

Trinity College

## Trinity College Digital Repository

---

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

---

Spring 2012

### Truth and Being: Heidegger's Turn to Poetry

Alexandra J. Pell

*Trinity College*, [alexandra.pell@trincoll.edu](mailto:alexandra.pell@trincoll.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Continental Philosophy Commons](#), and the [Philosophy of Language Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Pell, Alexandra J., "Truth and Being: Heidegger's Turn to Poetry". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2012.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/198>

Truth and Being: Heidegger's Turn to Poetry  
Alexandra Pell  
April 22, 2012

## Table of Contents

Introduction ... 3

1 | Articulating Being ... 7

1.1 | Revealing Truth

2 | Dwelling in the Abyss ... 18

3 | Critical Responses ... 32

3.1 | Adorno & Formal Implications

3.2 | Lacoue-Labarthe & Political Implications

4 | Remembrance ... 47

Conclusion ... 58

Bibliography ... 59

## Introduction I

Language first emerged as a philosophical topic in Ancient Greece when Plato initiated the question of how things in the universe came by their names. With the subsequent development of Aristotelian nominalism, objects came to be understood and named according to a commonality of forms. Both thinkers focused on language as it provided man with his ability to communicate and designate things both in themselves and as they were perceived. However, it was Aristotle's phenomenology that would serve to inspire Martin Heidegger's study of Being and language's role in its origination and perpetuation.

Language is generally conceived of as the medium through which man performs both written and verbal communication, though there are many differing perspectives to consider when approaching a study of the essence of language. On one hand, speech is most essential; on the other, the essential moment is the thought that precedes speech. Some hold that the essence of language dwells within the speaker, while for others it is the interaction between speaker and listener. Speaking may be either a passive participation in vocalizing the soul's sentiments or it may be a system in which every word is a sign. However, all will agree that language is the only way for man to clearly materialize his thoughts to others, to characterize his reality, and to communicate his ideals.

As Aristotle wrote in *On Interpretation*,

“Spoken words are the signs of the soul's experiences, and written words are the signs of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same speech sounds; but the soul's experiences, which they immediately signify, are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images.”<sup>1</sup>

In this conception, the essence of language is the element of commonality that successful communication presupposes. If language is a totality of these elements that Aristotle

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph J. Kockelmans, “Language, Meaning, and Ek-sistence,” in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 4.

identifies, then the act of processing that occurs in the time between the identification of the soul's sentiments and their communication through utterance is the significant moment, whether or not it is a conscious moment. What is revealed in this moment just prior to utterance is presupposed to be common to all, but what is it that is revealed? For Martin Heidegger, this moment is a bringing to the fore, an unconcealment that has the potential to elucidate the truth of Being.

Martin Heidegger was born in the conservative, rural town of Messkirch, Germany in 1889. Though he began his academic career studying theology at the University of Freiberg, he took up philosophy in 1911 and began teaching at the University four years later. Heidegger's early philosophical engagements were motivated by his readings of Aristotle's metaphysical questionings. Aristotle sought to discover what it is that unites all modes of being, and Heidegger's dedication to studying the nature of being was inspired and driven by this philosophy. His studies in phenomenology took place under Edmund Husserl, who had developed the bracketing method of *epoché*, or a phenomenological reduction that involves suspending the natural attitude toward our perception of the material external world. He held that by bracketing, it is possible to attend to the contents of the nature of your experience. During his early years as Husserl's assistant at Freiburg, Heidegger would gain a close enough understanding of his mentor's phenomenological position to wholly reject it.

Martin Heidegger's philosophical career is not without incriminating political implications. He joined the Nazi Party in 1933 as Rector of the University of Freiburg, which, according to popular belief, enabled him to establish Nazi educational policies in the classrooms. Though he resigned from his position as Rector a year later and distanced himself from National Socialist politics, a denazification committee at the university banned him from teaching until 1949.

Through his critical studies of Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Husserl, Heidegger formulated the basis for *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), which was published in 1927 long before his ousting and is now held among the most significant texts of contemporary Continental Philosophy. The text, dedicated to Edmund Husserl in friendship and admiration, is lengthy, complicated, and characterized by unfamiliar language that relies on unconventional hyphenations, prefixes, and suffixes to

communicate forms that Heidegger believed conventional language was unable to articulate. For Heidegger, if the ability to perform a phenomenological analysis comes before consciousness of objects, then it seems that the language used to articulate this primordial ability must predate the language of previous ontological studies. This is why he rejects the language of Husserlian formal ontology, replacing ideas such as transcendental consciousness and intentionality with terms like *Dasein* and *Being-in-the-world*. The new terminology leads the reader to re-think his own understanding of concepts in terms of Heideggerian *Leitworte*, or leading words, and to become more conscious of the implications that accompany each of his utterances.

A phenomenological view of language carries the presupposition that language is primarily driven by the meaning that the speaker intends and his audience perceives. By this, the phenomenological view also maintains that man's primary drive as a speaking being is to participate in meaning-giving. Heidegger's theory of language places an emphasis on poetry and calls for a complete illumination of man's existence through the revealing of inherent meaning that poetry allows. His writings on poetry were largely based on his exegetical reading of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843). His reading of Hölderlin's poetry illustrates his belief that an instrumental approach to language will fail to communicate being in the truthful way that the language of poetry can communicate being. Heidegger presents a new approach to understanding characterized by a repudiation of the language of technology and a renewed emphasis on intrinsic value, which requires a rejection of the modern subject.

In this paper, I will introduce Heidegger's take on the question of being and the ways in which it leads to a repudiation of both Cartesian subjectivity and the instrumental values it promotes in his opus, *Being and Time*. In the first chapter, I will explicate Heidegger's idea of the presence of truth in art and art's potential to allow truth to be uncovered, as he writes in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. In the second chapter, I will go on to show that Heidegger believed poetry to have the same truth revealing capabilities as great art. In his essays *What Are Poets For?* and *Language*, Heidegger places man in a dark era of technological dominance before he posits that the language of great poetry can allow man to dwell once again in a world in which he is aware of intrinsic values and

truth. He maintains that use of language in this way does not rely on the presence of a subject.

Finally, I will point out the objections posed by Theodor Adorno (1903-1960) in *Parataxis* and *The Jargon of Authenticity* and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1940-2007) in *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*. While Adorno's perspective leads him to disagree with Heidegger's failure to recognize the historical and conceptual differences between poetry and the essay as form, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that his combination of poetry, origin, and being is politically motivated and therefore problematic. Adorno takes issue with Heidegger's abandonment of modern subjectivity and argues that subjectivity is located within man's ability to express beyond designations. Lacoue-Labarthe finds Heidegger's "fascist" manipulation of Hölderlin to be problematic in the context of his involvement in the National Socialist political climate. For both thinkers, Heidegger's blend of poetry and philosophy remains an issue.

It seems to me that poetry's place on the spectrum of expression between the semiotic and the explicit means that the very qualities which convince some of its potential to effectively convey meaning and communicate truth render it problematic for others. The question of poetry's ability to communicate intrinsic meaning is an important subject for questioning, as Heidegger's critics have proven by taking up his work in the first place. Though they attack the implications of a return to the scattered syntax of the great poets, if we are to ignore poetry's unique structures, we are left with nostalgia for the intrinsic tenets of being-in-the-world that are passed over by a wholly technical understanding of language. As I explore the differences between the idea of the self that Heidegger sees illuminated by poetry and the limitations of the modern subject, I hope to reveal that Heidegger's aim is not to reconstitute the world from a poetic perspective but rather to restore the ontological through an engagement with what already is. Ultimately, I hope to show why the language of poetry figures so prominently in both Heidegger's writings on language and in the objections of his critics.

## 1 | Articulating Being

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger undertakes a phenomenological study in an effort to discover meaning in man's encounters with objects. His project is to uncover the meaning and mystery of Being itself rather than the meaning of particular, individual beings. What he is truly seeking to elucidate is what it means for an entity to *be* an entity. My first thought upon being confronted with this question was: If I am, as I have never had reason to doubt, a human and therefore representative of an individual entity, should I not have the power to articulate what being an entity means to me? It seems that for Heidegger, I will fail to discover the answer in a meaningful way unless I refocus my examination. Rather than investigating the nature of an 'entity', man should study the nature of *being*. To give an example: if the book is on the table, what is *is*?

As a reader, and a being, I find it easy to ask why I have never found the need to confront this issue before. If I operate among and assert about other beings all the time, why should I approach the topic of *being* in the first place? Heidegger seems to suggest that I have never previously been confronted with my lack of understanding because I already possess some basic, pre-ontological concept of being. He aims to convert this basic notion into a more explicit ontological understanding in order to avoid the incompleteness of Husserl's ontic matters and the traps of Cartesian dualism. We should be able to do this, as Heidegger points out, because if we have the capacity to pose the question of what *is* is in the first place, we should also possess the faculties to find the answer within our consciousness. As he writes in *Being and Time*, "Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very being, that being is an *issue* for it."<sup>2</sup>

In order to avoid perpetuating the contamination of his discussion of Being with the language of Cartesian dualism, Heidegger presents the notion of *Dasein*, or explicit, pre-ontological being-there, and avoids a discussion of the biological body altogether. Dasein can also be considered the *clearing* of being where all facets of objects become plainly apparent to human experience. Use of the term Dasein allows Heidegger to

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, from Donn Welton, *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 96.



convey both form and presence and to imply the necessity of a being's discursive engagement in the world and his own realm. Heidegger's emphasis on the necessity of practical engagement illustrates his belief that man finds meaning through using and making rather than through studying and knowing. This aspect of his writings is distinctly un-Cartesian in that it rejects the famous notion, *Cogito ergo sum*. However, that is not to say that Heidegger has truly escaped the pitfalls of mind/body dualism by simply avoiding the use of certain terms or demoting thought from its Cartesian position as existence-determiner.

Critics ask how Heidegger can imply that embodiment is not an essential part of the structure of Dasein while simultaneously putting forth the idea that Dasein is never without a body. It seems that the 'body' necessary for Dasein may be present in other objects, both ready-to-hand and present-at-hand, rather than in human form. If the essence of Dasein is existence rather than form, and it exists in relation to outside objects, it can be expressed without reference to its ontic properties. This brings to mind the notions of spatiality and perspective seen in Husserl's writings in relation to ontic objects. *Dasein* is not in the world like water in a glass, rather it encompasses the world and is subsumed by it at the same time. It dwells in the world and allows for *ek-sistence*. Man's Being is disclosed to him by the being-towards that characterizes ek-sistence. In *Being and Time*, language is derived from the disclosedness of man's existence. It plays an essential role in self-realization, as man must decide how to act within his thrownness. Without language, there would be no world in the Heideggerian sense of average-everydayness, as the being of objects would have no conveyable meaning.

Now, as David Cerbone points out in his article, *Heidegger and Dasein's 'Bodily Nature'*, we are met with the problem that man is merely a shell filled with this being-in-the-world, and our earlier problems with mind/body dualism have just been re-categorized and put to the side. Is the body now a just presence-at-hand distilled down to its instrumental value or is it something more? As Cerbone writes,

"Raising my arm, for example, treated as a mere bodily movement, can be described in the languages of physics and biology, as the motion of something with such and such mass with various goings-on at the micro and macro-physical level. Such descriptions do not, however,

capture the *significance* of the movement: I may, for example, be raising my arm to ask a question at a colloquium, to wave to a friend, or to drive a nail into a piece of wood.”<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious from this example that Heidegger does not mean the body is merely present-at-hand. However, is it ready-to-hand, like his example of the hammer? Is the body the equipment of being-in-the-world? The body is clearly a relational tool, that is, it is used for-the-sake-of, toward-which, with-which, etc. The body is also an integrated tool, as the arm is integrated with the torso, which is integrated with the neck and organs and so on. A Being is also capable of seamlessly drawing upon its own relational abilities and the integrated nature of its form, and often without any conscious attention.

However, another look shows that body parts are no more ready-to-hand than they are present-to-hand. A human body can only be directly utilized by that individual, and the body becomes incorporated with the self in the way a hammer never could. As Cerbone points out, it is different to lend a hand than to lend a hammer. For Heidegger, body parts are incorporated while *equipment* is not. Equipment is characterized by readiness, while body parts possess a certain ‘capacity’ that seems to be more constant, as it is dependent on integration. A hammer can gather dust in a shed, but a hand is called upon at all times for various crucial purposes.<sup>4</sup>

Traditional metaphysics has so far been unable to think of the lived body, as Heidegger sought to define it. Although it is possible to come to an understanding of the nature of motility and gesturing as physical and biological properties of the natural body, we have yet to find a way to ontologically reconcile our natural body with our lived body. It appears that the closest Heidegger gets to a reconciliation of the two is when he speaks in terms of “embodiment”. As David Kleinberg-Levin points out in his text, this term “carries us past the inveterate tendency to reify what we are trying to think and understand and engage”.<sup>5</sup> Now we can speak of Dasein in a dynamic way without

---

<sup>3</sup> David Cerbone, “Heidegger and Dasein’s ‘Bodily Nature’”, in in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, in Simon Critchley (Series Editor), *Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 217.

