

Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

Number 1 *Autumn*

Article 5

1986

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Recommended Citation

Vattimo, Gianni (1986) "The Crisis of Subjectivity from Nietzsche to Heidegger," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*: Vol. 1 , Article 5.

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The Crisis of Subjectivity from Nietzsche to Heidegger

Gianni Vattimo

1. NIETZSCHE, HEIDEGGER AND POSTMODERNITY

The title of this paper should not be understood in a narrowly chronological way, as if we merely wanted to explore the history of the notion of subjectivity during that period of philosophy that begins with Nietzsche and ends with Heidegger. I believe that these two names mark out a unifying theoretical strand which indicates a continuous development transcending their different approaches or results. This development can have philosophical significance to the degree that it involves the destiny, the vicissitudes not only of the *notion* of subject in the two thinkers, but also of the subject itself in an epoch of which Nietzsche and Heidegger are here considered the supreme interpreters. In other words, our initial thesis is that there exists between Nietzsche and Heidegger a substantial theoretical continuity, and that they

[Translated from the Italian by Peter Carravetta]

are basically saying "the same thing." To acknowledge this "same thing" means pointing to certain conceptual parallels and analogies between the two thinkers and then proceeding to place these similarities within an epochal horizon in order to see them as modes of revelation of a destiny which concerns (our) subjectivity in the present age.

Obviously, we are not dealing with a set of "neutral" or descriptive premises. And if this is true for every discourse in philosophy—even the most explicitly programmatic study of sources and "data"—then it ought to be especially valid for thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger who described themselves as "epochal" thinkers: representatives of a way of thinking whose "truth" is also and perhaps above all the truth of an epoch. In this they resemble Hegel, though their tone is fundamentally critical-destructive rather than triumphant.

The thesis concerning a concrete theoretical continuity between Nietzsche and Heidegger is not at all so evident if we recall how Heidegger himself considers Nietzsche the culmination of metaphysics and its inherent nihilism. Heidegger in fact considers it his task to go beyond metaphysics and nihilism, suggesting his radical discontinuity with the tradition that peaks in Nietzsche. Of course, in Heidegger's own texts dealing with this problem—in a sense, this means all his mature writings—the relationship between post-metaphysical thought and the nihilism of achieved [*compiuta*] metaphysics is not so clear-cut and schematic, and raises several interpretive problems. And while it is acceptable to call Nietzsche a nihilist, calling Heidegger one can seem scandalous. This issue could be developed at length.¹ Yet I feel that one of the most pressing tasks for philosophy today, one of its crucial theoretical aims, consists precisely in clarifying the ambiguities of the Nietzsche-Heidegger relationship—recognizing their profound continuity, the fact that they say the "same thing": nihilism.

If, as we hinted above, this continuity is not only a fact that can be inferred from the texts of these two philosophers, but also perhaps above all the result of a reflection on their epochal meaning, then clearly in this second sense we must, as good hermeneutists, fall back on a shared "pre-understanding" of the salient traits of our present epoch. This pre-understanding is, after all, what gave life to philosophy when it appealed to "experience," which was never that imprinting of signs and traces on the mental *tabula rasa* of a distorted, schematic empiricism. Rather, pre-understanding is a historically qualified experience, "knowledge of the world," familiarity and expectation, memory, language. So the

thesis of the continuity between Nietzsche and Heidegger is based not only on their texts, but also on our pre-understanding of the meaning of our historical existence in the present age. Reflecting upon this continuity means, therefore, activating and deepening this pre-understanding which, though seemingly vague and indeterminate, is nonetheless the guide and support of all thinking processes. As the horizon of our experience, such a supporting [*reggente*] pre-understanding must remain by and large implicit, though it is important to remain aware of it and its possibilities. In fact, it can even be perceived through the several signs and "symptoms" of our discourse. For instance, the theoretical as well as experiential-epochal horizon within which we can speak of a Nietzsche-Heidegger continuity, together with the corollary of a Heideggerian "nihilism," coincides with what hermeneutics calls the philosophical *koiné* of our epoch.² In other words, though we cannot once and for all give form to the contemporary pre-understanding which acts as the background of the Nietzsche-Heidegger continuity, we can certainly describe some of its traits more precisely. One of these is the demonstrable, pervasive presence—since at least the mid-seventies—of hermeneutics. This philosophy, which revolves around the problem of interpretation, harks back to Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and was developed in different directions but with shared concerns by philosophers like Gadamer, Pareyson, Ricoeur, Jauss and Rorty, who contributes an explicit attention to pragmatism. Thus broadly understood, hermeneutics can include philosophers such as Karl Otto Apel, the most recent Habermas, Foucault, and Derrida, whose philosophies do not properly speaking belong to its main trunk yet are profoundly related to it. Above all, the hermeneutic *koiné* constitutes today not only a field for theoretical speculation, but the underlying methodological self-consciousness of much literary and art criticism and of many trends in history, psychology and the social sciences. In short, the role and position of hermeneutics in contemporary European thought can be compared—though with different modalities and implications—to the importance of Marxism in the fifties³ and structuralism in the sixties-seventies.

