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*The Ecology of Being*

A Dissertation Presented

by

**Wesley Nolan Mattingly**

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Philosophy**

Stony Brook University

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Abstract of the Dissertation

***The Ecology of Being***

by

**Wesley Nolan Mattingly**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

in

**Philosophy**

Stony Brook University

**2017**

Ours is a world unsettled by ecological catastrophe. From its scorched horizons, unsettled questions issue. Do we in our time have a sense for ecology? Nature? Have we truly understood *its* sense? This dissertation unearths the pre-theoretical simplicity, elemental ecstasy, and untold history of experience in search of answers – unthought by science yet copious to the senses. In it I develop a lived ontology of nature through the twofold ecological difference between: the sensible earth and world; the sentient flesh and body. Theoretically, this sense of ecology is an extension and enrichment of concepts sown by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Historically, I ground it on the Heraclitean experience of *logos*, the Homeric experience of *oikos*, and explore their convergence in the wisdom of Thracian women, foreigners, and slaves. Along the way that history is revitalized for the modern reader and expressively concretized by poetry, earthwork art, and a first-hand account of being lost in the wilderness, immersed in the waters, and at work on the trails of Yosemite. From these grounds I harvest an original interpretation of the Presocratic archeologies of the elements and a seminal renovation of eco-phenomenology for the twenty-first century. Against the classical reduction of nature to horizons immanent to subjectivity, presence, or ownness, I rethink its transcendence on the basis of our earthly finitude and ecological vocation as caretakers of earth. This allocentric incarnation of care releases a way of dwelling other-wise than the devastator, deferring projective disclosure to allow for affective exposure to the undisclosable otherness of wild being.

These investigations culminate in the thought of the ecological fourfold. Reworked from the Heideggerian *Geviert* and the Merleau-Pontian chiasm, it limns how the four ekstases of the ecological difference gather into every experience of the things themselves. Existence emerges therein as the cross-fertilization of corporeal being-in-the-world and carnal being-of-the-earth. Finally, the folding of the fourfold adds to our understanding of time. A diagrammatic duplication of these temporal folds reveals how the inexplicable past and future of the earth are implicated in the timeliness of existence, furnishing the untimely, geohistorical grounds of being-there, in and toward the historical world.

*No one owns this land.  
This land belongs to the earth.  
We are only caretakers.  
We're caretakers of the earth.*

–Water Protector of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe  
protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline  
3 September 2016

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### **Abbreviations of Martin Heidegger's Works**

The following abbreviations of Heidegger's works are used in parenthetical citations and footnotes throughout. Aside from untranslated works, all citations include reference to page number(s) in English translations first, followed by the corresponding German pagination. Because cross-references are provided in Macquarrie's and Robinson's translation of *Sein und Zeit*, I have adopted the convention of citing this text without the corresponding English pagination. The recent appearance of previously unpublished titles as well as advances in Heidegger scholarship, including those proposed in this treatise, have frequently made it necessary to modify and clarify translations. All such changes are noted, with the original German furnished parenthetically when possible. Unless otherwise noted, references to Heidegger's works in German are from the "collected edition," *Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1975–), indicated by 'GA' and volume number.

### ***Works translated into English:***

- BPP *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Translated by Alfred Hofstadter. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1988.
- BF *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*. Translated by Andrew Mitchell. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2012.
- BT *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962.
- BW *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993.
- CP *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniella Vallega-Neu. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2012.
- CPC *Country Path Conversations*. Translated by Bret W. Davis. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010.
- CT *The Concept of Time (English-German Edition)*. Translated by William McNeill. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- E *The Event*. Translated by Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2012.
- EGK *Early Greek Thinking*. Translated by David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi. San Francisco: Harper, 1985.
- EP *The End of Philosophy*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 2003.

- ER *The Essence of Reasons*. Translated by Terrence Malick. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1969.
- FCM *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Translated by William McNeill and Nicholas Walker. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995.
- HHGR *Hölderlin's Hymns "Germania" and "The Rhine."* Translated by Julia Ireland William McNeill. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2014.
- HHI *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister."* Translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1996.
- HS *Heraclitus Seminar (1966 / 67)*. Translated by Charles H. Seibert. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1993.
- ID *Identity and Difference*. Translated by Joan Stambaugh. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969.
- IM *Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2000.
- KPM *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Translated by Richard Taft. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997.
- MFL *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. Translated by Michael Heim. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984.
- L *Logic: The Question of Truth*. Translated by Thomas Sheehan. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010.
- LQ *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*. Translated by Wanda Torres and Yvonne Unna. Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2009.
- M *Mindfulness*. Translated by Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary. New York: Continuum, 2006.
- N1 *Nietzsche*. Vol. 1: *The Will to Power as Art*; Vol. 2: *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.
- N2 *Nietzsche*. Vol. 3: *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*; Vol. 4: *Nihilism*. Translated by David Farrell Krell. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991.
- OWL *On the Way to Language*. Translated by Peter D. Hertz. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1971.

- P *Pathmarks*. Translated by William McNeil. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998.
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by Alfred Hofstadter. New York: Harper, 2001.
- PR *The Principle of Reason*. Translated by Reginald Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1991.
- Ps *Parmenides*. Translated by André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1992.
- QCT *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. San Francisco: Harper, 1982.
- TDP *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*. Translated by Ted Sadler. London: Continuum, 2002.
- WCT *What is Called Thinking?* Translated by J. Glenn Gray. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.
- WT *What is a Thing?* Translated by W.B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch. South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, 1967.
- ZS *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols-Conversations-Letters*. Translated by Franz Mayr and Richard Askay. Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2001.

***Works in German:***

- GA3 *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. 1991. (written 1929)
- GA5 *Holzwege*. 1977 (written 1935–46).
- GA6.1 *Nietzsche. Erster Band*. 1996 (written 1936–46).
- GA6.2 *Nietzsche. Zweiter Band*. 1997 (written 1936–46).
- GA7 *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. 2000 (written 1936-53).
- GA8 *Was Heißt Denken?* 2000 (written 1951-52).
- GA9 *Wegmarken*. 2nd ed. 1976 (written 1919–61).
- GA10 *Der Satz vom Grund*. 1997 (written 1955-56).
- GA11 *Identität und Differenz*. 2006 (written 1955-57).
- GA12 *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. 1985 (written 1950-59).

- GA13 *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens (1910-1976)*. 1983.
- GA15 *Seminare*. 1986 (written 1951-73).
- GA21 *Logik: Die Frage nach der Wahrheit*. 1976 (written 1925-6).
- GA24 *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*. 2nd ed. 1989 (written 1927).
- GA26 *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Logik im Ausgang von Leibniz*. 1978 (written 1928).
- GA29 *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik*. 2004 (written 1929–30).  
-30
- GA38 *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*. 1998 (written 1934).
- GA39 *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein."* 1999 (written 1934–35).
- GA40 *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. 1983 (written 1935).
- GA41 *Die Frage nach dem Ding: Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*. 1984 (written 1935).
- GA53 *Hölderlins Hymne "Der Ister"*. 2nd ed. 1993 (written 1942).
- GA54 *Parmenides*. 2nd Ed. 1992 (written 1942).
- GA56 *Zur Bestimmung der Philosophie*. 1999 (written 1919).  
-57
- GA65 *Beiträge zur Philosophie*. 1989 (written 1936–38).
- GA66 *Besinnung*. 1997 (written 1938-39).
- GA71 *Das Ereignis*. 2009 (written 1941/42).
- GA74 *Zum Wesen der Sprache und Zur Frage nach der Kunst*. 2010 (written 1939-60).
- GA77 *Feldweg-Gespräche (1944/45)*. 1995.
- GA79 *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. 1994 (written 1949, 1957)
- SZ *Sein und Zeit*. 17th ed. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2006 (written 1926).
- ZrS *Zollikoner Seminare: Protokolle, Zwiegespräche, Briefe*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2006. (written 1947–71).

### **Abbreviations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Works:**

- HLP *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology*. Edited by Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2002 (written 1960).
- IP *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954-1955)*. Translated by Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2010.
- N *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*. Translated by Robert Vallier. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2003 (written 1956-60).
- PhP *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald Landes. New York: Routledge, 2012 (written 1945).
- PrP *The Primacy of Perception*. Translated by James M. Edie. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964 (written 1946).
- S *Signs*. Translated by Richard C. McCleary. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964 (written 1959-60).
- SB *The Structure of Behavior*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Boston: Beacon Press, 1963 (written 1942).
- VI *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968 (written 1959-61)

### **Classical References**

Wherever standard abbreviations of classical works and authors are lacking in philosophical scholarship, I have adopted the conventions codified in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th Edition*. Edited by Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012.

**Arrowheads**

We finished clearing the last  
Section of trail by noon,  
High on the ridge-side  
Two thousand feet above the creek  
Reached the pass, went on  
Beyond the white pine groves,  
Granite shoulders, to a small  
Green meadow watered by the snow,  
Edged with Aspen—sun  
Straight high and blazing  
But the air was cool.  
Ate a cold fried trout in the  
Trembling shadows. I spied  
A glitter, and found a flake  
Black volcanic glass—obsidian—  
By a flower. Hands and knees  
Pushing the Bear grass, thousands  
Of arrowhead leavings over a  
Hundred yards. Not one good  
Head, just razor flakes  
On a hill snowed all but summer,  
A land of fat summer deer,  
They came to camp. On their  
Own trails. I followed my own  
Trail here. Picked up the cold-drill,  
Pick, singlejack, and sack  
Of dynamite.  
Ten thousand years.  
—Gary Snyder, “Above Pate Valley”<sup>1</sup>

We dwell in a world beclouded by ecological catastrophe. As the storm swells on the horizon, drawing closer by the day, these questions crack like thunder through the semidark. Do we in our time have a sense for ecology? Do we truly understand its sense? It may seem outlandish to begin a philosophical investigation with these questions. Has not science furnished us with answers? Before taking the road more traveled by en route to a philosophy of science, let us tarry to consider if the word ‘ecology’ says anything unfurnished by natural science. It must be admitted that here we are really quite lost. Still, the matters of concern to ecology are naturally in the air, copious to the senses as they are to common sense. Without knowing anything more, we gather that ecology pertains somehow to the inhabited reaches of nature and their inhabitants. Here we take leave of common sense and cleave closer to the senses. We keep

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Snyder, *Riprap; and Cold Mountain Poems* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), 11.



the first path for another day and wander, spurred by wonder, in what direction we know not to find another way. Nearly a century after Heidegger brought ontology down from the rarefied peaks of metaphysics to raise the question of being anew from the earth, and half again as long since Merleau-Ponty unearthed the wild being of the flesh, we way onward and earthward on the path of phenomenology. Ours is a journey – a timelost sense of *sense* – that unfolds on backroads uncharted in advance. So shall we rove in search of answers to the question concerning the pre-theoretical sense of nature, that of dwelling, and that of their relation. Through the trackless undergrowth of time and thought the following treatise cuts a trail toward the being of ecology and the ecology of being. While it holds no easy answer to catastrophe, it does hold a promise to make philosophy answerable to it in our tempestuous age, an age in need of wisdom as never before.

Like the trails over which I found my way to it, the journey ahead is marked at every pass and junction. When strung together, these wayposts tell a story.

Nick Thompson once said that the land and its places stalk us in stories. Giving voice to a belief indelibly etched into the lifeways of the Cibecue Apache people, he tells of stories shot like arrows whose wounds cannot be closed but for heeding the wisdom they transmit.<sup>2</sup> For some years now I have worn in my flesh a story of working the trails of Yosemite National Park, some three weeks trek from Cibecue. This story stove into me over the course those seasons. It cut deeper on my return from that place and deeper still for years on since. Until now, in trying to extract it, I find the arrow seated bone-deep, buried to the fletching. The cautionary trails of Yosemite have left their traces on my sight, so often like touching beyond arm's length with hands conducted and feet they well instructed to forefeel the ground ahead. Their traces are set in my gait as I retread the rhythms of that precipitous terrain, syncopated now with bittersweet aches from somewhat hobbled knees. And I bear them, these traces, in my very frame and posture, still stooped a notch from the heavy ruck I wore. Yet to this day I cannot debouch from a crowded subway onto the city streets without my spine standing plumb as a lodgepole pine. An embodied vestige of those stands of trees which greeted me, still blowing from the climb, my every bone poised in search of somewhere to root itself, some place to rest. And rest that body did, in very the midst of its travail, by learning to conform with near effortless ease to rooted folds of earth, the trailside talus, and all the asperities of that wild and wayward terrain.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1996), 58f.

To this phantom body, unleashed from the past to haunt my present yet, I find myself sutured by the thread of those places where once I worked and dwelled. But there is a trace of something other still, something out of place, out of body, unsutured from my self. An untimely sense, an unsettling sense for the elements of that wilderness, raw and disruptive. A sense of being seized upon and blinded, displaced and crippled, effaced and leveled down to earth. So also of humility, of deference to the elemental side of things. And a sense of indebtedness for the prolific gifts they have bestowed. I cannot say that *I* have a sense for these things. I can only say that they compose the atmosphere and medium of *one* who senses through me, has always done, long before I cared to listen. Permeating the dark and bewildering reaches below my own experience is one who defies all personification, all taxonomy, so cloaked is it by anonymity. Even so, this phantasm is anything but featureless. In our journey toward ecology as in the story that guides us, it will play a leading role in fact, becoming for us the ultimate guide. And should you let it take the lead, I have little doubt that it will plant its arrow in you too.

In key respects, this project began as a reworking of the trail, of those seasons I was granted. That trail wends through its chapters under the heading of what I have chosen to call “Wayposts.” These markers offer meditations on the agonies of the body, the ecstasies of water, and the work of laying stone at world's edge where every trail is a trace of untold others, of the earth and in the flesh. So do they chronicle my errant journey from abject mastery to the mysterious fluency of working other-wise, through an ability to respond to the other in the widest and wildest sense. The backcountry trail is by definition a way less traveled by today. Nonetheless, this trail-crossed story should find resonance at a sensuous register grown faint to us but still resounding, even as it challenges our age with an impersonal voice and ageless tenor of its own. It is an experience tangible to all who have ever tried their hand at the elemental weave of nature, at work or play, and discovered there some inwrought ingenuity that drew them out of themselves and into it, resisting the mind, the will, but guiding the hand as by sleight of it unto unforeseeable consummations.

So if the story I shall tell begins as a personal one, the journey it goes on to recount leads elsewhere. And it is precisely the journey of the person back beyond his personal past, and further back, to the uttermost nativity of nature, that marks the way toward ecology. Along the philosophical path this story will come to our aid as occasion not only to question and concretize but for orientation too. A kind of low-lying beacon from which to take our bearings, lest these

we lose in scaling the precipitous slopes of theory. If visible at all, the ecology of being recedes from view at such high altitudes. In a fashion, then, our efforts will bear fruit to the extent that they draw their inspiration from the spired growth that shelters on the trail as it does the sedentary thinker, papered in his dog-eared volumes and timbered in the walls that brace them. To raise up things wild wherever they take root, to aspire as one to the skies: thus does the task rise up before us.

## **Speak Ecology**

### **§1. At the Trailhead**

Over the course of three consecutive years I worked on a trailcrew for the National Park Service in that protected wild region of the Sierra Nevada known as the Yosemite backcountry. For seasons at a stretch, from vernal snowmelt to autumnal snowfall, I hung my soiled, sun-blached hat from a clasp on the vaulting of a tent pitched alongside a dozen or so others. In each of the camps we made, these tents formed earshot constellations furnished with a makeshift kitchen, latrine, and equipment flies, orbiting all about the campfire. I would make my home over seasons in several of these itinerant dwelling places set far into the back of beyond no road or wire spanned. But trails there were aplenty there, and on trails I earned my keep.

Mornings, before first light, I would belly out of my tent and take my place beside the others round the breakfast fire. Occasionally these others included a rollick of formidably mustached stockmen who provisioned us weekly with food and supplies, conveyed from afar by solemn strings of packmules. After breakfast foreman would address the crew regarding the day's itinerary in preparation for quitting camp. The dishes done and the fire still asmolter beneath the kindling dawn, we soon shouldered our packs and struck out on the trail for the workplace. This place was always located within roughly two hours hiking distance. Yet it could be situated wherever the trail did lead, be that the lofty lobe of a mountaintop or the lush twining dark of a wooded ravine. The work awaited us there, parceled out into adjacent sections of trail, each allotted to some person or partnership. So was I apprenticed to the trailwork trade.

Nominally stated, this trade entailed the cutting, building, and maintenance of hiking trails throughout the backcountry. Having spent the greater part of my first season earning my bona fides by lopping or sawing encroaching vegetation, clearing debris, and digging drainage trenches known as swales, I was now, in my second, deemed ready to try my hand at the bread and butter of the trade.

A trail cut across an arid plain requires little by way of foundation. But a graded highland trail, outflung and hitched from valleyed trough to lofty crest over stormlashed terrain, must be built upon and fortified with stone. This is accomplished by drystone masonry, itself perhaps the oldest trade there is. Unlike paved roads of mortared cobblestone, macadam, or asphalt, a backcountry trail is traditionally bedded and bulwarked with stones. Hewn extempore and laid dry, without mortar, these stones are assembled into interlocking configurations that bind them together by nothing more than their jointly contacted weight. The dry-cobbled riprap tread, retaining walls, terraced steps, and waterbar drainages of the trail co-operate in this way to hold it in place as it climbs and winds, keeping scree from sliding down and staving the tread and seasonal streams of water, people, and other pack animals from eroding the grade.

But something runs deeper through these works that sets the trail apart from the road and every routine thoroughfare. Built from a fund of simple techniques handed down over generations stretching back to the antelucan gloam of human history, they exhibit the unadorned province of stone as ground, shelter, and boundary marker. Today this trade is apt to appear obscure, anachronistic – salvaged from the past as a mere curiosity perhaps. Stone no longer holds its ancient pride of place in building and cultivation. As our world entered the age of modern technology, trails were traded for a boundless system of motorways and sidewalks; the drystone fence, hearth, and foundation for barbed wire, industrial gas stacks, and metropolitan monoliths of concrete, steel, and glass. But in such regions as the Yosemite backcountry, regions set aside and conserved precisely to spare them the denudations and depredations of that history, the stoneworks of the trail mark the end of the road. Thus do they ground and shelter a common passage to this day for those who work or hike them. A passage that awakens their senses to the elemental edges of the world, the traces of wild others, and the profundities of the past underfoot.

To indiscriminately pour asphalt over the trail in the blinkered interest of convenience and efficiency would be to acquiesce to our estrangement from the earth, our reckless indifference to it. Of course, even asphalt is inevitably unplumbed over time by weathers and wildlife. Sprouting roots and shoots that crack the smooth, confident surface of the human world, unbidden growth eventually encumbers the traveler, burgeons apace, and reclaims that surface for wilderness. Yosemite is one of the few remaining tracts of habitable land where wild encumbrances are allowed to flourish with minimal intervention. Even a trail intervenes; it bears

an ecological impact. “He who leaves a trace leaves a wound.”<sup>1</sup> But here only scarless traces are tolerated.

Swept beneath the tumult of our worldly affairs and routines, most of these traces have sunk like stones into the murkier fathoms of experience. Wherefore the trail is a vulnerable thing indeed. It lies situated on the limen of oblivion within the urban mindscape, and on the frontier of that irrepressibly expanding complexity and manifest destiny of the settled landscape we call world. Precarious too is the work that has gone into building the trail, for it shares no common ground with the strip-miner’s approach to the earth still sanctioned by that destiny. The fullbore drive of the continuous miner that will stop at nothing until its last fumes are spent and our dire fate is sealed. Neither does this work take its stand on the stump beside the incremental miner, the reform environmentalist, or any other would-be policymaker who demands the sustainable conservation of the land when this merely amounts to managing a stockpile of resources for human consumption – material, aesthetic, or intellectual. To a species that has asserted and extended its natural dominion as no other on earth before, trails are regarded as scarcely more than routes, outmoded and outlandish, within its hegemonic territory. As we enter the epoch of the anthropocene, a prudent yet willful understanding continues to vie with brute and mindless power for supremacy over the earth. Together they compel us to answer to nothing more than what can readily affirm and strengthen our outreach, nothing more than what we can project as our own. All such paths converge at the headline and bottom line until at last they cross the final line that stands between us and omnicidal devastation.

Rather than stand under the aegis of the anthropological, the trailworker stands out into being otherwise than human. This work is *ecstatic* in the oldest, richest sense of the word, patterned as it is on the artistry of the burrow, the den, and the nest as it is on the improbable ingenuity of the elements. Attuned to that which lies beyond the ambit of the self-directed body, the self-assertive will, and the self-enclosed mind, it defers to the *logos* of the *oikos*, allowing it to take the lead, to make the first stand. Gathered together and forelaid in the terrain are the faintest traces of this summons to working other-wise. And the backcountry trail is a *trace*, richly sedimented with such traces. This is not a matter of semantics, as though the trail’s archaic appellation said something more by virtue of its poetic aura alone. Rather, it expresses the eonic

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Michaux, *Darkness Moves: An Henri Michaux Anthology, 1927-1984*, trans. David Ball (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 176.

temporal thickness embedded in every trailbed, the indefinite implication of passage made by others long absent. Carved out of the earth by the immemorial transit of elements and existents, the backcountry trail is a moving compost of remnants and revenants from a past in which we were never present. It is a work far older than my own, our own, a work of the earth itself.

A trailbed is a deceptively shallow thing. As water courses over the earth it sculpts the terrain. In its seasonal descent it gradually carves out a navigable passage from peak to pool that is followed by thirsting prey and hungered predators of species untold. A trail is cut by paw and claw, its contours compacted with the flesh, fur, and feces of a time that continues to stake its claims on us. Among the spoor remarked by the practiced indigenous hunter-gatherer upon his arrival are the earthbound traces and negative spaces of these animal bodies. Their steps he retraces from one hint to the next, a journey punctuated by muscular enervations and innervations constantly adapting to and redistributing the consistencies of soil and stone underfoot. Incipit the European frontiersman, spurred on by his own homelorn hunger in quest of newground and settlement. In the course of his expedition encounters the hunter's game trail, a passage he takes not knowing where it will lead. Eventually the government stakes out the land, a requisition secured by martial routines that widen the trail, denude its environs, plunder it for spoils, and decimate those who once dwelled there. Disputing that claim – albeit with no small ambivalence – a National Park is founded. Yosemite. Enlisting the Army Corps of Engineers, the state fortifies the erstwhile routes of those marauders and designates them as officially sanctioned hiking trails. The seasons cycle. A new century dawns in which the earth itself is everywhere besieged. Until we fetch up to the present, when stewards of the park make a last ditch effort to recover these traces to conserve some part of what our age is bent on demolishing.

This cutaway view of the trail's evolution over time is but a sketch, rude and inchoate. Yet one can already begin to see how each of its temporal strata traces styles of wayfaring reincarnated and rearticulated, complicated and re-plicated, by those which lie above it. Over unlocked tracts of time, these passageways have worked the trail into sympathy with the places it meets and the beings meeting it, becoming sedimented in the sensible layout as in those who have worked it, often by simply passing through. In other words, the work of the latterday mason is the culmination of an immemorial archeology of the trail. Each is ingredient in each. Her flesh is grafted to its inexplicable past, her body incorporates its explicable future. If we are always already enfolded by a worldly physiognomy to which we are responsive, this work unfolds the

time of the othermost other, the elemental (m)other, earth. A time that it bleeds into our raw exposure to the elements, even as it recedes from disclosure. Releasing herself from the world as will and understanding – to say nothing of representation – the caretakers of earth make allowance for what defies their practical prehension, perceptual apprehension, and intellectual comprehension, concealing itself the moment they take it up, take it in, or stake them out in the space of concepts. Thus does she become a passageway for the elements and bygone inhabitants of the trail, which come to in-habit her, work through her in the sensuous apertures of the understanding.

Trailwork too is deceptively superficial. What might strike the uninitiated as a thoughtless test of brawn or willful contest with the elements has far more to do with the painter's eye, the sculptor's touch, and the poet's ear. For it is born in truth of an elementary refinement of the senses, guided by a humble attunement to the wild being of the sensible. To conserve the ecology of the trail is to key into the wildness of the other and to care for wild others under the open horizons of a common place of passage. Trailwork, as earthwork, is consummated when a simple ability to respond to the elements is coupled with a certain impractical wisdom, a subterranean wisdom, a knowing how to work them in a way that holds open that ramified passage on behalf of the others who opened it. So unlike the artless labor routinely read into the trades, earthwork is the art of the careful artisan. This is why her trails do not cleave to efficient routes, which dissemble what lies around them. Nor are they built on paved foundations, which dissemble what lies beneath. They are girded and undergirded instead by the warp of the earth itself. Like those that once connected the ancient Greek homesteads (*oikoi*) before the rise of the centralized city-state (*polis*) and the imperium of the human household (*oikoumenē*), backcountry trails conform to the wild layout. They requite its generative outlay. So that in some they beckon and all they shelter underway, they reawaken an intimate affiliation with those moist humors, hooves, and hands which moved the trackless earth in cutting them. Such trails draw us out of ourselves, out of this world, as they wend away and we with them into the outlands of space and time.

In the course of my apprenticeship I would ply, hone, and even begin to master a set of techniques that resembled the inscrutable stoneworks I encountered on nearly every stretch of trail, works that had abidingly safeguarded the passage. This, however, was no more than a passing resemblance. However I tried, my efforts to lay stone into solid, stable edifices were met



with indomitable resistance. Whether I had failed in the visual inspection and selection of the *vivum saxum*, miscalculated somehow in the hammer and chisel work of shaping it into serviceable form, or somehow lacked the agility necessary to muscle it into place, I did not know. What I did know was that my works were not up to snuff but always on the brink of downfall or implosion. The joints of my half-cobbled riprap broke beneath the faintest footfall. My unfinished walls toppled at the slightest passing glance. What's more, they *felt* like rather shoddy things, unsound if not unsafe.

Over time my technique improved somewhat. I managed to bring off works that exhibited some of the robustness of their centenary prototypes. But only to learn from my foreman that they were ill-devised and out of place as they stood. Though stone terraces are built with the same general principles in mind, said he while inspecting one of mine, each stone must be laid in response to the specific demands of its surrounds, giving rise to enormous variation. Some of these demands he went on to enumerate for me right then and there, pointing them out by way of example. And as he did I gradually lost control of my glandular function. In that section of trail alone he adduced such varied considerations as the slope, cant, and relative depth of the grade, typical wind and rainfall and runoff impact, foot and hoof traffic, geological composition, soil conditions, and seasonal groundcover, to name only those I still recall. Like a twenty-pound sledgehammer, this lesson hit me. And the impression it made was more than humbling, it was downright humiliating. In addition to being contracted to develop a working command of masonry and carry out the arduous labor it entailed, I was expected to exercise a breadth and depth of ecological expertise I clearly never acquired! Not that I was incurious of or allergic to the ecological science, mind you. As a matter of fact, in college I had even flirted with a major in the field. But this here was a horse of a very different color. Instead of weighing empirical data and competing theories from the armchair, I had been thrown into an utterly unfamiliar ecology – very far indeed from my old Kentucky home – an ecology *with* which I was called upon to work in ways responsive to its idioloical changes over seasons I had never once observed or felt. No longer was wilderness confined to the scenic backdrop, to leisure and scholarship. I was thrown headlong into it and entrusted to care for its well-being. At this daunting revelation the fear was on me, and I confronted it as I had most any other trial in the past. That night I retired to my tent to reflect on my predicament.

## §2. The Brain in a Vat and the Heart of a Ditch-Digger

Whether it was out of charity or desperation or simply some clerical error that the National Park Service saw fit to hire me onto a backcountry trailcrew, I'll never know. When first I applied for the position of drystone mason, my résumé could have been penned by a child who had mastered no more than the letters of her mother's name, 'N-A – N-A'. The exception being a degree in analytic philosophy, for which the words 'not applicable' seemed far too generous to undersign by the letter of the law. The years before I was hired on had unfolded for me as series of vagrant sojourns in two very different worlds, each closed off from the other and enclosed within itself. In one world I had studied at a liberal arts college where my days were devoted to sedentary lucubration and contemplation. In the other I had been an apprentice to a trade, first carpentry then automotive mechanics. These stints found me hard at work in unfinished houses or under the hoods and chassis of cars, pursuing projects that were simultaneously challenging, stimulating, and gratifying. I derived much pleasure from this work but it was not without its sorrows too. These jobs could be strenuous, tedious, injurious, and on occasion, grueling. Over time they began to take their toll. So much so that by summer's end I could not help but feel relieved to return to my scholarly haunts where I traded my bench vise for the theoretical virtues and my plumb rule for rules of inference to preserve the true.

If my studies in philosophy had taught me to be wary of falling into what Martin Heidegger described as the “uninhibited ‘business’” of one held captive by the thoughtless everydayness of our age – “the busy activity of Dasein in its superficiality” – my stints in the trades had exposed me to the superficiality of untried thinking.<sup>2</sup> Of a thinking that concerned and busied itself with such perennial problems as the knowledge, value, and the very being of nature without allowing itself to be problematized by flesh and blood experiences of it. Sedentary to the extent that it contented itself with merely staking out another territory for scholarship, this toothless thinking (as I styled it then) seldom dared to venture into the vast and theoretically uncharted wilds of the life-world beyond the life of the mind and its outermost citadels, text and institution. What's more, it was prone to an “uninhibited bustle” of its own. For me as for my peers, this chiefly insinuated itself in the accredited compulsion to “pre-professionalize,” to amass a storehouse of received knowledge and so “talk the talk” of some cherished specialization while competitively scaling the slopes of “marketability” by strategic “social networking,” the

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<sup>2</sup> SZ 177f., translation modified; FCM 159/GA 29-30 237.

accumulation of academic distinctions, and the fulfillment of publication quotas through frenetic “textual production.” Already in college I had witnessed others become preoccupied with this “business of philosophy.” And the deeper their embroilment, the more forgetful and mistrustful they seemed to become of their once-nourished vocation. Ready though I was to acknowledge the veracity of Thoreau’s assertion that, by and large, the “world is a place of business,” I was becoming ever more vigilant to the added caveat that “there is nothing, not even crime, more opposed to poetry, to philosophy, nay, to life itself, than this incessant business.”<sup>3</sup>

After college I remained gripped by the notion that what truly bears relevance to philosophy ought to carry weight in our lives. And one might say I came to work on trails in part as a thinker to the laboratory. But insofar as it thwarted the untried abstraction and artificiality of the philosophical thought experiment, this venture was perhaps closer to a kind of *fieldwork*. Here, I thought, was an opportunity to understand nature through work, and to understand the nature of work in its oldest, elementary incarnation. Hand to earth. So that what I sought to gain was not so much factual knowledge, secured by science and shored up by epistemology, but what John Dewey once characterized as “knowledge-plus.” Here was understanding marked by a surplus over scholarly erudition, or knowing-that, “turned to account in the instruction and guidance it may convey in piloting life through the storms and shoals that beset life experience.”<sup>4</sup> The simple word that Dewey unabashedly chose for this lived know-how was *wisdom*, the ancient province of philosophy. If much of the profession no longer measured itself by its ability to respond to this defining concern, my own attempts were born of a dissatisfaction that is apt to appear naïve to the sober professional. By the time I had completed my undergraduate training in analytic philosophy, the toothless problems concerning what knowers can know, disengaged from what they can be, no longer moved me. Most emblematic here was perhaps the Brain in a Vat: the much-touted thought experiment in which all the paper doubts of the pedant seemed to stack and fold in such a way as to form a caricature of what one might call the *paper philosopher*. A disembodied, solipsistic intellect haunted by a most warranted anxiety of having been sealed off hermetically from the wider, thronging world by its textual counterfeit. In taking to the trails of the backcountry I was suddenly seized upon by questions which shattered that vat,

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<sup>3</sup> “Life Without Principle” in Henry David Thoreau, *The Essays of Henry D. Thoreau* (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 198.

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey, *Essays, Typescripts, and Knowing and the Known*, *The Later Works of John Dewey, Volume 16, 1925 - 1953* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 2008), 389.

bared teeth more menacing than any paper tiger's, and gnawed at the seemingly impregnable walls dividing the philosopher from the artist, the artisan, and the trail.

How, I asked, might philosophy be made answerable to the task of rethinking nature wisely? Specifically, how could I turn philosophical thinking to account toward knowing how to work and dwell on nature's wild edge while reconciling the two worlds I stood bestride? Between the lived storms of work become abject labor, and the shoals of farsighted yet unlived, thus vitally immaterial thinking? And what recourse might this wisdom have to offer in contesting the assimilation of these worlds into the incessant machinations of business and busyness, calculation, production, and management ingredient to the denatured spirit of our age? The promise of any approach to answering these questions lay in extending the conventional precincts of philosophical inquiry beyond the bailiwick of the professional. This called for a thinking with teeth of its own. A wild thinking that crossed the Rubicon from abstract ideas to concrete praxis and back again to ideopraxis. As I saw it, if somewhat crudely then, the stakes of this emprise were captured in an epigram attributed to Georges Bataille. "What cannot move the heart of a ditch-digger," he cautioned, "already has the existence of shadows."<sup>5</sup> I took his words to heart in no uncertain terms. I reckoned I would become that ditch-digger. And by the spark that issued from the friction of two fractured worlds, I set out to rekindle some small glint of that lost age when philosophy was forged from the elements in the crucible of wisdom.

### **§3. Trailing Off: Slanted Conversations with Heidegger**

The day after I received the remedial lesson on trail ecology, I left my tent as the eremite his cell and pallet, having reached a series of well-studied conclusions. As with any other like retreat, the solitude I staked around me overnight was verily anything but, for I was several. And unto the innermost reaches of that inner theater, these several staked their claim. Tabernacled in me as I lay nestled in my bedroll was already quite a crowd of others with whom I conferred about my dilemma. But as the conversation ran its course, one voice rose above the others to prevail upon me. That voice, a youthful voice well-keyed to my young ears, belonged to the author of *Being and Time*. In Heidegger, *this* Heidegger conjured out of his most celebrated treatise, I allowed I'd found a worthy guide.

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<sup>5</sup> Georges Bataille, *Visions Of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 43.

I began that conversation by considering how philosophy had traditionally confronted such problems. By my lights, the philosophical landscape was overcrowded with theorists who claimed to concern themselves with work or nature, only to theoretically contract and distort how it was given, or else restrict it to an occasion for high-flown speculation directed elsewhere. However avowedly empirical, these theorists overlooked how their intellectual models were informed by experiences that preceded and exceeded them. As a result, I surmised, they remained purblind to their own theory-building process. Dewey, who was always on the margins of the conversation, had much to say about this intellectual blindness. What I have been describing was on his assessment an egregiously “*non-empirical method*” in the sense that it “begins with results of a reflection that has already torn in two the subject matter experienced and the operations and states of experiencing,” effectively “starting with a reflective product as if it were primary, as if it were the originally ‘given’.”<sup>6</sup> In my case this would be to uncritically begin with some latent theory of work or nature as though *it* were primary, fore-closing its givenness into whatever fell within that theoretical remit.

What is originally given to our experience, however, is not to be confused with what such methods purport to discover as basic. Contemplatively disengaged from their subject matter, they betray their pretensions to impartiality and rigor by foisting upon it an assortment of extrinsic products, assumptions, and interests. By always already projecting onto the given what it later pretends to discover in it, the theoretical attitude becomes deceptively self-confirming. In effect, the theorist fails to recognize how the presumptive bedrock, on which she turns her spade, is anything but terra firma. More gravel than bedrock, the grounds on which she stands are treacherous indeed. Built upon the phenomena truly given to experience, these epiphenomenal misgivings have been forelaid by the theoretical spadework of the past. In other words, they are unexposed constructs, sedimented into the narrow limits of common sense and conventional wisdom, which non-empirical methods overturn only to fall back upon. Such is the folly of any hard-nosed theorist who fails to discern the specter of theory, hence the lack of necessity, in what she takes to be self-evidently given to experience.

Initially, what most appealed to me about Heidegger was his refusal to separate the question of *what* something is from an investigation *how* it is given and *how* we gain access to it

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<sup>6</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover, 1958), 9, emphasis mine. This fallacy is comparable to that which the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty termed the “experience error” (PhP 5).

*pre-theoretically*. In contrast to methods that approach things from the high altitudes of metaphysics, scientific expertise, common sense or any other form of **ontological positivism** that presupposes their basic status as items within a domain of theoretical entities, he approached it phenomenologically, from the bottom up. A *radically* empirical philosophical method in the sense developed by William James, phenomenology derives its simple wisdom and legitimacy – and this is crucial – from a kind of elementary response-ability. It is based on an *ability* to be seized by and only then *respond* to the mysterious ambiguity, partiality, and profundity truly given to experience. Phenomenology gathers the senses of phenomena on *their* terms, rather than doing so in terms pre-established by our metaphysical, theoretical, or commonsensical prejudices. In his *Logical Investigations*, Edmund Husserl famously captures this task by calling for a return to “the things themselves” (*die Sache selbst*).<sup>7</sup> Originally dedicated to Husserl, *Being and Time* recaptures that task by appealing to the archetypal sense of the Greek word *phainomenon*: “that which shows itself in itself, the manifest.”<sup>8</sup> Heidegger would go on to caution that the manifest, the given, must be regarded with due suspicion. For a true phenomenon does not show itself as conventionally self-evident. But it is no less endemic to the everyday world for all that.

Following Husserl, but in a way all his own, Heidegger demonstrates that the wisdom of phenomenology is won through a methodological suspension of theoretical givenness. If not altogether equivalent to Husserl’s *epoché* of the “natural attitude” or Dewey’s pragmatic deflation of the “non-empirical method,” this move targets the common basis of such misgivings: the ontological positivism that informs our ordinary understanding of what is and what matters in the world.<sup>9</sup> Things are unable to show themselves in themselves when our understanding of being is confined to what has been antecedently thematized, disambiguated, and conceptually articulated into atomized units of theory or itemized facts to which we are related, as they to one another, *partes extra partes*. With this in mind, Heidegger launches his investigations in *Being and Time* by turning his sights on how our everyday practical orientation toward phenomena reveals an unthematic understanding of their pre-theoretical being.<sup>10</sup> What we

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<sup>7</sup> Edmund Husserl. *Logical Investigations*. trans. Dermot Moran, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2001), §2, p. 252.

<sup>8</sup> SZ 28.

<sup>9</sup> William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>10</sup> I hereafter adopt Heidegger’s word ‘thematic’ (*thematisch*) to describe phenomena made present as intentional objects of consciousness (i.e. *noemata*) through perceptual, reflective, and introspective acts of attention. Thematization (*Thematisierung*) runs the gamut from this basic advertence to categorical and judicative

thereby arrive at is an interpretation of phenomena that does not conflate them with posited beings (the products of reflection and theory) but accounts for how a fund of enactive intentions – prereflective, avolitional, unscripted – makes possible the appearance of beings as such. Significantly for me at the time, the everyday praxis that Heidegger foregrounds in the early chapters of *Being and Time* is none other than work, specifically the work of the artisan. Harder for me to figure was nature's place in this analysis. Aside from a handful of brief remarks, the being of nature seemed left to recede into the background.

Here was a thinker of forest paths and clearings, of handiwork, and what's more, a method I could put a shoulder to. I considered it no accident that the lion's share of *Being and Time* had been written in a modest chalet on the outskirts of the Black Forest beyond the precincts of the ivory tower. To my mind, Heideggerian phenomenology was exceptional in its attempt to give full measure to the fertile intersection of unstudied lifeways and philosophical *Denkwege*. It was at just such a crossroads that I presently found myself in the forests and mountains of Yosemite. Thus would I continue the conversation with Heidegger in my tent and on the trail. Though *Being and Time* laid no claim to expounding a philosophy of nature per se, and contained no mention whatever of 'ecology', I did find residues of thought that spoke to my predicament. From those residues that condensed around his analysis of work, I sought to extract an understanding of nature attained by the philosopher who would join hands with the tradesman *philosophically*: a contesseration of wisdom conveyed no less by the contact of hand in hand and hand to earth than by eye and mind alone.

Even then, however, Heidegger's suggestion that my body was not essentially involved in this work was something I found increasingly hard to swallow. Among the most striking aspects of trailwork are the claims it makes upon the body – and not just on its hands. Physically and sensibly taxing, kinesthetically demanding, and occasionally debilitating, there really is no denying this dimension acknowledged by every worker out there. The painful mishaps of the tyro no less than the chronic injuries and early retirement of the seasoned veteran make the point conspicuously. That Heidegger's thinking rides roughshod over the body has become something of a commonplace among detractors of every stripe in the wake of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's pioneering investigations. Far less attention has been paid to Heidegger's disregard for the felt or

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determination to theoretical systematization, corresponding to the nested hierarchy of active syntheses unpacked in Husserl's work. Accordingly, all theorization is thematization but not all themes are full-fledged theories, even if they are sedimented with theoretical interests and prejudices.

affective dimension of the body at work. Even in his early writings, Dasein's attunements and moods are as numerous as they are fundamental, even if *Angst* predominates. Yet from his analysis of the work-world the more basic of these are all but absent, leveled down to what is most familiar and "inauthentic." So poor in world is the worker of *Being and Time* that Heidegger characterizes her mood as one of "captivation" (*Benommenheit*), a "poverty in mood" (*Ar-mut*) he thereafter reserves for allegedly non-existent animals, proclaiming it as their "fundamental essence."<sup>11</sup> To wit the "dog [which] does not exist but merely lives." And if it "lives' with us" by virtue of co-attunement, or "transposedness" (*Versetztheit*), this manner of "being-with" (*Mitsein*) nevertheless falls short of "existing-with" (*Mitexistieren*) on his account of *Existieren*.<sup>12</sup> This is all quite puzzling since we can follow Heidegger in disputing a reductive psychophysiological interpretation of affective phenomena and still ask how something like *Angst* or wonder gets translated into touching and being touched, moving and being moved, bearing down on and being borne along by the work. Given the tremendous importance he later attaches to "fundamental mood" (*Grundstimmung*) as the unthought catalyst of the history of being and the "ore" out of which "all essential thinking" is "extracted," one cannot help but wonder if Heidegger's much touted and travestied glorification of handiwork masks a deeper disenfranchisement of the artisan.<sup>13</sup> How else to describe the worker of *Being and Time* but as a dogsbody: a being separated, much as the animal from Dasein, by a yawning abyss from the artist he later appoints to setting truth to work toward building worlds and grounding ages? For if Heidegger admits that artistic creation presupposes manual competence (or *technē*), we are given to understand that "handiwork does not, to be sure, create works," true works, "not even when we contrast, as we must, the handmade with the factory product."<sup>14</sup>

Rolling through my skull in this vein one day, as I bore down on the stonework, were some further pearls of wisdom imparted by my foreman, who knew whereof he spoke after decades laying stone. And speak he did on occasion of a certain ease, steadiness, and equipoise of the body at work on the elements. Blocking out this even frame, he stressed, was a matter of

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<sup>11</sup> SZ 61, 76, 176, 271; FCM 195, 258/GA29-30 287, 376.

<sup>12</sup> FCM 210/GA29-30 308.

<sup>13</sup> The relevant passage from Heidegger's *Contributions* runs as follows: "All essential thinking demands that its thoughts and utterances be newly extracted each time, like an ore, out of the basic mood [*Grundstimmung*]. If the fundamental mood is lacking, then everything is a forced clatter of concepts and of the mere shells of words" (CP 19/GA65 21, trans. mod.).

<sup>14</sup> PLT 56-7/GA5 46.



ensuring that your body was “trued to” whatever you were working – stone, soil, wood. Naturally, this process of “truing up” or “getting in true” had nothing to do with the logical calculation of truth conditions, propositional correspondence or coherence. And much though my foreman borrowed his words from the argot of masonry and carpentry, they implied less the measure of level and plumbline than they did those vestibular reckonings performed in the inner ear for bodily coordination and balance. In laying stone, he explained, “getting in true” meant “getting a feel for the stone,” which involved not merely the hands but the eyes and ears, stomach, lungs, and spine, in short, the body whole. These words were never entirely lost on me. As with much of his advice, I had some vague inkling of their meaning. But it would be years until I began to harness the wisdom they tendered. At the time they struck me as enigmatic apothegms, runes and riddles all. And all I could fathom from them was that my very body, much as my work, was so grossly out of true it was positively *sigoggin*. Spun into that old Appalachian yarn about the boy, bred and buttered on a mountain so steep as to stunt one leg and stretch the other in the walking, I’d be hard put to imagine a more fitting expression for how I stood out there on trails.

From the morning I quit my crowded tent well on into my sophomore season, I did aspire to “embody,” if only in scare quotes, the *echt* prototype of the worker I dimly saw depicted in Heidegger’s early thought – along with many of the problems and trappings attending it. But however I measured up to that exemplar, my efforts to resolve the ecological dilemma of the trailworker recurrently came to grief. Heidegger’s analysis of work in the everyday world had shed much light on my situation. Yet it somehow fell short of “extracting the ore” from *this* work in *this* far corner of the world. I foundered to heal the rift between those concrete phenomenological insights and the more formal, existential analyses they brought in train. What’s more, the elements continued to resist, mysteriously slipping away despite my persistence, my resolve to master them. Notwithstanding my habile engrossment in the matter at hand, the challenges set by the trail’s enveloping wilderness continued to confound me. And the body I operated like heavy tackle, it came to weigh on me like a millstone. A weight without respite save those intermittent days when its parts broke down to take me out of commission.

So far from the effortless ease attested by my foreman, my days were overladen with the crippling burden of my labors. An ungainly bulk of incoordinate limbs and writhing muscles, my body was tension and strain incarnate. Neither its bruised and trembling limbs nor its blistered

hands were any match for the stone, which stymied every heave and thrust and countered all hammerblows with rebounding reprisals. Behold this anguished body, cast in a frieze of dis-ease and dystrophy, hunched over and clenched against a deadweight load, hoisting it up, hauling it forward, and hurling it earthward only to fall at once upon another, and another, till the searing sunlight withdraws into the lank and lugubrious shadows of the day's falling. To the hordes of skin-boring insects, sucking through the fibers of its sweat-logged shirt we must add the stings of every droning second on this body, a scourge of time, which ensures that its labors measure up to the efficiently mechanized standards of management. It would be perverse to press the affinity, for its bondage is a voidable contract, entered under no more duress than the ubiquity, the inescapability of such contracts the world over. But the self-inflicted time of this body is not unrelated to the *durance vile*. The time of condemned and purgatoried, of the penal sentence or gulag or chain gang. A dead time carried over and weighing still upon the wretched living.

At the arrhythmic core of that body, as it labored in all outward shapes of ruin and resignation, lay buried convolutions of darkly knotted moods. Enclosed within myself and sunk into the solitary depths my self-inflicted misery, forlornness and desolation issued from my every shallow breath. Mounting slowly from that dark epicenter, then erupting to quake my drudging frame, was a hotblind frustration at the unbroken recalcitrance of the stone and all the wayward elements that resisted my efforts and mocked all foresight, all forethought, all studied discernment. Collateral to this was the tremulous dread of reprobation and condemnation that awaited me should I prove unequal to the task, a dread which only grew as the light built and unbuilt and the days wore on. And as they wore on me, the seething immensity of that misery commenced in measures to cool and congeal into the benumbing glacial floes of a paralyzing languor. The fatigue of my body came as a merciful reprieve in the midst of all that storm of torment, a turning to ice or lifeless stone. Riming my world with an ennui that cast me out of it, this anesthetic solace, more than any pain or woe or fell vexation, outweighed all else as chilling testament to my abjection.

So began this journey to ecology.

#### §4. In Brief Compass: A Reader's Guide

You will find that the table of contents points like a compass in four cardinal directions across this text, directions thematically indicated by the chapter foretitles. In chapters 1 and 7 the needle points to the *dramatic pole*, directing us to the domestic tragedy of finitude on the world-historical stage in the *theatrum philosophicum*, thence to the carnal comedy of existence enacted by two ancient caretakers of the earth. In chapters 2 and 8 the needle points to the *theoretical pole*, directing us along Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's respective paths to the ecology of being, which paths I extend in original directions toward the ecological difference, the ecological fourfold, and the ecological folds of time. In chapter 3 the needle falls on the *historical pole*, where it remains into chapter 7. Here we are steered toward the onto-historical grounds of ecology. By approaching the ancient Greek concepts of *logos* and *oikos* from the bottom up (3, 4), we unearth an elemental wisdom and attunement at the rhizomatic root of Western philosophy (5-7). At intervals between chapters the needle wavers between poles, where we take our bearings by a string of *wayposts*. These direct us off the theoretical path and into the chartless depths of lived experience, at work on the trails, lost in the forests, and immersed in the rivers of Yosemite. Having sketched these cardinal directions, allow me to offer a more detailed map of the philosophical landscape through which we shall pass.

In chapter 1 we embark on the first leg of our journey through the foothills of the denial of finitude, the distinguishing mark of a tragedy ages old. The discussion opens with an epigram from Stanley Cavell: "Not finitude, but the denial of finitude, is the mark of tragedy." Enlarging on this formulation, I begin by sketching out three traditional avatars of this tragedy – intellectual, existential, and political. According to the dominant twentieth-century approach to the problem, each is marked by a failure to acknowledge the *worldly* limits or *world-historical* conditions of cognition (Cavell), self-understanding (Heidegger), or public action (Arendt). We turn first to the Icarusian flight of Cavell's intellectualist, whose disengaged quest for absolution in absolutes, and above all certainty, overpasses the extra-cognitive basis of knowledge and reason in an all too fallibly human life-world. Drawing from the early Heidegger, we then set out to establish how this tragedy is reenacted on the existential stage by Dasein's inauthentic flight from world history into the counterfeit eternity of the familiar, routine being of the anonymous everyman (*das Man*). Finally, we come to Hannah Arendt, who alerts us to the politically tragic figure of the existential hero who strives to own up to his fate without recognizing in the

everyman a community of human plurality that is not to be outstripped. In each case tragedy spells *abjection*: an expulsion from the world deriving from an inability to respond to its limits, cognitive, practical, or political.

Having sketched the contours of the problem, thus conceived, I critically reexamine these responses. In this I set out to demonstrate how each tragic avatar ultimately stems from a forgetting of the elemental conditions of existence, that is, from our *earthly* finitude. This way lies what I call *ecumenism*: the dys-closure of being into the historical world. In the history I chronicle, the abject dream of the ecumene can be traced back to Aristotle's systematic vision, politically consolidated into the empire of his pupil Alexander the Great. If its inception coincides with philosophy's consecration of itself as a science of universal knowledge in the Classical age, its technoscientific culmination has come to define ours as the age of the anthropocene. Rather than take our finite measure from the self-concealing earth to which we are exposed, we discard those limits for the self-imposed measure of the understanding (practical, intellectual, ontological). Emboldened by the dystrophic disposition, or *dysposition*, to expand its territory unto full-disclosure, we persist in projecting ourselves toward nothing more than what can readily extend the outreach of our own horizons of immanence (self, mind, body, human household). Thus have we come to domesticate and ultimately devastate the wild otherness of being, the being of others wild, and the bewildering nature of existence. Ensnared by this *ecological tragedy*, I claim, is any stance toward our finitude that reduces it to a matter of inheriting and bequeathing institutions of world-historical significance, teleologically oriented toward the possibility of self-being, human being, or being-understood. By way of illustration, I develop a critique of the ecumenical undercurrents of Heidegger's *Being and Time* with special focus on the role of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*). There we are told that it is not the understanding but the fundamental disposition (*Grundbefindlichkeit*) of mood (*Stimmung*, viz. *Grundstimmung*) that originarily discloses our thrownness in the world, *from* birth and *toward* death. On my interpretation, resoluteness (or willfulness) is a fundamental mood in its own right. Implicitly subordinated to the understanding, this mood is geared toward the recuperation of ownness from thrownness, attuning Dasein to its world-historical departure (historicity) and destination (destiny). The gravamen of my critique is that this doctrine, which Heidegger will later seek to rectify on his own terms, misses the mark of our true calling as caretakers of the irrecuperable alterity and difference of being as such. Specifically, I argue that the *fundamental*

moods or attunements of Heidegger's early thought reveal themselves as *elemental misattunements* with respect to that ecological vocation. For they only compel us to take a stand in the historical world by casting us away from its *allohistorical* grounds in the time of the ontological other, the elemental other, earth. The details of this ecumenical understanding of being will be taken up at the beginning of chapter 2, where we explore how existential immanence (enstasis) has contributed to the metaphysical (hypostatic) and phenomenological (anthropostatic) horns of the ecological tragedy.

To borrow a figure from Karl Marx, the ecumenical provincialism of being is rehearsed on the stage of history first as tragedy, then farce. So did I reenact during my first season on trails two dramas stretching back to the dawn of philosophy in the West. With this in mind, each version of the tragedy of finitude in this chapter is accompanied by a retelling of the parable of Thales of Miletus and the Thracian maid, from which thinkers as disparate as Plato and Heidegger have drawn remarkably similar lessons concerning the respective lots of those who devote their lives to philosophy and those who don't. It is said that the alleged first Greek philosopher was traipsing the countryside one evening while engrossed in heavenward contemplation when he tumbled into a well. Bearing witness to the spectacle was an unnamed Thracian woman, who irreverently chided the far-sighted thinker for having forgotten the earth beneath his feet. Thales' response is unknown. But this hasn't prevented some philosophers from defaming him as an intellectually abject figure, and others from totemizing him as a mouthpiece for their own politically tragic apathy, if not antipathy, toward the life and thought of the multitudes. Over the course of the chapter, I draw evidence from what little we know of Thales' life and thought to contest these humorless epimyths. Setting one against the other, I forecast a generative interpretation to be elaborated in chapters 5 and 7, where his philosophy and the parable are examined in depth. Here we shall entertain the speculative idea that Thales might have absolved himself of tragedy on all counts by humbly laughing *with* the Thracian house-servant where his ecumenical successors laughed *at* her, drenched as he was in the archetypal element of his philosophy and brought down to earth by her *logos*. Through these avenues we arrive at a question of historical significance to us in the chapters ahead. Could it be that Western philosophy first leapt into history with a splash of humor and humility, steeped from an "ecological" thought?

Chapter 2 brings us to the second leg of our investigations: the theoretical foundations of the ecology of being. Here we follow Heidegger's path from ecumenical ambivalence to what I call the *ecological difference* (of earth and world), or simply *earth-world*, which he recovers from Hölderlin's poetry in the 1930s. This involves retracing his steps from the "originary sense" of nature as the outlandish (*unheimlich*) "'nothing' of the world" in *Being and Time* to his later reconception of that nothing as earth. Where Heidegger thinks world in terms of the horizons of disclosure defining the layout of significance wherein we work and think and dwell, he comes to conceive earth as that dimension of being which essentially closes itself from disclosure, transcends those horizons, yet supports them from below as their limit and generative ground. The earthly side of intraworldly beings inheres in what conceals itself the moment we take them up as equipment for unthematic circumspection or take them in as items of thematic inspection. Short of an appeal to a metaphysics of substance, I argue that Heidegger can only account for such *periphenomena* if he makes room for an experiential modality through which the earthly (or elemental) being of beings manifests itself in its difference from the world. Though he never fully developed this line of thought, I locate that expedient in his evolving treatment of disposition, moods, and attunements. Refining his account, I introduce a distinction between the ontological disposition of fundamental moods, which fall under our "disclosive submission to the world" in *Being and Time*, and what I term *elemental attunements*, which inhibit concerned disclosure to allow for affective *exposures* to the periphenomenal traces of earth. These traces, I submit, are experienced in gradations of absence, felt in such coefficients of adversity and perversity as resistance, partiality, ambiguity, and outlandishness. In all these ways, the wild being of phenomena moves us beyond and beneath the ambit of the understanding.

On my reading, Heidegger will eventually carve out an open place for dwelling poetically by the measure of elemental attunements in the disruptive rift (*Riss*) of the earth-world (marked by the hyphen). From the time of his 1934-5 lecture course on Hölderlin's hymns, he begins to formulate an approach to poetry that has less to do with meter and verse than it does with a way of thinking guided toward listening, saying, and dwelling through attunements to traces of the earth. In restraint and reticence (*Verhaltenheit, Verschwiegenheit*), for instance, Heidegger has it that our disclosure of senses, meanings, and holistic significance is moderated to foster exposures to the unsaid and uninhabited. In the *Country Path Conversations* he aligns this attunement with waiting (*Warten*), which lets things rest in their open mystery without expecting

(*Erwarten*) them to reveal senses that afford our concerns for intellectual and practical mastery. If existence extemporizes itself (*sich zeitigen*) toward the future by virtue of the projective thrust of the understanding, waiting affectively reinflects that orientation, preventing the not-yet from being overdetermined as the not-yet-understood. To dwell in this way is not to wait *for* an *explication* (*Auslegung*) but to wait *on* the hidden *implication* of things. With respect to the timeliness (*Zeitlichkeit*) of existence, it is to expose oneself to an undisclosable past and future in which one is *implicated* – in the dual sense of being temporally enfolded and called upon to respond. Such is the calling of the caretaker. Neither taking hold of herself nor seizing what is given through her own projective inertia, she withholds herself, takes her affective cues from the untimely earth, and thereby receives its sheltering hold in the precincts of the dwelling place.

This connection is made explicit in the *Contributions*, where care (*Sorge*) is recast as care-taking (*Be-sorgung*): an ability-to-be that “properly safeguards the cleared-concealed” in its “being-taken-back to the self-closing earth.” In later works, however, Heidegger more frequently equates waiting with *conserving* (*Schonen*). So far from implying a disinvolved appreciation or disinterested detachment, conserving uses (*brauchen*) things in such a way to avoid inflicting harm. It runs counter in all respects to the wasteful forms of ab-use that contribute to what Heidegger calls the challenging-forth (*Herausfordern*) and devastation (*Verwüstung*) of the earth – lifeways that strip being of its ecological difference. Epitomized by machination (*Machenschaft*), the metaphysical will to power (*Macht*), and the technological enframing of being (*Gestell*), challenging-forth strives to master beings at the expense of their mystery, as though to eventually overcome their resistance to full disclosure. In this it deprives the world of its generative grounds, driving the conditions for shelter unto their terminal impossibility and leaving us to wander like exiles in the uninhabitable wake of devastating progress. Yet Heidegger finds in Hölderlin’s poetry a summons that sets the tone for another age, unpromised by our world-historical destiny, another beginning that might deliver us from our ecological tragedy. If, in our age, there is still some prospect of averting the total devastation of the earth by conserving the ways it shelters the dweller, I contend it must be sought by these channels.

The third leg of the treatise, comprising chapters 3 through 6, is devoted to the historical grounding of the ontological sense of ecology laid out in the second. Having cut a trail toward the earth-world through Heidegger’s philosophy, we now set a course into ancient literary and archeological sources from Babylonia and China, Homer, Orphic and Aesopic traditions, the

iambic poets, Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus in process to the origins of ecology in the centuries leading up to the meridian of the first millennium BCE. What emerges is a chronicle of the earth-world in the epochs preceding the ascendancy of ecumenism in classical Greece. This study is devised to peel back the leaves of the historical record to unveil how nature (*phusis*), or phenomenal emergence as such, was once understood on the basis of the *logos* of the *oikos*: the *gathering* of earth and world together into the open horizons of the *dwelling place*.

Common sense leads us to associate ‘ecology’ (from *oikos* and *logos*) with its modern namesake. But to assume that the ontological question concerning ecology has been settled scientifically (or meta-scientifically) is to accede uncritically to what I call its *homological reduction*. From the time of Plato and Aristotle, when philosophy discarded the primacy of wisdom (know-how) for that of knowledge (knowing-that), consecrating itself as science in the ancient sense, *logos* would no longer be thought apart from *epistēmē logikē*: the acquisition of knowledge through the theoretical employment of reason. As a consequence, the myriad voices of the ancient world would no longer be regarded as genuine *logoi* at all if they failed to measure up to the interests and methodological standards of that enterprise. Thinking and saying thence became increasingly homological. When subjected to philosophical scrutiny, however, I claim that the Presocratic *phusiologoi* are misconceived as incipient roots of our scientific trees of knowledge. Instead, I maintain they bespoke the very same *logos* from which the poet draws her words and phenomenology its origin and summons: the gathering of phenomena into senses underdetermined by full-fledged objects, concepts, judgments, and theoretical entities. History has come full circle in these traditions, wedded by their commitment less to knowledge than to a wisdom based on our elementary response-ability to the earth. With this in mind, each primary source will be approached as an occasion for transposing the reader into experiences of *logos* and *oikos* in their nascent state. Phenomenology’s expedience to this end is underwritten by the fact that the sources in question belonged to a pre-scientific and largely pre-theoretical world, comparatively unknown, unbuilt, unmastered. In stemming the philosophical impulse toward intellectual abstraction, the simple wisdom of this method becomes in effect a living vehicle for a history untold by epistemology, anthropology, ideology, and onto-theology. It is therefore exceptionally well adapted to overturning the sediments of longstanding scientific and metaphysical prejudices in our efforts to rethink ecology philosophically and upturn the ecological roots of caring for wisdom. Thus equipped, we shall attempt in these chapters to



elucidate how generation qua being-of-the-earth, care qua caring-for-the-other, concern qua cultivation, and the elemental attunements of deference, humility, and humor formed the elementary determinations of existence in the ancient ecology of being, recycling and renewing the affiliations between earthborn caretakers and the earth they sought to conserve.

Having been guided toward the earth-world by the later Heidegger in chapter 2, his engagement with Heraclitus will serve as the guiding thread for the retrieval of the Presocratic understanding of *phusis* and *logos* in chapter 3. Before rebuilding those foundations, I commence to excavate the Classical origins of the ecumenical understanding of being in search of buried traces of its ecological precursors. As with so many of the Presocratic *phusikoi*, or natural philosophers, much of what we know of Thales' philosophy has been handed down to us from Aristotle. When subjected to scrutiny, however, Aristotle's seminal doxography reveals far more about his own ideas than it does about its subject matter. In particular, I consider how some of the more anachronistic and tendentious aspects of his interpretation betray an understanding of world as *oikoumenē*, a clipping of *oikoumenē gē* that places 'earth' (*gē*) under erasure. Heidegger's efforts to twist free of ecumenism coincided with his attempt to grapple with elements of the *phusikoi* domesticated by Classical thought. His ontological reconstruction of the Presocratic sense of *phusis* marks a significant departure from the metaphysics of beingness (*Seiendheit*), which dyscloses nature into a world of hypostatic entities "in itself" (realism) or "for us" (idealism). On his account, concealment was an intrinsic moment of the "coming-into-appearance" of beings named by *phusis*, so that every instance of phenomenal self-emergence was at once an emergent withdrawal from presence. I conclude that Heidegger's reconstruction thereby intimates the ecological difference of being.

That difference is writ large in the *logos* of Heraclitus, who famously spoke of the hidden heart of nature. Before it came to refer to discourse alone, *epistēmē logikē*, much less rational cosmological principles, *logos* announced itself in his thought at the elementary levels of experience in the way that *phusis* gathers earth and world together. On this heterological hardpan, truth eventuates through unconcealment: a harmonious tension and contention between concealing and revealing, absence and presence, silence and significance, exposure and disclosure. We shall sift through the Heraclitean fragments in search of this truth, foregrounding those pertaining to harmony/attunement (*harmonīē*), contention (*polemos*), hinting (*sēmainei*), and the wisdom of moderation (*sōphroneō*) in cultivating elements such as fire (*pur*). Along the

way we draw insight from Heidegger's conception of the silence (*Schweigen, Stille*) and asignifying drift (*Aufriss*) of hints (*Winke*) and hinting words (*Worte*) in the po(i)etic movement of language, and of the reticence and moderation (*Mäßigung*) defining the intimacy (*Innigkeit*) of the earth-world strife (*Streit*). What emerges is a deferent response-ability to the *logos* of *phusis* qua earth-world, an ecology conserved by waiting-as-listening amid the generative ab-sense that silently erupts beneath the layout of sense.

Chapter 4 continues the historical grounding of ecology by inquiring into the origins of *oikos*, the seminal locus of dwelling in ancient Greece. Owing to Heidegger's disregard of philosophy's incubation in this other house of being, which he peremptorily equates with being-in-the-world, this chapter takes a decisive departure from him. Here I seek to expand the history of being where Heidegger's falls short, striking out on a untrodden path that deviates from ecumenical highroads to arrive at an ecological epoch when existents dwelled in the world as caretakers of earth. Long before it was prefixed to modern science, and even before it was hypostatically fixed by Aristotelian science, *oikos* issued from the earth-world sung by Homer. In the era he depicts, the *oikos* materialized as an agrarian settlement consisting of a grange on which some noble family resided. But closer inspection reveals that this dwelling place was dramatically different from its counterparts in the synoikistic *poleis* of classical Greece and even more so from those of the *oikoumenē*, which was coextensive with the Greek and Roman *imperia*. Unlike those of later dwellings, settlements, and political territories, the horizons of the *oikos* were hospitably opened to include hired laborers and craftsmen, servants and slaves, animals, even strangers, outlanders, and gods. Scholars of all stripes have devoted volumes of research to this institution. The question at issue in this chapter, however, is not how the *idea* of *oikos* might inform a political, cultural, or anthropological theory of settlement and society (ideology). It is rather to phenomenologically educe from pre-classical Greece the *logos* of dwelling there, in the elementary sense unearthed in chapter 3. Here I propose that this way of dwelling was grounded on an understanding of being that was neither metaphysical nor strictly physical, but *mythophysical*. In other words, the self-emergence and gathering of *phusis* into the cosmic and local-temporal horizons of the *oikos* was rich in *mythological* significance, hearkening back to the sacred, cosmogonic past of all things born of Gaia.