<sup>4</sup> Cerbone, “Heidegger and Dasein’s Bodily Nature”, 113-114.

<sup>5</sup> David Kleinberg-Levin “The Ontological Dimension of Embodiment: Heidegger’s Thinking of Being,” in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, in Simon Critchley (Series Editor), *Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 128.

referring to it as a physical object, and we can gain a clearer picture of the ontological aspect of our embodied experiences.

As Kleinberg- Levin illustrates, our task as beings is to seek to “redeem” our pre-ontological understanding through a hermeneutical approach to our embodied experiences. The most effective way to achieve this is to be conscious of all gestures, moods, and experiences as they exemplify openness and participate in a questioning of the intrinsic value inherent to existence itself through everyday living. Man must be open to all that which is ‘other’, as this openness seems to be constitutive of man’s ontological embodiment. An ongoing appreciation of ontological being can be maintained by heeding the call to openness, as that is the deepest level of awareness. It seems that Heidegger believes himself to have reconciled the problem of mind/body dualism by asserting that Dasein is ontically constituted by Being-in-the-World but that Dasein also is the ontological embodiment of our openness-to-being. This hermeneutic approach to an explanation of Dasein communicates the struggle of articulating Being. The original language of Heidegger’s text appears to mirror the relationship between Dasein and the world, as his leading words, or *Leitworte*, act as an illustration of the kind of usable, active attitude about existence he is trying to convey.

Heidegger’s idea that Being can extend beyond the epistemological to the ontological allows him to get closer to certainty about the nature of the lived body by considering existence in its earliest form. This existential analytic provides a clearer phenomenological description of the lived body’s encounters with the world. Whereas Rene Descartes presented a world full of objects waiting to be encountered in present-at-hand form as mere structures, and Edmund Husserl focused on appearances and sensations, Heidegger’s world of readiness-to-hand allows a deeper level of constant connection between the self and the world. He defies the spatiality that Descartes and Husserl both relied upon, and instead of isolating the subjective consciousness he dissolves its autonomy by throwing it out into the world to relate to all things.

In his later writings, Heidegger would maintain his engagement with the problem of how to gain an ontological understanding of Being. He concerned himself with language in order to locate a foundation for its basic assumptions and reinterpret it in light of his quest to determine the meaning of Being. While he grants that language is a

system of signs and symbols in *Being and Time*, he goes on to pursue the pre-ontological relationships between modern philosophical conceptions of speech and language. For example, he asks what it is about man that forms the footing for this conception of language. In his pursuit of language he does not seek to elucidate the system of sounds and words, but rather the ways in which they communicate and allow meaning to manifest in an articulated form. Speech plays a role in both utilitarian identification and extra-verbal communication.

*Logos*, as a way of dealing with language, is the result of the phenomenological approach and the idea of disclosedness Heidegger puts forth in *Being and Time*. Together with mood and understanding, *Logos* constitutes disclosedness from the moment of understanding to the moment of assertion.<sup>6</sup> This allows things that are understood by the speaker to become articulated to his audience. As Jan Aler writes in his article, *Heidegger's Conception of Language in Being and Time*, "Language came to the fore as an accidental moment in the structure of assertion—namely, "speaking forth" (*Heraussage*), "statement" (*Aussagesatz*). *Logos*, however, is a constituent of assertion as pre-lingual but articulated explanation."<sup>7</sup> Both *Logos* and language are integral to the ontological structure of assertion, though language is what we recognize to be essential in the average-everydayness of social experiences.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes that the structure of Dasein must be freed. Dasein as *Logos* is equiprimordial with understanding, and language is the expression of this *Logos*. He writes, "The fact that language *now* becomes our theme *for the first time* will indicate that this phenomenon has its roots in the existential constitution of Dasein's disclosedness. *The existential ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk.*"<sup>8</sup> It seems that this means anything with the potential to be intelligible in primordial understanding has the potential to be articulated. Therefore, this is what initially allows Being-in-the-world to be articulated. If discourse always articulates intelligibility and understanding, the discourse that language expresses is existentially language. It is disclosedness that allows for this expression.

---

<sup>6</sup> Jan Aler "Heidegger's Conception of Language in *Being and Time*," in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 49.

<sup>7</sup> Aler, *Heidegger's Conception of Language in Being and Time*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Heidegger, "Being and Time" (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 203.

Disclosedness is a making-manifest in which language takes part by constituting (1) the about which (2) announcement (3) communication (4) manifestation in a utilitarian system which contrasts with Heidegger's later, more poetic style.<sup>9</sup> Disclosedness also leads to truth, and hearing and keeping silent specifically enable discourse's function in the existentiality of existence to become "entirely plain".<sup>10</sup> Through this hearing and keeping silent, language leads to a realization of the truth of existence. Heidegger is now able to accomplish his ontological goals with this idea that language as disclosedness allows for thrownness and appropriation of an entity's Being. In this thrownness, man is both actively and passively involved in meaning-giving by way of his language. Language is not merely an animation of words made possible by the mechanical processes of the vocal cords; it is a passive participation in recognition of the intrinsic value of external objects.

Heidegger's attempts to re-purpose original concepts with *Leitworte* illustrate this emphasis on intrinsic value. This return to the ontological, mythic origins of language illustrates being in such a way that it at once recalls the origins of words and frees them from these origins. Heidegger writes of this simultaneous uncovering and preserving,

"The ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the force of *the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself, and to keep the common understanding from leveling them off to that unintelligibility which functions in turn as a source of pseudo-problems."<sup>11</sup>

To rely on Kantian terms, this unintelligibility is caused by the pervasion of phenomena and the forgetfulness of things in their *nous*. Words are more important in their capacity to convey man's ontological condition than to determine instrumental values. Therefore, the foundation for man's ontological dwelling that Heidegger seeks to create will be built on language as a communicator of something beyond what is immediate to our experience. This allows man's ek-sistence to be characterized by his capability to give meaning to the realm of equipment in which he dwells.

---

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Kockelmans, "Preface," in *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), xi.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 204.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*., 220.

The activity of logos is what allows man to actively disclose existence, though logos itself is primordial and therefore unarticulated. As Jan Aler illustrates, the structure of logos is “aprioric” but not unable to be illustrated in a conversation composed of four moments: “ (1) I say (2) something (3) to someone (4) concerning certain events that happened.”<sup>12</sup> All four moments are required for understanding to occur. As we have seen, understanding requires hearing beyond the “acoustic phenomenon” of speech and an attention to intrinsic meanings. This insight is what allows the speaker to hold the listener’s attention. By this, the words and the rules that govern them fade to the background in the moment of speaking and hearing, thus allowing moods to be disclosed. Only in fallen, inauthentic speech, such as small talk, do words dominate the listener’s consciousness. Man as Being-in-the-world is in a state of thrownness that allows him to express logos existentially through language though the two are not the same. The presence of logos within the apriori structure of consciousness allows for this transition.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger gives the reader a sense that his definition of truth falls away from the traditional understanding of truth as a sort of correctness between assertions and the way things are. However, he does not reject it entirely—he allows that the phenomenon of correctness is merely one aspect of truth. Truth as correctness is merely concerned with the real. Heidegger goes beyond that to uncover ontological truth, an apriori uncovering that allows truth to exist in the realm of the real. This uncovering is an act of *poiesis*, a concept Heidegger will take up in his later essays along with a focused inquiry into the nature of great poetry.

## 1.1 | Revealing Truth

In his 1950 essay, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger sought to determine the artist’s role in the work of art and explains that the two are implicated in a cyclical relationship that ultimately gives way to truth. Just as the work of art could not exist without the artist, the artist derives his title from the work of art. In order to explicate this interrelation, Heidegger turns to an examination of the essence of art itself, which is not

---

<sup>12</sup> Aler, “Heidegger’s Conception of Language in Being and Time”, 53.

the same as the work of art. He observes the task of art and shows that there is a circular, self-referential relation between art, work of art, and artist. He shows that realization through this circular pattern is an archetype of human understanding, and he will later utilize it to illustrate language's role in the saying of being. Man's ability to create allows him to confirm his notion of his authentic self through that which he creates. For Heidegger, we must resist the temptation to dismiss this cycle by declaring that it violates logic. Rather, it must be closely followed in order to determine the origins, goals, and revelatory potential of great art.

Our starting point will be the work of art. As the work of art is a piece of art as a whole, its nature must reveal something about the nature of art as a whole. Initially, Heidegger presents the work of art as a mere thing but suggests that it is comprised of something further and more essential. He writes, "This something else in the work constitutes its artistic nature...The work makes public something other than itself; ...it is an allegory...a symbol."<sup>13</sup> It seems that the symbolic nature of the work of art cannot be made manifest and remain independent from the thingly element. By this, Heidegger establishes that we must define the nature of the thing and its potential to convey truth in order to determine the extent to which the symbolic depends on it. For Heidegger, truth is equivalent with capacity to communicate Being.

If a thing is to communicate Being, it must not be defined too generally. Heidegger therefore picks a specific pair of shoes in a work by Van Gogh to illustrate that a thing can transcend its status as equipment in the work of art. Though they are the shoes of a peasant woman who certainly put them to hard use in a muddy field, they are depicted together without their wearer or even any clinging clods of dirt.<sup>14</sup> For

---

<sup>13</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Note: The exact painting to which Heidegger refers in *The Origin of the Work of Art* is a matter of controversy among Heidegger scholars. While he may be referring to Van Gogh's 1886 painting "A pair of shoes", some believe that he melded aspects from a few different of Van Gogh's paintings, and others believe that the shoes to which he refers actually belonged to Van Gogh, himself. So, if the shoes did not belong to a farmer-woman at all, then does Heidegger's theory fail before it gets off of the ground? If he is wrong about the ontic properties of the painting, how can he possibly make any claims about its ontological properties? It seems to me that this ambiguity proves that what is at stake is not the ontic nature of the art, but rather the authenticity of our experience with the art. I do not mean to dismiss the attacks on the strength of Heidegger's phenomenological bridge between shoes and earth/world tension, but I do not think such critiques bear on Heidegger's goal: to find something essential disclosed in the work of great artists.

Heidegger, this does not mean the painting fails to capture the more complicated story behind the shoes. He writes,

“In the shoes vibrates the silent call of the earth...This equipment is pervaded by uncomplaining anxiety as to the certainty of bread, the wordless joy of having once more withstood want...This equipment belongs to the *earth*, and it is protected in the *world* of the peasant woman...But perhaps it is only in the picture that we notice all this about the shoes.”<sup>15</sup>

To the woman who owns the shoes, they are merely equipment. However, the viewer of the work of art is able to behold the shoes as they participate, in their passive reliability, in the perpetuation of the woman’s existence. The painting’s ability to render the essential truth of the woman’s existence for the viewer is its work. The painting discloses the nature of being for the woman in a way that recalls, for Heidegger, the ancient Greek notion of *aletheia*, or uncovering. Her essential being is now able to “stand in the light of its being.”<sup>16</sup>

At this point, Heidegger takes stock of what he has accomplished. It now seems that the nature of art is a working to uncover the truth of beings. It is apparent that he does not think of truth in the western sense of correctness or justice. Art establishes truth in the sense of emergence as it takes place through the work of art. Heidegger has now brought art beyond the realm of the thing—beyond the realm of simple physical representation. Now the question remains, how the artist can identify this essence in the subject so that he can uncover it.

To begin to answer this question, Heidegger points out that we must not seek to grasp the nature of a thing in order to determine its thingly substructure. The thingly substructure is not the “most immediate reality” of the work of art, though we had previously treated it in that way.<sup>17</sup> It may have appeared to be the most immediate aspect of the work of art, but it is not where the truth is located. Now it seems that the reality of the work will lead us to the meaning of art. He writes, “To gain access to the work, it would be necessary to remove it from all relations to something other than itself, in order

---

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 37.



to let it stand on its own for itself alone.”<sup>18</sup> This is where the artist plays his role and then immediately bows out. He releases the art to stand on its own; he is a martyr of the creative process that bears great art. So, where does the work belong after it no longer belongs to him?

The work of art is “set up”—dedicated to the world it opens. The work of art comes to be out of its materials and creates an Open in which a world is constituted. In Heidegger’s words, “The work moves the earth itself into the Open of a world and keeps it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.*”<sup>19</sup> This earth is not a physical object, but an undisclosable entity that is only to be opened up when it remains tightly closed. To let the earth be an earth is to bring it forth in its self-secluding. Here, Heidegger cites an example that he spends later essays elaborating on, “To be sure, the poet also uses the word—not, however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to use them up, but rather in such a way that the word only now becomes and remains truly a word.”<sup>20</sup> This act of bringing forth is the unity created by the work, and this unity is what allows the world to work as a world. Heidegger identifies this creation of a world in the instance of Van Gogh’s painting of the pair of shoes. It seems that a work of art creates a world and also brings forth the truth of that world—the work of art cannot bring forth truth without a world in which it can be received.