If this is the situation, then we are living in an age whose characteristic cultural "atmosphere" or "mood" facilitates the understanding of the Nietzsche-Heidegger continuity. In fact, above and beyond Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche, hermeneutics is the unifying thread of the two philosophies. I believe that in speaking of this relationship I am not necessarily endorsing some

misguided historiography, or—as Habermas said of Gadamer⁴—excessive “urbanization” of both Nietzsche and Heidegger, but the fact that there is indeed such a deeply rooted process in motion within our culture. If it is to remain true to the imperative of “saving the phenomena” which has guided it since ancient times, then philosophical reflection must reckon with this fact of our everyday experience, must “save” it.

To conclude these prefatory remarks,⁵ it is likely that recognizing this concrete continuity between Nietzsche and Heidegger constitutes also the decisive trait of what we call the postmodern in philosophy. As will become evident shortly, this continuity actually points toward the dissolution not only of “modern” subjectivity, but also, and more generically, of being itself—no longer structure but event, no longer origin or foundation but calling and “narration” [*racconto*]. This seems to be the sense of that devaluation [*alleggerimento*] of reality which is taking place in our lives, which are determined by those typically postmodern transformations of technology.⁶

2. FROM THE UNMASKING OF THE SUBJECT TO NIHILISM

Within this perspective, let me dwell further on my title’s “crisis of subjectivity.” If there is a difference between Nietzsche and Heidegger, it is this: Heidegger achieves that passage into postmodernity which Nietzsche merely announces and sets in motion. Yet there are parallels in their writings about postmodernity’s crisis of the subject.

In Nietzsche the crisis of subjectivity is announced primarily as the unmasking of the superficiality of consciousness.⁷ This is one of the meanings of *The Birth of Tragedy*’s distinction between Apollonian and Dionysian. Socrates, the champion of the Apollonian—of what is definite, rational, disengaged from the Dionysian: myth, irrationality, sensuality, the experience of living and dying—is also the champion of self-consciousness. How else justify his “knowing that he does not know”? But it is precisely to the degree that he absolutizes, distancing himself from his mythical, irrational, vital Dionysian roots to assume the task of a global *Aufklärung*, that his Apollonian rationality loses all vitality and becomes decadence. *The Birth of Tragedy*’s criterion for condemning Socratism is not truth, but life; Socratic self-consciousness is “critiqued” and unmasked not because it is non-true, but because it is non-vital. This prefigures several complex developments in Nietzsche’s subsequent unmasking of definite

forms, of values, and of the very notion of truth. The "suspicion" aroused by self-conscious subjectivity is certainly inspired by the discovery that the forms which fed it, previously considered stable and definite, are actually "false," being no more than sublimating appearances designed to comfort. However, these forms are unmasked and condemned not only for this, but also because, much like Socratic "enlightened" rationalism, they aspire to truth, forgetting that as deceptions they are bound to life, to the Dionysian. The complexity of this perspective will be found, expressed differently, in Nietzsche's subsequent work, yet already in *The Birth of Tragedy* we find that he cannot stop with the unmasking of superficiality, of non-truth, of the self-consciousness of the subject: he must go on, advancing toward nihilism and the dissolution of the very notions of truth and being.

In the works that follow *The Birth of Tragedy*, beginning with the *Untimely Meditations* and *Human, Too Human*, the unmasking of the superficiality of the self-conscious subject will in fact develop side by side with the unmasking of the notion of truth and with the broader dissolution of being as foundation. One can in fact say that the most representative expression of the crisis of subjectivity in Nietzsche is the announcement that "God is dead," which is formulated for the first time in *The Gay Science* and can be used as the emblematic utterance of Nietzsche's whole itinerary after his text on tragedy.