We first enter the *oikos* by mapping out its "economic" and "topographic" dimensions on the axes of *phusis* and *logos* from chapter 3. In contrast to what conventionally falls under the

banner of political economy, evidence indicates that Homeric society was founded on *oikonomia* in the original sense of the word: the careful stewardship of nature's greater household. To be a caretaker (*oikonomos*) of this household was a tenancy granted to those who abidingly saw to its *cultivation* (from *cultus* 'to worship' and *colere* 'to till', 'dwell', or 'care for'). This *natural economy* was based on the dispensation (*nomos*) of the intertwining orders *phusis* and *theos* (the divine), which allotted the dweller apportioned shares of land (*klēros*) and fate (*moira*), place and time. Through cooperative customs and rituals, the caretaker ensured that she partook *in* these orders whenever she partook *of* their gifts. In this precariously settled world, where crisis frequently coincided with opportunity at timely turning points (*kairoi*) in mythophysical cycles of generation and destruction, the caretaker's subsistence hinged on her attunement to the metabolic equivalence of caring for and being cared for by the other. Compelled by the infinite debt of earthly dispensation, mortals nourished exposures to the due measure and timely proportion of caring for others evergreen and immortal. A study of work and labor rituals as well as xenial customs of dwelling reveals how this was achieved by cultivating the earth in the construction of house and farmstead, the tending of crops and livestock, and the accommodation of guest-strangers.

On the foundations of this analysis I set out to reconstruct the Homeric ecology of being. The cornerstone of this interpretation is laid by tracing the semantic paradigm of *oikos* back: from the Classical acceptance of *oikeios*, the ecumenical closure of otherness into 'ownness' or 'belongingness', to Homer's word *oikeioō*, which referred to dwelling-with in a manner that affiliated others *as others* with the dwelling place. From pertinent passages in the Homeric epics I extrapolate two conditions of this *ecological affiliation* (*logos oikeios*). The first is generation (*genesis, genos*), or being-of as being born of earth. The second is caring-for (*philēo, philotēs*), or being-in by dwelling with earthborn others. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate how generation and caring-for served to gather together and sustain the two orders of the mythophysical *oikos*: the immortal earth and the mortal world. By dwelling other-wise with deference for the mythophysical other (Gaia), I conclude that the Homeric caretaker conserved the ecological difference of all things born of earth, be they crops or outcroppings, intimates or strangers, animals, humans, or divinities.

Philosophers have long presumed a yawning gulf to divide the mythological world of the Homeric Age from the advent of philosophy in archaic Greece. Chapter 5 traverses an earthen

bridge over that gulf by way of Homer, Solon, Babylonian mapmakers, Thales, Anaximander, and Heraclitus. Advancing an eco-phenomenological reappraisal Anaximander's philosophy that disputes the many mythoclastic, proto-rationalist, and obscurantist interpretations, I set out to unearth a watershed in which the vocation of *philosophia* derived from what was once a divine invocation to care (*phileō*) and dwell other-wise (*oikeoō*, *sophon*). We begin by examining *apeiron*, Anaximander's archetypal concept of boundless or indefinite being. For him *apeiron* named the material *archē* of beings (i.e. the source of their generation and destruction) as well as that indefinite element (*stoicheion*) out of which others more definite emerge (e.g. water, air, fire). Against the homological reduction or metaphysical inflation of his doctrine, I underscore its ingredience in our lived-through, flesh and blood encounters with the (a)periphenomenal self-emergence of *phusis*. I then proceed by way of its Homeric and early Archaic traces to demonstrate how this indefinite nature (*phusin apeiron*) announced the elemental side of being, or earthliness as such. This analysis culminates in an eco-phenomenological reinterpretation of Anaximander's sole surviving fragment.

Our reckoning with the elemental thought of Thales' Milesian protégé sets the stage for an ecological recovery of Thalesian philosophy. The first steps in this direction are taken as steps back to the coastal city of Miletus in the archaic Greek world, thus to the birthplace of Ionian philosophy and the formative locale of Thales' wisdom. Moving outward from the layout of his sixth-century dwelling place to the global topology depicted by two maps of the period, Babylonian and Anaximandrian, we wander through an earth-world shaped by Thales' *archē*. This waterborne voyage takes its bearings from the historiographic and archeological record. Yet it doesn't stop there. Our focus will fall on how these maps foster a transposition into the experience of being *moved* by the waters of the Archaic earth much as Thales might have been.

From this vantage point I deliver on the promises of chapters 1 and 3 by mending the tangled feazings of Thales' philosophy where they were left hanging. The misweave in the weft of Aristotle's warped treatment, and all those later patterned on it, opens a tear in the fabric of hermeneutic self-evidence, inviting a generative alternative sewn from the clues unraveled from the history of ecology. We revisit Aristotle's simplest, unembroidered formulation of the Presocratic concept *archē*: "that from which a thing is first generated [*gignetai*] and into which it is finally destroyed [*phtheirō*]." In this one detects the watermark of Homer's account of Okeanos, which he claims "is of all things the kind of *genesis*" as well as a source of destruction.

Fathoming this undercurrent will reveal that before Thales' *archē* flowed into the Classical Age as a philosophical concept, before it was decanted by science and metaphysics, it was drawn up from the same elementary experience of generation and destruction which had once inspired the deferent poetry of Homer and the dwelling rituals of the Homeric Age.

The cosmogonic primacy ascribed to earth (Gaia) in the mythologies of Homer and Hesiod prompts the question as to the relation between earth and water in Thales' archeology. Among the *phusikoi* he classifies as material monists, Aristotle notes that not one of them identifies earth as *archē*. But what if his homological reduction of their wisdom and his deracination of *oikoumenē* (world) from *gē* (earth) together conspired to camouflage from reason the indefinite mode of being that each regathered anew? This would suggest that the earth, which passed unnoticed directly under Aristotle's epistemophilic gaze, was hardly forgotten by his ecological predecessors as it was by him and his ecumenical successors. If early Presocratic thinkers never named earth "proper" (*oikeios*), this is because it so ruptures that hypostatic sense of *oikos* it cannot be properly named. Instead, their discourse deferently conserved the hinting silence of its indefinite being, which flashes emphatically, albeit apophatically, in Anaximander's word *apeiron*. Contra Aristotle, I argue that the definite elements named by water (Thales), air (Anaximenes), and fire (Heraclitus), were not competing answers to questions concerning: empirical knowledge of the indivisible material constituent of all beings; or *a priori* knowledge of the hypostatic beingness underlying their appearance. Rather, these *archai* were set forth as mutually necessary expositions of earth's (a)periphenomenal emergence into world.

By way of these channels I sound the depths of how Thales' archeological thesis ("water is the *archē* of all beings") conveys the ecological difference where his doctrine branches off from Anaximander's. Where Anaximander turns his attention to the wellspring of the elements, Thales foregrounds a single off-spring of its indefinite being. At their confluence under the care-given horizons of the dwelling place, water is a phenomenal precipitate of earthliness, set apart from other elements by their modes of indefinite disclosure and boundless exposure – vaporizing, conflagrating, or petrifying as the case may be. A ubiquitous phenomenon affiliated with every dwelling place it replenishes, water has always intimated, in the experience of its afflux and reflux, the debt exacted of all earthborn beings in the time of the earth itself. Although it gathers beings into life, life into bodies, and bodies into the lifeways of their communities, it can just as swiftly bring about their collapse. In the rift of the earth-world, the archeology of

water eventuates as the contention between the affordances and hindrances of this element, its sheltering allotments and cataclysmic exactions, in short, its ecological difference. More than air or stone or even fire, the indispensability, lability, and hazards of water together alert the caretaker to the necessity of duly accommodating and kairotically cultivating the earthly dispensation of the dwelling place. An ecological wisdom at least as ancient as Homer and as modern as eco-phenomenology.

The ecological difference refers primarily to the ontological relation between the earth and the world. Correlatively, it denotes the relation between the flesh and the body (explored in chapter 8). Yet Thales' discourse pertains to an *element* of earth and its phenomenal truth, one side of which is always experienced from *places* in the world. To localize our understanding of water, I draw in chapter 6 from Edward Casey's phenomenology of place. Casey's analysis of the complex, correlational interdependence of body and place will prove indispensable for understanding both the worldly manifestation of water and the Archaic *oikos*, which was at once a built place, a wild place, and a dwelling place in-habited on the edge of displacement. Against the brute experiential primacy and indissolubility of that correlational structure, however, I submit that the body's ecstatic immersion in the elements of place can occasion an exposure so intense as to effect a displacement more profound than Casey seems to allow. To enlarge on one of his key concepts, this exposure to the "ontological wildness" of the elements is not confined to wilderness. It lay dormant in the affective atmosphere of every place on land or sea, along the trail or city sidewalk. However exceptional or outlandish these immersive experiences have become in our age of ecological abjection, I submit that for that very reason they are indispensable for reconnecting us with the generative grounds of being-in-place and the finitude of the body, its being-of-the-earth. In broader strokes, one might say that when Casey declares the "true ecstasy of experience [to be] placial," this captures but one side of unconcealment: the revelations of the (corporeal) understanding. Insofar as we also stand out from place into the self-concealing side of truth, I insist that the ecstasy of experience is *elemental* as well. The contrast between the ecstatic implacement of the body and this hyper-ecstatic displacement enriches a theme introduced in chapter 2. If fundamental moods ground our bodies in the world, elemental attunements unsettle the body while exposing the flesh to the earth. Thought ecologically, earth is not itself a place. And if it manifests itself *as itself* in the place-world, it only does so through the displacement of the body from its habitual habitat and the dislocation of experience itself

from each by degrees ranging from disorientation to total immersion unto the brink of death. For Casey's project to lead us in the genuinely "ecocentric direction" he promotes, I conclude that the conflict between worldly implacement and earthly displacement mustn't take its sole measure from the body, mustn't be "fought on *its* terms." If we are to "let the earth be the guiding force, the first voice, the primary presence," as he puts it, I conclude that we must allow for its forceful disownment of, its silence to, its primary absence from the body.

In chapter 6, I seek to resuscitate the wisdom of Thales by renewing its vital claims upon our own. Narrowing the scope from *all* things to those given to elementary perception, to the imagination, and those regathered into speech, I set out to demonstrate the distinctive way that water generatively grounds the correlative structures of being-in-the-(place)-world. Rather than be premised on logical axioms, scientific facts, or "self-evident" common sense, these phenomenological arguments are supported by experiences lived and vividly expressed by poets of the earth. The sources in question have been selected for the potency with which they expose us to the being of water, diluting our modern preconceptions while flushing our ears, that they might become vessels for the theoretically unsieved poetics of its first-recorded philosophical spokesman. With this in mind, I defer to the words of those who not only describe our commerce with springs, rivers, and tides, but demonstrate the ways of water through discursive fluency. From these founts I educe how this element averts the eye and defies the ear in proportion to our *aversion* to its *dispersion* from perceptual sense and concerned *superfluity*. Only by deferring the urge to make sense of what is given to the organs of perception and *immersing* ourselves in the atmospheric intensity of water do we open the locks and sluice gates for the *emersion* of insight. In giving full measure to our exposure to its indefinite being, the phenomenologist and poet join hands in tapping the groundwaters of Thales' archeology, extracting inceptive *condensations* that slake our thirst for wonder with novel re-visions and poetic saying.

Chapter 7 draws the curtain on the history of ecology by returning to the parable of Thales, the well, and the Thracian maid introduced at the outset of our investigations. Historically, Thales has figured in the tale as a heroic emblem or a tragic omen of the philosopher. Meanwhile, the ecumenical tradition has failed to find the humor, let alone wisdom, in the words of the Thracian who takes him to task. Instead, she is cast as a supernumerary, an anonymous emissary of the rabble or everyman. Whether we look to the versions passed down from Plato or Aesop, the parable itself gives no indication of the philosopher's thoughts about his

pratfall or, for that matter, the laughter of the Thracian. But this has not prevented thinkers from filling his head with their own notions while emptying hers of any genuine philosophical acumen. In this chapter I seek to rectify these longstanding presumptions by composing a writ of restitution based on what we know of Thales and the Thracian, however partial and fallible that knowledge is. If there is a case to be made for the idea that Thales shared in her *humor* (from the Latin meaning ‘moisture’ or ‘liquid’), it is that his laughter would have sprung from *humility* (from *humus*, ‘earth’) in the face of a double *humiliation*, immersive and discursive. Quite unexpectedly, he found himself out of his depth in the very element that engendered his archeology and was later rumored to spell his destruction – according to one famous account Thales died of dehydration. But what ultimately brought him down to earth that day was a *logos* dealt by the none other than a fellow philosopher-caretaker, from an *oiketēs*, a servant of the dwelling place. On my reading, if we are to solve the riddle of the parable, we must find the *carnal humor* in the laughing *logos* of the Thracian: an elemental attunement to the earthly finitude of existence.

Typecast by Plato as an uneducated captive-slave among the faceless multitudes, the Thracian woman of the tale could not be more foreign to the founding fathers of Greek philosophy. Yet she is also described as refined and witty, addressing Thales in an idiom no less philosophical for being ribald. Plato, who disregards all countervailing biographical evidence to deliver a dry and sober defense of the impractical philosopher he finds in Thales, never condescends to question her identity. Nor, for that matter, has anyone bothered – at least among those who have followed in his footsteps. Against the grain of history, I propose that the Thracian assumed many identities indeed, each attesting to the idea that Democritus – also from Thrace – was by no means the first laughing philosopher. In this chapter I attempt to recover her untold story by tracking the timelost allusions of the parable in the *Theaetetus* back to the twin personae of Baubo and Iambe in the Orphic and Homeric hymns to Demeter. Along the way we discover a heritage of carnal humor among Thracians and, notably, Thracian women and slaves. Theirs were castes released from abjection in the Greek world by an unfettered laughter, an abderian laughter that simultaneously strengthened their bonds to the earth and subverted the institutions and destitutions of their world. My central contention is that Thales’ interlocutress stands at the wellspring of Western philosophy as heiress and literary personification of that heritage.



The story I shall tell runs as follows. The Thracian slave who lifts the spirits of the goddess in Homer's hymn and, in a variant from the Thracian poet Orpheus, bawdily lifts her own skirts while carrying Dionysus in her womb, accompanies the thrice-born god of Thrace while doffing her mythic garb to embark on a sacral pilgrimage along the coast of archaic Ionia. Her critical part in the hymns is replayed on a famous bridge on the edge of Eleusis during the Thesmophoric preamble to the Greater Mysteries, which were reportedly founded by a Thracian hero. Scurrilously, she sings and dances with Archilochus (the son of a Thracian slave-woman) through the first major wave of iambic poetry, her namesake. Mockingly, she addresses the *phusikos* in the parable related by Plato, the astronomer in the version attributed to Aesop (a Thracian slave himself on some accounts). Already in texts from the Classical period, however, we find her voice sanitized, her laughs throttled by the imperious voices of reason. Socrates, hears only slander in the scoptic repartee of Antisthenes, whose mother was another Thracian slave. And the humor of Thales' inquisitor strikes Plato as nothing short of defamation, vulgar, coarse, and slavish. Later, Aristotle will reinforce Plato's legislations against *iambos* (the performance, and the poetic genre) by condemning the iambically patterned "language of the many" as too common to stir the noble emotions. And by the time that ecumenism comes into its own, the Thracian's earthy humor will be ironically trivialized, then transmogrified as she takes on a Gorgonian aspect, tinged with malice and evil.

Acting off-scene (*obscaenus*) of that patrilineal drama to expose the mud (*caenum*) that cakes his flesh at the bottom of the well, the Thracian exposes Thales to a subterranean obscenity that is apt to unsettle a high-and-dry-minded thinker. From those dark depths she draws a bucketful of therapeutic humor, an allopathic dose of mockery and mystery decocted from care for her ecological affiliate. In light of our historical study, her laughter, which assumes all the buoyancy of water, reveals itself as a timely response to a kairotic moment of disjuncture between the world of the thinker and the elements of thought. Culling evidence that Thales and the Thracian drew their wisdom from a common source, I claim that her obscene exposure would have elicited from him a laughter unto death, born of an irreverence for the world together with a newfound deference for the waters of the earth. When its past-sunken sources are dredged, I conclude that the parable of Thales thereby conveys an elemental ecstasy that disperses the faraway vision of the philosopher and, upon his muddy emersion, an ecological response-ability that condenses the superfluity of existence. Thus does it hold water to this day as a testament to

the humorous equivalence of womb and tomb in the allohistorical way of all flesh, the carnal comedy of our earthly finitude.

All the theoretical and paths we have cleared converge in chapter 8. On this final leg of our journey we shall be guided by Merleau-Ponty, whose philosophy I reframe and renovate to introduce three significant developments in the ecology of being. In this we retread his path from *The Structure of Behavior* to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, then round its decisive ecological turn in *The Visible and the Invisible*. The first of these developments refashions the problem of finitude as a paradox of expression, set against the homological tradition as a kind of *hetero-teleology*. As early as *Structure*, I argue, one finds this concept at play in Merleau-Ponty's decision to pattern organic behavior on *melody*, symphonically integrated into the three orders of nature's gestalt being. In his middle period the hetero-teleology of expression is expanded through his analysis of gesture, conceived as the primitive mode of sense-making in which the body "sings" the world. Finally, it is refined in Merleau-Ponty's carnal ontology through the notion of institution (*Stiftung*) and the originary institution (*Urstiftung*) of the flesh (of the body), which sings instead the earth (the flesh of the world). Consolidating these themes, I seek to demonstrate how expression may be enlisted not merely in the task of attending to our *intellectual* finitude but contending with the ecological tragedy.

The second development consists in the attempt to rethink *existence* through the ecological difference as corporeal being-in-the-world and carnal being-of-the-earth, or *being-of-the-earth-in-the-world*. This difference is transversal to the phenomenological difference (sensing-sensible) and correlative to the earth-world. Building on Merleau-Ponty's concept of the chiasm from *The (In)Visible*, I configure the *chiastic* movements between the four ekstases of being (flesh, body, earth, world) into a *chiasmatic* arrangement. This I call *the ecological fourfold*. This linchpin of the treatise is prepared by an interrogation of Merleau-Ponty's earlier phenomenology of the body, of sensation as "rudimentary perception," and by an eco-phenomenological reconstruction of his later ontology of the flesh. On the latter front, I undertake a fine-grained analysis of the most prominent conceptual articulations of the phenomenological difference in *The (In)Visible*, bringing them together under the paradigm of touch. Namely: intertwining, divergence, chiasm (chiasmus/chiasma), visible-invisible, anonymity-ipseity, absence-presence, and empathy (*Einfühlung*).

Like a river through the landscape of the final chapter runs time. Starting from the historical movement of the physical, vital, and human orders of *Structure*, we follow that river on its course through Merleau-Ponty's evolving treatment of the "absolute past of nature." Along the way, we explore the concepts of trace and rhythm as impersonal expressions of *life-time*, or the natural history of the organism, and elemental time, which outstrips it. In the penultimate section of the treatise we come to the estuary at the end of the *Phenomenology*, where we are offered an apparently watertight critique of this "confused metaphor," this River Time. Marshaling insights from previous chapters, I contest Merleau-Ponty's position on the grounds that it rides roughshod over the elements of this metaphor, funneling our immersive experience of the depths of time into the point of view of someone who inhabits a "field of presence" on its surface. Moreover, I argue that the subjectivist theory he expounds in the *Phenomenology* betrays an ecumenical disclosure of the past into the historical world, as exemplified by his disavowal of the earth "prior to man."

After carefully dissecting the flesh of *The (In)Visible*, I then stitch out of its *disjecta membra* an interpretation that salvages the *element* of the River Time, shaped by Merleau-Ponty into the figure of a temporal "vortex." Following Heraclitus, who has us step into the river, we wade into water one last time to evince how the experience of immersion excorporates our bodies and exposes our flesh to the allohistorical *arrhythmia* of elements in the abyssal rifts of the historical landscape. Just as this immersion had previously been shown to displace our bodies and inhibit their lateral incorporation of local phenomena, so does it arrest our futural projection and dislocate us from the field of presence. I duplicate the allohistorical implications of this exposure with a graphic gesture, an ontological origami that sets the ekstases of being in motion by folding the fourfold to reveal its temporal thickness. The result is a moving image of our earthly finitude, one which unfolds the temporal difference of being-in and being-of. Being-in-the-world, we are corporeally synchronized with our personal concerns and the impersonal rhythms of life-time. Yet the flesh of our bodies, being-of-the-earth, is untimely in an elementary sense. And it is precisely the fluxive arrhythmia of the flesh of time that renews the ecological difference of each singular moment, furnishing the generative ground of being-there, in and toward the historical world.

## The Weight of Abjection

The artisan, or tradesmen . . . who exercise the mechanical arts, which are so named to distinguish them from the liberal arts. This is because the mechanical arts were formerly practiced by serfs and slaves, and indeed we commonly call mechanical anything that is vile and abject.

—Charles Loyseau, “A Treatise on Orders”<sup>1</sup>

As for the poor labourer at the bottom of the pyramid, who bears upon his shoulders the whole fabric of society, he seems himself to be pressed down below ground by the weight, and to be buried out of sight in the lowest foundations of the building.

—Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*<sup>2</sup>

Out of the land you’re digging there,  
Obedient and woeful drones,  
With all the effort of your bones,  
Of all your muscles, stripped and bare,

Say, what strange harvest do you farm,  
Convicts from the charnel house,  
And what contractor hired you out  
To fill what farmer’s empty barn?

Do you (our dreadful fate seems clear  
In your design) intend to show  
That in the pit we may not know  
The sleep we have been promised there;

Non-being will not keep its faith;  
That even Death can tell a lie,  
And that, Alas! eternally  
It falls to us, perhaps, at death

In some anonymous retreat  
To see the stubborn land is flayed  
By pushing the reluctant spade  
Under our bare and bleeding feet?

—Charles Baudelaire, “Digging Skeletons”<sup>3</sup>

High on the ridgetside switchbacks above Pate Valley, one day’s hike upstream from the storied Hetch Hetchy, a trill of hammers fills the air beneath a dawnbroached sky. We had

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Loyseau, “A Treatise on Orders,” in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, ed. Keith Michael Baker (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987 (1610)), 30.

<sup>2</sup> Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (London: Methuen, 1961), 1:353.

<sup>3</sup> Fernando Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Richard Zenith (London and New York: Penguin, 2001), 189-91.

finished clearing the last section of trail by midsummer. In the course of several seasons of neglect, dense clutches of manzanita and buckthorn had staked their heliotropic claims. Claims curtailed by shear and saw along that trail so that from its sides there did emerge, in all attitudes of disrepair, the remnants of century-old stoneworks. Those stones were laid as brush was cleared with like intent. To conserve the passage. To hold it open for others to come.

Much as anything built at the world's edge, the trails of the backcountry are things relentlessly fraught with closure. Each year the forces of nature conspire to encumber the way. Over several they can make it impassable or obscure it so completely that it disappears into its wild surrounds. The Pate Valley Trail, one of many embroidering the thousand square miles of sanctioned Yosemite wilderness, bears this out in spate. Along its precipitous descent through upper and lower montane forests to riverine woodlands, it sustains: the constant encroachment of the understory; sporadic deadfalls and rockslides; the seasonal slog and squelch of boots and hooves; and most ruinous of all, the onslaught of water.

The works of the dead bear the weight of the world that survives them. Nowhere is this more deeply graven than in places built of stone, time-honored bulwark, shelter, sepulcher of all. Embedded in and so thoroughly of the earth as to go unnoticed by the untrained eye, these works mark life's ramified passage into the elements. Long after that first crew cut the Pate Valley Trail and provisioned it with stone, its retaining walls, riprap terraces, and waterbars have remained, shoring up the grade to safeguard the passage. The ruins of ancient civilizations attest to the resilience and permanence that has made this element suitable for giving weight to human history, memorializing and marking out the boundaries of lifetimes, generations, and epochs of a past that was never present to us. But in regions like Yosemite, set aside from civilization for the sake of conservation, that weight is as nothing next to the preponderance of the earth.

The sun itself seemed to weigh upon me out there on the ridge where I labored like some latterday Atlas hobbled by his burden. After making the hour-long trek from camp, we had proceeded each to his or her own section of trail and fell to our tasks. Mine had seemed straightforward: the demolition and reconstruction of a retaining wall first erected, I was told, some three decades after Yosemite was founded. As were others in this area of the park, the wall was composed of a mortarless assemblage of dry-jointed stones that had been excavated from the vicinity. Where once they were quarried by strings of mules or oxen, it is now the trailworker's task to dislodge these earthsunken boulders and heave them end over end to grade. So menial

and strenuous is this undertaking that it has inspired an aptronym befitting of the abject castes of certain insect colonies. But “pissanting” merely stoked the flames of my vexation that day. Already I was some hours laying stone. And these hours – prolonged by constant wristwatch reckonings – seeped and pooled and ossified like things secreted from the trees. From those conifers that towered over me to the red squirrel achatter in their boughs, from the warm breeze that worried their needles to the wrinkled sound of a runnel purling over their naked roots, to all I was oblivious. Oblivious to all beyond my compass of concern, which had so contracted, so closed in upon itself in the midst of my labors as to admit of nothing other than the numb weight of my fatigue and that unfinished wall I had cobbled together – slipshod, disjointed, utterly implausible. As morning wore on, each stone passing through my hands grew heavier than the last. As through some contagious petrification, my body contracted this ponderous inertness. Beginning at the extremities, my avoirdupois came to weigh upon itself, the stronger parts hoisting and hauling the weaker along like gobbets of a corpse until the stronger too flagged and hung like lichen from its core.

The day had begun like any other that season. I had arrived at my section in good spirits, eager to fall to and determined to follow through. From the crew foreman I had received a clear idea of what the finished product should look like, the purposes it was to serve, and the specifications of its construction. But the moment I attempted to apply that formula in laying the stone, my efforts were confounded. However much I hammered and chiseled, shaping and reshaping their lobes and asperities into would-be congruities, the rocks refused to conform to my intentions. I would expend whole hours on a single stone, making minute adjustments to key it into the wall, only to discover that some other had shifted, its joints no longer sound. I would vacillate between dexterous absorption and deliberate reflection: from being utterly absorbed in the precision work of hewing and setting the stone, to examining and reappraising my faltering work. Yet the concerted industry of these two approaches proved unequal to the task. I ran up against an adamant resistance that stultified *all* efforts. The granite defied every form and end I imposed, be it manually or mentally. Yet I persisted. And at length I became the very embodiment of that resistance, my every exertion lunging forward out of then collapsing back onto the overwhelming fatigue.

I was initially captivated, engrossed by the plenitude of possibilities of this raw material. To my mind, the stones were ultimately interchangeable. Provided that I selected those of ample

size, each could be hammered into any shape I pleased (would that it were so!). In contrast to prefabricated materials – the finished lumber, concrete quadrels, and machined steel that I had worked before – the forms lying dormant in the granite were hypothetically manifold. I imagined the extraction of those forms to be an agonistic, quasi-Promethean endeavor. Here was an opportunity to measure the strength of mind and body against the impenetrable core of nature in its uttermost nativity, to master this element of earth through skillful self-mastery.

In his meditations on the “adversarial” imaginings of manual labor, Gaston Bachelard accords pride of place to granite in clashes such as these. “Granite,” he tells us, “is a particular kind of provocation. Its imperviousness is an offence that cannot be avenged without weapons, without tools, without human ingenuity.”<sup>4</sup> It would be years before I would read these lines. Still, they capture, by retroaction as it were, the thrust of my approach at the time. By the might and mastery of my tool-wielding body, deployed with willful intelligence, I sought to answer that provocation. As though to carry out Bachelard’s injunction “to dominate the very interiority of matter,” I would conquer the intransigent stone, break and shape it to my purpose. Thus would I strip form away from the formless, utility from inutile matter, which only mattered inasmuch as it yielded to my concern to convert into serviceable means to achieving those ends. But in time this elemental *agon* came to assume a certain tragic aspect. My Promethean ambitions were dashed upon the rocks. So far from yielding, the granite resisted my resolve, pulverized my intentions, calcified my concern. Until all that once mattered to me about this work now ached with fatigue, blistered with aggravation, and seeped away *ad tedium*.

Bachelard would later soften this image somewhat. From Goethe’s “passionate inclination toward granite and primitive rock [*Urgestein*],” he draws this simple admonition: “Stones are dumb masters. They strike those who look upon them dumb.”<sup>5</sup> In my single-minded struggle to master the stone, I was deaf and dumb to these hard lessons. I became more callous still as my concern was absorbed with the day’s heat into this world-defying element. But I was also deeply stricken. At the outset I had aspired to make some indelible personal impress on the trail, to add in human store to the longstanding legacy of workmanship that had harnessed it to the world. Over the course of the season, however, this aspiration began to topple beneath the stifling weight of that very tradition. Under the yoke of imperious regulations enforced by the

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<sup>4</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Kenneth Haltman (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002), 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 156-162.

National Park Service, I felt myself subjected to what was fast becoming a creatively degenerating process of conformity to a host of production quotas, codified heuristics, and managerial rubrics of assessment. Under this system of management, my works could only make that personal mark within a wider context that outstripped it. As one among many dispensable hands commissioned to fill a placeholder in that industry, I came to feel grimly alienated from the work. In effect, its gripping novelty was nullified by a double refusal of difference: of so many stones indifferent to my abilities and concerns; and of concern itself, recuperated into a calculus of efficiency objectives that militated against my commitment to it. Faced with this double refusal and déjà vu, I experienced my purposive captivation give way to an exasperated indifference and this to the benumbing fog of tedium.

Most of us are familiar with the benumbing effects of boredom in the workplace, be it a place of manual or intellectual labor, skilled trade or profession. But to succumb to these effects in a place where millions converge each year precisely to seek relief from them betrays a peculiar strain of abjection. In *The Book of Disquiet*, Fernando Pessoa offers a lucid description of this mood:

Nothing is worse than the contrast between the natural splendour of the inner life, with its natural Indias and its unexplored lands, and the squalor (even when it's not really squalid) of life's daily routine. And tedium is more oppressive when there's not the excuse of idleness. The tedium of those who strive hard is the worst of all.

Tedium is not the disease of being bored because there's nothing to do, but the more serious disease of feeling that there's nothing worth doing. This means that the more there is to do, the more tedium one will feel.<sup>6</sup>

It is one thing to suffer idle boredom. When there is nothing to do because I am doing nothing, it is easy enough to find something to do. Even when this condition runs deeper, as when I am bored with myself, there is still some palliative promise in escaping myself through various means. But when boredom derives from the deeds themselves, then this “feeling that there's nothing worth doing” finds recurrent confirmation. Once mired in the *tedium* of drudgery, it's not simply the case that significance withdraws from my ambit of activity. The very significance of that activity is vitiated. In this vein Pessoa speaks of “a vast effacement of every act I do, rather than a potential weariness from acts I'll never do.”<sup>7</sup> Whether they are efficacious as means to achieving some end is of no account here. For the drudgery has commissioned my concern to another, say, a managerial other whose imperatives outstrip all others. My body's involvement is

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<sup>6</sup> Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Zenith (London and New York: Penguin, 2001), 365.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.



thereby relegated to that of a means, an assemblage of organs in the narrow sense of the Greek *organa*: tools, implements, equipment.

Boredom typically arises when we cannot act for lack of concern, or are under some duress to act on a concern that doesn't seem to matter. But tedium, by virtue of its unremitting demands on our attention, compels a kind of constant action that forecloses the possibility of redirecting it toward new or nascent concerns beyond the compass of those already imposed. The upshot being that we are left to confront a rather unsavory dilemma. Either we opt out, or we content ourselves with token actions. Such was my dilemma the morning my work sunk into tedious drudgery. On I drudged out of sheer inertia. But these labors amounted to little more than minimally satisfactory expedients, contrived simply to lighten the burden of hours, minutes, and seconds. To the petrification of my body there was added that of time itself, which weighed on me like a millstone.

For most people most of the time, time is transparent. It is *nothing* in particular. Seldom in the sweep of our everyday affairs do we attend to it *as* something. In tedium, however, time becomes conspicuous. Excised from below the threshold of awareness by the scalpel of attention, whole slabs of duration are flayed, dissected, and minutely ascertained. Indeed, the metaphors customarily summoned to describe the tedious procession of time bear all the marks of pathology. Like some parasite or malignancy, time does not “fly” but “crawls,” “creeps,” or “drags along,” or else it congeals into an insidious *nunc stans* like some necrotemporal tumor. The same diagnosis rings true of idle boredom of course. But those falling victim to tedious drudgery more clearly *embody* these metaphors. Time feeds on their organs, metastasizes. Their bodies waste away before our very eyes.

Instead of filling time, my labors filled me with temporal dread. Because it afforded no firm purchase for my concern, the expanse of the future unfurled itself before me in its hollow breadth. I was temporally out of sync. Outcast from that concernful rhythm of expectation and fulfillment that confers on the past, present, and future their timely proportion, I languished in the arrhythmia of a *temps perdu*. To enter this indefinite term of confinement was to be denied the credences of time and thus to fall under the elongate shadow of its most infamous casualty. It was to be bound like Sisyphus to each redundant moment as by the shadow of a chain.

That the Sisyphian task has perennially served as emblem of drudgery and its discontents is suggestive. To be sure, both Homer and Ovid tell us that the mountain, on which the hapless

King hove his eternal burden, was sited somewhere in the deeper reaches of Hades. Yet numerous iterations of the myth suggest that this mountain rears up wherever one is bound to endure some protracted, futile labor. The Sisyphean task is essentially dislocated since it is liable to supplant the consolations of place with the desolation of a site whose significance collapses into the ineluctable order of the task. Within that order nothing has the right to exist unless it be conducive, the body included. All its energies are expended in making itself serviceable under a wider rubric of dislocation and dispossession. And all space becomes indifferent if not hostile to us as the fruits of our labors accumulate.

Such was my desolation at the worksite where my temporal torments were attended by a certain *horror vacui*. If I worked within earshot of others while enveloped by the lush beauty of that wild locale, I did so unwittingly. In the midst of my travails I'd been thrown back onto my solitary self, a displaced self incognizant of and insensate to everyone and everything beyond the workorder. As I proved feckless to this order, my prior self-possession and self-assertion ceded place to self-effacement. Sequestered from my own contracted world and cast into some operose no-place where myth and stone collide, I struggled to recover my place from that atopia, my face from among its resident shades.

By turns wearied and stupefied, forsaken by time and place, plagued by aggravation then tedium, and ceaselessly set upon by the elements themselves, I yearned for nothing that morning so much as deliverance. The drudgery had gone to work on me until I scarcely had the strength to stand. And the meat of my body hung from its slackened spine as though masticated by granite teeth. Before trudging back to camp I paused to regard the wall. There it stood, that ludicrous miscarriage of masonry, returning my gaze with the leer of a death's head in whose crooked rictus grin I saw my own foretold. Condemned not only to eke out a living by the sweat of my brow, unto dust I shall return, but to abjection everlasting. Thus did I flay the stubborn land like one of Baudelaire's skeletons, with all the effort of my bones, of all my muscles stripped and bare, while the earth laughed silently beneath my bleeding feet.

## Domestic Tragedy.

### The Denial of Finitude and the Abjection of Being-in-the-World

In the *Theaetetus* Plato's Socrates relates an anecdote that has since found its way into the annals of philosophic lore. The story tells of how Thales of Miletus, widely credited as the first philosopher, was contemplating the heavens during an evening stroll when, of a sudden, he fell into a well. On observing this humiliating spectacle, it is said that a "refined and witty Thracian housemaid" was sent to her laughing place, where she proceeded to taunt Thales. "In his eagerness to know about what was up in the sky," she gibed, he "fails to see what was in front of him and under his feet." Plato draws from this episode a telling conclusion. "The same joke," he muses, "applies to all who spend their lives in philosophy."<sup>1</sup>

Somehow, in the midst of that first season in Yosemite, I had lost the trail. Like some outcast ball gone missing in the tallgrass, I felt myself expelled. Where had I gone wrong? Had I been led astray by my conversations with Heidegger? By my rude grasp of his insights into work? Nature? Did I err in bringing them to bear on my dilemma? Or was I simply not cut out for this work? Or else was it that I'd been drawn into that well beside Thales – and Heidegger too, among others – reenacting that old and tragic farce of the philosopher beguiled so by his own farsighted vision of the world that he lost his footing on the earth? As the season cycled, I would be seized by the humbling affirmation of most if not all of these suspicions.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 174a, translation modified from M.J. Levitt in John M. Cooper, ed. *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 193. All further English translations of Plato's Dialogues are from this edition unless otherwise noted. Hereafter, citations of the Dialogues will adhere to the following format: name of dialogue (or standard abbreviation, cf. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.), followed by Stephanus pagination and section letter. Three other significant early variants of the parable occur in: Aesop (*The Astronomer and the Thracian Woman*, Gibbs, fable 314; *The Astrologer*, Perry 40); Hippolytus (*Dox.* 555); and Diogenes Laertius (1.1.34). Concerning my alterations of Levitt's translation: the word *emmelēs*, which Plato chooses to describe the Thracian, is better captured by 'refined' or 'cultured' than it is by Levitt's "amusing." As we shall see in chapter 7, Plato's choice may have been based on this word's close connection with *emmeleia*, a dance performed in Greek tragedies and mentioned admiringly at *Laws* 816b. As Plato portrays it there, however, this art was less a source of amusement so much as a solemn and stately performance, emblematic of moderation and *emmelōs*, i.e. being 'in tune' or 'in harmony' (816a). That *emmelēs* was a mark of cultural refinement is confirmed by the *Sophist*, where Plato expressly contrasts it with that which is "uncultured" (*amouos*) (259e). The importance of the language Plato adopts to depict Thales and the Thracian will become apparent in chapter 7.

## §5. Time in a Vat: The Intellectual Tragedy

Whatever exists, [the judge] said. Whatever in creation exists without my knowledge exists without my consent.

He looked about at the dark forest in which they were bivouacked. He nodded toward the specimens he'd collected. These anonymous creatures, he said, may seem little or nothing in the world. Yet the smallest crumb can devour us. Any smallest thing beneath yon rock out of men's knowing. Only nature can enslave man and only when the existence of each last entity is routed out and made to stand naked before him will he be properly suzerain of the earth.

—Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*<sup>2</sup>

“Not finitude, but the denial of finitude, is the mark of tragedy.”<sup>3</sup> Proffered to us by Stanley Cavell, these words spur our thinking off the trail and toward a broader, deeper reckoning with that final, pivotal question I pondered. For they prompt us to consider how we might read in that parable of the first philosopher not merely my plight, or that of every philosopher who has ever followed in his footsteps, but a tragedy that marks us all.

Finitude? What is that and how might its denial be considered a tragedy? One approach would be to follow Cavell in thinking finitude as an ineluctable condition of the human understanding, where ‘understanding’ designates a strictly cognitive capacity geared primarily toward the attainment of rational judgment and factual knowledge. With due credit to Immanuel Kant’s delimitation of knowledge and reason to the bounds of possible experience, Cavell discerns the finitude of the understanding in our failure to settle such questions as concern the metaphysical “thing in itself,” the existence of God, what happens after we die, and why there is something rather than nothing. What he takes these enigmas to reveal is not a defeasible, empirical limitation on our understanding: something we do not in fact know or something someday explicable once all the facts are in. Rather, the irresolvable nature of such questions lies in our inability to formulate a rationally adequate response to them without depriving ourselves of the conditions of reason. Kant puts the point quite clearly: “Human reason has this peculiar fate that . . . it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend

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<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian; or, the Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 198.

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 455.

every capacity of human reason.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, our understanding of the world is an *intrinsically* finite ability, a human condition in no uncertain terms.

As Anne O’Byrne observes, “we encounter finitude in the experience of our own limits, but we experience them *as* limits only when we run against them in an attempt to run beyond them.”<sup>5</sup> When our misapprehension of the human condition incorrigibly blinds us to the experience of our own limits in spite of our recurrent failure to run beyond them, that self-blindness becomes the mark of tragedy. Blindness is a pertinent motif. For the denial of finitude, much like missing the mark (*hamartia*) in Greek tragedy, does not come about through premeditated intentions suggestive of, say, some moral deficiency. It is a transgression unwittingly performed by everyone in some measure, disposed by the “peculiar fate” of the understanding to disguise and conceal from itself what lies beyond its reach, so that its limits remain subliminal. To forecast a historical direction we shall soon pursue in depth, there is reason to believe that this blindness emerged at an ancient stage of civilization, coinciding perhaps with the earliest taxa of scientific knowledge, the incipient organs of reason.

What lies in store for us who fall prey to the self-deceptions of rational self-evidence is, on Cavell’s appraisal, “a mode of tragedy in which what we witness is the subjection of the human being to states of violation, a perception that not merely human law but human nature itself can be abrogated.”<sup>6</sup> His verdict is brought into clearer view if we consider the intellectual(ist) version of the tragedy, which is chronicled by Cavell and commonly thought to define Thales’ role in the parable. Thales enters the drama, on most accounts, as a proto-scientific doctrinaire who sets his sights on the cosmological whole only to wind up in a paralogical hole. In the twin personae of the star-gazer and navel-gazer, he epitomizes the tragic thinker who regularly stumbles upon the limits of cognition as he blunders through the world. Time and again the purblind pursuit of the unconditioned – infallible knowledge, apodictic axioms, eternal Ideas, rational absolutes – lands him squarely in the well. Rather than draw a cautionary lesson from his mundane setbacks about the human condition and the wider world beneath and beyond the intellect, he marginalizes that world, disowns it. For him it’s as though his hapless excursions through it were no more than excurses, his experiences of it but errant

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), Avii (Preface to the First Edition).

<sup>5</sup> Anne O’Byrne, *Nativity and Finitude* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 419.

digressions from the route leading inward and upward toward the truth. The chastening experience O’Byrne mentions, that of running up against the limits and “thus discovering . . . that knowing is not co-extensive with being” is precisely what is denied our tragedian.<sup>7</sup> Instead, he condemns himself or humanity for a failure that is no failure at all but an all too human condition of the understanding. In this it never occurs to him that he could be underway toward the violation of that unabrogable estate.

At first blush, this is none too different from the lesson Kant draws from a modern offshoot of Plato’s anecdote. In this variant the natural philosopher is recast in the role of the early modern astronomer and mystic Tycho Brahe, who notoriously refused to accept the Copernican model of the solar system. Aesop’s ancient version of the tale had also orbited round an astronomer (an unnamed *astrologos*). Meanwhile, a link to Thales is evident from Brahe’s seventeenth-century biography, which records how someone’s prediction of a solar eclipse had inspired the Danish nobleman to abandon a promising career in jurisprudence for astronomy.<sup>8</sup> The story goes that Tycho was trundling by coach one night when he boasted to his coachman he could plot the shortest route by the stars. The counsel of Thales’ Thracian interlocutress finds echo in the coachman’s reply: “Good sir, you may well understand the heavens, but here on earth you are a fool.” This version of the tale, which appears in Kant’s book on Emanuel Swedenborg, develops out of a discussion of the metaphysics of the supernatural. Under Kant’s critical lens, Tycho typifies those dogmatic philosophers, “assiduous and engrossed,” who “train their metaphysical telescopes on distant regions and tell of miraculous things there.” While their rational instruments are more sophisticated and better calibrated than were those of the ancient astronomer, the admonition is much the same. What speculative reason teaches about “the other world” beyond the vale, Kant cautions, “can be attained here only by one losing some of the understanding one needs for the present.”<sup>9</sup> When reason overshoots the bounds set for it by

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<sup>7</sup> O’Byrne, *Nativity and Finitude*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> I owe this latter connection to Hans Blumenburg’s treatment in *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman: A Protohistory of Theory*, trans. Spencer Hawkins (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 86. Thales was widely renowned for his prediction of the solar eclipse that occurred in May of 585 BCE. See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. R.D. Hicks, vol. 1, Books 1-5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), 1.1.23 (book.chapter.paragraph) All further quotations of Diogenes are culled from Hicks’ translations and cited by classical abbreviation.

<sup>9</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Swedenborg: Dreams of a Spirit-Seer and Other Writings*, trans. Gregory R. Johnson and Glenn Alexander Magee (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2002), 27.

intuition, leading to a conflation of their respective objects, it is the chastening insight of Kant's own Copernican turn that is denied.<sup>10</sup>

In an edifying study of the branching lineage of the Thales parable, Hans Blumenburg points out that some fifteen years later, Kant effectively reversed the symbolic roles of the moony astronomer and the earthy sensibility of housemaids and coachmen.<sup>11</sup> In an intriguing footnote toward the end of the first *Critique*, it is now the “observations and calculations of astronomers” that “have exposed for us the abyss [*Abgrund*] of our ignorance,” which “human reason could never [otherwise] have imagined to be so great.”<sup>12</sup> If we fall upward from dogmatism into that bottomless well in the sky filled with doubt, Kant insists that skepticism is merely a “resting-place for human reason” on the flight path toward critique (A761/B789). For “reflection on this [abyssal] ignorance has to produce a great alteration in the determination of the final aims of the use of our reason,” whereby the “determinate boundaries [of pure reason] . . . are proved from principles.” Universalized from sublime experiences of such boundless reaches as the heavens, these principles delimit “not merely ignorance in one part or another but ignorance in regard to all possible questions of a certain sort” (A575/B603, A761/B789). According to the provincial sage of Königsberg, who never set foot beyond Prussia and whose own promenades seldom went beyond the borders of his birthplace:

[Reason] can reflect upon its dogmatic peregrination and make a survey of the region in which it finds itself in order to be able to choose its path in the future with greater certainty, but it is not a *dwelling-place for permanent residence*; for the latter can only be found in *complete certainty*, whether it be one of the cognition of the objects themselves or of the boundaries within which all of our cognition of objects is enclosed (A761-2/B789-90, *emphasis mine*).

We dwell in this picture on the grounds of certainty that reason has furnished for itself. But we can do so only insofar as we abide within its self-legislated horizons and the boundaries of possible experience. Along these lines, Kant posits reason in the shape of “a sphere, the radius of which can be found out from the curvature of an arc on its surface (from the nature of synthetic *a priori* propositions), from which its content and its boundary can also be ascertained with certainty” (A762/B790). Across his two versions of the parable, on the hoof and in the ether, the symbolic position of the heavens and the earth are not, strictly speaking, reversed after all. Under

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<sup>10</sup> Namely, “hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. However, this assumption has thus far failed to yield metaphysical knowledge.” In its stead Kant offers that “we cognize of things *a priori* only what we ourselves have put into them” (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxviii-xxii).

<sup>11</sup> Blumenburg, *Laughter of the Thracian Woman*, 86f.

<sup>12</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A575/B603. All further citations to this text in this paragraph will be parenthetical.

the horizons of Kant's transcendental geometry, both are ordered into the inverted world of reason, where *empirical* science brings the heavens closer at hand than any farmer's handful of earth, which quakes by means of architectonic plates for *critical* science. In both versions, navigational and astronomical, the empirical employment of reason serves to interrupt our dogmatic slumber, expose our ignorance, and awaken us to its reason's regulative vocation.

Still, all this leaves one to wonder. Have not the coachman and the housemaid suffered a peculiar fate in Kant's treatment, not so much *of* reason as *by* its cunning hand? Are they not also inverted somehow by its order? Each originally speaks on behalf of what is nearest and most intimate here, in front of us, just under our feet. But all this vanishes in Kant's geometric legerdemain, which discards the earth for the perfect sphere of reason, and our experience of nature for the "nature" of synthetic *a priori* judgment. For the time being, permit me to leave these questions open as temptations to further thought while divulging some sleight of the hand that hoodwinked even Kant. The achievement we have come to recognize as his critical system was indeed earthshattering. He is rightly credited with clipping the wings of high-flown metaphysics and returning to experience in a certain fledgling state (i.e. *Anschauung*). However, that return ultimately wasn't critical enough. For what lay in the coop of his analysis was precociously plumed with the assumption that "experience itself is a kind of cognition requiring the understanding," whose "rule is expressed in concepts *a priori*, to which all objects of experience must therefore necessarily conform."<sup>13</sup> As the world hurtled toward the Enlightenment, the cunning of reason would be embraced in the form of this ontologically positivist assumption. Thereafter, "Sapere aude!" would brook none but the limits autonomously self-instated by reason through its own immanent critique. As heirs of that age, we are resolved to deploy the powers of reason to liberate us from *their* "self-incurred tutelage." Ours is in effect a peculiar fate concealed twice over, first by ignorance, then rational self-evidence.

Where O'Byrne summons the thought of Wilhelm Dilthey, Hannah Arendt, and Jean-Luc Nancy to foreground the ontological dimensions of the tragedy of finitude, Cavell draws from Ludwig Wittgenstein's late and Heidegger's early work to develop a meta-skeptical critique of its modern intellectual casualties. Though his is a skeptical position, it takes aim at the hidebound, textbound disputes over skepticism among professional philosophers. Intellectualizing the problem as an epistemological dilemma, such debates have routinely

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Bxvii.



converted it into a failure that either cannot be rectified (“skepticism”) or must be (“anti-skepticism”) on pain of relativism, nihilism, or some other scourge of unreason. As Cavell sees it, the heroic crusades against the shadow of skepticism – the sciamachy waged by Descartes and reprised by the Anglo-analytic tradition – betray themselves as so many tragically defiant sublimations of its underlying truth. Cavell redirects a couple shafts of light through the all but impervious walls of this tradition to relume that veracity, which so often shines in the commonplace to be replaced by the abstract space of reasons. It is somewhere between these that Wittgenstein and Heidegger come into relief. In spite of their manifold differences, he tells us, these thinkers share an acknowledgement and acceptance of our finitude as cognizers and rational agents. This “truth of skepticism,” at which the former arrives and the latter begins, is concisely stated by Cavell: “the human creature’s basis in the world as a whole, its relation to the world as such, is not that of knowing.”<sup>14</sup> The point isn’t necessarily that we do not know what we take ourselves to know, but that the world precedes and exceeds our finite ability to know it. As Cavell sees it, the myriad avatars of intellectualism, past and present, are unanimous in their denial of this lived truth.

We might encapsulate the intellectual tragedy as follows. Those who deny this aspect of our finitude recurrently strive to run beyond the intrinsic limits of cognition only to beat their heads in vain against them, that is, without ever ascertaining them *as* limits. The denial can be attributed to two blinkered presuppositions: first, that our essential relation to the world is one of reasoning-about and knowing-that; second, that this relation surpasses all others, knows no extrinsic bounds, and exhausts what is and what ultimately matters about the world.<sup>15</sup>

One might read the parable of Thales as an intellectual tragedy in this way.<sup>16</sup> An over-inflated intellect, blinded by its own powers of comprehension, misses its mark in the wider world. Punctured, it deflates as it plummets toward the incomprehensible depths, the mundane lacunae of reflection. For as long the thinker falls prey to the cunning of reason, his pratfalls do

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<sup>14</sup> Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 241.

<sup>15</sup> Cavell unpacks a similar set of assumptions in part 2 of *The Claim of Reason*, entitled “Skepticism and the Existence of the World.”

<sup>16</sup> One recent, noteworthy proponent of this reading is John McCumber, whose *Time in the Ditch* borrows its title from another variant of the episode. McCumber represents Thales chiefly as a prideful omen of contemporary Anglo-American (“Analytic”) philosophy. This tradition he implicates in the tragedy of those who “view themselves as seeking, and perhaps even finding, truths that are universal and atemporal,” (he adds apolitical as well), “and that, therefore, hold independently of the conditions under which they are arrived at.” John McCumber, *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy and the McCarthy Era* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2001), xv.

nothing to deter him from pressing forward on a Faustian path of despair. A world-forsaken course where every unsurpassable limit is seen as an affront, an indignity which, unbeknownst to him, can only be remedied by an impossible transgression of finitude. We are born into this atmosphere of denial, a historically ingrained predisposition of the understanding to overextend itself and conceal this from itself. But our inability to turn what Aristotle called *peripeteia* toward *anagnorisis* – the misfortunes we suffer on that path toward some resipiscent recognition of the nature of our historical predicament – well, this bespeaks a catastrophe whose resolution is perpetually forestalled. In our terms, we succumb to a disposition, or more aptly, a *dys*position of **intellectual abjection** – from the Latin ‘*abjectum*’, to be ‘thrown off’ or ‘cast away’.<sup>17</sup> We find ourselves closed off and outcast from the grounds of existence, from our basis in a world beyond right knowing and reason. The intellectualist suffers this absurd and irrational misfortune in the company of others like-minded, a kind of high-minded solidarity among victims.

In being thrown into that unseen breach in his sober world to lie at well’s bottom with limbs asplay and knowledge bucket sunken in the muck, it is above all *nature*, resistant if not irreverent to comprehension, that debases the altivolant mind. In the intellectual tragedy, nature is antecedently assimilated into the world available to cognition. What is in principle cognizable is part of the “natural world,” whereas the strictly unknowable or irrational is cast aside as “supernatural.” After Kant, the intellectualist takes the being of nature for granted as a domain of possible *objects* of experience, disregarding that the objective is taken from and granted by the otherwise than cognitive. While this position may well find its slipping anchorage in philosophy, principally in the false depths of metaphysical realism and idealism, it is important to see how the former has sedimented our ordinary attitudes toward nature. It is commonly assumed that we perceive a mind-independent natural world over against which we stand as cognizing subjects,

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<sup>17</sup> Following Drew Leder’s convention in *The Absent Body*, I adopt the prefix *dys*- (from the Greek signifying ‘bad,’ ‘hard,’ or ‘ill’) in the context of abjection to describe a tragic stance, attitude, or misattunement that turns away (the English prefix, ‘dis-’ connoting ‘away,’ ‘apart,’ or ‘asunder’) from experiencing its ontological grounds, giving rise to their *dys*-closure and dystrophy. See Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), 84-87. In the case under consideration, the intellectual *dys*position of abjection involves a turn of mind that dirempts being into either being-subject or being-object. When it perpetually fails to disclose what is inaccessible to cognition, turning away from the *prejective* grounds of that operation (i.e. those given prior to the dichotomization of subject and object), the intellect is *dys*posed to find itself in a dystopia where its grounds are *dys*-closed by the understanding. That is to say, its grounds are concealed by its own powers to reveal, even if they are obliquely exposed, affectively, as by dysphoric moods. Lest the reader be misled by my use of the term abjection, it bears mention that I do not intend it in the psychoanalytic sense most notably employed by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* to refer to elements of the psyche, traumatic experiences, or marginalized groups excluded from and in conflict with the symbolic and social orders of the superego. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), 1-31.

gathering the facts about it and generalizing them with an eye to amassing factual knowledge. Meanwhile we defer to the natural sciences, to empirical methods purportedly more discerning and reliable than our own, as incontestable arbiters of that understanding. Over our everyday lives, then, one might say that the intellectualist worldview holds sway as the scientific worldview. Whether it be upheld by the scientific expert or the uninitiated, this naive realist or “empiricist” attitude collapses nature into the works of cognition (objects, concepts, theories) without inquiring into the relations that make cognition work and nature workable in the first place. However, as Thales learned when the unconsidered grounds of his lofty speculations suddenly gave way beneath him, he who expects his grounding in nature to be furnished by his understanding of the world forgets he walks the earth and abjectly breaks his learned head upon it. “Never condescending to what lies near at hand” or “under his feet,” and with scant appreciation for this natural born wisdom that no amount of erudition can bestow, the pace of his thoughts outstripped the stepwise circumspection of his stride.<sup>18</sup> So that well before he staggered over the limits of the intellect, it seems that Thales’ downfall was portended, step-by-step, by the broken reflection of the heavens in the unheeded puddles he roiled underfoot.

That Cavell enlists Heidegger in the endeavor to reclaim our intellectual finitude should prompt us to probe more deeply into the ontological underpinnings of its tragic denial.<sup>19</sup> Cavell alleges that the intellectualist misconceives our basis in the world as a cognitive relation to a totality of knowable particulars or rationally universalized principles while disregarding the conditions of that relation. While his critical project owes much to Kant and Wittgenstein, his reconception of our worldly foundations signals a break from the spectrum of ontological positivism represented by transcendently subjective, socio-linguistic, psychologistic, and physicalist traditions. Against this legacy of misplaced concreteness, Cavell suggests that the intellectualist error has less to do with the desire for omniscience than it does with a basic misunderstanding about the being of the world and its existents. As he expresses it, we cannot know everything since “there *is* no everything, no totality of facts or things, to be known.”<sup>20</sup> But

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, *Tht.* 174a.

<sup>19</sup> Be it said that while he does explicitly mention his debt to Heidegger here, Cavell’s approach to the intellectual tragedy owes more to Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, specifically his discussions of the practical understanding or know-how that forms the basis for rule-governed social practices (e.g. language games). Be that as it may, this – as well as warranted criticism of his treatment of Heidegger, by turns terse, desultory, and sheepish – should not distract us from pursuing this line of thought further than Cavell does.

<sup>20</sup> Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 239, emphasis mine.

would Cavell then go on to claim that these truths about the world (that it is not a totality of facts or objects of knowledge) and about ourselves (that we are finite intellects) are themselves no more than facts? Things to be known? Cognized? If he is to avoid a question-begging circularity without diminishing the strength of his critique, Cavell must take recourse to another, more basic way of dwelling in the world.

## §6. World Enough and Time: The Existential Tragedy

As was perhaps the case in ancient Greece, the intuitive man . . . aims for the greatest possible freedom from pain. . . standing in the midst of a culture, [he] already reaps from his intuition a harvest of continually inflowing illumination, cheer, and redemption – in addition to obtaining a defense against misfortune. To be sure, he suffers more intensely, *when* he suffers; he even suffers more frequently, since he does not understand how to learn from experience and keeps falling over and over again into the same ditch.

–Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”<sup>21</sup>

Had we but World enough, and Time,  
This coyeness Lady were no crime.

–Andrew Marvell, “To His Coy Mistress”<sup>22</sup>

These questions bring us to the second horn of the tragedy, brought to light when we consider how Cavell’s critique of intellectualism is informed by a broader conception of the understanding. The acknowledgement of our basis in the world not being that of cognizing and the “admission of some question as to the mystery of the existence, or the being, of the world” beneath and beyond its being-cognized is a position Cavell overtly adopts from Heidegger.<sup>23</sup> This affirmative stance toward our intellectual finitude is not a top-down cognitive achievement. It is rather secured from the bottom up, by a more basic way of understanding the phenomenal world and those to whom it’s given. This way lies the extra-cognitive or anoetic sense that Heidegger derives from the word ‘understanding’ (*Verstehen*) as it figures into such German expressions as: “Man versteht sich darauf,” roughly, that one has know-how or skillful mastery of something; and “etwas können,” a competence or ability to do something (BPP 276/GA24:

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<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, trans. Daniel Breazeale (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1992), 90f.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Marvell, *Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 50f.

<sup>23</sup> Cavell, *Claim of Reason*, 241.

392; SZ 143).<sup>24</sup> Though he seldom invokes the term, this practical understanding or know-how, underdetermined by factual knowledge of explicit norms or rules, corresponds to one form of what we have been calling *wisdom*.<sup>25</sup> In such early works as *Being and Time* (1926), *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927), and *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-30), Heidegger's analysis of *Verstehen* begins with our unthematic "comportment" (*Verhalten*) in and toward the world, through which "beings," or phenomenal senses, are laid out, unfolded, or *explicitated* (*ausgelegt*) within a region of ontic significance.<sup>26</sup> What is demonstrated by the thetically underdetermined dexterity of the theorist is tacitly presupposed by her conceptual and rational mastery.<sup>27</sup> In each case our practical "ability-to-be" (*Seinkönnen*) is the means by which

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<sup>24</sup> All citations of Heidegger are parenthetical and conform to the abbreviations listed on pp. ix-xii.

<sup>25</sup> Crucially, "practical understanding" in this sense is not to be confused with the faculty that philosophers since Kant have called practical reason: a cognitive operation of reflective endorsement (viz. moral judgment) through which one may resolve questions concerning what ought to be done.

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger adopts the term "ontic" to describe our relation to possible "beings or entities" (*Seiende*, literally 'that which is') in the world. This is to be differentiated from our "ontological" relation to the "being" (*Sein*) of those beings. In his analysis *Auslegung* may enter into either side of the ontological difference as the *sense*-making operation of our understanding (practical or existential) (for the ontic sense, see SZ 80,158; for "Auslegung des Seins," SZ 26, 38). This paragraph examines the everyday employment of ontic *Auslegung*, a term which is typically translated as "interpretation," with a lowercase 'i' to set it apart from "Interpretation" (*die Interpretation*), a term that Heidegger reserves for interpretation in the usual sense of advertence, conceptualizing, and judgment involved in *meaning*-making (e.g. textual interpretation, rationally inferring the motives from a person's action). Note that I shall preserve Heidegger's distinction between the respective correlates of inadvertent *Auslegung* and advertent *Interpretation* by rendering *Sinn* as 'sense' (unthematic) and *Bedeutung* as 'meaning' (thematic) and sometimes 'signification', while translating his puzzling term for holistic *sense*, *Bedeutsamkeit*, as 'significance'. Now, to better convey the meaning of *Auslegung*, I have adopted Welton's 'ex-plication', from the Latin meaning 'folding out' or 'unfolding' – *aus-legen* literally means 'to lay out'. As Welton notes, this rendering finds support in Heidegger's association between *auslegen* and *ausbilden* (to work out, develop, or educate) and *auseinanderlegen* (to take apart, or lay out from one another) (SZ 148-150). Cf. Donn Welton, *The Other Husserl* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 351, 461f.

<sup>27</sup> The distinction between practical understanding (knowing-how) and intellectual understanding (knowing-that) is illustrated by the difference between knowing how to ride a bicycle and knowing the principles of riding – say, by studying a beginner's guide or extrapolating material implications from observation – and deliberately applying them on the bikepath. Skillful competence in riding a bicycle is underdetermined by factual knowledge and rational judgment. Consider someone who has never ridden a bicycle. Whatever beliefs she has formed about riding and however justified, her first attempts are going to be rough-going, especially if she hasn't ridden *anything* before (e.g. a tricycle). Meanwhile, the textual acquisition of knowledge presupposes that one is able to move through a world of significance out of which meaning is stitched, as every verb, preposition, and indexical attests. Even a text laden with abstract ideas and their logical relations in the space of reasons would be inconceivable, meaningless, were we not endowed with some implicit ability to kinesthetically perceive and negotiate places we make sense of despite their lack of intrinsic *meaning*. The difference has been unpacked in myriad ways by phenomenologists of the last century, with each insisting on the primacy of sense (as opposed to meaning) in understanding the world. One particularly succinct formulation is provided recently by Donn Welton, who breaks this down into the contrast between "intentions-in-action" (i.e. inherent to it) and "intentions-of-action," where the action follows from an advertent act of consciousness (-of). See, for example, Welton's "Bodily Intentionality, Affectivity, and Basic Affects" in Dan Zahavi, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 194-206.

we direct ourselves toward beings in general within the world as a nexus of “concern” (*Besorgen*) for pursuing our projects (e.g. being a mother, an aesthete, an engineer, a trailworker).<sup>28</sup> “Projection” (*Entwurf*) is Heidegger’s name for our active yet unthematic intentional directedness toward our future possibilities (SZ 145). This is to be set apart from their derivative relations to cognition, specifically conscious advertence, which makes them present (*gegenwärtigen*) as actual items, thematically given as “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*) to inspection, expectation, deliberation, and so forth. As he articulates the distinction, “an ability-to-be [*Seinkönnen*], a possibility *as* possibility, is there [*da*] only in projection. If in contrast I merely reflect on some empty possibility into which I could enter . . . then this possibility is not there, precisely as possibility; instead for me it is, as we might say, actual.” (BPP 277/GA24 392).<sup>29</sup> Taking all this into account, we can say that understanding, ability-to-be, existence, and projection are inextricable Heideggerian concepts. They are all different ways of describing how *Dasein*, being-there (in the world), existence, *is* the possibilities it projects by “being-ahead-of-itself,” always already oriented toward the future (SZ 145, 181, 192).

In projecting our practical understanding toward these future possibilities, they are given as ontic correlates of that know-how. This is crucially different from their **ontological givenness**, which is invariably at stake for *Dasein*. Ontological givenness is simply another way of saying what Heidegger calls “being” (*Sein*). Recalling our earlier discussion of the misgiven “givens” of intellectualism, I adopt this term to emphasize both the ontological difference between being and beings, as well as the co-requisite relationality of each to our understanding of it on his account. In early phases of Heidegger’s thought, being is construed as the transcendental yet historically unfolding “clearing” (*Lichtung*) of “unconcealment” (*Entborgenheit*). An alethic back-ground setting that provides the conditions or “leeway” (*Spielraum*) for what can possibly count as a being (*Seiende*), enabling us to receive any such phenomenon as given, or in his words “manifest” (*offenbar*).<sup>30</sup> Otherwise put, any definite practical orientation toward beings (the

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<sup>28</sup> All other translations of *Seinkönnen* (e.g. “potentiality-for-being”) will be modified accordingly.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. “Projecting has nothing to do with comporting oneself towards a plan that has been thought out, and in accordance with which *Dasein* arranges its Being . . . understanding as projection is such that the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects – that is to say, possibilities.” (SZ 145). Heidegger clarifies that this is “to be sharply distinguished both from empty logical possibility and from the contingency of something present-at-hand” (SZ 143).