Now that we have established that the work of art requires a world to uncover concealed truths, we can return to the question of the origin of these truths. We turn our attention to the fact that the work of art has been created, and this element of creation is the focal point of the work, regardless of the artist’s role. For Heidegger, this “factum est” is what surpasses the artist to consistently be thrust forth from the work.<sup>21</sup> Both the artist, as creator, and the human who responds to the art and therefore maintains it are necessary to preserve its truth. This preservation of truth is the essence of art. As he writes, “Thus art is: the creative preserving of truth in the work. *Art then is the becoming*

---

<sup>18</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought.*, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 45.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 63.

*and happening of truth.*”<sup>22</sup> This truth arises in the act of composition, “as the poet composes a poem”.<sup>23</sup>

At this point in the essay, Heidegger shifts his attention to poetry and begins to advance the ideas he will develop further in his later essays. He writes, “*All art, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is, as such, essentially poetry.*”<sup>24</sup> Poetry goes beyond the realm of the unreal to illuminate the Open through a linguistic venturing. For Heidegger, this is apparent if considered in light of the “right concept of language”. Language must not be thought of as a mere means for communication and signification. Rather, it must be thought of as a means to bring things into the Open, as that is what is most essential to its speaking. Without language, beings could not be brought to appearance by naming. This projection of names constitutes the thrownness of things into world and earth where poetry can speak their unconcealedness. Unconcealedness allows a people’s world historical character to be brought into the world. He writes

“Actual language at any given moment is the happening of this saying, in which a people’s world historically arises for it and the earth is preserved as that which remains closed... In such saying, the concepts of an historical people’s nature, i.e., of its belonging to world history, are formed for that folk, before it.”

By this, Heidegger differentiates the language of poetry from everyday language while maintaining that the essential nature of language is poetry. As poetry, the most original form of essential poetry, language constructs a place for poetry’s ability to comprise art and found truth. This founding of truth through bestowing, grounding, and beginning is what allows for the preservation of art that is essential to its ability to communicate.

---

<sup>22</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 69.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 70.

<sup>24</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 70.

## 2 | Dwelling in the Abyss

After *Being and Time*, Heidegger's turned his thought toward the phenomenological truth allowed by the language of poetry. Heidegger's writings on poetry are meant to serve as a critique of modern subjectivity and a guide to help man can recover his wonder at things at once both self-withdrawing and revealed. In this section, I hope to explain why Heidegger rejects the limitations of subjectivity in favor of being in the sense of *Gelassenheit*, or releasement toward things.

In his collection of essays, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger seeks to discover the true nature of language and its role in articulating Being by conducting a linguistic exploration of man's consciousness. He does not take an anthropological, religious, or logical approach, but rather succeeds in his essays by following a poetic path. He begins by pitting man against an abyss in a dark era and challenges the poets to find a way to best experience this lack of ground through linguistic venturing. Although he spends the majority of his first essay characterizing the unshielded nature of man's being, Heidegger goes on to examine how this unshieldedness is chiefly what characterizes man's unique capacity for language in his last two essays. His analysis of poetry throughout his essays allows him to study language by entering into language's speaking of itself, rather than focusing only on man's speaking of language, which he believes to abysmal. Ultimately, Heidegger seeks to prove that language holds meaning within itself rather than drawing it from a correspondence model of reference foreign to the subject; within poetry exists the potential to uncover truth as it exists in the world. However, this is not to say that language should be utilized as a tool for characterizing the instrumental value of objects. He builds on his writings in *Being and Time* to suggest that poetry, as *Sprachkunst*, is uniquely capable of giving man a foundation built on uncovering intrinsic value in his unfounded world.<sup>25</sup>

Heidegger begins his quest in the essay *What Are Poets For?*, in which he sets out to answer the question of what poets must do in a destitute time. He begins by

---

<sup>25</sup> Walter Biemel, "Poetry and Language in Heidegger," in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 75.

characterizing the era to which we belong as a dark, destitute one. He writes, "...the evening of the world's age has been declining toward its night. The era is defined by the god's failure to arrive, or the "default of God"."<sup>26</sup> Heidegger goes even further to radicalize this concept by holding that man is forgetful of the default of God. He writes that the current era is a destitute time devoid of reason, as man has lost the sense that objects have value beyond their instrumental worth. It seems that God is the ultimate giver of value and the reason for intrinsic value of objects, but man has become forgetful of this in the recent cultural shift toward the destitute era. In this destitute, value-centric Age of Technology, man commits the great sin of ascribing human values to things of heaven and earth, which, for Heidegger, is a sign of the forgetfulness of the default of God.<sup>27</sup>

In this forgetful state, man believes that objects have value only insofar as they serve some human end. If man believes nothing is instrumentally viable on its own apart from human aims, man must have forgotten that there is a god who gives intrinsic value to things regardless of man's awareness. This utilitarian emphasis has led humanity into an abyss. He challenges mortals to reach into this abyss and "come into ownership of their own nature" rather than trying to escape.<sup>28</sup> He seeks to communicate Being in a way that transcends this compulsion toward valuation. For Heidegger, man can achieve this through poetry.

In this abysmal, post-philosophical era, Heidegger's theory of poetic language explains how man can think non-representationally and avoid the violence technology does to its objects by giving them a value. By avoiding subjectivity, man can avoid violence. He can let things be in their object-ness by letting go of his need to reify and dominate them. This requires him to relinquish his subjectivity to preserve a philosophical, phenomenological outlook. Poetic language has the potential to free man from his instrumental use of language and allow him to dwell poetically and be liberated from technology. Heidegger holds that poetry can bridge the gap between the realm of technology, in which truth and being are covered up, and the realm of thinking.

---

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> J. Glenn Grey, "Heidegger's "Being"", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 49, No.12 (Jun 5, 1952) pp. 415-422. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2021188> (Accessed 25/10/09)

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 94.

Heidegger holds that the poet is best equipped to delve into the abyss because he “entrenches himself in purposeful self-assertion, and by means of absolute objectification installs himself in the parting against the Open, then he himself promotes his own unshieldedness.”<sup>29</sup> It is the poet’s obligation to “retrieve truth from the void of forgetfulness” and bring it to light by seeing things in themselves.<sup>30</sup> The subject/object construct of man’s consciousness necessitates this ‘unshieldedness’ in order for him to objectify things outside of himself and experience the safety created by this venturing. This venturing is a synonym for the *Dasein*. *Dasein* identifies the dwelling or *ek-sistence* of a being within the historical frame of the infinite horizon of consciousness that encompasses the Open. Heidegger goes on to say that this historical frame is brought about by language. He writes, “Language is the precinct...the house of being...It is because language is the house of Being, that we reach what is by constantly going through this house.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, his essay *Das Seiende* reads, “Language is the primordial poetry through which a people speaks being.”<sup>32</sup> For Heidegger, the concept of Being is inextricably linked to poetic language.

Heidegger suggests that man’s representational consciousness is structured so that it takes the objects it identifies and ‘consumes’ them in their objective unshieldedness before moving on to new objects.<sup>33</sup> He writes, “What is presumed to be eternal merely conceals a suspended transiency, suspended in the void of a durationless now.”<sup>34</sup> This seems to mean that only language is capable of prevailing in terms of describing existence, because it is inexhaustible and has the ability to reach things in their thingness. If language is the thing more daring than Being, the poet is capable of daring the abyss by entering into its speaking. It seems that he believes that although man cannot venture or will himself into the abyss, he can dare it with language. However, this daring is not a way for man to escape his un-grounded state. The question of this essay is not how to use technology or language to free man from the destitute time, but rather how language must be thought of as a medium to experience it most effectively. While man uses

---

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 117.

<sup>30</sup> Grey, “Heidegger’s “Being”,” 418.

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 129.

<sup>32</sup> Arthur W. H. Adkins, “Heidegger and Language”, *Philosophy: Cambridge University Press*, Vol, 37, No 141 (July, 1962) p. 231. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3748439> (Accessed 25/10/2009)

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 127.

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 139.

technology to control, dominate, and exploit nature as a result of his subjective consciousness, he can use poetry as an outlet for his willing because poetry is a limitless resource for him. For Heidegger, this explains why poets wield such power when it comes to uncovering the truth of Being through language.

Heidegger begins his essay, “Language”, by reiterating the notion that man’s natural capability of speaking sets him apart from other organisms. He writes, “Man speaks... We speak because speaking is natural to us... It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal is the living being capable of speech.”<sup>35</sup> These statements seem to be obvious. However, the reader soon discovers that Heidegger is more preoccupied with language’s power to define and uncover “essences”. He begins with what appears to be an empty tautology, “Language is language”, and goes on to show that this phrase will not leave us falling into the absurd, infinite regress of man’s dependence on actual words. Heidegger explains this when he reminds the reader, “To reflect on language thus demands that we enter into the speaking of language in order to take up our stay with language, i.e., within it’s speaking, not within our own.”<sup>36</sup> This seems to mean that language is misused when employed as a mere tool to designate values within the realm of rules constructed by society. Entering, as the great poets do, into the speaking of language represents a withdrawal from the territory of valuation and the acceptance of a certain passivity with regard to expression.

Heidegger seeks to discover the truth of objects by uncovering them as they are. The original Greek term *aletheia*, or uncovering, characterizes Heidegger’s mission as a “truth-seeker” as it implies that truth derives from an uncovering of what already is. For Heidegger, it is important that man “must see [things] as they are in themselves and not merely as they are for him.”<sup>37</sup> This draws a distinction between reality as utility and reality as independent existence. For Heidegger, man has the potential to access things in themselves. He does not subscribe to the Kantian notion that it is impossible to know things in their *nous*. He believes that the poets are best equipped to do this because they have the gift of language, which enables them to experience the Open and communicate whatever objective truths they uncover without imposing an instrumental value. In great

---

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 187.

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 188.

<sup>37</sup> Grey, “Heidegger’s “Being””, 418.

poems, poets present a combination of poetry and thought: “The voice of thought must be poetic because poetry is the saying of truth, the saying of the unconcealedness of beings.”<sup>38</sup>

Heidegger draws upon the poetry of Hölderlin to affirm his belief that poetry is the only way to elucidate Being. Hölderlin writes, “Man dwells poetically on this earth”, and Heidegger believes that poets are messengers who make man aware of this dwelling by allowing him to conceptualize the divine through objective truth. He holds that poets are just as important to understanding Being as thinkers are because they place ordinary objects in their context within the scheme of Being and relate objects to a higher level. In other words, “to dwell poetically on earth is to find in the simple and homely things of every-day experience the divine and the holy.”<sup>39</sup> Whereas philosophers contemplate and interpret being, poets rediscover its very nature.

For Heidegger, the poets succeed because they avoid subjectivism. I have already mentioned that Heidegger’s main complaint about the Age of Technology involves the notion that it is an age in which everything is manipulated and given a value. The historical frame of this destitute era is characterized by man’s vision of himself in relation to objects as things that can benefit him. If something exists, it has value. Heidegger argues that this contributes to man’s homeless, unsheltered state, and he seeks to remedy this by curing man’s forgetfulness of the source of his being and returning him from the *Abgrund*, or abyss. For Heidegger, man’s primary duty is to listen, and man’s problematic approach to language in the Age of Technology is an active one in its subjectivity—he forgets to listen. Heidegger’s concept of the *Abgrund* is uniquely well suited to illustrate anti-utilitarian perspective in that man cannot exploit his surroundings if he is in a groundless state.

But what about Heidegger’s concept of language as the House of Being? It seems that a deeper understanding of this assertion will reveal the structure behind man’s ability to dwell poetically, which Heidegger will discuss later. In his essay, “Language”, Heidegger further investigates the questions that arise from his assertion: “Language speaks.” He defines what it is to speak and how man must best learn to make use of

---

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 420.

speech. Heidegger reveals that he is not trying to create a new way of looking at language. Rather, he is emphasizing the importance of “learning to live in the speaking of language”, just like he was seeking how to best experience the *Abgrund* in previous essays.<sup>40</sup> Speech in this sense refers to listening in tandem with passive articulation rather than the communication of cultural constructs. He analyzes Georg Trakl’s poem, “A Winter Evening”, and reveals how he believes the language of the three-stanza poem to be a metaphor for the nature of language. By recalling the central issue of the difference from *Being and Time*, Heidegger reveals that he believes language to be joined together with man’s nature without being overlapped with it or enmeshed in it. This will lead to an explanation of what it is to dwell poetically.

Heidegger begins the second half of the essay by reestablishing the central issue of the “speaking”. He says that language speaks, not man. He identifies that to speak is to name, to name is to call, to call is to bid, or invite things and world into our consciousness. This means that language, in the form of speech, calls things into our consciousness. He writes that this takes place by nature of the difference, or the division that prevails between world and thing that characterizes the middle of their penetration of each other. It seems that world and language are interchangeable as Heidegger writes, “World grants things...they penetrate each other”.<sup>41</sup> To further characterize this ‘middle’ he writes, “The difference for world and thing disclosingly appropriates things into bearing a world; it disclosingly appropriates world into the granting of things.”<sup>42</sup>

The difference is the bidder, and Heidegger tracks the bidding of language throughout Trakl’s poem. He follows each of the stanzas as he believes they bid, respectively, things, world, and the intimacy between them.

