger Vorträge 1957*. Ed. Petra Jaeger, 1994.
- GA 81 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 81. *Gedachtes* (1910–1970). Ed. Paola-Ludovika Coriando, 2007.
- GA 82 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 82. *Zu eigenen Veröffentlichungen*. Ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann, 2018.
- GA 89 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 89. *Zollikoner Seminare* (1959–1969). Ed. Peter Trawny, 2017.
- GA 94 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 94. *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931–1938)*. Ed. Peter Trawny, 2014.
- GA 95 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 95. *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938–1939)*. Ed. Peter Trawny, 2014.
- GA 96 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 96. *Überlegungen XII-XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*. Ed. Peter Trawny, 2014.
- GA 97 *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 97. *Anmerkungen I-V (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*. Ed. Peter Trawny, 2015.

Gesamtausgabe Volumes with the English Translations Consulted, and with Abbreviations

[Note 1]. Not all the volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* have been translated into English. [Note 2]. In the translation of some GA volumes, texts appearing together there have been separated, so their translation will only be found scattered in more than one English publication. [Note 3]. Most of the published translations I have used have been modified after I consulted the original German texts. In presenting these altered translations, in some cases altered in major ways, I have not hesitated to exercise a freedom that some scholars will no doubt challenge. Communicating and sharing the meaning is more important than dogmatic devotion to all the words. Judgment is required. But I have attempted, as much as possible, to make the thought that the texts convey more easily accessible and more comprehensible,

giving words to the philosopher's thought that might faithfully and adequately express it in more idiomatic English. At this moment in time, I consider that attempt to be more important than producing translations that reproduce with obsessive exactitude the awkward grammar and style that expresses and reflects Heidegger's struggles to say something profoundly new and difficult. [Note 4]. The German text will be referenced first, and the English translation will follow.

- AM *Aristotle's "Metaphysics" Θ 1–3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force.* Trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- BaT *Being and Truth.* Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- BC *Basic Concepts.* Trans. Gary E. Aylesworth. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- BCAP *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy.* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- BF *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking.* Trans. Andrew Mitchell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- BPP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology.* Trans. Albert Hofstadter. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- BPPh *Basic Problems of Phenomenology: Winter Semester 1919/1920.* Trans. Scott M. Campbell. London: Continuum, 2013.
- BQP *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic."* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- BT *Being and Time.* Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- BTS *Being and Time.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Revised and with a Foreword by Dennis J. Schmidt. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010.
- BWP *The Beginning of Western Philosophy: Interpretation of Anaximander and Parmenides.* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.
- CP *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event).* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- CPC *Country Path Conversations.* Trans. Bret Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.

- CPE *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. Trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- CT *The Concept of Time. The First Draft of "Being and Time."* Trans. Ingo Farin. London: Continuum, 2011. Also see *The Concept of Time* (bilingual edition), trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992); and "The Concept of Time," in *Becoming Heidegger: On the Trail of His Early Occasional Writings, 1910–1927*, ed. Theodore Kisiel and Thomas Sheehan, 1st ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).
- DT *Discourse on Thinking*. Trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- E *The Event*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013.
- EF *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*. Translation of the Niemeyer edition. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985.
- EGT *Early Greek Thinking*. Trans. David F. Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- EHF *The Essence of Human Freedom: An Introduction to Philosophy*. Trans. Ted Sadler. London: Continuum, 2002.
- EP *The End of Philosophy*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- ET *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and "Theaetetus."* Trans. Ted Sadler. London: Continuum, 2002.
- FCM *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. Trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- FS *Four Seminars*. Trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- GI *German Idealism*. Trans. Peter Warnek. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- H *Heraclitus: The Inception of Occidental Thinking and Logic: Heraclitus' Doctrine of the Logos*. Trans. Julia Goesser Assaiante and Shane Ewegen. London: Bloomsbury, 2018.
- HB *The History of Beyng*. Trans. William McNeill and Jeffrey Powell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015.
- HCT *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Trans. Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- HGR *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine."* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

- HI *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- HP *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry.* Trans. Keith Hoeller. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000.
- HR *Hölderlin's Hymn "Remembrance."* Trans. William McNeill and Julia Ireland. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018.
- HS *Martin Heidegger and Eugen Fink. Heraclitus Seminar 1966/67.* Trans. Charles Seibert. University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979. Reprint: Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1993.
- ID *Identity and Difference.* Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- IM *Introduction to Metaphysics.* Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- IMm *An Introduction to Metaphysics.* Trans. Ralph Manheim. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959.
- IP *Introduction to Philosophy.* Trans. William McNeill. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- IPR *Introduction to Phenomenological Research.* Trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- KPM *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics.* Trans. Richard Taft. 5th enlarged ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- LQT *Logic: The Question of Truth.* Trans. Thomas Sheehan. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- M *Mindfulness.* Trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary. London: Continuum, 2006.
- MFL *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic.* Trans. Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- N *Nietzsche.* Ed. and Trans. David Farrell Krell. 4 vols. New York: Harper & Row, 1979–1987. Translation includes revised versions of GA volumes 43, 44, 47, and 48.
- N1 *Nietzsche, vol. I: The Will to Power as Art (1936–1937).* See GA 6.1 and GA 43.
- N2 *Nietzsche, vol. II: The Eternal Recurrence of the Same and the Will to Power (1937).* See GA 6.2 and GA 44.
- N3 *Nietzsche, vol. III: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics (1940).* See GA 6.1 and GA 47.
- N4 *Nietzsche, Nihilism (1939).* See GA 6.1 and GA 48.
- NUM *Interpretation of Nietzsche's Second Untimely Meditation.* Trans. Ullrich Haase and Mark Sinclair. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016.

- OBT *Off the Beaten Track*. Trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- OHF *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Trans. John Van Buren. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- OTB *On Time and Being*. Trans. Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- OWL *On the Way to Language*. Trans. Peter D. Hertz and Joan Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- P *Parmenides*. Trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- PIA *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle: Initiation into Phenomenological Research*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008.
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- PM *Pathmarks*. Ed. William McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- PR *The Principle of Reason*. Trans. Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- PRL *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Trans. Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.
- PS *Plato's "Sophist."* Trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- P2 *Ponderings II-VI: Black Notebooks 1931–1938*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Indiana University Press, 2016.
- P7 *Ponderings VII-XI: Black Notebooks 1938–1939*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Indiana University Press, 2017.
- P12 *Ponderings XII-XV: Black Notebooks 1939–1941*. Trans. Richard Rojcewicz. Indiana University Press, 2017.
- QCT *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- QT *The Question Concerning the Thing*. Trans. James Reid and Benjamin Crowe. London: Rowman & Littlefield International. Translates GA.
- RZL *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges (1910–1976)*. Ed. Hermann Heidegger. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000.
- WIP *What Is Philosophy?* Trans. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback. New Haven, CT: College & University Press, 1958.

- WCT *What Is Called Thinking?* Trans. J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- WT *What Is a Thing?* Trans. W. B. Barton and Vera Deutsch. Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1967.
- ZSE *Translation: Zollikon Seminars: Protocols—Conversations—Letters.* Trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001. This is a translation only of *Zollikoner Seminare: Protokolle, Gespräche, Briefe*. Ed. Medard Boss. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1987.
- ZSG Not in the *Gesamtausgabe: Zollikoner Seminare: Protokolle, Gespräche, Briefe*. Ed. Medard Boss. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1987.

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INTRODUCTION

Prelude and Promise

As utopian oases dry up, a desert of banality and bewilderment spreads.

Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*¹

Today thinking must make itself alarming [*anstößig*] in order to jolt us humans into experiencing for the very first time the passion of thinking [*die Leidenschaft des Denkens*] and compel us [*zwingen*] to learn how to live in the dimension opened up by recognizing the underlying differentiation [*Unterscheidung*] of being and beings.

Heidegger, *The Event* (GA 71: 252/E 217)²

Our guardianship [*Wächterschaft*] of the truth of being [i.e., the openness of the clearing that makes presencing possible in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment] lays the ground for another history.

Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event* (GA 65: 240–41/CP 190)

Er-eignen [the appropriation laying claim to the essence—the fundamental dis-position—of the human being] originally meant: *er-äugen*, i.e., look, see [*blicken*], catch sight of [*im Blicken zu sich rufen*], and lay claim to [*an-eignen*].

Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity” (GA 11: 45/ID 136)

It is the same with familiar plants as with other familiar objects: in the end, we cease to think about them at all. But what is seeing without thinking?

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey*³

This is the second volume of my project, *Heidegger's Phenomenology of Perception*. The two volumes may be read separately, neither one requiring the other, although, if read together, they would reciprocate a certain illumination. These two volumes set out to question and explore seeing and hearing as, in their essence, ontologically disclosive capacities, or capabilities, considered in terms of a hermeneutical phenomenology and in the light not only of Heidegger's searing critique of contemporary life and the historical character of its perception but also of his visionary projection of the fourfold (*das Geviert*), a transformed world.

In his 1946 "Letter on 'Humanism,'" Heidegger ventures a response to Jean Beaufret, whom he quotes as telling him: "What for a long time now I have been trying to do is to spell out the relationship between ontology and a possible ethics" (GA 9: 352–53/PM 268). As I have conceived the project that has culminated in my two-volume work on Heidegger's phenomenology of perception, it is none other than that very relationship that I have been questioning and exploring—in regard to our seeing and hearing as *ethos*, ways of dwelling, ways of living in the world. How should we unfold Heidegger's claim, in this "Letter," that "the human being is the shepherd of being [*der Hirt des Seins*]" (GA 9: 331/PM 252)? What does that mean for our ways of seeing and hearing as ways of living?

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In the first volume, I proposed interpretations of what I consider to be the five keywords in Heidegger's project, namely (1) *Sein*, (2) *Da-sein*, (3) *Ereignis*, (4) *Lichtung*, and (5) *Geschick*. And I showed how they work together to define and advance Heidegger's project. Each of these keywords has multiple uses and meanings in the context of his project. In a greatly condensed preliminary interpretation, the principal sense of these keywords might be rendered as follows:

- (1) *Sein*: This word refers to the sheer facticity of being (the fact that there is anything at all rather than nothing), although *Sein* is also used to refer to the *clearing* constitutive of *Dasein's* existence as that field of openness within which the presencing of beings is possible. Thus, in this sense, being (sometimes spelled *Seyn*) is to be *differentiated* from beings in that it names the clearing—that

which provides an open expanse for beings to be present (GA 71: 247/E 213). In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger tends to work out his thought in terms of a post-metaphysical distinction between *Sein* and *Seyn*, where the first term carries a metaphysical sense, representing a constant presence serving as ground or essence, and where the latter term designates a temporalized post-metaphysical sense. But his use of *Seyn*, in this text and in others, is not entirely consistent. I will continue to use the English word “being,” understanding its truth, however, in a post-metaphysical way (Cf. GA 65: § 85, 171/CP 135).

- (2) *Da-sein*: Whereas “Dasein” (without the hyphen) simply recognizes the fact of human existence, “Da-sein” (with a hyphen) refers to the essential nature, or fundamental disposition, of that human existence, namely, its *bodily* situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*) and its *bodily* thrown-openness (*Geworfenheit*), an openness that lays out a field of experience within which beings can be present. Depending on the context, the word can also designate a human life that is lived authentically, recognizing, understanding, and achieving itself, that is, its potential, in and through that essential nature. In a text from the period 1941–1942, Heidegger succinctly explains this keyword, connecting it to the calling in and of our nature, claiming, or appropriating us for a process of appropriation: “Thinking is determined by the *appropriation* [*Er-eignung*] of the human being, whereby the essence of humanity is grounded in *Da-seyn*” (GA 71: 247/E 213). We need to bear in mind, however, that, as Heidegger repeatedly emphasized, this “essential nature” is not at all like the “essence” that has figured in the history of metaphysics: it is not fate, not eternal, immutable, and closed off from interactions with the world. Although he does not use the terminology of “first nature” and “second nature,” I think these familiar words indicate how he thinks of the human essence, namely, as always capable of development—development in ways not entirely pre-determined but continually responsive to the contingent conditions of life.
- (3) *Er-ignis*: This keyword refers, first of all, to an extraordinary *event* of profound historical significance, an event in which, with the sudden emergence of the ontological question about what it means to be, there is a reflective turn away from beings and a recognition of being as such, being itself. But second, as I argued in the preceding volume, the keyword refers to the *process* that this event calls

for and can set in motion, namely, our *appropriation*, a process that corresponds to what the event summons and claims us—that is to say, appropriates us—for: recognizing, understanding, and taking on the character and conditions of our proper role in relation to being. According to Heidegger, we need to find, in the pull of this relation (*Bezug*), our historical responsibility for being, the being of beings. Thus, to the strange ontological event “outside” us, there should correspond, awakened and bestirred “inside” us, a process of *appropriation* in which, decisively appropriated, we would recollect and retrieve our potential as *Da-sein* and accordingly undertake in earnest to achieve what we take it to call for: a responsibility to develop the humanity in ourselves, a responsibility in our being-with-others, and a responsibility for our role in determining what it means for beings (anything) to be—be present and absent—in our world. In the first volume, I accordingly distinguished three connected senses of *appropriation* (*Er-eignis*, *Er-eignung*): (1) “appropriation” as summoning and making a claim on us; (2) “appropriation” as our taking on what this summons and claim calls for; and (3) “appropriation” as *proprietion*, the task of authenticity, becoming true to our existence as human beings.⁴

- (4) *Lichtung*: A clearing that, in its openness, lays out, as a field, or world of intelligibility and meaning, the conditions necessary for the experiencing, hence the disclosing, of beings, both in their presence and in their absence. What our bodily existing and presence opens and lays out could be a field of visibility or audibility, a field organized by gesture, or a universe of discourse.
- (5) *Geschick*: Heidegger used this word in two inherently connected ways. In its common meaning, which Heidegger appropriates for his philosophy of history, the word refers to “destiny.” But, in light of word’s connection to the German words for sending and what is sent (*schicken* and *Schickung*), “Geschick” also refers to the sending (*Schicken*), hence the givenness, of historical conditions bearing a promising destiny as their immanent possibility: a possibility, perhaps blocked and forgotten, that nevertheless *might* still be available to us, found and retrieved from the history we have inherited, using our freedom and discernment to interpret this inheritance and rescue that promise for our future, working out the situations we find ourselves given.

The past is never simply past, totally past, buried and lost; that is an understanding of the past—a way of remembering what has been—that Heidegger challenges for the sake of a memory that retrieves from the past not only *what was* but also *what might have been*, hence what might consequently still be possible. He calls this a “memory in the future”: “eine Erinnerung in die Zukunft, welches Erinnern kein Vorhersagen sein möchte” (GA 97: 27): Another future, different from the one otherwise forthcoming. But such a work of memory, drawing on possibilities in the past that were left behind in order to influence what is coming as the future, should not be confused with prediction and prophecy. Therefore, this conception of memory correspondingly requires a radically different understanding of destiny, defining its freedom and responsibility in the sharpest imaginable opposition to the metaphysics of fate.

A new understanding of the past, a new inheritance, can profoundly *change* the course of future, challenging the assumptions on which it rested. The past can be a present for the future. In his “Gettysburg Address,” Abraham Lincoln retrieved an unrecognized and suppressed meaning of the American Constitution, a meaning both present and absent, in effect retroactively casting in a historically revolutionary light what was to be thought in the proposition that “all men are created equal,” belatedly “giving people,” as the historian Garry Wills noted, “a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely.”⁵ However, as Walter Benjamin argued, “only a redeemed humanity can receive the fullness of its past.”⁶

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Before continuing this interpretation of “Ereignis” and “Geschick,” I will now interrupt to summarize the structural logic in my interpretations, hoping that, at this early point in the Introduction, it might be helpful, especially for the reader who has not read the first volume, to follow step by step the intricate connections among Heidegger’s five keywords:

- (1) The human being (*Mensch*) is an existent being (*Dasein*).
- (2) The human being exists—lives—in the draw or pull (*Bezug*) of a connection to being (*Sein*) that Heidegger describes as a belonging-togetherness (*Zusammen-gehörigkeit*).
- (3) “Da-sein” (hyphenated) names our thrown-openness, our being-in-the-world, which is also the belonging-togetherness of being (*Sein*) and human being (*Mensch-sein*).
- (4) Our existence as *Da-sein* is inherently an openness, a clearing (*Lichtung*), laying out the necessary conditions for the possibility of our experiencing beings.

- (5) “Da-sein” names the being-in-the-world that our very existence as such has opened—opened, in fact, at the time of our birth, our entrance into the world; hence, our existence, our being-in-the-world, begins even before we are aware of it, constituting a pre-conceptual, pre-reflective, pre-ontological relation to being.
- (6) In that existence, that is to say, in the openness the sheer fact of our existence opens, we and being belong together. Hence, simply by existing, we open up a world in which being (*Sein*) and our being (*Mensch-sein, Dasein*) inherently belong together.
- (7) We ourselves are *in* the world we open up. Thus, our belonging-together with being constitutes our corresponding appropriation (*Er-eignung*) to bear responsibility for this world—for its being and its way of being.
- (8) Destiny (*Geschick*) concerns the question whether or not what we make of the historical world—the world in which we find ourselves given to inherit and live—actually serves its flourishing.
- (9) At stake in the question of destiny is the flourishing of our environment (symbolized by Heidegger’s invocation of earth and sky), the entire realm of nature (plants and animals), and the humanity, or dignity, of all human beings.

The interpretation I am proposing now continues in greater detail.

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In Heidegger’s project, “Ereignis” and “Geschick” are very complex terms with multiple uses and meanings. In the absence of self-evident definitions, readers need to determine meaning by contexts of use. Even that, however, becomes extremely difficult when there is not just one consistent, standard context of usage. Consequently, the words require interpretation, provisional proposals, in order to unfold their complexities and intricacies. And interpretation always provokes debate—as it should.

I like what Edmund Jabès once argued: “An unlimited text is one that every time gives rise to a new reading while partially escaping it. What still remains to be read is its one chance of survival.”⁷ Heidegger’s texts are incomplete in this way. Working through my interpretations, readers should accordingly bear in mind that, as Merleau-Ponty remarked, “The words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that enclose what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being, because they more nearly convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin.”⁸ So, before we concentrate on perception, I want to say a little more about Heidegger’s distinctive use of these two keywords. This could perhaps be especially useful for readers who have not read the first volume.

Ereignis. Heidegger hopes that the experiencing of this ontological event of disclosure, revealing being itself in its difference from beings, is one that will make us aware of an ontological claim on us, whether it happens in wonder and awe or in anxiety and dread. That is, the disclosing of the truth of being is an event that summons and claims us, appropriating us for a *process of appropriation* in which we come to recognize and understand ourselves in our belonging to, and our role in, the disclosing of this facticity of being, and accordingly begin taking on responsibility for the historical character of our disclosive relation to being, and, too, a responsibility for the future in regard to what beings there are in our world and how they can, or must, be present.⁹

So, what Heidegger calls our “entering into appropriation” (*Einkehr in das Ereignis*) is not only a question of our taking on responsibility for the truth of being; it is inherently also, therefore, a question of our being true to ourselves, true to our potential as human beings. And that means it is a question of becoming who we are in essence, namely *Da-sein*.¹⁰ In *Being and Time*, Heidegger thinks of this primarily in terms of existential authenticity. With “Ereignis” and related words, “Er-eignung,” “Ver-eignung,” “An-eignung,” “Zu-eignung,” and “Eignis,” Heidegger refines and develops this existential notion of authenticity, arguing for an understanding of what it means for us, as human beings, to actualize the potential in the essential nature of our humanity. This “authenticity” is not narcissism; on the contrary, it belongs in Heidegger’s interpretation of humanism as the commitment to developing our (sense of) humanity.

In his Summer Semester 1944 lectures on Heraclitus, Heidegger acknowledged that, in our everyday life, we act as if we need not concern ourselves with the fact that beings *are*, and are determined in and by their being. We live with beings all the time, but the being of these beings remains unthought. Consequently, he argues, we neglect our historical *responsibility* for the *being* of beings: for *what* beings *are* and for *how* they are (GA 55.2: 322/H 241). Neglecting their being, we abandon them to their vulnerabilities, their fate in an epoch that imposes total reification on all beings, reducing everything to commercial availability—and the will to power.

The *Ereignis* is an event in which being itself breaks through our lethargy, and thus it is—and should be experienced as—a challenge to our way of living, indeed reminding us that caring about being constitutes the very essence of our dignity as human beings, our distinction from all the (other) animals (GA 55.2: 375/H 280). So, this event, in which we finally “discover” being, is an experience that summons us to begin a process of critical self-examination and appropriation: work on ourselves.

This ontological event (*Ereignis*), the contemplating of being itself, which could happen to anyone at any time, apparently took place for the first time in archaic Greece, breaking into the thought of some pre-Socratic

philosophers like a flash of lightning. For them, the event was an experience of wonder and awe. However, it is only in modern times, and fully only in Heidegger's thought, that this event of experience gets interpreted, understood, in its essence, as appropriating, summoning us to recognize in ourselves, as thrown-open *Da-sein*, an ontological responsibility, that is, *Wächterschaft der Wahr-heit*, caring for the truth of being. For the pre-Socratics, this experience, decisive though it was for their thinking, was not an event that made them look into themselves to recognize their own role and responsibility for being. They did not make the phenomenological turn. It is that self-reflective turn, with its self-recognition, and its recognition of a corresponding ontological responsibility, that is, a responsibility for being, that Heidegger brings to the fore, retrieving and interpreting anew Parmenides' saying that mind and being are "the same." For Heidegger, what Parmenides is getting at is the belonging-together of man and being.

Reading and interpreting the history of philosophy, Heidegger was hoping that remembering and understanding the pre-Socratics' experience of this ontological disclosure could become a world-changing, history-making event, bringing forth a new humanity and a new world. But that transformation could happen only through a process of appropriation, in which we human beings, living today, having attained an understanding of the disclosive nature and character of our relation to being (a relation of interaction and belongingness), begin to take responsibility not only for beings but also for the very being of these beings. To change the world, we need to change ourselves. *Da-sein* (with the hyphen) names that change in ourselves.

What is awakened, aroused, and stirred by the ontological experience of something we commonly take to be "outside" us is something we commonly locate "inside" us: a disposition of our nature that, as Heidegger will say in his 1925 *Prolegomena to the History of the Concept of Time* (GA 20: 209), constitutes our "most fundamental disposition" (*Fundamentalbestimmung*). And, though he does not say so, it is in fact carried by our embodiment. But it is a dis-positioning dis-position, because it is our *Befindlichkeit* as *Geworfenheit*: how we find ourselves, uncannily situated in our thrown- openness—an openness to the world that is inherently relational and interactive, taking us, as it were, "out of ourselves." Heidegger refers to this disposition as "the gentlest of laws" (GA 12: 248/OWL 128). It is indeed the *gentlest* of laws, because it is a law of our ownmost nature, summoning us to recognize, take up, and develop ourselves, not only as the thrown-open, disclosive beings we are, but also, therefore, in our role as the guardians of being. However, recognizing ourselves in the dis-positioning thrown- openness that is *Da-sein* can be unsettling, disquieting, and unnerving.

In this regard, the phenomenology of our belonging-together (*Zusammen-gehörigkeit*) with being is for Heidegger of the greatest importance. But I think he arrived at an understanding of its full significance only in such later works as “The Principle of Identity” (1957) and “Time and Being” (1962). Whereas the Husserl of *Ideas* (1913) and *Cartesian Meditations* (1929), and the Merleau-Ponty of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), were, despite their major differences, still under the influence of Cartesianism, making the percipient subject the philosophical starting point for understanding the perceptual engagement with being, Heidegger questioned the subject, starting instead from the perceptual situation—the *belonging-together* of subject and object. Husserl’s starting point was the *transcendental* ego-subject and Merleau-Ponty’s was the *embodied* subject, but both philosophers adopted the subject as the starting point for their philosophical ruminations. However, in *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger made his point of departure the thrown-open, disclosive situatedness of *Da-sein*, our being-in-the-world.

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Now, as regards the word “Geschick,” which figures prominently in Heidegger’s early thought, I submit that there is no way to use it without raising countless very troubling questions. Sometimes, it can seem as if he is assuming or positing some transcendent metaphysical agency—some *theologoumenon*, mysteriously at work in the course of history.

Although, as a student and young scholar, Heidegger vehemently rebelled against the scholastic theology in which he was educated, and moreover attempted to think about human existence in terms of a radically immanent, this-worldly transcendence, formulated in a distinctive philosophical terminology of his own free of theologically saturated concepts, I suggest that he never entirely purged his thinking of a theologically inflected metaphysics. Vestiges of a certain theological inspiration subtly persist, even in the secular humanism to be found in the rhetoric of his postwar lectures and writings. These vestiges are particularly manifest in the rhetorical figure of destiny that is at the heart of his philosophy of history. And they continue to appear even *after* his forceful repudiation of an irremediably enigmatic interpretation of the “history of being,” referring to something that is neither a history in the familiar historiographical sense nor an interpretive meta-narrative following the logic in an unfolding of a succession of ways of conceptually understanding and disclosing what it means for something to be. His “history of being,” however, remained stubbornly obscure, an embarrassing problem—until it was eventually withdrawn into silence.

Basically, the meaning of “Geschick,” understood as signifying destiny, passed through three phases in Heidegger’s thought. (1) In the 1920s, Heidegger’s use of the word “Geschick,” meaning “destiny,” carried a

communitarian, nationalistic, culturally specific sense of destiny, a sense summoning the national culture of his native Germany to the achieving of its proper fulfillment, its so-called “mission.” In this use, he explicitly argued against the causality of fate; and he strongly repudiated all onto-theological, eschatological, and teleological interpretations, although it has sometimes seemed that, despite disclaimers, he remained to some extent under the influence of metaphysical, theological thinking during his early years as a scholar and academic. Something of an onto-theological sense occasionally seems to haunt his earliest use of the word. (2) But in the 1930s and the early 1940s, the word carried, and at least for a few years wholeheartedly encouraged, the sense of destiny belonging uniquely to National Socialism: an ontological nationalism and an ontological, cultural racism.

(3) In the late 1930s and the post-War years, Heidegger would still at times speak of destiny; but, as he began to twist free of the political ideology he once embraced, the question of destiny began to take on a diminished role in his thinking; and whenever it did appear, the word increasingly seemed to carry a sense of destiny that perhaps, finally, abandoned nationalism—even in its “merely” cultural version, and instead would bear witness to the human condition in its universality, representing his singular vision of a future transformed world in which we human beings would live together on this planet in a way worthy of our shared humanity—a way that would achieve and redeem what he regarded as the true “dignity” of our humanity. This universality, though, is never affirmed with the kind of reassurance we need to hear. Presumably it means to include *all* human beings in regard to their “humanity”—whatever that means. But, when he gives specific content to his vision, it is somewhat reminiscent of the utopian thinking in early German Romanticism, a poetic evocation of the communal life of a rural culture, and not a projection of an urban, cosmopolitan way of life. The images and rhetoric that he uses do not suggest a cosmopolitan, multicultural society and life. And yet, he will refer to characteristics constitutive of the supposed “essence” or “essential nature” of the human being. However, the building, dwelling, and thinking he conjures up in his utopian vision of the fourfold (*Geviert*) does seem to be planetary, hence inclusive and universal, in its concern for the nature of our environment—our air, water, and earth. But, as I shall argue, it is not at all apparent that the *Geviert* is a gathering that welcomes, as into a democracy, all human beings, regardless of their differences.

So, I need to say here that I feel considerable dissatisfaction reading Heidegger’s occasional invocations of “humanity” in the post-War years. All his thought ever provides seems to be nothing more than the

celebration of an abstract humanity. For the word to be more than this, he would need to give it moral substance, arguing for human rights and civil rights, and for the importance of respecting and protecting identities and differences. There is virtually no guidance regarding what he actually means when he invokes “humanity.” And, considering his early entanglement with National Socialism, we should be hesitant, if not reluctant, to think it carries forward the Enlightenment project. That connection to the Enlightenment will always be what I have in mind when I appeal to our sense of humanity.

In his notebook (1947–1948), Heidegger confided—to his credit—serious misgivings about the “history of being” for which, in the decade after the publication of *Being and Time*, he had emphatically argued (GA 97: 382). But to the extent that his interpretation of “destiny” essentially depended on this notion of the “history of being,” both the meaning and usefulness of “destiny” would come into question. By the 1950s, invocations of “Geschick” were unquestionably disappearing. However, after Heidegger abandoned the culturally specific, nationalistic interpretation, it becomes difficult to determine how “destiny” could still fit into his project. His “Letter on Humanism” (1946) is frustratingly abstract; but, insofar as the question of our destiny is still at stake, we are somehow to understand it in the context of his version of humanism.

In the post-War years, Heidegger refrained from giving “destiny” a significant role in his thinking about our inheritance of history and our responsibility for the future; but unfortunately, he also refrained from venturing to propose much substantive meaning for his vision of a “new humanism”: a transformed percipience, transformed humanity, and transformed world—unless we consider texts such as “Building Dwelling Thinking” and “The Thing” to indicate something of the substance: an ontologically grounded, ontologically oriented life. This is basically a vision that summons us to take responsibility for our disclosive relation to things: *what types* of entities can appear and be in our world and *how* they can appear and be in it. It is also a vision that, in projecting the fourfold (*Geviert*), suggests a different relation to nature: a different way of dwelling on this earth and under its sky. Thus if, in the 1950s and after, his thought is still inspired by a vision of destiny—and this is not certain—then it seems to be making a claim to be a destiny for humanism, a distinctive vision for humanity, for *all life* on this planet, and no longer only a vision for the German nation. One might wish, however, that, if this interpretation is right, the inclusiveness of that vision had been more resolutely pronounced.

Nevertheless, even Heidegger's post-War invocations of "Geschick" justifiably cause suspicion, because, first of all, he never unequivocally repudiated the word's service during the terror of National Socialism and, second, because in the post-War years, he never clearly rendered with sufficient substance its new interpretation in the context of his new humanism. What is his post-War vision with regard to the transformation of our *Mit-sein*, our being-with-others? There is, unfortunately, very little to inform our thinking. The word "Geschick" could of course still be used, free of destiny, simply to recognize the givenness of the historical situations we find ourselves in. So, in the post-War years (1947–1948), it seems that Heidegger increasingly recognized that he did not really need this word, "Geschick," in order to conceptualize his project. The concept he recognized that his project required is "Ereignis":

In the *Ereignis*, nothing happens. Here there is no more happening [*Geschehen*]; no destiny [*auch kein Geschick*], either. In the *Ereignis*, the essence of history is abandoned [*verlassen*]. All talk of the history of being [*Seynsgeschichte*] is an embarrassment [*Verlegenheit*] and a euphemism. (GA 97: 382)

While insisting that the "history of being" is not a history in the normal historiographical sense of "history" and accordingly is not about the historical succession of conceptual interpretations of the meaning of being, that is, what it means for something—anything—to be, Heidegger left very much in the dark what exactly this history is about. Eventually, as I noted, the word "Geschick," and, along with it, the enigmatic "history of being" in which it is supposed to figure, lost its usefulness and fell into the secrecy of a stubborn silence. But it is as if the philosopher wanted finally to retract or deny the promise that we could ever attain a comprehensive, consoling meaning for history.

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In imagining a future different from the past and better, above all, in regard to a different and better way of revealing being, Heidegger's project calls for retrieving missed possibilities and potentials from the past for the sake of appropriating and developing them to make a different future.

Even in the 1936–1938 *Contributions*, while invoking "the last god" and saying that "the last god is not the end," he was urging us to direct our thinking toward another beginning, understanding this as the beginning "of the measureless possibilities of our history" (GA 65: 411/CP 326). "History," he says there, meaning "authentic" history, should be understood

in terms of “being as unfolding in events of appropriation [*Seyn als Ereignis*]” (GA 65: 494/CP 388). Hence, the *Ereignis* is not so much a mystery (*Geheimnis*) as it is a “homecoming” (*Heim-kehr*), a return to the sense and call of one’s deepest nature, the proper relation to being (see GA 65: 408/CP 323). In question is our *ontological* responsibility, that is, our responsibility for being, a “releasement” into openness, responsive openness, a responsibility that cannot be thought in terms of the opposition between active and passive.

But this process of retrieving requires confronting the fact that the conditions holding sway in the present epoch—the epoch of the *Gestell*, imposing a universal regime of total reification—obscure, distort, and even block our awareness, recognition, and understanding of these possibilities and potentials (see GA 7: 26–27/QCT 26). What *is* the *Geschick*? What have we been granted (*geschickt*) to work with? How can philosophical thought penetrate and overcome social, political, and cultural forms of distortion and blockage? These questions bring our thinking back to the *Ereignis* and its appropriation of our way of living. Our stewardship of being (GA 65: 23/CP 20).

What our time requires is a critical confrontation, identifying, penetrating, and overcoming the social, political, and cultural factors currently blocking, obscuring, and distorting historical possibilities and potentials that might turn our world of unnecessary suffering in a different direction, while also addressing the planetary emergency.¹¹ But a good beginning would be Socratic work on ourselves. After *Being and Time*, Heidegger called this *appropriation: Er-eignung*.

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If *Dasein*’s “power” to be disclosive of being is constitutive of its essence, then this volume is about that disclosiveness and its potential in our experience of perception. It is also, therefore, about *Dasein*’s self-understanding, its commitment to questioning and realizing what that potential, that essence, demands. In *Being and Time*, this commitment of responsibility is thought primarily in terms of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*): being true to oneself, hence committed to developing one’s ownmost (*eigenste*) disclosive potentialities.

In the years following the publication of *Being and Time*, the word “Ereignis,” together with its constellation of connected words, assumed an increasingly important role in Heidegger’s project, more or less replacing “authenticity.” Scholars, however, have not found this key word—“Ereignis”—easy to interpret and translate. Besides interpreting it as referring to an *ontological event* of singular historical, indeed history-making significance, scholars have taken it to refer to our *appropriation* because of

the “eigen” (own) and “eignen” (enown) implicit in the keyword. Reconciling and deploying *both* these interpretations, I want to connect the word’s meaning to the Socratic practice of self-examination, an ongoing process of self-questioning constitutive of a certain “steady moral seriousness.” For Heidegger, human existence is first and foremost a question of authentic resolve: not merely determination, steadfastness of purpose, but also what I would prefer to call “steadfast moral seriousness,” meaning commitment to a ceaseless Socratic process of self-questioning in regard to the ethical character of the life each of us makes—not only for ourselves but also for our communities, our world, and indeed for all creaturely life on this planet.¹² As Harry Frankfurt says, “Taking ourselves seriously means that we are not prepared to accept ourselves just as we are.”¹³ This ethical commitment, which Socrates and later Hellenic philosophers called “care of the soul,” is both a response to the moral demands of social existence in the world *and* a response to the claim that summons us from deep within ourselves to attend to our *propriation*: a claim that summons us in the very disposition of our bodily nature, exposing us to questions that address us in our existential condition as thrown-open, disclosive beings: not only questioning how we have lived our time and who we are becoming but also questioning what we aspire to achieve in our life and time. For Heidegger, this is a process of learning that necessarily involves, as he thinks it would for Parmenides, the character of our disclosive relation to being.

So, in the context of this volume, the words “Er-eignis” and “Er-eignung” refer to the claim that appropriates the essence of the seeing of our eyes and the essence of the hearing of our ears, calling into question the character of their disclosive disposition and dedicating them to an ontological responsibility—a steadfast responsibility for the being and essence of beings, not only protecting and preserving beings from reification and other forms of violence but also protecting and preserving the clearings, the fundamental conditions of possibility for experience, within which all beings appear and depart. The *Ereignis* is unmistakably an inspired inheritance from Socrates; but it is also *much more* than a summons to authenticity, much more than being true to one’s potential, connected as it is to a critique of our contemporary experience of being and the being of beings, and to a vision of the transformation of humanity that would fulfill the promise in our being, dwelling on this earth in an authentic form of human existence: an existence that would serve the flourishing of life and nature. We need to understand ourselves in our percipience, need to understand what it means for our lives that, in the ways we see and hear, we are not only determining how we are standing on the earth and under the sky but also determining

the very conditions of the earth and the sky, now deteriorating in a planetary emergency. Learning to see and learning to hear are necessary, never-ending processes of ap-pro-priation (*Er-eignung*) and transformation. Processes that are bound to be decisive for the future.

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This second volume accordingly lays out the history-making significance of Heidegger's project for the disclosive character of our seeing and hearing, working through in some detail his twofold critique, a critique of our contemporary life and world and a critique of the history of metaphysics, and exploring, from the perspective of his philosophy of history, the purport of those critiques for a possible future lifeworld, in which the paradigmatic character of our ways of seeing and hearing could undergo processes of transformation. In both volumes, it is argued that, for Heidegger, what is ultimately crucial is our assumption of responsibility, even in the realm of perception, for our embodied nature as sentient, percipient beings who are thrown-open to experience, cast into the projection of a world of meaning where for a time we sojourn in the openings of its dimensions, making its emergencies and possibilities our own as we venture our way.

This volume is therefore not primarily a work of scholarly exegesis. It is, first and foremost, an endeavor to contribute to the still unfinished project of modernity—an admittedly utopian project inheriting the spirit of the Enlightenment. More specifically, it is an attempt to glean from Heidegger's writings a contribution to the hermeneutics and phenomenology of perception, concentrating on the capacities and capabilities of the two organs of perception fundamental in our bodily engagement in the world—seeing and hearing. Of what are these interactive faculties capable? What can we still learn?

Nietzsche gave much thought to this very question. In *Twilight of the Idols*, he wrote of learning to see, arguing,

Learning to see—habituating the eye to repose, patience, letting things come to it; postponing judgement, learning to comprehend each individual from all sides.¹⁴

A surprising challenge, because, for those of us who are not born blind, seeing comes naturally, and we therefore tend to assume that there is nothing in seeing to be learned.

What has drawn my thinking for quite some time to Heidegger's project is what might be implied by the fact that seeing and hearing are capacities and capabilities the ontological potential of which is an endowment, an

appropriation and disposition, that, both as members of a community and as individuals, we can cultivate and always further develop.

I shall argue that Heidegger's reflections on the negation of being that threatens our world today constitute a summons to learn a new, different way of seeing and hearing, a different way of dwelling on this earth, in a time that, like Nietzsche before him, he takes to be endangered by the ever-deepening night of nihilism, reducing being to nothingness. He is convinced that this reduction is causing us a spiritual destitution and suffering so deep that, despite the symptomology, most of us are virtually unaware of being in its grip. Insofar as our habitual ways of seeing and hearing are to some extent responsible for and complicit in the spreading of nihilism, learning a new way by drawing on our still unrealized potential would seem to be urgently desirable.

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In the course of his lifetime, beginning with his earliest writings, Heidegger attempted to work out in compelling critical analyses and arguments the significance of the present crisis, or emergency, defined as a neglect of being. Why does this neglect matter? His critique makes clear why it is imperative for us to examine the character of our perception and think about its potential for transformations that could contribute to the redeeming of our humanity and our planetary emergency.

In the lectures on Heraclitus as in so many other texts, Heidegger consistently argued that, beginning with Descartes, the modern interpretation of the human essence as subject not only prevents genuine experience of the humanness of the human but also distorts our relation to the beings we encounter in the world, because what determines our humanness and the being of beings is not something that can be properly thought in terms of the subject-object structure (GA 55: 382, 386–87/H 284, 288). We are the guardians of the clearings, the perceptual fields of being that our very ex-istence intrinsically opens as constitutive of the necessary conditions of meaningfulness for the possibility of experiencing the presence and absence of beings.

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From the very beginning of his project to its end, Heidegger's method was both phenomenological and hermeneutical. This method was carefully laid out and explained in the "Introduction" to his 1927 work, *Being and Time*. In this "Introduction," Heidegger takes over Husserl's conception of phenomenology. However, he subtly revises it by returning to the Greek origin of the word in *phainesthai* (to show itself in the light) and *logos* (that which discloses, giving an account, explicating, laying out, unfolding,

articulating), thereby calling our attention to the intrinsically hermeneutical character of all experience—the inescapable facticity of hiddenness. As phenomenological, his way of thinking sought faithfully to describe human experience, both in its typically lived everydayness and in its deeper ontological truth. But given the nature of this experience, the method also had to be hermeneutical, recognizing that it is intrinsic to the nature and truth of experience to be *aletheic*, necessarily forming and presencing in an interplay of concealment and unconcealment.

In *Basic Concepts of Ancient Philosophy*, his early 1926 Marburg lectures, Heidegger explains and shows how his phenomenology functions, not only to illuminate the experiential origin, formation, and development of concepts in the context of the history of philosophy but also to lay out and examine the interconnections of the concepts, the ways they are woven together into a coherent discourse (GA 22: 1/BCAP 1). In this phenomenologically grounded explication of concepts, Heidegger's procedure follows very closely Husserl's methodic *Sinnesgenesis*; but there is, in Heidegger's approach, a much clearer, much heightened recognition that the reflexive character of phenomenology makes the descriptive nature of its enquiry work in a *performative* way, since reflective understanding inevitably induces a certain transformation in the experience. For Heidegger, phenomenological description always seems to be in the service of such transformation.

This present volume, making use of phenomenology but going far beyond its essentially descriptive function, engages Heidegger's concerns regarding the *character* of perception—in particular, the ontological responsibility inherent in our ability to be disclosive, receptive, and responsive in the ways we perceive the world. And it engages these concerns in the light of his searing critique of the *Gestell*—the total imposition of reification—totally determining our contemporary world. This critique of contemporary perception stirred him to contemplate and project the development of our disclosive capabilities in perception as part of a very different way for us to dwell on this earth and under the sky. In imaging the fourfold—*das Geviert*—Heidegger sketches the revolutionary character of his truly visionary utopian project.

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Thus, I consider Heidegger's most enduring contributions to be (1) an insightful and boldly challenging reading, fairly comprehensive, of the history of Western philosophy, and above all, of the Western discourse of metaphysics, from the pre-Socratics to and through the neo-Kantians and Husserl; (2) a very compelling *critique* of Western philosophy that is based

on this reading and attempts to deconstruct, and overcome, its metaphysical foundations and scaffolding; (3) corresponding to this critique of metaphysics, an equally compelling critique of the increasingly overwhelming, accelerating technologization (*Machenschaft*) and dehumanization of life in the Western world; and finally (4) the sketch of a utopian vision, the “fourfold,” suggesting the character of a transformed humankind living in a poetically transformed relation to one another and to the whole of nature. These constitute a truly extraordinary contribution—not only to the discourse of philosophical thought but also to the understanding and very living of our lives in a time of momentous challenges, confusing and difficult.

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There are many ways of reading and interpreting Heidegger’s project of thought. Their differences, however, even when conflicting and seemingly irreconcilable, are not necessarily to be regretted. They can, on the contrary, be fruitful. One of those ways of approaching and interpreting the project concentrates on his critique of the modern world. This is a critique inspired in large measure by Nietzsche that sees the world suffering under the increasing nihilism and dehumanization that the institutions and technologies we created are imposing in our reckless will to power. So, in the present volume, we shall explore not only what Heidegger has to tell us about how seeing and hearing have been affected by such nihilism and dehumanization but also what he has to tell us about how seeing and hearing have been complicit in the making of this world.

For too long, the modern world—and its reflection in philosophical discourse—has been swayed by the conviction that what singularly distinguishes and separates the human from the animal is the power of reason, the power in reason. There is truth in this representation. But as getting at the sole, or even major difference, this representation neglects the importance of the capacity and ability to be responsive to unnecessary suffering in determining the essence of our humanity. This capacity and ability are more fundamental, and certainly no less important, than the ability to reason. The tragic character of our time, manifest in the character of our percipience, our capacity for seeing and hearing, reflects, in all the forms of unnecessary suffering, our monstrous indulgence in a power of reason that has forgotten its rootedness in *pathos*. Before the voice of reason, there is the voice of *pathos*—our *earliest* experience of appropriation in our engagement with living beings. Thus, as an event in which we find ourselves beginning to recognize and understand the nature of our relation to being, the *Er-eignis* is an event that involves *Er-leidnis*, a process of growing into a

certain empathic responsibility—a felt openness to the *being* of beings, an awakening sense of the ethical.

Now, as I have indicated, Heidegger's project is much more than a critique; it is also an attempt to imagine the possibility of a different, better world. As he says forcefully in *Being and Time*, "Higher than actuality stands possibility. We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as concerned with possibility" (GA 2: 51–52/BT 63). But the social and cultural conditions of consciousness can decisively block historical possibilities and opportunities that once were available. So, we need first of all to retrieve these possibilities and opportunities from the forgetfulness in which they were buried. Regaining that subversive historical memory, we can then begin to explore what his project implies for a transformation in the character of our seeing and hearing. And I shall propose a reading of Heidegger that brings out for our consideration the significance of his project as a contribution to what Schiller called "the aesthetic education of man," a reading, therefore, that finds in Heidegger's thought his distinctly original inheritance of nineteenth-century German Idealism and Romanticism: above all, inspiration in difference from the philosophers Kant, Hegel, and Schelling, and from the poets Schiller, Hölderlin, and Novalis, all of whom, in one way or another, envisioned some kind of transformation in the consciousness and character of the human being: a more enlightened, more humane, more poetic way of living. And they all gave thought, accordingly, to the importance of encouraging the education and development of our senses and sensibilities, and not only our cognitive ability to construct new concepts for critical understanding, knowledge, and invention. Like this earlier generation of German poets and philosophers, Heidegger understood that in the philosophical project he was envisioning, such education and development are essential. But first of all, as he argued, we need to recognize and understand ourselves: Who we are and what we are capable of?

In his 1943 lecture course on Heraclitus, Heidegger expressed in very dramatic words what is at stake in that question, arguing that, estranged from the fundamental dispensation of our nature as human beings, we are betraying its great potential:

We do not measure up, in a historical way, to the demand that history places upon us simply by filling our calendar with numerous commemorations, only to forget all "commemorating" the following week because we then have to race out to see the latest film. The flight in the face of this demand is not an invention of the present: it begins rather with Christianity, and only changes its form with the emergence of the

present. The planet is in flames. The essence of the human being is out of joint [*aus den Fugen*]. We must learn to let our thinking span from the most ephemeral flickering of the fleeting day—the pedestrian, the “is”—all the way into this destitution [*Not*] so that we can experience a single destiny [*Geschick*] in its entirety. (GA 55: 123/H 92)

We are living in a time of crisis and emergency. But it is often precisely in emergencies that what is most needed emerges. For Heidegger, historical salvation accordingly begins when we acknowledge and understand who we are—what it means to be a human being. And this is something that calls for recognizing and understanding our role in relation to the disclosing of being. Here, it will be a question of how seeing and hearing are engaged in this meaning.

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In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger says, “*Dasein* [is] a not-yet that every *Dasein*, as the being that it is, has to become” (GA 2: 324/ BT 288). *Dasein* is the common German word to designate human existence. In that sense, each of us human beings *is*, quite simply, a *Dasein*. However, according to Heidegger, we human beings are not yet, as such, living authentically, that is, in keeping with our essence: each of us is a *Da-sein*, a situated thrown-open being, called upon therefore to be mindful of our inherent openness and exposure to the world—a situating thrown-openness that the hyphen breaking open the word *Da-sein* emphatically signifies, although, inconsistently, Heidegger only sometimes used it.

To the extent that we move toward our most proper, most appropriate, most authentic existence, to that extent we *become* what we always already have been fatefully assigned and disposed by nature to be, namely: *Da-sein*. So, the human being—*der Mensch* or *Dasein* without the hyphen—both is already, and yet, not yet, *Da-sein*. We can fulfill ourselves individually—and fulfill our historical destiny (*Geschick*) as belonging to Western civilization—only insofar as we realize our essence, hence our most fundamental disposition, which is to be structurally dis-posed as the site of clearings, situated in the worlds of meaning our very existence as such opens and clears. Thrown-openness (*Geworfenheit*) is our existential situation, our essential situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*). Becoming a true openness, that is, a *Da-sein*, means getting in touch with the “design” in our capacities and bringing what we understand to be their latent potential to their proper fulfillment in a skillfulness (“power” or “virtue”) grounded in ontological understanding (*Schicklichkeit*).

What is the character of our disclosiveness? Since the character of this disclosiveness bears on the question of *what* beings can be present and absent in our world and on *how* they can be so, we need to think about how we should develop this power, this ability.

The project I am engaged in, attentive to the potentialities constitutive of our human existence, draws inspiration from Aristotle's psychology. However, it is situated, thanks to Heidegger, in the context of an existential phenomenology, with ethical, moral, and social-political implications that Heidegger himself leaves largely unexplored. Consequently, after Heidegger, we have much work to be done: not only philosophical work regarding the nature of our perceptual capacities and capabilities, their potential and development in relation to being, but also work on ourselves. In a poem evoking a certain "turning" (*Wendung*), a turning very different from what Heidegger calls a "Kehre," the poet Rilke called it "heart-work" — *Herzwerk*.¹⁵

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As I shall read it here, Heidegger's project lays out a phenomenology of perception in the context of a comprehensive critique of the modern world and a corresponding critique of the history of Western metaphysics that shows how, even as it reflects theoretically and critically on that world, Western metaphysics remains a problematic reflection of it. The argument I am making in the first volume and further developing and demonstrating in this second volume is that the question of being (*Sein*) summons us to recognize, understand, enown, and enact our ownmost responsibility (our *Er-eignis*, *Er-eignung*) as *Da-sein*, grounders and guardians of the perceptual clearing (*Lichtung*), that expanse of openness which, within its conditions of intelligibility, makes possible the reception of the meaningful presencing, or being, of beings in our seeing and hearing.

Heidegger's critique of the life-world and of the metaphysics that belongs to this world calls for fundamental changes that require our breaking away from the past for the sake of a truly new future. This is a task that ultimately involves retrieving forgotten historical opportunities from the world we inherited and exploring the ontological possibilities that appear in the historical situation we find ourselves in. At stake in this project, as Heidegger conceives it, is a profound questioning of the very meaning of being, the conditions of intelligibility for the experiencing of what-is: an ontological task for the sake of a transformation of humanity and world. This means taking responsibility for our existence and our world, both as individuals and as members of various historical and cultural communities.

Transformation gets underway when, in the very act of perception, its phenomenology as world-disclosive is recognized: not only (1) the fact that perception is inherently the laying out of a field or clearing, a certain world determining the conditions and boundaries of intelligibility and meaning, but also (2) the fact that everything meaningfully disclosed in the world that our presence, our ex-istence, has opened and cleared takes place in the tension of an interplay between concealment and unconcealment, and moreover, (3) the fact that we are responsible for protecting and preserving the conditions that make the disclosive phenomenology of that interplay possible. It is not sufficient that, simply by existing, we *are* (always already) world-disclosive; it is crucial that we become reflectively mindful of our role, our participation, hence our responsibility, in sustaining the dynamics—the hermeneutical dimensions—of that phenomenon. That is the task enjoined by what Heidegger calls “*Einkehr in das Ereignis*”: “entering into the event and process of our appropriation.”

In the world of today, Western metaphysics, reflecting the character of our quotidian lives, reduces the inherent openness of the perceptual field to a subject-object structure that forgets and suppresses our pre-conceptual, pre-reflectively undifferentiated, interactive belonging-together-with-being. Because of that forgetting, we create for thinking a false problem and end up in either empiricism or idealism, both of which represent grotesque distortions of our experience (GA 40: 164/ IM 165–66, IMm 130).

When, in a forest, you dig even a little beneath the surface of the earthen ground, you will discover that seemingly self-contained life-forms are in fact fundamentally connected, deeply rooted in their intertwining. Thus, we human beings are formed and flourish in our social and cultural interdependencies no less than the mushrooms and the trees near which they grow can flourish only in their underground forest symbiosis. Nothing exists alone. In its fundamental openness, our *Da-sein* is inherently *Mit-sein*: in fact, not only a being-with and a belonging-to that connects each of us inseparably with all other human beings but also a being-with and a belonging-to that connects us in responsibility to the being of all that presences in the context of our world of experience.

Pre-reflectively, hence always *already*, our seeing and hearing *are* ontologically attuned organs. But they are also *not yet* ontologically attuned: that pre-reflective, pre-ontological attunement only constitutes their “first nature,” their given potential, laying it out in, and as, the field of our experience. That potential, powerfully suppressed by the prevailing nihilism, is the granting of a promise (*Versprechung*)¹⁶ that requires of us a difficult process of transformation to redeem that promise. The potential,

with its appropriation and its promise, needs to be recognized, understood, enowned, and finally enacted; it needs to be actualized.

In this process, appropriation (*Er-eignis*) inevitably requires our expropriation (*Ent-eignis*): to live authentically as *Da-sein* means a certain estrangement from our old selves—and from the “essence,” or “essential nature,” in terms of which we have learned to think of ourselves. First of all, what Heidegger means by “essence” (*Wesen*) is not the fixed, closed structure that figures in the history of metaphysics. For Heidegger, an “essence” is a *structure of interaction* open to the world, hence finite and not immutable. Second, the “essential nature” that, in Heidegger’s project, interprets the being we truly, authentically are (namely, *Da-sein*, thrown-open beings, existing interactively in the world) does not correspond to what we normally and habitually think of ourselves as being. The meaning of *Da-sein* (written with a hyphen) is not the same as *Dasein*. This latter term merely indicates existence; it does not recognize that existence is a thrown-openness. Thus, when we recognize ourselves as *Da-sein*, as thrown-open beings situated in the situations of a world to which our very existence has opened us, that, the philosopher tells us, is going to be an unsettling experience throwing us far from our familiar, comfortable, habitual sense of what we are as human *Dasein*. Consequently, Heidegger argues that the process of our appropriation—the process in which we recognize, understand, and actualize the essential nature we already are potentially—is also a process of expropriation, taking us out of ourselves, out of our “first nature.”

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For me, the “*Leidenschaft des Denkens*” that Heidegger invokes carries a doubled meaning in this regard, at once affirming a passionate commitment to thinking rooted in *pathos*, while also recognizing the sympathy and sorrow that responsible thinking must learn to bear today for the sake of understanding the world’s unnecessary suffering and resisting all that is oppressive, and offering some hope in preparing for a transformation of the world worthy of our still-to-be-achieved humanity.

At stake is the retrieving and developing of a potential intrinsic to the “first nature” of our perception, such that it would be more in touch with our ethical and moral sensibilities. This *Leidenschaft* is surely of the greatest importance, insofar as Heidegger’s project is intended to be, uniquely and at once, both ontological and historical, arguing for a revolutionary, history-making transformation in our way of being human and, correspondingly, in the world we live in, where how, in all our engagements with this world, we are understanding the very meaning of being determines the fate of all entities, all beings—everything that in any way *is*, including ourselves.

Transformation requires our appropriation (*Ereignis*), the process in which, after getting lost in the self-estrangement that we undergo in entering the social-cultural world, we “come back” to ourselves: recognizing, understanding, and taking up—that is, enowning—the *claim* that appropriates our responsibilities for what takes place in the formation of meaning in the realm of perception: claims appropriating us to assume responsibility for the *character* of our *capabilities* in response to all that we encounter in the clearings (*Lichtungen*) we essentially *are* as ex-isting *Da-sein*—and, first and foremost, even more fundamentally, to enown and assume responsibility for the character of the clearings themselves, the *Spiel-Räume*, spaces of interplay, within the dimensions of which entities emerge and vanish in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. Thus, engaged in, and by, this appropriation, our enowning of the clearings and taking responsibility for them make it possible for whatever (things, entities, beings) we encounter within the clearings to be present and absent *just as they are* in their phenomenological truth. Heidegger calls this attitude “Anwesen-lassen,” letting-presence. But before we can let-presence, before we can let-be, we need to learn letting go of our old selves: a process involving our estrangement, an expropriation (*Ent-eignung*).

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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger, recalling the Socratic thought, says that the human being is that being for whom its being is—and should be—always in question. Always being in question, and always putting ourselves in question, is what defines the ground of our humanity. Even questioning our most fundamental assumptions about what constitutes our ideal of humanity. We cannot get to know ourselves and live up to the humanity constitutive of our potential, without that questioning. All that we encounter in the world addresses us with existential questions: Who are we, we beings who call ourselves human? What does our way of seeing and hearing tell us about ourselves—about our way of being human and our understanding of what it means to be human? What can we learn from what we are seeing and hearing about the *character* of our seeing and hearing? What kind of character do we want our faculties of perception to embody? These questions make a claim on our responsibility—a responsibility that engages our ability, in perception, to be appropriately responsive to whatever it is that we encounter in our journey through the world.

Do we really know what these modes of perception, these perceptual capacities, are capable of? Insofar as our ways of seeing and hearing affect how the world presents itself, how the world is, then changes in

the character of our seeing and hearing might correspondingly change the world in ways that could resist, or even overcome, the forces of nihilism that Heidegger sees increasingly devastating our world and threatening our very existence as human beings. There is much that we can learn about perception—and from perception—as we follow the course of Heidegger’s project.

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Recognizing that perception is a matter of capacities and capabilities is not at all something new in philosophical thought. Nor is there anything new in recognizing that, as such, our perceptual faculties, our organs of perception, are capable of cultivation, guided development. What *is* new, however, is attempting, *first of all*, to think of this cultivation, this development, in the context of Heidegger’s critique of Western metaphysics and of the lifeworld within which that metaphysics emerged and maintained its sway, and, *second*, to think the education and cultivation of our perceptual faculties in the context of his philosophy of history—which is to say, in the context of an interpretation of history that imagines and projects, in the inheritance of Western history, the possibility of a revolutionary transformation, achieving the ontological potential to which, as to our “destiny,” it summons us.

What I am interested in doing, after Heidegger, is (1) spelling out the *development* of our modes of perception, based on (2) the recognition that these modes of perception (seeing, hearing) are capacities and capabilities, and on (3) the recognition that capacities and capabilities are such that they can undergo learning and development. In this regard, I want to argue (1) that Heidegger’s thought implicitly recognizes these three points, and (2) that, indeed, his project *requires* such learning and development, but (3) that unfortunately he does not explicitly attend to processes of learning and development as such. However, (4) it must be insisted that these capacities and capabilities *need* to be developed, realizing and fulfilling their potential, *if* the form of life he envisions in his later, more poetic evocations of life, ending the malevolence of our time, is to be actualized as more than mere daydreams. As Michel Foucault once argued, “There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all.”¹⁷

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In a letter (August 1915) to his friend, the Princess Maria von Thurn and Taxis-Hohenlohe, Rainer Maria Rilke confided a thought to the truth of which he was deeply committed:

It is certain that the divinest consolation is contained within humanity itself—we would not be able to do much with the consolation of a god; only that our eyes have to be a trace more seeing, our ears more receptive, the taste of a fruit would have to penetrate us more completely, we would have to endure more odor, and in touching and being touched be more aware and less forgetful—in order promptly to absorb out of our immediate experiences consolations more convincing, more preponderant, more true than all the suffering that can ever shake us to our very depths.¹⁸

The poet's words remind me of Heidegger's wedding wish for Peter Rees, son of a close friend, and his bride, married in 1962. But quoting Hölderlin's words, not Rilke's, about a "saving power," Heidegger says, "[May] you remain awake for the saving power [*das Rettende*], ready and able to savor everywhere the secret sense of things [*wach bleibt für das Rettende, bereit und tätig, überall den geheimen Sinn der Dinge zu kosten*]" (GA 16: 585–866).

In 1910, five years before that letter to the princess, the eponymous character in Rilke's short work of prose fiction, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, penned this reflection, echoing Nietzsche's words:

I am learning to see. I don't know why it is, but everything penetrates more deeply into me and does not stop at the place where until now it always used to finish. I have an inner self of which I was ignorant. Everything goes thither now. What happens there I do not know.¹⁹

Like the character in his story, the poet sought to make his perception more receptive, more susceptible to learning the truth from what it is given to see and hear.

In closing his miniature story, "A Little Ramble," Robert Walser said, "We don't need to see anything out of the ordinary. We already can see so much" [*Man braucht nicht viel Besonderes zu sehen. Man sieht so schon viel*].²⁰ Just seeing rightly what is right before our eyes—seeing in particular the presence of all the little things, the shy things that do not attract attention: that is very much a part of what we need to learn. To see such things in their truth requires eyes moved by *pathos*, attunement to being, instead of only by the urgings of the will to power—or the will that seeks only the power of knowledge. But this way of seeing—Heidegger called it *Gelassenheit*—is easier said than done. As Maurice Blanchot observed, "The everyday is what we never see a first time, but only see again."²¹ This is an exaggeration, to be sure; but it marks a certain truth. The arts, including literature, invite us to look and see again, but really always for the first time.

Heidegger's ceaseless questioning in the realm of thought invites that same endeavor, retrieving missed pasts, missed opportunities.

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It has not been common, or customary, to consider Heidegger's phenomenology to be a contribution to processes of learning and, in the broadest sense, education; however, John Dewey once wrote, provocatively, that "if we are willing to conceive education as the process of forming fundamental dispositions toward nature and fellow-men, philosophy may even be defined as *the general theory of education*."²² It has been in the spirit of this abiding sense and purpose of philosophical thought that I have undertaken this present work, which is very much about the recognition, understanding, and enowning of our most fundamental disposition, namely our thrown-openness—and the capacities and response-abilities it underlies and claims.

In his 1962 lecture on "Time and Being," Heidegger adumbrated the hope behind his project: that, in "perceiving and receiving" (*Vernehmen und Übernehmen*) all that is given to us in presence, we might attain "the distinction of human being": "das Auszeichnende des Menschseins" (GA 14: 28/OTB 23). What is the character of the perceiving and receiving that would *correspond* to this distinction? What is it that we need to learn?

In an "Afterword" to the edition presenting the *Zollikon Seminars*, the Swiss psychiatrist Medard Boss summarized, in homage to Heidegger, what he had learned from the philosopher:

Being-human [*Mensch-Sein*] fundamentally means to be needed as the preserve of a capacity that, open to the world, can receive-perceive [*weltweit offenständige Bereich eines Vernehmen-Könnens*], so that the things given us in perception [*die Gegebenheiten*], making up the world by their significance and referential relationships [*Bedeutsamkeiten und Verweisungszusammenhängen*], can emerge in it, show themselves, and come to their presencing and to their being [*in ihn hinein aufgehen, zum Vorschein, zu ihrem Anwesen, ihrem Sein gelangen können*]. If there were not something [*gäbe es kein Wesen*] like open-standing being-human [*offenständigen Mensch-Seins*], then how, and into what, should something come into presence at all [*anwesen*] and disclose itself [*sich entbergen*], that is, come to be [*sein können*]? (GA 89: 366/ZSE 295)²³

I want to draw on Heidegger's texts in order to provide further substance for the claim and the question articulated here so lucidly by Medard Boss.

Although Heidegger maintained over many years a steadfast commitment to the idea of transformation—a new and redeemed "second nature,"

as I would describe it—he did not give enough attention, enough thought, to what this would actually mean for our perceptual capacities and capabilities. Who can imagine how the utopian “promise of happiness,” the entirely secular, earth-bound redemption of our world, might be realized if our seeing and hearing were to become what potentially they supposedly already are—ontologically attuned organs of perception, receiving what they are given to experience in an *initial* openness, that is, before the moment of judgment, that lets beings be? What would be different if our perception were to be guided by a deep, intimate understanding of our relation to being and the responsibilities that relation calls for?

I think Heidegger would agree with Adorno, despite their significant differences, when he conceded that “one cannot say exactly how people should think about progress, because the crisis of the situation is precisely that, while everyone *feels* the crisis, the word that would bring resolution [*das lösende Wort*] is lacking.”²⁴ I think Heidegger would also agree that, as Adorno argues,

We may not know what the human being should be, or what the right arrangement of human things should be, but what the human being should *not* be, and which arrangement of human things is wrong, that we know, and it is only in the determinacy and concreteness of this knowing that something other, something constructive, opens up to us.²⁵

This is why Heidegger’s critique of our time, formulated in observations regarding the character of our experience with seeing and hearing, is so important for the redemptive hope inspiring his project.

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What significance is there in the fact that we can look at something, noticing it in a glance, but not really see it, not see it with recognition, appreciation, or understanding? Likewise, we can hear something but not attentively listen, needing to listen in order to hear it well. In the English language our words suggest that we need to recognize degrees and phases of attentive engagement, shifting from perception that is involuntary and unfocused to perception that is questioning, intensive, concentrated, and deliberate. The distinctions we make in talking about what and how we see and hear are not only ways of indicating that there are degrees and phases in perception. They also mark the falling short of an achievement, and bespeak attempts to attain a more meaningful, richer, truer, more fulfilling experience. The distinctions we make tell us that the grammar of

perception recognizes positive and negative degrees of learning, attainment, and fulfillment.

Our eyes are organs of sight, but they can also weep. What is the significance of this fact, this uncanny affinity, that the very same organ that is endowed with vision, a capability appropriated by its very nature for objective clarity, should also be capable of tears, indeed susceptible to weeping precisely because of what has been seen or not seen? Should we not recognize that weeping, as an expression of sympathy, affective connection, is actually the *root* of seeing? Should we not recognize that our eyes can be moved to tears because their sight is essentially rooted in *pathos*, a *sympathetic relation* to the world—a relation to which, of course, the circumstances of life in the historical world can all too easily do enduring or permanent damage?

In “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” Merleau-Ponty observes that “others and my body are born together from an original ecstasy.”²⁶ In a text published in *The Visible and the Invisible*, he points out that what we take to be our personal vision is part of a visibility “older than my operations and my acts” so that “we must say that the things we see pass into us as well as we into the things.”²⁷ In the texts collected in this work, Merleau-Ponty lays out the phenomenology of our earliest, pre-personal, pre-ontological involvement with the being of things—what, in “The Principle of Identity,” Heidegger will describe as a deeply felt belonging-together (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) in “oscillation”: a vibrant, vibrating, “schwingenden,” “schwebenden” relation (GA 11: 45–48/ID 36–38). However, as the infant enters the social world of the adults, the pre-personal, pre-conceptual, pre-ontological bodily felt connection of its vision and hearing to the dimension of *pathos* must increasingly submit to attenuation, and even repression—hence a certain degree of coldness. As the poet Mallarmé says, “The child must relinquish its openness [*exstase*].”²⁸ If our eyes and ears are always subject to the historical conditions that shape their world, then of what attainment and fulfillment—what historical *Schicklichkeit*—are they capable?

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In T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” the poet laments the prevailing character of our capacity for vision, recognizing at the same time what has happened to our sense of history and our sense of ourselves as human beings dwelling in a world reduced to the dimensions of the visible and knowable.²⁹ How interrupt and break the historical continuum, the endless repetition of the same oppressive institutions, the same violent gestures, the same types of blindness, the same ontological categories, the same old horizons delimiting sensibility and intelligibility?

In “The Turning” (1947), Heidegger gave voice to a kindred lament: Philosophical thought, he says, has failed so far to “bring us into the proper relation to destining”:

No merely historiographical representation of history as happening [*kein historisches Vorstellen der Geschichte als Geschehen*] brings us into the proper relation to destining [*in den schicklichen Bezug zum Geschick*], let alone into the essential origin of destining [*zu dessen Wesensherkunft*] in the disclosing coming-to-pass of the truth of being, that is, the disclosiveness of the clearing that makes it possible for everything to come into its own [*im Ereignis der Wahrheit des Seins*]. (GA 11: 123/QCT 48, BF 72)

At stake is an understanding of history that would draw us in our mindfulness to reflect critically on our perception of the given, in order to make a decisive and fundamental difference in the disposition and character of our perception, the conduct of our lives, and the conditions in our world. And it is for the sake of recognizing the contingent prospect of another beginning, one that would serve the promise envisioned as our shared destiny as mortal human beings, that Heidegger will emphatically differentiate the rhythms and measures of serial time and history that we commonly live by (namely, *Zeitlichkeit*) from the underlying dimension of temporality (namely, *Temporalität*) in which recollection of the past and hopes for the future are gathered, intertwined, into the dynamics of the present (GA 71: 213/E 182). Although Heidegger rejects Husserl’s transcendental subjectivity, he does take over for his own project the intricate structure of time that Husserl brought to our attention in his path-breaking lectures on the phenomenology of time-consciousness.

Entering this intricate interweaving of the three dimensions of ecstatic temporality, we should find ourselves living with a much more engaged sense of the still living past and the openness of the future, gathering together what has been and what could be into the free play of the present (GA 69: 95/HB 80): past experiences of the past, past experiences of the present, and past experiences of the future; our present experiences of the past, our present experiences of the present, and our present experiences of the future; and, too, anticipated future experiences of the past, anticipated future experiences of the present, and anticipated future experiences of the future. Entering into this grounding ontological dimension would represent an “untimely” challenge to our present *Zeitlichkeit*—the time that belongs to our clocks, our watches, the times and dates we insert into our calendars of remembrance. In one of his *Letters*, Horace (65 BCE–8 BCE) seems to

express an intimation of this dimension of time when he said, “Time will bring to light whatever is hidden; it will conceal and cover up what is now shining with the greatest splendor” (*Epistles*, I. 6.24).

If what is at stake in Heidegger’s project is not merely a new beginning for philosophical thought, but a transformation of our lives and our world—indeed the very destiny of humanity and the fate of this increasingly imperiled planet, then it is imperative that we work with an understanding of time and history that enables us to think about them properly and constructively. Grounded in the intricate experience of time exposed by phenomenology, Heidegger’s philosophy of history begins with a critique of historiography, which not only fails to understand the past and our relation to the past, and fails to understand the future and our relation to the future, but even more fundamentally, it fails to understand the very essence of time, hence the essence of historical experience. Without the necessary understanding of past and future, our sense of the present is tragically foreshortened and our understanding of what it might be possible to achieve in our present historical situation is greatly diminished. According to Heidegger, the everyday representation of historical time, which historiography uncritically reflects, is tragically self-defeating, inherently discouraging or defeating any worldview that is revolutionary and transformative.

We cannot even begin to engage Heidegger’s project as long as we are committed to a conception of historical time that represents it as a straightforward linear series of discrete punctate now-events, such that the past is made to appear as an object fixed in its pastness, dead and buried, rather than something we continue to inherit, and such that there is no way to think the possibility of inheriting and retrieving the past, no way to think the possibility of taking over missed opportunities, no way to think the possibility of carrying forward the past as still open to question, still open to reinterpretation, still open to different ways of inheriting and appropriating it. It is not only a question of “committing the future to memory,” as Sarah Cliff suggests, in a phrase that lends itself to a reversible, twofold interpretation, but also a question of committing memory to the future.³⁰ As Reinhart Koselleck has compellingly argued, we need to begin thinking of the historical past as bearing possible *futures*, pasts that are still alive, inherited as still awaiting (new) determinations of their sense, their significance, the unfolding of their potential, and perhaps their contingently destinal promise.³¹ If we are to “enter into appropriation” (what Heidegger calls our “*Einkehr in das Ereignis*”), we must first enter into *Temporalität*, the phenomenological dimension of historical time that, with its intricate

interweaving of “protensions” and “retensions,” underlies and unifies the three moments in the “objective” order of temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) that prevails in everyday life.

We must recognize our indebtedness to Edmund Husserl, for it was he who first broke through ontic *Zeitlichkeit* to disclose, in the phenomenology of time-consciousness, the ontological dimension of *Temporalität*. It was Heidegger, however, who, in *Being and Time* (1927), began to explore the implications of this breakthrough for his philosophy of history, reading the past not as *Vergangenheit*, what is irrevocably *vorbei*, but as *das Gewesene* (“what has been”) and thinking its recovery in the context of a philosophy of history oriented by a figure of destiny (*Geschick*): our historically given possibilities—promising opportunities.³² In every moment of the present, he argued, we are inheriting the past and carrying it into a future that will give it historical meaning. Can we harvest that meaning for Heidegger’s conception of historical destiny? Can we release his vision of destiny from the metaphysics of presence? Can we read it as falling into contingency?

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Reflecting critically on our time, Heidegger tells us, in “The Turning,” that “we do not yet hear, we whose hearing and seeing are perishing through radio and film under the rule of technology” (GA 11: 123/QCT 48, BF 72). Explaining the significance of this diagnosis, he continues, “The constellation of being is the very denial of world in the form of injurious neglect of the thing.” What he is lamenting is an ever-spreading, ever-deepening nihilism, leaving us empty of spirit, lost in a meaningless world, a world in which the things we have made, the things we have brought forth in the world, all the things we dwell with, are now turning against us, threatening and imperiling our way of life, in part because of the violent way we see things and correspondingly interact with them—a way Heidegger once described as an “assault,” an expression of what Nietzsche called our will to power. Might learning to see and hear differently make a significant difference in our world? As the German translator of Heidegger’s seminars in Le Thor commented, explaining the philosopher’s interpretation of *Da-sein*,

It is important to experience *Da-sein* [i.e., the *Da-sein* of the human being, of *Menschsein*] in the sense that man himself is the *Da*, i.e., the openness of being for him, in that he undertakes [*übernimmt*] to preserve this and in preserving it, to unfold it [*sie zu bewahren und bewahrend zu entfalten*]. (GA 15: 415/FS 88)

For Heidegger, this response-ability—preserving and developing the openness, the receptivity of the *Da* that we are—constitutes our highest responsibility. Abandoning that responsibility, we lose a connection to history and destiny—even lose, in fact, a connection to ourselves. In consequence, even the present moment is left bereft of real meaning.

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Staking out, in “The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics” (1929), his sharp divergence from Husserl’s phenomenological method, Heidegger argued that “the task assigned to philosophy” is “not to describe the consciousness of the human being [*Mensch*], but to evoke and educe the *Da-sein* in the human” (GA 29–30: 258/FCM 174). This condemnation is wrong; he should instead have said that the task is *not only* to describe, because the insightful description of our experience *is* actually a necessary stage in the process of critical reflection, and because that reflection is a propaedeutic necessary for the transformation Heidegger has in mind. He meant, of course, that what is needed today is not phenomenological description in the service of Husserl’s transcendentalism, but rather description as an *existential* task, enabling us to learn how to live our lives together in a way that measures up to the humanity in our human nature, a humanity that silently calls us to become more fully—that is, with more awareness and greater resoluteness—the human beings that phenomenology can show us we potentially are. For Heidegger, phenomenology should take up the challenge to guide us toward realizing the humanity that is already inherent even in our bodily disposition as human beings. We are, each one of us, already summoned, says Heidegger, “to undertake a transformation [*Verwandlung*] of ourselves into being a *Da-sein*” (GA 29–30: 430/FCM 297): becoming what, by virtue of that inherent disposition, we, to a certain extent, always already are, and yet also, in some ways, have still to become, namely, thrown-open ex-istence, fully ex-posed, cast, like dice, into the givenness of a historical world we did not make but for the future of which, as our inheritance, we are nevertheless responsible, cast to clear our own way within it, opening ourselves to the world, but also opening our own world of possibilities. Thus, as he argues in his *Contributions to Philosophy*,

The human being is primordially [. . .] claimed by the truth of being—that is, by the allotted clearing. Through this claim of being itself, the human being is assigned as the guardian of the conditions necessary for sustaining the truth of being: being human, understood as “care,” grounded in *Da-sein* [*Mensch-sein als “Sorge” gegründet im Da-sein*]. (GA 65: 240/ CP 189)

Grounded in our nature as thrown-open ex-istence, we are responsible for the protection and maintenance of the clearing, the necessary conditions for the possibility of meaningful presencing.

Phenomenological description serves the grounding of this care, getting us to reflect on our existence in a way that is inherently performative and transformative. In his hermeneutical use of phenomenological reflection, Heidegger attempts to *describe* our experience as lived in actual everyday life without making the mistake of treating it as if it were already reflective, but rather finding, within that existence, the *potential* for the reflection he is undertaking to describe and bring forth. Connecting in this way with our experience, his description becomes performative. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological descriptions also work in this way, transforming our experience through a reflectively formed description that is not immediately true of our experience as commonly lived—until it *makes itself true* through a fidelity of insight that gets into the heretofore unrecognized and undeveloped essence of that experience, retrieving it, and bringing it forth, performing a transformation.

Heidegger seems implicitly to understand phenomenological description to function this way. Consequently, he argues,

[o]ur fundamental task now consists in awakening a fundamental attunement in our philosophizing. [. . .] Awakening means making something wakeful, *letting* whatever is sleeping *become wakeful*. [. . .] The awakening of attunement, and the attempt to engage this strange task, in the end coincide with the demand for a complete transformation of our conception of the human. (GA 29–30: 89–93/FCM 59–63)

However, to question concerning this fundamental attunement does not mean to further justify and continue the contemporary human traits of mankind, but suggests the way to *liberate* the humanity *in* mankind, to liberate the humanity *of* mankind, that is, the *essence* of mankind, *letting the uncanny Da-sein* in us become essential:

It is *the liberation of the Da-sein in the human being* that is at issue here. And this liberation of the *Da-sein* in mankind is something that we human beings can accomplish only in and for ourselves, in each case from retrieving the very ground of our essence. (GA 29–30: 248/FCM 166)

This is work for phenomenology.

In “My Way in Phenomenology” (1969), written many years after *Being and Time*, Heidegger reaffirmed his commitment to the earlier

interpretation of the phenomenological method, essentially unchanged since *Being and Time*: “The understanding of phenomenology consists solely in realizing it as possibility” (GA 14: 102/OTB 82). Possibilities and potentialities for living are what this volume is about: what we might learn from Heidegger regarding the fundamental nature of perception—and its character in our time so that we can explore our possibilities and potentialities for transformation and perhaps more fully embody the meaning of our humanity in the character of our perception and in new forms of sensibility.

In this brief text, Heidegger also differentiates his phenomenological approach from Husserl’s, asking: What is it that phenomenology is concerned with? What is *die Sache selbst*? His answer, phrased as a question, gives us the fundamental task:

Is it consciousness and its objects or is it rather the being of beings in their unconcealment and protective hiddenness?” “Ist es das Bewußtsein und seine Gegenständlichkeit oder ist es das Sein des Seienden in seiner Unverborgenheit und Verbergung? (GA 14: 99/OTB 79)

In other words, is it the task for philosophy to make the description of consciousness an end in itself? Should philosophical thought be satisfied with such description? I think Heidegger is right to question that assumption, right to insist that the ultimate object must be human existence. However, in order to change attitudes, habits, and ways of perceiving and actively engaging the world, it is necessary to get us to be much more attentive to their experience, more attentive to our way of inhabiting the world we share with other human beings, other animals, and the environment of nature. And this requires raising consciousness—precisely a task for which the disciplined practice of phenomenology is uniquely fitted. For Heidegger, though, there needs to be a process of recollection (*Er-innerung*) akin to Plato’s *anamnesis*, but understood now as getting in touch with, and retrieving, the fundamental law (*Ge-setz*) of our own “inner” disposition as appropriated for *Da-sein*. That is indispensable. Without that, the procedure of reconstruction, also called “Erinnerung,” that Heidegger undertakes in order to formulate a critique of the history of metaphysics could not make an effective connection with our lives. The critique needs to connect us to our responsibility for being.

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Remembering with indebtedness Merleau-Ponty’s major work, I am calling the project I am undertaking here Heidegger’s phenomenology of perception. Because it is a question of our perception as experienced, our

project must be phenomenological. And because the unfolding and development of our perceptive capacities requires first accessing a pre-reflective, pre-conceptual, pre-ontological understanding of being that is already carried by our embodiment and then, second, retrieving it as a potential, a disposition, already immanent within those capacities, this project, as Heidegger recognizes in his “Introduction” to *Being and Time*, must also be hermeneutical, engaged in the so-called “hermeneutical circle.” Moreover, following Heidegger, we shall argue that, as a way to “the truth of being,” perception itself is inherently hermeneutical—and needs to be realized as such. In other words, the very *logic* of the phenomenon *is*—intrinsically and necessarily—hermeneutical: in fact, phenomenology cannot be other than hermeneutical, insofar as it is committed to letting the phenomenon show itself as it essentially is, namely, always to be encountered only in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment. Even in its presencing, every phenomenon belongs to the dimension of its concealment. Consequently, the task for philosophical thought must be to remind us of this concealment: in order to safeguard and maintain that dimension of concealment, it must be forever vigilant in reminding us. As Heidegger understood, learning much from Nietzsche, the greatest of all dangers we are facing is the forgetting of this dimension—the neglect, denial, or suppression of being—the being of beings. That is the danger they call “nihilism.”

Nihilism can overtake us because being can be brought into the openness of our awareness *only* as the being *of* what-is; and since we are disposed to see and hear *only* what-is, only the beings, or entities, that are in presence, we are liable to overlook and forget being itself as such—the fact of their very presence. This is why Heidegger takes us back to the pre-Socratic philosophers, who were, unlike all their contemporaries, struck by the sheer *that-it-is* of an entity as that entity; and it is why the “new beginning” requires, as he later came to understand, that we begin to address the nihilism taking control of our world by giving thought to the sheer being of beings. Can we now, perhaps, like those earliest Western philosophers, find ourselves struck, as if hit by a bolt of lightning, by the fact that there is a world of beings, instead of nothing?

Using the phenomenological method to illuminate, in terms of the human *Dasein*, our understanding of (the meaning of) being, Heidegger’s “fundamental ontology” reappropriates the Greek beginnings for the sake of the possibility of a different experience and comportment in relation to being, hence another inception, breaking through the nihilism of our time, and undertaking, as he articulates it in his 1928 lectures on *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, a “historical recollection in a revelatory

moment of self-understanding” (GA 26: 9/MFL 8). He never wavered in pursuing this project.

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So, in this volume, I want to lay out (1) my understanding of Heidegger’s narrative about the history of being, a narrative belonging to the history of philosophy—belonging, more particularly, to the history of metaphysics. This is, as I shall argue, a *history of philosophy* that, under the influence of a certain *philosophy of history*, follows the neglect of being, being itself and as such, in the texts of metaphysics down through the ages, bringing that neglect or denial to light in a compelling form of critique, centered on the “appropriation” of our human potential to realize, achieve, and become the kind of being we, by the very nature of our bodily disposition, most essentially, most deeply, already are. And I want to connect this with (2) what I suggest as a corresponding twofold critique of perception: a Heidegger-inspired critique of what Husserl called “the natural attitude,” our *habitual, quotidian ways* of seeing and hearing, and a critique showing that, and how, the *reflection* of these ways has figured in the history of metaphysics, rendering its discourse neglectful of the very thing it strives to understand. In other words, the historical discourse of metaphysics has also been insufficiently critical, taking over too much of the “natural attitude”: like a mirror, it has uncritically reflected the “natural,” quotidian structuring of perceptual experience.

The chapters in this present volume accordingly follow, and present for consideration, the logic implicit in Heidegger’s project: (1) a *description* of our life-world and its metaphysics, (2) a *diagnosis* and *critique* of this life-world and its metaphysics, (3) an attempt to recollect and retrieve redeeming possibilities, possibilities hidden, missed or blocked, within our heritage, for a different future, overcoming metaphysics in philosophy and overcoming what is deeply unsatisfying about our present world. Hence, in particular, serving the possibility of a profound transformation in our ways of seeing and hearing: a transformation retrieving and perhaps redeeming their deepest, ownmost potential in relation to the ontological dimension of the world.

The chapters proceed from the most basic structural phenomenon in perception, namely, from a chapter on the figure-ground *Gestalt*, to chapters on the *Gestalt* reduced to totality in the time of the *Ge-stell*, and then to a chapter on Heidegger’s utopian envisioning of the *Geviert*, the gathering of earth and sky, us mortals and our gods. Thus, in schematic form: *Gestalt* → *Gestell* → *Geviert*. Part I, on the ontological dimension of embodiment, sets the stage for that progression, discussing embodiment

in general as preparation for my discussion of perception, while the first chapter in part II, critically examining the historically crucial role of vision as paradigm for philosophical thought, takes us into the history of vision in the discourse of philosophy, bringing to the fore a diagnosis and critique in which Heidegger's own perpetuation of that paradigm is shown to be in some respects problematic and contrary to his own critique, that is, serving the *Ge-stell*, that is, the imposition of total reification.

The history of metaphysics that Heidegger tells enables him to demonstrate the truth in his critique. However, we cannot separate Heidegger's history of philosophy from his philosophy of history without losing the sense and significance of his critique. The neglect of being—being as such—in the discourse of metaphysics that his telling of its history reveals gives rise, in his thought, to speculative thoughts belonging to a *philosophy of history* that imagines the possibility of another, very different relation to the meaning of being—that is, the manifestation of being in thought, hence what might be called “another beginning,” setting in motion another ontological order—both for the lifeworld and for the metaphysics it encourages.

We can thus discern the way in which the history of philosophy that Heidegger tells, and in particular, his history of metaphysics, as the discourse concerned with being, represents the subtle influence over his thinking of a certain highly abstract, speculative philosophy of history, envisioning, for the sake of its “redemptive” potential, an entirely new relation to the existential and philosophical meaning of the manifestation of being. In much later writings, Heidegger no longer invokes his speculative—and in some respects problematic and justifiably controversial—philosophy of history, constructed around the idea of destiny, but his silence in that regard does not necessarily mean that he has entirely abandoned it. Instead, he opposes the world and the metaphysics he has accused by turning to poetic evocations of “the fourfold” (*das Geviert*), a different way of building and dwelling—living mindfully on the earth of this planet, living mindfully, too, under the immeasurable vastness of the sky, a sky the dimensions of which should serve as our ultimate measure.

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After the chapter on the *Geviert*, this volume closes with a chapter on hearing, concentrating, *first*, on the phenomenology and critique of hearing in the age of the *Gestell*, for example, on such matters as the requirement of univocity, the suppression of the echo, the reduction to subjective sensation, and then, *second*, concentrating on the process of retrieving the potential for a transformation of hearing, redeeming its inherent, latent potential. I argue that, although Heidegger is very critical of vision in the age of the *Gestell*,

he never adequately subjects to critique the dominance of vision as paradigm in the history of philosophical thought; however, stirred no doubt by his efforts to understand ancient Greek thought, especially that of the pre-Socratics, he does attempt to explore hearing in a phenomenology that shows us how we might think the transformative development of that capacity, representing its achievement using the word “hearkening.” Harkening—*Horchen*—is, I suggest, the never-ending, never fully achievable fulfilment of our capacity for hearing, involving an ontologically attuned mode of listening. That is to say, it is not only a way of hearing attentive to what comes into the field of sound, but moreover a way of hearing mindful of the field, the clearing, itself and as such, hence, too, it is a hearing that follows the withdrawing of sounds into the depths of their concealment in an uncannily resonant silence, learning what the emerging of sounds from silence and the returning of sounds into that silence can teach us about our mortality, our humanity, and our world.

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Following Heidegger’s critical observations where I think they lead us, we shall interrogate the prevailing *character* of our seeing and hearing as *organs of receptivity*, organs responsive to the *givenness* of sensible beings in the *given* conditions of our present world order. This enquiry should be recognized as necessary, inasmuch as Heidegger’s lifetime reflections on being as it figures in the history of metaphysics never ceases to engage a certain philosophy of history (explicitly in the late 1930s and 1940s, implicitly and silently in the post-War years) that speculatively envisions a profound transformation not only in our engagements with beings but also, more fundamentally, in our relation to being as that which makes possible the conditions in terms of which we can experience the presencing of beings in the perceptual field (GA 11:38–47/ ID 29–38). And surely, if there were ever to be what Heidegger calls “another inception,” it would require fundamental changes in the *character* of our sensibility, our perception, our way of receiving being—that which is given us: “If the ground of the human essence [*Wesensgrund des Menschen*] is the draw of connection to being [*Bezug zum Sein*], then the transformation of the human being [*der Wandel des Menschen*] can come only from the transformation of this draw of connection [*nur aus dem Wandel dieses Bezuges*]” (GA 69: 99, 139/HB 84, 119–20). This ontological connection is crucial. Thus, the philosopher makes the same argument in “Recollection in Metaphysics,” invoking “the essential structure of human being in connection to being [*die Fügung des Menschenwesens in den Bezug zum Sein*]” (GA 6.2: 485/ EP 78–79). How we receive what we are given to see and hear is crucial.



My project in this book will not assume that the transformation Heidegger envisions would necessarily be an extremely radical event, apocalyptic or cataclysmic. This moderation should not be understood, however, to mean that the human essence—our “human nature”—is immutable, totally determined and totally determinate. It is an essence, a “nature,” in *ceaseless interaction* with the conditions operative in our world: essence-in-process, rather than an essence in the familiar metaphysical sense. And there is certainly much in the character and disposition of what we consider to be settled “human nature” that we can and, I think, should change: change by learning and developing new habits, new skills, new abilities; change, too, by altering the various conditions—socioeconomic, geopolitical, environmental, and perhaps even genetic—that are determinative of the way we are living. As Heidegger says in his “Letter on Humanism,” for human beings it is ever a question of “finding what is fitting in their essence [*in das Schickliche seines Wesens*], finding what corresponds [*entspricht*] in our lives to the meaningful granting of being [*Geschick des Seins*]” (GA 9: 331–32/PM 252–53). And, as the text makes clear, what corresponds is our mindfully taking care, as much as possible, of the world-historical conditions in terms of which beings can come into meaningful presence. For, we are the grounders and preservers, the guardians, of being—and that means that we are the guardians of the clearing, the conditions that make the presencing of beings possible.