<sup>30</sup> Famously, Heidegger overturns the longstanding interpretation of ancient Greek understanding of *alētheia*, in terms of adequation, or correspondence to reality “in itself” independent of existence. In early phases of his thought he reconceives it as the “unconcealment” (*Entborgenheit*), “unhiddenness” (*Unverborgenheit*), or “uncoveredness”

given) implies a particular *Seinsverständnis*: an understanding of the being of beings in general (their ontological givenness), which grounds the possibility of their basic manifestation, their salience to our projects, concerns, and abilities.<sup>31</sup> In contrast to our comportment toward beings (e.g. using a word processor for producing text), he claims, “that which we have competence over” in our understanding of being – is not a ‘what’, but being as existing” (e.g. productivity as our ability-to-be); in other words, it is an understanding of ourselves (SZ 143).<sup>32</sup> For sake of simplicity, then, let us refer to our understanding of being as our **ontological understanding** while bearing in mind that this is always deeply conjoined with our **existential self-understanding**. Heidegger has it that what essentially distinguishes our “being as existing,” what sets us apart from all other entities, is that we are that being which, “in its very being, that being is an *issue* for it” (SZ 12, cf. 192). On his account, “this basic mode of [Dasein’s] being,” wherein it is concerned with its own being, “is conceived as care [*Sorge*].”<sup>33</sup> In other words, we are caretakers of that for the sake of which we exist. At issue for us careful beings is that our practical understanding necessarily projects itself from our ontological understanding and existential self-understanding. We are possessed of a distinctive ability to disclose, project ourselves upon, and thereby amplify the givenness of beings, our own included, beyond the ways they have been given to us. This issue is implicitly taken up in the everyday world by any project that does not simply reiterate what is and what matters to us already, but transcends that facticity by enacting significantly new terms of engagement, enlarging the possibilities of how things

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(*Enthullenheit*) in which Dasein essentially stands by virtue of “disclosedness” (*Erschlossenheit*), a fundamental *existentiale*, or condition of existence. For more on Heidegger’s conception of truth, see §19, and §21.

<sup>31</sup> What I am calling salience is unpacked by Heidegger in terms of ontic sense and significance. Note, by ‘ground’ is meant that which gives or grants something as given, which Heidegger sometimes equates with the non-given ‘es’ of the ‘es gibt’ (there is, it gives). In his early works, ontological grounds are often cast in transcendental terms. The sense or unconcealment of being is to be grasped as the *condition for the possibility* of the “manifestness” (*Offenbarkeit*) of beings. Crucially, this is not to be confused with the metaphysical grounds of modern transcendental philosophy: the unconditioned, ahistorical structures of transcendental subjectivity; or the logico-historical dialectic of intelligibility (*Geist*). Rather, it amounts to a phenomenological thematization of our unthematic understanding of being, which is historically unfolding and epochally defining. An understanding of the *prejective* grounds of the correlation between Dasein’s abilities-to-be and the phenomenal world (prejective in the sense of being prior to the ontic differentiation of subjectivity and objectivity). For more on these themes, see §9.

<sup>32</sup> Otherwise put, this ontological understanding involves our particular “self-understanding as being-able-to-be-in-the-world [*Sichverstehens als In-der-Welt-seinkönnen*],” which determines *how* the world is given to us and *how* we are given to ourselves (BPP 279/GA24 394).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. “Dasein’s basic mode of being is that in its being its very being is at issue. This basic mode of being is conceived as care [*Sorge*], and this care as Dasein’s basic mode of being is just as originarily concern [*Besorgen*], if Dasein is essentially being-in-the-world, and in the same way this basic mode of Dasein’s being is solicitude [*Fürsorge*], so far as Dasein is being-with-one-another” [*Miteinandersein*] (L 189/GA21 225, trans. mod.).

truly are.<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, this issue can be made explicit and philosophically taken up. Such is Heidegger's initial project, conceived as "the theoretical conceptual interpretation of being, of being's structure and possibilities" as thematized by phenomenology and grounded by the science of ontology (BPP 11/GA24 15).<sup>35</sup>

How does all this bear on the problem of finitude? Well, in the case of the single-minded intellectual orientation Cavell takes to task, the existential issue is very much at stake yet never taken up. The givenness of the given is never brought to light or philosophically grounded, but uncritically posited in advance as a covertly theoretical totality of beings – a byproduct of high-level cognition to which they are present-at-hand. The ontological difference between being and beings is obscured by ontological positivism. It reduces the former to the latter. A blindness to that reduction lurks behind every metaphysical vision. As a consequence, the extra-cognitive limits of cognition are never given to the intellectualist, never registered as limits *per se*. Cavell's "truth of skepticism" reveals itself here as an existential truth, expressly stated by Heidegger. As "an original determination of Dasein's existence . . . understanding is not at all primarily a cognition . . . since existence is indeed more than mere cognition in the usual spectator sense of knowledge and such knowledge presupposes existence" (BPP 276/GA24 390f.).

What Cavell finds tragic about the *hamartia* of the intellectualist Heidegger calls "inauthentic" (*Uneigentlich*). And where Cavell tells us that the denial of finitude leads to an apparent abrogation of "human nature," Heideggerian inauthenticity betrays a violation of Dasein's self-concern, its own (*eigen*) careful vocation. On Heidegger's official position, Dasein does not simply designate the conditions of selfhood or humanity, as some critics assume. It refers to that essential relation to being defined by an existential vocation to which the intellectualist fails to answer. To say that our essence lies in existence is not to make some categorial claim about *what* we are, say, in terms of some metaphysical *idée fixe* that universally

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<sup>34</sup> Facticity (*Faktizität*) is Heidegger's term for how we cannot but take up some definite mode of being-in-the-world that responds in some measure to what has already been projected as saliently given in the past. Construed in terms the existential-ontological constitution of Dasein's timeliness, facticity and historicity refer to Dasein's "being-already-in-a-world, falling (*Verfallen*) refers to "being-amidst" beings in the present, and understanding to "being-ahead-of-itself" toward the future (SZ 193, 249). These ekstases together make up the horizontal temporal structure laid bare in Division Two of *Being and Time*.

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger will subsequently abandon the very notion of ontological *science* for reasons that will become clear in the sections ahead (e.g. §8, §19).



defines us (e.g. ensouled body, *animal rationale*, *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*).<sup>36</sup> Instead, it is a claim about our mode of being, about *how we are* such that we are able to *stand out* from every actual determination, anthropological, psychological, theological, physical, and so on. Da-sein's *da*, the existential *there*, is not fixed in the space of actuality, thematized by intuition, concepts, reasons, or measurements. Every instance of being-there is rather being-out-there, outside its actual and individual limits, extended toward a world of open possibilities, and relational all the way down (being-in-the-world). Heidegger makes the point by stressing that our essence must be "thought in terms of *ekstasis*," a Greek word composed of the roots *ek-*, meaning 'out', and *stasis*, 'to stand' (P 249/GA9 326).<sup>37</sup> Thought in this way *ek-sistence* (as he marks this nuance), implies neither a subjective appropriation of objects, nor the self-transcendence of consciousness or spirit toward the thematic or intelligible world.<sup>38</sup> Instead it designates an eccentric or outstanding relation to being that perforates these forms of immanence. Accordingly, a leading term he will adopt for this relation is *Inständigkeit*: an insistent standing in (*Innesteher*) the radical openness of being by partaking in its historically unfolding truth (P 284/GA9 374).

If this all sounds abstruse, consider an illustrative contrast between intraworldly entities and being-in-the-world. Other beings are given, thematically or unthematically, by their standing in horizons of worldly significance that have been projected onto them. As *static* beings, they remain enclosed within and closed off to the determination of their givenness, their essential possibilities for being the beings they are. A shoe, for instance, has not been granted the ability to overstep what intentions and purposes the cobbler has hammered into its soles, however it be repurposed by the Pavlova who fills it, the Van Gogh who paints it, or the Herzog who eats it. The essence of the shoe remains laced, or buckled as the case may be, to the assignments and

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<sup>36</sup> Throughout his body of work Heidegger juxtaposes *Existenz* and the Scholastic concept *existentia*, which he interprets to signify actuality or "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*) within a metaphysical understanding of being *qua* idea (e.g. P 249/GA9 326). We shall return to this theme in §9.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger reframes the issue in the "Letter on Humanism" (1946) by taking up the anthropological designations of existence: "the point is that in the determination of the humanity of the human being as *ek-sistence* what is essential is not the human being but being – as the dimension of the *ekstasis* of *ek-sistence* (P 254/GA9 333). But I shall argue that this is somewhat problematized by Heidegger's preoccupation with human ways of standing out toward being and his tendentious treatment of the nonhuman existence (see §9). Accordingly, we shall sometimes render 'Dasein' as 'human being', dropping the ontic plural to distinguish it from metaphysical and strictly theoretical conceptions of human beings on the whole.

<sup>38</sup> Compare this with his later clarification in the "Introduction to 'What is Metaphysics?'" (1949): "The ecstatic essence of existence is therefore still understood inadequately as long as one thinks of it as merely a 'standing out,' while interpreting the 'out' as meaning 'away from' the interior of an immanence of consciousness or spirit (P 284/GA9 374).

consignments of those who give it grounds on which to tread by relacing it anew. What sets Dasein apart for Heidegger is how it spatially and temporally stands out, from itself and all that is and has been (f)actually determined. We *ek-sist* (literally, ‘to step forth’) toward significant possibilities *we* project onto the future as essential determinations of our ability to be.<sup>39</sup> In other words, we transcend stasis by dis-closing (*erschliessen*) the world, reopening and reconfiguring its possibilities.<sup>40</sup> In the process we come to understand ourselves. Rather than own up to this distinctive ability to open ecstatically onto and thereby amplify the ontological givenness of beings, the intellectualist understands herself essentially in terms of a static relation to given beings as a whole, antecedently and adventitiously shaped like a shoe on the last. More precisely, the intellectualist’s relation to the world and self-understanding are *inauthentic*. Because her world has not been projected on the basis of Dasein’s careful vocation, she excludes herself from the inceptive renewal of being. To that extent, her worldview betrays a disownment of existence.

If Heidegger’s practical and ontological rethinking of the understanding helps to account for what is so tragic about the intellectualist, it is also called to account by a domestic tragedy of its own. Before we can soundly set forth in this critical direction, we must first gain a solid footing on the trail that Heidegger cuts toward our *existential* finitude. The inauthentic disownment of existence reenacts the tragedy in another scene of abjection, setting the stage for another act in the drama that first led us off trail to Thales’ well. Here we shall discover that it is not merely the peculiar fate of the intellect that leads us astray but that of everyday moods, inauthentic moods, which make us tranquil captives of the present. In that counterfeit eternity one busies oneself, seized by the moment and seizing it like Andrew Marvell’s courtier. Just so, for the existential captive, it’s as if the sun stood still midday and time’s winged chariot midflight, projecting no shadow and trailing none behind. But as the curtain falls we shall come to find that Heidegger’s resolute efforts to woo and master the “coy mistress” of time, to possess

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<sup>39</sup> In the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* he adds to this an important qualification: “Dasein does not exist at first in some mysterious way so as then to accomplish the step beyond itself. . . . Existence, instead, always already means to step beyond or, better, having stepped beyond” (BPP 300/GA24 426). Cf. BW 228-31/GA9 326f.

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger’s uses term “disclosedness” (*Erschlossenheit*, from *erschliessen*: ‘to open up’ or ‘explore’) to refer to the ontological opening of a world (a nexus of significance) in which beings can be ontically given or, as he puts it, “discovered” (*entdeckt*) as “ready-to-hand” (*zuhanden*) or “present-at-hand” (*vorhanden*). Since human being is essentially open to the world, he equates disclosedness with “the basic mode of *Dasein*, according to which it *is* its there,” i.e. as being-in-the-world (SZ 220). Such is the sense in which the *da* of *Dasein* comes to be associated with “openness to the world” (*Weltoffenheit*) (SZ 137), “the clearing” (*die Lichtung*) (SZ 133), and the world (or some region thereof) with an “openness” (*Offenheit*), “the open” (*das Offene*) Dasein “opens up” (*eröffnet*) (C 240f., 260/GA65 304, 328).

her wholly within the marble vaults of the world, are misdirected. That they bespeak an abject dysaffection that earns him no more than a valedictory chortle. Neither father nor mistress, time is above all a humorist of rich and regenerative obscenity, burying the scythe that would crop her veil between laughing stalks of corn and hermaphroditic flowers. Just as it was hymned to console the grieving Demeter in the winter of her daughter's abduction, this earthy humor, fertile and resilient, has seasonally nourished the caretaker.<sup>41</sup> But what of that agelast, that humorless visage that furrows the cover of the German philosopher's tome? This question will provide us with much food for thought in the chapters ahead. Here we begin that gleaning by waying onward on Heidegger's path.

The thought of this dimension of our finitude begins in the recognition of how our understanding is engulfed by unclocked temporal horizons of its own impossibility. These horizons are implied by the sheer fact that Dasein finds itself there in the world as a being stretched between two poles of non-existence. In *Being and Time* Dasein's time in the world is ontologically interpreted as "timeliness" (*Zeitlichkeit*): the significance of the past, present, and future enfolded in and unfolded by the ecstatic unity and breadth of care, which we have already seen to be oriented toward the future by virtue of the understanding.<sup>42</sup> Neither that I came to exist nor that I shall inevitably cease to is a possibility I (have) project(ed). Birth and death are facts whose sense is undecided and at stake as they redound and rebound on all our days as inescapable conditions. "Thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*) is Heidegger's term for the timely "whence" and "whither" of the spatial "wherein" and "whereat" of being-there.<sup>43</sup> By virtue of the understanding I project (*entwerfen*) a world of my own possibilities, throwing (*werfen*) myself toward a future whose significance owes itself to me. Yet this self-directed activity throws itself

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<sup>41</sup> I direct the reader bewildered by these allusions to chapter 7, where they are unfurled at length.

<sup>42</sup> For sake of clarity and consistency, I depart from Macquarrie's and Robinson's translation of *Zeitlichkeit* (the temporal determination of existence) as 'temporality', retaining this term for *Temporalität* (the temporal determination of being). When a broader term is called for to capture both dimensions, I shall err on the side of 'temporality'. By the same token, I hereafter render (*sich*) *zeitigen* as 'extemporize' (not 'temporalize') to refer to the eventuation of temporality through Dasein. The aptness of 'extemporize' is borne out by its Latin derivation, indicating both an ecstatic (ex-) and unthematic/unpremeditated (extempore) mode of being. All further translations are modified accordingly.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. "This characteristic of Dasein's Being – this 'that it is' – is veiled in its "whence" and "whither," yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the "thrownness" of this entity into its "there"; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as being-in-the-world, it is the "there." The expression "thrownness" is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over" (SZ 135). Note that the spatiality to which I refer in this sentence is emphatically not the container space of objective extension, but a region of significance configured by Dasein's able know-how, concerns, and "solicitude" (*Fürsorge*), or concern for others.

out from (*ent-*) the utmost passivity of having been thrown (*geworfen*) into a world that others have projected in the past of my not yet. Because I am always already understandingly oriented toward the future, I have also been thrown into the possibility of death, which occasions the closure of my world and the future time of my having been. As *natal* beings our condition in the world is one of having-been-born, of being (p)re-positioned and (p)redisposed by a past that precedes and so exceeds our ability to recuperate it that as long as we exist we never cease to be *in statu nascendi*. As *mortal* beings we are “being-toward-death” (*Sein zum Tode*), an existential *statu moriendi* rebounding on all our days from the future. On Heidegger’s account, these two aspects of our thrownness signal the finitude of the understanding: that it is ultimately not the ground of its own projection but “thrown projection” (*geworfener Entwurf*), heterogenous, incomplete, and historically situated (SZ 148, 199, 223, 285).<sup>44</sup>

Heidegger maintains that owning up to our mortality is requisite to the acceptance of our natal condition. But before he develops that position, which we shall fill out in the next section, he limns the mark of tragedy in terms of a certain abject captivity to the latter condition. To grasp the stakes of the problem of finitude for him, it will therefore be worthwhile to fix our sights on his concept of *historicity*, under the rubric of *natality* first set forth by Hannah Arendt.

On the one hand, my birth is an utterly contingent but undeniable event in my immemorial past. Since I have no episodic memory of it, I cannot straightforwardly lay claim to it as mine in the way that personal experiences can be integrated into an individual conscious life. Because phenomena belonging to that past do not figure among the intentional objects available to recollection, egoic consciousness finds no anchorage there. In this respect, the time preceding my existence is *personally* immemorial; it is unavailable to noetic acts through which I am given to myself in introspection.<sup>45</sup> Even to recuperate my birth into my conscious life would require a kind of dubious reconstruction by proxy. Seizing upon memories conveyed by others, I would need to subjunctively reinstate my ego in a past that was present for them as it wasn't for me, as though I had already emerged from the undifferentiated we that newborn child was.

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<sup>44</sup> These three aspects of our finitude will be elaborated below.

<sup>45</sup> This mode ontic givenness, traditionally associated with self-consciousness, mustn't be confused with the lived-through first-personal givenness of conscious experience in general: the intentionally non-objective self-awareness that reflexively accompanies every intentional act. What I am calling "self-awareness" here is roughly equivalent to what Husserl terms *Erleben*, which he distinguishes as the lived-through (*leibhaftig*) character of all conscious experience (*Erfahrung*).

An ontological reconsideration of this problematic shifts the focus from the event of birth to the condition of having been born, which stakes its claim on every moment of my existence. According to Heidegger, this is "neither a fact [*Tatsache*] that is finished nor a *factum* [*Faktum*] that is settled" in the way that the event of my birth can be known by securing a biological or genealogical explanation of it (SZ 179, trans. mod.). Why it was that *I* was born is rather a question concerning what makes my life singularly significant.<sup>46</sup> As such, it is constantly and unavoidably *at issue* for me and decided by my projects, if never entirely resolved. Along these lines Heidegger elaborates on the statement above, adding that "Dasein's facticity is such that *as long as* it is what it is [viz. care/timeliness], Dasein remains in the throw." Even the refusal to appreciate or own up to having been born constitutes a response to this question – a most prevalent one in fact. Regardless of whether I refashion my natal thrownness *per se* as a self-defining concern, my projects determine that for the sake of which *I* ever came to be at all.

To have been born into a world that is already old is to be older than ourselves. That is to say, we are not coeval with the world nor do we come into it *ex nihilo*, as though by some immaculate conception we should arrive untainted by its atrocities, unimpressed by its victories, unmoved by its ecstasies. On the contrary, we are stamped to the core by its history, so that from the outset our existence is inflected through and roundly dependent on that of our forebears, intimate and anonymous. Such is our historicity on Heidegger's appraisal. Here is how he assays the matter in 1929, arriving at it through Kant: "All projection-and thus all 'creative' human activity [*Handeln*] – is thrown, i.e., determined by its self-unmastered [*selbst nicht mächtige*] dependence, Dasein's dependence on what there already is as a whole" (KPM 244/GA3 235, trans. mod). The emphasis on *Handeln* in this remark signals the historicity of our practical understanding. According to Heidegger, we find ourselves from the outset responding in large measure to beings already given as intraworldly correlates of the funded abilities, concerns, and projects of others from our prenatal past. Under the influence of everyday consuetudes, we adopt inherited styles of comportment unawares, projecting their possibilities toward whatever familiar nexus of significance we happen to have been thrown into and continue to fall amidst. Like some

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<sup>46</sup>As O'Byrne expresses the point, "the question of birth becomes troublesome as the question 'Why was *I* born?' not least because it is not yet clear what allows me to call my birth *mine*. How does the event that happened when I first appeared in the world come to be *my* birth?" (*Nativity and Finitude*, 38).

inquiline in the dwellings others have left behind, we take up residence in a readymade world of readily adapted concerns.

O'Byrne introduces the exigencies of this existential tenancy of ours in the opening pages of *Natality and Finitude*. As she weighs it, "birth introduces us to a world that is not of our own making and to a past that we have the impossible task of making our own."<sup>47</sup> Though we cannot entirely understand or be held responsible for a past we have not shaped, we *are* called to own up to how it has shaped us. For we are *implicated* in a historical world, and to it we are congenitally able to respond. O'Byrne proceeds to sharpen the point:

As specifically natal beings, our finitude is brought home to us in the recognition that there was once a time when we were not, that we owe our existence to others, and that those others are nevertheless not the ground of our being.<sup>48</sup>

Nothing about my projects or those undertaken by what would become my ancestors and predecessors, indeed nothing belonging to the time of my not yet, foretold that it was *I* who should be born.<sup>49</sup> Be that as it may, their abilities, concerns, and projects personify a repertoire of generational wisdom from which I draw my own. Even to eschew or disregard that endowment would be to bear its inexpungible impress. I remain in its throw regardless. Nor was the wisdom of my progenitors spun out of whole cloth, however much they patterned it anew. For they too found themselves already stitched to the world by the threads of that which was and mattered in the deeper past of their forebears, implying an existential tapestry spanning the fullness of time over generations untold.

To capture this aspect of our historicity I have adopted the term **implication**. Before it accrued the technical meaning of a relation between propositions in logical arguments, 'implication' named a concrete phenomenon within the work-world. The Latin word for an 'interweaving' or 'intertwining', as one might describe the design of a tapestry or basket, was *implicationem*, from *implicare*, meaning 'to enfold', 'involve', or 'weave together'.<sup>50</sup> In our

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<sup>47</sup> *Natality and Finitude*, 6.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> As Heidegger poses the question in *Being and Time*: "Has Dasein as itself ever decided freely whether it wants to come into 'Dasein' or not, and will it ever be able to make such a decision? . . . This belongs to Dasein's essential thrownness into the world" (SZ 228).

<sup>50</sup> In the *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* Irène Rosier-Catach notes that the cognate *implicitus*, past participle of the verb *implico*, was used in classical Latin in the sense of 'to be joined, mixed, enveloped'. Its first logical usage, she submits, coincides with Latin translations of Aristotle's *De interpretatione* (14.23b25–27), in which *implicitus* is used to render the Greek *sumpeplegmenē*, which derives from *sumplekō*, 'to

treatment, 'implication' will bear primary reference to how the immemorial, or deep past is ecstatically plaited into the present and future. More precisely, in these sections it will be used to designate how existents, and by virtue of them other beings, are temporally enfolded by, interwoven from, and involved in a world of prefabricated significance. In the context released by our etymology, it is essential to all artisanry that it be informed yet underdetermined by that which came before it, so that no effort is entirely redundant, no work a perfect reproduction. Rather than its difference being foreclosed by a repetition of the same, each new undertaking *re-plicates* the world and *com-plicates* the past and the future. The phenomenon of plication suggests a fold that remains open, open to the possibility of being unfolded and re-enfolded. So does the personal past fold over onto the present in a way that precludes absolute closure into the same no less than absolute novations stitched out of whole cloth. In the wider warp of historicity, our personal lifework is enfolded by and involved in an impersonal past, an anonymous heritage of lifeways interwoven into our own as conditions of their possibility.<sup>51</sup>

The passive level of practical involvement through which we are implicated can be clarified by contrasting it with the local, ontic operation of Heideggerian *explication*. Rather than an unqualified binary, however, these two concepts must be understood as a liminal pair, entwined and mutually dependent. To retrofit the famous Kantian formulation, explication sans implication would be empty, devoid of factual affordances, whereas implication sans explication would leave us circumspectively blind. In *Being and Time* explication is paired with "circumspection" (*Um-sicht*, alternatively "foresight" or "for-sight"), which is said to guide our "way around" (or "dealings" in, *Um-gang*) a *circumambient* region of the everyday world (*Umwelt*) such as the "work-world" (*Werkwelt*). "Circumspective explication" (*umsichtige Auslegung*) designates Dasein's spontaneous ability to work out the senses of beings, disclosing their affordant as-structure (*Um-Zu, Wofür, Wozu, Worum-willen*). This aptitude of the practical

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bind together'. See also Plato's *Sophist*, where the visitor describes the combination of noun and verb in a proposition as a "weaving together" (262c). Barbara Cassin, ed. *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 480.

<sup>51</sup> In this light, the mystery of the impersonal past bespeaks an affinity to what was once called the *misterium artis* or trade skill of the Middle Ages. A wisdom pleated with *misteria* (trade secrets) passed down from master to apprentice in a succession extending back to the historic institution of the guild, and even further back to the inception of weaving, masonry, carpentry, etc. What made this wisdom secret was not simply the collective oath among members of the guild to keep it strictly *entre nous*. Its veritable mystery lay in the nature of its implication. At work in the artistry of every practiced tradesman was an unsigned history of others, impersonally working through him or her. To be absorbed in the world in this way is to be caught up in a past that transposes the generality of impersonal into the singularity of personal existence.

understanding enables us to lay out the differential “assignments” of “ready-to-hand equipment” (*zuhandenes Zeug*) against the background of a holistic layout of significance (viz. *Verweisungsganzheit, Zeugganzheit*) (SZ 80, 158). In the case of the work-world of the “artisan” (*Handwerker*), that significance is said to be one of “serviceability, conduciveness, usability, [or] manipulability” (*Dienlichkeit, Beiträglichkeit, Verwendbarkeit, Handlichkeit*) (SZ 117, 68). By skillfully using a hammer, in Heidegger’s oft-cited example, Dasein explicates the determinate sense of that equipment *as* a hammer (rather than a nail or drill), which equipment is understood in terms of what it can be used for (e.g. hammering as opposed to fastening or drilling) for the sake of significantly advancing some project. This sense is relational all the way down. It is determined by its interrelations to other assignments in a nested hierarchy of increasingly comprehensive projects and concerns.<sup>52</sup> As Heidegger defines it, explication “is grounded existentially in understanding,” the futural thrust of which projects the local and global layouts of significance within which senses can be articulated (SZ 148). We have already mentioned that the German *entwerfen*, projecting, means literally ‘to throw out from’. Significantly, it was also once used to denote ‘drafting’, ‘sketching’, or ‘designing’. In an observation that enriches our derivation of ‘implication’, Michael Inwood points out that *entwerfen* originally bore reference to weaving a design by passing the shuttle to and fro through a warp of thread.<sup>53</sup> Bearing all this in mind, consider a weaver at the handloom. To extend our lived analogy, one might liken our finite situation once again to a kind of tapestry. Before the weaver even takes up the shuttle, that process has commenced with other existents in her prenatal past. Their explications are implicated in her concernful abilities as in the tensed warp of senses she discloses. In the weaver’s circumspect handling of the loom, every wefting stroke of her hand re-plicates the guiding threads of that warp into a projection of the finished design that every strand explicates. Even as the warp of the past is progressively overlaid by her pattern, her weft must be tightly

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<sup>52</sup> Only when circumspective involvement begins to falter, leading to the detachment of the fundamental relationality of being-in-the-world, does equipment ready-to-hand become conspicuous in the form of present-at-hand objects of perception and cognition. Only then does the attentive eye and mind step in to inspect what went awry with an eye to restoring the smooth functioning of absorbed comportment (cf. SZ 57, 61f., 68). Heidegger will go on disentangle explication from any kind of interpretation (*Interpretation*) based on “looking at” or “perceiving” something present-at-hand while “holding-oneself-back from any manipulation or utilization” of it (SZ 61f.). For that matter, we are told, it is not to be equated with “theoretical assertions about something present-at-hand,” less systematized “assertions about the happenings in the *Umwelt*, accounts of the ready-to-hand, ‘reports on the Situation’” or any other propositional descriptions assigning predicates to subjects and objects (the “apophantic” as-structure) (SZ 158, 150, 32-4). For more on these themes, see §21.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 176.



fastened to it, lest it come unraveled from the world. Working a worldly region – be it the handweaver's attic, the painter's studio, or the mason's quarry – requires the practical explication of its personal and generational implications. As for the handmade, so too for any fundamental venture of remaking ourselves, the world, and making ourselves at home there.

However we own up to the immemorial past by projecting our possibilities from it, we never quite get to the bottom of our thrownness in a way that might exhaust its implications. I can project myself toward being an unconditionally loving brother on the basis of the fraternity I find embodied by my uncles, but not without foreclosing a host of other possibilities afforded by the history of fratricide, sorority, or being an only child. And however we "take it over" by countering its throw with our own projections, we never quite "come back behind our thrownness" as a possibility that we have ourselves projected.<sup>54</sup> As Heidegger goes on to explain:

In being a ground [*Grund*] – that is, in existing as thrown – Dasein constantly lags behind its possibilities. It is never existent *before* its ground, but only from it *as this ground*. Thus 'being-a-ground' means *never* to have power over one's ownmost being from the ground up (SZ 284, trans. mod.).

Considered in light of the foregoing analysis, these lines suggest three key respects in which natal historicity implies the finitude of the understanding: (i) projection is incomplete (it can neither *entirely* recuperate the past nor can it *definitively* recuperate any part of it); (ii) projection is heterogenous (it is grounded on possibilities which others have projected); and (iii) projection is historically situated (it is limited by its position in a historical milieu that must be explicated on its own terms before it can be re-plicated into a world of one's own).

To the fact that our natal historicity makes us beneficiaries of a world projected by our forebears, Heidegger adds another factual dimension to his analysis of our finitude. "Dasein is thrown into a certain mode of being: projecting" (SZ 145).<sup>55</sup> Thrownness is the condition of having-been, but insofar as we are thrown into the world with a projective ability-to-be, we are always already understandingly recasting our past toward the future. This means that we are thrown *toward* the possibility of death, toward our future having-been, irrespective of whether we project ourselves toward it as *our own* possibility. To restate an earlier point, the natal and mortal dimensions of our finitude are inseparable. Every moment of an individual arc of

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<sup>54</sup> The line in its entirety: "In its existence it never gets back behind its thrownness, so that it could first release this 'that it is and has to be' from *its* [own] *being-its-self* and lead it into the 'there'" (SZ 284).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. "The essence of man, the *Dasein* in him, is determined by this projective character" (FCM, 362/GA29-30 526f.)

existence forms a personal crease in the implicature of world history, which extends beyond the vanishing points of one's own birth and death, giving onto the impersonal horizons of a prenatal past and postmortem future. Much as we are implicated in the immemorial, then, so too are we set the impossible task of responding to the unforeseeable.

In being delivered into a world that is not of our own making, Heidegger has it that we find ourselves homeless. As “originary [*ursprünglich*], thrown being-in-the-world,” he writes, Dasein is “‘not-at-home’” but a “naked ‘that it is [‘and has to be’] in the ‘nothing’ of the world” (SZ 276-7, cf. 135, 343).<sup>56</sup> This “nothing,” forecast by birth and backcast by death to enshadow every moment in between, expresses neither the absence of the world nor that of intraworldly beings. Instead, it indicates the “utter insignificance” of a world devoid of possibilities onto which *I* have projected and in terms of which I understand myself (SZ 187, 343).<sup>57</sup> “In the dark” of our naked homelessness, Heidegger tells us “there is emphatically ‘nothing’ to see, though the very world itself is still ‘there’, and ‘there’ more obtrusive,” precisely as that which incorrigibly resists my own mastery, stays my prying hands, and beggars my self-understanding (SZ 189). To this nothing we are promised from the pashaunted day of our arrival to the impenetrable night of our departure. And if we are all too prone to seek refuge from it in the “false days of everydayness,” described in this passage from *Contributions* as “the ones that profess to know and to possess even the night when they illumine and thus eliminate it with their borrowed light,” we only do so as misbegotten exiles of the world (CP 382-3/GA65 487).

To comprehend how Heidegger thinks our finitude could be denied in this way, we must first grasp how he takes it to be disclosed. There is a temptation to blithely consign the shadows and foreshadows of nonexistence to the annals of the historian and arcana of the prophet in finding ourselves unable to fully penetrate them by the light of understanding. Yet this is belied by their affective intimations in the here and now. As we each stand in and out toward our world under the aegis of the understanding, practical and ontological, we also stand out from it into the

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<sup>56</sup> In Heidegger's early writings, *ursprünglich*, which I have chosen to render as ‘originary’, is a cypher for existential-ontological priority (hence “more originary”). Later on it takes on the sense of onto-historical priority as well. In *Being and Time* Heidegger sets forth three criteria with which one may ascertain the degree to which an interpretation of a phenomenon is originary (viz. uncovers the originary being of a phenomenon). First, it conforms to the self-showing of the phenomena under consideration. Second, it accounts for the phenomenon as a whole. Third, it elucidates the cohesion of the phenomenon's actual and possible structural features (SZ 231f., loosely paraphrased). All discrepant translations of *ursprünglich* are modified accordingly.

<sup>57</sup> In the case of being-toward-death as being-toward-nothingness, it is not only that we *have* not (entirely) recuperated these possibilities, but that we *cannot* in principle project them as or own.

time of other existents, who have opened our world and will decide our bygone place within it. Ex-sistence steps forth from one abyss while stepping toward the other. And their implications are made tangible on every step of the way before they are ever explicated. In being finite, our understanding is neither self-grounding nor does it primarily reveal its own grounds according to Heidegger. In its stead, what “discloses Dasein in its thrownness” is its affective “disposition” (*Befindlichkeit*) (SZ 136). Heidegger draws this neologism from the reflexive verb *sich befinden*, meaning literally ‘to find oneself [somewhere]’, but also ‘to be [in some condition]’. To wit, the colloquial “Wie befinden Sie sich?” – ‘How do you find yourself?’ or ‘How are you?’. *Befindlichkeit* thus combines the ideas of *wherein* and *how* one finds oneself being.<sup>58</sup> But this ordinary acceptation can be misleading. Disposition and the understanding are featured in *Being and Time* as co-originary existential-ontological conditions (*existentialia*) of Dasein.<sup>59</sup> But where the latter involves an active appropriation of the world as significant, “disposition implies a *disclosive submission* to the world, out of which we can encounter something that *matters* to us” (SZ 137f., emphasis mine).<sup>60</sup> As an ontological condition, disposition is not to be equated with occasional ways that something comes to matter specifically through one’s “bodily condition” (*körperliches Befinden*), feelings, emotions, or moods elicited on the basis of some larger, ipseological concern we have adopted.<sup>61</sup> The curiosity of an entomologist or a net-wielding child upon hearing a chirring sound in the grass, for instance. Rather, disposition – or “the ability to be attuned” (*Gestimmtsein-können*) as he later expresses it – consists in how we find ourselves basically disposed and responsive to a world that matters at all, on the whole, merely by virtue of having been thrown into it (cf. ZS 165f./ZrS 210f.). Far from a senseless expanse of non-being

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<sup>58</sup> Hence the aptness of ‘disposition’ as a translation for this term, which is preferable to mentalistic associations invited by Macquarrie’s and Robinson’s ‘state-of-mind’. All translations hereafter are modified accordingly.

<sup>59</sup> In a parallel vein, we read in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* that “with regard to Dasein’s comportment toward beings, our interpretation of the understanding of being in general has presented only a necessary but not a sufficient condition.” Whereupon Heidegger launches into a discussion of disposition as a further necessary condition (BPP 281/GA24 397-8).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. “A disposition not only discloses Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to that world which is already disclosed with its own Being ; it is itself the existential kind of Being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the ‘world’ and lets the ‘world’ ‘matter’ to it” (SZ 139).

<sup>61</sup> In a lecture delivered with Medard Boss in 1966, published in the *Zollikon Seminars* volume, Heidegger clarifies what he had meant by disposition in *Being and Time* by considering how it accordingly addresses the question, “Wie befinden Sie sich?” – viz. ontologically. “The question,” he explains, “need not refer necessarily to one’s ‘bodily condition’ [*körperliches Befinden*]. The question can be meant as an inquiry into the very factual [*faktisch*] situation of the other. However, such a condition is to be distinguished from what is interpreted as ontological disposition [*Befindlichkeit*] in *Being and Time*. It is the attunement determining [*be-stimmende Gestimmtheit*] Da-sein in its particular relationship to the world, to the Da-sein-with [*Mitdasein*] other humans, and to itself (ZS 139/ZrS 182).

awaiting our projections to be there, as though the understanding could stake a sovereign claim to it, the world is originally accessible as affectively undergone, staking its claim on us by soliciting the sense-making activity of the understanding. But for this fundamental sensitivity to being gripped and directed by the prehensile “nothing” of the world as a matter that concerns us, it would be impossible for us to concernfully comport ourselves toward beings at all. And only by first being unsettled, stirred or stricken, by the originary passivity of our thrownness may we then be roused to care for our own being as an essential project. By counter-throwing my self into what distinctively matters to me over the course of my individual (existentiell) lifetime, I make a home in a world that precedes me and exceeds my understanding. In this way, disposition is that dimension of care which discloses the finitude of our practical and ontological understanding: that each is grounded on matters that matter apart from its employment.<sup>62</sup>

It is owing to its ground-disclosive character that Heidegger attributes the “fundamental historicizing” (*Grundgeschehen*) of Dasein to the “disposition of mood” (*Befindlichkeit der Stimmung*) (BW 100/GA9 110). So are we disposed toward the mood of *Angst* in *Being and Time*, accorded pride of place as fundamental (*Grundbefindlichkeit, Grundstimmung*) for its grounding disclosure of our thrownness, our natal and mortal finitude (SZ 184f., 310). Heidegger allows that “mood” (*Stimmung*) “is *ontically* the most familiar and everyday sort of thing” (SZ 134). Sorted psychologically, it is interpreted as a mental state, an emotive predisposition to how particular things, events, or situations matter. Yet these so-called “moods” (denoted by the more common word *Launen* in later texts), theoretically classified and readily available to reflection, are liable to cover over that fundamental disclosure.<sup>63</sup> Ontologically, fundamental mood specifies some determinate way we are disposed, a specific manner in which the world matters on the whole (e.g. *as* comforting or threatening, hospitable or uninviting). In so doing it sets the tone for regional and episodic moods, on the basis of which we “become affected in some way” by

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<sup>62</sup> Beginning in 1929 and into the 1930s Heidegger will begin to rethink Dasein’s ontological disposition historically in terms of “fundamental mood” (*Grundstimmung*) – a word that appears only once in *Being and Time* (SZ 310) – and “attunement” (*Gestimmtheit*), and “being-attuned” (*Gestimmtsein*). These now assume an ontological status that was somewhat equivocal in earlier discussions of mood and attunement, deriving from the epochally defining ways in which the world has mattered in the past (see chapter 3). For an overview of these themes, see Michel Haar’s “Attunement and Thinking,” in Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall, eds., *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995). Note that we shall treat *Stimmung* and *Gestimmtheit* as equivalent concepts in what follows, referring as Heidegger does to moods and attunements interchangeably.

<sup>63</sup> In Heidegger’s 1934 lecture course, published under the title of *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*, he equates *Launen* with the “small moods” [*kleine Stimmungen*] of human beings in contrast to the “great” or “fundamental” moods that ground an age of a world-historical people (LQ 110/GA 38 129f.).

particular beings (i.e. *Affektion*) that sensibly afford or inhibit the senses we concernfully project onto them. In Heidegger's words:

*[Fundamental] mood has already disclosed, in every case, being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct one-self towards something. . . . And only because the "senses" [die Sinne] belong ontologically to an entity whose kind of being is being-in-the-world with disposition, can they be "touched" [gerührt] by anything or "have a sense for" [Sinn haben für] something in such a way that what touches them shows itself in affection [Affektion] (SZ 137).*

Underscoring its concomitance to disposition, Heidegger introduces mood in *Being and Time* as a mode of "originary disclosure . . . in which Dasein is brought before its being as 'there'" (SZ 134). Understanding is a matter of intentionally directing oneself toward (regions of) the world, of coming to *stand in* its horizons of significance. Whereas mood or attunement is what first opens us to those horizons, affectively directing us toward matters that may not bear any personal, or existentiell, significance at all. As a rule, then, Heidegger adopts the impersonal pronoun to describe this disclosure: "A mood makes manifest 'how one is and how one is faring' [*wie einem ist und wird*] . . . *prior to* all cognition and volition," hence egoic consciousness and personal agency (SZ 134f.). For this reason he goes on to say that it should not be confused with an "emotional event or state," "a bringing to consciousness," or *self-projected* concerns (SZ 137). "Never simply a consequence or side-effect of our thinking, doing, and acting," mood is said to obtain as "the presupposition for such things, the 'medium' within which they first happen" (FCM 65-8/GA 29-30 97-101).

This line from the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-30) brings to the fore the ontological priority of mood's "originary disclosure." Mood is ordinarily taken to designate that complex of sensations, affections, feelings, emotions, and passions given to introspection and traditionally theorized by empirical psychology, cognitive science, as well as the various faculty psychologies of Western metaphysics. But a phenomenological approach to these affective phenomena unveils how they originally manifest themselves, unthematically and pre-theoretically, as felt in the midst of our comportment, be it practical circumspection, theoretical inspection, or privative modes of these such as thoughtless repose (cf. SZ 18). Heidegger's interpretation accordingly begins with a methodological suspension of any preconception of affectivity that construes it in terms of unclearly expressed propositions or propositional attitudes, occurrences immanent to conscious life, or mental states arising in the subject as it relates to the objective world. Setting aside all such ontic interpretations of affectivity and unhinging it from the *anthropological difference*, he stipulates that "moods are not placed in the

subject or in objects.” Rather, “we are, together with beings, transposed [*versetzt*] into moods,” as an “all-enveloping force that comes over us and things together” (HHGR 80/GA39 89).<sup>64</sup> In the case of another existent being, this affective transposition is said to facilitate a kind “going along with [*Mitgang*] it in its access [*Zugang*] to and in its dealings [*Umgang*] with its world.” By virtue of “transposedness,” *what* and *how* things matter to and concern others elicit like moods and solicit like manners of comportment from us (FCM 204/GA29-30 299). Mood thus becomes for Heidegger a necessary – albeit insufficient – condition for being-with-others (*Miteinandersein*) at the level of existence (*Mitexistieren*).<sup>65</sup>

Recalling Cavell’s characterization of tragedy as the denial of finitude, let us narrow our sights on the **existential tragedy**. When Heidegger examines the denial of our temporal finitude as a “flight” from thrownness in *Being and Time*, it should now be clear why this is couched in terms of “misattunement” (*Ungestimmtheit*).<sup>66</sup> “Having been thrown,” he explains, “Dasein flees

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<sup>64</sup> In the *Zollikon Seminars* Heidegger refers to the binarism of being-subject and being-object as the “anthropological difference” (ZS 185/ZrS 231). On his view, this dichotomy is anthropological in the sense that it rests on a metaphysics that antecedently posits existence as human subjectivity *cast over against* objects (*Gegenstand, ob-jectum*), or *beneath* them (*Sub-jekt, sub-jectum*) as the transcendental ground of their being (cognized). The former is traditionally associated with metaphysical realism, the latter with idealism. The anthropological difference is metaphysical inasmuch as it rides roughshod *over* the ubiquitous natural phenomena – human *and* nonhuman – that manifest themselves to experience *prejectively*: prior to the thematically accomplished distinction between subject and object, by virtue of our more basic, unthematic acquaintance with the world – e.g. the skillfully absorbed comportment and disposition of being-in-the-world.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. “The ability to transpose oneself into others and go along with them, with the Dasein in them, always already happens on the basis of man’s Dasein, and happens as Dasein. For the being-there of Da-sein means being-with-others [*Mitsein*], precisely in the manner of Dasein, i.e., existing-with-others [*Mitexistieren*] (FCM 205/GA29-30 301).

<sup>66</sup> Heidegger’s insistence on the fact that Dasein is always in some mood or particular attunement tells against Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation of *Ungestimmtheit* as ‘lack of mood’, which gainsays Heidegger’s intentions here (cf. SZ 134). In ordinary language, the word *ungestimmt* means ‘untuned’, as one would describe a musical instrument. To say that an instrument is untuned is really to say that it is out of tune, which does *not* imply that it emits no sound or pitch. And, indeed, *ungestimmt* is roughly synonymous with *verstimmt*: ‘out of tune’ or ‘upset’. Though Heidegger cautions against grasping *Ungestimmtheit* as a physical or psychological phenomenon (ibid.), it is equated with the existential-ontological sense of *Verstimmung* – a detail out of piece with Macquarrie and Robinson’s rendering of *Verstimmung* as “bad mood.” Thus he explicitly brackets the psychological and reflective interpretations of *Verstimmung* before redescribing it as follows: “In this [*Verstimmung*], Dasein becomes blind to itself, the environment with which it is concerned veils itself, the circumspection of concern gets led astray” (SZ 136). The English ‘misattunement’ maintains the affinity between *Verstimmung* and *Ungestimmtheit* in a way that “lack of mood” or “lack of attunement” does not, giving due measure to Heidegger’s assertion in the same passage that *Ungestimmtheit* is “is far from nothing at all,” but rather “pallid” [*fähle*] and “evenly balanced” [*ebenmäßig*]. ‘Misattunement’ also retains the musical resonances he expressly takes advantage of to disentangle these terms from their psychological connotations. Along these lines, in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger tells us: “An attunement is a way [*eine Weise*] . . . in the sense of a melody that does not merely hover over the so-called proper being at hand of humans, but that sets the tone for such a being, i.e., attunes and determines the manner and how [*Art und Wie*] of their being” (FCM 67/GA29-30 101). All further translations of the word *Ungestimmtheit* will be modified accordingly. The connection between attunement and melody will be explored in chapters 3 and 8.

– proximally and for the most part – from this thrownness, *which has been more or less explicitly revealed*” (SZ 348, emphasis mine). “Proximally and for the most part” (*zunächst und zumeist*) is Heidegger’s shorthand for our fallen absorption in the public everydayness of “the One” (*das Man*) or the “everyman” (*Jedermann*).<sup>67</sup> Dasein flees *from* its thrownness to take refuge in this anonymous mode of being anyone, hence no one in particular. Dasein’s “fallenness” (*Verfallenheit*) holds such sway in this crowded asylum as to alienate it from its historicity, its futurity, thus from the very possibility of its ipseity. Crucially, this is not to deny that the self only emerges from the anonymity of existence as condition for the possibility of individuation (CT 8E/8). On Heidegger’s view, it is by relenting to the solicitations of everyday *moods* that one finds oneself keyed to the familiar attitudes, habitudes, and platitudes of this inauthentic mode of being-with-others at the expense of authentic “self-being” (*Selbstsein*), being one’s *own* self. By attuning us *exclusively* to what is most familiar, such moods conceal the natal and mortal thrownness that “has been more or less explicitly revealed,” not primarily by the understanding but by disposition (e.g. that of the fundamental mood of *Angst* in SZ). Such is the thrust of Heidegger’s assertion that “everydayness is familiar to [Dasein] through the disposition of a pallid misattunement.” So dysposed, our “disclosive submission” to what is nakedly *unfamiliar* promotes a reassuring “subjection to others,” who lay claim to “‘understanding’ everything” in a world where one truly “dwells in tranquilized familiarity” (SZ 371, 126, 178, 189).

Though most commentators focus on how *Angst* gets dampened and inauthentically reinflated as fear and anxiousness, Heidegger enumerates a host of misattunements that conspire in the existential tragedy. Prominent among them is *Beruhigung*, a word that can mean both ‘reassurance’ and ‘tranquilization’, as one might describe the bearing of an inebriate. Indeed, as Heidegger delineates it, this mood suggests the “self-certainty, “decidedness,” and

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<sup>67</sup> In *Being and Time* Heidegger adds further clarification to what is meant by this expression: “‘Proximally’ signifies the way in which Dasein is ‘manifest’ in the with-one-another [*Miteinander*] of publicness, even if ‘at bottom’ everydayness is precisely something which, in an existentiell manner, it has ‘surmounted’. ‘For the most part’ signifies the way in which Dasein shows itself for the Everyman [*Jedermann*], not always, but ‘as a rule’.” (SZ 370, trans. mod.). According to Heidegger, “proximally, [Dasein] is not ‘I’, in the sense of my own Self, ‘am’, but rather the Others, whose way is that of the ‘one’ [*Man*] (SZ 129). I use the singular, indefinite pronoun ‘One’ (rather than ‘They’) to render the nominalized ‘Man’, since it is not only a more literal translation, but more directly conveys the anonymity of the “who” of everyday publicness, in which no one is himself and everyone is the *indefinite* other (cf. CT8E/8). For Heidegger, the collective yet anonymous sense of *das Man* is inscribed in ordinary language: “We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as one [man] takes pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as one sees and judges; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as one shrinks back; we find ‘shocking’ what one finds shocking. The ‘one’, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.” (SZ 126-7, trans. mod., et passim).

“untroubled indifference” attending the “comfortableness of the accustomed” but also a kind of “dull ‘suffering’,” whereby “being has become manifest as a burden” (SZ 255, 370f.).<sup>68</sup> As with anyone who has had too much to drink, so too for inauthentic existence, which finds itself apparently at home with most any indiscriminate others in well nigh anyplace it has routinely fallen into. But this is a specious and fugitive way of dwelling, a false home won only through becoming “dead to the world” – a telling turn of phrase. It is a home whose tenants have benumbed their basic sensitivity to the cold, unsettling world without, where they are anything but at home with themselves. By definition a drunk is not himself; he is all drunks. One finds oneself intoxicated the moment one leavens the burden of selfhood by dousing it in the same frothy ambiance of turbid insouciance and heady bluster from which is distilled the demeanor of every anonymous drinker.

On the one hand, writes Heidegger, our flight into this breezy familiarity “brings tranquilized self-assurance – ‘being-at-home’, with all its obviousness – into the average everydayness of Dasein,” who is reassured by the “tranquilized supposition that it possesses everything, or that everything is within its reach” (SZ 189, 178). Like the proverbial man who lost his keys in the night and confines his search to the foot of a streetlamp for the light, those become “lost in the publicness of the One” assume that everything lies within the reach of their nyctophobic understanding (SZ 175). A narrow, illucid clearing of borrowed light where all is allegedly possessed while naught is re-covered, the nothing twice covered over.

On the other hand, our flight shifts the burden of self-being onto “the One-self” (*das Man-selbst*), a transference sustained by the onerous compulsion to adapt to the frenetic inertia and strategic social commerce, which being an indifferent member of our dromocratic society entails. As Heidegger stresses, “this tranquilization in inauthentic being does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one into uninhibited ‘business’” (SZ 177f.). Here we find a heedless industry, fueled by misattuned modes of concerned absorption such as “distraction” and “curiosity.” The existential condition of fallenness is defined by a certain way of being “captivated” (*benommen*) by our present concerns (SZ 61, 344).<sup>69</sup> But in *inauthentic* falling we are *held* captive to “the domination of the One,” confined to a field of presence fenced off from

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<sup>68</sup> For these reasons I shall hereafter render *Beruhigung* (translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as ‘tranquility’) into English as ‘tranquilization’. The connection to *Ungestimmtheit* is evident from Heidegger’s first mention of it in *Being and Time*, where he describes misattunement as distinctly “burdensome” (SZ 134).

<sup>69</sup> Heidegger will later use this word to describe the world-poverty of nonhuman animals (FCM §§58-61).



our natal past and mortal future, and enthralled by an endless variety of fleeting possibilities (CT 8E/BZ 8).<sup>70</sup> So that whenever we curiously seize upon one, making it present through advertent inspection or inadvertent circumspection, we find it “leaps away” toward the future as *we* are seized by distraction (SZ 348). Heidegger tells us that this restive “hankering after possibilities,” which are “proximally at the everyday disposal” of customary concern as “merely ‘actual’” (i.e. made present), indicates that “self-projection has fallen forfeit to thrownness,” thus to a kind of “tranquilized ‘willing’ under the guidance of the ‘One’” (SZ 195, trans. mod.). Instead of being grounded on a stable self-projection, our concerns are leveled down to conform with whatever “one” is obliged to think and do and say as one among many fungible placeholders in the public world, wound up by the mainspring of the overtime workday and clocking round from sunpop to bodydrop in the dead of night. Swept up in the throw of such convenances, tranquilized Dasein vacillates between: suffering their tedium and monotony, “sinking away in the dullness of it”; and “evading it by seeking new ways in which its dispersion in its affairs may be further dispersed,” as into into ceaseless diversions that indulge the temptations of the ever same paraded as the ever new (SZ 371).

So long as we are misattuned to the world, we dwell like castaways who vacillate between eking out a living and divertissements contrived to palliate the *taedium vitae* attending the business and busyness of the public arena.<sup>71</sup> To better capture *this* tragic disposition, allow me to introduce the concept of **existential abjection**, a practical and ontological complement to the intellectual disposition above. Practically, existential abjection refers to moods of stifled desperation, muted despondency, and bland resignation brought on by one’s downtrodden subjection to an all too familiar world, where the slightest reprieve comes at the cost of bitter self-compromise and self-abnegation. Ontologically, it refers to a mode of being-in-the-world for which being-affected is outstripped by an understanding that is casts itself forth only by casting itself away from its worldly finitude. As though to slough off their thrownness and project themselves from themselves, the existentially abject court aseity, even as their every deed betrays unsettled debts to an advenient past. Not only does one remain, as do we all, in the throw

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<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, Heidegger asserts that being “completely captivated by the ‘world’ and by the Dasein-with of others in the ‘One’” is the “distinctive kind of being-in-the-world” exhibited by inauthenticity (SZ 176).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. “Just living along [*Das Dahinleben*] in a way which ‘lets’ everything ‘be’ as it is, is based on forgetting and abandoning oneself to one’s thrownness” (SZ 345)

of those who came before, one is engulfed in its surface currents, borne along by its whims, and condemned to that empty recurrence of the past apportioned to all who consign it to oblivion.

Today one cannot read Heidegger's indictment of the banal debasements, insidious subjugation, and affective destitution of public society without drawing some rather striking parallels to our own. That it should remain so timely is perhaps the most unsettling testimony of a further feature of the existential tragedy, perennially renewed by our flight from thrownness. To deny the worldly finitude of the understanding is to be denied the world-historical departure and destination of existence. Whether mobilized by a blind allegiance to or protective mimicry of the same-thinking, same-acting, same-saying "dictatorship of the 'the One'" (SZ 126) – to extend Heidegger's notoriously self-ascriptive analogy – the abject march in lockstep to the status quo without the slightest regard for how it is rooted in the status quo ante. Proximally and for the most part, they comport themselves in traditional ways, drawing from a generational fund of abilities, concerns, and projects handed down from the past. But inasmuch as they are tranquilized to their natal thrownness, they remain uncritical of for being oblivious to their historical inheritance. It is the tragedy of every sober professional, useful citizen, and serious practical man of the world who contrives to disinvolve himself from history while betraying it in his every word and deed, farcically reprising *its* tragedies in the counterfeit eternity of a lifetime. In another sense, however, this tragic figure *is* disinvolved from history. In fleeing his *mortal* thrownness, retreating from death as that possibility for resolutely owning up to the task of individuation, he effectively fails to extricate his "fate" (*Schicksal*) from facticity, what he will be from what has been. On Heidegger's later diagnosis, he thereby exempts himself from the "destining" (*Geschick*) of the history of being.<sup>72</sup> This errant path figures into his writings from the 1930s as a divagation from the epochally unfolding truth of being that is stewarded by a world-historical people. A people whose age-grounding understanding transcends their anonymous facticity toward authentic *Mitsein*: being one's own self with others under the horizons of world history. To the abjection that defines the existential tragedy we must therefore add the historical deprivation befalling one who temporizes at the expense of a self-defined fate and thereby forfeits his mortal vocation to caring for the longevity of existence beyond his own.

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<sup>72</sup> Heidegger prefigures this analysis in *Being and Time* when he observes that "Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its 'generation' goes to make up the full historicizing of Dasein" (SZ 385).

## §7. Echoes Stolen from the Well: The Thracian Maid and the Political Tragedy

Ever since the trial of Socrates, it has been clear that they [philosophers] have a strained relationship with reality as it is, and especially with the community in which they live. The tension sometimes takes the form of open persecution; at other times merely a failure to understand their language. They must live in hiding, physically or intellectually.  
–Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*<sup>73</sup>

At this stage let us return to the tale of Thales, but this time with less of the shopworn glibness traditionally affected by the philosopher's gloss. I should like, that is, to peer more deeply into that storied well as into those who gathered round it, while hearkening back to the laughter that echoed from its depths. We began by casting Thales as a tragic figure, an emblem or omen of the philosopher whose all-consuming quest for unlimited comprehension of the world cast him away from its grounds as he abjectly fell to earth. Were this the whole story, that verdict would surely stand much as it inexplicably has the test of time. The more we sift through Thales' life and thought, however, the greater becomes our suspicion that history might be leading us astray. Be it said that precious little is known of the Milesian who flourished from roughly 624 to 548 BCE. None of his writings is extant so that we have only a handful of belated paraphrases from which to decipher his doctrine. Moreover, many of these are fraught with anachronistic and eisegetical interpolations concerning a doctrine already then centuries old. For these reasons, it must be admitted that the greater part of what follows is conjectural, but no more so than Plato's anecdote itself. And certainly far less so than the dubious conclusions he draws about Thales, to say nothing of those reached by scholars under Plato's shadow. Caveats aside, I should mention that the overarching intention here is neither biographical nor historiographical, but hermeneutically generative. Taking up a task to be brought to fruition in chapters 5 through 7, our aim is to explore how a more penetrating and scrupulous interpretation of the parable, reached through a phenomenological approach to Presocratic life and thought, might reveal a still graver tragedy than those already delineated. On this recension we shall see that it was Thales who first sounded the tocsin of finitude and Heidegger who failed to hear it, betraying by his deafness that abject provincialism of being which leaves all worldbound thinkers high and dry.

On closer scrutiny of what we do know about him, and contrary to the caricature that opened our discussion, Thales of Miletus does not fit neatly into either of the tragedies covered

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<sup>73</sup> Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Continuum, 1972), 257.

thus far. Anyone who would typecast him in the role of the intellectualist who trades practical wisdom for abstract speculation from the armchair must contend with ancient testimony that Thales was not only a factotum but in many ways the quintessential pragmatist. A ditch-digger he wasn't, to be sure, yet there is strong evidence to suggest he was in fact a farmer as well as a civil engineer and statesman of some renown, typifying a versatility common among his Milesian peers.<sup>74</sup> "The man's a Thales," writes Aristophanes about Meton, the town-planner of *The Birds*.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, in Plato's *Republic*, Thales is affiliated with Anacharsis on the basis of their mutual ingenuity in the "crafts" and "sciences."<sup>76</sup> The hyperbolic light this casts on Plato's version of the parable in the *Theaetetus* seems to have escaped even the most discerning of readers. In recent years Kirk, Raven, and Schofield have taken this oversight to task, noting that "one of the oldest versions of the absent-minded professor theme, would have more point if applied to someone not so notoriously practical in his interests as Thales."<sup>77</sup>

It is even less plausible, of course, to frame him in the existential tragedy. Not only did Thales earn the reputation of being the first Greek philosopher by interrogating the common sense and conventional wisdom of his time – his seminal studies in geometry, astronomy and meteorology are further testaments to this – he was even credited by some as having promulgated (before Socrates) the apothegm "Know thyself."<sup>78</sup> The Roman poet Juvenal characterizes Thales as a "gentle genius."<sup>79</sup> And Plutarch extolls the originality of that genius, remarking that Thales "seems to have been the only philosopher who then carried his

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<sup>74</sup> Herodotus 1.170 (KRS 65), 1.74-5 (KRS 66); D.L. 1.1.23-7; Aristotle, *Politics* 1259a9 (KRS 73), translated in G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 77f. All further translations cited from this volume are abbreviated as 'KRS' followed by fragment number.

<sup>75</sup> Aristophanes, *Birds* 1009. *Aristophanes: Birds, Lysistrata, Women at the Thesmophoria*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000). Cf. *Clouds*, 180. All further translations of Aristophanes are from Henderson (Loeb editions).

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Republic* 600a.

<sup>77</sup> Kirk et al., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 81.

<sup>78</sup> We owe Thales' association with the Delphic imperative "Know thyself," thus with the classical doctrine of autognosis espoused by Socrates and Plato, to the following reports by Diogenes Laertius: "The apothegm 'Know thyself' is his" (1.1.40); "When Thales was asked what was difficult, he said, 'To know one's self.' And what was easy, 'To advise another.'" (1.1.36). Among Thales' most famous scientific breakthroughs was the discovery of Ursa Minor and the prediction of the eclipse in May, 585 BCE (D.L. 1.1.23, cf. KRS, frags. 74-6).

<sup>79</sup> Juvenal, *Satires* 8.180-4; translated in *Juvenal and Persius*, trans. G. G. Ramsay (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1918).

speculations beyond things of common use.”<sup>80</sup> If the sage of Miletus was known for his shrewdness and pragmatism in the public arena, he was also said by Diogenes Laertius to have lived for some time “in solitude as a private individual [who] kept aloof from State affairs.”<sup>81</sup>

So roundly does Thales exemplify the philosopher who critically renounces the collective credulity and docile complacency of the everyman that the Heidegger takes the Milesian’s fall into the well to be a mark of philosophical probity – not fallenness. After reciting Plato’s version of the parable in *Die Frage nach dem Ding (What is a Thing?)* (1935), Heidegger tenders an epimyth of his own, albeit one reminiscent of Plato’s. “Philosophy,” he concludes, “is that thinking with which one can start nothing and about which housemaids necessarily laugh” (WT 3/GA41 3). By this he obviously intends the unnamed Thracian woman, the house-servant whose mirth at Thales’ expense bespeaks nothing for Heidegger so much as the anonymous cachinnations, conclamations, and enthrallment of *das Man*. As the remark suggests, it is not only the loutish philosopher that inspires such tranquilized irreverence but the dark “nothing” whence all true philosophical thinking emerges. On that note, it is not at all trivial that Thales could have been swallowed up by that nothing, plummeting to his death. Heidegger readily grants the risible if not frivolous seeming of all essential thinking, particularly the titular question of his essay on the thing. Even so, he would have us refrain from “taking things lightly” and discard all thoughtless laughter for an unwavering philosophical sobriety in the face of that “abyssal ground of nothingness” our mortality intimates (SZ 386; CP 186/GA65 236). Since he thinks a serious confrontation with such matters inevitably raises “questions with which one cannot start to do anything insofar as common opinion and the horizon of housemaids are concerned” (WT 10/GA41 10).

When Heidegger proposes that there is yet something to be learned from the laughter of *this* housemaid, he has already refused to consider it on its own terms, much less be transposed into the mood that provokes it. To properly respond to the question concerning what a thing is, he surmises, “she thinks we should first look around [*umsehen*] thoroughly in [the] roundabout-us [*Um-uns-herum*],” the *Umwelt* of everyday *Umsicht* and *Umgang*, so as to “take in view what is most immediate, most capable of being grasped by the hand” (WT 7/GA41 7). Yet he never condescends to examine her hands and the distinctive way they grasp the world. Instead, he

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<sup>80</sup> Plutarch, *Vit. Solon* 3.4; translated in *Plutarch's Lives*, trans. J. Langhorne and W. Langhorne (New York: Henry G. Bohn, 1859).

<sup>81</sup> D.L. 1.1.26.

promptly generalizes her understanding of the thing in terms of the ready-to-hand usability belonging to the *Umwelt des Handwerkers* set forth in Division One of *Being and Time*. From there he proceeds to set aside all interpretations of the thing conditioned by an understanding that relates us to beings, intellectually or practically. Contrariwise, he stipulates that “with the [ontological] question ‘What is a thing?’ we are asking for something unconditioned” in the sense that “there are no more things that provide a basis and ground” (WT 9/GA41 8). He insists that even to properly pose this question requires that we “pass over” all particular things (beings) and be “addressed by what is as such within the whole” (WT 51/GA41 49). And what is this but the (ontological) “thingness” of the thing, “which conditions the thing as a thing” but is conditioned by no-thing ontic (WT 8f./GA41 8)? Having consigned the housemaid to her dustbin from the outset, Heidegger is able to assert in earnest that the philosophical descent into the abyssal ontological ground, or (no-)thingness, of the thing “is not a mere joke but something to think over.” For “we shall do well to remember occasionally that by our strolling we can fall into a well whereby we may not reach ground for quite some time” (WT 3/GA41 3). If Heidegger locates an element of tragedy in the parable, then, it is that Thales did not fall deeply enough into that abyss, his view from those grounds at well’s bottom falling well short of the whole. Heidegger’s appraisal strikes a telling note in its claim to wholly grasping the thought of the first philosopher: “we ask about what is all around us and can be grasped by the hand – Whose? – “yet we alienate ourselves from those immediate things very much more than did Thales, who could see only as far as the stars” (WT 9/GA41 8). Reading this leaves one to wonder if Thales did not see the nothing from the bottom of the well far clearer than Heidegger ever saw him.

Significantly, in the *Theaetetus* Plato had allegorized the parable in much the same way, observing that

whenever [the philosopher] is obliged . . . to discuss the things that lie at his feet and before his eyes, he causes entertainment not only to Thracian servant-girls but to all the common herd [*ochlō*], by tumbling into wells and every sort of difficulty through his lack of experience.<sup>82</sup>

Plato’s assessment of the fraught relationship between the philosopher and his community is suggestive. However “idiotic” or “comic” he might appear to the *hoi polloi*, Plato avers that the philosopher would dismiss that ridicule no less than their admiration: “For really such a man pays no attention to his next door neighbor; he is not only ignorant of what he is doing, but he hardly knows whether he is a human being or some other kind of creature. . . . Used as he is to

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<sup>82</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 174c.

envisage *the whole earth*,” he remains unmoved by even their “praise [as he thinks it] comes of a dim and limited vision, an inability . . . to take a steady *view of the whole*.”<sup>83</sup> It is difficult to imagine two less likely bedfellows than Plato and Heidegger. And to think that they would share the same Procrustean bed for that matter! Yet their agreement that the philosopher is a friend to wisdom who offends the apprehension of the many, which he must fend off to arrive at a comprehension of the whole, has led some commentators to implicate them both, along with Thales, in yet another tragedy. On this interpretation, Thales’ attempt to uncover the universal principle of reality (“all is water”) inaugurated a philosophical tradition that pretends to assimilate the whole of being while denying or disguising its inexplicably singular complexity, thus our finite comprehension of other existents.