#### A WINTER EVENING

*Window with falling snow is arrayed,  
Long tolls the vesper bell,  
The house is provided well,  
The table is for many laid.*

---

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 207.

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 200.



*Wandering ones, more than a few,  
Come to the door on darksome courses.  
Golden blooms the tree of graces  
Drawing up the earth's cool dew.*

*Wander quietly steps within;  
Pain has turned the threshold to stone.  
There lie, in limpid brightness shown,  
Upon the table bread and wine.<sup>43</sup>*

For Heidegger, language speaks in this poem. The intimacy in the third stanza that brings thing and world together is produced by the introduction of Trakl's concept of Pain. Heidegger writes, "Pain joins the rift of the dif-ference. Pain is the dif-ference itself."<sup>44</sup> He goes on to interpret that pain is not a human sensation, but the seam that binds together world and things. As the dif-ference, pain is the "luminous joining" that "expropriates the world into its worlding, which grants things." This penetration of thing and world is a central issue in this essay, but Heidegger does not seem to be implying that it has any cultural significance. Trakl's poem is most relevant to Heidegger because it articulates the four-fold nature of the world thus encouraging man to experience the world in itself. The concept of the four-fold seems to be one of Heidegger's most complicated, and I find it to be best elucidated by Herbert Spiegelberg in his paper *Das Ding*,

"Earth and sky, divinities and mortals—being at one with one another of their own accord—belong together by way of the simpleness of the united 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 simpleness of the four...The appropriate 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."<sup>45</sup>

It seems that man is capable of experiencing the four-fold without being limited by his subjectivity because it is characterized by "essential being". In "...Poetically man

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 193.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 202.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Edwards, "Heidegger's Quest for Being", *Philosophy: Cambridge University Press* Vol, 64. No. 250. (Oct., 1989) p 456. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/> (Accessed 25/11/09)

Dwells...”, Heidegger will note that man’s dwelling is dependent on the fourfold, as “Man’s dwelling depends on an upward-looking measure-taking of the dimension, in which the sky belongs just as much as the earth.”<sup>46</sup> This seems to reflect a different, pre-evaluative cultural attitude that is capable of measuring without seeking to dominate. He will add that poetry is the only medium still capable of this measuring.

Heidegger returns to the concept of the dif-ference to characterize its ability to “still things in thinging and the world in worlding” and gather them into the rift as the peal of stillness.<sup>47</sup> This leads Heidegger to conclude, “Language speaks as the peal of stillness... language goes on as the taking place or occurring of the dif-ference for world and things”.<sup>48</sup> Although he says that the peal of stillness is not human, speech is indeed human nature and human beings are brought into their own by language. He explains this, “language needs and uses the speaking of mortals in order to sound as the peal of stillness for the hearing of mortals.”<sup>49</sup>

Heidegger goes on to reiterate that mortal speech is designating names and thereby bidding thing and world to come. He identifies that mortals call the dif-ference by responding, and that they “heed the bidding call of the stillness of the dif-ference” by nature.<sup>50</sup> It seems that mortals exist in language by listening in the peal of stillness and responding. This recalls Heidegger’s approach to the abyss in the previous chapter, as he identified that it was more important to learn how to experience the abyss than to learn how to defy it. He identifies the root behind man’s ability to dwell poetically when he notes, “What is important is learning to live in the speaking of language.”<sup>51</sup>

Heidegger proves in this essay that it is foolish of the reader to take his assertion, “Language is language”, as a simple tautology. He uses the essay to lay out a logical plan that links man’s nature with language in a way that draws them into one another without overlapping them.

However, Heidegger does not conclusively prove that man’s subjective conscious is capable of becoming wholly fused with things. Although he has just conducted a close

---

<sup>46</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 219.

<sup>47</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 204.

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 205.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 205.

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 206.

<sup>51</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 207.

reading of Georg Trakl's "A Winter Evening", a closer look at his analysis reveals that he has not really provided any definitive interpretation of the text. Man is set apart from things (in the gathering sense) because he can only experience objects through the *Vorstellung* of his own consciousness. Therefore, how can he definitively interpret anything? Heidegger writes in his "Letter on Humanism", "Being is the nearest thing. But this nearness remains furthest away from man... To experience and to say this—this is what the thinking of the future will have to learn."<sup>52</sup> Heidegger holds that to reflect on the nature of language is to use speaking as an abode for this nearest being of mortals.<sup>53</sup> In "Language", he redefines what it means to truly speak in order to establish a foundation for his discussion of man's consciousness. In the linguistic struggle between instrumental and intrinsic values, man is conditioned to default towards dominance because he is an agent of valuation and wholly enmeshed in technology. In order to return to what is essential in speech, that is, uncovering of intrinsic value, man must be attuned to the call of the dif-ference.

Heidegger writes that there are three generally accepted assertions regarding speech. First, it is held that speech allows expression in that, "If we take language to be utterance, we give an eternal, surface notion of it at the very moment when we explain it by recourse to something eternal."<sup>54</sup> This seems to explain language at its most intuitive, cultural form. Expression is what allows the communication of thoughts and ideas and encompasses language as a basic neuronal process. However, Heidegger warns that language can become nothing more than printed word when used merely for reference. He writes language as reference alone, "will never help us to escape from the inversion of the true relation of dominance between language and man."<sup>55</sup> Though he is essentially a speaking being whose linguistic capabilities came before his first utterances, man continues to wrongly ignore the provenance of his ability to signify in his daily discourses. This ignorance of his own essence has caused him to be further alienated from the intrinsic value of objects—things in themselves. The inverted relation caused by this ignorance leads man to believe that he is the master of language.

---

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, "Heidegger's Quest For Being", 446.

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190.

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 214.

For Heidegger, speech is an activity of man in that it is the activity that allows for his existence, or, “It is language that first brings man about, brings him into existence.”<sup>56</sup> Finally, he characterizes speech in the greater context of human expression as “a presentation and representation of the real and the unreal.”<sup>57</sup> This is the characterization that allows speech to create a historical framework for being. Language always communicates what man’s representational consciousness comes up with, so it is always a *representation* and therefore secondary which seems to be pejorative. However, for Heidegger, this representation is precisely what gives man the potential to dwell free of the modern notion of subjectivity.

Heidegger acknowledges that man is incapable of circumscribing the whole nature of language, but he uses these three definitions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of speech, although he questions their “correctness” because, “despite their antiquity and despite their comprehensibility, they never bring us to language as language.”<sup>58</sup> Heidegger maintains that the most comprehensive way to experience language as language is to return to the tautological assertion that “Language speaks.” This realization leads him back to the notion that poetry is the “purest” medium when it comes to communicating the nature of things as they are. It is a symbolic way that is able to come very close to the purely semiotic in its method of signification. Man dwells within poetry, as he is always already at home there.

In “...Poetically Man Dwells...”, Heidegger reads into all the implications of Friedrich Hölderlin’s assertion and responds to the phrase itself. He begins to pick apart the phrase by questioning each component. First, he recalls his notion that man is made homeless by his “hunt for gain and success” spurred on by the emphasis on value in the Age of Technology, so he asks, how is there space for the poetic in the hectic nature of dwelling in this destitute era? Heidegger notes that this poetry mostly represents “at best a preoccupation with aestheticizing”, and it is easy to discount it as “frivolous mooning”.<sup>59</sup> These assumptions are legitimized by the pervasive instrumentalism and alienation from language inherent in the technological age. Next, Heidegger points out

---

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190.

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190.

<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 191.

<sup>59</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 211.

the problem that the phrase was penned by a poet in the first place which begs the question of whether or not poets are blind to actuality and merely bring things forth from their imagination. He recalls the notion of original Greek *poiesis* and notes that this word carries implications of bringing forth. However, it appears that Heidegger is speaking polemically as he backtracks and explains that complete dwelling and poetic bringing-forth are indeed compatible.

Heidegger points out that the word ‘dwelling’ does not necessarily refer to the dwelling conditions in the current era. It can instead be thought of as a function of Being; it is one of many forms of human behavior. He writes, “Perhaps the two can bear with each other...Perhaps one even bears the other in such a way that dwelling rests on the poetic...we are required to think of dwelling and poetry in terms of their essential nature.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, Hölderlin must be referring to poetry and dwelling in their individual essences, rather than as the cultural constructs that man imagines them to be. Heidegger fleshes out this point by saying that dwellings are attained through building. Creation, or *poiesis* as putting forth, is a sort of building, and poetic creation allows us to obtain dwelling. He writes, “we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell, as a—perhaps even *the*—distinctive kind of building.”<sup>61</sup> By following this path of thought we are to arrive at the nature of dwelling, and Hölderlin is capable of this because “he poetizes the essence of poetry.”<sup>62</sup> In this, he is able to see things in the house of being because he removes them from a technological frame and creates a new frame in which the uncovering of intrinsic values can take place.

However, Heidegger is not satisfied with this. He also goes on to ask how man can even claim to have reasoned the nature of something. He then comes full circle in his writings and adds that man knows such things only when he is the recipient of these claims. Man receives these claims from language. As we have seen before, man is wrong to act as though he controls language, for “in fact language remains the master of man. When this relation of dominance gets inverted, man hits upon strange maneuvers.”<sup>63</sup> He emphasizes repeatedly that language does the speaking and man is only capable of

---

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 211.

<sup>61</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 213.

<sup>62</sup> Biemel, “Poetry and Language in Heidegger,” 78.

<sup>63</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 213.

speaking when he listens and responds to the call. This explains the effectiveness of poetry as, “the responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry.”<sup>64</sup> Man listens more closely to the pure language of poetry. Poetic language allows man to constantly build and produce. In order to build, foundations are necessary. Thus, through language, man creates for himself a grounding in the abyss. Once he has created a grounding, he no longer must rely on his utilitarian tendencies to be rooted in the world. For Heidegger, “man is capable of dwelling only if he has already built, is building, and remains disposed to build, in another way.”<sup>65</sup> Building seems to be the key. He goes on, “Authentic building occurs so far as there are poets, such poets as take the measure for architecture, the structure of dwelling.”<sup>66</sup> However, he makes sure to avoid turning this into a definitive statement by going on to bring up all the questions invited by this seemingly absolute assertion.

Heidegger concludes his essay by bringing up the question of poetry’s transcendence. He wonders what the measure for poetry may be and concludes that it seems to be God. So we must ask, what is God? Heidegger seeks to address this question by distinguishing which aspects of the fourfold are alien to the god and which are alien to man. It seems that the earthly aspects under the sky are intimate to man and therefore the poet is able to call them. The poet’s adeptness at calling enables him to also call the aspects of objects that conceal themselves. These aspects are familiar to the god. As Heidegger explains, “The poetic saying of images gathers the brightness and sound of the heavenly appearances into one with the darkness and silence of what is alien.”<sup>67</sup> However, it is man’s unique structure of consciousness that allows him to connect to poetic language.

As we saw in *Being and Time*, Man’s structure of consciousness, when viewed in the form of subject/object, means that he can only learn through negation. Therefore, Heidegger assures the reader that man truly does have knowledge of the poetic. He writes, “That we dwell unpoetically, and in what way, we can in any case learn only if we

---

<sup>64</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 214.

<sup>65</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 215.

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 225.

<sup>67</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 224.

know the poetic.”<sup>68</sup> Man only knows things in terms of other things he knows and things he does not know. As Heidegger noted in “What Are Poets For?”, “A comparison places different things in an identical setting to make the difference visible.”<sup>69</sup> This setting is man’s subjective consciousness. Thus, man dwells poetically on earth because poetic language dares the limits of language as it expresses consciousness by revealing concealed elements of objects.

Ultimately, for Heidegger, it is man’s capacity for responding that enables him to use language, specifically poetic language, to create a grounding for himself in the *Abgrund*. By Being in the abyss, beings are forced to venture and dare language in order to exist in the destitute time. Heidegger holds that poets are best equipped to communicate that which is concealed through language, as they are able to reveal things that do not fit into the structure of our consciousness and bring the Open toward man as an object. He writes, “Man places before himself the world as the whole of everything objective, and he places himself before the world. Man sets up the world toward himself, and delivers Nature over to himself.”<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, this frame of consciousness both characterizes by building and is characterized by an uncovering of the historical frame present in the Age of Technology when beyond the focus on value and production. As Heidegger reminds the reader, “the essence of life is supposed to yield itself to technical production.”<sup>71</sup> Heidegger’s *Poetry, Language, Thought* seems to be in essence a confrontation of the abyss of a dark era through poetic language with the realization that poetic language alone allows man to dwell in the abyss. Indeed, Heidegger employs his own theories as he uses poetic examples throughout his essays to support his assertions. He ultimately succeeds in laying a foundation for the notion that language holds meaning within itself rather than drawing it from a foreign correspondence model of reference. Man needs the guidance of the poets to realize transcendent images as they are concealed to his consciousness and to provide him with a grounding in the midst of a godless abyss.