It is this responsibility that accounts for why the word “Ereignis” emerged as the guiding word for Heidegger’s thinking after *Being and Time*, not only to designate historically significant ontological events in which the prevailing meaning of being is called into question or even profoundly altered but also to call attention to the most fundamental disposition of our bodily nature, the disposition, namely, that summons human *Dasein*, human ex-istence, to its essential fulfillment, making an existential claim on the potential in our capacities. But, as I shall argue, “Ereignis” is a word that can serve in this key way only when its functioning is understood in phenomenological terms, that is, not according to the common meaning of that word, which simply refers us to something happening, but rather according to the singular meaning that Heidegger constructs, referring us to a history-making event of ontological significance: an *event* in which there is an experience of being as such, being itself, that then engages us in a self-reflective *process* of appropriation, a claim and summons summoning and appropriating us to *Da-sein*, to being (*-sein*) in the world with greater attentiveness and deeper self-understanding.

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In a text for lectures delivered in 1951–1952 and subsequently assembled under the title *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger makes a comment that is crucial to both his project and mine:

The things for which we owe thanks are not the things we have from ourselves. They are given to us. We receive many gifts, of many kinds. But the highest and really most lasting gift given to us is always our essential nature, with which we are gifted in such a way that we are what we are only through it. That is why we owe thanks for this endowment, first and unceasingly. (GA 8: 94/WCT 142)

In a perfect world, perception would be experienced as the gift of a capacity to be acknowledged by, and in, the very *character* of its reception of what it is given, making itself a celebration and thanksgiving. In other words, like Rilke, Heidegger wants us to seek and discern, in what we are given to see and hear, something much deeper than everyday perception recognizes: the dispensation or endowment of a gift, the possibility of something promising in, and as, our shared human destiny. Perhaps even intimations of the possibility of our breaking through and beyond the nihilism that prevails in the present epoch, determined as it is by a technological and technocratic rationality that requires the total imposition of its paradigmatic ontological order.

This imposition (*Gestell*) affects the way we live in historical time and remember the past. As Koselleck has pointed out,

Every historical space constitutes itself through the time in which it can be measured, thereby becoming controllable politically and economically.³³

What this means is that historical conditions, bearing opportunities that depend on our being able to imagine, recognize, and investigate possible alternative histories, and that inherently project us beyond the “objective” measure of serially ordered historical time, can be taken up and appropriated only by way of a great struggle against the reigning ontology, in which the freedom in our historicity, hence the future granted in our past, lies buried. Imposing the “objective,” “rational,” computationally required order of time on historical experience, the *Gestell* threatens to deny the projection of the *Geschick* that figures in Heidegger’s philosophy of history not only all possible usefulness but also all transformative meaning.

In this regard, we do not recognize the extent to which our history and our future depend on the character of our perception, our ways of *receiving* what is *given* to *be* perceived. If perception is our endowment, our gift, then it must be in and as perception that we remember to give thanks—not only for the givenness of this faculty but also for the givenness of the world it enables us to receive. Thanksgiving must belong to the essential character of perception. And would that not be performed or expressed most appropriately by virtue of the thoughtful character of our *reception*? A reception of the given that is not a passive submission to what is already given, but rather a reception that becomes our exploring, in perception, of the conditions of possibility—conditions of perceptual intelligibility—necessary for the truth to emerge, and moreover be *shown* to emerge, from the time-space interplay of concealment and unconcealment. In question is the *ontological* dimension of our reception: the actualizing of our pre-ontological understanding of being. The *character* of our receptivity in perception has never been given the philosophical attention it needs. This attention to character becomes especially important with the beginning of the “modern” worldview in Renaissance humanism.

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Although we need to think of perception in terms of potentiality and realization, terms reminiscent of Aristotle, there is no completely fixed, determinate “design,” no teleology in the Aristotelean sense structuring our capacities. Here is where Heidegger differs from Aristotle: If we let ourselves be truly ap-pro-priated by the openness of the clearing, hence understanding ourselves in terms of our thrown-openness as *Da-sein*, we are drawn into an uncanny self-estrangement, where our sense of who we are as human beings, and indeed the very terms of our identity—our *Zu-sein*—are radically called into question. As Heidegger says in *The Event*,

To see the human being merely humanly (humanistically, humanely, anthropologically) and even all-too-humanly (“psychologically”) means to experience nothing of the human being. (GA 71: 93/ E 78)

Heidegger’s thinking does not explicitly discuss, as such, the existentially appropriate, ontologically appropriated development and cultivation of our perceptual capacities. However, he does nevertheless give us phenomenological descriptions that, in stark terms, reveal the present character of our seeing and hearing; and these descriptions generate, as in the writings of Nietzsche, a critique of our time, a kind of ontologically inspired “diagnosis” of our habitual way of seeing and hearing, bringing to light their

unmistakable ontic shortcomings and failings—and, too, going beyond Nietzsche’s account of nihilism, showing their ways of falling into ontologically significant errancy, destructiveness, and violence. This critique, moreover, is not only (1) contextualized in relation to the history of being but it is also (2) formulated in relation to a philosophy of history that is (3) oriented toward preparing for the future possibility of a radical overcoming and transformation of our historical experience of being—a transformation perhaps inaugurating another understanding of being, beginning the redeeming of the great, still unfulfilled promise granted in the meaning of the first of the great ontological discourses. However, Heidegger also differs from Hegel—or rather, from a common misreading of Hegel, ignoring the inherently deconstructive force of the dialectic, in that the transformation Heidegger has in mind can never actually be achieved, never completed, and never fully realized; and moreover, its nature, its character, inherently remains incessantly, endlessly questionable.

In his “Introduction” to *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel contemplates the course of world history with an unflinching gaze, acknowledging that what he sees from the perspective of Reason is a grim picture of wars, slaughter, and human misery, centuries of unnecessary suffering. How should philosophical thought respond to this undeniable historical reality? The answer he proposes is essential that philosophical thought should struggle against this reality by counterfactually, speculatively presupposing, and keeping its commitment to the estranged perspective of Reason, which is paradoxically at once sufficiently in and of this world to understand it and yet also absolutely outside and beyond it, a vision that is pure disruptive possibility.³⁴ Behind this fundamental speculative proposition is the idea that the best way—perhaps the only way—to end and transform historical life as we have known it is continually to question and challenge it from the visionary perspective of Reason, hence recognizing that, as he argues in *The Science of Logic*, if “what ought to be” is ever assumed to be realized or fulfilled, it would cease to function as a critical “ought,” becoming instead a sorry capitulation to the world as it is—more of the same.³⁵ The realization and fulfilment of Hegel’s vision of Reason abides solely in the moral struggle to achieve it, abides solely in the attempt itself, an unending task.

Thus, for both Benjamin³⁶ and Adorno,³⁷ we must never forget that the idea of the redemption of history (*Standpunkt der Erlösung*), although necessary for the sustaining of hope and the encouragement of struggle, is an impossible possibility, its promise beyond the calculation of both means and ends. The importance of the idea, however, is that it serves both to guide and encourage our struggle to achieve a better world. As Adorno

says, “Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible.” Likewise, as Derrida has argued compellingly,³⁸ Heidegger’s “other inception,” his vision of a profoundly new historical epoch in the experience of being, needs to be understood as belonging intrinsically to a future always still to come, a future, therefore, that is *not continuous* with the unfolding succession of historical events recognized in historiography. Understood as an ontological “event,” an event bearing on the meaning of being, Heidegger’s keyword “Ereignis” functions as an adumbration of the possibility of a fundamental transformation of the world—a transformation always remaining, however, still-to-come.

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In the long history of philosophical thought in the Western world, the nature of perception has been subjected to one hostile narrative after another. There is, consequently, an important truth in what T. S. Eliot observed in “The Dry Salvages,” but it is a truth that need not be burdened with any theological doctrine: “The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.”³⁹ Our corporeality is what, in the course of natural history, we human beings have, in a certain manner of speaking, been “granted.” And for each one of us, it is, in a sense, a fatality, but also a gift, a gift we never asked for, something bestowed—in terms of a worldly causality—by, of course, our parents. Bestowed with a question attached: What should we make of the capacities the body possesses? Since perception is obviously fundamental in the way we live on the earth as embodied mortal creatures, this question calls into question the *character* of our perception, marking something of its difference from the physical nature of perception. Can we think of perception as a refuge for the being of beings—a refuge for the conditions that make the very appearance of beings possible?

Although for too long a neglected dimension of Heidegger’s hermeneutical phenomenology, perception assumes, as it must, a crucial role in the formation of what I shall call *Dasein*’s emerging body of ontological understanding.⁴⁰ It is this body of understanding, standing under the sky and on the earth, ruled by the law of mortality but free as a god to imagine ideals worth sacrificing for, a body of understanding at once intimately familiar and yet also strange, suspended between nature and culture, disposition and transformation, the potential and the actual, forgetfulness and recollection, to which the philosopher dedicated his entire lifetime of thought. Our response-ability—as in perception—holds an essential, indispensable key to the hidden promise in his project of enquiry. In his major work on Nietzsche, Heidegger speaks of this promise, this *Versprechung*, requiring

our responsibility in confronting the ever-increasing dangers in nihilism (GA 6.2: 368–70/N4: 226–27).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger suggests important criticisms of the character of our prevailing ways of seeing and hearing. But he leaves these criticisms without considering in much detail how the character of those ways might be developed, changed for the better, and how such changes might in turn affect our historical existence. And even in his later thought, when he formulates his critique of our technology-driven world, and again registers criticisms of the prevailing character of perception, he leaves mostly unthought, or only implicit, the question of a potential for development and cultivation—in processes of learning. Nevertheless, when he contemplates the fragments that remain with us of pre-Socratic thought, his rigorous interpretation brings out modalities of perception—of seeing and hearing—that show us a very different way, a very different character: what I think we would all agree represents a more appealing, more desirable character. And although he lucidly delineates the difference between that pre-Socratic character and the character that prevails in the modern epoch, implicitly expressing admiration for the ancient ways, he does not sufficiently explore how retrieving the pre-Socratic provenance, the historical *Herkunft* of our perceptual ways in a bodily processed work of recollection, could alter the prevailing modalities of perception and sensibility, transforming them in ways that might be of great consequence for our historical existence. But he was obviously touched and moved by the legendary stories surrounding the life and thought of Heraclitus, who, he says, inspired him “to be thoughtfully concerned with the extraordinary that presences in all things ordinary” (GA 55: 12/H 11). For this worldly redemption of the worldly to happen, we need first to redeem the character of our seeing and hearing.

Heidegger’s attempt to retrieve the pre-Socratic experience is not undertaken out of a misguided romanticism, a nostalgia for a lost past; it is his way of deepening his conceptual understanding of the present world—deepening it enough to illuminate something of our potential today as human beings. His retrieval of the past is therefore to show us that things could be otherwise. What we take as inevitable, as irreversible, as fate, are the mere contingencies of a history that has many times been interrupted and altered—a history that, we may suppose, always still can be transformed by our assumption of responsibility for the way things are.

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Embracing our given nature as percipient, a nature that, contrary to what cultural conventions, habits, and the natural sciences induce us to

believe, is in its deepest truth unfathomable, we can grow into our responsibility as human beings by attending with care to the immeasurability of the dimensions opened up by our appropriated, appropriately attuned response-ability. This post-metaphysical response-ability, freeing all beings from the fate of reification, is concisely characterized in this passage on the term *Eignung* (claim of appropriation) from *The Event* (1941–1942):

To the unique claim of being [Anspruch des Seyns], namely, *that it is*, there pertains [. . .] the gathering of all capacities [die Versammlung aller Vermögen] into the unity of the preservation of the truth of being [die Wahrung der Wahrheit des Seyns, i.e., the clearing for the interplay of concealment and unconcealment]. (GA 71: 162/E 139)

Consequently, in our dis-position, “assigned and committed to our preservation of the in-between [angeeignet zur Wahrung seines Inzwischen],” we human beings can move toward what is most proper to our existence only insofar as we are, in our appropriation to, and for, propriation, “steadfastly responsible [inständig verantwortet] for the pure enowning eventuation of beings, bringing them into the time-space of their inceptual truth [die reine Eignung des Seienden in den Zeit-Raum seiner anfänglichen Wahrheit]” (ibid.). This extremely dense but crucial formulation of Heidegger’s claim will, I hope, be satisfyingly interpreted in the course of our work in this volume.

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According to Heidegger, metaphysics, understood not as an esoteric discourse taking place among philosophers but as naming a form of life, a way of living in the world, “grounds an age [begründet ein Zeitalter], in that, through a specific interpretation of what is [auf eine bestimmte Auffassung der Wahrheit], it gives the age the ground of its essential form [Wesensgestalt]” (GA 5: 75/QCT 115). Metaphysics, as understood in this “existential” way, reflects and shapes our very sense of what it means for something—anything at all—to be. Thus, as Heidegger argues in his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Western humanity, in all its comportment toward entities, including itself, is in every way sustained and guided by metaphysics—by our historically shaped and shared ways of making sense of the world we live in.

But, as we know, over time, the conditions of living change, and this eventually means that, to some degree, our sense of reality also undergoes change so that what we take to be “real”—*das Wirkliche*—is always “something that comes about [seiend] on the basis of the essential history of being itself [aus der Wesensgeschichte des Seins selbst]” (GA 6.2:

376/N4: 232). Contemplated from the point of view of this history of being, such changes appear to constitute a hermeneutical succession of epochs, each epoch defined not only in terms of a distinctive disclosure of being, a coherent, shared sense of what-is and what matters, but also in terms of what the age conceals, blocks, denies, and forgets about itself and its past.

As I noted earlier, in his later, post-War writings, Heidegger will no longer invoke his speculative philosophy of history, projected through the problematic figure of destiny. Instead, he will simply oppose the world and the metaphysics he has accused by turning to poetic evocations of a different way of building and dwelling. This shift is perhaps already suggested in his *Überlegungen* (1931–1938), private notebooks belonging to the turbulent 1930s. In confiding his thoughts and sentiments to these notebooks, Heidegger seems to have found some compensation and solace in occasions for a very personal appropriation of the redeemed life-world he hoped for, writing, with words that are reminiscent not only of Hölderlin and Rilke but also of Heraclitus, that we need to “learn somehow to find the great joy in little things [*die große Freude an den kleinen Dingen lernen*]” (GA 94: 321/P2: 233).

Might the turning point on the way to the hoped-for transformation come not in an apocalyptic crisis, a cataclysmic event, but instead in the situations of ordinary life, when people everywhere have learned to become more present in the presence of the present, mindful in thanksgiving for the little things that compose their day? Perhaps the transformation could come in the joy of seeing that everything, even the most ordinary and insignificant thing, is surrounded by a gathering of the fourfold, earth and sky, we mortals and our “gods,” the embodiments of our values, principles, ideals, and dreams.

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In his essay “Franz Kafka,” celebrating the tenth anniversary of this great writer’s death, Walter Benjamin recalls from his childhood an old folksong, “The Little Hunchback.” And he reflects,

This little man is at home in distorted life; but he will disappear with the coming of the Messiah, of whom a great rabbi once said, perhaps with an irony sharp enough to penetrate our delusions, that he did not wish to change the world by force, but that it would be necessary only to make a slight adjustment in it [*daß er nicht mit Gewalt die Welt verändern wolle, sondern nur um ein Geringes sie zurechtstellen werde*].⁴¹

Putting aside for a moment Heidegger's highly abstract speculations regarding the *Geschick des Seins*, the promising possibility of destiny that might be carried, unnoticed, hence hidden, in the unfolding of the grand "history of being," I can only believe that there must have been times when, perhaps in the spirit of a mood inspired by words from the poets he loved, he felt, and understood, that in our learning to find a simple joy even in the littlest of things, a "transformation in our way of being present here in the world [*Verwandlung des Da-seins*]" might perhaps begin to happen. Although in the very next note, and on the same page, he says, perhaps challenging the assumed simplicity of this thought, "Richer than all fulfillment is the ripening of anticipation and preparedness [*Reicher denn alle Erfüllung fruchtet die Bereitschaft und Erwartung*]" (GA 94: 321/P2: 233).

This thought, as an expression of hope, of simple faith, figures in another, earlier note in the *Black Notebooks*:

Yet no matter how much the unrestrained distortion [*die losgelassene Verfälschung*] of everything rages [*sich austobe*], there remains for the wise [*dem Wissenden*] the mature calm of the mountain, the gathered illumination of the alpine meadows, the silent flight of the falcon, the bright cloud in the expansive sky—that wherein the sublime stillness of the farthest nearness of being has already announced itself [*jenes, worin sich schon angesagt hat die grosse Stille der fernsten Nähe des Seyns*]. (GA 94: 304)

This is a lovely word-image. But should we not avoid giving this invocation of "being" a metaphysical interpretation? I suggest reading this invocation as a *rhetorical choice* for his expression of hope, his faith that, despite the nihilism of our time, the goodness and beauty and truth of this world will somehow prevail.

The farthest "Nähe des Seyns" is an expressive, evocative figure of speech, designating no thing, no being, no agency, no hidden source, no hidden God. Heidegger is not proclaiming, suggesting, or implying some new theologically inspired "Annunciation." In many of his texts, "Seyn" seems to designate the open clearing. If we follow this indication, then the reference to "that wherein" the "farthest nearness of being" has "already" been "announced" is, as I propose to read it, an unnecessarily misleading way of invoking this open clearing, which, in and as its openness, already *in a sense* makes way for, or, as Heidegger prefers to say, "already announces," a future-to-come, hence something to hope for. But why "the farthest nearness"? Those words refer to the fact that, as he has argued elsewhere, what is nearest, namely, our thrown-openness, the true disposition of our nature as human *Dasein*, is farthest from our self-recognition and

self-understanding. And why “the sublime stillness”? Those words refer to the fact that we are not yet giving to *beyng*—the open clearing that, in its immeasurable dimensionality, is constitutive of our *Da-sein*—the attentiveness, the mindfulness, it is calling for. We do not venture deeply enough into the sublime stillness to learn what it might teach.

Suffering no loss of meaning in the context of this note, the post-metaphysical faith and hope that Heidegger wanted to express could have been communicated, I think, *without* any suggestion, or hint, of a reference to some metaphysical source hidden behind the dispensation of being. Rather, the philosopher’s gaze, recognizing the openness of the clearing, finds adequate succor in the thought of a future for the being of such things as he names in this passage. It is only in the openness that our mindfulness must protect with vigilance that faith and hope can find their proper hold. Not restricted to the serial order of time (*Zeitlichkeit*) measured by our clocks, but dwelling in the ecstatic dimensions of temporality (*Temporalität*), wherein the absent *always already* has a presence, there is no need to assume any metaphysical transcendence.

This interpretation holds true for Heidegger’s text on Anaximander. And it accordingly explains why Heidegger can introduce the “seer” Kalchas, arguing that his vision is not at all a question of prediction, prophecy, or some extraordinary faculty of clairvoyance, but is rather, very simply, a vision grounded in an understanding of the world in terms of being as the open clearing, hence the time-space expanse within which everything happens:

Only when a man [*sic*] *has seen* does he truly see. To see [in the proper sense] is *to have seen*. What is seen has arrived and remains for him in sight. A seer has always already seen. And having seen in advance, he sees into the future. He sees the future tense out of the perfect. [. . .] What is it that the seer has seen in advance? Obviously, only what becomes present in the lighting that penetrates his sight. What is seen in such a seeing can only be what comes to presence in unconcealment. (GA 5: 345–46/EGT 34)

Heidegger’s explanation continues, attempting to demystify and demythologize; it is an explanation that recovers the hermeneutical phenomenology, showing the seer’s vision to be grounded in a deep understanding of the ontological in terms of its temporality: “What is past and what is to come also become present, namely, as outside the expanse of unconcealment.” Thus: “Even what is absent is something present, for as absent from the expanse, it presents itself in unconcealment.” The seer, he says, “stands in

sight of what is present, in its unconcealment, which has at the same time cast light on the concealment of what is absent as being absent” (GA 5: 347/EGT 35). Consequently, because the seer in his wisdom sees what he sees from the standpoint of the open clearing, hence in terms of the ecstatic dimension wherein concealment and unconcealment are inseparably intertwined, Heidegger says, “The seer sees inasmuch as he has seen everything as present” (GA 5: 347/EGT 35). Yes, everything, in the sense that the seer’s vision, grounded in the opened clearing, understands that everything—whatever has been and whatever is to come—is gathered in its concealment and unconcealment into the presence of that clearing. This understanding of the temporal dimensions of being illuminates why, in that note we find in his *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger can speak of what has “already announced itself.” Lacking in such wisdom, most people see only the mountains, clouds, meadows, birds, and streams; and even then, in fact, we mostly give what appears in our world only a superficial glance or look. Moreover, we do not see these things as having been granted their taking place in, and by, the open clearing of ecstatic time-space that inconspicuously “announces itself” together with them. The “announcement” may be said to be present simply because of the clearing, a clearing that, though encompassed by a horizon, is in truth radically open; but its recognizability requires attentiveness, and the presence of the future that it lets us ponder comes without any promises. What is called “destiny” in Heidegger’s thought is always a question, never a finished answer.

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Heidegger’s history of Western metaphysics is a contribution to the history of the human spirit, guided by a philosophy of history that is both a critical interpretation of our time and a vision bringing to light possibilities for understanding and achieving the moral greatness constitutive of the humanity to which we claim to aspire, taking responsibility for the conditions of our world. Heidegger’s history of Western philosophy is thus in the service of a project summoning us in the West to a responsibility for transforming ourselves and our world—a project inspired and guided by a philosophy of history initially grounded in the speculative idea of a destiny that the philosopher can only project in hope, for the future depends on our freedom and our use of that freedom.

Consequently, in regard to its historical purport, and even its very intelligibility, this perpetually tempting idea of destiny must itself be kept always in question. This questioning of “destiny” is all the more necessary in the context of Heidegger’s philosophy of history because, as I have argued, the German word for destiny has an ambiguous double meaning,

conventionally signifying destiny along with all its metaphysical resonances, but also signifying, in a metaphysically neutral, entirely prosaic sense, the sheer facticity of our given situation. But, because of the ambiguity, there is a temptation to give priority to its signifying of “destiny.” Consequently, the German word “Geschick” constantly threatens to twist our attention *away* from an obdurate facticity, away from the “given” in that ordinary sense, distracting us with futile onto-theologically tinged speculations about the future to come—destiny’s “sending,” destiny’s “dispensation.” What matters is how woefully or wisely we interpret and engage the “given” historical conditions. Heidegger vividly represents the danger he sees already present in those conditions.

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Heidegger argues that, at present, the way we experience both time and history—our being-in-time and our belonging-to-history—is the cause of needless loss and suffering. The way out of, or beyond, this condition, namely a process of revolutionary releasement or liberation that encourages faith and hope, requires that we achieve a radically new relation to the past, the present, and the future. Consequently, it requires a different experience with recollection memory; and it requires hope and faith, a revolutionary relation to the future. Heidegger expresses this in terms that suggest a paradoxical experience: “eine Erinnerung in die Zukunft,” a recollection that is connecting us to a future springing from the past; a retrieving of the past that, though affirming a future, is neither prediction nor prophecy (GA 97: 27).

The past is not past (*vorbei*), buried, complete, finished, and eternally immutable; it is what has been, and also what of the past remains, continues, persists, as still promising possibilities to retrieve and develop, possibilities and opportunities perhaps blocked, or perhaps unrecognized, and then forgotten and abandoned. Here we can begin to distinguish and contrast (1) the historiography (*Historie*) against which Heidegger inveighs from (2) history as *Geschichte*, living and recollecting the unfolding in time of our historical dwelling, our belonging-to-history and to the succession of ways in which being has been understood (GA 5: 325–28/EGT 17–18). Both *Historie* and *Geschichte* are ways of disclosing; but, as such, they are also inevitably concealing. Hence, Heidegger wants us to recognize in history a succession of *epochs* in the experiencing and understanding of being, each epoch both revealing and concealing. What distresses Heidegger, though, is that what *chronological* history conceals, and in effect blocks or denies, is an accessible past from which we might still be able to retrieve hitherto unrecognized possibilities bearing on our world in the future. With “history” as

it is understood and practiced in historiography, “history,” therefore, as registering a chronological ordering of events that are irretrievably past, we find ourselves trapped in the *Ge-Stell*, an ordering of time and history that hides the history of being (*Seinsgeschichte*) and closes off the past, turning the past into a semblance of fate and giving us weak grounds for hope (GA 5: 75–95/QCT 115–33). *Historie* is history as deprived of hope, denied promise, denied even the possibility of some redemption. The *Seinsgeschichte*, however, works with a phenomenological and hermeneutical experience of time and history, calling for, and engaging, a way of experiencing history and retrieving its potentialities that at least *holds open* the possibility of a transformative, redemptive *Ereignis*, or moment, in the unfolding of the history of being. “Ereignis,” appropriation, is thus, for Heidegger, the key to “the beginning of a new thinking, whereby the old order passes into the new and the ensuing age becomes the modern age [*Neuzeit*]” (GA 6.2: 142/N 4, 97).

In struggling to take us into a new experience and understanding of *Geschichte*, Heidegger is arguing for a hermeneutical phenomenology, the most fitting method, most fitting discipline, for bringing out a relationship to time and history that is genuinely disclosive of their still available possibilities and opportunities for a revolutionary, transformative project to work with. In Hölderlin, Heidegger recognizes a poet whose remembrance retrieves, or recollects, from the past not only what was but also what might have been, and what still might be possible. And this “might still be possible” also requires what Heidegger calls “waiting”: an existential relation to the future that is neither anticipation nor expectation, neither subjectivity nor objectivity, but rather a hope and faith that encourages a radically different relation to the future, namely an experience and understanding that might turn out to be redeeming, messianic, not only rescuing us from the catastrophe toward which the Anthropocene epoch appears to be headed but also engaging us in processes of appropriative transformation—of ourselves, our communities, and our mortal dwelling on Earth (GA 5: 325–26/EGT 17). It is in such processes that the redemption of our world must take place. And it is for the sake of these processes that, after *Being and Time*, Heidegger ventured to deploy a new keyword. That word is “Ereignis,” summoning us to our urgent responsibilities. Our stewardship of being (GA 65: 23/CP 20).

“In the first beginning: wonder [*Er-staunen*]. In the other beginning: foreboding [*Er-ahnen*]” (GA 65:20/CP 18). Wonder at the very *being* of beings; foreboding in recognizing how pervasively it is today under attack.

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“Leidenschaft” is, for Heidegger, an important word (See also GA 65:23/CP 20). Its currently primary meaning is passion. But passion can be both

active and passive. Its passive sense is suffering. And sacrifice. Bearing in mind the long history of unnecessary suffering in our world, I suggest that it is in its *Leidenschaft*, its ability to respond to the needs of a destitute time, that our thinking must find its true historical vocation. The urgency of the present moment demands of us nothing less.

NOTES

1. Jürgen Habermas, “The New Obscurity: The Crisis of the Welfare State and the Exhaustion of Utopian Energies,” in *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian’s Debate*, ed. and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, introduction by Richard Wolin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 68. See also Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity: An Unfinished Project,” in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, ed. Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 38–55; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Jürgen Habermas, ed., *Observations on “The Spiritual Situation of the Age,”* trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984); and Jürgen Habermas, “Psychic Thermidor and the Rebirth of Rebellious Subjectivity,” in *Marcuse: Critical Theory and the Promise of Utopia*, ed. Robert Pippin, Andrew Feenberg, Charles P. Webel, and contributors (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1988), 5, 9, 11.

2. And see GA 71: 247/E 213: Being is to be differentiated from beings in that it names the clearing—what provides an open expanse for them to be present.

3. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Italian Journey (1786–1788)*, trans. W. H. Auden and Elizabeth Mayer (San Francisco, CA: North Point Press, 1982), 54. A reflection following his visit to the Botanical Garden in Padua.

4. In *Avventura*, Giorgio Agamben proposes to understand “Ereignis” as designating a certain adventure, namely the process—he calls it “anthropo-genesis”—whereby we become authentically, or more fulfillingly, the human beings we are. It seems to me, however, that all he has done is provide some new words, less precise and illuminating, for appropriation and propiation:

“Avventura” è, in questo senso, la traduzione piú *[sic]* corretta di *Ereignis*. Esso è, dunque, un termine genuinamente ontologico, che nomina l’essere in quanto avviene—cioè nel suo manifestarsi all’uomo e al linguaggio—e il linguaggio in quanto dice e rivela l’essere. [. . .] E se l’evento che è in questione nell’avventura non è altro che l’antropogenesi, cioè il momento in cui il vivente, con una trasformazione di cui è impossibile conoscere le modalità, ha separato—per poi riarticolare insieme—la sua vita e la sua lingua, ciò significa che, diventando umano, esso si è votato a un’avventura che è ancora in corso e di cui non è facile prevedere gli esiti. (Rome: Nottetempo, 2015), 66–67

5. Garry Wills, “Prologue,” in *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 5.

6. Walter Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I, Part 2, 694; “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken), 254.

7. Edmund Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, II and III, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 109.

8. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 102. In “The Key,” Jabès suggests that the meaning of the word “God” is “only its openness to meaning. It *means* meaning: the adventure and ruin of meaning.” See Geoffrey Hartman and Sanford Buddick, ed., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), 352.

9. See François Raffoul, *The Origins of Responsibility* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

10. “The purpose of all philosophical knowledge is simply this: that spirit recognize itself in everything in heaven and on earth. For spirit, there is nothing that is entirely other.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), vol. 10, §377, *Zusatz*.

11. On the blocking of historical possibilities and opportunities, see Iain MacDonald, *What Would Be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019). Although greatly illuminating in his exposition, commentary, and critique of Adorno, MacDonald misses the passages where Heidegger explicitly recognizes such blocking. See, for example, GA 7: 26–27/QCT 26.

12. See Anne Freemantle, “Steady Moral Seriousness,” *The Nation*, vol. 225, no. 14 (1977): 442–43.

13. Harry Frankfurt, *Taking Ourselves Seriously and Getting It Right*, ed. Debra Satz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 2.

14. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1968), 65.

15. Rainer Maria Rilke, “Wendung,” in *Gesammelte Werke, Gedichte* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag 1927), Bd. III, 460–62.

16. See Heidegger, “Die seinsgeschichtliche Bestimmung des Nihilismus,” in *Nietzsche*, GA 6.2: 368–69; “The Onto-Historical Determination of Nihilism,” in *Nietzsche*, vol. 4, 226. My translation: “Insofar as being is the unconcealment of beings as such, being has already addressed itself [*zugesprochen*] to the essence of humanity. Being itself has already spoken out for, and laid claim to [*vor- und sich dahin angesprochen*], the essence of humanity, insofar as it has withheld and reserved itself [*sich selbst vorenthält and spart*] [even] in the unconcealment of its essence. Addressing [us] in this way, [. . .] being is the promise of itself [*Sein ist das Versprechen seiner selbst*]. Thoughtfully encountering being itself in its staying-away [*Ausbleiben*, i.e., its resistance to the nihilism taking over our historically given present] means: to become aware of this promise [*dieses Versprechens innewerden*], the promise as which being itself ‘is.’”

17. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 8.

18. Rilke, *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1910–1926*, trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947, 1972), 139–40.

19. Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949, 1964), 14–15. Rilke is obviously echoing what Nietzsche said in *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1968), 65.

20. Robert Walser, *Kleine Wanderung* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967), 7.

21. Maurice Blanchot, “La parole quotidienne,” in *L’Entretien infini* (Paris: Galimard, 1959), 355–66; “Everyday Speech,” *Yale French Studies*, vol. 73 (1987): 14.

22. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, in *John Dewey: The Middle Works*, vol. 9 (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1985), 338. Italics in the original.

23. Medard Boss, “Schlusswort,” in *Zollikoner Seminare*, GA 89: 366; “Afterword,” in *Zollikon Seminars*, 295. Translation revised.

24. Theodor W. Adorno, “Fortschritt,” in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), vol. 10.2, 628–29; “Progress,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 143–44.

25. Adorno, “Individuum und Organisation,” in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), vol. 8, 456.

26. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 174. And see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 123, 133.

27. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Interrogation and Intuition,” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, 123. And see “The Intertwining—The Chiasm,” in *The Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

28. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945), 57.

29. T. S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” in *The Wasteland and Other Poems*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), 5: “And I have known the eyes already—known them all —/ The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase, / And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin, / When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, / Then how should I begin.” (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963),

30. See Sarah Clift, *Committing the Future to Memory: History, Experience, Trauma* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

31. See Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten; Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Also see Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

32. See Benjamin’s “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I.2, 691–704; “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 253–64. There are striking and fascinating similarities and affinities between Heidegger’s philosophy of history and

Benjamin's: not only in substance but also even in rhetorical constructions. But this is a topic we must unfortunately forbear, here, from discussing further.

33. Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), xii.

34. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), 21.

35. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1995), 132–33.

36. See Walter Benjamin, "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2.1, 179–203; "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986), 277–300, and also his reflections "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1.2, 693–704; "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253–64.

37. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), 333–34; *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: NLB, Verso, 1978), 247.

38. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994); and "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992). In "Marx and Sons," published in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1999), 248–49, Derrida says, "Messianicity (which I regard as a universal structure of experience, and which cannot be reduced to religious messianism), is anything but Utopian [as that term has been commonly understood]: it refers, in every here-and-now, to the coming of an eminently real, concrete event, that is, to the most heterogeneous otherness. Nothing is more 'realistic' or more 'immediate' than this messianic apprehension, straining forward toward the event of that which is coming." Insofar as Heidegger's invocations of "Ereignis" are to be understood as signifying an extraordinary ontological experience that sets in motion a questioning of the reigning meaning of being, I would suggest that his word is an adumbration of this always-still-underway transformation of our world as it is in the epoch of the *Gestell*.

39. T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages," in *Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), 191.

40. This volume is the culmination of a project that began in the 1970s regarding Heidegger's phenomenology of perception and his contributions to an emerging body of ontological understanding. I have for a long time been drawn to imagining the possibility of a very fruitful dialectic between Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty with regard to embodiment, or say incarnation, and, more specifically, with regard to perception. What Merleau-Ponty could give to Heidegger is

a much richer phenomenology of embodiment, concretely fleshing out his analytic of *Dasein*, which, in its finitude, its vulnerability, and its cast of moods and dispositions, is very much in need of a more elaborated representation of its incarnation. Thus, for example, Heidegger attributes to *Dasein* a pre-ontological understanding of being, but he fails to explicate the nature of its embodiment, without which his conception of that understanding risks remaining within the metaphysical dualism of a Cartesian or Kantian theory of mind. And correspondingly, what Heidegger could give to Merleau-Ponty's early phenomenology of perception is the ontological dimension, which disrupts the subject-object structure—and indeed the other persistent metaphysical assumptions—that his phenomenology inherited from Husserl and the systems of German idealism.

41. Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1977), II.2, 432; "Franz Kafka on the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 134.

PART I

THE ONTOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF EMBODIMENT

Da-sein in the Sensible

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
T. S. Eliot, “The Dry Salvages”

“Body am I, and soul”—thus speaks the child. And why should one not speak like children? But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*¹

There is more wisdom in your body than in your deepest philosophy.
Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*²

Only the human being is admitted [*eingelassen*] to the destiny [*Geschick*] of ex-istence. [. . .] The human body [*Leib*] is [consequently] something essentially other than an animal organism.
Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism”³

§1

Envisioning Da-sein

In “Of the Power of the Intellect; or of Human Freedom,” the final part of his *Ethics*, Spinoza says, “The mind can cause all the modifications of the body, or the images of things, to be related to the idea of God (*ideam Dei*)” (Proposition XIV).⁴ Moreover, he also argues, “In God, there exists an idea which expresses the essence of this or that human body under the form of eternity” (Proposition XXII). Arguing that “it is the nature of

reason to conceive things under the form of eternity,” he explains what this proposition means, saying, “Everything that the mind understands under the form of eternity it understands [. . .] because it conceives the essence of the body under the form of eternity” (Proposition XXIX). These propositions, together with others, leads him to the proposition that, as he puts it, “He who possesses a body fit for many things possesses a mind of which the greater part is eternal” (Proposition XXXIX).

Elaborating the significance of this proposition, he explains, “In this life, it is our chief endeavour to change the body of infancy, so far as its nature permits and is conducive thereto, into another body which is fitted for many things, and which is related to a mind conscious as much as possible of itself, of God, and of objects.” Developing the mind, one correspondingly develops the body, hence its perceptivity; developing the body, hence its perceptivity, one correspondingly develops the mind. In this regard, what is most important, for Spinoza, is the cultivation of what he calls the “intellectual love of God.” Arguing for a certain idealism and rationalism that later, in Schelling, would give substance to Romanticism, Spinoza also identifies this “love of God” with the assumption, or rather adoption, of the viewpoint of eternity (Proposition XXIX): “It is the nature of Reason,” he says, “to conceive things under the form of eternity [*sub specie aeternitatis*].”

In other words, it is important for us to imagine what we think would be the ideal world, a morally perfect world—things as they would present themselves if contemplated from the standpoint of redemption [*wie vom Standpunkt der Erlösung*], as Adorno phrased it in *Minima Moralia*—because that speculative vision, that projection, would both encourage and guide us to work for the moral improvement of the actual world.⁵ That, he argues, is “the only philosophy that can be responsibly practised in the face of despair.” Heidegger would probably call that standpoint the standpoint of the *Geschick*—the destiny that would befit our humanity. It is not easy, however, to determine what world—what ethical life—his vision of destiny imagines.

The *Ethics* may be read as Spinoza’s answer to the question: What is the *character* of the perceptivity that must correspond to this “intellectual love of God”? In “Of Human Bondage” (Proposition XXVII), Spinoza brazenly overturns the epistemological priority of the mind in the entire history of idealism from Plato to Descartes. With thinking steeped in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, he says, “The more capable the body is of being affected in many ways, and affecting external bodies in many ways, the more capable of thinking is the mind.”⁶

What embodiment, what perceptual capabilities, would correspond to the mind's intellectual love of God? In the light of Heidegger's critique of our contemporary world, what transformations in the historical character of perception are needed? How might a perception that redeems its potential change our world? There are hints in numerous texts, such as "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," "Poetically Man Dwells," "The Thing," and "The Origin of the Work of Art." I submit that the questions Spinoza's *Ethics* provokes point to a responsibility engaging the potential inherent in our perception. They point to a claim carried by, and in, the most fundamental disposition of our embodied nature. That claim calls us and appropriates us, demanding that we consciously take responsibility for our role in the clearings—the necessary conditions for the experiencing of a world—that our very existence, our simply being bodily present in the world, makes.

At stake is more than the realization and fulfillment of our bodily nature as *Dasein*. In question is how we should dwell on this planet earth and sojourn amidst its beings. This is a question concerning the character of our way of *embodying* openness—*Da-sein*. Perception is fundamental in this openness. Thus, the character of our perception is crucial to understanding the world in which we are living—and indeed the history and future of this world, which Heidegger's narrative brings to light through his critical reading of the history of metaphysics.

I want to argue not only that perception has, or bears, a *logos*, a meaning, but also that perception *is* itself a *logos*, in the sense that it is always the articulation of a situation. And I want to argue that, as such, the structural formations of perception are gatherings and layouts, gathering and laying out perceptual fields for the presence and absence, appearing and vanishing, of beings: what in the context of Heidegger's reading of Heraclitus translates the *legein* of the *logos*. I shall accordingly show that, in the course of his philosophical reflections, Heidegger's phenomenology illuminates the essential nature of perception in its hermeneutical functioning as constituting structures of articulation, hence instantiating embodiments of *Logos*, gathering and bringing beings into presence, into unconcealment: what, in the context of his studies regarding Heraclitus, he will interpret in terms of the Greek words, *legein* (meaning to gather, collect, or bring together, and lay out) and *aletheia* (meaning unconcealment) (GA 55: 364–65/H 272–73).

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Since perceptivity is a function belonging to, and constitutive of, our embodiment, this first chapter will take up for thought the philosophical problematic of embodiment as it figures in the context of Heidegger's project. The reading of Heidegger that will be proposed here is intended

to make a small contribution to *the emerging body of understanding* that is inscribed, yet left in a certain obscurity, in Heidegger's work of thought: a body of understanding "emerging" both in the sense that it is being brought forth hermeneutically from out of its implicitness, its hiddenness in the weave of the philosopher's text, and in the sense that the attempt to articulate its presence in the text enables us to elaborate and let emerge, as a way of being in the world, the potential granted us by grace of our embodiment.

The potential in question, the potential at stake, is, we might say, the "gift" of a body of *ontological* understanding. Such a body would be engaged in realizing and actualizing the potential that is primally given to us, hence bodily carried, borne for the duration of the body's life, in what Heidegger calls, in his "Introduction" to *Being and Time*, a "pre-ontological understanding of being" (GA 2:15–20/BT 32–35). That pre-ontological understanding can only be an understanding carried by the human body: an understanding initially carried without awareness and recognition. Heidegger, however, does not acknowledge the body's role in bearing this original understanding. In fact, after introducing it in order to set in place the beginning of a hermeneutical circle that will ground and defend his projection of the ontological understanding toward which his analytic is summoning us, he leaves this earliest understanding behind him, never returning to give it further thought.

Neglecting to think further about this pre-ontological understanding—and the nature of the embodiment that bears it—is an unfortunate omission. As is widely recognized now, Heidegger repeatedly turned away from opportunities to give the question of the human body the thoughtful attention he gave to other matters. He did at least, however, argue against the way in which the human body has been represented in European thought since Descartes, namely in terms of a substance metaphysics. The body that we *are*, the body that we *live*, is not a substance: *Leib*, not *Körper*. So, Heidegger made it clear that what is needed is a phenomenology of embodiment, recognizing in *Dasein's* bodily existence not only our thrown-openness (*Geworfenheit*) and situatedness (*Befindlichkeit*) but also our inherently disclosive faculties—speech, gesture, perception. Our disclosive capabilities, embodying forms of articulation, cannot be reduced to the objectivity that is represented in the physical sciences. Thinking about these capabilities can consequently liberate us from metaphysical representations of the human body and the nature of bodily existence.

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In 1784, Kant stirred European thought with two major contributions to the philosophy of history: "What Is Enlightenment?" and "Idea for a

Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” In the latter, he wrote, as the eighth proposition, “The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about [. . .] a perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed completely.”⁷ Heidegger, too, formulated a philosophy of history, eventually giving it considerable weight in his thinking, especially during the late 1920s, the 1930s, and the 1940s. And, like Kant, he gave thought to the fitting development of our natural capacities—in particular, and above all, not only our seeing and hearing but also our gestures. Also, like Kant, his reflections on such development and his hopes for the future emerged from a critique and diagnosis of the historically formed character of our “natural capacities.” Unfortunately, however, he would have no part in Kant’s idea of an enlightened cosmopolitan world.

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After more than two thousand years of humiliation, Nietzsche attempted the redemption of the human body, recognizing its nature and its role in our destiny: “Lead back to the earth the virtue that flew away,” he said, “back to the body, back to life, that it may give the earth a meaning, a human meaning.”⁸ Challenging the oppressive mind–body dualism that has persisted throughout the entire history of metaphysics, a dualism that thinks of the body only as a material substance, moved like an object by a morally errant will, Nietzsche argued that, once we understand our embodiment, our life will acquire a new meaningfulness: “It is learning to speak ever more honestly, this ego: the more it learns, the more words and appreciation it finds for body and earth.”⁹ So he urged us to give the gift of thought to our embodiment: “You shall create a higher body [. . .]!”¹⁰ Could this “higher body” be what Spinoza was imagining?

Indebted to Husserl’s phenomenological account of intentionality, Heidegger read Nietzsche’s critique of this metaphysical dualism and took it over, concentrating on what the new understanding of embodiment implies for the philosophical representation of our being-in-the-world. Briefly stated, the new understanding shows the folly in solipsism, a representation that imprisons us in ourselves, creating an unbridgeable abyss between ourselves and the world. Thus, using a hyphen to reveal the hidden essence, Heidegger wanted to say that the nature of the human *Dasein* is *Da-sein*, being thrown–open to the world it is “in”—thrown open to the world it inhabits. Actually, when a hyphen is introduced, the Greek origin of the word “existence” already exhibits and affirms this openness: *ex-istence*. Intentionality is the dynamic, interactive belonging-together of *Mensch* and *Welt*, human being and being.

In his lecture on “Time and Being” (1962), Heidegger draws on Husserl’s phenomenology of time-consciousness—specifically, the interweaving, in the present, of the past and the future—to reformulate the fundamental dimensionality of human existence in its space-time clearing, indicating how history and destiny, past and future, more deeply—and more bodily—engage us than we commonly suppose:

The dimensionality [of embodied human existence] consists in a reaching out [i.e., what Husserl would have recognized as a spatial-temporal intentionality] that opens up, in which what approaches from the future brings about, or consummates what has been, and what has been brings about, or prepares for futural approaching, and the two-way interactive connection between them brings about the opening up of openness. (GA 14: 19/OTB 14–15)

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger declared, “Human *Dasein* [is] a not-yet that every *Dasein*, as the being that it is, has to be” (GA 2: 324/ BT 288). As, each of us, a *Dasein* in Heidegger’s sense, we human beings find ourselves stretched between an always-already (namely, a given potential constitutive of our essential nature) and a not-yet (namely, that same potential insofar as it is not yet realized and fulfilled). And although he says, in his “Introduction” to this work, that, for philosophical thinking, nothing could be more important than the question of being, the fact is that *Being and Time* is principally about the human being (*Mensch*) as embodied *Da-sein*. Yet this embodiment, as such, remained in for the most part unthought, unexplored, within Heidegger’s project, despite its obviously crucial role.

To be sure, in laying out phenomenologically what the thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) of *Da-sein*, being-the-*Da*, involves, Heidegger not only revised in fundamental ways Husserl’s conception of intentionality but also, even more consequentially, transformed Husserl’s conception of the human body, casting it without reserve into the world, not keeping it within transcendental idealism. *Geworfenheit* opens out a body that, despite Husserl’s critique of the figure of the human body in substance metaphysics, and despite his introduction of an intentionality that should weave the human body into the very texture of the world, nevertheless had still remained caught up in that metaphysics. We must not underestimate the significance of Heidegger’s challenges to Husserl’s transcendental idealism and to the history of metaphysical representations of the human body. Those challenges played a crucial role in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception. But Heidegger left mostly unthought what should come *after*

his work of deconstruction. Once intentionality releases the human body from its encapsulation, its representation in a substance metaphysics; once intentionality inextricably situates us in the world, how should we think about its capacities and capabilities—*our* capacities and capabilities, those, for instance, that are constitutive of perception?

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In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), a work written in the light of some familiarity with Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Merleau-Ponty argued that the human body "is our general medium for having a world."¹¹ In large measure, I suspect, we have Eugen Fink and Medard Boss to thank for occasionally provoking Heidegger to give some attention to the embodied nature of human existence. But what attention he does give is mostly concentrated in a critique of the way Western metaphysics has represented it in the course of its long history, from Plato on. So, in laying out, in the terms of his hermeneutical phenomenology, what calls for thought, Heidegger neglects the embodiment essential to his project: (1) the engagement of the human body in, and as, *Dasein's* dis-positioning thrown-openness, (2) the engagement of the human body in, and as, shaping and maintaining our world-clearings (*Lichtungen*), (3) the engagement of the human body in, and as, bearing the claim of appropriation (the *Ereignis*) in its most fundamental disposition, and (4) the engagement of the human body in learning ways of receiving what we are given to encounter in the fields of perception.

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In German usage, the word *Dasein* often simply recognizes something as existing, as a living being, as belonging to life in the world. In Heidegger's usage, however, there is a crucial difference between *Mensch*, the word signifying the human being, and *Da-sein*, his word signifying the *essential nature* of human beings, who are to be sent on their way through life, each one as a dis-positioned thrown-openness, site of clearings, openings into the world. We are fields and trajectories of energy, not only structural formations. Our gestures do not only accommodate and conform; they precipitate space. Our seeing and hearing open—and also close—fields of meaningful experience. They are extensions of sense and sensibility stretching beyond the substantial solidity of the physical body and organizing space and time.

We are always already *Da-sein*, always already appropriated, as *Da-sein*, in our endowed potential, our essence; but we are not yet *Da-sein* insofar as (1) we are not aware of that fundamental feature of our bodily presence and (2) have not taken up our given potential, the openness of our essential nature, as an existential task; nor have we appropriately realized

it in a responsibility to keep in our care the clearings we inhabit and are. What is it that, according to Heidegger, we need to realize? We ex-ist as thrown open; we are ex-posed, unsettled, living *outside* our physical body: Only living creatures are opened and ex-posed in this way. Inserting a hyphen into the word, rendering it as *Da-sein*, is a way of emphasizing this thrown-openness. The human body is not, ontologically considered, a self-contained substance, as metaphysics has always maintained: we are actively responsive and interactive in our environment, our world. Our most fundamental disposition is one that perpetually *dis*-positions us: We can never be settled in the world like a granite boulder or the deep-rooted oak.

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In 1664, in the midst of the Baroque, while art and the architecture of cathedrals enjoyed an extravagance of spirit, Descartes argued, in his *Treatise on Man*, for a mechanistic conception of the living human body, a body pictured as an elegantly designed machine functioning according to divine laws.¹² For this mechanical body, Heidegger substitutes a thrown-open body intricately interwoven into the textures of the world, a body exposed and interactive, a body *dis*-positioned, a body that cannot be contained any longer, cannot be positioned, in a substance metaphysics: a human body in, and as, its living of worldly life.

Heidegger follows the German language in distinguishing between the body of experience (the body as lived, *der Leib* as *erlebt*) and the body as “mere” substance, object, thing (*Körper*). Although he concedes that, to the extent that thinking remains entangled in metaphysics, the bodily (*das Leiblich*) is “the most difficult” of problems to work through (GA 89: 231, 292/ ZSE 184, 231), he recognized that his project depended on an understanding of the lived body, the body that we are, the body that embodies *Da-sein*. Only this understanding can rescue it from the violence in that metaphysics. To begin with: “The human body is something essentially other than an animal organism” (GA 9: 324/ PM 247). Moreover: “As far as our experience shows, only the human being is admitted to the destiny of ex-istence” (*ibid.*). And this means not only that we human beings are living beings but also that, as existing, we have been endowed with bodies having a distinctive essential nature—a distinctive structure, a distinctive disposition (*Er-eignung*). Heidegger indicates that structure by inserting a hyphen into the word *Dasein*, making the opening and dis-positioning of that structure, that disposition, visible and legible as *Da-sein*: “The human being occurs essentially in such a way that he or she is the ‘t/here,’ that is, the clearing of being”: “Der Mensch west so, daß er das ‘Da,’ d.h., die Lichtung des Seins ist” (GA 9: 325/PM

248). In one of the *Zollicon Seminars*, Heidegger illuminates this inherent structure: “We would not be embodied [*leiblich*] in the way we are unless our being-in-the-world fundamentally consisted of a receptive-perceptive relatedness to something that addresses us meaningfully in its presence within the openness of our world, appearing in that openness as which we exist” (GA 89: 292/ZSE 231). In fact, it is not only the openness of our existence that determines the nature of our embodiment; it is also that our embodiment is such that it is the medium through which we *open* the world we enter. It is the *Da-sein* nature—the *Da-sein* structure—of our bodies that makes possible, and indeed *is*, the laying out of the clearing. Heidegger makes our dis-positioning thrown-openness as embodied *Da-sein* phenomenologically concrete in a description that figures in “Building Dwelling Thinking”:

When I go toward the door of the lecture hall, I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I *am* there. I am never *here* only, as this encapsulated body [*abgekapselte Leib*]; rather, I am *here and also over there*, already pervading the room, and only thus could I go through it. (GA 7: 159/ PLT 157)

My eyes take me “over there” to the door; but also, through the orientation of my movement and the pacing and spacing of my steps, my body has already projected me from here to the door.¹³ *Where*, then, *is Da-sein*? *Where* am I? Heidegger’s phenomenology denies us the solid, self-contained embodiment we settled into, opening us into a world of interactions, trajectories of gesture and movement.

Perception situates us in a field of vectors and perspectives anticipations and memories: we are dispersed. When I am gazing out the window of my study, my vision instantly takes me to touch the tiles on the distant rooftops and venture into the clouds gliding by. In that experience with vision, I am not only where I am. I am also where I am not. As *Da-sein*, I am inherently open, dispersed, and disposed in the openness. When I lift a cup of tea to take a sip, *where* is my hand? In order to bring the cup to my lips in a gentle and well-mannered way, the destination of my gesture, and its timing, must already be measured at the beginning, determining the melodic arc of the movement. The gesture begins as an arc in virtual space-time, an arc already formed in sensing and anticipating the destination of its trajectory in the very instant it begins. Considered not in the space of physics or physiology, but instead in the space-time of lived experience, *where* is my hand?

The phenomenological body—the lived body that we are—*makes* itself present, bodying itself forth in an openness and exposure that its very being, its very existence, creates:

The bodying–forth of the body is determined by the way of my being [*Das Leiben des Leibes bestimmt sich aus der Weise meines Seins*]. The bodying–forth [*Leiben*] of the body is, therefore, a way of *Dasein*'s being. But what kind of being is that? If the body as body [*als Leib*] is always *my* body, then this is *my own way* of being. Thus, bodying–forth is co-determined [*mitbestimmt*] by my being human, thrown into the world for a sojourn amidst the beings that show up in the clearing [*im Sinne des ekstatischen Aufenthaltes inmitten des gelichteten Seienden*]. (GA 89: 113/ZSE 86–87)

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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger argues for phenomenology: “Seeing,” he says, “does not mean just perceiving with bodily eyes [as in science-oriented realism and empiricism]; but neither does it mean [as in some version of idealism] pure non-sensory awareness of something present-at-hand in its presence-at-hand way of being” (GA 2: 195/BT 187). Phenomenology reconciles these two polar systems of thought, borrowing but altering what it takes from each.

In subsequent work, he will argue that we do not see because we have the neurophysiology of eyes but have eyes because we see, emphasizing thereby that vision is involved in our entire way of being-in-the-world and that it is therefore inseparable not only from memory, recognition, and understanding but also from motility and other forms of activity engaging the conditions we encounter in the environment. Only our history-laden bodily existence-in-the-world can explain the nature and character of our seeing: what we see and why. And only this history-bearing embodied existence-in-the-world can explain the vision we posit as the human destiny—*our* destiny. Our eyes are consequently the organs into which our entire visionary existence is gathered and concentrated. Hence, though, it is possible to have eyes open and yet not see.

A survivor of the Łódź Ghetto, where people were dying from starvation, falling dead on the street, and people were being rounded up for deportation to gas chambers, is reported to have said, “The people had ears but didn’t hear, had eyes and didn’t see.”¹⁴ How is that possible? No doubt because their sense of doom was too horrifying, too devastating, and disintegrating to be comprehended and believed. Dead eyes, dead ears—already. A last defense before even bare life is exterminated—*bloßes Leben*.¹⁵

But could the eyes of our seeing become *in actuality* what they already are *in potential*, namely ontological organs, not only interacting with beings in the visible and the invisible but also attuned in awareness to their role and responsibility in regard to being itself, the clearing as that manifestation, that opening of their vision, which lets beings be present and absent, visible and invisible, audible and inaudible? Could they?

§2

Remembering the Forgotten Body

The task of remembering our embodiment—*Er-innerung*—is not only, first and foremost, to cease neglecting it or subjecting it to cultural prejudices and metaphysical projects, and so finally giving it the felt sensing and incarnate thought it demands, letting the phenomenon freely reveal itself; it is also to enter into the body of experience more deeply, more hermeneutically, as if by Platonic *anamnesis*, in order to retrieve its latent, heretofore concealed *a priori* nature, its disposition as thrown–openness: what in *Being and Time* Heidegger connected to our pre-ontological—and, I would add, our prepersonal—understanding of being and eventually retrieved through the thought of the *Ereignung*, the *Dasein*-appropriating, bodily felt claim that summons us to recognize and take on our responsibility in and for the open clearing that is our *Da-sein*. That responsibility for the conditions that make the presencing of beings possible is enjoined by our response-ability in regard to all the beings that are present and absent in the clearing.

We are intrinsically, and pre-reflectively, an openness—a *Lichtung*. We are born *Da-sein*, already thrown open, opened out to a world of meaning. But in the course of entering the process of normalization that represents the social-cultural world into which we are born, we lose touch with the fact of our *participation* in orienting, shaping, and sustaining that openness; moreover, we neglect the role, and the significance, of the openness as such. Perception *is* that openness to a world of meaning. What happens when we lose touch with our participation and forget our part in preserving and maintaining the openness—“das Lichten der *Lichtung*”? Heidegger sees in this forgetting the danger he calls the *Ge-stell*: a time of total reification, an assault on the very being of all beings. However, he believes that there are grounds for hope in drawing attention to this danger and getting us to recognize and understand the fact that the most fundamental disposition of our embodiment, the disposition constitutive of the very nature of our embodiment, makes a claim, appropriating us to the recognition, understanding, and enowning of our pre-reflective, pre-conceptual participation in the clearing of the realms

of meaning we inhabit. And he believes that, *if* we were to attend to this claim, a summons that, I suggest, we should understand as addressing us from the disposition constitutive of the very being, the very essence, of our embodiment, calling upon us to recollect and retrieve it from its pre-reflective operation, then it might be possible for us to preserve and sustain an openness in our clearings that would *resist* the total imposition of reification—and perhaps even prepare for a world no longer ordered by that imposition. This, as I understand it, bespeaks, among other things, the importance of recognizing in our embodiment—or say, in the capacity of our perception—its onto-historical role as vigilant guardian of what Heidegger calls “the truth of being”: our openness to worlds of meaning.

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Despite the importance of the pre-ontological, pre-personal understanding for the argument, in *Being and Time*, that the “analytic of *Dasein*” is phenomenologically grounded and is not arbitrarily imposed, Heidegger does not refer to it, nor explicitly make further use of it, in the explication of *Dasein* that he undertakes in the rest of the book. Nor, for that matter, ever after. Nevertheless, its latent understanding plays an absolutely crucial methodological role in the hermeneutical circuit, supporting his argument that the existential structures he wants his analytic account to show are indeed constitutive of *Dasein*; and moreover, that the *analytic* is, as such, the invocation and appeal of an existential potential *already* calling upon us, if we are prepared to listen, to realize it in our lives:

Dasein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather, it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its being, this being is concerned *about* its very being. Thus, it is constitutive of the being of *Dasein* to have, in its very being, a relation of being towards this being. And this in turn means that *Dasein* understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness. It is proper to this being that it be disclosed to itself with and through its being. *Understanding of being is itself a determination of the being of Dasein.* The ontic distinction of *Dasein* lies in the fact that it *is* ontological. (GA 2: 16ff /BT 32ff)

Dasein is at once *already* ontological and *not yet* ontological. Consequently, understanding *Dasein* requires a phenomenology working within the so-called hermeneutical circuit. “To be ontological,” he continues, “does not yet mean to develop an ontology.” Thus,

if we should reserve the term “ontology” for the explicit, theoretical question of the being of beings, the ontological character of *Dasein*

referred to here is to be designated as *pre-ontological*. That does not signify simply being [*seiend*] ontical, but rather being [*seiend*] ontical in the manner of a [certain stage in the] understanding of being.

The point is that we *always already have* a certain pre-conceptual understanding of the meaning of being, that is, a certain level of understanding of our phenomenological relation to being; but it is an understanding that, initially, is only pre-conscious, pre-reflective: a latent potentiality of understanding borne by our embodiment. Our phenomenological body “knows” more than we do! Heidegger observes,

Dasein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself. *Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each *Dasein* itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities. We come to terms with the question of existence always only through existence itself [only, in other words, through the way we, each of us, live our life. (GA 2:17/BT 33)

Thus, Heidegger explains the methodological significance of the pre-ontological for understanding how the “ontological structure of existence,” the structure, namely, of our *Da-sein*, what we essentially are as human beings, constitutes a challenging existential question, a summons and a task for us in the course of our life. And he takes pains to point out the hermeneutical role of this pre-ontological understanding in the project he is undertaking, although he leaves unsaid, if not unthought, the most elementary question: how could such a pre-ontological understanding be possible unless our embodiment carried it? He neglects to argue that this understanding is carried by the phenomenological body, grounding and attuning our seeing and hearing.

The very concept of a pre-ontological, pre-personal understanding implies at least the possibility that there is an ontological understanding: something to be attained in our ontic lives. And this suggests a structured process of development, in which that pre-ontological, pre-personal understanding is retrieved (*erinnert*) and unfolded in an ontological understanding operating (*verwirklicht*) in our seeing and hearing.

Concluding the “Introduction” to *Being and Time*, Heidegger states emphatically that “the question of being is nothing else than the radicalization of an essential *pre-disposition* of being that belongs to *Dasein* itself, namely, the pre-ontological understanding of being.” This “pre-ontological understanding” is invested *a priori* in our embodied ap-propiation, our

Er-eignung, our disposition to be, as *Da-sein*, the site of clearings, within which the beings we perceive appear. This disposition, the gentlest of laws, the “sanfteste aller Gesetze” (GA 12: 248/ OWL 128), is “the most fundamental” of all of our bodily dispositions, because it is what constitutes our own thrown-openness, the *dis*-positioning openness of our very ex-istence. And it is “the gentlest” because it is not imposed from outside ourselves, but instead is constitutive of our very own nature. This disposition not only throws us open; it also claims and summons us—appropriates us—to recognize, understand, and take responsibility for the thrown-openness that we are, protecting and preserving our openness to being. It is because of this bodily openness to the world, this bodily grounded clearing and openness to being, that we always bear, necessarily, even in the earliest stage of infancy, a pre-conceptual, pre-ontological, bodily felt understanding of being. Hence, the concern of our project in this volume is to schematize how, by virtue of our awareness, we can *retrieve* this pre-ontological understanding, taking it up and correspondingly transforming our seeing and hearing into modes of perception that actualize that understanding, so that they become genuinely ontological, genuinely receptive, and responsive to the truth of being.

However, when Heidegger introduced the notion of a pre-ontological understanding of being as essential for getting his hermeneutical project underway, he did not appreciate that the assumption of this pre-reflective, pre-conceptual understanding makes sense only if it is conceived as carried by the very nature of our bodies. Since this pre-ontological understanding is not carried “in” consciousness, it can be carried only in the pre-reflective pre-consciousness of our bodily nature. It is a bodily felt attunement of understanding.

Heidegger’s neglect of this point is consequential, for it means that he would not venture to undertake any phenomenologically rigorous enquiry into the hermeneutical emerging and unfolding of this pre-ontological understanding of being in our modalities of perception, our gesturing, our motility—and indeed in all the modalities and dimensions of our embodiment. Instead, it seems, he posited such an understanding only in order to support or confirm the assumption that *it makes sense* for us to think about the achievement of a genuinely ontological understanding of being—the understanding, or interpretation, namely, that he is determined to bring to philosophical recognition.

What the concept of a pre-ontological understanding of being suggests or implies, although Heidegger does not say so, is what I propose we should think of as a *modeling* of our existential development as human

beings capable of living up to the ontological potential constitutive of our *Da-sein*, our ownmost, most “authentic” being. This development, this process of maturing, would have three stages or dimensions: first, a *pre-ontological* understanding of being, forever carried in latency or implicitness by our embodiment; second, an *ontic* understanding of being, formed in the course of our adaptation in and to worldly life; and finally, although the notions of completeness, perfection, and finality make no sense here, the possibility of an authentically *ontological* understanding of being—the kind of understanding that Heidegger’s lifetime of thought was committed to bringing about. This ontological stage requires our retrieval of the pre-ontological understanding of being, the bodily felt understanding of being carried by the body’s dis-position, or *Er-eignung*. Because Heidegger always turns away from reflecting on our embodiment, he does not acknowledge that it is *the human body* that carries this pre-ontological understanding. How else could that understanding survive and endure? Surely, he would not want to locate it, as systems of idealism would, in a disembodied “consciousness.” Where else, then, could it possibly reside? Where else could it be carried, even when—indeed *necessarily* when—we are not conscious of it, if not in our corporeal existence?

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In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty asks us to reflect on our experience with perception:

When I turn toward perception, and pass from direct perception to thinking about that perception, I reenact it, and find at work in my organs of perception something older than myself of which those organs are merely a trace.¹⁶

“I am born into personal existence,” he adds, “from a time that I do not constitute.”¹⁷ In other words: “My personal existence must be the resumption of a pre-personal tradition. There is, therefore, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it.”¹⁸ This “other subject,” a pre-personal, pre-ontological existence preceding, and abiding “beneath” my social formation, is the thrown-openness of *Da-sein*.

In “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” a later text, Merleau-Ponty argues that “others and my body are born together from an original ecstasy.”¹⁹ He elaborates this phenomenology more fully and more radically in “The Intertwining—The Chiasm” (texts written around 1960 and published in 1964, three years after his death), where he radically breaks

free of the conceptions of the body that figure in idealism and in empiricism, enabling him thereby to deconstruct the subject-object structure in its claim to primacy. Thus he observes, for example, that “the look [*le regard*] envelops, palpates, espouses the visible things. It is as though our looking were in a relation of pre-established harmony with them, as though it knew them before knowing them.”²⁰ In “The Principle of Identity” (1957), Heidegger attempts a difficult methodological “*Einkehr*” (GA 11: 41/ID 31ff.), a return intended to bring to our attention the phenomenology of this relation (*Bezug*) in a dimension (*Bereich*) of interactional belonging-together (*Zusammengehören*) that he characterizes as “*schwingend*” and “*schwebend*”: vibrational, oscillating, and reciprocating (GA 11: 39–47/ID 31–39). In “The Intertwining—The Chasm,” Merleau-Ponty will describe this dynamic infrastructure using similar wording, especially bringing out the reversibility.²¹

Our pre-personal, pre-ontological, pre-conceptual, bodily felt understanding of being is manifest, I suggest, in the openness, the exposure and vulnerability, the curiosity and excitement, the wonder and awe of the infant and young child. But in the course of the child’s socialization and ego-formation, that openness undergoes a certain suppression and closure, defending the child from the demands of excessive stimulation. As the poet Mallarmé once observed, the infant must soon relinquish its original “*exstase*,” a fresh and innocent openness.²² Transposed into Heidegger’s phenomenology, the poet’s verse is saying that, as the infant enters into the ontic life-world, learning its social norms and cultural forms, it must relinquish and “forget” its innocent openness, its pre-personal, pre-ontological understanding of being. However, the pre-personal, pre-ontological dimension is neither lost nor even completely forgotten; it is only sublated, surpassed but still available for philosophical recovery as the bodily felt sense, or understanding, of being that we always still bear within us and that, circling back hermeneutically from our ontically engaged life to our pre-ontological attunement, we can always, in principle, retrieve.

The pre-ontological understanding remains as our endowment, our entrustment, our promise, a potential for recognition and development, even when suppressed, unknown, and unacknowledged in the ontological forgetfulness of a merely *ontic* understanding of being. Heidegger’s project accordingly attempts to awaken us to a genuinely *ontological* experience and understanding of being—that possibility, or potential, toward which we have always already been summoned by grace of the pre-ontological understanding inherent in the dispositional nature of the human embodiment.

Our self-development requires that we break out of the narrowness, the “forgetfulness” of our habitual, culturally constructed ontic understanding, opening ourselves to the question of the *being* of these beings, opening ourselves to the significance—and indeed the very presencing—of being as such. It requires mindfulness, overcoming a life lived by habit, as Pascal observed, in a perpetual condition of distractedness. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger registers in unequivocal terms just what is ultimately at stake: “the opening up [*Eröffnung*] of human being, out of its captivity [*aus der Befangenheit*] in that-which-is [*im Seienden*], to live in the openness of being [*zur Offenheit des Seins*]” (GA 5: 55/PLT 67).

Getting to this deepened, expanded understanding, shifting gears, so to speak, while still continuing to live “pragmatically” in the world of the ontic dimension, requires, I suggest, getting in touch with that pre-ontological understanding we have always already carried and *retrieving* it for the opening up of our present living by way of a kind of *anamnesis*, a phenomenologically disciplined *recollection* that, in his two-volume work on Nietzsche, Heidegger will simply call “Er-innerung,” using a word that implies a process of remembering that demands a certain concentrated inwardness—a going deeply into oneself—in order to *retrieve* something of the forgotten, repressed, pre-reflective, and pre-ontological understanding of being, something of our relation to being in the first stage—the infancy stage—of our experience of thrown-openness (GA 6.2: 481–90/EP 75–83).

The premise behind the project presented in this volume is that it is inherent in the very logic of our dispositions and capacities that they can be developed. In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, his 1929–1930 lecture course, Heidegger emphasized that “what philosophy deals with only discloses itself at all within and from out of a transformation of human *Dasein*.” And he repeatedly indicated that the task of thinking is “to liberate the humanity [*Menschheit*] in man”—liberate “the essence of man,” and “let the *Da-sein* in him become what it essentially is” (GA 29–30: 423, 248, 255/FCM 292, 166, 172). Similar thoughts are expressed in the 1946 “Letter on Humanism.” Noteworthy in the 1929–1930 lectures is that the key notion of appropriation—*Ereignung*—is already conceived very lucidly, as when, for instance, he speaks of “the necessity of the ultimate demand upon man”: “die Notwendigkeit der äußersten Zumutung an den Menschen” (GA 29–30: 254/ FCM 171). What is the demand? “It is that *Da-sein* as such is demanded of man, that it is given to him—to be [situated in] the here”—“daß dem Menschen das Dasein als solches zugemutet wird, daß ihm aufgegeben ist—da zu sein” (GA 29–30: 246/FCM 165). To *understand* ourselves as *Da-sein* in the nature of our ex-istence and accordingly *take*

responsibility for ourselves as *Da-sein*: that is the essential task we are given by nature's ultimately inscrutable facticity (GA 29–30: 247/FCM 166). And it should be manifest by now that this is a task engaging our embodiment—a task for our response-abilities in seeing, hearing, and gesturing.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufman (London: Viking Penguin, 1954, 1966), 34. Translation modified.
2. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 34–35. Translation modified.
3. Martin Heidegger, “Brief über das Humanismus,” GA 9: 324; “Letter on Humanism,” in *Pathmarks*, 247. Also see (GA 6.1: 99/N 1: 98–99).
4. Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, preceded by *On the Improvement of the Understanding*, ed. James Gutmann (New York: Hafner, 1960), 263–71.
5. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951, 1969), 333; *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso NLB, 1978), 247.
6. Spinoza, *Ethics*, 249. But see Dante, *The Inferno*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jane Hollander (New York: Doubleday Random House, 2000), Canto VI: 107–8, 110: “quanto la cosa è più perfetta, | più senta il bene, e così la doglienza”: “the more perfect a being becomes, the more it is cognizant of the good, and for precisely that reason, it suffers all the more [in witnessing the misery and depravity of the world].” My paraphrase.
7. Immanuel Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 50.
8. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 76.
9. *Ibid.*, 32.
10. *Ibid.*, 70.
11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 146.
12. René Descartes, *Treatise on Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
13. See Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of motility and gesture in *Phenomenology of Perception*. And see *The Body’s Recollection of Being*, where I interpret gesture and motility in relation to Heidegger’s reading of Heraclitus, arguing that they are bodily forms of the *logos* and its *legein*, gathering and laying out haptic, practical, gestural fields of intelligibility and meaning.
14. See Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002, 2005), 143.
15. Walter Benjamin, “Kritik der Gewalt,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, GS II.1; “Critique of Violence,” in *Reflections*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York:

Schocken: Formation 1986), 277–300. And see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere e la nuda vita* (Milano: Einaudi, 2009); *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

16. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 351–52.

17. *Ibid.*, 347.

18. *Ibid.*, 254.

19. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Philosopher and His Shadow,” in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press), 174. And see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 123, 133.

20. Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 133.

21. *Ibid.*, 131–55.

22. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945), 57: *L'enfant abdique son extase/ Et docte déjà par chemins*. The infant must relinquish its innocent openness, required almost at once to become knowledgeable (*docte*) about the ways of the world.

PART II
FORMATION

1

VISION AS PARADIGM IN THE LIFE OF THOUGHT

Understanding the facticity of our situatedness is essential to our existence, our very being, and in such a way that, on the basis of that understanding, we, each of us a *Dasein*, are enabled, in our lives, to develop the different possibilities in our way of seeing.

Heidegger, *Being and Time*¹

Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible.

Paul Klee, *Creative Credo*²

Er-eignen [to appropriate] originally meant: *er-äugen* [present before the eyes], *blicken* [notice, catch sight of], *im Blicken zu sich rufen* [summon into one's sight], *an-eignen* [lay claim to].

Heidegger, "The Principle of Identity"³

The upward gaze [*Das Aufschauen*] goes up into the sky, and yet it remains below on the earth. The upward gaze spans [*durchmißt*] the space between sky and earth. This span of the between is measured out [*zugemessen*] for the dwelling of human beings. We will now call the span that is opened and meted out the dimension [*das Dimension*].

Heidegger, ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . ."⁴

§1

Paradigm

Vision is a wonderful gift. So, it is not surprising that, from the earliest years of Greek philosophy—not only in Plato's time but, even much earlier, in the time of the pre-Socratics—vision would serve as the paradigm

for defining knowledge, truth, and reality. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger quotes Aristotle, implicitly expressing his agreement: “The care for seeing [*die Sorge des Sehens*] is essential to the being of the human being” (GA 2: 227/BT 215). This is followed by a quotation from Augustine regarding “the remarkable priority of ‘seeing’.” I shall argue that, as our contemporary world reveals, this priority is both good and bad.

Vision has its own distinctive nature and character; and that means its own distinctive way of relating to and experiencing the “being” of beings, in all four of its senses, namely: (1) as referring to the sheer *fact* that something—anything—is, (2) as designating the *essence* of *what* beings are, (3) as designating the meaningful *presencing* of beings, and (4) as referring to the clearing as the fundamental condition necessary for the possibility of all meaningful experience with regard to beings—hence as referring to the perceptual field within the open dimensionality of which beings can appear and depart, be present and absent, in their presence. In sum, when philosophical thought takes vision to be the source and substance of its paradigm, the distinctive character of vision becomes significant in framing the discourse of metaphysics—the ways in which thought could conceive of being (GA 55.2: 253–55/H 194–95).⁵ This understanding of being was, in large measure, a reflection of everyday life, mirroring its everyday neglect, denial, and distortion of being—its so-called “forgetfulness of being” (*Seinsvergessenheit*). Consequently, instead of serving as a critique of that relation to being, metaphysics legitimated it, complicit in the increasing ontological nihilism that Heidegger sees herding us ever nearer to catastrophe.

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In “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility,” Walter Benjamin observed, “Just as the entire mode of existence of human societies changes over long historical periods, so does their mode of perception.”⁶ In fact, as Jan Patocka said in *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*,

We do not even perceive in the same way as ancient Greeks, even though, physiologically considered, our sense organs are the same. Humans in a secularized epoch see not only different things, but they see them differently.⁷

Although our eyes and ears, the physical organs of perception, have apparently not undergone any noticeable anatomical or physiological changes, our ways of seeing and hearing unquestionably have: these ways involve understanding; hence they belong to history. That is why, as Heidegger argued, the physicalism of the sciences will never understand the historical changes that have taken place in our ways of seeing and hearing.

In 1435, the publication of *De pictura*, a treatise by Leon Battista Alberti, set in motion a revolution, not only in painting but also in philosophical thought—and even in the life-world. In this *Treatise*, teaching linear perspective in the art of painting, Alberti demonstrated a technique in which all the straight lines that are perpendicular to the plane of the painting converge toward a single vanishing point. In 1525, a treatise by Albrecht Dürer, *Instructions for Measuring with Compass and Ruler*, contributed to the spreading of this technique.⁸ Before long, linear perspectivism became the fundamental law for European painting, the model, in fact, for a way of looking and seeing the world, presenting scenes of the visible world of the Renaissance in a way that differed profoundly from how the world of the Middle Ages was presented. In perspectivism, painting shows the world as if it were seen through the frame of a window. Thus, as Heidegger insightfully argued in “The Age of the World Picture,” in the modern epoch, the being of the world is *enframed*—rendered as a picture, implying that its visibility is under total control. When we study the history of perspectivism, we can see that the Renaissance already prepared the world for the ontology belonging to what Heidegger calls “the age of the world picture.” As Mauro Carbone has commented,

Different images of seeing have been affirming themselves in different epochs of Western history, and each epoch has tended to choose a particular optical apparatus as the model of the way in which, according to that particular epoch, we [should] see. In other words, each epoch has conceived the way in which human beings [should] see the world according to the characteristics of the optical apparatus that that very epoch ended up choosing as its model: this is what modernity did with the window.⁹

Might Heidegger’s turn to hearing (*Wende zum Hören*) in some major lectures and seminars contribute to the beginning of the end of the ocular-centric paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality that has dominated the Western world at least since the time of Plato? Plato, of course, would not recognize the world that has eventuated through the unfolding of the logic of this paradigm, which had a very different, more congenial character in his time.

†

From the very beginning, philosophical thought in the Western world has been represented in terms of metaphors, allegories, and concepts drawn from visionary experience. Inheriting the archaic beginning, Plato brought that thought to consummate expression in a metaphysical

language reflecting the influence of the shimmering southern sunlight within which he lived. However, he repudiated visual perception, denying it any truth, any access to reality, while at the same time taking from it, for a theoretical, contemplative, nonsensuous vision, the sublime vision of the philosopher, all its familiar vocabulary and imagery. This apparent contradiction in his thought seems worth pondering—especially in light of the fact that, in a certain way and to a certain extent, Heidegger also fell into the same paradoxical contradiction, since he drew on the phenomenology and language of vision even in his attempt to overcome or convert the metaphysics that depended on the favoring of vision in the formulation of the paradigm for knowledge truth and reality that has determined for thousands of years the historical course of Western philosophical thought. Thus, for instance, in his 1943 lectures on Heraclitus, he used the language of vision to express his question about the fate of being in the future of the Western world:

Whether and how being itself inceptually clears into the open within the history of the Occident, and whether and how being, even now, still gleams in a faint light, which some believe to be a mere vapor. (GA 55.1: 100/H 75)

For Heidegger, the future, hence the fate, of being depends very much on the proper use of historical memory. But what should we make of the invocation of “a faint light”? I note in this textual passage the philosopher’s decision to use vision-derived, vision-related terminology and of course I note the invocation of the “faint light” itself. Both that decision and the thing itself are too important to be dismissed as mere rhetoric, “mere vapor.”

In Plato, vision is not only the paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality, but it is also determinative of the very conception of a paradigm for philosophical thought. As such, vision has played a significant role in steering the course of metaphysics, and indeed the historical unfolding of Western history, moving it steadily in the direction of what Heidegger calls the *Gestell*, the total imposition of reification and ready availability, gathering everything into available presence in the realm of visibility.

It is easier for us to shut our eyes than close our ears. It is easier for us to remain untouched and unmoved by what we see than by what we hear; what we see is kept at a distance, but what we hear penetrates our entire body. Vision is consequently the preferred sense for the egoic will to power, the subject’s dominion over objects.¹⁰

In his 1944 lecture course on Heraclitus, Heidegger attempted to explicate the meaning and importance of *physis*, observing, “No one can be concealed before *physis*. Anyone who is, insofar as that one is, must be such that he emerges against the emerging itself, and comports himself emergently toward *physis*”:

Everyone who is, as someone, does not merely occur as a being within the clearing (of being). Such a one not only stands “in” the clearing, as does a rock or a tree or a mountain animal; rather, such a one looks into the clearing and this looking-in is one’s “life.” [(GA 55.1: 172–73/H 130)

Besides noting that the characterization of human existence is presented in terms of vision, we should ponder the suggestion that the groundwork is, in a way, already laid out in ancient times for the eventual unfolding, in our time, of the *Ge-stell*—the universal imposition of “standing reserve,” an ordering of everything into permanent availability, hence total, permanent unconcealment. In the coming world-order, no one can remain concealed. And the world finally becomes nothing but a picture, totalized, controlled. Must seeing the world as if pictured from outer space serve the will to power? Or could it humble us and make us recognize our awesome responsibility?

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In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger invoked vision when he declared that the task for phenomenology as a contribution to philosophical thought must be the exploration of the ontological difference between being and beings, hence, though not as Husserl practiced it, “the leading of our enquiring vision from beings back to being [*die Rückführung des untersuchenden Blickes vom naiv erfassten Seienden zum Sein*].”¹¹ Heidegger inherited the vision-ruled paradigm of Platonism in the metaphysics he took over, but he challenged it for encouraging a metaphysics he sought to overcome or convert because of its inherent and increasingly manifest implications. Like Plato before him, though, he himself drew on the metaphors of vision and light in order to indicate a radically different experience in relation to knowledge, truth, and reality. And, also like Plato, he provided no explanation for what seems to be a contradiction—or, at the very least, a certain tension pulling his thought in opposing directions: using the language of vision to challenge the conceptions of a metaphysics dependent for their construction on that same language of vision.

Eventually, however, at least in part because of Heraclitus, Heidegger would venture to shift the language of his argument, moving from the visionary metaphysics of Platonism to the hermeneutical phenomenology of listening and hearing, no doubt convinced—correctly, I suggest—that breaking away from a vision-centered method in order to think, instead, in terms of listening and hearing might be helpful in overcoming or converting the catastrophic rule of metaphysics.

Nevertheless, what is intriguing is Heidegger's very powerful and resolutely steadfast connection with the fundamental metaphors of vision that figures in Plato's thought. However, he does fault Platonism, and indeed the entire history of metaphysics, for not understanding and appreciating the significance of the hiddenness that Heraclitus had insisted on. For Heidegger, the hermeneutical recognition of the role of hiddenness is crucial to the project of overcoming or converting a metaphysics that attempts to deny the dimension of concealment in which alone the essence of truth, the truth of being, is protected and preserved.

Drawing on the etymological association of *Ereignis* (event of appropriation) with *er-äugen*, which originally meant “to bring something into view, that is, to catch sight of something, call something into view, hence to appropriate it,” Heidegger turns to vision to explain our essential nature in its role as opening clearings for the visible presence of the world.¹² This suggests that it is in an event in our experience with vision that we are likely to bring into view the process of appropriation and attain the greatest understanding, through which the human being can achieve becoming the *Da-sein* it is already in its essence.

For Plato, the *Ideas* are like the radiant, fiery sun, bringing light to the earthbound world below. Plato's *Ideas* are visionary both in origin and in conceptual presentation: they are essences, idealities, sources of guidance that, although taken—stolen—from the visible “looks” of things, have been stripped of their lowly, contemptible sensuous origin and rendered meta-physical, projected into a realm of pure thought beyond the merely visible; and as independent of common belief, they ground a reflective, critical consciousness. Perhaps the greatest virtue in that idealism is to be found precisely in its unwillingness to accept without sufficiently critical questioning what “the many” believes to be fact and truth. The appeal of this idealism lies in its persistent visionary transcendence of facticity, its defiance of our assumptions about reality, and its refusal to abandon our longing and struggle to approach a better world. Platonic thought is an idealism committed to a truth that beckons us from a vision of that better world, projected in the realm of the *Ideas*.

But when *aletheia*, the transcendental ground of worldly truth, the ground that makes truth-as-correctness possible, is not recognized, then the dimension that constitutes the truth of being in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment is blocked from view, and truth and knowledge of truth get reduced to correctness—a capitulation to facticity. And that reduction leads all too easily to the crisis regarding truth that we are confronting today. This is a crisis that it would not be far-fetched to see as nihilism, the total denial of being—and consequently, the reification of beings.

In lectures delivered during Winter Semester 1933–1934 and recently published under the title *Being and Truth*, Heidegger says, “We want [. . .] to experience what powers are reigning over our *Dasein* [*welche Mächte unser Dasein da beherrschen*] when that *Dasein* stands under the domination [*unter der Botmäßigkeit*] of the customary concept of truth.” This thought leads him to ask: “How did the reigning concept of truth come to its reign? How did it repress the earlier one [*Wie kam es zur Abdrängung des früheren*]?”¹³ There can be no doubt that this reigning conception of truth—truth as correctness—owed its origin to the experience with vision that the Greek philosophers drew upon, living as they did in that part of the world most favored by the sun’s splendid light. But the earlier, archaic conception, grounded in the daily experience of the emerging and submerging of the light of the sun, precluded constant visibility, hence also human domination.

Was Plato so blinded by that light that he could not see the truth of being—the being of truth—in its dimension of withdrawal, its protection in hiddenness and darkness? We shall return to this question. And we shall learn from Heidegger’s retrieval of the thought of Heraclitus that taking vision and light as paradigm, which is what metaphysics from Plato on has done, is not a philosophically innocent matter.

§2

Prosopopoeia

In a 1951 lecture, “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B50),” Heidegger took up for thought a saying attributed to Heraclitus, the pre-Socratic philosopher Heidegger seems to have enjoyed the most. In a plausible translation of this fragment, Heraclitus says, “When you have listened not to me (my words, my *logoi*) but to the *Logos* itself [i.e., disclosiveness itself], it would be wise to be in accord [*homologeîn*] with the One unifying All” (GA 7: 230–31/EGT 75).

Interpreting the ancient words, Heidegger takes Heraclitus to be saying that “mortals, whose [proper] essence remains appropriated [*vereignet*]

bleibt] to *homologeïn* [i.e., attunement, consonance, and correspondence], redeem their historical destiny [*Geschicklich sind die Sterblichen*] when they measure [up to] the *Logos* as the *Hen Panta* [One unifying All] and submit themselves to its measure” (GA 7: 231/EGT 75). In other words, emphasizing the meaning of the *homologeïn*, it would be wise (and appropriate to our nature) for us—in, for instance, our perception—to correspond to, or become like, or become near in character to, the *Logos* (i.e., being itself) by virtue of becoming that which, like the *Logos* in its *Legeïn*, gathers and unifies all in the layout of a clearing that makes possible the disclosing of beings in their meaningful presence.

I would like to explore a little the significance of the hermeneutical phenomenology of vision that can be drawn from Heidegger’s reading of this fragment B 50. The key to the learning at issue here revolves around the notions, as Heidegger interprets them, of *legeïn* (a verb signifying what speech, and by reasonable extension, all other forms of articulation, including perception, are, namely a disclosive bringing-forth and a gathering-laying-out) and *homologeïn* (a becoming-like, a resembling, a drawing-near, hence a certain *correspondence*, *consonance* and *attunement*, between (1) human forms of articulation and (2) the ontological dimension of articulation—the necessary conditions for the possibility of disclosiveness).

I will show that, in this short 1951 text on Heraclitus, Heidegger’s way of thinking about our capacity for vision is strikingly similar to his way of thinking about vision in an earlier 1949 text, “The Turn,” even though their thematic contexts and orientations are different. Despite the significant differences, however, the two lectures draw on the very same metaphorical imagery, creating for our thought an uncanny prosopopeia. In “The Turn,” Heidegger speaks of “the lightning-flash of being” (*Aufblitz des Seins*), “the glance of being” (*das Blitz des Seins*), and “the looking of being” (*das Blicken des Seins*).¹⁴ In fact, the lecture is saturated with thoughts in which ontological matters, matters concerning being, are expressed in the language of vision—and, most surprisingly, in phrases that seem to attribute vision to being itself, as if being could have eyes. Similarly, in the lecture on Heraclitus, where Heidegger connects fragment B 50 to fragment B 64, he draws our attention to the “flash of lightning” (*der Blitz*) that “steers the totality” of what is present and suggests that the “flash” in this image metaphorically represents the “glance” or “looking on” of being—the *Blick des Seins* (GA 7: 226–27, 232, 233/EGT 72, 76, 78). Thus, the connection between vision (looking and seeing) and being that he made in “The Turn” is reinforced when, a few years later, in this lecture on Heraclitus, he will speak of the “lightning flash of being” and “the [lightning]

storm of being” (*das Gewitter des Seins*) (GA 7: 232, 233–34/EGT 76, 78). So we find that, in the lecture on Heraclitus, Heidegger *envisions* being by using the very same metaphorical imagery he had used in the earlier 1949 lecture, concerned as it is with a turning that is both a turning in the human relation to being and a turning in the history of being itself.

The question is, what does Heidegger’s prosopopoeia in these two texts mean? Why does he resort to this strange rhetorical conceit, speaking as if *being* could look, cast a glance like lightning, and see in a flash of light? After all, he repeatedly tells us in numerous texts and in unequivocal terms that what “being” signifies is not an entity, not a being. So, we can be confident that it is not a question of an anthropocentrism or anthropomorphism. Why then is he using this rhetorical construction? A quick answer, truthful but far from telling the whole story, would be that, like the Greek philosophers before him, Heidegger wants to say something important about the predominant *character* of human vision in our time and about the historical possibility of a certain ontological transformation.

Being of course cannot see; however, it is, in one of its significations, the clearing (*Logos*), that which lays out (*Legein*) the conditions of intelligibility and meaningfulness for perceptual experience, hence that which makes the presencing of beings—the visibility of beings—possible. Thus, in a congenial fiction, we might say that, in its functioning as the clearing, giving beings their visibility, being can “see.” If now we were to imagine being as capable of seeing, how might we attempt to emulate *its* way of seeing? Would it not be a question of making our seeing more open—hence more attentive to its openness, its letting-be?

I suggest that, in effect, the prosopopoeia represents a polemical strategy, an attempt to imagine our perception—seeing and hearing—free of the nihilism of our time, free of the violence it is daily enacting.