Nietzsche's radical unmasking of the superficiality of the I proceeds mainly through the awareness of the interplay of forces in social relations, especially power relations. The unpublished text *On Truth and Deceit in an Extra-Moral Sense* shows how the world of truth and logic is constructed on the basis of an "obligation to deceive according to rules," socially determined and according to a system of metaphors warranted and legitimized by society. At the same time, all other metaphoric systems which herald creativity in the individual, if not relegated to the unconscious, are demoted to "poetic fictions." *Human, Too Human* will conduct its entire critique of knowledge with similar arguments, insisting also on the fact that what we consider conscious experience is whatever we have a language for, names and possibilities of description in a socially convened and imposed model language. The world of consciousness will therefore tend to attain the configuration of a world of awarenesses shared by society and imposed on us via the conditioning that language requires. But there's more: for the contents of our consciousness that concern the phenomenal world are not the only "fictions" regulated by

social conventions; the image the I has of itself, in short self-consciousness in its true sense, is now seen as the image of ourselves which others communicate to us (and which we accept and adopt for reasons of security: in order to defend ourselves we must in fact introject others' perceptions of us, making our calculations accordingly; in the struggle for survival, mimicry, camouflage [*mimetismo*] is a crucial instrument).⁸ That which we call egoism is therefore only an "apparent egoism," as the title of aphorism 105 in *Dawn* says explicitly:

Pseudo-egoism.—Whatever they may think and say about their 'egoism,' the great majority nonetheless do nothing for their ego their whole life long: what they do is done for the phantom of their ego which has formed itself in the heads of those around them and has been communicated to them; . . . all of them dwell in a fog of impersonal, semi-personal opinions . . . all these people, unknown to themselves, believe in the bloodless abstraction 'man,' that is to say, in a fiction. [Hollingdale trans.]

This fiction is precisely the result of these impersonal, diffuse and all-pervading opinions which go on developing independently from the lives of individuals. The "social phantom" character of the ego has both "linguistic" and "disciplinary" roots. Linguistic because in order to communicate there's an obligation to deceive according to a system of socially accepted lies or metaphors; disciplinary because the necessity to communicate our needs to others forces us to know and describe them in a systematic manner which is ultimately superficial. All of these exigencies seem to culminate in the relation between "those who command and those who obey," a relation which above all else requires self-consciousness.⁹

If, on the one hand, the critique of the superficiality of consciousness and therefore of the subject in its most classical, metaphysical definition develops in the direction of the unmasking of its alleged immediacy and "finality," and is brought back to the interplay of forces over which the subject has no control (being rather its result and expression); on the other hand, as it first appeared in the play between the Apollonian and the Dionysian in *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche continues at the same time on the road toward the ever more explicit awareness of the "necessity of error" (cf. *Human, Too Human*, Part I), a condition expressed in emblematic terms in aphorism 361 of *The Gay Science*, "The Problem of the Comedian," where we find an entire philosophy of culture as the production of "lies," systems of concepts and values that have no possibility of being "legitimated" vis-à-vis the true reality

of things. These lawful deceits are borne by and multiply solely from the manifestation of a capacity to lie and to mask oneself which, though in origin an instrument of defense and survival, is now autonomous and develops beyond any possible vital function. Thus lying, metaphor, the inventiveness of culture creating worlds of appearances cannot any longer legitimize itself in terms of foundation, not even with the perspective of a vitalistic pragmatism. The discovery of lying, or of "dreaming" (as Nietzsche says in aphorism 54 of *The Gay Science*) does not mean that we can stop lying and dreaming, but only that we must continue dreaming *knowing* that we are dreaming: only thus can we avoid perishing.

The whirlwind circularity of the conclusion of aphorism 54 in *The Gay Science* locates, in its broadest implications, the terms of the "crisis of subjectivity" the way Nietzsche discovered it and lived it: once unmasked, the superficiality of consciousness does not become the path to a new, more secure foundation. The non-finality of consciousness means, on the other hand, the end of *any* finality [*ultimità*], the impossibility, therefore, of thinking in terms of a foundation, and from that the general need to make adjustments in the definition of truth and of being. This broadening of the unmasking discourse to its most radical and vast ontological terms is actually the direction Nietzsche's mature works take, from *Zarathustra* onward. This period is marked by the discovery of the idea of the eternal recurrence of the same, of nihilism, of the will to power and the overman: all these terms define, much more than a positive, Nietzschean philosophy, his own ever problematic effort to realize an ontology after the end of foundational thinking, after the death of God. As far as the problem of subjectivity is concerned, the term with which Nietzsche defines his vision of a humanity no longer "subject(ed)" (in all its meanings and correlations, from subjectivity to subjugation) is that of *Uebermensch*, superman [*superuomo*] or, better, overman [*oltreuomo*].¹⁰