All facets considered, Heidegger’s idea of poetic language is consistent with his phenomenological project. As we saw in *Being and Time*, language is a dimension of *ek-*

---

<sup>68</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 226.

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 98.

<sup>70</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 107.

<sup>71</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 109.

*sistence* because of its meaning-giving and uncovering properties. Because of the phenomenological preoccupation with the flawed perspective of man's consciousness, our potential to gain a successful view of language is dependent on whether or not our concept of man's Being is successful.<sup>72</sup> If the success of language depends on whether or not listening and speaking are capable of asserting an always already constituted structure of saying, then poetry is the best way to communicate the world. It calls world and things together in such a way that they create an openness in which Being manifests itself. As Heidegger writes, "Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Joseph J. Kockelmans, "Language, Meaning, and Ek-sistence," in *On Heidegger and Language*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press: 1972), 7.

<sup>73</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 216.



### 3 | Criticisms

Martin Heidegger incited a large and growing debate with his writings. The problem of the relation between his philosophy and his National Socialist politics has divided his followers: his political involvements become either contingent or essential to an analysis of his philosophical work. Theodor Adorno and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe are two thinkers from different eras who shared the latter perspective. In this chapter, I will explicate Adorno's formal criticisms and Lacoue-Labarthe's political criticisms as they problematize the implications of Heidegger's reliance on poetry.

#### 3.1 | Adorno & Formal Implications

Theodor Adorno established himself as a leading German intellectual around 1949 with his return to Frankfurt after a Nazi-imposed exile in England and the United States. As one of Heidegger's most prominent critics, Adorno is also famously a critic of positivist thought and instrumental reason. Positivism is a philosophical system within which every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically verified or is capable of logical or mathematical proof, and that therefore could be reasonably expected to reject the metaphysics that Heidegger's writings were born out of. However, Adorno does not deny in his writings that language contains a moment of transcendence. Adorno finds grounds to reject both Heidegger's fundamental ontology and the language with which he expresses it because he believes Heidegger to have stymied language's transcendence in the first place.<sup>74</sup>

Adorno notices Heidegger's allowance of the antagonism that characterizes the relationship between the totality of communication and the violence it does to the particular. It seems that the essential violence that characterizes language is such that in order for things to be elevated to the conceptual their particularity will come into question. Adorno will point out the effects of this elevation and what it says about

---

<sup>74</sup> David Sherman. "Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity." (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 38.

individuality. He is troubled by the circle between language as a medium for universality and a tool used to render things in their particularity. As David Sherman writes,

“Heidegger’s philosophical stand against reflection does not result in a dialectical separation always straining toward a fleeting identity between expression and thing. Instead language tends to lose the things to which it purportedly refers, for it no longer flows from its subject matter but rather “seems to fly above its correlative, thereby establish[ing] itself as something higher”. (JOA p. 87)<sup>75</sup>

His critique of Heidegger’s conceptual language leads him to suggest a different form to provide a coherent totality.

In his literary criticisms, Theodor Adorno examines the nature of the relationship between philosophy and literature from a methodological standpoint. He presents his critiques in a complex, dialectical style of writing that communicates the presupposition that whatever one writes about is characterized by irresolvable conflicts that cannot be translated into a logic of non-contradiction. In his writings, Adorno does not try and overcome contradiction; rather, he is conscious that social reality is characterized by conflict, and his dialectical style reflects this consciousness. For Adorno, it would be mere ideology to assume that a text or work of art can render any social reality in a non-contradictory manner. He holds that the truth content of any art form is located in this contradiction, and the first task for anyone who approaches any subject matter must be to attend to the pre-inscribed contradictions in that subject matter. Though he does not deny that language possesses an element of transcendence, Adorno identifies the contradictions in Heidegger’s fundamental ontology and theory of language, which he problematizes in his essay, *Parataxis* and his work *The Jargon of Authenticity* (1973). He also suggests that the answer for the dialectical, contradictory nature of society can only be found at the level of form. He furthers this notion in his piece, *The Essay as Form*. Ultimately, Adorno is focused on the effects that language and philosophy have on the nature of individuality.

In *Parataxis*, Adorno examines Heidegger’s analysis of the poetry of Hölderlin by using the philological approach as a point of departure. This approach is based on the

---

<sup>75</sup> Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno*, 40.

belief that it allows a more in depth reconstruction of intentions than the philosophical approach would, as it objectifies subjective intention, which can be viewed as the locus of the truth. A philological approach allows preconstruction of intentions, and subjective intention becomes objectified. Intentionality is articulated through the poem therefore the intention is part of rather than basis for and must be interpreted as such. In order for the philological approach to be successful, structural unity is presupposed, and the work is the totality. Therefore, authorial intention becomes part of the poem, and this intentionality must be interpreted as a part of rather than a basis for the poetry. If what the author intended to say is the truth, then everything is located within the artist. Therefore, the process of writing could be deemed superfluous. This is problematic, as it excludes the necessity of language and means that truth must be trans-subjective.

Language is not merely subjective, as it could not communicate without presupposing commonality. For Adorno, it is a Philistine conception to hold that the author has control over the final product. As Adorno writes in *Notes to Literature III*, “The contradiction according to which every work wants to be understood purely on its own terms but none can in fact be so understood is what leads to the truth content.”<sup>76</sup> Truth content lies in the structure, and therefore Heidegger’s method of extracting *Leitworte*, or thematic words, reduces the work and ignores the notion that a work of art is the totality of its moments. This jargon, though Heidegger believes it to get closer to an ontological understanding, is what renders his analysis problematic for Adorno—it just covers up the destitute era rather than reaching into it. He writes that his problem with Heidegger’s thought is that “it transforms a bad empirical reality into transcendence.”<sup>77</sup> Heidegger transforms philosophy into literature in his reading of Hölderlin’s poetry. He levels the conceptual differences between the two, while Adorno is always noting the historical differences between them.

In a way, it seems that Adorno agrees with Heidegger. Poets are capable of achieving truth, as their awareness of the unity of language constitutes a violence that is

---

<sup>76</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry,” in *Notes to Literature II*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>77</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Jargon of Authenticity” (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 116.

capable of receiving nature when considered dialectically in terms of unity. That this unity does violence to language represents the dual character of language. As Adorno writes of Hölderlin, “His dialectical experience does not know language merely as something external and repressive; it also knows its truth.”<sup>78</sup> However, he maintains the notion of subjective intention that Heidegger rejects: “Without externalizing itself in language, subjective intention would not exist at all. The subject becomes a subject only through language.”<sup>79</sup>

Adorno writes, “The poetry of the late Hölderlin becomes polarized into names and correspondences on the one hand and concepts on the other.”<sup>80</sup> It seems that a work is not totally reducible to its structure, and thus Adorno refutes the philological approach he began with. This dialectical writing implies the paradoxical relationship between poetry and philosophy. For Adorno, Hölderlin’s poetry is attractive to phenomenologists and those who hope to elucidate the meaning of Being because of the “abstractions”, which “bear an inviting resemblance to the medium of philosophy.”<sup>81</sup> However, Hölderlin does not get any closer to an explanation of Being with the abstractions in his poetry than Heidegger does with his *Leitworte*. In dealing with names, both Heidegger and Hölderlin fail to encapsulate the idea of Being and these names become mere shells of failed ideas.

The problem is that poetry cannot be interpreted as *Aussage*, or message, as what is true of philosophy cannot be formulated into a poetic message. If the philosopher fails to distinguish between them, as Adorno accuses Heidegger of doing, he effectively deaestheticize poetry and it becomes philosophy. Poetry cannot be any more effective at characterizing reality than philosophy is if it is neutralized in this way. As Adorno writes, “The truth content’s aesthetic medium is ignored; Hölderlin is skewered on the alleged *Leitworte* selected by Heidegger for authoritarian purposes.”<sup>82</sup> It seems that, for Adorno, Heidegger has committed the very offense he sought to avoid in his essays—he has taken

---

<sup>78</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 136.

<sup>79</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 137.

<sup>80</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 123.

<sup>81</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 123

<sup>82</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 116.

a utilitarian approach to poetry and given it an instrumental value through his analysis of it.

In order for the relationship between philosophy and poetry to be productive and positive, the two must come to each other without violence. Philosophy is capable of elucidating truth content within poetry, as poetry benefits from the conceptuality that philosophical considerations reveal. Like the relationship between language and Being, the relationship between philosophy and poetry cannot be understood in terms of mastery. Poetry is a mere vehicle for philosophy, and philosophy also serves as a vehicle for the poem as long as it remains indifferent to the poetry itself. For Heidegger, any commentary that philosophy provides must make itself superfluous. Adorno's problem with Heidegger's analysis of Hölderlin is rooted in the fact that Heidegger turns poetic lines into statements; therefore the two are dialectically elided in his work. This makes his discourse quasi-poetic, which is problematic for Adorno, as he holds that the difference between the two must be respected. By picking and choosing certain words, Heidegger is effectively detemporalizing the truth content of the poem and neutralizing its intrinsic value. Adorno writes, "Heidegger's is false in that, as method, it detaches itself from the matter at hand and infiltrates the aspect of Hölderlin's poetry that requires philosophy with philosophy from the outside...the assertion of an unarticulated unity of form and content is no longer adequate."<sup>83</sup> This unity can only occur if the poem is viewed as a totality.

For Adorno, Heidegger's treatment of the poet is a misguided glorification. His, "pseudo-poetry testifies against his philosophy of poetry", and his "cheap heroizing of the poet" draws the focus away from the medium that is the locus of the truth content.<sup>84</sup> Setting Hölderlin apart with the metaphysical elevation a philosophical treatment allows for lacks "sensitivity to the collective strength that produces spiritual individualization in the first place... detemporaliz[ing] the truth content of philosophy and literary works."<sup>85</sup> By giving poetry the philosophical treatment, Heidegger already ensures that the results

---

<sup>83</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 128.

<sup>84</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 116.

<sup>85</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 121.

of his reading will bear witness to his method. It is apparent that Heidegger's utilitarian attitude toward the deconstruction of poetry is challenging in light of his belief that such searching for instrumental value is what has caused society's fallen status.

Adorno holds that language only designates things, which must mean that language operates as a mere medium for universality. This is problematic because it leaves words incapable of rendering things in their particularity. He writes, "They are mere signs. They do not want to be that; it is a death sentence for them. This was the price Hölderlin had to pay. His poetry diverges decisively from philosophy, because the latter takes an affirmative stance toward the negation of existing entities."<sup>86</sup> In *Parataxis*, this is the essential violence that characterizes language. In order for things to be elevated to the conceptual level, they must die in their particularity. The only method of maintaining some level of particularity is through proper names. Proper names are supposed to render individuality, as they cannot be subsumed under generalization. Adorno writes of the desire to retain individuality, "it is produced by nostalgia for the missing name, as well as by nostalgia for a universality, in the good sense..."<sup>87</sup> However, no object is capable of resisting the universal just as no language is capable of rendering the particularity of a thing in its essence. This means that of course Hölderlin's poetry is incapable of reconciling the actual and conceptual or the finite and the infinite. Reconciliation is ultimately blocked, as language cannot be divorced from conceptuality. Adorno says of Hölderlin, "he pointed up the untruth in any reconciliation of the general and the particular within an unreconciled reality..."<sup>88</sup> He reveals this dualistic nature of language through the paratactic language of his poetry.

For Adorno, the only form that can operate without reducing concepts to objects is the essay. He writes, "The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary

---

<sup>86</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 123.

<sup>87</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 124.

<sup>88</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Parataxis*, 127.

character.”<sup>89</sup> The essay is the only medium capable of portraying the world as a totality, in that its contingency necessitates a whole. As a constellation of concepts, it is free from both philosophy and literature; it bridges the gap between the two. The essay is not an objective treatise, as it is merely subjective. As he writes in *The Essay as Form*, “Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done. The essay mirrors what is loved and hated instead of presenting the intellect, on the model of a boundless work ethic, as *creatio ex nihilo*.”<sup>90</sup> In his writings, Adorno mobilizes the essay in a methodological manner, as he believes it is the only mode of presentation that adheres to the present social reality. Therefore, the essay is capable of holding out against the cheap reconciliation of ideology because it does not disavow antagonism. In this view, the essay is the form responsible for conveying the semiotic through conscious manipulation of the symbolic.

Adorno’s writings in *Notes to Literature* elucidate his theory that the dialectical relationship between philosophy and literature parallels the conflictual nature of social reality. His dialectical style of writing enables him to communicate his position that any attempt to render this reality in a non-contradictory manner is purely ideological and false. As he writes, “The ambitious transcendence of language beyond its meaning results in a meaninglessness that can easily be seized upon by a positivism to which one thinks oneself superior; and yet, one falls victim to positivism precisely through that meaninglessness that positivism criticizes and shares with it.”<sup>91</sup> For Adorno, art partakes of these contradictions. Like Heidegger’s problem of the abyss, Adorno’s issues with the culture of post-Holocaust horror are rooted in the notion that there are no new forms to communicate the new, degraded culture. Therefore, 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts are forced into 18<sup>th</sup> century forms—they are incapable of communicating anything that comes after the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that, for Adorno, the best explanation for the dialectical relationship between culture and literature lies at the formal level.