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In “The Turn,” Heidegger reflects on an ever-increasing nihilism in the world—a nihilism interpreted in terms of the *Gestell*, namely the imposition of an order that submits absolutely everything to reification in constant presence—total availability—for the sake of the human will to power. He also reflects on the possibility of turning our future, our destiny, away from its violence, its devastating destructiveness, even finding strength precisely in its danger and drawing, as he so often does, on the vocabulary of vision in order to convey his thinking. As in the lectures on Heraclitus, his argument makes startling use of prosopopoeia. His thought is that, if we can be brought to an understanding of the danger challenging our time as the epoch in which being comes to presence in, and as, configurations

determined by the *Gestell*, then the oblivion of being into which we are falling might be overcome and our unfathomably deep relation to being, a relation deeper than we could ever succeed in representing, could perhaps be “turned” from forgetfulness into safekeeping. So, he attempts to make us understand by conveying what is involved in the language of vision. This is the significance of the prosopopoeia. How does it bear on our interpretation of the relation between vision and *Logos*?

According to Heidegger, “the turning of the danger [inherent in the nihilism operating in the epoch ruled by the regime of the *Gestell*] comes to pass suddenly” (*ereignet sich jäh*) in the “self-lighting” (*Sichlichten*) of being:

In this turning, the clearing belonging to the essence of being suddenly clears itself and lights up. This sudden self-lighting is the lightning-flash [*das Blitzen*]. It brings itself into its own brightness [. . .]. When, in the turning of the danger [*in der Kehre der Gefahr*], the truth of being flashes [*blitzt*], the essence of being clears and lights itself up [*lichtet sich das Wesen des Seins*]. (GA 11: 120/QCT 44, BF 69)

In 1957, ten years later, the same imagery appears in Heidegger’s lecture on “The Principle of Identity,” where the appropriation that takes hold of the bond between man and being in the time of the *Gestell* is described as glimpsed in a lightning-flash.¹⁵ What is to be seen anticipates the historical reality, that that bond, that belonging-together, can be lifted into awareness (*Besinnung*) and developed (*ereignet* and *erlichtet*) in accordance with our responsibility for the destiny of being in the realm of perception.

Continuing the metaphorical imagery in “The Turning,” in which, as in Plato, a certain visualism figures in philosophically consequential, indeed decisive ways, Heidegger tells us,

“To flash” [*blitzen*], thought in terms both of its derivation and of what it designates, is “to glance” [*blicken*]. In the flashing glance [*Blick*] and as that glance, the essence of being, a coming to presence of being, enters into its own emitting of light [*in sein eigenes Leuchten*]. Moving through the element of its own shining [*durch das Element seines Leuchtens*], the flashing glance retrieves that which it catches sight of and brings it back into the brightness of its own looking [*birgt der Blick sein Erblicktes in das Blicken zurück*]. And yet that glancing, in its very giving of light, simultaneously also keeps safe [*wahrt*] the concealed darkness of its origin as the unlighted. The in-turning [*Einkehr*] that is the lightning-flash of the truth of being is the entering, flashing glance—insight [*Einblick*]. (GA 11: 121, GA 79: 74/QCT 45, BF 70)

“The in-flashing of world into the *Gestell* is,” he says, “the inflashing [*Einblitz*] of the truth of being into truthless being”: a reduction of the world into the *Gestell*, transforming the openness for meaningful presencing (“the truth of being”) into a reifying closure (“truthless being”). Nevertheless, he believes, what shows itself in this world is always an event that makes an ineluctable claim on us: it is always a bringing-to-sight that *ap-propriates* (*er-eignet*) our vision, bringing it toward insight into its ownmost nature:

In-flashing [*Einblitz*] is the disclosing coming-to-pass of appropriation [*Ereignis*] within being itself. Such disclosive coming-to-pass [*Ereignis*] is a bringing-to-sight that appropriates, [which is to say that it is] a bringing-of-what-is-seen-into-its-own, its essence, its truth [*eignende Eräugnis*]. (GA 11: 121, GA 79: 74/QCT 45, BF 70)¹⁶

“Insight into that which is,” he says, “names the disclosing that brings into its own that which is coming-to-pass of the turning within being” (GA 11: 121, GA 70: 74–75/QCT 46, BF 70). And he urges us to understand that, although it might have seemed as though this “insight into that which is” means “only a glance [*Blick*] such as we men throw out from ourselves into what is,” the truth is otherwise: “insight [*Einblick*] as in-flashing [*als Einblitz*] is the disclosively appropriating coming-to-pass of the constellation of the turning within the coming-to-presence of being itself [*Sein selber*], and that within the epoch of the *Gestell*” (ibid.). In other words, it is a question of the ap-propriation (*Er-eignen*) of our ability to be ontologically disclosive, our capacity for a hermeneutical perception. We are responsible for the character of our vision.

Near the end of this text, Heidegger argues that, despite the prevailing rule of the *Ge-stell*, which gathers (*Ge-*) everything into reification under its imposition of order (*-stell*), there are still [*dennoch*] grounds for hope:

The bright open space of the world [*Lichtblick von Welt*] still lights up [*lichtet sich*] and the truth of being flashes [*blitzt*]. Indeed, at the very instant when the *Gestell* lights up, revealing itself as the danger [*als die Gefahr*], i.e., as the saving power [*d.h., als das Rettende*]. Moreover, in the time of the *Gestell*, as a destining of the coming to presence of being [*als einem Wesensgeschick des Seins*], there comes to presence a light from the flashing of being. The essence of the *Gestell*, though hidden from understanding, is nevertheless intensely experienced, hence no blind destiny in the sense of a completely ordained fate [*kein blindes Geschick im Sinne eines völlig verhängenen Verhängnisses*]. (GA 11:122, GA 79: 75/QCT 47, BF 71)

This is because, in all our visual experience, we human beings are “the ones who are caught sight of”: “die im Einblick Erblickten.” We are not only the ones who behold as meaningful what shows itself; we are also the ones—indeed the only ones—caught and held in sight, called into question, and held to account for our way of looking and seeing in our way of beholding, held to account by the beholding of what presences: what Heidegger here calls “the lightning-glimpse of being.” So how are we to respond to the questions this text leaves us with? Questions not only regarding the *character* of our seeing and but also regarding *what it is* we are willing and resolved to see (GA 11: 123–24, GA 79: 77/QCT 44, BF 72–73). We need to *see* with understanding what is happening to our world: because of our nihilism, an ever-increasing devastation of the earth and an ever-increasing destitution of the spirit.

The thought in the text concludes: “Insight into that which is—thus do we name the sudden flash of the truth of being [penetrating] into truthless being.” And, “when insight comes disclosingly to pass [*Wenn Einblick sich ereignet*], then human beings are the ones who are struck in their very essence [*in ihr Wesen Getroffenen*] by the lightning-flash of being.” In such “insight,” human beings would at long last be “the ones who are caught sight of,” hence made responsible for being (GA 11: 123–24; GA 79: 77/QCT 44, BF 72–73). Heidegger’s tropes suggest the uncanny thought that, in the world of the visible, we human beings are not only the ones who behold what shows itself but are also the ones—indeed the only ones—caught and held in sight, called into question, and held to account for our way of beholding—as if our way of looking and seeing were visible to the imaginary beholding at work in “the glimpse of being.” So how are we to respond to the questions this text leaves us with: “Will the *appropriation* of insight into that which is bring itself disclosingly to pass?” (*Ereignet sich Einblick in das was ist?*) “Will we *correspond* to that insight through a looking that looks into the essence of technology and becomes aware of being itself within it?” (*Entsprechen wir dem Einblick durch ein Blicken, das in das Wesen der Technik blickt und in ihm das Sein selbst gewahrt?*) “Will we see the lightning-flash of being even in the essence of technology?” (*Sehen wir den Blitz des Seins im Wesen der Technik?*) (ibid.).

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The textual passages that I have quoted can be perplexing, because, as already noted, they *seem* to present “being” in unmistakably anthropomorphic terms, rendering it as if it were an entity—a something—somehow capable of agency. We are familiar with the experience in which we, we human beings, have a sudden insight—an insight so unexpected, so surprising,

and so very sudden that, as we are wont to say, it happens in a flash, like a bolt of lightning. But here Heidegger appears not to want the flash to describe only the turning of *our* sudden insight, disclosing, and bringing to light, the truth of being. He also wants to describe *being itself* as a look or glance—a look or glance that, like lightning, suddenly flashes, clearing and lighting things up. Why?

Heidegger's metaphorical language persists in moving ambiguously, swinging and oscillating, between *our* being and being *itself*. This double, two-sided (*zweideutig*) reference, however, is *not* what it seems to be, namely, an anthropomorphism, turning being into something that is capable of casting a flashing glance. What does the oscillation mean?

If we are determined to avoid taking his words to be treating being as a singular being, or a higher kind of being, then, it seems to me, we are compelled to construe the construction as an elaborate metaphorical thought. That is, it serves as a provocation, a challenge for thought—indeed, as I shall argue, an *appropriating claim* on our vision. But that, of course, requires, first, that we understand how metaphor functions in Heidegger's thinking.

To understand metaphor, Heidegger turns to that word's Greek etymology. The word derives from the Greek *meta*, meaning "after" or "beyond," and the Greek *phero* (*pherein*), meaning "carry," "move," "bear," and "transport." Thus, a metaphor is a word or word-construction, a *Wortbild*, that takes us somewhere—somewhere else, somewhere different or new. Hence, for Heidegger, as a thinker for whom what he has to say always comes "from out of the experience of thinking" (*aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*), a metaphor is never merely a literary embellishment, never merely a figure of speech; it is always a medium for expressing in words a thought that might take our experiencing and thinking to a different or new place. How, then, is Heidegger's ambiguous metaphorical construction working? And where—into what future possibility—might it be taking us?

If we assume that the quoted passages are metaphorical, then we might understand them to be saying that being—all that in any way presences—shines or flashes a critical spotlight on our way of seeing, and, like a mirror, puts us on the spot. Shining directly on us, "the light of being" claims us for a question: Is our way of looking and seeing realizing and actualizing the character of our vision that most befits the dignity of our humanity? Is our way of looking and seeing realizing and actualizing the disposition of character to which, in their essential nature, they have already—a *priori*—been claimed, appropriated, and oriented? Does the *actuality* of our looking and seeing "correspond" to their endowed potential? Held in the light of being,

in its “flashing glance,” we are beheld in our beholding: beheld, as it were, by the *as-if* omnipresent sight of being. The point of this trope is to call on us to reflect on the character of our seeing. Does our seeing *correspond* to the imaginary “looking” of being? If we understand “being” to mean that which makes the presencing of beings in the realm of visibility possible, then the question is simply asking: Is our way of seeing an open clearing (*like* the way we might imagine being itself to look and see)? The anthropomorphism is just a rhetorical ruse to get us to look and see with ontologically appropriated eyes—our own *Blick des Seins*. These questions are consequently intended to get us to enter into a process of self-examination and appropriation eventuating in our responsibility for being and beings—what, in “Time and Being,” Heidegger calls an “Einkehr in das Ereignis” (GA 14: 49–50/ OTB 40–41). We are by nature thrown-open—we are already *Da-sein*; but according to Heidegger, this essential nature summons us to appropriate it, to take it up for appropriation, the further development of its potential. This appropriation is a responsibility that concerns the character of our ability to receive and respond, in appropriate correspondence (as in the *homologeîn* invoked by Heraclitus), to what we are given in perception, in seeing and hearing.

As the ones “caught sight of”—that is, from the hypothetical and metaphorical standpoint of “the glance of being”—we are appropriated (*ereignet*) not only for the process of questioning ourselves and taking responsibility for our condition of thrown-openness but also, ultimately, for the larger history-making task of overcoming or converting, by virtue of the *character* of our perceptivity, the *Gestell* that rules our time, securing for a different future “the truth of being,” that is, securing an *openness* for “das Anwesen des Anwesenden,” the meaningful presencing of things, *whatever* in any way, any sense, *is* (GA 11: 122–24, GA 79: 75–77/QCT 47–49, BF 71–73).

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I am suggesting that the key to understanding Heidegger’s prosopoeia is to be found in Heidegger’s use of the concept of the *Ereignis*—and, as related to it, the notion of correspondence (*Entsprechung*), inspired by what Heraclitus says in fragment B50 about the *homologeîn*. Although in ordinary German usage, the word *Ereignis* means the happening of an “event,” Heidegger brings out an etymological meaning latent and hidden within it, namely, an *Anspruch*, a certain *claim* on us: the claim, namely, to become more fully, with a deeper sense of care and mindfulness, the thrown-openness we already are by nature, achieving an ontological dimension of “correspondence” (consonance, attunement) to our essence and in

relation to the being of the beings that come into presence in the fields of our clearing. Thus, the meaning of *Ereignis*, simply signifying at first the *event* that is an encounter between a human being (*Dasein*) and being (as in the meaningful presencing of some being, something that in some way *is*), undergoes a profound semantic shift, so as to signify that our engagement in such encounters is, when thought more deeply, the activation and recognition of a claim, a summons—an *ap-propriation*—to take up and develop our ownmost potential in relating to the meaningful presencing of what is. In other words, the *Ereignis*, understood first as (1) a phenomenological event, or situation, of meaningful presencing in a *Dasein's* life, is unfolded into (2) an *Er-eynis* in the sense of an appropriation that claims us for (3) an *Er-eynis* in the sense of our propriation. But the *Ereignis* also summons us to take into our responsibility, into our care, the conditions necessary for the being of beings. That demands critical reflection on the *character* of our perceptual engagements and on our developing of the potential inherent in our perceptual capabilities. The most fundamental dimension of this potential is the openness of the clearing itself, within which vision receives whatever might, given prevailing historical conditions, come as meaningful into its presence.

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Having proposed an interpretation of Heidegger's use of prosopopoeia in "The Turning," I will now consider his use of that rhetorical strategy in his reading of the text on Heraclitus, in order to suggest how, in the *legein* ("the laying-out that gathers") and the *homologein* (a becoming-like, or corresponding, that draws near in its character), our vision is opened to possibilities that bear on the question of our historical destiny (*Geschick*) as human beings. In the *homologein*, we would each take up our ownmost nature as embodied mortal beings gifted with a certain capacity for vision. Through a process of propriation, our vision would *correspond* to what is called for in our appropriation.

If we recognize that perception is a form of articulation, hence a manifestation of the *Logos*, then the Greek word *Legein* would name and describe the ontological essence and law of its functioning: a laying-out-that-gathers, *laying out* the transcendental conditions of appearing, a field of percipient experiencing, and *gathering* into the clearing, into the openness of its compass, the beings that come into sensible presence. Thus, if the operative law of our perception—for example, the carefully developed character of our way of seeing and hearing—actually *corresponds* to this ontological Law (*Logos*) in the mindfulness of its laying-out and in-gathering, then our perception would realize the deep wisdom of the *homologein* that Heraclitus

is recommending. Seeing and hearing would become ontological organs, organs fully belonging to being: as if *our* seeing were the seeing projected by being itself, and *our* hearing the hearing properly belonging to being itself.

What I am arguing, after Heraclitus and after Heidegger, is that the *correspondence* signified in the *homologeîn* might be thought of as constituting an *ontological appropriation* of our capacity for visual perception, an appropriation that summons us to an awareness and mindfulness that would enable our vision to become more fittingly and more responsively what, in its essence, its inherent disposition, it already is, namely: a clearing, a disclosive laying-out-that-gathers.

I hope in this way to bring out for further thought, further questioning, the importance of perception—especially seeing and hearing—in Heidegger’s Greek-inspired conception of “the good life.” To follow this conception, we need to reflect on the *possibilities* in perception as an endowment of capacities capable of learning and development, not only in regard to various skills but also in regard to character and disposition. And this, in turn, means developing our seeing and hearing as ontological organs, organs ontologically attuned, attuned primarily, and first of all, to the role of the clearing, being itself, rather than *only* to the beings that it lets us encounter. Heidegger might speak here about fulfilling the appropriation of our organs of perception in correspondence with their ontological dimension and function.

Only prosopopoeia can explain the point of suggesting that we imagine our looking and seeing, our glance, our gaze to be the glance or look or gaze *of* being. Only prosopopoeia can explain the point of suggesting that we should imagine our seeing becoming the lightning flash, or lightning bolt, *of* being. Heidegger’s phrases are claiming *us* for an appropriated (*ereignete*) correspondence: there is always, inherent in the taking place of perception, a claim (*Anspruch*) calling for a correspondence (*Entsprechen*). In other words, the presencing of beings (i.e., the phenomenology in the being of beings) always claims our vision for a *homologeîn*: the developing of a character *corresponding* to its inherent potential as a mode of unconcealment or disclosiveness (*Entbergen*), bringing something forth in the gathering layout (*legeîn*) of a field formed by the interplay of visibility and invisibility. Heidegger’s commentary on fragment B 50, attributed to Heraclitus, understands the Greek word *legeîn* to designate the opening up, or clearing, and laying-out of a visual field, a field that makes possible the *gathering* of beings into their presence.

Beings should always engage our perception in a process of appropriation (*Ereignis*, *Ereignung*). And in that appropriation, we would not only

be addressed and stirred to question ourselves by what we encounter; we would also be called upon, bestirred by our essential nature, to recognize, realize, and live up to, hence *correspond* to, its potential. This “corresponding,” I suggest, is how I think we need to understand the otherwise rather obscure term *homologeîn* in the fragment of Heraclitus and in Heidegger’s reading of that fragment. In other words: the intimate bond of correspondence (*Entsprechung*) between the human being and being, which makes a claim (*Anspruch*) on us to take responsibility for being (i.e., for the meaningful presencing of beings), and to the wisdom of which, according to Heidegger, the Greek philosopher summons us, finds expression in the Greek word *homologeîn*. And as regards Heidegger’s interpretation of what Heraclitus says about the *legeîn* of the *logos*, I am arguing for the assumption that it is not only language that is a gathering-and-laying-out; our vision is also a *legeîn*, a laying-out-that-gathers—and also an *aletheueîn*, a clearing for presencing, an unconcealing or disclosing in the interplay of concealment and unconcealment.

Thus, the Heraclitus fragment is telling us, through his word *homologeîn*, that it would *correspondingly* be wise, and indeed most appropriate, most fitting for our vision to become—and for us in our looking and seeing to become aware of ourselves as—a laying-out that disclosively brings-forth and gathers into unconcealment. This would be, as Heidegger might put it, the fitting appropriation (*schickliche Ereignung*) of our vision.

What Heidegger is getting at, as he phrases it in “The Turn,” is our *corresponding* to being and, in that correspondence, belonging to its claim [*dem Sein und dessen Anspruch zu entsprechen und im entsprechen dem Sein zu gehören*] (GA 11: 118, GA 79: 71/QCT 41, BF 67). Heidegger keeps to this concern as his text nears its closing. Drawing our attention to the “lightning-flash of being” and the “turning” that it enjoins, he asks: Will we, by virtue of the way we look and see, *correspond* to the insight into that which is? Will we, in our looking and seeing, *correspond* to the “glance of being”? This *Entsprechen* is the *homologeîn* that Heidegger finds in the words of Fragment B 50, the sage counsel of Heraclitus. We need to translate this wisdom into our everyday perception, attending to the clearing our presence—our being *Da*—provides for what is and is not. We need to make it a type of *praxis*.

In “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16),” another text belonging to Heidegger’s trajectory of thinking in 1943, our attention is drawn to the phenomenology of the clearing (*Lichtung*) as that which, through the appropriation of the human being in its *Da-sein*, opens up a time-space within the bounds of which things can appear in the light, coming into

unconcealment. The lighting, or clearing, he says, “not only illuminates what is present, but gathers it together and secures it in advance in presencing. But,” he asks, “of what sort is the presencing of gods and men?”

They are not only illuminated [*beleuchtet*] in the lighting, but are also enlightened [*er-leuchtet*] from it and toward it. Thus, they can, in their way, accomplish [*vollbringen*] the lighting (bring it to the fullness of its essence) and thereby protect it. (GA 7: 285/EGT 120.)

But at the same time that we are made visible (*er-lichtet*), held, so to speak, in the “beholding” of the clearing, hence entrusted (*zugetraut*) to the lighting-clearing that keeps and shelters us, we are also made solely *responsible* for it—that is, for the lighting, “appropriated,” in Heidegger’s words, “into the event of lighting” (*in das Ereignis der Lichtung vereignet*), ourselves entrusted with holding open the clearing and thereby corresponding (as in the *homologein*), for instance in the way we see, to the laying-out and gathering of that clearing—the *Legein* of the *Logos*.

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Strange though it is, Heidegger’s use of vision in a prosopopoeia gives rhetorical force to an ontologically motivated challenge to the current historical, culturally shaped character of our vision.

Here, now, is a passage from “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), a text earlier than the two texts we have been considering, in which Heidegger comes close to using the prosopopoeia we have been exploring. This nicely illuminates its significance:

That which is, is that which arises and opens itself [*das Aufgehende und Sichöffnende*], which, as what presences, comes upon man as the one who opens himself to what presences in that he apprehends it [*indem er es vernimmt*]. That which is [*Das Seiende*] does not come into being at all through the fact that man first looks upon it [*es anschaut*], in the sense of a representing that has the character of subjective perception [*subjektiven Perception*]. Rather, man is the one who is looked upon by that which is [*der vom Seienden Angeschaut*]; he is the one who is [. . .] gathered toward presencing by that which opens itself. To be beheld by what is [*Vom Seienden angeschaut*], to be included and maintained within its openness [. . .], to be driven about by its oppositions and marked by its discord—that is the essence of man in the great age of the Greeks. (GA 5: 90–91/QCT 131)

Heidegger’s evocation of the age of the Greeks in “The Age of the World Picture” continues, enabling us to connect what he is arguing here to his later commentary on the *Logos* in Heraclitus:

Therefore, in order to fulfill his essence, the Greek man must gather (*legen*) and save (*sozein*), catch up and preserve, what opens itself in its openness, and he must remain exposed (*aletheuein*) to all its sundering confusions. Greek man is as the one who apprehends [*der Vernehmer*] that which is, and this is why, in the age of the Greeks, the world cannot become totally enframed, as in a picture. (Ibid.)

In the prosopopoeia, Heidegger is asking us to reflect on our way of looking and seeing: “Being,” of course, does not name a being, does not signify anything that can look and see—but *what if* we supposed that it could, and *what if* we supposed that *we* could look and see the way we imagine being to look and see! What then, would our looking and seeing be like? The answer to that question lies in what “being” is meant to signify, namely, the *Anwesen-lassen*, Da-sein’s opening of the open, that which makes the presencing of beings possible: the *Lichtung*, the clearing: the *legen* constitutive of looking and seeing.

It is impossible, of course, to miss the strongly ocularcentric vocabulary upon which Heidegger has drawn to imagine and describe the phenomenology of the appropriation of the human being for the project of overcoming or converting the rule of the *Gestell*. It is, as we noted, a vocabulary inspired in part by the etymological connection between *Ereignis* (signifying not only an event but also the appropriation of *Dasein* for the process of appropriation) and *Eräugnis* (signifying holding something in view) (GA 11: 45/ID 36). And because of the etymological derivation of *Er-eignen* from *Er-äugen*, Heidegger can confidently argue that *our perception* is subject to this appropriation. Perception is to be experienced holding in view its belonging-together with being and its corresponding appropriation and responsibility for being. Drawing on vision for metaphors and allegorical images enables Heidegger to emphasize that the turning in the history of the truth of being is possible only insofar as *our* existence, hence—among other things—our way of looking and seeing, is decisively and resolutely appropriated by and for this revolutionary ontological task. Heidegger’s turning to the language of vision is a way of calling upon us *to take over our part* in history-altering possibilities, a way of very pointedly *charging* our capacity to see, our capacity for vision, with its greatest ontological responsibility.

The strange phrases are consequently speaking about the possibility of a certain turning (*Kehre*), or rather, a certain return (*Einkehr*), a step back (*Schritt zurück*) into the depths of our essence, to retrieve what has *always already* taken hold in us, namely, our *Ereignung*, our appropriation in, and as, belonging to the phenomenology of being—belonging (*Gehören*) to,

and being needed for, the meaningful way that the presencing of beings takes place. For instance, in the world of the visible and the invisible. So, in speaking of light, lightning, and flashing, the phrases are speaking about our appropriation, *our own—ownmost—capacity* for lighting and clearing, making way for the illumination of beings: whatever presences in the interplay (*Zwischenspiel*) of concealment and unconcealment.

What is to flash up is thus not being, but rather our own insight—insight into that which *is*, in its correlation to *our* way of being and seeing. And if we achieve that insight, that understanding regarding the claim, the appropriation (*Ereignis, Ereignung*) that the presencing of being makes on us, it might indeed seem as if we had suddenly been struck—had found ourselves struck—by a bolt of lightning. Finding ourselves in a flash of insight, joined in phenomenological correlation to being, what we need to realize is that we, and we alone, are ultimately *responsible* for how things—beings—appear; responsible for how the things we encounter in the realm of the visible and the invisible are meaningful in their presencing and are present in the way they are. Our appropriation to be *in* this correspondence, this *homologeîn*, is a historical responsibility: a responsibility for being—for *openness* in receiving, and for the *meaning* of what is presencing in our world. Because how we see things affects how they are, how they can, or must, manifest in the current epoch of our world. Being is thus a mirror-reflection of the character of our seeing, revealed and manifest in the ways what we are looking at is presencing to our perception. What more catching way could there be to emphasize the *ontological appropriation* of our looking and seeing, summoning us to an *ontologically appropriate, ontologically attuned* way of looking and seeing, than to translate and allegorize that appropriation, as Heidegger does in “The Turn,” using a trope that reminds us that we are “caught sight of” by “the looking of being”? What might we learn about ourselves—and about the world this vision has built—by reflecting on the character of our vision?

It is not possible for us to enter the realm of the visible without being ourselves of visible nature, held in our bodily presence within the visible. We are not only beings gifted with the capacity to see; indeed, we are able to see only because we are also beings who, inhabiting the realm of the visible our existence has opened, are there to be seen, beheld, and held to account for the character of our beholding. That is, we are also visible, standing unconcealed in our way of being, looking and seeing, from a moral point of view.

We need to bear in mind that Heidegger takes seriously what he sees and hears in one of the German words commonly used to speak of

perception: *Wahrnehmung* means the caring receiving of truth. Thus, for Heidegger, perception—seeing, for instance—is in essence the guardianship and safekeeping of truth-as-unconcealment. Perception (*Wahrnehmung*) is an engagement with the world in which it takes place: an engagement that involves protection, preservation, and safeguarding. Protecting, preserving, safeguarding the truth of being—the being of truth: the openness of the clearing as that which makes meaningful presencing in our world possible. The taking-over (*Übernahme*) of this, our appropriation, which summons us to protecting and preserving the interplay of concealment and unconcealment—that is, the openness of the clearing—might possibly prepare us for the overcoming or converting (*Verwindung*) of the epoch of the *Gestell*, epoch of the totalizing imposition of an order of constant availability.

§3

The Idealism in Plato's Vision-Generated Paradigm

Heidegger's reading of Plato suggests that taking vision as paradigm for knowledge, truth, and reality played a crucial role in the emergence of the *Gestell* in the unfolding of Western history and the history of philosophy. The generation from visual experience of the word *paradigm* itself is just a preliminary indication of the importance of vision in Greek experience and thought.

Our word, *paradigm*, which we are using, here, to describe the role of vision in the philosophical discourse of modernity, is itself a vision-generated word. It derives from the word *paradeigma*, which signifies “model.” This word can be traced back to the ancient Greek words *para*, meaning “next to” or “alongside of,” and *deiknunai*, meaning “to show” or “to indicate.”

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According to Heidegger, in early Greek thought the word *physis*, etymological source of our modern words *physics* and *physical*, did not refer merely to the realm of nature: it was also a way of thinking about what he understood by the word *Sein*, being. *Physis* has often been translated as the ancient Greek word for nature, although, as Heidegger has compellingly argued, that translation misrepresents the experience of nature and being in the thinking of the Greek philosophers—and also, no doubt, the experience of nature in most premodern cultures. This noun, *physis*, was formed in conjunction with the verb *phuein*, referring to growth, dynamic emergence, the ever-changing forms, and energies operating in the natural world. Following Heraclitus, Heidegger interprets *physis* as naming the “Aufgehen und In-sich-zurück-gehen” of beings, their emerging from

concealment and returning to concealment: an endless, constantly changing process, whereby beings enter presencing for a while and return to temporary or permanent absence. According to Heidegger, a dimension of sheltering concealing (*bergendes Verbergen*) was essential to this Greek understanding of *physis*. Heraclitus expressed this point, saying, playfully, poetically: “Nature loves to hide.”

The words *physis* and *phuein* are related in their etymology to *phos*, signifying light and luminescence, the linguistic source of our modern words for photography and phosphorescence. This connection is historically decisive because, as Heraclitus already observed, *physis* is manifest in an interplay of concealment and unconcealment. *Physis*—nature—being—the *hen-kai-pan* (ἓν καὶ Πᾶν: all-in-one) was experienced by the Greeks as referring to what emerges from a dimension of dark hiddenness into the light of the sun, wherein it could show itself, shining forth in its visibility and unity. Strange and even paradoxical though it might seem, Heraclitus recognized that the dimension of hiddenness is what protects and preserves all that is—all that is visible. But it was the phenomenon of shining that compellingly confirmed the presence of truth—the *truth* of the visible *and* the invisible.

But in this visibility, things are not only surrounded by the invisible; they are themselves partly withdrawn into hiddenness. They would not be “real” otherwise. Insofar as they are “real”—as we would say—they belong to, and are drawn into, the realm of the invisible: the underside of my desk is hidden; the far side of the mountain is hidden; but also hidden from me right now are the past and future of the surface of the desk I am using to write on. This surface that is *presently* visible belongs, therefore, to times of hiddenness.

Such hiddenness makes error and deception possible. What I think I see as I gaze out my window at the tree in the distance turns out not to be a hawk, but instead a broken kite. Truth, understood as correctness, a correspondence between perceiver and perceived, subject and its object, sentence and its reference—always takes place—necessarily takes place—in a dimension that enables an interplay of concealment and unconcealment. Truth as correctness is *grounded* in *aletheia*, protected by *aletheia*, the dimension of openness that makes possible the interplay between concealment and unconcealment. But whence the Platonic thought that truth is revealed in its shining?

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In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger traces the formation of the Platonic *Idea* and the genealogy of the concept of paradigm, showing their

origin in a specific experience with vision. The point of this historical trace-work is to reveal what happened to the *Ideas*, and above all, to the *Idea* of being, in the succession of years unfolding the insights of the archaic, pre-Socratic inception. What Heidegger shows us is the increasing reduction and reification of being in the history of metaphysics: “die Beschränkung des Seins.” Thus, he points out that, at a certain moment in the history of philosophical thought,

being as *Idea* is exalted, it becomes true being, while the being of beings, considered in earlier times to be of the greatest importance, is degraded to what Plato calls *mè on*, what really should not be and really *is not*, because the so-called “real world” always deforms the idea, the pure appearance, by incorporating it in matter. The *Idea* now becomes a *paradeigma*, a model. (GA 40: 193/IM 154)

Moreover, this paradigmatic *Idea* is said actually to shine, somehow illuminating the very *essence* of things. It is not at all obvious that this shining is merely a literary figure—or that it is understood, somehow, as a purely ideated shining seen only by an interior cognitive act. Continuing this narrative, Heidegger remarks how *Idea* in the sense of “paradigm” not only *derived* from the nature and character of our experience with vision but also, in its turn, powerfully *influenced* how we formed our concepts and categories in order to understand the nature and character of our experience. In its paradigmatic role, vision figured in the crucial philosophical distinction between appearance and reality and the no less fateful philosophical understanding of truth, which reduced truth as unconcealment to truth as adequate correlation, correctness of representation. In sum, Heidegger shows us that, in the formation of some crucial philosophical concepts, the ocularcentrism of philosophical discourse, informed by the conjunction of (1) the semantic constellation pertaining to illumination {*phos*, *phuo*, *physis*, and *phainesthai*} and (2) the semantic constellation pertaining to knowing as seeing {*eidos*, *oida*, *idein*, *idea*}, played a decisive, and by no means innocent role in the history of metaphysics. However, at the same time that Plato disparaged the sensuous, sensible vision of our eyes, denying that they can see and know the truth, he elevated the intelligible, theoretical “vision” of the mind to sublime heights. But the etymological origin of these Greek words belies the sublimity Platonism claims. The words “theory” and “theoretical” are derived from the Greek word for seeing. This is also true for our word “idea” (in Greek, *ιδεα*) and the word that, in Husserl’s phenomenology, designates the *essence* of something: in Greek, *ειδος*. What Heidegger shows is that the *Ideas*, or essences, that the Platonic mind “sees”

actually had a very humble origin, which metaphysics “forgets”: essences originally belonged to things in and of this empirical world: they were taken and abstracted *from* the things themselves, lifted off the most epistemologically reliable face (aspect or appearance) and transformed into ideal objects of knowledge and insight. *Ideā* and *ειδος* originally named the *look* of something, how something lets itself be seen. Thus, the theoretical priority of vision. In other words, it is from *having seen* that knowing (in Greek, *ειδεναι*) arises (GA 55.2: 253–55/H 194–95; GA 55.2: 370/H 205–6). But, in Plato and centuries of subsequent epistemologies, this origin is repudiated and left behind, eventually falling into forgetfulness.

And, as Heidegger points out: “For Plato, *Idea* rises above *aletheia*, the interplay of concealment and unconcealment, because it is eternal visibility [*Sichtsamkeit*] that becomes essential for *idein* (*psyche*), instead of unconcealing as the way being presences [*nicht die Entbergung als Wesung des Seyns*]” (GA 34: 99, n.2/ET 84 n.2). For Plato, the paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality is completely taken over by vision—hence his neglect of the dimension of hiddenness:

From the standpoint of the *Idea*, appearing [*das Erscheinen*] now takes on a new meaning. What appears—the phenomenon—is no longer *physis*, the emerging power [*das aufgehende Walten*], nor is it the self-manifestation of the appearance [*das Sichzeigen des Aussehens*]; no, appearing is now the emergence of the copy [*das Auftauchen des Abbildes*]. And since the copy never equals the prototype [*Urbild*], what appears is *mere* appearance [*bloße Erscheinung*], actually an illusion [*ein Schein*], a deficiency. [. . .] The truth of *physis*, *aletheia* as the unconcealment that is the essence of the emerging power, now becomes *homoiosis* and *mimesis*, assimilation and accommodation, resemblance and repetition [. . .], it becomes a correctness of vision [*Richtigkeit des Sehens*], of apprehension as representation [*des Vernehmens als Vorstellen*]. (GA 40: 193/IMM 154–55)

Now, how does this fit into a story of errancy, corruption, reification, and reduction—decline and fall? Heidegger elaborates the significance of the foregoing account by observing,

Once we fully understand all this, it becomes undeniable that the interpretation of being as *Idea* is a far cry [*Abstand*] from the original beginning [in pre-Socratic thought]. Yet, when we speak of a decline [*Abfall*] it should be noted that this decline remains lofty; it does not sink into baseness. [. . .] The basic [Platonic] concepts *Idea*, *paradeigma*, *homoiosis*, and *mimesis* foreshadow the metaphysics of classicism. (GA 40: 193–94/IMM 155)

So, it would seem that we cannot expect to understand the history of metaphysics and epistemology in the West—nor even, perhaps, the historical course of ethical life in the West—without first understanding how and why the ancient Greek philosophers viewed the manifestation of being in terms of the paradigm of vision and the phenomenon of light. And this means that we need to give further thought to the visual generation of the Platonic concept of essence—what Plato called *Idea*.

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The Platonic *Idea* is uncannily visible; it is somehow seen, seen as shining—indeed, shining more clearly, more consistently, and more illuminatingly than any material things in the cosmos. Hence, it is reducible neither to the entity it illuminates nor to the subject who perceives by way of its illumination. Is it visible, then, only to the mind's eye? What is this "mind's eye," if not a metaphor, a figurative way of referring to an act of conceptualizing? In any case, Heidegger's reading depends upon recognizing that *Idea* and *eidos*, two words for essence, are terms originating in the Greek experience with vision:

The word *Idea* means that which is seen in the visible, the aspect [*An-sicht*, a term that refers us to vision] it offers. What is offered is the appearance, or aspect, the *eidos*, of what confronts us [what is facing us]. The appearance [or aspect or face] of a thing is that wherein, as we say, it presents, introduces itself to us, places itself before us [*vor-stellt*] and is present, i.e., in the Greek sense, it *is*. This standing is the stability of that which has emerged from out of itself, out of *physis*. But from the standpoint of man, this standing—there of the stable and permanent is at the same time the mere surface [*das Vordergründige*] of what is present *through itself*, namely, the apprehensible [*das Vernehmbare*]. In its appearance [*Im Aussehen*], the being presents its what and how. It is apprehended and taken up [*vernommen und genommen*], it is possessed, it is the accessible presence of the present: *ousia*. (GA 40: 189–90/ IMM 151)

This interpretation of the ocularcentric generation of the *Idea* suggests that, although empiricism and rationalism belong to two distinct histories, two distinct conceptual formations, they are both rooted in the same visual experience and share an ocularcentric genealogy. According to empiricism, all our ideas either come directly from perceptual experience or are at least connected to ideas that do have a direct perceptual origin. Thus, the idea is, in the most literal sense, an abstraction, torn away from the perceptual object that is its source and referent. When we encounter a being (*Seiende*), any being, it will appear, presenting a certain aspect, a certain face (*Ge-sicht*),

a gathering of visible features—from a certain perspective. What is seen, in perspective, is the presentation of a surface the sensible qualities of which constellate, or gather into, an *eidōs*, an idea of what the visibly appearing object really is, when insignificant qualities and relations are removed by a procedure of sensuous abstraction from the presentation of the object. Every object we encounter is perceived from a certain angle or position, and in a certain relational or environmental context. But since some angles or positions or contexts can be misleading, we favor seeing the thing in the best possible light, the best context, and from that angle or position—typically a frontal position—most likely to lead to confirmation over time: the coin seen in a way that shows its roundness, not its thinness as seen from a position on the side; the tree seen from a side, not from high above it; the mouse seen in the light, rather than some sounds merely heard in the dark. What this means is that the *eidōs* as *essence* of the thing (being, entity) is an ideational, cognitive *construction*, gathering together those visible traits or characteristics that are the most frequently seen, the ones in our experience that are most familiar, most constant, most stable, and most consistently turn out to give us a reliable confirmation of our expectations—in brief, a veridical encounter. It is necessary here to bear in mind that *eidōs* and *Idea* say the same in Greek: they are both terms that pertain to seeing. Thus, the essence (*eidōs*) that is elevated to the realm of *Ideas* is really no other than that most favored aspect, with its constellation of attributes, “peeled off” from the surface of the object and reified in the form of an eternal *Idea*. This is why the aspect or face seen from that most favored angle or position, and in the most favored context, inclined Plato to regard the gathered constellation of perceived attributes as the *essence* (*eidōs*) or *Idea* of the thing. Hence, according to rationalism, the empirical priority must be reversed, favoring the mind as that which ultimately determines the object of perception, imposing its structure, its conditions, on the object. The *Idea* is always a prototype, paradigmatic for perceptual experience; it is the cognitive source of the possibility of perceptual experience and the referent for the illumination of the meaning that the perceptual object is given.

In thinking about the phenomenological origin of the Platonic *Idea*, Heidegger says,

The aspect something provides is how it appears and shows itself, the look and appearance that it gives. What appears over there—for example, that house—shows itself in the aspect and look of “house” and “houseness,” and thus *is* a house. As another example: what appears *here* shows itself as the look of a book and book-ness, and *is* thus a book. The

look in terms of which something appears as what it is thus contains the “what-being” of that particular being.

The analysis continues:

Plato was the first to think the being of beings [the essence] from out of the look of what appears, and as this look. In Greek, “look” is *eidos*, *idéa*. The look wherein it is discernible what a house is—not this or that particular house, but rather what a house is in general—is something not at all sensory, but rather something extrasensory. To think beings from out of the *Idea*, and thus from out of the extrasensory, is the distinguishing characteristic of the thinking that is given the name “metaphysics.” (GA 55.2:253–55/H 194–95)

Thus: “What something is [. . .] is the *idea*, the look, the visage, which reveals the thing in question in such a way that, through this, it shows itself in its what-being [its essence]” (GA 55.2: 270/ H 205–6). These “visages,” however, are supersensible, that is, meta-physical, because they can be seen only by minds, minds capable of entering into immediate, direct relation to the essences.

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In the texts of Platonism, one of the earliest known forms of idealism within the Western philosophical tradition, there is, of course, a familiar story regarding our perception of things in the world. This story, introducing definitions that differentiate shadows, images, opinions (*doxa*), appearances, knowledge (*epistémé*), and wisdom (*sophia*), confirms the ocularcentric generation of the Platonic concepts of knowledge and truth. At the center of this story we find the doctrine of recollection (*anamnesis*) and the myths Plato repeats concerning the transmigration of souls. According to this account, *Ideas*, also called “Forms,” are eternal, serving as paradigms and prototypes for our worldly knowledge; that means that they have existed *a priori*, prior to all our worldly experience, prior to our encountering them and participating in their work: they are not merely subjective. We, as souls, disembodied, first encounter them during our spiritual wanderings, prior to the time of (re)incarnation. In the moment of (re)incarnation, our souls forget their great encounter with these *Ideas*, these idealized essences; and we as mortal earthlings lose the illumination those *Ideas* cast. However, when our souls, endowed by grace of their embodiment with organs of perceptivity, encounter things in the world, it is possible for them to be reminded of the forgotten *Ideas*. This is the process that Plato calls *anamnesis*, recollection; but, as Heidegger shows, it involves two moments,

or phases. *First*, a moment of sensuous abstraction, the moment of the *eidōs*, in which the most striking, most constantly, consistently, enduringly reliable aspects or features are discriminated and made visible as such: “what appears (in its shining forth, its seeming) shows an aspect [*ein Aussehen zeigt*]” (GA 40: 198/IMM 158). *Second*, there is a moment of recognition, when, because of a visible resemblance, this sensible aspect awakens a *recollection* of the forgotten *Idea*. Thereafter, depending on the character, the virtue of the soul’s worldly life, this *Idea* becomes a paradigm or prototype, a shining exemplar and source of illumination, for the remaining years of the soul’s journey through the visible world of the senses.

Here, I think, one can begin to discern the outline and direction of an interpretation that would show how deeply and extensively the nature and character of the ancient Greek experience with seeing must have influenced, if not determined, the conceptualization of ontology and epistemology in the earliest years of philosophical thinking in the Greek world. But after deriving its paradigm for ontology and epistemology from visual perception, Western philosophical thought turned on that perception, using that same paradigm to disparage all claims to knowledge, truth, and reality derived “directly” from perception. And yet, at the same time, it also perpetuated a visualism that neglected the dimension of concealment, favoring visibility and metaphysical totality.

It is Heidegger’s contention that philosophical thinking, in the moment of its historical instauration, enjoyed what might be described as a “privileged” experience with vision, an aesthetic and aletheic experience, from which it increasingly moved away, and that its consequent loss of contact with this profound, originary dimension of experience correspondingly affected its subsequent understanding of being and knowing.

For the [Platonic] Greeks, “being” basically meant an enduringly dynamic presence (*Anwesenheit*) (GA 40: 65/IMM 50). But what happened in the course of time? Greek philosophy departed from this ground of being and never returned to it, forgetting its importance. “It remained instead in the foreground of that which is present [*Sie blieb im Vordergrund des Anwesenden selbst*]” (ibid.). “The transformation of *physis* and *logos* into idea and statement had its inner ground,” says Heidegger, “in a transformation [*Wandlung*] of the essence of truth from unconcealment to correctness” (GA 40: 198/IMM 159). This transformation, he argues, “is a *decline* from the first beginning [*ein Abfall vom anfänglichen Anfang*]” (GA 40: 197/IMM 158). This “decline” clearly lies in reduction and reification: the transformation of *physis* into the physical, *logos* into statement, and being into

constantly available presentness. The argument and its narrative of decline (*Verfallsgeschichte*) continue:

The essence of truth could not be maintained in its initial, original force. Unconcealment, the space prepared [*gestiftete Raum*] for the appearing of the entity, or the being [*Erscheinen des Seienden*], broke down. “Idea” and “statement,” *ousia* and *kategoria*, were saved from the ruins. [. . .] A ready-made [*vorhandener*] *logos* had to assimilate and accommodate itself to a ready-made entity or being [*dem Seienden*] as its object [*Gegenstand*]. (GA 40: 199/ IMM 159)

“And yet,” Heidegger adds,

a last glimmer and semblance [*Schein und Schimmer*] of the original essence of *aletheia* [the ground, or essence of truth, a dimension, underlying truth as correctness, in which the interplay of concealment and unconcealment takes place] has been preserved. [. . .] But the remaining semblance of *aletheia* no longer has sufficient sustaining power or tension to be the determining ground for [our experience of] the essence of truth [as it lays claim to our visual experience]. (Ibid.)

Taking the visible as paradigm for knowledge, Plato’s successors fell into a certain blindness: they lost sight of the dimension of the invisible. But when claims to knowledge are denied their grounding in the openness of enquiry, denied in consequence their polemic with the invisible, they lose their power to illuminate; they become mere assertions of belief (*doxa*). When the dialectical essence of truth disappears, dogmatism takes over.

§4

Held in Beholding

“Seeing,” Heidegger tells us, “does not mean just perceiving with the bodily eyes; but neither does it mean pure non-sensory awareness of something present-at-hand in its presence-at-hand.” And he explains that

in giving an existential signification to “sight,” we have merely drawn upon the peculiar feature of seeing, that it lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves. Of course, every “sense” does this within that domain of discovery which is genuinely its own. But from the beginning onwards the tradition of philosophy has been oriented primarily toward “seeing” as a way of access to entities and to being itself. *To keep the connection with this tradition, we may*

formalize “sight” and “seeing” enough to obtain therewith a universal term for characterizing, as access in general, any access to entities or to being itself. (GA 2: 196/BT 187. Italics added)

Maintaining the connection with an ocularcentric tradition, despite all the negativity that entails, is apparently more important, for Heidegger, than overcoming or converting the metaphysics and its paradigm—a metaphysics he is otherwise eager to break out of. Nevertheless, in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935, revised for publication in 1953), Heidegger discusses at length the historical representation of the relation between being and thinking, turning to the structuring or *Gestaltung* of visual experience and to vision-derived terminology in order to explain what he wants to say about that relation in the history of philosophical thought:

From the vantage point to which our questioning has now brought us, we can survey another aspect. We have shown that, contrary to current opinion, the word “being” has a strictly circumscribed meaning. This implies that being itself is understood in a definite way. Thus understood, it is manifest to us. But all understanding, as a fundamental mode of disclosure, must move in a definite line of sight [*bestimmte Blickbahn*]. The line of sight [*Blickbahn des Anblicks*] must be laid down in advance. We call it the “perspective” [*Perspektive*], the track of fore-sight [*Vorblickbahn*]. Thus, we shall see not only that being is not understood in an indeterminate way, but that the determinate understanding of being moves in a predetermined perspective [*in einer schon bestimmten Vorblickbahn*]. (GA 40: 125/IMM 99)

This prompts him to comment,

We have become immersed (not to say lost) in this perspective, this line of sight which sustains and guides all our understanding of being.

We take for granted the perspectivism constitutive of the modern world since the Renaissance. That is our world. We can no longer easily think otherwise. Yet vestiges of older ways of seeing remain.

Under the spell of ocularcentrism, despite attempts to suspend the worldly habits that come naturally to us and retreat into the realm of the transcendental, Husserl followed the linearity of the narrowly staring gaze and described the “shape” of intentionality as like a ray or beam. Neglecting corporeal experience, intentionalities operative below the head, he was never able to recognize physiognomies and configurations of intentionality

different from the linear. This linear, confrontational, oppositional character of vision, determining, as it does, both the modern experience of being and the philosophical discourse, continues a history that Heidegger traces all the way back to the ancient Greeks. In modern times, to be sure, this “line of sight,” fixating whatever it beholds, assumes a distinctive—paradigmatic—force and weight. But the history of this privileged “line of sight” already began with Plato, who of course had no way of knowing its fateful consequences in the centuries that followed:

What makes our immersion the more complete as well as the more hidden is that even the Greeks did not and could not bring this perspective [*Vorblickbahn*] to light [*ans Licht*], and this for essential reasons (not [only] for reasons of human deficiency). Still, the growth of the differentiation between being and thinking [in, e.g., the structure of subject and object] played an important part in forming and stabilizing this perspective [*an der Ausbildung und Verfestigung*] in which the Greek understanding of being [already] moved. (GA 40: 125/IMM 99)

As late as his 1962 lecture on *Time and Being*, Heidegger was still conveying his thought in terms of visual perception. In that lecture, he says it is necessary—hence our responsibility—that we “show how this ‘there is’ can be experienced and seen [*wie sich dieses ‘Es gibt’ erfahren und erblicken lässt*]” (GA 14: 9/OTB 5). Later in that same lecture, he states that his “sole purpose” is “to bring before our eyes being itself [i.e., the clearing in which we dwell and for which we are responsible] as [the principal concern of] the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*]”: “das Sein selbst als das Ereignis in den Blick zu bringen” (GA 14: 26/OTB 21).

Profoundly influenced by what the ancient Greek philosophers said about vision from out of their ways of seeing, and by the vision-centeredness of the entire philosophical tradition that he inherited and both continued and rejected, Heidegger’s thinking shows itself to be consistently oriented toward what one might learn from such historical experience and reflection. In returning to read the pre-Socratics, Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus, Heidegger sought to learn something about ways of seeing that, in the paradigm of knowledge truth and reality that dominated philosophical thought after Plato, was no longer recognized. He returned to the Greek philosophers not in sentimental nostalgia, not in some misguided conviction that we of today could ever—or even should—see things exactly as they did, but rather in order to retrieve for us and for future generations *what could be learned* from the wisdom in their ways of

seeing—learned from the past, so that, in future, we might perhaps see otherwise. If another epoch in the dispensation of being were ever to happen, surely learning to see otherwise—see differently—would be an imperative precondition. And, judging by the volume of his writings concerned with vision, not only as it is in our experience but also as it is engaged in philosophical discourse, where it figures as metaphor, paradigm, and source of terminology, I am convinced that Heidegger understood this.

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In his lectures on Parmenides, Heidegger draws on things he had been thinking about in *Being and Time* in order to challenge some conventional certainties: “It is said that the Greeks were visual [*Augenmenschen*], and therefore their interpretation of the world was focused on seeing, on the countenance [of things], and on the light. [*Sie erfaßten die ‘Welt’ vornehmlich vom ‘Auge’ her und achteten deshalb ‘naturgemäß’ auf das Blicken und den Anblick. Dazu mußten sie dann das Licht und die Helle bedenken.*]” “But why,” he asks, “were the Greeks visual? Are not all people visual?” He answers, “Certainly they are, insofar as they have eyes and see. [. . .] But what is the eye?” (GA 54: 215–17/P 145–46). A strange but provocative question. However, Heidegger refrains from explaining here why, in his own thought, so bold, original, and revolutionary, vision is still given such a prominent, even paradigmatic role. But let us follow the thread of Heidegger’s thought:

What is the “eye” without its ability to see? We do not see because we have eyes, but we have eyes because we can “see.” But what does it mean to “see”? [. . .] Of what help would any light be, no matter how luminous, and what could any optical instrument do, no matter how refined and accommodating, if the power to see did not itself *in advance* get a being in sight by grace of the visual sense and the medium of the light? Just as the eye without the ability to see is nothing, so the ability to see, for its part, remains an inability [*ein Unvermögen*] if it does not come into play [*schwingt*] in an *already established* relation of man to visible beings. (GA 54: 215–17/P 145–46. Italics added to the English translation)

Moreover, he argues,

If man did not already have being in view, then he could not even think the nothing, let alone experience beings. And how is man supposed to stand in this bond drawing us into connection with being [*im Bezug steht*], if being itself does not address man and claim his essence for that

connection with being? But what else is this relation of being to the essence of mankind if not the clearing, or the open [*die Lichtung und das Offene*], which has lighted itself for the unconcealed? If such clearing [*Lichtung*] did not come into play [*schwingt*] as the open of being itself [*als das Offene des Seins selbst*], then a human eye could never become and be what it is, namely the way man looks at the demeanor of the encountering being, the demeanor as a look in which being is revealed [*nämlich, die Weise, wie der Mensch das Aussehen des begegnenden Seienden als einen Anblick erblickt, in dem sich Seiendes entbirgt*]. (GA 54: 217/P 146)

Thus, he declares, “Only because looking is [always already] claimed [*in Anspruch genommen*] in this way [i.e., claimed pre-reflectively, pre-ontologically, and pre-conceptually to be a clearing] can the ‘eye’ receive a priority [*Vorrang*]” (ibid.). In other words, our looking and seeing are by their very nature always already disposed, *appropriated—ereignet—*by and for the clearing, which structurally but not temporally precedes our acts of looking and seeing, making it possible for beings to enter the world of our experience. Seeing and being inherently belong together. Without this thrown-openness that structurally sets us into conditions of visibility making possible our belonging-together with beings, there would be no seeing.

For Parmenides, what appears *in* the clearing, *in* the field of vision, makes a claim, because he thinks of the things we encounter as “looking back” at us, “giving us a look,” namely, in that they are *giving* themselves to us, making themselves visible, or *letting* themselves to be visible. We of today do not see things this way: we sense no such claim, hence no responsibility in their regard. Seldom do we feel that what we see is addressing us, calling us into question. But, for Heidegger, in every act of beholding, we are in turn beheld: visible in the *character* of our way of seeing. That there is (*es gibt*) anything at all to see, or indeed, that there is (*es gibt*) a world at all, is the giving of a gift—the gift of a givenness (*Gegebenheit, Gabe*). What does our beholding ask of us? Heidegger’s answer is simple: Beholdenness. Making the character of our seeing measure up to its latent ontological potential, taking the being of beings into its care, thankful for the vision that opens up a visible world, celebrating its visibility.

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There is much more than this in Heidegger’s challenge to the conventional wisdom perpetuated in the philosophical discourse on visual perception. Thus, for instance, in *Being and Time*, he argues against the epistemologies in idealism and empiricism that *foreshorten* perception, reducing it to sense data or impressions located either in the interiority of consciousness

or else in our physiology. These epistemologies reverse the natural order of perceptual experience, claiming that what we first see and hear, see and hear immediately, are discrete sensations on the basis of which we then are able to *infer* the presence of sensible objects. Making the same argument that Wittgenstein makes, he contends that what we first hear are not mere noises, or complexes of sounds, but rather the creaking wagon and the motorcycle—the things themselves. What we hear is “the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling” (GA 2: 217–18/ BT 207).¹⁷ It requires considerable effort, much training and practice, as he notes, to hear a “pure noise.” Pure sound, he argues, is the construct of a reflective procedure involving sensuous abstraction. Heidegger’s argument here is a phenomenological argument, a straightforward argument about the facts of perception. However, it has implications far beyond these facts, attempting, first of all, to make us more attentive, more present, in our perception. In such mindfulness, it becomes easier for us to get a feeling for the *character* of our perception, hence, too, a felt sense of our *relation* to the very *being* of beings and the conditions in accordance with which they can be manifest. Both paradigms, idealism and empiricism, the one recognizing only the subjectivity of the subject, the other recognizing only the objectivity of the object, neglect the phenomenological primacy of the *relation*, the interactive belonging-together of subject and object.

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The texts we have been reading provide strong phenomenological arguments against historically significant representations in the paradigm that both idealism and empiricism have adopted, albeit in different ways, regarding the nature of perception. Already, as early as the 1920s, Heidegger took a keen interest in the subject matter of phenomenology. The analytic of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* was written in the spirit of the phenomenological enquiry he inherited from Husserl, although it unequivocally repudiated Husserl’s transcendental idealism.

In drawing on Heidegger’s existential version of phenomenology, I am attempting to retrieve a latent potential in perception—seeing and hearing—that could alter the future toward which Heidegger believes we are heading. Ultimately at stake in this present volume is a retrieving that attempts to think perception in relation to epochs in the “history of being” that Heidegger sketches—for the sake of the possibility of “another inception,” or at least a profound transformation not only in the philosophical understanding of beings in their manifestation but also, of course, in our lifeworld experience.

§5

Envisioning the Question of Being

The thinking that eventuated in the writing of this chapter began, for me, with a question that my reading of Heidegger provoked, a question he does not explicitly address as such, namely: What is “being” in terms of our experience in the realm of human vision? In other words, how should we interpret the *Seinsfrage*, the “question of being,” as a question for our vision—indeed, a questioning of our vision? I take this questioning as representing a challenge, not only to our contemporary life-world but also to philosophical thought, inasmuch as its history is also a history of reflection that has been profoundly influenced, as the very term “reflection” indicates, by the character of our historical experience with vision. And in fact, Heidegger’s thinking perpetuated the paradigmatic authority of vision, expressed and represented, especially in his early, phenomenological phase, in words drawn from visual experience, despite his incontrovertible originality and his strenuous efforts to overcome or convert the legacy of a metaphysics profoundly committed and indebted to visual perception and the language that reflection infers from that experience.

If “being” is posited as the name for *Da-sein*’s opening and clearing of a ground, or field, of conditions for the possibility of *meaningfulness* in our experience, then in the realm of vision, “being” should name not light but the lighting, the laying out of the conditions for light to make visible. In other words, it is necessary to keep in mind the distinction between the light and the lighting, which corresponds to the distinction between the ontic and the ontological, and between beings and being as the necessary condition that makes the presencing of beings possible: *Die Lichtung*, in the sense of opening clearing, “precedes the light [*geht dem Licht voraus*].”¹⁸ Thus, in its summoning forth of our capacity for vision, the light takes part in the inauguration of visibility, serving the conditions of possibility for seeing, and making sense out of, whatever presences, giving itself to be seen.

But can our vision break away from its cultural history? Can it achieve some autonomy in relation to the corrupting temptations, the habitual distractions, distortions, and deceptions, of everyday life? And can philosophical thought break away from metaphysics without ceasing to depend on the visual paradigm? It is striking that, considering how closely bound up vision has been with the metaphysics Heidegger struggled to break out of, vision remained, for this philosopher, such an important source of imagery, rhetoric, and concepts for his thought.

§6

The World as Enframed Picture

Metaphysics begins with the movement of thought from the sensible to the supersensible. We can chart this movement in Plato, whose thought emerged from perceptual experience only to repudiate it in a dialectic of struggle that ultimately cannot resolve or sublimate the internal contradiction inherent in casting the paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality in terms of vision: sight, insight, blindness, shadows, reflections, images, the phenomena of light. From the very beginnings of philosophical thought in the lands of Greek antiquity, seeing has played a significant role. Fundamental philosophical concepts manifestly owe their origin, their construction, and their interpretation to the nature and character of visual perception, even when, as in Platonism, philosophical thought turns against that experience and disavows it. Heidegger's narrative draws our attention to this genealogy because, in the modern world, the vision-ruled paradigm has been complicit in the "enframing" of the world, increasingly forcing all life into a reified, rationally instrumentalized, readily available and usable totality: something absolutely objective, totally present, uncannily resembling the world as represented in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's brilliant and magisterial, but utterly crazy manifesto of logical positivism: a world reduced to "what is the case," hence a world that must logically exclude possibility and necessity, and all matters of value, whether ethical or aesthetic, as meaningless expressions of subjectivity.

In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger tells how, in Plato's thought, the realm of metaphysics emerged, beginning a long journey toward a world it never imagined possible:

We, late born, are no longer in a position to appreciate the historical significance of Plato's daring use of the word *eidos* for that which in everything and in each particular thing [reliably] endures as present. For *eidos*, in the common speech, simply meant the outward aspect [*Ansicht*] that, as visible, the thing offers to the physical eye. Plato demands from this word, however, something utterly extraordinary: that it name what precisely is not and never will be perceivable with physical eyes. [. . .] For *Idea* names not only the non-sensuous aspect of what is physically visible. It names that which constitutes the *essence* (*eidos*) of the audible, the tastable, the tactile, the truth that is hidden in everything that in any way is accessible. (GA 7: 20–21/QCT 20)

Platonism disavows, or does not recognize, the humble origin of the essence as *Idea*. And not only that. Platonism claims for its essences, its *Ideas*, a higher truth, a higher reality, an immutable and enduring presence: a being, or beingness, that Heidegger calls *Vorhandensein*, recognizing that this term is an interpretation that can only approximate how Plato might actually have understood the presence of the *Ideas*. In any case, what Heidegger's narrative, his genealogy, brings to light is the secret irony, the secret contradiction, hidden in the sensuous emergence of the *Ideas*, the pride and joy of metaphysics. But Plato's sublime vision of the *Ideas* created a divided world, leaving the truths belonging to our empirical world to endure reification in a paradigm generated by a vision tempted to lose sight of the hermeneutical dimension of hiddenness and darkness.

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In a 1938 lecture, "The Age of the World Picture," very much concerned with vision, Heidegger essentially argues that we moderns have Gorgon eyes, turning the entire world we inherited to stone (GA 5:75–113/QCT 115–54). Although the origin of what Nietzsche called the will to power can be traced back, through the writings of epic poets, the documents of historians, and the ruminations of philosophers, to the early years of Western civilization, it is only in modern times, but beginning, I would say, with Renaissance humanism, that the domination of this will to power has been able to consummate its triumph. In this "age of the world picture," everything is to be kept within the realm, the control, of the visible. The invisible must be invaded, conquered, and obliterated. Everything in the world must be made readily available for use. Totality, objectivity, and constant presence must rule. The world is to be held, as if it were an enframed, totally enclosed picture, for the bidding in our beholding. What Heidegger describes as "the age of the world picture" constitutes, he thinks, a distinctive epoch in the destining of being—the Anthropocene epoch of "modernity," in the exigent continuation of which we are presently living.

The experience of seeing was very different, he suggests, in the world of the ancient Greeks: in that world, "the human," he says, "is the one who is looked upon [*vom Seienden Angeschaut*] by that which is; the human is the one who is [. . .] gathered toward presencing by that which opens itself. To be beheld by what is, to be included and maintained within its openness [. . .]—that is the essence of the human in the great age of the Greeks."¹⁹ There was, in this cultural understanding, a deep sense of humility. For the ancient Greeks, human life took place on the earth, under the vigilant gazes, or glances, of the gods in the heavens above. They can always see us; only seldom, if ever, do we mortals get to see them.

Elaborating his narrative in regard to Parmenides's representation of looking and seeing, Heidegger emphasizes that, for Parmenides, the world, illuminated by the gods and coming into the visibility they have granted, faces us, in effect, with an appearance, a "look," that *precedes* our own looking and bids response: "The looking [*Das Er-blicken*] performed by man [. . .] is already a response to the originating look [*ursprünglichen Blick*], which first elevates human looking into its essence" (GA 54: 158/P 107). But things are made visible and show themselves to us thanks to the granting of an illumination, a lighting, that is represented, in a trope, as the originating, or primordial "look." Hence: "In the compass of the primordial look [*Im 'Gesichts-kreis dieses anfänglichen Blickes*]," which is what Heidegger will elsewhere call the granting ("es gibt") of the *Lichtung*, "man is 'merely' the looked upon. This 'merely,' however, is so essential that man, precisely as the looked upon, is first received and taken up [*an- und aufgenommen*] into the connection of being to himself [*in den Bezug es Seins zum Menschen*] and is thus led into perception [*zum Vernehmen gebracht wird*]" (GA 54: 159–60/P 107–8).

Today, however, *we* are the ones who do the looking and seeing, because that is the most powerful way to take control and achieve precedence and domination over the totality. Plato's idealism, however, unknowingly facilitated this situation, placing "reality," the essence of things, in an unchanging, eternal realm beyond our empirical world, accessible nevertheless by the mind's sovereign eye in its procedure of philosophical contemplation. Thus, in perceiving and apprehending, the Greeks experienced and understood themselves to be *exposed* to, and in that sense *beheld* by, what they were seeing. This humility, felt with a sense of human finitude, limitations in power, is why in the age of the Greeks the world cannot become picture. Not yet, that is! Because, as Heidegger points out in "the Age of the World-Picture," "the fact that the beingness of whatever is [*die Seiendheit des Seienden*] is defined for Plato as *eidos* is the presupposition, destined far in advance and long ruling in concealment [*die weit voraus geschickte, lang im Verborgenen mittelbar waltende Voraussetzung*], for the world's having to become picture" (GA 5: 91/QCT 131). The truth of being, for Plato, is not in the world, but in the mind's eye. Plato's ideal forms, claiming truth and sole reality, are in constant presence, imposing their eternal rule over the world we live in. Considered from our present historical position, this could be described as the beginning of the subject's use of vision for its empowerment.

In the course of a phenomenological juxtaposition, revealing the difference between the character of the ancient Greeks' way of seeing and the

character of the modern way of seeing, Heidegger distinguishes between what he calls the *encountering* way of seeing and the *grasping* way of seeing. The first is an open, receptive looking, whereas the second is predatory: *der Raubtierblick, das Spähen* (GA 54: 159/P 108).

Thus, we learn that the point of Heidegger's narrative is not merely to present a historical reconstruction; it is, rather, to show a contrast between the Greek world and our world that provides the basis for an ontologically grounded critique, not only of metaphysics but also of the modern world—its present and its future. In fact, the narrative offers an interpretation of the history of philosophy oriented by a philosophy of history. In “The Age of the World Picture,” Heidegger says,

In distinction from Greek apprehending [*Vermehmen*], modern representing [*Vorstellen*] intends something quite different. Here, to represent [*vorstellen*] means to bring what is present at hand [*das Vorhandene*] before oneself as something standing over against, to relate it to oneself, to the one representing it, and to force it back into this relationship to oneself as the normative realm [*als den maßgebenden Bereich zurückzwingen*]. Wherever this happens, man “gets into the picture” in precedence over what is. [. . .] Therewith, man sets himself up as the setting in which whatever *is* must henceforth set itself forth, must present itself [*sich präsentieren*], i.e., it belongs to a picture of the world. (GA 5: 91/QCT 131)

The world itself has become, for us, a picture, framed in a way that the cartographers of earlier, distant centuries would not have been able even to imagine. And the position—*Stellung*—of modern people in relation to being is strikingly different from the position of people in the ancient and mediaeval worlds:

What is decisive is that man himself expressly takes up this position [*diese Stellung*] as one constituted by himself, that he intentionally [*willentlich*] maintains it as that taken up by himself, and that he makes it secure as the solid footing for a possible development of humanity [*Entfaltung der Menschheit*]. [. . .] Now, for the first time there is such a thing as a “position” of man. (GA 5: 91/QCT 132)

In this positionality, which is the very essence of the *Ge-stell*, objectivity and reckonability, together with constant availability, are *imposed* on everything; our relation to being is thus determined by an impositional will to power. In this context, representation—*Vor-stellen*—consists in gaining

mastery over the totality of beings, hence over their very being, their ways of presencing, making them come to a stand as objects: *Dadurch kommt das Seiende als Gegenstand zum Stehen* (GA 5: 92/QCT 132). Our way of looking and seeing are complicit in the operation of this ontological regime, this ordering and imposing—this *Be-stellung*.

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Religious art belonging to the Byzantine Christian world shows us a very different world, a premodern world in which vision was cast in a different role, both in its formation of the relation between the beholder and the beheld and in its relation to the visible and the invisible. In the Byzantine epoch, and indeed long before, there were maps picturing the world. But it is only in modernity, the triumph of the Anthropocene age, that there has been an attempt to *reduce* the world to a picture that presumes to enframe its totality, everything placed, finally, exactly where it belongs.

In a series of lectures at Carnegie-Mellon University on the differences between (1) Byzantine representations of Christ Pantocrator and the Virgin Mary and (2) representations of them during the early Renaissance, Jean Paris illustrated significant moments of change in the history of vision, lending compelling confirmation to Heidegger's reflections on the difference between the ancient Greek philosophers' experience with seeing and the experience that prevails among us moderns. Paris's study begins with the representation of God the Father in Byzantine art and concludes with the representation of Madonna and Child in the paintings of the Renaissance. As the account moves through a succession of shifts, it brings to light a "deep structure" of transformation in the "syntax" of painting that indicates a corresponding pattern of shifts—not only in the cultural history of our visual perception but also in our understanding of our world and our place in this world. There are no references in the lectures to the philosophical writings of Heidegger, and I cannot tell whether or not Paris was familiar with Heidegger's work. Nevertheless, I am struck by the affinities that are to be found. According to my reading, Paris provides material from art history that exemplifies and confirms Heidegger's interpretation of the history of being in terms of the phenomenology of visual perception. Both scholars have a story to tell that documents the rise to power of willful subjectivity.

The art-historical narrative gets underway with an analysis of the "Pantocrator," a thirteenth-century mosaic created for the Basilica San Marco in Venice.²⁰ Paris calls attention, first of all, to the frontal symmetry of the mosaic image of God as the Christ, with a highly stylized bearded visage and piercing eyes: "His visual beam, His Regard" is projected right

in front of Him, perpendicular to the wall.” This symmetry, he says, is to “assert the Almighty’s Authority,” for it is an extremely lucid way of “emphasizing His visual vigilance, His quality of Supreme Seer, of Panteopote.” And he explains this image as follows:

If there is no depth in Byzantine mosaics, if the divine space prevents our intrusion by opposing a dazzling wall of gold to our own “regard” [looking], as a supernatural frontier which reveals and at the same time forbids the absolute infinity of the being, clearly the third dimension is not to be found at the background of the image, but *in front* of it, protruding straightforward as the very look of transcendence itself: *we* are the third dimension, *we* are the picture! (Ibid.)

According to Paris, this visual relationship resolved the theological conflict between the need somehow to represent God and the danger of idolatry, which would inevitably reduce the dimensionality of God’s transcendent divinity to a visible object-for-us. But how could Christ be depicted *for himself* and not *for us*? Here, Paris argues, is the genius of the Byzantine answer: “by inverting the relation between the observer and the observed.” In other words:

By imposing God as an Eye, i.e., not as an object to be looked at, but as a Subject staring at us from His inaccessible source, as a Regard filling our own world, watching the faithful, inside the Church, so that no one may escape His all-embracing attention.

The Byzantine artists cleverly inverted our profane relationship to the image. In effect, then, it is *as if* God sees us but we cannot see Him: he is the One-who-sees; we are only the seen. We are permanently held in His beholding. So:

If, contrary to visual conventions inherited from the Italian Renaissance, lines are *diverging* toward the horizon, it is not because the Byzantines are clumsy craftsmen, not because they ignore the basic laws of optics or do not know how to adjust volumes to distances, but because, in inverting our relation to the image, they must also invert its own architecture: if God is the viewer, *we* are His perspective, and it is only logical that lines be *converging* to *us*.

This is exactly what Heidegger’s *prosopopoeia* accomplishes: “Seen” by Being, the character of our way of seeing is appropriated, made responsible for our way of seeing what is—and judged accordingly.

Paris shows that “right from the beginning, the Virgin Mary obeys the same canons as her husband and son.” And he invites us to consider the *Virgo Orans*, an early-twelfth-century mosaic in Ravenna. This mosaic represents “the primordial Virgin.” Like the mosaic of God the Father, this one also adheres to a very strict, and therefore “unnatural” frontal symmetry: “she is standing upright on the gold wall, hands stretched, arms open, eyes looking straight ahead.”²¹ Other Byzantine images of God and the Virgin Mother likewise are designed to hold us in their beholding, making us the objects of their judgment.

But what happened to this frontal posture, and to the divine gaze or stare confronting and overpowering us mortals? That is the story Paris proceeds to tell, relying on the “ontological” succession of images, which ideally “retrace the transformation of Byzantine sacred space into Italian profane space—and the gradual emergence of perspective.” In the next work Paris considers, a sixth-century mosaic located in the Basilica of Saint Apollinaris the New, the Virgin is depicted *sitting down*, on a throne, surrounded on both sides by angels. This mosaic, he asserts, represents a momentous historical shift, since,

up to this point, in the Christian era, standing up, arms open, hands outstretched, the child attached to Her by magic, regardless of the laws of gravity, She has asserted Herself as a purely metaphysical symbol, as a counterpart of the Creator. In such an absolute schema, a seat, however imperial it may be, introduces a third and suspicious [iconoclastic] element. First of all, it implies localization. [. . .] Divine Power now appears to be rooted in a single place, depending on a piece of furniture. It is not a Power any more, but a person. At the visual level, [. . .] the new position *humanizes* her, suggests a need for rest, hence a fatigue incompatible with the immaterial. [. . .] And even Jesus no longer defies the rule of gravity: from his magic levitation he, too, falls into comfort. On his mother’s lap, he will soon be able to frolic, to reject his frightful tutelage, to become what he already potentially is: a *bambino*.²²

Nevertheless, as Paris then explains, “the body remains hieratic, quite symmetrical, and the eyes are still glaring [. . .]. Frontal position, geometrical schematization, direct gaze: these previous characteristics of the divine are still connected by a deep necessity.”

Paris sees another phase set in motion when the infant Jesus, always depicted in all earlier representations in accordance with the frontal symmetry, is suddenly rotated on the Virgin’s knee:

And all at once, in disrupting the frontality, he necessarily disrupts the steadiness of his gaze. No longer perpendicular to the wall, his visual beam is now wandering far from us, losing itself in the distance.²³

This simple rotation carried revolutionary implications. First of all, the axis of symmetry was now broken; second, the frontality of Jesus, and Mary too, gave way to a variety of more humanized, more profane and worldly postures; and third, the powerful stare, subjecting us to its mysterious, absolute power, was now increasingly deflected, looking elsewhere. Often, the mother would now be shown not looking straight out at us but down at the infant son on her lap:

From high metaphysics, art falls down to the level of daily psychology: instead of a unified, integrated structure, we now have two rival figures loosely connected by tenderness, boredom, or melancholy—that is, by an external element, a human, all-too-human projection subjectively, capriciously imposed upon the [sacred] scene.²⁴

In particular, Paris maintains,

In turning her attention away from us, Mary renounces her last supernatural privilege: her *Regard* [Look]. The power that she formerly projected from the gold wall is now merely enclosed in the image. All the so-called “sacred conversations” take place in a space that is no longer sacred, since it is no longer protected against our own violation of it. Its intermediary character retains some features of the primeval sphere of absolute being: it does not concern us, we have no part in it; but it is offered to our eyes, it is a show. We are now almost in the position of “voyeurs” peeking in at a private scene without any risk of being disturbed or discovered, since the two figures ignore us entirely.²⁵

Thus, as Paris observes, “instead of being objects for God to look at, we become plain subjects looking at them.” The story Paris tells, using Christian religious art, is the story of the rise to power of modern subjectivity. We finally steal from the divine beings the power to see, the power to frame reality, imposing closure and totality. The will to power inherent in vision finally overpowers God, holding Him in our beholding. Once the divine beings turn their look away from us and we can look at them, insolently, shamelessly, and with impunity, the age of the world picture is triumphant.

For Paris, the rise to power of ego-subjectivity can be seen very clearly in the Renaissance emergence of perspective—the transformation of a

sacred surface (deflecting our transgressive look) into a profane volume, a volume that invites us to use our acquired godlike power to gaze into the depths of the invisible, reducing it to a totality over which we possess absolute control. Moreover, perspective, multiplying and relativizing positions, subverts the metaphysical absoluteness of authority, dogmatic truth. It also subverts political monarchism. Thus, for the Byzantines, an art of perspectivism would have been heresy. For them:

As long as perspective characterizes our physical world, our binocular vision, imposing it on divine space would amount to sacrilege. God is beyond all laws of optics, and so must be His representation: His flat, abstract silhouette proclaims that aggressively, and all His heavenly relatives are similarly exempted from depth, as they are, say, from death and gravity. [. . .] But we have also discovered that the consequence, or better said, the condition of this aesthetics, is that depth, excluded from the wall, will be projected in front of the image, signified by the Divine *Regard*. This is why this *Regard*, like the symmetry that goes with it, constitutes the true perspective of the fresco: an inverted perspective only from our [modern] viewpoint, which substitutes a logical, rational perspective for the transcendent one.²⁶

The “discovery” of perspective represents the viewpoint of the modern ego-subject, whose will to power has finally seized and appropriated visionary being. The stare of God becomes our stare; God’s frontal look, which once made us look at and confront ourselves, has been turned aggressively onto the realm of the metaphysical divine. Our own vision becomes confrontational and frontal, inaugurating a *frontal ontology* based on the strengthening of foveal attention and the repression of peripheral, background awareness. As our vision becomes more and more detached, aloof, claiming, falsely, an absolute sovereignty free of location, free of context, free of conditions, it becomes a stare; it becomes a be-holding that attempts to hold and turn everything into something purely present-at-hand (*vorhanden*), as if for an eternal, all-powerful observer.²⁷ A Gorgon’s aggressive vision imposes a frontal ontology.

With the emergence of linear perspectivism, the geometric rationalization of the visible world, vision was for the first time seeing itself depicted, hence seeing itself seeing itself. And we were able for the first time to contemplate theoretically a strictly *rational* mastery of the whole visible world. “Las Meninas,” the most famous painting by Velasquez, celebrates the reflexivity in this historical moment, which recalls, and corresponds to, the Cartesian and Kantian revolutions in the history of philosophy.²⁸ In

the paintings of the Renaissance, the imposition of linear perspective is a celebration of humanism and its rationalism.

Paris concludes his lecture with a comment on the chain of events that, in staging the Renaissance in painting, Alberti set in motion:

“At long last,” exclaims Alberti, “perspective makes me see the world as God saw it.” We can take this statement at its face value: when space becomes the endless travel of our eyes, when every character, every form, discovers an utter loneliness, when the world has nothing to offer but absence, then the Divine *Regard* will be well defeated, so that painting, like literature, reversing its whole course, may finally proclaim the victory of Man.²⁹

But is this really our victory? When we look beyond the victory, what we might see, as did Heidegger, is the dark shadow of nihilism—and perhaps even the abject end of all life on this planet. It is still too soon to tell, but this triumph, celebrating the rule of subjectivity, could already be turning into a struggle against self-destruction.

We noted that, in the narrative Heidegger is telling in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* (written for a university lecture in 1935 and revised for publication in 1953), the history of metaphysics unfolds as a *Verfallsgeschichte*, a history of deformation and decline, *Verunstaltung* and *Verfall*, in which Heidegger attempts to demonstrate, not only that, in our anthropocentric will to power, we are falling ever more tragically into the groundlessness of nihilism but also that this dangerous condition is deeply and inextricably bound up with the history of vision as our paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality (GA 40: 15–20/ IMM 11–14). Hence, in Heidegger’s narrative, it seems that the more vision triumphs in its dominion over the visible and the invisible, the faster we decline and fall into the throes of nihilism—a devastation (*Verwüstung*) and decadence (*Untergang*) that Heidegger, following Nietzsche, sees as consuming all of Western civilization. It is not surprising, therefore, that Heidegger’s critique of philosophy—its metaphysics in particular—is connected to a critique of modernity, and that both critiques critically engage the phenomenological character of vision: everyday vision and the philosophical vision that both reflects on that everyday vision and is also, despite its freedom and critical intent, a reflection and manifestation of it.

In the 1930s and 1940s, however, Heidegger’s history of decline gave way to a seemingly more prophetically hopeful history of being, envisioning the possibility of “another inception,” a radical break with the historical

continuum and its epoch, according to Heidegger, of an ever more comprehensive nihilism. But with the rise and fall of the Nazi *Reich*, that narrative likewise fell into silence. The spirit of hope, however, did not die, despite an even more intense intimation of the danger; for that spirit was now to be renewed in a poetic vision of the events of the world gathered into the dynamics of the Fourfold.

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In his critical interpretation of modernity, of the fate of truth in our time, Heidegger has much to say about the *character* of the vision—visual perception, visual experience—that prevails in today’s world, and about the possibility of a very different experience with vision, opening the way for a very different future world, released from the rule of nihilism. Corresponding to such a redeeming transformation in the character of vision, hence in our reception of the given, there would be a difference in the way in which the being of beings—and being itself—would presence. Heidegger lets his thinking be drawn toward that history-redeeming prospect, somehow disrupting the currently prevailing ontological order.

I will argue here that the terms of Heidegger’s “overcoming” of metaphysics—his *Überwindung* or *Verwindung*—are often ocular, but never intentionally meant to be ocularcentric—especially not in the later, post-War years of his thinking. Although he never denounced the ultimately corrupting, nihilistic influence of ocularcentrism in the discourse of philosophy beginning with Plato, he took a very critical position with regard to the will to power encouraged in the habitual, everyday experience of seeing and, equally, in the ocularcentric metaphysics that centuries of reflection, unwittingly modeled after this corrupted experience, brought forth. Eventually, his critique of the will to power in vision stirred him to think of vision in terms of a radically different character, and even to let his thinking shift from a vision-generated project to a project that works instead with listening.

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Now, it might seem that, in telling a story about the human fall into a time of nihilism, subjecting the presencing of being to the violence of the will to power, Heidegger was telling the very *same* story that so many reactionary thinkers in Europe had been telling and repeating since the closing years of the nineteenth century: a sinister variation on the Old Testament story of a fall from the good and the true, a story of moral and spiritual corruption that all too easily falls into nostalgia for a lost paradise and concludes with a sweeping condemnation of an increasingly corrupt ethical life. There

are occasionally, to be sure, some deep and profoundly disturbing affinities between Heidegger's critique of our technology-formed modernity and the anti-modern, anti-progressive narratives that were, during the early years of the twentieth century, in wide circulation among the political forces of the German right. However, throughout Heidegger's critical writings, early to late, returning to the beginnings of metaphysics in ancient Greece, there is always the counterweight of a corresponding search for hints and traces of a redeeming "new beginning," a revolutionary repetition of that first great originating event, which inaugurated philosophical thought among the pre-Socratics: something completely different from the simple turn backward for which the conservatives among his contemporaries were preparing to battle—and also very different from the "new beginning" proclaimed by the official program of National Socialism.

When Heidegger returns to the thought of the pre-Socratics, to the writings of Plato and Aristotle, or even evokes an idyllic rural life that seems to be vanishing before his very eyes, it is not out of nostalgia, not out of a desire to reverse the movement of history and return to the past; instead, it expresses his conviction that the great beginning of metaphysics in the ancient past is an event that preserves as yet unrealized historical possibilities: a truth that was never realized, never actualized, something that could perhaps enable us to build a new and better future world, drawing inspiration and guidance from our disowned and almost forgotten past. Furthermore, he does not spare the premodern, and even the ancient world from his critique: the Romans, for instance, reduced to *ratio* the *logos* they inherited from the Greeks; and although the ancient Greek philosophers invented the wondrous word *aletheia*, designating the unconcealment that opens the dimension within which truth as correctness becomes possible, Heidegger points out that, precisely because they were thinkers inaugurating the beginning of the history of metaphysics, they could not know the existential, world-historical significance of the forgetfulness and concealment that their own keyword unwittingly anticipated. They could not know the future that their word was secretly announcing: a future in which human beings would live in a world denied the immeasurable dimensions of being, a world in which the openness that underlies the very possibility of truth as correctness would be foreclosed, lost in forgetfulness, and in which even that closure, that loss, though objectively felt, would not be properly recognized and understood. Heidegger's careful reading of Plato's "Myth of the Cave" makes it a parable that has much to teach us living in today's very demanding world.³⁰

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Metaphysics was supposed to be the guardian discourse of being—above all, of being as such. Because Heidegger reads the history of metaphysics in terms of the question of being, his critique of modernity sees Western history in terms of an ever-increasing “forgetfulness” of being—an ever-deepening reduction and closure, taking place not only in the ontological dimension of everyday optical experience but also in the discourse of metaphysics, the discourse of thinking that is supposed to keep us open to transcendence. Heidegger himself, in fact, was guilty of this closure, as he fairly quickly realized, when, in *Being and Time*, immediately after raising the question of being, he set about exploring the question in terms of, that is, within the framework enclosure of, the phenomenology of human existence. Compelled by his own critique of metaphysics to abandon the design of the project he had begun in that work, Heidegger’s thought began a radically different approach, while continuing to think in a phenomenologically disciplined way about the character of our experience. As he says in *Time and Being*, a 1962 text written three and a half decades later, being must be thought, “without regard to its being grounded in terms of beings”: “ohne die Rücksicht auf eine Begründung des Seins aus dem Seienden” (GA 14: 5/OTB 2). With that in mind, he recast his project, attentively listening to the Greek middle voice in a way that Husserl had not. In this recasting, he would be faithful at last to the radical conception of phenomenology that he had defined in the “Introduction” to *Being and Time* but unknowingly betrayed in the text that followed—the conception, namely, of phenomenology as “letting the phenomenon show itself *from out of itself*.”

That formulation might appear at first to be merely a recapitulation of Husserl’s formulation in the first volume of his *Ideas*; but in fact the reflexive, middle voice grammar, faithful to the Greek, articulates a radically different conception that resists appropriation by the subjectivity operative in Husserl’s transcendental idealism.³¹ Whereas Husserl’s formulation appropriates phenomenology for his reductive version of transcendental idealism, Heidegger’s formulation, which for a first quick reading might seem to be nothing more than a recapitulation and rephrasing of Husserl’s definition, reveals the fact, for a longer, more reflective reading, that it radically *opens* phenomenology to a dimension for thought, which necessarily boundlessly exceeds the grasp of such idealism and even the happening of being as it is for us today, suggesting a different understanding of being—of what it means to be.

An appropriated beginning for philosophical thought, such as Heidegger envisions, would be a beginning in which the discourse of thought would *let itself be appropriated* by the claim, the *Anspruch*, of being, instead of requiring that the matter for thought fit into the Procrustean bed of an analytic of *Dasein*. It is a question of the openness of the site from which the project begins. What this means is that thinking would attempt to keep its words exposed, open, and receptive to the directives brought in the claim that being makes. In this present volume, that claim will be understood as a claim on the character of our vision and the character of our hearing: a claim, therefore, on our willingness and commitment to develop our perceptive capacities.

The stakes could not be greater, and more consequential. The question of being is charged with ethical significance because invoking the being, or beingness, of beings serves to remind us that our ontology and epistemology must never fail to recognize, respect, and protect the *being* of all beings. The question of being calls into question all totalizations, all reifications, all reductionisms, all forms of ontological abuse and violence: it opens all domains to the draft of being and holds them open—ethics and politics no less than ontology and epistemology. The discourse of being that Heidegger is attempting to “redeem” is a discourse that, as he observes in his “Letter on Humanism,” contests and breaches all forms of closure—including those still at work in the most progressive tradition of humanism; and in the course of indicating the dimensions of a “new humanism,” the “Letter” points toward the possibility of different ways of looking and seeing.

§7

The Future of the Paradigm

If we believe that vision has dominated modernity with the encouragement of a vision-generated paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality, then further questions confront us: If the character of seeing is embedded in cultural history, how have historical changes in the culture of our visionary experience, changes including our understanding of seeing and of ourselves as beings gifted with sight, affected the history of the vision-generated paradigm of rationality? Does vision display, as Heidegger seems to have believed, a *distinctively* corrupt character in modernity? Why does vision assume a singular role in the philosophical discourse of modernity? Heidegger’s thought gives us ways to reflect on these questions.

I wish to argue that, in the course of a struggle to understand the texts of the pre-Socratics and think philosophically about poetry and language,

Heidegger found himself moving away from the unexamined ocularcentrism of the philosophical tradition. Indeed, his lectures bearing the title *The Principle of Reason* (1955–1956) suggest that, little by little, his thinking was separating itself from the old rationality of vision, moved, perhaps by the very logic of his struggle to understand the language of the pre-Socratics, in the direction of the very different paradigm of rationality, and the very different way of thinking: one that could come only from attentive listening and hearing. His *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, a set of texts written in the years 1936–1938, already strongly suggest such a shift, working not only, as in *Being and Time*, toward a “moment of vision” but also toward a thinking attuned to, and attuned by, the echo, the resonance (*Anklang*) of being. This means that the *Ereignis*, our appropriation in regard to being, might come not only in a moment of vision but also, or perhaps instead, in a moment of *hearkening*—a profoundly deep ontological attunement in our hearing.

Does Heidegger’s thinking, struggling to listen and hear something still unthought in the shadowy traces of the pre-Socratics—and something still unspoken in the writings of poets, poets such as Hölderlin, Rilke and Trakl—foreshadow a paradigm shift of his own in his way of relating to the presencing of being? It is at least true, I think, that Heidegger’s thinking after *Being and Time* is turned more often, and with more urgency, in the direction of auditory experience, resonating to the need for a different ontology, and attempting to become responsive to still unrecognized possibilities in the history of (our experience of) being. Perhaps the distinctly different tone of voice in the expression of his thought following the recasting of the project design operative in *Being and Time*—the strange, *unheimlich* tone of the *Beiträge (Contributions to Philosophy)*, that depends so much on an effort to listen and hear, and becomes audible in some of the texts that follow—is a tone more attuned by the tonality that being itself has set at this moment in the unfolding of modernity, when the ocularcentric, anthropocentric paradigm of rationality that has ruled over the modern life-world can no longer contain the polyphony, the emergent anarchism of the *Logos*. It seems to me that Heidegger’s turn away from ocularcentrism is indicative not only of an attempt to overcome and get beyond the history of metaphysics but also of an attempt to challenge the terms that modernity dictates to our lives.