The problem with the notion of the overman consists in the fact that its most typical reading seems to lead to the position of metaphysical subjectivity—self-consciousness, self-control, will to power against others—and, what's more, a subjectivity that strengthens its more traditional aspects. Yet in the philosophy of eternal recurrence, in which "there are no facts, only interpretations,"¹¹ even the idea that there could only be interpreters "is only an interpretation."

Everything is subjective, you say; but this is already an *interpretation*, the "subject" is not a given, it is only something added through

the imagination, something stuck on afterwards. Is it finally necessary to place the interpreter behind the interpretation? But this is already invention, hypothesis.¹²

If it is difficult to establish what or who is the overman, one thing is certain: it is not a strengthened form of metaphysical subjectivity, at least not in the sense of self-consciousness and will. In fact even will itself, which does nevertheless play such a central role in the later Nietzsche, is taken within the interplay of negation and de-founding [*sfondamento*] according to which everything is interpretation, even this very thesis. Within this context, what appears to give a positive—though problematic—characterization to man no longer subject, is his capacity to negate himself as subject, to go beyond all imperatives of self-preservation in the direction of limitless experimentation. This suggests, to some extent, the Schopenhauerian version of Kant's aesthetic disinterest, though radicalized even more.¹³

Ascetic Ideals and all the complex, cruel games that moral and metaphysical man has played and dealt himself—and which today are further developed by the mindless *hubris* of technicians and engineers¹⁴—all seem to attest to the fact that with man there came upon the earth an unprecedented phenomenon, an animal capable of turning against himself, against his own spirit of self-preservation:

the existence on earth of an animal soul turned against itself, taking sides against itself, was something so new, profound, unheard of, enigmatic, contradictory, and *pregnant with a future* that the aspect of the earth was essentially altered.¹⁵

The capacity to experiment beyond the interests of conservation is realized, according to Nietzsche, in the mindless or casual [*spensierata*] inventiveness of the technicians and the engineers—which makes one think that science and technology have a decisive role in defining man's new position, no longer subject, in the world. But these are fleeting remarks. For Nietzsche, the exemplary figure of the overman is, in a fundamental sense, the artist. The "ultra-human" path of art which he sketches in his last writings seems to point to the two main roads traveled by the avant-gardes of the twentieth century: on the one hand, the will to forms, the most radical technical experimentation conceivable; and on the other the dissolution of any rule of form in the name of an art no longer subjected to constructive ideals, but rather well on its way to the extreme experience of destructuration, toward the end of

any hierarchy within the product as well as of the artist or consumer as "subjects."

The open-ended problematic in which the figure of the overman remains does not only, or primarily, indicate a theoretical inconclusiveness or even an aporia that may characterize Nietzsche's thought. In expanding to a general ontological discourse that beckons the dissolution of being as foundation, this problematic alludes to the impossibility of redefining subjectivity by means of a simple theoretical design, with a "clarification" of concepts or a taking hold of errors. Metaphysics, Heidegger claims, is not merely an error we can escape, an opinion we can discard once we recognize its falsity.¹⁶ Thus the collapse [*insostenibilità*] of the notion of subjectivity reflects the collapse of subjectivity itself in the world, in the present epoch of being: it cannot find a pacifying theoretical resolution at the hands of some clever thinker.

The same itinerary that stretches from the unmasking of the metaphysical subject to the dissolution of being as foundation and to nihilism can also be employed to characterize Heidegger's meditation, though in different terms. Here again I must proceed sketchily, referring the reader to my more extensive treatments of the topic.¹⁷ Guided loosely by the analogy with Nietzsche, one might say that what we can call the "unmasking" [*smascheramento*] of the subject in Heidegger's thought is the critique of the conceptions of man as a *Vorhandenes*, a "thing" among many other things characterized solely by specific attributes (for example, as Heidegger says in his text on Humanism, the metaphysical definition of man as a member of the animal genus endowed with reason as its specific difference). In *Being and Time* man is not thinkable as a subject precisely because this would make him something "merely present." Man is, instead, the *Dasein*, being-there [*l'esserci*], that is, above all, projection. For Heidegger, the subject is characterized by a substantiality which is no longer present in *Dasein* as project: man is defined not as a given determinate substance, but as a "having-to-be," an opening upon possibility. *Dasein* thinks of itself as subject, that is, as substance, only when it thinks itself inauthentically, with the horizon of the public and everyday "they."¹⁸