---

<sup>89</sup> Theodor Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” in *Notes to Literature I*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>90</sup> Adorno, *The Essay as Form*, 152.

<sup>91</sup> Adorno, *The Essay as Form*, 155.

### 3.2 | Lacoue-Labarthe & Political Implications

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe focuses his criticisms of Martin Heidegger's writing on content rather than form. He writes to reveal and condemn what he believes to be the fascist nature of Heidegger's thought. He believes that the political motivations behind Heidegger's writings overshadow his philosophy entirely. To back up this weighty claim, Lacoue-Labarthe assembled five of his lectures presented between 1987 and 1998 that highlight the damning "aesthetic-politico" echoes in Heidegger's work. In *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, Lacoue-Labarthe examines the intellectual background of Heidegger's treatment of poetry from Romanticism to German Idealism and explores the implications of the relationship between poetry, philosophy, and politics. He begins the prologue, entitled "Heidegger's Onto-Mythology" by citing Heidegger's declaration that "Knowing a primal history is not ferreting out the primitive and collecting bones. It is neither half nor whole natural science, but, if it is anything at all, it is mythology."<sup>92</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe lays the foundations here for his further investigation of Heidegger's concept of the provenance of the possibility of a 'historical Being' by introducing the fundamental concept of the Mytheme, and ultimately the possibility that Heidegger is the thinker of the National Socialist movement. He takes issue with both the context of Heidegger's analysis and than the implications of his method.

In his reading of Hölderlin, Heidegger remains attached to the nationalistic ideals of being ontologically rooted in German soil, though he rejects the bloody and discriminatory biologism of the Nazis. Because of his commitment to *Heimat*, or homeland, in his interpretations, it is necessary to consider Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin in the context of the political climate as it manifests itself and forms a motif in his analysis. Without wholly reducing his poetic thought to party politics, Lacoue-Labarthe believes that the importance of Heidegger's poetic thought lies in its connection to the essential thought of National Socialism. He writes, "The proposition "Heidegger is the thinker of National Socialism" means that Heidegger attempted to

---

<sup>92</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, "Heidegger's Onto-Mythology," in *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, trans. Jeff Fort. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 3.



think—and he is probably the only one to do so—the *unthought* of National Socialism, what he himself called in 1935 “the inner truth and greatness of the Movement.”<sup>93</sup> Whereas Adorno took issue with Heidegger’s hero-worshipping of poets, Lacoue-Labarthe problematizes his mythologizing of poetry itself towards the aim of establishing this inner greatness. He goes on to suggest that Hölderlin must be interpreted in a very different way and scrutinizes the relevant writings of Alain Badiou to this end.

In the Prologue, Lacoue-Labarthe seeks to clarify the influences that shape Heidegger’s concept of *beginning*. For Heidegger, “The fundamental error... is the opinion that the inception of history is primitive and backward, clumsy and weak. The opposite is true. The inception is what is most uncanny and the most violent.”<sup>94</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe points out that even though Heidegger has distanced himself from the National Socialist party, this statement is “somber” because of the obvious aesthetico-politico echo of a statement combining the origin of “knowledge” of the glorious inception of Greek history with “mythology” if the dream of German ideology was to invent a national myth characterized by the mimetic relationship between the Modern and the Ancient. Lacoue-Labarthe writes here that creation of a myth was deemed to be the only way to constitute an origin for the German “historial Dasein”, as Heidegger would phrase it. The dream of instituting a national myth is also illustrated by Wagner, Nietzsche, and of course the Nationalist Socialist project. Lacoue-Labarthe briefly defends Heidegger here, noting that is impossible to confuse Heidegger’s actual positions with those of the Nazis.

He then moves on to develop the idea of the beginning, or *Anfang*, even further. First he identifies the term ‘mythology’ as a *hapax*, or a term that only occurs once, in Heidegger’s writings on the *Ur-Geschichte*, an idea about the transcendental beginning of history he first presented in *Being and Time*.

Heidegger emphasized the need to find an origin of the spiritual-historical Dasein, and suggested it could be found in the irruption of Greek philosophy. This irruption, for Heidegger, represents the first time that a people rose up to “face beings as

---

<sup>93</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 83.

<sup>94</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 3.

a whole... as the beings that they are". Lacoue-Labarthe asks what the implications of "placing oneself" under the Greek beginning are, and Heidegger answered that this beginning is a-temporal in that it "stands there as the distant injunction that orders us to recapture its greatness" despite its historical context.<sup>95</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe compares this to the notion of Dasein as put forth in *Being and Time*, in terms of its a-temporal characteristics and inability to be exhausted. The parallel between the *Anfang* and the Dasein is, "why the opening of History, the rebeginning, is a repetition or retrieval of what did not yet arrive or begin."<sup>96</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe seems to argue that this represents the movement of *techne* from ontology of work to that of art. From this point on in the prologue, he is able to explicate the ways in which Heidegger equalizes art, origin, history, and myth. If the *Ur-Geschichte* as the origin of History is a matter of mythology, as Heidegger says, than art is essentially myth in its ability to characterize the beginning.

In this way, the mission of beginning has fallen entirely to mythology. Myth is the historical inscription of a people, and the poem is a Mytheme, or that element which is essential to the myth. By this, it is originary and capable of characterizing a "national epic". In the Epilogue, Lacoue-Labarthe writes, "Myth—*die Sage*, in Heidegger's vocabulary—reemerged ...because it was thought to be originarily linked to the being-of-a-people: to "peoplehood." Myth is the originary poem of every people."<sup>97</sup> It seems as though this is a Romantic notion.

Lacoue-Labarthe then brings up a new interpretation, the "national modernist" interpretation, that implies as Holderlin did that the Modern "should be understood...as the repetition of what did not happen in the Ancient—and art, or politics, or both together, should be understood as the anamnesis of the forgotten or the remembrance of what is originarily "potential" but absent." This would mean that there is no possible founding myth, and any "mythological *reconstitution* is illusory, erroneous, and indigent."<sup>98</sup> Any "German ideology" is only a representation of myth that is never more

---

<sup>95</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 7.

<sup>97</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 88.

<sup>98</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 15.

than a “confused and wounded ‘protest’”, to use Lacoue-Labarthe’s somewhat harsh wording.

In chapter one, Lacoue-Labarthe takes up the question of the Poem’s vocation, and he poses it as such, “Should poetry cease to be of interest to philosophy?”<sup>99</sup> It seems that the best way to go about determining the answer is to acknowledge the reason for asking the question in the first place. Lacoue-Labarthe recognizes that Alain Badiou is responsible for placing this problem at the center of what is at stake in philosophy. In *Being and Event*, Badiou holds that the Poem is specifically suited to philosophical discourse in the “age of the poets” from Hölderlin to Celan. For Badiou, philosophy should turn away from the Poem and re-devote itself to the initial conditions of the Matheme—politics, love, poetry, and mathematics. Lacoue-Labarthe takes issue with this thesis on the level of correctness and of justice. He points out that the stakes are immense, as exploration of this topic necessarily involves Heidegger’s legacy—one that notes the potential of the mutual exclusion of poetry, philosophy, and politics.

Lacoue-Labarthe seems to hold that Heidegger’s interpretation of myth as a means of thinking, which is how he reads Hölderlin, reflects the emphasis on aesthetics and politics from the era of German Romanticism. He held the Romantic poets to represent speculative Idealism and sought to demarcate Hölderlin from this historical implication. The Romantic poets, who represented the potential of German Ideology, sought to invent a new mythology with the aim of bringing Germany into its true historical, political place—to constitute an origin for a people’s “historial Dasein”.<sup>100</sup> Heidegger’s treatment of myth is a reflection of the Romantic goal to create the aesthetico-political, a goal that ultimately found expression through National Socialism. Heidegger’s position between the philosophical and the political seems to render him uniquely capable of speaking to the relationship between poetry, philosophy, and politics. In a situation with such severe implications, it is of course impossible not to choose a side.

Lacoue-Labarthe allows that the central aim of Badiou’s project is an attempt to make philosophy possible again by returning to Plato’s founding gesture. Poetry must be

---

<sup>99</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 4.

repudiated so that philosophy can exclusively provide the basis for truth in politics. This call for repudiation seems to be referring to the suturing between poetry, philosophy and politics that Badiou would suggest needs to be “unsutured”, as philosophy needs to be sutured to the other 3 aspects of the Matheme: politics, love, and mathematics. After 1945, in an effort to free itself of the political, philosophy handed itself over to the Poem—this is problematic for Badiou. Lacoue-Labarthe notes that the poetry of Paul Celan marks the end of the age of the poets for Badiou by calling for poetry to be sent back to its own solitude.<sup>101</sup> At this time, he raises 3 questions to Badiou’s thesis about the relationship between philosophy, poetry, and politics.

First, it seems that Badiou’s concept of philosophy is too narrow for Lacoue-Labarthe, as is his concept of poetry. His list ignores Goethe, Rilke, and others. Celan, Hölderlin, Heidegger would have differing lists. For Lacoue-Labarthe, this points to the high political and philosophical stakes. Next, he asks if Badiou’s philosophical absolutizing of poetry is grounded outside of poetry. For Lacoue-Labarthe, absolutizing of poetry is based on the provenance, or native element which the myth promotes. This includes the political connotations of myth as the potential to furnish a national identity. Finally, he inquires as to the nature of the essential link between philosophy, poetry, and politics? He does not ask to cast doubt upon the concept of the suture, but rather to suggest that the Mytheme is sutured rather than the Poem. This seems to be where Lacoue-Labarthe believes the politics to be engaged. He identifies the two remarks of Badiou that speak to the bonds/sutures and lists three propositions to support his own case.

First, Badiou states that the existence of the poets would have been aporetic without Heidegger’s thought. The poets lent legitimate historicity to the thought that philosophy was handed over to poetry when the idea of political historicity was abused by National Socialism.<sup>102</sup> Next, he speaks to the nature of the suture between philosophy and poetry, and doing so incriminates their bond. He also incriminates the “suturing to the political of philosophy’s suturing to the Poem”.<sup>103</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Badiou is wrongly critical of the poem. Rather, he could solve the misunderstanding by

---

<sup>101</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 19.

<sup>102</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 22.

<sup>103</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 23.

identifying the Mytheme as the problematic element. Perhaps the Mytheme is that which is sutured.

Lacoue-Labarthe bases his criticism on Alain Badiou's concept of the "suturing" of philosophy to poetry in his *Manifesto for Philosophy*. He identifies that it is Badiou's aim "to make philosophy possible once again by taking a step beyond the declaration of its end."<sup>104</sup> For Badiou, this necessitates another event like Plato's 'surgical removal' of poetry from philosophy—an "unsuturing" of philosophy from its relationship with poetry.

For Lacoue-Labarthe, Badiou leaves out the fact that philosophy's problematic relationship with poetry, which is present even in the very beginning of philosophy, is a result of the origin of poetry, or myth.<sup>105</sup> Badiou wrongly believes philosophy to have been sutured to the poem in the age of the poets. Lacoue-Labarthe suggests that philosophy is historically sutured to the Mytheme, and that such a suturing has brought about consequences for poetry, philosophy, and politics.<sup>106</sup>

Lacoue-Labarthe goes on to say that philosophy's refusal of myth, first represented by Plato, was repeated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique*. Through his critique of metaphysics, Kant brought about "the first anamnesis of philosophy and, therefore, the first repercussion after the fact...of the Platonic decision" to separate myth from of philosophy.<sup>107</sup> It is this anamnesis, or recollection, that seems to have prepared the reactionary ground for the Romanticist project.<sup>108</sup> As Lacoue-Labarthe sees it, this Romantic pursuit of a new mythological religion led inevitably to the National Socialist politics of the 1930s, as well as to the poetic thinking of Heidegger.

So the suture does not join poetry and philosophy so much as it joins philosophy and myth, a connection that has dangerous implications when considered in terms of Nazi ideology. Lacoue-Labarthe traces the historical development of National Socialism out of German Romanticism. He summarizes the Romantic project by citing Schelling, "Philosophy was born and nourished by poetry in the infancy of knowledge; we may

---

<sup>104</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 18

<sup>105</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 21.

<sup>106</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 27.

<sup>108</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 28.

thus expect them, on completion, to flow back like so many individual streams into the universal ocean of poetry from which they took their source... a new mythology is itself to arise..."<sup>109</sup> The making of myth is the foundation of the State, and so the creator of the Mytheme plays a political role without being directly involved in the political, himself.