A close reading of *Being and Time* confirms that, while continuing to draw on the language of vision, Heidegger nevertheless undertook a devastating critique of quotidian seeing—a diagnosis, we might say, of the psychosocial pathology of everyday seeing—which he repeated, essentially

unchanged, in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*.³² And, as we have already noted, in the earlier work Heidegger points to the correlation between our present-at-hand ontology (*Vorhandensein*) and seeing in the mode of staring, a “reinen Anstarren,” a “stares Begaffen,” a reifying gaze (GA 2: 82, 93, 199/BT 88, 98, 190). This correlation also figures in his discussion of the “theoretical attitude,” which philosophical thought has enshrined as the model for looking and seeing—and for all systems of knowledge. He also points out that the theoretical way of beholding is a “dimming down” of the world to what is purely present-at-hand (GA 2: 184/BT 177). This “diminishing” of illumination, or of radiant splendor, is likewise invoked in his critical analysis of truth as assertion and statement (*apophansis*, a Greek word that describes languaging as a process of coming to light and becoming visible: letting something be seen in its uncoveredness), where he says that, in “setting down the subject,” assertion “dims entities down to focus.” In the latter text, his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, this critique would seem to be reinforced, and even extended, since the visual language Heidegger uses in formulating his critique of modernity—he wrote, there, of a “darkening of the world,” a *Weltverdüsterung*—suggests the thought that there may be some *connection* between this “darkening,” the decline and fall of Western civilization, and the dominion of a vision-driven will to power in our paradigm for knowledge, truth, and reality. But the critique itself, and the world-transformation for which it might be preparatory, are still figured in terms that refer us to vision.

We might consequently find it rewarding to turn to the phenomenological and hermeneutical character of hearing that Heidegger explores in his ruminations on Heraclitus in order to encourage our getting beyond the epoch of the *Gestell*—or at least to twist free of vision as the paradigm in metaphysics of knowledge, truth, and reality.

Among Heidegger’s later writings, texts written after both *Being and Time* and *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, there are some extremely important works primarily concerned with the historical character of vision, examining this character in relation both to the historical conditions of modernity and to the philosophical discourse that, however obliquely, reflects those conditions, continually reinscribing their terms within its vision-saturated language. The texts I have in mind are “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God Is Dead’” (1936–1943), “The Question Concerning Technology” (1949–1955), “The Turning” (1949), and “Science and Reflection” (1954). In all these texts, there is a deeply critical examination of vision-based thinking and vision-centered discourse, situating this critique in relation to the vision distinctive of quotidian life in our

time and exposing the historical formation of this vision, beginning with the legacy of antiquity. These are very important texts, but they are not the only ones in which Heidegger critically examines vision and its philosophical discourses. And, as we have already noted, this critique also figures, even though only implicitly, that is, without explicit acknowledgment of its critical implications, in his reflections on the pre-Socratics—Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus—and in all his thinking, early and late, about Plato, whose word for the *Idea* derives, as he shows, from the vocabulary of vision.

It must be recognized, however, that there is in Heidegger's thought no sweeping disparagement of vision as such, nor of the discourse of light as such, as when Heidegger reflects on Kalchas, the seer, in "The Anaximander Fragment." Nor is there any disparagement of light and vision in his "Logos" study on Heraclitus, Fragment B50 and his "Aletheia" study on Heraclitus, Fragment B16. Heidegger always attempts to articulate a difference—call it "an ontological difference"—between (1) the *character* of our habitual, "normal" vision, a way of seeing that he argues is forgetful of the lighting by grace of which we are enabled to see what is visible, and that he therefore accuses of being corrupt, violent, and pathological, and (2) the *character* of a radically different way of seeing, a "redeemed" vision realizing its latent ontological potential for mindfully "recollecting" the giving of the gift of the lighting, providing as it does a *field* of light by grace of which there is for us a visible world. This ontologically mindful mode of vision is a way of seeing moved by its hermeneutical understanding of the manifestation of being.

So my claim is that Heidegger is not at all hostile to visual perception as such; but (1) he certainly is strongly critical of the habitual *character* of vision that has prevailed in our civilization, and that still prevails in our time, and (2) drawing a connection between what is problematic in those systems and the character of the vision from which the systems are derived, he argues against the philosophical systems that in one way or another are reflections of that habitual character.

Thus, for example, in his commentary on Heraclitus, he points to the fact that we "turn from the lighting, and turn only toward what is present," toward that which "immediately concerns" us in our "everyday commerce with one another" (GA 7: 287/EGT 122). And in *Being and Time*, he is critical of a gaze that stares, as if to seize hold of and clutch at what it perceives, a gaze or glance that turns everything into usable things or available things. He also speaks disparagingly in "What Are Poets For?" of "the still covetous vision [*des noch begehrenden Sehens*] of things" (GA 5: 316–17/PLT

138). But, is there not a *connection* worthy of critical thought between those characteristics of our habitual way of seeing things and the epistemologies and ontologies of which he is critical?

Heidegger's critique of our vision, and of the philosophical discourses informed by this vision, is not a form of reactionary anti-modernism, but always, I believe, the beginning of an effort to think a *new way* of seeing. This effort is, I believe, at the very heart of a text from his late period, "Ἀγχιβάση: *A Triadic Conversation on a Country Path between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide*," in which he attempts to think beyond the horizon determined by our present vision and to articulate a radically different figure-ground structure for perception in terms of an ontological attitude, or disposition (*Stimmung*), that he calls *Gelassenheit*, releasement, letting-be. We shall give further thought to this attitude in a later chapter.

§7

The Paradigm in Critique: Genesis and Prospect

Under the domination of a way of seeing in the everyday character of which the will to power prevails, and in which, therefore, a strong affinity binds together an instrumentalized vision and a culture of technology—*Machenschaft*, as Heidegger calls it, "the being, or entity [*das Seiende*] becomes an object either to be beheld (view, image) [*für das Betrachten (Anblick, Bild)*] or to be acted upon (product and calculation)" (GA 40: 67/IMM 52). Under the control of a willful vision, the beingness of beings is ontologically reduced, either to the *practical* objectivity of a being always ready-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*) or else to the more deliberative, more abstract, more *theoretical* objectivity of a being always present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*). What is *zuhanden* is seen, is visible, only instrumentally, as the means to an end in the context of some manipulative interest, some practical activity. We might say that the being that is *zuhanden* is looked at but not really seen. The *Zuhandene* tends to be noticed, really seen, really made visible, only, as Heidegger argues, when there is an instrumental breakdown. When a breakdown in use occurs, the very *being* of the instrument suddenly becomes crucial: its being is now *vorhanden*, coming into presence for a gaze seeking rather to *understand* the being of the thing. But does this abstract, more theoretical gaze necessarily see the being of beings more insightfully, more truthfully? Could there be a way of looking and seeing for which the being of beings would appear in another modality, neither as *zuhanden* nor as *vorhanden*? Might *Gelassenheit*, understood as an *ontological* attitude, or disposition, be Heidegger's attempt to think a third kind of relationship to beings—a relationship free of the paradigm that our habits of looking and seeing have encouraged?

In *both* paradigm modalities, however: “The original world-making power, *physis*, degenerated [reduced thereby] into a prototype to be copied and imitated” GA 40: 67/IMM 52). In the modern-world functioning of the paradigm, the original Greek ontology has increasingly fallen under the sway of a calculative and instrumental rationality: under the torsion of its vision, and under its mode of production. Ontology is thus increasingly bent to the service of a will to power. The original emergence of energies, the *phainesthai*, or appearance of beings, is reduced and fixated to objectivity. A vision that was originally open to receiving and perceiving in its givenness the luminous sway of being—that which presences and gives itself to be seen—becomes, in Heidegger’s words, a mere looking-at or looking-over or gaping-at. To be sure, as he concedes, there *are* still beings. However, the *presencing* of being “has gone out of them” (GA 40: 66–67/IMM 50–52). What does he mean by this? The entity or being (*das Seiende*) has been made into an “object” of endless and ever-changing activity, and only thereby has it retained an appearance of its permanence, but in its reified reduction it is actually no longer bearing any recognizable connection to the dimension of manifestation itself—what Heidegger will subsequently call the clearing. This is nihilism, the obliteration of being, the dimension of worldly experience that makes possible the *presencing* of beings. Our habitual ways of seeing are increasingly taking part in that self-destructive obliteration.

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In a 1927 lecture course at the University of Marburg, Heidegger observed that the apprehension of being always turns, at first and necessarily, to some particular being; being itself is noticed not in itself but only as the being of beings. Thus, the task for phenomenology must be understood as “the leading of our vision from beings back to being as such”: leading our vision from the realm of the visible back to the clearings that make the presencing of visible beings possible, and from there, leading us into the invisible, the realm that shelters all that is visible (GA 24:29/BPP 21).

The philosophical “redemption” of vision ultimately hinges on the safeguarding of the invisible, the abyssal ground, but also the shelter, of the visible. That, however, demands wresting our gazes and glances from the forces of nihilism that constantly besiege us; and it demands the metamorphosis of the will to power that, in our time, structures the character of our perceptivity, determining *how*, and consequently, even *what* we see.

In one of the Le Thor Seminars, hence in Heidegger’s thinking as late as the year 1968, we find the language of vision still engaged: “Metaphysics starts from beings [*vom Seienden aus*], raises itself to being, and then returns

to beings as beings, clarifying its understanding of them in the light of its understanding of being [*es im Licht des Seins aufzuhellen*].”³³ The unnecessary use of this language of vision is even more significant in the lecture on “Time and Being” (1962) that I discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In that text, maintaining a certain noteworthy continuity, not only with *Being and Time* (1927) but also, even more remarkably, with the thinking in his 1930s writings, Heidegger suggests that the philosopher carries a responsibility to “show how the ‘there is’ [the ‘*Es gibt*,’ i.e., the meaningful happening of beings] can be experienced and glimpsed [*wie sich dieses ‘Es gibt’ erfahren und erblicken läßt*]” (GA 14: 9/OTB 5). And he continues, saying that the philosopher must “try to look ahead [*vorzublicken*] to the ‘It’ which is the giving of being and time [i.e., the *Es* that *gibt*, namely, *Da-sein*’s clearing as condition of possibility for being and time].” “Thus,” he adds, “looking ahead [*vorblickend*], we become foresighted [*vor-sichtig*] in still another sense. We try to bring the ‘It’ and its giving into view [*in die Sicht*]” (ibid.). We must contemplate this “foresightedness” in relation to the future of history; it belongs, ultimately, to a certain prophetically inflected discourse. In these remarks, Heidegger is alluding to the beginning of another inheritance of history in the life of the Western world and the possibility—the prospect—of another inception for philosophical thought.

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Here is where I want to argue, if only briefly and necessarily in somewhat awkward English, showing the connections among Heidegger’s words, that discerning the way to destiny (*Geschick*) in that which, in our historical situation, has been given or sent (*geschickt*), that is, as the facticity, the undeniably given factor (*das Gegeben, die Gabe*) in our experience of the situation we find ourselves in, will always be at least to some extent a question of the *Schicklichkeit* (skillfulness, capability) that our seeing and hearing have developed and achieved, perhaps above all in regard to the character and quality of their receptivity.

In German, the phrase *Es gibt* has two meanings. It can mean, in the literal sense, “It gives”; but it can also mean “There is. . . .” Hence, it can mean “There is given”: different ways of claiming or asserting facticity, claiming or asserting that something is the case. But Heidegger can work with this locution to unfold a meaning, or rather a constellation of meanings, that cannot be derived from the wording of the English translation. Thus, for instance, references to the given, to what in English is simply sheer facticity, can easily become, in the context of Heidegger’s thought, a gift (*Gabe*)—indeed a gift of destiny (*Geschick*), that is to say, a gift sent or granted (*geschickt*) by the historical conditions in which we find ourselves:

a “gift” bearing within it, for those with the gift of appropriate insight, discernment, and an exceptional ability to interpret events, the possibilities and opportunities for achieving the great “destiny” presumably calling us, as Heidegger supposes, to our shared sense of humanity.

However, Heidegger’s invocations of *die Gabe*, especially in the context of his discussions of destiny, should make us uncomfortable (GA 14: 12–14/OTB 8–10). They carry an ontotheological ring. When I think of the *Shoah*, the genocide in Myanmar, the tragic war that continues in Syria, the starving children in Yemen, the homeless living on the streets of my own city, then metaphysically inflected talk of being as a *Gabe* and *Geschick* seems monstrously wrong. But when I am sitting in the midst of my beautiful garden in full summertime bloom, I sometimes think to myself “What a gift!” So, the gift and its givenness do not have to be thought within an ontotheological interpretation. We need to keep the phenomenology of the given free of such an interpretation, returning our thinking to phenomenological everydayness, where we can talk of the given in very matter-of-fact ways, for example, it is a given that, on the Fourth of July weekend, there will be heavy traffic on the roads around New York City. That is a given, a fact, and its givenness is a fact. No ontotheological giver, sender, no destiny-laden ontotheological gift! Nevertheless, some facts, some givens, can be experienced with an appreciation that relates to them in their givenness *as if* they were a gift. Perhaps because they are unexpected, or surprising; or because we recognize that these wonderful things or events might not have been: we are aware of their contingency, their precariousness, their fragility, their extraordinary character. But, to be sure, there is, also, an experience of the given that has inspired metaphysics. That beings quite simply *are*, that there *is* a cosmos, that there is anything at all rather than nothing: that, too, is a given; and the sheer facticity of its givenness may strike us, as it did Pascal, with wonder and awe—and the distinctive joy we feel when we receive a precious gift.

But it is the unadorned *facticity* of givenness—what we are given to experience in perception—that we need to contemplate in the context of the phenomenology of perception. In both empiricism and idealism, philosophical thought has struggled to understand the givenness of the given in perception. Heidegger suggests a new way, at once intriguing and problematic, for us to think about it, connecting what is given (or sent) in perception to the idea of destiny in a narrative grounded in his philosophy of history, and making that connection by a leap into the event and process of appropriation (*Er-eignis*, *Er-eignen*). Thus, what Heidegger calls “our destiny” is perhaps a gift in the sense that it is something that could possibly be

“found” by insightful, historically well-informed interpretation in whatever the historical situation “sends” or “gives” to our perception.

What, for him, is “given” could not be more different from the “impressions” that Hume describes as if he thought our minds, our perceptive organs, were like paper in a printing press; nor could it be more different from the givens, or intuitions (*Anschauungen*), that Kant considers in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And neither Kant nor Hume is attentive to the question of receptivity—the *character of the reception* we give to what is given to us, sent our way. Despite their ethical concerns, they ignore the character of our receptivity, which is initially so intertwined with what is given and correspondingly received that it inevitably affects the character of the sensible itself. Neither philosopher understood that reception is a question of character: an experience that can challenge our very sense of humanity, our sense of who we are as human beings. This is a thought that was left for Emerson, the American Transcendentalist, dutiful reader of Kant, to bring into the discourse of thought.³⁴ What would be the most appropriate, most fitting character—the *Schicklichkeit*—of a receptivity, a response-ability, in perception that would let itself be appropriated by, and attuned to, the given or sent, in such a way that promising history-making possibilities hidden in what we are given (sent) must come to light, beckoning our use of freedom?

The retrieving of what we interpret to be the destiny (*Geschick*) that is sent (*geschickt*), or given, in the historical situations (*Schickungen*) we find ourselves in depends, however, on an appropriate form of historical memory, a form drawing its vitality and relevance from that phenomenologically deep dimension of temporality (*Temporalität*) in which past, present, and future have not been programmed according to time (*Zeitlichkeit*) as a linear series of time-points, such that the past is buried, lost, rather than present-as-past. As Heidegger says in his 1943 lectures on Heraclitus: thinking in a genuinely historical way, hence not historiographically, is “to experience what has been [*das Gewesene*] as what is unfolding as what is to come [*als das schon wesende Kommende*]” (GA 55.1: 11/H 11). However, the retrieving of a sense of destiny as our own present historical possibility also very much depends on the fittingness (*Schicklichkeit*) of our perceptual abilities—our ability to be co-responsive, receptive, keeping the ontological dimension of our experience open, so that new modalities of being could perhaps begin to emerge. But in Heidegger’s preparatory thinking, the paradigm favoring vision persists, its dominance significantly challenged only, it seems, when he ventures deeply into the thought of Heraclitus.

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In concluding his brief text on “Logos (Heraclitus, B 50)” with an elegiac statement in regard to the history of being, Heidegger continues to use metaphors of light and vision, blurring the distinction between (1) optical light and (2) ontological lighting, that is, the clearing, that he vehemently argued for elsewhere:

Once, in the beginning of Western thinking, the essence of language flashed in the light of being [. . .] But the lightning abruptly vanished. No one held on to its streak of light and the nearness of what it illuminated. (GA 7: 233–34/EGT 78)

“We see this lightning,” he argues, “only when we station ourselves in the storm of being.” Then, suddenly shifting from a criticism of metaphysics to a translation of this criticism that turns it into one that speaks concretely to our habits in everyday life, he says,

Yet everything today betrays the fact that we bestir ourselves only to drive storms away. We organize all available means for cloud-seeding and storm dispersal in order to have calm in the threat of a storm. But this calm is no tranquility. It is only anesthesia; more precisely, it is the narcotization of anxiety in the threat of thinking.

To this, however, he nevertheless attaches an expression of hope, assigning philosophical thought its most awesome task:

The word of thinking rests in the sobering quality of what it says. Just the same, thinking changes the world [*Gleichwohl verändert das Denken die welt*]. But it changes it in ever darker depths of a riddle, depths which, as they grow darker, nevertheless offer promise [*das Versprechen*] of a greater brightness.

This should return philosophical thought to the forgotten dimension of perceptual experience, which compellingly challenges the priority and role of the subject–object duality that the visual paradigm tempts us to adopt. Even overcoming that epochal paradigm could suffice to open up our world to the dimension from which something of that promise might come.

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In “Dawn of Being,”³⁵ perhaps the most rewarding of Heidegger’s *Thought-Poems* (*Gedachtes*, GA 81: 68–69), there is, as I read it, an

illuminating recapitulation of his history of being, a narrative survey that takes us on a journey that begins with the momentous ontological *event* (*Ereignis*) in which the Greek philosophers' first experience of being, being itself, set in motion the discourse of metaphysics, a journey in thought that has traversed epochs of history to eventuate in the events of our own situation today, seeing us undergoing a catastrophic estrangement from being—an estrangement, that is to say, from the claim that being makes on our response-ability. Despite that estrangement, the philosopher can envision us *exposed* to bright, enlightening possibilities, events in which a new sense of being might emerge, overcoming our prevailing understanding and bearing the promise of another beginning, another destiny: “Die Frühe des Seyns.”

In this thought-poem, Heidegger meditates on the phenomenology of the extraordinary experience (*Ereignis*) in which thought turns from its engagement with beings to a contemplation of being, opening our experience with vision, above all its response-ability in relation to the claim of appropriation summoning us, as thrown-open, situated beings, to achieve what our essential nature calls for. Heidegger's German is at many points both syntactically and semantically very obscure. But I interpret the poem as a post-metaphysical meditation on the history of being from its earliest Greek inception up to the present time, concluding with a brief rumination on our present plight, and ending on a well-tempered note of hope.

I think this meditation not only explains the Greek inception and the need for another beginning but also urges us to open up our lives to the potential for momentary insights into our relation to being. It is in just such moments, such *Augenblicke*, that we, both as individuals and as communities of culture, might find ourselves exposed and opened up to a historically new sense of being.

Ex-istence means ex-posure not only to what speaks, what calls to us, in all our encounters with other people and the things in the world, but also, at the same time, ex-posure to the summons that comes from within our very own nature as “erlichtet,” reminding us of our responsibility to care for the conditions that enable beings to be present in our world. Responsibility for the being of beings speaks to us in all our worldly encounters with other people, other animals and things.

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So, is the ancient appeal of the visual now to be left behind? The words that convey Heidegger's vision-saturated thought are telling. In “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B16),” Heidegger says,

Wonder [*Erstaunen*] first begins with the question, “What does all this mean and how could it happen?” How can we arrive at such a beginning?

“Perhaps,” he suggests, “by abandoning ourselves to a wonder that is on the lookout for what we call clearing and unconcealing [*Vielleicht so, daß wir uns auf ein Erstaunen einlassen, das nach dem ausschaut, was wir Lichtung und Entbergung nennen*]” (GA 7: 267/EGT 104).

Reading Heidegger’s boldest, most rigorous, most dispassionate critical writings on the history of philosophy together with his scrupulously careful reflections on the pre-Socratics, for whom, living as they did in the dazzling radiance of the southern sunshine, the phenomena of vision—night and day, brightness and darkness, light and shadow, the somber and the glowing, and before all else, the interplay of the visible and the invisible—naturally figured significantly in the expression of their thought, one cannot avoid feeling something of the enchantment and quiet pleasure that must have accompanied the thinking of this north-dwelling philosopher as he ventured into the vision-saturated ontology of their distant world, still shining brightly from within its historical time.

NOTES

1. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, GA 2: 444–45; *Being and Time*, 385.
2. Paul Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” in *Tribune der Kunst und Zeit* 13, ed. Kasimir von Edschmid (Berlin: Erich Reiss, 1920); Norbert Guterman, trans., “Creative Credo,” in *Theories of Modern Art*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 182.
3. Heidegger, “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11: 45; “The Principle of Identity,” in *Identity and Difference*, 36.
4. Heidegger, “. . . dichterisch wohnet der Mensch. . .,” GA 7: 198; “Poetically Man Dwells. . .,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 220.
5. On essence, see Heidegger’s extraordinarily lucid account (GA 55.2: 253–55/H 194–95) of how, in Plato’s thought, the metaphysical essence, the “idea” of the thing, emerged from visual experience. It is well worth reading. Also see GA 55.2: 370/H 205–6.
6. Walter Benjamin, “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1.2, 431–508; “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 217–51.
7. Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák, ed. James Dodd (Peru, IL: Open Court, 1996), 11.

8. Albrecht Dürer, *The Painter's Manual: A Manual of the Measurement of Lines, Areas and Solids by Means of Compass and Ruler*, trans. Walter S. Strauss (New York: Albis Books, 1977). I am grateful to Mauro Cardone for drawing my attention to this treatise.

9. Mauro Carbone, *Philosophy-Screens: From Cinema to the Digital Revolution*, trans. Marta Nijhuis (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2019), 58–66. The quote comes from page 62.

10. David Michael Levin, *The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change, and the Closure of Metaphysics*. (New York: Routledge, 1989), 32.

11. Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, GA 24: 29; *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 21.

12. Heidegger, “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11: 45; “The Principle of Identity,” *Identity and Difference*, 36, 100, a bilingual edition in which, however, the sentence concerning this etymological derivation is not translated. And see Heidegger’s 1957 text, “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 124–25: *Er-eignen heißt ursprünglich: er-äugen, d.h., erblicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen, an-eignen*. That is: “*Er-eignen* originally derived from bringing something into view, that is, catching sight of something, calling something into view, appropriating it.” For the English, see *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 116–17.

13. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Wahrheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2001), GA 36–37: 124; “Introduction,” in *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 97.

14. Martin Heidegger, “Die Kehre,” in *Die Technik und die Kehre aus Wissenschaft und Dichtung* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1962), 43–47; GA 11: 120–24; “The Turning,” in *The Question of Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 49. There is also now a beautiful new translation of “Die Kehre” (“The Turn”) by Andrew J. Mitchell, trans., *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 68–73. For the German language original of the Mitchell text, see “Die Kehre,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 73–77. There are remarkable similarities and affinities between Heidegger’s philosophy of history and that of Walter Benjamin, despite the obvious differences. On Benjamin’s similar metaphors to characterize the history-breaking, history-transforming moment of vision—what Heidegger calls the *Augenblick* (moment of vision) and Benjamin calls the *Jetztzeit* (now-time)—consider Benjamin’s conception of what he terms a “constellation,” “wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now [*Jetztzeit*].” Both want to disrupt the historical continuum by retrieving overlooked possibilities in “what has been.” And both deploy in this regard the metaphors of a lightning-flash. See *Das Passagen-Werk, Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 5, part 1, 576–77; *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 462–63. Also see his 1940 “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” *Gesammelte*

Schriften, vol. I, part 2, §5–6, 695 and §14, 701. For the English, see “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” “On the Concept of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), §5–6, 255 and §14, 261. Besides *Augenblick-Jetztzeit* and *Augenblick-Einblick-Blitzen*, there are other remarkable similarities and affinities between the two philosophers in regard to their philosophies of history, for example, with regard to teleology, fatalism, determinism, and the contingency of progress. There are also, of course, significant, crucial, fundamentally irreconcilable differences, mainly in regard to political ideology.

15. GA 11: 47/ID 38: *Das Ereignis vereignet Mensch und Sein in ihr wesenhaftes Zusammen. Ein erstes, bedrängendes Aufblitzen des Ereignisses erblicken wir im Ge-Stell.* (“Appropriation is an experience that claims man and being for their essential togetherness. [But] it is in the *Gestell* that, for the first time, we glimpse the lightning-flash of appropriation in its most threatening form.”) Also see now the latest translation of this text in Andrew J. Mitchell, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2012). His translation does not, however, contain the passage I have quoted. It appears only in the draft that Stambaugh translated: “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1957), 31.

16. Heidegger, “Die Kehre.” In this edition, the text says: “Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis.” And see “Die Kehre,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 74; “The Turn,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell, 70. In this edition, the text says: *Einblitz ist Ereignis im Seyn selbst.* In other words: The flashing is the event and claim of appropriation in being itself, that is, in the clearing.

17. This last point is reiterated in “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” *Holzwege*, 15; GA 2: 10: “Things are closer to us than all sensations. In the house, we hear the door slam, and never acoustical sensations or sheer noises. In order to hear a pure noise, we have to hear away from things, to take our ear away from them; that is, to hear abstractly.”

18. On the crucial distinction between light and the lighting, see Heidegger, “Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens,” GA 14: 79–83; “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*, 64–67. Also see his 1966–1967 seminar dialogue with Eugen Fink, concentrating on Heraclitus: GA 15: 231–33.

19. Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” GA 5: 91; “The Age of the World Picture,” QCT 131. And see “Die Kehre,” GA 79, 75–77/BF 71–73. For a similar argument, see the 1942–1943 *Parmenides* lectures, GA 54: 158–60/P 107–8.

20. Jean Paris, *Painting and Linguistics*, in *Praxis/Poetics*, Series, no. 1 (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, 1975), 40.

21. *Ibid.*, 43.

22. *Ibid.*, 49.

23. *Ibid.*, 50. As an illustration, Paris mentions *The Hodigitria*, an anonymous Italian painting of the twelfth or thirteenth century, located in the Fogg Art Museum. Another is the “Madonna with Angels” painted by Cimabue near the end of the thirteenth century.

24. Ibid., 61.

25. Ibid., 62.

26. Ibid., 69.

27. On the stare, see GA 2: 82, 93, 99/BT 88, 98, 104.

28. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1973), 308–11. And see Samuel Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989). Also see David M. Levin, *The Opening of Vision* (London: Routledge), 152–66, 239–40.

29. Paris, *Painting and Linguistics*, 72.

30. See Martin Heidegger, *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit* (Bern: Verlag A Francke, 1947); *Wegmarken*, GA 9: 203–238; “Plato’s Theory of Truth,” in *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Henry Aiken and William Barrett (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), vol. 3, esp. 265.

31. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Collier Books, 1962), §24, p. 83. Translation altered.

32. See, in this regard, GA 2: 184, 477–78/BT 177, 412, where the theoretical way of beholding is described as a “dimming down” of the world to what is purely present-at-hand. This “diminution” of light and visibility is likewise invoked in his critical analysis of truth as assertion and statement (*apophansis*, a Greek word that describes languaging as a process of coming to light and becoming visible: letting something be seen in its uncoveredness), where he says that, in “setting down the subject,” assertion “dims entities down to focus” (GA 2: 205–6/BT 197).

33. Martin Heidegger, *Vier Seminare: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969—Zähringen 1973* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, 1986), 101–7, GA 15: 306; “Seminar at Le Thor” (September 4, 1968), in *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 22. Translation revised.

34. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience,” in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 469–92.

35. To read this extraordinary poem in my translation-paraphrase, see *Heidegger’s Phenomenology of Perception*, vol. I, 296.

THE *GESTALT*

Figure and Ground, Subject and Object

In 1943, as the Allied war against Germany continued to rage, Heidegger devoted his Summer Semester lecture course to the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus, reading his cryptic sayings as representing “the inception of Occidental thinking” (GA 55: 109–81/H 83–135). One of the fragments on which he concentrated is fragment 123: φυσικς κρυπτεσθαι φιλει. In the Diels translation, this says: “Nature likes to hide.”¹ But, as Heidegger argues, this translation leaves us with much to be questioned and interpreted. It is far from satisfying, especially in regard to the word translated as “Nature.” But “φιλει” is also in need of further interpretation and illumination. And according to Greek grammar, κρυπτεσθαι, the word translated as “hide,” is a reflexive verb. So, it should have been translated properly as “hide itself.” Urging us to leave hasty thinking aside, instead opening our eyes and ears as we prepare ourselves simply to hear the word” (GA 55: 123/H 92), Heidegger accordingly ventures his own translation, recognizing that reflexivity, but turning “φιλει” into a phrase introducing the noun “Gunst”: “Das Aufgehen dem Sichverbergen schenkt’s die Gunst” (GA 55: 110/H 84). This could be translated as saying: “Emerging to self-concealing gives favor.” This is how Assaiante and Ewegen propose to render Heidegger’s translation (H 84). Keeping to the archaic spirit of Heidegger’s translation, however, Bernard Freydenberg has suggested this, emphasizing “Gunst,” “the Beneficent”: “The Arising, to the Self-concealing, the Beneficent gives.”² I would like to offer another translation, avoiding the possibility of even a mischievous hint of some beneficent metaphysical agency, although I suppose that Heidegger’s word “Gunst,” which introduces a new and problematic noun, might be rescued by taking it to refer, beyond that one saying, to the Heraclitean *Logos*, the Law that governs the cosmos, hence the being of all beings in their emerging and

submerging, arising and going under, concealment and unconcealment, presence and absence.

But, remaining with just that one saying, I would like to propose, in a plain, pedestrian grammar: “Emerging is gracious and obliging in regard to (the) self-concealing (self-submerging).” That is to say, emerging and submerging, coming forth and withdrawing, appearing and vanishing, coming into presence and departing are ceaseless, cosmological events and processes, suggesting the way that Heraclitus understands the eternal law, or logic, of the cosmos, being as such, according to which all particular beings, all that *is* in any way and at any time, must obey that most fundamental law of being, namely, finitude: coming into being, staying for its allotted time, and departing. For us human beings, this law is a sentence of death: our nature, fated to endure mortality.

Now, without wanting to diminish in any way the cosmological or ontological dimension that the fragment urges us to recognize and, indeed, embrace, I would like to illuminate its meaning and importance for the realm of perception—in particular, for seeing and hearing. Heidegger himself, in fact, makes the connection, introducing fragment 54 and reminding us of the ontological difference between being (i.e., the clearing our presence opens) and beings (i.e., what can appear in the clearing):

Physis [φύσις] is the inconspicuous. Emerging, as that which in the first place bestows the cleared open for an appearing, withdraws itself behind all appearing and every appearing thing, and is not just one appearing thing among others. Consequently, within the narrower region of the visible, what typically (and often exclusively) attracts our attention is, for example, what stands in the light and remains accessible as illuminated; over against this, the brightness itself [i.e., the background context, the perceptual field] is the unimposing and self-evident medium to which we tend to pay attention only when the illuminated object somehow becomes inaccessible to us, e.g., in consequence of the onset of darkness. Human beings then fashion a light for themselves. (GA 55: 142/H 108)

This last thought then provokes in Heidegger a vehement, impassioned critique of our contemporary world:

As a result of such fashioning, the modern metropolis, even before the war, has already turned night into day by means of a technology of illumination, so that neither the sky nor the light of the stars can be seen. And because of this technology, brightness itself has become an object

that can be produced. Brightness, in the sense of the inconspicuous [i.e., the perceptual ground or field] in all shining, has lost its essence. (GA 55; 142/H 108)

He concludes this peroration with an exceptionally caustic, scathing attack on our superficial way of life. His words here make the intensity of his rage, derision, and sarcasm truly palpable. What has our world become?

The open clearing, the perceptual ground—*φύσις*—was visible, was manifest, for the free thinking that took place at the inception of philosophy, and it *is* still visible; but now, it is “for the most part,” he says, “not properly beheld” (GA 55: 143/H 109). Today, only what is objectifiable, calculable, and readily controlled is recognized in our “reality.”

If emerging and submerging are understood to designate the dynamics of *physis* [*φύσις*], that is, the truth of being and not beings, then what is at stake is not only the *visibility* of the clearing, the field of perception, but also the *openness* of the clearing, the *openness* of the field of perception, as that which makes possible the presencing of beings. What Heidegger calls “the truth of being” is intended to refer to the unfolding of *aletheia*, not truth as correctness, but rather the dynamics occurring between concealment and unconcealment that makes truth as correctness possible. More precisely, his invocation of the inceptual thought of *aletheia* is intended to turn our attention to the nature of the interaction between them, questioning above all “the unconcealment of self-concealment”: whether the *field* of the interaction is open or foreclosed, and whether the interaction itself, the *Zwischen-spiel*, is free-flowing or blocked (GA 55: 175/H 131). Heidegger recognizes in such blocking and closing of the dynamics proper to the perceptual experience a consequence of the “forgetfulness of being,” the nihilism, that prevails in modern times. “Nature,” the “ever-emerging”—*φύσις*—summons us, in its archaic Greek inception, to recognize the “truth” of its being, hence its *logos*, in the dimension belonging to *aletheia*.

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Even in the realm of everyday perception, the most ordinary experiences in looking and hearing, the fundamental Law, or *Logos*, of which Heraclitus would remind us is powerfully operative, awesome in its ever-changing dynamics, endlessly intriguing in its ambiguity and duplicity, and deeply mysterious in its playfulness. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that, in another fragment (number 52), another one of the philosopher’s sayings, we find this: “Time is a child playing a game of draughts; the kingship is in the hands of a child.”³ Telling a story that became historical legend, Diogenes Laërtius once reported that Heraclitus used to shock the citizens

of his city, playing “knucklebones” with the youths on the steps leading up to the great temple of the goddess Artemus, one of the largest temples of the sixth century BC.

It is as if, for the Ephesian philosopher, the cosmos, in its unfathomable wisdom, liked to play hide-and-seek with us in the fields, the worlds of perception, that our presence on this planet opens up around us. Although playing this game in our looking and listening can sometimes be frustrating, discouraging, disappointing, and even dangerous, a game leading us, perhaps, into suffering and tragedy, it can also be, for anyone who has shared the philosopher’s wisdom, a game showing how things appear from the cosmological perspective—everything playing a role in the divine comedy.

Who knows whether the legendary story is actually true? But, in any event, in fragment 123, the saying attributed to Heraclitus lends itself rewardingly to an interpretation that appropriates for our consideration the phenomenology of perception. In particular, it concerns the dynamics of the *Gestalt*, the formation and deformation of the figure-ground structure: the reversibility of figure and ground, the play between the receding, or withdrawing, and the coming forth, the emerging and the retreating, or submerging. Perception is impossible without the interplay—the *Zwischenspiel*—of concealment and unconcealment. Everything we see and hear appears within a field, a context, a world that provides some intelligibility and meaning. But the being of that field, context, and world will never be limited to what can be perceived. Hiddenness, in time and in space, is always involved, always operative, always in a sense present, delimiting every experience. Moreover, this hiddenness is not caused by, or reducible to, the finitude of our faculties; it is, rather, inherent in the very nature, or essence—the very being—of the things themselves. Concealment is the dimension—and shelter—from out of which things emerge: it is therefore the dimension that makes possible—or gives favor to—emerging. But emerging is always already submerging, because coming into presence is always already destined for a time of withdrawing, returning into the dimension of concealment from which it arose and which, even during its emergence, it in turn favors with its protection, safeguarding that concealment. Heidegger explains the reciprocity: “While emerging, as emerging, gives favor to self-concealing, self-concealing joins itself to emerging in such a manner that the latter [i.e., the emerging] can emerge from the former [i.e., from self-concealing], and, for its part, remain secured in self-concealing (and this means conjoined to it)” (GA 55: 141/H 107). Each gives to the other what the other needs: the dimension of concealment shelters possibilities and gives rise to what emerges, while what emerges

maintains and shelters the dimension of concealment from the imposition of total visibility, the regime of the *Gestell*. There is, in this reciprocity, a certain “harmony,” as Heraclitus notes in fragment 54 (GA 55: 141–60/H 107–20); but it is a harmony-in-tension, a tension stressing the free-flowing relation between figure and ground that can even erupt in strife, as when, for instance, something hidden, concealed in the background, must exert pressure, or force, in order to emerge into attention, claiming the visibility that had been refused it; or as when the background is very noisy, cluttered, or eventful, making it difficult for us to attend to what is trying to emerge in the midst of this perceptual field.

What we need to understand is that, and how, concealment makes self-emerging possible, favoring it with its protecting, and that, and how, reciprocally, emerging is what favors concealment, sustaining the conditions that protect it. Only in our metaphysically generated system of logic is this phenomenology represented as an untenable, irreconcilable contradiction.

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In the context of perception, the term *Gestalt* (*Ge-stalt*) designates a configuration of elements, or parts, gathered, unified, and integrated into the formation of a coherent organic whole in such a way that (1) the form of the whole is different from a mere summation or collection of its elements or parts, and correspondingly, (2) these elements or parts would be different, or would function differently, if it were possible to isolate or abstract them from that whole, that form.

Now, consider two well-known examples of *Gestalten* (integrated, organic perceptual wholes): the duck-rabbit, derived from Jastrow and the no doubt equally familiar *Gestalt* that can be seen either as a pure white vase standing in a black space or, with equal ease, as the heads of two people—twins, in fact, since their silhouettes are isomorphic—directly facing one another across a white space. These drawings attract our attention and provoke the gaze to movement because of their uncanny perceptual ambiguity, encouraging an experience of reversibility: they invite us to shift our visual focus back and forth, seeing as figure what we had taken as ground and seeing as ground what we had taken as figure. They invite us to allow our eyes to play with the freely flowing interplay that is possible between figure and ground, softening, or rather dissolving the dualism that, especially in our epoch in the Western world, typically differentiates, and tends to fixate, figure, and ground. The duplicity of these images makes them intriguing: it also makes them a source of visual pleasure, as intelligible formations of meaning emerge and dissolve before our very gaze. In their presence, one experiences in their play a certain quite singular freedom: it is as if one were

magically transported back in time—back to the innocent enchantments of early childhood, when the nature of things, even the most ordinary, was still mysterious, still strange, still unstable and uncertain—and still open to free variation. Edges vibrated, boundaries were porous, shapes flexible, things hovered, secret affinities of shape and color revealed themselves. The identity of things underwent transformation, a familiar object suddenly becoming something else.

Once upon a time, in the magic of early childhood, that mythopoetic time this description invokes, our vision knew nothing of the disciplinary regimes to which, in due time, it would be subjected. Once upon a time, our vision could move freely, spontaneously, back and forth, between fact and fantasy, dream and reality, play and correction. Back in those days, vision was—for good or for evil—an affective attunement. For young children, *Gestalt* reversals are natural events, manifestations of a mimetic magic inherent in the visionary world. And yet, at the same time, these reversals are also, for the young, demonstrations that the natural world is hospitable to their exercise of freedom: there is room, within the unforeseeable nexus of natural causation, for their freedom to play. Why shouldn't a duck turn into a rabbit or a rabbit turn into a duck? Why can't a pen lying on the desk be a submarine that has just emerged from the depths of the ocean? And why can't a knotty, gnarled burl on the trunk of an aged tree be the visage that reveals a mischievous old forest spirit hiding within it?

See Paul Auster's beautiful evocation of this childhood *mimesis* in his *Report from the Interior*:

In the beginning, everything was alive. The smallest objects were endowed with beating hearts, and even the clouds had names. Scissors could walk, telephones and teapots were first cousins, eyes and eyeglasses were brothers. The face of the clock was a human face, each pea in your bowl had a different personality, and the grille on the front of your parents' car was a grinning mouth with many teeth. Pens were airships. Coins were flying saucers. The branches of trees were arms. Stones could think, and God was everywhere.⁴

The mimetic magic of childhood. Can that way of seeing things be recovered?

Seeing something *as* something else. The *Gestalt* shift, reversing figure and ground, letting a different configuration emerge, is a prime instance of a hermeneutical process: it is the hermeneutics that is inherently possible by virtue of the chiasmic dynamics, the interactions in the structuring of the

perceptual experience. That freely flowing energy, that *physis*-characteristic of structural formations ever in process of emerging and submerging, forming and unforming, appearing and withdrawing, is, I think, what in our perception Heidegger wants to encourage.

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Drawing inspiration from this early, pre-Platonic Greek thought, Heidegger recognized the need to recover, even for perception, their dynamic sense of the ways of the *cosmos*, and, in particular, our world: not only being in its *Aufgehen* and *Untergehen*, its emerging and perishing, its coming forth into presence and its withdrawing into absence, but, even more fundamentally, its boundless energy and creativity, its ceaseless flow of changing formations. Thus, he recognized the need to reconsider the fate, in our time, of the perceptual *Gestalt*, which is (1) compelled to fit into a subject-object structure that conceals the priority of a more fluid, more undifferentiated dimension of experience before and underneath it, and is (2) forced into a reification of figure and ground, arresting the natural flow, the dynamic movement in a yielding of the ground that makes possible the emergence and prominence of a meaningful formation or figure.

It could be useful to think of the dynamism of the ground in the figure-ground structure (*Gestalt*) of perception in relation to the way that Heidegger proposed to understand *physis*, which he takes to be one of the names for *being* in the thought of Heraclitus. Suggesting its transcendental functioning, which he thinks we moderns overlook and neglect, he argued for its uncanny, inherently inconspicuous mode of visibility:

Physis does not occur within what emerges and what has emerged in the manner of something that appears: rather, it is the inconspicuous in all appearing things. However, it is in no way “the invisible” [. . .]. *Physis* is not the invisible—on the contrary, it is what is seen inceptually, which, however, is for the most part never properly beheld. (GA 55: 143/H 109)

“In order to represent here the relationship in question,” he says, “take, for example, a room, which of course contains ‘space.’ However, we do not behold the space as such, but rather only the furnishings and whatnot (i.e., those things that appear as objects within that space).” So, paradoxically:

As the pure emerging, *physis* is more manifest than every manifest object; [and yet] it remains and unfolds as the inconspicuous. [. . .] In itself, and not only as some consequence or effect, the emerging as the

inconspicuous is more disclosive and more revealing than any conjoined thing pushed forth into appearance. What contains the more originary within itself does not require effects and activities, [. . .] and it shines from out of itself without contrived embellishments and trimmings, and without imposition [. . .]. The inconspicuousness rests in itself and does so only because in its very essence it gives favor to self-concealing. (GA 55: 143–44 /109)

The perceptual event always takes place in the interplay between concealment and unconcealment. We might thus say: In the perceptual event, being, *physis*, the figure-yielding ground in the figure-ground *Gestalt*, is that which *yields* in both senses of that word: it (1) yields and recedes into inconspicuousness in order to (2) yield, or generate and give favor to figuration. In other words, the ground (1) yields, or surrenders, its claim to attention in order to (2) yield, or generate, the figure in its greater visibility. The ground in the *Gestalt* is certainly visible; it belongs to the visible; but it is not visible in the same way that the figure is. We might call it “peripheral.”

In the emergence and formation of every perceptual *Gestalt*, there are two moments: (1) a process moment (the emerging-withdrawing of being) and (2) a structural moment (the moment in between the emerging and withdrawing, i.e., between unconcealment and concealment, in which the process settles for a time into a more enduring presence. For Heraclitus, however, *physis* never becomes totally stable, settled, reified; the structural moments that take place in the *Gestalt* remain intrinsically transitory. This is the vibrant vitality, the liveliness, the life, that Heraclitus recognized in all of nature—indeed, in the cosmos. Heidegger understood the “logic” of this dynamism, and he sought to exhibit its ontological importance in resisting reification and the destructiveness it involves. If we consider the ground, or field, that operates in the perceptual *Gestalt* to manifest the same “logic” that Heraclitus attributes to *physis* and that Heidegger attributes to *Sein*, I think we gain some insight into how the later philosopher’s critical reflections on the “forgetting” of being in metaphysics and on the reification of being in the Western life-world bear on the character of our experience, today, in seeing and hearing.

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Without rejecting the philosophical representation of the connection in perception and cognition between subject and object, but rather attempting to see it in its appropriate phenomenological context, Heidegger argues in *Being and Time* (1927) for a new way of experiencing and thinking about that connection:

Although unassailable in its facticity, this “subject-object connection” remains a really direful presupposition, as long as its ontological necessity and above all its ontological nature continues to be left in the dark. (GA 2: 79/BT 86.)

Even while continuing to think using vision as representative, as paradigmatic, Heidegger fought against the epistemic *priority* of the subject-object polarity in the paradigm of knowledge, truth, and reality. Vision is largely responsible for generating a paradigm representing perception and knowledge solely in terms of that structure.

In *Fundamental Problems of Phenomenology*, a lecture course that Heidegger gave in 1927, the philosopher emphatically argued against that representation of our experience:

We saw with reference to the perceivedness of the perceived [*bezüglich der Wahrgenommenheit des Wahrgenommenen*] that on the one hand it is a determination of the perceived entity but on the other hand it belongs to the perceiving—it is in a certain way objective and in a certain way subjective. But the complete separation [*Scheidung*] of subject and object misses [*reicht nicht aus*] the unity of the phenomenon [i.e., the dimension in which the perceiving and the perceived belong inseparably together]. (GA 24: 447/BPP 314)

In the 1943 text, “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16),” there is a passage of significance in this regard. In it, Heidegger asks us to consider:

Why is it that we are ever and again so quick to forget the subjectivity that belongs to every objectivity? How does it happen that even when we do note that they belong together, we still try to explain each from the standpoint of the other, or introduce some third element which is supposed to embrace subject and object? Why is it that we stubbornly resist considering even once whether the belonging together [*das Zusammengehören*] of subject and object [or, for that matter, the relation of *Dasein* and *Sein*] does not arise from something that first imparts their nature [*bewährt*] to both the object and its objectivity, and the subject and its subjectivity, and hence is prior to the realm of their reciprocity [*zuvor den Bereich ihres Wechselbezuges*] as completely distinct [i.e., in their oppositionality, their *Gegen-ständlichkeit*]? (GA 7: 266/EGT 102–3)

I regard this question, leading us into the dimension of the perceptual field where we human beings and the being of the beings we encounter

are joined in belongingness (*Zugehörigkeit*), to be one of Heidegger's most important insights in regard to the phenomenology of perception.

In his commentary on *aletheia* in fragment B16 (1943), Heidegger, faithful to the phenomenological method, takes a step back in order to draw our attention to the dimension of our perceptual encounter that *precedes* and *underlies* the formation and stabilization of the subject-object structure: a dimension where we are inextricably intertwined with the being of the beings encountered: intertwined in the draw and pull of a bonding relation (*Bezug*) so tight that one might say that there is a relation without two terms. Similarly illuminating is what he says at a certain point in his 1946 "Letter on Humanism," again suggesting that, preceding and underlying the formation of the subject-object structure there is a dimension of perceptual experience in which there is, always, a certain belonging-together of *Sein* and *Dasein*, and it is from within this belonging-together, this primordial indifferentiation, that the structure emerges, with the object appearing in a figure-ground *Gestalt*. Metaphysics, however, sees only the settled structure; it does not see *physis*, the emergence and submergence, the appearing and vanishing—nor, *a fortiori*, the dimension before and underlying the stabilization of a structure.

However, it is crucial that we understand that, for Heidegger, the "identity" in this belonging-together, the primordial dimension of our perceptual experience, is not a simple, undifferentiated identity, a settled, fixed state of unity; rather, it is the vibrant, dynamic, oscillating (*schwebende*) identity of identity and difference.

In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Merleau-Ponty proposed a similar deconstruction of the way that the structure of perception is represented in metaphysics, arguing,

We must rediscover, as anterior to the ideas of subject and object, the fact of my subjectivity and the nascent object, that primordial layer at which both things and ideas come into being.⁵

Consequently, he says,

My personal existence must be the resumption of a pre-personal tradition. There is, therefore, another subject beneath me, for whom a world exists before I am here, and who marks out my place in it. This captive or natural spirit is my body, not that momentary body which is the instrument of my personal choices and which fastens upon this or that world, but the system of anonymous "functions" which draw every particular focus into a general project.⁶

There is, then, as he would express it in 1945, not yet entirely free of Cartesian influence, “a communication with the world more ancient than thought.”⁷ This designates what, in the wording of Heidegger’s project, is represented as the primordial belonging-together of subject and object, man and world—what Merleau-Ponty suggests we think of as a pre-reflective, pre-conceptual, synesthetic, bodily felt belonging-together.

In Heidegger’s phenomenology, the “system of “anonymous functions” is represented by the hyphenated *Da-sein*, showing the human being connected to being in its thrown-openness. I think this “communication,” this “system of anonymous functions,” is what Heidegger was attempting to enter when, in order to get out of the subject-object structure and into the *Ereignis*—the appropriation operative in a *Sein-Menschsein* relation that is really a drawing-together (*Bezug*) and a belonging-together (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) preceding the emergence and formation of that structure—he suggests substituting the word “Bezug” for the word “Verhältnis” (relation) as the proper way to characterize it,⁸ thereby recognizing the *Schweben*, the *Gegenschwung*, the two-way, interactive, oscillating character of the connection, each pole *drawn* by and to the other, each pole appropriated (*einander überereignet*) by the other in the reversibility of their belonging-togetherness (GA11: 39–42/ID 31–33). Heidegger’s preference for the word “Bezug” shows his revisioning of Husserl’s intentionality, which does seem to be more of a static, linear *Verhältnis*, a relatedness that is not interactive, not reversible, not *wechselweise*. The revisioning recognizes a vibrant dynamic in the *Bezug*, according to which the pull or draw comes neither from the side of the object (realism) nor from the side of the subject (idealism); but it also thereby recognizes, in the belonging-together of *Mensch-sein* and *Sein*, the phenomenology of the *Ereignis*, the appropriation to ontological responsibility—responsibility for being—implicitly engaging all perception, all seeing and all hearing.

Writing about the Greeks, Heidegger could not avoid thinking of vision; but in following his own path of thought, he was led to question the reign of the vision-generated paradigm. Taking us into the elemental depths of the phenomenology of perception—into the dimension of its grounding—Heidegger challenged the representations of our perceptual experience that have constituted the very core of the vision-generated paradigm. Thus, in the text of a 1944 lecture on Heraclitus, Heidegger argued that even the separation (*Trennung*) of the belonging-togetherness of subject and object “is still a binding and relating [*ist noch ein Verbinden und Beziehen*]” (GA 55: 337/ H 251).

Although after *Being and Time* there are no more references in his writings to our pre-ontological understanding of being, Heidegger never really abandoned, and never actually forgot, this primordial dimension of our experience: what he would articulate so lucidly in his 1957 texts on “The Principle of Identity” and “Basic Principles of Thinking.” Moreover, in the “step back” (*Schritt zurück*) that he makes in his 1962 text on “Time and Being” (GA 14), going into this dimension of perception, Heidegger retrieves our appropriation, the claim on our responsibility (*Er-eignen*) in relation to being. The appropriation takes place in the dimension of perceptual experience that *precedes and underlies* the stable figure-ground formation and the structuring of the encounter in terms of a subject and an object.

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Heidegger’s argument for a phenomenological deconstruction is powerful and compelling; nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception is a significant enrichment, illuminating and articulating the emergence of the subject-object structure and the figure-ground structure from the elemental sensuous field in which, in regard to both formations, there is an inherent dynamic interaction, an original fluidity, that both rationalism and empiricism have failed to acknowledge. In saying that being and mind are “the same,” Parmenides was, I think, already intuiting or presupposing this underlying moment of elemental affective “indifference.” But in the European thought that emerged in Christian theology and continued to develop in the modern discourse from Descartes on, this bodily felt dimension of perceptual experience, a pre-ontological understanding of being, was lost to awareness and reflection. We need to retrieve this affective *Zusammengehören* and the pre-ontological understanding of being that it bears within it. In that retrieving lies our response-ability—hence the possibility of a history-breaking transformation in the character of our sensibility and corresponding perception.

Can we discover ourselves in our situated thrown-openness as *Da-sein*, laying out the conditions of intelligibility and meaning that constitute the fields of perception within which beings can come into presence? To experience this would be to recognize the depth of a belonging-together of subject and object, figure and ground that metaphysics represents as an opposition (*Gegen-stand, Gegen-über*). And it would be, moreover, the beginning of a recognition of our ap-proprietation, the claim on our ontological responsibility that the world that our existence, our presence, has opened, cleared, and inhabited inherently makes.

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I want to suggest, now, that the affectively constituted, more originary dimension of perception is experienced in what the ancient Greek philosophers called “*pathos*.” With the remarkable exception of Schelling’s system of metaphysics, which was no doubt a significant influence on Heidegger’s phenomenological explication of the *Mensch-Sein* interaction, and in which the earlier philosopher called attention to the “thrust” (*Schwung*) of primordial energy operating beneath conceptual experience,⁹ the metaphysics Heidegger inherited does not see this ontologically crucial dimension of *pathos*, because of its prejudice against sensibility and its favoring of conceptual thought. Metaphysics, settled into abstract concepts of the understanding, takes as primary and fundamental what is actually secondary. In *pathos*, however, we experience and recognize a certain not yet differentiated belonging-together of percipient and being.

Heidegger is right to recognize the importance of *pathos*. This recognition is manifest in his use of the word “*Bezug*” to describe the belonging-together: whereas “*Bezug*” suggests a relation involving a dynamic interaction, a reciprocal draw or pull, the word “*Verhältnis*” indicates a more differentiated, more polarized, less dynamic relation. Something similar should be argued in regard to the phenomenology operating in the figure-ground relation.

Perhaps initially provoked by Nietzsche, Heidegger undertook a powerfully compelling critique and deconstruction of the metaphysics he inherited: (1) a body-mind separation that essentially turns the body into a mindless substance while releasing the mind to float in the air; (2) a reified figure-ground structure that disregards its organic vibrancy, events of emergence and submergence, and the deep interplay of concealment and unconcealment; (3) a subject-object structure that reduces our existence to the condition of a subject and reduces things to mere objects; and (4) a subject-world relation that threatens to enclose the subject in a permanent solipsism, not even breaking out in the intentionalities of perception.

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In “Time and Being,” a 1962 lecture in which he distinguishes and also connects the two senses of “*Geschick*” (i.e., phenomenological givenness and historical destiny), Heidegger says, according to one translation, one interpretation, “The sending in the destiny of being [*Das Schicken im Geschick des Seins*] has been characterized [*gekennzeichnet*] as a giving [*ein Geben*, a making-possible] in which the sending source [*das Schickende selbst*, which I take to refer to the clearing, hence also to the ground, in the

perceptual *Gestalt*] keeps itself back [*an sich hält*] and, in this way, withdraws from unconcealment [*im An sich halten sich der Entbergung entzieht*]” (GA 14: 27/OTB 22). I am proposing to interpret Heidegger’s description of the *An sich halten* in terms of the phenomenological structuring of perceptual experience. What he is describing nicely fits the structure and operation of the clearing as field of perception; and it also nicely fits the phenomenology of the emergence, within that clearing, of the figure-ground structure constitutive of the perceptual *Gestalt*. Our concern in this chapter is precisely that *Gestalt* formation: its phenomenology and its peculiar destiny in the historical contingencies influencing our appropriation (*Er-eignung*): “appropriation” not only in regard to the achieving of our essential (proper) nature as beings thrown-open in our ex-istence as *Da-sein* but also in regard to the response-abilities concerning being—the being of beings—to which that nature in its dignity summons us as beings gifted with perceptual capabilities. Is there not some responsibility enjoined in the response-ability of perception? If so, what might it be?

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In both empiricism and idealism, philosophical thought has struggled to explain and understand the given in perception. Heidegger suggests a new way, at once intriguing and problematic, for us to think about it, connecting the given in perception (whatever is *geschickt*) to the idea of destiny (*Geschick*) in a meta-narrative grounded in his philosophy of history, and making that connection, as we shall see, by a leap into the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*). Thus, in the context of this volume, what Heidegger calls the way to our *Geschick* is something that could possibly be found in whatever it is that perception “gives” us—in whatever we are “given” or “sent” by way of perception. However, finding our way to this destiny depends, significantly, on how we are *responsive* to the *being* of the given, how we *receive* what is given.

For Heidegger, the reception of the given could not be more different from the receiving of “impressions” that Hume describes, as if our minds were like paper in a printing press; nor could it be more different from the impassive, existentially meaningless moment of “receptivity” and “reception” that Kant lays out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Neither philosopher thought of perception as a question of character—an experience that challenges our very sense of humanity, our sense of who we are as human beings. That is a thought that was left for Emerson, the American Transcendentalist, dutiful reader of Kant, to bring with great moral lucidity into the realm of thought.¹⁰ Moreover, for Heidegger, since what is given or “sent” (*geschickt*) by way of perception always bears hidden within it

a history of possibilities regarding the way to approach the future of our humanity, the character of our perception is of the utmost significance. What history-making response-ability is required of our perception? The trajectory of Heidegger's thought leaves us with this compelling question.

Contrasting the currently prevailing way of perceiving and apprehending the world with the way suggested by Parmenides' dictum ("mind and being are the same"), Heidegger states,

That which is, is that which arises and opens itself, and which, as what presences, shows itself to the one who correspondingly opens himself to that presence, by virtue of the way that he perceives and apprehends it [*den, der sich selber dem Anwesenden öffnet, indem er es vernimmt*]. (GA 5: 90/QCT 130).

I want to take this as an ontological description with performative force, suggesting how we might transform our perceptual experience so that, in its reception of the given, it achieves the potential its true, deep ontological nature is calling for—and, in fact, already schematizing in the openness and *pathos* of its most fundamental disposition.

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Perception is not totally passive and submissive in its reception of the given. It is an acquiescent receptivity that actively cooperates in disclosing and bringing-forth that which is given. In "The Question Concerning Technology," hoping to "prepare a free relationship" to technology by "opening our human existence to the *essence* of technology," Heidegger lays out the four different philosophical representations of what we think of as "causality," exposing all the different types of causation to critical question by gathering them into an essence for which he adopts the Greek term *poiesis*: "Her-vor-bringen," "bringing something about," or "letting something come forth into presencing" (GA 7: 7–16/QCT 3–15). But how, he asks, does this bringing-forth happen, be it in nature or in hand-work or in art? "What is the bringing-forth in which the fourfold way of occasioning [causing] plays?" "Occasioning," that is, making things occur, he explains, drawing the instrumental causes under the authority of *poiesis*, "has to do with the presencing [*An-wesen*] of that which at any given time comes to appearance in the enactment of bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*]. Bringing-forth brings hither out of concealment and into unconcealment." This "bringing-forth" is what "comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment." Such coming into unconcealment while leaving behind a realm of concealment is what some of the Greek

philosophers referred to as *aletheuein*. So, *techné* designates the distinctively *instrumental* ways of bringing-forth-into-presence that predominate in modern technology; and as such, this modern techno-logy has its distinctive logic, distinctive relationship to *aletheia*, unconcealment as the ground of the possibility of truth-as-correctness. Heidegger's way of introducing his critical thoughts regarding this modern form of *techné*, namely, by considering it in relation to *poiesis* and *aletheia*, enables him to expose its character, showing that, when properly understood as a singular type of bringing-forth and revealing, its *way* of bringing-forth-into-presence has taken on in our world of today the distinctive character of a "challenging" (*Herausfordern*): in other words, *techné* has become a bringing-forth that brings forth a *Ge-stell* in the sense of im-position, an ordering into position and standing-reserve (*Bestand*), serving the will to power. What prevails today is the *Gestell*: "We name that challenging claim which gathers man thither to impose on self-revealing the order of standing-reserve: *Ge-stell*" (GA 7: 20/QCT 19). This way of bringing-forth, imposing an order of totality and permanent availability, "blocks the shining-forth and holding-sway of truth": "Das Ge-Stell verstellt das Scheinen und Walten der Wahrheit" (GA 7: 29/QCT 28). In the epoch ruled by the *Gestell*, the *Gestalt* is challenged forth "into the frenziedness of ordering [*das Rasende des Bestellens*] that blocks every view into the coming-to-pass [*Ereignis*] of revealing [*jeden Blick . . . verstellt*] and so radically endangers [*von Grund auf gefährdet*] the bond [*Bezug*] to the essence of truth" (GA 7: 54/QCT 33). Today, our world is increasingly technologized, so the way in which our technologies bring forth increasingly dominates our lives, making their requirements paradigmatic, modeling and determining all our other ways of bringing-forth-into-being. Increasingly, these technologies determine the very *being* of all beings—how we hear and see all that *is*. In the violence of reification, the forces constitutive of the *Gestell* are attacking the very *being* of what appears in the perceptual *Gestalt*.

According to Heidegger, the character of the *Ge-stalt* "gathering," as a bringing-into-presence, could not be more divergent today from the character of the gathering-and-bringing-forth that supposedly took place in the premodern world. In the premodern world that he invokes, bringing-forth was a bringing-into-presence in which what showed itself "rests and moves freely [*beruht und schwingt*] within what we call revealing [*das Entbergen*]" (GA 7: 13/QCT 11). So, the question is whether it might be possible for us living today to enter somehow into "a more original [*ursprünglicheres*] revealing and hence to experience the claim of a more primordial [*anfänglicheren*] dimension of truth" (GA 7: 29/QCT 28). Could there be a formation

of the perceptual *Gestalt* different from the gathering-and-bringing-forth that today, in the epoch of the *Gestell*, can only be a gathering into total reification? If we are to prepare ourselves for the possibility of a *Gestalt* free of reification, then, says Heidegger, “it is necessary, as a last step upon our way, to look with yet clearer eyes into the danger [*noch helleren Auges in die Gefahr zu blicken*]” (GA 7: 30/QCT 29).

We need to reflect critically on the historical conditions that are given to us (*beschiedt*), because those historical conditions bring within them the terms in accordance with which it might be possible for us to challenge the domination of the *Gestell* and encounter beings in a way that would more nearly accommodate or befit their proper being. What is at stake in this challenge, this struggle against the *Gestell*, is therefore not only the fate of particular beings in our world but also, ultimately, the future of being itself.

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It is important that we keep in mind, here, that, according to Heidegger, “the open [i.e., the clearing] is being itself” (GA 54: 224/P 150). In the preface to a text on Parmenides that he presented in the final session of his 1973 Zähringen seminar, Heidegger, interpreting the Greek philosopher’s claim that thinking and being belong together as bearing on the phenomenology of perception, offered this comment, directing our attention to the open clearing as that field or matrix that makes it possible (*Anwesenlassen*) for something to emerge or come forth into meaningful presence:

If perception is to be such that it can encounter the perceivable, it must hold itself open for [. . .] for what? For presencing [*Anwesen*].

Both, perception and presencing [*Vernehmen, Anwesen*] require for their own possibility [. . .] a free and open dimension within which they can encounter and engage one another. (GA 15: 401/FS 93)

This summons us to recognize and understand our appropriation, and the concomitant responsibility to be the *Da* that, by essence, we are already but also not yet: *Da-sein*. Not yet, because in his 1940 Freiburg lectures on Nietzsche and European nihilism, Heidegger laments the fact that in our modern epoch, the *Da*, the dynamic, vibrant ground that we are, the clearing that our very existence intrinsically opens for the *Gestalt* encounter between subject and object, has been neglected. And this, in turn, has meant that the original fluidity, the interactive, *freischwebende* character of what we now think of as the subject-object encounter has become reified, hardened, and reduced to a dualism of opposition. However, he still found considerable hope in the fact that, despite the pressures of our culture, it is

still possible to enlighten people about the dangers in reifying that encounter and about the crucial function of the perceptual ground, the dimension of openness.¹¹

This suggests questions about how in the Western world the figure-ground structure in perception, more fully articulated as the subject-object-ground structure, or as the subject-object-clearing structure, might be differently experienced. Thus, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger asks us to consider: “Might there not perhaps be a more primally granted way of disclosing [i.e., a bringing-into-perceptual-attention, a *Her-vor-stellen*] that could draw the saving power into its first shining forth in the midst of the danger, a way of disclosing things that in the technological age rather conceals than shows itself?” (GA 7: 35/QCT 34). Following this question, he reminds us that “there was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name *techné*. There was a time when that way of disclosing which brings forth the truth of being into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called *techné*.” Could there be, then, in *all* our visual engagements—not only in those, like the *Gestalt*-reversal puzzles, set up for the play in duplicity—more freely flowing interactions between subject and object and between figure and ground, subject and ground? Could we, in all our *ontic* perceptual engagements, get (back) in touch with the *pre-ontological* dimension that, however strongly blocked or repressed, always precedes and underlies the subject-object structure?

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The German word for perception, *Wahr-nehmung*, bears within its two fragments the memory of the two alternatives it reconciles: our perception can either emphasize the *wahr-*, caring, protecting, preserving, faithful to what is, or emphasize the *-nehmen*, a reception that is, or could be grasping, seizing, imposing its will, narrowing down the ground or field to what can be controlled, reduced to visibility. However, when the two fragments are put together, the word suggests the possibility of a perception, a *Gestalt* formation, that receives with care and responsibility what it is given.

In “The Anaximander Fragment,” Heidegger observes that “our usual way of representing things would like to exclude from what is present all absence” (GA 5: 350/EGT 37). Getting into the phenomenology of our perceptual experience, which, he argues, always takes place in a time-space interplay—the *Zeit-Spiel-Raum*—of concealment and unconcealment, Heidegger says,

Whatever lingers awhile becomes present as it lingers in the jointure [*in der Fuge*] that arranges presencing jointly between a twofold absence.

[. . .] What has arrived may even insist upon its while solely to remain more present. That which lingers perseveres in its presencing, [. . .] It strikes the willful pose of persistence, no longer concerning itself with whatever else is present. It stiffens—as if this were the way to linger—and aims solely for continuance and subsistence. (GA 5: 355/EGT 42)

Although Heidegger expresses his argument in the form of a phenomenological description that seems to locate the willful pose—in effect, a usurpation—entirely on the side of the entity that enters one’s field of vision, what he is concerned about here is the willful imposition that characterizes the act of perceiving itself, such that the perceptual *Gestalt* gets separated and isolated from the interplay of presence and absence in the clearing (*Lichtung*), compelled to remain, as if suddenly reified, frozen in a sealed-off, monadic presence. He calls this attitude “rebellious,” “an insurrection,” and considers it to be characteristic of the perception that reigns in our present time.

In *Event* (1941–1942), Heidegger formulates what might well be considered to be the most crucial argument in his phenomenological project with regard to perception:

A *being* is a *possible* object, something standing over and against, only because it stands in the open domain of *beyng* [i.e., stands in the clearing]. Precisely where there is an “over and against” [*Gegenüber*], something more fundamental occurs essentially [namely], the clearing of the “in-between” [*die Lichtung des Inzwischen*]. (GA 71: 17/E 10)

The phenomenology of perception is nicely articulated here. All perception takes place in the clearing of a perceptual field. And it is within the clearing of that field, a grounding of relationality, that the percipient “subject” encounters the perceived. In that clearing, the being that appears, in perception, as “object” over and against a human “subject” *belongs together with* that percipient subject in the togetherness, reciprocity, and reversibility of a certain back-and-forth dance (*Schweben*) of address and claim. But, *preceding* the formation of the subject-object structure, and always remaining as ground *underneath* it, what Heidegger is bringing to our attention is the fact that there is a *more fundamental, originary dimension*—call it the pre-ontological dimension—involved in the forming of the *Gestalt*, in which a certain oscillation (*Gegenschwung*) prevails, a dynamic, two-way (*wechselseitig*)¹² interactive flow, bringing together what metaphysical reflection on the relation between *Mensch* and *Sein* has *re-presented* as figure and ground, subject and object.

Everything that in any way *is* is only as appearing in its relationality—a network of relations. This network of relations is a field, a ground, a clearing—it is the necessary condition of meaningful appearance, inherently open. It is imperative that we let the clearing *be* clearing, let the ground *be* ground; and that means that, as the figure emerges into salience, we preserve and protect the sheer *energeia*, the play of the ground or field in its natural propensity for *yielding and withdrawing* into self-concealment. In the forming of a meaningful *Gestalt*, the ground *yields* in both of its two possible senses: (1) it retreats, or recedes; but in that dynamic, (2) it also at the same time brings forth.

However, Heidegger believed that what is distinctive of the modern age is the way that the withdrawing and self-concealment of the ground is either neglected or actively defied. Although the yielding of the ground, as ground, inherently resists totalization, making absolute control of the perceptual situation impossible, nevertheless, in the present world, where a technologically advanced form of capitalism is ever-expanding its global reach, its planetary dominion, the nihilism of the will to power increasingly prevails, constantly subjecting the being of the ground to processes that bind it in obedience to economic forces we struggle to control.

The more powerful the subject becomes, the more that which it experiences in perceptual interaction is reified, immobilized in the state of objecthood. Can we discover and recognize ourselves in our way of apprehending as objects what we encounter in the world? Guiding us to this self-recognition and self-understanding, Heidegger hopes to release the figure-ground and subject-object structures from their reification—a situation that is as stultifying for the human being reduced to a subject as it is destructive for whatever is reduced to the being of an object.

There are things one can see only by not staring, things one can hear only by refraining from intently listening for what is expected, delicate fragrances—the subtle exuberance of certain flowers—that one can gather only by not trying to catch them, flavors one can taste only by savoring, textures one can feel only with the touch of a caress. Such experience is possible only when we let the ground gathering in the *Gestalt* simply *be*.

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In “Moira (Parmenides, VIII, 34–41),” concerning a meditation by Parmenides on the dispensations and apportionments over which *Moira*, embodiment of fate, deity guarding the crossroads of decision, presided, Heidegger observes,

Ordinary perception [*Das gewohnte Vernehmen*] certainly moves within the lightedness of what is present [*im Gelichteten des Anwesenden*] and sees

what is shining out in color [. . .]; but it is dazzled by changes in color [*aber tummelt sich in ihrem Wechsel*] and pays no attention at all to the still light of the lighting [*achtet nicht des stillen Lichtes der Lichtung*]. (GA 7: 259–60/EGT 100)

Obsessed with the multitude of things that concern it in the course of everyday life, ordinary perception takes the clearing for granted without recognizing the clearing as that which makes perception possible (see also GA 54: 201/P 135). From a philosophical point of view, ordinary perception is obsessed and distracted: it functions in obedience to the duality (*Zwiefalt*), the ontological difference between being and beings, but without understanding it. Mindfulness of being is what preserves and protects the truth of beings; but only the philosopher turns away from the shining, colorful, dazzling things—or from whatever attracts the attention of the many—to give thoughtful attentiveness to the clearing itself.

Heidegger's commentaries on the pre-Socratics, especially Parmenides and Heraclitus, offer an extraordinarily rich gathering of phenomenological reflections, interpreting their experience with regard to perception. Writing on Parmenides, Heidegger points to a crucial difference:

Looking, human looking [*Das Blicken, auch das Blicken des Menschen*], is, as experienced in its originary moment [*ursprünglich erfahren*], not the grasping of something [*nicht das Erfassen von etwas*], but the self-showing [*das Sichzeigen*] in view of which there first becomes possible a looking that grasps something [*ein erfassendes Blicken*]. If man experiences looking only in terms of himself and understands looking as precisely “going out of himself” as ego and subject, then looking becomes a “subjective” activity directed onto objects [*auf “Gegenstände” gerichtete “subjektive” Tätigkeit*]. (GA 54: 152/P 103)

The difference Heidegger is registering here is the difference between how Parmenides is presumed to understand the experience seeing and how we of today tend to experience seeing. If what Heidegger says here faithfully describes the phenomenology of the pre-Socratic experience, then there is indeed a difference from which there is much to be learned. According to Heidegger, the pre-Socratic philosophers, if not also their contemporaries, experienced looking not only in terms of how that which *is* gives itself to be seen in the realm of visibility; they also experienced looking as the way the human being emerges and comes into presence in the midst of a world (GA 54: 152–53/P 103). For these Greek philosophers, the visual situation was not, as idealism represents it, a one-way event, privileging of subject-position; rather, it was a two-way (*wechselweise*) interaction,

in which the human being who is looking and that which is seen *belong together* in what Heidegger would elsewhere call a reversible oscillation or “Gegenschwung.” Moreover, the dimensions of the pre-Socratics’ field of vision were, it seems, fundamentally different from ours, because, for them, “the uncanny” (*to daimonion*) surrounded the ordinary: it was “that out of which all that is ordinary emerges [. . .] and that into which everything ordinary falls back” (GA 54: 151–52/P 100–2). However, living as we do in today’s world, we overlook that primordial dimension in our experience of being. And yet, even on our own terms, we cannot avoid encountering and recognizing something like the Greek *daimon*, manifest in the form of the enigmatic, the immeasurable, the abyssal, all that still exceeds our categories of understanding and our systems of control. For the vigilant and mindful, the uncanny is always present, even now, haunting even our most ordinary perceptions.

According to Heidegger’s interpretation, the pre-Socratic Greeks, or at least the philosophers among them, experienced the perceptual situation as one in which the things they looked at were felt to be looking back at them:

What appears to the looking [*Was dem Erblicken erscheint*] is the sight that solicits man and addresses him [*an den Menschen ergehende und ihn ansprechende Anblick*], the look [*der Blick*]. The looking performed by man in relation to the appearing look is already a response [*die Antwort*] to the original look, which first elevates human looking into its essence. (GA 54: 158/P 107)

For Parmenides, things in the world *let* themselves be visible. In a sense, they “look” at us, and in that visibility, they address us; their appearing is a form of questioning. Their “looking” asks: what are we going to do with them? Thus, their “looking” calls *us* into question. However, the “looking” that first makes visible presence possible—what Heidegger, demythologizing the ancient Greek way of seeing the world, calls “clearings”—is “more ordinary” than what we commonly think of as looking. The clearing is a “looking” that *opens*, opens in a way that *lets* things show themselves, while at the same time sheltering things and keeping them safe in its dimension of concealment. But *we*, as *Da-sein*, are the clearings: it is our being-in-the-world in openness that makes it possible for beings to show themselves. So ultimately, Heidegger argues, what matters is contemplating the character of our own way of looking and seeing: “which one, the look of emerging into presence or the look of grasping, has the essential priority in the

interpretation of appearances and on what grounds is this ordering determined?” (GA 54: 159/P 107). Which character will prevail? Much depends, Heidegger thinks, on whether or not we are able to retrieve for actual living something constitutive of the early Greek experience: a sense of the emergence of things into presence and, too, a sense of their departing—but also, even more deeply, a sense of the perceptual event as making a claim on our responsibility.

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Since, despite horizons, the ground that manifests in the perceptual *Gestalt* is inherently boundless, even indeed abyssal, the will to power that reigns when the ego-subject assumes absolute sovereignty regards the ground as a perpetual threat to its domination. The ground resists totalization, resists reification, resists reduction to a figure. Every ground that is turned into a figure can appear as such only against another irreducible ground, a ground always already withdrawn from the perceptual grasp. But beginning in the modern epoch, the grounding dimensionality constitutive of the perceptual *Gestalt* has increasingly come under assault.¹³ Today, exceptional exertion is required to resist the various pressures, the various forces, rigidifying, reducing, and closing off the perceptual *Gestalt*. Seeing tends today to become a fixated staring: everything is framed, a picture. The play of shadows and reflections, indicative of the concealments that belong to the truth of being, is to be ignored. Hearing avoids a commitment to deep listening, turning a deaf ear to fields of resonance: echoes, reverberations, overtones, and undertones. And the philosophical representations of perception have reflected such ways of experiencing.

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If we understand “being” in terms of the perceptual presencing of beings, then isn’t the figure-ground relation that is constitutive of the *Gestalt* a repetition in perception of the ontological difference? According to Heidegger’s brief attention to the *Gestalt* in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” where it is a question of the mighty strife and struggle between earth and world, a *polemos* that the Greek temple brought to heightened presence within the region that it gathered around it, it can be concluded that the structure formed in perception is, in essence, a local manifestation of this very strife and struggle, and that therefore, wherever and whenever a figure emerges for a while from the ground and a visual *Gestalt* is formed, a vision appropriated by the truth of being might also see it as a local configuration where the ontological difference is taking place: a dynamic differentiation in the field within which the presencing of beings is unfolding.

To see this—that is, to see the *Gestalt* hermeneutically as an ontological event of differentiation (as *polemos*)—would accordingly be, I think, the most appropriated way of seeing the deeper significance of what is there (what *es gibt*) to be beheld. In thinking about the work of art, Heidegger says,

The strife [*Streit*] that is brought into the rift [*Riß*] and thus set back into the earth [*zurückgestellte*] and fixed in place [*festgestellte*] is the *Gestalt*. Createdness of the work means: truth as set in place in the figure [*Festgestelltsein der Wahrheit in die Gestalt*]. *Gestalt* is the structure [*das Gefüge*] in whose shape the rift [the differentiation or difference] composes and submits itself [*sich fügt*]. This composed rift [*gefügte Riß*] is the fitting or enjoining [*Fuge*] of the shining. (GA 5: 51/PLT 64)

The ontological difference, characterized in the Parmenides lectures as a primordial “differentiation” (*Scheidung, Entscheid*), is operative in each and every moment of perception, but always concealing itself within, and as, the withdrawn, ever-receding abyssal ground of the ontic-level differentiation of the figure, appearing by coming forth out of its ground (GA 54: 223–43/P 150–63).

To recognize the operation of the ontological difference as taking place in the subject-figure-ground difference of the perceptual *Gestalt* is to recognize that difference as indicating, or echoing, the primordial *Riß*, the moment of primordial differentiation (*Ur-teil*) underlying all our perceptual syntheses and judgments (*Urteilen*)—and to recognize, moreover, that this rift, this di-vision, de-cision, and scission (*Scheidung*) is a manifestation of the ultimately anarchic, abyssal “norm” or “law” (Greek: *arkhé*) underlying and gathering all our so-called “acts” of perception. Once this is brought into mindfulness, then, as Heidegger says in his third Le Thor Seminar (1969), it is no longer the presence as such (*Anwesenheit*) of a being that draws one’s attention, but rather the self-withdrawing, self-concealing *ground*, ultimately a limitless dimension, the *Es gibt*—being itself—that *lets* presencing take place, and which the presencing beings, or entities, covers over in order to make themselves figures of attention independent from, and of greater interest than, the ground, the open clearing.¹⁴ The turn in mindfulness that the philosopher is calling for is a turning of reflective attention *away* from what is present (*das Seiende*) toward the event (*Ereignis*) of its sheer presencing, the phenomenon in which something is coming-into-presence. It is that *event* that appropriates us in our being as *Da-sein* (GA 5: 346/EGT 34).

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In “What Are Poets For?” (1926–1950), Heidegger tells us that “objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] blocks us off against the open”: “Sie sperrt uns jedoch gegen das Offene ab” (GA 5: 298/PLT 120). The representation of the structure of our perceptual experience in terms of an encounter between a subject and an object appearing *against* its ground, a representation that is distinctly modern in its provenance, reduces the being of the thing to objecthood and the being of the human being to subjecthood. It also reifies the ground. Hence, it essentially serves the will to power of the modern-age ego-subject, simultaneously functioning (1) to defend the ego-subject’s sovereign position and (2) to control what is presencing in the encounter by reducing it to the typified, reified being of an object.

There is, in this impositioning, a defensiveness that might be considered pathological, were it not so commonplace, so “normal.” Thus, Heidegger says, “the most venturesome daring does not produce a defense. But it creates a [deep] secureness for us”: “Das wagendere Wagen stellt keinen Schutz her. Aber es schafft uns ein Sichersein” (GA 77: 111/CPC 72). “We are secure,” he argues, “only where we neither reckon with the unprotected nor count on a defense erected within willing. A [genuine] security exists only outside the reifying that turns away from the Open” (*ibid.*).

†

By 1945, in thinking about the metaphysical representation of the relation between subject and object, Heidegger will take steps to prepare for another way of experiencing and understanding what that representation was failing to recognize. In his “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking” (1944–1945), the Scientist comes around to recognizing something that Heidegger often strenuously argued, namely, that the subject-object relation is actually “only a historical variation of the relation of man to the thing, insofar as things can become objects”: “offenbar nur eine geschichtliche Abwandlung des Verhältnisses.” This stirs the Scholar to observe that “the same is true [*das Selbe gilt*] of the corresponding historical change of the human being into an ego-subject [*Ichheit*]” (GA 77: 140/CPC 91).¹⁵ If the representation of human beings and things and the representation of the structure of their relation are “only” historical variations, hence a matter of contingency, not eternal fate, then there are indeed grounds for hope. Heidegger’s recognition of this historical contingency and variability is of decisive importance, getting rid, as it does, of old metaphysical pictures. It resolutely dispatches to the basket for trash all *metaphysical* interpretations of the “Geschick” and its “Schickungen”—destiny and its historical dispensations.

†

Perhaps a time will come when the “hidden glory of the visible world” (*die verborgene Herrlichkeit der sichtbaren Welt*) might be “granted” (*offenbart*) to eyes more deeply rooted than ours are today: eyes that Novalis once referred to as being of “a new and higher kind,”¹⁶ developing a capacity, or dis-position that Heidegger would have connected to a mindful awareness of the clearing as that which makes possible wondrous events—the “truth of being”—in the interplay of the visible and the invisible.

Carrying forward Heidegger’s poetic imagination, which found so much inspiration and guidance in the pre-Socratics’ philosophical texts, I would like to suggest that we consider how we might rescue the perceptual *Gestalt* from the imposition of conditions that today are turning it ever more catastrophically into an instantiation of the nihilistic *Gestell*, and that, going beyond the prospect of this historically urgent release, we might draw on Heidegger’s poetized evocations of the fourfold (*das Geviert*) to reflect on the hermeneutical phenomenology that would characterize this liberated *Gestalt* in its ontological attunement of perception.

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In *The Principle of Reason* (1955–1956), a seminar on Leibniz’s fundamental principle, Heidegger draws on the two meanings of *Geschick*, namely as signifying not only the shared destiny of humanity but also what is given in our clearings, namely the possibilities for achieving that destiny that might be available in and through the historical conditions we find ourselves given, inviting us to consider the destiny of being (*Geschick des Seins*) not as some metaphysical force or agency, much less as something operating like fate [*Fatum*], but rather as the phenomenological interaction between our percipient ability and the given conditions for the experiencing of what presences:

Being, in proferring itself [*indem es sich zuschickt*], brings about [*erbringt*] the free openness of the temporal play-space [*das Freie des Zeit-Spiel-Raumes*] and, in so doing, first provides human beings with the freedom of an openness to whatever fitting ontological possibilities happen to be available at the time [*den Menschen erst ins Freie seiner jeweils schicklichen Wesensmöglichkeiten befreit*]. (GA 10: 140/PR 94)

Although we must assume some responsibility for the openness-character of the clearing, its nature and its dimensions are not ever under our control: the destiny (*Geschick*) of being that, as the possibility of a different experience of what it means to be, we are granted by the very nature of our

existence is, and has always been, filtered and refracted [*zugeschickt*] through the prevailing historical conditions, the various *Schickungen*, in which we find ourselves. In our time, the granting of those conditions, powerfully determining the ontological possibilities, has been taken over by the imperatives of the *Gestell*. More frequently now, the temporal play-space is losing its free openness; and the ground that once yielded promising possibilities is now threatened by the forces of reification. Dependent on the yielding of that ground, the dynamic logic operative in perception is increasingly surrendering the gift of destiny to the work of fate, hostile forces, and situations we have neglected to comprehend and transform. That is what, urgently, Heidegger wants to tell us.

Could the *Gestalt* that has increasingly been turned into a manifestation of the *Gestell* be rescued and redeemed? What new world is Heidegger envisioning? That is the question that his poetic projection of the *Geviert* attempts to contemplate. In another chapter, we shall consider this transformation of the *Gestalt* and the world it gathers.

NOTES

1. See Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 33.

2. Bernard Freydberg, "Heidegger's Heraclitean Comedy," *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 37 (2007): 260.

3. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, 28.

4. On the child's mimetic openness to correspondences and equivalents (seeing something as something else), and on the process of recollection that retrieves this wonderful mimetic experience from the past, see Paul Auster, *Report from the Interior* (New York: Picador Press, 2013), 3. Auster's inspiration was, no doubt, Walter Benjamin's essay "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken, 1986), 333–36. For the German, see Benjamin, "Lehre vom Ähnlichen," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), vol. 2.1, 204–10; and "Über das mimetische Vermögen," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2.1, 210–13. I imagine that Auster was also familiar with Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion of "seeing as" in his *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 193–214.

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945), 254; *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 219. Perhaps this is the most fitting place to acknowledge the presence of a significant partner in this project: one who, for

the most part, remains silent and invisible, but whose influence, even when not named, not cited, is operative in fact everywhere. From the very beginning of my acquaintance with Heidegger's thought, I was also always steeping my reflections in the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty: not only his major published work the *Phenomenology of Perception* but also his much later writings, published under the title *The Visible and the Invisible*, writings in which it seems that the shock in a "second reading," a much later encounter with Heidegger's thought, finally shattered and vanquished the remaining influence of Cartesianism still operating in his phenomenology, opening up for further enquiry hitherto unexplored dimensions. We shall find, perhaps not, after all, so surprisingly, that, once Heidegger had purged his thinking of its remaining metaphysical tendencies, enabling him, after the impasse he encountered in completing the project in *Being and Time*, to reformulate his project and concentrate in a different, but still strictly phenomenological way on the appropriation and awakening of our ownmost potential; and that, correspondingly, once Merleau-Ponty removed from his thinking the very last vestiges of Cartesianism, guided by his renewed reading of Heidegger, a "second" reading, so to speak, that induced a shock that was truly shattering, there is in regard to essentials little difference between Heidegger's phenomenology of perception and the phenomenology of perception that figures in Merleau-Ponty's late manuscripts, published in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Both projects submit the phenomenology of perception to the *hermeneutics* of concealment and unconcealment. And both projects also share a concern for the cultivation of our perceptual capacities, although only Heidegger ventures to contextualize that cultivation in light of a critique of our entire way of life in the contemporary world that suggests a corresponding transformation of our perceptual response-abilities.

6. Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 294, in the French, 254 in the English translation.

7. Ibid.

8. GA 11: 39/ID 31: "Der Mensch ist eigentlich dieser Bezug der Entsprechung, und er ist nur dies": "The human being *is* in its essence, its ownmost truth, this mutually drawing bond and only this."

9. See Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Karl Friedrich August Schelling (Stuttgart-Augsburg: J. G. Cotta, 1856–1861), vol. I, 292, 394, 400.

10. See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 469–92.

11. Heidegger, *Nietzsche: European Nihilism*, GA 48: 177: "Wir Heutigen und manche Geschlechter vor uns haben diesen Bezirk der Unverborgenheit des Seienden längst vergessen und nehmen ihn so gerade ständig in Anspruch. Wir meinen, ein Seiendes werde eben dadurch zugänglich, daß ein Ich als Subjekt ein Objekt vorstellt. Als ob nicht hierzu vorher schon ein Offenes sein müßte, innerhalb dessen Offenheit etwas als Objekt für ein Subjekt zugänglich werden und die Zugänglichkeit selbst noch als erfahrbare durchfahren werden kann. Die Griechen

jedoch wußten, wenngleich unbestimmt genug, von dieser Unverborgenheit, in die herein das Seiende anweist und die es gleichsam mit sich bringt. Wir können uns trotz allem, was seitdem an metaphysischer Auslegung des Seienden zwischen den Griechen und uns liegt, dieses Bezirks der Unverborgenheit erinnern und ihn erfahren als jenes, worin auch unser Menschsein schwingt.”

12. On the “wechselweise” *Bezug* binding *Mensch* and *Sein*, see Heidegger, “Die Gefahr,” *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 64; “The Danger,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 60; and see “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 124–25; “The Principle of Identity,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 116–17.

13. Perhaps there is no narrative and analysis regarding the phenomenology of nihilism as the denial of the ground that is richer and deeper in existential and ethical significance than what one finds in F. W. J. Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom*. See *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings Sämtliche Werke, VII Band, 1 Abteilung 1805–1810*, ed. K. F. A. Schelling (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1860), 333–416, but especially 406–8; *Schelling: Of Human Freedom*, trans. James Gutmann (Chicago: Open Court, 1936), especially 86–90.