The "definition" of *Dasein* in terms of projection rather than in terms of subjectivity does not, however, evidence the character of an unmasking which leads to a new and more satisfying (and reassuring) foundation. To say that *Dasein* is projection opens up, in fact, the question of authenticity, which is central to *Sein*

und Zeit and, in different terms, throughout Heidegger's subsequent development. Since the project cannot be made authentic by referring to any sort of pre-given substantiality—for example, a "nature," or an essence, etc.—it can only achieve authenticity by choosing the possibility which is most proper, but not in the sense of "appropriate" (which legitimates by referring to a basic structure or substance), but in the sense of being unavoidable and ever open as possibility which, as long as Dasein is, remains such. This "most proper" possibility is the impending possibility of death. The project which is Dasein is authentically chosen only insofar as it decides ahead of time with regard to its own death. As is well known, Heidegger refuses to describe in existential terms the meaning of this anticipatory decision: it does not obviously correspond to the decision to put an end to one's life by means of suicide, nor does it entail a "thinking about death" in terms of the Christian warning about becoming dust.¹⁹ The content couched in the notion of the anticipatory decision concerning death is rather to be sought in those pages of the second section of *Being and Time*—those pages which open up with the problematic of being-towards-death—where Heidegger speaks of our historical heritage (see especially par. 74); and in those pages where he speaks of the relationship of Dasein with others (par. 53). The meaning of these pages can be gathered by reading a passage from a much later work, *Der Satz vom Grund*,²⁰ in which Heidegger no longer speaks of authenticity or inauthenticity. These terms and problems are now channeled, and transformed, in the new thematic of the eventuality of being. The shift can be best understood if we bear in mind the terminology of the original German: authentic is *eigentlich*; event is *Er-eignis*. What they both have in common is the root *eigen*, which means "proper." In this passage, what in *Being and Time* was the anticipatory decision concerning death now becomes the "leap" in the abyss of the "liberating tie with tradition."²¹ The tradition of which Heidegger speaks in *Der Satz vom Grund* is not what in *Being and Time* is called *Tradition*, which was characterized as an acceptance of the past as both dead and irrevocable (therefore anything but liberating). Within *Tradition* the past is conceived as *vergangen*, and this represents the mode according to which inauthentic experience is related to the past. True authentic existence thinks the past, instead, as *gewesen*—not as "past," dead and irrevocable, but as "having been"—and its tradition is now called *Ueber-lieferung*, with the German root word meaning *ueber-liefern*, that is, *trans-mitting*. If we now turn to *Being and Time* for the difference between *Tradition* and *Ueber-lieferung*, between accepting the past as *vergangen* and the capacity

to hand it down as *gewesen*, we find that in the latter case the past is accepted within the perspective of the anticipatory decision of death. Only by projecting itself in anticipation of one's own death can Being see the past as history, as a heritage of yet open possibilities which speak as models of possibility as well as possible models. The authentic relationship with the past is opened up by the awareness of one's own mortality, a condition that assumes as only mortal even the traces and the models which have been handed down through history. The leap into the *Ueberlieferung* is a liberating move because it removes us from the order of the "given," that is, from what is inherited (and within which the project of Dasein finds itself thrown), or the finality of a "natural order": the leap into the *Ueberlieferung* is (only) event, only trace of other possible-mortal existences which Dasein accepts or rejects as possibilities still open to it.²²