The suturing that Heidegger speaks to in his separation from Nazism is not only a suturing of philosophy and poetry, but also a "suturing to the political of philosophy's suturing to the Poem".<sup>110</sup> Since the Poem is a Mytheme for Heidegger, the withdrawal is not a separation from politics. It seems that the political and the poetical are linked further by his withdrawal. As Lacoue-Labarthe writes in the epilogue, "Every withdrawal traces and draws out that from which it withdraws."<sup>111</sup> The emphasis changes—not from politics to poetry but from politics as poetry to myth. The connection between politics and poetry is strengthened through myth. While Badiou sees that Heidegger is "handing philosophy over to poetry", Lacoue-Labarthe sees it as handing philosophy and poetry together over to Myth and that is what makes Heidegger, though not simply a Nazi, the thinker of National Socialism.<sup>112</sup>

Ultimately, it seems this first chapter is meant to present the implications of the Heideggerian notion of myth as beginning and the implications of Badiou's idea of the suture/un-suturing of philosophy, poetry, and politics. Lacoue-Labarthe does leave the end of the first chapter with a question. He asks, if it is possible today to think a Poem without any Mytheme, "one that has renounced neither thinking itself in its possibility... nor foretelling for human beings what is necessary—that is, answering, for their sake, and in their favor, for what is necessary."<sup>113</sup> He then recalls Benjamin, who represents a treatment of poetry that opposes the Heideggerian one.

Benjamin sought to get at the "esoteric heart" of Romanticism where history and religion coincide.<sup>114</sup> For him, this was the location of the drive to create a new religion based on "art understood in its essence", *Dichtung*. For Lacoue-Labarthe, Benjamin

---

<sup>109</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 23.

<sup>111</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 84.

<sup>112</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 83.

<sup>113</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 36.

seems to represent that the poetry of Romanticism necessitated interpretation. This is where Lacoue-Labarthe ties the chapter together. Benjamin allows the designation of poetry to return to the Matheme, as Badiou suggested it should. However, Benjamin's Matheme is "not the 'mathematical'. It is the Poem itself, that is, prose. So, Why should philosophy, or what remains of it 'unsuture' itself from the poem, if at the same time... this can engage another politics."<sup>115</sup> Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Heidegger's poetical thought is archi-fascist whereas Benjamin saves both philosophy and poetry from the political nature of the Mytheme. For Heidegger, the poetry of Hölderlin asks for an heroic return to myth, while Benjamin reads it as a call for a new sobriety of art.<sup>116</sup> What Hölderlin is able to present through these alternate readings is that both philosophy and poetry are incompatible with the Mytheme and require the Matheme instead.

In the Epilogue, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that Heidegger enables us to understand the "political stakes of art in the modern age" and allows the possibility of understanding that *techne* is what is at stake in the modern political, in the sense that "the one who fashions in the highest sense, is the statesman".<sup>117</sup> He wraps up the Epilogue by stating that the notion of the 'agonistic', which seems to have played a great role in the establishment of Nazi politics as 'total artwork', is present in three Heideggerian motifs. These motifs of Uprootedness, Repetition of Greek destiny, and the theologico-political, which Lacoue-Labarthe explains as the lamentation over an "existential loss", the appeal to a recommencement, and the listening to the poem as "gospel", create the foundations for the idea of the 'political religion' at the foundation of totalitarianism.

So, the question remains if Lacoue-Labarthe has proven Heidegger's thought to be fascist. He is aware of the fact that his text is short, only ninety-two pages, and that this is hardly enough opportunity to fully develop such an incendiary claim. Whether or not he establishes Heidegger's fascism, Lacoue-Labarthe succeeds in clarifying the relationship between Heidegger's thought and National Socialism through his presentation of the political implications of poetry as mythology.

---

<sup>115</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 37.

<sup>116</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 37.

<sup>117</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, 89.

## 4 | Remembrance

Having worked through both Heidegger's writings and the writings of two of his critics, I can say that I understand why his decision to do away with the modern notion of the subject creates problems from the standpoint of metaphysical analysis. The modern notion of the subject allows for a direct connection between seeing and signifying—it creates a reassuring aura of straightforwardness. However, I find myself still unsure as to whether this new poetic language truly rids itself of any trace of subjectivity, as Heidegger claims it does. I wonder if it is possible for there to be a structure of the self that is allowed within the poem. If there were room for the notion of the self within poetry, would it really hinder the poem's ability to carry out ontological saying? In her essay, *Poetic Subjectivity and the Elusiveness of Being*, Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei pursues a similar line of questioning by performing a close reading of Hölderlin and seeking to detect a vestige of self within his verses.

Gosetti-Ferencei points out that for Heidegger, Hölderlin's poetry cannot be reduced to subjective expression, historicity, or language. That is to say, Hölderlin's verses are not a result of his biological or empirical experiences.<sup>118</sup> Hölderlin is complicit, as “the poet of poets” in the moment of transcending the metaphysical understanding of the subject. Like the artist, the poet is tied to his accomplishment through his creative production and subsequent abandonment of it. According to Heidegger, the poet's work should stand alone to communicate the truth of Being and the founding of history. As Gosetti-Ferencei writes,

“The poet is not merely a being among beings, but a structure and a shelter of the interstice between Being and beings, and the one who can wrest himself, or rather is wrested, from the domination of beings as mere actuality or mere presence—in order to utter the historical, essential word of remembrance and preparation.”<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, “Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Toward a New Poetics of Dasein.” (New York: Fordham University Press, 204) 101.

<sup>119</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 105.



At this point, it occurs to me that this may mean the poet is not necessarily characterized by any action that could turn him into the subject. He is passive and seems to be more of a medium or vessel than an agent. I think that Gosetti-Ferencei truly captures this passivity when she writes, “Thus poetic language, when it is essential, is not to be reduced to communication, nor to culture, both of which imply Enlightenment-humanist rather than historical-ontological concerns.”<sup>120</sup> History and ontology are not the result of subjectivity; rather, they are the products of Being, itself.

For Heidegger, the author of the poem is not the subject and therefore does not determine the quality of the poetic utterance. He writes, “Who the author is remains unimportant here, as with every other masterful poem. The mastery consists precisely in this, that the poem can deny the poet’s person and name.”<sup>121</sup> This seems to simultaneously confirm Adorno’s critical attitude towards Heidegger’s deification of the poet and the notion that poetic experiences are ontological rather than subjective. The idea that the identity of the poet is not of importance seems to further emphasize the power of the poem itself.

Gosetti-Ferencei cites the philosophy of Julia Kristeva as she presents a compelling alternative to Heidegger’s complete erasure of subjectivity. Kristeva, as Gosetti-Ferencei notes, “suggests that every utterance, and thus every account of language, implies a subject, albeit one radically conditioned or ‘shattered.’”<sup>122</sup> In fact, it is Heidegger’s moment of *Gelassenheit*, or releasement, that reveals the subject’s role in language.<sup>123</sup> In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva builds on the ideas of Jacques Lacan as she takes a psychoanalytic approach to an evaluation of language and comes up with an idea that appears to present an alternative idea to Heidegger’s treatment of subjectivity. For Kristeva, the language of poetry takes part in a dynamic signifying process in which bodily drives are discharged through our efforts at signification and use of words. The expression of our individual drives is what shapes our subjectivity, and there are two modes of operation by which they are expressed.

---

<sup>120</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 105.

<sup>121</sup> Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 195.

<sup>122</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 202.

<sup>123</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 202.

First, semiotic language is an evocation of feeling or a discharge of inner energies. These are the sounds man uses in infancy to convey his basic needs through rhythms and noises to his mother before he has access to symbolic forms of language. Man uses symbolic language once he reaches the developmental stage in which he can grasp the difference between himself and the objects that surround him and communicate that difference with words. It is a mode of conveying clear and orderly meaning that would be devoid of meaning were it not for the latent rhythms of the semiotic that remain hidden in language even after man has a mastery of the symbolic. This dependent, dialectical relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic characterizes all linguistic expression after the point of this thetic break. Once the body leaves prelinguistic, psychic space, bodily sounds turn into a verbal means of communication and subjectivity begins to develop. The uneasy interchange between the two modes of communication is impossible to transcend, so the subject is always in process.

Kristeva's post-Freudian idea of subjectivity shares with Heidegger the notion that utterance in the form of speech is not the pivotal moment of language. Rather, primal significations that are revealed in poetic language illustrate the ways in which language can disclose itself in a moment of *Gelassenheit*. This echoes Heidegger's assertion that "language speaks". Both also share the idea that language extends beyond its communicative function to convey something essential about the experience of Being, though Kristeva maintains that the semiotic presents the possibility of disclosing the subject. Both also reject the idea that language is merely a communicative expression that is produced consciously by the "self", or subject—Kristeva's theory of the unsayable is grounded in social interactions while Heidegger's essential "saying" is not grounded in the idea of a body. It seems that Kristeva's subjects gain the ability to communicate effectively from social interaction, which clearly requires a body, while Heidegger's Beings get their beingness from words, themselves.

The semiotic, essential nature of language is made more obvious by the language of poetry. Poetic language is uniquely capable of signifying ontologically because it articulates the moment of the thetic break, or the moment when the symbolic outweighs the semiotic, in a way that can be heard without ever being communicated in the realm

of the symbolic. By verbally expressing this threshold, poetry confronts presuppositions about the linguistic relationship between truth and clarity. For Heidegger, this expression takes place independently of subjectivity, whereas Kristeva would say that it illustrates the very essence of subjectivity. Either way, poetry represents a bringing to the fore of the infinite realm of the semiotic that other forms do not.

It seems to me that Kristeva and Adorno agree that the trace of subjectivity is located within language's capacity for expression and designation. Though Heidegger noted that language plays a role in the founding of Being, language also plays a role in the furthering of Being through human interaction. To this view, the social element is what gives language its truth; truth is located in the totality of the communicative structure. This structure is what allows the message to be communicated. Kristeva's moment of the thetic break represents the synthesis of Heidegger's ontology and Adorno's notion of individual expression, and is therefore capable of constituting a subject without making the "self" necessary for meaningful communication to occur. In this way, her poetic theory seems to me to represent a compromise between Heidegger's dismissal of subjectivity and the identity-driven utterances that characterize non-poetic communication. It also allows for the violence that Adorno believes to characterize language—in the absence of the paternalistic law of the symbolic realm there is nothing to prevent the kind of violence that troubled Lacoue-Labarthe in his analysis, as well. It seems that Lacoue-Labarthe was right, in a way, to point out that the ambiguity inherent in Heidegger's linguistic program creates the potential for a certain violence. However, as Gosetti-Ferencei points out, the fascism of which Lacoue-Labarthe accuses Heidegger hardly seems driven by semiotic and primal urges; rather, it seems almost wholly symbolic in its ideology and obsessive in its adherence to history.<sup>124</sup> The dialectical relationship between the two seems to be furthered by the suggestion that the semiotic represents that which is most flexible and innate while fascism is unmoving and imposing. The question remains whether the consequences of a return to the semiotic prove the importance of the symbolic or suggest that the truth of Being is ambiguous and violent and the symbolic represents the failure to suppress it.

---

<sup>124</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language", 224.

However, it is important to note that not all poetry succeeds in venturing beyond subjectivity in Heidegger's view. Rainer Maria Rilke's poetry, especially his *Duino Elegies*, did not receive the appreciation that Heidegger afforded Hölderlin. He wrote in a 1982 lecture on Parmenides that Rilke's concept of the Open did not come close to the *aletheia* that poetry is required to perform to speak being.

“What Rilke terms “the Open”, principally in the eighth of his Duino Elegies, has nothing but the sound of the same words in common with what the thinking of the essence of *aletheia* comprehends in the term “the Open”. A brief explanation of what Rilke means by “the Open” can assist us to form a more stable concept and to be ready for a more clarified contemplation of what is thought in the essential realm of *aletheia* by means of a resolute differentiation from the Rilkean word. [...] It is necessary only to point out unambiguously, that Rilke's naming of “the Open” is different in every respect from what is conceived concerning “the Open” in its essential relation to *aletheia* and from what is to be conceived in terms of a conceptual question.”

On the continuum between the semiotic and the symbolic, the poem falls closer to the semiotic while the essay is the closest to wholly symbolic as it is possible to be while still maintaining a dimension of the philosophical. For Kristeva, it is because of poetry that the thetic moment has not taken all communication and rendered it totally symbolic. By this, poetry is able to illuminate the ineffability of Being by creating infinite linguistic possibilities through the shattering of syntax.<sup>125</sup> It seems to me that because man is capable of composing poetry in this way, he is capable of experiencing the ontological truth of his existence. However, I think Kristeva believes the primary function of poetry is to balance the technical aspects of the symbolic rather than to reveal truth about being. Nevertheless, both Kristeva and Heidegger agree that poetry communicates something primordial by serving as the medium through which language gathers Being and mortals together.

Having read the criticisms of Lacoue-Labarthe, I tend to agree that Heidegger's phenomenological project becomes muddled when considered in terms of a

---

<sup>125</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 216.

mythological beginning or return. While I would not deny that a departure from the rules of the symbolic does a violence to the unity of the symbolic and the semiotic, I would question whether this violence is dialectically problematic for the self. It seems to me that it may actually allow the self to exist more truthfully. If subjectivity is a product of the self's unquestioning linguistic activities, then subjectivity comes from evaluating objects in only the instrumental sense. This implies a lack of phenomenological sensitivity, an ignorance of *aletheia*.<sup>126</sup> Poetry places the semiotic at the fore of communication to promote awareness of that which must be uncovered.