One proponent of this view was Hannah Arendt, who almost certainly had Heidegger in mind when describing “the entirely serious way” that Plato generalizes the episode “on the assumption that the philosopher does not need the ‘rabble’ to inform him of his ‘foolishness’.”<sup>84</sup> And indeed, the lesson she takes from it would seem to apply as much to the former Nazi Party member as it does to the would-be philosopher-king he so fondly quoted during his infamous rectorship in 1933, an involvement he would later concede was “the greatest stupidity of his life” – but only in private correspondence with his peers.<sup>85</sup> For Plato the Thracian’s words and laughter bespeak a mood of vulgar hostility to, if not outright contempt for, the philosopher’s vocation, perhaps foreshadowing the iniquity suffered by Socrates when sentenced to death by the Athenian majority. Blumenburg points out how this assumption has continued to persist, so that for more than two millennia the parable has “retained an ambiguous position between comedy and tragedy.”<sup>86</sup> But Arendt calls this into question. Since the time of Plato, she explains, philosophy has been all too prone to mistake the “intramural warfare between man’s common sense, this sixth sense that fits our five sense into a common world, and man’s faculty of thought and need of reason, which determine him to remove himself [from the common world] for considerable periods.” Rather than recognize this as a tension within themselves, “the philosophers have interpreted that intramural warfare as the natural hostility of the many and

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 174be, emphasis mine.

<sup>84</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 1 (San Diego: Harcourt, 1978), 82f.

<sup>85</sup> This anecdote, based on a letter he received from Heidegger, is recorded in Heinrich Wiegand Petzet’s *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1929-1976* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), 37.

<sup>86</sup> Blumenburg, *Laughter of the Thracian*, 13.

their opinions toward the few and their truth.” On her view, Plato’s misapprehension of the Thracian woman’s “innocent” laughter is symptomatic of the chronic “persecution mania of the philosopher,” nourished by thinkers as politically sophisticated as Hegel.<sup>87</sup> Arendt would have us see that any philosopher who disdains to heed or sublimates the laughter of the housemaid, who insulates himself from her world by a strictly contemplative and totalizing understanding of it, is bound to harbor a totalitarian conception of the multitude as servile rabble to be tyrannized, rather than a plurality of singular beings with whom all true servants of wisdom do join hands. A philosopher of this misodemic cast is unconscionably alienated, outcast from the social grounds of his vocation. He succumbs to **political abjection**.

### §8. Stifled Laughter in the Dark: The Ecological Tragedy

The judge tilted his great head. The man who believes that the secrets of the world are forever hidden lives in mystery and fear. Superstition will drag him down. The rain will erode the deeds of his life. But the man who sets himself the task of singling out the thread of order from the tapestry will by the decision alone have taken charge of the world and it is by such taking charge that he will effect a way to dictate the terms of his own fate.  
–Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*<sup>88</sup>

If this critique finds its mark in Plato as it does in the early Heidegger, I maintain it falls grossly wide of it as far as Thales is concerned. That history has reprised his pratfall time and again only to use him as a mouthpiece for its own ulterior archetypes of the philosopher – heroic, tragic, or pathetic, as the case may be – should give due pause for reassessment.<sup>89</sup> The parable itself gives no indication of Thales’ reaction to the laughter of the house-servant, but leaves us in the lurch as it leaves him at the bottom of the well, where her mysterious mocking echo is met with a no less mysterious silence against which time has not as yet prevailed. In their haste to fill

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<sup>87</sup> Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 81f. “If we are thinking in terms of progress,” writes Arendt, then Hegel’s philosophical elitism “certainly is a ‘relapse’ into what philosophy had been since its beginning, and Hegel repeats the story Plato told about Thales, with a great show of indignation at the laughing Thracian peasant girl.” *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1989), 35.

<sup>88</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 199.

<sup>89</sup> Blumenburg notes that “with later rises in literacy, authors reappropriated the fable to criticize pagan philosophy, astrology, lack of scientific rigor, and intolerance toward visionaries ahead of their time. For over two and half millennia, it has appeared in Mediterranean and European texts by theologians, preachers, philosophers, and other thinkers, among them Tertullian, Chaucer, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Martin Heidegger” (*Laughter of the Thracian*, 140). Blumenburg’s study retraces its iterations in their hands and those of still others.



that silence with the solemn words of their own cherished Ur-philosophers, both Plato and Heidegger never bother to ask what *Thales* might have thought about the laughter of house-servants, to say nothing of wells and rendezvous with death. Let us then try to redress that negligence by composing a writ of restitution based on what we know of Thales' words and deeds, however partial and lacunary that knowledge surely is. And let us begin that generative interpretation by entertaining for a moment the hypothetical motion that Thales absolved himself of tragedy on all counts by laughing *with* the Thracian maid, acknowledging thereby the *earthly* finitude of the philosophical thinker.

What on earth would Thales have laughed at? And why? Not only has he been diverted from the heavenward path of his thinking as he tumbles earthward, he has conceivably just come within a hairsbreadth of death. Fortunately for us, this is a matter about which history has not remained altogether silent. In the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* Diogenes Laertius records the following about Thales: "He held there was no difference between life and death. 'Why then', said one, 'do you not die?' 'Because', said he, 'there is no difference.'"<sup>90</sup> Would it have been an indifferent peal of laughter, then, that overcame Thales in the sodden dark? A devil-may-care guffaw in defiance of death for its non-difference from life? Could Thales have seen reflected in that well, centuries in advance, what Lucretius beheld in the "mirror in which nature shows us the time to come after death" reflected in "the bygone ages of eternity that elapsed before our birth," each of which is "nothing to us" and therefore nothing to fear?<sup>91</sup> There is some grain of truth to these notions, but they can just as easily lead us astray. I would like to suggest – tentatively at first, then with increasing evidence and subtlety – that if Thales discerned the unreckonable expanses of time revealed in nature's mirror, this was not because he sought to envisage the whole after Plato's tragic archetype. Nor was *death* for him a matter of indifference. Quite the contrary, for what this arch(aic) thinker of the earth saw envisaged in its most specular element was, I surmise, none other than the rictus grin of death, thus, the humorous face of that world-wisened fool that time shows us all when unfurled in its elemental breadth.

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<sup>90</sup> D.L. 1.1.35.

<sup>91</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 3.973-77, translated in *On the Nature of Things*, trans. Martin Ferguson Smith (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001).

With an eye to developing this idea, it bears mention that the word ‘humiliated’, from the Latin *humus*, originally meant ‘lowered to earth’.<sup>92</sup> If there is any case to be made for this amendment to the parable, it is that the philosopher’s laughter would have sprung less from indifference toward death per se as it did from humility, from his own abasement. For his humiliation that day had been dealt by a *logos* issued by none other than a fellow keeper of the *oikos*, an *oiketēs*, a servant of the dwelling place and fellow caretaker of earth.

By all accounts the Thracian enters the story as a foil to the philosopher of ancient Greece. Much as she is portrayed in the *Theaetetus* as an anonymous effigy of the common herd or rabble (*ochlos*), she is also described as “captive-slave” (*andrapodētois*), “imperceptive” (*ou gar aisthanontai*) and “uneducated” (*apaidētō*), to say nothing of the fact that she is a foreign woman.<sup>93</sup> Yet she speaks in an idiom at once philosophical and vulgar, giving voice to a *logos* so trenchant as to inspire in Plato a humorlessly strained and none too suasive defense of the impractical philosopher and his indifference to the “dim and limited vision” of the common man. Thales, whom we know was actually anything but impractical, engaged as he actively was in pragmatic affairs inimical to Plato’s philosopher, would not have bristled so. In him her sage words would have conceivably invited a different response. On this revisionist variant, what later thinkers would dismiss as foolish mockery brought Thales down to earth. So did the reproach of the Thracian woman hit its tragicomic mark: in his single-minded inspection of the heavens, devoid of human settlement, inhabited by no mortal, he had lost all sight of what had gathered them both into dwelling there. He had forgotten the wellspring of every community, every dwelling place: the *water* welled just beneath his feet. In a flash, like a desert freshet, an Archimedean insight breached the ethereal horizons of his thinking to spill into that arid desolation. Rather than scoff at her irreverent logic, one can readily see why Thales would have humbly acknowledged its well-drawn wisdom. He had just fallen into “his” element! For him this was no “irony” – at least not the kind that dissembles the low as the lofty in a gesture of high-minded urbanity or pride. So far from a dry flash of wit, his was a splash of humor (from *umere*, ‘wetness’ or ‘moisture’) born of the acknowledgement that the joke was on him, that for all his high-flown ruminations on water he was all wet when it came to walking on it, and that it very well could have done him in. Had chance not intervened, one imagines he might have paid

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<sup>92</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all etymologies of English words are based on the "Oxford English Dictionary, Third Edition," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com>.

<sup>93</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 174ce.

his final debt to nature on that day, the last laugh erupting then as ever from the earth, the Thracian's own falling silent upon finding him there, upside down, dead in the water.

This gallows humor could not have been lost on Thales as it traditionally has on his more serious-minded doxographers, ventriloquists, and ironists. Their oversight becomes all the more perplexing once the parable is situated within the context of the lore that seeps from Thales' death. According to one celebrated account, Thales met his end at an advanced age. As Diogenes Laertius tells it, philosophy's preeminent waterbearer was engrossed once more, this time by an athletic contest on a hot summer day, when at a stroke he succumbed to *dehydration*! In the well-versed words of the satirist:

As Thales watched the games one festal day  
The fierce sun smote him and he passed away;  
Zeus, thou didst well to raise him; his dim eyes  
Could not from earth behold the starry skies.<sup>94</sup>

Echoing the Thracian woman's earthy quip, the final line casts a premonitory shadow over the mishap at the well. It is worth noting that in ancient Greece wells were widely held to be sources of premonition, intimated by the bucketfull or by backward-turning glances, their waters reflecting as they ever have sidereal visions in the dark of night. From Thales' well, philosophers from Plato onward have been quick to raise buckets filled with sententious triticisms and sardonic conceits of their own concoction. Not one dram of humor have they drawn from well's bottom, from which the philosopher and the housemaid drew their common share. To see why philosophy never got the joke, we shall look to how it has recurrently taken Thales' doctrine out of *its* element, meanwhile stripping the Thracian of that *logos* which convoked them both round the being of the earth. Reinscribing Presocratic thought within the narrow limits of their own anachronistic and anachoristic understanding of being, philosophy has revealed less about it than it has about its own *ecologically* tragic undercurrents.

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<sup>94</sup> D.L. 1.1.39. At 1.2.4 Diogenes recounts a competing report of Thales death, citing an apocryphal letter written by Anaximenes to Pythagoras. On this account the aged philosopher was walking out at night with his maid-servant to view the stars when fell down a "steep slope" to his death. Well-drawn are the parallels to the well episode, whether we consider the final line of the elegiac verses quoted above or the maid-servant in this variant. The same depicted as a crone in Diogenes' version of the parable: "It is said that once, when [Thales] was taken out of doors by an old woman in order that he might observe the stars, he fell into a ditch [*bothron*, 'ditch', 'trench', or 'grave'], and his cry for help drew from the old woman the retort, 'How can you expect to know all about the heavens, Thales, when you cannot even see what is just before your feet?' (D.L. 1.1.34).

In chapters 3, 5, and 6 we shall contrive to redress that misplaced revelation by reapproaching the Presocratics from phenomenology. And we shall make a steadfast effort to get to the bottom of the fabled well in chapter 7. There its hidden sources will be traced by Thracian tributaries to a humor toward death, from which not only housemaids but all earthly caretakers necessarily laugh. At this juncture, let us begin to unpack the new avatar of tragedy just unveiled by considering why it might have been that Heidegger failed to find the humor in the tale. And let us take up that task by exploring his remedy to existential abjection in such early texts as *Being and Time*. In these works we encounter a decidedly un-Thalesian gesture: a sharp differentiation between life and death. Meanwhile, the mortal mood he alleges to deliver us from tragedy is not humor but a certain angst-ridden willfulness, which promises to secure existence authentically in its self, thereby the world-historical posterity of its self-projected fate.

When Heidegger takes up the theme of death in Division Two of *Being and Time*, it is framed by the existential-ontological project of grasping Dasein's being as a whole. He will eventually abandon that enterprise, declaring that such a "characterization of [its] end or wholeness can only be provisional" (SZ 241).<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, he will retain "the question of Dasein's wholeness" in last analysis as a legitimate and indeed pivotal one concerning its existentiell or "ontic possibility" (SZ 309). As the nontrivial incompleteness of *Being and Time* and its fundamental ontology confirms, the hermeneutic of existence uncovers *existentialia* that are ultimately dynamic, open-ended, and provisional. But at the *existentiell* level of its unique predicament and individual self-understanding, each instance of Dasein is said to "reach its wholeness in death, thereby losing the being of its 'there'" (SZ 237).<sup>96</sup> As long as I am 'there', in the world, I exist in the tense of the not-yet. I am the possibilities I project ahead of myself toward the future. Upon my death this open-ended, futural ekstasis comes to an unexpected close, whereupon my projects – however unfulfilled – are petrified with marble finality into an individuated whole. By virtue of

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<sup>95</sup> Translation modified: in what follows I translate Heidegger's term *Ganzheit* as 'wholeness' to maintain its consistency with *Ganzsein* (*being-whole*) and *Ganzseinkönnen* (*ability-to-be-whole*). Macquarrie and Robinson's inconsistent use of 'totality' obscures the root word common to all of these expressions.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. "As long as Dasein is as an entity, it has never reached its 'wholeness'. But if it gains such 'wholeness', this gain becomes the utter loss of being-in-the-world" (SZ 236). To underscore the importance of the existentiell dimension of Heidegger's program in *Being and Time*, we might recall these remarks from the introduction: "Dasein has turned out to be, more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically. But the roots of the existential analytic, on its part, are ultimately *existentiell*, that is, *ontical*. Only if the inquiry of philosophical research is itself seized upon in an existentiell manner as a possibility of the Being of each existing Dasein, does it become at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence and to undertake an adequately founded ontological problematic" (SZ 13).

my understanding, my being-ahead-of-myself, the fact that I shall someday die, and that each day of my existence brings me one day closer to that eventuality, reverberate through my existence as its unchosen mortal condition.

Howsoever we disregard or deny this condition, Heidegger has it that it obtains for all mortal beings, all Dasein qua thrown-projection. In having been thrown into the ability to project myself understandingly, I am able to choose how to conduct myself toward my future being-gone (*vorbei*), even though it will never be present to me. To paraphrase Montaigne's gloss on Plato, I may build death by making it the constant work of my life.<sup>97</sup> In this work, distinguished by Heidegger as *authentic* being-toward-death, I take up the question of my terminal wholeness as my own decisive issue. Authentic for owning up to the careful vocation of existence, this project sets death to work as an occasion for building toward that for the sake of which I am, and rebuilding the world as a home in which to dwell with others *as myself*. The possibility of my death rebounds on my present concerns, evincing their urgency while prompting some response, however belated and unsettled, to the question as to why it was that *I* was ever born. As the self-chosen countermeasure to the existential tragedy, building death involves for Heidegger an ever-renewed decision concerning whether my fate will be resorbed into the anonymous past of my natal thrownness, which ceaselessly threatens to swallow me back up in the specious present of the everyman. By resisting the temptation to flee into the inauthentic fallenness of the public world, and adopting instead a stance of "anticipatory resoluteness" (*vorlaufende Entschlossenheit*) toward the *Angst*-exposed 'nothing' of my postmortem non-existence, I am said to retrieve my fate from the throw of my prenatal past and that past as my own. What is ultimately decided for each of us in being-toward-death, what it is that we are building, is not merely the prospect of authentic self-being, but that of being-historical. In Heidegger's own words, "timeliness [*Zeitlichkeit*] gets experienced in a phenomenally originary way in Dasein's authentic being-whole, in the phenomenon of anticipatory resoluteness" (SZ 304). He will thus equate this phenomenon with both "choosing to choose a kind of self-being" *and* with "Dasein's originary historicizing [*Geschehen*]" (SZ 270, 384). If we are paralyzed by *Angst* in an uncanny present, overwhelmed by the otherness of a self-effacing past and future, resoluteness mobilizes

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<sup>97</sup> "Death is the condition of your creation, it is part of you; [in fleeing death] you are fleeing from your own selves. This being of yours that you enjoy is equally divided between death and life . . . the constant work of your life is to build death. You are in death while you are in life . . . during your life you are dying" (1:20). Translated in *Essays*, trans. John M. Cohen (New York: Penguin, 1993).

us to extemporize ourselves historically. It is on these grounds that Heidegger accords pride of place to the futural orientation of our worldward thrownness. For him it is primarily the mortal projection of a self-made whole that affords redress to the “timeless,” “selfless” malaise of existential abjection.

Critics since Levinas have situated Heidegger within the necrophilic philosophical tradition inaugurated by Plato for identifying our existential vocation with building toward death. The objection takes on considerable force when we consider how Heidegger’s early reckoning with mortality is more severely problematized by natal finitude than his comparatively cursory treatment of the latter would suggest.<sup>98</sup> My critical assessment in this chapter and the next will take a similar tack, but from an elementary angle that amplifies the problem. It is certainly true that Heidegger understates the rupture of having been born into the world in relation with (human) others, both those from whom we inherit it and those with whom we dwell, thus our entanglement in being-with-others even as we own up to being-toward-death. And there is good reason to think that the futural thrust of the understanding toward the putative wholeness of selfhood lends itself to him as a kind of historical birth control – a form of contra-inception or prophylaxis against the unforeseeably singular newness and otherness of each historical moment. For our purposes, such considerations might even serve to explain to some extent his preemptive sterilization of Thales’ fecund insights no less than his unregenerate response to the laughter of the Thracian. But I should like to investigate how Heidegger’s early conception of finitude conceals a more radical rupture yet, one he will later uncover and never cease in attempting to mend. More so perhaps than all *human* plurality, *the earth* quakes the world of *Being and Time*. An eruption rifting that world asunder, opening below it a chasm more abyssal than any world-historical *Abgrund*. As I shall argue, these groundswells are not merely historical. They are *allohistorical* (from the Greek *allos*, ‘other’), unleashed from a past deemed unmemorable, not simply for its being forgotten or unrecorded, but for its being immemorial, inexplicable (*unauslegbar*), superfluous to being-in-the-world as such.<sup>99</sup> In the beyond beneath the horizons of *Being and Time* there revolves the time of the elemental other, earth, a past and future that withdraw from the understanding but affectively reverberate through the memorial world and the finite arcs of its existents. As we shall see, Heidegger’s treatment of mood and attunement

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<sup>98</sup> Cf. Anne O’Byrne, *Nativity and Finitude*, 1-14.

<sup>99</sup> Or as Heidegger might put it, *existentially* irrecoverable, as opposed to immemorial to me in *existentiell* sense.

captures some aftershock of this reverberation. Yet his contraction of these experiences into being-delivered-over to “our” own destining via “my” own fate reveals itself as an abortive leap, one that balked at a more abyssal fall to earth.

Provided this revelation holds water, one might be compelled to regard Dasein’s “fundamental” moods askance. To restress an earlier point, Heidegger identifies *Angst* as fundamental for its disclosure of our thrownness into the *world*. Meanwhile, as I shall argue, *resoluteness* is covertly enlisted as a fundamental mood in its own right, gearing us willfully into the historical appropriation of that disclosure. As a so-called “counter-mood” to the misattunements of existential abjection, resoluteness becomes necessary for Dasein’s projective “mastery” of its moods, its self, and its fate. It is said to solicit that decisive counter-throw of thrownness toward ownness, whereby we press into our own finitude, individual and world-historical. Reconsidered from the allohistorical standpoint, however, in which our own world tends away toward a shimmering surmise, could it be that these moods constitute not only derivative attunements, but misattunements with respect to a deeper sense of thrownness? Misattunements that miss the mark of a more elementary vocation? Could it be that they afford a *nisus* toward closure – ipseophilic, anthropocentric, and voluntarist – which is at the very least unmindful if not evasive of that temporal condition? I submit that it is precisely such misattunements that compel the early Heidegger to commit himself to an abject truncation of our finitude, our “ecstatic” timeliness, into what is in truth an unduly *enstatic* (or ontologically immanent) understanding of being and time. An understanding that *dys-closes* and thereby disguises its own inexplicable excess: the being of non-worldly others and the non-worldly otherness of being. To deny that more fundamental, or better said, *elementary ekstasis* of being-in-the-world, as I claim he initially does, is to deny our *earthly* finitude, our being-of-the-earth. Such is the denial to which our entire discussion has been leading. Such is the **ecological tragedy** befalling every child of history who casts himself away from the wildness of being in his efforts to build and settle a world of his own.

In *Being and Time* we read that the existentiell question concerning death as an ontic possibility of Dasein does not principally pertain to its “being-at-an-end” (*Zu ende sein*) or its “being-whole” (*Ganzsein*), but to its “being-toward-the-end” (*Sein zum Ende*), its “ability-to-be-whole” (*Ganzseinkönnen*) (SZ 234, 245). Heidegger groups these latter concepts under the general heading of authentic being-toward-death, whereby that ability “is answered by Dasein as

resolute [*entschlossenes*]" (SZ 309).<sup>100</sup> The promise of anticipatory resoluteness lies in establishing the conditions for freely *choosing* death in a way that secures the constancy and cohesion of the self over the course of existence (SZ 322). Thus: "we call 'resoluteness' . . . that existentiell choosing which we seek – the *choosing to choose a kind of self-being* [*Selbstsein*]" (SZ 270, emphasis mine).<sup>101</sup> Recall that "proximally and for the most part," on his account, "Dasein is absorbed in the 'One' and is mastered by it" (SZ 167). Dasein is always already disposed toward falling into the tranquilized routines of self-forgetful everydayness. But in being misattuned to its worldly finitude, it abjectly succumbs to that enthrallment. While authentic *extemporizing* consolidates the self, Dasein's inauthentic *temporizing* leads to self-dispersal. Acquiescing to prevailing factual circumstances in a contracted present, we while away the time in distraught preoccupation with sundry practical concerns, forgetting their embeddedness in the past while merely awaiting their actualization (cf. SZ 261f.). Choose though we do among readymade possibilities, we have not "chosen to choose" in the sense that they have not been authentically self-projected from the grounds of care. Instead they are projected for us at the historico-transcendental level of decision, which we have forfeited to the One-self, whose emphatic proclamation of what is simply reiterates what *has been*.

To those seeking to wrest free of existential abjection by "choosing to choose," Heidegger issues a rather curious exhortation: "Factically, Dasein *can, should, and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods,*" which we are told can only be achieved "by way of a *counter-mood* [*Gegenstimmung*]" (SZ 106, emphasis mine). At first blush, one might be inclined to identify this counter-mood as *Angst*. But on closer inspection, the texts do not bear this out. Though we read in *Being and Time* that "*Angst* brings [Dasein] back from its absorption in the 'world'" so that "everyday familiarity collapses" (SZ 189), Heidegger elsewhere clarifies this "bringing back" as a "shrinking back before . . . the nothing," which is "essentially repelling" to the understanding (P 90/GA9 114). By inciting the wholesale disinvolvement of readiness-to-hand, *Angst* disrupts our concerns, interrupts our comportment, and impairs our practical understanding (SZ 343). It thereby introduces a moment of what Heidegger calls "suspense" or

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. "The question of the ability-to-be-whole [*Ganzseinönnen*] is one which is factual and existentiell. It is answered by Dasein as resolute [*entschlossenes*]" (SZ 309).

<sup>101</sup> Translation modified with clauses reversed. Cf. "Resoluteness constitutes the *loyalty* [*Treue*] of existence to its own Self" (SZ 331).



"bewildered rest" in the projective movement of existence (P 90/GA9 114).<sup>102</sup> Restoring that movement requires more than *Angst* alone, lest it be through the anxious flight into the straits of existential abjection. To *authentically* resume its movement, which requires an orientation toward caring for *itself*, Dasein must neither flee nor simply deliver itself over to this arrestive mood. On the contrary, the existent must become "master" of *Angst* in a way that prevents it from being reinflected into misattunements to the historical world (e.g. fear, captive curiosity, distraction, tranquilized reassurance).

Though Heidegger never makes the suggestion *expressis verbis*, there is every reason to interpret this "counter-mood," geared toward self-mastery, as resoluteness. Resoluteness lends itself to him as the decisive countermeasure to the "tranquilized 'willing' [*beruhigte Wollen*] under the guidance of the 'One'," which is said to lead Dasein to "comport itself towards its possibilities . . . *unwillingly*; [i.e.] inauthentically" (SZ 195, 193).<sup>103</sup> As indicated by his previous analysis of the insidious self-deception of *Beruhigung*, such unwilling comportment is not originarily a matter of psychological compulsion or physical coercion. Nor does it stem from *abulia*, *akrasia*, or any other agentive inability to act on introspectively premeditated needs, desires, or reasons. Instead, resoluteness purportedly counters the disposition of existential abjection at the lowermost levels of experience, unthematic and pervasive. So that if this counter-mood falls under the rubric of willing, this has nothing to do with the empirical or transcendental psychology of the subject. Rather, by properly situating it within his analysis of ontological disposition, I wish to suggest that Heidegger's early thought of resoluteness is to be read as a synecdoche for the *fundamental mood of willfulness*, which promotes an authentic self-understanding against the backdrop of the historical world.

It should be noted that resoluteness is not directly linked to will or mood in *Being and Time*. Nor, to my knowledge, is the second connection made in any of the standard commentaries. To find support for this interpretation we must look to later works. By my lights, the most comprehensive and penetrating treatment of this theme to date is Bret Davis' *Heidegger and the Will*. His analysis sheds much light on the voluntarist ambivalence of Heidegger's

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<sup>102</sup> As he puts it, "we 'hover' in *Angst*" [*Wir 'schweben' in Angst*]" (P 88/GA9 112).

<sup>103</sup> The entire statement: "Dasein *can* comport itself towards its possibilities, even *unwillingly*; it *can* be inauthentically; and factually it is inauthentically, proximally and for the most part. The authentic 'for-the-sake-of-which' [*Worumwillen*] has not been taken hold of; the projection of one's own ability-to-be has been abandoned to the disposal of the 'One'" (SZ 193).

writings from the 20s, examined under the lens of his anti-metaphysical deconstruction of the will in the decades to follow. Though Davis does not go so far as to interpret resoluteness as a mood, he does call attention to several crucial passages that reveal a connection to willing. Let us follow his lead by considering this excerpt from *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1936), where Heidegger forges the connection:

Whoever wills, *whoever lays his whole Dasein into a will, is resolute* [*entschlossen*]. Resoluteness delays nothing, does not shirk, but acts from the moment and without fail. Resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] is no mere resolution to act, but the decisive [*entscheidende*] inception of action that reaches ahead and through all action. *To will is to be resolute* (IM 22/GA40 23, emphasis mine).<sup>104</sup>

By saying that resoluteness qua willing is "no mere resolution to act," Heidegger is underscoring its status as an existential-ontological condition for the possibility of comportment. This already marks a *prima facie* departure from *Being and Time*, where he had relegated the analysis of the will to its ontic employment. The will is traditionally conceived as a subjective faculty that enables the agent to select among and act upon consciously premeditated intentions. In the phenomenology of *Being and Time*, however, the focus falls on Dasein's unthematic ability to press into possible (unthematic) intentional objects of concern or solicitude. These possibilities could not be given in the first place, according to Heidegger, were they not already disclosed by the understanding, which establishes the horizon of significance "for-the-sake-of-which" (*Worum-willen*) we willfully concern ourselves with beings. As he puts it:

In willing [*Wollen*], an entity which is understood – that is, one which has been projected upon its possibility – gets seized upon. . . . Hence, to any willing there belongs something willed, which has already made itself definite in terms of a "for-the-sake-of-which" [*Worum-willen*]" (SZ 194).

From here Heidegger proceeds to lay out three transcendental conditions, which must be set in place by the understanding if "willing is to be possible ontologically": (i) the "prior disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*] of the 'for-the-sake-of-which in general'" by the ontological understanding; (ii) the disclosure of the intentional object of concern (the willed possibility) by the practical understanding; and (iii) the projection of the self onto this possibility by Dasein's authentic self-understanding (*ibid.*).

Let us try to bring into sharper relief the interplay of understanding, willing, and the "for-the-sake-of-which" in Heidegger's early writings. Davis approaches this theme by drawing attention to how the German word *Wille* ("will") is cognate with *Umwillen*, a kinship obscured

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Bret W. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2007), 44.

by the standard English translation of the latter as "for-the-sake-of." For Davis this suggests an alternative translation of the fundamental significance (*Bedeutsamkeit*) of the world set forth in Division One of *Being and Time*: "the primary 'what-for' [*Wozu*] is" less a "for-the-sake-of-which" so much as "a 'for what will' [*Worum-willen*]." <sup>105</sup> Whether this rendering captures the *mens auctoris* remains less than self-evident if we confine our attention to Heidegger's ostensive claims about the will in this text. When we shift our focus to other works of the period, however, a more outspoken position comes into view. Most pertinent here is perhaps this claim, which Davis culls from the 1928 Marburg seminar on Leibniz: "World . . . is primarily defined by the for-the-sake-of-which. . . . But a for-the-sake-of-which, a purposiveness [*Um-willen*], is only possible where there is a will [*Willen*]" (GA26 238). <sup>106</sup> Should we therefore conclude, asks Davis, that beings are involved in Dasein's world predominantly as equipment serving "'in order to' (*umwollen*) carry out the projects of Dasein's will (*Wille*)?" <sup>107</sup>

On the face of it, this conclusion is disqualified by Heidegger's overt stance in *Being and Time*, where the will only figures into Dasein's practical understanding. In a proleptic remark that anticipates a common misconception of *Being and Time*, from which he would continue to disabuse his readers long after it saw print, Heidegger suggests that "readiness-to-hand and equipment have nothing to contribute as ontological clues to interpreting the primitive [*primitiven*] world" correlated with the "understanding of being . . . constitutive of primitive Dasein" (SZ 82). But if willfulness, as resoluteness, is *covertly* smuggled into the existential-ontological level of analysis as a condition of Dasein's authentic, world-building ability, this evidently would seem to commit Heidegger to something akin to transcendental voluntarism. Davis makes a compelling case for the idea that the early Heidegger occupied a more ambiguous position. Yet he also adduces these lines from the 1929 essay "On the Essence of Ground," where a kind of transcendental will is explicitly formulated and equated with the ontological projection of worldly significance:

This surpassing that occurs "for the sake of" [*Der umwillentliche Überstieg*] does so only in a "will" [*Willen*] that as such projects itself upon possibilities of itself [*seiner selbst*]. This will that essentially casts the "for the sake of itself" over and thereby before [*über- und damit vorwirft*] Dasein cannot therefore be a particular willing, an "act of will" as distinct from other kinds of comportment. . . . All forms of comportment are rooted

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 35. SZ 84, cf. SZ 193 (noted above.)

<sup>106</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 36.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 35. Davis' parenthetical translation of 'in order to' (*um zu*) as *umwollen* could be rendered alternatively by either: *um zu willen*, 'in order to will'; or by modifying the statement to read: "in order to . . . for the sake of Dasein's will."

in transcendence. The “will” in question, however, must first “form” [or build, *bilden*] the for-the-sake-of as and in a surpassing (P 126/GA9 163).<sup>108</sup>

When coupled with his equation of the will with resoluteness in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, these lines – written only shortly after *Being and Time* – provide strong evidence in favor of interpreting Heidegger's early concept of resoluteness as a transcendental-ontological ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*) that is integral to our authentic self-understanding and understanding of being. Accordingly, when resoluteness is introduced in *Being and Time* it is said to promote Dasein's ability to "bring itself back" from its "lostness in the 'One'" by “making up for not choosing" (SZ 268). This is not attained by opting for some set of actual choices as opposed to others, but at the transcendental level of decision. As Heidegger explains, “making up' for not choosing signifies choosing to make this choice – deciding for an ability-to-be, and *making this decision from one's own Self*” (ibid., emphasis mine). In so doing, he says, "Dasein *makes possible*, first and foremost, its authentic ability-to-be” (ibid.). Otherwise put, resoluteness is the condition for the possibility of Dasein's “ability-to-be-its-self” (*Selbstseinkönnen*) and for thereby owning up to its careful vocation. Only if this transcendental decision has been made can we willfully comport ourselves toward ontic possibilities of our *own*.

The term *Entschlossenheit* – for which 'resolve', 'determination' and 'decidedness' are also viable translations – suggests both a way of being 'opened up' or 'un-closed' (*ent-schliessen*) as well as 'having decided' (*sich entschlossen*). These senses are combined in *Being and Time*, where we read that “resoluteness is a distinctive mode of Dasein's disclosedness [*Erschlossenheit*],” and that "resoluteness 'exists' only as a decision which understandingly projects itself [*verstehend-sich-entwerfender Entschluss*] (SZ 297f., trans. mod.).<sup>109</sup> If Dasein finds itself existentially abject in being inauthentically entrained by the counterfeit eternity of the everyman, resoluteness un-closes those confines through a decision to authentically give shape to its selfhood in an open-ended future it projects as its own. The crucial question then becomes whether this transcendental decision is truly made "from one's own self," as implied above. If it is, would this not lead us to a full-blown idealism, entailing nothing short of a freely self-positing transcendental self? Once more, we must look to Heidegger's later writings to shed light on his earlier position.

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. ibid., 36.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. ibid., 40f.

By the time of his *Contributions to Philosophy* (1936-38), Heidegger had begun to move away from the phenomenological application of the transcendental method. For he now sees it, just so, as a vestige of idealist metaphysics.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, he retains the language of the will, albeit ambivalently, by provisioning it with scare-quotes, as well as hyphenated and *prima facie* paradoxical qualifications, which together mark the *Contributions* as a transitional work on the path toward Heidegger's eventual *Verwindung* of voluntarism.<sup>111</sup> Setting aside the complexities of that development, we would do well to glean from this text a remark that not only demonstrates how far he has come from equating resoluteness or willing with transcendental choosing ("choosing to choose"), but helps to illuminate his idiomatic sense of decision. We read: "What is decision anyway? *Choice*? No; choosing always concerns only something pregiven, something that can be taken or rejected." (CP 79/GA65 100). To grasp the pre-giveness of this decision, which our practical know-how and actions do not so much generate as respond to, we might turn back to the abovementioned selection from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*. To his assertion that "to will is to be resolute," Heidegger parenthetically adds that "the essence of resoluteness [*Ent-schlossenheit*] . . . by no means [lies] in an accumulation of force [*Kraftspeicherung*] for 'activity,' but in "letting" (*das Lassen*) as a "relation to being" (IM 22/GA40 23).<sup>112</sup> Rather than emerging from the activity of the understanding, then, a resolute decision is better said to be something we deliver ourselves over to and undergo, heed and sustain.<sup>113</sup> This brings us to the second stage of our interpretation: the characterization of resoluteness as mood, a discriminate ability-to-be-disposed. Recasting resoluteness in this way will serve to explain how Heidegger is able to set it apart from the ontic

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<sup>110</sup> See especially CP §91, §122, §132, §184, §259, §262, and §267.

<sup>111</sup> E.g. ">>Wille<<", "Ent-schluss", "Ent-schlossenheit" (CP 210/GA65 298). Shortly after, in *Mindfulness* (*Besinnung*) (1938-9), all three of these figures are combined in three lines, along with "power" (>>*Macht*<<) and "mastery" (>>*Herrschaft*<<) (M 170/GA66: 193).

<sup>112</sup> The quote in its entirety: "The essence of willing is traced back here to resoluteness [*Ent-schlossenheit*]. But the essence of resoluteness lies in the un-concealment [*Ent-borgenheit*] of human Dasein for the clearing of being, and by no means in an accumulation of force [*Kraftspeicherung*] for 'activity.' . . . The relation to being is rather one of letting [*das Lassen*]" (IM 22/GA40 23). Davis cites this passage as partial confirmation that, according to the early Heidegger, resoluteness is not a voluntarist concept, traditionally conceived. I would part ways with Davis here and argue that what these and similar passages indicate is that Heidegger's earlier treatment of resoluteness and the will, precisely as *affective* transcendental structures, would not pass unscathed under the scythe of his later critique of Nietzsche, in whom he discovers a version of his own earlier position (cf. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 44 ff.).

<sup>113</sup> Harkening back to its link to disclosedness in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger accordingly cautions that "the resoluteness intended in *Being and Time* is not the deliberate action of a subject, but the opening up of human being, out of its captivity in that which is, to the openness of being" (PLT 65/GA5 55).

activity of the practical understanding, the ontological understanding, while counterposing it to worldly misattunement.

In our preliminary analysis (§5), we saw that fundamental mood involves a disclosive submission to our worldly thrownness. What distinguishes resoluteness as a *counter*-mood is its promotion of an active self-understanding. It thereby assumes an orientation not merely toward the future, but toward the *authentic* future. Relevant here is Heidegger's proclamation in *Being and Time*: "The primordial and authentic future, is the 'towards-oneself' (to oneself!), existing as the possibility of nullity, the possibility which is not to be outstripped" (SZ 330). Resoluteness attunes Dasein to that nullity as a possible projection for the sake of self-being. In contrast to the activity of the understanding, which it promotes and modulates, this fundamental mood exemplifies the sort of active-passivity that Heidegger later calls "letting." Namely, it consists in letting the mortifying mood of *Angst* intermittently temper concerned comportment with a certain restraint and heedful self-scrutiny in the face of death.

In view of the aforementioned parity between resoluteness and willing, this interpretation can be retroactively supported by Heidegger's eventual subsumption of the latter under fundamental mood. He does not expressly associate the will with mood until his early lectures on Nietzsche from the 1930s, an engagement that will precipitate Heidegger's dramatic reappraisal of these themes. In his Freiburg lecture on "The Will to Power as Knowledge" (1939) he returns to his foregoing investigation of this line from *The Antichrist*: "*To will is to command*: but commanding is a particular *affect*" (N1 57/ GA6.1 70). As Heidegger elucidates it:

In commanding, "the innermost conviction of superiority" is what is decisive. Accordingly, Nietzsche understands commanding as the fundamental mood of one's being superior [*die Grundstimmung des Überlegenseins*] (N2 152/GA6.1 651).<sup>114</sup>

In this light, the ability to let oneself be affectively commanded, or disposed, by the will assumes the form of a fundamental mood that could be called *willfulness*. To better establish Heidegger's commitment to this thesis, independent of Nietzsche, we might call upon a contemporaneous text entitled *Mindfulness (Besinnung)* (1938-9). Here we find Heidegger developing a contrast between the metaphysical concept of the will and what he terms "the will of being" (*der Wille des Seyns*).<sup>115</sup> The former is said to involve the agentive subject's "self-reliant exertion" or

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 40f.

<sup>115</sup> We shall delve more deeply into Heidegger's turn toward *Seyn* in the next chapter.

"striving" toward an objective "possession" (*Besitz*). Concerning the latter, by contrast, we are told that "this 'will' means the *ardor* [*Leidenschaft*], the *fundamental mood* [*Grundstimmung*] of persevering in the destiny of undergoing the plight [*Er-leidens der Not*] of the abyssal ground [*Ab-grundes*]" (M 52/GA66 63-4, emphasis mine).<sup>116</sup> What is so unusual about this concept of willfulness is that it is neither seated in the mind, nor does it belong to some ahistorical transcendental subject. Rather, it is as an age-pervading mood, fundamental in the sense that it promotes our originary extemporizing toward the decisive destining of a world-historical people. As Heidegger puts it already in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, "history is man" as the "transition" of the sense of being. And insofar as "man is enraptured [*entrückt*] in this transition," man is "absent in his essence . . . removed into essential having been and future" (FCM 365f/GA29-30 531). Similarly, in the lecture on Nietzsche quoted above, we read that "willing always brings the self to itself," to which he crucially adds that the self "*thereby* finds itself out beyond itself" (N1 52/GA6.1 63). Notice that he does not say that willing emerges from the self. In authentically pressing into authentic self-being in being-toward-death, Dasein rather finds itself "out beyond itself," willfully attuned to the abyssal grounds out of which new onto-historical epochs erupt.<sup>117</sup> What distinguishes Heidegger's initial dalliance with transcendental voluntarism from his later critique of it is the extent to which he thinks the "historicizing of Dasein," described in *Being and Time* as its "fateful destiny in and with its 'generation'," can be determined by the understanding, willfully geared toward the mastery of one's moods (SZ 385). Let us see how the fundamental mood of resoluteness contributes to that *historical* vocation.

Spanning the turn in Heidegger's thinking is the idea that fundamental moods are *ekstases* of the self, spatial (lateral) as well as temporal (vertical). "Mood," he writes, "is precisely the fundamental way in which we are outside of our self" (N1 99/GA6.1 100).<sup>118</sup> One way of interpreting this would be to situate it within context of the discussion of "spatiality"

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<sup>116</sup> Translation modified in line with the conventions set forth by Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu in their translation of Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie*.

<sup>117</sup> As Heidegger suggests in the *Contributions*, the abyssal ground is not a mere "emptiness or vacancy," but rather "the disposed and disposing emptiness [*gestimmt stimmende Leere*] . . . according to the attuning intimation of the event [*dem stimmenden Wink des Ereignisses*]," which is to be grasped as "the fullness of what is still undecided and is to be decided" (CP 301/GA65 381).

<sup>118</sup> To lend context and clarification to his statement, Heidegger has just told us: "Mood is never merely a way of being determined [or attuned, *Gestimmtsein*] in our inner being for ourselves. It is above all a way of being attuned, and letting ourselves be attuned [or determined], in this or that way in mood [*sich Be-stimmen und Stimmenlassen in der Stimmung*]" (N1 99/GA6.1 100).

(*Raumlichkeit*) in *Being and Time*. Here we learn that Dasein is not a self-enclosed "being here" stationed alongside other beings "out there" in the world, *partes extra partes*. Rather, it in-habits a region of concern "whereat" (*Wobei*) it laterally stands outside itself into other beings, ready-to-hand and existent, by "spatializing" (*verräumlichen*) the world in the mode of "de-severance" (*Entfernung*) – a word that connotes the removal of distance. By bringing them nearer in the sense of making them available to our practical abilities in a space configured by concern and solicitude (*Fürsorge*), de-severance facilitates our comportment absorption in and with other beings.<sup>119</sup> It is something akin to this lateral ekstasis that Heidegger builds into the concept of affective "transposedness" (*Versetztheit*) in his lectures from 1929-30.<sup>120</sup> Provisionally, then, one might say that mood affectively transposes us into beings, prior to projection, disclosing the ways they solicit (or inhibit) our understanding, thereby their (ir)recuperability by de-severance into the outreach of the self (*Man-selbst*, or *Selbstsein*). The fundamental mood of resoluteness would foster that recuperation for the sake of Dasein's self-being, its authentic ability to be whole. Thus we read in the lectures on Nietzsche that "will is, in our terms, *Ent-schlossenheit*, in which he who wills stations himself abroad among beings in order to keep them firmly within his field of action" (N1 48/GA6.1 45). In other words, resoluteness reinfects the lateral ekstasis of inauthentic moods, as well as the arrestive mood of *Angst*, making Dasein responsive to what can be seized upon and assimilated into its sphere of self-mastery, its ipseological *enstasis*.

Now, as early as *Being and Time*, we find that all lateral ekstases are based on a more fundamental, vertical dimension. In Division Two this is laid out in terms of Dasein's ecstatic temporal structure, its timeliness. Here the phenomenological foundations laid in Division One are rethought through a genetic-temporal analysis of the correlations between the structure of

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. SZ 105. In *Being and Time* Heidegger clarifies the *Wobei* of de-severance as follows: "Dasein understands its "here" [*Hier*] in terms of its environmental "yonder". The "here" does not mean the "where" of something present-at-hand, but rather the "whereat" [*Wobei*] of a de-severant being-amidst, together with this de-severance. Dasein, in accordance with its spatiality, is proximally never here but yonder; from this 'yonder' it comes back to its 'here'" (SZ 107, trans. mod.). Note that in German the preposition *bei* is ordinarily used to refer to a proximal relation to place as opposed to isometric space. Heidegger lays emphasis on this in introducing the phenomenon of "being-amidst" (*Sein bei*): "The expression 'bin' is connected with 'bei', and so 'ich bin' ['I am'] means in its turn 'I reside' or 'dwell amidst' the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way" – the two chief existential correlates of intraworldly familiarity being concern and mood (SZ 54). With some caveats, he goes on to associate "Dasein's spatialization [*Verräumlichung*]" with its "bodiliness" [*Leiblichkeit*] (SZ 108), leading some recent commentators to suggest that his term *Raumlichkeit* is most properly translated as 'embodiment'. For more on these themes, see §13 below.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *FCM* 204/GA 29-30 299 (cited above). Contrasting mood with a state that is "situated in the subject," Heidegger elsewhere contends that "we are transposed [*versetzt*] by mood [*Stimmung*], and by virtue of it, into beings and their being" (LQ 130/GA38 152).



care and that of Dasein's world (*Weltlichkeit*). In this analysis the spatial transposition of mood (qua disposition) gets recast as the mode of extemporizing Heidegger calls "having-beeness" (*Gewesenheit*), which co-operates with the temporal ekstases of the future (understanding) and the present (fallenness) (SZ §68). Mood discloses how our *whereat* stands out from the present into the "whence" of having-been thrown into the world. As we established above, however, not just any mood will suffice for this disclosure. Certain misattunements are liable to conceal that vertical dimension altogether. Only *fundamental* moods are said to belong to Dasein's authentic historicizing. And only in being mastered, that is reinflected through an understanding that "brings the self to itself," do they afford the re-appropriation of that past toward the "co-historicizing" (*Mitgeschehen*) destiny of a generation.

The contrast between this aspect of resoluteness and "unwilling" misattunements such as one finds in *Being and Time* is brought to the fore by Heidegger's discussion of the ecstasy of anger in these lectures, where the will becomes an explicit theme. Like any other mood, anger draws us outside of ourselves in proportion to its intensity. To wit, "I was beside myself with rage." On Heidegger's view such idioms are apt descriptions of limit cases in which "our being 'altogether there' vanishes" and "is transformed into a kind of 'falling apart'" (N1 45-6/ GA6.1 42-3).<sup>121</sup> Barring the intervention an enstatic counter-mood, anger is said to occasion a seizure of our whole being, so that we are not our own master" but rather mastered, enthralled as in tranquilization (*ibid.*). In being seized by a furious ecstasy, the self is displaced, its timeliness truncated, and its understanding is reduced to sheer reactivity, impulsive and transient. One is thereby given to indulge in the generalized barking and fuming displayed by all blowtops. Although it is often elicited by a clash of willful selves, Heidegger opposes the mood of anger with Dasein's willful ability-to-be-itself. Recalling the opposition of misattunement and resoluteness in *Being and Time*, he asserts: "We call anger a *counter-will* that subsists beyond us, in such a way that in anger we do not remain together with ourselves as we do when willing, but, as it were, lose ourselves" (*ibid.*, emphasis mine). Willfulness is likewise featured in this text as an "agitating seizure" (N1 59/GA6.1 56). In contrast with anger, however, this mood does not seize upon the self and spirit it away. On the contrary, in "reaching out beyond itself" that "seizure and agitation" is said to resolve itself into a "lucid grip," one "in which we take hold of

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<sup>121</sup> Due emphasis should be placed on the word "altogether" in this statement. For Heidegger recurrently insists that nothing short of death can dispossess Da-sein of its 'there' (e.g. FCM 365/GA29-30 531).

ourselves and achieve lucid mastery over the beings around us and within us" (N1 48/GA6.1 45). Heidegger adds temporal thickness to this spatial interpretation by redescribing willfulness as kind of "self-overcoming," which he links to the self-overcoming movement of the history of being (N1 63/GA6.1 60).

If this is the ultimate destination of resolute *Angst* as early as *Being and Time*, let us not forget that it can only be reached by way of self-being. Taken alone, *Angst* discloses the sheer contingency, self-deprivation, and otherness of the world into which we have been thrown. But as Heidegger stresses, "*Angst* can mount authentically only in a Dasein which is resolute," since resoluteness converts *Angst* into a "mood which neither inhibits nor bewilders him," but "liberates him *from* possibilities which 'count for nothing'," namely, inasmuch as they are anonymously unanimous and historically noncommittal (SZ 344). Resolutely anticipating the possibility of death, then, not only draws one out of the "bewildered rest" and immobile revulsion before this *Angst*-ridden nullity. It "snatches one back from the endless multiplicity of possibilities" into which we are thrown in having been born, and by which we are enthralled in fallen misattunements of "comfortableness, shirking," and "taking things lightly" (SZ 384). Each of these two stances toward mortality, arrest and flight, cedes place to resolute being-toward-death as my "ownmost" existentiell project, whereby the possibilities projected are "in each case mine" (SZ 425). It is a project revealing death as an immanent moment of *my* existence in the form of an *ever-renewed decision* concerning whether my fate will be assimilated into the deindividuated and dehistoricized thrownness of the One, or instead be willfully counter-thrown toward an individuated whole.

Such is the upshot of the "repeated retrieval" (*Wiederholung*) of our natal thrownness, or historicity, in *Being and Time* (cf. SZ 339, 343).<sup>122</sup> As Joseph P. Fell encapsulates it:

One returns to the everyday world in practical world in . . . authentic resolve, [whereby] one "remembers" and "repeats" what anxiety has disclosed. . . . Authentic resolve thus consists in a proper *co-ordination* of anxious having-been and future anticipation: of the *limit* imposed on praxis by the sheer contingency of nature and the *possibility* afforded to praxis by the opening for meaning [or significance].<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Heidegger: "*Angst* brings one back to one's thrownness as something possible which can be repeated [*wiederholbare*]. And in this way it also reveals the possibility of an authentic ability-to-be – an ability which must, in repeating, come back to its thrown 'there', but come back as something future which comes towards [*zukünftiges*] [the past]. The character of having been is constitutive for the disposition of *Angst*; and bringing one face to face with repeatability [*Wiederholbarkeit*]" (SZ 394).

<sup>123</sup> Joseph P. Fell, "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger," in Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall eds., *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), 75f.

When inflected through resoluteness, *Angst* recurrently discloses my future having-beenness as a finite possibility for self-projection, a disclosure mediated by the understanding in a way that *Angst* per se is not. But rather than retain the notion of a natal or mortal attunement that would recurrently perforate the wholeness of that self-encapsulated future, Heidegger gives so much weight to resoluteness that it sometimes appears to tip the balance of thrown-projection in favor of a *consummate* self-projection. Consider, for instance, the following:

Resoluteness gains its authenticity as anticipatory resoluteness. In this, Dasein understands itself with regard to its potentiality-for-Being, and it does so in such a manner that it will go right under the eyes of Death in order thus to *take over in its thrownness that entity which it is itself, and to take it over wholly* (SZ 382, emphasis mine).

There is a considerable tension between these lines and Heidegger's earlier avowal that we never "have power over our ownmost being from the ground up" (see §5 above). Both Davis and Michel Haar recognize the tension. And each furnishes compelling evidence for thinking that, in last analysis, Heidegger rejects the idea that Dasein's thrownness, let alone its death, could ever be wholly self-grounded or willfully mastered.<sup>124</sup> As Davis reminds us, "the crucial point [is] that it is a *finite* freedom, a *finite* power, that Dasein has, and it chooses to choose knowing that its choice is a finite one, and will have to be repeated with every new 'situation' into which it is thrown."<sup>125</sup> To be sure, Heidegger concedes that "Dasein may well have passed its ripeness before the end," that "for the most part, Dasein ends in unfulfillment, or else by having disintegrated and been used up" like an apprentice who never reaches mastery (SZ 244). Still, such passages as the one above do seem indicate, at the very least, that the task he sets for us is precisely one of choosing and reasserting the (im)possibility of self-mastered wholeness in the face of that unfulfillment, that perpetual apprenticeship.<sup>126</sup> Once its historical ramifications are unpacked, this conclusion will bring us to the abject heart of the ecological tragedy.

Heidegger asserts that authentic being-toward-death through anticipatory resoluteness "pushes existence into its finitude" (SZ 384). More precisely, it keys us into our *world-historical* implications and inceptive possibilities for their explication, ways of re-plicating the world we've been dealt. On the one hand, as already mentioned, owning up to self-being demands

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<sup>124</sup> Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 48ff. Cf. Michel Haar, *Heidegger and the Essence of Man*, trans. William McNeill (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992), 10.

<sup>125</sup> Davis, *Heidegger and the Will*, 49.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. "The more authentically Dasein resolves – and this means that in anticipating death it understands itself unambiguously in terms of its *ownmost distinctive possibility* – the more unequivocally does it choose and find the possibility of its existence, and the less does it do so by accident" (SZ 384).

owning up to one's historicity. Writes Heidegger: "the resoluteness in which Dasein comes back to itself, discloses current factual possibilities of authentic existing . . . in terms of the *heritage* which that resoluteness, as thrown, takes over" (SZ 383, emphasis mine). Only by grappling with this generational legacy, which is impressed into our world, do we transpose our existentially abject anonymity into authentic being-with-others. From this "heritage" I solicitously select, reject, or refashion worldly significance by projecting it toward my "ownmost distinctive possibility" and "goal," my self-projected fate (SZ 384). This is what is ultimately meant by the claim that "Dasein's originary historicizing . . . lies in authentic resoluteness," whereby it "hands itself down to itself, free for death, in a possibility which it has inherited and yet has chosen" (SZ 384). On the other hand, resoluteness keys Dasein into how its fate might be secured to bear the scrutiny of future history, the co-historicizing destiny of an age. Thanks to the mark we make on the world, Heidegger allows that we *are with* our survivors. Insofar as our projects are implicated in their world, our being-with-others extends to our future having-been.<sup>127</sup> Thus, resolute existence works toward being historical on both sides, retrieving the prenatal past it has inherited and projecting it toward an individuated fate it bequeaths to others in its postmortem future. Therein lies the promise of the self that promises itself to death on Heidegger's account. Our mortal reckoning is an incitement to a world-historical understanding that answers for our implication in the time of bygone others while enlarging the understanding of future generations.

We shall fill in the delicate contours of this assessment in the chapter ahead. But permit me to preview how the ecological tragedy is played out in this existential epic. To the extent that Dasein comes to realize its existential vocation in the resolute pursuit of ipseological wholeness, it is resolved *fundamentally* to care not merely for its existentiell self but for the historically unfolding being of the self *as such*. To press into my existentiell finitude is to come to terms with an indefinite destiny that simultaneously grounds and places limits on *my* understanding. On this score, the fundamental mood of resoluteness (or willfulness) remediates my existential abjection by reattuning me to other selves in my prenatal past and my unsettled debts to self-being. It discloses these debts as opportunities for settling myself in the world and for widening its horizons for other selves to come. If this is what Dasein's destiny ultimately amounts to, it stands

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. "In such being-with the dead [*dem Toten*], the deceased *himself* is no longer factually 'there'. However, when we speak of 'being-with', we always have in view being with one another in the same world. The deceased has abandoned our '*world*' and left it behind. But *in terms of that world* [*Aus ihr her*] those who remain can still *be with him*" (SZ 238).

to reason that resoluteness fundamentally attunes us to nothing more than what can be projected by the self as such (i.e. the existential, as opposed to the existentiell self) and what can possibly extend its historical sphere of influence. In effect, it essentially promotes the recuperation of being into the world-historical horizons of the self-understanding, reinforcing the *unlimited* expansion of its territory.

This prompts the question as to whether these moods don't close us off from a dimension of being subtending that territory, and whether they don't thereby conceal the ontological grounds and limits of the self, its world, and the understanding that drives their historical unfolding. Birth and death are not projected by the self; they are inescapable facts imposed by *nature* on existence, natality and mortality its *natural* conditions. Yet Heidegger has seemed to reduce our finite condition to one of being thrown into horizons of ipseohistorical significance, our vocation to one of securing them against the utter insignificance of nature, which is only historical insofar as it falls under them. If death marks the closure of my world, and extinction ours, then the *allohistorical* longevity of nature is bound to be a source of *Angst* overcome by resoluteness within a wider context futility on this picture. After all, even chiseled epitaphs are eventually erased by the elements, eroded by the waters of time. But Heidegger would have us take arms against the sea by willfully enlisting the understanding to master that which inexplicably overwhelms it at the beginning and in the end. If he affirms resoluteness as a fundamental attunement to the historical world, my contention is that this betrays itself as an abject misattunement to the allohistorical conditions of existence. Conditions buried in the subterranean depths of being beyond self-being, beyond being-understood, depths from which this mood casts us away, even as it anchors us to our selves in a world of our own. Thus does Heidegger's fundamental ontology bear the mark of a tragedy reaching back to the very advent of philosophy, the denial of our *earthly* finitude.

As yet, however, we have had little to say about his account of *nature* in *Being and Time*. At first blush this is warranted. One would search in vein for a satisfying discussion of nature in this text. Pertinent remarks are sporadic and apparently incidental to Heidegger's philosophical concerns. And when he does if briefly touch on it, we see why. For he apparently gives us to understand that there is nothing to nature over, under, or beyond the world. Yet we shall see that first appearances may well be deceptive here – as they so often are in Heidegger's house of being. So that if his thinking was initially marked by tragedy, there are grounds for thinking it

was also underway from the outset toward the ecological comedy of “history: conceived as the playing out of the strife between *earth* and world” (CP 76/GA65 96, emphasis mine)

### §9. Humility Floats on Water: Educing Ecology from the Bottom Up

Methods, notwithstanding their efficiency, are after all merely the runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.  
–Heidegger, “The Nature of Language”<sup>128</sup>

To come to grips with the ecological tragedy, to begin to grapple with it, we must first set out to rethink nature, history, and natural history *ecologically*. This undertaking will eventually lead us back to the very *Ursprung* of philosophy in the West. To a wellspring of thought that issued, as does the timespanning sun, from points farthestmost East before pooling in Miletus to be broken with a splash. Whereupon, at length, it seeped westward, falling below the occidental horizon for vast stretches of the world’s turning. Ages before the modern science of ecology, and long before Heidegger unearthed the elemental side of being from Hölderlin’s riverlaced poetry, Western philosophy took its founding leap into history with Thales’ humiliating fall into the very element whose indefinite nature (or self-emergence, *phusis*) he singled out as the replenishing source (*archē*) for the gatheredness (*logos*) of the *oikos* – a word that carried a range of meanings we shall soon explore, including habitat, household, homestead, and simply, *dwelling place*. The legitimacy of this claim rests on a careful elucidation of its meaning, the portmanteau word being after all a modern development, but I should like to propose that Presocratic philosophy first issued from an “ecological” thought. For Thales in particular, this thought churned the depths of wonder to surface in the saying of water (*hudōr*), that element which continues to shelter the dwelling place even as it also threatens its dispersal, as it has from the earliest draughts and droughts and debacles of recorded history.

To my mind, the woefully unsung tragedy of philosophy’s long reputed genarch and repudiated archetype, is not that he lost sight of his debt to wisdom or others in his intellectual vision of the heavens. Nor is it that he did not fall profoundly enough to reach the lowermost *archai* of being-in-the-world. Rather, it’s that his wisdom would be consumed by the maelstrom of history, which purged it of its own outlandish elements and drove it downward, and

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<sup>128</sup> OWL 92/GA12 187.

downward yet, until it went missing for ages beyond all hope of retrieval. Swept below the currents of time, this ecological wisdom nearly vanished without a trace, like something buried beneath the seabed of the Aegean.

I say *nearly*, for in the countercurrents of phenomenology, conceived as a pre-theoretical response-ability to and bottom-up inquiry into lived experience, we find a recourse with which to sound his wisdom and recover its traces from the depths. Cast under the theoretical light of a univocally epistemophilic tradition dividing words from deeds, theory from praxis, most scholars sift through the Presocratic fragments as through the ashes of a pyre whose meaning is made tangible only in the ink-black residues deposited on the fingertips. They forget that these thinkers belonged to a time and place in which language was wedded less to knowledge than to wisdom. To wit, the Presocratic prominence of such words as *sophia* (wisdom), *phronēsis* and *sōphronein* (thinking wisely directed toward due response). Theirs were *logoi* that were not confined inert to a world of texts. Instead they were transmitted and consummated by those who still spoke of *phusis* from and on behalf of the *oikos*, a place of co-habitation in the world as granted by the earth. Our historical grounding of ecology, then, will begin by rekindling the wisdom of *logos* and *oikos* that burned at the dawn of Greek antiquity. And for this we must learn not only to speak *with* the Presocratics, in their own tongue, but to laugh with them as well. To retrieve the ecological thought of Thales and the elemental attunement of the Thracian from the depths of time is to restore the mystery and thus the question-worthiness of the place from which their words, deeds, and moods first issued. It demands a return to its inwaters and outlands and the boundaries between, as to those who dwelled there, passed through, sojourned there as strangers. It is to evince how such matters moved us, how they mattered, before they were buried beneath centuries of misplaced concreteness. And it is to restore the rightful place of the elements to *our* thoughts, words, and deeds that we might regather from them the wisdom of all things dwelling, in the world *and* of the earth. Anchored to the radically empirical origin of philosophy, at the confluence of mythology and art, is an ecological thinking that responds to the difference of being. If the *logos* of the *oikos* still speaks, if it still questions us, I propose that phenomenology will teach us how to listen.

Before we can listen we must first unstopper our ears. The ecology of the ancients cannot fall under the aegis of science if it is, as we have suggested, pre-theoretical at its source and pre-scientific at its mouth. We must therefore do away with the presumption that common sense or

factual knowledge is sufficient to fathom its historical sources, let alone raise the elementary question concerning its meaning. To succumb to this temptation would be to uncritically accept the meaning most familiar to us. Conventionally, ‘ecology’ ambiguously refers to either: (1) a scientific discipline comprising a subset of empirical methodologies, theories, bodies of evidence, and knowledge; or (2) its object/s of study. Though our understanding of the logically ordered organic milieu we call “ecologies” (2) is predicated on 1, naive realism leads us to believe this logical order has always been part of nature “in itself,” a freestanding, “mind-independent” reality awaiting our discovery. Meanwhile, a growing vogue of naive constructivism would suggest that it has no basis whatsoever in reality, but is merely a figment of culture, theory, political machinations, or these in combination.

Whether one assigns ontological priority to 1 or 2, *eco-logy* is ordinarily understood as a kind of *logos* in a technical sense that can be traced back to ancient Greece. Before the Classical period, *logos* had been a richly polysemic expression, commonly translated as: ‘word’, ‘account’, ‘discourse’, ‘language’ (*inter alia*). Significantly, it has also been rendered in terms of ‘gatheredness’ in a fertile sense we shall harvest (chapter 3). But at the same time that philosophy first consecrated itself as science in the ancient sense of *epistēmē*, discarding the primacy of wisdom for that of knowledge, *logos* underwent a reduction of its own. Under the rubric of science erected by Aristotle and refinished – some might say defaced – by the Stoics, that broad acceptation ceded place to a narrower one. Thenceforth *logos* would be idealized as the nomic structure of universal validity defining *the* definitive scope (*horos, horismos*) of what it is for a thing to be (*to ti ēn einai, later essentia*) – the whatness of beings. And this became *the* first and final measure of legitimacy (*logos qua metron, later ratio*) for any given utterance about it. That criterion of legitimacy was, of course, reason (*dianoia*). In sensu stricto, then, *logos* came to designate *logikē*: (a) the science of propositional logic, recognizable to us in its formal employment (the organon of deductive reason yielding knowledge a priori); and (b) the logical methods of science (the organon of inductive and quantitatively reductive reason yielding knowledge a posteriori). Such is the kernel of truth that Heidegger evinces by tracing the word ‘logic’ (viz. *Aussage-Logik*, the ‘logic of assertion’) back to *epistēmē logikē*. If spurious in some respects, this etymology nonetheless captures the essence of *logos* in the first ontohistorical



epoch to understand being as “beingness” (*Seiendheit*).<sup>129</sup> The result of this reduction, once entrenched, was that *logos* would no longer be thought apart from *epistēmē*, from the acquisition of knowledge by the scientific employment of reason. *Epistemology*. Thenceforth, the manifold *logoi* of the ancient world would no longer be allowed to speak for themselves, no longer be regarded as genuine instances of *logos* at all so long as they failed to measure up to its misgiven essence. In short, language and thought would become increasingly *homological*.