14. See Martin Heidegger, *Vier Seminare: Le Thor 1966, 1968, 1969—Zähringen 1973* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977, 1986), 101–7; GA 15: 363–68; *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul, 59–62. For more on the perceptual *Gestalt*, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 465; *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul; New York: Macmillan, 1962), 406; *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 239, 300; *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 185, 247. Also see Martin C. Dillon, “Gestalt Theory and Merleau-Ponty’s Concept of Intentionality,” *Man and World*, vol. 4 (November 1971): 436–59. I would like to note here the publication of Antonio Cimino and Pavlos Kontos, ed., *The Phenomenology and Metaphysics of Sight* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

15. Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche (1944–1945)*, GA 77: 140; “Αρχιβασιη: A Triadic Conversation on a Country Path between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Guide,” in *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 91. Also see “Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking,” in *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John Anderson and E. Hans Freund (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 78. And see “The Turning” for Heidegger’s point about the historical character of the subject-object relation: “Die Kehre,” in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11: 115, 116, 122; “The Turning,” in *The Question of Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 37, 39, 47. It is a point intended to support his vision and argument for the possibility of a transformation in the character of this ontological relation. Heidegger unequivocally recognizes that the epoch determined by the rule of the *Gestell* is not a fate, not an order that cannot be overcome or surpassed. See in particular, “Die Kehre,” GA 11: 115: “Wenn das Gestell ein Wesensgeschick des

Seins selbst ist, dann dürfen wir vermuten, daß sich das Gestell als eine Wesensweise des Seins unter anderen wandelt." And see "Die Kehre," GA 11: 122: "Das Gestell ist, obzwar verschleiert, noch Blick, kein blindes Geschick im Sinne eines völlig verhangenen Verhängnisses." Related supportive arguments, referring to "eine je epochale Prägung" in and as which *Sein* takes historical shape, are also to be found in (1) "Die Onto-theo-logische Verfassung der Metaphysik," in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11: 73; "The Onto-Theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics," in *Identity and Difference*, bilingual ed., trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 67, and in (2) "Protokoll zu einem Seminar über den Vortrag 'Zeit und Sein'," in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14: 61; "Summary of a Seminar on the Lecture 'Time and Being'," in *On Time and Being*, 52, where Heidegger speaks of the "wechselnden Gestalten, in denen das Sein epochal-geschichtlich sich zeigt."

16. Novalis, *Das Dichterische Werk*, in *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 3rd enlarged and revised ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1977), vol. I, 203–4.

Chapter 3

THE GESTELL

The *Gestalt* in a Time of the Total Imposition of Order

The nineteenth century was incapable of responding to the new technological possibilities by creating a new social order.

Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*¹

[Immanent critique] must dissolve the rigidity of the temporally and spatially fixed object into a field of tension drawn between the possible and the real.

Theodor W. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*²

All reification involves a forgetting.

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno,
*Dialectic of Enlightenment*³

Negative dialectics penetrates its hardened objects through possibility—the possibility of which the objects' actuality has blocked, yet which gazes out of each one.

Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*⁴

Our objectification is a blocking [*sperrt*] of the openness.

Heidegger, "What Are Poets For?"⁵

World and *Gestell* operate [. . .] in opposite ways, in regard to the essence of being. World is the guardian of the essence of being. *Gestell* is the complete forgetting of the truth of being.

Heidegger, "The Danger," *Insight into That Which Is: Bremen Lectures 1949*⁶

“Ge-stell” is the name for the gathering of the imperatives [*die Versammlung des Herausforderns*] that position [*zu-stellt*] man and being opposite one another in such a way that they reciprocally confront and challenge one other [*sich wechselweise stellen*].

Heidegger, “The Principle of Identity”⁷

We live under an intensive compulsion and necessity to perceive [. . .].

Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*⁸

Das Gestell [i.e., the universal, total imposition of objectification] is, in a sense, the photographic negative [i.e., the obverse and denial] of appropriation and responsibility [*des Ereignisses*].

Heidegger, *Seminar 1969 in Le Thor, France*⁹

2.12: The picture [*Das Bild*] is a model of reality. 2.1512: It [the picture] is like a measure laid over reality [*wie ein Maßstab an die Wirklichkeit angelegt*].

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*¹⁰

Heidegger’s greatest contribution to philosophy is, I think, his comprehensive narrative interpreting the history of philosophy. The story he wants to tell presupposes, and is guided by, a certain philosophy of history, a history of the different ways in which being (what it means to be) has been understood. This history is driven by a critique of the modern world and a corresponding critique of its metaphysics, a discourse that, even while critically reflecting with great thought on the features of this world, continues nevertheless to reflect and manifest the world’s forgetfulness of being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) and consequently, too, its nihilism, that is, the reduction of being to nothingness.

The story he wants to tell, however, is also *oriented* by the idea of a destiny (*Geschick*) of promise and hope awaiting the Western world, a destiny to be sought in, and retrieved from, the historical conditions that we have been given to live with—what Heidegger calls the *Seinsgeschick*. This destiny of promise and hope is to be salvaged from the emptiness and desolation of our spiritual wasteland: a “eine vollständige Verwüstung.”¹¹ With an ever-greater acceleration in the technological management of everyday life, time and history are dehumanized: we are losing touch with a meaningful experience of time and history, hence too with a vision of

human purpose, inheritance, and a future he thinks, problematically, in terms of destiny. And yet, even in texts conveying his darkest, grimmest thoughts, Heidegger will never renounce his hope for a “transformation” of the world: not only the possibility of a new stage in the achievement of our essential humanity but also the possibility of a new epoch in the history of being, a new and better way of experiencing, or disclosing, the being of beings. It is this hope, this vision, that deeply motivates his philosophy of history and informs his way of reading the history of philosophy.

†

According to Heidegger, in today’s world, “the essence of technology lies in the *Gestell*.” What is this *Gestell*? Often translated as “enframing,” it names the epoch of the modern world, determined by a regime of disclosiveness that orders and imposes constant availability and reification on the being of all beings in its way of disclosing them:

Its regime [*Walten*] belongs [*gehört*] to destiny. Since a destiny at any given time starts human beings on a way of disclosing [*einen Weg des Entbergens*], the human being, while on this path, is continually on the brink of the possibility of pursuing and pushing forward only that which is disclosed in ordering [*im Bestellen*], and of deriving all standards [*Maße*] on this basis. Thereby, the other possibility is blocked, [*verschließt sich die andere Möglichkeit*, namely,] that the human might be admitted more and sooner and ever more inceptually [*anfänglicher*] to the essence of that which is unconcealed and to its unconcealment, in order that we might experience as our essence our needed belonging to, and responsibility for, disclosiveness [*die gebrauchte Zugehörigkeit zum Entbergen*]. (GA 7:26–27/QCT 26)

In the so-called “modern world,” beginning, in terms of the prevailing narrative regarding the history of philosophical thought, with Descartes, the *Gestalt* that figures in perception undergoes a process of reification: the *open whole* increasingly becomes a *closed totality*. This has profound ontological consequences: for the flourishing of cultural life, for the freedom and justice operative in our political life, for the responsible inheritance of history and for the promise ventured in a new projection of the future.

†

In “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” a lecture from the late 1960s, Heidegger contemplates the ending of the discourse we call “philosophy” and the beginning of what he calls “thinking,” arguing that “it remains possible that in the ending of

philosophy another beginning of thinking is concealed.”¹² However: “The direction that philosophical thinking has followed along the way of its history from its beginning is fulfilled in an ending of philosophy,” in which it “disintegrates into independent sciences.” Moreover:

The character of the sciences, which becomes more and more clearly pronounced, is easily recognizable in the way the sciences understand the categories that in each case define and structure the ontology of their thematic fields, namely, in terms of the instrumental. The categories are regarded as operative exemplary ideas whose truth is measured on the basis of the effect that their application brings about within the progress of research. (Ibid., 215)

Thus, he says,

Scientific truth is equated with the efficiency of its effects. The sciences take on themselves the task of forming the exemplary concepts that are needed. These exemplary concepts are permitted only a technical-cybernetic function, so that all ontological content is excluded. Philosophy becomes superfluous. (Ibid.)

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us even to imagine the beginning of philosophical thought in archaic Greece:

In its beginning, the thinking that is later called “philosophy” finds itself initially directed to perceive and to say the astonishing [*das Erstaunliche*], namely, that beings are and how they are. What we call “beings,” ambiguously and confusedly enough, the Greek philosophers experienced as what-is-present [*das Anwesende*] because being was granted to them as presence [*Anwesenheit*]. In this [presence], what was thought together was the passage from presencing to absencing, from arriving to disappearing, from emerging to passing away, that is, movement. (Ibid., 216)

Reading the earliest Greek philosophers, all we can say is that

in the course of the history of philosophy, the experience and interpretation of the presence of what-is-present is transformed. The end of philosophy is reached when this transformation culminates in its final possibility. The history of this transformation and its completion has thus far not been recognized because Greek thinking was overlaid with modern ideas. (Ibid., 216)

However, when we attempt to free ourselves from our prevailing representations, we can see that

presence in the sense of the objectiveness of *objects* remained unknown to Greek thinking. To them, what-is-present was never given as an object. Presence in the sense of objectivity first begins to be thinkable for philosophy when the what-is-present [. . .] was found by Descartes in the *Ego sum* of the *Ego cogito*. (Ibid., 216)

Consequently, from Descartes on,

subjectivity constitutes the region in which and for which an objectivity is first framed together. And in the meantime, the presence of what-is-present has also lost the meaning of objectivity and objectiveness. What-is-present concerns the human being of today as that which is in each case orderable. Presence, even though it is hardly ever considered and expressed as such, shows the character of the absolute orderability of everything and anything. (Ibid., 217)

Heidegger argues, however, that

the transformation of the presence of what-is-present is not based on a change in the views of the philosophers. Rather, philosophers are only the thinkers that they are insofar as they are able to correspond to the transformed claim of presence. (Ibid., 218)

Reflecting on this orderability, a historical development distinctive of our time, he asks, “To what extent is orderability the last phase in the history of the transformation of presence?” “No human being,” he says,

can decide whether yet more transformations are impending. We do not know the future. Nevertheless, in order to determine orderability as the last possible phase in the historical transformation of presence, no prophetic glimpse into the future is needed. The insight into the present day is sufficient, if only this insight, instead of describing the state of the world and the situation of human beings, looks to catch sight of the kind of the presence of human beings and of things, along with the presence of humans toward things. Consequently: In the dominance of the orderability of what-is-present, in this itself, the power of the imposed placing comes to light inasmuch as this power places human beings themselves in such a way as to securely place everything that is present, and therefore human beings themselves, in their orderability. (Ibid., 218)

In the course of struggling to understand how our present plight came about, Heidegger noticed something of the utmost significance:

From its beginning and throughout its history, philosophical thinking has reflected on what-is-present with regard to its presence, but has not recognized presence itself in the history of its transformation, nor recognized presence in view of that which determines it as such. The question concerning this determination requires that thinking find its way into a region that remains inaccessible. (Ibid., 219)

What metaphysical thought has overlooked in the representation of all our experience—overlooked for reasons inherent in its logic—is the clearing: that which makes perceptual experience—presencing (*Anwesenheit*)—possible. Recognizing and understanding the functioning of this dimension of our experience is crucial to the transformation Heidegger considers both necessary and urgent. But we also need to recognize and understand the reasons for our blindness, denying what, hidden, underlies all forms of experience.

†

In this chapter, I shall further develop my argument that, in the modern world—the world the beginning of which we might identify with the philosophical thought of Descartes—the perceptual *Gestalt* is getting increasingly reduced, reified, fixated, totalized, and standardized. That is to say: it comes increasingly under the sway of the *Ge-stell*, the imposition of a totalizing order of constant availability. “*Gestell*” is Heidegger’s name for the character of our contemporary world as it is manifest ontologically, that is, in terms of its ontological character, its determination of the conditions in accordance with which we can experience the being of beings. “*Gestell*” names the total imposition of an order that reduces everything to the constant availability and positionality of an object of control and use: reifying not only human beings but also forests, mountains, and rivers, and all the other animals. As Heidegger characterizes it in *The Event*, it is “a compulsion toward totality” (*Zwang zur Totalität*) that takes possession of everything (GA 71: 83/E 70). We of today, he argues, “have fallen irredeemably into bondage to an ever-accelerating technologization and machination [*Machenschaft*],” and remain completely oblivious to the nature of the danger confronting our very humanity (GA 71: 155/E 133).

With his remarkable gift for intuition and insight, Emerson already recognized the compelling influence of the *Gestell*, observing, in “The Method of Nature”:

My eyes and ears are revolted by any neglect of the physical facts, the limitations of man. And yet one who conceives the true order of nature, and beholds the visible as proceeding from the invisible, cannot state his thought without seeming to those who study the physical laws, to do them some injustice.¹³

In this chapter, we will draw on Heidegger's critical observations to give thought to what all this means, what it involves, in regard to our experience with vision. How, in the epoch of the *Gestell*, is that dehumanization imposed on the perceptual *Gestalt*? In what way is the peculiar "rationality" in *Machenschaft* operative in our looking and seeing? We need more than ever now to give thought to how beings are brought to presence in the epoch of the *Gestell*, when not only beings, but being itself—being as that which makes presencing possible—can be reduced to the imposed positionality, hence the being, of an object (*Gegen-stand*).

There are many pathologies at work today in our culture. Our perception is not free of them. In reflecting on the spirit of his time, the poet Mallarmé observed, "Nowadays, with our eyes dazzled by iridescences, opaline shimmerings and scintillations, we could hardly gaze without difficulty on something as hazy [*vague*] as the future."¹⁴ As we already noted, this bedazzlement was of concern to Heidegger, too (GA 7: 259–60/EGT 100). He lamented how it draws our attention away from the clearing, the perceptual field, as that which lets visible things appear in their intelligibility as visible. Without a lively, vigilant sense of the perceptual clearing, our deep connection to past and future, history and destiny, is severed.

As Heidegger says, in thinking about Nietzsche, being concerns the coming-into-presence—that is, the unconcealment—of entities. We implicitly experience and understand the being of entities in terms of being. So, although being is not a thing, and in that sense, it *is* nothing, nevertheless it plays an absolutely crucial role in our relation to entities, our experience and knowledge—and in that sense, it is not unimportant, not nothing. Indeed, it is decisive. In our time, however, beings are under siege. We are living in an epoch of nihilism that Heidegger defines in terms of the *Gestell*. This nihilism is the reification of beings, subjecting them to our will to power; and it is also the reduction of (their) being to nothing-of-importance, hence to a nothingness that denies to being its crucial role. What is that role? The importance of being lies in its reminding us that entities are necessarily such that they exceed what we (can) know of them, and indeed are always richer in meaning than we are capable of recognizing in our concepts. Thus, insofar as we keep being in mind, we can, at least

to some extent, protect entities, protect beings, from the nihilism of the *Gestell*—the reductionism and reification imposed on entities by the will to power in all its operations and institutions. We must protect the thought of being, the *being* of beings, because that is the only way to protect beings.

In “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God Is Dead,’” Heidegger discusses various forms of the verb “stellen” (to position, set in place, fixate, pin down) in interpreting the will to power:

To preserve the levels of power which the will has attained at particular times requires that the will surround itself with that which it can reliably and at any time fall back on and from which its security is to be guaranteed. These surroundings enclose the enduring existence, at the immediate disposal of the will, of that which presences [*unmittelbar verfügbaren Bestand an Anwesendem*] [. . .]. This enduringness [*Beständige*] is however turned into a permanence [*Ständigen*], i.e., into that which stays [*steht*] constantly at one’s disposal [*Verfügung*], only by its being brought to a standstill and set in place [*Stellen zum Stand*]. This placing [*Stellen*] has the nature of a production [*Herstellens*] that re-presents [*vor-stellenden*]. (GA 5: 239/QCT 179)

In this chapter, we will reflect on the im-positional, reifying nature of the *Stellen* that, in the age of the will to power, takes over the formation of the perceptual *Gestalt*, with fateful consequences for our way of seeing and hearing, and also, thereby, for the world that our seeing and hearing inhabits.

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In his 1943 Summer Semester lecture course on Heraclitus, Heidegger proposed an interpretation of the nihilism taking over our time, connecting it to the imposition—the stamping into position—characteristic of the *Gestell*, making the human gaze serve the will to power in structuring our perceptual experience and indeed determining the properties of all the beings we encounter:

Everything that is, only *is* insofar as it is the “product” and therefore the “property” of the human—namely, of the human as the highest configuration of the will to power. The human is precisely that concrete thing from whose gaze nothing may remain concealed and from whom no being can withdraw, for the human alone and in the first place stamps all beings with the mark of “being.” (GA 55: 67/H 52–53)

Even the very being of the human being—the meaning of our humanity—is under siege in this epoch of the *Gestell*. But, as Heidegger shows, the

impositional logic of the *Gestell* was already inherent as a historical possibility—only a possibility, not an inevitable fate—in the way Heraclitus experienced and thought about *physis*, being, nature, the cosmic order: “From the not ever submerging thing, how may anyone be concealed [from it]?” (ibid.). This can seem awesome and sublime when we are thinking of the divinity of the sun and its light; but it became a frightening reality when, in the twentieth century, there was no place to hide from the totalitarian state.

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Rilke’s poetry speaks to our time with great clarity about the *Gestell* that is operative in our vision. In his “Duino Elegies,” he points out,

With all its eyes the creature-world beholds
the open. But our eyes, as though reversed,
encircle it on every side, like traps
set round its unobstructed path to freedom.¹⁵

We behold the openness, but courage fails us; we encircle and delimit the clearing, defensively enclosing the openness and blocking what might be coming from beyond the horizon.

The poet feels the operation of an inherent violence that, in the epoch of the *Gestell*, tends to prevail in our way of looking and seeing. In his “Sonnets to Orpheus,” after reflecting on the way blooming flowers open, he addresses us, naming us “the powerful ones,” the “violent ones”—“Wir, Gewaltsamen,” and he asks,

We, with our violence, are longer-lasting.
But *when*, in which of our lives,
are we at last open and receiving?¹⁶

Heidegger lets us know in no uncertain terms that he recognized this violence in our way of relating to things—for instance, in the way we look and see. What is the way to an alternative? In “Wendung” (“Turning”), a poem he wrote in 1914, Rilke put all his hope into the practicing of “heart-work,” because, he said, “the world wants to be nourished by love.”¹⁷

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In “The Turn” (1949–1950), the text of a lecture, Heidegger warns of the ever-growing danger he calls *das Gestell*, reminding us that we must be the guardians of the coming to presence of being. “The danger,” he says, “is the epoch of being coming to presence as the comprehensive imposition of order [*Gestell*],” that is, briefly stated, as the absolutely total imposition

of a regime of reified, closed meaning, a regime that attempts to reduce everything to total presence and constant availability.¹⁸

Heidegger's term, *Gestell*, often written with a hyphen, as in *Ge-stell*, in order to emphasize an organized assembling (*Ge-*) that positions everything in totalizing reification (*-stell*), is frequently translated by the invented word “enframing,” suggesting closure and indeed foreclosure. And, in the context of his argument in “The Age of the World Picture,” translating “*Gestell*” by “enframing” does bring out one of its most significant features. However, since the meaning of this word is not perspicuous, I prefer to define it, as I have done here, so that I can continue to use the German word.

In the nihilism of this regime, there are forces at work in the world that increasingly pressure the *Gestalt* that forms in perception, making it reified and reifying—an event belonging to, and always reinforcing, the *Gestell* (GA 79: 73–74/QCT 46, BF 68–69).

In his lecture on “The Question Concerning Technology” (1955), Heidegger characterizes the *Gestell* this way:

Ge-stell means the gathering together [*das Versammelnde*] of that setting-upon [*Stellens*] that sets upon man [*den Menschen stellt*], challenging him forth [*herausfordert*], to bring the real into unconcealment [*entbergen*], [but] in the mode of ordering [*in der Weise des Bestellens*] as standing reserve [*als Bestand*]. *Ge-stell* means that way of disclosing [showing, presenting, bringing out] which holds sway according to the essence of technology. (GA 7: 21/QCT 20)

And he calls our attention to the way our seeing of things is affected by the conditions laid down for us under the domination of the *Gestell*: “The *Ge-stell* blocks off [*verstellt*] the shining-forth and holding-sway of truth [*das Scheinen und Walten der Wahrheit*]” (GA 7: 29/QCT 28). In other words, it aggressively controls and obstructs the openness of the clearing, that which “sends,” or makes possible, the presencing of all beings. This regime of control, enforcing a certain reification, things firmly fixed (*festgestellt*) in their dispensation, is, he says, the “extreme danger,” “die äußerste Gefahr” (ibid.). As he observes in “What Are Poets For?,” “Objectification [*Vergegenständlichung*] blocks us off against the open [*sperrt uns jedoch gegen das Offene ab*]” (GA 5: 298/PLT 120). And then he adds, offering an ontological explanation that bears within it the most profound psychological astuteness: “The more venturesome daring [*Das wagendere Wagen*] would not produce a defense [*Schutz*]. It would actually create a security

or safety for us [*ein Sichersein*].” The real danger lies in failing to see *beyond* what presently presences into the dimensionality from out of which what presences emerges. The real danger lies in failing to make the phenomenological turn, entering into the phenomenon of presencing—“in ein ursprünglicheres Entbergen einzukehren” (GA 7: 29/QCT 28). We are secure, in fact, “only where we neither reckon with the unprotected nor count on a defense erected within willing. [Because] real safety exists only outside the objectifying that closes us off from the open” (GA 5: 298/PLT 120). Paradoxically, it is only when we “yield ourselves [*überlassen*] to the undistorted presence [*unverstellten Anwesen*] of the thing,” yielding, that is, to what Rilke calls our “unshieldedness,” our *Schutzlossein* in the openness, trusting that fundamental openness, in which the bond (*Bezug*) bringing *Mensch* and *Sein* together is not yet divided, mediated, and turned into an opposition, in fact a dualism; it is only then that we can hope to enjoy what is greatest in our engagements with the world (GA 5: 10/PLT 25). However, in our present time, a time determined by the will to power and its *Gestell*, a strange relation, a troubled reciprocal appropriation, prevails—“ein seltsames Vereignen und Zueignen waltet” (GA 11: 45/ID 36, BF 117). In today’s world-order, what prevails are calculative, instrumental—hence essentially “economic”—relations to all things, all beings, including, most dangerously, relations among human beings.

In Heidegger’s narrative, there once was a time—*einstmals*—when *techné* was experienced as *poiesis*, a revealing, or unconcealment (*Entbergen*), that brought forth a truth in beings, letting them be “in the splendor of radiant appearing” (*den glanz des Scheinenden*) (GA 7: 35/QCT 34). Might we of today see things in keeping with that way? Might we be capable of breaking out of an ontological framework that limits our experience of what *is* to just two modes of being: readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandensein*) and presentness-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*)? That capability seems very difficult, if not impossible, in today’s world.

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What will occupy much of Heidegger’s thinking after the publication of *Being and Time*, and especially in the years following World War II, is (1) a critique of the will to power driving the modern world into the abyss of its ontological forgetfulness and, by way of contrast, (2) an evocation of the character of life lived according to an ontological understanding of being and how that understanding affects our way of relating to what is and what is not. Such an understanding, transforming our perception and sensibility, could profoundly transform the world, no doubt in ways at present virtually unimaginable. However, although it is desperately needed,

Heidegger is under no illusion regarding the magnitude of the difficulty even in demonstrating this need. If the desolation of the earth—its ever-extending *Venwüstung*—is not seen, despite its visibility; if the deadness of the silence in forests which songbirds used to enchant is not heard; if we no longer miss the visibility of the stars at night because of all the electric lights here on earth; and if the loss of a sense of our shared humanity is not felt, then what transformation, and what renewing inception, interrupting the chain of events we call history for the sake of a true enlightenment, could still be possible—not only for us but, even more, for those generations coming after us? Although looking and seeing, listening and hearing are “natural” events, not matters we normally have to will, if we are to develop their ontological dimension, their deep belonging to the very *being* of beings, then there is much we need to learn in our capacity for seeing and hearing: a skillfulness, or *Schicklichkeit*, that would begin to embody the character that befits the destiny (*Geschick*) that, in texts such as his “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger envisions for the achievement of our humanity.

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In his 1935 Freiburg lectures, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger reflected on the ontological struggle he discerned taking place in the world of his lifetime: a struggle not merely over the *meaning* of being but also over whether or not there is any need to give thought and care to being. Challenging and subverting the Nazi invocations of struggle that he was hearing and reading, Heidegger encouraged his compatriots to take up a very different struggle: the struggle to protect and preserve the truth of being. “The struggle [*Kampf*] meant here,” he says, “is an originary struggle [*ursprünglicher Kampf*]”: a struggle for “the un-heard of [*das Un-erhörte*], the hitherto un-said and un-thought.” Significantly, Heidegger explains what is at stake in terms of the visibility of things present-at-hand (*Sichtbarkeit vorhandener Dinge*):

The eye, the seeing, which once viewed the sway of things in an originary way, [. . .] has now been reduced to mere observing and inspecting and staring [*Das Auge, das Sehen, das ursprünglich schauend einstmals in das Walten erst den Entwurf hineinschaute, hineinsehend das Werk her-stellte, wird jetzt zum bloßen Ansehen und Besehen und Begaffen*]. Our looking is now only something optical [*Der Anblick ist nur noch das Optische*]. (GA 40: 66–67/IM 66, IMM 51–52)

In the age of the *Gestell*, this is how things are. And it is telling that Heidegger explains the character of this age in a diagnosis of our way of seeing.

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In his poem-fragment, “In the lovely Blue. . .,” Hölderlin felt compelled to wonder: “Giebt es auf Erden ein Maß?” “Is there any measure on the earth?” “Is any measure given to us?” Answering his own question, he replies, emphatically and decisively, “There is none.” And yet, he does not yield to despair, holding on to a vision of hope: “Is God unknown? Is he manifest like the sky? “This is what I would prefer to believe: He is the measure of man. Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth.” “Dieses glaub ich eher. Des Menschen Maß ists. Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde.”¹⁹

We no longer know the proper measure. We have reduced the immeasurable to something we can measure. But that loss of the immeasurable has meant that we lose all sense of the finite, the measure befitting our nature, our dwelling here on this planet Earth. Consequently, that which we *can* measure, a measure over which we *are* able to exercise our will to power, replaces the immeasurable as *that by which* we measure and orient our lives. We are losing our moral compass.²⁰ Our gestures now are prone to violence, violating, sometimes in the subtlest of ways, all they reach and touch and handle and hold: we no longer carry a firm sense of the gestures that are befitting, the gestures that embody the appropriate measure. Reflecting on Hölderlin’s thought, Heidegger says,

What is the measure for human measuring? God? No. The sky? No. The manifestness of the sky? No. The measure consists in the way in which the god who remains unknown is revealed *as* such by the sky. God’s appearance through the sky consists in a disclosing that lets us see what conceals itself, but lets us see it not by seeking to wrest what is concealed out of its concealedness, but only by guarding the concealed in its self-concealment. Thus, the unknown god appears as the unknown by way of the sky’s manifestness. This appearance is the measure against which man should be measuring himself. (GA 7: 194–208/PLT 216–29)

“A strange measure,” Heidegger admits, “perplexing to the common notions of mortals, inconvenient to the cheap omniscience of everyday opinion, which likes to claim that it is the standard for all thinking and reflection”:

A strange measure for ordinary thought, and also in particular for all merely scientific ideas, certainly not a palpable stick or rod [*Maßstab*], but in truth simpler to handle than they, *provided* our hands do not abruptly grasp but are guided by gestures befitting the measure [*Gebärde die dem Maß entsprechen*]. (Ibid.)

Without the immeasurable ground, now reduced to something entirely measurable, a ground increasingly within our power, we lose our grounding at the very moment when, in a tragic delusion that eventually reveals its truth, we believe that we are firmly grounded, having finally gained mastery over the ground as immeasurable measure.

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In “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), Heidegger argues with stunning insight that, for the first time in world-history, our world has been turned into “picture,” an enframed, mastered totality: “The fact that the world can become picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age [*die Neuzeit*]” (GA 5:90/QCT 130). For the very first time, “the being of that which *is* consists in the fact that it is brought before man as the objective, placed in the realm of man’s knowing and controlling, and is in being only in this way” (ibid.). Everything that *is* comes into being in and through its being-positioned (*ge-stellt*), set in its visible totality before us, enframed like a picture. The being of beings now has meaning for us only in its being-positioned—its *Vorgestellt-sein*. This is a truly earth-shaking anthropocentric remaking of the world—a fateful remaking, an ontological regime in which we human beings emerge deeply estranged from ourselves, altered in our being even more disruptively than are all the things we have so recklessly turned into mere objects for our will to power.

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In *Being and Time*, Heidegger points out that “by looking at the world theoretically [in abstraction from practical engagements that situate us in the world], we have already *dimmed it down* [*abgeblendet*] to the uniformity of what is purely present-at-hand [*vorhanden*]” (GA 2: 184/BT 177). Later in this same work, he notes another way in which things are dimmed down: “In ‘setting down the subject,’ we dim entities down to focus [. . .], so that by thus dimming them down we may let that which is manifest be seen in its own definite character as a character that can be determined” (GA 2: 207/BT 197). This dimming-down (*Einschränkung des Blickes*) takes place in our perception, making the object endure the same violence from which the ego-subject itself is suffering.

There is also a certain violence in the reduction of seeing to a line of sight (*Blickbahn des Anblicks*), as if seeing were like an arrow intensely aimed at its targeted object, ideally positioning that object directly in front of the eyes (GA 40/IMM 99). In Husserl’s phenomenology, vision is depicted as like a ray or a beam. This misses the wider, more diffused, more expansive dimension, which is such that we visually encompass and apprehend an

entire environment. Husserl's beam-like vision and beam-like intentionality are the logical products of his egology, a transcendental idealism. But insofar as these descriptions are actually instantiated, a certain violence in vision is involved. The narrowing of vision to the figure of focus means that there is no space for the play of light, for radiance, for shining and shimmering, gleaming and glowing, shading and shadowing. The warmly radiant beauty that we imagine in thinking, through the words of the Greek philosophers and poets, the bygone world of those Greeks is impossible in the epoch of the *Gestell*. We can *imagine* the radiance of *aletheia*, "the truth of being," and we can imagine the effulgent energy of *physis*, that which is forever emerging into the light of presence; but we are not able without great strain to *see* what presences in *our* world in such a phenomenology. Without the open time-space of the clearing, nothing could ever radiate and shine.

For the early Greek philosophers, looking is not merely the perception (*Vernehmen*) of beings, but always an "Anblick des Seins," a "looking of being" on the basis of a primordial unity, a "primordial consent" (*anfänglichen Einvernehmen*), between man and being—which is why those Greeks did not know the concept of object and never thought of being as objectivity (GA 54: 157–60, 219/P 107–8, 147). For these early Greeks, *physis* did not mean "the physical" as modern physics and the other natural sciences understand it. Rather, it meant something like an eternally dynamic effulgence in ongoing growth (*Gewächs*):

The self-clearing emergence from itself, which brings-forth, from concealment into unconcealment, that which emergently presences. *Physis* is the bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*], clearing and emerging from itself. (GA 79: 64/BF 60)

However, Heidegger argues, insofar as the bringing-forth involves a setting-down, a bringing-to-place, a *Stellen*, the epoch of the *Gestell* is a destiny that, while remaining concealed from the Greeks, was already "announced" in the very first epoch in the history of being, even though it was originally experienced in connection to growth as the gathering of what grows (*ibid.*).

The *Gestell* is a regime that imposes on things its ordering, its categories, its uses, its values; as Heidegger repeatedly said, it encourages us to assault them. Could this violence be avoided? Only, it seems, if the ontological conditions we are given—the so-called *Seinsgeschick*—were to make it possible for us to provide for the thing a "free field" (*ein freies Feld*

gewähren) in which we could let the thing disclose its true character, its presence as a thing (GA 5: 10/PLT 25). Heidegger believes that, if there is ever to be an epoch after the *Gestell*, we must achieve a deeper insight into the hidden latent essence of technology in regard to its way of bringing-forth. We need to envision *techné* as *poieisis*. But first of all, we must find our way back into the “guardianship of being” that claims and appropriates us (GA 79: 70/BF 66).

Heidegger believes, however, that, precisely in the time of greatest danger, a “turning” is possible: Though still ruling over our looking and seeing, yet not recognized and understood as such, the *Gestell* is, “although veiled, still glance [*Blick*], and no blind destiny in the sense of a completely ordained doom [*kein blindes Geschick im Sinne eines völlig verhangenen Verhängnisses*]” (GA 79: 68, 75/BF 64, 71; QCT 37, 47). Heidegger accordingly permits himself to imagine the possibility of such a “turning.” Once again, his visionary thinking is entrusted to the language of visual experience:

The turning of the danger comes to pass suddenly [*ereignet sich jäh*]. In this turning, the illuminated clearing belonging to the essence of being suddenly lights up. This sudden self-lighting is the lightning-flash [*Das jähle Sichlichten ist das Blitzen*]. (GA 11: 120/QCT 44, BF 69)

In this moment, the “truth of being” shows itself: we learn that what we need urgently to protect and preserve is: the open, the clearing—that which enables the meaningful presence of beings.

Thus, in his major work on Nietzsche, Heidegger argues that the promise of destiny depends on *our* safeguarding the dimension of concealment—“das Ausbleiben des Seins”—that encompasses the clearing; it depends, that is, on our vigilance in holding the disclosive capacity of the clearing open for promising possibilities for the future:

Insofar as being is the unconcealment of beings as such, being has already addressed itself [*zugesprochen*] to the essence of humanity. Being itself has already spoken out for, and laid claim to [*vor- und sich dahin eingesprochen*], the essence of humanity [. . .]. Addressing [us] in this way, [. . .] being is the promise of itself [*Sein ist das Versprechen seiner selbst*]. Thoughtfully encountering being itself in its staying-away [its *Ausbleiben*, i.e., its resistance to the nihilism taking over our historically given present] means: to become aware of this promise [*dieses Versprechens innwerden*], the promise as which being itself “is.” (GA 6.2: 368–69/N4: 226)

We should understand this thought, this *Entgegendenken*, as a warning against the nihilism that threatens to reify the clearing, being as the openness to a dimension of meaning not reducible to current intelligibility, a dimension that always remains withdrawn, concealed outside the prevailing horizon of the clearing. That dimension of being is nothing thing-like, but its nothingness is not insignificant. Indeed, it is only by virtue of our *protecting* that “nothing” in its withdrawing from nihilism, that is, “staying away” from the *Gestell*, that history could become promise and prelude.

However, even though fatalism is not justified, our perceptions are shaped and our actions are constrained by the historical conditions we find ourselves given. Thus, it matters how we understand history and our relation to it. This is why Heidegger’s critical reading of the history of philosophy, which he connects as much as possible with a critique of our contemporary world, is ultimately guided by a philosophy of history:

We tend to locate history in the realm of mere happening [*Bereich des Geschehens*], instead of thinking history in accordance with its essential origin from out of destining [*aus dem Geschick*]. (GA 79: 69/QCT 38, BF 65)

That is, instead of thinking history in terms of (*aus*) the promising ontological possibilities that the historical conditions are (still) granting us. “History,” for Heidegger, never refers merely to a chronological succession of past events. It always refers to the retrieving of a past by means of an interpretation bearing ontological meaning for the future. In the epoch of the *Gestell*, however, this understanding of the past is not encouraged. The past is dead, its meaning buried in its chronological position.

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In this regard, there is an intriguing remark in “The Age of the World Picture.” It invites us to give thought to the phenomenology of the shadows, for even when we notice them in the course of our everyday life, we seldom, if ever, ponder their ontological significance, their role in the time-space interplay, the *Spielraum*, of concealment and unconcealment:

Everyday opinion sees in the shadow only the lack of light, if not light’s complete denial. In truth [*In Wahrheit*], however, the shadow is a manifest, though impenetrable, testimony [*offenbare, jedoch undurchdringliche Bezeugung*] to the concealed emitting of light [*Leuchtens*]. In keeping with this concept of shadow, we experience the incalculable as that which, withdrawn from representation [*Vorstellen*], is nevertheless

manifest [*offenkundig*] in whatever is, pointing to being [*das verborgene Sein anzeigen*], which remains concealed. (GA 5: 112/QCT 154)

The “concealed emitting of light” refers to the clearing. The shadow, drawing our attention away from the thing that casts it, compels us to recognize in its presence what substance-metaphysics cannot conceptualize.

One could make an analogous argument regarding the ontological significance of the echo, which, as it withdraws and fades, draws us into the sounding of an abyssal silence. The shadow and the echo are extraordinary gifts to perception: their secret (*Geheimnis*) is, for anyone disposed to give it deep thought, a confirmation in the realm of the sensible of an ontological dimensionality that cannot be reduced to the presentness of an objectivity readily available to serve the imperatives of the *Gestell*. Heidegger’s reflection on the shadow stirs him to express his conviction that the truth of being “will be given over to man when he has overcome himself as subject, and that means when he no longer represents that which is as object” (GA 5: 113/QCT 154). Shadows and echoes are opportunities to experience, for a moment, our release from the ontology that rules in the *Gestell*.

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Nothing, I think, can represent the character of the *Gestell* in perception better than the Gorgon’s stare. In *Being and Time*, there are—so far as I know—at least three brief references to the stare: “ein starres Begaffen eines puren Vorhandenen” (GA 2: 82, 93, 99/BT 88, 98, 104). I am not aware of any other text in which it is named or discussed. Nevertheless, Heidegger seems to realize intuitively that visual perception, and the stare in particular, is a compelling instantiation of the way that the impositional character of the *Gestell* functions: not merely objectifying but also fixating, holding in place, imposing a position, permitting no movement. The stare is a form of violence: it is, in fact, deadening, mortifying.

The stare is not the same as the gaze that tarries; nor is it the same as watching or observing. Heidegger reflects on it in discussing the phenomenology of our different ways of relating to the being of things, the being of beings. To stare at something, in contrast to using it, or in some other way interacting with it, is to relate to it as being in the mode of presence-at-hand: *Vorhandensein*. Heidegger defines it as preeminently “representational,” because “representation” in German is *vor-stellen*, meaning “to set before” or “to position before.” What is stared at is held constant in its positionality of presence before one. Thus, it is inherently aggressive, *confrontational*, compelling what it sees to stay directly in *front* of its narrowly focused visual beam. And it is imposing, forcing what it sees into reification

within the subject-object structure. In the time of the *Gestell*, perception tries to achieve absolute control over the presencing of what presences, imposing a *frontal* view, a *frontal* ontology.

Might we overcome, or get beyond the ontological epoch of the *Gestell*? Is another way of relating to beings possible—a way, namely, that would show more respect for, or do greater justice to, their being, their essential nature? Is another formation of the perceptual *Gestalt*, a formation very different from the one that prevails in the time of the *Gestell*, at all possible? As I shall argue in the next chapter, *Gelassenheit* (letting be, releasement) is Heidegger's name for the relation to beings that could make possible the epochal transformation Heidegger has in mind. It is ultimately a question of our finally realizing that the *Gestell* cannot totally determine the dimensions within which presencing takes place. Indeed, we have always already been sojourning within the time-space field opened up by an ontological dispensation not totally reducible to the *Gestell*. Despite the limits imposed by historical conditions, there are, for those who let themselves be appropriated to the clearing and its conditions of presencing, promising opportunities to be effective in bringing about historical changes. For, as we need constantly to remind ourselves, the subject-object relation is a human construction or projection, enshrined in our grammatical forms, not something we must regard as eternal, necessary, and inevitable: it is, as the scientist in Heidegger's "Conversation on a Country Path" observes, "only a historical variation [*nur eine geschichtliche Abwandlung*] of the relation of the human being to the thing, insofar as things can become objects" (GA 77: 140/CPC 91).

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In the 1960s, "Minimalism" or "Literalism," a new movement in the art of painting, emerged in New York. We shall briefly reflect on the art of this movement, because, as it seems to me, contemplating the works of art produced in the spirit of this movement in relation to our critical diagnosis of the Gorgon stare might shed a little light, from a philosophical point of view, on the world-historical significance of both the art and the stare that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although the positionality of the stare has always been something in which we human beings could be motivated to engage, it seems to have become more common in correlation with the increasing instrumentalization and commodification of our lives. And it does not seem merely accidental or coincidental that this movement in art should have happened at a time when the *Gestell* achieved an unprecedented measure of dominance, influencing even our ways of seeing—the character of our perception and cognition.

One of the earliest and most important artists in this movement was Frank Stella, who was not only boldly experimental but also exceptionally articulate in formulating what he understood to be the essence of his project at the time. In a way, his canvases of that time period are immediately accessible, reduced as they are to the “minimalism” of simple objects for visual engagement: objects made so that that one could possess them—and entirely master them—in one immediate look. But paradoxically, for that reason, the “perceptual meaning” of these works can seem withdrawn from easy and immediate conceptual intelligibility. What do they mean? What is their “point”? Answers to such questions cannot be found in the works themselves without understanding the history of art—especially art in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth. They demand illumination in terms of the originality of their intervention in the unfolding history of art—an illumination that Stella has admirably provided, thinking about his work in dialogue with certain critics. However, approaching his canvases with Heidegger’s critique of the ontological character of the world-epoch in which we are living enables us to appropriate his work for further illumination, not only—as I want to argue—supporting what he understands his works to be about but also demonstrating concretely, in terms addressing our visual perception, the very essence of what Heidegger calls *das Ge-stell*, the universal, global imposition of a regime of total control over all modes of disclosure.

In a 1964 interview, Stella explained the intention informing and shaping his project: “Only what can actually be *seen* there [in the painting] *is* there. [. . .] What you see *is* what you see.”²¹ This statement, giving expression to an aesthetic associated with Minimalism or Literalism, can seem very straightforward, simple, and clear; but the experience to which it is referring is, phenomenologically considered, anything but simple and clear. What the artist is proposing is, in fact, ambiguous. On the one hand, it can be understood as urging that spectators avoid imposing interpretations of meaning that control, or even prevent, a disciplined, genuinely attentive-looking, an actively engaged, receptive mode of seeing openly present to the unfolding disclosive presence of the work, letting the phenomenon show itself from out of itself. But on the other hand, it can be taken to give the most lucid possible expression to the reduction and reification of vision and its objects in the epoch ruled by the *Ge-stell*, calling for a vision bereft of history, bereft of human meaning, a vision reduced to absolute presentness, a beingness totally there, constantly there, before the sovereign gaze, without past, without future. “My painting,” says Stella, “is based on the fact that only *what can be seen there is there. It really is an object.* The

painting is just an object [. . .]. All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all I ever get out of them, is the fact that *you can see the whole thing without any confusion*. [. . .] *What you see is what you see.*"²² This suggests the capacity of a sovereign gaze to capture the presence of the artwork in the totality of its actual presentness. There is nothing the work withholds, nothing that withdraws from the visual grasp. The work is all there, totally present, totally available; there is no withdrawing into self-concealment. Although deeper reflection on the phenomenology of this experience will refute the truth in such a description of the aesthetic encounter, bringing out the ways in which the vision that his works solicit actually defies, and indeed are induced to defy, the reign of *Ge-stell*, I suggest that what Stella has described is nevertheless a perfect instantiation of the vision that, in Heidegger's critique, holds sway over our world order.

"I always get into arguments, with people who want to retain the old values in painting—the *humanistic values* that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that *only what can be seen there is there. It really is just an object*. A painting is an object."²³ I agree that the painting is something material, "objectively" belonging in, and to, the "real" world—it is a thing. But I also must argue that paintings cannot be reduced to thinghood—and, moreover, no matter how thing-like, how "minimal" they become, they nevertheless will always show the impossibility of that reduction. In their thinghood, by contrast, "mere" things do not *show* what they are, do not *make a show* of their ontological category. Perhaps we should understand Minimalism in art as attempting an aesthetic equivalent of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* version of logical positivism: The work supposedly has no meaning. Although intended to work against interpretation, it cannot avoid that fate.

But what if, instead of describing his paintings, Stella were describing how we commonly and habitually are disposed to see all the things—and events—in our world? Do we really want to live in a world in which only what can actually be seen is there? What happens to the invisible? Is the invisible not also always present in our experience of material things? In the epoch of the *Gestell*, total and constant visibility is required. Darkness, guardian of the invisibility of things, must be invaded and conquered by the pervasive infrastructure of lighting that we have designed and built (GA 79: 93–94/BF 88–89, ID 35). Technologies of surveillance, including powerful lights, are appearing everywhere. Our world is increasingly resembling Jeremy Bentham's blueprint for the *Panopticon*, which he intended only as a model for prisons.

Technology requires uniformity, standardization; and as much as possible, it requires quantification. Increasingly today, everything must submit to these demands, these conditions. Only what can be quantified is recognized as real and admitted into our reckoning with reality. We are living now in an age of the greatest objectification. There is a cruel irony in this development: It was our will to power—the absolute sovereignty of the ego—that required this objectification in order to assure total control. But the logic of this requirement eventually requires the appropriation of the ego’s will to power, subjecting even it to objectification: an objectification that hollows out the ego’s interiority, leaving it empty, bereft of any meaning, any reality of its own independent of the objectified world. Since only what is objective and ultimately quantifiable is recognized as real and true, the meaningful reality and truth belonging to subjectivity must be denied. The truth of what our metaphysical age taught us to think of as “subjectivity,” “inner life,” is no longer to be trusted.

Before our thinking moves on, it should be noted that in Stella’s later works the aesthetic of the earlier works, experiments in the obliteration of meaning, is radically abandoned. The later works are more like sculptures than paintings even when still attached to the wall, because they create multiple planes, dimensions, and perspectives in a rich and lively array of colors. The eye of the beholder is now addressed by works that encourage—and for the most enriching experience indeed require—a prolonged interrogation and exploration of the work, engaging in the liveliest way possible its multiplicity of planes, shapes, dimensions, and colors, and, too, its ways of playing with the interplay of the visible and the invisible, light and darkness, shade and shadow. These later works burst open with a wonderful, playful joy, offering a celebration for the eyes: they are works that provoke and enliven the potential in our ability to see, works of art that emerge as art in the poetry of an intertwining dance—perception and being, belonging inseparably together. They are works that celebrate the free play of perception, works that appeal to our freedom.

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In “The Principle of Identity,” a 1957 lecture that presents Heidegger’s reflections on Parmenides’ assertion that being and thinking are “the same” in their belonging-together, Heidegger connects, as he so often does, a seemingly very abstract, purely philosophical problem with a matter of immediate contemporary concern, questioning our blind faith in technology, the essence of which is, he argues, the *Gestell*: We are failing, he says, to hear the ontological claim (*Anspruch*) that still speaks, even in the essence of technology (GA 79: 123/ID 34, BF 115):

Let us at long last stop conceiving technology in a merely technical way, that is, in terms of the human and its machines. In this age, let us listen to the claim under which there stands not only the human, but all beings, nature and history, in respect to their being. (GA 79: 123/ID 34, BF 116)

“Our entire human existence,” he argues, “is everywhere finding itself challenged [. . .] to devote itself to the planning and calculating of everything”:

What speaks in this challenge [*Herausforderung*]? Does it spring from a merely artificial whim? Or are we not already concerned with beings themselves [*das Seiende selbst*], in such a way that they make a claim on us with respect to their availability for planning and calculation? What comes to light here? Nothing less than this: The human is challenged when beings must appear within the envisioned horizon [*Gesichtskreis*] of what is calculable. And not only this. To the same degree that being is challenged, the human, too, is challenged, that is, forcibly positioned [*herausgefordert, d.h. gestellt*] to secure all beings that are his concern as the standing reserve [*Bestand*] for his planning and calculating; and to carry this manipulation on, past all bounds. (GA 79: 124/ BF 116, ID 34–35)

In consequence, Heidegger gives this situation, our technological world, a name that is especially useful in our endeavor to think about the phenomenology of perception in our time:

The name for the gathering of the challenge, which places man and being face to face [*so zustellt*] in such a way that they reciprocally challenge one other, is *das Ge-Stell*. [. . .] In the mutual confrontation of man and being we discern the claim that determines the constellation of our age. [. . .] The *Ge-Stell* is more real [*seiender*] than all of the atomic energy and the entire world of machinery, more real than the driving power of organization, communications, and automation. Because we no longer encounter what is called the *Ge-Stell* within the purview of representation that lets us think the being of beings as presence [*das Sein des Seienden als Anwesen denken*]*—the Ge-Stell* no longer concerns us [*geht uns nicht mehr an*] as something that is present. (GA 79: 124/BF 116, ID 35–36)

This is the situation that Heidegger regards as the greatest of dangers. Being and human being “belong together,” “delivered over” (*einander ge-eignet*) to one another—but in a way that has become destructive to both. In this

strange bondage, we enter into what he calls a “singulare tantum”: what Heidegger, drawing on the etymological derivation of *er-eignen* from *er-äugen*, calls “the event of appropriation” (*Er-eignis*), to be thought precisely in terms of our habitual way, today, of looking and seeing: *das Er-äugnis* (GA 79: 124–25/BF 117, ID 36).²⁴ I interpret Heidegger’s attention to this derivation as indicating that seeing inherently involves our appropriation—and that means that what we see always bespeaks a certain claim on our seeing: a certain responsibility for our ability to be responsive, receiving what is given to behold in and by our situations.

However, in this “appropriation,” “the possibility arises that an awakening to awareness might overcome [*verwindet*] the dominance [*das bloße Walten*] of the *Ge-Stell*, turning it into a more original appropriating [*ein anfänglicheres Ereignen*]”:

Such a transformation [*Verwindung*] of the *Ge-Stell* could, by virtue of our assumption of responsibility, bring about the appropriate, much-needed recovery [*ereignishafte Zurücknahme*], taking technology from its position of dominance back to its [earlier] role of service [*Dienstschafft*] in the realm by which man reaches more truly into the urgency of the ontological claim on the disposition of our capabilities [*eigentlicher in das Er-eignis reicht*]. (GA 79: 125/BF 118, ID 37)

As Heidegger nears the end of his lecture, having moved, but only in a sense, quite far from the insight of Parmenides in order to think the significance of the insight for our time, he allows himself to speculate and envision the possibility of a different world:

Assuming we could look forward to the possibility that the *Ge-Stell*—the mutual [*wechselweise*] challenge of man and being to enter the calculation of what is calculable—were to address itself to us as the event of appropriation that first estranges [*ent-eignet*] man and being from their present relation and thereby enables them to return to their own proper being [*in ihr Eigentliches vereignet*], then a path might open for man to experience beings in a more originary way: the entire modern technological world, nature and history, and above all, their being. (GA 79: 128/BF 121, ID 40)

However,

As long as reflection [*Besinnung*] on the world of the atomic age [. . .] strives for no more than the peaceful use of atomic energy, and will

not be content with any other goal, thinking is stopping halfway. Such half-way measures only secure the technological world all the more in its metaphysical predominance. (Ibid.)

Reminding us that the “sameness” of *Mensch* and *Sein* that Parmenides proposed for reflection remains what is in question for us here—and in urgent need of further thought—Heidegger summons us to meditate in courageous freedom on the character of our relation to being, that is, to the *being* of the beings that figure in our world.

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In the context of a meditation on perception, we cannot reflect on the relation to being without eventually giving thought to our relation to the presence of the ground, the field of perception, and its horizon. In Beckett’s *Endgame*, there is a moment when Hamm, watching Clov looking out the window with a telescope, asks him what he can see: “And the horizon? Nothing on the horizon?” Clov, exasperated, lowering the telescope, replies, provocatively invoking God, “What in God’s name could there be on the horizon?”²⁵ Because the horizon delimits the will-to-see, indicating the presence of a dimension exceeding the will’s grasp and comprehension, Clov’s question is also, in effect, the question that, in *Country Path Conversations*, provokes Heidegger’s three interlocutors to reflect on the will and the possibility of its transformation into non-willing—*Gelassenheit* (GA 77: 83/CPC 52). Can the will active in visual perception challenge the reign of the *Gestell* in this way?

What happens to the horizon in the time of the *Gestell*? It seems that Nietzsche noticed what happens, because he asks us a startling question: “Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?” And he follows this with another question, secretly related: “What did we do when we unchained the earth from the sun?” (GA 5: 261/QCT 106–7). In “Nietzsche’s Word: ‘God Is Dead,’” which he worked on from 1936 to 1943, Heidegger comments on this, returning to the world depicted in Platonism in order to comprehend the historical situation into which we of today have fallen:

The sun forms and circumscribes the field of vision, wherein that which is as such shows itself. “Horizon” refers to the supersensory world [*übersinnliche Welt*] as the world that truly is. This is at the same time the whole that envelops all and in itself includes all, as does the sea. We have begun, in effect, to unchain the earth, as the abode of man [*Aufenthalt des Menschen*], from its sun. The realm of the supersensory [. . .] no

longer stands over man as the authoritative light [*maßgebende Licht*]. The entire field of vision has been wiped away [*weggewischt*]. We humans have drunk up the sea, the whole of that which is as such [*das Ganze des Seienden als solchen*]. For man has risen up into the I-ness of the ego-cogito [*Denn der Mensch ist in die Ichheit des ego cogito aufgestanden*]. (Ibid.)

His argument continues, using the language of visual perception to emphasize the structure of oppositional positionality:

Through this uprising [*Aufstand*], all that is [*alles Seiende*] is transformed into object [*zum Gegenstand*]. That which is [*Das Seiende*], as the objective, is swallowed up [*hineingetrunkem*] into the immanence of subjectivity. The horizon no longer emits light of itself [*Der Horizont leuchtet nicht mehr von sich selbst*]. It is now nothing but the point-of-view [*Gesichtspunkt*] posited in the value-positing [*Wertsetzungen*] of the will to power. (Ibid.)

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In “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), Heidegger connects the question of horizon to a question that is provoked by the dominant interpretation of words attributed to Protagoras, in which he seems to be asserting that man is the measure of all things. Heidegger disputes that interpretation, arguing that what the Greek philosopher is saying actually implies a critique of the arrogance and insolence—the *hubris*—of his contemporaries, who were already defying and exceeding the proper measure—the measure most appropriate for us mortals:

Through man’s being limited to that which, at any particular time, is unconcealed, there is given to him the measure that always confines us to this or that. Man does not, from out of some detached [i.e., transcendental] I-ness, set forth the measure to which everything that is, in its being, must accommodate itself [*sich fügen*]. The human, who possesses the Greeks’ fundamental relationship to that which is and to its unconcealment, is the measure (*metron*) *only insofar as* he accepts restriction [*Mäßigung*] to the horizon of unconcealment that is limited after the manner of the I; and he consequently acknowledges [*anerkennt*] the concealedness of what is. (GA 5: 103–10/QCT 143–51. Italics added).

It is crucial to appreciate that *anthropos*, as understood by Protagoras, is not the same as *Mensch*. As Heidegger argues in his discussion of Ernst Junger’s *The Worker (Der Arbeiter)*,

That the particular *human being* becomes the *metron* of the *einai tōn ontōn* [the measure of the being of beings] does not mean that the human being changes into the subject, and thus truth changes into certainty. The human being becomes the measure [*maßgebend*] within the Greek interpretation of what is. This is prefigured [*vorgebildet*] in the saying of Parmenides [that thinking and being are “the same”], which only means that the presencing and absencing of what is will always be *related* to the human being and be determined *in* his domain. But this never means that the human being [. . .] makes the “world” the object of mastering and finds his essence in this mastering.²⁶

In other words, what Protagoras asserts, namely, that the human being is the measure of all things, does not mean what it is taken to mean in modern times since Descartes. Protagoras still recognizes the immeasurable: that which is beyond human measure, beyond the horizon. Heidegger acknowledges that we of today assume, in the way we live on this planet, that we *are* the measure for all that *is* in our world. What he is disputing, however, is *how* we of today are making ourselves the measure. For Protagoras, the human being is indeed the measure of all things that are *within* the human world. But the world of human existence is not the whole of the cosmos. And since we human beings are finite and mortal, the measure that we are and that we possess and master is necessarily also finite. We must accordingly recognize the delimitation of our measure by the immeasurable, by that which *exceeds* all human measure. Every attempt to master the immeasurable and every attempt to reduce the immeasurable to what we are capable of measuring is consequently an act that the ancient Greeks, including Protagoras, regarded as *hubris*, an exceeding of human measure that is doomed to end in tragedy. Contrary to the modern interpretation, which happily, but perhaps not so innocently appropriates the words of Protagoras to support the will to power that prevails in the modern age, Protagoras’s words are not arrogant words of defiance, a declaration of god-like power, but rather the recognition and acknowledgment of the modest measure proper to human life—and a warning to those who, like Orestes in Gluck’s opera, “Iphigénie en Tauride,” would defy and abandon that measure. Pursued by the gods, Orestes cries out in a voice strained by anguish: “J’ai trahi la nature, [. . .] j’ai comblé la mesure.”

According to Heidegger, what Protagoras is saying is the very antithesis of *hubris*, the opposite of an affirmation of the will to power.²⁷ Protagoras has been egregiously misunderstood and misrepresented: taken to be essentially an early, untimely modern, a Nietzschean precursor, asserting

the will of man over all. This, however, would be reading back into Protagoras our own modern way of thinking. Whereas Protagoras is saying something much more modest, yet also extremely important: in regard to the things in and of our world, man *is* the measure; however, there is a realm or dimension *beyond* the human world. We are *not* the measure of the cosmos. The dimensions of the cosmos are beyond our reach, beyond our measure. We have no way to measure its extent.

In a draft fragment intended for “The Death of Empedocles,” Hölderlin has Empedocles brazenly boast:

I know everything. I can master everything;
 I recognize it as entirely the work of my own hands, and direct,
 as I want,
 a lord of spirits, the living.
 The world is mine, and submissive [*untertan*] and useful
 Are all powers to me.²⁸

There can be no doubt here: The poet, committed as poet to meter and its measure, sees in Empedocles’ words a dangerous and self-destructive defiance of measure. For the poet, we human beings, cast into a realm between the animals and the gods, must learn to recognize in ourselves the mortality of our condition—and we need to take the finitude of this mortality as the proper measure of our lives and the sentence of our fate. But, of course, precisely as human beings, we are free to defy this measure, even free to choose certain death for the sake of a cause, a measure, we hold dearer than our life. In the ancient defiance of measure, we can already discern something of the essence of the *Gestell*.

Heidegger believes, however, that the fundamental metaphysical position of Protagoras is actually “only a certain narrowing [*nur eine Einschränkung*], but that still means nonetheless a preserving [*Bewahrung*], of the fundamental position of Heraclitus and Parmenides” (GA 5: 105/QCT 145–46). What Protagoras is expressing is, we might say, a very early form of humanism: an attempt simply to concentrate the attention of his contemporaries on matters pertaining to mortal life here in this earth-bound world:

It is one thing to preserve the horizon of unconcealment that is limited at any given time through the apprehending [*Vermehmen*] of what presences (man as *metron*). It is quite another matter to proceed into the unlimited sphere of possible objectification, through reckoning up the representable and imposing it as binding for all. (GA 5: 106/QCT 147)

It is a self-serving error of judgment to project onto the distant past our modern attitude in regard to the question of measure. Protagoras is still very far—perhaps one could say still immeasurably far—from the modern attitude.

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Measure and the immeasurable are also in question in a later text: Heidegger's *Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking* (Winter 1944–1945), wherein three interlocutors—a scientist, a scholar, and a guide—give further thought to the question of the openness of the field of experience and its horizon (GA 77: 3–157/CPC 1–104). As they draw our attention to the horizon, we should recall Clov's question about what “in God's name” could be on the horizon. That question generates countless further questions regarding the future, destiny, and its promise. What might be coming? How might we influence what is impending? For a world suffering in the nihilism of the *Gestell*, what hope is there? Do we need the redeeming power of another god? In Clov's question, is “God” simply the name for the unknowable possibilities of the future we hope for? Or is there, perhaps, absolutely *nothing* in God's name—nothing in naming God? Is “in God's name” nothing but an empty turn of phrase, naming, in fact, nothing? In the epoch of the *Gestell*, is there nothing to hope for from that which lies beyond the horizon? In the time of the *Gestell*, what happens to the horizon?

The question of the horizon first arises in Heidegger's *Conversation* when the guide refers to the discursive horizon in which all of their reflections are moving. The scholar, however, takes the horizon out of a discussion about the rhetorical horizon of their reflections and puts it into a discussion belonging to the phenomenology of perception. He remarks, “We must open up this horizon and, insofar as it is opened up, yet still murky, we must illuminate it. It seems to me that we humans by nature move within such horizons. The human is—if I may put this in a makeshift manner of speaking—a horizontal being [*ein horizontales Wesen*]” (GA 77: 83/CPC 52). And he explains that it is only by looking out *beyond* the thing to be seen—a tree, for instance—that we can actually *see*, see understandingly, the presence of the individual tree (GA 77: 86/CPC 55). The crucial point here is that the phenomenology of the horizon challenges the will to power (GA 77: 141–44/CPC 91–93). The will to power encourages us to reduce the *Gestalt* of our perception to the figure, the thing in focus, cutting off its background, its surrounding field and horizon.

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In 1836, Thomas Cole, the great Hudson River School painter, penned, for delivery in a lecture, these words, expressing both grief and hope:

I cannot but express my sorrow that the beauty of [the American] landscapes is quickly passing away—the ravages of the axe are daily increasing—the most noble scenes are made desolate, and oftentimes with a wantonness and barbarism scarcely credible in a civilized nation. [But] we are still in Eden; the wall that shuts us out is our own ignorance and folly.²⁹

Can we still, even today, continue to believe in our Eden? Does Heidegger’s projection of the fourfold—*das Geviert*—not indicate that he continued to shelter some measure of hope?

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Heidegger seldom wrote down his thoughts on the subject of happiness; but I have found and taken note of two, striking in their intensity and severity of judgment. The first sees destruction of the earth in the ways that our social, political, and cultural institutions serve a corrupt, decadent search for “happiness”:

The devastation of the earth [*Die Verwüstung der Erde*] can easily go hand in hand with a guaranteed supreme living standard for mankind, and just as easily with the organized establishment of a uniform state of happiness [*gleichförmigen Glückszustandes*] for all human beings. (GA 8: 31/WCT 30)

And although Heidegger is not opposed in principle to happiness, he manifestly has nothing but contempt for what is today craved as happiness, or craved for the sake of happiness:

The greatest nihilism is precisely where one believes one has “goals,” and feels “happy” [. . .] in this drunken stupor of “lived experience” [*in dieser lärmenden “Erlebnis”-Trunkenboldigkeit*] (movies, trips to the beach)—precisely here is the greatest nihilism. (GA 65: 139/CP 109)

In Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, we find what might at first seem to be a very different reflection on happiness, although, for further reflection, the sentiment it expresses might not be so far from Heidegger’s: “What would a happiness be,” he asks, “that was not measured by the immeasurable grief

at what is?"³⁰ These words remind me of what Heidegger wrote in "The Origin of the Work of Art":

The resoluteness intended in *Being and Time* is not the deliberate action of a subject but the opening up of human being [*die Eröffnung des Daseins*], out of its captivity in that which is [*aus der Befangenheit im Seienden*], into the openness of being. (GA 5: 55/PLT 67)

Audible in Heidegger's words there is, I believe, a deep grief and lament regarding what is, although his thought, unlike Adorno's, is expressed here in a much more restrained, more theoretical form. But these two philosophers, despite all their enormous differences, nevertheless shared a distress regarding contemporary culture and its values—a distress that they both measured against a vision of the ideal world that they considered to belong to the immeasurable.

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Heidegger never abandoned all hope. In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger says, "Even the *Ge-stell* gives us the possibility of achieving our destiny [*Schickung des Geschickes*]" (GA 7: 25/QCT 24). And in "The Turn," as we noted earlier, he affirms this possibility. But he misses an opportunity to affirm it in a way that unequivocally makes it dependent on our responsibility: "If the *Gestell* is a historical dispensation of the conditions of possibility for being, i.e., the presencing of beings [*ein Wesensgeschick des Seins selbst*], then we may venture to suppose that, as just one among many modalities in which beings can come to presence, the *Gestell* itself is susceptible of change." So, we have some reason to hope that another future, "still veiled (*noch verhülltes*)," might be waiting (GA 79: 68/BF 64, QCT 37).

However, inasmuch as the *Gestell* is a time in which there is an ever-increasing threat to the very dimensionality of being, "modern man must first and above all find his way back into the full breadth of the space proper to his essence [*in die Weite seines Wesensraumes*]" (GA 79: 70/BF 66, QCT 39). That space is represented by the spacing of the hyphen in "Da-sein," the word that invokes our essence as thrown-open, disclosive beings. This disclosive openness constitutes our greatest responsibility as *Da-sein*: "protecting the openness of the conditions of possibility in terms of which we are able to experience the being of beings [*das Wesen des Seins in seine Wahrheit zu wahren*]" (GA 79: 70–71/BF 66, QCT 40–41).

NOTES

1. Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capitale du XIXeme Siècle: Exposé,” in *Das Passagen-Werk, Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1982), vol. 5.1, 76; “Paris, Capital of the 19th Century: Exposé of 1939,” *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University press, 1999), 26.

2. Theodor Adorno, “Sociology and Empirical Research,” in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heineman, 1981), 69.

3. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “Le Prix du Progrès,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Continuum, 2002), 191.

4. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), vol. 6, 62; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Continuum, 1973), 52. Adorno’s rhetorical trope has the reified thing looking back at us with accusation, but also with hope. In “The Turning,” Heidegger uses a similar trope to make a similar argument against the violent way we look and see things. In his prosopopoeia, “being,” serving at once as the key to an accusation and as the key to a transformative turn, is capable of a glance that is like lightening: “Will we,” he says, “as the ones caught sight of, be thus brought home into the essential glance of being [. . .], so that we will belong within the fourfold of sky and earth, mortals and divinities?” (see GA 11: 120–24/QCT 44–49). And see my discussion in part II, chapter 1 on vision as paradigm.

5. Martin Heidegger, *Wozu Dichter?* *Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950), 275; GA 5: 298; “What Are Poets For?” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 120.

6. Martin Heidegger, “Die Gefahr,” “Einblick in Das Was Ist, Bremer Vorträge 1949,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1994), GA 79: 53; “The Danger,” “Insight into That Which Is,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. Andrew Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 50.

7. Heidegger, “Der Satz der Identität,” GA 11: 44; “The Principle of Identity,” in *Identity and Difference*, bilingual edition, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2002, 1957), 99 for the German, 35 for the English. I have revised Stambaugh’s translation. And see “Lecture III, The Principle of Identity,” “Basic Principles of Thinking: Freiburg Lectures 1957,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 116. The quote comes from a Freiburg lecture presented in June 1957. It was originally published in 1957 by the Verlag Günther Neske in Pfullingen under the title *Identität und Differenz*, and republished as “Vortrag III, Der Satz der Identität,” “Grundsätze des Denkens, Freiburger Vorträge 1957,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 124.

8. Reinhart Koselleck, *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, trans. Sean Franzel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 39.

9. *Seminare*, GA 15: 366; *Four Seminars*, 60. Le Thor, September 11, 1969.
10. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1961), 9–10. My own translation.
11. See, for instance, Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*, GA 96: 3; and “Die Überwindung der Metaphysik” and “Das Wesen des Nihilismus,” the two texts in *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*, GA 67.
12. Martin Heidegger, “On the Question Concerning the Determination of the Matter for Thinking,” *Epoché*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 213–23. Translated by Richard Capobianco and Marie Göbel. The first draft of this text was presented in a lecture in 1965. It underwent several subsequent revisions. It is closely related to the 1964 text, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” *On Time and Being*, 55–73. For the German, see GA 14: 67–90.
13. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Method of Nature,” in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 118–19.
14. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945), 715.
15. Rainer Maria Rilke, “Duineser Elegien,” *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 470; *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939, 1963, 1967), 66–67.
16. Rainer Maria Rilke, “Sonette an Orpheus,” in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962); *Sonnets to Orpheus*, bilingual edition, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1942, 1962), Part II, number 5.
17. Rainer Maria Rilke, “Wendung” (“Turning”), in *Rilke, Poems 1912–1926*, bilingual edition, trans. Michael Hamburger (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1981), 48–49.
18. Martin Heidegger, “Die Kehre,” “Einblick in Das Was Ist: Bremer Vorträge 1949,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 68–77; “The Turn,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, trans. Andrew Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 64–73. Also see an earlier translation, but of a later version: “The Turning,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 36–49. The translations here follow my own sense, but draw on the excellent translations by Mitchell and Lovitt. And see also the lecture bearing the title “Das Ge-stell,” one of Heidegger’s 1949 Bremen lectures, “Insight into That Which Is,” in Andrew Mitchell’s translation, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 23–43. “Positionality” is Mitchell’s word for “das Gestell.” It is a great improvement over Lovitt’s “Enframing” as a translation for the term “Gestell,” to which Heidegger gives an original use; but it is still not very clear. I do not know of any single word that could make its meaning perspicuous. For the German original, see “Einblick in Das Was Ist: Bremer Vorträge 1949,” GA 79: 24–45.
19. Friedrich Hölderlin, “In lieblicher Bläue. . .,” in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Paul Stapf (Berlin: Der Tempel-Verlag, 1960), 415–16. On the question of measure, see David Kleinberg-Levin, “Freedom in Right Measure: Hölderlin’s Anguished Question,” in *Gestures of Ethical Life: Reading Hölderlin’s Question of Measure after*

Heidegger (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 21–61. Also see Kleinberg-Levin’s “Usage and Dispensation: Heidegger’s Meditation on the Hand,” in *Gestures of Ethical Life: Reading Hölderlin’s Question of Measure after Heidegger*, 204–74.

20. See Heidegger’s comments on measure in his *Anmerkungen I (Schwarze Hefte 1942–1948)*, GA 97: 3–4: “Since we remain restricted to the age of equipment [*Einrichtung*] and in this time only our contrivances [*das Eingerichtete*] matter as the real and efficacious [*das Wirkliche und Wirksame*], there is always an urgently pressing endeavor to make what is coming [*das Kommende*] readily comprehensible and justified [*rechtfertigen*] by considering the prospect [*Aussicht*] of possible adjustments and preventive measures [*mögliche Einrichtungen und Maßnahmen*], when we in fact know no measure [*kein Maß kennen*] and when measurelessness [*Maßlosigkeit*] consists no longer only in the exceeding of all measures [*im Überschreiten aller Maße*], but in the ignorance of every measure, and indeed even, and above all, in an unwillingness and inability [*Unwillen und Unvermögen*] to make any resolute effort to question, as the inception [*Anfang*], the origin [*Ursprung*] of the measure in the very essence of being [*im Wesen des Seyns*].” The text continues: “Measurelessness itself loses its measure [*maß-los*] in an essential sense. We no longer know what underlies the measure and how measures are to be received and protected [*empfangen und bewahrt*], and how to make room for the emergence [*Entspringen*] of the moderate, the well-tempered [*des Maßvollen*]. The essential measure-lessness [*Maßlosigkeit*] is ultimately a matter of lack of guidance [*Rat-losigkeit*]; this lack of guidance does not even know of any ‘guidance’ in the sense of a fitting indication [*passenden Anweisung*] of alternatives and improvisations. The inceptual lack of guidance [*anfängliche Rat-losigkeit*] is grounded in the fact that our essential nature [*unser Wesen*] struggles against being well-counseled [*sich gegen die Wohlberatenheit aufbäumt*], inasmuch as it has gone astray and taken refuge [*weggeflüchtet*] in the destructiveness [*Unwesen*] of a system organized for the sake of marshalling and total planning [*Befehlens und Planens*].”

21. See the interview with Frank Stella quoted in Harold Rosenberg, *The De-Definition of Art* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 125. Italics added.

22. See the interview with Frank Stella in Bruce Glaser, “Questions to Stella and Judd,” *Art News* (September 1966), vol. 38, 58–59. Italics added.

23. See the interview with Stella in *LIFE* (January 19, 1968), vol. 64, no. 3, 49. Italics added.

24. See Heidegger’s 1957 text, “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 124–25: “Er-eignen heißt ursprünglich: er-äugen, d.h., erblicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen, an-eignen.” That is: “‘Er-eignen’ originally meant to bring something into view, that is, catch sight of something, call something into view, appropriate it.” For the English, see *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 117. The Stambaugh translation does not translate this sentence: See “Der Satz der Identität,” in *Identity and Difference*, 36.

25. Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 31.

26. See Heidegger, *Zu Ernst Junger “Der Arbeiter”*, GA 90: 68–70.

27. On Heidegger's thoughts in relation to Protagoras, see also his *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, GA 27: 154; *Aristoteles: Metaphysik IX*, GA 33: 193–203; *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus*; GA 48: 161–82, 210–11, 229–33; and *Zu Ernst Junger, "Der Arbeiter"*, GA 90: 68–70.

28. See Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles. A Mourning Play*, trans. David Farrell Krell (Albany: State University of New York Press, 3008). All three versions of the fragment.

29. Thomas Cole, "Essay on American Scenery," in *American Monthly Magazine* (New York: Proceedings of the American Lyceum, January 1836), 1.

30. Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1969), §128, 266: "Was wäre Glück, das sich nicht mäße an der unmeßbaren Trauer dessen was ist?" For the English, see *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, Verso Editions, 1978), 200.

PART III

OPENING WORLDS OF POSSIBILITY

4

GELASSENHEIT IN PERCEPTION

Caring for the Truth of Being

Our thinking is a pious reception.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures*¹

All that is visible clings to the invisible. [. . .] Also, perhaps, the thinkable clings to the unthinkable.

Novalis, “On Goethe”²

Everything visible also remains invisible.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*³

I never succeed in painting scenes, however beautiful, immediately upon returning from them. I must wait for a time to draw a veil over the common details.

Thomas Cole, “Letter to Asher Brown Durand”⁴

I have to look a long time at a being or thing before I see it. Then I get used to its presence; and it disappears without a sound.

Edmund Jabès, *The Book of Questions*⁵

First of all, we need to make our seeing attentive and open for what is out of the ordinary.

Martin Heidegger, *The History of Being*⁶

It is crucial that *Dasein* should explicitly assume responsibility for what has been disclosed [i.e., believed to be true], defending itself against semblance and disguise, and confirming again and again its intrinsic nature as site of disclosiveness.

Heidegger, *Being and Time*⁷

§1

Two Dimensions of Truth

In the German language, a commonly used word for the disclosive nature that takes place in perception is “Vernehmung.” But Heidegger, listening to the words of his native language as few among his compatriots would, reminds us that there is another word: “Wahrnehmung.” *Wahr* means true; and *nehmen* means to take: perception is a taking, or receiving, of the true, or a taking to be true. But *wahr* is related to verbs that mean protecting, preserving, and taking into one’s care. So, Heidegger wants to argue that perception is not merely *Vernehmen*—a taking; it is, more properly, a taking into care: a way of receiving and caring for the truth—and for that which is necessary for the truth.

The German language has a rich etymological archive of words related to “truth” (*die Wahrheit*) and “the true” (*das Wahre*):

- (1) *wahren*: watch over, look after, take care of, keep safe, protect, preserve
- (2) *bewahren*: keep, protect, preserve, save, rescue, guard
- (3) *verwahren*: keep, continue to protect and preserve
- (4) *gewahren, gewahr werden*: become aware of
- (5) *währen*: to last, continue, endure
- (6) *bewähren*: establish as true, prove, verify, authenticate
- (7) *gewähren*: grant, impart, favor, accord, vouchsafe, guarantee

Heidegger draws on this treasury of affinities to imagine the poetic spirit of ethical life in terms of an ontologically grounded epistemology. Gathering together these different, but cognate meanings, Heidegger argues that, when properly understood and experienced, the deep, *ontological* nature of perception is a philosophical love for the truth. However, in its uprootedness, the habitual character of our perception, formed under the pressures of modern culture, does not know this love and care. Could thinking accordingly guide us to discover within ourselves a felt sense of the love for truth that perception originally and inherently bears—its greatest entrustment and consequently its greatest responsibility? Might we retrieve from forgetfulness this fundamental disposition, this ontological attunement (*Stimmung*) of our perception so that perception becomes an organ of being—an organ of the truth of being? Can we overcome the threat to truth at work in our time, our world, denying us the ontological dimensionality of truth?

Consider some lines of verse from “On the Road Home” by Wallace Stevens:

It was when I said,
 “There is no such thing as the truth,”
 that the grapes seemed fatter.⁸

As I read these lines of verse, it expresses the poet’s repudiation of the correspondence theory of truth—what in Heidegger’s thought reduces the experience of truth to truth-as-correctness, that is, the correspondence between an object and a perception, or a statement regarding that object, that is based on a culturally settled sense of reality. For the poet, the grapes seem fatter when their being is not reduced in its truth to correctness, the reification of a definition, a prescriptive category: there is always more to discover, always more to learn and know, always the possibility of a surprise. The grapes seem fatter when typicality, totality, and finality are not imposed on their presence. Released from truth-as-correctness, freed from old habits and assumptions, the grapes reveal much more of themselves. Thus, the poet is also affirming an *ontological* sense of care: a caring for the truth (*Wahrheit*) that belongs to the very *being* of the grapes. At the same time that he invokes these grapes, placing their being before the eyes of our imagination in a simple representation (*Vorstellung*), he revokes the reification of the *Gestalt* that the assumption of correctness would impose. This is the spirit of *ontological* care that inspires the phenomenological approach: an approach to its object that approaches but never closes the distance, always endeavoring to recognize in the object its irreducible otherness. Such is the truth of being: the deeper dimension of truth that underlies, or grounds, truth-as-correctness; the greater dimension that truth-as-correctness, the conception of truth holding sway in our time, conceals and denies. For Heidegger, the ancient Greek word *aletheia* (unconcealment) names the ontological dimension of openness that first grants the possibility of truth-as-correctness (GA 14: 86/OTB 69). “Aletheia” is therefore to be translated, not as truth, but rather as unconcealment: the underlying condition that makes possible all claims to truth—and all endeavors to confirm or disconfirm such claims.

“Gelassenheit,” meaning releasement, or letting-be, is Heidegger’s word for the ontological attitude, the way of approaching the being of beings, expressed by the poet. “Gelassenheit” names the way in which one would take the truth of being—the being of beings—into one’s caring. Phenomenology requires and adopts this attitude as its method, its discipline,

because attempting to let beings be is the only way to make possible the free disclosing of their being: insight into the truth of what and how they are.

†

Heidegger gave a set of four very important seminars over the period from 1966 to 1973, first published in French in 1977. In his “Afterword,” the German translator of these seminars commented,

It is important to experience *Da-sein* [i.e., the *Da-sein* of the human being, of *Menschsein*] in the sense that man himself *is* the *Da*, i.e., the openness of being for him, in that he undertakes [*übernimmt*] to preserve this openness and in preserving it, to unfold it [*sie zu bewahren und bewahrend zu entfalten*]. (GA 15: 415/F 88)

For Heidegger, this response-ability—preserving and developing the disclosive openness, hence the receptivity of the *Da* that we *are*—constitutes one of our highest responsibilities. Our vision arises from *pathos*, feeling, sensibility, rather than from reason. What would it be (like) for our eyes to maintain, against all the abusive pressures in the world, their rootedness in that sensibility? And what would it be (like) for our eyes to become ontologically attuned organs—organs attuned by, and to, the being of beings, the ontological dimension of perceptual experience? These are, in brief, the questions Heidegger’s lectures are asking us. His project for thought calls for learning to see differently. But how so? In thinking that delves into his hermeneutical phenomenology, we can discern an answer.

Entrusted in its very essence with the love of truth, perception is summoned to become the first moment in the *Wächterschaft der Wahrheit*: a vigilance in guardianship of truth—not only caring for the truth of beings that is disclosed in “correct” understanding, and not even caring also for the richer ontological truth of beings disclosed in *Gelassenheit*, but also caring for the truth of being itself, which concerns the conditions necessary for disclosiveness as such.

Thus, we human beings have both [i] an *ontological* responsibility for our ways of opening and sustaining the truth of being, protecting our fields of perception and meaning for the interplay of concealment and unconcealment, and also [ii] an *ontic* responsibility for appropriate comportment in relation to the beings we encounter and in the midst of which we dwell.

Wahrheit: In this context, it takes on the meaning of “truth” as *aletheia*, the ontological dimension of truth, “truth” as designating the truth of being: not truth as propositional correctness, the correctness of statements, or the correctness of perceptions, but truth as the dimension always underlying, always presupposed by, claims of correctness; that is *aletheia*, a pre-Socratic word for the dimension of an openness open to the interplay of concealment

and unconcealment. At stake for Heidegger is our vigilance in the guardianship of *aletheia*, the *ground* of truth-as-correctness: that dimension of openness that makes truth-as-correctness possible (GA 5: 348/EGT 36).

This guardianship is constitutive of our very being as *Da-sein*: we alone are the beings who, by our thrown-openness, and in our thrown-openness, are appropriated, claimed, for grounding the disclosiveness of truth. Perception is accordingly called upon to be the first and most elemental guardian of the truth of being.

†

In American courts, we are asked to swear that we will tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But these days, truth is in trouble. And not only in the courts. However, we have learned from Plato that truth was already in trouble in his Athens. Socrates constantly spoke out against the sophistry and deceitfulness of the politicians. For Heidegger, though, Plato's vision-generated idealism missed the fateful significance of the open dimension of self-concealment indicated by the word *aletheia*, and it thereby failed to protect the ontologically grounding dimension of truth from its subsequent reduction to truth-as-correctness. Consequently, Platonic idealism was in its own distinctive way unwittingly complicit in preparing for the catastrophic crisis in truth that we are confronting today. (GA 14: 87–88/OTB 69–71)

†

In his commentary on “Aletheia” in Heraclitus, Heidegger takes advantage of the constellation of different meanings, both literal and figurative, borne by the words he uses, arguing that gods and men “are not only illuminated in the lighting of the clearing they have opened [*in der Lichtung nicht nur beleuchtet*], but are also enlightened [*er-leuchtet*] from it and toward it. Thus, they can [*vermögen*], in *their own way* [*auf ihre Weise*], accomplish the lighting of the clearing [*das Lichten vollbringen*], bringing it to the fullness of its essence and protecting its openness [*die Lichtung hüten*]” (GA 7: 286/EGT 120). We human beings are said to be “luminous” (*gelichtet*) in our very essence: bringing things to light, casting light on the things we see, we find ourselves “brought into the light [*er-lichtet*] and appropriated, claimed, made responsible for the event of clearing [*in das Ereignis der Lichtung vereignet*]” (ibid.). Our minds are like sources of light, illuminating what things mean, disclosing their truth. But we are accordingly always to be held responsible for our way of beholding: “gods and men belong in the lighting not only as lighted and viewed, but as the invisible [*unscheinbaren*], bringing the lighting with them in their own way, preserving [*verwahren*] it and handing it down for the sake of its endurance [*in seinem Währen*]” (GA 7: 286/EGT 121). In other words, we are, as he also says in this text,

“entrusted” (*zugetraut*) with this gift of truth, and consequently must assume the role of its protector (GA 7: 287/EGT 122). Will we then, we vision-gifted beings, be faithful, true to this entrustment—or will we betray it? Will we prove ourselves worthy of it? Will we preserve, in the way we see, a guardian awareness of the conditions necessary for truth? And will we pass on this awareness, and the enlightenment it bestows, in the thinking of our philosophical discourse—and in the life of our culture? In short, will we accomplish (*vollbringen*) what vision, as a capacity appropriated (*ereignet*) for truth, makes possible for us? What needs our learning is the ability of our seeing to shelter the ontological ground of truth, the necessary conditions for its possibility, while at the same time bringing the truth of beings to light in a world that is constantly threatening it.

†

In *Being and Truth*, Heidegger returns, as he often would, to a discussion of Plato’s “Myth of the Cave” in *The Republic* (Book VII, 514a–17b):

What is at stake here is *aletheia* in the sense of the unconcealed. Socrates says that the prisoners in the cave would take the shadows of things to be the unconcealment of truth. The question is how these human beings relate to the *alethes*, the unconcealed.

The commentary continues:

As strange as the condition of these human beings is, and as odd as the setting is, these human beings are nevertheless related to the *a-lethes*, to the unconcealed itself; by their very nature, human beings from childhood on are sent forth into the unconcealed, no matter how strange their condition may be. [. . .] *To be human* means to stand in the unconcealed and relate to it. (GA 36–37: 131–32/BAT 104)

However, although the cave dwellers see the shadows, they do not see the shadows *as* shadows, that is, as mere appearances, do not see that what is showing up on the wall in front of them is nothing but a succession of shadows (GA 36–37: 134–35/BAT 106).

But there are some among them who are not satisfied with what they see; they want to understand why they see what they see. Thus, as Heidegger observes, “The kind and manner of truth depends on the kind and manner of the human being” (GA 36–37:143/BAT 113). A difficult, arduous process of “education,” one that very much involves how we look at and see things, is necessary. The process would not be complete until all the

deluded people, prisoners of their own ignorance, could see their delusion as such and, released from that condition by a desire for true knowledge, they could finally, perhaps, venture forth, leaving the darkness of the cave. But when they leave for the outside world, will they still be deluded, seeing only truth-as-correctness and forgetting the ontological dimension that makes such truth possible?

†

Claims to truth-as-correctness do not take place in isolation, but always belong in the phenomenology of their disclosure to a particular context, discursive field, or world of intelligibility and meaningfulness. This context, field, or world, its dimensions open to an interplay of concealment and unconcealment, necessarily *precedes* and *underlies* every claim to truth in the sense of correctness. Thus, as Heidegger argues, an object must first be disclosed and made intelligible *within the phenomenological structure of the world* before it can be the grammatical subject of a true or false, correct or incorrect propositional claim. *Aletheia* names the opening of a world of meaning, an ontological dimension, for the interplay of concealment and unconcealment, within which beings come into meaningful presence and truth.

In this regard, consider Alfred Tarski's "theory of truth." For Heidegger, it could only be a theory regarding correctness: "The snow is white" is true if and only if the snow is [factually] white. Yes. But consider how much of the world this simple-seeming definition presupposes and leaves without recognition. We should recognize in this logical positivism, this extreme form of rationalism, an expression of the will to power. The one-dimensionality in contemporary theories of truth serves dogmatism and tyranny, not truth. Ultimately, however, that one-dimensionality cannot protect claims to truth; sooner or later, questions and challenges will emerge from the invisible, the unheard, the unrecognized dimension of truth.

Caring for the "truth of being" means protecting the *essence* of beings from reduction to what is actually (*jeweilig*) visible, audible, and perceptible. But it also means, even more fundamentally, protecting and preserving the conditions necessary for the very possibility of truth-as-correctness. This care-taking mindfulness, protecting (*Bergung*) and preserving (*Wahren*) of the essence, or being, of truth, that is, its occurring (*Wesen*), is our responsibility (GA 65: 389–92/CP 307–9). All our statements, perceptions, and gestures are instances of our capacity for disclosiveness. And in this disclosing, we ourselves are disclosed—*erlichtet*, disclosed as who we are, both to ourselves and to others.



If our eyes are open, beings come into presence before them: they are *given* something to see. In the modern discourse of philosophy, the “something” we are given to see has often been regarded as a givenness reducible to “sense data,” “impressions,” or “discrete sensations.” Heidegger’s phenomenology contests this way of thinking about the presencing of things in our perceptual field. It also contests the way in which, correlatively, philosophical discourse has conceptualized the *reception* of this givenness. For Heidegger, the “receptive capacity” of the senses is very much at stake. Understood as a question about our relation to the way that the *being* of beings is perceptually present, neither idealism nor empiricism has appropriately represented *the care-character of the receptivity* that takes place in our perception. Indeed, neither idealism nor empiricism has properly recognized that the point of departure for understanding the nature of perception is neither subjectivity nor objectivity, but rather an interactive *relationship* between *Sein* and *Mensch*.

According to Heidegger, what the eyes (*Augen*) are capable of being in their ap-pro-priation (*Ver-eignung*) has not yet been brought to its proper (*eigen*) potential. Could our vision, our perception, become an ontological organ, an organ of being—an organ of the truth of being, hence the guardian of beings in regard to their essence, their ways of being? All that Heidegger can suggest is the beginning of an answer, encouraging us to develop the care required by the phenomenological attitude. He will call this attitude *Gelassenheit*—releasement, letting-be. And, as he often did, he expressed his thought in the language of vision, but without necessarily having our seeing—the character of our perception—explicitly in mind:

Only when mankind, in the disclosing coming-to-pass of the insight [*im Ereignis des Einblickes*] by which he himself is beheld, renounces human self-will and projects himself toward that insight, away from himself, does he correspond in his essence to the claim of that insight. In thus corresponding, mankind would be gathered into its own essential being [*ge-eignet*], so that we, within the safeguarded element of world, might, as the mortals, look out toward the divine. (GA 79: 76/QCT 47, BF 71)

This lecture on “The Turn” ends with an expression of hope for the future, solemnly expressed in the grammar of the subjunctive. For me, however, this invocation of the divine should be interpreted without assuming onto-theology, designating instead the highest values, ideals, and principles that, looking into the future, we aspire to achieve here on earth.



Reflecting, in one of his letters, on the *Duino Elegies*, Rilke describes the poet as called upon to become a “bee of the invisible” who stores the “honey of the visible [. . .], in the great, golden beehive of the invisible.”⁹ And with a sobriety and lucidity that avoids nostalgia, he gives voice to a lament provoked by the presence of the mass-produced objects increasingly replacing the familiar things of use in daily life:

“What has been lived, what has been experienced, the things that know us are vanishing. [. . .] We are perhaps the last ones who will have known such things.” And then he says: “The responsibility rests with us, to preserve the memory not only of them [. . .], but of their humane and larean value.”¹⁰

The task—“our task”—“is to inscribe this provisional, perishing earth into ourselves so deeply, so painfully and passionately, that its being may rise again, ‘invisibly,’ within us. *We are the bees of the invisible [Biene des Unsichtbaren]*.”¹¹ “The earth,” he warns,

has no other refuge [from our will to power, our nihilism] except to become invisible: *in* us, who, through one part of our nature, take part in the invisible. [. . .] Only in us can this intimate and enduring transformation of the visible into an invisible be accomplished, no longer dependent upon being visible and tangible, since our own destiny is continually growing at once *more actual and invisible* within us.