What we are dealing with is a topic which seems very far from Nietzsche's. The similarity and the parallels which, in this light, exist between the Nietzschean and the Heideggerian itineraries will appear less problematic if we think for a moment that here, also, as with Nietzsche, what takes place during the meditation upon the limits and the untenability of (the notion of) subjectivity is the discovery of the groundlessness of being. The discourse on the possible authenticity of Dasein deals in fact with Being itself, and it is no mere accident that in Heidegger's later writings this discourse opens up to being as event. The question of authenticity is not purely a problem of an "ethical" or "psychological" aspect of that particular being (i.e.: entity) called Dasein. Already in *Being and Time* things, objects, the world in its wholeness come to Being, or give themselves as entities, only insofar as there's Being-there, Dasein which opens up the horizon of their givenness. Therefore there's no being outside, or before, or independently of the thrown project which Dasein is. That this project can realize itself as authentic only insofar as it decides concerning its own death—that is to say, in the form of the liberating bond with tradition, in assuming the historical heritage as *gewesen*, possibility, having-been-mortality—all this means (with the help of passages which we cannot reconstruct here in analytic fashion but, which are certainly understandable to the reader of Heidegger's last writings), that Being is Event, that Being is *not*, but happens, gives itself. Within the framework of our guiding hypothesis, this is also what we can call Heidegger's nihilism. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger expands the collapse of metaphysical subjectivity into a general ontological discourse which experiences the "de-grounding" [*sfondamento*] of Being by discovering the con-

stitutive relationship between existence and death. Existence appropriates and becomes authentic [*eigen-tlich*] only insofar as it lets itself be expropriated, deciding towards its own death in the event [*Er-eignis*] which is both expropriating and transpropriating [*ent-eignend* and *ueber-eignend*]. This is being itself as *Ueber-lieferung*, transmission of traces, messages, linguistic formations in which alone our experience of the world is rendered possible, and in which things come to Being.

This breaking-through or de-grounding towards ontology—a nihilistic ontology, to be sure, and another trait that links Nietzsche and Heidegger—takes place, as hinted above, not as the result of a pure shifting of concepts, but in relation to more general transformations in the conditions of existence which have to do with modern technology and its rationalization in today's world. In Nietzsche, the line of reasoning is very straightforward: the death of God means the end of belief in ultimate values and foundation, because these beliefs corresponded to the need for reassurance typical of a humanity somehow still "primitive." The rationalization and organization of social work and the development of science and technology which have been made possible precisely by the religious-metaphysical vision of the world (we can think of the sociology of religion in Max Weber and the relationship he established between capitalistic science-technology and Judeo-Christian monotheism) have rendered these beliefs superfluous. This is, incidentally, another way of conceiving nihilism. The destiny of subjectivity unveiled in its groundlessness, and the nihilistic dissolution of Being are thus inextricably bound up with each other and with the history of the technico-scientific rationalization of the world. It is precisely the technical organization of the world that makes obsolete both being as foundation and the hierarchic, dominated structure of self-consciousness or subjectivity.

In Heidegger the passage from the level of the existential analytic (in *Being and Time*) to that of the history of metaphysics as the history of being—which corresponds to the "turn" in his thought beginning in the thirties—takes place precisely in reference to the awareness that, in a world like ours and his, made up of great historical powers which tend to be totalizing and totalitarian, the essence of man cannot (any longer, if it ever could) think itself in terms of individual structures, or in terms of supra-historical definitions. It should not be difficult to show, if we bear in mind those "historically" more compromised and compromising pages of the *Introduction to Metaphysics* (the 1935 course in

which Heidegger addresses explicitly the question of the destiny of the West, of Germany, Russia and America, and their tendency to institute themselves as systems of total domination),²³ that the explication of the “verbal” as opposed to the nominal sense of essence (*Wesen*, read as a verb in the infinitive: to become an essence [*essenzializzarsi*], to determine-itself each and every time in a destiny-like manner, in an epochal fashion; to happen [*accadere*]) is linked both to the awareness of the “weight” that historical superpowers possess in determining the destiny of humanity, and to the givenness of those “thrown” projections which make up, each and every time, time and again, the disclosures of the truth of being in which historical humanities (the historical-destinal “essences” of man) define themselves. Now this “weight” that leads being to give-itself—to make itself known and happen, take place in its epochality and to become event—unveils itself precisely in the modern world of science-and-technology. This is not, once again, an “eternal” structure which would in the end become visible only to ourselves: it is rather the epochal happening (coming-to-being) of being within the framework of the conditions that can be verified with the technological organization of the world, which is “tendentially” totalizing. Heidegger will express all of this much later in certain passages of *Identity and Difference*, in which he will speak of the *Ge-Stell* (which I suggested be translated, at least in Italian, as *im-posizione*, im-position),²⁴ that is, of the system of total organization typical of the techno-scientific view of the world, as the fulfillment of metaphysics and as the “first flash” of the event of being, in short, as a *chance* to go beyond metaphysics made possible by the fact that in the *Ge-Stell* man and Being lose those very characteristics which metaphysics had attributed to them—above all, their position or status as subject and object.²⁵