This **homological reduction** lay dormant in the modern science of ecology from its very inception. In 1866 Ernst Haeckel, German biologist, naturalist, and physician, adopted the term *Oecologie* to unify the disjointed inquiries of the natural sciences into a rational system yielding knowledge of the “relationships of the organism to the surrounding outside world, which in the widest sense, can be taken to include *all the conditions of existence*.”<sup>130</sup> At first blush, an ambitious philosophical undertaking! But make no mistake. Insofar as this apprehension of the “outside world” is strictly achieved through epistemology – an anthropological schema of apprehension, or *logos* of human contrivance and order – the scope of these existential conditions has extended no further than what can possibly manifest itself within a horizon of theoretical observation geared toward anthropogenic interests. Beyond those regions conceivably tractable to the imperium of human powers of reason and knowledge, the phenomena studied by the science of ecology are presumed to have no sense of their own and nothing to offer it. Otherwise stated, what “exists” in the *oikos* for the science of ecology is not permitted to emerge from itself into phenomenal manifestation, but always already emerges from the possibility of what can intelligibly be thought and said about it in a world pre-ordered by theory. In spite of its

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. IM 127/GA40 92; N1 77/GA6.1 75; CP 135, 217/GA65 172, 343. To inquire into beingness, for Heidegger, is to ask about the most general entitative, or present-at-hand, properties of beings, categories translated through logical predication into judicative propositions whose universal correspondence and validity set the apodictic standards for discourse. Etymologically, *epistēmē* is related to *ephistēmi*, ‘to place upon’. Its prefix *epi* connotes a standpoint over something, implying an activity of *overseeing*. Thus the implication that knowledge is gained from the top down by standing above its objects. Strictly speaking, the word ‘logic’ derives not from *epistēmē logikē*, but from *logikē technē*. But in light of the indissoluble relationship between *logikē* and *epistēmē* in Classical thought, *epistēmē logikē* would not have been an unusual turn of phrase for Plato or Aristotle. And though Heidegger does not exploit the connection, *logikē technē*, properly grasped as the scientific production of knowledge, fits quite easily with his analysis of the medieval understanding of being as “production” (*Herstellung*) of “whatness” (*Sachheit*) – associated with beingness in his later works – which he traces back to Scholasticism (cf. BPP §11).

<sup>130</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie Der Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformierte descendenztheorie* (Berlin: Georg Reiner, 1866), 286, translation and emphasis mine.

early pretensions to establishing “all the conditions of existence,” this science can only offer *theoretical* conditions on the basis of *theory*-laden experience.

Consider the systems-theoretical approach that has gained such a strong following in recent decades. No one would dispute that we are indebted to the science of ecology, and this approach in particular, for our knowledge of the natural world and much of our growing awareness of the manifold problems that confront us in the present epoch of the anthropocene. Problems ranging from industrial pollution, freshwater scarcity, large-scale deforestation, and the mass extinction of plant and animal species have brought the environmental crisis to the forefront of public attention. But the mainstream tendency to approach these as technical scientific problems demanding technoscientific solutions and technocratic reforms can prevent us from raising more basic questions about how they are framed, and perhaps even sanctioned, by our understanding of nature. As Bryan Bannon encapsulates the predicament:

If the idea of nature as an orderable and calculable system is the fundamental or grounding idea of ecology as a science, and if that idea of nature is partially responsible for the devastation of nature, calling upon ecological science as the ultimate authority in how humanity ought to relate to nature is not necessarily going to remove us from our currently problematic set of relationships and behaviors.<sup>131</sup>

However much data it collects or knowledge it gains, and however valid and worthwhile on its own terms, ecological science falls short of philosophy to the extent that it does not inquire into how theoretical experience, its theory-laden comprehension of the “natural world,” is grounded on a elementary, pre-theoretical relation to nature, and how this might be turned to account toward relating to it wisely. I am referring not only to those correlations between practical wisdom and the practicable, or perception and the perceptible, which shape our being-in-the-world, but others extraneous to these in principle yet requisite to their attainment. When our fundamental concern is scientific knowledge for its own sake, or else for the sake of conceptual and technological mastery of the nature, detrimental or remedial, we may content ourselves with a transitive rational discourse *about* an *oikos* with no *logos* of its own. But once that concern is shifted to wisdom, in particular to knowing how to work and dwell in an *oikos* which supports those projects while preceding and exceeding our knowledge of it, we must inquire into a *logos* unspoken by natural science. And we must do so in a way that permits it to question our own. Therein lies the ecological promise of phenomenology.

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<sup>131</sup> Bryan E Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery: A Phenomenological Foundation for an Environmental Ethic* (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 2014), 68.

Husserl was the first to adopt the term ‘reduction’ to describe the phenomenological method. ‘Reduction’ derives from the Latin ‘*reducere*’, meaning ‘to lead back’. For Husserl it refers to that procedure which, applied in tandem with the *epoché*, or the thetic suspension of the theoretically misgiven, leads the inquirer back to how phenomena are given to pre-theoretical experience. Too often, this term has misled critics to assume that phenomenology is a *reductionist* method: one that lays claim to establishing infallible knowledge, apodictic truths, or ultimate explanations. Yet neither Husserl’s eidetic and genetic nor Heidegger’s early ontological application of the procedure bears out this assumption. On the contrary, a closer reading reveals their respective reductions to be unequivocal testaments to the idea that phenomenology is continuously underway. It stands or falls by retooling its methods when problematized by the matters at hand, whether that be the constitutive analyses of Husserl, or Heidegger’s hermeneutic circle round the abyss of being. From the very introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger avers that “our analysis of Dasein . . . is not only incomplete; it is also, in the first instance, provisional” (SZ 17). His abiding commitment to this non-reductionist approach, this ambiguity of the hermeneutic enterprise, is discernible well into his later work, even after the term ‘hermeneutics’ has faded into the background. Such is the basis for his steadfast commitment to a thinking ever underway. It is also the thrust of Merleau-Ponty’s express acknowledgment at the beginning of his own magnum opus. According to him, the “unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoate style in which it proceeds,” are not “the sign of failure.” On the contrary, they indicate hardwon efforts “to reveal the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason,” and “to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state” (PhP lxxxv). For these thinkers, the largesse of phenomenology is one bestowed by the way itself, by the *arriving* and not by the promise of some ultimate *arrival*, let alone a return to a primitive fundament where we reach bedrock and our spade is turned. Bearing in mind these considerations, I here introduce the term **eduction** (from the Latin *educere* ‘to lead out’ ‘bring into view’) as an alternative, less *misleading* way to characterize how phenomenology brings into view and thematically develops our unthematic experience of phenomena, which only manifest themselves in themselves once we methodologically suspend the ontological positivism of the natural attitude, average-everydayness, and the world-views of representationalism, scientism, and metaphysics.

If the science of ecology begins from the homological reduction, it is also important to see how its seeds in Classical thought have grown in the course of the intervening centuries, taking root in the soils of modern and contemporary philosophy. Typically, this growth is fostered by a given philosopher in proportion to her institutionally and/or methodologically acquired myopia in matters of wisdom extraneous to knowledge. In the chapter ahead, we shall single out metaphysics as an illustrative example of this relationship. But there is a subtler way that even much of twentieth-century phenomenology was complicit in *this* reduction, simply by assuming that the question concerning ecology had already been settled by modern science. Once ecology is cast aside as *no more than* a pre-positated regional ontology, not a region of being but of theoretical *beings*, or a science that seeks to derive causal explanations for objectively given phenomena in that domain, then all inquiry into its ontological sense is also forgone. This would be a harmless move were the concept spun out of whole cloth. But it just so happens that scientific ecology fortuitously christened itself with two words whose provenance can be traced back to the pre-scientific world of ancient Greece.

Although our word ‘ecology’ derives from the Greek *oikologia*, it is notable that this word was unspoken in antiquity. *Oikologia* is in fact a later holophrasis of *oikos* and *logos*, words in common usage as early as Homer. To salvage an initial trace of its pre-scientific meaning, we must look past the anachronistic *oikologia* and direct our sights to *logos oikeios*. Antisthenes (c. 445-365 BCE), a pupil of Socrates and humorous critic of Plato, identified *logos oikeios* as the “proper account” of a thing: one “that shows what a thing was or is.”<sup>132</sup> According to Aristotle, Antisthenes denied Plato’s assumption that the “essence” (*ti esti*) of a thing could be defined, insisting that one can only establish a *partial* inventory of its qualities. Rather than a metaphysical essence, this proper account was said to provide something of a gestalt, or general impression, of what sort of thing it is (*poion*).<sup>133</sup> Setting aside for the moment the reduction of *logos* to discursive “accounts” and *oikeios* to what is “proper,” it is the partial and permeable aspects of *logos oikeios* that are of special significance to us. The meaning of *oikeios* one finds in Antisthenes actually derived from an older semantic paradigm. In archaic and early classical

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<sup>132</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1024b26, translation from Jonathan Barnes, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 1 & 2 (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984). Unless otherwise noted, all further translations of Aristotle are culled from these volumes and correspond to the Bekker numbers therein. Cf. D.L. 2.6.3.

<sup>133</sup> Arist. *Metaph.* 1043b4.

Greek texts, it designated a way of being “affiliated” with the *oikos*, the dwelling place, which was likewise a partial and defeasible mark of *what* something or *who* someone is (see chapter 4).

The gravamen against the surrender of the concept of ecology to science is that its Greek roots intimate the *heterological* difference on which rests the legitimacy of phenomenology. Absent that difference, this method forfeits all distinction from the science of logic and the logico-theoretical protocols governing science. What the etymology of ‘ecology’ suggests when subjected to philosophical scrutiny is not at all some rude and incipient form of *epistēmē logikē*. Rather, we shall discover that it announces the very *logos* from which phenomenology draws its origin and summons. By extending that analysis to *oikos*, we shall uncover from its early ancient sense an understanding of the world that offers an unconsidered archetype and revolutionary prototype for the phenomenological concept of horizon. I would like to suggest that the Presocratic understanding of the dwelling place and its horizons afford an indispensable expedient for rehabilitating the openness and porosity of these concepts in such a way that they no longer fall under the scythe of some of the most incisive critiques of phenomenology. In the lost echoes of *oikos* we catch an inkling of how phenomenology might possibly vindicate itself of the charge that it reduces all transcendence to immanence, all difference to the same, that it collapses being into horizons immanent to subjectivity, consciousness, ownness, or presence. If prior reductions have retained these enstatic residues, the leap back to the hyper-ecstatic horizons of the *oikos* leads elsewhere and other-wise. For the phenomenologist, it leads to an *eduction* that would draw forth and develop the othermost being of phenomena without dissolving their difference from being-represented, -constituted, or -disclosed. The forgotten unity of *logos* and *oikos* divulges nothing short of an understanding of being. An ancient wisdom that does not court the chimeras of ontological immanence but gives some – if not quite full – measure to the unworldly side of nature. If the philosophical method inaugurated by Husserl and refined by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty has entered our century as “eco-phenomenology,” this method finds its historical grounding in the once-nourished response-ability to *logos oikeios*, an ability-to-be that confounds the homologies of science and metaphysics by releasing the thought of difference from elements of being.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> For an introduction to and something of an informal manifesto of eco-phenomenology, I direct the reader to Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine, eds., *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003).

**Ecology.**

**Clearing a Trail to the Earth-World through Heidegger's Philosophy**

In the previous chapter we explored how traditional approaches to the problem of finitude emerge from a diagnosis of the tragic plight of those who deny the conditions of cognition in the life-world or else the world-historical grounds of existence as such. In each case, intellectual and existential, tragedy spelled abjection: an expulsion from the world stemming from an inability to respond to what lay beyond the ambit of all-knowing reason or the everyday outreach of an inauthentic self-understanding. Yet we also saw how the early Heidegger furnishes an adequate solution to these problems only to fall into the well beside Plato's Thales and Plato himself. Heidegger's antagonistic stance toward the public sphere of the everyman, which he equates with the *Umwelt* of the Thracian maid, echoes Plato's hostile reaction to her laughter. It also augurs perhaps some inkling of Heidegger's tragic involvement in the Nazi regime. But there was yet another strain of abjection running through his *philosophy* in the 1920s and early 1930s, another tragedy that might shed light on his political downfall. If coming to grips with worldly finitude entails resolutely owning up to existentiell historicity and the self-projection of one's own fate, we discovered that Dasein's existential vocation in *Being and Time* was one of caring for the destiny of self-being as such. As co-historicizing *Mitsein*, Dasein's share in this destiny is a matter of responding to other *selves* in the past of its not and its future having been. On the basis of this existential contraction of otherness, of history into the unfolding significance of being thrown into a self-projected world and counter-throwing oneself toward the next, it was argued that Heidegger casts the self away from its *natural* historicity and futurity. More precisely, Dasein's resolute attunement to nothing more than what has or possibly could figure into the horizons of the self-understanding, and disclosure more generally, betrays an inability to respond to the unworldly *otherness* of nature, which precedes, exceeds, and recedes from those horizons. In short, it marks a denial of *earthly* finitude, an expulsion from the earth.

Could it be that the failures to conserve the difference between I and thou, us and them, human and nonhuman, are all more deeply rooted in a misattunement to and unwitting

dissemblance of this difference between world and its ontological other, earth? Could it be that an ecologically abject understanding of being underwrites the assimilation of the latter terms into the former, if not their wholesale liquidation? The infamous *Blut und Boden* ideology of Hitler's Germany would indeed seem to point in this grave direction. Having been co-opted into the willful horizons of a totalitarian world of wide-scale technological mobilization, an abject aura of earthliness, infused as power in the blood of a race, was by no means incidental to what it would eventually be used to legitimize; namely, the horrific atrocities committed against "them" on the other side of that ethnic difference. We shall not venture further into the controversy surrounding Heidegger's lamentable entanglement in those dark times. Although the gravity of these timely debates is not to be diminished, I should stress from the outset that we mustn't allow them to blind us to the trail that will eventually lead Heidegger out of the self-enclosed world of willful power, and we with him, toward a non-willful releasement to the earth. Nonetheless, as we follow that trail it will be important to keep these matters firmly in mind. At length we shall discover that such allophobic and in-different ways of being in the public world stretch back to the historical advent of the ecological tragedy, which contributed to the hegemonic idea of the political in classical Greek thought and its actualization under Alexander's reign.

Our primary aims in this chapter are not political or ideological, but rather ontological and ecological. Here we set out on the theoretical leg of the journey charted at the end of chapter 1, a journey toward the ecology of being. Heidegger was implicated in the ecological tragedy through his early dalliance with voluntarism and ipseologism, which will be linked below to an equivocal lingering of anthropologism. Yet we shall see that his philosophical recovery of the earth from Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry in the 1930s reveals a transitional thinker, underway to a philosophical ecology. The overarching purpose of this chapter is twofold. It will be to assay those parts of Heidegger's corpus which promote that transition, and to clarify what exactly that transition amounts to. It will be my contention that he gets underway as early as *Being and Time* with a much-overlooked discussion of the outlandish presence of unworldly nature. In roundabout steps, we shall track that elemental thought along Heidegger's *Denkweg*, retracing his journey over its *Holzwege* until rounding his ecological turn to the earth-world.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Famously, Heidegger adopts the word *Holzweg* as a lived metaphor with the dual sense of: a forest path that seems to lead nowhere as it turns back upon itself while circling round the edges of a clearing; and a way of thinking that lets itself be guided by aporetic questions round a hermeneutically similar path.

On the earthen fundament of this ontology, we learn that the task which being finite sets for us is not merely one of gearing into a fundamental attunement to the world and its history. Nor is it carried out through a self-directed fate that stewards the destiny of other existents who share our essential self-understanding. If it is to affirm our earthly finitude, that project must rather defer itself for the sake of taking care of the *other* other, the *elemental other*, the no-thing beyond and beneath the horizons of the world. Confounding the distinction between "whoness" and "whatness," this Ur-anonymity essentially closes itself from disclosure and unsettles us from our own habitats, even as it exposes us to the generative grounds and sheltering conditions for dwelling in the world. The vocation of the caretaker, the groundskeeper of being and conserver of earth, is one of cultivating a response-ability to earth's *invocation*. This calls for an ontologically allopathic disposition, a heteropathic attunement to an alterity and difference undisclosed by the understanding. On my assessment, it is only by attuning ourselves to the elemental limits of disclosure that we come to dwell *in* the world *of* the earth.

Before we can embark on this path toward the difference of being, we must first come to reckon fully with the philosophical stakes of the ecological tragedy, which imperils the metaphysician as it does the phenomenologist. This way lies a provincialism of being at least as old as Plato, one which has entrenched itself in the history of philosophy unto the present day.

#### **§10. Ecumenism: The Dysclosure of Being**

'Ecumenism' derives from the Greek *oikoumenē*, typically rendered into English as 'inhabited world', 'inhabited earth' or simply 'ecumene'. A clipping of *oikoumenē gē*, this word subtly altered the meaning of that older expression by placing 'earth' (*gē*) under erasure. As it gained currency in classical Greece, the once distinct senses of 'earth' and 'world' (*kosmos*) began to merge. Translations become commensurably undecidable. A conceptually similar shift appears in the English expression 'natural world', which suggests that nature – presumably including earth – amounts to nothing more than a part or aspect of the world. When we commence our historical grounding of the concept ecology in the chapters ahead, we shall examine how the semantic development of *oikoumenē* coincided with the disappearance of the earth from the ancient Greek world and, concomitantly, with the demotion of earth's cosmogonic and archeological primacy. By the time Aristotle enters the picture, one finds that position supplanted by reason and *oikoumenē* first systematized by science (*epistēmē logikē*) into reason's



idealized territory (see §18). Hereafter I adopt the term *ecumene* in the sense of ‘~~earth~~-world’: a *sous rature* device intended to mark how this concept orders earth into being wholly vacuous if not homologous with the world as settled by the understanding (in sensu lato).

In these terms, I would like to propose that the ecological tragedy takes root in the dystrophic grounds of an **ecumenical understanding of being**, abbreviated as **ecumenism**. By this I mean the *enstatic* dys-closure of being into the horizons of the world, grounded on and preeminently ordered by the measure of the understanding. The Greek word ‘enstasis’ originally meant ‘standing-within’ or ‘placing-within’ as one stands within oneself or within a place. In ancient and medieval contexts it appeared in reference to an insular mental space of contemplation, but also to taking a stand to defend some territorial claim. Building on these senses, I redeploy ‘enstasis’ as a designator of ontological immanence, signaled in Heidegger’s early works by the term *Eigentlichkeit*, ‘ownness’ or ‘authenticity’. A disclosure that closes that immanence off to its non-immanent grounds (or “transcendence” in the later Merleau-Pontian sense): this is what is meant by ontological *dys-closure*. As we learn from Heidegger, the understanding is a spatiotemporal ekstasis of existence (from the Greek *ex-istasthai*, ‘to stand out’). Existence stands out from itself into the openness of being, into other beings, and toward the future by virtue of the understanding. But ecumenism begins from a disposition (another ekstasis of existence) that is subordinate to the understanding. Attuning us merely to what can possibly be understood – intellectually, practically, ontologically – it contracts the ecstasy of existence into the enstatic horizons of mental, egoic, personal, ipseological, bodily, or human being-in-the-world. Ecumenism fixes these enstases in place and defends their respective worldly standpoints against all territorial challenges. Whatever is disclosed is always already domesticated by a fundamental dysposition that conceals the fundament of experience, so that unworldly (aspects of) phenomena manifest themselves as no more than beings teleologically underway toward full-disclosure.

As I shall argue, the erasure of the earth first announced by *oikoumenē* is at the core of every ecumenical philosophy: from the dysclosure of being into the *hypostatic* idea of being and time into the teleology of reason, to the dysclosure of being into *anthropostatic* (or ipseostatic) being-in-the-world and time into its world-historical destiny. Traditionally, philosophy’s part in the ecological tragedy has been enacted through one of two enstatic dyslosures, perpetuating respectively the intellectual and existential denial of our earthly finitude: (i) metaphysical

*hypostasis*; and (ii) phenomenological *anthropostasis*. Before we address the ab-sense Heidegger releases from the earth, much less inquire into the origins of ecumenism, it will be helpful to get a sense for the metaphysics of being and the specters of classical phenomenology he would later twist free of, ecologically.

(i) *Hypostatic Thought: The Metaphysics of Beingness*

Metaphysicians have long used the term ‘hypostasis’ (from the Greek root *hupo* meaning ‘under’ or ‘beneath’) to refer to the substantial foundation or static essence of a being that underlies its inessential properties or attributes.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, let us understand by **hypostatic disclosure** any intellectual operation that antecedently posits – implicitly (realism) or explicitly (idealism) – a priori theoretical foundations as the universal explanatory basis of phenomena (and their experiential correlates). Traditionally these *metaphysical* grounds have consisted in fixed ideas or principles, exempt from phenomenological scrutiny and believed to furnish the unconditional rational basis, or reason, for the conditional appearance and order of phenomena. Hypostatic thought works in tandem with the *homological reduction* to delegitimize all other ways in which beings gather themselves into sense. To the extent that our experience is dysposed toward hypostasis, it remains enclosed in a sphere of intellectual immanence (enstasis) wherein phenomena manifest themselves only insofar as they are already so grounded or possibly can be. Meanwhile, their subterranean conditions are disguised as theoretical incompleteness: an incidental shortcoming that is rectifiable in principle, say, by a “grand unified theory.” Such a “theory of everything,” teleologically posited, lays claim to establishing what beings ultimately are and what ultimately matters about them from within an experientially impregnable space of representations, concepts, and judgments. The ecumenical territory of reason.

Ontologically, hypostatization names the entification of being. As such, hypostatic thought corresponds to the ontological understanding Heidegger finds in the history of Western metaphysics as onto-theology. On his view metaphysics is, as it ever has been, defined by the employment of reason geared toward establishing the beingness of beings as a whole (cf. §9

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<sup>2</sup> In *Existence and Existents*, Emmanuel Levinas records that “in the history of philosophy, [*hypostasis*] designated the event by which the act expressed by a verb became a being designated by a substantive.” Where he retrofits the term phenomenologically to refer to the upsurge of existence from the anonymous *there is* into the “private domain,” our focus will be on its place in the realist and idealist traditions of Western metaphysics. Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ Press, 2001), 25, 83. It bears mention that another context in which the concept of hypostatization features prominently is biomedicine, where ‘hypostasis’ suggestively refers to the coagulation of blood and solid particles in the vessels of an organ due to poor circulation.

above). In his own words, metaphysics names “the thinking of being [that] takes beings, in the sense of the objectively present, as the point of departure and the goal for passing over to being” (CP 335/GA65 423). It interprets being qua beingness, that is, in terms of those objective beings (viz. essences, categories) universally and constantly present to inspection and cognition. On Heidegger’s appraisal, “all our knowledge, and especially scientific knowledge, has its grounds and hold in metaphysics” (HHI 19/GA53 21). Hypostasis or beingness is the byproduct of the enstatic disclosure of being into being-intelligible. Famously, Heidegger traces this back to Classical thought. In Plato, for instance, he submits that beingness assumed the form of *idea* (form/idea) and ultimately that of *agathon* (the good). In Aristotle, he says it is named by *eidōs* (essential appearance/look) and ultimately that of substance (*ousia*) (CP §110). Heidegger argues that the understanding of being qua beingness has persisted into modernity. In Kant, for instance, who converts it into the transcendental a priori structures of subjectivity: the forms of intuition and the categories of the understanding. Posited as the ground of beings anthropologically differentiated into subject and object, subjectivity comes to be grasped transcendently as the logical substratum cast under (*sub-jectum*) beings – the objects of cognitive experience (*Erkenntnis, Erfahrung*) – as the synthetic a priori structure that conditions the possibility of their appearance (CP 337/GA65 426-7). Prior to its culmination in Nietzsche, Heidegger gives us to understand that metaphysics reaches its apogee in Hegel, who casts beingness as the absolute (self-)knowing of Spirit (*Geist*), conceived as the teleologically unfolding rational unity of subject and object (CP 156, 337-8/GA65 199, 427; §110).<sup>3</sup>

To the subjectification of being by metaphysical idealism, which posits the subject as the transcendent(al) ground of beings, we must add the objectification of being by metaphysical realism, which reduces all beings to self-grounding objects (*ob-jectum*) over against the empirical subject, who is said to approximate their beingness (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*) through representation and cognition. Each of these two metaphysical positions is reached from a top-down theoretical inquiry into ontological hypostasis, subjective or objective, which it has antecedently posited as the metaphysical ground of beings. What is discounted at such high

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<sup>3</sup> More precisely, Hegel understands being as the surplus generated by the absolute movement of reason, a surplus produced in itself and ultimately recuperable for itself. Here the ontological ground of theory is posited as a byproduct of reason, but only on the assumption that being is teleologically constituted by reason. Thus are beings always already cloaked by a garb of ideas awaiting their objective actualization. Hegel encapsulates this hypostatic teleology in his famous formulation: “What is rational is actual; what is actual is rational”; and “Nothing is actual except the Idea.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010), 20.

altitudes and what phenomenology seeks to uncover from the bottom up are, by contrast, the *prejective grounds* of beings. In Heidegger's case, a methodological suspension of the ontological positivism concomitant with detached theoretical inspection enables him to gain degrees of theoretically unmediated access to the grounding relation between being and beings, couched early on in terms of Dasein's being and phenomenal manifestation as such. This relation is *prejective* in the sense that it manifests itself to us before we project ourselves into the dichotomous difference between being-subject and being-object, thus into its sundry antinomical corollaries, which have plagued the metaphysical tradition.

Short of reconstructing the prejective genesis of its own perceptual, conceptual, and judicative accomplishments, no theory can legitimately be called empirical, let alone philosophically critical. Until she has done so, the theorist lacks the resources for adequately addressing the question concerning the pre-theoretical conditions of her own theory-building process, a question perpetually deferred by reflection's incapacity to fully reflect itself (cf. §3 above).<sup>4</sup> Thus does the onto-phenomenological inquirer regard the hypostatization of *die Sache selbst* as an uncritical contraction of experience and the questionability of being.

(ii) *Anthropostatic Thought: Heidegger and the Shadow of Humanism*

It is possible through metaphysical thinking to arrive at the second form of dysclosure under consideration. But this is by no means necessary. A non-metaphysical variant was prefigured in our interpretation of the ipseological undercurrents of *Being and Time* (§8). As Heidegger will later concede, "in *Being and Time* Da-sein still stands in the shadow of the 'anthropological', the 'subjectivistic', and the 'individualist'." He will also admit that that his earlier talk of "human Dasein" was "misleading" on that treble score (CP 208/GA65 295). But anthropostatic thought is discernible yet perhaps in his propensity to frame ontology in terms of the relation between being and Dasein, where Dasein just so happens to amount to human ways of as relations to being. To wit, a *Seinsverständnis* that only human being is capable of. In this Heidegger comes dangerously close to *anthropostatic dysclosure*: the metaphysical *or*

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<sup>4</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, this theoretical self-blindness holds for the positive sciences as well. As David Wood explains, "the limits of any positive science reside in its constitutive incapacity to deal with its conditions of possibility," an incapacity which stems from the fact that "every science proceeds on the basis of idealization – a process that feeds on the calculable and excretes what it cannot conceptualize or quantify. David Wood, *Thinking After Heidegger* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 17. Science becomes positivistic, hence metaphysical in spite of all claims to the contrary, when it denies or disregards that "constitutive incapacity," hypostatizing theoretically indigestible beings through objectification, idealization, and quantification while reducing the legitimacy of theory to statistical significance and causal explanation.

phenomenological contraction of being into the possible horizons of the human understanding. Under these horizons nothing *is* unless it can be integrated into the teleology of being-represented, -known, -explained, -constituted, -said, or otherwise disclosed by beings who share our self-understanding. As a result, the prehuman conditions of disclosure are concealed and disguised as “primitive” or imperfect approximations of human accomplishments. Where before we spoke of the homological reduction, here we might speak of an *anthropological reduction*.

As early as 1929 we find Heidegger wrestling with critics who reproached him for not having adequately bracketed the “anthropocentric standpoint” in undertaking the existential analytic of Dasein. He will come to allege that this “misinterpretation” turns on a failure to properly grasp his conception of the understanding as a mode of transcendence. Owing to transcendence, construed as the activity of existence, he explains that the “very *essence* of Dasein that there stands ‘at the center’ is ecstatic, i.e. ‘*excentric*’” (P 371/GA9 162). To be sure, Dasein’s ability to project itself spatially and temporally into its possibilities enables it to transcend the static (f)actuality of human beings discovered by scientific anthropology, physiology, and psychology just as it does the hypostatic determinations of the “human essence” (e.g. *zōon logon echon*). Such is evidently the basis for Heidegger’s disavowals in the “Letter on Humanism” (1946), where he insists that “every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one” (BW 225/GA9 321). Heidegger emphasizes time and again that his method must be set apart from ontologically positivist conceptions of human beings, which approach Dasein as a present-at-hand entity, an object of inspection or categorical designation. In *Being and Time* and other early writings he takes great pains indeed to set these approaches in their proper (ontic) place, far indeed from that which “human Dasein” occupies in the phenomenology of existence.<sup>5</sup> As he puts it in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1929-30), insofar as man “ex-sists [as] an existing from itself in the essence of its being . . . man is that *inability to remain* and is yet *unable to leave his place*.” As Dasein, human being is *unable to remain* in the sense that it *is* its possibilities. Human being is therefore “never simply [present] at hand, but essentially absent in his essence, in his essentially being away, removed into essential having been and future” (FCM 365-6/GA29-30 531, emphasis mine). On the other hand, he goes on to clarify that human being is *unable to leave its place*, the ‘there’ of Da-sein, insofar as its future rebounds on the actuality of its present.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. (ZS 175/GA89 220).

Still, more troublesome questions remain. Is ‘Dasein’ simply another name for *human possibility*? Are beings no more than how and what they manifest themselves to be in Dasein’s world? And is that world ultimately nothing more than the “field of possible relations to human concerns,” as one respected commentator suggests? Thus no more than the *anthropocene*?<sup>6</sup> Heidegger has it that “world [is] the basic determination of Dasein,” giving rise to the ecstatic “unity of the structure of being-in-the-world” (BPP 297/GA24 422). But if Dasein’s ecstatic transcendence toward the world betrays a positive discrimination for a world confined to human ways of being-in (comportmental, ipseological, linguistic, etc.), then this would suggest a certain anthropostatic blindspot in his approach. In that blindspot would lurk something akin to what Giorgio Agamben called an “anthropological machine,” reproducing a scission between human and nonhuman so wide it cannot be crossed by the ecstasy of experience.<sup>7</sup> How else are we to read Heidegger’s peremptory denial of animal being-there and full-fledged being-in-the-world in the 1930s, or for that matter his peremptory claims that language belongs solely to human being?<sup>8</sup> More pointedly, if we look to the *Zollikon Seminars* delivered well into the 1960s, we find an unequivocal affirmation of the “anthropocentric” misreading he had previously gainsaid. “The *Da* in *Being and Time*,” he advises, “should designate the openness where beings can be present for the human being, and the human being also for himself. The *Da* of *being* [i.e. Dasein] distinguishes the humanness of the human being” (ZS 120/GA89 156-7). As if to drive home the point, he then aligns the “ecstatic standing-in [*Innestehen*]” the “*Da*”, in the “clearing . . . of being,” with the *human* activity of transcendence, concluding that “therefore, there cannot be the being of beings at all *without* the human being” (ZS 176/GA89 221).

Heidegger’s recurrent attempts to disqualify humanist readings of his work are belied not only by its early proximity to the tradition, but by his turn toward a peculiar new avatar of humanism in his mature writings. This turn coincides with the *Kehre* in his ontological investigations. As opposed to beginning from the analytic of Dasein as he did in *Being and Time*, Heidegger methodologically reverses that approach by beginning from *Sein* beyond *Dasein* – or more precisely *Seyn* (beyng). In *Being and Time* Heidegger had introduced Dasein as “the mode

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<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Sheehan, “A paradigm shift in Heidegger research,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 192.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2004), 79f.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger notoriously contrasts the “worldless” [*weltlos*] stone and the animal “poor in world” [*weltarm*] to man, who is “world-building” [*weltbildend*] (FCM 201-267/GA29-30 261-388; cf. LQ 29/GA38 31).

of being which this entity – man himself – possesses,” *always already* possesses since “we are it, each of us, we ourselves” (BT 36, 32/SZ 15, 11). But works from 1930s show Dasein inscribed anew as “Da-sein,” rethought as a mode of being which we are *not yet* but *might could be in the future*. In the *Contributions*, for instance, Heidegger modifies his definition from *Being and Time* by shifting the emphasis from the declarative to what Richard Polt has termed the “future subjunctive.”<sup>9</sup> Yet Heidegger reinserts the human into the *Da* in its very deferral. “Da-sein [is] the mode of *being* that is distinctive to humans *in their possibility*,” we read, “*thus it is no longer at all necessary to add ‘human’* [to the term ‘Da-sein’]” (CP 237/GA65 301). That possibility belongs to an “inceptive” (*anfänglich*) future of “being there” beyond the “there” of our world and the “now” of our age, thus to a time that is radically undecided by scientific anthropology *no less than* it is by the history of being.<sup>10</sup> As he encapsulates it, “Da-sein is not simply the human mode of being (still very easily misunderstood in *Being and Time*)”; nor was it ever meant to be “something that could simply be discovered as given with . . . present human being”; it is rather “the ground of future human being, a ground that essentially occurs in [a] grounding” that “is in itself transitional and tentative.” It is human being, then, “to whom alone *Da-sein* is proper [*dem allein das Da-sein eignet*]” (CP 237, 232/GA65 300, 294).

In sum, the anthropostatic closure of being-there into being human persists in the existential vocation of being “the ground of future human being,” even if this ultimately boils down to being “consigned to stewardship over the truth of being” as “the ground of another history” (CP 232, 386, 190/GA65 294, 490, 240). From this it would seem to follow that Heidegger hews to an *ecumenical* disclosure of being into the worldly horizons of an understanding that surpasses “our” own through an “overcoming of all subjectivity” but is precisely *more human* than human on that account (CP 199, 359, 204/GA65 252, 455, 259). Is there perhaps some hidden recourse in Heidegger’s thought of *beyng* that might guide us out of the manmade forests of ecumenism?

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger's "Contributions to Philosophy"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>10</sup> After Heidegger, I use the term ‘inceptive’ to designate any phenomenon or correlative disclosure that evinces the singular newness of the future in a radical, historically underdetermined way.

## §11. Forest Paths Leading Elsewhere: The Other Heidegger and the Other Difference

Unfriendly, and difficult to attain  
Is the closed one from whom I come, the mother.  
–Friedrich Hölderlin, “The Journey”<sup>11</sup>

In the forests, you see the tenderness of darkness, how it folds things into itself, nature *nurturans*, for all good things are cradled in darkness first: seeds and babies, sleep’s dreams and the heart’s love, compost and starlight.  
–Jay Griffiths, *Wild: An Elemental Journey*<sup>12</sup>

The same inscrutable mystery lies at both the center of a stone and the core of the earth. Standing in the hollow interior, the mystery comes alive for me.  
–Dan Snow, *In the Company of Stone*<sup>13</sup>

### (i) *The Ecological Difference*

Heidegger’s struggle to twist free of ecumenism hinged on this most difficult of all thoughts he handed down us. That is to say, the thought of being as “event” (*Ereignis*) of rupture whereby being is rifted into: *world*, the inhabitable horizons of significance disclosed by the understanding; and *earth*, which essentially closes itself from those horizons even as it grounds the very possibility of the world, thus being-in-the-world. “World and earth,” writes Heidegger, “are essentially different from one another yet never separated” (PLT 47/GA5 35). Let us call this inseparable differentiation of earth and world the **ecological difference**, abbreviated simply as **earth-world**. And let us understand by that difference a **heterological relation**, setting this against the homological and the anthropological reductions. A conjunction of the Greek words *logos* and *heteros* (‘other’ or ‘different’), a heterological relation can be defined as one that meets the following criteria:

1. it involves at least one term that is **(en)static**, i.e. it stands stably within or encompasses (local-temporal) horizons that define the limits of its sense or significance;
2. it involves at least one term that is **hyperstatic**, i.e. it stands in some measure outside, remains partly closed off from, and delimits the horizons of 1;
3. it is **ecstatic**, i.e. each term must stand out of itself and into the other to enter into the relation;

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in HHI 30/GA53 35.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Griffiths, *Wild: An Elemental Journey* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Dan Snow, *In the Company of Stone: The Art of the Stone Wall* (New York: Artisan, 2001), 1.



4. it is **heterostatic**, i.e. the two terms *are* only insofar as they enter into the relation, whereby each term is differed from itself through the other;
5. the hyperstatic term is **genostatic**, or generatively grounding, i.e. it stands as the origin and continual source of the (en)static term's possible senses, or significance, whereas the inverse does not obtain.

Thus defined, the ecological difference is transversal to what Heidegger calls the ontological difference. The former structures how beings are phenomenally given as well as their being, givenness, or un-concealment. Heidegger must be acknowledged as the first to thematize each of these differences phenomenologically. Notwithstanding his later reservations concerning this method, I would like to propose that phenomenology – and in particular an eco-phenomenology – offers the clearest way to disentangle what Arendt disparaged as the “mythologizing confusion” of Heidegger’s earth.<sup>14</sup> And this in a way that doesn’t denude it of the lived wisdom and social foundations that the ancient Greeks derived from the myths of Gaia and her elemental progeny. If Heidegger strayed from the ecological path, I claim that neither spiritual nor metaphysical *ecstasy* is to blame. Rather, to the extent that he upheld the view that Dasein stands out from itself *toward* the earth (*ekstasis*) only to return to its self in the place of the human (*anthropostasis*) – however world-historically displaced – he attenuated the ecological difference by an *enstatic* violation of condition 3, which compromises 4 and 5 as well. Coupled with the conclusions reached in the last section, there is thus some reason to doubt that his overcoming succeeds as a full-fledged twisting free of the ecumenical dysclosure of being. Suffice it to say that the question concerning ecumenism, in the form of anthropological reductionism, would continue to hound Heidegger, gnashing at his heels like a non-existent animal he could never quite get shed of. Before we address his ambivalence to the earth-world in greater detail, permit me to elucidate the criteria of the ecological difference, one by one.

Consider the words Heidegger opts for to translate the essence of earth. After Hölderlin, who alludes to the “closed one [*Verschlossene*] from whom I come,” Heidegger designates earth as self-closing (*sich verschließend*). Thus does he also speak of its self-concealing (*sich verbergend, sich verhüllend*) excess (*Übermaß*) over appropriation into ownness (*Ereignung*)

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<sup>14</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Existenz Philosophy,” *Partisan Review* 81 (Winter 1946): 51.

(PLT 46, 48, 61/GA5 33, 36, 52; CP 196, 300 379/GA65 412, 482). In our heterological rubric, this is to say that the being of the earth hyperstatically withdraws from the understanding by virtue of which Dasein stands in (en-stasis) the world, its open horizons of revealing. No such standpoint is possible for us in the case of the earth, yet it *is* no less for all that. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger explains first how this bears on comportment. “The earth,” he writes, “shatters every attempt to penetrate into it,” so that every effort to extract utility from it leads only to destruction. Moreover, regardless of how well we manage to dissimulate that destruction “under the appearance of mastery and of progress in the form of the technical-scientific objectification of nature, this mastery nevertheless remains an impotence of will” (PLT 45-6/GA5 33). Shifting modalities to perception, he proceeds to generalize the point:

The earth appears openly cleared as itself only when it is perceived and conserved as that which is by nature undisclosable [*Unerschließbare*], that which shrinks from every disclosure [*Erschließung*] and constantly keeps itself closed up [*verschlossen*] (PLT 46/GA5 33).

Earth *is* only insofar as it stands out from itself (ek-stasis) into the open horizons of the world. Yet this emergence is essentially undisclosable, unworldly, *hyperstatic*. One of Heidegger’s overarching insights in this essay is that true artworks evince this hiddenness *as* hidden. They reveal the earth’s hyperstatic difference (from the world). Disclosed as the undisclosable, earth is enigmatic – paradoxical even. It appears in the places we abide only to displace us, draw us out of our own, and direct us elsewhere. In order to grasp how Heidegger takes earth to ground the worldly horizons of stasis, it is first necessary to bring into sharper focus how this hyperstatic withdraw informs the heterostatic relationality of every intraworldly being. In *The Introduction to Metaphysics* he elucidates this dynamic as follows:

Because being, *phusis*, consists in appearing, in the offering of a look and of views [*Aussehen und Ansichten*], it stands [*stehen*] essentially, and thus necessarily and constantly [*ständig*], in the possibility of a look that precisely covers over and conceals [*verdeckt und verbirgt*] what the being is in truth – that is, in unconcealment [*Unverborgenheit*] (IM 110/GA40 111f.).

While comportmental explication and perceptual interpretation furnish phenomena with *stasis*, senses and meanings with some stable, constant standing in our enstatic horizons of significance, their being stands on its own apart from those operations. In other words, their being admits of a hyperstatic excess over appropriation. The out-standing manifestation of earth in the world is for this reason fundamentally *unstable*, or as Heidegger puts it, “constantly self-closing” (*ständig Sichverschließende*) (PLT 61/GA5 51). The self-closing or self-concealing aspects of phenomena are given to experience as an inexplicable surplus over their explicated senses. Earth eventuates in the inadvertent blindspots of inspection as it does in circumspective inhibitions occasioned by

resistance to affordance, unreadiness-to-hand. Correlatively, for all intraworldly beings it occupies the posterior to their anterior, the ulterior at their innermost interior, as the hidden residuum of disclosure. The understanding of being qua *phusis* (“nature”), signaled in the lines above, will be discussed in some detail in the next chapter (§19). For the time being, permit me to render this word provisionally as ‘self-emergence’: the coming forth of beings from concealment (absence, ab-sense) into appearance (presence, sense). With that said, consider Alexander Di Pippo’s exegesis of this passage:

The emergence of an entity into presence, its self-blossoming into the space of unconcealment simultaneously conceals an aspect of itself which cannot *in principle* be disclosed. Therefore, appearance is not an aspect of an entity which is to be divorced from its real Being, but rather dis-closing an appearance of itself which does not exhaust its possibilities of appearing belongs intrinsically to the Being of an entity.<sup>15</sup>

Whether ascertained from the standpoint of Dasein’s disclosure or from that of nature’s self-disclosure through Dasein, being covered over or concealed *in principle* by disclosure is integral to the being of every phenomenon qua earthly. Ladelle McWhorter makes an important observation about this elementary ambivalence, considered as a condition of ontic manifestation as such – be it through perceiving, thinking, or doing. Paraphrasing Heidegger, she writes: “In order for any of this revealing to occur . . . concealing must also occur.” These two modes of being are co-requisite. Or in her words, “revealing and concealing belong together.” Far from another false pearl plucked from the philosopher’s abyssal navel, the veracity of this statement is palpable to anyone who gives due measure to the earthly finitude of the understanding (intellectual, practical, or existential-ontological). Consider some examples. The French poet Henri Michaux continually gave expression to it from beyond the sanctioned territories of philosophy. “Any progress, every new observation, every thought, every creation,” he tells us, “seems to create (*at the same time as light*) a zone of darkness.”<sup>16</sup> It is the same dark truth that Jay Griffiths finds in the forest and Dan Snow in the stone. Like Michaux, they unearth how darkness cradles all that shines, all that comes alive. Learning to see, bringing to light, brings with it a degree of blindness to whatever falls outside of that clearing of insight. By the same token, hearing something is also a discriminate deafness to the noise, the unheard no-thingness, of the ambient soundscape. If all this has about it the air of a platitude, it is one whose truth is scattered to the winds by its self-evidence. The shibboleth that would have us see there is nothing

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander Ferrari Di Pippo, “The Concept of Poiesis in Heidegger’s An Introduction to Metaphysics,” *Thinking Fundamentals, IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conferences* 9, no. 3 (2000): 18.

<sup>16</sup> Michaux, *Darkness Moves*, 78, emphasis mine.

new under the sun forgets that the break of dawn sets the constellations back in their sockets, that the zone of darkness does more than surround the light of day; it penetrates the very atmosphere and medium of all truth lived. Why this is so and why it must be are questions that hold even greater perplexity. McWhorter takes a crucial step toward addressing them. If “all revealing comes at the price of concomitant concealment,” she offers, this is not merely a “kind of Kantian acknowledgement of human limitation” or intellectual finitude:

Rather, it is a point about revealing *itself*. When revealing reveals itself as temporally linear and causally ordered, for example, it cannot simultaneously reveal itself as ordered by song and unfolding in a dream. How things come forth conceals both other things and other ways those things might have come forth otherwise.<sup>17</sup>

In *Being and Time* we learn that when something is revealed as present-at-hand or occurrent (*vorhanden*) by inspection, its readiness-to-hand or availability (*Zuhandenheit*) is concealed. According to Heidegger, the inverse holds true as well. Moreover, when something is thematized and known by the intellectual understanding or placed into service and mastered by the practical, some other knowable or useful aspect of that being is concealed. But the self-concealment of the earth is a thought more elemental still. Here it will be worthwhile to palpitate and ponder another handful of examples.

Heidegger follows Snow by having us consider the stone, a touchstone of earth that manifests itself as essentially self-concealing to each of these ways of understanding it. “A stone presses downward and manifests its heaviness,” he observes. But that heaviness withdraws from manifestation the moment we take up the stone to skillfully manipulate it or take it in to attend to and calculate its weight. In the everyday work-world of the mason, Heidegger would have us see that “material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of equipment” (PLT 44/GA5 32). The heaviness of the stone, manifested as a *resistance* to our concerns for appropriating it into the world of phenomena ready-to-hand is one facet of its earthly hyperstasis. “In the earth as essentially self-closing,” we read, “the openness of the Open finds the greatest resistance [*Widerstand*] (to the Open)” (PLT 67/GA5). The less it resists the practical understanding of the artisan, the more stably the stone will stand within her serviceable horizons, from which its heavy instability withdraws in equal measure. Inversely, the more the stone resists, the heavier it becomes, and the greater its disruption of her concerned involvement. Were she to persist in this operant manner in an effort to overcome its resistance and

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<sup>17</sup> Gail McWhorter, “Guilt as Management Technology: A Call to Heideggerian Reflection,” in Ladelle McWhorter and Gail Stenstad, eds., *Heidegger and the Earth: Essays in Environmental Philosophy* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2009), 5.

understandingly penetrate the earthen heaviness of this thing, Heidegger insists that her efforts could not but come to grief. He explains: “If we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock,” appropriating it into our horizons of significance, “it still does not display in its fragments anything inward that has been disclosed.” Instead, we find it “has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure of its fragments” (PLT 44/GA5 32). Bruce Foltz clarifies the point:

No matter how many times it is broken, each fragment is no more open and displays nothing more of its “interior” [or its heaviness] than did the original stone. Even when it is utterly pulverized, it is not penetrated or mastered – that is, opened up, made present and available as stone – but merely destroyed. At each attempt, it further withdraws into its own enclosure and concealment.<sup>18</sup>

Yet one might take another tack, less direct and seemingly less willful. Heidegger offers that we might place the stone on a scale to calculate its weight. But in this *thematic* disclosure “the weight’s burden,” its lived-through heaviness, “has escaped us.” Bearing all this in mind, we can say that stone offers a most palpable illustration of the self-withdrawing shadow of the earth in the worlds of artisan and scientist alike. As Heidegger concludes, “earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it,” and “shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained” (PLT 45/GA5 33).

In a book entitled simply *Stone*, John Sallis generalizes the point to describe how the artist, by contrast, lets earth shine darkly through the stone: “Like the earth to which it belongs, stone shows itself only when it is brought into the open *as* self-secluding, as closed off, as self-closed. This is what the artwork and only the artwork can do.”<sup>19</sup> Snow, himself an earthwork artist of this element, gives lived testimony of this. “Soon after human being picked up the first stones,” he surmises, “they probably hurled them to the ground in an attempt to break them open. The desire to see what was inside would have been too tempting not to.”<sup>20</sup> Though Snow would like to think that his “own effort to break stone issues from a loftier calling,” he admits that what drives him is really “quite practical.” But he also gives due weight to how “nature defies the touchstones of the artist: planning and building,” a defiance he humbly acknowledges at the core of his work.<sup>21</sup> Rather than reassert those touchstones by willfully striving to overpower the resistance of the earth, Snow touches stone in ways that remain open to being touched by it. In

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<sup>18</sup> Bruce Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth: Heidegger, Environmental Ethics, and the Metaphysics of Nature* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1995), 138.

<sup>19</sup> John Sallis, *Stone* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 114.

<sup>20</sup> Snow, *In the Company of Stone*, 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

running his palm over its surface, he begins to get a feel for its “immutable center.” “The truth of where the stone is headed is held there,” he says, withholding itself from mastery as an “inscrutable mystery” that guides the hand in setting the stone in place.<sup>22</sup>

Like McWhorter, Foltz emphasizes that earthly hyperstasis is not restricted to so-called “raw materials” like Snow’s, or what Heidegger sometimes calls “mere things” (cf. PLT 28/GA5 13). When we apply the methods of phenomenology to allow beings to manifest themselves in themselves, their earthliness abounds. Writes Foltz:

It is the solidity of a colored object that can support a play of color only because of its very density; it can present one side of itself only by withholding another. . . . In Heidegger’s thinking proper, the earth is not only that in which plants take root and upon which houses are built but also the human body, the sound of a word or the script of a text, the bronze or clay that upholds a sculpted surface. In each case, *the earth is what bears and gives rise to what comes to light only by remaining intrinsically dark itself*. The earth is the sound that carries the words of a poem and secretly permeate its meaning, but they withdraw into mere phonemes – incapable of bearing a poem or meaning whatsoever – when explicitly examined and investigated.<sup>23</sup>

In all beings there lurks this dark and mysterious element, one that resists revealing and conceals itself the moment we begin to take them in thematically or unthematically take them up. For it comes forth in ways otherwise than being-understood, ensuring that our appropriation of any given being remains incomplete yet ever underway toward innovation. Without earth, being would have nothing left to give, no allure, no tension, no wonderment. Oversaturated by the brilliance of an inconceivably enstatic revelation, one which would cast its own omnivoyant light and heave its omnipotent might into every corner of the world at once, all things would be rendered weightless and transparent. More pointedly, in such a world the very possibility of what we call beings would be foreclosed by the implosion of their local-temporal horizons. The assimilation of being into being-in-the-world would thereby annul the ontological difference as such. Yet this is precisely the tragic impossibility invited by ecumenism. By dysclosing the earth into world, *as* world, it disregards and disguises how hyperstatic difference erupts into it and ruptures its significance. Moreover, it obscures how the world lends stability to that stochastic plenitude, supplying settled horizons for the *static* explication and differentiation of phenomenal sense. This enstatic aversion to the *ekstasis* and *heterostasis* of the earth-world stems from a failure to acknowledge the essential inexplicability of the earth. As a result, the ecumenical understanding of being spells dystrophy for the generative grounding of the world, or *genostasis*.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>23</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 14f., emphasis mine.

It deprives itself of the ways that nature nurtures, cradles, “bears and gives rise to what comes to light only by remaining intrinsically dark itself” as the source and limit of possible significance.

Heidegger’s name for heterostasis is *Streit*, ‘contention’ or ‘strife’. As he writes in his essay on the work of art, “the opposition [*Gegeneinander*] of world and earth is a strife [*Streit*].” This concept, which we shall explore in depth through his *Auseinandersetzung* with Heraclitus in §§24-5, is not to be thought as mere “discord,” which breeds “disorder and destruction.” Rather, the “essential strife” of earth and world is defined as one in which “each carries the other beyond itself” (PLT 47f./GA5 35). Through that ecstatic interplay of hyperstasis (disorder) and stasis (order), old orders are destroyed and generated anew. Accordingly, Heidegger tells us that world is generatively grounded on the “earth, self-closing ground . . . only so far as truth happens as the originary strife [*Urstreit*] between clearing and concealing” (PLT 73, 54/GA5 63, 42). Bryan Bannon foregrounds this element of Heidegger’s thinking. Echoing McWhorter’s observation, he encapsulates with extraordinary concision what we have dubbed the ecstatic and heterostatic criteria of the ecological difference. “World unconceals (*unverbergen*), while earth conceals (*verbergen*), but is only together that a being is disclosed (*entbergen*) as a being.”<sup>24</sup> Summarily put, un-concealment, truth, eventuates ecologically in every given phenomenon as the heterostatic relation between revealing and self-concealing. Every making-present coincides with the presencing of absence, the manifestation of an irreducible difference from any sense or significance we project onto it. In short, all beings *are* both *in* the world and *of* the earth.

A further stipulation in Heidegger’s seminal essay points to the asymmetry of the genostatic relation. The world is grounded on the earth. But rather than be grounded on the world, the earth “juts through” (*durchragen*) its horizons, opening what he calls a “rift” (*Riss*) or “fissure” (*Zerklüftung*) (PLT 47/GA5 35). The German word *Riss* carries a range of meanings, including ‘crack’, ‘tear’, or ‘rupture’ (such as a fracture or fissure along a faultline). It can also refer to a difference between two positions in a dispute. Heidegger combines these meanings in describing the rift as the “open place,” a zone of semidark between the earth and world, a “common ground” on which their strife plays out (CP 401/GA65 510; PLT 61/GA5 52). In our inscription of the ecological difference, ‘earth-world’, the rift is marked by the hyphen. The ecstatic eruption of earth into the world cuts a tear in the fabric of significance, a groundbreaking rupture that disrupts our understanding and interrupts our concerned involvement. Thus does it

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<sup>24</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 79.

destabilize our standpoint in and displace us from the world. We have already mentioned how, in the *Contributions*, the *Da* of Da-sein often appears to mark the position of the human being in an undecided future, hence being-there in a *human world* to come. But at other times Heidegger finds his way back to the ecological path by equating the *there* with a “between” (*zwischen*) and Da-sein with an “equivocal” (*zweischedeutig*) sense of being-in-between. On this *elementary* rethinking of existence, beyond the *fundamental* thinking of *Being and Time*, Da-sein is said to take place essentially on the “ground-between” (*Zwischengrund*) earth and world. There, at “the center of their strife,” we enter into our true, ecological vocation. It is there, he says, that we are “called to the stewardship of beyng,” the constant renewal of the strife. Something which can only be done by holding our world open to the mystery of earth (CP 381/GA65 484).

So conceived, earth does not designate some region of beings (e.g. so-called “natural beings”). Nor should it be confused with the totality of such beings (waters, stones) or natural kinds (H<sub>2</sub>O, feldspar), or anything else that might fall under the ecumenical banner of the “natural world.” Nor again is it posited as an utterly inscrutable realm beyond the world, beyond nature, or beyond experience, ineffable and phenomenologically vacuous. Earth is rather a dimension of nature, a dimension of being in the sense that one speaks of a hidden dimension of a problem or question. It manifests itself in the world as the hyperstatic (self-concealing) dimension of static phenomena (beings). The heterostasis (strife) between their earthliness and worldliness problematizes the world. It quakes the stable grounds laid by the understanding, opening dark and abyssal fissures beneath its horizons, out of which emerge the inviolable difference and otherness of beings. Thus does earth revive and replenish the world, grounding the possibility of rebuilding, reworking, thinking and saying world anew. Earth is no mere postulate. It is *experienced* in gradations of absence, *felt* in such coefficients of adversity and perversity as resistance, disinvolvement, inexplicability, unintelligibility, partiality, ambiguity, and mystery, which are together ingredient in our lived relationality to phenomena that extend beyond and beneath the ambit of what is disclosed by perception and comportment, inspection and circumspection, knowing-that and knowing-how, from our own standpoint in the world.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I borrow the concept ‘coefficient of adversity’ from Sartre. See: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1984), 628-35.



(ii) *World-Disclosure, Earth-Exposure, and Response-Ability*

Let us try to bring the concept of genostasis into sharper focus by shifting that focus to how we experience the earthly grounding of the world. Recall one of the conclusions we drew from Heidegger's treatment of disposition and attunement. Without the ability to be seized upon or gripped by matters that matter in general, and by how they matter in a specific place or region, an understanding of those matters, of their sense and significance, would never be solicited in the first place, never leave the ground as it were. Otherwise put, the understanding is *grounded* generally on disposition and specifically on attunement. Consider now the correlates of these abilities to be affected; consider that which they disclose. Earlier we suggested that the earthliness of beings comes forth in ways otherwise than being-understood. If Heidegger is to resolve the apparent paradox of disclosing "that which is by nature undisclosable" without recourse to metaphysical grounds (hypostasis, substance), his account must accommodate a modality of experience that allows earth to manifest itself *as* itself, in its difference from the world. It must allow for a mode of access to beings that doesn't merely reinforce our standing in the world, but draws us out of that standpoint and into that which conceals itself beyond and beneath its horizons. To set this apart from the centripetal ekstasis of the understanding, which stands out into beings only to bring them centrifugally back into its sphere of immanent influence (enstasis), let us refer to this latter modality as **hyper-ekstasis**.

To my mind, Heidegger's efforts on this front remain somewhat piecemeal and undeveloped. Yet the direction they invite us to pursue is sketched in the margins of writings as early as *Being and Time* (see §§14-15). And it is starkly drawn by the time he delivered his lectures at Freiburg in 1934. There he makes the connection explicit: "We would not stand at all if this standing were not *attuned-through* [or *permeated*] by moods [*von Stimmungen durchstimmt*], by virtue of which *earth, ground*; in short *nature* first bears, preserves and threatens us" (LQ 130/GA38 152, emphasis mine). We learned from *Being and Time* that "disposition implies a disclosive submission to the *world*" (SZ 137f., emphasis mine). But what of "that which is by nature undisclosable?" What of this earth, which "first bears, preserves and threatens us"? In this case we encounter a passivity more passive and an ekstasis more ecstatic than any possible relation to the world. That includes the ekstasis of *fundamental* moods, which are ultimately subordinate to the ekstasis-enstatic movement of the understanding. We encounter not worldly ekstasis but earthly *hyper-ekstasis*. Allow me to further qualify this affective

submission to the *earth* by the word **exposure**, which always implies a reciprocal relation. ‘Exposure’ derives from the Latin *ex-ponere*, ‘to set out’, ‘put out’, or by extension ‘to displace’, suggesting a strong affinity to ecstasy. Indeed, on our account, hyper-ecstatic exposure is precisely that by virtue of which we are drawn out of enstasis and into the heterostatic relation with the earth that draws us out of the ourselves, out of our world, and carries the world beyond itself. On the basis of this etymology, we shall adopt this concept to designate both:

1. an experience of earthly phenomena that sets them out into the openness of unconcealment, revealing the ways they are concealed from the understanding and thus displaced from the world; and
2. an experience of being thereby put out, cast out, displaced from the world ourselves, deprived of stable grounds in a way that lays us open to dispossession, ridicule, precarity, in short, the worldly abjection of that expulsion.

We have seen how the very same moods that extricate us from our *existential* abjection by disposing us fundamentally to the world can also be elementary misattunements to the earth, casting us away from it in the disposition of *ecological* abjection. Yet our hyper-ecstatic exposure to the earthliness of beings is not without perils of its own. For it can so arrest and bewilder the understanding that we find ourselves cast away from (*ab*) our worldly grounds and into an abyss of insignificance. But provided we are disposed to it in certain ways, Heidegger suggests that this very abyss may come to ground us, reveal itself as an “abyssal ground” (*Abgrund*). In “What are Poets For?” (1946), he alludes to this abyss as the “complete absence” of worldly grounds. He notes, however, that “the word for abyss – *Abgrund* – originally means the soil and ground,” the “undermost declivity down [*Abhang hinab*] which something descends” (PLT 90/GA5 269, trans. mod.).<sup>26</sup> In being exposed to the earth, we fall into an abyssal rift in the world. Like Thales when he plummeted down the well, it may be some time before we reach some solid ground on which to stand. To dwell in the earth-world is to incur constantly the risk of abjection from both sides. A risk taken whenever we break new grounds between them.

Let us consider how an attunement to the self-concealing excess over world-disclosure might redispense and reattune the activity of the understanding. This way lies a *response-ability* to

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<sup>26</sup> In chapter 5 (§33) we shall find that this elemental abyss was named by the word *apeiron*, as in Xenophanes, who held that that the earth opens downward “indefinitely” (*es apeiron*).

the earth: a disclosure that is constantly deferred and differed by exposure (1 and 2). By redisposing us earthward – to the abyssal, self-closing grounds of the world – **elemental attunement** unveils its finite horizons while unmasking the transgressions of hypostasis and anthropostasis, each of which affects to having full-disclosure, or total enclosure, within its reach. Elementally reinflected in this way, worldly disclosure (affective or projective) would take its measure not from the understanding but from the earth itself. By withholding itself and thereby holding open the mystery of earth, it would conserve the ecological difference. For the early Heidegger, the unworldly side of things disclosed by fundamental moods is a repellent absence, which first confounds the understanding, then acts as a spur to willfully fortifying and expanding its territory. Through elemental attunement, by contrast, this side of things would be exposed as an enticing absent-presence or intentionally generative quasi-presence that resists and disrupts disclosure while soliciting the understanding toward *inceptive* responses that replenish the possibilities of what can possibly be bestowed with sense and meaning. The earth withdraws from the most penetrating gaze. It stays the skillful hand. Even so, this “zone of darkness” *moves*. That is to say, it manifests itself by moving *us* in the dual sense of being stirred affectively and comportmentally borne along by the wild otherness of being.

To be sure, elemental attunements do not expose full-fledged worldly presence. Taken on their own, apart from the understanding, the phenomena to which they grant us unpremeditated access are not intentional correlates of comportment (e.g. ready-to-hand equipment). Nor are they intentional correlates of noetic advertence, perceptual acts, or judging (e.g. present-at-hand objects, events, categories, or propositions). We can only labor under the misapprehension that these correlations are ontologically exhaustive if we are *misattuned* to the elemental self-concealment of beings. A disposition that compels us to persist in disclosing nothing more than what already affords or can possibly afford the understanding. Contrariwise, the earthly side of beings, to which we are exposed, corresponds to what some scholars have termed the *periphenomenal*. A phenomenon so defined is one whose paradigmatic mode of presencing is peripheral to inspection, circumspection, cognition, and conation. It is something less yet something more than being-understood, like the heaviness of the stone, the mystery at its core.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> I borrow this definition with slight modification from William Earle in *Evanescence: Peri-Phenomenological Essays* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1984), 1-4. Cf. Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World*, Second Edition (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2009), 384. Megan Craig, *Levinas and James: Toward a Pragmatic Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2010), 203. The

Earthly periphenomena arrest and inhibit the understanding. But provided we make an allowance for being exposed, relaxing our own active, unilateral hold on the world, its movement is resumed bilaterally. We come into a kind of active-passivity, a response-ability that oscillates between disclosure and exposure, moving only in those ways open to being moved beyond our own remit. Rather than fully developed senses, we respond to indeterminate directives possibly underway toward sense at the edges and in the ruptures of our horizons. These *traces*, as we shall come to style them, are intentionally generative in the sense that they solicit responses that cultivate the arable ambiguity and inexhaustible abundance of the earth. An elemental attunement is maintained to the extent that we continue to make allowances in our canny congress with things for being-directed, attentively or comportmentally, by the uncanny non-sense quavering beneath the senses we receive and bestow in directing ourselves toward the world. For the senses traced out by hyper-ecstatic exposure reveal less what we ourselves can do with beings, so much as what they can do with us, through us, in the rift of the earth-world.

## §12. The Devastation of the Sheltering Earth

It is good, at certain hours of the day and night, to look closely at the world of objects at rest. Wheels that have crossed long, dusty distances with their mineral and vegetable burdens, sacks from the coal bins, barrels, and baskets, handles and hafts for the carpenter's tool chest. From them flow the contacts of man with the earth, like a text for all troubled lyricists. The used surfaces of things, the wear that the hands give to things, the air, tragic at times, pathetic at others, of such things – all lend a curious attractiveness to the reality of the world that should not be underprized.  
–Pablo Neruda, “Towards an Impure Poetry”<sup>28</sup>

Permit me to clarify some terminology that has loomed about the periphery of our discussion. We will have occasion to speak of *elements* in reference to phenomena as disparate as stone and steel, light and night. In no way should this be interpreted as a revival of an outmoded conceptual scheme, a speculative metaphysics, or primitive science, as though we were simply applying old, incondite words to designate the nicer distinctions between the

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hidden conative or willful determination of Heideggerian comportment is spelled out below, where we shall stress that this is not to be grasped as the operation of an individual instance of Dasein - much less an agentive subject – but rather a historico-transcendental structure co-originary with the understanding and deeply enmeshed in his conception of the destining of a world-historical people.

<sup>28</sup> Pablo Neruda, *Five Decades: Poems, 1925-1970*, trans. Ben Belitt (New York: Grove Press), xxi.

objective particulars that chemistry has ordered on the periodic table by atomic weight and number. Contrariwise, in our phenomenological investigations, the elements and the elemental side of beings belong to the order of periphenomena distinguished by the ways in which their ontological self-concealment, their *earthliness*, manifests itself in our unthematic experience of the world. Stone, for instance, may be thematically distinguished from water by virtue of visual inspection, conceptualization, and judgment. Yet the ecological difference of these elements inheres in the distinctive ways that each conceals itself from world-disclosure: not only cognitive feats but the full range of activity that Heidegger associates with the understanding. More precisely, that differentiation is made by virtue of an exposure to their respective quotients of resistance, partiality, ambiguity, mystery, and so forth. Now, we will also address earthliness itself as *the elemental* or the *elementality* of beings, be they embodied or enrooted, entered or interred. If, on Heidegger's view, the mental, comportmental, and equipmental, bear primary reference to being-in-the-world and intraworldly beings, the final chapter of this treatise will examine existence qua being-of-the-earth and elementality qua extraworldly beings of the earth. As Bannon unpacks the phenomenal manifestation of this pre-position, this *of-ness*:

To say that a being is of the earth means that it emerges into a world of meaning [or significance] in such a way that it also, as that which shelters the world, repulses every attempt to completely unconceal it.<sup>29</sup>

What Bannon, after Heidegger, calls “sheltering” (*Bergung, bergen*) lends further precision to the distinctive way in which earth grounds the world: namely, as a dwelling place. A brief review of this concept will therefore prove instructive. If we hearken back to the “The Origin of the Work of Art,” we read that “the world, in resting on the earth, strives to elevate [*überhören*] it,” for world is possessed of a “self-opening” that “cannot endure anything closed.” On the other hand, “earth . . . as that which shelters [*die Bergende*], tends always to draw the world into itself and hold [*einzubehalten*] it there” (PLT 47/GA5 35, trans mod.). Thus we can say that earth shelters (*bergen*) not in spite but *by virtue of* concealing itself (*sich verbergen*). In drawing the world ecstatically beyond its own horizons, the earth threatens an explosion of those horizons, distending them into a depthless expanse of pure difference, chaos, or in our terms, hyperstasis.