It is in the invisible that the visible ultimately finds refuge. Everything visible—including us mortals—belongs to the truth of the invisible: belongs, I mean, not only to what is presently concealed, such as the underside of my desk, but also to the invisible as such. Everything visible—including us mortals—has been destined to depend for its very being and truth on that strange realm, that uncanny dimension, the invisible. The invisible *shelters* the being of all beings. And yet, it must also be recognized that, reciprocally, the invisible dimension of the truth of being is, and can be, sheltered nowhere other than in the way visible beings are received into presence. The invisible depends on the realm of the visible that we keep open in the way we exist (GA 65: 389–92/CP 307–10). These two facts charge us—charge our capacity to see—with a consequential responsibility. But is the typical, habitual way of seeing that prevails today appropriately sheltering? Is our seeing today open and receptive to the invisible, protecting and preserving it as the ontological dimension necessary for what is presencing?

§2

Gelassenheit

I am now going to argue that it is in the ontological attunement of *Gelassenheit* that the disposition and character of our perception embodies its appropriation (*Vereignung*), entrustment, and responsibility to care for the truth—the truth of being, necessary condition, not only for the possibility of truth as correctness in regard to beings but also for the very being of beings.

At Walden, his experiment in learning to live a simple, independent life in harmony with the natural world, Thoreau seems to have learned what I think Heidegger would call the attitude of *Gelassenheit*. In “The Bean Field” chapter of *Walden*, Thoreau reports on the phenomenology of hoeing, anticipating not only Heidegger’s conception of *Gelassenheit* but also the philosopher’s conception of the fourfold (the *Geviert*) as a gathering of earth and sky, mortals and the gods who are the metaphorical embodiments of our values and ideals:

When my hoe tinkled against the stones, the music echoed to the woods and the sky, and was an accompaniment to my labour, which yielded an instant and immeasurable crop. It was no longer beans that I hoed, nor I that hoed beans.¹²

There is, in this report, a certain insight into the ontological character—the essence—of *Gelassenheit* as a temporary neutralization of the objectifying will, a suspension of the subject-object structuring of experience: a suspension in which our experience of the world and our comportment in it are instead taking place in terms of an underlying ontological dimension wherein the usual ontic structure of duality generated through the will to power is not (or not yet) operative.

I think it is useful to think of this in the context of the phenomenology that Merleau-Ponty articulates in *The Visible and the Invisible*: “it is not I who sees, not he who sees,” he says, “because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general.”¹³ This retrieves for further development the pre-personal, pre-conceptual, pre-ontological dimension of embodied experience: vestiges of the experience of the child that still survives, even if deeply hidden, in all of us: it retrieves it to modulate or deconstruct the subject-object structure that predominates in the ontic dimension of the life of the “well-adjusted” adult.

The phenomenology of these matters leads us into questions regarding the *character* of perception—our seeing, for instance—as a modality

of response and reception. In all perceptual experience, there is always something that is simply taken as immediately given. Both empiricism and idealism have proposed theories of knowledge that attempt, in one way or another, to explain the nature of the given and its givenness. We shall not take the time to rehearse those theories here.¹⁴ Suffice it to observe that none of the proponents of these epistemologies is as concerned as Heidegger plainly is, not only to ponder, as an existential and ontological question, the *Es gibt*, the givenness of the given, and that which makes such givenness possible, but also to reflect critically on the *character of the reception* that corresponds to the presence of the given. The epistemologies that figure in empiricism and idealism treat reception as if it were solely a question of the structure of cognitive activity and our competence to encounter reality in, or through, what our perceptual faculties are given. They consequently neglect the *character* of the perception as a mode of reception. For Heidegger, therefore, much more is at stake in the perceptual act of receiving the given than what the ruling epistemologies assume.

What *Gelassenheit* would require is that willfulness should yield to willingness. Essentially, *Gelassenheit* is a question of adopting the phenomenological attitude: respecting the truth—the being—of whatever presents itself: not, of course, in the sense of necessarily admiring, esteeming, revering, honoring, or loving that which presents itself, because, after all, what presents itself might be undesirable, odious, minatory, perhaps even evil, but rather, respecting the givenness—the “*Es gibt*” of what is given—strictly in the sense of recognizing and acknowledging the *facticity* of the matter, taking notice of it, taking it as whatever it shows itself to be, but in light of an understanding that concealment belongs to every unconcealment. What we encounter is never the totality of the object; moreover, what we are seeing of it might not be showing it in a way that enables us to see it as what it really is. In any event, an *initial attitude* of letting-be, an *initial attitude* of ontological openness—a preliminary openness to the being of what is encountered—is always both prudent and wise.

Caring for the truth of being in the attitude of *Gelassenheit* requires a moment in which we suspend judgment, just as in the attitude necessary for the phenomenological method, yielding to what gives itself to be seen in a *neutralization* of willing. One of Heidegger’s words for that relation to truth is “sheltering”: not denying, distorting, or suppressing the facticity—the that-it-is, the what-it-is, and the how-it-is—of the phenomenon. “The essence of *Da-sein*,” he says, “is the sheltering of the truth of being in what is”: “Das Wesen des Da-seins [. . .] ist die Bergung der Wahrheit des Seins [. . .] in das Seiende” (GA 65: 34–35, 308/CP 29–30, 244). Another one of

Heidegger's words for the fitting ontological attitude is *Wächterschaft*, as in "Wächterschaft der Wahrheit" and, as saying the same, "Wächterschaft für das Offene": a vigilant, caring protecting of the truth of being—that is, of the open itself (GA 54: 224/P 151).

It is essential to understand that this sheltering, this protecting, and preserving of the ontological ground of truth does *not* mean protecting truth from questioning, from contestation. On the contrary, the fact is that protecting the openness of the clearing—the dimension necessary for the sheltering of being—is precisely what enables us to learn more about what we are *taking* to be the truth, truth in the sense of correctness, and thus to learn the most appropriate, most fitting way of receiving and responding to what is given; because, in the ontological dimension, claims to such truth will always be exposed to new perspectives, new disclosures, new questions, new contestations arising from that which has been concealed by, or withdrawn from, the open context. The only way to respect and care for the truth, the only way to watch over it and vouchsafe it, is to keep all claims to truth *forever-exposed* to questioning from that dimension.

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According to Heidegger's reading, Heraclitus not only severely admonished his contemporaries; he also passed judgment on the habitual disposition of human nature:

Mortals are irrevocably bound to the revealing-concealing gathering [i.e., the clearing] that lights [*lichtet*] everything present in its presencing. But they turn from the clearing [*Lichtung*] and turn only toward what is present [in its expanse], which is what immediately concerns them in their everyday commerce with each other. (GA 7: 287/EGT 122)

"They have no inkling of what they have been entrusted [*zugetraut*] with: the openness of the clearing [e.g., the opened field of visual perception], which in its lighting first allows what is present to come into appearance."

However, although "entrusted" with the clearing, we—we mortals—tend to "forget" it, failing to "protect and preserve" it (*verwahren und überliefern*) (GA 7: 286/EGT 120–21). Thus:

Everyday opinion seeks truth in variety, the endless variety of novelties displayed before it. It does not see the quiet gleam [*den stillen Glanz*] (the gold) of the mystery that everlastingly shines [*immerwährend scheint*] in the simplicity of the lighting [*Lichtung*]. (GA 7: 288/EGT 122)

The mystery, for Heidegger, consists in the fact that, although we can become aware (*eingedenk*) of the clearing, the ontological dimension of being, and can understand its function in the phenomenology of perception, we are nevertheless challenged to represent in traditional philosophical categories—that is, in terms of the prevailing paradigm—the presence of such openness, because, although belonging to the visible, this dimension of our experience is nevertheless not *objectively* visible, *objectively* present, in the way that entities are visible. Its presence requires the openness distinctive of *Gelassenheit*.

†

In his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger reiterates the interpretation of phenomenological method that, subtly departing from Husserl, he formulated in introducing *Being and Time*. He argued,

To apprehend [*Vernehmen*] means to let something come to one not merely accepting it, but taking a receptive attitude toward that which shows itself. (GA 40: 146/IMM 116)

This is hardly the *initial* attitude of our habitual way of perceiving, which tends to be structured defensively—or in what might also be considered a position of passive aggression. What I interpret Heidegger to be proposing as the ideal character of reception has two structural “moments,” corresponding to the two structural dimensions of truth. (1) The more crucial, more decisive, and more fundamental moment, namely, *the ontological*, calls for *Gelassenheit*, *receptive openness* in regard to whatever we encounter. This receptive openness is what enables the best possible understanding of the character of that which is presented to perception. It is also, however, the moment in which one is most exposed and most vulnerable, open perhaps either to the sublime mystery and wonder of being or, instead, to a traumatic encounter with danger and evil—or perhaps with meaninglessness, terrifying intimations of the possibility of meaning reduced to nothingness. (2) The *second moment* ideally involves a pragmatic shift into the *ontic* dimension of experience, whereby we are moved by the most fitting reception and response to this particular given, depending on a “correct” perception or apprehension of the nature, or character, of that given, that presence. All too often, however, we immediately rush into hasty phenomenological judgment, avoiding, repressing, or diminishing the openness of the first moment, not only in regard to being itself but also in regard to the *being* of the being that is present in the perceptual encounter.

†

It was in the mid-1940s, hence in the wake of the Nazi experiment in the will to power, that Heidegger turned to developing for his project the notion of *Gelassenheit*. In the course of those years, he composed an imaginary conversation between a scientist, a scholar, and a teacher, in which the three touched on an attitude (*Haltung*) of non-willing that they called *Gelassenheit*. Subsequently, in 1955, Heidegger delivered a “Memorial Address” honoring the composer Conradin Kreutzer, again invoking *Gelassenheit*. Sometimes translated as “letting be,” sometimes as “releasement,” this word names a certain *Stimmung*, a certain mood, cast of mind, disposition, and attitude in regard to our reception of the given—whatever beings, entities, events, and situations we encounter. This *Gelassenheit* should be understood, in its first moment, as *ontological*: it is an openness of disposition and attunement that structurally *precedes* ontical acts of will and cognitive apprehension. It is the opposite of the ego’s will to power; it requires of us a certain reserve or restraint (*Verhaltenheit*), a suspension and neutralization of the objectifying will, initially releasing whatever is encountered from our control, letting it simply be—be itself and show itself. It involves a certain composure, resting in itself: an *in-sich-beruhen*. It is an attitude or disposition, restrained (*verhalten*) in order to let itself be appropriated (*vereignet*) by the being of that which is encountered.

†

There is, I suggest, a certain connection of significance between the attitude of *Gelassenheit* as I am interpreting it here and the *phronesis* that Aristotle discusses in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Briefly formulated, *phronesis* is practical wisdom, a keen sense of what is appropriate, what is good, right, and just, that comes from the nature of a well-educated, well-formed disposition of character and that serves to inform ethical judgment and action. As an *ontological* attitude of genuine openness to what-is, restraining and suspending the will operative in premature judgment and action, *Gelassenheit* is a form of practical wisdom, *phronesis*: it is the wisdom of the phenomenological attitude, the wisdom of one disposed by character to want to do what is most fitting, right or just, and who accordingly tries to make it possible for what-is, what comes, what presences in the given situation, to show itself as what it is. As an ontological attitude, *Gelassenheit* is thus an *openness to being* that can coordinate well with the wisdom of *phronesis*. The *ontological* form of *Gelassenheit* makes sense from an *ontic* point of view: it is, indeed, practical wisdom, not only to *know and understand* what-is in the given situation but also to *act* with due diligence, prudence, or caution. So

there is also an *ontic* form of *Gelassenheit*, which, insofar as it embodies the practical wisdom of *phronesis*, might be called prudence or judicious caution. But as an *ontic* attitude, the openness of *ontological Gelassenheit*—letting be, letting go—might, or might not, be felt, and judged, to be appropriate. Hence, practical wisdom—*phronesis*—should be called upon to determine whether or not, as an *ontic* attitude, an attitude, that is, in regard to some particular being or beings, the openness of *Gelassenheit* remains appropriate. Obviously, sustaining openness, letting be, would not be appropriate if, in the ontological openness of initial encounter, the being in question should reveal itself to be someone with malevolent intention. Practical wisdom requires learning to see and learning to hear. And first of all, what needs to be seen and needs to be heard is “the truth of being”: the conditions necessary for experiencing the *being* of beings.

†

In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche argued for the importance of “learning to see,” characterizing it as “habituating the eye to repose, patience, letting things come to it.” It is a question, he says, of “postponing judgment, learning to comprehend each individual case from all its sides—the essence of which is *not* to will.”¹⁵ This could not be a more beautiful formulation of *Gelassenheit*. Caring for the truth of being. Unfortunately, however, Nietzsche thought of this effort as requiring strong willpower, leaving us, his readers, to interpret the apparent contradiction and paradox in the light of his glorification of “will to power.” My suggestion, briefly stated, is that perhaps we should draw on Spinoza’s conception of “power” to interpret what Nietzsche means.

As an ontological attitude, *Gelassenheit*, momentarily suspending or neutralizing the will, not only (1) would receive the given with an openness that, just as the phenomenological method requires, lets the given be and show what it is and as it is, but it also (2) would protect and maintain the openness of the perceptual field itself, faithful to what exceeds the presence of the given and its meaning, even extending that openness beyond the horizon toward the invisible and the immeasurable.

In “Home at Grasmere,” Wordsworth wrote of the “deliberate voice” of reason, which says: “be mild, and cleave to gentle things,/Thy glory and thy happiness be there.”¹⁶ And in another poetically expressed thought, he observed, “With an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things.”¹⁷ I suggest reading these lines of verse to be ways of representing *Gelassenheit* as an ontological attitude: an attitude, that is, in regard to the truth of being—the *being* of beings.

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Actually, it might with good reason be argued, I think, that *Gelassenheit* was in fact prefigured by Nietzsche, and also in the very definition of the phenomenological method, the definition, namely, that, in 1913, Heidegger's teacher, Edmund Husserl, formulated as "the principle of all principles" in the first volume of his *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*¹⁸ and that Heidegger significantly but subtly revised in his 1927 "Introduction" to *Being and Time*, returning to the word's derivation from the Greek language and emphasizing its middle-voice grammar. *Gelassenheit* (letting, letting be, letting go) is essentially another way of characterizing the dis-position of the Husserlian *epokhé*, the suspension of engagement, the assumption of a distinctive indifference or neutralization, that is at stake in the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology, Heidegger says, "means *apophainesthai ta phainomena*—to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" with regard to what and how it is (GA 2: 36–52, but especially 46/BT 51–62, esp. 58). However, by retrieving the Greek derivation of the word "phenomenology" from *phainesthai* and connecting that word with *aletheuein* (to bring forth into unconcealment), he subtly revised Husserl's conception in two absolutely decisive revolutionary ways: first, he gave greater emphasis to the open and receptive character, the letting-be, of the method; and second, he emphasized the hermeneutical character of the method, that is, its taking place only by entering into an interplay of concealment and unconcealment, presence and absence.

Heidegger's interpretation of the word *Gelassenheit* also drew inspiration from its return to Greek thought, retrieving the philosophical phrase *kata physin*, which means "in accordance with [or in keeping with] *physis*, nature," hence letting be. What is *kata physin* is disposed in attunement with the nature of things—in keeping with the way things rightfully are. *Gelassenheit* is the way we take responsibility, in perception, for the truth of being, faithful to our entrustment.

As we noted, in his 1935 *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger reiterated with significant elaboration the conception of a hermeneutically attuned phenomenological method he had formulated earlier in *Being and Time*, holding that, to apprehend or perceive (*Vernehmen*) "means to let something come to one, not merely accepting it, but taking a receptive attitude toward that which shows itself" (GA 40: 146/IMM 116). This is not the predominant attitude (*Einstellung, Verhalten*) of our ordinary habitual vision. Perhaps, as Heidegger seems to acknowledge in his lectures on Parmenides, it never was the predominant attitude, not even in the world of

the ancient Greeks—except among a few of their extraordinary poets and philosophers. Be this as it may, the attitude that Heidegger is urging us to recognize and learn is essentially the phenomenological method, which he expressed with exceptional emphasis by using the grammatical construction of the Greek middle voice: letting the phenomenon show itself in its own way: *Anwesen-lassen*. This is the attitude that he will in later years describe as *Gelassenheit*: letting be, letting presence.

In the Parmenides lectures (1942–1943), Heidegger points out that, for the ancient Greek philosophers, “looking is the ‘reception’ [*Vernehmen*] of beings on the basis of a primordial consent [*aus einem anfänglichen Einvernehmen*] given to being, which is why the Greek philosophers did not even know the concept of object and never think being as objectivity. (GA 54:160/P 108).¹⁹ Correspondingly, they did not know the distinctive subjectivity of the modern subject. Their experience of things was, however, inherently—albeit unreflectively—hermeneutical: the presencing, or appearing, of things—*phainesthai*, *aletheia*—was seen as always taking place in an interplay of concealment and unconcealment. And this interplay meant that the will to power that, in the modern epoch, emerged into domination was held in check, because that interplay always confronts the subject’s will to power over things with the insurmountable facticity of finitude, concealment, and the forever-present possibility of deception and error.

†

In chapter 2, I argued that, in the transformation of the perceptual *Gestalt* into the closed, totally reified form of a *Gestell*, the self-concealing withdrawing of the ground is subjected to an “assault” that attempts, for the sake of the ego-subject’s sovereign power, to reify and reduce the ground to a figure so that the ego-subject will have absolute control over phenomenology of the perceptual field—its *phainesthai* and *aletheia*—in its totality.

However, the ground will serve as ground to our perception only insofar as its giving of itself can be appropriately received by perception, and that means: its being as grounding, hence its withdrawing into partial self-concealment, must be respected. The ground of the *Gestalt* must be allowed to presence *as* ground, that is, as differentiated from the figures on which our attention is concentrated. This fundamentally calls for ontological *Gelassenheit*: letting the ground *be* the recessive grounding that it is.

Gelassenheit is the principal theme of Heidegger’s “Conversation on a Country Path.” In this conversation, the three interlocutors converge on the thought that, somehow, we need to learn a different way of looking and seeing—a neutralization or suspension of the will to power. Somehow,

we need to learn “non-willing”: a relinquishing of the ego’s will to form a totalized, closed-off horizon [*ein Absehen vom Wollen des Horizontes*] (GA 77: 142/CPC 92). Such relinquishing of the will would be a precondition for the possibility of openly and caringly “receiving” the presencing of what would show itself in its truth (GA 77: 144/CPC 93–94).

Heidegger left no uncertainty regarding the ontological importance of *Gelassenheit* as the attitude that appropriately expresses the neutralization of the will in letting-be, letting-presence (*Anwesen-lassen*): In the relation between *Mensch* and *Sein*, both poles, that is, “both the perceiving and the presencing [*Vernehmen sowohl als auch Anwesen*], need [. . .] a [field] free and open within which they can encounter and engage one another [*einander angehen*]” (GA 15: 401/FS 93).

What our time requires is what, in “On the Essence of Truth,” Heidegger described as a radical deformation or undoing (*Verunstaltung*) of the *Gestell*, that reifying form of the *Gestalt* commonly operative in the ordinary perception belonging to the modern epoch (GA 9: 177–202/PM 136–54). That may be extremely difficult to achieve. But even very modest efforts to enact *Gelassenheit* as the first moment, the ontological moment, in all one’s everyday perceptual encounters could begin to make a significant difference. In this attitude, our vision would *let itself* become appropriated and attuned by, and to, the situations in which we find ourselves, responsive to what the situations call for. The more open we are, the more neutral our will, the more our responsiveness might finally be fitting and appropriate to what we are given.

Needless to say, as an *ontic* attitude, *Gelassenheit* is *not* always appropriate or desirable. What will *always* be appropriate and desirable is only *Gelassenheit* as an *ontological* or transcendental attitude—the very first “moment” in a perceptual encounter.

This of course is much easier said than done, and Heidegger is under no illusions. Non-willing, the suspension or neutralization of the will, is not easy. But it is not the paradox it might at first seem to be, namely, the will willfully engaged in a suspension of the will.²⁰

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What needs learning is how we can shelter the truth of being while bringing it to light. In Rilke’s “Sonnets to Orpheus,” there is a stanza in which, contemplating the opening of a flower in blossoming, the poet asks us, as “the powerful ones,” “the violent ones” (*Wir, Gewaltsamen*), to reflect on the prevailing tendency in the nature, or rather character, of our perceptivity. For the poet, there is too much violence in the way we see the world:

We, with our violence, are longer-lasting.
 But *when*, in which of our lives,
 Are we at last open and receiving?²¹

The poet is keenly aware of the difficulties achieving such an open clearing in our seeing. In the eighth of his “Duino Elegies,” he says:

With all its eyes the creature-world beholds
 the open. But our eyes, as though reversed,
 encircle it on every side, like traps
 set around its unobstructed path to freedom.²²

Whatever we might think about the poet’s claim regarding the vision of the other animals with whom we share the earth, this is a concise description of how, in the epoch of the *Gestell*, our vision, human vision, is fatefully steered by the will to power. For Rilke, it is only with the power of love that we can transform the epoch of the *Gestell*: “Work of seeing is done,/ now practice heart-work.”²³ Heidegger does not emphasize learning the power of love; but it seems worth considering whether learning the receptivity in *Gelassenheit* is perhaps not very different from learning heart-work.

This invocation of heart-work should make us recognize that *Gelassenheit* is not only of great importance for our thinking about needed changes in matters ontological and epistemological; it is also of great importance for our thinking about fundamental changes in social relations. It represents an attempt to liberate social relations from power, from domination: an attempt to transform social relations by grounding them in a freedom from power that would, for the first time, truly respect the humanity of the human being. It is unfortunate that Heidegger did not consider how *Gelassenheit* could transform our *Mit-sein*, our being-with-others. In this attitude, there is respect for the otherness, the singularity, of the other. And from this, mutual trust can emerge and unfold.

Although we must not ignore the differences between Rilke and himself that Heidegger rightly insisted on,²⁴ primarily in regard to a difference in essence between the human and the animal, nothing, perhaps, comes closer to articulating for me the *Gelassenheit*-character and the *Wahrheit*-character of the way of looking and seeing toward the enactment of which Heidegger’s critique of vision implicitly summons us than Rilke’s 1914 poem, “Wendung” (“Turning”). In one of its stanzas, the poet imagines a

way of seeing that is without defense, receiving the visible into its openness and sheltering still what remains in the keeping of the invisible:

Animals trustfully stepped
into his open glance, grazing,
and captive lions
looked in wide-eyed, as into inconceivable freedom;
birds flew straight through him,
tremendous, as if into children.²⁵

Might this perhaps be read, recalling Emerson, as eloquently describing the phenomenology of “pious reception” in a vision of “redeemed” character, faithful to our entrustment?

NOTES

1. Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Intellect,” in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 418–19. Emerson contrasts here thinking to intellect, which “is void of affection, and sees an object as it stands in the light of science, cool and disengaged. [. . .] The intellect [. . .] reduces all things into a few principles.” Emerson, “Intellect,” 417.

2. Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), “On Goethe,” in *Philosophical Writings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 118.

3. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), 300; *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 247. And see Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982). Influenced by his reading of Rilke, especially the *Duino Elegies* and *Sonnets to Orpheus*, but also the poet’s letters, Blanchot has insightful things to say about vision. Familiar also with Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and possibly other writings, Blanchot points toward a vision that defies the Nietzschean will to power—and its temporality.

4. Thomas Cole, “Letter to Asher Brown Durand” (1838), in Louis Legrand Noble, ed., *The Life and Works of Thomas Cole* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, 1856), 248.

5. Edmund Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, II and III, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 71.

6. Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns*, GS 69: 54; *The History of Beyng*, trans. William McNeill and Jeffrey Powell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 48. The textual passage is preceded by this: “The trace [*Spur*] of the truth of beyng. The extra-ordinary in the essential sense is that which remains overlooked—the being of beings.” I take what is overlooked to be the clearing, the open. And the

text continues: “In that which is strange, the unusual announces itself. What is more unusual than being to the human being who, in modernity, is as if banished, living in the midst of beings, oblivious to being?” (Trans. modified).

7. Heidegger, GA 2: 294; *Being and Time*, 265. My translation.
8. Wallace Stevens, “On the Road Home,” in *The Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961, 203).
9. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1991), 483; *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1910–1926*, trans. Jane B. Greene and M. D. Herter-Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947), 374–75.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Henry David Thoreau, “The Bean Field,” in *The Portable Thoreau*, ed. Carl Bode (New York: Viking, 1964), 408.
13. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 142.
14. See Heidegger’s discussion of truth as *aletheia* in *Sein und Zeit*, GA 2: 282–305; *Being and Time*, 256–7, and also see his 1925–1926 lectures on logic: *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*; GA 21; *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). For a thorough discussion, see Daniel Dahlstrom, *Heidegger’s Concept of Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). For a brief summary regarding how the Greek philosophers understood truth as *aletheia*, see Graeme Nicholson, “Truth as Phenomenon,” *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 68 (June 2015): 803–32.
15. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 1968), 65. As I noted in my Introduction, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Rilke echoes Nietzsche’s words about “learning to see.” See *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1949, 1964), 14–15. But in his understanding of what he needs to learn, he differs, as one can easily imagine, from Nietzsche.
16. William Wordsworth, “Home at Grasmere,” in *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 174.
17. William Wordsworth, “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798,” in *The Major Works*, ed., Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 131.
18. See Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1962), chapter 2, §24, 83.
19. Merleau-Ponty also calls attention to this primordial “consent.” See his discussion of the experiential unity, the prepersonal “contract” that, by a “gift of nature,” precedes the formation, in perception, of the subject-object structure: *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1945), 250–51; *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 216.
20. See Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

21. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Sonette an Orpheus," in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 510; *Sonnets to Orpheus*, bilingual edition, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton: 1942, 1962), Part II, no. 5, 78–79.

22. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Duineser Elegien," in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 470; *Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: W. W. Norton, 1939, 1963, 1967), 66–67.

23. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Wendung" ("Turning"), in *Rilke, Poems 1912–1926*, bilingual edition, trans. Michael Hamburger (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1981), 48–49.

24. Heidegger repeatedly made known his objections to Rilke's articulation of "the Open." See, for example, what he says in "Wozu Dichter?," GA 5: 269–320; "What Are Poets For?," in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 91–142. And see *Parmenides*, GA 225–40; 151–61, in the English translation.

25. Rilke, "Wendung," ("Turning"), 46–47; and see "The Turning," in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1910–1926*, trans. Jane B. Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1947), vol. II, 116. Translation altered.

Chapter 5

THE GEVIERT

The Thing and Its World Redeemed

We seek the unconditioned Absolute [*das Unbedingte*] and only ever find things [*Dinge*].

Novalis, *Miscellaneous Observations*¹

What something [*etwas*] is in its very being [*in seinem Sein ist*] cannot be reduced [*erschöpft sich nicht*] to its being an object [*Gegenständigkeit*].

Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"²

Each beloved object [*geliebte Gegenstand*] is the center of a paradise.

Novalis, *Miscellaneous Observations*³

[May] you be vigilant, watchful [*wach*] for the saving power [*das Rettende*], able to savor everywhere the secret sense of things [*den geheimen Sinn der Dinge zu kosten*].

Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*⁴

The world is Eden enough, all the Eden there can be, and what is more, all the world there is. [. . .] Romanticism's work [is] the task of bringing the world back, as to life.

Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary*⁵

In this chapter, we shall give thought to the thing, envisioning it, following Heidegger, as a *Geviert*, possible site for the gathering of the fourfold: earth and sky, mortals and what Heidegger unfortunately calls their "gods."⁶ The *Geviert* is, I believe, Heidegger's visionary projection of a transformed humanity (*Menschentum*) and a correspondingly transformed

world, in which all things would be rescued from objecthood and returned to their redeemed being as *things*. It is his projection of the fitting destiny—*Geschick*—that he hopes it might be possible for us, inheriting our history, to appropriate and approach. Leaving aside difficult, perhaps unresolvable questions about Heidegger’s own interpretation of the “gods” he invokes, I shall take his invocation of “gods” to *embody*, metaphorically, the highest values, ideals, and principles constitutive of the ethical life we conceive for our humanity; as such, they accordingly represent a projection of the life that would redeem the promise granted us only in the achievement of a morally grounded historical existence.

Reminding us, in his volume *Against the Event*, of Maurice Blanchot’s ruminations on the everyday, Michel Seyeau argued, “The everyday is what we never see a first time, but only see again.”⁷ In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger strongly disparaged the everyday: for him, everydayness is life lived inauthentically, without the care for being that thought enjoins. But in the post-War years, he began to reconsider that harsh indictment and, looking differently at everyday things, he intensified his critique but now attempted to envision the possibility of an everyday world redeemed by mindfulness (*Besinnung*). It is, I believe, in order to induce us to see again, hence see otherwise, that Heidegger gives thought to perception—and above all, to seeing. The fourfold, *das Geviert*, is his envisioning of a different way of seeing things—even the most ordinary things in our everyday world. The key to this different way of seeing, a way that might begin to redeem things, returning objects to their being as things, is the ontological attitude of *Gelassenheit*, which holds open a clearing for things that, in a guardian care, lets them be what they are.

In his notebook thoughts written during the 1930s, Heidegger, sounding very much like Rilke, observed that “the great joy in learning about small things is the distinctive art of the transformation of human beings into thrown-open clearings [*eigene Kunst der Verwandlung des Da-seins*].”⁸

But what is a thing? What is it for something—anything—to *be* a thing? What stirred Heidegger to raise such a question was his deeply felt conviction, as he expressed it in 1949, that somehow “the things are as though long gone, gone away”—“and nevertheless they have never yet been *as things*” (GA 79: 23/BF 22). What would it be like for things finally and fully to be things? What would it be like for things to be *experienced* as things?

In this chapter, we will give thought to one of Heidegger’s most revolutionary proposals: a fundamental reimagining of the phenomenology of the thing, not only leaving behind all the metaphysical conceptions but also

challenging us to venture into a profoundly new experience in relation to the things with which we live, the things, near and far, with which we are surrounded. Briefly stated, what constitutes the thing (*Ding*) according to Heidegger's vision is (1) that its being is inherently conditioned (*be-dingt*), fated to finitude, vulnerable to destruction, dissolution, and nothingness, and (2) that it is the site of a gathering (*Ding*) taking place around it.⁹ Heidegger seems to have derived his vision of this new old experience from the etymological origin and history of the Germanic word for "thing," thereby retrieving in recollection (*Erinnerung*) an experience actually as old as the word itself—or perhaps, indeed, even older. This derivation exemplifies the material importance of cultural memory in Heidegger's project. It is always a question of memory for the sake of an ontological disclosure that could profoundly change the future toward which we seem to be irrevocably headed. So, to the extent that, by means of what he calls "thoughtful recollection" we could be brought around to experience the presencing—and the presence—of things in this new old way, a way requiring the phenomenological attitude of *Gelassenheit*, there is some reason to hope that the essential nature of things might be rescued from the catastrophic fate that, with its ever-increasing sway, is awaiting them in the epoch in which the *Gestell* triumphantly dominates our world, our lives.

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Arguing that philosophical thought needs to become a negative dialectic, Adorno observed, "The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of its hardened objects is possibility—the possibility of which the object's actuality has cheated them, yet which gazes out of each one."¹⁰ Heidegger, too, emphasizes possibility—in fact, not only as a way to undertake the work of critique but also as a way to envision how things could be different (GA 2: 51–52/BT 63).

In "The Turn" (GA 79: 74–75/QCT 45, BF 70), expressing his distress regarding "the neglect of the thing [*die Verwahrlosung des Dinges*]"—and, even worse, the frightening violence to which, in the epoch of the *Gestell*, the thing is increasingly subjected—Heidegger argues that "the impositional ordering belonging to the *Gestell* sets itself above the thing, and leaves it, as thing, unsafeguarded, truthless": "Das Bestellen des Gestells stellt sich vor das Ding, läßt es als Ding ungewahrt, wahrlos" (GA 79: 75/QCT 46, BF 71). "Wahrlos" means both truthless and unprotected.

Heidegger was trying to awaken us to a more thoughtful awareness—so that, with the eyes we have been given, we might perhaps find ourselves moved by "the secret sense of things" to envision a different world. Might a different experience with things, and, correspondingly, a

different philosophical understanding of the thing, be achievable? Might we find a way to break out of the regime of the *Gestell*? Drawing guidance and inspiration, as he so often did, from the etymological history of the words in his language—in this instance, the relationship between *Ding*, the word for thing, and the verb *dingen*, meaning “to gather,” as in a community assembly—Heidegger undertook to explore what it might mean to think of the thing as determined (*bedingt*) by its being a center, a place, of gathering: a gathering that he imagines as a fourfold, a round-dance (*Reigen*) gathering earth and sky, mortals and gods into their ownmost modes of ap-pro-priation (*Er-eignung*): a ring of interacting, reciprocating relationships that would bring each of the four, through and with each of the others, into its own ap-pro-priation (GA 7: 167–87/PLT 165–82).



In Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, there are some lines of verse that, posing an urgent question, merit our consideration as a way of opening this chapter:

We, with our violence, are longer lasting.
But when, in which of all lives,
Are we at last open and welcoming?¹¹

The fate of all the familiar things that belonged in his world was for many years a matter of the greatest concern in Rilke’s life. But the violence he felt to be threatening the world of these things is something that Heidegger also recognized as defining our time, our world; and it was for him no less of a distress. What will be our answer, our response to the poet’s question? In a 1918 letter to a friend, the poet wrote, “I can hardly stand before beautiful old things without being frightened at their forlornness,—how lost they have become, though they still continue to exist.”¹² And he deplored the commercial production of so many ugly things—“a shameless sign of their exploitation, their non-reality, their nothingness!”¹³ This is not nostalgia. Several years later, in a 1925 letter to another close friend, he returned to this theme:

Nature, the things of our intercourse and use, are provisional and perishable; but they are, as long as we are here, *our* property and our friendship, co-knowers of our distress and gladness, as they have been the familiars of our forebears. So, it is important not only not to run down and degrade all that is here, but just because of their transience, which they share with us, these things should be understood and transformed by us in a most fervent sense. Transformed? Yes, for it is our task to

imprint this provisional, perishable earth so deeply, so patiently and passionately in ourselves that its reality shall arise in us again “invisibly.”¹⁴

“The *Duino Elegies*,” he said, reflecting on these poems, “show us at this work, at the work of these continual conversions of the beloved visible and tangible.” And he followed this claim with a compelling expression of his inconsolable despair over what was happening to things—especially the things of the hearth he grew up with and loved:

And this activity is curiously supported and urged on by the ever more rapid fading away of so much of the visible that will no longer be replaced. Even for our grandparents a house, a well, a familiar tower, their very clothes, their coats: were infinitely more, infinitely more intimate, almost everything a vessel in which they found the human and added to the store of the human.¹⁵

And rather like Heidegger, Rilke used “America” as a rhetorical figure for the fraudulent materialism in the “utopian progress” he opposes:

Now, from America, empty indifferent things are pouring across, fraudulent things, sham life [. . .] A house, in the American sense, an American apple or a grapevine over there, has *nothing* in common with the house, the fruit, the grape into which went the hopes and reflections of our forefathers [. . .] Live things, things that have mattered in our lives, are fading away, vanishing, no longer to be replaced.¹⁶

Then, expressing himself emphatically, he wrote, in italics, “*We are perhaps the last still to have known such things.*” This dire warning, already a cry of mourning, prompted a reflection on the poet’s responsibility:

On us rests the responsibility of preserving not only the memory of them, [. . .] but also their human and laral value. (“Laral” in the sense of the household gods.) The earth has no way out other than to become invisible: *in* us who with a part of our natures partake of the invisible [. . .]—*in* us alone can be consummated this intimate and lasting conversion of the visible into an invisible no longer dependent upon being visible and tangible, as our own destiny continually *grows at the same time MORE PRESENT AND VISIBLE* in us. The *Elegies* set up this norm of existence.¹⁷

The most important thing that we can do, he thinks, is protect the invisible, including the invisible dimension of the things that are visible—and

attempt to redeem the promise in familiar things by poetically estranging them, withdrawing them, for a while, from usage, and from the possession of categorial knowledge. Heidegger likewise summons us to safeguard the invisible: it is this realm of the invisible that, surrounding things, protects them and preserves their truth. Unlike the *object*, which resists invisibility, the *thing* gathers and celebrates the invisible.

†

In the Summary, or Protocol, of a 1962 seminar concerning Heidegger's lecture on "Time and Being," we find this illuminating evocation of the fourfold, the *Geviert* which, in this volume, I am attempting to contemplate in terms of the phenomenology of the *Gestalt* that forms in perception as a gathering around the perceived thing:

What appropriation [*Ereignis*] appropriates [*ereignet*], that is, brings into its own [*ins Eigene bringt*], [is] the belonging-together of being and man [*das Zusammengehören von Sein und Mensch*]. In this belonging-together, what belongs together is no longer being and man, but rather—because of the correspondence, or oscillation, in the appropriation—mortals taking part in the fourfold of the world [*die Sterblichen im Geviert der Welt*]. (GA 14: 51/OTB 42)

Envisioning the gathering of the fourfold—earth and sky, mortals and gods—around each and every *thing* our sight encounters, Heidegger suggests how a certain receptive, welcoming openness to the dimensions constituting our world might turn the perceptual experience that is now determined by the *Gestell* into something entirely different, released from nihilism and the history of violence. However, Heidegger's envisioning of the *Geviert* involves a "Revolution der Ortschaft des Denkens," a "revolution in the topology of thinking" (GA 15: 385/FS 72). Are we capable of such transformation? In the fourth of the poet's *Duino Elegies*, we are reminded that the ego-logical subject, the bourgeois subject, does not easily renounce its will to power. It proclaims, "I remain nevertheless. There is always looking." ("Ich bleibe dennoch. Es gibt immer Zuschaun.") There is always looking. But what is the character, quality, and dimensionality of that looking?

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In reflections written between 1938 and 1940 and published under the title *The History of Being*, Heidegger worked to sharpen his critique of the nihilism into which he watched our world falling, calling attention to the ways we human beings have already been reduced to hollowed-out

subjectivities and *things* have been reduced correlatively to mere objects, mere items, serving the imposition, the *Gestell*, of the will to power:

Beings are everywhere abandoned in their being, leaving them to the claws and talons of objectification [*Fängen und Griffen der Vergegenständlichung*]. The objective is the spoils of calculation. Objectivity imposes itself in the place of being. “Beings” disintegrate [*Das “Seiende” verfällt*]. And being [that which makes their meaningful presencing possible] has concealed itself. (GA 69: 151/HB 130)

“Nevertheless,” he says, “the din and rush of everything imposes itself and denies what has gone before, disseminating the semblance of the new [*den Schein des Neuen*].” Thus, he laments, registering an observation that is similar to those one finds in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* and in some of Rilke’s letters:

Not a trace [*Spur*] leading to being remains anywhere, for even beings have been eroded by use into calculated contrivance [*errechnete Gemächte*]. The latter lays claim to all passion and all meaning.

The critique, reminiscent of Plato, continues:

Everything has to be new and ever more rapidly new. [. . .] What is without substance is what endures and has its presencing in the shining of mere semblance. The unconditional character of the shining of mere semblance demands of everyone who does not want to perish here that they “engage” in this process. The shining semblance itself, however, is incapable of acknowledging itself, since before all else it must first of all constantly evade itself, so as not to discover what is behind it. Shining semblance must continually keep itself on track and divert calculation and suffering onto the objective. (Ibid.)

In his postwar writings from the mid-1940s through the 1950s, Heidegger intensified and developed this critique while at the same time thinking beyond it, as in his vision of the fourfold surrounding the thing. Can we recover the wondrous facticity of the thing? Can the promise in the thing be redeemed? Can its essential being—the being proper to it—be rescued from our instrumentalizing assault and—as Heidegger expresses the issue in “What Are Poets For?”—from “the still covetous vision of things”—“des noch begehrenden Sehens der Dinge” (GA 5: 317/PLT 138)? Heidegger’s

envisioning of the fourfold is an attempt to affirm the possibility of a more hopeful world for vision to bring forth.

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In his 1931 “Little History of Photography,” Walter Benjamin comments on a statement made by a photographer who had argued that “the spirit that overcomes mechanics translates exact findings into parables of life.” He wrote,

The more far-reaching the crisis of the present social order, and the more rigidly its individual components are locked together in their death struggle, the more the creative, in its deepest essence [. . .] becomes a fetish.¹⁸

Benjamin argues against art that attempts to present our world as unquestionably beautiful, and, as if anticipating Andy Warhol, he urges the unmasking of “a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance, but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists.”

The perception of the *Geviert* that Heidegger envisions in his later writings potentially endows even the smallest, slightest thing with cosmic and metaphorical significance—but only in terms of its existential relationality, which brings into view the *interdependencies* among the four that require of us mortals the assumption of our responsibility as sole guardians of the thinghood of all the things that appear in our world.

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If, in our time, the thing in its perceptual *Gestalt* is increasingly suffering the imposition of reification and totalization, or closure, turning it into an instance of the *Gestell*, might it be possible not only to resist this imposition and rescue the *Gestalt* from this fate, but actually to transform it—transform it into what, after Heidegger, we might call a *Geviert*, a perception-event that becomes the site for a gathering of the fourfold? In and for such a perception, each being singled out for attention—be it a tree, a tin of sardines, a light bulb, a river, or a human being—would appear as the center of a site for a fourfold, a multidimensional structure, gathering around it, and into a certain presence, earth and sky, the fundamental elements between which the world we inhabit has taken place, and mortals and gods, the two dimensions of material and spiritual life shaping our world.¹⁹

It is in his later thinking that Heidegger introduced this thought of the fourfold; but the presentation leaves it vulnerable to interpretations that assume it is “merely” metaphorical—philosophical poetry. We should take

the metaphor seriously, letting it, as the Greek provenance of the word suggests, take us into a very different experience of the thing. What if we attempt to understand Heidegger's thought-image as allegory indicative of a possible transformation in our perceptual experience? Can we take his thought and give it convincing phenomenological meaning: a meaning for perception, and perhaps even a significance that Heidegger himself did not venture to entertain?

My claim in this chapter is that the fourfold—*das Geviert*—is Heidegger's utopian dream-concept, his envisioning of a world transformed: a world in which everything, each and every being, would be experienced as gathering around it, as if in a dance, a round-dance (*Reigen*), earth and sky, mortals and their gods. Many scholars seem not to know what to make of the texts in which Heidegger discusses this fourfold; not sure how to understand it, they regard it as a “merely” metaphorical fantasy or thought-experiment of little significance. I shall attempt not only to suggest and defend its significance but also to redeem it as a sublime utopian vision—in fact, a vision, a *Denkbild*, bearing truly revolutionary potential—by showing how its cosmic dimensions might be connected to the material transformation of the world we actually live in.

In this redeeming, however, I feel compelled to draw out and unfold implications that take us beyond where Heidegger's vision, as he himself must have understood it, would take us. Nevertheless, I hope that what I am drawing out from his conception—primarily a secular and democratic significance reminiscent of the world evoked by Walt Whitman—will at the very least be discerned and recognized as an appropriate possible extension of the meaning and significance Heidegger gives it, an extension that is a potential genuinely implicit in its very design.

Is this fourfold merely the wishful thinking of an abstract philosopher? I want us to take it seriously, because I believe that it could be made into much more than a mere metaphorical fantasy. But let us proceed slowly.

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There is a delightful anecdote told about Heraclitus of Ephesus, the philosopher who believed that the elemental nature of the universe is fire. When some curious admirers sought out the old man in his home, they found him, much to their surprise and consternation, not appearing deeply absorbed in thought or study, as they had imagined, but simply bent over the hearth, serenely warming himself while cooking something to eat. Noticing both their reluctance to disturb him and also their poorly disguised disappointment, their disillusionment at finding a philosopher, a sage, engaged in something so ordinary, he welcomed them, but he would

not forswear reminding them that “even around the humble cooking stove the divinities are present.” Heidegger liked to repeat this story (GA 9: 354–55/PM 69–70). Perhaps it was this story that bestirred in him the vision of a very different way of encountering the essential character of the thing—a vision that finally takes us out of, and beyond, the various metaphysical conceptions that have held sway since the beginning of Western thought. What Heidegger envisions is that the thing—presumably each and every thing, no matter how small—is, as such, a topology for the gathering of a *Geviert*, bringing together earth and sky, mortals and gods.

Might we, living in today’s world, actually learn to see things this way? What might that actually mean?

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In “Fundamental Questions of Metaphysics,” a series of winter semester lectures given in 1935–1936 at the University of Freiburg and published in English translation under the title *What Is a Thing?* (GA 41), Heidegger took up for questioning some of the major philosophical and scientific conceptions of the thing, touching on Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel, but concentrating primarily on Kant.²⁰ This was not the first time that he had lectured on this topic; nor would it be the last time. His questioning of representations of the thing in the history of metaphysics figures prominently in *Being and Time*, published in 1927, and in a 1935 lecture, revised several times in the 1950s in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” as well as in “The Thing,”²¹ a 1949–1950 lecture first published in 1951, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” a 1951 lecture first published in 1952, and “The Question Concerning Technology,” based on a 1949 lecture that Heidegger continued to work on and revise into the mid-1950s.

In concluding *What Is a Thing?* Heidegger comments that that question ultimately cannot be answered without addressing the question “Who is man?” And he finishes this thought with a remark touching on the dimension of openness that encompasses us in our relations with things—an openness that becomes increasingly important in the hermeneutical phenomenology of his later thinking: “A dimension is opened up in Kant’s question about the thing which lies between the thing and man, and reaches out beyond things and back behind man.”²² This dimension that thinking has opened up between the thing and man reaches “beyond things” to being itself and lies “behind” our human existence in our appropriated essence in *Da-sein*. In elaborating phenomenologically what that meant, Heidegger takes us deeper into the belonging-together of the human being as *Da-sein* and the thing in its distinctive mode of being—deeper into our experience of appropriation and the responsibility that forms therein. This

experience, originating in the belonging-together of *Sein* and *Dasein*, is explicated in his text on “The Principle of Identity,” a text that retrieves for our thinking the wisdom of Parmenides.

Heidegger challenges the primacy of the subject-object structure into which the philosophical tradition since Descartes has represented and enshrined the essence of the thing—the thing our untutored experience encounters. First, that representation distorts our experience, both of ourselves and of things, as they are in the “natural attitude” of everyday life. And second, the structure represented fails to recognize the unifying bond (*Bezug*) that *precedes* the differentiation that emerges and develops into that structure. Heidegger also challenges how, inheriting Aristotelian metaphysics, both empiricism and idealism conceptualize the object, either separating the object’s posited “substance,” its “matter,” from its phenomenal “qualities” or predicated “attributes,” or else reducing the “substance” to nothing but a gathering of phenomenal “qualities.”

Listening to what gifts language grants to those who listen with care to their language, Heidegger hears in the word for “thing” that he inherited from his native language the Old High German word for a gathering (GA 7: 177ff./PLT 174ff.). This etymological “recollection” emboldened him in his critique of all the philosophical representations of the thing since Aristotle. And it inspired him to envision a very different experience and understanding of the thing. Insisting on approaching the thing phenomenologically, taking the thing as it shows itself, just as it is given to our experience, Heidegger insists: the thing is simply a thing. The thing things. That “thinging” is its very essence. The thing is first encountered as a thing, something that is; and it is only for subsequent thought that it can be taken to be *res*, *ens*, or object. As he argues in “The Thing,” taking the thingness of an ordinary jug for his theme, “the thingness of the thing has become concealed, forgotten” (GA 7: 172/PLT 170). In the sciences as in philosophy, “the nature of the thing never comes to light, never gets a hearing.” In fact, he adds, “not only are things no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet been able to appear to thinking as things” (GA 7: 172/PLT 171). In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” he reflects upon the thingness of a bridge, and in “The Thing,” he reflects on the thingness of a jug, seeing these things as sites for the gathering of the fourfold (GA 7: 172/PLT 171). Is this poetizing of the thing phenomenologically grounded? To be sure, in our everyday interaction with things, we do not experience them as gatherings of a fourfold. However, if we give thought to the things we encounter and live with, suspending our habitual ways of thinking about them and interacting with them, it becomes possible to envision these things as

Heidegger has described—and, moreover, to see that the thing has *always* been a gathering of the fourfold, even though we did not recognize it as such.

In the poem “Anecdote of the Jar,” Wallace Stevens describes a situation that suggests how something like this fourfold gathering might occur.²³ Here is the first stanza, the first two lines of the second, and one line from the third and final stanza:

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
[. . .]

It took dominion everywhere.
[. . .]

This jar, though, is mischievous. And it is by no stretching of the imagination at all certain that its gathering is, or will be, redeeming.

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In *What Is a Thing?*, Heidegger asks a question reminiscent of Nietzsche’s critique of metaphysics: “Has man read off the structure of the proposition [*das Wesen des Satzes*, i.e., the grammatical construct of subject and predicate] from the structure of things, or has he instead transferred the structure of the proposition onto the things?”²⁴ Manifestly, he wanted to argue that the philosophical representation of the thing in the history of Western metaphysics has been beguiled by the grammatical structure of its languages instead of registering our everyday experience of the thing—and bringing out, by way of a hermeneutical phenomenology, the commonly unrecognized pre-reflective, pre-conceptual dimension that underlies and precedes the oppositional (*gegen-ständlich*) moment of structural differentiation, turning the relation between human-being and thing-being into an inherently willful relation between subject and object.

The thing can be seen—and heard—as a gathering only insofar as we, in relating to it, hold ourselves thrown-open, open to experience the thing in the expanse of its fourfold dimensionality, deeply connected to earth and sky, deeply connected, also, to a felt sense of our mortality and to a vivid concern for our highest ideals and aspirations as human beings.



In an essay comparing Adorno and Heidegger in which she acknowledges the considerable affinities and correspondences between them, despite the magnitude of their political differences, Ute Guzzoni explores what the two philosophers have to say regarding the possibility of “a relation to things no longer corrupted by the spell of identity on the one hand and by the oblivion of being on the other.”²⁵ This formulation of the matter indicates the direction of her argument, skewed very much in favor of Adorno. However, although it is correct to say that Heidegger was deeply concerned about the oblivion of being (i.e., nihilism), Guzzoni seems to think, incorrectly, that this implies that Heidegger, unlike Adorno, was not concerned about the corrupt, totally reifying imposition of identity on things—that is to say, on their being. This frequent criticism of Heidegger actually makes no sense, inasmuch as the reason why Heidegger felt concerned about the oblivion of being was precisely because he cared about protecting and preserving the being of *things*. It was always for the sake of the rescuing and redeeming of *things*—all the beings of our world—that Heidegger fought against the oblivion of being. Thus, for Heidegger, there is no either-or: to be concerned about the oblivion of being necessarily requires being concerned about the logic of identity imposed on things in the violent time of the *Gestell*.

For the purposes of her comparison, Guzzoni relies primarily on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and on some of his shorter texts, such as “The Origin of the Work of Art” (1935–1936), “*Gelassenheit*: Country Path Conversations” (1944–1945), “The Thing” (1951), and “Building Dwelling Thinking” (1951). Unfortunately, however, there is no consideration of Heidegger’s thinking regarding things in “The Age of the World Picture” (1938), “The Question of Technology” (1949), and “Poetically Man Dwells” (1951). But above all, there is no consideration of Heidegger’s thinking with regard to identity and difference in “The Principle of Identity” (1955–1957). This crucial text followed many earlier texts, in which he formulated a strong critique of the contemporary character of our relation to things—our relation to their ways of being present and to the conditions that make their presence and absence possible.

What makes “The Principle of Identity” singularly significant is that, in it, Heidegger *opposes* the reifying imposition of categories of identity—the corrupting “spell of identity”—by engaging our attention in the *phenomenology* of the subject-object dialectic: the oscillation or counter-resonance (*Gegenschwung*) operative in the belonging-together of *Mensch* and *Sein*. Moreover, by drawing our awareness back into the phenomenology of this

primordial interaction preceding the formation, in extreme differentiation, of the subject-object structure, Heidegger does not only *oppose* the “spell of identity,” but he also shows us a way to *resist* its influence, its power. That is because, in returning back into the pre-conceptual dimension of this interaction, a dimension belonging to repressed nature, wherein structural differentiation has not (yet) solidified, we cannot easily avoid feeling and recognizing that there is no identity without difference. Retrieving from its repression our experience of that dimension in our relation to things (“die Grundstimmung des Bezuges zum Seyn,” as he phrases it in his *Grundfragen der Philosophie*, GA 45:2) thus *begins* the process that Adorno called “reconciliation”: the “redeeming” of the *being* of things, freeing them from domination.²⁶ As Adorno has nicely described it:

The reconciled state would not, through philosophical imperialism, annex the foreign, but would have its happiness in the persistence of the foreign and the different within the granted nearness.²⁷

Returning in awareness to the phenomenology of the pre-conceptual dimension could encourage what Adorno characterized as “the long and non-violent look upon the object.”²⁸ Heidegger would have no problem agreeing with this characterization. For him, though, it would be a question of a way of seeing that is grounded in, and emergent from, an *ontological* moment of *Gelassenheit*, the attitude constitutive of the phenomenological method, letting the object, the thing, *be* what and how it is.

Arguing for the “reconciled state,” Adorno will even speak—as Heidegger has also—of learning “the love for things,” “nestling near to things,” and being “in touch with the warmth of things.”²⁹ And, in an essay on Alban Berg, Adorno, again like Heidegger, urges us to develop an “attuned sensibility,” a gentle, caring protection of things—“eine schonende Liebe.”³⁰ This mindful protection (*Wahren*) is what Heidegger emphasizes by thinking of perception as *Wahrnehmung*.

In his “Conversation” on *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger’s interlocutors give thought to nearness and farness. Guzzoni is thus entirely mistaken when she argues that, in his commitment to the “abstraction” of an ontological orientation for being, Heidegger *turned away* from the lifeworld of human beings and our relation to things. On this nearness and farness, the thinking of the two philosophers once again in fact converges. According to Adorno,

The non-violent observation that generates all happiness of truth is bound to the fact that the observer does *not* assimilate the object: nearness is bound to farness.³¹

This “farness” is not coldness, rejection, or neglect, but recognition and respect for the singularity and otherness of the thing.³² In the context of Heidegger’s project, the phenomenology of this farness-in-nearness and nearness-in-farness is moreover inherent in the emerging and withdrawing of beings; and it is represented in the two axes constitutive of the “topology of being” that would form in the fourfold around each and every thing. “Geviert” is thus Heidegger’s name for the redeeming of things, a possibility for the things we are living with, requiring, hence dependent on, our caring, our response-ability, releasing things from the tyranny of the reifying logic of identity in the subject-object structure.

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In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in the course of attempting to understand in what ways the work of art is a distinct *kind* of thing, Heidegger critically examines three different interpretations of the thingness of the thing that, “predominant in the course of Western thought, have long become self-evident and are now in everyday use”: (1) the thing as an underlying substratum, a substance around which various properties or qualities have assembled (see Aristotle and the Western philosophers of the Middle Ages); (2) the thing as synthetic unity of the sensible manifold given to the senses (see Kant); and (3) the thing as formed matter, matter informed, or determined, by its ideational form (again see Aristotle). In one way or another, he argues, all three of these interpretations are reflections of an attitude—one might call it the will to power—that encourages what he boldly describes as an “assault” upon the thing, an “inordinate attempt” to exercise control over the thing (GA 5: 7–16/PLT 22–31). All three interpretations fail to recognize and understand the thingness of the thing, either reducing its self-containment to subjectivism or reifying it in the objectivism of the natural sciences. And none even begins to appreciate the distinctive way in which this thingness emerges and manifests in the work of art; they all miss the work’s relation to the hermeneutics of truth and the way in which, while belonging to the elements, dependent upon their materiality, the work of art brings forth a world. “In setting up a world,” he says, “the work [of art] sets forth the earth.” Thus: “The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and preserves it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth*”: “Das Werk läßt die Erde eine Erde sein” (GA 5: 32/PLT 46). And it “opens up [*eröffnet*] in its own way the being of beings” (GA 5: 25/PLT 39).

Heidegger thinks that in the authentic work of art, we can experience the “truth,” that is, the being, of beings. However, what makes the traditional, representational work of art—at least the work of art from ancient

times to the very late nineteenth century—fascinating from a philosophical point of view is that it is at once a thing and not a thing, a thing made of earth, a thing composed of matter, and yet, at the same time, a thing that presents itself in a way that utterly transcends and often conceals its thinghood. As a work of art, it is the mystery of a complete transformation, a thing no longer only a thing that can be weighed, measured, or objectified. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, though, as representational art yielded to Abstraction, Minimalism, and other forms of intensely self-reflective art that call attention to their material conditions of possibility and question that process of transformation, the mystery in the presence of a representation of the world has been vanquished so that enchantment has given way to processes of disenchantment, works of art revealing the work in its humble thingly being. But that, too, can be revelatory, as revelatory as representationalism, whether showing the illusion that art creates to *be* nothing but an illusion, hence showing the work of art in its emergence from, and submergence in, the materiality of the thing, or isolating and showing nothing but the thing itself in its unadorned thingness, as if it could be cut off from all relationality; that too is art opening up a world for us.

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While formulating objections to all three metaphysical interpretations of the thing, Heidegger nevertheless draws upon all of them to a certain extent in order to imagine the thing as appearing to our perception in a profoundly new *Gestalt*—that distinctive geometric configuration he calls the *Geviert*. In “The Thing,” Heidegger says,

Earth and sky, divinities and mortals—being at one with one another of their own accord—belong together by way of the coherence of their unifying fourfold. Each of the four mirrors in its own way the presence of the others. Each therewith reflects itself in its own way into its own, within the coherence of the four. (GA 7: 180–81/PLT 179)

Each thing in its presencing gives us mortals something to think about, something to care about, something that appropriates us, calling us as we are into question. The text continues,

This mirroring does not portray a likeness. The mirroring, lightening each of the four, appropriates their own presencing into simple belonging to one another. Mirroring is this appropriating–lightening way, each of the four plays to each of the others. The appropriative mirroring sets each of the four free into its own, but it binds these free ones into the simplicity of their essential being toward one another. [. . .] This

appropriating mirror-play of the simple one-fold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, is what we call world.

This leads into an illuminating explication of the sense Heidegger wants to make of our “appropriation” as gathered through the thing into its surrounding fourfold:

If we let the thing be present in its thinging from out of the worlding world, then we are thinking of the thing as thing. Taking thought in this way, we let ourselves be concerned by the thing’s worlding being. Thinking in this way, we are called by the thing as the thing. Thus, in the most immediate sense of the German word *bedingt*, it is we who are the be-thinged, the conditioned ones. We have left behind us the presumption of all unconditionedness. (GA 7: 182/PLT 181)

To be able to see what is visible, we must ourselves belong to the visible. We can relate to things only because we are ourselves be-thinged: in other words, we are beings who are conditioned to perish, made of the same ultimate matter as all the things we live with. Heidegger further explains, then, what this implies, and indeed enjoins, regarding our appropriation as mortals:

If we think of the thing as thing, then we are engaged in sparing and protecting the thing’s presence in the region from which it presences.

At the same time, however, that he wants to emphasize our appropriated responsibility for things and their conditions of possibility, he also wants to deny any suggestion of subjectivism and anthropocentrism:

When and in what way do things appear as things? They do not appear *by means of* human making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls [*andenkende Denken*]. (Ibid.)

Things do not necessarily appear, or show themselves, to *be* things; they can, instead, appear only as *objects*. And, in the contemporary world, things mostly *do* appear as objects. We do not even realize that they are the constructs of a modern will to power. But, in their truth, things are not reducible to objects: an object is the product of a process of detachment and abstraction, removing it from its referential context; thus isolated, it

becomes the product of an imposed meaning and identity. Unlike objects, things are obdurately inseparable from their context, which alone gives them their own proper meaning. Things resist their reduction to objecthood, resist their reduction to our purposes in many different ways; however, we are often insensitive and blind to that resistance, determined to make them yield to our will and serve our purposes. For things to appear, to presence, as things requires not only the *fact* that we, in our thrown-openness, are not encapsulated, thing-like substances, but also that we take a step back (*Schritt zurück*) from the so-called “natural attitude” (our everyday habits) into the phenomenological. This, he says, is “no mere shift of attitude,” because “all attitudes tend to remain committed to the precincts of representational thinking”:

The step back does, indeed, depart from the sphere of mere attitudes. But the step back takes up its residence in a co-responding [*Ent-sprechen*] which, appealed to in the world’s being by the world’s being, answers within itself [*innerhalb selber*] to that appeal. (GA 7: 183/PLT 181–82)

In the step back into phenomenology, philosophical thinking refrains from taking the contemplative, theoretical position that sees the thing as *vorhanden*, present-at-hand, and refrains as well from the instrumental position, for which the thing is something merely *zuhanden*, ready-to-hand, in order to co-respond as openly as possible to the thing in its gathering of a world. However:

A mere shift of attitude [*Wechsel der Einstellung*] is powerless to bring about the advent [*Ankunft*] of the thing as thing, just as nothing that stands today as an object can ever be simply switched over into a thing. (GA 7: 183/PLT 181)

It is not entirely clear how we might prepare for such an ontological transformation, returning things to their thinghood and redeeming their historical essence and promise (GA 7: 184/PLT 182). Heidegger quite appropriately does not presume to tell us what to do. He does, however, counsel “pure waiting,” which I take to mean finding a way, in the way we live, to make the world more receptive to ontological change without exercising or encouraging the will to power. It would be a question of our being, by virtue of our appropriated mindfulness, more open to the dimensionality of the clearing—the perceptual field—and more vigilant in holding it open for what might come to presence in its field of presencing.

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In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” Heidegger describes how a “thing” such as a bridge is, and could be regarded as, a site gathering the fourfold, earth and sky, gods and mortals, around itself (GA 7: 154–61/PLT 152–58). Despite a certain formal similarity, this understanding of the perceptible thing in its contextual place greatly differs from the metaphysical conceptions proposed in the past, because its point of departure is not the conceptual and theoretical exigencies of some philosophical system, but *the thing itself as perceived*, and as it figures or functions in all the contexts of our lifeworld. But Heidegger’s distinction is to have recognized an implicit logic of *gathering relationality* in all three philosophical representations of the thing.

In the course of Western thought, “the thing has been represented as an unknown X to which perceptible properties are attached.” So, he adds, “From this point of view, everything that already belongs to the gathering nature of this thing appears only as something that is afterward read into it” (GA 7: 156/PLT 153). This does not mean that Heidegger rejects the usefulness, hence the pragmatic truth, in the ways that the nature of the thing is treated in mathematics, physical science, and technology. However, beginning his phenomenology, in this text, by observing the ways in which the bridge as a thing serves the life of a community, the ways in which it functions in our lifeworld, Heidegger is not only suggesting a different *understanding* of the thing and of the way we might *think* of the thing; he is also suggesting a different way of *experiencing, and living with*, all the bridges and jugs in our lifeworld—and indeed, a different way of looking at, and seeing, each and every thing that presences in our world. At stake in the redeeming of the thing as thing is an entirely different way of living, building, and dwelling. Thus, as Heidegger’s description in this text makes clear, even our sense of location, place and space, and nearness and farness can, and would, undergo enormous transformation, were we, in our sensibility and perception, to encounter all things as topologies for the gathering of the fourfold—and correspondingly experienced ourselves as mortals taking part in this gathering.

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In “Building Dwelling Thinking,” “What Are Poets For?,” and “The Thing,” as well as in other texts, Heidegger explains with philosophical clarity and poetic beauty what “earth” and “sky” can signify, and what our most appropriate, most fitting comportment in relating to them should involve. “Earth” and “sky” are names designating the environmental elements and the natural world they compose—rivers, oceans, clouds, volcanos, stone; but they are names that also call into the gathering all the plants

that grow and all the animals that make their way in the nature of these elements. “Sky,” moreover, symbolizes, or meta-phors, the sublimity of the depths of the infinite, the immeasurable, granting us mortals a sensible intimation of the measureless by which to take the measure of our humanity as human beings, while “earth” symbolizes, or meta-phors, the dense, the obscure, the limits, or finitude that, even while it grants a certain measure of security, a sense of groundedness, also compels us, as in the emergency of landslides and earthquakes, to recognize the ultimate groundlessness of the human condition. For the earth can withdraw its grounding from the world; and in response to the will to power, it can show itself to be a ground from which all final grounding has been withdrawn. The earth is also that to which, in our death, we return. We have an ineluctable responsibility to take earth and sky in our care.

Besides gathering earth and sky, the thing also gathers mortals. But who are the mortals? Because, for Heidegger, we human beings alone can die, we are the mortals. Always already and yet, we are not—or not yet. Not, or not yet, unless we are like Socrates, like Montaigne, individuals who would live their lives with a deep sense of their mortality giving coherence and meaning to even the seemingly most insignificant matters in their lives. This “mortality” that Heidegger ascribes is not simply a neutral empirical fact characterizing all human beings. We are all, as human beings, assigned to death, fated to die, to perish. In that sense, we are all mortals; death in the sense of no longer being alive is inscribed in our very essence. But how we live our lives and how we live our dying and meet our death is up to us. We can evade it and deny it or take it over as the measure of our lives and as giving shape to the meaning of our life as a whole. To be a mortal in that more existentially authentic sense is to live one’s life with death as the measure.³³ In his *Essays*, Montaigne remarked that to study philosophy is to learn to die. Hence, as he also said, it is always to live life with the taste of death in the mouth.³⁴ But death, in our culture, is as much as possible reduced to a mere fact, avoiding the reality, avoiding its fullness of meaning.

If living with a deep sense of mortality is required of us in order to take part in the fourfold, then most human beings are not yet fully gathered into the fourfold that surrounds all things. So, while I consider that sense of mortality to be of the greatest importance for living to the fullest and deepest extent what it means to be a human being, I think Heidegger wants to say that *all* human beings, regardless of the depth and extent of their sense of mortality, would be gathered, nevertheless, into the fourfold that surrounds all things. For all human beings are earth-bound beings already fated to die; all are in that way mortals summoned to acknowledge, and learn how to

live from, their mortality. I will now explain why this more inclusive sense of “mortal” should not be neglected.

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In Heidegger’s projection of the fourfold, the thing is envisioned as gathering us, as mortals, into our deepest human connections. This gathering that he imagines around the thing certainly makes us see in a new light the things we have reduced to objects. Things once again could possess existential meaningfulness. But we human beings are not only mortal; we are social, cultural, political beings. Hence, I want to argue that, in this projection of the gathering, Heidegger neglected to think what a gathering of mortals should mean in terms of our human connections. Without envisioning the thing in the ethical life of human connections, we cannot even begin to reconcile and redeem the promise in the thing—the promise of the thing. The thing will remain a corrupted matter; and it will continue its tyranny as object. That means, correspondingly, that we remain subjects, not only subjected to the tyranny of the object but also imposing that subjection, that oppression, on the lives of others.

So I want to argue, differing from Heidegger, that this gathering must be a *democracy* in that it recognizes the *shared humanity* of all mortals, all human beings, regardless of race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and other social identities; a *democracy* that recognizes the shared humanity of people in all social and economic conditions, all stations and vocations, all destinies; a *democracy* that recognizes that no one, not even the richest, can enjoy what they have without depending on the consent and contributions of all the others gathered in the social order.

Thinking of Heidegger’s fourfold as the envisioning of a new, universal humanism, a humanism recognizing our “true dignity” as human beings, consequently seems to conflict with his exemplary rhetorical images of the fourfold, which consistently evoke the world of a pastoral, Arcadian community. (At least, it seems that it does not have to be German!) There are no images of a fourfold gathering human beings together in the context of urban, cosmopolitan life. No images of any gatherings around the things belonging to an advanced industrial society. So, I do not see how it is possible to reconcile his humanism, which presumably must be universal and democratic in virtue of its recognizing that there is humanity to be found in all human beings, with the world of his rhetorical images. Insofar as all human beings are recognized and gathered, they are recognized and gathered only in their mortality—not in their humanity. In this there is a decisive difference. Hence, in Heidegger’s project, the fourfold cannot be the gathering of a true democracy. Nor can it redeem the historical fate of

the thing, rescuing its promise for the world to come. That process can be completed only when, because of their belonging-together, *both* the being of the thing *and* the being of the human being are released from all forms of violence.

It is imperative that the fourfold recognize and affirm our deep social and ecological interdependencies—and the corresponding responsibilities we have as individuals and members of various communities. No one can exist in total, absolute isolation and independence. There are many versions of individualism. Some versions are to be celebrated. But the form of individualism that the system of late capitalism and its technocracies encourages today—and even sometimes requires—is in many ways very destructive, threatening interdependencies we desperately need and making very difficult the peaceful reconciliation of differences that is essential for the flourishing of human life on this planet.

So, I want to suggest, as a way to begin thinking the completing of this process, a very different image for the gathering of the fourfold. Around even the smallest thing, a thing seemingly inconsequential in the cosmic drama—let us think of a tin of sardines—the four are waiting to gather, waiting to be received into the realm of the visible and audible. And that means that, gathered around this ordinary tin of sardines, one should bring into view and acknowledge all those who in any way took part in, or contributed to, the presence of this tin, with its sardines, on my table: all the fishermen, boat-builders, longshoremen, miners, geologists, engineers, machine inventors, tin-factory workers, packers and truckers, bankers, lawyers, government legislators, fisheries police, merchants, road builders, bridge builders, traffic light designers, electricians, street light manufacturers, olive grove farmers, olive oil makers, and so many others. All gathered, all gathering, whether or not they are visible, and whether or not we have explicitly recognized their presence. Recognition, or say, rather, acknowledgment, is something that ultimately depends not only on mindfulness, on our giving thought to the appropriation that has brought us into the gathering that surrounds the thing engaging us, but also on our kindness, our generosity of spirit.

I would argue that it is to give voice and encouragement to just such mindfulness, and just such acknowledgment of our shared humanity, our shared mortality, and shared interdependencies, that the American poet, Walt Whitman, wrote his greatest poems, “Song of Myself” and “Salut au Monde!”³⁵ They are poems of celebration and gratitude that gather *all* of us into the fourfold of a democracy built by generosity of spirit and mutual acknowledgment. Sadly, though, Heidegger’s fourfold is not Whitman’s,

because, despite its “humanism,” its solemn invocations of “humanity,” the world the philosopher projects does not seem to welcome all human beings. How can the essence of the thing be redeemed in a fourfold that still has not brought all human beings together into a condition of reconciliation? I believe that, as participants gathered into the fourfold, every one of us is bound into the responsibility of a relationship of mutual respect with all the other human beings in the gathering.

We also are bound into a responsibility for the natural world—the environmental elements, earth and sky, and all the things, plants and animals, that those elements make possible. In regard to *this* dimension of the gathering, my thought gladly returns to Heidegger’s topology, which makes compellingly clear our role in that relationship to nature: faithful guardianship. We, we mortals, bound as we are to the generosity of earth and sky, and to the plants and animals those elemental environments support, are the ones—the only ones—entrusted with the preservation and truth of nature, hence, too, we are entrusted with a caretaking that calls on us to prepare, as best we can, for a way of bringing forth, letting things presence, whether in perception or in making and using things, that would no longer be in the grip of the technological, military-industrial economy, the encompassing *Gestell* that, in our time, imposes its reified ontology, its essentially nihilistic determination, on the truth of being.

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But, now, finally, *who* are the gods, the fourth participant, in this *Geviert*? *What* are they? Heidegger does not actually tell us very much. He invokes them with very little explanation or interpretation of their ontological status. The first thing we need to do with Heidegger’s invocation of “gods” or “divinities” is to take them out of theology and Romantic metaphor, bringing them into meaningful relation to us mortals as embodiments of utopian challenges to our way of seeing things, making us responsible for poetically building a more just, more humane world while at the same time caring for and saving earth and sky. That, I think, is how we should best interpret Heidegger’s invocation of the gods and his assertion that, between gods and mortals, there is a kind of “mirroring,” appropriating each to the other. I suggest taking this to mean that the gods, being exemplary in their embodiment, are projections that reflect, or mirror, our highest ethical values, moral principles, and cultural ideals, appropriating us for their actuality, their realization, the consummation of their embodiment.

In the famous interview published in *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger is quoted as saying, no doubt with Hölderlin’s poem in mind, that “Only a god can save us.”³⁶ A god? Yet another god? Might we not have had enough of

the gods? Might his disquieting words be simply a way of saying that only something extraordinary—some extraordinary event—he cannot now even begin to imagine what—not necessarily a god as such—might save us? Might his invocation of a god be nothing more than a figure of speech, a dramatic way of saying that our situation is so dire, so grave that it seems hopelessly beyond human powers to turn things around and rescue us from the very worst?

The ancient Greeks eventually abandoned their gods, laughing at their moral failings. Today, the God of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is envisioned as imperiled, suffering and perhaps dying because of the evils that we humans have wrought, exercising our free will. The Christian's savior passed through this world, but few were the ones who recognized him. The world is destitute; it remains to be transformed. The Jews still hold on to their conviction that the Messiah has not yet come. The time for that transformation has not come. But the Jewish prophets counsel hope in vigilance and spiritual preparation for that coming. The failure of Christ to transform the world seems to confirm the Jewish skepticism, or perhaps rather, the attitude of waiting and hoping, portrayed so compellingly by Kafka and Beckett. More precisely, it is a question of waiting without waiting and hoping without hope. Very much, it seems to me, what Heidegger was getting at.

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In “The Question Concerning Technology,” even in the midst of invocations of the danger of nihilism in our time, a time submitting the *Gestalt* to the *Gestell*, the imposition of reification, Heidegger, like Hölderlin, is not without hope. There is promise of transformation, he says, because, “wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already brought into the unconcealed” (GA 7: 19/QCT 19). Might we not, in such mindfulness, such openness of heart, find ourselves enabled to perceive “the secret sense of things”?

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It is appropriate that the gods, interpreted metaphorically as embodiments of our highest, most cherished values, principles, and ideals, should be projected in the sky, signifying that they are as insubstantial as air if not materially actualized on the ground where we dwell.

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As we noted, in the interview published in *Der Spiegel*, Heidegger voiced his concerns regarding the present and future of the contemporary world and opined that “only a god can save us.”³⁷ Years earlier, in the 1930s

and 1940s, years when his thinking seems to have been influenced with exceptional intensity by Nietzsche, Heidegger brought his thinking to bear on the question of “the last god.” In *The Event*, texts written during the War years 1941–1942, Heidegger said,

The last god is the oldest, most inceptual god, the one that is determined in regard to his essence in the inceptuality of the beginning, the one that could *be* more eminently only if the truth of being were inceptually grounded in him, which is not something in his own power. (GA 71: 229–30/E 197)

In his *Contributions to Philosophy*, texts written during the years 1936–1938, Heidegger had written this:

- “Dasein [. . .] hat sein Wesen in der Bergung der Wahrheit des Seyns, d.h. des letzten Gottes in das Seiende.” [“*Dasein*’s essence lies in its care, its protection and preservation, of the truth of being—that is to say, the last god—in the realm of beings (the realm of what-is).”] (GA 65: 35/CP 29)

And again:

- “Das Wesen des Da-seins [. . .] ist die Bergung der Wahrheit des Seins, des letzten Gottes, in das Seiende.” [“The essence of *Da-sein* [. . .] is taking the truth of being, the last god, into its care, its protection, in the realm of beings.”] (GA 65: 308/CP 244)

The “last god” invokes a momentous time of transition, an event (*Ereignis*) of history-breaking, history-making significance, when, at long last, we human beings, recognizing and understanding our essence as *Da-sein*, finally “enown” it and begin to enact it, and, no longer appealing to deified forces to cause, explain, and justify the way things are, we begin to take responsibility for the conditions of the world. The future for us depends on our taking into our care the openness of the world that our existence (*Da-sein*) opens up. “The last god” symbolizes the god of the moment when, at long last, we *cease* depending on a god to take care of what needs to be done.

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In concluding his short text on “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50),” Heidegger draws, as he so often did, on the metaphors of visual perception to assert his unshakable conviction that “thinking changes the

world.” However dark our future appears, he believes, no doubt inspired by Hölderlin, that, paradoxical though it might seem, it is precisely when our situation seems darkest that it can “offer promise [*das Versprechen*] of a greater brightness” (GA 7: 234/EGT 78).

As Walt Whitman says, in his *Leaves of Grass*, as if anticipating Heidegger’s redeeming of the thing in its reticent truth, making visible the gatherings of the fourfold, already waiting, needing only to be recognized: “All truths wait in all things.”³⁸ Unfortunately, however, the humanism of democracy, where the principle is the identity, or reconciliation, of identity and nonidentity, will be waiting in vain for proper recognition from Heidegger’s conception of the fourfold. But reading Whitman after Heidegger, we can imagine the democracy that could gather in a fourfold around all things.

NOTES

1. Novalis (Georg Phillipp Friedrich von Hardenburg), *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, trans. Margaret Mahoney Stoljar (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997), Fragment no. 1, 21. For the German, see *Novalis Schriften, Historische-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl, and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–2006).

2. Heidegger, “Brief über den Humanismus,” in *Wegmarken*, 179; GA 9: 349; “Letter on Humanism,” in *Pathmarks*, 265.

3. Novalis, *Novalis: Philosophical Writings*, Fragment no. 51, 31.

4. “238. Die Rettung des Arztums,” *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, GA 16: 586–87. Heidegger’s wedding wishes for Peter Rees, the son of his deceased friend, Theophil Rees, is discussed by Andrew Mitchell in “Heidegger’s Breakdown: Health and Healing under the Care of Dr. V. E. von Gebattel,” *Research in Phenomenology*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2016): 94–95.

5. Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 52–53.

6. For an interpretation differing from mine, I urge my readers to read Andrew J. Mitchell’s book, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2015).

7. Michael Seyeau, *Against the Event: The Everyday and the Evolution of Modernist Narrative*, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12. And see Maurice Blanchot, “Everyday Speech,” in *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 238–45.

8. *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte)*, GA 94: 321. My translation.

9. Etymology supports Heidegger's attempt to imagine a redeeming return of the object to its original meaning as thing, reversing the course of material and cultural history. This is the redemptive functioning of memory at work in his project of thought. See *Wikipedia*.

10. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), vol. 6, 62; *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), 52.

11. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Die Sonette an Orpheus," in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1962), 510; *Sonnets to Orpheus*, bilingual edition, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1942, 1962), Part II, 5, 78–79.

12. See Rilke's 1918 letter to Marie von Bunsen, *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1910–1926*, trans. and ed., Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 176–77.

13. *Ibid.*

14. See Rilke's letter to Witold von Hulewicz, November 13, 1925, in *Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke 1910–1926*, 374.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 374–75.

17. *Ibid.*, 375.

18. Walter Benjamin, "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. II, Part 1, 383; "Little History of Photography," in *Selected Writings 1927–1934*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 526. A provocative thought, considering the revolutionary cultural and art-historical influence of Andy Warhol's painting of Campbell's soup cans.

19. In *Journey to the End of Night*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: New Directions, 1983, 108), the French writer Louis-Ferdinand Céline says, "To the eye, a small sardine tin lying upon the road at midday throws off so many reflections that it can take on the dimensions of an epiphany." How about thinking of it taking on the dimensions of a *Geviert*? In *The Equivocation of Reason: Kleist Reading Kant* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007, 83), James Phillips quotes this passage and comments, "This car crash of a sardine can scintillates like a [Kantian] Idea." Indeed it does—and, set in a *Geviert*, it gathers mortals in relation to their ideals, recollecting their sublime vision—their Kantian Idea—of a morally perfected world. But I concur with Phillips' reluctance to presume even the possibility of completed perfection (*The Equivocation of Reason*, 40).

20. See Martin Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding*, GA 41; *What Is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1967).

21. Heidegger, "Das Ding," in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, 163–81; GA 7: 167–87; "The Thing," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. Albert Hofstadter, 165–86. Since the near-final draft of this chapter was written, an excellent new translation by Andrew J. Mitchell of an earlier version of Heidegger's text on "The Thing" has

been published in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 5–22. For the German, see “Das Ding,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA 7: 167–87. I highly recommend Mitchell’s translation, both for its content, different from the later version translated by Hofstadter, and for the quality of the translation; however, except for the textual quotes at the very beginning of this chapter, all my textual references to this text will be to the *earlier* translation of the *later* version rendered by Hofstadter, and using the 1950 lecture published in 1954 in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. I have now added the pages in the *Gesamtausgabe*. For a historically oriented consideration of the topic, I recommend Wolfgang Rainer Mann, *The Discovery of Things* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

22. Heidegger, *Die Frage nach dem Ding*, GA 41: 246; *What Is a Thing?*, 244. And see the superb “Analysis” by Eugene T. Gendlin that follows the translation of *What Is a Thing?*, 247–96.

23. Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 60–61.

24. Heidegger, *Die Frage nach den Ding*, GA 41: 44; *What Is a Thing?*, 46. And see a similar argument in, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage books, 1989), Part I, §§20–21, 27–30.

25. Ute Guzzoni, “‘Were Speculation about the State of Reconciliation Permissible . . .’: Reflections on the Relation between Human Beings and Things in Adorno and Heidegger,” in *Adorno and Heidegger: Philosophical Questions*, ed. Iain Macdonald and Krzysztof Ziarek (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 124–25.

26. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970ff), vol. 10, 742–46; vol. 6, 17. Hereafter, references to this edition will be abbreviated as GS, followed by volume and page numbers.

27. Adorno, GS, vol. 6, 192.

28. *Ibid.*, vol. 10, 602.

29. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 47; vol. 6, 191, 345.

30. *Ibid.*, vol. 16, 92; vol. 18, 495.

31. *Ibid.*, vol. 4, 112.

32. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, 192.

33. See Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2020). How acknowledging our mortality makes us free.

34. Michel de Montaigne, “That to Philosophize Is to Learn to Die,” in *The Complete Essays*, trans. Donald Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 62.

35. To my mind, the greatest of all the poems in Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* is perhaps his “Song of Myself.” The title might suggest a narcissism. But in truth the poem is a song coming from the poet’s sense of *Mit-sein*, a song celebrating the spirit of democracy in which the poet goes *out* of himself, and names and receives and welcomes all beings to *come into* his sense of “self.” See “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Doubleday, 1917), 33–109: “All truths wait in all

things,” he says there (stanza 30). And this thought is unfolded in the verses that follow, recognizing the hidden truth in a leaf of grass, the blackberry, a tree-toad, a mouse. “I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots [. . .] I ascend to the nest in the fissure of the cliff” (stanzas 31, 32). He is, in spirit, in vision, everywhere, going out of himself where “the mocking-bird sounds his delicious gurgles, cackles, screams, weeps” and where “the humming-bird shimmers,” taking their lives into himself, moved by his caring, his sympathy (stanza 33). But his song does not gather only nature, only earth; it gathers all mortals as well. “I take part, I see and hear the whole” (stanza 33). The poem concludes (stanza 52) with his returning, in death, to the elements: “I depart as air [. . .], I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love.”

The other great poem of his own *Geviert* bears the title “Salut au Monde!,” in *Leaves of Grass*, 163–76. Here the poet finds himself asking himself: “What do you hear Walt Whitman?” And in answering this summons, the poet gathers into his hearing the voices of people all over the world, the sounds of people at work and at play, living their lives:

I hear the workmen singing and the farmer’s wife singing,
 I hear in the distance the sounds of children and of animals early in the day, [. . .]
 I hear fierce French liberty songs, [. . .]
 I hear the Coptic refrain toward sundown, pensively falling on the breast of the
 black venerable vast mother the Nile, [. . .]
 I hear the Arab muezzin calling from the top of the mosque,
 I hear the Christian priests at the altars of their churches, [. . .]
 I hear the Hebrew reading his records and psalms [. . .]

And after more of these invocations through hearing, the poet in the man Walt Whitman is summoned once again, asked this time what it is that he sees. And once again he answers, gathering people into the fourfold of his sight, his vision. After naming and acknowledging the ordinary daily lives of people all over the world, their passions, hardships, struggles, achievements and joys, the poet confides in us:

My spirit has pass’d in compassion and determination around the whole earth, [. . .]
 I think some divine rapport has equalized me with them.

Whitman’s songs are democratic gatherings, sincerely egalitarian, excluding no one. For even the thief and the murderer are still, after all, human beings, mortals whose violently tormented and destructive existence calls for an appropriate moral response. Such is Whitman’s “fourfold” as figure of democracy.

36. Heidegger, *Rede und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910–1976*, GA 16: 671.

37. See Heidegger, “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,” “The Spiegel Interview,” in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker*, trans. William J. Richardson, ed. Thomas Sheehan (Chicago, IL: Precedent, 1981), 57.

38. Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” in *Leaves of Grass*, stanza 30, page 70.

PART IV

HEARKENING

Chapter 6

FOLLOWING THE ECHO

And the ear of our thinking [*das Ohr unseres Denkens*], does it still not hear the cry?

It will refuse to hear it [*ihn überhören*], so long as it does not begin to think.

Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, Glorified for centuries, is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought.

Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsche’s Word ‘God Is Dead’”¹

There remains the final reflection, how shallow and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things.

Alfred North Whitehead, Preface, *Process and Reality*²

. . . an attentive, concentrated perception, a gathering taking-in, that remains in listening.

Heidegger, “. . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .”³

The clearing, the open region, is not only free for brightness and darkness but also for resonance and echo, for sound and the vanishing of sound. The clearing is an opened region, open for everything that becomes present and absent.

Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”⁴

The quiet heart of the opening [*Ort der Stille*] is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging-together of being and thinking, that is, presencing and perceiving [*Anwesenheit und Vernehmen*], can arise at all.

Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking”⁵

§1

The Gift of Hearing

What is hidden in the gift of hearing? Of what is our hearing capable? Like our seeing, hearing is a capacity and capability that can be developed. What is the character of hearing in our time? How could its potential, its promise, be retrieved, developed, and redeemed?

Hearing bears a singular responsibility in Heidegger's attempt to turn thinking toward its appropriation, preparing for an inceptual experience, the beginning, perhaps, of a new, more promising epoch in the historical unfolding of being. In this final chapter, we will be reflecting on the significance of Heidegger's turn to hearing—his "Wende zum Hören." In question are history-breaking possibilities that have remained unheard, repressed, and blocked by hearing itself, which today is determined by the historical conditions imposed by the prevailing ontological regime.

In *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger says that we "need first of all to hear [*hören*] the appeal of what is most thought-provoking [i.e., being]. But if we are to perceive what most provokes thought, we must for our part get underway to learn thinking. [. . .] What we can do in our present case, or anyway can learn, is to listen mindfully, properly, authentically [*genau hinzuhören*]" (GA 8: 28/WCT 26). What is it that Heidegger thinks we need to hear? And what, after Heidegger, is the task for our own philosophical thought to work out in regard to hearing?

†

Rilke has given eloquent voice to his distress: We moderns, he says, have created a world so full of noise that we are losing our capacity for deep attentive listening. In a long unpublished poem-fragment, a fragment without a title, composed in 1922:

Louder than gale, louder than sea swell, men
 have roared and yelled. [. . .] What preponderances of stillness
 must reside in the cosmic spaces, when
 the cricket is audible still to yelling mankind,
 when stars, the silent, shine for us in the yelled-at heavens!
 Oh, if only they spoke to us, the remotest, ancient, most ancient
 forebears!
 And we: listeners [*Hörende*] at last. The first human listeners.⁶

Why have we not yet achieved such hearing, such listening? Several years later, he wrote, in two versions, fragments for "Gong," a poem in which he

imagined the deepest possible hearing, the hearing of ears that have become what might be called authentically ontological organs, not only by virtue of their depth, their immeasurable extension in space and time, following the echoes of sound as they fade away into silence, but also by virtue of their openness, laying out a clearing in the midst of the world's noise for what might be entering the realm of hearing from an immeasurable depth:

Sound [*Klang*] by hearing no longer
measurable. As though the tone
that exceeds us all around
were a ripeness of space.⁷

In another fragmentary version, the poet imagined a sound that only an ear “deeper” than ours could hear:

Not meant for ears. [. . .] boom
that like a deeper ear
hears us, the seemingly hearing.⁸

We do not truly hear—not yet, anyway. Thus, it is not surprising that, in the “Sonnets to Orpheus,” he would address us, his readers, summoning us to an arduous existential undertaking, an exercise in learning:

Be—and at the same time know the condition
of not-being, the infinite ground of your deep vibration [*deiner innigen
Schwingen*],
that you may fully fulfill it in this single time.⁹

Despite his substantive disagreements with Rilke, Heidegger, as I read him, shares both the poet's concern for the atrophy of human hearing and the poet's encouragement of efforts to *develop* our capacity for hearing, especially as an ontological organ. This is not only a question of practice; it is also very much an adventure in learning—as when, later in that same poem, the poet urges us to become “an ear of earth”—“ein Ohr der Erde.”¹⁰ This might be understood to characterize the hearing of mortals gathered into the fourfold—the *Geviert*, gathering mortals and gods, earth and sky into a ring of unity around the thing. I suggest that, for Heidegger, this gathering is what happens in the hearing that is proper to what he thinks of as “the ear of thinking”—“das Ohr des Denkens” (GA5: 267/QCT 112).

That is to say, the ear appropriated (*an-eignet, ver-eignet, zu-eignet*) by, and for, the task of genuine thinking: thinking that is *of*, hence also *from*, the dimension of being.