3. BEYOND THE SUBJECT?

It would be yet another metaphysical illusion—implicitly tied to the idea that there could be an ordered world of essences—to think that we can extract a lesson from Nietzsche and Heidegger on the true nature of subjectivity such that we may correct our errors concerning this “specific” topos of philosophy. What we have found, instead, is that the untenability, the internal contradictoriness of the metaphysical conception of the subject (in Nietzsche the discovery of its superficiality and its non-finality; in Heidegger the experience of the groundless projection) is given only as the

collapse of the subject itself in a world radically transformed by the techno-scientific organization and which brings to its limit, explicitly for Heidegger and implicitly for Nietzsche, the notion of metaphysics as the thought of foundations. The “beyonding” of the metaphysical conception of the subject is, within this perspective, a going beyond the historical-destinal “essences” of metaphysical subjectivity, and this involves the problem of the surpassing of metaphysics in its concrete-historical givenness, as the world of total organization. In short, the fact that Nietzsche’s overman and Heidegger’s “re-calling” thought are not so clearly defined as alternative “solutions” to the crisis of (the notion of) metaphysical subjectivity should not be taken as a limit or incapacity on the part of either of the two thinkers, but must be understood as evidence of a “destining” condition—more specifically, in the Heideggerian sense of *Geschick*, which alludes to a “sending”—a heritage which calls forth as possibility, and not as a deterministically fixed fate conceivable only within the horizon of necessitating metaphysical structures. Since the experience of the *Ge-Stell*—or of the death of God as announced by Nietzsche—places us in front of the historic-destining of the *Wesen*, the coming to pass of Being, we should not search for guiding threads, pointers, or legitimations in suprahistorical structures, but ought to look only at the *Geschick*, at the ensemble of meanings which, by taking the risk of interpretation (which can be authentic only if it projects itself towards death, if it takes the responsibility of its radical groundlessness), we can succeed in recognizing in the taking place [*accadere*] into which we are thrown.

In different ways but following similar motivations, Nietzsche and Heidegger tell us that this happening be defined as *Ge-Stell*, as the world of science-and-technology and that moreover in this world we must search for the traits of a post-metaphysical humanity which is no longer “subject(ed)” [*soggetta*].

But isn’t the world of science-and-technology also the world of totalitarian organization, the world of dehumanization, the world of planning that reduces every humanity, every individual experience, every personal expression to a moment of a statistically foreseeable normality or when it doesn’t fall within this middling capacity, to an accidental marginality devoid of consequence? Nietzsche and Heidegger seem to bet, each in his own way, on yet another possibility, though this also is tied to the unfolding of modern science-and-technology. For Nietzsche, the world in which God is dead because the organization of social work has rendered superfluous that “excessive” reassurance which it rep-

resented, is also the world in which reality becomes lighter, in which it becomes possible to "dream knowing one is dreaming," in which, finally, life can carry on within less dogmatic horizons, contexts which are less violent and at the same time explicitly dialogical, experimental, risky. It is true that for Nietzsche this perspective is fundamentally open only to artists, or at any rate only to a sector of humankind, since the majority of people, according to him, remain bound to providing, by means of planned manual labor, the very freedom of these few. But this is probably the aspect of his philosophy which we can define as being still "Modern," against the more explicit "Post-Modernity" of Heidegger. It is likely, in fact, that the elitist and aesthetic conception of the overman on Nietzsche's part is secretly linked to an image of the world of science-and-technology which is fundamentally "machinistic" [*macchinica*], an idea, that is, according to which technology consists above all in the invention of machines in order to multiply the physical strength of man and increase his capacity of "mechanical" domination (as in moving, relocating, transporting, etc.) over nature. This conception of technology has as its paradigmatic model the motor or the engine. To the degree in which the capacity of the motor is seen as the capacity to channel and utilize energy to induce modifications and physical alterations in nature and matter, the overcoming of subjectivity which such a technology allows coincides with the overcoming of the subjection to manual labor; yet this remains the fundamental model of any type of labor in a world whose development is conceived solely as an ever growing multiplication of the capacity to "move" [*spostare*], to utilize energy in a mechanical sense.