We might liken these horizons to a riverbank. As land (from the Latin *terra*) meets water, so too does world meet earth (the subterranean).<sup>30</sup> The history of the earth has perennially

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<sup>29</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 84.

<sup>30</sup> In his lecture course on Parmenides (1942-3), Heidegger draws a crucial etymological distinction between the Greek word *gē* and the Latin *terra*. Conceptually, *terra* is closely affine with *oikoumenē*. Each erases the difference

reshaped the landscape of experience. Likewise does the river undermine its banks. It can even carry them away. But it also holds them open and over time it reforms them. Its churning belly, where currents pick up speed, harbors no stasis, no handhold or foothold from which to take things in or take them up as we can on land. And at a stroke, like a thunderclap, the river can disgorge itself onto the shore in spate, releasing flows of singular phenomena that dislodge our timeworn beliefs, break our inveterate habits, and expose the mysterious softness of our most adamant certainties. So does the earth support the world's horizons, holding open what would otherwise harden and thicken into impenetrable walls of misplaced concreteness.

By definition and lived exposition, the horizons of the world are described by limits that are never actually reached. Every journey that strikes out toward that spectral convergence of land and sky attests to this. A worldly horizon *is* its possibility, one that holds true only by withholding itself from actuality. Thus does it frustrate the intention to arrive at its limits while setting the background conditions for the differential manifestation of all that appears within them. Were it not for this local-temporal withdrawal, we would move nowhere and everywhere at once, which is to say we would not move at all. Meanwhile, the givenness of beings would be condensed into an undifferentiated knot of nonsense. It would be like the Borgesian Aleph, where one place envelops all places in the eternity of an instant. Now, the horizons of the world do place limits on the understanding. But to assume that the understanding imposes these limits on itself is to mistake their possibility for *its* possibilities, much like the man who would embark on a journey in search of world's end. As we discover in our mundivagant roving, the horizons of the world are not imposed by us; they are held open, in their possibility, by the earth at the convergent vanishing point of soil and sky. By withholding itself from what is understood, earth supports the openness and sustains the otherness of being which the understanding cannot establish for itself.<sup>31</sup> In other words, it prevents the world from enstatically contracting into homogeneous senses and meanings, which would otherwise encase beings like insects in amber.

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between earth and world. Each could be used to denote either earth or world since each is based on an ecumenical understanding that essentially reduces the sense of the former to the latter. As Heidegger notes: "For the Romans, the earth, *tellus, terra*, is the dry land, the land as distinct from the sea; this distinction differentiates that upon which construction, settlement, and installation are possible from those places where they are impossible. *Terra* becomes *territorium*, land of settlements as realm of command [i.e. ecumene]. In the Roman *terra* can be heard an imperial accent, completely foreign to the Greek *gaia and ge*" (Ps 60/GA54 88f.).

<sup>31</sup> One might object here and say that geography measures and defines these limits, even if it doesn't impose them. But of course the geographer's studies do not capture the earth we encounter in our lived experience, which is their condition of possibility.

By retaining, or in Bannon's words "preserving," the openness of the world, earth shelters the possibility of *dwelling, being-in*, a possibility that transcends the (f)actuality of containment in thematic space by situating us in a place that affords our concernful abilities. But here a crucial point should be made. *Pace* Husserl, who fills the abyssal ground with an *Erdboden* that is essentially *our* ground and conceives of earth itself as our "originary home" (*Urheimat*), and contrary to Heidegger himself at times, *the earth is not a dwelling place*, even as it shelters.<sup>32</sup>

The difficulties Heidegger confronted in thinking being ecologically, transitional though he was in gathering earth and *human* world together in their difference, are exposed by his occasional relapse into an ecumenical idiom that dys-closes earth into world. For example, as late as 1957 he depicts earth, like he once had nature in *Being and Time*, as "the inhabited landscape or territory [*Landschaft*]," which is brought "into the nearness of human being [*Menschen*]" (GA13 139).<sup>33</sup> He makes a similar claim in "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1951):

To be a human being means to be on the earth [*auf der Erde*] as a mortal. It means to dwell. . . . Building as dwelling, that is, as being on earth . . . remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset [*im vorhinein*] 'habitual' – we inhabit it [earth], as our language says so beautifully: it is the *Gewohnte*" (BW 349/GA7 149).

Note, however, that this is a claim about "man's everyday experience," not about originary experience. But Heidegger's slides back into ecumenism have conspired with the common tendency to decontextualize his interpretation of the everyday world, leading many a reader astray. The dysclosure of earth as ultimate dwelling place and existents with "earth-dwellers" has been carelessly trumpeted by many of Heidegger's disciples. Worse, this misconception has even insinuated itself into the minds of those wishing to draw from him resources for grappling philosophically with ecological problems and concerns.<sup>34</sup> Even on Heidegger's anthropological

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<sup>32</sup> See Husserl's "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature," translated in full in Merleau-Ponty's *Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* (HLP 68-73).

<sup>33</sup> From "Hebel – der Hausfreund," translation mine.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, McWhorter, "Guilt as Management Technology," in McWhorter and Stenstad eds., *Heidegger and the Earth*, 4. A paradigmatic case of this misconception is also to be found in the very title of Bruce Foltz's book *Inhabiting the Earth*. Foltz, whose treatment of these themes is usually marked by an admirable lucidity, slips into an ecumenical dysclosure when he writes that "the earth is a region of the world." Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 14, cf. 137. According to Heidegger, region denotes a congeries of places *in* which we dwell. A region makes up part of the world, hence Heidegger's expression *Weltgegend*. Now, Foltz's exegesis does indeed find support in "The Origin of the Work of Art," where Heidegger makes the following assertion: "Upon the earth and *in* it [*Auf die Erde und in sie*], historical human being grounds his dwelling in the world" (PLT 45/GA5 32, trans mod., emphasis mine). Yet this prompts the question: how can we be said to dwell *in* the earth? This is not simply a trivial semantic point, for on it can be said to hinge the ecological difference itself. In more careful moments, Heidegger and Foltz both seem to imply that we *only* dwell *on* the earth, i.e. *in* a world grounded *on* it. For instance, Foltz endorses Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's celebrated apothegm: "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells upon this

restriction of it, however, the thrust of the ecological thinking we have been pursuing would entail that earth is no territory at all, that it cannot be disclosed as or projected toward or otherwise appropriated into the historical world and still be earth as such. Rather, earth must be thought as essentially unworldly and, on that very score, the self-concealing ground of dwelling in the world.

Heidegger is by no means a historical anomaly in this regard. His efforts to wrest free of ecumenism must be recognized as the outcome of an ecological predicament that has imperiled our thinking for ages, casting human being away from its earthly finitude. It is a denial that has perennially dictated that no passage is worth taking, no work worth doing, if not sanctioned by “our” concern, that no being truly is if it hasn’t a proper place in the history of the world underwritten by that sanction. Having been thrown into that world, we suffer its history as children of ecological abjection. And every belated discovery of wilds our age has laid to waste is an intimation of that disposition, that response-*inability* to what bewilders comprehension.

What would it mean to dwell in a world responsive to how it is generatively grounded on the earth? Bannon offers a straightforward entryway into the themes built into this question. If he takes up where Heidegger left off in the passage above, he also guides us elsewhere, that is, beyond the ecumene. On this score, his commentary is worth quoting at length:

‘Dwelling’ (*wohnen*) is etymologically connected to the verb ‘to habituate’ (*gewöhnen*), to the commonplace (*Gewöhnlich*), and to habitude (*Gewohnheit*), and could also be translated as ‘to live’ in the sense of inhabiting. What allows for dwelling, for habitual relations, for the commonplace, is world: earth is that which emerges, but necessarily emerges into a world. It is in this sense that earth is said to shelter (*bergen*) beings. The earth shelters insofar as it retains the mystery; it resists complete disclosure within the relations of the world, which are essentially open and subject to change. Earth embodies the open relations of the world, preserving [or holding] them in a being and, as sheltering, remains something that closes itself (*sich verschliessen*).<sup>35</sup>

The *Gewohnte* is not earth, then, but world. In contradistinction, earth is essentially *ungewöhnlich*: unfamiliar or non-habitual. It is also essentially *unheimlich*: unhomely or outlandish. Its hyperstatic excess inhibits our abilities to habituate ourselves to it, to in-habit it as a familiar region affording our concerns. Not in spite but because of this, however, earth shelters dwelling places in the world. It exposes us to the uninhabitable outlands of being, regenerating (genostasis) how beings matter in ways that reshape our concerns and habitual ways of dwelling.

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earth” (Foltz, 154). Foltz draws the conclusion that we can only dwell poetically by conserving these self-concealing grounds, a cultivation that allows it to support and shelter dwelling. But one is inclined to wonder if the self-concealment of the earth isn’t rather challenged and threatened by destruction when it becomes nothing more than a *Weltgegend* bearing an essential relation to human in-habitation, as it does in the Heidegger’s Fourfold.

<sup>35</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 79.



Every being is *of* the earth in the sense that it emerges out of self-concealment (earth) into unconcealment (world), meanwhile bearing earthbound traces that linger on as the ongoing source and limit of its arable store of possibilities. These traces reside on the dark and slimy underbelly of things as horizontal lesions in the tissue of significance, fecund orifices for the proliferation of larval senses. To attempt to master beings in a way that denudes their mystery, as though to eventually overcome their resistance to full-disclosure, is to roll them over and violate their possibility. In the Aleph, as in every ecumenical vision, lies the impossibility of the world. Extending his earlier treatment of stone, Foltz gives further consideration to how the elements are pressed into impossibility when their resistance is met with persistence to penetrate them:

The pulverized stone – still inviolate itself – can no longer support the sculpted shape or the portal of a temple; neither can the stockpiled soil, set upon with chemical fertilizers and pesticides, sustain nourishing growth; nor can the planned, organized, leveled acreage support more than a semblance of human habitation.<sup>36</sup>

When the measures of the earth are transgressed by the understanding, we deprive the world of shelter. Such is the ecumenical fallout of the scientific worldview and the machinations of modern technology on Heidegger's mature account. According to him, when we discard earth's staying power for the limitless power of the understanding, when we extract from the elements a universal constant presence for theoretical inventory or a stockpile of available resources to be managed and optimized to yield maximum production at minimum expense, what inevitably ensues is the wholesale "devastation [*Verwüstung*] of the earth" (EP 109f./GA7 96-8). If this dystrophic "world-event that beleaguers the earth" begins with innocuous disclosures, Heidegger has it that devastation "reaches its extreme when it settles into the appearance of a secure state of the world" in which the human realization of "a satisfactory standard of living" becomes "the highest goal of existence [*Daseins*]." In that world, which bears no small resemblance to our own, "the supply for the continual repletion of an undisturbed contentment is secured, so that everything remains overseeable and arranged and accounted so as to be useful." Meanwhile, "the unnecessary never impedes on the daily routine" (CPC 139-40/GA77 216). Not until resource depletion brings about an unsatisfactory standard of living are we roused from our catatonic stupor to see devastation for what it truly is. Having squandered the time to question our relation to the earth, we take recourse to desperate acts of brinkmanship and triage, mere palliative measures to recoup what little remains of the means of subsistence. After the elemental conditions of being-in-the-world are driven unto their terminal impossibility, there will be no

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<sup>36</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 138.

question of indemnity or settlement for us. The earth will simply replevin our extraction, and this beyond all ransom or reprieve.

The horrendous aftermath of devastation should not, and increasingly cannot, be taken lightly. Yet the lesson to be taken from Heidegger's critique of machination and modern technology is not that they are propelling human being toward some terminal disaster that awaits us in the future. As ever, his thinking operates not at the level of (f)actuality but within the sphere of possibility. The question concerning technology does not turn on the calamitous effects of resource depletion and pollution of the soil, sea, and air; nor does it turn on human standards of living. What devastation forecloses is the possibility of truth as such, not correspondence or adequation but the lived truth of unconcealment. Heidegger gives us to understand that unconcealment essentially "happens" (*ereignet*) in the coincidence of revealing *and* concealing. Therefore, truth and *total* revealing are mutually exclusive. And the tragic *nisus* toward full-disclosure can only lead to total concealment. This is what ultimately gives the lie to the idea that dwelling could ground itself by the measure of the understanding alone. But the essence of modern technology consists in a mode of revealing that covers over that heterostatic truth by "enframing" (*Gestell*) all beings into a standing-reserve or stockpile (*Bestand*) of constantly present and available resources, optimized to yield maximum producibility, calculability, and utility. It insidiously blinds us to the ecological difference between what is revealed in the world and what is self-concealed by the earth. In willfully asserting the power of the understanding over earth, we abjectly drive the conditions for shelter unto their terminal impossibility, obliterating the affordances for dwelling in the world. In this way, the devastation of the earth transpires not merely in strip-mining, but by stripping it of its share in the truth of being as it strips us of the ability experience that truth. In Heidegger's own words:

The threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more originary truth (BW 333/GA7 29).

The harrowing conclusion of Heidegger's critique, then, is not necessarily that the inexorable march of progress might leave us perpetually inauthentic or disembodied – as some recent commentators have suggested. Rather, the threat boils down to technology's parasitic impoverishment, and irrevocable overdetermination of how being is revealed. Devastation, then, is simply another name for the ecological tragedy of ecumenism. Long before our world careers toward environmental catastrophe, that tragedy has been playing out in our dwelling places.

What is at stake here is not merely the biological fate of our species – as if this were not enough. Nor is it merely our ability to psychologically adapt to that fate. Philosophically, the pivotal question is whether the world will continue to be gathered into difference with the earth or else continue to collapse into the ecological indifference of being.

### §13. Dwelling Authentically in the World

The old house I lived in, its red brick walls, its rooms of noble height and spaciousness, its old dark woods and floors that creaked, seemed to be living with the life of all its ninety years, and to be enriched and given a great and living silence, a profound, calm, and lonely dignity, by all the lives it had sheltered. The house was like a living presence all about me, and my sense of all these vanished lives would grow so strong that I seemed to live among them as their son and brother, and through them reach back into a living and unbroken past as real as all the life that passed about me.

—Thomas Wolfe, “The Train and the City”,<sup>37</sup>

Before we can move forward in our discussion, we must first clarify what we mean by ‘dwelling’, which is crucially not what Heidegger always meant. Despite their discrepant morphologies, the rich connection that the German word for dwelling bears to inhabiting and habituating holds true in English as well. Signally, the *OED* informs us that ‘habit’ originally meant ‘to dwell’ or ‘to sojourn’. ‘Inhabit’ places emphasis on the preposition ‘in’, hence on the ontological pre-position of being-in (*In-sein*). In *Being and Time* Heidegger draws from Grimm’s etymology of the German *in* by tracing it back to the Old High German *innan* (or *innian*). Like our cognate verb ‘inn’, *innan* presumably stems from the Latin *habitare* ‘to dwell’ (*wohnen* or *sich aufhalten*) in the sense of *domi esse* ‘being at home’ and *recipere in domum* ‘receiving into the house or home’. It also bears mention that *habitare* is cognate with *habituare* ‘to habituate or make familiar’. Bannon’s coupling of ‘dwelling’ (*wohnen*) and ‘habituating’ (*gewöhnen*) is based on their common derivation from this Latin paradigm. Next, Heidegger turns his attention from *in* to *sein*, linking the nominative singular *ich bin* (I am) to *bei*. This preposition, which originally connotes nearness or closeness, conveys a sense of unthematic proximity such as one finds between close friends. In this sense, *bei* figures into expressions we would typically

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Wolfe, *The Complete Short Stories of Thomas Wolfe* (New York: Scribner, 1987), 12.

translate with our words ‘at’, ‘near’, or ‘amidst’ (e.g. *bei sich zu Hause* ‘at one’s home’, or *bei sich Sein* ‘being at home with one’s self’) (SZ 54).<sup>38</sup>

(i) *Some Remarks on Heidegger’s Etymologies*

At this juncture, it will be helpful to pause for a moment to reflect on what we, after Heidegger, seek to gain from this foray into the etymologies of *wohnen* and ‘inhabit’. The analysis above involves a form of interlingual translation, whereby a word in one language is carried *over* (*trans-latus*, *Über-setzung*) into those of another, parent language by means of derivation. It would be mistaken to think that Heidegger thereby strives to *reduce* the meaning of these words to the dictionary definitions of their foreign etyma. Heidegger himself is quite emphatic on this point. Let us begin, then, by considering what he avowedly does *not* seek to gain through translation and, by extension, etymology:

A ‘dictionary’ [*Wörterbuch*] can give pointers as to how to understand a word, but it is never an absolute authority to which one is bound in advance. Appealing to a dictionary always remains only an appeal to one interpretation of a language, an interpretation that, in terms of its procedure and its limits, usually cannot be clearly grasped at all. . . . There is no such thing as translation if we mean that a word from one language could, or even should, be made to substitute as the equivalent of a word from another language (HHI 62/GA53 75).

When we look to the dictionary to determine the meaning of words, we uncover interpretations. Heidegger insists that “all translating must be an interpreting.” More precisely, we arrive at an *innerlingual* translation of an *experience* into the formal rubric of lexical definition.<sup>39</sup> While Heidegger acknowledges that this interpretation generally provides us with “correct information” about meanings, the upshot of the lines above is that this information “does not yet guarantee us any insight into the truth of what the word means and can mean” (HHI 61f./GA53 75). In other words, a dictionary does not fully capture the experiences its entries interpret – what he sometimes styles as the “spirit of language.” Regardless of their accuracy, lexical definitions and etymologies fall short of conveying how phenomena are manifested through a given word against the historical backdrop of being-in-the-world. This would appear to discredit the assumption, voiced in recent decades by scores of criticasters, that Heidegger is no more than a logogogue who falls victim to some version of the etymological fallacy: an evocation of the

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<sup>38</sup> Given that it connotes extrinsic or *partes extra partes* relations, the conventional translation of *bei* as ‘alongside’ is inconsistent with the unthematic, prejective relationality implied by Heidegger’s compound verbal noun *Sein-bei*. For this reason, we shall hereafter render *bei* as ‘amidst’ or ‘at’, and *Sein-bei* as ‘being-amidst’ or ‘being-at-(home)’.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. “It is said that ‘translating’ is the transposing of one language into another, of the foreign language into the mother tongue or vice versa. What we fail to recognize, however, is that we are also already constantly translating our own language, our native tongue, into its genuine word. To speak and to say is in itself a translation . . . In every dialogue and in every soliloquy an original translating holds sway” (Ps 12/GA54: 17).

former meanings of words and expressions leading to an unwarranted revocation of their latterday acceptance. Against that misconception, Jeff Malpas argues:

The common criticism of Heidegger's supposed reliance on dubious etymologies often seems to misunderstand the way in which what is often at issue here is not the attempt to find the 'real' meaning of words in their past histories, but rather to emphasize and pursue the multiple meanings that words may bear. It is thus a means to stimulate a way of thinking with language that is not restricted to the literal and yet is not simply metaphorical either. . . . when Heidegger rejects the metaphorical reading of certain expressions . . . it is not in order to insist on the purely literal (whatever that may be), but rather to force us to focus on the concrete matters before us, as well as to undercut the certainty of that distinction itself.<sup>40</sup>

Far from romanticizing the past or indiscriminately submitting to its authority, Heidegger's etymologies partake in and awaken us to the hermeneutic task traditionally consigned to the lexicographer. Our entry into this "way of thinking with language" is provided by the concrete medium of lived experience in all its historical richness and complexity. Etymology aims at translations that carry over an experience of the past by way of its inscription on the present. On this approach, the derivation of a word is not devised to recover a bygone web of signs, a domain of extension, or thematic intentions of utterance, but the ancestral tension between the familiar and the foreign.<sup>41</sup> By examining the familiar meaning of a given expression in our own language and investigating how that meaning emerged from older ones, foreign to our own or unfamiliar to the present age, we defamiliarize our language in ways that afford contrastive insights into lived experience. Thus does Heidegger see the ultimate task of the philosopher underway toward language as one of "preserving [*bewahren*] the force of the most *elemental* words" (SZ 220). Following him, then, it is an "originary translation" in the sense of an *elementary* interpretation of phenomena that shall serve as the *terminus ad quem* for our frequent etymological excursions, which are by no means incidental to our eco-phenomenological and ontological aims.

(ii) *The Elemental Instability of Dwelling Fundamentally*

Bearing in mind these proleptic remarks, we now ask: What is the originary translation evinced by Heidegger's etymology of 'wohnen' (inhabit)? Untethering this word from its familiar lexical meanings sets the stage for a parity that is apt to strike the modern ear as *outré*. Theoretically misattuned to being-in, we take it for granted that 'in' refers most concretely to containment in simple spatial location, one defined by such mensurable, isotropic coordinates as thematized by physics. For what could be more certain than the concepts and knowledge

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<sup>40</sup> Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2008), 36.

<sup>41</sup> As Heidegger puts it, "translation is an awakening, clarifying, and unfolding of one's own language by coming to grips [*Auseinandersetzung*] with the foreign language" (HHI 65f./GA53: 80).

furnished by what is reputedly the most basic and comprehensive scientific discipline? By sifting through the unspoken origins of language, Heidegger seeks to challenge this homological reduction by uncovering how the lived experience of being-in was regathered into saying prior to the conceptual sedimentation of modern science and metaphysics into the ossified definitions of ordinary language. Such is the purpose of his etymology of ‘wohnen’: not the attainment of apodictic knowledge but the extrication of knowing how to say and dwell from language.

In this etymology Heidegger finds support for the idea that the meaning of the conjunction of ‘being’ and ‘in’ is further conjoined with that of ‘dwelling’. What is thereby released is another sense of ‘being in’, at once less familiar and more concrete. An unthematic mode of in-volvement historically and ontologically prior to derivatively thematic residues of “in-ness” (e.g. the manner in which the brain is *in* the skull). Inscribed as ‘being-in’ and simultaneously intimating the *bei* of being-*at-home-in*, it is this lived, ontological meaning of in-ness that Heidegger has in mind when he identifies dwelling as “the basic character of Dasein” (PLT 213/GA7 193).

How exactly does the distinction between objective being-in-space and prejective being-in-place manifest itself in our experience? Once more, the etymology of ‘dwelling’ and ‘inhabiting’ offers a hint. The ability to in-habit or dwell-in a place is *intimately* bound up with habituation, with making it familiar (*gewohnt, habituate*) from a pre-position of inadvertent proximity or nearness. Such habituation is not a subjective operation by which an agent adapts to objective conditions in the world. It belongs to our prejective relationality, our congress with the world: acquired structures of sensation, perception, and comportment that condition the adaptation, indeed, the very possibility of the subject. It is this ubiquitous structure of preconscious sensorimotor capacities that Husserl identifies when he writes that “habit is the originary source of every bestowal of objective sense.”<sup>42</sup> We also find it in Dewey, who points out how “habits incorporate an environment within themselves.”<sup>43</sup> And another echo issues from Merleau-Ponty, who submits that “habit expresses the power we have of dilating our being-in-the-world or of altering our existence through incorporating new instruments” (PhP 145). To

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<sup>42</sup> “Natur und Geist,” (F I 32, 162a), translated in Rudolf Bernet, Iso Kern, and Eduard Marbach, *An Introduction to Husserlian Phenomenology*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press), 202f. Husserl is naturally referring here to the *passive* syntheses underpinning the active constitution of objective profiles and full-fledged objects.

<sup>43</sup> John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York: Cosimo, 1922), 32, 52.

habituate oneself to an instrument, which is never merely instrumental to be sure, is on his view to in-habit it, to  *dwell*  like the celebrated organist when he “settles into the organ as one settles into a house (PhP 146).”

Such habits foster familiarity that enables us to reside ecstatically in the things of a homeplace or workplace. This has less to do with theoretical or factual knowledge of how commodious these places are than it does with how commodious they are to our unthematic abilities, concerns, and projects. A coffin is no more familiar for being measured to our frame. And no amount of architectural planning can recreate the intimate propinquity of a house and the child it shelters through infirmity and convalescence, work and play, as together they weather the seasons. Such a place, a dwelling place or the ensemble of places we call world, belongs not to the order of calculation – the measure of dimensions or physical forces. It is ordered by our ability to affectively, skillfully, and creatively orient ourselves by it, within it, and through it. So that upon our return to that place we find it replete with things laid out in sympathy with the habitudes and attitudes of our body. We settle into the everyday world as the latest tenant in a long-cherished house that was built by others and is, as it ever was, cohabited. By moving around it circumspectly we get a sense of its layout and furnishings, of the import they carried and the purposes they served and for whom. We explore its rooms, peer out of its windows, try its doors and cabinets, its bath and toilet, retracing the routine movements of bygone inhabitants whose presence lingers on in every palmworn surface and sunken floorboard. Finally, we take our place beside the other lodgers in the kitchen while cooking, at the table over dinner, and in every quiet haven for conversation. Such inter-involvements instruct us in how these unfamiliar places, which we had no part in making, might nonetheless accommodate us. Not without having first explicated the furnished senses of the house may we begin to rearrange and remodel it into a homeplace of our own. Thus do we come to live in these common quarters, not merely as others do and have before but by dwelling with them as ourselves.

“Not only does a house mirror a body by its very structure,” writes Edward Casey, but “it is often functionally similar to the body, taking in dwellers, holding them in its interior, egress to them as well.”<sup>44</sup> So is the body also a mirror of its dwellings, suggesting a kind of double mirror, or  *mise en abyme* . As we have oriented ourselves to the house by virtue of its (sup)pliancy to our concerns, its structure has also left its impress on them and the adhesive dough of our habits.

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<sup>44</sup> Casey,  *Getting Back into Place* , 120.

From its entryways to its passageways and every built feature, fixture, and texture between, every house is haunted by the past. Especially those whose doors have opened onto generations. Like creaks beneath the floorboards of the present, their traces perdure. Such is the “unbroken past” that Wolfe finds quartered all about him, as though the “vanished lives” his timeworn rooms “had sheltered” were living still and each moment there a window on their world. Insofar as I am but the latest tenant of a place in which the physiognomy of these others lay doubled, it not only reflects and deflects but can even redirect my habitual ways of residing, reconfiguring each of the competencies that phenomenologists include in the schema of the lived body.<sup>45</sup> As we dwell in places, these places in-habit us. This no metaphor, but an originary translation of ‘dwelling’ and ‘inhabitation’, a reciprocity educed from the lived experience of being-in-place.

In his early writings, Heidegger routinely downplays the role of the affective conditions of dwelling just as he does the corporeal. In their stead he appeals as a rule to a disembodied understanding to account for Dasein’s ecstatic emplacement. As a result, the greater emphasis tends to fall on the *projective* dimension of existence at the expense of its thrownness. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, for instance, the ecstasy of existence is equated with the activity of “projection [whereby] Dasein has always already *stepped out beyond itself* [aus sich heraus getreten], ex-sistere, it is *in* a world” (BPP 170/GA 24 241f.). We stand out from ourselves as we step into the *locales* of the everyday world. For the early Heidegger, all of this takes place under the aegis of practical (self-)understanding. To wit, “the craftsman in his workshop . . . given over [*ausgegeben*] to his tools, materials, works . . . in short, that with which he concerns himself.” In doing so, says Heidegger, he “understands *himself* from [*aus*] his things,” from the things made available to him in that place (BPP 160/GA24 227).

We can accept that familiarity is requisite to dwelling. We can also accept that a place devoid of salience to one’s practical competencies would be all but uninhabitable, especially when we consider more basic abilities such as bodily posture, maneuverability, and locomotion. Yet the privilege accorded to the understanding in Heidegger’s work from the 1920s, together with his tendency to restrict its correlative projections to the operant intentionality of the operator, betoken a conception of being-in that leaves little room for the ecological difference.

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<sup>45</sup> This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as “habit memory” is famously conjured by Bachelard in reference to the house one is born and raised in. By habitually climbing its staircase and opening its doors, that original coupling is so “inscribed in us,” he observes, that we may return after many years of absence and still find it “faithful to” or arranged in sympathy with our abilities to inhabit it. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 14f.



On a cursory reading, *Being and Time* does after all seem to cast Dasein as essentially no more than a user at the control panels or producer at the bench, manipulating what has been placed before him by preformed skills in a world prescribed with its own standard operating procedures. It is an interpretation that would plague Heidegger as early as 1929. The *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* shows him seeking to discredit this reading by appealing to the distinction between methodological primacy and existential or ontological primacy. Here he stresses that *Being and Time* was an attempt to provide

a preliminary characterization of the phenomenon of world by interpreting the *way in which we proximally and for the most part [zunächst und zumeist] move about in our everyday world*. There I took my departure from what lies to hand in the everyday realm, from those things that we use and pursue. . . . It never occurred to me, however, to try and claim or prove with this interpretation that the essence of man consists in the fact that he knows how to handle knives and forks or use the tram” (FCM 177/GA29-30 263).

Heidegger is saying that the tool analysis featured in the Division One of *Being and Time* was never meant to yield the "primitive" (*primitiv*) or "originary" (*ursprünglich*) existential-ontological structures of Dasein, for these should not be conflated with how it exists in the world “proximally and for the most part.”<sup>46</sup> Here as in *Being and Time* this latter expression is intended precisely to signal Dasein’s inauthentic fallenness from those more originary determinations of its “essence.” The “course towards the idea of worldhood in general” proceeds by way of the “world of everyday Dasein which is closest to it,” that is, the *Umwelt* or circumambient world that is most familiar and readily available to our concerned involvement (BT 94/SZ 66). Emblematic of that *Umwelt* is the “work-world of the artisan” (SZ 117). But the lesson to be learned from Heidegger’s hermeneutics of suspicion is that what is mundanely closest to us is precisely what is most derivative from an existential-ontological perspective. Heidegger launches his interpretation from Dasein’s average-everyday understanding of itself and its world. But to draw from this the conclusion that Dasein is essentially *homo faber* and *Welt* a system of *Umwelten* is to forget the preliminary and provisional intent of his analysis. *Contra* commentators as well-reputed as John Sallis and as ill-reputed as Graham Harman – and others too numerous to inventory – Heidegger never claims that all beings are ready-to-hand, or in Harman’s verbiage, “tool-being.”<sup>47</sup> In fact, a close reading of the text reveals the suggestion

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<sup>46</sup> This insight is developed by Joseph P. Fell in his analysis of this passage in “The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger,” Dreyfus and Hall, eds., *Heidegger: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995), 66.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John Sallis, *Delimitations: Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995), 142. Hubert Dreyfus, “Heidegger’s History of the Being of Equipment, in Dreyfus and Hall eds., *Heidegger:*

already quoted in chapter 1. Namely, to the contrary, “perhaps even readiness-to-hand and equipment have nothing to contribute as ontological clues to interpreting the primitive [*primitiven*] world” correlated with the “understanding of being . . . constitutive of primitive Dasein” (SZ 82).<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that authentic *Selbstsein* contravenes its essence the moment it takes up its knife and fork at the dinner table or hammer and chisel in the work-world. The distinction between authentically owning up to the essence of our existence and inauthentically fleeing it is not a matter of *what* we do so much as *how* we do it. Nevertheless, we might wonder whether *Being and Time* actually supplies us with the resources for concretely distinguishing the labor of the entirely capable yet inauthentically fallen user-producer from the work of the existential hero, who wields his tools with authentic bravura. Being-in is ostensibly ecstatic for Heidegger from the outset. And this holds true for inauthentic self-effacement as it does for authentic self-projection. The problem arises when we consider how ekstasis exhibits the same structure in each case, illustrated by the forging homology between Dasein the world-builder and Dasein the craftsman. In both accounts Heidegger seems to give *existential-ontological* primacy to the understanding.

We can begin to clarify the issue by posing a couple of questions. Is authentic dwelling a heterological relation? Does it conserve the mutual difference, dynamism, and cohesion of being-there and being-elsewhere, affordance and resistance, mastery and mystery? Authentically or no, Dasein in-habits the world by competently transcending itself into things and places. But if it does so only to secure their availability to the *same* set of projects, abilities, and concerns, then what we have is not an ecstatic and heterostatic relation at all but an *enstatic* and *homeostatic* appropriation of the otherness of beings into the vortex of immanence encircling the self and its world. Otherwise put, insofar as being-in is being for the sake of extending and maintaining the outreach of the self-understanding, that ecstatic projection is bound to relapse into **retrojection**: a projection that secures enstasis against the “essential being away” that Heidegger ascribes to ex-sistence qua thrown.<sup>49</sup> And this holds true even if the understanding projects itself toward

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*A Critical Reader*, 174; Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2002), 4, 7, 15, 50. Harman’s assumption that Heidegger is expounding an “ontology of objects” or substance is so baseless and wide of the mark it is hardly worth taking seriously.

<sup>48</sup> Here I am indebted to Fell’s astute analysis, which invokes this line in defense of the view that Heidegger never intended readiness-to-hand to be an originary phenomenon. Fell, “The Familiar and the Strange,” 67.

<sup>49</sup> Heidegger encapsulates and defends this centrifugal inversion of the understanding’s centripetal ekstasis in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: “What is most proper to such activity and occurrence is what is expressed in

significance more fundamental than equipmental usability or utility. Does Heidegger really mean to say that dwelling amounts to no more than being at home with one's own self in the world? If so, then the fall into existential abjection is not only assured; it is inescapable. With nothing more to draw from than the repository of significance inherited from the historical world, reduced to a time-honored fund of worldly self-projections, there would be nothing to replenish the store of significance over what has been. To be sure, ever-new possibilities would lie at our disposal. But that for the sake of which we concern ourselves with and comport ourselves toward them would remain either arbitrary or else bound up in the same sense of being into which we were born. We would become *essentially* no more than operators, merely manipulating and rearranging the world as it was and is and ever will be. In domesticating the ecstasy of dwelling through retrojection, Heidegger would effectively replay the existential tragedy on the stage of *world history*. A tragedy enacted by those who flee from the outlandish into the familiar, dwelling as captives in the homeostatic horizons of the understanding. Of course, the problem is only amplified when we consider Heidegger's penchant for contracting enstasis even further, into the *human* understanding in its commerce with *its own* world.

From this immanent critique, it would seem to follow that the very possibility of the *existential difference* between authentic Self-being and inauthentic being-one's-self (*das Menschsein*) rests on a more elementary ekstasis, a hyper-ekstasis which conditions that very difference by deferring and differing enstasis, deferring and differing the absolute historical immanence of beings to the self-understanding-world correlation. Short of allowing for this originary openness, in which beings manifest themselves in their very recoil from projection, it is difficult to see how our understanding of ourselves and of the world could unfold and expand historically. What seems to be missing here is an account of how Dasein's canny abilities to habituate itself to beings by projecting (*entwerfen*) its possibilities onto them is engendered and reconfigured by an ability to respond to how it has been thrown (*geworfen*) into the earth-world. This would entail not merely how we have been thrown into the familiar yet uncanny condition of being at home, there, in a public world where everyone is the other and no one himself – an inauthentic condition remediated by the understanding. Rather, it would call for a response to

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the prefix 'pro-' [Ent-], namely that in projecting [Entwerfen], this occurrence of projection carries whoever is pro-jecting out and away from themselves in a certain way. It indeed removes them into whatever has been projected, *but it does not as it were deposit and abandon them there* – on the contrary: in this being removed by the projection, what occurs is precisely a peculiar *turning toward themselves on the part of whoever is projecting*" (FCM 363/GA29-30 527, emphasis mine).

how we have been thrown out of this world and up *against* the irremediable *Unheimlichkeit* of unworldly nature. Without such a response-ability, dwelling effectively devolves into nothing more than homeostatic subsistence, secured by an abject protective mimicry of all the willful forces that perpetuate the same world belonging to the same historical self. It betrays itself as ecologically abject in its forgetfulness of earth.

#### **§14. Outlandish Clues for Dwelling Other-wise in *Being and Time***

##### *(i) The Affective Atmosphere of the Dwelling Place: Resistance, Resignation, and the Outlandish*

Recalling once more the carpenter “given over [*ausgegeben*]” to the things of the workplace, we can begin to gather clues for how Heidegger might have approached this quandary as early as *Being and Time*. In §29, entitled “Being-there as Disposition,” he observes that “disposition is so far from being reflected upon, that it assails Dasein and does so precisely in its [Dasein’s] being unreflectively devoted and *given over* to the ‘world’ with which it is concerned [*Hin- und Ausgebensein an die besorgte ‘Welt’*]. A mood assails us.” (SZ 136, emphasis mine, trans. mod.).<sup>50</sup> A year later, in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, Heidegger will speak of a dimension of nature that manifests itself in the work-world as “what is already there before all producing . . . or of what offers *resistance* [*Widerstand*] to the formative process that produces things” (BPP 116/GA24 164, emphasis mine). Recall that he later associates resistance with the manifestation of the *earth*. Returning to *Being and Time*, we find resistance “encountered as a hindrance to willing” (SZ 210). Heidegger foregrounds how that encounter involves “being affected” (*Betroffenswerden*) in some way by “the unserviceable, resistant, or threatening character of that which is ready-to-hand,” hence the unreadiness-to-hand of that resistant nature which runs “*against*” and “*counter to*” our concerned comportment toward it (SZ 137, 254, emphasis mine). And he grounds that occasional condition on ontological disposition, through which matters come to matter before they affectively assail us in some way. Disposition “has already disclosed the world-as something by which it can be threatened, for instance” (SZ 137). In “coming across that which is inconvenient, disturbing, hindering, endangering, or in general resistant in some way,” he will go on to say that “concern resigns itself to it [*findet sich damit ab*]” – a vestige of *Befindlichkeit* (*sich befinden*) and perhaps

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<sup>50</sup> I have added the translation for *Ausgebensein* (elided by Macquarrie and Robinson) while omitting their extraneous addition, “and on which it [*Dasein*] expends itself,” of which there is no indication in the German.

an augury of the “*Ab-* [of *Abgrund*] as the complete absence of the [worldly] ground” (SZ 356; PLT 90/269). In this deferral of concern, one “lets [resistance] be encountered” in such a way as to expose Dasein’s “abandonment to a 'world' of which it never becomes master” (SZ 356). Could it be that in these texts there already opens a rift in which we encounter the earth of Heidegger’s mature writings? Could it be that resignation lends itself as an *elemental attunement*, one which comes over us when “concernful dealings fail to cope” with nature unready-to-hand, lets us be affected by its resistance, and gives us over to the elemental side of things (SZ 356)? Is there some connection between resignation and the sense he will later release from “releasement” (*Gelassenheit*)? And could it be that this elemental attunement invites exposures to the earthly measure of dwelling ecologically, response-ably, otherwise than by the measure of disclosure? In the section ahead, these guiding questions will lead us to recover some small measure of the earth from the ecumenical landscape of Heidegger’s early thought.

We may seize hold of things in the world without allowing for them to seize hold of us, without receiving them as they show themselves in their resistance to our concerns. When reclined *en pointe* by the lolling body in its lap, the most sturdy wooden chair is inclined to creak and groan. Should we be unresponsive, misattuned to how it resists, but persist instead to nourish our concern for sitting in comfort, it is only a matter of time before the chair will collapse and we with it. Thus is a habit broken. Thus are we unseated from the places wherein we dwell when our concern with their affordances and our to ability to project ourselves toward them are not tempered by an ability to be given over and respond to those aspects of things that inhibit our habitual ways of dwelling.

There was one crucial stone left unturned in our review of the etymology of dwelling. We mentioned that an archaic meaning of the word ‘habit’ – the semantic and morphological base for ‘inhabit’ and its cognates – was ‘to dwell’. What we didn’t mention was that ‘habit’ derives from the Latin *habitus*, past participle of *habere*, meaning (transitively) ‘to hold’ or (reflexively) ‘to be’. When one digs still deeper into history, one finds that *habere* stems from the Proto-Indo-European root *ghabh-*, which said ‘to hold’ but also ‘to give’ and ‘to receive’. We needn’t fall into the pitfalls of the etymological fallacy to appreciate how the very ingenuity of language might point us toward another sense of being-in released by ‘inhabit’. It suggests a way of bestowing a place with significance through being held therein, neither tightening our hold on ourselves nor on what is given through our own projective inertia, but by withholding ourselves,

resigning ourselves, and thereby receiving the sheltering hold of the earth. Dwelling so would be a giving that perpetually gives itself over to what can only be received through its own disruption and deferral. It would be to take hold of things near and ready-to-hand while remaining gripped by the enticing no-thingness that slips through our fingers.

Before turning back to *Being and Time*, allow me offer a preview of where we are headed. Heidegger's concept of dwelling from the 1930s onward owes much to his engagement with Hölderlin, from whom he draws the thought of the ecological difference. Following that engagement, Heidegger will come to rethink being-in-the-world as dwelling in the "locality" (*Ortschaft*) apotheosized by the rivers of Hölderlin's hymns, a place that "intimates the mysterious concealment of the intertwining relations toward the foreign [*Fremden*] and one's own [*Eigenen*]" (HHI 143/GA53 178). In his lecture course on "The Ister," he will now say that we dwell only by standing out from ourselves into that locality, and that that we reach our "homecoming" (*Heimischwerden*), thereby the "fundamental truth of history," only "in and through [a] journeying . . . into the foreign," the "non-habitual" (*ungewöhnlich*), and ultimately the *Unheimliche*, that which grounds the essence of human being as "not at home" (HHI 142, 31, 49, 68, 71/GA53 178, 36, 61, 83, 87). Put simply, dwelling is construed as a journey whose destination is not a home that keeps the *Fremd* or *Unheimliche* at bay, but one in which they flourish. Mining a parallel vein, Heidegger adds caution to his earlier claim from "Building Dwelling Thinking." In our "everyday experience," the earth remains "habitual" (the *Gewohnte*). Yet, "for this reason it recedes behind the manifold ways in which dwelling is accomplished" and the "real sense of . . . dwelling, falls into oblivion" (PLT 146/GA7 149). For the later Heidegger, then, dwelling becomes a heterological relation. It involves an understanding that maintains distance in proximity, strangeness in familiarity, and the slippage of the *uncanny* earth through all the canny ways we grasp the world.

Thus far, our analysis has advanced at a level of generality that has identified affective exposure as the hyper-ekstasis through which earth manifests itself *as* itself, resistant yet sheltering. But we have yet to specify the determinate affective character of that inexplicable manifestation. From early on, Heidegger couples the unfamiliar, extreme cases of disinvolvement, and concerned resignation all with *das Unheimliche*, conventionally rendered as 'the uncanny'. We shall occasionally adhere to that somewhat stilted convention, as we did just now in juxtaposing it with canniness (in the sense of being world-wise, or circumspect in worldly

matters). To a German speaker, however, *das Unheimliche* bears primary reference to ‘the home’ (*Heim*), thus to ‘not-being-at-home’ (*Nicht-zuhause-sein*) or even finding oneself ‘nowhere’ (SZ 188). In an effort to avoid such unwieldy formulations as ‘unhomely’ (*unheimlich*) and ‘not-at-homeness’ (*Unheimlichkeit*), I shall opt instead for the English ‘outlandish’. This word shares the illogical and undomesticated connotations of the German. It also points back to the connection Heidegger forges between land and the Latin *terra*: “that upon which construction, settlement, and installation are possible” – in contrast with *gē* in the ordinary sense (Ps 60/GA54 88f).<sup>51</sup> The outlandish, which signals the impossibility of these achievements, is a *subterranean* experience undergone in the very midst of our terrestrial situation. Following Heidegger, then, we shall use this term to designate the incursion of the foreign, alien, unsettling, unfamiliar, or extraordinary as experienced within the precincts of a dwelling place – or more generally the “homeland” (*Heimat*) in his idiomatic sense. Accordingly, in *Being and Time*, outlandishness is associated with the most unsettling forms of *Angst*. Bringing us face to face with the “‘nothing’ of the world’,” profound *Angst* is the fundamental mood in which “‘being-in enters” not merely the straits of existential abjection, but “the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘not-at-home’” (SZ 189).

For us, the oft-mentioned infrequency of the word ‘earth’ in *Being and Time* serves not only as an indicator of an incomplete ontology of nature but as yet another mark of the ecological tragedy. Nevertheless, the discerning reader will detect a way for dispelling this tragedy along the lines he would later pursue. The outlandish “‘nothing’ of the world’,” which shines forth in fundamental moods such as *Angst*, assumes in this text a peculiar allotrope of presence. Significantly for our purposes, Heidegger equates that absent-presence with nature in the ordinary sense. I would like to suggest that this interpretation cuts a trail. Ungraded and rugged but less cumbersome than is commonly supposed, that trail brings us to the foothills of an ecological understanding of nature as earth-world.

#### (ii) *Mundane Disclosures and Profound Exposures*

Once more we embark from *Befindlichkeit*. In §40 of *Being and Time* Heidegger reprises this affective ability-to-be as the fundamental way in which Dasein is disclosed. What follows is a brief summation of Dasein’s flight from the “outlandishness” (*Unheimlichkeit*) of the “not-at-home” (*Un-zuhause*) into “being-at-home” (*Zuhause-sein*) in the familiar precincts of publicness.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. footnote 30 above.

To this he adds a noteworthy remark. He suggests that outlandishness is somehow constitutive of Dasein, and not simply proximally and for the most part. Writes Heidegger: “From an existential-ontological point of view, the ‘not-at-home’ must be conceived as the more originary phenomenon” (SZ 189f.). Later, in §57, Heidegger sharpens the point by identifying the “outlandishness [that] reveals itself authentically in the fundamental disposition of *Angst* . . . as the most elementary [*elementarste*] way in which thrown Dasein is disclosed” (SZ 276, emphasis mine). Now, Heidegger is not altogether consistent on this point.<sup>52</sup> But in these lines he seems to be saying that not being-at-home, or outlandishness, is more than simply an epiphenomenon of our thrownness, proximally and for the most part, into the “everyday lostness in ‘*das Man*’” (inauthentic being-in). Rather, it is an *inescapable* condition that essentially belongs to Dasein’s existential-ontological structure (authentic being-in, care, timeliness).

In these sections Heidegger has it that outlandishness is disclosed through originary *Angst*: a *profound* or *elementary* sense of displacement and dispossession. This is set apart from the kind of *mundane* or “factual *Angst*” that “turns away” from the “‘not-at-home’ [that] gets ‘dimmed down’” as a result (SZ 189). When reinflected inauthentically as a misattunement to the world, which drives us toward fleeing it, *Angst* becomes just another “mood [in which] thrownness gets *closed off* [*verschließt*]” (SZ 276). Let us pick up a couple strands from a prior discussion. You will remember that *Angst* is characterized as a fundamental mood for its originary disclosure of the world-historical grounds of the understanding, which cannot uncover these grounds on its own. In Heidegger’s terms *Angst* reveals our thrownness. Most often, he equates thrownness with having been born into a familiar yet pasthaunted, hence outlandish, world already projected by one’s forebears. What makes the *public* world outlandish is that it is *not yet* our own. In being thrown into its “naked ‘that it is,’” Dasein finds itself in the world without salience to its existentiell self-understanding. Such is the “‘nothing’ of the world” at the level of interpretation where Dasein’s not-being-at-home boils down to not-being-at-home with its *self*. Existential abjection. But that is not to say it doesn’t eventually make itself at home and dwell there by donning the cloak of authenticity and refurbishing the world with self-projected

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<sup>52</sup> For instance, he had earlier equated the “the phenomenon of the world” with the “‘wherein’ of an act of understanding which assigns or refers itself,” adding that the world “wherein Dasein already understands itself in this way is always something with which it is originally familiar” (SZ 86). But as we shall consider directly, perhaps this can be reconciled with Heidegger’s allusions to nature in this text, a phenomenon that appears in the wherein of the world as a kind of originary presence, neither ready-to-hand nor present-at-hand for theoretical discovery.



significance. Even then, as we saw in chapter 1, the experience of mundane *Angst* is resolutely repeated in the steadfast retrieval of the outlandish truth it discloses.

On the other hand, when we “interpret Dasein’s outlandishness from an existential-ontological point of view,” we uncover a phenomenon “which reaches Dasein itself and which comes from Dasein itself” (SZ 189). On this deeper level of interpretation, it would appear that the most “authentic” self-achievements and home-furnishings of being-in-the-world would simply cloak the elementary truth that we are *essentially* neither at home with ourselves nor altogether in the world. *Angst* is later said by Heidegger to awaken us to the abyssal grounds of existence and to the world’s inhospitable vacancy. Is this conclusion not already foretold in the claim that “the disposition of mood” is the “fundamental happening of our Da-sein”? For this is not an assertion about what is chronologically prior or proximally and for the most part attainable. It means rather that our inauthentically *Angst*-ridden claims to squatters birthrights, as well as our *Angst*-defying pursuit of authentic *bei sich Sein*, cover over a more insidious strain of *Angst* that always already threatens to “bring one face to face with repeatability” of our thrownness (SZ 343). A condition of having been thrown into a dimension of being more profound than any dark hollow in which human being has ever dwelled. What we are exposed to at this subterranean register of attunement is not so much the unfamiliar settlements and sediments deposited in the world by the historical labor of projection. More profoundly, we are exposed to having been thrown into an incorrigibly outlandish condition that intimates the understanding’s *inherent* failure to penetrate the “‘nothing’ of the world” as a dimension intrinsic to being as such. Inducing a suspension of outbound intentionality so sweeping as to prise our grip from everything ready-to-hand, this *elemental* attunement to the outlandish keys us into the finitude of the understanding. It brings us face to face with the inexorable precarity and exile of dwelling in a world that is unfamiliar *by its very nature*, just as each of us is to herself. In this direction lies the evening redness of Cormac McCarthy’s world, teeming with all things wayward and wild. A world bewildered by things that entice our centered gaze and cajole our concern, only to veer awry and dissipate. Things that draw us out of ourselves, toward the undermost, othermost edges of experience, “like those vaporous beings in regions beyond right knowing where the eye wonders and the lip jerks and drools.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*, 55.

## §15. An Unsung Element of Heidegger's Early Ontology of Nature: The "Nothing" of the World as Originary Presence

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun.

–Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature,"<sup>54</sup>

On the rudest surface of English earth, there is seen the effect of centuries of civilization, so that you do not quite get at naked Nature anywhere. And then every point of beauty is so well known and has been described so much, that one must needs look through other people's eyes, and feel as if he were seeing a picture rather than a reality.

–Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Nature,"<sup>55</sup>

In a perspicuous essay, entitled "The Familiar and the Strange: On the Limits of Praxis in the Early Heidegger," Joseph P. Fell draws attention to how *Being and Time's* undeveloped treatment of to nature makes room for the essential outlandishness of ourselves and that of nature more "naked" than even Hawthorne did envision. "What is disclosed by anxiety," he suggests, "is one's having been thrown without ascertainable reason into the midst of a brute and meaningless nature," into "its sheer that-being in its utter otherness or strangeness."<sup>56</sup> Fell's interpretation is based on a handful of passages from *Being and Time* in which Heidegger hints at an originary or elementary way of being-present-at-hand (*Vorhandensein*), which has been overlooked by the keenest of scholars. It is a mode of being neither ready for circumspection nor derivatively present for detached inspection – much less for representation in the age of the "world-picture." Undisclosed and even concealed by these worldly attainments, but exposed by *Angst*, this presencing is characterized by Fell as "the original ground-possibility of both the presentness-at-hand of the theoretical object of science and the readiness-to-hand of the equipment of everyday praxis."<sup>57</sup> One cornerstone for his reconstruction of this widely disregarded nuance of Heidegger's early thought appears in the paragraph preceding the one just quoted in reference to the "repeatability" of our thrownness. While the word 'nature' finds no mention yet, Heidegger lays out a tripartite distinction he later applies to its ontological sense:

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<sup>54</sup> From Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, *Nature, Walking* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 7.

<sup>55</sup> "English Note-Books," in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1891), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Fell, "The Familiar and the Strange," 75, 77.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

*Angst* is anxious in the face of the “nothing” of the world; but this does not mean that in anxiety we experience something like the absence of what is present-at-hand within-the-world [*innerweltlichen Vorhandenen*]. The present-at-hand must be encountered in just *such* a way that it does *not* have *any* involvement *whatsoever*, but can show itself in an empty mercilessness. This implies, however, that our concerned awaiting finds nothing in terms of which it might be able to understand itself; it clutches at the “nothing” of the world (SZ 343).

We can detect three distinct modes of being in this account: (1) “what is present-at-hand within-the-world” (defined in §69b as the correlate of “theoretical discovery”); (2) what is concernfully involved as ready-to-hand; and (3) the presence-at-hand exposed by *Angst*, an ambiguous kind of presencing that absents itself from the world and begs the understanding.<sup>58</sup> It is this third, unworldly or outlandish dimension that informs Fell’s interpretation of the “originary sense” of nature in *Being and Time*.<sup>59</sup> This connection is already intimated by Heidegger’s allusion to a “mode of being” not captured by the “traditional signification” of “nature” and “belonging neither to the ready-to-hand nor to what is present-at-hand as ‘things of nature’ [*Naturdinglichkeit*]” (SZ 211). What he calls the ‘things of nature’ corresponds to what we mean by the “natural world”: a thematically objectified and theoretically conceptualized totality of beings. Thematically unstable, theoretically incomprehensible, and practically ungraspable, the presence-at-hand in 3 would withdraw into *utter* absence if it weren’t exposed by such moods as *Angst*. Fell finds strong support for this in an essay written shortly after *Being and Time*. Consider a footnote from “On the Essence of Ground” (1929), which begins on a cautionary note similar to the above-quoted caveat against conflating Dasein’s essence with the complete, de-anxietized, knife-wielding, train-hopping operator in the everyday *Umwelt*:

If we somehow equate the ontical system of useful things (of tools) with the world and explain being-in-the-world as traffic with useful things, we then abandon any understanding of transcendence as being-in-the-world in the sense of ‘a basic constitutive feature of Dasein’ (ER 81/GA9 155).

In the remainder of this swollen footnote, Heidegger proceeds to attribute the scarcity of ‘nature’ in *Being and Time* to a blindspot in its “analysis of the environment [*Umwelt*].” No more than a “*preliminary characterization* of the phenomenon of world,” that analysis was avowedly “subordinate” to the ontological problem of worldhood. As he explains:

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<sup>58</sup> Thus, pace Michael Zimmerman, it is not the case that *Being and Time* makes only one reference to “the possibility of a disclosure of entities that is neither instrumental (ready-to-hand) nor objectifying (present-at-hand)” Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990), 154. Cf. BT 100/SZ 70, quoted below. All the same, Zimmerman should be credited as being one of the leading exponents of the view that Heidegger *never* defended anything like a pragmatist, instrumentalist, or “productivist” ontology.

<sup>59</sup> Fell, “The Familiar and the Strange,” 70.

There are reasons why the concept ‘nature’ seems to be missing in the Analytic of Dasein – not only ‘nature’ as the object of natural science but also ‘nature’ in a more originary sense . . . The decisive reason is that we encounter nature neither within the compass of the environment [*Umwelt*] nor even primarily [*primär*] as something *to which we comport* ourselves [*wozu wir uns verhalten*]. Nature is originally manifest in Dasein because Dasein exists as affected-attuned [*befindlich-gestimmtes*] *in the midst* of beings. But only insofar as disposition (thrownness) belongs to the essence of Dasein . . . can we attain the *basis* for the problem of nature (ER 81-3/GA9 155, trans. mod.).<sup>60</sup>

If Dasein directs itself toward the everyday *Umwelt* primarily through its practical understanding, nature (in the originary sense) manifests itself “in Dasein” when that holistic layout of significance is radically ruptured and the understanding disrupted, leaving Dasein utterly disinvolved. In that moment of suspense, certain attunements can allow for beings to manifest themselves in a way that precedes our practical and intellectual understanding of them. Thus does elemental *Angst* expose us to the outlandish elements of beings, to no-things that are nonetheless present-at-hand *as* undisclosable. Such is this originary sense in which ‘nature’ announces the “‘nothing’ of the world” in *Being and Time*, prefiguring the “earth” in Heidegger’s later writings. Earthly nature manifests itself to the understanding as a privative phenomenon, a periphenomenal ab-sense or *hyperstasis*. Along these lines, §31 of *Being and Time* shows Heidegger struggling to articulate a mode of being “*resistant* to sense” or “absurd” (*widersinnig*) if not “essentially devoid of sense” or “nonsensical” (*unsinniges*) (SZ 152, emphasis mine). Adopting language strikingly similar to how disposition and mood “assailed” us in §29, he goes on to expressly associate this range of phenomena with nature. In his words, “the present-at-hand, as Dasein encounters it, can, as it were, *assault* Dasein’s being; *natural events* [*Naturereignisse*], for instance, can break in upon us and destroy us” (SZ 152, emphasis mine). In other words, it is precisely in being delivered over to nature by moods that we are seized by the elements themselves, stirred or stricken by nature’s outlandishness, its absurdity.

Because he approaches it primarily through the disengaged arrest of profound *Angst*, Heidegger typically depicts unworldly nature as utterly insignificant. Such is nature in its “empty mercilessness.” An inhospitable and destructive presence. But there are also points where he appears to carve out a space for another possibility. On these occasions, we glean an inkling of the earth as generative ground and shelter, embedding beings with inceptive traces of sense as it “bears” and “preserves.” In the *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, for example, he contrasts the being of nature with “*historical* beings – historical in the broader sense of world-historical.” Nature, he stresses, can only manifest itself in intraworldly beings. “But for all that,

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 67.

*intra-worldliness does not belong to nature's being*" in the way that it belongs to world-historical beings, described here as "all the things that the human being . . . creates, shapes, and cultivates: all his culture and works." These observations apparently add temporal depth to nature only to sequester it from that of the world. But Heidegger goes on to qualify this, adding that we would never be able to comport ourselves toward nature or make factual discoveries about it at all were intra-worldliness not a "*possible* determination" of its being (BPP 169/GA24 240). As Fell points out, "the disclosure of beings in anxiety as *not* dependent on the world for their being" is just what enables Heidegger to maintain the "basic distinction between historical (including artifactual and equipmental) beings and natural beings."<sup>61</sup> That is to say, between beings whose presence depends on Dasein's projection of their significance and those whose presence does not. Moreover, to the degree that *Angst* becomes an occasion not only for owning up to having been thrown into the world (Dasein-dependent facticity, history) *but also* for having been born into unworldly nature (Dasein-independent facticity, allohistory), this fundamental mood gets reinflected. Not as resolve to be sure, but as something like *resignation* in the sense described above. In this way, we come into an elemental attunement to hyperstasis and *genostasis*. To the generative traces of an irrecoverable past. Accordingly, Fell describes how profound moods may foster exposures to "the limit imposed on praxis by the sheer contingency of nature *and* the possibility afforded to praxis by the opening for meaning [and/or what we have been calling significance]."<sup>62</sup> To be "assaulted" by originary nature is to be "assailed" by *Angst*. If we relent from willful persistence in meeting "hindrances to willing" and instead resign ourselves to them, this nature can also "stir and strive" through us as no mere human contrivance can.

These last words are gleaned from what has become the *locus classicus* in the debate over Heidegger's early ontology of nature. Because it has given rise to competing interpretations – being used as grist for mills rendering Heidegger into such varied sheaves of prepackaged -isms as pragmatism, instrumentalism, romanticism, and humanism – it will be worthwhile to interlard this passage from *Being and Time* with parenthetical indicators of the three modes of being introduced at the beginning of this section.<sup>63</sup> Namely, the tripartite distinction between: (1)

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 75-7, emphasis mine.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. Dreyfus reads this passage through the later Heidegger as a paradigmatic case of the ordering or enframing (*Gestell*) of nature into a standing-reserve, or stockpile of resources. Thus does he adduce it in support of the

thematic or theoretically-given presence-at-hand; (2) unthematic readiness-to-hand given to circumspection; and (3) unthematic presence-at-hand, or the originary sense of ‘nature’ to which elemental attunements give us over. Having arrived at the phenomenon of nature from his *preliminary* analysis of *Welt* as *Umwelt*, Heidegger has just adumbrated nature *via negativa*. As we encounter them in our environment, natural (aspects of) beings are simply those, which “in themselves, do not need to be produced,” e.g. raw materials (e.g. “mineral,” “wood”) such as “we find in natural products” (e.g. “hammer, tongs, and needle”). Were this his final word on the matter, Heidegger’s analysis would be cast in a dubious if not *devastating* light by his later writings, most notably those which declaim against the technological ordering of nature into a stockpile of raw material resources. But in the very next paragraph, Heidegger develops his analysis of ‘nature’ in ways more substantive and generatively ambiguous:

“Nature” is not to be understood as that which is just present-at-hand [1], nor as the *power of Nature* [2]. The wood is a forest of timber, the mountain a quarry of rock; the river is water-power, the wind is wind ‘in the sails’ [2]. As the ‘environment’ [*Umwelt*] is discovered, the ‘nature’ thus discovered is encountered too. If its mode of being as ready-to-hand [2] is disregarded, this ‘nature’ itself can be discovered and defined simply in its pure presence-at-hand [1]. But when this happens, the nature [3] which ‘stirs and strives’, which assails [*überfällt*] us and enthalls [or arrests] us as landscape, remains hidden. The botanist’s plants [1] are not the flowers of the hedgerow [3]; the ‘source’ which the geographer establishes for a river [1] is not the ‘springhead in the dale’ [3] (SZ 70, translation slightly modified).

In each instance, 1 and 2 refer to worldly manifestations, modes of being that are Dasein-dependent in the sense sketched out above. Yet Heidegger begins with the suggestion that the sense of ‘nature’ he is about to describe outstrips that of 1 and 2. In the originary sense (3), the nature of wood does *not* manifest itself as a “forest of timber” ready-to-hand for the logger, nor does the nature (3) of a flower manifest itself as a botanical phenomenon for the scientific observer (e.g. as a cytological structure or taxonomic class). We mustn’t be misled here by the expression “pure presence-at-hand” (*puren Vorhandenheit*), which should not be mistaken for originary presence.<sup>64</sup> This is confirmed by the detail that “pure presence-at-hand” is “discovered and defined,” and that some third aspect of nature “remains hidden” from these theoretical disclosures of it, hence the pair of contrasts in the final sentence.

According to Heidegger, the hidden dimension of nature (3) manifests itself when we are “assailed” by a mood that unleashes the outlandish aspects of beings, drawing us out of our own

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conclusion that “*Being and Time* was itself a formulation of the penultimate stage of technology” (174). Hubert Dreyfus, “The History of the Being of Equipment,” in Dreyfus and Hall ed., *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, 173-185.

<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere in *Being and Time*, Heidegger links “pure presence-at-hand” with the metaphysical concept of *ousia* and with the “making-present” of beings (SZ 25f.), which is *derivative* of readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*) (SZ 72).

striving to make sense of the world in terms of 1 and 2. This unworldly dimension either: (a) “enthalls” or “arrests” us by its mercilessness resistance and absurdity; or else it (b) “stirs” us, with incipient senses that cannot be discovered or utilized, and “strives” through us by redirecting the eye and guiding the hand toward the possibility of new or renascent ways of building, dwelling, and thinking, which these senses trace out. In the first case (a), we are enthralled, literally “taken captive” (*gefangen nimmt*). But this is crucially not the sort of existentially misattuned captivation that accompanies one’s fallen absorption in everyday concerns, let alone a curious distraction with familiar ephemera. It refers instead to how, in *Angst*, “Dasein is taken back to its naked outlandishness, and becomes captivated [*benommen*] by it” (BT 394/SZ 344). The state of suspended animation and “bewildered rest” induced by elementary *Angst* is attended by a mood of *elementary captivation*. What of the second case (b)? In order for nature to “stir and strive” through us, we must make an allowance for it. Here is where something like resignation enters the picture, reinflecting *Angst* in a way that restores the projective movement of existence. Rather than resolutely cleaving to our own concerns in the face of natural resistance to them, we resign them to nature. So that it comes to work through us in words, works, and thoughts that are fertilized by its arable mystery.

“Stirs and strives.” These tropes, died in the unmistakable hues of German Romanticism, presage Heidegger’s radical rethinking of nature, refracted through the prism of Hölderlin’s poetry. In the early 1940s, Heidegger will resume the discussion about the “source” of the river unseen by the geographer and unreckoned by her measure, pointing out that in Hölderlin’s hymns “the essence of the rivers cannot at all be identified and made visible geographically.” They can “be experienced only from out of the poetic dwelling of human beings” (HHI 166/GA53 205). Following this decisive ecological turn in Heidegger’s thinking, the poetic is thought to take its measure neither from the understanding nor from the worlds it erects, but from the “inconspicuous law of the earth,” the contravention of which spells impossibility for the world (EP 110/GA7 96). Cast in this light, he tells us, “the poetic erects the essence of dwelling.” Dwelling *in* a world *of* the earth. In this it furnishes an emergent and most urgent countermeasure to the “excess of frantic measuring and calculating” that has come to define the age of worldly machination and earthly devastation (PLT 225f./GA7 206f., trans. mod.).