The problem with poetry, it seems, is that the scattered syntax leaves the truth content of a poem open to too much interpretation. As Adorno writes, "Since the interpretation of poetry deals with what was not said, one cannot criticize the interpretation for not being stated in the poetry."<sup>127</sup> The fact that there is the possibility of multiple interpretations seems to signify that there is a necessary trace of subjectivity within poetry, and it is this trace which gives each poem renewed meaning for the individual. To my understanding, this is the element that gives poetry its uniquely broad influence. By this, I mean that great poetry awakens something, though never the same thing, in every reader who carefully considers it. I think that the universal truth that poetry uncovers is the very fact that there is something to be uncovered, an essence to be poetized, within every being. This is the element of commonality that communication presupposes, and it is what is most important within the poem; it is more important than the words on the page or the poet who put them there.

I think Heidegger would disagree with my synopsis because, admittedly, I am evoking something like the human imagination, which he believes to be an element of subjectivity fueled by mere images.<sup>128</sup> Heidegger agrees that the relevant aspect of the poem is not the content, but rather the "poeticized" (*das Gedichtete*). The content, as imagery, appeals to imagination while the poeticized is the true subject matter, or something more pure and essential to the experience of reading the poem.

In considering this question of imagery, I return to Heidegger's analysis of Georg Trakl's *A Winter Evening* that I introduced in the second chapter. The poem is

---

<sup>126</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 31.

<sup>127</sup> Adorno, *Parataxis*, 116.

<sup>128</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, "Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language," 74.

filled with vivid imagery that creates a clear picture of the chill of winter and the isolated wanderers before they find the plentitude of the hearth. The first two stanzas seem wholly characterized by this sort of imagery, and I cannot resist the scene forming in my mind as I picture the snow falling and the dark paths. If the poet is able to cause this scene in my mind, was it not first formed in his mind? In my view, the answer to this question means either that the poet is indeed a subject, as he also possesses an image of the scene in his consciousness, or, as Gosetti-Ferencei notes, for Heidegger these objects “*are* the poet himself, since the poet’s word is the “telling-naming”... This does not anthropomorphize these elements, but conversely, desubjectifies the poet. The poet is himself a “sign”...”<sup>129</sup> This is how the poet is uniquely capable of conjuring things in their essences without participating in a relationship of dominance with the things. The poet is not a subject because the things he writes about are gathered as echoes rather than as his own unique moods or experiences.<sup>130</sup>

As the only medium that is capable of uncovering Being in its elusive shieldedness, poetry relies on a primordial unity that is unbounded by human subjectivity. This seems to me to be the element of poetry that is most mythological—the continuing faith in what has been lost. The theme of remembrance of what has been lost pervades Hölderlin’s poem *Andenken*, to which Heidegger dedicated a lecture in his text *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*. The poem crystalizes the pain of incurable distance while emphasizing the poet’s role in establishing permanence despite this distance.

#### REMEMBRANCE

*The northeast blows,  
Of winds the dearest  
To me, because a fiery spirit  
And a good voyage it promises to mariners.  
But go now and greet,  
The beautiful Garonne,  
And the gardens of Bordeaux  
There, where along the sharp bank  
Runs the path and into the river  
Deep falls the brook, but above  
Gaze out a noble pair*

<sup>129</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 104.

<sup>130</sup> Gosetti-Ferencei, *Heidegger, Hölderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language*, 105.

*Of oaks and white poplars;*

*Still I remember this well, and how  
The broad treetops of the elm wood  
Lean over the mill,  
But in the courtyard a fig-tree grows.  
On holidays there too  
Walk the brown women  
On silken soil,  
In the month of March,  
When night and day are equal  
And over slow paths,  
Heavy with golden dreams,  
Lulling breezes drift.*

*But someone pass me,  
Full of dark light,  
The fragrant cup,  
So that I may rest; for sweet  
Would be slumber in the shade.  
It is not good  
To be soulless with mortal  
Thoughts. But a  
Conversation is good and to say  
The heart's intention, to hear much  
About days of love,  
And deeds which occurred.*

*But where are the friends? Bellarmin  
With his companion? Many  
Are shy of going to the source;  
For richness begins namely  
In the sea. They,  
Like painters, bring together  
The beauty of the earth and disdain  
Not the winged war, and  
To dwell alone, for years, beneath  
The leafless mast, where through the night gleam neither  
The holidays of the town,  
Nor lyre-music and native dancing.*

*But now to the Indies  
The men have gone,  
There to the windy peak  
On vine-covered hills, where down  
The Dordogne comes*

*And together with the magnificent  
Garonne as wide as the sea  
The river flows out. But it is  
The sea that takes and gives memory,*

*And love too fixes attentive eyes  
But what remains is founded by the poets.*<sup>131</sup>

Whereas Rilke failed to reach far enough into the abyss and was therefore not fully capable of questioning metaphysics in his *Duino Elegies*, Hölderlin is able to emerge from the Cartesian frame and conjure a place of origin for being; he can access the Open. Heidegger's idea of the potential of poetry seems completely embodied in Hölderlin's *Andenken*, or Rememberance. For Heidegger, the act of remembering represents the opposite of the modern, metaphysical drive to absorb and dominate; that is why *Andenken* is capable of capturing the moment of *aletheia* that great poets can conjure through their venturing.

For Heidegger, remembrance, or commemoration, represents a return to the determination without dominance that has been forgotten—it speaks more to destiny than it does to history. This is the destiny of the truth of being. As Avital Ronell points out, Heidegger's 1941-42 lectures entitled *Andenken* in *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* was presented at a historically relevant time, a time at which he is believed to have instilled his talk with a disillusioned debate with the biologism of National Socialism.<sup>132</sup> He insists, in his opening remarks, that the reader must not become awestruck by the beauty of a poem, as that would mean he were approaching it as if it were an object. He writes, “through a hasty attachment to “subject matter,” our attention to the poetic word would be immediately led into error.”<sup>133</sup>

Heidegger interprets the poem's landscape to reveal the tropes that convey something more than a recollection of personal experience; the content is not that which is essential. Each element of the landscape, from the fig tree to the women, comes to the poet in the form of a thought that has created a marking within his memory. Heidegger tracks the events of greeting, sending, strangeness, celebration, and commemoration as they compose the poet's encounter with his thoughts. He believes Hölderlin's mariners to be poets who “must therefore know the heavenly bodies and be masters in reading the

---

<sup>131</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry.” Trans: Keith Hoeller. (New York: Humanity Books, 2000), 105.

<sup>132</sup> Avital Ronell. “On the Misery of Theory without Poetry: Heidegger's Reading of Hölderlin's “Andenken””, *PMLA*, Vol. 120, No. 1, Special Topic: On Poetry (Jan., 2005), pp. 16-32. Published by: [Modern Language Association](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486142) Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486142>

<sup>133</sup> Heidegger. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, 107.



quarters of the sky.”<sup>134</sup> The aforementioned wind beckons the poets as mariners toward their destiny; they take part in the willing that illustrates man’s driving toward his destiny in poetry. But just as soon as the wind greets the poet, he instructs it to go away. By this, the wind illustrates the ultimate transience—a vehicle for the poet’s willing, though he himself is grounded in historicity.<sup>135</sup>

Because the gusts of wind in Hölderlin’s opening line and the lulling breezes of later stanzas represent the fleeting nature of our encounter with our originary past rather than just wind, special attention should be paid to their movement in the poem. The poet sends the wind to reconstitute his memory through greeting. This is illuminated in the line, “*Geh aber nun und grüße /But go now, go and greet.*” This Greeting is at once a return and indicative of a departure. As Avital Ronell writes, “The genuine Greeting amounts to a kind of promising correspondence, a reciprocal promise that aims to correspond to the most essential level of the other...The Greeting is a letting be of things and of human beings.”<sup>136</sup> This is a greeting without economy or permanence; rather, it seems representative of an uncovering of being. Authentic truth is revealed through this greeting, as it is echoed in the poem’s landscape, which is a gathering greater than a mere collection of objects. Greeting allows the poet to establish a nearness in which he can experience the light of the true greeting.<sup>137</sup> For Heidegger, poetry allows a remembrance of greeting and therefore a founding for the poet’s dwelling. Though we cannot find a foundation in the abyss, the poets create a new foundation out of what remains through poetry.

The origin of this founding is located in the last line, “*But what remains is founded by the poets.*” This famous and much interpreted final line seems to establish why Hölderlin is both the poet of poets and Heidegger’s muse. His poetry comes close to the origin of Being and creates a grounding for man in the abyss by the passive gesturing of the will. As Heidegger writes in *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*, “We never find the ground in the abyss. Being is never a being. But because being and the essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present at hand, they must be

---

<sup>134</sup> Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 111.

<sup>135</sup> Ronell, “On the Misery of Theory Without Poetry”, 22.

<sup>136</sup> Ronell, “On the Misery of Theory Without Poetry”, 22.

<sup>137</sup> Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 120.

freely created, posited and bestowed. Such free bestowal is a founding.”<sup>138</sup> The granting in Hölderlin’s verses is present in the echoes of the poet’s thoughts. The verses are constituted by thoughts, and the subject falls away to the passivity of commemoration.

---

<sup>138</sup> Heidegger, *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry*, 59.

## Conclusion I

Heidegger's critics are rightfully skeptical of his dialogue with Hölderlin's poetry, as his rejection of subjectivity represents a jarring departure from our understanding in the modern era. Ultimately, a successful attempt to understand Heidegger's theory of language seems to require acceptance of the increasingly blurred line between poetry and thought. The poet possesses the qualities of a thinker and the thinker takes on an element of the poetic, though it seems that the two never quite become one in the same. The progressively more poetic style in Heidegger's writings after the turn toward Hölderlin's poetry illustrates this merging. His inclusion of "The Thinker as Poet" in *Poetry, Language, Thought* makes the merging explicit.

After turning from his explication of the intricacies of Dasein in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's adoption of a poetic style allows him to identify the thinking that surpasses mere instrumental representation. Heidegger's understanding of poetry as a projective utterance capable of founding truth renders it uniquely capable of bringing forth Being without subjectivity, as I hope to have shown. The poet alone is capable of perceiving the concealed unknown and disclosing its truth to Being. Without poetry, we would be unquestioning in our groundlessness—value-driven entities lacking authentic humanity. Heidegger sought to find a means by which man could go outside of his understanding of consciousness to come together with Being. He found a path in the language of great poetry.

## Bibliography I

- Adorno, Theodor W. 1991. *Notes to Literature vol I & II*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann New York: Columbia University Press
- Adorno, Theodor W. 1973. *The Jargon of Authenticity*. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press
- Allen, William S. 2007. *Ellipsis: of poetry and the experience of language after Heidegger, Hölderlin, and Blanchot*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Cerbone, David. 1999. "Heidegger and Dasein's 'Bodily Nature'", in in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, in Simon Critchley (Series Editor), *Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
- Paul Edwards, "Heidegger's Quest for Being", *Philosophy: Cambridge University Press* Vol, 64. No. 250. (Oct., 1989) p 456. [Http://www.jstor.com/stable/](http://www.jstor.com/stable/) (Accessed 25/11/09)
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. "Thinking and Poetizing in Heidegger and in Hölderlin's "Andenken"". In *Heidegger Toward the Turn: Essays on the Work of the 1930s* . ed. James, Risser. 1999. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Gossetti-Ferencei, Jennifer. 2004. *Heidegger, Holderlin, and the Subject of Poetic Language: Towards a New Poetics of Dasein*. New York: Fordham University Press
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1999. *Contributions to Philosophy: from Enowning*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 2000. *Elucidations of Hölderlin's poetry*. Trans. Keith Hoeller. Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books
- Heidegger, Martin. 2009. *Logic as the question concerning the essence of language*. Albany: State University of New York Press
- Heidegger, Martin. 1971. *Poetry, language, thought*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kleinberg-Levin, David. 1999. "The Ontological Dimension of Embodiment: Heidegger's Thinking of Being," in Donn Welton (ed.), *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, in Simon Critchley (Series Editor), *Blackwell Readings in Continental Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. pp. 122-149
- Kockelmans, Joseph J. 1972. *On Heidegger and Language*. Evanston [Ill.]: Northwestern University Press.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe. 2007. *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Ronell, Avital. "On the Misery of Theory without Poetry: Heidegger's Reading of Hölderlin's "Andenken"", *PMLA* , Vol. 120, No. 1, Special Topic: On Poetry (Jan., 2005), pp. 16-32. Published by: [Modern Language Association](#) Article Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25486142>

Scott, Charles E. 2001. *Companion to Heidegger's Contributions to philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Sherman, David. 2007. *Sartre and Adorno: the dialectics of subjectivity*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

Wrathall, Mark A. 2011. *Heidegger and Unconcealment: truth, language, and history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.