We can on the other hand hold Heidegger's conception of technology as being modelled more or less explicitly upon information theory or telematics [*informatica*], which constitutes the essence of Late-Modern or Post-Modern technology.²⁶ The *Ge-Stell* does not entail the possibility for man to dispose of his metaphysical traits as subject because, in the technological world, he becomes factory worker, part and parcel with the machine. More radically, instead, information technology seems to render subjectivity unthinkable for it is not given to one subject to possess or to manipulate, within a logic still bound to a master-slave metaphysics, the information from whose coordination and connections depend the true "power" of the late-modern world. We are not talking here of the negative utopia of the robots that would take over the world; rather, we are more realistically taking cognizance of the intensification of social complexity, which is not

simplified but is rendered more diffuse and pervasive by means of the technology that goes with information. This renders the conceiving of humanity in terms of multiple “subjective” poles, characterized by self-consciousness and by spheres of “conflictual” power, rather impossible. Only on this account, perhaps, can the Nietzschean and the Heideggerian meditation on the destiny of subjectivity in the epoch of the dissolution of being as foundation contain for us some indications pregnant with a future.

1. See especially my *Le avventure della differenza* (Milano: Garzanti, 1980); *Al di là del soggetto* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984²); *La fine della modernità* (Milano: Garzanti, 1985).

2. See the article “La secolarizzazione della filosofia” in “Il Mulino,” 1985.

3. In an emblematic fashion Sartre described this hegemonic position of Marxism in certain pages of *Question de Méthode*, now the preface to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (It. trans. by P. Caruso, Milano, 1963, Vol. I, p. 76).

4. Cf. J. Habermas-H.-G. Gadamer, *Das Erbe Hegels* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979) pp. 9-51.

5. I am referring once again to the books mentioned in Note 1.

6. I have developed this topic especially in *La fine della modernità*, op. cit.

7. I must limit myself to few remarks. For a more thorough analysis, see my studies on Nietzsche: *Il soggetto e la maschera*; *Nietzsche e il problema della liberazione* (Milano: Bompiani, 1983, III Ed.); *Introduzione a Nietzsche* (Bari: Laterza, 1985).

8. Cf. *Dawn*, 26. Nietzsche’s works are hereafter cited by the title and number of the aphorism, or by the number and title of the chapter in question. The translation I refer to is the critical edition of the *Opere*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari (Milano: Adelphi, 1965 etc.). The Posthumous notes are also taken from the same edition, with the number of the note, the volume and the page. [Whenever possible, I have made use of the Kaufmann translations. *Tr.*]

9. Concerning this point, see *The Gay Science*, 35.

10. I have explained at length the reasons behind the choice of this terms in *Il soggetto e la maschera*, op. cit.

11. See Note 7 /60/ in *Opere*, Vol. VIII, t. 1, p. 299.

12. *Ibid.*; and see also *Beyond Good and Evil*, 22.

13. On this point, see the concluding chapter of the cited *Introduzione a Nietzsche*.

14. Cf. *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, “What is the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?” Ch. 9.

15. *Ibid.*, II, “‘Built,’ ‘Bad Conscience,’ and the Like,” Ch. 16.

16. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Saggi e discorsi*, Ital. trans. by Gianni Vattimo (Milano: Mursia, 1976), p. 46.

17. Besides the books cited in note 1, see also my *Essere, storia e linguaggio in Heidegger* (Torino: Edizioni di “Filosofia,” 1963); and *Introduzione a Heidegger* (Bari: Laterza, 1985, IV Ed.⁴).

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18. Cf. *Being and Time*, especially paragraphs 10, 25, and 27.
 19. On this, besides the cited *Introduzione a Heidegger*, see Ugo M. Ugazio, *Il problema della morte nella filosofia di Heidegger* (Milano: Mursia, 1976).
 20. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* Pfullingen: Neske, 1957).
 21. *Ibid.*, p. 187.
 22. On this point, see M. Bonola, *Verità e interpretazione nello Heidegger di "Essere e Tempo"* (Torino: Edizioni di "Filosofia," 1983).
 23. Cf. *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (1935, but published in 1953), Ital. trans. *Introduzione alla metafisica* (Milano: Mursia, 1979 [1968]), pp. 46-47.
 24. See *Le avventure della differenza*, op. cit., p. 185.
 25. Cf. *Identität und Differenz* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957); Eng. trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row 1969), pp. 37-39; Ital. trans. by Ugo M. Ignazio in "Aut Aut," No. 187-88 (Gennaio-aprile, 1982), pp. 13-14.
 26. See the cited introduction to *Fine della modernità*, pp. 9-23.