†

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger reflects on the “voice of conscience” (“Stimme des Gewissens”), exhibiting its existential structures and its role in the formation of the self. “To the call of conscience,” he says, “there corresponds a possible hearing” (GA 2: 358/BT 314). Moreover, “when this phenomenon has been exhibited, we recognize the extent to which it attests an authentic potentiality-for-being in *Dasein*” (ibid.). The recognition and actualization of this potentiality is, however, always a challenge, because we are constantly subjected to the temptation to lose ourselves in the cacophony of noises and voices that happen to be most powerful in our world, hearing only what the multitude are thinking and saying, so that we fail to hear—*überhören*—the singular inner voice that speaks from the sensibility constitutive of the social being (*Mitsein*) appropriating and determining our “originary” nature. When we lose connection to that sensibility, we cannot hear the inner voice that protests and challenges *what is* for the sake of *what ought to be* (GA 2: 355–61/BT 312–17). So, the question is whether or not *Dasein* has within itself the strength to get back from this lostness in social conformity, this lostness in listening away from itself, hearing only the voices of the powerful multitude [*im Hinhören auf das Man*], tempted and distracted by the world of confusion and corruption (GA 2: 360/BT 315–16). “This listening away [*Hinhören*] must get broken off,” he says; but ultimately, “the possibility of another kind of hearing, one that would interrupt it, can only be given by *Dasein* itself” (GA 2: 371/BT 324). If, however, the disposition of a moral conscience has not already been awakened, then how can *Dasein* by itself be the *source* of that interruption?

Adolph Eichmann’s defense, in his trial, that he could hear no contrary voices, should remind us that there are people within whose life moral conscience is so damaged, so corrupted that it even will serve evil in the name of the good; and it should remind us that there have been, and still are, communities of such intimidating unanimity that they can silence courageous individuals who dare to speak out, heeding the voice of their own conscience.

In the years just prior to the publication, in 1927, of his book *Being and Time*, Heidegger was obviously very much engaged in thinking about the voice of conscience, recognizing all the moral shortcomings involved. And yet, as National Socialism emerged, seized power, and proceeded to rule by brutal violence and terror, Heidegger steadfastly supported the regime,

remaining loyal at least until 1934. What happened to his own voice of conscience? How could his own hearing have gone so terribly, tragically awry? What was he not hearing as he listened to the radio broadcasts of political speeches and the uninhibited chatter echoing in the marketplace—and why?

†

Although Heidegger's phenomenology recognizes that our being is inherently a being-with-others, he neglects the importance of listening to others, *except* insofar as such listening takes us away from ourselves, away from our self-development. He seems to assume that listening to others can *only* be detrimental to the realizing and fulfilling of our own individual potential. Hence, he neglects reflecting on the social formation of the self in the cultural process of moral education and gives no thought to the importance of listening to others who are different: people of other faiths, people of other races, other ethnicities, other cultures, immigrants, and refugees from foreign lands. The thrown-openness of *Da-sein*—the structure of its essential nature—should be understood to be an openness to the other, and, moreover, to constitute an inherent *responsibility* to be open to the other.

Although Heidegger continued to give thought to hearing, not only in the context of critical engagements with the discourse of metaphysics but also in the context of a critique of our life-world in the epoch of the *Gestell*, he seems not to have returned to reflect, in the wake of the Holocaust, on hearing the voice of conscience: no critical reflection on his own hearing, no critical reflection on that of his countrymen.

†

Questioning the character of our hearing in regard to the voice of conscience constitutive of our being-with-others is, for Heidegger, part of a larger problematic concerning hearing as a medium of responsibility in relation to being. In that ontological relation, a way of disclosing the being of beings, there is a belonging-together of *Mensch* and *Sein*, hence a responsibility the character of which, in our time, urgently demands our attention.

In this chapter, we will undertake readings of a number of Heidegger's lectures and seminars, concentrating on listening and hearing, instead of on looking and seeing. There is in his project more attention and thought given to this mode of perception than one might have surmised. I suggest that, although he never explicitly explained his turn to hearing as a way of overcoming the vision-generated paradigm in metaphysics, his reflections on the phenomenological and hermeneutical character of hearing encourage our getting beyond the epoch of the *Gestell*—or at least getting free of vision as the dominant paradigm in metaphysics for understanding knowledge,

truth, and reality. But his reflections offer us even more, because, as he helps us to understand, being claims and appropriates our capacity for hearing, challenging us to a higher responsibility: not only to develop our ability to be more receptive and responsive but also to learn the wisdom awaiting us when we enter into the ontological depths of the phenomenology of hearing and sound: “We want to experience what powers are reigning over our *Dasein* when that *Dasein* stands under the domination of the customary concept of truth [i.e., the concept at work in *Dasein*’s way of disclosing being].” Thus, he asks us to consider: “How did the reigning concept of truth [i.e., the truth of being] come to its reign? How did it repress the earlier one?” (GA 36–37: 123–24/BaT 97).

We can close our eyes, but we cannot close our ears in the same way. Yet, just as our eyes can be open, though we do not see, or see rightly, what is happening directly in front of them, so too, in our way of hearing, we can be as if deaf.¹¹ Such deafness is not only ontic; it can also be ontological. That is because it constitutes a certain relation to being—being as such. In our time, this relation is fundamentally determined by a technological way of thinking and experiencing being.

“Ontological” reflection is not only concerned with how beings in their ontic presence and character are understood and represented; it is also, and in fact primarily, concerned about the very *being* of these beings, hence it is engaged in thinking about the necessary conditions for the possibility of experiencing and disclosing beings in regard to their truth. However, possibilities for promising transformations that emerged in the historical past can be *blocked* (*verschließt sich*) in certain ways by the historical determinants of our world (GA 7: 27/QCT 26). This indicates why, and how, the gift of hearing becomes, for Heidegger, a subject in need of ontological thought.

We will find Heidegger invoking, always with a certain sense of urgency, the crucial role of listening and hearing in a surprising number of major lectures and seminars. As he sought to understand the elusive aphorisms of the pre-Socratics, reflected on ambiguities in the principle of identity, pondered the meaning of Leibniz’s principle of reason, read the poetry that most stirred his heart and mind, and gave thought to the emerging of hidden sense in the etymology and construction of the words in his native language, Heidegger found himself increasingly needing to listen and hear what the words were saying in a much more attentive and disciplined—but also much freer way, not so tightly bound by habitual or customary patterns of sound and sense. “No one,” he laments, “has an ear for the never-ending resonance [*nie erklingenen Klang*] in the sounding of the oldest words” (GA 66: 246/M 217).



Although most of Heidegger's attention to hearing occurs in the context of his critical reading of the history of metaphysics, he also became concerned about what had been increasingly happening to hearing since the beginning of the modern world.

In "The Turn," Heidegger argues that "we do not yet hear, we whose hearing and seeing are perishing through radio and film under the rule of technology" (GA 11: 125/QCT 48–49; BF 72). Somehow, we need to learn how to dwell in this world of ours despite the inevitable, ceaseless noises (*Geräusche*) of urban, industrial, and commercial life. In the context of Heidegger's great project, a compelling argument can be made that we desperately need to be liberated from the commercialization and unprecedented intrusiveness that characterize the *Ge-stell* constitutive of our contemporary world of sound. This *Gestell* is determining our ontology: what possibilities there are for the experiencing and disclosing of being. The proliferation of acoustic technologies is in many ways to be welcomed. Some of these contemporary technologies are empowering and enriching; but some are harmful not only to our health and sanity but also, in alarming ways, to the democracy we want to live in. We need to recognize and understand how these new technologies are affecting the character, and even the very nature, of our hearing—and of course, too, our world, and the way we are living. We need to find a way to unblock existential possibilities that historical conditions have persisted in blocking, so that we might retrieve the liberating possibility of another, profoundly different relation to the experiencing and disclosing of being (GA 7: 27/QCT 26).¹²

Heidegger, like Nietzsche, was deeply troubled by what he regarded as the ever-increasing danger in nihilism. The nihilism he discerned is present not only in the discourse of metaphysics; it is also a destructive force, a devastating cancer of the spirit, taking over our entire way of life. Since this nihilism raging in the world is *echoed* in the discourse of metaphysics, Heidegger concentrated on calling attention to the ways in which nihilism has taken over that discourse, holding sway in spite of the fact that metaphysics takes pride in the critical and transcendental power of its thinking. Addressing the way thinking in metaphysics hears, Heidegger says,

When we hear in the name "nihilism" that other register [*Ton*] wherein sounds [*anklingt*] the essence of that which it names, then we are also hearing differently the language of that metaphysical thinking which has experienced something of nihilism without being able to think its essence. Perhaps with that other tone in our ears [*mit dem anderen Ton*

im Ohr], we will eventually ponder the age of that consummation [*Vollendung*] of nihilism that is now beginning in another way than we have hitherto. (GA 5: 266/QCT 111)

These Nietzschean ruminations continue, assigning to the philosophical ear a strenuous task:

We are accustomed above all to hearing a false note [*einen Mißton herauszuhören*] in the name “nihilism.” However, when we ponder the essence of nihilism as belonging to the history of being, then there is at once something dubious in simply hearing a false note [*dann kommt in das bloße Hören des Mißtones alsbald etwas Mißliches*]. (GA 5: 265/QCT 110)

This problematic hearing should not be surprising, though, considering that metaphysics cannot be expected to avoid echoing the failing hearing that prevails in the world. The idle chatter of the world almost drowns out the singing of things, the fourfold that the poetic spirit in all of us wants to hear.

We tend to use words as if they were commodity labels, stuck onto the things. Such an attitude in naming things—“This is a house, that is a tree, and that over there is a bridge”—can make it difficult to experience them in their rich dimensions of meaning. What do we hear—and what might we hear—from the things themselves by way of these words, these names? When Heidegger’s thinking invokes bridges, jugs, and other things, his language is poetic, *alethic*, attempting to bring forth for sight and sound the rich dimensions of meaning that are gathered by these things. This is how he indicates what could be different if we were to cultivate our hearing as an ontologically attuned way of living.

Hearing and listening are never merely physiological events; they are experiences that concern us in our lives. They are existential matters and accordingly require phenomenological understanding. Heidegger believes that, in the Western world, and in the metaphysics that has been formed within its conditions, we have been failing to realize a potential in hearing that is urgently needed.

Nevertheless, it seems that, when he was able to find within himself, and within the world he had so often contemplated with Nietzschean distress, a certain measure of hope, he would allow himself to imagine a world transformed, a world in which we might see—and hear—wondrous gatherings of the fourfold, bringing to things immeasurable dimensions of meaning. But, for the hearing of these gatherings, would one not need an

“ear of earth”—the “Ohr der Erde” about which Rilke sings in his *Sonnets to Orpheus*?¹³ And an ear for the winds and the waters, the other elementals?

†

Continuing Heidegger’s project beyond where he left it, I want to situate hearing within a *model* of individual development, arguing that, beyond ontic experience, we need to give thought to the ontological fulfillment of a process of development in our hearing: a process that originates, *ursprünglich*, in a pre-ontological dimension of auditory experience—our “first nature”—and passes into and through the ontic formation of socially conformed hearing, to achieve its authentic consummation—our “second nature”—in a hearing deeply attuned by ontological understanding: a hearing for the key to which I propose to draft Heidegger’s word “Hörchen.” The word, but not the interpretation I am proposing, already appears in *Being and Time* (GA 2: 217/BT 207), wherein, arguing against the dominant epistemologies and psychologies of our time, Heidegger attributes to the experience it names the *fulfillment-stage* of our “Ursprünglichkeit,” our “first nature,” our earliest, pre-ontological, pre-conceptual experience and understanding of being. I shall argue, however, that there is more to the experience of hearkening than Heidegger seems to recognize when he connects it to discursive understanding. In what follows, “hearkening” will name the character of a hearing that has become, in its “second nature,” an ontological organ. In other words, it will name a mode of hearing that opens and sustains the ontologically disclosive dimension of the auditory field. Hence, it is a hearing grounded in, and attuned by, an understanding of what Heidegger calls “the truth of being.”

†

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger lays out some important reflections on hearing. He argues there that, if we are to grasp the nature of *Dasein*’s existence as disclosive (*die Erschlossenheit des Daseins*), we must consider discourse (*Rede*), a form of disclosiveness that is exclusively constitutive of human existence. And, in this regard, he maintains that hearing (*Hören*) is of the utmost importance, because it belongs (*gehört*) so intimately to the understanding of discursive communication (*zum redenden Sprechen*) (GA 2:214/BT 204). The connection between understanding and hearing is in fact so common that, as Heidegger observes, when we have not understood something we frequently say that we have not heard “rightly”: “*nicht ‘recht’ gehört*” (GA 2: 217/BT 206). While recognizing without question the essential nature of this connection, I will concentrate instead on hearing as a matter of *perceptual* experience: not only on hearing as taking place *in* an auditory clearing but also on hearing as the very *opening* of auditory clearings, auditory worlds.

†

But let us, first, continue thinking, with Heidegger, about the distinction he draws, in *Being and Time*, between (1) hearing as mere acoustic sensation or perception and (2) hearing as understanding: “Listening [*Das Hören*] is constitutive for discourse [*für das Reden konstitutiv*]. And just as linguistic utterance [*sprachliche Verlautbarung*] is based [*gründet*] on discourse, so acoustic sensation [*akustische Vernehmen*] is based on [the experience of understanding that is] hearing [*Hören*]” (GA 2: 217/BT 206). We must of course recognize the importance of hearing for discursive speech; however, we should not reduce hearing, or bind it exclusively, to *Rede* and *Sprache* any more than we should reduce it to the physiology of acoustic sensation.

Against the physiological interpretation, Heidegger will even argue that we do not hear (i.e., hear properly, understandingly) because we have the physiology of ears, openings in the body for the reception of auditory vibrations, but have ears only because we can hear (GA 10: 70/PR47). It is simply not possible to derive the meaningfulness of a Bach fugue from the facts that physiology can record. In fact, I would add, we do not even hear only through our ears. At least in infancy, our hearing may be said to inhere in, and be attuned by, the field of sonorous being as a whole: the infant lives in a bodily felt inherence in the openness of the sonorous matrix and hears with—and through—the entire body. The infant’s ears are the body as a whole.¹⁴

Hearing of course precedes the acquisition of language; and it often is initially wordless, even though naturally occurring, from our earliest infancy, through the influence of the forms of meaning constitutive of our social and cultural life. Thus, as Heidegger rightly notes, “Listening-to [*Das Hören auf*] is the existential being-open [*Offensein*] of *Da-sein* as being-with for the other [*Mitsein für den Anderen*]” (GA 2: 217/BT 206). It is in interaction with the world and with other human beings that our hearing opens. We listen and hear (*hören*) not because we have anatomical ears, but because, in our world, we belong (*gehören*) to the being of beings:

We humans are only able to listen—for example, to the thunder of the heavens, to the rustling of the woods, to the flowing of a spring, to the tones of a harp, to the clatter of motors, and to the noise of the city—insofar as we belong, or do not belong, to all of this. (GA 55.2: 247/H189)

Hearing, as one of *Da-sein*’s modalities of disclosive openness, is constitutive of our primordial, pre-ontological *belonging* to the world. With this

belonging, though, comes a responsibility to hear attentively (*gehorsam*) in an open way. We are summoned, called, by that which we encounter through the auditory field, to a listening and hearing that are attentive and authentic, actualizing the belonging-togetherness with being that is our pre-ontological potential as thrown-open *Da-sein*, so that we might even become, in hearkening, the faithful guardians of the openness of the auditory field, guardians, that is, of the necessary conditions for receiving and disclosing whatever we are given to hear.

According to Heidegger, “hearing in fact [*sogar*] constitutes the primary and authentic openness of *Da-sein* for its ownmost possibility of being [*für sein eigenstes Seinkönnen*]” (GA 2:217/BT 206). Emphasizing the intimate connection between hearing and discursive interactions, he says, “*Da-sein* hears [*hört*] because [*weil*] it understands” (ibid). Thus, as the philosopher shows, the hearing that forms in understanding is not only crucial in regard to our self-development as human beings; it is first and foremost crucial in our social existence, our being-with-others: “Being-with develops [*ausbildet*] in our ways of listening to one another [*Aufeinander-hören*]” (GA 2:217/BT 206). And, conversely, our ways of listening to one another develop in the course of our being-with-others. Hearing (*Hören*) is constitutive of our belonging (*Gehören*) in social existence. In proper, authentic hearing, says Heidegger, we are gathered into that social, cultural, historical belonging. Thus, our voice, the voice we call “our own,” always belongs to the language of the community into which we are born and raised—belongs, in fact, to all its voices and sounds. That belonging constitutes both an indebtedness and a responsibility. We shall return to this theme, giving some thought to the democracy in the fourfold that is celebrated in the poetry of Walt Whitman.

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In Winter Semester lectures taking place in 1933–1934, and published under the title *Being and Truth*, Heidegger contemplated the possibility of a major shift in the historical dominance of vision as our paradigm for understanding knowledge, truth, and reality:

The seen [*das Gesichtete*] becomes especially preeminent in the comprehensive conception of the world. [. . .] But alongside this, another fact also emerges, even if late—that is, first with Aristotle—a fact that rules over Greek *Dasein* as essentially as ideas and seeing. This is *hearing* [*das Hören*]. Indeed, Aristotle asks whether hearing might not somehow be the higher sense and, accordingly, whether it might condition the higher comportment of human beings. (GA 36–37: 157/BaT 123)

“In this context,” he continues, “hearing and seeing are not conceived of as confined to mere sense perception; rather, they are taken more broadly.” So, for instance, hearing is to be understood as “listening to what has been spoken, hearing the word of the other.” This makes good sense, because, as he notes,

Language is the fundamental element of the being-with-one-another [*Miteinander*] of human beings. For the Greeks, *discourse* is the defining moment for the essence of human beings. The human being is a *zoon logon echon*, that is, the kind of living being that has the capacity for talk, the kind of being that [. . .] reaches out with speech to others. (Ibid.)

Thus, he argues, “Hearing, as in hearing the other and, at the same time, one another, is no merely acoustic phenomenon; rather, it means, for instance, hearing a summons, lending an ear to a wish, listening to a request, or hearing an assignment.”

What is the significance of the fact that, at least since Plato, truth has been conceived and thought in terms of vision rather than in terms of hearing? We should not underestimate the importance of Heidegger’s argument, and the significance of the paradigm shift it indicates, not only for our appropriation of the vision paradigm that Plato’s “Myth of the Cave” allegory brought to overwhelming influence in the history of philosophical thought but also for our endeavor to break out of the epoch of the *Gestell*, which continues to impose its vision-generated ontology. As Heidegger contemplates the possibility of some “great transformation of human *Das-ein*” (GA 36–37: 118–20/BaT 93–94), a transformation, of course, that might overcome the nihilism of our time, he says, “We want [. . .] to experience what powers are reigning over our *Dasein* when that *Dasein* stands under the domination of the customary concept of truth.” Thus, he asks us to consider: “How did the reigning concept of truth come to its reign? How did it block and repress the earlier one?” (GA 36–37: 123–24/BaT 97). And how might turning to hearing and developing its potential transform our conception of truth—and our relation to truth?

†

In this chapter I will argue that Heidegger has much to say about our capacity to hear, and that, beyond lamenting the character and quality of our hearing in the world of today, and lamenting, too, our stubborn, willful avoidance of careful, mindful hearing in everyday life, his critical thinking shows a passionate, sustained concern for the development, as “second nature,” of what we might call the *ontological realization* of our

hearing, retrieving by an “inner” reflective process—*Er-innerung*—the pre-ontological experience and understanding of being that we carry, as our “first nature,” in our bodily being.

†

Sensation, sensory awareness (*Empfindung*), and perception (*Wahrnehmung*, *Vernehmen*) are, like speech, ways of interacting and communicating with the world. They are forms of articulation, clearings laying out fields of intelligibility and meaningfulness, within the conditions of which what is present and absent can come into presence and be experienced. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger calls these forms of articulation “Rede,” connecting all the forms, including sensory awareness and perception, with “speech” and “discourse.” To be sure, they are all distinctive forms of *logos* as *legein*, each one laying out an experiential field of disclosiveness and gathering into articulation, within its bounds, that which presences.

However, even though language (*Sprache*) is unquestionably the highest form of articulation and some degree of interpretation always plays a role in the social and cultural formation of perception, gesture, and even sensation, I think it is not illuminating to represent these forms of experience without considering our embodiment. Thinking of our bodily forms of articulation, for example, sensation and perception, as derivations from language is a temptation to “intellectualization.” Sensation and perception need their own distinctive phenomenological recognition. Although always culturally mediated in a number of different ways, sensation is of course the most primitive, most immediate of these forms, whereas language is the most highly evolved form of articulation. But insofar as being—in all four of its senses¹⁵—lays claim to them, they fulfill their proper essence by corresponding (as in the Heraclitean *homologein*) to that ontological claim by developing and becoming ontologically attuned organs. Even our fundamental, primordial capacity for sensory awareness can be cultivated and developed. However, as Heidegger has argued, what epistemology since Descartes has represented as sensory awareness or sensation (“sense data,” “impressions”) is *not* a lived experience, but rather a philosophically constructed abstraction: a conceptually formed interpretation that replaces the lived experience. This not only misses the phenomenology of sensory awareness; it also betrays its ontological potential, the culmination of a process of appropriation (*Er-eignung*), such that these ways of articulation, ways of interacting and communicating, could become ways of receiving being—being itself—into their care, hence taking into their care the disclosing of the beings that figure in our world. In the consummation of our

hearing, redeeming of the character of its potential, hearing would at last become hearkening.

What might this “character” be? Besides suggesting that our hearing should be free of the influence of “the many” (“*das Man*”) and that it needs to become (1) more deeply understanding than our habitual way of hearing, (2) more “primordial” than the “sense data” hearing posited by the prevailing epistemologies, and (3) more “primordial” than the “acoustics” recognized by the prevailing psychologies and physiologies, Heidegger undertakes to explain, as an essential constituent in his critique, how epistemology and the human sciences have represented hearing in the reigning paradigm. Moreover, he introduces a new keyword to name its character in fulfillment: *das Horchen*, hearkening:

On the basis [*Auf dem Grunde*] of this existentially primary potentiality for hearing [*Hörenkönnens*], something like hearkening [*etwas wie Horchen*] becomes possible. Harkening is itself phenomenally more fundamental [*phänomenal noch ursprünglicher*] than what the psychologist “initially” [*“zunächst”*] defines as hearing [*Hören*], namely, the sensing of tones [*das Empfinden von Tönen*] and the perception of sounds [*das Vernehmen von Lauten*]. Furthermore, hearkening [*Horchen*] has the mode of being [*Seinsart*] of a hearing that understands [*des verstehenden Hörens*]. “Initially” [*“Zunächst”*] we never [*nie und nimmer*] hear noises and complexes of sound [*Geräusche und Lautkomplexe*], but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. We hear the column on the march, the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the crackling fire. (GA 2: 217–18/ BT 207)

This critique of the reigning epistemological paradigm is reiterated in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” wherein Heidegger says, “Things themselves are closer to us than all sensations. In the house, we hear the door shutting, and never acoustical sensations or sheer noises. In order to hear a pure noise, we have to hear “away” from things; that is, we must hear by abstraction” (GA 5: 10–11/PLT 25–26). According, however, to the paradigm prevailing today, we *never* hear the door or the north wind; strictly speaking, all that we *immediately*—“actually”—hear are sensations, sensory data, on the basis of which we are disposed to *infer* a door or a wind. Understood in this way, sensations enclose us in our subjectivity, foreshortening the reach of the experience. For Heidegger, though, all experiencing, even a level of sensing below awareness, is relational, interactive, a form of belonging that situates us in the world. This understanding of perceptual experience as relational and interactive undercuts both the immediate, unmediated objectivity in empiricism and the idealized

subjectivity in rationalism, because both schools of thought, ignoring the nature of our lived experience, are consequently compelled to posit theoretically generated explanations.

Heidegger's critique of this paradigm has contributed greatly to its diminishing authority; nevertheless, his critique does not seem to recognize the full range of our auditory experience: not even, first of all, with regard to the phenomenology of sensation. Sensuous abstraction, isolating sensations, is always possible; and it can play a significant role in aesthetic experience. Moreover, there are occasions when we do initially [*zunächst*] hear an isolated noise, a sound, and do not know what caused it. We cannot identify it in relation to some particular event or thing. Did a book fall off the desk? Is a neighbor at the door? We naturally attempt to concentrate our attention on the sound—the sensation—as such, isolating it, in order, if possible, to identify it.

This, however, is not at all like the paradigmatic situation represented by the epistemologies Heidegger was challenging. In fact, this paradigm can still be discerned in current versions of both rationalism and empiricism, according to which all we can (ever) hear (immediately) are discrete sounds, such that it is on the basis of these sounds that we must *infer* the likely presence of the thing making those particular sounds. Heidegger compellingly argues against the paradigm in these epistemologies, insisting that it requires “a very artificial and complicated frame of mind” [*Es bedarf schon einer sehr künstlichen und komplizierten Einstellung*] in order to “hear” a “pure noise” or “pure sound” (GA 5: 10–11/PLT 25–36).

The fact that *typically*, right from the very beginning of the experience, that is, involuntarily, and without mediation, without venturing an inference, we initially (*zunächst und eigentlich*) hear the things themselves—motorcycles and wagons, window shutters creaking and banging, and not mere sounds floating in the air—is, he argues, “the phenomenological proof [*phänomenalen Beleg*] that *Da-sein*, in its being-in-the world, always already dwells in the world, *together with* things ready-at-hand [*zuhanden*]” (GA 2: 217–18/BT 207). So, typically, we do not initially (*zunächst*) experience a chaos of “sensations” (*Empfindungen*) that would *first* have to be *formed* (ordered and gathered into a manifold) in order to provide the ground from which a subject could finally *leap* into an inference about what is happening in the world (GA 2: 217–18/BT 207). Existential phenomenology, faithful to our experience of being-in-the-world, demolishes the representations of perception that figure in all the old epistemologies, all the fanciful theoretical constructions argued for in idealism and the science-worshipping empiricisms.

In aesthetic experience, however, we often do concentrate on our immediate sensations, the sounds themselves. Pure sounds are the products of a process of sensuous abstraction, as in, for example, listening to the intricacies of melodic phrasing in one of Bach's "Suites for Cello" or comparing the interpretations by Montserrat Caballé and Joan Sutherland in singing Desdemona's heartrending aria, "Il salce funebre sarà la mia ghirlanda" (Verdi's "Otello").

Similarly, Heidegger argues that, in conversation with others, we hear the content of what the others are saying: we hear, or are attentive to, the *meaning* of their words; we do not normally concentrate on the sounding (*Verlautbarung*) of their words, although sometimes, tone of voice and pronunciation matter for the interpretation of meaning. However, as Heidegger observes, "even in cases where the speech is indistinct or in a foreign language, what we hear initially [*zunächst*] are unintelligible *words*, not merely a multiplicity of tone-data [*Tondaten*]" (GA 2: 217–18/BT 207).

§2

Stages of Learning and Development: A Model

I want now to take over the hint in Heidegger's use of the word *Horchen*, drawing on his characterization of the hearing that word names, that is, as primordial and possessing the mode of being [*Seinsart*] of a hearing that deeply understands being, in order to think, after Heidegger, about the development of the ontological potential in the disposition of our capacity for hearing.

Although Heidegger does not think of his reflections on hearing as suggesting a model of learning and development, those reflections nevertheless do provide what is needed for the construction of such a model. In various writings, Heidegger proposes a critique of the hearing that prevails in our time, and that makes it possible for us to lay out, in phenomenological terms, a model of learning and development in regard to our hearing. In the model I am proposing, "hearkening" will characterize the inherent ontological potential in hearing—the consummate stage in our capacity for hearing, in which one enters the ontological, hence hermeneutical dimension of our capacity for hearing.

We can hear, and listen; or we can hear and not listen: a question of attentiveness. We can also listen and hear; or we can listen and still not hear: a question of achievement. I suggest that the phenomenological reflection into which Heidegger's thinking guides us indicates that there are *three fundamental stages of ontic engagement* in the experience that our ears receive: (1) hearing-, ontically open, ontologically deaf, the simple, basically passive,

involuntary experience of receiving some sound that “gives itself” to be heard, as when, for example, someone hears the doorbell ring and the dog barking; or someone hears a strange sound coming from the cellar. (2) listening₋₁, a concentrated, more prolonged attending to what one involuntarily hears or heard, hence an intensification of that first stage of hearing, giving more attention, for instance, to learn if what one heard really was in fact the doorbell, or attending more intently to that strange sound, perhaps waiting to hear it again, or attempting to elicit from what was heard already some meaning or some reference to its source or cause: What was it I heard? The ladder falling? Was it the oil burner in the cellar? And [3] hearing₋₂, which is the achievement, or completion, of the endeavor to listen₁ and hear well, as, for example, when one is listening to a lecture and hears the professor begin to speak, but cannot hear, or hear well enough, what is being said, so one strains to hear, listening₋₁ with singular intensity, until finally, with considerable effort, one can hear₋₂ the words clearly enough to catch their meaning. As we might expect, music does not merely require hearing₋₁. It demands an attitude of attentive listening₋₁, so that in hearing₋₂ one can discern the intricacies of melody, the dialogue among the different instruments, and the many other aesthetically significant features of the composition and the performance.

The development and cultivation of our hearing, fulfilling its potential, even still *within* the *ontic* dimension, is of great importance for everyday life. It is imperative for good parenting, good childcare, good teaching, caring psychotherapy; it is necessary, too, for any serious engagement with music; and it is essential for any deeply satisfying, deeply meaningful friendship. There are skills and techniques to be learned; but, beyond these, there must always be a fundamental attentiveness and attunement, a disclosive openness. Beings matter; the being of these beings matters. Ontic life is not all distraction, evasion, superficiality, numbness: *Benommenheit*.

But for Heidegger, the human ear is singularly appropriated and claimed (*ver-eignet, an-eignet*) by and for being; that is to say, it is appropriated to be, and to serve as, an ontological organ. Thus, there are, according to Heidegger, *another two stages* that are possible for the unfolding of the phenomenology of hearing as a hermeneutical, ontologically disclosive faculty. Indeed, we should find that Heidegger even reserved a distinctive word for the genuinely ontological stage, *beyond* the achievement in ontic hearing₋₂. *Horchen*, hearkening, names this stage, with its two dimensions.

Here is where we decisively need to rehabilitate the *pre-ontological* experience and understanding of being that was introduced in *Being and Time* but that later, without any explanation, he unfortunately left behind.

The possibility of hearkening is actually intimated and already summoning us in a hearing that takes place *prior* to the ontic hearing₁ of everyday life: a primordial hearing, an elemental attunement to and by being, involuntary and acquiescent, that engages, without full awareness, the body's pre-ontological experience and understanding, or sense, of being. This is hearing as sheer openness, attunement (*Stimmung*), our auditory existence as *Da-sein* laying out the necessary conditions for ontic modes of hearing. In this pre-ontological openness and attunement to the auditory world, we are *exposed* to the sounding of being itself: it is simply the elemental singing of the world, the murmuring of the cosmos, the sounding of the "Es gibt," a stillness and silence, and a depth of sounding that is not really any specific sound, not something that can be made into an auditory object, but rather the sheer being of the world, the surrounding background of life, of which we get a bodily felt sense. This is our pre-ontological experience and pre-conceptual understanding, as auditory beings, of the very being of the world. It is the auditory world we belong to in the time of our infancy. We grow, of course, out of it and grow beyond it; but that initial immersion in the realm of sonorous energy remains with us, submerged beneath our egological, socially constructed hearing and listening, but available for deeply reflective retrieval in a hermeneutical movement.

In hearkening, we retrieve, as if by a process of "recollection," our pre-ontological experience and understanding, or sense, of being, the gift carried by our embodiment, and in that way, we become attentive, beyond auditory events, to the very opening of the auditory field as such. Harkening is thus an experience of the ontological dimension of this auditory field: an attentiveness to the conditions of openness, and to the emergence and submergence of sound, the soundings of things in regard to their entering and leaving the auditory field. In the peculiar silence of hearkening there already stirs a preliminary acquiescence in, and belonging to, the ultimately abyssal openness of the auditory field. Harkening is not only an attunement to being itself; it is also an attunement *by* being itself.

Harkening is a hearing that is not only aware of its hermeneutical character, its disclosiveness, but listens to things (*Seiendes*) in a way that *protects and preserves the conditions of disclosiveness, being itself*, that is, the openness that grants the interplay of concealment and unconcealment in accordance with which things can come into audibility within the auditory field and, in due time, depart (GA 7: 277–79/EGT 113–14). Harkening is an experience with hearing that, in recognizing and retrieving its potential, brings out both its phenomenological and its hermeneutically disclosive character: phenomenological, because the openness of its reception is a disclosiveness

that lets what is to be heard sound forth; and hermeneutical, because its reception is a disclosiveness takes place in an auditory field structured according to the interplay of concealment and unconcealment.

So, I want to suggest that hearkening (*Horchen*), precisely as a hearing that understands being and our relation to being, should name the ontological consummation, or fulfillment, of the pre-ontological experience and understanding of being carried in latency, that is, as potential, in our auditory endowment. It should name the consummate stage in a process of learning-to-hear, in which, by virtue of our recollecting and retrieving that primordial, pre-ontological understanding our embodiment continues to carry throughout life, hearing is finally grounded in the ontological dimension of the auditory field—grounded, that is, in an immeasurable disclosive openness that reminds us not only of our responsibility in regard to the being of beings but also of our existential finitude and mortality. In §9, we shall return to reflect further on the experience involved in hearkening.

Suffice it for now to recognize, and differentiate, in the *ontological* unfolding of hearkening, two moments, phases, or dimensions: (1) the moment when our listening goes beyond the presence of its present object, or objective, to attend to the phenomenon of its emerging, lingering, and vanishing—the phenomenon of its presencing. And (2) the moment when our listening passes beyond the presencing of the object, or objective, to attend to the sonorous field of audibility, the context or world, or set of conditions, that makes possible the audible sonorous presence of that object or objective.

This interpretation of hearing as fulfilled in hearkening thinks our hearing in terms that are central to Heidegger's project: (1) in terms of the claim on our appropriation (*Er-eignen*), that is, the call and summons to recognize, understand, and appropriate, or enown, our nature, our dis-position, as thrown-open *Da-sein*, and (2) in terms of the belonging-together (*Zusammen-gehörigkeit*) of being and human being (*Sein* and *Dasein*) in the interaction and oscillation (*Gegenschwung*) of a bonding (*Bezug*) that draws the two toward one another and, in this bonding, restrains us (*Verhaltenheit*), correspondingly demanding that each of us become heedful of our singular responsibility (*Gehörigkeit*), as existing in auditory fields of sense, to take into our care the conditions of possibility for the being of beings.

§3

Against Univocity

Was Heißt Denken? What is Called Thinking? The words in Heidegger's title for lectures that argue against univocity cleverly subvert that

very univocity. The question thus lends itself to multiple ways of hearing it, interpretations that multiply the questions: What is thinking? What is [commonly] called thinking? What is [authentic, true] thinking? What is thinking calling for? Who is being called upon by thinking?

Heidegger's argument against univocity in language—and, correspondingly, against the hearing that demands it—is the issue I want us to consider at this point. In the 1951–1952 lectures gathered under his title, Heidegger argues for the recognition of “our need and necessity first of all to hear the appeal [*Anspruch*] of what is most thought-provoking”: namely, that in regard to the modern experience of a technologically driven world, we are still not giving thought to this experience in relation to the question of being. But, he says, if we are ever to “learn thinking,” we must first learn to “listen closely” for, and to, that “appeal” to our capacity for thinking (GA 8: 28/WCT 25). Close listening, he then explains, demands that we break the habit of “one-track thinking,” “*eingleisiges Denken*,” a distorted and distorting way of reflecting on our world, on our lives, which the very “logic” of technology compels. That “logic,” he asserts, “wills and needs absolute univocity [*unbedingte Eindeutigkeit*]” (GA 8: 28–29/WCT 26). What such univocity supports is *das Ge-stell*: the total imposition of order, an order of constant availability, the oppressiveness of standardization, and ultimately the tyranny and violence in the logic of identity and totality, authoritarian regimes of absolute power, the will to power in all its destructive nihilism. In his great work on Nietzsche, Heidegger declares,

The life of actual language consists in multiplicity of meaning. To relegate the animated, vigorous word to the immobility [*die Starrheit*] of the univocal, mechanically programmed sequence of signs would mean the death of language and the petrification and devastation of human existence. (GA 6.1: 145/WPA 1: 144)

Without polyphony, without polysemy, without the field of resonances, reverberations, and echoes that language opens up, thinking would not be able to move; it would become paralyzed, dead.¹⁶ But, grave though this is, an even stronger claim will eventually unfold in Heidegger's thinking. Although Heidegger suggests a difference between the death of language and the destruction of human existence, he believes, in fact, that they are ultimately the same: the death of language spells—is—the ending of the possibilities for a truly human existence. And the corruption and atrophy overtaking our hearing are at work in this death of language.

If Heidegger's distress over univocity concerns its complicity in a nihilism that he understands first and foremost in terms of our forgetfulness of being, and thus as our loss of the open dimensionality of the field for presencing, with its unpredictable possibilities for our breaking out of this epoch, my own distress also concerns, beyond this, the political consequences of this univocity: its complicity in totalitarian regimes, or, more generally, a politics of domination. We must never forget the marvelous story, told in the Book of Daniel and depicted with intensity in Rembrandt's painting, "Belshazzar's Feast" (1635), about the "mene, mene, tekel parsin" that appeared on a wall in Babylon, foretelling the destruction of the empire. Even in biblical times, tyrannical regimes feared, and sought to erase, the enigmatic, intentionally ambiguous handwriting on the wall that communicated, and thus demonstrated the underground existence of, a fearless resistance. Totalitarian states cannot tolerate, cannot permit, ambiguity, equivocation, multivocity, polyphonia, anarchies of sound and sense, not even—or rather, especially—in a whisper, since such uses of language would give free play to forms of resistance communicated in cleverly disguised meanings. Totalitarian states accordingly attempt, at whatever the cost, to suppress such constructions. They always want to secure the domination of a one-dimensional language, a language without undertones and overtones, a language without history, without borrowings from other cultures.¹⁷ At the same time, however, these regimes themselves resort to ambiguity, euphemisms, seemingly innocent locutions, since it is only in that way that the duplicity distinctive of totalitarian ideologies can be maintained. Hence, for Heidegger's reasons and for mine, the utmost importance is to be given to historical possibilities and missed opportunities for the flourishing of a free use of language. Heidegger would of course insist that totalitarian regimes can neither be understood fully nor truly overcome without first understanding the nihilism, the reductive negation of being, ruling over our time. But it is precisely in univocity that nihilism reigns. And that univocity necessarily involves the complicity of our hearing.

It is obvious that the metaphoricity present in much of literature could not survive in the suffocating atmosphere of univocity. But neither could philosophical thought—nor indeed any living culture, any flourishing society. Insofar as language is the shelter of being, it must be polyphonic, open to the full register of tonality that constitutes the dimensionality of being. And since being, namely the interplay of concealment and unconcealment, is inherently hermeneutical, the language of being, language as the sheltering

of being, must be hermeneutical; and that means that our hearing must likewise be hermeneutically attuned, mindfully sheltering being in the polyphonic interplay of its appropriation.

In *What Is Called Thinking?* Heidegger discusses the dialectical character of the conversation that takes place in Plato's *Phaedrus*, observing that it can be "interpreted in totally different spheres and respects, according to totally different implications and problematics." "This multiplicity of possible interpretations," he says,

does not discredit the strictness of the thought content. For all true thought remains open to more than one interpretation—and this by reason of its nature. Nor is this multiplicity of possible interpretations merely the residue of a still formal-logical univocity that we properly ought to strive for but have not attained.

"Rather," he observes,

multiplicity of meanings is the very element in which all thought must move in order to be strict thought. To use an image: to a fish, the depths and expanses of its waters, the currents and quiet pools, warm and cold layers, are the element of its multiple mobility. If the fish is deprived of the fullness of its element, if it is dragged onto the dry sand, then it can only wriggle, twitch, and die. Therefore, we always must seek out thinking, and its burden of thought, in the element of its multiple meanings, otherwise everything [essential] will remain closed to us. (GA 8: 75/WCT 71)

In language, this most fundamental element is sound. Philosophical thinking, however, has neglected this element, always favoring the conceptual dimension. Returning to the Greek understanding of "logos," Heidegger points out that logic was originally understood as a dialectical form of thought. As in Hegel's "speculative proposition," this meant that opposite meanings might be held together in the unstable tension of a single sentence. According to this understanding, however, "a proposition is never unequivocal":

The statement "God is the Absolute" may serve as an example. The ambiguity that is here possible is foreshadowed by the difference in stress with which a statement of this kind can be pronounced: *God* is the Absolute—or, God is the *Absolute*. (GA 8: 159/WCT 156)

What such multivocality purports is not merely the necessity for a certain freedom of interpretation, an art of interpretation, but also the obligation to make of thinking a way of listening that is “attuned” to the different registers, the different tonalities and voices, of language (GA 8: 29–39/WCT 28–36).

In keeping with this understanding of what is required of thought if it is to give itself over to the task of thinking the assertion that what is most thought-provoking about our time is that we are still not thinking, Heidegger will consistently express his thought making use of words that make a singular claim on our capacity to hear, to “attune” the ear of our thought to the registers of tone and voice required by the assertion. What attunement would be appropriate? How could we let ourselves be appropriated by what here most urgently calls for thought? According to Heidegger, we must somehow make ourselves appropriately attentive to the *way* in which the assertion speaks—*how* it speaks:

By “way” or “how,” we mean something other than manner or mode. “Way” [*Weise*] here means melody [*Melodie*], the ring and tone [*Klang und Ton*], which is not just a matter of how the saying sounds [*Verlautbarung*]. The way or how of the saying is the tone from which and to which what is said is attuned [*gestimmt*]. We suggest, then, that the two questions—concerning the “tone” of our assertion, and concerning its nature as a statement—hang together. (GA 8: 39–40/WCT 37)

This eventually leads Heidegger toward the heart of his argument:

People still hold the view that what is handed down to us by tradition is what in reality lies behind us—whereas in fact it comes toward us because we are its captives and destined to it. The purely historical view of tradition and the course of history is one of those vast self-deceptions in which we must remain entangled as long as we are still not really thinking. (GA 8: 82/WCT 76)

“That self-deception about history prevents us,” he says, “from hearing the language of the thinkers.”

We do not hear it rightly [*Wir verhören uns*], because we take that language to be mere expression, setting forth the views of philosophers. But the thinker’s language tells what is. To hear it is in no case easy. Hearing it presupposes that we meet a certain requirement, and we do so only on rare occasions. We must acknowledge and respect it. To acknowledge and respect consists in letting every thinker’s thought

come to us as something in each event unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible—and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought. (Ibid.)

As Heidegger recognizes, the question that sets his seminar in motion—“What is [called] thinking?”—demands a reading and hearing that permits the words to resonate, to address us in multiple voices, multiple tones, multiple senses (GA 8: 117–19/WCT 113–14). In German, the question more explicitly registers these multiple voices and senses: “Was heißt denken?” bids us not only to give thought to the character of thinking, to determine what thinking is; it also asks us to reflect on a certain calling, as if evoking and invoking a vocation, a calling. Who is being called to thought, called upon to think? Who is called by thinking? What is it to be called, or recalled, into thought? And what is required of us by this calling? According to Heidegger,

It is we ourselves to whom the question [. . .] is addressed directly. We ourselves are in the text and texture of the question. [. . .] We ourselves are, in the strictest sense of the word, put in question by the question. (GA 8: 119/WCT 116)

This is not, he insists, merely playing with the verb “heißen,” “to call.” If the thinking that responds to the question as a calling that claims us in our responsibility is regarded as merely playing with words, or even if the verb is heard in its most common meaning (as in, e.g., “What do you call that village up there on the hill?”), the strenuous venture of thought to which the question is calling us, using the word in the sense of summoning and urging, will not have been heard (GA 8: 120–21/WCT 116–18).

There is, in Heidegger’s “calling,” a claim, a demand (*Anspruch*), to undertake an arduous task deeply *threatening* to our settled form of life: a task that we are not prepared—indeed, perhaps even afraid—to acknowledge and assume:

“To call” means “to command,” provided we hear this word in its native, telling sense. For “to command” basically means, not to give commands and orders, but to commend, entrust, give into safe-keeping, keep safely. The word means: to call into arrival and presence; to address in a commanding way. Accordingly, when we hear the question “What is called thinking?” in the sense that asks, “What is it that appeals to us to think?”, we are then asking: What is it that enjoins our nature to think

and thus lets our nature attain genuine thought, arrive in thinking, there to keep it safe? (GA 8: 122/WCT 118)

Whether consciously or not, we do everything we can to avoid hearing the claim that the calling would otherwise make on us—the unsettling, “erschütternden” claim, namely, to think.

The claim requires, as Heidegger’s own use of the German language shows, a careful listening to words:

If we succeed in hearing that [*Falls dies Hören glückt*], then it may happen—provided we proceed carefully—that we get more truly to the matter expressed in any telling and asking. (GA 8: 123/WCT 119)

Are we not, we human beings, we mortals, the ones being named by the calling that takes place in the question? According to the philosopher, the question “asks for what wants to be thought about in the pre-eminent sense”:

It does not just give us something to think about, nor only itself, but it first gives thought and thinking to us; it entrusts thought to us as our essential destiny [*Wesensbestimmung*], and thus first joins and appropriates [*vereignet*] us to thought. (GA 8: 125/WCT 121)

“What is called thinking?” If we hear the question as calling us, then we might hear it entrusting language to us. This entrustment is a calling, an appropriation (*Ereignung*) that pulls us out of our ordinary, everyday habits. It requires a relation to language, hence, crucially and decisively, a way of hearing—or more precisely, a way of listening and hearing—absolutely different from the carelessness and indifference into which we easily fall—and without realizing it, will have, in fact, according to Heidegger, always already fallen. Thus, while our habituated relation “satisfies the demands of common speech in usual communication,” it encourages conditions in which “words are constantly thrown around on the cheap, and in the process get worn out.” With cold irony, he adds, “There is a curious advantage in that. With a worn-out language [*abgebrauchten Sprache*], everybody can talk about anything” (GA 8: 132/WCT 127). “Was heißt denken?” is a question that appropriates us, claims us, claims our hearing, in a way that throws us absolutely out of our ordinary, everyday habits, resisting fixation in any one register of voice, any one tone, any one meaning.



For Heidegger, the phenomenology and historical unfolding of the human capacity for listening is a question of, and for, our destiny, the most responsible use of our freedom. As he says in *The Principle of Reason*,

Being, in proffering itself, brings about the free openness of the temporal play-space [*des Zeit-Spiel-Raumes*] and, in so doing, first frees humans unto the openness of whatever fitting essential potentialities [*schicklichen Wesensmöglichkeiten*] they might happen to have. (GA 19: 140/PR 94)

“Destiny,” in contrast to “fate,” requires our freedom, is in fact the very essence of human freedom, and thus is not bound to the calculative, serial linearity of history, in which the past would be petrified, fossilized, absolutely past, finished, and done with, and in which the possibilities it once might have brought forth would consequently have become blocked and irretrievable.¹⁸ The triumph of fate is the *negation* of freedom, the *impossibility* of freedom. But in its struggle against fate, freedom shows its sublime moral quality. “Destiny” is the promise in the unrealized, unrecognized, blocked, and repressed possibilities and potentials that abide unheard within the giving, the granting, of the ontological conditions—the particular conditions determining the being of beings—that are constitutive of, and operative in, the world-clearings of our time. Those historically formed conditions, though, can obscure, distort, and even block the retrieving of our possibilities and potentials.

In “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger explicates the role of listening in the attunement that determines how the history of being—“being” understood, here, as signifying that which makes the presencing of beings possible—might shape our destiny:

Always the historical conditions that are granted for bringing forth into unconcealment [*Das Geschick der Entbergung*] hold sway [*durchwaltet*] over man. But what is granted [*das Geschick*] is never a fate that compels [*das Verhängnis eines Zwangs*]. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs [*gehört*] to the realm of the granting [*den Bereich des Geschickes*] and so becomes one who listens and hears [*Hörender*], and not one who is simply constrained to obey the conventions of the community [*Höriger*]. (GA 7: 26/QCT 25)

The clearing that our very existence opens and is, laying out and gathering sonorous auditory and linguistic fields of experience, makes possible (gives or sends) what is to be heard. The giving or sending that occurs in the

clearing constitutive of the auditory field takes place in the historical conditions of our shared world.¹⁹ Many of these historical conditions are not under our control; but they do not compel our subjection to some reign of fate. Nevertheless, their factual givenness must be taken into account, because they determine in various ways and to various degrees both *what it is* that the open clearing lets come forth, lets presence, and also *how, or in what way* what it lets come forth into presence can be manifest, permitting or denying certain characteristics, certain features.

What does belonging in the realm of the granting, the realm of destining, require of us? What kind of relation to our historicity is called for? Stated with a brevity that undoubtedly provides more questions than answers, I would suggest, as the beginning of an answer, that it is a question of our engaging the conditions constitutive of our historicity in a radically different way. More specifically: by attuning ourselves to, listening for, and attempting to hear, echoing in the language of being that defines our time on earth, the audible unconcealment of a heretofore unheard dimension of sense, in which we might experience *in a radically different way* the presencing of the being of beings—and thus might experience *the radically different presencing* of that which now, in the present epoch of being, gives itself to be heard in our language in the inconspicuous little word, “is.”

Getting us to hear in the common word “Ereignis,” commonly meaning “event,” a deeper sense, namely our appropriation, that could not be more at odds with the shallowness, the one-dimensionality, of its ordinary sense, Heidegger attempts to draw us into reflecting on ourselves and our responsibility for being—hence, more specifically, reflecting on the character of our hearing as a mode of *Anwesen-lassen*, our way of bringing forth of what *is* into its unconcealment.

Thinking of the calling in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger argues that our experience needs to break out of its “captivity in that which is,” break out of its “Befangenheit im Seienden,” retrieving blocked and lost possibilities in the “openness of being” (GA 5: 55/PLT 67). The destiny of thinking depends on our capacity to hear the language of being in a way that releases it from the will to power and its rule of univocity. A bridge is *not* a bridge. A stone is *not* a stone. The greatest poetry, ever resisting reifications of being, always teaches that.

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In “The Thing” (1950), Heidegger brings out the implications of thinking toward the possibility of a very different human relation to things. Hearing the naming and calling of things instanced and embodied in the polyphonic play of the word-sounds, Heidegger writes in a way that lets *us*

hear them also: “We are—in the strictest sense of the word—be-thinged, the ones conditioned.” In German: “Wir sind—im strengen Sinne des Wortes—die Be-Dingten” (GA 79: 20/PLT 181; BF 19). He will not merely argue this point abstractly; instead, he will make it sensible, audibly present, in a way that speaks directly to our hearing. Thus, in reading this text, silently sounding and hearing its words, we should find ourselves exposed to language in such a way that we can actually *hear* our thinking being conditioned, “bedingt”: conditioned in its sensuous incarnation—but also freed, released into otherwise unimaginable possibilities for play in the bringing-forth of meaning. We would accordingly undergo an experience with language, working with the thought that Heidegger forms in language, so that we not only hear thought requiring language, requiring a material, sensible, thing-like embodiment—but also even hear thought *emerging* from sounds and meaningful sounds, hear the sensuous dimension of language itself as it brings meaning into being. Accordingly, we learn through an auditory experience with language—that is, by *hearing* the sounding, the “Verlautbarung,” of the words that speak of our conditionedness—that living in the midst of things (*Dinge*), our being-conditioned, hence “bedingt,” is in the very nature of our being as human. The sounding of the words, here, instances and embodies the thought. And not only that: Heidegger’s “polyphonia,” his word-sounds in play, demonstrates thinking in the very process of being born, arising out of the sensuous materiality of language, its “thingly-conditioned” substance. This is not the experience with language the nature of which idealism, or cognitivism, wants to convince us. Hearing the emergence of meaning from sound is an extraordinary event that solicits our sense of the intertwining of our language, the language we have inherited, and our understanding of the ways in which the being of beings can appear. And it finally begins to deconstruct the metaphysical priority of the intelligible over the sensible.

Here now, for us to hear, first in Heidegger’s German, is a passage in which the play of the word-sounds, contradicting the claim for idealism in Husserl’s phenomenological account of language, certainly seems actually to be generating the philosopher’s thought:

Die Vierung west als das ereignende Spiegel-Spiel der einfältig einander Zugetrauten. Die Vierung west als das Welten von Welt. Das Spiegel-Spiel von Welt ist der Reigen des Ereignens. Deshalb umgreift der Reigen auch die Vier nicht erst wie ein Reif. Der Reigen ist der Ring, der ringt, indem er als das Spiegeln spielt. Ereignend lichtet er die Vier in dem Glanz ihrer Einfalt. Erglänzend vereignet der Ring die Vier

überallhin offen in das Rätsel ihres Wesens. Das gesammelte Wesen des also ringenden Spiegel-Spiels der Welt ist das Gering. Im Gering des spiegelnd-spielenden Rings schmiegen sich die Vier in ihr einiges und dennoch je eigenes Wesen. Also schmiegsam fügen sie fügsam weltend die Welt. [. . .] Aus dem Spiegel-Spiel des Gerings des Ringen ereignet sich das Dingen des Dinges. (GA 79: 19–20/PLT 180; BF 19)

If one listens to the soundings of Heidegger's German, this textual passage not only makes more, and deeper sense; it also suggests, as I noted, the extraordinarily intriguing thought, a thought-provoking thought, that here the sensuous, *das Sinnliche*, has actually given birth to the sense *der Sinn*, the thoughts themselves actually coming from the sound of the words:

Spiegel/Spiel, west/Welt, welten/Welt, Reigen/Ereignens, umgreift/Reif, Reigen/Ring, Ring/ringt, Spiegeln/spielt, Ereignend/vereignet, vereignet/Vier, Gering/Rings, einiges/eigenes, spiegelnd-spielenden, schmiegen/schmiegsam, schmiegsam/fügsam, fügen/fügsam, Gerings/Ringen, Ringen/Dingen, and finally, das Dingen/des Dinges.

To deny that the sensuous sense has given birth, here, to the thought—call it the intelligible, or the cognitive sense—seems to leave no alternative to turning Heidegger's thought, which seems to be claiming a deep truth, into nothing more than a witty ditty. Here, I want to suggest, we are witnessing the promise of happiness revealing its presence in the way that the polyphonic, sensuous matrix of language gives rise to thought, exposing this thought, moreover, to reverberations of sound that subvert univocality and open thought to new trajectories of interpretation. Nothing more compelling than this writing-sounding-thinking, in which thought and sound, the intelligible and the sensible, belong together, can be imagined for the project of disrupting the metaphysics that, since Plato, has opposed the intelligible to the sensible, denying reality to the latter.

The English translation, of course, cannot transmit the experience that Heidegger wants us to undergo, although even Hofstadter's fairly literal English translation still provides, in its faithful repetition of words and syllables and letter-sounds, something for us to hear that approximates the experience with the original language:

The fouring, the unity of the four, presences as the appropriating mirror-play of the betrothed, each to the other in simple oneness. The fouring presences as the worlding of the world. The mirror-play of the world is the round dance of appropriating. Therefore, the round dance

does not encompass the four like a hoop. The round dance is the ring that joins while it plays as mirroring. Appropriating, it lightens the four into the radiance of their simple oneness. Radiantly, the ring joins the four, everywhere open to the riddle of their presence. The gathered presence of the mirror-play of the world, joining in this way, is the ringing. In the ringing of the mirror-playing ring, the four nestle into their unifying presence, in which each one retains its own nature. So nestling, they join together, worlding, the world. [. . .] Out of the ringing mirror-play, the thinging of the thing takes place. (PLT 180; BF 18)

It is impossible to believe that Heidegger was unaware of these resonances and echoes, these mirror-plays. Indeed, to insist on such a position would run entirely counter to his own explicitly articulated argument of thought. The passage that I have quoted here exemplifies the extraordinary importance that Heidegger gives to listening: it makes present in the most immediate way the inextricable connection between listening and thinking and, no less intimate, no less inseparable, the connection between thinking and languaging, intelligible meaning and its sensuous incarnation. Moreover, the wordplay in this passage, like the wordplay we encounter in so many of Heidegger's other texts, makes a very compelling exhibition in support of Heidegger's otherwise mystifying claim that, in a sense that we can only ignore or deny at our own peril, language itself can speak—if we are willing to listen. When we listen to the word-play in that passage, it may indeed strike us that what we are hearing is the speaking of language itself; for the words seem to take on a secret life of their own, generating new words, new thoughts, and surprising associations, as if without the mediation of human intention—and even in resounding opposition to conventional sedimentations of meaning, prevailing understandings, and seemingly unquestionable relationships. It is precisely this independence of language that gives encouragement to Heidegger's conviction that language might bear within it, even when most in danger of losing or forgetting its ordinary sense of being, or perhaps at that moment most keenly, intimations of another dispensation of being—intimations of a destiny, a redemption, that is still awaiting its time of recognizability.

In many of the texts that followed *Being and Time*, similar presentations of these language-generated connections can be found; but in no other texts that I know of, not even in the writings that are gathered into what is titled his *Contributions to Philosophy*, is there such an intense, sustained experience of these connections. The far-reaching significance of such experience with thought and its language—what is ultimately at stake

for Heidegger—concerns nothing less, I think, than the possibility of our release, not only from metaphysics but also from history as the weaving of fate. But if, in thoughtful word-play, language can be released, even if only for a moment, from the prevailing regime of sound and sense to bring forth new or different physiognomies of meaning, might one not affirm the hope that language, language as the shelter of being, could someday bring forth into unconcealment, shattering the power of historical fate, the sounding and wording of a revolutionary new relation to the meaningful presencing of being? What do we need to hear? And how do we need to listen?

§4

The Principle of Reason (1955–1956)

In his major 1944 lecture course on “Heraclitus’s Doctrine of the Logos,” Heidegger warns us,

As long as metaphysics, in whatever form it may take, continues to rule over Occidental thinking in its ground—and this is indeed still happening at the present moment—λόγος and every question concerning λόγος will be mastered, but thereby also limited, by “logic.” (Heraclitus, GA 55: 254–55/H 194)

During the Winter Semester 1955–1956, Heidegger offered a lecture course on Leibniz’s principle of reason: “Nothing is without reason” (GA 10: 3/PR 3). He continued working on the text, which was published, with revisions and supplements, in 1957. It is to the text of these lectures, *The Principle of Reason (Der Satz vom Grund)*, that we shall now turn. In Latin, the principle of reason reads: *nihil est sine ratione*. Challenging at once the assumption in rationalism that requires univocity as well as the conventional interpretation of this principle that reigns in rationalism, Heidegger argues that there are, in fact, two profoundly different ways of sounding and hearing what this principle is saying: in brief, beyond (1) the *epistemological* interpretation, which emphasizes “reason,” a claim to comprehensive knowledge, namely, that, for everything, there is, and must be, a reason or cause, there is also (2) an *ontological* interpretation, which emphasizes instead the question of being. According to Heidegger’s reading of the history of philosophical thought, the ontological interpretation—nothing *is* without reason—has been missed, left unheard, drowned out by the epistemological. Hearing the principle as a principle of being and grounds fundamentally alters our understanding of the stakes that are engaged. In fact, it is not only the principle *as such* that he urges us to hear otherwise. Both “Satz” and

“Grund” are also to be heard otherwise: “Satz” as signifying a leap, not only a principle; and “Grund” as signifying a ground, not only reason and cause.

Heidegger’s intent, in this study, is not to archive the history of this principle in the discourse of philosophy; nor is it to challenge its significance, its seemingly invulnerable authority. What is of concern, though, is nothing less than what it is saying—how we are to understand what it is saying, what it is “about.” For, despite the sway of this principle across many centuries of philosophical thought, Heidegger will show not only that what the principle is saying, what it is “about,” is by no means self-evident, and that there are in fact two different ways of understanding it; moreover, he will suggest an interpretation that differs from the conventional, the canonical—an interpretation showing how polyphonic listening induces the very ground of the principle, as it has been traditionally and commonly understood, to tremble and give way, opening it up to reveal an abyss that in the history of philosophical thought had long been concealed. But Heidegger’s moves crucially and decisively require listening to the principle free of settled custom so as to hear both sound and sense differently.

But let us not move too precipitously. Soon after getting underway in the first lecture, Heidegger begins his challenge to the sensible form of the principle and the authority of the meaning it is presumed to favor and sustain. He comments,

To the extent that human cognition [*menschliche Vorstellen*] reflects on the fact [*darauf besinnt*] that in some manner it always gets to the bottom and founds everything [*ergründet und begründet*], the principle of reason resounds in human cognition as the motive of its conduct [*klingt in ihm . . . als Beweggrund seines Verhaltens an*]. We say with caution: the principle of reason resounds [*klingt an*]. This principle is by no means as easily and straightforwardly put into words as one would like to suppose on the basis of its contents. Even where human cognition embarks upon a reflection [*Besinnung*] on its own proper activity and fosters this reflection; even where this reflection rises up to what was, for a long time, identified with the Greek word *philosophia*; even in philosophy the principle of reason has just begun to resound, and this for some time now. Centuries were needed for the principle of reason to be stated as a principle. The short formulation [*nihil est sine ratione*] [. . .] speaks in Latin. This formulation of the principle of reason was first mentioned and specifically discussed in the course of those meditations Leibniz carried out in the seventeenth century. (GA 19: 4/PR 4)

Something uncanny can be heard resounding here. What Heidegger's challenge brings out is the fact that the meaning of the words belonging to this principle is resoundingly unstable, making it necessary that we give thought to the way, or ways, that we *hear* this principle. What, then, is the relation between reason and sound, reason and hearing? Contrary to what rationalism and idealism claim, the sensible *shelters* the intelligible and is essential in bringing it forth. This we need to understand in order to grasp the fundamental relation that the principle asserts between reason and being. Thought must no longer remain tone-deaf—must no longer remain deaf!

The principle implies a necessity: for every being there is *necessarily* a reason. “But what kind of necessity is this? On what is it based? Moreover, if everything has its rational grounding, what reason, or ground, is there for the principle of reason itself? Where does the principle of reason have its own ground?” (GA 19: 7–8/PR 6). These questions—and all the others that Heidegger sets in motion in his first lecture—bring out the uncanny and enigmatic character of this principle—and its vulnerability. It is formulated according to normal grammar; but when we listen to its claim, we are compelled to acknowledge its peculiarity:

What the principle of reason posits, and how it posits it—the manner in which it is, strictly speaking, a principle—is what makes it incomparable in relation to all other sentences. (GA 10: 9/PR 7)

Heidegger makes a compelling argument for the role, here, of listening and hearing. The fourth lecture begins with the words: “We hear the principle of reason [*Wir vernehmen den Satz vom Grund*]. We subscribe to this principle as soon as we hear it [*Kaum vernommen, ist der Satz von uns auch schon angenommen*] for we find nothing that seems to speak against it.” In keeping with this recognition of the role of hearing, Heidegger will attempt to bring “more clearly” into the field of our experience “to what extent the principle of reason not only factually always already resounds [*immer schon anklingt*], but *necessarily* resounds, and in which sense of necessity” (GA 10: 15/PR 25).

Asking whether the demand of reason that, for every being, for everything that is, reasons or rational causes must always be rendered, lies “in the essence of reason itself,” Heidegger says. “Before we inquire far afield, let us limit ourselves to asking first of all whether we hear the demand to render reasons.” “We must answer,” he states, “both yes and no”:

Yes—for lately we have had the demand to render reasons all too oppressively in our ears [*im Ohr*]. No—for we indeed hardly notice its pressing demand. Everywhere we move in the aura of the demand to render reasons and at the same time we have an uncommonly difficult time simply paying attention to this demand so as to hear that *language* in which it genuinely speaks. (GA 10: 44/PR 28–29)

Adding, “We indeed make use of devices to ascertain and check the radioactivity in the atmosphere,” he observes, “There are no devices for hearing the demand that requires the rendering of reasons [*Für das Hören des Anspruchs*]” (ibid.).

Heidegger’s contestation of metaphysics—hence his contestation of the only historical destiny (*Geschick*) that metaphysics recognizes and supports—goes very deep, because, sooner or later, as he says in the very first lecture, we encounter the impossibility of getting to the very bottom of the matter. If every proposition must have a rational ground, then what grounds the principle of the ground? This question uncovers the *abysal* dimension of being: an abyss that, in the principle as metaphysical rationalism understands it, has remained either ignored or denied—in a certain concealment, blocked despite the efforts of Hegel and, especially, Schelling to expose it.

Moreover, since the principle is a proposition about being, the full truth of the principle hinges on our admitting doubled meaning into philosophical discourse; hence, it hinges on our recognizing and listening to a discourse open to more than one authoritative voice. In the “destiny” (*Geschick*) that metaphysical rationalism assumes, there is no recognition that what we have been given (*geschickt*) are in fact historically conditioned, hence variable and alterable conditions for the possibility of experiencing the presencing of beings. Consequently, this “destiny” can offer us no solid, firm ground, and no absolutely final ground, for what we assume to be its promise.

In keeping with this understanding of what is required of thought if it is to give itself over to the task of thinking, Heidegger will consistently express his thought using words that make a claim on our capacity to hear, to “attune” the ear of our thought to the registers of tone and voice required by the task. The task is an appropriation, a claim on our thinking, calling on us to measure up to its potential. What attunement would be appropriate? How could we let ourselves be appropriated (*vereignet*) by what here most urgently calls for thought? We must somehow make ourselves appropriately attentive to the way in which the task speaks to us, yielding

to its *Enteignung*, its compelling disappropriation, estranging us, in a sense, from ourselves, our sedimented habits in relating to the being of the world we live in, so that our thinking might be opened up to the true dimensionality of the principle.

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The mystical poet, Angelus Silesius, anticipating by centuries the writing of Gertrude Stein, wrote, “The rose is without why, it blooms because it blooms. It pays no attention to itself, it asks not whether it is seen” (GA 10: 53/PR 36). Taking up the objection to the principle of reason that these words would seem to suggest, Heidegger first states the obvious difference between the rose, which cannot demand reasons, and human beings, who can. As he pointed out in his earlier work, *Being and Time*, we are the only beings for whom our very being can be—and is—a question. We are the only beings who can question our existence, determined to know why we exist, and indeed, like Pascal, we want to know why there is anything at all, rather than nothing. But even if we can somehow reconcile the mystic’s rose and Leibniz’s “mighty principle,” Heidegger concedes that we are still left with an obdurate and troubling truth: the principle of reason does not tell us the reason, or ground, for the principle itself. And in the moment that we realize this, the ground beneath our feet will begin to tremble and we will find ourselves teetering on the verge of an abyss. But Heidegger detains us; though we have been alerted to the danger, we are not yet near enough to fall off the edge. “What,” he asks, taking us closer to the ontological problematic, “does the principle of reason say?” (GA 10: 60/PR 39). He tells us,

We will get an answer only if we listen appropriately and hear the principle of reason. For that it is necessary to pay attention to the tone [*den Ton achten*] in which it speaks. For the principle intones [*tönt*] in two different tonalities [*zwei verschiedenen Tonarten*]. In each it says something different. Until now we have heard the principle of reason more in an indeterminate tonality [*in einem unbestimmten Tonart*]. This allowed us to think about the principle of reason in different formulations without contemplating the source of this diversity. (Ibid.)

About the prevailing reading of the principle, “Nothing is without reason,” Heidegger says, sharply, “We hear this now often enough, almost to the point of tedium.” Continuing to introduce the principal argument in these lectures, he says, using the word “schwingen,” so important in the thought of German Romanticism,

We should now tune in [*vernehmen*] to how, in this sentence that speaks in a hollow unison [*gleichtönend*], two different tonalities vibrate [*schwingen*]. We can say: “*Nihil est sine ratione.*” “*Nothing is without reason.*” [. . .] Or we can also set the pitch in this way [*den Ton auch so legen*]: “*Nihil est sine ratione.*” In the affirmative form this means: every *being* (as a being) has a *reason*. (GA 10: 60/PR 39–40)

Here we finally learn what is at stake: it is a question of hearing the invocation of being vibrating and resonating in the tonalities of the language. If the first way of hearing the principle presents an epistemological reading, the second presents for the first time an ontological. As Heidegger notes, Leibniz was the first philosopher to give the principle of reason an interpretation explicitly indicating its ontological dimension: “*There is a reason in the very nature of things why something exists rather than nothing*” (GA 10: 43/PR 27). With an anxious insistence entirely absent in Leibniz, Heidegger, responding to the increasingly menacing grip of nihilism, maintains that the epistemological interpretation must not obscure this ontological version. In fact, it certainly seems that the driving intention behind this course of lectures is to secure, to preserve and protect, the minatory undertone sounding in the ontological rendition. And catch, of course, its reverberations, drawing us into the abyssal dimension of the ontological. But not until we abandon the presumption of univocity and listen for a different tonality, the sounding, or resounding, of a different voice, will we be granted the possibility of hearing the principle as a principle telling us, first and foremost, not only—as the powerfully normative tradition would have it—something about the demands of reason but also something about being—about beings and their ground, the open field or clearing that made their being, their presencing, possible. Something, therefore, truly *geschicklich* appears in its two intertwined senses: (1) “*geschicklich*” in the sense of the conditions that history grants us for enabling the meaningful presencing of beings and (2) “*geschicklich*” in the sense of the promise in destiny.

Already, as early as the 1929 essay, “On the Essence of Reasons,” prepared for publication in the “Festschrift” honoring his teacher, Edmund Husserl, Heidegger was struggling to bring out, into the hermeneutics of audibility, the ontological dimension of the principle in its linguistic incarnation. However, that early essay failed, he thought, because it did not solicit our capacity to hear the tonal reverberations of language (GA 10: 67–68/PR 45–46). With words that hint at the history-shattering experience that can happen when the principle is actually sounded and heard, Heidegger argues,

We come closer here to what can be brought into view as soon as we more clearly hear—and keep in our ear—[*hören und im Gehör behalten*] the principle of reason in the intonation [*Betonung*] that we will provisionally call the normative intonation [*die maßgebende*]. [. . .] The intonation allows us to hear a unison [*Einklang*] between the “is” and “reason,” the *est* and *ratio*. Indeed, we already heard this unison before we made the assessment that the principle of reason speaks about beings and their having a reason. Our thinking should now bring forth what has already been heard in the intonation. Thinking should bring into presence *something one can hear*. In so doing, it brings forth what was un-heard (of) [*Un-erhörte*] before. Thinking is a listening [*Erhören*] that brings forth something [startlingly] meaningful. (GA 10: 69/PR 46. Italics added).

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In the years after *Being and Time*, we find increasing philosophically motivated attention to listening—a listening attentive, in fact, to the sensuous flesh of language. Indeed, in keeping with the approach to the question of being that his thinking underwent, Heidegger pulled away somewhat from vision as the preferred trope for his thinking, characterizing his themes less in terms of vision than in terms of a certain mode of listening, a certain attunement (GA 10: 69–79/PR 47). But he still maintained, thinking of Heraclitus and Plato, that thinking is a hearing and a seeing: *ein Hören und ein Sehen* (ibid.).

Heidegger’s turn to listening, to hearing, after the “failure” of *Being and Time* to respond appropriately to the question of being, compels us to work through some extremely difficult problems. We must find a way out of an aporetic logic that recognizes only two conceptions of hearing, neither of which can serve the calling to thought. Neither hearing as a physiological event nor hearing as mere metaphor can get at the phenomenology of the experience involved in thinking being—presencing. If hearing must be exclusively either physical fact or literary fiction, the philosophical turn to hearing can only end in delusion. But this means that neither science nor metaphysical poetics can register how and what the philosopher is hearing. And yet, the tonal shift that Heidegger is asking us to make in hearing the principle is not imaginary, not a fiction, but a phenomenologically verifiable shift—a shift in emphasis that is really sensible, audible. The shift engages, in fact, a sense that can be bodily felt.

As if the prevailing metaphysical dualism—compelling an interpretation of hearing that is restricted to choosing between the facts of science and the fictions of metaphor—were not already an extremely difficult stumbling block, there is also another metaphysical dualism to overcome:

the dualism that separates the intelligible from the sensible, favoring the first. If the philosophical tradition can recognize only an irreconcilable dualism separating the sensible and the intelligible (i.e., the cognitive), how is a thinking that works by hearing to be understood? Hearing is not merely an acoustical event, as the physical sciences understand it. “It is we who hear, not the ear.” The neuro-physiological ear is of course necessary, but it is not sufficient for listening and hearing (GA 10: 71/PR 47). Heidegger remarks, however, that we would be wrong to turn away from physiology only to fall into the assumption that thinking can be hearing “only in a figurative sense.” That metaphorical interpretation is an alternative he resoundingly repudiates (GA 10: 70/PR 47).²⁰ Unless we are to recognize in metaphor (*meta-pherein*) what the ancient Greeks made of it, namely, a truth that takes us to a place to which we have never been before.

As Heidegger would argue in many other lectures and seminars, here too he attempts to clear a way for our thinking to enter into the phenomenology of hearing—a mode of hearing that, I will argue, can ultimately serve thinking as an ontological organ only by taking us into the open dimension of the field of audibility, the openness that is the necessary condition for letting sonorous beings sound forth in the truth of their being. Moving toward this phenomenological demonstration, he says,

When we perceive something in hearing and seeing, the manner in which this happens is through the senses, it is sensible. This assessment is correct. Nevertheless, it is still untrue, for it leaves out something essential. Of course, we hear a Bach fugue with our ears, but if we leave what is heard only at this, with what strikes the tympanum as sound waves, then we can never hear [and will never understand how it would ever be possible to hear] a Bach fugue. *We* hear, not the ear. Of course, we hear through the ear, but not with the ear if “with” here means the ear as a sense organ that conveys to us what is heard. (Ibid.)

That is because what is heard is *something meaningful*—a Bach fugue. His argument against the prevailing alternatives continues:

Whatever is heard by us never exhausts itself in what our ears, which from a certain point of view can be seen as separate sense organs, can pick up. More precisely, if *we* hear, something is not simply added to what the ear picks up; rather, what the ear perceives and how it perceives will *already* be attuned and determined by what *we* hear. [. . .] Of course, our hearing organs are in a certain sense necessary; but they are never the sufficient condition for our hearing—for that hearing

that accords and affords us whatever there really is to hear. (GA 10: 70–71/PR 47)

Of course, as Heidegger explains in “The Nature of Language,” it is just as much a property of language to sound and ring and vibrate, to hover and to tremble [*Daß die Sprache lautet und klingt und schwingt, schwebt und bebt*], as it is for the spoken word of language to carry a meaning” (GA 12: 193/OWL 98).

It is time, as Heidegger insists, that we move beyond the Platonism that has held sway for so long in the way of thinking that has generated and perpetuated Western metaphysics:

Although our hearing and seeing are never a merely sensible registering, it is also off the mark to insist that thinking as listening and bringing-into-view are only meant as a transposition of meaning [*Übertragung*], namely as transposing the supposedly sensible into the nonsensible. The idea of “transposing” and of metaphor is based upon the distinguishing, if not the complete separation, of the sensible and the nonsensible as two realms that subsist on their own. The setting up of this partition between the sensible and the nonsensible, between the physical and the nonphysical, is a basic trait of what is called metaphysics and which normatively determines Western thinking. Metaphysics loses the rank of the normative mode of thinking when one gains the insight that the above-mentioned partitioning of the sensible and the nonsensible is not sufficient. When one gains insight into the limitations of metaphysics, “metaphor” as a normative conception also becomes untenable—that is to say, metaphor has been [but can no longer be] the norm for our conception of the essence of language. Thus, metaphor has served as a handy crutch in the interpretation of works of poetry and of artistic production in general. But the metaphorical exists only within metaphysics. (GA 10: 71–72/PR 48).

Having cleared away the thicket of misleading paradigms, Heidegger is ready to concentrate on hearing the principle of reason according to a different sensible intonation—a modality-shift in our experience with hearing that suddenly brings to the fore the *ontological* significance of the principle of reason as a principle not only about beings but also about the being of beings: “Being is akin to a ground; it is ground-like.” That is, if we shift our tonal stress, listening carefully and polyphonically to the invocation of being in the principle, it becomes possible to hear something of that ground, which otherwise would not be audible. We will, in that shift, find ourselves

hearing the principle speaking about being in its presence as ground. This is, I suggest, another way of thinking of “the truth of being” as the clearing, the open (GA 2: 72–73/PR 48–49). Also, Heidegger’s invocations of the ground should always remind us of the *Gestalt* formation.

However, “everything depends on whether or not we remain gathered into what the principle of reason says implicitly” (GA 10: 75/PR 50). In an argument saturated with words belonging to the phenomenology of hearing, Heidegger comments,

The principle of reason is one of those principles that remains silent about what is most proper to it. Whatever remains silent divulges nothing in sound [*Das Verschweigene ist das, was nicht verlautet*]. To hear what is silent [*Das Lautlose*] requires a hearing [*ein Gehör*] that each of us has and no one uses correctly. This hearing has something to do not only with the ear, but also with a human’s belonging [*Zugehörigkeit*] to what its essence is attuned to. Humans are at-tuned [*ge-stimmt*] to what determines [*be-stimmt*] their essence. In this determining [*Bestimmung*], humans are called forth by a voice [*durch eine Stimme betroffen und angerufen*] that sounds [*tönt*] all the more purely the more it silently reverberates through what speaks [*je lautloser sie durch das Lautende hindurchklingt*]. (Ibid.)

What is required of our hearing is therefore an extraordinary relation to language; a relation—the lovely word “Zugehörigkeit,” which also figures in “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung,” comes near to characterizing it—that is not merely to the *meaning* of the principle but also, in a way that metaphysics makes seem enigmatic, a relation to its sounding, its pitch, its voice, or rather, its voices, more than one.²¹ An extraordinary—and certainly unsettling—relation indeed, if what is required is, as it seems, something other than, or more than, merely experiencing a shift in emphasis, a shift in the placing of the accent. But what could it be that would make this shift seem enigmatic, unsettling? After all, as Heidegger points out, we are not unfamiliar with shifts in emphasis, shifts in our experience of tonality or voice, which also, because of that, bring about a corresponding shift, a silent shift, of meaning. Such shifts frequently take place in the communicative exchanges of everyday life (GA 10: 85/PR 57). And we know, also, that there can be both polyphony and polysemy, multiple meanings for a word.

What Heidegger is getting at is, however, something peculiar to this principle: the shift required here in our hearing involves no ordinary, everyday experience. It is an ontological shift, a shift into the openness, the

stillness and silence of the “truth” of being. In silent reverberations, “Nothing *is* without *ground*” invokes being:

The pitch [*Der Ton*] has shifted from the “nothing” to the “is” and from the “without” to “reason,” or the “ground” [. . .] This shift in pitch [*Die Verlagerung des Tones*] makes it possible to hear an accord [*Zusammenklang*] between being and reason, or the ground. Heard in the new tonality [*Tonart*], [. . .] the principle now speaks of being. (GA 10: 76/PR 50)

And what it is saying, if heard properly in the shift, is that beings are *grounded* in being—which is to say that audible beings are always experienced in the figure-ground *Gestalt* of an auditory field, the layout of being.

But if being is the ground of beings, being itself must be *without* grounding. This, however, confronts us with something that is much more than just unsettling: what the principle (*Satz*) has called upon us to hear, in a shift that really requires a sudden “leap,” as Heidegger’s play on the duplicity of the German word “Satz” suggests, is that the being of beings “is” ultimately an unlimited dimension of openness. The principle of reason, once so reassuring, so familiar-sounding, so comforting, suddenly now, in the duplicity of a shifting audibility, gives itself to be heard in a way that compels us to realize that when we leap away from the delimited ground settled by reason, we will be compelled to recognize the openness of being. It is this open dimension of being, then, that, soundlessly resounding, silently reverberating, can nevertheless be heard speaking: speaking in a paradoxical register that unsettles our habitual way of hearing, calling for a different kind of listening. It is to this different kind of listening, a kind that already appropriated us, but without our conscious engagement, that Heidegger refers us in his 1951 lecture on “Language”: “Every word of mortal speech speaks out of such a listening [*aus solchem Gehör*], and as such a listening” (GA 12:29/PLT 209).

When our listening to the speaking of language follows its sounding, whiling with it, we are carried, or transported, by the echo into an unfathomable silence. The echo is therefore the *metaphor* of the ontological: it carries our hearing into an openness it reveals as the true dimensionality of being. It is the echo that, as it fades away, takes us into the abyss, the groundlessness beyond reason that is the deepest truth, the deepest manifestation of being as such. This groundlessness, however, is not the nothingness that nihilism wants us to encounter, but rather the openness that, for a

hearing appropriately attuned, belongs to the sublime greatness of being—beyond the possibility of its adequate conceptualization in language.

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Having completed in their essential moments his reflections on the tonal shift, Heidegger turns in the eighth lecture to the question of the “destiny” of the Western world. He is of the conviction that nothing less than the promise of destiny is at stake in regard to this other way of hearing. Drawing on the double meaning of “Geschick,” he wants to explore the possibilities for our destiny (*Geschick*) that come our way in what we find ourselves given (*geschickt*) to experience—to hear and learn to hear—in the historically conditioned dimensions of the clearing, that is, in the *Geschick des Seins*. Nothing less is at stake, because in the history of the Western world, and in particular, in the history of metaphysics that is its critical reflection, the reduction of being to the exigencies of the *Gestell*, blocking off the dimension of openness, is drawing us ever deeper into the danger, and the emergency, that he calls, after Jacobi, after Nietzsche, “nihilism”: our loss of any sense of the open dimensionality of being, hence our loss of the open dimensionality of the perceptual field of meaning, the time-space interplay (*Zeit-Spiel-Raum*), within which we might think and live, with some sense of hope, beyond the conditions of the present epoch (GA 10: 87ff./PR 59ff.).

To hear the second tonality in the principle of reason, hence to hear the principle speaking, addressing us as an *ontological* principle of being, is to hear, as Heidegger says, its history-shattering claim on us as human beings—a claim on our responsibility, a responsibility, in part, for the language that first ushers us as humans “into our essence,” and into the possibilities for the future that are given in our historical situation. Our foremost responsibility in this regard is to serve as the sole guardians of the being (*Wesung*) of beings, guarding all beings, present and absent, against their reification. Hearing the principle in this other, ontologically oriented way, “we are challenged to find what is fitting [*schicklich*] for us as human beings,” given the capacity to recollect and make our own that history in the bidding, the “Geheiß” of which we inherit, as promising, earthbound possibilities (GA 10: 100–1/PR 68–69). To hear (*hören*) the claim, the call, in an ontologically thoughtful way would be to experience ourselves in relation to “that to which we always already belong [*ge-hören*]”: a singular epochal dispensation of being (*Geschick des Seins*), in which the ground of a field of meaningful audibility—a clearing—can be heard resonating as it withdraws into silence, evading any reduction to the comfort of “reason” (GA 10: 137/PR 92). Our belongingness, our *Zugehörigkeit*, to an

ultimately unfathomable ground constitutes a challenge to our capacity to think and hear with understanding, *outside of metaphysics*, the true significance of being (GA 10: 139–44/PT 93–97).

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Speaking and hearing are limited by the historically given conditions in terms of which the presencing of beings is possible (GA 10: 140/PR 94). This historical dispensation (*Geschick*) nevertheless opens a field of resonances within which and from which the principle of reason might be heard speaking, according to the second tonality, of the *belonging-together* [*Zusammen-gehörigkeit*] of being and ground (GA 10: 144/PR 97). There is of course, as Heidegger will bring to our attention, an explanation for the fact that this second tonality has not heretofore been audible, an explanation for our historical inability to hear it, or even to listen for it. Needless to say, this means that we have been, and for the most part still are, deaf to the claim on us that constitutes—against the grain of a continuing history, more of the same—our singular epochal task and our hope for a different future. The claim we are not hearing is nothing less than the claim on the thoughtfulness of our experience made by the being of beings—presencing as such. Our not (yet) hearing it is a manifest symptom of the reifying pressures of nihilism, a withdrawing of being from the order of history that makes it virtually impossible to hear, beyond the monotone that registers the reified, object-form presence of beings, the reverberations and echoes that would otherwise announce, otherwise bespeak, the being of beings. To hear (*hören*) the claim thoughtfully would be to interrupt the reign of the *Gestell* and experience “that [dimension of openness] to which we always already belong [*ge-hören*]” (GA 10: 137/PR 92).

According to Heidegger, what we belong today is a time of crisis, a time of urgency: a singular epochal dispensation of the relation in which being and ground can be heard to resonate. Our belongingness, our “Zugehörigkeit,” to that situation throws us into an emergency in its two reciprocally engaged senses, namely, as crisis and as opportunity, precondition for the realization of our potentiality-for-hearing and our potentiality as beings favored with the gift of language.

The question for Heidegger is whether our way of hearing language could become a hermeneutical transmission, a true “Überlieferung,” understanding this transmission as a *delivering* in both its senses, hence the beginning of a liberation, bearing, through the speaking of language itself, the still unthought, unheard-of riches, reverberations concealed within the very language of this inheritance, that might somehow be used to rescue us from the fate of a nihilism toward which, ever more precipitously, driven

by the will to power as the will to submit the world in its totality to a rationalizing calculus, we are recklessly rushing ahead (GA 10: 153/PR 102).

In the thirteenth and final lecture, Heidegger returns to his reflections on the *Logos*, arguing that “being and ground belong together in *Logos*”: “Sein und Grund gehören im *Logos* zusammen” (GA 10: 157–61/PR 104–7).

But our modern way of thinking about “*Logos*” and “being,” here signifying word and being, makes this belonging together virtually impossible to experience, to hear, and to contemplate, without reduction to nominalism, and ultimately to nihilism, for “*logos*” has in the modern epoch become reason, understood as “ratio,” instrumental, calculative rationality, and what “being” means has been obscured by a paradigm that, not recognizing the difference between being and beings, represents being as a being, albeit the highest or first of all beings, and represents all beings, including being, as objects of a subjective will to power.

At the heart of Heidegger’s argument is the thought that the principle of reason could be interpreted in a way very different from the way the tradition of metaphysics has interpreted it; that, by a certain shift in our hearing of it, we could even experience the principle as *opening up* a time-space field that would make it possible for us to break out of the prevailing ontological framework.

Thought in terms of Heidegger’s discipline of listening, the principle of reason yields an opportunity to prepare for, or anticipate, the eventuality of another epoch in the language and history of being. Perhaps it could be argued, then, without weakening Heidegger’s well-known critique of ontotheology, that this listening, no longer bound to an ontically absorbed univocity deaf to the deeper resonances of being that are always also sounding within our words, and no longer bound to a rationality that repudiates such polyphonic listening, might be regarded as initiating the opening of our experience with language for the very first time to the possibility of a redemptive or transformative moment, breaking out of the continuum of history in order to prepare our world for another epochal *Geschick*, another constellation of world-historical conditions involved in determining the grounding, the clearing that *Dasein* holds open, making possible a significant difference in our experiencing of what there is and how what-is appears.

And might this moment come about in part because of the “reconciliation” of the two senses of “sense,” that is, the intelligible, or cognitive, and the sensuous, or material, since ancient times not only divergent but also maintained in exclusionary opposition to one another? I suggest this

conjecture because, in listening with thought to the saying of the *Logos*, understood as the principle of reason, what thinking lets us hear, when the two senses of sense collaborate in the resonances and reverberations of an attunement their reconciliation made possible, is an immeasurably deepened experience of the *being* of beings—a deepened experience of the open, the clearing, as that through which the world that the existence of the human *Dasein* opens makes possible the presencing of audible beings.

When this principle is duly received by an appropriated hearing, it bespeaks an attuned belonging-together, a *Zusammengehören-Stimmung*, not only of being and *Logos*, as Parmenides is telling us, but also of sensibility and rationality. What Heidegger's compelling reading lets us hear, in the wording of the principle, is the undeniable fact that, despite what metaphysics has always claimed, sound and sense are working together. Hence, it seems that there can be a joyous moment of reconciliation, affirming the affinity that makes the two senses of sense work together. Perhaps, in the long history of human suffering, this reconciliation grants us a surprising intimation of the utopian promise of happiness.

§5

The Principle of Identity (1957)

Over the course of many years, Heidegger called attention to the fact that the sounding and echoing of certain philosophical propositions can make consequential claims on our hearing, requiring that we become more thoughtful, more aware, in our listening. In the Preface to *Identity and Difference*, a 1957 publication containing “The Principle of Identity,” Heidegger boldly proposes a very surprising argument, bringing out the importance of listening for our understanding of this principle. No one before him had ever given thought to the sensuous, auditory dimension of the principle. But Heidegger calls attention to the auditory belonging-together [*Zusammengehörigkeit*] of identity and difference,” stating,

Readers are to discover for themselves in what way difference stems from the essence of identity by listening to the harmony [*auf den Einklang hört*] that reigns [*waltet*] between the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*] and the sustaining of an openness [*Austrag*]. (GA 11: 29/ID 21).