## §16. Dwelling Ecologically

He feels the great restfulness of that place, its casual perfect order. It is the restfulness of a place where the merest or the most improbable accident is made a necessity and part of a design, where death can only give into life. And Mat feels the difference between that restful order and his own constant struggle to maintain and regulate his clearings. Although the meanings of those clearings and his devotion to them remain firm in his mind, he knows without sorrow that they will end, the order he has made and kept in them will be overthrown, the effortless order of wilderness will return.

The leaves brightly falling all around him, Mat comes into the presence of the place. It lies clearly and simply before him, radiant as though a light in the ground has become visible. He has come into a wakefulness as quiet as sleep.

–Wendell Berry, *A Place on Earth*<sup>65</sup>

### (i) *Dwelling as the Poet Says*

What does Heidegger mean by “poetic dwelling”? Famously, he derives the title of his 1951 lecture from these lines of Hölderlin’s hymn *Der Ister*: “Full of merit, yet also poetically, man / Dwells on this earth” (PLT 214/GA7 196).<sup>66</sup> In our previous discussion we saw how Heidegger’s works from the 1920s cast dwelling ontologically as being-in, which is always being-in-the-world. Beginning in the mid-1930s, when dwelling gets recast poetically, it comes to bear a no less essential relation to the earth. To understand what this relation amounts to, we must first ascertain how it is for Heidegger that the poetic involves a way of being-in-the-world more encompassing than the composition of line and verse. In his first lecture course on Hölderlin from 1934-5, he approaches poetry as a way of thinking that arrives at a clearing of insight less by conceptual routes, or the less-traveled paths of the philosopher, than by listening to and being guided toward saying through *mood* or *attunement*. In a lecture on the hymn to “Germania,” Heidegger resounds this theme by pondering the origins of poetic saying. His remarks harken back to how “earth, ground; in short nature first bears, preserves and threatens us” (LQ 130/GA38 152) through the affective permeation of our standpoint in the world:

The voice [*Stimme*] of the saying [*Sagen*] must be attuned [*gestimmt*], that the poet speaks from out of a mood [*Stimmung*], a mood that determines and disposes [or tunes, *be-stimmt*] the ground [*Grund*] and soil and permeates [*durchstimmt*] the space upon which and within which poetic saying founds a way of being. This mood we name the fundamental mood of poetizing (HHGR 73/GA39 79).<sup>67</sup>

Later on in the lectures Heidegger limns the elemental shape of this mood:

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<sup>65</sup> Wendell Berry, *A Place on Earth* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2001), 317.

<sup>66</sup> “...Poetically Man Dwells...” (“Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch, wohnt Der Mensch auf dieser Erde”). See: HHI 137/GA53 171. Cf. Friedrich Hölderlin, *Samtliche Werke, Kritische Textausgabe* (Darmstadt Luchterhand Verlag, 1984), 9:26.

<sup>67</sup> Translations lightly modified. Note, that McNeill and Ireland translate *Stimmung* as ‘attunement’, which we reserve for *Gestimmtheit* (used by Heidegger as though interchangeable with *Stimmung*).



The fundamental mood is accordingly a transporting . . . *into* the earth. In attuning in this manner, it opens up beings as such in general, and this opening up of the manifestation of beings is indeed so originary that, by virtue of the mood, we remain inserted into and bound into beings as opened up (HHGR 124/GA39 140).

If the early Heidegger tends to assert the primacy of understanding, dwelling poetically shifts that primacy toward affectivity. In his later thought, *Grundstimmung* is first on the scene to “set the tone” and so “determine” (*bestimmen*) the “ground” (*Grund*) for each inceptive epoch in the history of being. According to him, several such moods are gathered into saying by the poet – *inter alia* mourning, abandonment, longing, and mindful courage. At bottom, all imply an attunement to the outlandish nature without and its foreignness within. So that if Shelley, in his “Defense of Poetry,” would have us see that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” Heidegger would say that their governance rests at bottom on their acknowledgement of “ground and soil,” hence the “inconspicuous law of the earth.” No longer does Heidegger present the understanding as an ecstatically transcendent activity (projection) that culminates in the enstatic re-enclosure (retrojection) of beings into the immanence of the self, the outreach of the will, or the self-willed destiny of a world-historical people. For poetic attunements ground an age by deferring the understanding and deterring disclosure. The redress to ecumenism they afford lies in a hyper-ekstasis that counters ecologically abject dyspositions and forestalls enstatic closure by affectively transposing us into things and binding or holding us there, away from ourselves. As such, they reveal themselves as elemental attunements: departures that postpone all homecoming, the return to the self or one’s own, while *deferring* and *differing* that destination. If Novalis tells us that “philosophy is really homesickness,” an “urge to be at home everywhere,” then poetic dwelling would abide in the indefinite, the insatiate prolongation of that urge.

Writings from this period lend much support to this interpretation. In the same lectures on Hölderlin, Heidegger points out that we dwell poetically in the “homeland” (*Heimat*) – not as a mere birthplace, nor as a mere landscape familiar to us,” but as “precisely that which attunes us” to “*the power of the earth.*” This “power” affectively overpowers us. And it is only a “homeland,” so conceived, that “human being first experiences himself as *belonging* to the earth” even as it cannot belong to him (HHGR 80/GA39 88, emphasis mine). The ability to open and hold open this exposure to being-of-the-earth rests on several newly articulated features of our being-in. Regarding the *where* of poetic dwelling, Heidegger claims that is by “standing at the *threshold* of the homeland” that moods such as “longing can range into the foreign and remote” (HHGR 155/GA39 170, emphasis mine). The “mysterious concealment of the

intertwining relations toward the foreign and one's own" are remotely intimated from without, on the margins, at the outermost horizons of the world where the understanding is disrupted, displaced, placed in question by the otherness of being. Dwelling poetically means being *of* these outlands and hinterlands of the homeland, where earth and world each carries the other beyond itself and everyone beyond herself. The *how* of poetic dwelling, its ability-to-be, consists precisely in a response-ability that maintains this condition of suspense through a measured coordination of understanding and attunement. Like Mat at the edge of the clearing in Wendell Berry's story, who "comes into a wakefulness as quiet as sleep," this is not inert arrest so much as a tensed restraint.

(ii) *Dwelling Is as Waiting Does*

During his lectures on "The Ister," after emphasizing that the essence of dwelling amounts to more than the practical and technical "possession of accommodation and housing," Heidegger describes the ecological response-ability of the poet as a way of *Verweilen*, a word commonly rendered as 'lingering,' 'whiling,' or 'abiding,' as one does at angles of repose:

Dwelling takes on an abode [*Aufenthalt*], specifically that of human beings upon this earth. The abode is an abiding [*Verweilen*]. It needs a while [*der Weile*]. In such a while human beings find rest [*die Ruhe*]. Yet rest here does not mean the cessation of activity or the stagnation of disturbance [*Fortfall der Störung*]. Rest is grounded upon repose [*Beruhigen*] in the steadfastness of one's own essence (HHI 20/GA53 23, translation slightly modified).<sup>68</sup>

Heidegger will introduce another name for this "abiding" a couple years later. In the *Country Path Conversations* (1944-5) he calls it "waiting" (*Warten*), a comportmental deferral that not only lets human beings rest, but things as well, all within that "restfulness of place" poetized by Berry. Recall that understanding, as projection, constitutes the futural thrust of existence. Waiting stalls that activity in a way that prevents the not-yet from being overdetermined as the not-yet-understood. In contradistinction to "awaiting" or "expecting" (*Erwarten*), "waiting has, properly speaking, no object" – neither object of representation nor object of intention. "In waiting," says Heidegger, "we *leave open* that upon which we wait" (CPC 79/GA77 115f., emphasis mine). Dwelling as waiting means biding one's time at the edge of place. It is a matter of allowing our moods to hold sway in an open, receptive way. A matter of being-in by being directed by no-thing in particular as opposed to always converting that allowance into object-oriented accomplishments – objectivating perceptions as well as goal-directed behaviors. As

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<sup>68</sup> *Verweilen* is formed from *weil*, which once meant 'while' or 'during'.

Heidegger puts it, “the ability to wait surpasses all achieving and its accomplishments”; it “transcends all force of action [*Tatkraft*]” (CPC 147/GA77 227, trans. mod.). In this respect, waiting could not be further from expecting. Fundamentally geared toward actions and perceptual acts, expecting fore-closes phenomena into one’s own intentions. When we are attuned to only those phenomena underway toward being understood, our expectations agitate the repose of waiting. As a *modus vivendi*, expectant being-in-the-world betrays itself to us as nothing so much as the wide-open throttled engine that powers the perpetual busyness and business of all the multi-tasking administrators and opportunistic admen of the corporate spaces at the empty heart of the anthropocene. Public delegates and their subordinates, and rattlepates of every stripe, who hurry while they wait for that next appointment to arrive. In Heidegger’s words:

The human chases things around in an unrest that is foreign to them by making them into mere resources for his needs and items in his calculations, and into mere opportunities for advancing and maintaining his manipulations (CPC 149/GA77 229).

To practice dwelling as waiting is to defer all this. It is to let beings rest as indeterminate enticements, affective correlates lingering in the outlandish rifts of our local and temporal horizons.<sup>69</sup> It is to be delivered over to the sheer that-being of nature and to release its mode of presencing from the will to know and master it. “To will to take hold of pure waiting in haste,” quips Heidegger, “would be like trying to scoop water with a sieve” (CPC 143/GA77 221).

What then of things on which we dwell while drifting through waiting? “Instead of pouncing upon it as an object with explanations of physics,” or equipment with assignments conducive to our concerns, Heidegger explains that we let something rest when we “wait upon its thingly essence [*Dingwesen*]” (CPC 186/GA77 213). As we discovered above, the essence of a thing consists not only in what we reveal of it (its worldliness) but in what is concealed by revealing (its earthliness or elementality). As we stand out from ourselves through ecstatic projection, beings stand out from our explicated horizons as inexplicable, intimating the elsewhere of our being-there, our being-in. Waiting upon a thing’s essence, then, entails a revealing that would not attempt to antecedently determine what is to be revealed or how, let alone pursue the abject project of full-disclosure. Instead, it would be a praxis that takes its measure from an attunement to the elemental side of things and continues to nourish that

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<sup>69</sup> As Heidegger elaborates, “in the open-region cleared by waiting things lose their character of objects, or rather never acquired this character in the first place” (CPC 81/GA77 125)

exposure in the process of revealing. In this way, waiting entails a response-ability, a coordination of the understanding's activity and the passivity of being-disposed, -attuned and -exposed, which generates responses to the ecological difference of every thing.

(iii) *Dwelling by Conserving the Earth*

In an essay entitled “Praxis and *Gelassenheit*,” Andrew Mitchell notes that Heidegger elsewhere positions this way of being-in-the-world against the “challenging-forth” (*Herausfordern*) exhibited by the technological enframing of being, which begins as a willful misattunement to the earth. In a reversal of his earlier position, Heidegger professes that “it is first the will, which arranges itself everywhere in technology that devours the earth in the exhaustion and consumption and change of what is artificial” (EP 109/GA7 96). By first opening this technological clearing – a totalizing framework for maximally extracting, mastering, processing, and consuming beings – this ecological dysposition places one “unreasonable demand” after another on nature (QCT 14/GA7 15).<sup>70</sup> As Mitchell explains, challenging-forth essentially boils down to the “demand that nature reveal itself to us as ‘purely present’, without remainder.”<sup>71</sup> Heidegger’s juxtaposition of the way the farmer once cultivated his fields and the challenging-forth of twentieth-century mass-mechanized agribusiness is illustrative:

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [bestellte] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to *take care of and to maintain*. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order [*Bestellens*], which sets upon [*stellt*] nature. It sets *upon* it in the sense of challenging it forth [*Herausforderung*]. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon [*gestellt*] to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use.

This setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature is an expediting *demand* [*Fördern*], and *in two ways*. It expedites in that it discloses and sets-forth [*erschließt und herausstellt*]. Yet that expediting demand is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense (QCT 14-15/GA7 15-16, trans. mod., emphasis mine).

Heidegger considers another case in point: coal. In being mined from the earth and stockpiled, coal is directed toward supplying energy, which powers the factory farms, machinery, and transport involved in agricultural mass-production together with the labor force itself, which

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. “The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging-forth [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such” (QCT 14/GA7 15).

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Mitchell, “Praxis and *Gelassenheit*,” in François Raffoul and David Pettigrew, eds., *Heidegger and Practical Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). p. 327. Mitchell is quoting from Heidegger’s 1949 Bremen Lecture “Das Ge-Stell” (GA79 25). Note the contrast between what Heidegger calls “pure” presence-at-hand and originary presence-at-hand (cf. §15).

relies on both industries to stockpile food for the sake of sustaining productivity, and so on in an endless, self-perpetuating cycle of production. Heidegger's observations are almost trite today, over sixty years after these lines were written, but in 1953 they were astute, prescient. In his timely commentary on them, Bannon extends the contrast between caretaking and devastating:

Certainly the [traditional] work of the farmer orders (*bestellt*) the land, but the farmer does not ask the land to do anything outside its cycles of growth and rest. Within a disclosing of beings that is characterized by challenging, however, the farmer's ordering of the land takes on a new aspect. The land is no longer that *with* which the farmer works, but that *upon* which the farmer works, applying the latest machinery, GMO crops, and chemical or organic pesticides in order to *maximize* the yield, in order not to *waste* any of the land's potential. The demand to maximize and not to waste any latent potential in the land is a *challenge* to the earth; the modern farmer pushes the earth to its limits and possibly beyond. . . . What has changed is the way in which the farmer relates to the earth and thereby is able to demand more and more of it.<sup>72</sup>

The line that is being drawn here is less between the actual practices involved – planting, tilling, harvesting, etc. – than it is between the (im)possibilities they are projected from on the basis of two different understandings of being. To distinguish the productivist understanding that fuels the world of modern technoscience and challenges the earth, Heidegger introduces the concept “machination” (*Machenschaft*) – a word he links to *machen* (making) and *Macht* (power). As he defines it, “machination means the accordance of everything with producibility [*Machsamkeit*] . . . as an ongoing annihilation . . . empowered by coercive force [*Gewalt*]” (M 12/GA 66 16). Its intellectual manifestations in metaphysics and calculative rationality, as well as its practical manifestations in technology and political economy, converge in machination's drive toward attaining “complete security against all uncertainty” (CP 159/GA65 203). It inaugurates an “epoch of unconditional organization” wherein “the ‘organic’” and “the ‘living’” collapse into the “‘mechanical’ in the broad sense of the plannable-makable” (M 154/GA66 154). In this framework machination “directs everything toward calculation, utility, breeding, manageability, and regulation” through “impelling all the forces capable of power and of transforming power . . . into self-overpowering.” As a result, says Heidegger, “purpose is leveled off as means” and “goals become superfluous” (CP 98/GA65 124; M 13, 17/GA66 17, 22).

In “The Principle of Identity,” Heidegger observes how relating to nature in this way, reducing it to a standing-reserve (*Bestand*) of resources for willful manipulation and exploitation, challenges us *as well*. Existence becomes a human resource (*Personal-bestand*), “forced to secure all beings that are his concern as the substance for his planning and calculating; and to

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<sup>72</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 61, emphasis mine.

carry this manipulation on beyond all bounds” (ID 34-35/GA11 43f.).<sup>73</sup> Turning back to the *Country Path Conversations*, we find one interlocutor refining our picture of the man who hasn’t time enough to wait in his rush to secure the “resources for his needs and items in his calculations.” At which point, a second speaker interjects to complete the thought:

By not letting things be in their restful repose, but rather – infatuated by his progress [*Fortschritt*] – stepping over and stepping away from them [*über sie weg-schreitet*] – the human becomes the pacesetter [*Schrittmacher*] of the devastation [*Verwüstung*], which has for a long time now become the tumultuous confusion of the world (CPC 149/GA77 229).

Heidegger is naturally referring to the devastation of the earth. In taking the measure of what can be and what can matter about it solely from the understanding and forging ahead in the name of technoscientific progress, grand unified theories, and maximum homeland security, human being deserts the ecological essence of things, the ecology of existence, and precipitates the desertification (*ver-Wüsten*) of nature. “Where there is peril, deliverance [*das Rettende*] too gains in strength.” So reads the exhortation first issued by Hölderlin and preserved in Heidegger’s celebrated essay on technology (QCT 42/GA7 29).<sup>74</sup> What recourse, pray, might dwelling as waiting possibly hold for averting the ecological tragedy and halting the invisible hand of natural devastation? Toward the end of his essay, Mitchell offers a clue:

The thing challenged forth – a piece of the standing-reserve (*Bestand*) – is purely present and thus *in excess* of itself. The *letting things rest* that is practiced in dwelling returns these things to their proper *measure*, limits their unconcealment, and lets them abide as things. Dwelling attends to this limit between concealment and *shelters* it.<sup>75</sup>

Earlier we explained how earth shelters the world by placing a limit on the possibility of full-disclosure as total re-enclosure. On Mitchell’s reading, for dwelling to refrain from challenging-forth, it must be responsive to this limit in a way that shelters *it* and thereby allows earth to shelter us. Therein lies the vocation of the *caretaker*. In the 1930s Heidegger had adopted the term *Bergung* (‘sheltering’ or ‘salvage’) for our careful reciprocity with the earth. And in the *Contributions* he redescribes it, just so, as a kind of “care-taking” (*Be-sorgung*), a praxis that “properly safeguards the cleared-hidden [*das Gelichtet-Verborgene verwahrt*]” in its “being-taken-back to the self-closing earth.” “Safeguarding,” he explains, means “allowing beings *to be*

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<sup>73</sup> Elsewhere, Heidegger qualifies this somewhat as follows: “Yet precisely because man is challenged more originally than are the energies of nature, i.e., into the process of ordering, he is never transformed into mere standing-reserve. Since man drives technology forward, he takes part in ordering as a way of revealing.” (QCT 18/GA7 18). This modern technological contraction of our way of revealing was elaborated in §12 above.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. “Patmos” in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Gedichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003), 88. Cf. *Friedrich Hölderlin Poems and Fragments*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press), 462f.

<sup>75</sup> Andrew Mitchell, “Praxis and *Gelassenheit*,” 328, emphasis mine.

. . . *as* the beings they are and can be in the truth of not yet thematized being.” And this may be done any arena, be it through “the creation of works, state-building deeds, and thoughtful sacrifice” or “in encountering the lifeless and the living: stone, plant, animal, human” (CP 57/GA65 71, trans. mod.). In later works Heidegger’s subsumes these careful practices under the heading of *Schonen*, conventionally translated as ‘sparing’ or ‘preserving’. Recently, this convention has been contested by Foltz, who argues that these translations, which imply an arms-length reverence for the unaltered and unadulterated, fall short of capturing the meaning of Heidegger’s concept. Just as the bodybuilder is, by definition, never at home in his or her body, Foltz reasons that “the house is not genuinely a house if it is merely preserved and not inhabited.” So far from connoting a disinvolved appreciation or disinterested detachment, ascetic or aesthetic, he points out that

the German *schonen* does not mean to refrain from using something or to set it aside, but to use it in such a way that harm is not inflicted upon it; used reflexively or with regard to things, it means to ‘look after’ in the sense that one ‘looks after one’s health’.<sup>76</sup>

On these grounds, Foltz proposes ‘conserving’ as a more adequate translation. “To conserve one’s strength or health,” he submits, means precisely “to use it while nonetheless keeping it sound and intact.” To add further support to the idea that *schonen* and using are not mutually exclusive but complementary concepts for Heidegger, Foltz draws attention to the “Building Dwelling Thinking” essay, where we learn that “conserving itself consists not only in the fact that we do not harm”; “genuine conserving [*schonen*] is something *positive*.” It requires that “we properly shelter [something] back [*zurückbergen*] in its essence” (PLT 147/GA7 151).<sup>77</sup>

“Poets are men who refuse to utilize language,” writes Jean-Paul Sartre.<sup>78</sup> E.E. Cummings strikes a similar note: “If a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little - somebody who is obsessed by making”<sup>79</sup> To ascertain how Heidegger takes conserving to be a kind of “using” (*brauchen*), one patterned on poetic praxis, we must come to appreciate how he distinguishes conservative use from “utilizing” or “exploiting” (*ausnutzen*), “wearing out” (*abnutzen*) or “consuming” (*verbrauchen*) in the sense of using up. Each of these impoverished ways of using carries connotations of waste and ab-use. Contrariwise, Heidegger

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<sup>76</sup> Foltz, *Inhabiting the Earth*, 161.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; Cf. Mitchell, “Praxis and *Gelassenheit*,” 328.

<sup>78</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernhard Frechtman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 6.

<sup>79</sup> E. E. Cummings, *Is 5* (New York: Liverlight, 1985), foreword.

maintains that “proper use does not debase what is being used – on the contrary, use is determined and defined by leaving the used thing in its essence.” Rather than a self-directed activity that imposes itself on things and steps over their essence toward their impossibility, “‘using’, implies a *measured or fitting* [*anmessende*] *response*,” a form of active-passivity befitting of the useless absent-presencing of beings. It does not ground itself from the outset in the concerns of the producer or the needs of the consumer. Neither does it use beings merely to meet those demands. Instead, conservative use takes the form of a *response* that brings forth (*poiesis*) as purposeless and needless what has already been exposed. In this respect, it is very much akin to the mutely wakeful workways of Berry’s storied farmer, one who “*feels* the difference” between the “restful order” of nature and “his own constant struggle to maintain . . . his clearings.” To give on the basis of what has been received: such was the sense of ‘habit’ released by the ingenuity of language in §14. In proportion to our habitual ability to defer to and only then respond to the limits of revealing, using finds its fitting measure in what is used, much like the outreaching hand “must fit itself to the thing,” namely, by a gentle hold that waits for the thing to manifest itself essentially in its specific proportion of affordance and resistance to being handled (WCT 187/GA8 190, ut sup.). Or consider the painter from Heidegger’s essay on the artwork, who is said to “use pigment, but in such a way that color is not used up but rather only now comes to shine forth” (PLT 46/GA5 34). Thus does conserving let the essence of a thing shine forth in its ecological difference. As the responsive way “to use something is to let it enter into its essential nature,” and “to safeguard [*Wahrung*] it in its essence,” (WCT 187/GA8 190), so does Heidegger tell us that “genuine conserving [*schonen*] . . . takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own essence.” According to him, “the basic character of dwelling is this conserving” (PLT 147/GA7 151).

Challenging-forth transgresses the limits of the thing by expecting always something more of it. It drives the thing beyond its possibilities until they are all used up, all worn out, extinguished. It *takes* place by plundering the essence of all things shining, depriving them of their own mysterious luster as though to avenge the affront of the earth that withholds itself from eye and mind and prying hand. In that abject gesture, however, which declines the sheltering hand for the shadow it casts, we strip the world of its generative grounds. To borrow from Dewey, we “become not merely a pilgrim but an unnaturalized and unnaturalizable alien in the



world.”<sup>80</sup> In the uninhabitable wake of our devastating progress we are left to wander, forlorn and forsaken, like misbegotten exiles of the *earth*.

Yet Heidegger finds in Hölderlin’s hymns a summons that sets the tone for another age, unpromised by our world-historical destiny and indefinitely deferred. Another beginning that might could deliver us from the ecological tragedy. From the machination of modern technology and the incineration of nature. In that unforeseeable age, dwelling would be attuned to the lawful measure of the earth. Understanding ourselves essentially as caretakers of it, we would conserve that measure, using things near and ready-to-hand while nourishing exposures to how they also lay beyond our grasp. Through Heidegger we arrive at an elementary condition of being-in-the-world: “mortals dwell insofar as they conserve the earth” (PLT 148/GA7 151). In the improbable age of the future ones, this would call for a praxis that does not project itself, from itself, toward things its retrojects. On the contrary, conserving entails waiting: a praxis that allows things to rest in their elemental essence before taking them up or taking them in. Thus do we arrive at a measured response that projects on the basis of having been thrown into the outlandish being of nature. Only by embracing the self-estrangement of our belongingness to earth may we conserve its sheltering power. Thrown-projection, as response-ability, chastens the conceit of ecumenism. It safeguards the essential ambiguity and strangeness of beings from homological and anthropological disclosure, from challenges and demands altogether “foreign to them.” To dwell in this way is to wait on their foreignness, to *minister* to it, taking care of what is most unfamiliar within the familiar precincts of the dwelling place. Inasmuch as it twists free of the hypostasis of the intellect and the anthropostasis of the willful subject, Heidegger tells us that “waiting is the essence of releasement [*Gelassenheit*]” (CPC 80/GA77 123). Against the abject *nisus* toward closure, dwelling as waiting releases things from the *ecumene*. It fertilizes their abyssally generative grounds. At the same time, it releases existence from that tragic world and delivers us over to our ecological difference. Being-in-the-world is essentially dwelling in the ecology of being, where our own locally ecstatic horizons (wherein and whereat, whence and wither) and our own ecstatic temporal horizons (having-been and not-yet) give onto the generative, extra-horizontal ecstasy of being-of-the-earth.

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<sup>80</sup> Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, 24.

## The Riddle of the Cairn, a Trace of Passage

Stones seem to want to congregate. In a stream they remain together when all else is washed away. On a mountaintop they endure when everything else is blown away. Every piece finds its right relationship to every other.

–Dan Snow, *In the Company of Stone*<sup>1</sup>

The form [of the cairns] is an expression of the fullness, vigour, heavy ripeness and power of nature generated from a centre deep inside.

–Andy Goldsworthy, earthwork artist, *Stone*<sup>2</sup>

The voice of stone is an echo from the depths of time.

–Dan Snow, *Listening to Stone*<sup>3</sup>

The ensuing days passed before me like a cortege, each one more dismal than the last, but somehow I managed to finish that wall before it finished me. And when it narrowly passed inspection, I moved on to other assignments. Another wall built or terrace mended, a different section of trail, but always the same insurmountable adversary. I drudged in this way for the greater part of that first season, completing a project at intervals then plodding on to the next, and the next, and so back into the morass of abjection. To tell the story of the morning I became apprenticed to the trade is to capture a folly recommenced each morning. And there would be nothing more to tell were it not for a series of windfalls.

A trailworker's lunch is an itinerant affair. After stashing her tools off trail she takes her midday meal in any wild place that lends itself to repast and repose, be it the sundrenched brow of the nearby peak or the flocculent duffbed of a cedar grove. Likewise had I been given to quit the grade and rove in search of new and appetizing pastures from time to time. But on this day it was neither hunger nor languor that drove me from the trail. In my haste to decamp that morning I had forgotten to replenish my stores of water. And it was nothing so much as an intense and searing thirst spurred me on my journey down the trace.

The word 'journeyman' derives from the Old French *journee*, meaning one day's travel or employment. Under the guild system of the Middle Ages, this title was bestowed upon those

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<sup>1</sup> Snow, *In the Company of Stone*, 91.

<sup>2</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1994), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Snow, *Listening to Stone* (New York: Artisan, 2008), xii.

who, having completed their apprenticeship with a master craftsman under whom they worked in exchange for food, lodging, and training, were then sanctioned to ply their trade for a daily wage. Whereas the apprentice lived under the care of the master craftsman – often as member of the household – the journeyman earned this title by *journeying* overland from workshop to workshop to gain the requisite experience to becoming a master himself. In ancient times, masons also journeyed. And this tradition survives to this day in certain parts of the world, predominantly in Europe where the wandering journeyman – *der Wandergeselle* of Germany, for instance – remains a fixture of hinterland roadsides and intersections, his outreached thumb unfurled to flag down rides to the next workplace on the way toward mastery.

During my apprenticeship I labored under the misapprehension that a trail was no more than an artifact: a thing that derives its meaning, function, and development from its entrenched position in the human household. Be it said that I was aware of the so-called “game trails” left by other animals and was even troubled by that expression, which seems if anything to imply that other species make no mark other on the wild but for that which betrays its presence to the hunter. Still, I fell prey to the conventional wisdom that these passageways were something less than trails, veering as they do from designated routes through the world. At best, these were to be regarded as proto-trails underway toward designation. At worst, they were anti-trails, whose false promises of worldly destinations led to nothing more than worldless divagations.

How curious that my first steps toward journeymanship would retread those of the guild apprentice, leading as they did to an errant excursion beyond my employer’s household: a government-sponsored worksite where the trail is no more than an artifact of work to be used or product of labor consumed. Further still, these steps would take me out beyond the order of mastery as such. It is by virtue of these errant transgressions that this journey would become for me a passage from the abject world to the wild earth, thence toward being at work in the earth-world. Lest we lose our place in the story by wandering prematurely into these bewildering thickets, let us return to that meridian hour as I stashed my tools and lit out to quench my thirst. It was there, at the wild edge of the world, that I would first discover that every trail is a trace.

At a turn of that same set of switchbacks, several runs below where my first wall lay, I had been at work on a stone-crossed drainage. Devised to divert water runoff from the trail during the rainy season, its “waterbar” was composed of a file of partially embedded rocks oriented toward a rill just beyond the oxbow of the switchback. The channel was long run dry.

But having gone without all morning, and the nearest attested watersource being some distance downtrail, my thirst compelled me to see where it led. As I made the dubious descent over sifting sediment, my course veered steadily from the trail and into a redolent forest of sugar pine and cedar. Under that canopy the sunlight was cut into motesprent shafts, punctuated by fleeting chiaroscuros that transpired from stump to stone to soil. As time wore on the journey stoked the flames in my gullet. My tongue seemed to singe in my very mouth, wither like a scarious petal, so sere had it become. At length I lurched, halted, hunkered. Palms on knees aquiver, I cast about for *any* damp vestige or residue. Not one lick or trace in sight. At this I braced myself to rise and was about to turn back when I glimpsed something ever so slightly out of piece, some misweave in the weft of the wilderness there. Among the congeries of undergrowth, disappointed widowmakers, and boulders strewn about like the flung playthings of petulant titans, an innocent heap of stones resolved itself before my eyes into a modest cairn. Comprised of just three rocks balanced precariously atop one another, the whole scarcely knee-high to a child, this enigmatic relic appeared as though provoked out of the earth itself to waver, indeterminately yet somehow purposively, between human hand and happenstance.

A cairn is a simple stonework generally composed of a free-form stack of unhewn stones, held together by nothing but their balanced weight and contact. Traditionally situated on the threshold between familiar landscapes and deeper reaches of wilderness, it is an exceedingly elusive phenomenon. While cairns sometimes point to shortcuts or fledgling routes to landmarks off the beaten track, their sense is underdetermined by their occasional function as signs. More often than not they serve no extrinsic purpose whatever, recalling nothing so much as those swaying chessmen sculptures erected by children between games. One needn't be an avid backpacker to have witnessed this. Wherever people mill or lie about in the presence of pebbles, cairns tend to spring up like a sandcastles. For others who later happen upon them, these stoneworks are not so much signs but cynosures. Rather than point to determinable things, they simply signal, draw attention to themselves.

Intriguingly, the cairn retains for the passerby the allure of both sign and signal regardless of its provenance. The ambiguity is enticing, irresistibly so for me as I meditated on that thing beside the streamless streambed, a thing whose form and placement drew attention to the mystery of its origins. The pillared equipoise of this motley stone triad could well have been a human contrivance. Then again, I could not rule out the improbably ingenuity of a fortuitous

collaboration of rockfalls, rainfalls, and windfalls. By virtue of its ambivalent configuration and liminal ubiquity, this anonymous work, this adespoteon, cut across the conventional judicative binaries of purpose and chance, culture and nature, history and prehistory. It was a veritable Sorites paradox, a classic example of vagueness rendered in terms of rock. One stone more, one less perhaps, would decide the matter, committing it to one side or other and settling the question of what it truly was. But as it stood, the cairn was defiantly undecidable, signaling if anything some anogenic petrology that beggared every anthropology, every archeology, while holding untold perplexities for me. It concealed itself like some alluring riddle of the earth.

The thoroughgoing undecidability of a cairn does not dampen its *semiotic* allure for the wayfarer. Yet this is quite unlike the way she is directed by sanctioned trailmarkers: signage, and other equipment for backcountry orientation. Rather than orienting herself by a trail of signs through a charted landscape, each one confirming the conducive signification of the last along her route from departure to destination, she finds in the cairn something less than a sign. Instead of directions and directives, it offers only hints and *Holzwege*, paths leading nowhere, mere *traces* of passage. If the cairn solicits an anthropogenic expectation, its allure is sustained by the unexpected evocation of something otherwise than human.

This ambiguity is inscribed in its very name, the roots of which bisect and coadunate with others across the subterranean strata of language. ‘Cairn’ derives from the Scottish *carne*, a cognate of the Gaelic *carn*, meaning ‘heap of stones’ or ‘rocky hill’. Digging deeper, we find that *carn* stems from the ancient Gaulish *karnen* (horn), an offshoot of the Proto-Indo-European base *ker-n-*, meaning *inter alia* ‘the highest part of the *body*’. Corporeal connotations such as these crop up in modern German and Dutch, in which the cairn is referred to as a ‘stone man’ (*Steinmann* and *Steenman* respectively). Across these etymological stratifications, ‘cairn’ carries traces of geological, animal, and human features, comprising a semantic body without organs whose origins are no less obscure than the phenomena it names.

Whenever its operant sense breaks down, the cairn is liable to scatter and shatter rigid reference points of orientation. From antiquity, when cairns were associated with Hermes, the Greek god of travel and treachery, these quasi-signifiers have borne a designifying edge. Hermes was once believed to be the archetypal trailblazer, setting stones to mark safe passage through the trackless wilderness. And it was Greek custom to build piles of stones called ‘herms’ (*hermai*) along the way, upon which offerings were made to the eponymous god in hopes of

good fortune and fertility. Such alms were then allotted by Hermes as a ‘windfall’ (*hermaion*) to starveling mendicants and vagabonds who chanced upon them. Cairns originally subtended the territory of this divinity. They appeared along the trace and at the edges of the dwelling place. And since Hermes was a psychopomp, ordained by Apollo to shepherd dead souls to the underworld, they also marked the boundary between life and death in the form of tumuli. By the fifth century BCE, cairns had evolved into rectangular effigies replete with heads, and phalli pointing toward springs, villages, and safe havens. Over the outlands between places, these Hermetic incarnations stood sentinel, gathering mortals together under the aegis of a sacred past. A time when Hermes had cast the first stone, slaying Hera’s Argus. And others were heaped at his feet in vindication of his feigned innocence.<sup>4</sup>

If it has lost much of its mythic significance, the cairn has retained to this day, in one form or another, its role as place- and passage-marker. Taking a leaf from Farley Mowat, Annie Dillard describes the Inuit custom of building anthropomorphic *inuksuit* across the desolate tundra east of Hudson Bay.<sup>5</sup> “An Eskimo traveling alone in flat barrens will heap round stones to the height of a man, travel till he can no longer see the beacon, and build another.”<sup>6</sup> Over expanses bleared by blizzards, the cairn becomes a means to staying the course. But in landscapes more hospitable, it can just as easily steer us off it. Much like the riddlesome prophecies of the Delphic oracle at the stone temple of Apollo, cairns can place routine referents under erasure. Concealing what they reveal and revealing what they conceal, they can beckon toward *disorientation* as well. Before we enter this wild passage, allow me to pose the riddle of the cairn which beckoned me that day.

What is a riddle but a question shot like an arrow to mystify, stupefy, strike us dumb? Again like the arrow a riddle wounds us; it riddles us with dolorous doubts. In this respect it is akin to its graver congener the paradox, which may strike wounds that never heal. In some ways, however, a riddle can be more cruel if only because it pretends to such irreverence while simultaneously throttling the familiar voices we use to make sense of the world. To decipher it we must relinquish these voices and deliver ourselves over to the ab-sense of an answer that calls them into question. Like students of any foreign tongue, we must dispense with the assumption

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Karl Kerényi, *Hermes: Guide of Souls*, trans. Murray Stein (Dallas: Spring Publications Inc., 1987), pt. 2, ch.3.

<sup>5</sup> The word *inuksuk* means literally ‘that which acts on behalf of a person’.

<sup>6</sup> Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), 44.

that this aberrant hint of sense could ever be exhausted or translated without remainder. Most crucially of all perhaps, we must learn to speak *with* the riddle by attuning our ears to its secret strings: the sonant and surd beneath the absurd, nonsense quavering with sense, by turns innocent of meaning and teeming with implications that laugh at us until that epiphanic moment when its wound heals and we learn to trill its laughter in the dark.

For the worldly traveler, en route over well-trodden paths to fixed destinations, the riddle of the cairn nothing short of an irreverent affront to routine manners of proceeding. Already I have adopted the term ‘route’ to refer to such courses between two or more anthropotropic loci of the ecumene. The English word ‘route’ is a Gallicism that derives (by way of the Old French ‘*roupte*’) from the Latin ‘*ruptus*’, meaning ‘broken’. No ancient civilization enlarged and secured the ecumene as did the Romans. The martial routes they built to connect the far-flung lands of their empire were collectively known as the ‘*via rupta*’. The ‘broken road’ derived its name from the way it was forcefully broken by legions of Roman captives coerced into slave labor. These slaves carried out the *route rupture*, the deforesting rupture of “trackless” wilds, *terrae nullius*. The first-century Roman poet Statius described this process in some detail:

How many hands are working together!  
Some fell the forest while some denude mountains  
Some smooth boulders and baulks with iron  
Others with sand that is heated, and earth  
Tufa, assemble the stones of the structure  
Some with labour drain pools ever thirsty  
Some lead the rivulets far to the distance.<sup>7</sup>

Compare this with John Steinbeck’s account of the early stages of industrialized agriculture, which bored into the Great Plains of twentieth-century America and hollowed it out:

The tractors came over the roads and into the fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. They crawled over the ground, laying the track and rolling on it and picking it up. Diesel tractors, puttering while they stood idle; they thundered when they moved, and then settled down to a droning roar. Snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through dooryards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses.<sup>8</sup>

From ancient to modern times, the *route rupture* has ridden roughshod over the earth, extirpating all obstacles and leveling its wild layout. Like the hiker bent on reaching his destination – even if that means shortcutting the odd switchback for the sake of efficiency to the detriment of forest

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<sup>7</sup> K.D. White, *Greek and Roman Technology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), 96.

<sup>8</sup> John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 35.

habitats – this mandate has brooked no compromise. Having forcibly scored on its surface the concerns of unimpeded travel, power, and production, routines have long put the earth to rout.

Every route is uncompromising to the extent that it cleaves to routine: a rote method of procedure or habitual series of steps taken in order to achieve some end. In the argot of the military, the meanings of these two words were once conjoined. In this context ‘routine’ referred to an order directing troops to march toward a destination in order to accomplish some strategic objective. Today the word is still used as a synonym for conscription. By acceding to the routine, however unwittingly, the worldly traveler perpetuates an imperialistic approach to wilderness. But from the cairn there issues a silent remonstrance, beneath or beyond that order yet fainter and more reticent. An equivocal voice all but muffled by the unanimous allocutions from the pulpits of anthropolatry. This voice is one of inter-rupture, intimating an irreverent oblocution that challenges the imperious commands of the routine. Here are things that fit uneasily into our world, it interjects. Here are stones outlandish.

If we inhabit the ways of the ecumene on routine travels along routes of authoritative signs that mark its territory, the riddle of the signoclastic cairn invites a journey off the map. Its inwrought ambiguity and enigmatic provenance have served since time immemorial to signal mystery, eliciting idle wonderment or puzzlement. After those who followed their undecidable summons into the otherworldly keep of the divinities, we find they prompt us yet to actively question their wild origins. It is a manner of questioning that proceeds step by step, traversing a region without landmarks but teeming with traces of an elemental past.

On occasion these traces may be so arranged as to invite the passage of our bodies. This points to the archaic crossroads in our language between traces and trails. ‘Trace’ has emerged from this conjunction to denote those tracks, vestiges, or remnants such as footprints or fossils, which hint at the bygone passage of some person, place, or thing. Intriguingly, it also once referred to a series of dance steps. But unlike a route, the trace would be a dance that oversteps the basic moves, letting the unmeasured music of the journey take the lead. For the inquisitive wayfarer, this entails a wayward foray into treacherous brambles, twining with ruses and riddles and lacking in routine points of orientation. To gambol down the trace requires a willingness to relinquish the canny contrivances with which we habitually center ourselves in more familiar habitats. The cairn invites us down this uncanny passage, an outlandish passage that calls into



question the ways we negotiate, make sense of, and survive in the world. Indeed, it may even invite a *danse macabre*.

In this regard, the cairn conjures not only the artifices of Hermes and the auguries of the Delphic oracle, but the riddles of the Sphinx. By this I mean that mythical creature storied to have guarded the gates of the ancient Greek city Thebes, the same since consecrated in limestone on the west bank of the Nile at Giza. Here was a riddle that put everything at stake for the passerby, who spared no effort solve it on pain of dismemberment and certain death. But where the unaccompanied voice and ambulatory prowess of homo habilis saw Oedipus through to the other side, the riddle of the cairn cannot but remain insoluble barring some acknowledgement of the limits – perhaps even the absence – of man.<sup>9</sup>

As in the long ago so too now. As in other places here. I once had a conversation with a trailworker whom had been wrested from his trade for an entire season and redeployed to an ad hoc routine he called “cairn duty.” His assignment was to traverse the trails of Yosemite National Park, licensed map in hand, and to demolish every cairn he discovered along the way. It seemed that in recent years the Park Service had received complaints from hikers led astray by the cairns, which had been mistaken for markers of officially sanctioned routes through the park. A costly liability to the government, since these deviant wanderings off the map had occasionally given rise to missing persons reports, requiring the intervention of rescue teams, helicopters, and canine units. As often happens in the wilderness, some remain lost to this day.

*This* cairn at least had eluded that routine. And so it stood, intact and solicitous. The surrounding forest appeared to be virtually impregnable on each side of the open corridor of the streambed I’d followed here. No other path could I discern and again I might have turned back had I not begun a kind of desultory circumambulation of the cairn. Apace with the drift of my thoughts, my body moved in a kind of slow, gyroscopic orbit round the open perimeter of that place. For how long this went on I cannot say, until I found myself quite suddenly enmeshed in the underbrush. My course, it seems, had drifted at a tangent to the channel. But I noticed at once the same sifting soil beneath my boots. On a whim I drew back a limb and before my eyes there unfurled the merest trace of passage. Judging by the tread, it appeared to be some tributary to the watercourse, carving out of the woods a sloping tunnel no larger than a fawn’s breadth.

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<sup>9</sup> The famous riddle posed to Oedipus by the Sphinx: “Which creature has one voice and yet becomes four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” The solution Oedipus provided and for which he was granted safe passage was *man*, who crawls through infancy, walks through adulthood, and hobbles with a cane through senescence.

**History Told.**

**The Ancient Emergence of *Logos*, a Summons to the *Oikos***

In what sense is the ecological difference *ecological*? Over this chapter and the next we set out to answer that question through a recovery of the historical roots of this word and the senses they held before the rise of ecumenism in the West. What may have seemed arbitrary or misguided in speaking of the *ecology* of being will acquire a historical depth and weight from this study. What's more, our discoveries will fertilize the philosophical grounds of the earth-world laid in chapter 2. From the Presocratic experience of *logos* and the Homeric experience of *oikos*, we shall harvest a history untold by anthropology, ideology, onto-theology, and philosophy more broadly. On my somewhat eccentric telling, that story begins and ends with Thales, whom I have chosen as a philosophical spokesman of those who once dwelled in the world as caretakers of earth. Yet we shall find that his arc was by no means exceptional, that it converged with many who shared his philosophical vision and others who simply lived it, without fanfare, without even the benefit of a sympathetic witness. All paths in this treatise do lead us somehow back to water. To the wellspring at the *Ursprung* and the *Ur-Sprung* into the well. But our historical embarkation from Homer and our philosophical bypaths through Heraclitus and Anaximander will together serve to certify that the grounds we seek are no less arable in Gaia, that ecology burned just as brightly in fire, and that those abyssal grounds extend downward in place and time indefinitely. One thing is definite. Howsoever they fortified them, the walls scholars have built betwixt Homer and Thales as between the enchanted gardens of Gaia then Demeter Chthonia and the landscaped systems of Plato then Aristotle, are misplaced where they stand. If walls there are to build, they belong at the edge of that territory newly ordained by Classical thought, which annexed all that came before it, uprooting the stochastic, domesticating the fantastic, and trading elements for letters and first principles. Having unstoppered our ears to lend them to a *logos* other than *epistēmē*, let us make a first, halting attempt to listen to what Thales had to say, however indirectly, under Aristotle's theoretical juris-

diction. Our failure to parse the former from the latter will be an incitement to wall off the *oikoumenē*, historically and philosophically, defining its proper limits so as to attend to the *logos* of the *oikos* beneath and beyond them. Only then may we begin to truly listen to that *logos*, first as it sizzled and crackled in Heraclitus, then as it poured from the mouths of rivers, broke with the waves, and trickled through the streams of Thales' archeology.

### §17. From Water and Substance Comes Mud: Aristotle's Interpretation of Thales

It is a veritable misfortune that we have so little extant of the works of the ancient masters and that not a single one of their works was handed down to us complete. We are involuntarily influenced by this loss, measuring therefore with false standards, and letting ourselves be disposed more favorably toward Plato and Aristotle by the sheer accident that they never lacked connoisseurs and copyists.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*<sup>1</sup>

I came to Casablanca for the waters.

What waters? We're in the desert.

I was misinformed.

—Humphrey Bogart and Claude Rains, *Casablanca*

#### (i) *The Archeological Thesis*

According to Aristotle and Simplicius, Thales was for all intents and purposes the first among the natural philosophers, known to them as *phusikoi* or *phusiologoi*.<sup>2</sup> Beyond his reputed empirical discoveries, however, the question as to what that title originally amounted to admits no easy answer. Doxographical evidence of Thales' broader phusiology, his doctrine of "nature" (*phusis*), is threadbare.<sup>3</sup> And our insight into his archeology of water (in the sense of a *logos* of

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, trans. Marianne Cowan (Washington, D.C.: Gateway, 1962), 35f. As Kirk, Raven, and Schofield have noted, "*phusis* is probably not used in the collective sense, 'Nature', before about the middle of the fifth century." Yet this entified sense of an objective totality is, of course, not at issue here. Moreover, they go on to say that *peri chrēmātōn phuseos* ('on the nature of things', or better 'on the self-emergence of things') and *peri apantōn phuseos* (on the self-emergence of all [things]) were likely in use during the Archaic period belonging to the Ionian *phusikoi*. We shall take a closer look at the Presocratic concept of *phusis* in §19 below.

<sup>2</sup> Simplicius in *Phys.* p. 23, 29 in Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, eds., *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, 5th to 7th Editions* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1966–67), abbreviated hereafter as DK. Translation from KRS 81. Unless otherwise noted, all further translations of Presocratic and early doxographic sources are from KRS.

<sup>3</sup> In what follows I shall introduce various calqued terms based on the Greek word *phusis*, viz. 'phusical' and 'phusiological', to signal the Presocratic understanding of these concepts. The aim here is to prevent their conflation with such terms as 'physical' and 'physiological', which have strong modern connotations. For the same reason, I adopt 'poietic' as opposed to 'poetic' as an attributive cypher for the Greek *poiēsis*. For sake of legibility, however, I shall break this convention in the case of Presocratic concepts less likely to mislead, while clarifying ambiguities by context when necessary. In these cases, such terms as 'archeology', 'cosmology', 'geology' and 'anthropology' could

*archē*, a doctrine of the origin of things) is more or less limited to terse summations in two far-flung books of Aristotle's corpus. The first of these appears in the midst of a discussion, resumed from the *Physics*, on the four causes (*aitia*). Here, in Book 1 of the *Metaphysics*, we find the first extant summation of Thales' account of water as *archē* of all things (*phainomenai*) (*Met.* 983b20).<sup>4</sup> Call this the **archeological thesis**.

Shortly before, Aristotle had laid out his own formulation of the concept *archē* under the homological rubric of *epistēmē logikē* (see §9), introducing it as that which is most "theoretically knowable" (*theōrētikos, epistētos*) (*Met.* 981b1). In these terms he goes on to equate *archē* with cause (*aition*). It bears emphasis that *aition* should not be conflated with our modern concept of (efficient) causality, which corresponds to just one of the four Aristotelian causes. In this book Aristotle is concerned with *aition* as the rational ground or "ultimate 'why'" (*to dia ti proton*) of a thing, yielding knowledge of its essence, or *what* makes it the being that it is. Aristotle has it that the highest attainment of wisdom (*sophia*) amounts to just that: "universal [*katholou*] knowledge" of "the first causes and the principles [*ta prota aitia kai tas archas*] of things" (983a29, 982a22, 981b29).<sup>5</sup> Setting aside his elaboration of its other (viz. ontological and theological) dimensions elsewhere, it is predominantly Aristotle's conception of first philosophy as the pursuit of scientific knowledge (*epistēmē*), in the form of a theory of first causes and principles (metaphysical aitiology and archeology), that antecedently frames his reconstruction of Thalesian philosophy in the *Metaphysics*. Within that framework, *archai* are reduced to the first principles of knowledge, grasped as explanatory essences (995b8). "That from which a thing can first be known," we read, "is also called the origin [*archē*] of the thing," i.e. "the first point from which a thing either is or comes to be or is known" (1013a14-18).<sup>6</sup> The posited

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be rendered more directly as 'archēology', 'kosmology', 'gēology', and 'anthrōpology'. In every instance, the suffix -logy (-logical) draws its meaning from the Presocratic conception of *logos*. As we saw in §9, this is at variance in crucial respects with the epistemic sense of *logos* (homology) introduced in Classical thought and most familiar to the modern ear.

<sup>4</sup> All further citations of Aristotle in this section are parenthetical.

<sup>5</sup> The line quoted from in the first clause runs as follows: "In one of these [causes we have to acquire knowledge of] we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the 'why' is referred finally to the formula [*logos* in the sense of an explanatory ground], and the ultimate 'why' is a cause [*aition*] and principle [*archē*]" (982b29). On Aristotle's view, necessary condition of wisdom is the ability to demonstrate one's knowledge of the causes, or explanatory essences of things, by giving a discursive account (*logos*) of them. This *logos* is said to concern the universal, in contrast to perception (*aisthēsis*) concerning the particular (*Met.* 1035b35). Thus his claim that "he who is more exact and more capable of teaching [i.e. giving a universal account of] the causes is wiser, in every branch of knowledge" (982a11).

<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Aristotle frequently equates *archai* with the first principles of knowledge (e.g. *Met.* 995b8).

correspondence between knowledge and reality reveals two conditions of *archē* as first principle. This principle is both: “elemental,” a *stoicheion* in the sense of a basic theoretical and correspondingly material constituent; and universal in yielding knowledge of all things of its kind (*kategoria*).<sup>7</sup> All these homological assumptions should be kept firmly in mind as one delves into Aristotle’s conjectural review of Thales’ archeological thesis.

Having adumbrated his concept of *archē* and identified knowledge of the four causes as the aim of his inquiry, Aristotle begins the third chapter of *Metaphysics*, Book 1 with an overview of the various archeologies of the *phusikoi*. In this he begins from the presumption that it “will be of profit to the present inquiry” since “obviously they too speak of certain principles and causes” (983b2). At which point we arrive at the *locus classicus* (983b6-27), where we can distinguish three different interpretations of Thales’ thesis that water is the *archē* of all beings. (1) Water is the “original source of all existing things [*ex ou gar estin apanta ta onta*],” namely, that “from which they first come into being [*gignetai*] and into which they are finally destroyed [*phtheirō*].” (2) As such a source, water falls under what the natural philosophers “declare” (*phasin*) to be “the first principle [*archion*] and element [*stoicheion*] of existing beings.” And finally, (3) water is “the natural substance [*ousias*] . . . in the form of matter [*en hules edei*] . . . of which all things that are consist” and “from which things come into being, while it is preserved . . . persisting but changing in its qualities” (983b6-10).<sup>8</sup> Taken alone, the first and simplest formulation could reasonably, albeit ambiguously, be attributed to Thales when we consider that Anaximander of Miletus (c. 610-546 BCE), his likely protégé, described *apeiron* (the indefinite) as *archē* in this fashion.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, 2 and 3 are clearly Aristotelian formulations. *Archē* figures into 2 as an “element” in the axiomatic sense of “first causes and the principles” already set forth in Aristotle’s preliminary discussion. Finally, 3 is unmistakably informed by his own metaphysical doctrine of substance as the underlying basis or substrate (*hupokeimenon*) of a being’s predicable qualities or attributes (*sumbebekos*) (*Met.* 983b9f.).

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<sup>7</sup> Both Plato’s and Aristotle’s scientific reappropriation of *stoicheion* (element) as simplest constituent of something (e.g. a first principle or axiom) is thought to bear a connection to the conventional sense of *stoicheion* as letter of the alphabet or spoken syllable. Cf. Charles H. Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 120.

<sup>8</sup> Clauses reordered and translation modified. Note that Aristotle goes on to admit that the reasons he ascribes to Thales for identifying water as *archē* are conjectural (*labon isos*), as noted above.

<sup>9</sup> From the Theophrastean doxography of Anaximander preserved by Simplicius: *Simpl. in Phys.* 24, 13; DK 12A9 (cf. KRS 101). For an in-depth analysis and ecological reconstruction of Anaximandrian *apeiron*, see §33 below.

Aristotle's exegesis is dubious indeed. Like those of the other early *phusikoi* he goes on to examine, Thales' doctrine is treated as a primitive and distorted form of his own scientific archeology, couched in terms of rational and metaphysical grounds, causes and substances, homologies and hypostases. The presumption that these thinkers posited some "one or more than one" element as fundamental substrate and explanatory principle leads Aristotle to think that theirs were competing theories laying claim to knowledge of the first (material) of his four causes: the basic material "of which all things that are consist" (*Met.* 983b7, cf. 984a17). He thereby sows the seed for the time-honored assumption that Thales and the other early natural philosophers subscribed to some crude hybrid of: material monism (ontology qua monousiology); epistemic foundationalism (aitiology qua pantology); and/or metaphysical universalism (cosmology in the sense of a rationally or noetically ordered whole). In these terms, tradition ambivalently credits the *phusikoi* with being the first to theoretically generalize from empirical observation the universal explanatory principles of nature, understood as beings on the whole. At the same time, their theories are judged to fall well short of the rational scientific methods instated by the Athenian triumvirate of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. The supposed Presocratic turn toward rationalism and naturalism is traditionally regarded to have been impaired or diverted by the vagaries of myth and superstition endemic to the world of Homer, which their thinking had only just begun to overturn.

(ii) *The Cosmological and Theological Theses*

Such is the duplicitous rationale for the archeological thesis in the *Metaphysics*. On the one hand, Aristotle supposes that Thales could have derived thesis from empirical inspection: "from seeing the nurture [*trephō*] of all things to be moist, and the warm itself coming-to-be from this [qua *archē*] and living by this"; or "the seeds of all [living] things having a moist nature" (*Met.* 983b22). Thales is thus regarded to have had perhaps some crude grasp of material and efficient causality. On the other hand, in *On the Heavens* (Book 2.13), we find the second of Aristotle's two commentaries on the doctrine of water. Here he offers an alternative interpretation inspired by certain mythological and cosmogonic beliefs attributed to Thales. First, Thales is reported to have said "the earth rests on water [*gēn eph' hudatos keisthai*]" (*Cael.* 294a28, cf. *Met.* 983b20).<sup>10</sup> Call this the **cosmological thesis**. Aristotle proceeds to reconstruct

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. KRS 84. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield point out that this account "was professedly known to Aristotle only indirectly, on the information of others" (KRS, p. 90). More troublesome yet for the historian, Aristotle disguises

and swiftly refute what is in all likelihood a spurious argument for this thesis, patently fallacious yet empirically supported by the comparative buoyancy of air and water (*Cael.* 294a32). But the *Metaphysics* shows him offering speculative grounds for the *mythological* sources of Thales' doctrine. Namely, the Greek belief that "Okeanos and Tethys" were the "parents of creation" (*Met.* 983b30).<sup>11</sup> The implication being that Thales might have shared some version of the popular view that all beings originated from the primeval waters, believed to have since come to encircle the inhabited world. Commentators point out that the further inference to the idea that the earth came to "rest" on these waters – "floating like a log" as Aristotle suggests – is discrepant with Greek *doxa* (*Cael.* 294a28). It is, however, of a piece with earlier, near-eastern creation myths and cosmologies.<sup>12</sup> And there is evidence that Thales likely would have been exposed to these beliefs over the course of his relatively well-documented sojourns in Egypt, where several of his achievements were recorded.<sup>13</sup> That he was heir to such mythological traditions would be consistent with a further statement Aristotle imputes to him. In his treatise *On the Soul* we read: "Thales thought that all things are full of gods [*panta plerē theon einai*]" (*De an.* 411a7). We shall explore the Homeric myths that might have informed this **theological thesis** together with the other two theses in chapter 5 (§36).

The mythological connection is revealing not least for what it tells us about Thales, declared by some to have been of Phoenician descent and others to have toured the Phoenician searoute routes along the Egyptian coast and beyond.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, it gives some indication as to why his doctrine might have struck a classical Greek thinker like Aristotle as so outlandish. Whether Aristotle assumed they were based on empirical evidence, rational argument, or mythological dogma, we can reasonably conclude that he found Thales' two theses

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this by interpolating into Thalesian doctrine extraneous concepts from his own system. The word *keisthai*, for instance, translated here as 'rests' and elsewhere as 'being in position' or 'being situated', features prominently in Aristotle's inventory of the categories.

<sup>11</sup> Historians suggest that Thales would have probably been most familiar with the Homeric version of this myth (e.g. *Iliad*, Book 14., cf. KRS p. 13f.). For more on this theme, see §36 below.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk, et. al. consider the Babylonian creation epic of Apsu and Tiamet, who represent primeval waters, as well as the myth of Eridu, in which all was sea before Marduk built a raft that became the world (KRS p. 92).

<sup>13</sup> For evidence of Thales' journeys to Egypt see KRS 67, 68, 79. While the archeological thesis could fit easily with either Greek or near-eastern mythologies, it is more difficult to square the cosmological thesis with the former. On this score, Kirk, et al. submit: "Thales' view that the earth floats on water seems to have been most probably based upon direct contact with near-eastern mythological cosmology" (KRS 93).

<sup>14</sup> For evidence of Thales' Phoenician descent, see KRS 62, 63. For ancient allusions to his journeys by the Phoenician trade routes, see KRS 67, 68).

utterly unconvincing if not mystifying – and this despite his own tendentious hermeneutics. Given that philosophy draws much of its own ancient history from Aristotle’s systematic account of his predecessors, it is unsurprising that Thales’ *logos* would be peremptorily dismissed as a mataeology, an inane discourse, and filed into the cabinet of historical curiosities. Nor is it, by the same token, surprising that it remains there to this day, as though it had no voice of its own and nothing worthwhile to say. As difficult as it undoubtedly was, and increasingly became as the centuries elapsed, to separate the wheat of Thales’ wisdom from the apocryphal chaff, it is all the more difficult to weigh the foregoing evidence and not have some serious doubts about the received view of his philosophy.

### §18. On the Origins of Ecumenism: Placing Earth Under Erasure

Only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a State that is universal by right, of elevating the State to the level of *de jure* universality. It is as if the sovereign were left alone in the world, spanned the entire ecumenon.

–Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>15</sup>

#### (i) Aristotle and his Pupil: A Lesson on *Oikoumenē*

We shall return to Aristotle’s interpretation of Thales in chapter 5, subjecting it to a deconstruction informed by the historical understanding of ecology recovered in this chapter and the next. Here we take up where we left off in chapter 2 (§10) by examining the origins of ecumenical understanding of being. It is my contention that the philosophical foundations of ecumenism were laid by Classical thought. The hypostatic disclosure of earth and the homological reduction of the ecological difference are evident from Plato’s and Aristotle’s interpretations of Presocratic *phusiologoi* from Thales onward. These ecumenical undercurrents inform the assumption in the *Theaetetus* that Thales sought to “to envisage the whole earth [*gēn blepein*]” – associated in this text with land and property (174e). And they come to the fore in Aristotle’s *On the Heavens*, where he reconstructs Thales’ argument for the cosmological and archeological theses on the basis of measurable, quantitative properties predicated of the elements, presented there as material “substances” (294a28-32). But the evidence linking Aristotle *directly* to the ecumenical earth-world issues from those among his treatises most

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<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), 375.



congenial to modern science. Most notably, in the *Meteorology* we find him equating earth with “known sections of the earth” (*schēma tēs gēs*) and the sum of these with the *oikoumenē* (*Mete.* 362a32-b16). As was mentioned in chapter 2, *oikoumenē* derives from *oikoumenē gē*, whose sense it alters by stripping it of ‘earth’ (*gē*). The word *oikoumenē* is first attested in Herodotus (c. 484-425 BCE). In the *Histories* he deploys it against the prevailing view, mythologized by Homer and Hesiod and upheld by many of the Presocratics, that the river Ocean surrounds the world.<sup>16</sup> In its stead, Herodotus expounds an empirical geography to defend the idea of *oikoumenē*: an enclosed territory sharply defined by human habitation, political power, and intercommunication rather than furies or the fundament.<sup>17</sup> Noting that some settled lands were not necessarily included within its boundaries, James Romm suggests that

*oikoumenē* can be better translated as 'known world' or 'familiar world', or even (if we take account of the qualifying phrase *huph'hēmōn* or *kath'hēmas* which sometimes accompanies it) 'our world'. It constitutes the space within which empirical investigation, like that championed by Herodotus, can take place, since all of its regions fall within the compass either of travel or of informed report.<sup>18</sup>

Enlarging on Herodotus’ investigations by means of pure reason and geometrical calculation, Aristotle expands its boundaries to the whole domain inhabited by human beings to the extent that its scientifically knowable limits (*kata ton logon*) can be depicted or represented (*graphousi*) (*Mete.* 362a32-b16). Thus do we find the earth reduced to nothing more than either unclaimed land or unknown space. Illustrative is a line from Xenophon (430-354 BCE) in his hagiography of Cyrus the Great, who is used as a mouthpiece for the idea that “inhabited space [*chōra oikoumenē*] is a possession of great value; but when it is deserted, it becomes worthless.”<sup>19</sup> The ecological indifference marked by this Ur-ecumenical concept, which anticipates the Roman *terra nullius*, betrays a conception of earth as vacuous unless it belongs to the territories of landed settlement and reason.

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<sup>16</sup> Writes Herodotus: “For my part I know of no river called Ocean, and I think that Homer, or one of the earlier poets, invented the name” (Hdt. 2.23)” Cf. “I cannot but laugh when I see numbers of persons drawing maps of the world without having any reason to guide them; making, as they do, the ocean-stream to run all round the earth, and the earth itself, to be an exact circle, as if described by a pair of compasses, with Europe and Asia just of the same size” (4.36). All translations of Herodotus are from *Herodotus The Persian Wars* [Histories], trans. A. D. Goldley, vol. I-IV (Cambridge, MA: D. Appleton & Company, 1920).

<sup>17</sup> Hdt. 1.27-8, 1.170, 5.73.

<sup>18</sup> James S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1992), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Xen. *Cyropedia* 4.4.4f. (cf. Xen. *Agesilaus* 1.20).

If Classical thought reduced the *heterologoi* of *phusis* and *oikos* to epistemology and ideology (*idea/eidos*) while setting the teleological stage for the disclosure of earth as “natural world,” ecumenism only gained ascendancy in actuality with Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) one of Aristotle’s most illustrious pupils. Under Alexander’s reign, *oikoumenē* would enter into demotic parlance at the same time that the outlandish mystery of the earth was being ousted from the world. Mark Munn notes that already in Xenophon we find *oikoumenē* equated with “the settled regions within an idealized Lydian empire.”<sup>20</sup> But it acquired new meaning with Alexander’s conquests. In his hagiography of Alexander, Plutarch (46-120 CE) tells of how the young king brought men together not by reason (*logos*) but by (*arms*), bidding them to recognize “the *oikoumenē* their fatherland, his army their citadel [*akropolis*] and protection, all good men their kinsmen, and all bad men not of their kin.”<sup>21</sup> In this period, Karl Galinsky explains:

*Oikoumenē* came to denote not only the changed geography, which included the Middle East and parts of Asia, but also its social, political, and ethnic dimensions. A cosmopolitan variety of peoples and cultures lived under the aegis of a ruling power.”<sup>22</sup>

It mustn’t be forgotten that the overwhelming majority of those living under this power were vanquished, subjugated peoples, assimilated at the cost of their social, political, and ethnic differences. This enclosure of the human other was predicated on the disclosure of the otherness of being, earth into world. So unlike the decentralized and variegated *oikoi* chronicled in the Homeric epics, and even the comparatively diverse city-states into which they were politically consolidated in the course of the Archaic and Classical periods, the ecumene irrupted into the Hellenistic as the geopolitical territory of a single, hegemonic civilization. Rounding out the rampant deforestation and colonization of Greece initiated by Archaic urbanization, this territory continued to expand despotically beyond her borders. If this mandate had been heralded by Plato’s and Aristotle’s ecumenical visions of “the whole earth,” it was carried out through the imperialist administration of science and martial technology, the mobilization of a worker-soldier

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<sup>20</sup> “In his *Anabasis* of the younger Cyrus,” Munn explains, “Xenophon’s usage has a specific geographical boundary: no city beyond the Syrian Gates is described as *oikoumenē*, even though several flourishing towns there would deserve such a description as much as the Phrygian and Cilician towns he passed through. The implied distinction suggests that Xenophon’s usage derives from a Sardocentric itinerary listing the settled regions within an idealized Lydian empire.” Mark Munn, *The Mother of the Gods, Athens, and the Tyranny of Asia: A Study of Sovereignty in Ancient Religion* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2006), 195.