In the text that follows, he reiterates this point, saying that the principle of identity is not a merely abstract speculative presupposition; rather, it gives us an immediate experience of what it means—“if we listen carefully to its emphatic intonation [*Grundton*], and think about that instead of just thoughtlessly mouthing [*leichtsinnig daherzusagen*] the formula ‘A is

A.’ For the proposition is actually saying: ‘A is A.’” Just as he does in his interpretation of the Principle of Reason, the emphasis he asks us to hear in his interpretation of the Principle of Identity falls on the word that invokes being. “Now,” he asks, challenging our habits,” what do we hear?” (GA 79: 117/ID 26; BF 110). Said either out loud, but in a flat voice, without expressive emphasis, or in the silence of one’s mind, and without attentive listening, we will not hear the *ontological* claim it is making, will not hear the originary *emergence* of difference from identity, hence we will not hear the harmony of their belonging-together—the fundamental *unity* of being that underlies the difference and makes it possible:

Heard in its fundamental, emphatic intonation [*aus seinem Grundton gehört*], what the principle of identity invokes is precisely what the whole of Western-European thinking has in mind, namely: The unity of identity forms a fundamental tonality characteristic of the being of beings [*die Einheit der Identität bildet einen Grundton im Sein des Seienden*]. (GA 79: 117–18/ID 26; BF 110)

Identity is identity only through difference: its possibility depends on differentiation. And correspondingly, difference is difference only through identity: its possibility depends on identity. Hence their deep resounding unity. Here, “being” appears in the identity of identity and difference.

Moreover, if we do not catch the emphatic tonality (*Grundton*) invoked in the “A is A” (or in the “A = A”), we will also not hear, in the event (*Ereignis*) that is the very *sounding-out* of the principle, its appropriation (*Ereignis*), its claim on us, responsible for the sustaining (*Austrag*) of the unity of being in its fundamental openness. (I take the grounds for this interpretation of “*Austrag*” from *Besinnung*, writings from the years 1938–1939, in which Heidegger tells us: “Der *Austrag* meint [. . .] Eröffnung, *Lichten der Lichtung*—*Er-eignis* als *Austrag*.”) (GA 66: 84/M 70).

According to the principle, we are drawn out of ourselves (*Austrag*), appropriated (*ereignet*) to bear responsibility for the openness of the clearing, appropriated for giving ourselves over to what that *Grundton* indicates, namely, the laying out of a primordial field of audibility, hence the *range of tonality* within which all sonorous beings, each in its unity of an identity and difference, can *be* in their presence and absence.

A proper—that is, ontologically appropriated—hearing is also crucial for understanding the philosophical wisdom of Parmenides. In discussing the Greek philosopher’s thought that being and apprehending are “the same,” Heidegger argues that what is at stake in the fragment lies in our

belonging to being: “Im Menschen waltet ein Gehören zum Sein.” This is “a belonging that listens (*hört*) to being because it is appropriated by and to being [*weil es diesem übereignet ist*]” (GA 79: 121/ID 31; BF 113–14). The human is that being whose only way of being is to-be-drawn-into-correspondence-with-what-is: “Der Mensch *ist* dieser Bezug der Entsprechung, und er ist nur dies.” This correspondence is constitutive of the human *Da-sein*, which belongs (*gehört*) to being and accordingly hearkens (*hört auf*) to being. “Let us think of being,” he says,

according to its inceptual sense [*nach seinem anfänglichen Sinne*] as presencing. Being is present [*west*] to man neither incidentally nor only on exceptional occasions. Being is present and abides [*west und währt*] only as it concerns [*an-geht*] man through the claim [*Anspruch*] that it makes on him. For it is the human, open toward being in its very nature [*offen für das Sein*], who alone lets being arrive as presence [*läßt dieses erst als An-wesen ankommen*, i.e., it is only us human beings to whom it is possible for beings to presence]. (GA 79: 121/ID 31; BF 114)

If we listen carefully and hear what Parmenides is saying, then between us human beings and being, understood as meaningful presencing, there is a bond (*Bezug*) drawing the two together, such that there is at once both an identity and a difference, because, without us, no meaningful presencing of beings is possible. *Da-sein/Sein*, perceiving/perceived: conjoined like the two sides of a leaf. In the belonging together that Parmenides invokes, there is a fundamental attunement we need to hear and ponder.

§6

The Auditory Field: What Heraclitus Hears

In “Logic: Heraclitus’s Doctrine of the Logos” (1944), Heidegger states that “Logos” is the name through which Heraclitus thinks of being, being itself, being as such—“the one that is all”: *hen panta unei* (GA 55.2: 261–66/H199–202). How does this “one that is all” engage our hearing? Heidegger argues that, in what he calls hearkening (*Horch*en), our hearing is not only attentive to the sounds and voices of beings; it also recognizes and understands itself as dependent on something more fundamental, something originary, namely, the time-space clearing, the laying-out and gathering-in of an auditory field, or world, of percipience. This is what the pre-Socratics thought of as “the one that is all.”

The *Logos* is the *hen panta*: the originary foregathering [*ursprüngliche Versammlung*], the presence [*Gegenwart*] in which all that is present

presences [*alles Anwesende anwest*]; it is the being in which all beings are. (GA 55.2: 376/H 280)

However, Heidegger is keenly aware of the difficulties blocking our way to pay attention to this originary ontological dimension of our everyday experience of hearing:

The path that one must take to the originary *Logos* is long and far, and there are scarcely any signs indicating the way. But perhaps a reflective thinking and the proper care of its mindfulness [*Achtsamkeit*] are in fact aided by the collapse [*Zusammensturz*] of the world: a world which is already groundless and empty. (GA 55.2: 377/H 281)

The foregathering layout of the *Logos* is not inaudible; but it is “quiescent,” withdrawn from easy immediacy (GA 55.2: 282, 358, 391, 395/H 268, 284–85, 289, 292–93). The layout of the clearing silently emerges unnoticed from within the very structure of our natures, intrinsically taking place as the openness that *is* our very existence, our presence in the world (GA 55.2: 383/H 285). As such, its audibility requires retrieval in the inner silence (*Erschweigen*) and freedom of a process akin, we might say, to Platonic recollection—*Erinnerung*. Consequently, says Heidegger, Heraclitus believes,

The soul must abandon its accustomed ways and paths and limit itself [*sich verarmen*] to its singularly focused [*einzig Geringe*], genuinely attentive listening [*eigentlichen horchsamen Hinhörens*], for it is then, and only then, that its *logos* is enriched [i.e., by hearing its gathered belonging to the *Logos* and letting that belonging be heard through its own *logos*]. (GA 55.2: 394/H 292)

“But,” Heidegger argues,

Even when human beings bring the *Logos* [i.e., the being of the clearing] into the range of their hearing [*zu Gehör*], there is not the slightest guarantee that they will then correspond [*entsprechen*] to (and with) it—there is no guarantee that they will bring the *Logos* together into their own proper gathering [i.e., their own proper *logos*, speech, thought]. Even when humans listen with their ears open, it is not guaranteed [*verbürgt*] that they have listened to what they have heard, and that they will be gathered toward it [*sich darauf sammeln*] in a truly hearkening way [*horhsam*]. (GA 55.2: 402/H 297)

There is no guarantee that they will take on responsibility for the *logos*—being, the open. But it is only in a hearkening way that we can take on that responsibility, compliantly heeding our co-responding correspondence (*homologeîn*) to the *Logos*. What this means, phenomenologically, is that hearkening is a hearing attentive in a sheltering way to the field itself, being itself, the openness of the auditory field as such. Thus, according to Heidegger, the *Logos* that Heraclitus invokes is the clearing:

the sheltering foregathering [*wahrende Versammlung*] which, as the One [*das Eine*], unites beings as a whole, thereby resonating, as being, through beings as a whole, and allowing this whole to appear in its resounding tonality. (GA 55.2:333/H 248)

(In translating this passage, I have substituted words pertaining to the experience of hearing for Heidegger's words, which belong to the paradigm of vision).

The *Logos* is a *Legein*, a gathering layout, or clearing, that allows the whole it gathers to become audible in its resounding tonality. Heidegger describes this *Logos* as “a surrounding region” of stillness and silence, “the open area and the expanse in which something can take its sojourn” (GA 55.2:335/H 250). It is

the open field of presence into which everything is foregathered, and from out of which [. . .] everything that is emerges, sooner or later to disappear. (GA 55.2: 338/H 252)

This clearing or open expanse could be a discursive field, a universe of discourse—but it could also be a field of auditory perception. And when our hearing of things—beings—hears, beyond them, *into* the gathering layout (the *Legein* of the *Logos*), hence hears, and hears into, the dimensionality of openness that constitutes the necessary condition for beings to be heard, then our hearing becomes a hearkening that co-respondingly corresponds (*entspricht*) to the *Logos* in a responsibility that Heraclitus calls *homologeîn* (GA 55.2: 358/H 268).

Hearkening is therefore fundamentally different from ordinary hearing. It is not ontic, but ontological, attuned not to beings, but rather to the functioning of the auditory field, or world, as such. Thus, it may be said, paradoxically, to be, in Heidegger's words, an “attending-to that does not actually ‘hear’ anything.” Indeed, in this hearkening, “we are,” he says, “subjecting our ears and our hearing to extraordinary strain. And yet,

what would this hearkening be, if we were not *already able* [i.e., as in the disposition of our pre-ontological experience] to hear an appeal [coming from within us] that persists?" (GA 55.2: 245/H 188). And this "appeal" is for us to take responsibility for the fields, the worlds, our presence opens. What is to be "heard" in hearkening is the functioning, audibly inaudible, of the field of audibility itself: the auditory world in its immeasurable tonal openness, as the unifying condition for the very possibility of our ordinary, habitual ontic experience in hearing.

But, he asks, "What would such hearkening and hearkening-toward [*Aufhorchen*] be, and how would it awaken, if we were not *already obedient* [*gehorsam*], compliant in regard to what can, and indeed does, come forth?" In other words: "What would all human listening in the sense of a perceptual apprehension [*empfindungsmäßigen Vernehmens*] of noises, tones and sound [*Klängen und Lauten*] be" without listening grounded in the deeper ontological sense of hearkening—"a compliantly attentive relation [*gehorsamen Bezugs*]" to being, that is, to the auditory field as condition necessary for very possibility of hearing the presence of meaningful beings? (GA 55.2: 245/H 188).

Hearkening is a listening "compliantly attentive to something [*ein Gehorchen zu Solchem*] to which we in fact *already* belong (*schon gehören*) by virtue of our hearing [*in einer Hörigkeit*]." That "something" is the open clearing our presence as *Da-sein* is. As we can confirm by retrieving our pre-ontological experience and understanding of being, we *already belong*, in and through our hearing, in the draw of a connection (*Bezug*) to being, understood, in this context, as the field, or world, of audibility that our sheer existence and presence as *Da-sein* has opened up, foregathered, and laid out. This belonging, Heidegger says, is "an obedience that has nothing in common with subjugation [*Knechtschaft*], since this originary listening [*ursprüngliche Hörigkeit*] is nothing other than being open to the open" (ibid.). This being open, he says, would be "freedom itself." But, if being an openness is the originary experience in authentic hearing, then we need to consider: "Who *are* we? What does it mean to be human?" According to Heidegger,

The human is the being [*Wesen*] that is alone open to the open; and only because of this openness can the human also close itself off from the open in a certain way: namely, by allowing what is to be encountered in it to be only an object [*Gegenstand*], an objectified thing [*Objekt*]. (Ibid.)

Intuitively understanding the phenomenology of hearkening, Heraclitus used words that would echo and resound, taking us, if we are ready, into

the sublime depths of being, where our hearing, losing to silence the echoes it was following, would finally belong to the awesome truth of being. That, as I shall argue, is the responsibility, the correspondence, the *homologeîn*, that the philosopher wants the echo to teach us.

§7

Lecture on the Logos in Heraclitus, Fragment B 50 (1951)

In Fragment B50, Heraclitus tells us how we should listen to the wisdom he wants to impart regarding the *Logos*. Heidegger gives this fragment exceptional attention because, as he interprets it, the fragment concerns “Logos” as one of the pre-Socratic Greek names for being. In this fragment, Heraclitus says,

*Ouk emou, alla tou logou akousantas
homologeîn sophon estin hen panta [einaî].*

I suggest translating this as “Listening not to me [my own words], but to the *Logos* [itself], we experience the wisdom of being in accord with [the truth said in the thought] ‘One is All.’” Working with the connection, in German, between the word for hearing (*Hören*) and the word for belonging (*Gehören*), Heidegger argues that what is at stake in the fragment is “genuine hearing,” hearing with *ontological* understanding: hearing as a compliant belonging and attentive attunement to the truth of the *Logos*: “Wenn ihr nicht mich (den Redenden) bloß angehört habt, sondern wenn ihr euch im horchsamen Gehören aufhalten, dann ist eigentliches Hören” (GA 7: 222/EGT 67). What is this hearkening belonging and attunement? What makes hearkening—hearing that is compliantly attentive (*horchsam*) in regard to the *Logos*—the “authentic” or “proper” way of hearing? Because it is ontological, concerned with the functioning of the conditions necessary for hearing all that *is*, hearkening is the way of hearing that both underlies and protects our ability to hear, vouchsafing the potential inherent in the very nature of hearing.

“Logos” and “Legein” are words uttered, we presume, by Heraclitus, appearing in mere fragments of his thought. They are words that refer to articulation—all forms, or gestures, of articulation. “Logos,” a noun, has been translated into English as “meaning,” “word,” “speech,” “discourse,” “account,” “reason,” and “logic.” “Legein,” the corresponding verb, has been translated into English as “to speak,” “to articulate,” “to give an account,” and “to explain.” But according to Heidegger, these ancient Greek words are ontological, referring to being. Thus, he argues, they would be most fruitfully opened up when understood to mean a fundamental

disclosiveness: a disclosive *laying-out-that-gathers* (or a disclosive *bringing-forth-that-gathers*). This interpretation represents an *ontological* understanding of the responsive, receptive, articulatory nature of perception, because it retrieves the most fundamental dimension, namely, the relation of perception to the *being* of beings—and above all, being itself. It enables us to think about the phenomenology of hearing in regard to its pre-ontological and ontological stages of formation and development: that is to say, the two-way, interactive “correspondence” between our hearing and being. What does it mean for the character of our hearing when we think of it as belonging together with being in a two-way interaction, a reciprocal responsiveness, hence as *corresponding* to the *Legein* of the *Logos* (being) by virtue of itself instantiating and exemplifying it, hence, itself becoming in its own way the *legein* of a *logos*?

In the commentary that now follows, I shall *capitalize* these two Greek words when they refer to being and leave *without* capitals the corresponding ontic sense, referring to the nature of hearing as the personal experience of individuals.

According to Heidegger, the gathering in our *legein* “is more than mere amassing”: understood more deeply, more ontologically, the *legein* is (1) a gathering that brings forth and lays out in unconcealment; but it must also be, at the same time, (2) the sheltering and safekeeping (*Bergen* and *Verwahren*) of being, hence a way of caring for the being of beings, that is to say, a way of caring for the phenomenological conditions that make it possible for beings to be present in and absent (GA 7: 215/EGT 61). If this were to describe the essence of human articulation (*legein*), then, asks Heidegger, “what would hearing be?” (GA 7: 219/EGT 64). Answering this question, he argues that, appropriately understood, that is, understood in relation to its appropriation (*Ereignung*), that is, the claim constitutive of its essence as an openness to being, hearing bears a responsibility for its ways of disclosing being. Properly understood and experienced, our hearing is an auditory *legein*: “Hearing is ultimately [i.e., in its proper, ownmost fulfillment] a gathered hearkening”: “Das Hören ist erstlich das gesammelte Horchen” (GA 7: 210/EGT 65). Harkening is the *essence* of hearing in its consummate stage of achieved development. The argument continues, rejecting, to begin with, the claim that the sciences make:

We hear when we are “all ears.” But “ear” does not here mean the acoustical sense apparatus. The anatomically and physiologically identifiable ears, as the tools of sensation, never bring about a hearing, not even if we take this solely as an apprehending of noises, sounds, and

tones [*Geräuschen, Lauten, Tönen*]. Although it is true that apprehension lives only as long as it is embodied [*obwohl das Vermehmen nur lebt, indem es leibt*]. (Ibid.)

“We do not hear because we have ears,” says Heidegger, conscious that he is once again making a paradoxical, counterintuitive claim. “We have ears, i.e., our bodies are equipped with ears, because we hear” (ibid.). The physical organs make possible the reception of soundwaves; but they cannot account, as such, for the phenomenology and hermeneutics of hearing—hearing as *meaningful disclosive experience*, the *disclosing of something meaningful* in the sensible, auditory field. Nor can physicalism even begin to discern, in our ordinary hearing, what Heidegger’s philosophical thought calls “hearkening,” namely, its ownmost, but still unrecognized and unfulfilled potential in relation to being.

Heidegger takes Heraclitus to be suggesting that we should try to understand and experience our hearing as *legen*, hence as corresponding to the *Legein* of being by virtue of entering into the *ontological dimension* of the experience, attending not to audible beings but rather to the opening clearing of an auditory field. Thus, hearing would achieve its ontological potential as a medium of disclosiveness. That is what Heidegger believes we can learn from reading—and hearing—the wisdom of Heraclitus.

As the Greek philosopher obviously knew, we can hear, but not really listen, not give what is heard any attention. We can even listen to all that is giving itself to be heard, but fail nevertheless to hear what is deeply, and most significantly taking place. If, however, we are listening wholeheartedly and let our hearing be drawn into the ontological depths of what is happening, then our hearing, ontologically appropriated, can become a *legen*, a gathering laying-out of something meaningful, corresponding and belonging to the *Legein* of the *Logos*. In hearkening, our hearing belongs to being; it becomes an organ of being.

Like vision, hearing is a capacity that can be developed in certain ways, learned as a skill or art. Skillfulness (*Schicklichkeit*) in listening is especially needed in music, theater, poetry, teaching, and psychotherapy, but also in the discursiveness essential for harmonious social existence and a flourishing political democracy. But what I find most exciting in the trajectory of this argument is that Heidegger is schematizing a distinction between an undeveloped, or underdeveloped, way of hearing and, in the greatest possible contrast, a much more developed way of hearing—a “proper” hearing, an “*eigentliches Hören*,” a hearing that fulfills its ownmost essential potential as a hermeneutical medium of disclosiveness: an ontologically attuned hearing,

attuned, that is, by and to being, the layout of an auditory field, the necessary condition for experiencing the presence of audible beings. That is what he will call “Hörchen”: “hearkening” (GA 7: 219, 222–23/EGT 63, 65–66).

Hearkening is the realization of a potential and promise inherent, or latent, in the capacity we think of as hearing. It is hearing as an ontological organ, a listening that, with deep understanding, opens and clears an auditory field for the being of sonorous beings in their meaningful presencing—a listening that is, moreover, *aware* of itself as serving, in that role, the protecting and preserving of the conditions necessary for “the truth of being”—that is, necessary for, but also circumscribing, the openness that lets meaningful presencing take place. Hearkening is a way of hearing that corresponds to—lives up to—its role of responsibility for protecting being.

According to Heidegger, “although we remain always and everywhere in correspondence [*Entsprechung*] to the being of beings, [regardless of whether we are aware of this correspondence], we nevertheless seldom are attentive [*achten*] to the appeal and claim of being [*Zuspruch des Seins*].”²² Our given [*geschick*] bodily disposition of nature is not sufficient to compel this correspondence, because we are, after all, entirely free to ignore the calling of that disposition, free to neglect it, or abuse it; and because, moreover, even the most thoughtful among us are frequently distracted, forgetful, inattentive. In “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16),” Heidegger outlines the problem:

Mortals are irrevocably bound to the revealing-concealing gathering [the clearing] which lights [*lichtet*] everything present in its presencing. But they turn away from the clearing and turn only toward what is present, which is what immediately concerns them in their everyday commerce with each other. They believe that this trafficking in what is present creates by itself for them a sufficient familiarity with it. But it nevertheless remains foreign to them. For they have no inkling [*sie ahnen nichts*] of what they have [already] been entrusted with [i.e., in their pre-ontological relation to being]: an openness that allows what is present to come to appearance. But the *Logos*, in the open setting of which beings come and go, remains concealed and forgotten. (GA 7: 287/EGT 122)

His analysis continues, indicating the way to the urgently necessary awareness:

The more familiar to them everything knowable becomes, the more foreign it [the clearing] becomes to them—without their being able to

know this. They would become aware [*aufmerksam*] of all this if only they would ask themselves: How could anyone whose very essence belongs to the clearing ever withdraw from receiving and protecting the clearing? How could one, without immediately discovering that the everyday can seem quite ordinary to him only because this ordinariness is guilty of forgetting what initially brings even the apparently self-evident into the light of what is present?

We need to be reminded; we need to get in touch with that belonging, that correspondence [*homologeïn*]. But, whether we realize it or not, we are in fact always already engaged, appropriated, in and by the “first nature” of our *Da-sein*, for being-the-sites-of-clearings. However, we still need to retrieve and hear that engagement, that appropriation, from our pre-ontological experience of belonging in a relation to being in the deepest dimension of our hearing:

When the hearing [*akouein*] of mortals is directed to the *Logos* [i.e., being] itself [*einzig am Logos*], directed, that is, to the Laying-out-that-gathers [*an der lesenden Lege*], then mortal *legeïn* is brought with appropriate skillfulness into the gathering of the *Logos* [*in das Gesamt des Logos schicklich verlegt*]. Mortal *legeïn* lies secured [*geborgen*] in the *Logos*. Its destiny [*Vom Geschick her*] is to be appropriated [*er-eignet*] in *homologeïn*. (GA 7: 229/EGT 74).

Our hearing is a *legeïn*, a medium of disclosiveness that takes place in the layout of the auditory field. We need to recognize and understand this: the role of the auditory clearing, the immeasurably deep dimension that is opened and laid out wherever there is a mortal *Da-sein*. Our “destiny” depends on how we appropriate our given situation, this singular moment in the historical unfolding of being as reflected in the metaphysics that has taken shape in the Anthropocene epoch: depends on how we appropriate and, in an ongoing process of appropriation, actively take up and take on the individual and collective demands our time calls for, corresponding to the potential constitutive of the finite and never-completed achievement of our humanity. This process of appropriation and appropriation requires, and is, a hermeneutical work of memory (*Erinnerung*), an approach to the historical past that is disclosive of that past in a way that retrieves potentials kept within it, blocked or abandoned and forgotten, that it might still be possible to work with and develop. So, appropriation and appropriation require a revolutionary new *form of memory*, a form befitting the needs of that retrieving and disclosing of the past as what was, what has been, in order

to learn what might still be possible. But they also require a revolutionary new *form of futurity*, a relation to the future that is hopeful, hence redeeming, or messianic, because of how we are understanding ourselves in our being-in-time and our belonging-to-history. That understanding involves recollecting; but it also involves waiting. Waiting is difficult: it is not passivity; rather, it involves *learning* to wait, learning to dwell in the openness of being: a renewed faith and hope in relation to the future, consequent upon the retrieving of the past through a new experience with memory.

Thus, in “Aletheia (Heraclitus, Fragment B 16),” Heidegger argues that mortals hearkening to the *Legein* can, “in *their* own way [*auf ihre Weise*],” namely, by being mindfully attentive, “accomplish” the auditory clearing (i.e., bring the silence of the field into the fullness of its own essential presencing), thereby not only consummating its potential role in our hearing but also protecting it through a guardian awareness, a “Wächterschaft der Wahrheit”: “das Lichten zu vollbringen (ins Volle seines Wesens bringen) und dadurch die Lichtung zu hüten” (GA 7: 285/EGT 120).

In the depths of each and every perception, we are always being addressed in regard to our highest capabilities. We are never hidden from the auditory clearing; we are entrusted with its open, receptive silence, responsible for protecting and preserving it in its openness.

In genuine, proper, *eigentliches* hearing, we experience and understand our hearing to be a *legein*, dispatched to the *Logos* (*wenn das sterbliche legein sich in den Logos schickt*), belonging wholeheartedly, in achieved awareness, to the opening of an auditory field. In this way, our hearing becomes what it is capable of being, responding to the claim made on us by that which is calling to be heard (GA 7: 226/EGT 71): it corresponds, as in *homologein*, to the openness that makes the field of audibility into a clearing of silence, a laying-out that gathers, letting what presences within that lay-out, that field, that world, sound forth and reverberate and echo (GA 7: 220–21, 229/EGT 66–67, 74).

†

When Heraclitus told his students that, instead of listening to the words as his, hearing them as thoughts coming from him, they should listen to the speaking of the *Logos* itself, the words with which this profound wisdom was imparted let the abyssal tonalities of the *Logos* resonate and reverberate for their hearing in a dimension of the auditory field far beyond their capacity to take its measure. The *Logos* speaks *in* his words and *through* his words: these are words that the philosopher presumably *chose* to use, and use in precisely the order that we have inherited. However, what we need to hear is that Heraclitus speaks in a way that lets the *Logos* echo uncannily through the

sounds of his words, his *logoi*, while the *Logos* itself remains nevertheless in an essential reserve of perpetual self-concealment. If we listen well to the original Greek words, letting ourselves be thoroughly abandoned to their sounding, it is possible for our hearing to be drawn, beyond sound, into an immeasurable silence—the eerily audible murmuring silence of being itself.

Heidegger’s deepest, most concentrated, most extensive reflections on hearing in relation to the sounding of language undoubtedly took place in his seminar writings on Heraclitus. In the 1943 Summer Semester seminar on “The Beginning of Western Thinking,”²³ Heidegger reflected on the possibility of thinking today what the ancient philosophers said in regard to our hearing; and, like Adorno, though with a different objective, he had harsh words of criticism regarding this capacity, declaring that, with “our stopped-up and obdurate ears,” “unseren verstopften und verstockten Ohren,” what the ancients were saying might never be heard, never be understood (GA 55.1: 74/H 57).

But a second, more sustained meditation took place one year later, in his Summer Semester 1944 seminar on “Logik: Heraklits Lehre vom Logos” (GA 55.2/H 137ff.). I would translate this title as “Heraclitus’s Teaching of the *Logos*.” Claiming that there can be no deep understanding of what the philosopher meant by “Logos” without attending to its audibility, its *Hörbarkeit*, Heidegger undertook a critical examination of the predominant character of hearing in the epoch of the *Gestell*. However, he understood that the openness of the clearings our existence intrinsically opens can challenge but never escape engaging world-historical conditions. What our clearings make possible is always, to a greater or lesser extent, determined by such given world-historical conditions.

But how are we supposed to hear the *Logos* itself through the philosopher’s words? What kind of listening and hearing does it call for? What is the difference between a listening that hears only what Heraclitus is saying and a listening that hears, *in* his words, *through* his words, the *Logos* itself? It seems to be a question, Heidegger says, of hearing the *Logos* as laying out an auditory field and accordingly setting the fundamental tonality for the philosopher’s words of thought. But, he asks, “is the *Logos*, which can be heard and is being heard, really a saying, a sounding-forth and divulging [*ein Sagen, eine Verlautbarung*]?” If so, then can the saying of the *Logos* to be “properly” heard as sound—*Laute*? Or is it, he asks, a question of voice—*Stimme*?²⁴ Finally, he wonders whether it is even possible actually to *hear* the *Logos* at all. Might it be such as to speak only in silence?

Before we give further thought to these questions, I think it important to note, that by the time that we have read to the end of the next three

pages in Heidegger's text, we will have encountered no less than eleven verbs directly pertaining to the capacity of our ears. Here, provisionally translated, are some of the words:

“hören” (“to hear”), “anhören” (“to tell that something is the case by what one can hear”), “zuhören” (“to listen to”), “hinhören” (“to turn one's listening attentively towards”), “überhören” (“to miss hearing”), “verhören” (“to fail to hear”), “horchen” (“to hearken”), “aufhorchen” (“to give oneself over to hearkening”), “gehörchen” (“to hearken compliantly”) “horchsames Achten” (“hearkening attention”), and “vernehmen” (“to perceive, in the mode of hearing”).

Many other words and phrases, also pertaining to our hearing and listening, can be found in the texts of his thought:

“das Hörbare” (“the hearable”), “lautlose Stimme” (“soundless voice”), “das Vernehmliche” (“the audible, as taken up into perception”), “das Vernommene” (“that which is taken up, perceived, in hearing”), “das Akustische” (“the acoustic”), “Ohr” (“ear”), “Ohr unseres Denkens” (“ear of our thinking”), “Gehör” (“a hearing that belongs and submits”), “Horchsamkeit” (“the ability to hearken”), “Hörigkeit” (“ability to hear”), “Anklang” (“resounding harmony,” “echo”), “Geräuschen” (“noises”), “Tönen” (“tones”), “Klängen” (“noisy sounds”), “bestimmen” (“to attune and determine”), and “Verstimmung” (“to be out of tune”), “Laute” (“soundings,” “resounding sounds”), “Schalle” (“mere sounds,” “noises”), and “Verlautbarung” (“a vocalization that divulges something”).

With so much of Heidegger's thought now published, no scholar can rightly say any more that Heidegger was not intensely engaged in the phenomenology of perception.

In his 1943 seminar commentary on the fragment, Heidegger makes explicit the distinction that he hears concealed within the ancient words: the distinction, namely, between two modes of listening and hearing: a mode that characterizes our common, ordinary, everyday experience, experience limited to the ontic realm of sonorous beings, and a mode, much more strenuous and difficult, which would instead give itself over to the *Logos* itself, having been appropriated and attuned—as in the *homologeîn*—by the tonality of the field of sound that the *Logos*—understood here as another name for the clearing—lays out and sets in motion. And as another word for being, I will write this “Logos” in capital letters so as to mark

its difference from the human word, human speech, discourse—*logos*. For Heidegger, it is, of course, the *Logos*, the *Logos* itself and as such—*being* itself and as such, hence presencing itself and as such—that properly concerns the philosopher. “The [finite] human *logos*, or word,” as he points out, “is subject to the claim [*Anspruch*] of the [immeasurable, originary] *Logos*” (GA 55.2: 309/H 232–33). This *Logos*, in relation to which our own *logoi* (words, perceptions, gestures) are to be attuned (*be-stimmt*), is “the originary gathering, the being of beings as a whole [*das Sein des Seienden im Ganzen*].” Thus, the human *logos* (not necessarily a word, since it could be a gesture and a perceptual articulation) “is, authentically, properly [*eigentlich*] understood, the self-gathering in and upon the originary, grounding, gathering lay-out [*das Sichsammeln auf und in die ursprüngliche Versammlung*]” (ibid.).

To name the hearing that is most appropriate to, and that accordingly corresponds to, the tonality-setting *Logos*, Heidegger turns to “Hörchen,” “hearkening,” and its constellation of related words, words impossible to translate in any standardized way: “We are calling ‘hearkening’ this attentive listening that hears nothing [ontic] at all [*gar nichts ‘hörende’ Hinhören*].” Heidegger concedes, in saying this, that his commentary will seem thereby to “stress and strain in a singular way [our notions about] the ear and its hearing” (GA 55.2: 245/ H 188). But, he argues, hearkening is the enacting, as achieved “second nature,” of the “primordial” (i.e., pre-ontological) capacity to hear: it is the “grounding audibility” (*ursprüngliche Hörigkeit*) that is our “being open for, and to, the Open” (ibid.). In brief, hearkening is the appropriation and fulfillment of the promising potential in our pre-ontological experience and understanding of being: the appropriation and fulfillment of our pre-ontological stage of hearing in an auditory field that our *Da-sein* originally opened up simply by existing in the world.

At stake, therefore, is the possibility of a hearing, or more precisely, of “an already-having-heard,” a *Zuvor-gehört-haben*. Why so? The answer is that hearkening involves the recollection and appropriation of what we might call a phenomenological *a priori*: the originary, pre-ontological, pre-reflective opening layout of the auditory field that is our necessary condition for the very possibility of hearing sonorous beings.

Thus, the *Logos*, which is being heard and can be heard, is indeed [*doch*] to be understood as a speaking, an imparting or divulging [*Verlautbarung*]; for the hearing of humans meant by the [philosopher’s] saying does ultimately concern [sensibly audible] sounds and voices. (GA 55.2: 243/H 187)

There is of course, as he avers here, a world of difference between (1) hearing as the ears' sensory experience of noise and sound (*sinnlichem Empfinden von Schall und Laut*), (2) the ordinary, everyday ontic way of hearing, and (3) the attentive, compliant listening of hearkening—hearing “as obedient heeding” (*horchsamen Achten*) and submissive listening (*gehorsam*). About the third, Heidegger says,

This hearkening way of hearing [*horchsame Hören*] is the true, or proper [*eigentliche*] hearing, that which in the former way of hearing [i.e., ordinary everyday way of hearing], and also in the merely acoustic experience [*Empfinden*], is not perhaps simply absent [*fehlt*], but rather is only forgotten by us. (GA 55.2: 246/H 188)

In other words, it was always already inherent in the pre-ontological disposition of our hearing as a potential that, as in Plato, we *could* “recollect”—and learn to actualize.

In the course of our daily lives, absorbed as we are in all our worldly concerns, we simply do not listen for, hence do not hear, and so cannot deeply listen to, what—according to Heidegger—calls and demands most essentially, most fatefully to be heard: presencing as such, and the laying out of the auditory field itself as that which makes this possible. Instead, without realizing what is happening and what is at stake, our hearing is disposed to be easily distracted, absorbed in ontic everydayness, tempted and distracted by the noises and sounds of the things in our world, and by the multitude of voices that clamor for our attention. We turn away from the claim of what Heidegger calls “the essential”: the calling of the *Logos*—an early name, as he says, for being—that stakes out our destiny as the only animals endowed with a capacity to hear the gift of language. But we do need to hear the abyssal source of our words, perceptions, and gestures, the *Logos* that “speaks” *before and after* those ways of articulation. For that source is the dimension of sound from which our language, our gestures, and, too, our hearing, with all that they bring into presence, draw their poetic, most creative potential—their revelatory, and perhaps indeed redemptive promise. However, precisely as primordial source, that *Logos* cannot be caught in words; it “speaks” simply in and by its presence as source.

Attending to the ontological dimension of hearing, namely, (1) presencing as such and (2) the conditions of its possibility, can benefit the disclosive quality and character of everyday *ontic* experience in many ways, enriching and refining it. What is needed is a hermeneutically attuned phenomenology of our ontic experience in everyday life: a phenomenology

that opens up that experience, opens it, for instance, to the emerging and the withdrawing.

After arguing against interpretations that would reinforce our neglect of the ontological dimension of hearing, Heidegger says,

Through this hearkening [*Horchsamkeit*], we are granted [the possibility] of hearing the song of the earth [*das Lied der Erde*], with its violent trembling and quivering, that remains undisturbed by the gigantic bustle and noise [*Lärm*] that the human being has brought about on the exploited surface of the earth. The need to hear [*Das Hörendürfen auf*] the song of the earth is a need that requires that our hearing be of a sensible nature; it requires the instrumentality [*Sinneswerkzeuge*] of sensory experience, that, namely, of the ears. (GA 55.2: 247/H 189)

“The ear that is necessary [*nötig*] for right or proper hearing is the one that is appropriately vigilant and compliant [*der Gehorsam*]” (ibid.). Compliant, above all, that is, not first of all to what sounds forth in everyday life, but to the originary *Logos* that is the opening and laying out of an auditory field for the presencing of whatever sounds forth (GA 55.2: 260/H 198). This requires an acquiescent quiescence, a meditative hearkening stillness.

Thus, our originary, primordial, pre-ontological capacity to hear, an “*ursprüngliche Hörigkeit*,” a “vorliegen-Lassen,” is, according to Heidegger, simply our “being-open for the Open,” “our Offensein für das Offene” (GA 55.2: 245/H 188). And it is the promise inherent in this primordial, pre-ontological relation to being (“our first nature”) that hearkening retrieves, develops, and attempts to redeem, understanding and properly (*eigentlich*) *grounding* the nature of our hearing in its relation to being. This requires, borrowing words from Heidegger’s 1951 lecture on Hölderlin: “an ever more painstaking listening,” a “stets bemühteren Hören,” a compliant listening attentive to the openness in which the arising and fading away of sounds and voices takes place (GA 7: 194/PLT 216). For it is those events of arising and departing sounds that, appropriating our hearing, draw us into a compelling experience of “the truth of being,” the openness of a field for meaningful experience. In hearkening, we hear what is sounding; but, in our attentive obedience, we *also* hear everything as *taking place* in an auditory field that extends *beyond* the horizon of our hearing:

We are all ears [*ganz Ohr*] when our gathering [*Sammlung*] devotes itself entirely [*verlegt*] to hearkening, the ears and the mere invasion of sounds [*Andrang der Laute*] being completely forgotten. (GA 7: 220/EGT 66).

This is what belonging to the *Logos* means. And because of this belonging, there is a peculiar priority in hearkening—as in its *always already belonging* and its *always already having heard*. This seemingly paradoxical temporality *corresponds* to the ontological or structural priority of the clearing, the openness of the auditory field. When hearing is grounded in an ontological understanding, an understanding of the conditions that make hearing possible, it has, in a sense not to be neglected, already heard everything that has been, everything that is, and everything that ever will be. Because of its awareness of the clearing, and its retrieving of the experience of belonging pre-ontologically to that clearing and taking part in holding it open, hearkening is, in a strange but important sense, a hearing that, somewhat like the seemingly “prophetic” vision attributed to Kalchas, might be said to have *already heard* (*zuvor-gehört*) everything that will ever presence within its auditory dimensions. There is an ontological wisdom (*sophia*), a wisdom concerning time and being, to be found in hearkening (GA 55.2: 247/ H 189–90). ‘Εν καὶ Παν.

†

So now, let us consider a little further how, in this context, we should understand what Heraclitus means by invoking a *homologeîn*. Fragment 50 says that it is wise to hear, not only the words, the *logoi* of the philosopher, but, *through them*, the *Logos* itself. The *homologeîn* represents the ideal for human existence: the possibility and desirability of a co-responding correspondence between (1) the ontological *Legeîn* of the *Logos* and (2) the ontic *legeîn* of our hearing—that is to say, between the originary gathering and laying-down of the *Logos*—and the *legeîn* of the hearing in which we human beings are engaged, which is a gathering and laying-down of the conditions necessary for disclosiveness: a *legeîn* that is constitutive of our mortal’s way of hearing and that is first made possible by, and forever dependent upon, the sonorous field of meaningful presencing our existence opened up. Of course, as Heidegger notes, “the way in which the human [*der Mensch*] gathers itself into the gathering [the “Ver-sammlung” of the “*Logos*”] is other than [i.e., not to be identified with] the way that [for Heraclitus] the *Logos* itself gathers into its gathering” (GA 55.2: 280/H 211–12). But “the human *logos* remains subject to the claim [*An-spruch*] of the *Logos*.” This is a claim that calls for the achievement of a *homologeîn*, a *Gleichheit* in our own hearing: that it be a gathering-laying-out *like* that gathering-laying-out (*Legeîn, Lesen*) of the *Logos*. What the claim puts in question is whether, by virtue of our hearing, we are willing to *become* “the truth-keepers of being,” protecting and preserving the openness of the clearing for presencing—above all, in the words that we use, but also in

our way of listening and hearing (GA 55.2: 387/H 288). And, in gathering itself into compliant, obedient correspondence with the *Logos*, the human being is “gathered into its own proper being,” enabled thereby to “unfold into its own richness of being”: “Im Sichsammeln auf den *Logos* versammelt sich der Mensch in sein eigenes Sein” (GA 55.2: 357/H 267). That is to say, in the *homologein*, we would be gathered into our essential nature as belonging-together with being—“and that means,” as Heidegger emphatically insists, letting our hearing emerge “from out of *being*, and not from out of *beings*” (ibid.).

If, in the *legein* of our auditory perception, we were to approach such a correspondence to being (the *Legein* of the *Logos*), making our hearing *serve* the layout of conditions for presencing in general, that would raise for Heidegger the possibility that hearkening could potentially play a major role in the beginning of a new epoch in world history: the “unfolding and fulfillment [*Entfaltung und Erfüllung*] of the history of the human” (GA 55.2: 356/H 267). The question is accordingly: “How should we prepare [*vorbereiten*] for the *homologein*?” (GA 55.2: 353/H 264). Although our hearing is, pre-ontologically, always already a gathering laying-out, it is *not yet* a gathering laying-out in a reflectively appropriated, hermeneutically revealing way.²⁵

In everyday life, we hear words and speak words, hear sounds and voices; however (1) we are disposed not to hear, echoing and reverberating through them, the *primordial event*, the opening-up of a sonorous field of tonalities by grace of which alone our speaking and hearing are made possible; (2) moreover, we are habitually disposed not to speak and listen in a way that would *let be heard* the echoes and reverberations of that primordial event—and heard, indeed, precisely *as* recalling that gathering laying-out by grace of which, or by the letting (*Lassen*) of which, alone, *our* speaking and hearing, as ways of bringing-forth into presencing, are made possible (GA 55.2: 315–29/H 236–46).

Now, as Heidegger explains, the *Logos* is not itself a word; it is, rather, the openness that makes the word possible. It is, he says, more originary than our words: it is, rather, “the prophetic word [*Vonwort*] coming *before* every language.” And as such, it is the originary “silence of the calm,” the “Erschweigen der Stille,” the promise that precedes and anticipates the moment of language, the moment of hearing: a silence paradoxically resounding with all the sounds of language and all the sounds of the world, a silence that, sheltering and preserving all the sounds and voices of language and things, must be broken if human words are to come forth (GA 55.2: 383/H 285).

But how could this *Legein* be heard at all? How could it possibly sound? How could it, or how does it, make itself manifest in our speaking and hearing? Heidegger will say only that it is “like an absent, missing present [*abwesende Gegenwart*],” that it is somehow “present and yet nevertheless absent [*gegenwärtig und dennoch abwesend*]” (GA 55.2: 317–18, 339, 356/H 238, 252, 266). No wonder our standard, prevailing systems of logic are unable to give it any recognition in their notational schemes! Heidegger is reluctant to say more—although he has said that we should try to *hear* the “grounding tone,” the “Grundton,” of the inceptive thinking indicated by the ancient Greeks (GA 55.2: 298/H 225). So presumably, we need to learn how to speak and listen in a way that somehow lets the fundamental tonality of this momentous grounding event—the very opening of a world of sound—be heard in its granting of the conditions of possibility—if only as the faintest of echoes resounding in the depths of our ordinary, everyday words: echoes so faint, so inaudible, so near to being nothing, that one might well doubt the claim of their presence.

It would presumably be a question, though, of developing our hermeneutical capacity to listen and hear. In fact, Heidegger says precisely this, though he does not set out any model for a process of development. After quoting Nietzsche’s observations about the growing wasteland and his warning to those “who hide wastelands within,” Heidegger makes a remark of the greatest significance: “Meanwhile [*Indessen*], it has become necessary to improve our ability to listen and hear [*unserem Hörenkönnen nachzuhelfen*]” (GA 8: 60/WCT 55). What is required? I will simply reiterate the lapidary formulation that Heidegger urged in the lecture on Hölderlin, already quoted earlier: “an ever more painstaking listening” (GA 7: 194/PLT 216).

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If the *Legein* of the *Logos* is the laying out of the “Grundton,” the abyssal event setting out the immeasurable field of tonality and gathering into harmonics all the sounds and voices that arise, *geschickt* from this field, would it not accordingly be necessary to learn how, with appropriate thought, to draw our words, receive our words, from the sounds resounding in the field first laid out by the “Grundton”? Heidegger touches on the thought of a “Grundton,” but he leaves its enigmatic, uncannily resounding in a discreet silence. Because of this enigmatic status, however, it is vulnerable to an interpretation that turns it into an intolerant, tyrannical law, an *arkhé* dictating the proper tone of voice, the proper sound, for the relation to truth. The “Grundton” must not in any way be reduced to ontic reality; it is not imposing a particular sound or tone of voice, but, expressed in traditional terms, we might say that it is the abyssal, inaudible, ontologically necessary

condition for the very possibility of sounds, tones, voices, language. It is the setting of the phenomenological *range of tonalities* recognized by the auditory field. It is not to be heard in the ordinary way—the way we hear the sounds and tones of human languages, or the sounds of things surrounding us in the world. It figures only obliquely, in a hermeneutically sublime way in the audible field of sounds, tones, and voices: it manifests only in the faintest of fading echoes. Its presence, “nothing” but the generosity of the gift, the “Es gibt,” the phenomenological *Ereignis* that consists in laying out an audible field of sonorous energies, is inherently inaudible, indeed almost nothing. Hence, it demands a singular mode of vigilance and attunement to register its presence—or should we say its absence? In any case, that mode, enjoined by an ontological understanding, is what Heidegger calls “Hörchen”: “hearkening.” He specifically reserves this archaic word, which he thereby revives, to name the mode of hearing that, being attuned by its ontological understanding, lets itself be open to the “Ereignis,” our appropriation to the opening of the auditory field by grace of which alone we are enabled to hear what is given (*gegeben* and *geschickt*, sent from the clearing) for us to hear and bring into words. However, as William Carlos Williams, one of America’s greatest poets, has said, “So much talk of the language—when there are no/ ears.”²⁶

†

So, let us now attempt to listen once again to the words of Heraclitus, each of us, as readers, giving their inscription our voice. Here, again, is Fragment B 50:

ouk emou, alla tou logou akousantas
homologeîn sophon estin hen panta [einaî].

It is absolutely crucial to utter out loud the words that Heraclitus used, listening carefully to their sounding. What Heraclitus wanted to say *could* have been said in other ways—with other wording and some other grammatical structures. Therefore, bearing in mind that he devoted himself to thought in a time long before the metaphysical polarities introduced by Platonism, it would not be unreasonable to conjecture that the words that he used were chosen not only for their purely cognitive meaning but also for their sound, the dimensions of meaning that their sensuous, sonorous effect could—and would—evoke. When one speaks out loud the words of the fragment, listening carefully to the way they sound and resound, vibrate and echo, letting manifest whatever images and memories the word-sounds might conjure up in free, unconstrained association, I wager that one undergoes

an experience that communicates in the most vivid, most immediate, most compelling way some things of the greatest significance with regard to the sensible nature of the *Logos*. Above all else, its sublime archaic connection to breath and wind. Listening intently to the words of Heraclitus, we should hear the originary *Logos*, as that laying-out of the auditory field that enables beings to come into audible presence, leaving in its wake resounding echoes as it withdraws into an abyss of silence beyond the grasp of language. But listening only in a quickly passing act, “beim flüchtigen Hören,” to the sounding (*Verlautbarung*) of the philosopher’s wise saying, one will hear nothing at all of this *Logos*, not even the sound of its withdrawing into silence (GA 8: 39/WCT 37).

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The child’s desire to learn speech is solicited and awakened not only by the voices of other human beings—parents, teachers, and friends—but also by the sounds of our artifacts, our machines, and by the sounds and voices of nature.²⁷ Human speech even retains vestiges of the voices of nature that summoned us in a time before we were able to speak the language of our community. One must listen with the greatest possible attentiveness to Fragment 50, attributed to Heraclitus, the philosopher who declared that nature loves to hide. One of the places where nature loves to hide is in the sensible flesh of language. Within the philosopher’s words, almost obliterating them with their supernatural force, one can hear the eerie sounds of a distant wind, a roaring, howling, furious wind, an unheard-of wind coming from the abyss of being: sounds made audible through the sounding of the philosopher’s words, a mighty wind swirling and echoing, finally dying away, returning to the silence that accompanies all, the silence in which all is one. Through the philosopher’s words, we are hearing a wind that is the very breathing of being. Let us listen to the sound of his words. One must speak the words out loud and listen!

*Ouk emou alla tou Logou akousantas,
homologeîn sophon estin hen panta [einaî].*

This fragment concerns, as Heidegger argues, the thought of being. But at the same time, the *words* that the philosopher uses, reiterating no less than five times the long “ou” sound, conjure into presence the haunting, unnerving sound of a breath or a wind; and they let us actually *hear* the resounding echoes of this primordial speech, as it lingers and slowly fades away. This breath, this wind, the very sound of the presencing of being,

the very voice of the *Logos*, is an extraordinary gift that the thinker has bequeathed. But it is almost too awesome and overwhelming for us to hear.

One cannot really hearken to the sounding of that *Logos* without involuntarily shuddering. That “ou,” repeated so emphatically, so prolonged in its resounding, becomes an ontologically disclosive echo that carries us far, far away—away from ourselves, away into the depths of a silence that is beyond measure, beyond grounding, louder than any sounds we’ve ever heard, and yet also more silent than all the silences we have ever known, reminding us that all-that-*is* is *one* in its final vulnerability—nothingness.

†

Human speech and writing retain vestiges, traces, of the voices of nature that summoned us in our infancy, a time before we were able to speak the language of our community. For Emerson that infancy is “the perpetual Messiah,” because, even without conceptual understanding, the infant, open, exposed to the world, intensely present, can hear, in the language of nature and the language of the community into which it is about to enter, the prophetic message, the promise of redemption that those languages bear.²⁸

When I visited the island of Delos many years ago, what struck me most about this desolate, inhospitable land, birthplace of Apollo and of Artemis, was the implacable wildness of the wind, a ferocious wind sweeping without sympathy or mercy across the island. Reflecting back on that experience, I find myself wondering what that wind might have been imparting—had I only known a way to make human sense out of its inhuman sounds. For it felt like the wind belonging to the *Logos* that Heraclitus, silently, attentively hearkening, invoked with his well-chosen words. But perhaps it was precisely in that vertiginous feeling that I was being granted, in a language beyond our worldly words, an intimation of the wondrous birth of language—a hint of its forever concealed origin in the breath of nature, a hint, though, that could easily pass for nothing.

†

Listening to the words of Heraclitus, Heidegger found himself reminded of a storm. This is a storm that comes, however, not, as in Benjamin’s thought, from Paradise, endeavoring to awaken in us at least a “weak messianic strength,”²⁹ but rather from the deep silence of the *Logos*; although, as there is reason to conjecture, this frightening storm does in its own way announce the possibility, vouchsafed in its keeping, of another—historically inceptive—experience of being. In any case, the *Logos* that Heraclitus heard and invoked is no ordinary wind, no ordinary breath, no ordinary storm; it comes, Heidegger says, revealing its message with an

awesome might, accompanied by sudden bolts of lightning, revealing the presence of being in language:

We see this lightning only when we station ourselves in the storm of being [*in das Gewitter des Seins*]. Yet everything today betrays the fact that we bestir ourselves only to drive storms away. (GA 7: 234/EGT 78)

Continuing this interpretive commentary, Heidegger concludes,

To think is surely a peculiar affair. The word of thinkers has no authority [. . .]. The word of thinking rests in the sobering quality of what it says. Just the same, thinking changes the world. It changes it in the ever-darker depths of a riddle, depths which nevertheless, as they grow darker, offer promise [*Versprechen*] of a greater brightness. (Ibid.)

To hear, echoing within the inscriptions of human saying, the uncanny echoes of the wild, originary *Logos* and descry adumbrations of its radiant presence concealed within the lesser illuminations into which the human word brings things: would that not be to get a sense of what hope language promises, what possibilities it might bear for a redemptive overcoming of nihilism? Heidegger's unshakable faith in thinking—and his faith in the transmissibility of that primordial experience of being that language is still preserving—have seldom been given such a boldly ambiguous, indeed polyphonic, and perhaps even aporetic formulation.

The breath or wind one can hear echoing through the words of Heraclitus is a breath or wind that becomes, in Heidegger's reading, the fury of being, a raging, roaring, punishing storm, withdrawing into concealment from the world in an epoch overwhelmed by nihilism—the destitution, therefore, of the primordial *Logos*, whose sublime gift, granting in its uncanny silence the very possibility of language, the possibility of meaningful sound, is no longer to be heard echoing, reverberating, murmuring, singing, in the words bereft of meaning that are almost nothing, now, but instruments of exchange in what Heidegger believes to be an increasingly speechless, spiritless, despondent world. In the lingering and echoing of the “ou,” Heidegger heard the words of Heraclitus not only as promising but also as minatory, haunting, carrying us away into what can sound like nothingness, a frightening abyss of silence, primordial source, *Ur-quelle* of all sounds, all words.

But the echoing into which the words of Heraclitus draw us is not at all meant to take us into nihilism; rather, they are meant to tell us that our humanity lies in the journey of gathering and belonging-together that the

origin of language sets out for us and makes possible. His untimely words leave behind them, in the persistence of their echoing, the promise in the *Logos*: a promise for us to redeem or betray.

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Although certainly not sober and cautious in his political life, Heidegger was an exemplar of sobriety and caution in his philosophical reflections, especially in regard to the inheritance of words through which he tried to hear, as if in their own voices, what the pre-Socratic philosophers wanted to say. We cannot know what Heraclitus would have thought about Heidegger's invocations of destiny—his contention that what is at stake in our learning to hear the gathering-laying-down of the *Logos*, which he takes to be another name for the being of beings, is to be understood in terms of an event of appropriation, an *Ereignis* that lays out and enjoins a destiny for the history of being—a *seinsgeschichtlich* *Geschick*. But there can be no doubt that Heidegger's reflections are drawn to the words of Heraclitus—especially Fragment 50, but also Fragment 45, which asserts the immeasurable limits of the breath, the “psyche”—because he heard these words to be giving him a way to think, *beyond* nihilism, *beyond* the epoch of being whose prolonged history of suffering has for too long been reflected in the diremptions and reifications of metaphysics, toward the possibility of a new beginning for the Western world. And if nothing is more urgent, for Heidegger, than the release of our languages, our words, from the nihilism and inhumanity that separate them from the primordial field of intonations, from their ancient, immemorial etymologies, and from their poetic, shockingly concrete inaugural sense, then it becomes imperative, within his narrative, that we begin learning the way of hearkening, letting our hearing, hence also our forms of saying, be responsive to the momentous claim on our responsibility that beckons from the field of tonality—the opening of human language—set in motion according to the phenomenology of the primordial *Logos*.

†

However, in light of Heidegger's deconstruction of the metaphysical commitments of religion and theology, one certainly cannot read into his commentary a traditional narrative of redemption. And yet, when we bear in mind his emphatic invocations of the *Ereignis* and the *Geschick des Seins*, and his passionately critical reflections on nihilism, it would be difficult to maintain that, in his careful discussion, his *Erörterung* of listening and hearing, there is nothing at all to suggest such a narrative.

Could there be a passage out of and beyond nihilism, beyond its history of material and spiritual devastation? In fact, in the course of a well-known

interview granted to *Der Spiegel* not many years before his death, Heidegger is recorded as declaring: “Only a god can save us.”³⁰ I doubt that this remark should be taken to indicate his faith in God, or indeed in any god, any transcendent metaphysical agency. I think that declaration merely means that he does not know whether we will ever have the wisdom—and the necessary will—to redeem the promise (*Versprechung*) in ourselves and the potential in our planet. But listening to the speaking or saying of language in a way that *passes into and through* the sounds and words that serve our absorption in quotidian life, listening in a way that hearkens to the silent intimations of the *Logos*, the opening of a sonorous field of meaningful possibilities, one is tempted to believe that there is still some slight measure of hope.

In *What Is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger affirms such hope in the calling to think, to give thought to the meaning in the fact of being, even though he recognizes how seldom that calling is heard:

A voice calls to us to have hope. It beckons us to hope [*Eine Stimme heißt uns hoffen. Sie winkt uns das Hoffen zu*], invites us, commends us, and directs us to hope. (GA 8: 128/WCT 123)

§8

Echo and Silence

In the realm of seeing, there are shadows. When we walk, we are accompanied by the shadow that reminds us of our death. In the realm of hearing, there are echoes. Where do these echoes take us? Into silence. Why does Heidegger so frequently invoke echoes and silence?

There are, however, many kinds of silence, audible and audibly different. There’s the silence that follows the vanishing sound of the train as it leaves the station, bearing my dying grandfather to hospital. There’s the silence that overwhelms when I hear the stories of Auschwitz survivors. There’s the silence of rejoicing lovers, finally rejoined after a prolonged and far separation. There’s the silence of the child entranced and captivated by the magic theater of shadow-puppets. There’s the sublime silence that follows the last note in the songs of Schubert’s “Winterreise.” And there’s the silence of hope and prayer. But there is also an ontologically revealing silence into which the echo could take us, if we acquiesce in following it mindfully: the murmur and hum that, in the deepest depths of silence, is the audibly inaudible sound of being itself.

In “The Way to Language,” Heidegger calls attention to the possibility of hearing a moment in our use of language when it can “unexpectedly become a soundless echo which lets us hear something of the proper

character of language [*ein lautloser Anklang, der uns ein Geringes vom Eigentümlichen der Sprache hören läßt*]” (GA 12: 232/OWL 113). What is that proper character of language? And why do we hear it by way of a soundless echo? I suggest that, for Heidegger, the historical task proper to language is to let us hear how, dependent on being for its very possibility, it brings being not only into our words but into the intervals *between* them, present as in a soundless echo. Thus, our responsibility for being, for the possibility of a future epoch of sense, is also our responsibility for language.

†

According to Heidegger, hearkening is the hearing that properly belongs to mortals. Why? I will gradually unfold an answer to this question. Although the experience of being into which hearkening takes us is an authentic development of our capacity for hearing, it can be an uncanny, even disquieting experience, drawing us out of ourselves in a movement of existential estrangement (*Entfremdung*) and expropriation (*Enteignung*): a movement that gives us a compelling understanding of our mortality, as we are drawn by the echo into the dissolution of sound and voice in a silence beyond all familiar silences. That is the silence, the stillness, the *hen panta*, that exposes us to the eternal transience and ephemerality of all that in any way *is*—even the earthen planet that grounds the world we have built. The echo announces our finitude, measured by the immeasurable. And, like the shadow, the echo is an audible reminder of death. But the echo can take us far beyond our death into the eerie hum of the universe, and it can take us even beyond that hum of being, deep into the unutterable abyss of silence, primordial source of sound and language.³¹ There is much wisdom to be learned by following the echo as it vanishes into the nothingness it protects and preserves.

§9

Overcoming the History of Metaphysics in Its Future Echoes

In *After Babel*, George Steiner observed, “Shakespeare at times seems to ‘hear’ inside a word or phrase the history of its future echoes.”³² Heidegger’s comprehensive, critical reading of the history of metaphysics is an attempt to overcome—to sublimate and surpass—that history, catching it even as it resounds in its future echoes. That attempt, perhaps quixotic, is nevertheless deemed imperative because, insofar as the past is still present, metaphysics can retain its conceptual grasp of the future.

In his early 1935 lectures, revised for publication in 1953 under the title *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger reminds us, in words that belong to the practice of hearkening, of the polemical vocation of philosophical thought:

All essential philosophical questioning is necessarily untimely [*unzeitgemäß*]. Philosophy is essentially untimely because it is one of those few things that can never find an immediate echo [*Widerklang*] in the present. [. . .] What has no immediate echo in everyday life can nevertheless be intimately bound up with a nation's profound historical development [*kann mit dem eigentlichen Geschehen in der Geschichte eines Volkes im innigsten Einklang stehen*]. It can even hear anticipations of such development [*Es kann sogar dessen Vorklang sein*]. What is untimely will have its own time. (GA 40: 10–11/IMM 7)

This raises, but does not answer, a question he will formulate soon thereafter, still without offering an answer, in his 1936–1938 reflections, gathered together under the title *Contributions to Philosophy*:

Do we who are concerned about what is to come [*Ob wir Künftigen*] have an ear for the resonance of the echo [*Klang des Anklangs*], which must be brought to resonant audibility [*zum Klingen*] in preparation for the other beginning? (GA 65: 112/CP 89)

What this requires, Heidegger suggests, is a certain “shift,” or “transposition,” challenging the limits of our capacity to hear:

Following a simple *shift* of essential thinking, the happening of the truth of being [in, e.g., the meaningful presencing of sonorous beings] must be transposed [*versetzt*] from the first beginning into the other, so that the wholly other song of being might emerge into resonance [*das ganz andere Lied des Seyns erklinge*]. (GA 65: 8–9/CP 9)

Heidegger describes the shift as “simple,” but we must not underestimate the extreme difficulties for hearkening demanded by such a shift, for what Benjamin says in relation to Kafka should also be said here in regard to our ability to hear—and that means to recognize—the claim that is supposed to address us through the singing of language as the preserve of the clearing for the meaningful presence of things:

This listening requires extreme effort because only indistinct messages reach the listener. There is no doctrine to be learned, no knowledge to be preserved. What are caught flitting by are snatches of things not meant for any ear.³³

Even if our hearkening were to catch a “message” that claims or appropriates us for the course of a certain “destiny,” for what the openness of

hearkening should make possible, the task we would confront would be daunting: nothing less than to redeem the potential in the possibilities that the historical conditions of our world have given us to work with. Like an earthquake, the “song of being” sets in motion too many unsettling reverberations, too many echoes. However, these reverberations and echoes could perhaps open up for hearing possibilities blocked by the historical conditions to which our hearing had been compelled to submit.

As an ontological experience, an experience of being, hearkening is not only the most difficult stage in our hearing; it is also a hearing that grounds our *ontic* relations to the beings of our world. Hence it can inspire us, in our everyday ontic interactions, to listen better and hear better. There’s wondrous music to be heard in the leaves of swaying trees, the bees gathering pollen, the creaking of the window’s shutters. But are we also open to cries of pain and the voices that speak of fear and suffering? To hear these things rightly, corresponding to their truth, requires restraint and patience—and our own capacity to enter into the passion of silence.

To “have an ear for the resonance of the echo” (GA 65: 112/CP 89) is one of the ways for Heidegger to say that it is necessary for those who are preparing for what they hope is to come—those who are dedicated and committed, and belong to the future of another ontological dispensation, another ontological inception—to break out of a linear structuring of time (*Zeitlichkeit*) where the echo cannot continue to resonate, and enter into the originary dimension of temporality (*Temporalität*), where it might be possible to live keeping in mind, *hence still resonating, and unsettling the present*, echoes of that event of inception, that *Ereignis*, the full meaning of which remains—always—still to come (see my *Introduction*, endnote 35).

§10

Into the Rings of Harkening: Where the Echo Takes Us

In Book II of *The Book of Questions*, Edmund Jabès recorded a thought that bears on the stranger, more elusive dimensions of silence that are going to be entered only in a moment of hearkening: “Not the silence of word, but of stone. Not the absence of voice which memory can betray, but of the earthworm’s confession to the fat mud.”³⁴

Permit me now to repeat the question Heidegger is asking us in his *Contributions to Philosophy*:

Do we who are to come have an ear for the resonance of the echo, which must be brought to resonant audibility in the preparation for the other beginning? (GA 65: 112/CP 89)

Why is what we need to hear present only as an echo? What is it that is echoed? And why must we hear it and bring it to audibility? Why is the echo so decisive for breaking out of our present ontological regime and preparing for another epoch in the meaning of being? Where does the echo ultimately take us?

Before we bring this final chapter to a close, reimagining differently Heidegger's fourfold, I want at least to approach answers to these compelling questions by returning to the model I proposed earlier, recapitulating the stages in the development of our hearing, but this time now mapping those stages in a topology that interprets that development in terms of a centrifugal movement of expansion into ever greater auditory dimensions, ever more distant rings in the hearing of being. Let us now rehearse the stages of hearing in order to enter the rings of hearkening.

I suggest that, in the phenomenology of hearing, we can discern an auditory field composed of six distinct rings, constituting a widening and deepening experience—and understanding—of the auditory. Thus, in hearkening, our hearing finally lets go of its object and follows the echo into the dimension where its resounding will take us and finally leave us. The temporal articulation of the rings can be schematized as a journey in which we are moved from ontic hearing and listening into the ontological, and from there, following the echo, into the cosmological and, finally, the sublime depths of an abyss, where being becomes nothingness:

- (1) The first ring is the originary auditory experience of infancy: a pre-personal, pre-reflective, pre-conceptual, and *pre-ontological* experience of being. It is the infant's originary, bodily felt openness to being, an auditory attunement to being, an intimate belonging to being; but the experience is, of course, sensed without any recognition, any reflective, conceptual understanding. As we increasingly enter and take part in the social, cultural world, this openness, this attunement, increasingly shrinks and subsides, receding into forgetfulness. It is, in effect, abandoned and repressed for the sake of our adaptation to the demanding conditions of ontic, ego-logical "reality." However, in attempting to enter into the genuinely *ontological* experience and understanding constitutive of the third and fourth rings, retrieving something of that originary, pre-ontological experience, some resonance of that which, thanks to the nature of our embodiment, we have continued to carry with us, could be immeasurably rewarding.

- (2) In the second ring, the field of *ontic* hearing and listening, we experience the presence of beings in the figure-ground *Gestalt* and, for the most part, in the structure of subject and object. However, as we have noted, in venturing the idea of the fourfold, Heidegger attempts to imagine a momentous transformation in the historical inheritance of these structural formations. As Heidegger contemplates it, dwelling in the fourfold would engage our hearing and seeing in many ways: specifically, in our ethical life with others, our interactions with the natural environment and the other animal species, but also, very significantly, in the aesthetic character of our relation to the things with which we live in our world, unsettling the subject-object structure, or even twisting free of it.
- (3) In the third ring, there is a retrieving, a recollecting, of our pre-ontological experience and the beginning thereby of an *ontologically attuned* hearing and listening, in which we become rigorously attentive to the sheer *presencing* of beings: the emerging, whiling, and vanishing of that to which we are listening. What engages us is presencing as such: the presence of what is present and the presence of what is absent.
- (4) In the fourth ring, we enter into the consummation stage of this ontological attunement, in which our auditory attention *shifts away* from the acoustic presencing of beings, away from the ontic, to hear what makes that presencing possible: the silence of the recessive ground or field itself, understanding that withdrawing of the ground as the necessary condition for the possibility of all ontic presencing. Thus, in the fourth ring, we are attentive to the *being* of sonorous beings *as* taking place in the openness, or clearing, of an auditory field, in fact, an entire auditory world. Attention shifts from beings to their being, shifts from that which is presencing to the (necessary) conditions that make such presencing possible.
- (5) In the fifth ring, our hearing becomes cosmological, a hearkening that passes *beyond* the bounds of the ontic field, beyond the ontically constituted world, and beyond the ontological conditions of presencing, to hear still, even in the uncanny silence of the elemental and the cosmic, the faint, virtually inaudible hum and murmur of being—the uncanny “sound” of being itself in an awesomely deep and far silence.

- (6) But following the echo into the dimension of the sixth ring, we experience its final vanishing, leaving our hearing in an infinitely deep silence that is even beyond the cosmic hum and murmur of being. This is the abyss where the reign of silence and stillness is absolute and hearkening falls into sheer nothingness.³⁵

Hearkening is the hearing that properly belongs to mortals because it lets itself be drawn into dimensions of the auditory where we cannot avoid confronting our mortality, and where we experience in the transience and ephemerality of everything in our world the last echoes of a silence, a nothingness, that is at once humbling and dignifying, releasing us into the truth that challenges the very meaning of all our building and dwelling—and the character of our existence as human beings, weak and vulnerable, sojourning only briefly on this earth. Carried by the echo into the farthest ring, where we encounter the sound of nothingness—and the nothingness of sound—and find ourselves disclosed, laid bare in our existential destitution, called into question and ultimately defenseless, perhaps we could learn to let go. And then—go on. Listening, hearing, opening ourselves with renewed attention to the sounds and voices of our everyday world. For there is much that we still have not heard.

§11

The Fourfold

Pindar brings the sixth of his Olympian Odes to a close of simple beauty, entreating the immortal gods: “Make blossom the delightful flower of my song.”³⁶ Hölderlin echoes this in “Bread and Wine,” where, after reminding us to contemplate how “the great destiny” that once claimed ancient Greece might still resound for our hearing, he invokes the need for words that sing “like flowers leaping alive,” and, in the fifth strophe of “Germanien,” he speaks boldly of language as the “flowering of the mouth,” “die Blume des Mundes.”³⁷ By invoking such phrases, the poet is reminding us of the biblical Garden, of language and life before the mythic time of our corruption and exile; and he is invoking the dream of another time, a time of redeemed life, a time of flourishing, in which the poet’s words could really sing.

Commenting on these phrases, Heidegger remarks that, in the singing of language, “the earth blossoms toward the bloom of the sky” (GA 12: 194/OWL 99). For the poet, according to Rilke, this requires “an ear of earth,” “ein Ohr der Erde.” For Heidegger, this is an ear attuned, always eager to experience, both in nature and in poesy, the “singing of the earth.”

In “Der Mutter Erde,” a fragment of an unfinished hymn, Hölderlin imagines the possibility of a future community bound together by song.³⁸ It must be noted, however, that he had in mind only a community of “brothers.” Nevertheless, if we read Walt Whitman, we should find that the idea of a community gathered by song has not yet vanished.

In utopian thinking no doubt inspired by Hölderlin, Rilke, and Nietzsche, Heidegger asks us to imagine a fourfold (*Geviert*), gathered through the singing of language:

The sound of language, its earthiness [*Das Lautende, Erdige der Sprache*], is held within the harmony that attunes the regions of the world’s structure, playing them in chorus. (GA 12: 196/OWL 101)

In this gathering, “there are four voices, four registers of attunement, which come to sound in this chorus”: the earth and the sky, mortals and gods:

In these four voices, destiny gathers the whole unending relation. Yet not one of the four stays and passes closed in upon itself. None is in this sense limited. None is without [its openness to, and dependence on,] the others. (GA 4: 170/HP 194)

In Heidegger’s poetic “Eden,” there is a *Geviert*, a four-dimensional garland of soundings and voicings, surrounding each thing. Why are we not yet able to hear that?

†

In his recapitulation of the chapter in Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which the animals, agents of remembrance evoking a redeemed world, patiently urge Zarathustra to learn poetic singing, Heidegger writes this:

Once more they repeat their message: the world is a garden. Once more they call for Zarathustra to come out. [. . .] They call to him that he should learn from the songbirds how to sing: “For singing does a convalescent good.” [. . .] But now the dialogue between the animals and Zarathustra is moving upon a ground that has been transformed by the conversation itself. The animals are now speaking to a Zarathustra who has come to grips with his illness. [. . .] Now Zarathustra agrees with his animals. With their injunction to sing, the animals are telling him of that consolation he invented for himself during those seven days [of unconsciousness]. Once again, however, he warns against turning the injunction to sing into a call for tunes on the same old lyre. (GA 6.1: 278–79/N2: 58)

“What,” Heidegger asks, “is being thought here?” No doubt conscious of the audible reverberations between the two key German words, *gesungen* and *Genesung*, Heidegger offers his answer:

This, that the thought most difficult to bear, as the convalescent’s conquering thought, must first of all be *sung* [*gesungen*]; that such singing, which is to say, the poetizing of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, must itself become the convalescence [*Genesung*]; but also, that such singing must be genuinely creative, original, *unique* [*einzig*], and not become a popular tune. Zarathustra therefore calls himself a poet as well as one who guesses riddles. [. . .] Poetry, if it is to fulfill its task, can never be a matter for barrel organs and ready-made lyres. But the lyre, viewed now as an instrument for the new singing and saying, has still to be created [*muß erst noch geschaffen werden*]. (GA 6.1: 279/N2: 58)³⁹

Heidegger’s “Nietzsche,” hearkening to the singing of the world, must make the language that we speak and write sing again—mean again. And that requires bearing responsibility for the opening of a world in which our words could be free from the *Gestell*, able to listen and speak in ways that would encourage new modes of presence, new ways of being. This *Genesung*—this redeeming of historically blocked and forgotten possibilities—is an untimely task for our time, requiring that, through what we have learned from hearkening, we connect our experience of language with our experience of dwelling on the earth and under the sky. When our words really connect with our life, they have meaning, they mean something—and it is only then that they *sing*. Hearing echoes of our primordial connection with nature and bringing it into audibility and visibility in our ways of communicating and gathering with one another, we might begin to break out of history to find ourselves in a transformative moment.

For Heidegger, as for Hölderlin, the hope for our future requires hearing the opening granting of the “grounding tone” or “grounding attunement” and understanding its significance. This “grounding tone”—Heidegger also calls it the “Anfangston”⁴⁰—gives rise to all sounds, all tones. It is the sound of the *opening up* and *laying-out* of the auditory-linguistic field, our life-world, with all its tonal possibilities for echoes and reverberations, capable of shaking and shattering the very foundations of our ontological epoch.

§12

Democracy in the Fourfold of Listening

If the fourfold represents Heidegger’s late thinking, imagining, as an ideal, what human existence could be like, hence how it could be different

from its past and present, then I want, following Hannah Arendt, to think—against the grain of Heidegger’s own thought—about how listening and speaking could take part in a fourfold in which the political form of life would be a flourishing democracy.

For Heidegger, though, the gathering of our thought into the fourfold should remind us of our irrevocable indebtedness to nature. We human beings are singularly responsible for protecting nature. We are also called upon to care for our language, not only protecting it from its abuse and corruption but also redeeming its creative promise. The redemption of language is impossible, however, without the corresponding redemption of nature, if for no other reason than that such redemption must include the reconciliation of the two senses of “sense”: what, in the discourse of metaphysics, has been a dualism that opposed the sensible for the sake of the intelligible. But in the singing of language, there comes to hearkening a memory as old as language itself: a memory that calls for our reconciliation with nature. And this, as Heidegger recognized, requires going beyond Nietzsche, who merely reversed the order of privilege, to complete, in thought and everyday life, the reconciliation of the sensible and the intelligible.

In the fourfold that Heidegger projects in thought, mortals are coupled with gods. In this coupling, Heidegger thinks of human beings as mortal in contrast to the gods, who are immortal, undying. We are gathered into the fourfold only, it seems, in terms of our mortality, our subjection to inevitable death. But, in the poetry of Walt Whitman, there is much more than our mortality to be considered when we contemplate the gathering.

As citizens of a democracy, we need to speak with one another; and we need to listen to one another. We need conversation. What could be the meaning of *Mitsein*, our being-with-others, if it does not summon us to gatherings in which we talk and listen with an open mind to the voices and stories of others, listen with respect and sympathy? Although Heidegger recognizes the existential importance of *Mitsein*, he leaves it in many ways an abstraction.

There are three lines of verse in Hölderlin’s “Celebration of Peace” (“Friedensfeier”) worth recalling here:

Much, from morning onward,
 Since we have been in conversation [*Gespräch*] and have heard from
 one another [*hören voneinander*],
 Has human kind learnt [*erfahren*]; soon, however, we may be in song
 [*Gesang*].⁴¹

In the *Geviert* of my imagination, we mortals, having become mindful of the values, ideals, and principles that our cultural traditions have metaphored in the form of gods, would trustingly engage with one another, talking and sharing our thoughts and feelings, matters of critical importance for the flourishing of ethical life. But can we—will we—find a way to live peacefully, harmoniously with one another? And with nature, and all the living creatures rescued in the legendary narrative of Noah’s great boat? Might our *Gespräch* then become, perhaps, a true *Gesang*, worthy of celebration?

In the 1855 version of “Song of Myself,” Walt Whitman welcomes and therefore hears, singing and resonating, gathered into celebration within his own voice, all the voices, all the songs of the world. He opens his hearing to listen and tune in to the world:

Now I will do nothing for a long time but listen,
And accrue what I hear into myself [. . .] and let sounds contribute
toward me.
I hear the bravura of birds [. . .] the bustle of growing wheat [. . .]
gossip of flames [. . .]
I hear the sound of the human voice [. . .] a sound I love,
I hear all sounds as they are tuned to their uses. (lines 584–88)

Listening with heartfelt openness, the poet finds himself granted a blessing: he can hear, gathering in the very formation of his own voice, the sounds, the voices of the world: a gathering (*Geviert*) of earth and sky, mortals and gods, the embodiments of our human values, ideals, aspirations. This listening is revolutionary: it is a gathering that creates and celebrates democracy, a gathering open to all, regardless of their identity and difference. The poet’s song is a truly democratic gathering, welcoming all, excluding no one. The poet is telling us that what he calls his “own” voice actually owes its existence, its possibility, to a whole world of sounds and voices. His voice is shared: it belongs to all these other sounds and voices, is indebted to them all, and keeps them in gratitude and poetic remembrance gathered mindfully (*eingedenk*) within his voice, responsible for protecting and preserving them. And he is gently reminding us to listen, listen well, to learn that the voice we call our own, and the words we use, are likewise indebted to the voices and words of others. In this world, we belong together with one another.

Whitman takes our hearing into the dimensions of a vast openness, where, perhaps for the first time, finding ourselves deprived of the habitual defensive boundaries, we are compelled to recognize in others, regardless

of their difference, a shared mortality and, in the indebtedness of our voices and words, we discover our interdependence and a belonging-together that affirms the meaning of our humanity. For the bread on his table, and for his health, the monarch depends on the baker's work—and the baker's health. When the workers are impoverished and many people fall into destitution, they are vulnerable to plagues. But eventually, because of interdependencies, not even the king sheltering in his castle can escape these plagues. In Whitman's poetic vision of a democratic *Geviert*, we mortals are responsible for one another in life and in death. And, as Hannah Arendt has forcefully argued, it is especially in public conversation—a politics of *Gespräch* that seldom takes place, even now—that this responsibility needs to be exercised. (When Hölderlin says that we “are” a conversation, he is not asserting a fact; rather, he means this word to invoke and bestir our essential nature: a potential the realization of which could be redeeming for our humanity.)⁴² In this conversation, listening to the other is as important as speaking, if not, indeed, as I believe Emmanuel Lévinas would claim, of even greater importance. And, as we are now realizing with stress and strain, and considerable heartache, words matter—the ones we use, the ones to which we give the consent of our hearing.

§13

History and Destiny: The Task for Our Hearing

In “Bread and Wine,” Hölderlin laments the decay of ancient Greece, the silence of the heavenly voices, the songs that kept in cultural memory the great deeds of the people and the great ideas they embodied in their gods: “Where, to delight the gods, brim-full with nectar, the songs? / Where, then, where do they shine, the oracles winged for distant encounters? / Delphi sleeps, and where now is the sounding forth of great destiny to be heard?”⁴³ “Delphi schlummert, und wo tönet das große Geschick?”⁴⁴ Aware of the danger, Hölderlin voiced his warning in powerfully ringing words. The danger could already be felt, observed, heard. Even then, by him and by others.

What matters now, today, is how woefully or wisely we interpret and engage the “given” (*geschickt*) historical conditions. Heidegger would interpret this fact of “givenness” using the word “*geschickt*” and its cognate words. In his writings and seminars, Heidegger vividly represented the dangerous “destiny” (*Geschick*) he could see in those conditions.

The succession of epochs of the world we have built on this planet, a course reflected in the metaphysical unfolding of the history of being that Heidegger narrates—a sequence of epochs now named the Anthropocene—is

beginning to reveal in more unmistakable portents the apocalyptic catastrophe toward which, in tragic short-sightedness and deafness, a tragic absence of the necessary wisdom and will, we are recklessly headed. This danger has many dimensions: it is of course profoundly ontological, as Heidegger argued. But he also called our attention to the devastation of our natural environment and, in consequence, the prospect of overwhelming material and economic destitution; and he expressed his concern regarding the corruption of ethical life, together with an intensified expansion in the economically propelled political forces gathering our world, our planet, into technologized, dehumanizing totalities.

Heidegger's project of thought struggles to achieve what is nearly impossible: fearlessly recognizing the signs of danger, while at the same time refusing to abandon hope (GA 5: 325–26/EGT 17).

Perhaps, though Delphi is gone, that great destiny that Hölderlin thought he could hear still echoes and sings wherever we mortals take earth and sky, the realm of nature, into our care, and work to create and build great democracies, gathering all of us, regardless of identities and differences, into the discovery of common purpose, sharing our convictions, ideals and hopes, talking and listening well to one another, caring for one another.

Only time will tell.

NOTES

1. Martin Heidegger, "Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot,'" GA 5: 267/QCT 112.
2. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), xiv.
3. Heidegger, ". . . Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch . . .," *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA 7: 202; ". . . Poetically Man Dwells . . .," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 223: "einem Nehmen das nie das Maß an sich reißt, sondern es nimmt im gesammelten Vernehmen, das ein Hören bleibt."
4. Heidegger, "Das Ende der Philosophie und die Aufgabe des Denkens," in *Zur Sache des Denkens*, GA 14: 81; "The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking," in *On Time and Being*, 65.
5. Heidegger, GA 14: 84/OTB 68.
6. Rainer Maria Rilke, *Poems 1912–1926*, bilingual edition, trans. Michael Hamburger (Redding Ridge, CT: Black Swan Books, 1981), 80–81.
7. *Ibid.*, 104–5.
8. *Ibid.*, 108–9.
9. Rainer Maria Rilke, "Die Sonette an Orpheus," in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 515; *Sonnets to Orpheus*, trans. M. D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton, 1942, 1962), Part II, verse 13, 94–95.

10. Rainer Maria Rilke, “Die Sonette an Orpheus,” in *Gesammelte Gedichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel-Verlag, 1962), 517; 98–99 in the English translation.

11. A survivor of the Łódź Ghetto, where people were dying from starvation, falling dead on the street, and people were being rounded up for deportation to gas chambers, is reported to have said, “The people had ears but didn’t hear, had eyes and didn’t see.” How is that possible? No doubt because their sense of doom was too horrifying to comprehend and believe. See Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The photography of Trauma* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002, 2005), 143. And see Baer, *Spectral Evidence*, 146: “Two different perceptions of realities were in constant conflict: on the one hand, a myopically present-oriented mode of existence that was staked on bare survival and on psychological defenses against the unassimilable news of one’s own impending death in the extermination camps; on the other, an equally inadequate hope for a future beyond Nazi rule.” For these people, even the word “world” no longer had any meaning.

12. On the blocking of historical possibilities and opportunities, see Iain MacDonald, *What Would Be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019). Although greatly illuminating in his exposition, commentary, and critique of Adorno, MacDonald misses the passages where Heidegger explicitly recognizes such blocking. See, for example, See GA 7: 26–27/QCT 26.

13. Rilke, “Die Sonnette an Orpheus,” Pt. II, §15, p. 517; *Sonnets to Orpheus*, p. 99.

14. See David Michael Levin, *The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change, and the Closure of Metaphysics* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 45.

15. The four senses of “being,” briefly formulated: (1) referring to the facticity of the “that there is,” the “*Es gibt*,” (2) referring to the essence, (3) referring to presencing, and (4) referring to the clearing, as that which makes presencing possible.

16. See John Sallis, *Echoes: After Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). Also see David Michael Levin, *The Listening Self* (London: Routledge, 1989).

17. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964), especially pp. 119–30, 173–98. In this book, Marcuse, one of Heidegger’s students, discusses, among other things, the disintegration of the “logos,” ideology in the language of positivism, critical reason and the language of protest, the struggle for truth, the triumph of technological rationality, the reification of language and its relation to violence: these are all themes that Heidegger, either implicitly or explicitly, at least touches on in his writings on language. Perception is also in question; it can easily be captured by ideology, giving birth to prejudice and blind spots.

18. See some especially clear, unequivocal statements on freedom, fate, and destiny in one of Heidegger’s texts from the 1950s, “Die Kehre,” in *Identität und Differenz*, GA 11: 115–16, 116, 122; “The Turn,” in *Bremer und Freiburger-Vorträge*, GA 79: 68–69, 69–70, 75; “The Turning,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Others Essays*, 37–38, 39, 47; *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*, 64–65, 65–66, 71.

19. Heidegger says, “Die Lichtung des Seins, und nur sie, ist Welt,” GA 9: 326: “The ontological clearing, and only this, is the world.” And see also *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, GA 79: 51–52: “Die Welt ist [. . .] das Sein selber”: “The world is [. . .] being itself.”

20. As Heidegger argues, “What one listens to and brings into view in thinking cannot be heard with our ears nor seen with our eyes. It is not perceivable by our sense organs. If we take thinking to be a sort of hearing and seeing, then sensible hearing and seeing is taken up and over into the realm of nonsensible perception, that is, [according to the traditional paradigm, into the realm] of thinking. In Greek such transposing is called *metapherein*. The language of scholars names such a carrying-over ‘metaphor.’ So thinking may be called a hearing and listening, a viewing and a bringing into view only in a metaphorical, figurative sense” (*Der Satz vom Grund*, GA 10: 70; 47 in the English).

21. Heidegger, “Hölderlin und das Wesen der Dichtung,” in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung* GA 4: 36. In this text, what is at stake is our “Zugehörigkeit zur Erde.” But how would the “singing” of the earth, the singing of all things on this earth, be heard without the belonging of our hearing and the hearing of our belonging?

22. Heidegger, “Was ist das—die Philosophie?,” GA 11: 20.

23. See Heidegger’s 1943 lectures in *Heraklit. Der Anfang des abendländischen Denkens*, GA 55. 1. For the English (hereafter referenced by H), see *Heraclitus*, trans. Julia Goesser and S. Montgomery Ewegen (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1–135.

24. *Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*, GA 55. 2: 243–44. This also appears on pages 186–87 in the English translation, referenced by H, which contains both Part I and Part II.

25. See in particular Heidegger’s exquisitely clear statements, *Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos*, GA 55. 2: 294: “Wir folgen daher dem Fragment 50 und achten darauf, daß hier Heraklit den Bezug des Menschen zu dem *Logos* eigens bestimmt, und zwar als *homologein*. Hieraus ergibt sich das Entscheidende: der Mensch selbst muß in sich ein *legein* und einen *logos* haben, ein Lesen und Sammeln.” And see GA 55. 2: 309: “Der menschliche *logos* steht unter dem An-spruch ‘des *Logos*.’ Wir unterscheiden also, um dies noch einmal eigens einzuschärfen, aufgrund der beiden Fragmente bereits deutlicher das, was schon aufgrund des Fragments 50 unterscheidbar wird: Wir unterscheiden ‘den *Logos*’ schlechthin [. . .] und den menschlichen *logos*. Der *Logos* ist die ursprüngliche Versammlung, das Sein des Seienden [i.e., die Lichtung] im Ganzen.” For discussions of the “*homologein*,” see David Michael Levin, *The Body’s Recollection of Being* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), 90–166; David Michael Levin, “Hermeneutics as Gesture: A Reflection on Heidegger’s ‘Logos (Heraclitus B50)’ Study,” in *The Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, ed. Michael Zimmerman, Tulane Studies in Philosophy, vol. 32 (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1984), 69–77; David Michael Levin, *The Listening Self* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 66–75, 205–69; David Michael Levin, *The Philosopher’s Gaze*, revised paper ed.

(Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2003), 116–69; and David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, *Gestures of Ethical Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 204–74.

26. William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), 106.

27. See David Kleinberg-Levin, *Before the Voice of Reason: Echoes of Responsibility in Merleau-Ponty's Ecology and Levinas's Ethics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).

28. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature," in *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), ch. 8, 46.

29. As in Walter Benjamin's 1921 fragment, Benjamin, "Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der moralischen Welt," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1985), vol. VI, p. 98; "The Meaning of Time in the Moral Universe," in *Selected Writings 1913–1926*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), vol. I, 286–87. Italics added. And see Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), vol. I, Pt. 2, 697–98; "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257–58. Benjamin's phrase is "schwache messianische Kraft."

30. Martin Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* (May 31, 1976), 193–219. The interview with Rudolf Augstein and Georg Wolff took place on September 23, 1966, ten years before its publication. There is a translation of the interview by Maria Alter and John D. Caputo published in *Philosophy Today*, vol. 20 (Winter 1976): 267–84, reprinted in Emil Kettering and Günther Neske (eds.), *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 41–66.

31. I recommend without reservation, as the finest work on hearing that I know of, Lawrence Kramer's *The HUM of the World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018). It is erudite, rigorously phenomenological, and full of wonderful insight: a worthy supplement, or introduction to, this chapter on hearkening. Also see David Nowell-Smith, *Sounding/Silence: Martin Heidegger at the Limits of Poetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); and Tyler Whitney, *Eardrums: Literary Modernism as Sonic Warfare* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019). I have not yet had an opportunity to read David Espinet, *Phänomenologie des Hörens: Untersuchungen im Ausgang von Martin Heidegger* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). Also worth further investigation that cannot be pursued here: Sean Franzel, *Connected by the Ear: The Media, Pedagogy and Politics of the Romantic Lecture* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019); and Kata Gellen, *Kafka and Noise: The Discovery of Cinematic Sound in Literary Modernity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019). And, finally, I suggest reading Max Levin's "Sounding the Anthropocene," *Silica Mag* (May 25, 2020), and listening to the sound-ecology artworks the essay provides: www.silicamag.com/gallery/sounding-the-anthropocene/.

32. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 4.

33. Benjamin, "Brief an Gershom Scholem," in *Gesammelte Briefe 1938–1940* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), vol. VI, 105–14.

34. Edmund Jabès, *The Book of Questions*, II and III, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 71.

35. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard asks us to think about the experience of nothingness. What is the effect of this experience? "It begets anxiety," he says: "Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. [. . .] Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit [. . .] looks into its own possibility." Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, trans. Reidar Thomte (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 61.

36. Pindar, *The Odes of Pindar*, trans. John Sandys (Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University, 1968), 66.

37. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Brot und Wein," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Der Tempel Verlag, 1960), 277–78; "Bread and Wine," in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger, ed. Eric L. Santner (New York: Continuum, 1990), 183. And see "Germanien," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 322; *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, 213.

38. Friedrich Hölderlin, "Der Mutter Erde," in *Sämtliche Werke* (Berlin: Der Tempel Verlag, 1960), 296–98.

39. Nietzsche's animals, like many of those in Kafka, are agents of memory, wakening us from our guilt-haunted sleep of forgetfulness.

40. See Hölderlin, "Grund zum Empedokles," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 1040; and "Über den Unterschied der Dichtungsarten," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 1008. His own words are: "Anfangston," "Grundton," and "Grundstimmung."

41. Hölderlin, "Friedensfeier," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 309.

42. *Ibid.*, 307, 309.

43. Hölderlin, "Brot und Wein," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 277; "Bread and Wine," in *Hyperion and Selected Poems*, 183. Translation altered. And see Heidegger's reflections on these words in "Hölderlins Erde und Himmel," in *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, GA 4: 165.

44. Hölderlin, "Brot und Wein," in *Sämtliche Werke*, 277.

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