<sup>21</sup> Plut. *De Alex. fort.* 1.6, 329a–d. Plutarch, *The Age of Alexander: Ten Greek Lives by Plutarch*, trans. Ian Scott-Kilvert and Timothy E. Duff (New York: Penguin, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Karl Galinsky, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

class, a slave-driven market economy, and the proliferation of a form of cosmopolitanism that traded the mysteries of the enchanted cosmos for the institutional powers of the *polis*.<sup>23</sup>

(ii) *Stoic Oikeiōsis*

By the time of his death in 323 BCE, Alexander had dutifully realized the Panhellenic vision of King Philip II. Having fortified his father's occupation of Thrace, he laid siege to Miletus in his conquest of Ionia and extended the Macedonian empire from Greece to the outlands of Egypt and Persia for the first time. In the century ensuing, that vision would be consecrated into thought as *oikeiōsis*. Like *oikoumenē*, this word stems from *oikeō* (*oikeioō*), which originally bore reference to a way of dwelling with others *as* others in the *oikos*, deferring to their alterity openly, responsively, carefully (see §30 below).<sup>24</sup> But under the Stoics, Julia Kristeva observes that it came to denote for any living being a kind of appropriation, or as she translates it “conciliation”: a “taking hold of oneself” and preserving that self in a sense that corresponds to our term *enstasis*.<sup>25</sup> In human beings (*zōon logikon echon*) this principle was posited to account for the transition from the natural to the ethical. Allied with the power of reason, it was thought to “bind us not only to ourselves but also to the concentric spheres” of the *kosmos*. Beginning with the enstatic individual – the originary site of one's own (*oikeion*) – that appropriation reached outward to absorb all beings into the “human universality” of “the community of reason.”<sup>26</sup> Kristeva concludes her analysis by suggesting that in spite of its earlier

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<sup>23</sup> Plato was one of several ancient scholars who noted the widespread deforestation that occurred in the fourth century BCE (e.g. *Critias*, 3de, 11b). For an overview of how this phenomenon is attributable to the rise of Archaic *polis*, see Signe Isager and Jens Erik Skysdsgaard, *Ancient Greek Agriculture: An Introduction* (Routledge: London, 1995), 12-14. It bears mention that the earlier imperial framework of the Alexandrian *oikoumenē* paved the way for what would become the Christian interdenominational mandate inaugurated by the fourth-century CE Roman emperor Constantine – the origins of ‘ecumenism’ in the religious sense. In this tradition *oikoumenē* takes on the ideological sense of the kingdom of Christ, defended by these interdenominational powers.

<sup>24</sup> The infinitive of *oikeō* is *oikein*. Here and throughout I adopt the convention of lemmatizing ancient Greek words in the first-person singular indicative. Exceptions occur in contexts where commentators opt for the infinitive in their exegesis.

<sup>25</sup> Kristeva's translation of *oikeiōsis* as ‘conciliation’ appears to be influenced by the treatment of this principle found in Cicero's *De finibus*, who does not provide the Greek term, or its Latin equivalent, but opts instead for both *conciliatio* (‘association’, ‘conciliation’) and *commendatio* (‘recommendation’).

<sup>26</sup> In Diogenes Laertius' doxography of Chrysippus one finds a canonical statement of how *oikeiōsis* is manifested by the hierarchical cosmic arrangement of living beings. Writes Diogenes: “An animal's first impulse, say the Stoics, is to self-preservation, because nature from the outset endears it to itself [literally, the animal is made *oikeion* to itself by nature], as Chrysippus affirms in the first book of his work *On Ends*: his words are ‘The dearest [first *oikeion*] thing to every animal is its own constitution and its consciousness thereof’ . . . And nature, they say, made no difference originally between plants and animals, for she regulates the life of plants too, in their case without

associations with hospitality, *oikeiōsis* “was less a thought of the other” that respects its “difference than an *autarchy* that assimilates the other,” whose otherness it “erases under the common denominator of reason.”<sup>27</sup> Otherwise put, this Stoic concept was simply the hypostatic rationalization of what *oikoumenē* would render in terms of bloodshed and natural devastation. To Thales, however, these two arch ecumenical concepts, torn from *oikeō* and *oikeion*, would have seemed just as baffling as his archeology did to the Classical and Hellenistic ear.

### §19. Self-Emerging *Phusis*: Nature as Earth-World

How then might we understand the *logos* of *phusis* expounded by Thales and the other *phusiologi*? In what sense can ecology, ages *avant la lettre*, be attributed to him? Given the increasing nominalization and theoretical abstraction of language over the course of Western history, there is danger of misapprehending the sense of these phenomena by an overreliance on lexical definition. And considering the pre-scientific age in which the Presocratics thrived, we would be remiss to entify that sense by translating it into calcified concepts of metaphysics or epistemology. A common yet grossly anachronistic tendency has been to convert being, as they understood it, into some categorically or substantially immutable presence on view from nowhere, their wisdom into what is theoretically knowable in principle. This is one of the strongest virtues of Heidegger’s etymological deconstruction and ontological reconstruction of *phusis* and *logos*. While undeniably controversial, his approach is illuminating not least since it uncovers the verbal dynamism from beneath the sedimentary strata of substantives that have compacted around these words over centuries of sedentary doxography and interpretation. What’s more, we shall see that it unearths the *heterological* senses of *phusis* and *logos* from the hypostatization of the former and the homological reduction of the latter. Heidegger’s retrieval of Presocratic thought, which coincides with the ecological turn in his own thinking, thereby unsettles the Classical domestication of the elements, guiding us out of the ecumene, the “natural world,” and back to a sense of nature in which world *and* earth are gathered.

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impulse and sensation, just as also certain processes go on of a vegetative kind in us. But when reason by way of a more perfect leadership has been bestowed on the beings we call rational, for them life according to reason becomes natural life. For reason supervenes to shape impulse scientifically . . . [And since] our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe . . . the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things” (D.L. 7.85f.).

<sup>27</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 57-9.

Heidegger sets out to recover *logos* from an early Greek experience of being that could be called “natural,” so long as this is read as *physical*.<sup>28</sup> Within that ancient clearing, he explains, *phusis* named the sense of being as such and not merely a specific mode of being or region of beings as it would in Classical thought (P 183-6/GA9 239-242; cf. BPP 107/GA24 151). Conventionally, this common Greek word, which derives from *phuō/phuein*, ‘to emerge’ or ‘to grow’ (intransitive) – has been translated as ‘nature’.<sup>29</sup> Yet this can be misleading. An echo of *phusis* can still be heard in ordinary sense of the Latin *natura*, ‘birth’; *nat-* is the past participial stem of *nasci/nascor*, ‘to be born’. But the early Greek understanding of *phusis* has little in common with the metaphysical concept of nature familiar to us. For this reason, Heidegger goes to great lengths to dislodge many of our “natural” intuitions about ‘nature’.<sup>30</sup> His treatments of *phusis* typically begin with a series of anti-metaphysical qualifications. Broaching the theme in the *Contributions*, for instance, he stipulates that what is “at issue here is not at all ‘nature’ (neither as object of natural science, nor as landscape, nor as sensibility)” (CP 149/GA65 189). In *Mindfulness* he enlarges on these caveats, tracing these misconceptions to their source:

If we say that metaphysics is the actual ‘*physics*’ as the knowledge of *phusis* in the sense of the being of beings . . . then we do not mean what was later called ‘nature’ or even ‘the sensible’, [*phusis*] has nothing in common with ‘nature’ or even ‘the sensible’ just as little as it has anything in common with the ‘supernatural’ and ‘spirit’ and ‘super-sensible’ (M 327/GA66 368-9).

Heidegger’s intent here is not to situate *phusis* beyond the realms of experience and intelligibility, but at their source. His claim that “sensibility,” “the sensible,” and “spirit” are irrelevant should be grasped as an attempt to prise *phusis* from a metaphysical understanding of the being of beings, or givenness of the given. Posited and ordered into a hypostatic framework shorn up by such binaries as intelligible/sensible, form/matter, and substance/accident, the concept of nature is traditionally framed in antinomical opposition to, or else as no more than a product of, human being, history, or spirit. This framework is meta-physical in the strictest sense. It lays claim to understanding “nature” through a host of predominantly human achievements –

<sup>28</sup> Cf. IM 15/GA40 17; PR 63/GA10 92l; CP 149f./GA65 190.

<sup>29</sup> As Heidegger explains in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” the translation of such Greek words into “Roman-Latin thought” is not “the innocent process it is considered to this day.” On the contrary, “beneath the seemingly literal and thus faithful translation there is concealed, rather, a *translation*, of Greek experience into a different way of thinking.” According to Heidegger, “the rootlessness of Western thought” draws its origins from the understanding of being qua beingness – or what we have termed *hypostatic thought* – that becomes standard in this period (PLT 23/GA5 7f.).

<sup>30</sup> Indeed, as Bannon points out, “Heidegger has very little to say about nature as such given that he considers the idea of nature as a *substantial*” domain to be the product of a modern “interpretation of beings . . . or at least one that rises to undisputed prominence in modernity.” Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 84.

objectivation, conceptualization, reasoning, theorizing, knowing – that operate *above* or *beyond* (*meta*) their ontological grounds (*phusis*). The cognitive achievements of the subject can be taken for granted as autogenous, as self-grounding, only by passing over their genesis from more basic registers of experience, where the subject and the anthropological difference collapse into the prejective ecstasies of being-in- and being-of-nature. To restate an earlier point, every metaphysics of nature rests on a contraction of lived phenomena into that which conforms to hypostatic thought exempt from phenomenological scrutiny. By unwittingly (realism) or wittingly (idealism) discounting the unthematic manifestation of nature, metaphysics conflates *physical* phenomena with the products of its own operations, the given (beings) with its theoretical givenness (being qua beingness). Thus does it misconstrue the hypostatic binaries above as straightforward translations of how “nature” is given to pure intuition or reason and constitutive of ultimate reality.

In view of the increasingly prominent role of attunement over the course of Heidegger’s career, it should not come as surprising that he traces the metaphysics of nature back to an ontological *misattunement*. The *Contributions* identifies “wonder” (*Erstaunen*) as the “fundamental mood” (*Grundstimmung*) elicited by being qua *phusis* in the early Greek world – the so-called “first beginning” whence our age emerged. At the other end of the history of being, we find the undecided age of the future ones ushered in by epochally inceptive attunements. To such poetic moods as mourning in the first Hölderlin lectures, the *Contributions* adds *Entsetzen* (‘dismay’ or ‘unsettlement’). Heidegger offers that *Entsetzen* could set the tone for “the other beginning,” an unprecedented age that would allow nature to *resist* and *unsettle* the order of willful machination and technological power. But it is neither wonder nor unsettled dismay that holds sway in our age. On his appraisal in the *Contributions*, “we are misled and accustomed [*gewöhnt*] . . . through metaphysics . . . to seeing in ‘unsettlement’ [*Entsetzen*] . . . only the wasteland [*Wüste*] and the ghastly” (CP 380/GA65 483, re-ordered). Modern technology finds its intellectual grounding in the history of metaphysics. From an ontohistorical vantage point, then, the devastation (*Verwüstung*) of the earth was foretold – ages before the actual advent of destructive technologies – by the metaphysical disposition toward the outlandish being of nature. An elementary aversion to nature as a *wasteland*, worthless when theoretically deserted (cf. Xenophon’s assessment above) Rather than be drawn out of the hypostatic standpoint by an attunement to earth, which supports that standpoint from below, the metaphysician soars high

above it to always already find herself in an antecedently posited “natural world.” In the inverted world of the ecumene, the concrete self-emergence of *phusis*, “within” or “without,” is presumed to be what is most abstract, unreal. Whereas that which happens to fit nicely into the theoretical space of concepts and reasons is most concrete, most real.

Heidegger sets the Presocratic experience of *phusis* apart from naive realist-empiricist and idealist-constructivist conceptions of nature. *Phusis* is not a freestanding reality “in itself,” lurking behind the veil of our ideas, appraisals, judgments, and representations. Nor is it a “for-itself” byproduct of such accomplishments. The phenomenologist vacates the standpoint of the impartial scientific spectator, who beholds nature at a lived distance within the theoretical landscape. She clips the wings of absolute spirit, for whom it becomes the backdrop for the teleology of Reason and the actualization of the Idea. In each case, nature is relegated to the hypostatic territory (objective or subjective) of the ecumene, where the earth is *intellectually* challenged-forth and devastated.<sup>31</sup> Heidegger argues that this understanding of “nature” as region or totality of theoretically present-at-hand beings was entirely foreign to Presocratic thought. According to his deconstruction, the advent of Western metaphysics was inaugurated when *idea* and *eidos*, not *phusis*, came to name being as such. And as the modern children of Protagorean man came to measure of all things by the subject, metaphysics would reach its meridian while *phusis* sunk into ontological oblivion.

Thinkers such as Anaximander, Parmenides, and Heraclitus understood *phusis* unthematically and pre-theoretically *ab origine*. Theirs was an experience innocent of the hypostatic reductions of and disjunctions between nature and human being, history, art, and spirit. As Heidegger submits, these were all understood as modes of being qua *phusis*.<sup>32</sup> As we

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<sup>31</sup> As Herbert Marcuse puts it in his influential commentary on Hegel’s system: “Reason is an objective force and an objective reality *only because all modes of being are more or less modes of subjectivity*, modes of realization. . . . all types of being culminate in the free ‘comprehensive’ subject who is able to realize reason. *Nature thus becomes a medium for the development of freedom*” Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 10f. Such is the thrust of Hegel’s famous thesis in §18 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “living Substance is being which is in truth *Subject*.” Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 10. Since nature just is “self-alienated” subjectivity for Hegel, the teleology of nature gives over to the self-positing teleology of spirit. Against those who “conceived of matter in general as the *non-ens*,” he contends that “even in this element, nature is a representation of the Idea.” On this basis, he notes, “one may very well admire in it the wisdom of God [*die Weisheit Gottes*],” i.e. the immanence of absolute spirit in the natural world (from §194 of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, translated in Ernst Behler, ed. *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline and Critical Writing* (London: Continuum, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger expatiates on this thesis at length in his 1939 essay “On the Essence and Concept *phusis* in Aristotle’s Physics B, I”, where he writes that “the differentiation of ‘nature and spirit’ is simply foreign to the Greeks” (P 186/GA9 243).

read in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*: “*phusis* originally means both heaven and earth, both the stone and the plant, both the animal and the human, and human history as the work of humans and gods” (IM 16/GA40 17). In this text Heidegger offers several formulations of that originary sense. *Phusis* names that by virtue of which beings come to manifest themselves or “come-into-appearance” in the clearing of unconcealment (*alētheia*). It names “that which emerges from itself” (*von sich aus Aufgehende*) into presence from self-withdrawing absence. And it names “the generation, growth, or standing-forth [*Entstehen*], arising from the concealed and thus enabling the concealed [*Verborgenen*] to take its stand for the first time [*in Stand bringen*]” (IM 15f./GA 40 17). Recall that for Heidegger unconcealment is only possible within the world, the layout of significance that determines the senses of particular beings. In this vein Bannon points out that the same word, *Aufgehen*, which announces *phusis* in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, had been used in *Being and Time* to define being-in-the-world as “unthematic, circumspect *absorption* [*Aufgehen*]” in the world (BT 71/SZ 76). This resonance leads him to suggest that Heidegger would have us hear the connections between “the notions of world, *Aufgehen*, and manifesting in a nonrepresentational manner (the emergence is unthematic).”<sup>33</sup>

To build on Bannon’s suggestion, remember that Heidegger uses this “sense of being absorbed in the world” to distinguish Dasein’s manner of being-in from beings present-at-hand contained and extended in thematic space. Dasein dwells, in-habits a region of the world unthematically configured by concern and solicitude (BT 79f./SZ 53f.). This detail is crucial to appreciating how Heidegger reconstructs *phusis* as a theoretically *and* concernfully underdetermined mode of self-emergence, running the gamut from worldliness to the unworldly presence of nature in *Being and Time*. This is why he will come to identify it as an “emergence into presence” (*anwesenden Aufgehens*), which “presencing” (*Anwesenheit*) admits of self-concealing elements that withhold themselves from revealing (CP 156, 336/GA65 222, 424f.). Phenomena emerge of themselves into the world wherein they may or may not facilitate our own ways of dwelling. Only derivatively do they become the intentional objects of conscious acts, let alone “objects of representation.” Moreover, they do so without being exhausted by any compartmental explication.

Dilating upon on this last point, I would like to suggest how the formulations of *phusis* from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* also intimate, by way of *Verborgenen*, the being of the

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<sup>33</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 48f.



earth. It bears repeating that the earth is distinguished from world by emerging into the horizons of experience *as* undisclosable. *Hyper-stasis* thus “takes its stand for the first time,” apart from all the operations imposed on it by the understanding. As self-concealing (*sich verbergend*), elements and elemental aspects of phenomena come into appearance within a rift or (dis)rupture of significance. They emerge into presence shot through with absence, veering between sense, nonsense, and ab-sense. Thus they resist conversion into the full-fledged affordances of practical circumspection and the perceptual wholes given to advertent inspection. But this is not to say that the being of the earth is somehow unnatural or supernatural. On the contrary, as Michael Zimmerman encapsulates Heidegger’s position, earth and world are both immanent to *phusis*:

Earth does not merely refer to what conceals itself, in contrast to what manifests itself in the historical world. Earth names the self-concealing power, *phusis*, which generates the things that can thrust into appearance in an historical world . . . [the] clearing through which earth can be partially disclosed in various ways.<sup>34</sup>

The sun in its ascension, the inflowing tide, the blossoming of the flower, and the “coming forth of animals and human beings from the womb”: all are instances of the phenomenal self-emergence named by *phusis* (IM 15/GA40 16). But because that auto-emergent eventuation is concurrently and continually an emergent return to earth, *phusis* is also intimated in the descension, the outflowing, and the withering of these beings, as well as their passing away into soil and tomb. As Heidegger describes this last dynamic: “With its very coming-to-life, every living thing already begins to die, and conversely, dying is but a kind of living, because only a living being has the ability to die” (P 227/GA9 297-8). Self-emergence retains self-concealment, whence beings arise and into which they continually withdraw as the ground and limit of their being. Such is the sense in which Heidegger takes *phusis* to have been unified with *alētheia*: the heterostatic interplay of revealing and concealing said by ‘un-concealment’, which was later “covered over by the *idea*” (CP 174/GA65 222). Taken together, these insights suggest an ecological conclusion of paramount importance. Before the ascendance of the first ecumenical epoch in the Classical period, *phusis* announced the being of the earth-world.

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<sup>34</sup> Michael E. Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth's Future: Radical Ecology and Postmodernity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994), 129f.

## §20. Language Unsigned but Underway: Off the Beaten Track of Structuralism and onto Heidegger's Path toward the Other *Logos*

We are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard.

–Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*<sup>35</sup>

The philosopher speaks, but this is a weakness in him, and an inexplicable weakness: he should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is there ready-made. But yet everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he hearkens to within himself. His entire “work” is this absurd effort. He wrote in order to state his contact with Being; he did not state it; and he could not state it, since it is silence. Then he recommences . . .

–Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*<sup>36</sup>

Heidegger's interpretation of the Presocratic *logos* is deeply informed by his study of Heraclitus, the thinker who flourished in Ephesus from roughly 535 to 475 BCE. *Logos* and language are intimately related. So before we can begin to make sense of that interpretation, which condenses Heidegger's thinking from the 1930s through the 1950s, we must first attempt to limn the contours of how he comes to approach language in this period. In *Language After Heidegger* Krzysztof Ziarek draws much needed attention to an important feature of Heidegger's way to language, one that has been almost entirely obscured by its post-structuralist reception. Contrary to the prevailing view of that school of thought, Heidegger's thinking is thoroughly non-Saussurean in spirit and execution. For it is not based on the relationship between signification and signs. On the contrary, he maintains: “Language does not exhaust itself in signifying, nor is it merely something that has the character of a sign or cypher” (PLT 129/GA5 310). It is precisely the asignifying development of the sign from “the ‘still or silent force’ [*stille Kraft*]” of “being as element” that he aligns with originary language, *Sprache*, in his later writings (P 242/GA9 316). The line between semiotics or structuralist linguistics and a phenomenology of language is drawn between whether or not an elementary experience of language allows it show itself in itself. According to Heidegger, this only happens when we have bracketed: (1) the everyday understanding of language as a system of ready-to-hand equipment for communication (e.g. the sign as “signaling-equipment” [*Zeigzeuge*] in *Being and Time*); (2)

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<sup>35</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam Classics, 2004), 197.

<sup>36</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1968), 125.

the logico-theoretical understanding of it as present-at-hand (e.g. linguistics); (3) the reduction of language to “expression” if this entails the metaphysically-loaded procedure of making public the “private” content of thoughts; and even (4) the idea that language is a strictly human achievement. For Heidegger, one might say that that each of these presuppositions is very much in danger of forgetting what Thoreau exhorts us to acknowledge.

As Ziarek elucidates Heidegger’s stance toward 1, “language for him is not essentially a system of signs but rather the way in which emergence and manifesting, or being’s disclosure of beings, comes to signs.”<sup>37</sup> Heidegger names this “saying” (*Sage, Sagen*), which he traces, by way of *sagan*, to ‘showing’ (*zeigen*) in the sense of letting something appear (cf. OWL 93/GA12 188).<sup>38</sup> Saying is the elementary “emergence and manifesting” of phenomena through what Ziarek refers to as “the ingenuity of language.” It comprises the “poietic momentum” (Ziarek) or “way-making movement” (*Be-wägung*) of language that operates beneath the order of what Heidegger calls “terms” (*Wörter*) and “word-signs” (*Wörterzeichen*), such as those one finds in a dictionary (*Wörterbuch*). In effect, saying is what bears these bearers of discursive meaning (*Bedeutung*). As he characterizes it, this conceptually underdetermined dimension of language first makes way or “sets the tone” (*bestimmen*) for signification or meaning by opening a clearing for beings and their relations to appear. Thus: “language . . . receives its tonality and determination [*Bestimmung*] from saying as that which makes way for everything [*dem alles Be-wägenden*]” (OWL 95/GA12 191).

The resonances of *Stimmung* and *Gestimmtheit* are not without significance here. In *Being and Time* Heidegger had identified “silence” (*Schweigen*) as one of the essential conditions of “discourse” (*Rede*) (SZ 164). By silence he does not intend the absence of sound but rather that of given signs or meanings. Merleau-Ponty’s allusion to our mute “contact with Being,” which we shall return to in chapter 8, resounds a similar refrain. No common expression

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<sup>37</sup> Krzysztof Ziarek, *Language After Heidegger* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2013), 4. Such is the sense in which Heidegger claims “the event words [*das Ereignis wortet*]” and through words it “comes to terms” (GA74 99). As Ziarek interprets it, this line is performative. It “should be read as indicative of the fact that the event takes place as and brings itself to words, with the inclusion of its ‘own’ name, *Ereignis*, among them, and does so specifically through the way in which the alternating prefixes added to the root meanings constellated by Heidegger span and stir . . . [how] language moves itself, writing and ‘speaking’ in the spaces and with the beat outlined by prefixes, hyphens, etymons, and compounds” – e.g. *Zueignung, Aneignung, Er-eigen, Er-eugen, Er-äugen*. With this in mind, Ziarek stresses that the “extended examination and reinvention of *das Ereignis* as a German word” is “not only a matter of etymology or meaning, since it renders *Ereignis* into a critical, poietic, and nonconceptual [or conceptually underdetermined] ‘word’ that then shapes how Heidegger thinks, deploys, or reinvents his . . . key terms” (ibid., 25).

<sup>38</sup> Not to be confused with *Zeichen*, ‘signs’.

better captures this phenomenon perhaps than ‘pregnant silence’, as when used to describe that palpably heavy atmosphere – restful or restive as the case may be – which hangs in the air when words fail us and our tongues are simply tied. Silence is essential to discourse because it is liable to disrupt our rote preoccupation with the byproducts of “assertion” (*Aussage*) or mere “patter” (*Gerede*), thus the “self-evidence and self-assurance of the average ways in which these things have been explicated [*Ausgelegtheit*]” and interpreted (SZ 170).<sup>39</sup> Were language merely a matter of speakers referring and hearers attending to things once ready-to-, now present-at-hand and passing the word along, there could be no accounting for its “infinite compositionality.” Underdetermined by any formalization – as we learn from what the tortoise said to Achilles (Carroll) and the math student to his instructor (Wittgenstein) – the copious ingenuity of language is not reformed out of logic but *performatively pre-formed* through our unscripted abilities to be moved by the referential indeterminacy and unspoken equivocity of the world. Those abilities to be *affected through moods and attunements* enable us to break the trammels of convention and move language beyond the domain of rigid signifiers or rigid designation. What Heidegger later calls “saying” is precisely the inceptive response to the affective call of that movement underway toward the coherent deformation of meaning.

*Being and Time* equates this call, this pregnant silence of language, with discourse in its most “outlandish mode.” Like other manifestations of *Unheimlichkeit*, it is exposed by moods – Heidegger singles out *Angst* and “reticence” (*Verschwiegenheit*), which move us toward certain styles of comportmental response (SZ 322, 343). Consider just the latter mood for a moment. By “taking the word away from the well-informed patter [*verständigen Gerede*] of the ‘One’” and attuning us to a “silent discourse” whose outlandish ambiguity finds no cognate in fact or fiction known, Heidegger says that reticence “gives rise to the genuine ability-to-hear [*Hörenkönnen*],” that is, “listening” (*Horchen*) (SZ 296, 163, trans. mod.). When merely hearing, we attend to what is said exclusively within the context of conventional meanings that reaffirm how language is already understood ontologically (e.g. as communication). If misattuned to the outlandish elements of discourse, hearing perpetually falls into the kind of tranquilized reassurance exemplified today by the *consumer* of language, commodified as an endless stream of

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<sup>39</sup> In *Being and Time*, Heidegger defines “assertion” (*Aussage*) as “a pointing-out which gives something a definite character and which communicates” (SZ 156). He characterizes “patter” (*Gerede*) as an inauthentic mode of discourse leveled down to the expression or communication of what has already given by our “average understanding and the disposition belonging to it” (SZ 167f.).

information or “content” that momentarily satisfies her curiosities until she succumbs to distraction and the insatiable desire for more. Listening, by contrast, breaks us out of that discursive cycle of existential abjection by reticently salvaging a moment of silence from the cacophony. Listening *waits* to be guided by the nascent polysemy of the world unsaid, with an ear tuned in to the secret strings of saying. In listening, nonsense thrums with ab-sense, teeming with implications that speak through us in ways new and renascent. Through it saying reopens the being of language, amplifying and enriching it, every time it breaks the silence.

In the *Contributions* Heidegger recapitulates his analysis from *Being and Time* then enlarges on it. After reiterating that “language is grounded in silence [*Schweigen*],” he reaffirms that the “basic mood [*Grund-stimmung*] of this grounding is restraint” [or reticence, *Verhaltenheit*], described as an ability to *conserve* the silence (CP 401, 27/GA65 31, 510). In this mood, closely related to reticence, we exercise restraint by deferring projection. When restraint is nourished in waiting, we are said to “bear the silence,” “holding silent” (*Erschweigen*) and maintaining the “stillness” (*Stille*) of language in the absence, withdrawal, or refusal of terms (*Wörter*), fully articulated meanings. This hyperstatic moment of silence is pregnant indeed. For it gets recast here as the generative eventuation of language, the language of the event (*Ereignis*). By deferring to the silent play of ab-sense, which breaks away (*ab-*) from conventional meaning, we gear into opulent constellations of “words” (*Worte*) in Heidegger’s idiomatic sense. Semiotically and semantically unspecified, a *Wort* is an inceptive “drift” (*Aufriß*) of larval senses in the “rift” (*Riss*) of meaning, a “hinting” (*winken*) heterologue that wriggles with ambiguity (see §26 below).<sup>40</sup> In so doing, the word po(i)etically opens new paths toward possible terms, which bear it as a page of text its watermark.

In an untranslated manuscript entitled *Zum Wesen der Sprache*, Heidegger again rekindles his analysis from the 1920s and proceeds to stoke its flames, bringing the practical dimension of reticence into sharper relief. Once more, the most basic response-ability to language is identified as listening, described here as an “attentive” or “mindful” (*achtendes*) praxis of “bearing the silence” (*Er-schweigen*) and “holding the stillness” or “holding still” (*Die Stille Halten*).<sup>41</sup> In contradistinction to Husserlian “attention” (*Aufmerksamkeit*), this way of

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<sup>40</sup> In Heidegger’s words from 1941-2, “Das Ereignis ist das anfängliche Wort” – “the event is the inceptive word” (GA71 145, translation mine).

<sup>41</sup> Listening is the comportmental response-ability solicited by the attunement of restraint. Along these lines in the late 191930s, Heidegger writes in *Zum Wesen der Sprache*, “Erschweigung ist die Verant-wortung des Wortes.” Into

listening is not to be confused with a noetic act. Rather than directing a ray of intention toward the world, listening remains attentive precisely to what cannot be constituted or otherwise appropriated. Like waiting it is *undirected* in the sense that it does not seek out and seize upon an intentional object (see §16). In Heidegger's words, listening is a "self-deferral" (*sich fügendes*) to a silence, which it bears "not only prior to and about all senses" that are already given, but "prior to and about all objects. . . beings, and habitual comportment" (GA74 155).<sup>42</sup>

For Heidegger, listening is an elementary response-ability to the being of language that offers a way of releasing ourselves from the hypostatic and homological reductions. Ziarek's elucidation of this metaphysical overturning is worth quoting at length:

The very possibility of bringing metaphysics to its turning point, its *Verwindung*, and turning with it also the way we experience the question of being, hinges on such a *transformation of language*. For this transformation means a critical change in how thinking unfolds; instead of being guided [primarily] by conceptual grasp and definition, it is steered and molded by what *listening* to language discloses [viz. at the level of saying]. In short, without transforming our relation to language, of our experience of what language is and how it guides deliberation, thinking will not be able to change, and *no amount of radical critique, postmodernity, or postmetaphysics, will force or manufacture the transformation at issue here for Heidegger*.<sup>43</sup>

There is a remarkable consistency between Heidegger's way to language, how he records that path, and what he sets out to accomplish in traversing it in the text. His intent is not to use language as a readymade vehicle for transmitting his ideas, just as little as it is to subject it to conceptual analysis. It is rather to performatively enact a po(i)etics that begins from the affectively inceptive ways that language speaks through us. If often discordant to our "metaphysically well-trained ears," as Ziarek astutely puts it, Heidegger's poetic armamentarium – his etymologies, neologies, paralogies, holophrastic tropes, floating prefixes, and hyphenations – is devised to reattune our ears, "not for aesthetic reasons but because the ability to listen to and follow language comes to prompt and pattern the very movement of thought, allowing for the most important philosophical opportunities and discoveries."<sup>44</sup> The more deeply he plumbs the abyssal depths of being, the more mindful must we become to how Heidegger's outlandish idiom responds, and thereby prompts our own response, to the question of language.

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our idiom this could be felicitously rendered: "Holding silent is the response-ability concerning the word" (GA74 135, translation mine).

<sup>42</sup> "Horchen: als *Er-schweigung* – nicht nur vor und über allen Sinnen, sondern vor und über allen Gegenständen vor und über allem Seiendem und dem gewohnten Verhalten."

<sup>43</sup> Ziarek, *Language after Heidegger*, 15, emphasis mine.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

## §21. Gathering *Logos*: The Heterological Layout of Truth

All that we know is that having everything we yet hold nothing,  
that feeling the wild song of this great earth upwelling in us we  
have no words to give it utterance.

–Thomas Wolfe, *Of Time and the River*<sup>45</sup>

Jesus knew the man whose mutilation left him functionless, who  
had eyes and could not see and had ears and could not hear. I  
know the man whose mutilation left him organless, who sees  
without eyes and hears without ears.

–César Vallejo, “There is a Man Mutilated . . .”<sup>46</sup>

Drawing on its Homeric acceptance and its residual traces in Aristotle, Heidegger suggests that before *logos* designated the performance or content of human speech acts or logical reasoning, this word derived its meaning from the verb *legō/legein*, which referred to a selective “laying” (*legen*) out and “gathering” (*sammeln*) of beings into a relation that separates them from one another.<sup>47</sup> *Inter alia*, he tells us, this encompassed: “gleaning, collecting wood, harvesting grapes, making a selection,” or as we find it in Homer, the convening of people (IM 131-2/GA40 132-3).<sup>48</sup> Here in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger goes on to anticipate such eminent scholars as Charles Kahn and D.C. Schindler by interpreting the Presocratic *logos* not simply as a human accomplishment but as a concrete phenomenal event to which we are basically responsive.<sup>49</sup> Permit me simply to sketch out the most pertinent contours of this account.

If all beings are given by *phusis*, they yet differ with respect to how earth and world, self-concealing and revealing, are differentially *gathered* into them. Consider the emergence and withdrawal of stone, animals, and humans. For each of these beings to be stand distinctly within our horizons, it must be gathered together and lie collected into some cohesive layout of

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Wolfe, *Of Time and the River* (Garden City, NY: The Sun Dial Press, 1944), 34.

<sup>46</sup> From *Payroll of Bones* in César Vallejo: *The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), 29.

<sup>47</sup> By way of an excursus into Heraclitus, Aristotle’s mention of *logos* in *Phys.* 192a3-9 (cf. 252a13) is analyzed along these lines in Heidegger’s essay on the concept of *phusis* in the *Physics* (P 212f./GA9 270-80).

<sup>48</sup> Heidegger quotes Hom. *Od.* 24.106: “‘Amphimedon, by what disaster have you all been plunged down into the darkness of the earth, all of you prominent and of the same age; one could hardly bring together [or select] (*lexaito* <a form of *legein*>), in a search throughout a polis, such noble men?’” (IM 131f./GA40 132). Cf. PR 107/GA10 160f.; EGT 60-2/GA7 214-216. According to Heidegger, the sense of *logos* as a gathering into language (monologue, dialogue) and into reason (*logos* as logic via the Latin *ratio*) derives from this older, more basic Greek sense. He adduces the word ‘analogy’ to illustrate how this ambiguity has carried over into modern language. As a *gathering* of two unlike things into a *linguistic* figuration, the older acceptance of *logos* is paired with the newer in this word (IM 131-2/GA40 132-3).

<sup>49</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 102. D.C. Schindler, “The Community of the One and the Many: Heraclitus on Reason,” *Inquiry* 46 (2003): 422.

significance that stabilizes its appearance against its withdrawal back into the concealment whence it emerged.<sup>50</sup> Otherwise it would be impossible to distinguish emergence from submergence, appearing from disappearing, presencing from absencing, revealing from concealing, identity from non-identity. Taken together, these dynamic movements describe the dynamic unconcealment (*alētheia*) of *phusis*. And the gathering together of their non-disjunctive dyads is precisely what Heidegger claims the Presocratic *phusiologoi* understood by *logos*.<sup>51</sup>

(i) *Taking in Meaning and Taking up Sense amid the Clamor of the World*

Before we turn to Heidegger's ontological retrieval of *logos* from Heraclitus, some points of clarification are in order. When we say that *logos* is what gathers beings into a significant layout of "sense" (*Sinn*), it is crucial this not be mistaken for discursive "meaning" (*Bedeutung*).<sup>52</sup> In §7b of *Being and Time* on "The Concept of the *Logos*" Heidegger unpacks this distinction between sense and meaning in terms of: (1) the hermeneutic as-structure of "explication" (*Auslegung*); and (2) the apophantic as-structure of "interpretation" (*Interpretation*) and "assertion" (*Aussage*). While both play a role in "discourse" (*Rede*), 1 is unthematically projected as a possibility salient to our concerns and abilities (e.g. the tool *as* pen used for writing). Meanwhile, 2 involves derivatively thematic ways we conceptualize the senses antecedently disclosed by 1, whereby the hermeneutic *as* gets converted into the 'is' of predication (e.g. 'The pen is a Parker', 'The pen is five inches in length'). Although assertion is for us the most familiar mode of discourse, occupying for this reason a prominent place in his analysis of "patter" (*Gerede*), Heidegger insists that assertion does not exhaust discourse (just as signs don't) – a proto-Wittgensteinian point he illustrates by cases of non-assertoric speech such as "requesting" (SZ 32). Observing this distinction, Heidegger translates *logos* in §7b as "letting-

<sup>50</sup> Heidegger frequently designates this finite persistence by the word *verweilen*, meaning 'lingering', 'staying', or 'dwelling'. In *The Introduction to Metaphysics*, this expression features prominently in his encapsulation of the three elements of the early Greek understanding of being. For them, he writes, being eventuates as an "*aufgehend-verweilende Walten*" an "emerging" (*phusis*) and "abiding" (*logos*) that "prevails" in unconcealment (*alētheia*) (IM 15/GA40 16).

<sup>51</sup> With regard to identity, this formulation might strike a peculiar note to a modern ear. We tend to hear the supposed one-to-one relation of the ego or person in the word 'identity'. However, as Heidegger reminds us, before identity "attained its preeminence in the I" as the "*explicitly self-appertaining*" truth of its "knowing *itself*" or its self-certainty, "identity derived from the *alētheia* of *phusis*, from presence as . . . *gatheredness* into unconcealment" (CP 156/GA65 199).

<sup>52</sup> In Heidegger's words from *Being and Time*: "Taken strictly sense [*Sinn*] means the upon-which [*das Woraufhin*] of the primary projection of the understanding of being. . . . When we say: beings 'have sense', this means: they have become accessible *in their being*" (SZ 324).



be-seen” (*Sehenlassen*) and “letting-be-heard” (*Vernehmenlassen*), or allowing for the “showing forth” (*apophansis*), “making manifest” (*dēloun*), or “unconcealment” (*alētheia*) of phenomena. More precisely, he tells us that *logos* is a “synthesis” that “lets something be seen in its togetherness [*Beisammen*] with something – letting it be seen *as* something” (the hermeneutic *as* of circumspective explication) (SZ 32-34). Put simply, it gathers beings into a relational nexus of significance against the backdrop of which each manifests a stable sense that stands apart from others. As we have seen in Heidegger, the word ‘letting’ (*lassen*) regularly signals disposition, mood, and sometimes response-ability. But it would be some years before he would bring these dimensions of the *logos* to the fore.

(ii) *Simply Listening: Conserving the Silence of the Earth*

Heidegger had dramatically refined his interpretation of *logos* by the time he delivered his 1951 lecture, entitled “Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50).” Here we find him exploring a lower register of sense than was captured by apophantic and hermeneutic *as*-structures of *Being and Time*. Heidegger begins the lecture by tracing *logos* once again to *legen*, which he now interprets as “‘letting-lie-together-before’ [*beisammen-vor-liegen-Lassen*]” in the “self-showing” (*Sichzeigen*) of an “appearance” (*Scheinen*). Instead of an object that stands before us as we visually inspect it at a detached distance, Heidegger clarifies that this essentially “means . . . that whatever lies before us *involves* [*anliegt*] us and therefore *matters* [*angeht*] to us” (EGT 62, 64/GA7 216, 218f., emphasis mine, trans. mod.). You will recall from *Being and Time* that disposition is said to disclose how things *as* such matter while mood discloses how they matter in some way within (regions and situations of) the world. Could it be that *logos* originally lays out and gathers together (aspects of) phenomena otherwise than those available to circumspective explication and interpretive inspection? Could it be that we are exposed to the *logos* of the *unavailable*? In this vein Heidegger turns back to the distinction we introduced between listening and hearing. “Hearing [*hören*],” he explains, “is primarily gathered together in listening [*Horchen*],” which gathering is less a matter of “the activation of the body’s audio equipment” than it is a manner of being (hyper)ecstatically given over to what “we have heard [*gehört*] when we *belong* to [*gehören*] what addresses us” (EGT 65/GA7 219, emphasis mine). In attuning ourselves to the *logos* we become, as he puts it, “all ears,” which is impossible when “we only hear [*anhören*] the wording [*Wortlaut*], as the expression of a speaker.” In these selective hearing, he says, “we are not yet even listening [*zuhören*] at all” (EGT 66/GA7 220, trans. mod.).

When Heidegger cryptically adds that “we do not listen because we have ears,” but rather have ears because we listen, this is not to imply that listening is a disembodied ability, that it has entered “into the realm of the spiritual [*das Geistige*].” Contrariwise, if I may be permitted this unHeideggerian thought, it points to how attuned listening involves the sensorium of the entire body. In a way that problematizes what some phenomenologists construe as the perceptual equipment of the lived body proper, this ability would be one that transects – synesthetically perhaps – the thematically discrete modalities of perception.<sup>53</sup> Only at the level perceptual accomplishment where hearing, sight, and touch (etc.) can be parsed from one another does it become possible to attend to the noematic correlate of a specific act and receive independent verification of its identity from a second act across modalities. Listening, by contrast, obtains at a lower, undirected level of experience. It is not an act from which emanate outbound rays of intention – like the noeses of egoic consciousness in Husserl’s eidetic phenomenology. In this connection Heidegger reprises his analysis from *Zum Wesen der Sprache* by setting listening apart from selective acts of hearing directed toward intentional objects such as sounds or tones, as well as from those same acts when further thematized through “the physiology of the senses” (EGT 65/GA7 219). If there is any connection to be made here to classical phenomenology, it would be to the ubiquitously non-discriminating “curiosity” (*Neugier*) unveiled in Husserl’s manuscripts from the early 1930s: an “originary affection” (*ursprüngliche Affektion*) he singles out as the driving force behind the passive syntheses of the non-egoic sphere of preconscious experience.<sup>54</sup> In this light, the contention that “we have ears . . . because we listen” is not the

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<sup>53</sup> Illustrative is Drew Leder’s Heideggerian treatment of the lived body as a(n) (un)ready-to-hand *Zeug*-complex in *The Absent Body* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1990), 83.

<sup>54</sup> In recent years there has been a dramatic reappraisal of the place of affection within Husserl’s phenomenology. This is thanks largely to the appearance of previously unpublished *Nachlass* manuscripts, in particular: *Die Lebenswelt: Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution, Texte aus dem Nachlass, 1916-1937* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), abbreviated as Hua. XXXIX.; and Edmund Husserl, *Späte Texte über Zeitkonstitution: Die C-Manuskripte, 1929-1934* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), abbreviated as Hua. VIII. Owing to these texts, it has become more commonly accepted that the later Husserl considered affection to be a pervasive feature of conscious life, contributing to its coherence, unity, and emergence. In the C-Manuscripts, for instance, the focus falls not on an occasional feeling, emotion, or mood of curiosity aroused on the basis of some more general personal interest, but rather on the motivational basis for advertence as such. Husserl identifies this *instinctive* or “natural” curiosity as “the lowest, all-founding interest,” one which is not founded on, even if reshaped by, those interests distinctive of an *individual* conscious life (Hua. VIII, 325, translation mine, *et passim*). Instinct enters into this analysis as an “inborn” or “inherent” (*angeboren*) “manner of empty striving (*Streben*) still lacking the [conscious] ‘presentation of a goal’” (Hua. VIII, 326). For Husserl, being affected entails being *motivated* toward some response at the passive or active levels of consciousness. He claims that the association of non-egoic consciousness and the intentional acts of the ego likewise exhibit an affective-motivational structure, underdetermined by full-fledged rationality albeit

inscrutable quandary it initially seems. For Heidegger, the ear is involved yet inessential precisely because listening, like “natural curiosity,” derives from a disposition that even the deaf do enjoy. More to the point, there would be nothing whatever disclosed by hearing, no such act motivated in Husserl’s terms, but for a more passive and originary exposure to phenomena. An inalienable ability to be affected by matters that matter simply by virtue of their manifestation.

Along these lines, Heidegger characterizes listening as a “thoughtful attending to what is simple [*nachdenkend auf Einfaches zu achten*],” which calls to mind the “mindful” or “attentive” (*achtendes*) response to the silence addressed above (EGT 65/GA7 220). Just as *Zum Wesen der Sprache* suggests that listening lets the pregnant silence of discourse gather itself into words (*Worte*) that are not yet terms (*Wörter*) or word-signs (*Wörterzeichen*), so we read here that “saying and discourse essentially happen [*Sagen und Reden wesen*] as the letting-lie-together-before of everything” (EGT 63/GA7 217). The same words he had used to translate *logos*. Otherwise stated, we can only become “all ears” once we restrain our thoughtless adherence to readymade terminology and reticently come to terms with silence as the ontologically regenerative eventuation of language, the always singular saying beneath the patter of fungible signs and familiar expressions. In the thought that “saying is *legein*,” writes Heidegger, “we have stumbled upon an event [*Ereignis*] whose immensity still lies concealed in its long unnoticed simplicity,” notably owing to its “long accepted manifestations” as “expression and signification,” which do not “reach into the realm of the originary, essential determination of language” (EGT 63-4/GA7 217f.).

In the age of the first beginning inaugurated by the Greeks, that event was said simply by *logos*, which has beggared conceptual analysis and definition from its inception. By laying stress on its originary acceptation as *legein*, Heidegger sets out to salvage a peculiar – one might even

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teleologically oriented toward it (Hua VIII, 260).

Husserl thus situates curiosity, as original affection, at the most primitive level of a unitive motivational framework underpinning genetic gradations of accomplishment ranging from affective “allure” (*Reiz*), which motivates the passive syntheses of time-consciousness, to the explicit norms – theoretical, axiological, and practical – governing the most advanced forms of logical “position-taking” (cf. *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, trans. Anthony J. Steinbock (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 339. The normalizing framework of his theory, then, is the enstasis of the ego and its rational activity, which leads him to enstatically dys-close all phenomena only insofar as they are underway toward egoic accomplishment. (e.g. “Affektion ist zwar als solche Affektion *zur Zuwendung*, aber Zuwendung besagt: *Das Ich ist motiviert, aktiv zu werde*,” Hua. VIII, 319f., emphasis mine). This prevents him from exploring the hyperstatic possibilities to which we are exposed by non-egoic affection. For the same reason, there is little room in this teleo-methodological scheme for an analysis of a curiosity undampened by the inability to constitute, or bestow sense on, that which elicits it in general, i.e. an elemental attunement of *earthly* curiosity.

say outlandish – way of saying. Arising from a reticent attunement that keys us into listening as opposed to merely hearing, saying reveals itself as an ecological response-ability. Essentially, he writes, saying “is not characterized as a reverberation which expresses meaning”; nor is it limited to “vocalization.”<sup>55</sup> Instead, he proposes that *legein* “names the *inexhaustible mystery* that the speaking of language eventuates [*ereignet*] from the unconcealment [*Unverborgenheit*] of what is present” (EGT 64/GA7 218, emphasis mine). Such is the way that *logos* is united with *alētheia*: the “unconcealment [that] uses [*brauchen*] concealment, *lethe*, as a reservoir from which revealing can, as it were, draw” (EGT 70f./GA7 225f.). As such, it partakes of both dimensions of unconcealment: “*logos* has in itself this revealing-concealing character [*entbergend-bergenden Charakter*] (EGT 71/GA7 226). Put simply, *logos is heterological*.<sup>56</sup> Every disclosure of what is present through selective hearing and apophantic discourse conceals this silent reservoir, meaningless, inexplicable, yet teeming with implications from which saying draws its possibility. Prior to our interpretation of the world in *terms* of signs and concepts (i.e. homologues), and even before we segregate it into sights, sounds, and smells or negotiate it as a region of concerned affordances, the affective atmosphere of the silent *logos*, the *logos* of “being as element,” stirs and strives through us, moving us toward these copious responses in “the language which all things and events speak without metaphor” (Thoreau).

Thus does Heidegger arrive at the ecological difference of *logos* in this text. By virtue of the inexhaustible enticements of its mystery, the concealing (*entbergend*) character of the “laying that gathers” shelters sense against its implosion into what has already been asserted, heard, and interpreted. Heidegger expresses the point accordingly: “Laying is a sheltering [*Bergen*]. Laying shelters everything present in its presencing” and enables it to “endure [*währen*] in unconcealment” (EGT 70/GA 7 225). To expand on an earlier suggestion, *phusis* emerges of itself into phenomenal presence. Yet we learned from *Being and Time* (§15 above) that the originary presence of nature is permeated by absence, hyperstasis. In being laid out and gathered by *logos*, the elemental origin and ongoing source of making sense of the world, nature resolves itself into beings with enduring senses and stable identities that nonetheless remain open to

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<sup>55</sup> As Heidegger explains, “the words that language uses are only fragments that have precipitated out of the word, and from them humans can never find their way to beings or find the path back to them, unless it be on the basis of *legein*” (P 213/GA9 279f.).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. “But disclosure is *alētheia*. This and *logos* are the same. . . . *logos* is *in itself and at the same time* a revealing and a concealing (EGT 70/GA7 225).

renewal and renovation. Conserving the sheltering elements of language means letting their heterostatic ambiguity rest in its revealing-concealing character. It demands a reticent waiting that does not strive to disclose them in *terms* of being-understood. The overarching thrust of Heidegger's analysis is that we must allow for an exposure to the non-sense and absurdity of the *logos* before seeking to give voice to it. Only by delivering ourselves over to "feeling the wild song of this great earth upwelling in us" (Wolfe) and acknowledging that we "have no words to give it utterance" may we duly care for and cultivate the generative grounds of all utterance. The prospect of finding shelter in the language of the world, in the "house of being" where "human being ek-sists by dwelling" (P 254/GA9 313), is underwritten by an out-standing way of listening and saying that responds to the silence beneath the clamor of the said.

Several years after the "Logos" lecture, in his meditations on "The Essence of Language" (1957/8), Heidegger will reframe the curious remark that "we have ears . . . because we listen." Extending the idea to the mouth and how it bespeaks the mouth of the river, he writes:

Those differences [between vernacular manners of speaking, *Mundarten*, in regions of a country] are not only or primarily grounded in different movement patterns of the organs of speech [or speech equipment, *Sprachwerkzeuge*]. The landscape, and that means the *earth* speaks in them, differently each time. But the mouth is not merely a kind of organ of the body understood as an organism – *body and mouth are part of the earth's flow and growth* in which we mortals *flourish*, and from which we receive the soundness of our roots. If we lose the earth, of course, we also lose our roots (OWL 98f./GA12 193f., emphasis mine, trans. mod.).

This passage serves as a further testament to the ecological difference of language in Heidegger's later thought – and this despite the presumptive equivalence of earth and "landscape." If the movement of language is consummated by being-in-the-world, these lines seem to indicate that it is soundly rooted in being-of-the-earth. To forecast a line of thought to be pursued in chapter 8, we might consider how these lines signal another dimension of the elemental, namely, the body itself in its hyper-ecstatic mode. If the lowermost roots of listening and saying are footed in the seams of the earth, in its "flow and growth," it follows that these seams must be unsutured from the mouth of the organized body that consumed so much of twentieth-century phenomenology. Accordingly, and in a manner unthought by Heidegger, we shall eventually put our shoulder to the idea that listening and saying each takes root in no body at all, but in the body's *flesh*.<sup>57</sup> By disporting itself away from the enstatic *organization* of embodied comportment, I shall argue

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<sup>57</sup> So conceived, the being-of-the-earth named by the flesh, which we shall stitch out of Merleau-Ponty's later thought in the final chapter, bears some family resemblances to Deleuze's concept of the "body without organs." It is perhaps noteworthy that this concept was excised from the poetic mind of Antonin Artaud, much like Heidegger upturned the earth from Hölderlin. See especially chapter 6 of Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. See also: Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990).

that this concernfully *superfluous* and ontologically *overgrown* incarnation of existence is sensuously grafted to the sensible earth, responding in kind to its silent summons.

## §22. Heraclitus Loves to Hide: The Hinting Summons of the Elemental *Logos* and the Generative Obscurity of the Poetic

Poets, as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive.

–Gary Snyder, “Poetry and the Primitive”<sup>58</sup>

Heidegger’s claim that we are not yet listening when we simply attend to the utterance of a speaker hearkens back to the titular aphorism of his 1951 lecture on Heraclitus. That fragment begins as follows: “It is wise, listening not to me but to the *logos* . . .” (XXXVI, D 50).<sup>59</sup> Projected across the camera obscura of history, Heraclitus of Ephesus cuts a peculiar figure silhouetted by a cloak of epithets: “the riddler,” “the misanthrope,” the “melancholic,” and most prominently *ho skoteinos*, ‘the obscure’ or ‘the dark one’. Heraclitus’ words are said to take us down “a hard path” through “darkness” and “gloom,” from which many a reader has strayed.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, those who adhere to the straight and narrow path quickly despair of the task he sets for us, much as they lose their way in retracing Thales’ steps. Expecting the teachings of a learned man or the superficial discoveries of a fledgling natural scientist, they find only the “stammering” philosopher, a fool on an errand fraught with “ambiguous connections” which lead only to *aporiae*.<sup>61</sup>

Significantly for us, the Greek word *skoteinos* also meant ‘oracular’. And fortunately for us, Heraclitus offers an account of oracular utterances that has weathered the sands of time. The account concerns those once issued by the Pythian oracle of Delphi, a sacred place reputed to have been located above the navel-center of earth. Upon inhaling the silent effluvia that emanated from a stony chasm in the ground, the priestess was moved to utter the *logos* of the god Apollo. About this *logos*, Heraclitus has the following to say: “The lord whose oracle is

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<sup>58</sup> Collected in *Earth House Hold* (1969), reprinted in Gary Snyder, *Look Out: A Selection of Writings* (New York: New Directions, 2002), 113.

<sup>59</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*. I have adopted Kahn’s translations in this section unless otherwise noted. But given the unwieldiness of the Roman numerals he adopts to catalogue the fragments, I have included the more common Diels-Kranz numbering as well. Each is cited parenthetically with the latter indicated by a ‘D’.

<sup>60</sup> D.L. 9.16.

<sup>61</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* 1407b13.

Delphi neither declares [*legei*] nor conceals [*kruptei*], but gives hints [*sēmainei*] (XXXIII, D 93, trans. mod.). Now, we can heed the counsel of D 50 by not merely *hearing* Heraclitus' *own* account (*logos*) and still glean from this line a hint for how Heraclitus would have us *listen* to the *logos as such*.<sup>62</sup> A proper respect for the *logos*, mortal or divine, requires an attunement to its distinctive mode of unconcealment (*alētheia*), to how it makes way or clears a path for periphenomena, which guide us toward senses and meanings beyond those customarily explicated and interpreted. Unlike the signs of “erudition” (*polymathiē*) (cf. XVIII, D 40), but like the hints of the oracle, the hints of the *logos* should not be taken at face value. Their ambiguity defies “knowing” (*epistantei*) as it does that sort of “perceiving” (*eidenai*) which has nothing but knowledge in its sights (XIX, D 57). Rather than dismiss these hints on account of that obscurity, as homological thinkers have done the *phusiologoi*, fragment D 93 suggests that we reticently listen to obscurity as a genostatic phenomenon. An occasion for participating in the po(i)etic movement of language toward generative difference. Given that Heraclitus is a *prophētēs*, a spokesman for the *logos*, these considerations suggest the better part of wisdom would be to cut the conceit of certainty and self-evidence post haste, that we might attend to the hints he conveys.<sup>63</sup>

My decision to construe the *sēmainei* transmitted by the oracle as ‘hinting’ is partly motivated by Heidegger and partly by Charles Kahn. In his lectures on Hölderlin’s hymn “Germania,” Heidegger translates D 93: “Der Herr, dessen Spruchort zu Delphi ist (Gott Apollo), sagt weder, noch verbirgt er, sondern *winkt*” – “The lord whose oracle is Delphi, neither says, nor does he conceal, but rather *hints*” (HHGR 114/GA39 127). The word *winken*, which Heidegger selects to render the Greek *sēmainei*, is cognate with the German *Wink*, meaning ‘hint’ or ‘summons’, and *Winkelzug* ‘ruse’. *Winken* can be translated into English as ‘hinting’, ‘summoning’ or ‘beckoning’. In *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, Kahn opts instead for ‘gives a sign’, but he qualifies this by linking *sēmainei* to *huponoia*, a ‘hint’, ‘allegory’, or more literally an ‘under-sense’. He explains that *huponoia* involved a second, implicit layer beneath their explicit signification, an under-sense – or in our language ab-sense – that required careful

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<sup>62</sup> Roman Dilcher jettisons the idea that Heraclitus is indirectly alluding to his own style here; Charles Kahn is less committal. Roman Dilcher, *Studies in Heraclitus*, Spudasmata, vol. 56 (Zurich: Georg Olms, 1995), 151. Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 123.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 123, 130. Similarly, Dilcher submits that “puzzlement, disappointment and unexpected turns are essential features of this philosophy,” features which challenge the reader “to reflect upon his own state of mind and actively engage in the philosophical discourse” (*Studies in Heraclitus*, 15).

interpretation to decipher. Giving a sign in this manner, he advises, “means uttering one thing that in turn signifies another.”<sup>64</sup> This dynamic lends itself to Kahn as guiding principle for translating and interpreting Heraclitus’ discourse as well as for understanding the *logos* as such.<sup>65</sup> According to Kahn, the two are inseparable, for the fragments abound in hints which suggest that Heraclitus’ style is deliberately performative:

This parallel between Heraclitus’ style and the obscurity of the nature of things . . . is not arbitrary: to speak plainly about such a subject would be to falsify it in the telling, for no genuine understanding would be communicated. . . . Hence the only appropriate mode of explanation is allusive and indirect: Heraclitus is consciously and unavoidably ‘obscure’.<sup>66</sup>

On Kahn’s assessment, Heraclitus adopted a technique of performative obscurity to prod, perplex, and so beckon the many among his slumberous audience, whom he takes to “act and speak like men asleep,” toward an wakeful engagement with words, words which *demonstrate* the wisdom of *logos* whenever they say anything about it (V, D 73).<sup>67</sup>

Heidegger takes a similar hermeneutic tack but departs from Kahn by insisting that the mode of discourse at issue here unfolds underneath *signification as such*. Even if we are beckoned by hinting to wakefully partake in the *logos*, Heidegger has it that this begins from the asignifying grounds of language and culminates in an interpretation that is richly unsettled. What is said through hinting, he claims, does not simply point to a pre-established term. Rather, “what is said points to the unsaid, and what is unsaid to what is said and to be said” (HHGR 114/GA39 127).<sup>68</sup> Two decades later, in “A Dialogue on Language” (1953-54), Heidegger will frame the contrast more starkly: “hints and gestures [*Winke und Gebärden*] . . . differ from signs and chiffres, all of which have their habitat in metaphysics” (OWL 26/GA12 111). The connection to gesture, which we shall examine by way of Merleau-Ponty in chapter 8, sheds light on the otherwise baffling conclusion from Heidegger’s 1951 lecture. Namely, that saying, as *legein*,

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<sup>64</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 43, 123

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 124

<sup>67</sup> Kahn accordingly applies a hermeneutic principle of “both..and” as opposed to “either/or” in his translation and commentary. What is called for in interpreting the Heraclitean doctrine is not a simplification but an amplification that accommodates its substantive tension and ambiguity, or what he terms it “linguistic density”: “the phenomenon by which a multiplicity of ideas are expressed in a single word or phrase” (*ibid.*, 89).

<sup>68</sup> In his essay “*Winke*,” published in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, Heidegger restates this claim in less paradoxical language: “‘Hintings’ are words of a thinking that (1) in part needs this expression but (2) is not fulfilled in the expression” (GA13: 33). Translation from Kenneth Maly’s essay, “Reading and Thinking: Heidegger and the Hinting Greeks,” in John Sallis, ed. *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 236.



surpasses “vocalization.” As illustrated by hands that silently conduct the symphony of speech, indeed, by the full range of preconscious bodily expression, hinting needn’t necessarily be vocalized. But rather than point like a finger or turning signal to determinate phenomena, it points to the periphenomenal edges of beings present-at- and ready-to-hand, thus to the asignifying edge of the sign, the paralanguage of the utterance, and the silent reservoir of heterologous words (*Worte*) from which new senses are drawn in originary saying. Heidegger puts the point just so: “The word is the hinting silence” – “Das Wort ist die winkende Stille” (GA74 62). Much like the language of the Delphic oracle, which “unconceals while it conceals, and . . . conceals while it unconceals” (P 213/GA9 279), so too for “originary saying,” which “does not only immediately reveal, nor does it only simply and plainly conceal; rather this saying is both at once” (HHGR 114/ GA39 127f.). As Heidegger later puts it, “hinting [*Der Wink*] is the revealing and simultaneously concealing showing.”<sup>69</sup> It assumes the form of a po(i)etic gesture that responds to the ecological difference of phenomena at the heterological level of language, making way for the hitherto unsaid and so expanding the *Spielraum* of sense and meaning.

Earlier in the “Germania” lecture, Heidegger had effectively conjured the spirit of Heraclitus from these lines of Hölderlin’s poem “Rousseau”: “hints [*Winke*] are / from time immemorial the language of the gods” (HHGR 31/GA39 32). Invoking elemental periphenomena such as “thunderstorms and lightning,” Heidegger attempts to retrieve from the words of the poet that ancient world “in its nakedness” to which Snyder alludes. A world resounded by saying more “primitive” (Snyder) than our own in the language of things, which is copious and standard (Thoreau). In this language, long dead but haunting still our own, Heidegger tells us “the gods become manifest, not as something referred to or observable, but in their *Winken*.” As though to disabuse once more a structuralist misinterpretation, he goes on to further hone the distinction between hints and signification introduced above:

Even in the realm of the everyday, the hint or summons [*der Wink*] is something other than a sign [*Zeichen*], and beckoning [*das Winken*] means something other than pointing [*Hinzeigen*] to something. Whoever beckons does not just draw attention to himself – for instance, to the fact that he is standing at such and such a place and can be reached there. Rather, beckoning – for example, when departing – is the retaining of a nearness [*Nähe*] as the distance increases, and conversely, when arriving, is a making manifest [*Offenbarmachen*] of the distance that still prevails in this felicitous nearness. The gods simply beckon insofar as they *are* (HHGR 31/GA39 32, translation slightly modified).

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<sup>69</sup> Quotation from “Erinnerung an Hans Jantzen: Wort der Freunde zum Freund in die Abgeschiedenheit” as translated by Kenneth Maly, “Reading and Thinking: Heidegger,” 236.

We would do well to recall here that retaining nearness in distance and distance in nearness – in short, the intertwining of the “foreign and one’s own” – was precisely how Heidegger characterized the *poetic* way of dwelling (§§14-16). Just as the hinted beckoning of the gods is not explicated so much as implicated in wild peripeteiae of the sky, he goes on to say in the same paragraph that “poetizing [is] the beckoning shrouded in the word [*das Wort*],” in the hinting silence, as the very “becoming of the word.”<sup>70</sup>

It is on these grounds that poetry is not to be interpreted as merely an “‘expression of psychical experiences’ [*Erlebnisse*],” a term Heidegger associates with the inner life of the subject. “For a month now, wandering over the Sierras, / A poem had been gathering in my mind.” Plucked from Kenneth Rexroth’s “Climbing Milestone Mountain,” this line gestures not to an arrangement of private thoughts but, within the context of the poem, to words gathering into an open mind like clouds in the open sky.<sup>71</sup> So conceived, the poet is not a self-enclosed subject so much as a prejective atmosphere, pregnant with silence, in which the earth itself is gathered into saying. And if the poet still summons us today, it is because she rouses to greet it as Michaux each morning from the darkest fathoms of slumber, “without knowing exactly what being I am, in fact without even thinking or worrying about it,” but by abiding “as a sea of clouds . . . that no doubt borders on the stratosphere.” And so long as they obnubilate themselves in favor of the undecided, not “afraid to ‘lose their man’” – or their woman as the case may be – it is indeed possible for one and all to condense and precipitate that poetic ecstasy.<sup>72</sup>

### **§23. Nature Regathering Itself: The Ambiguity of the Heraclitean *Logos***

Heidegger’s meditations on the elemental emergence of hinting anticipate what has since become a consensus in Heraclitus scholarship: *logos* is not a strictly anthropological achievement

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<sup>70</sup> Later on, Heidegger returns to the wild hints of nature, which he relates to the words of the poet as follows: “As a founding, the poet’s originary saying [*Sagen*] is *not some whimsical inventing*, but his *placing himself under the thunderstorms of the gods*, capturing in the word and in the *becoming of the word* their beckonings [*Winke*], the lightning flash, and so placing the word – together with its entire, concealed rupturing force – amidst the people” (HHGR 198/GA39 217, emphasis mine).

<sup>71</sup> “Climbing Milestone Mountain, August 22, 1937,” in Kenneth Rexroth, *In the Sierra: Mountain Writings* (New York: New Directions, 2012), 3.

<sup>72</sup> “Trying to Wake Up,” in Michaux, *Darkness Moves*, 97. In §48 we shall undertake a more thorough analysis of Michaux’s poetic expression of trying to wake up by bringing it into dialogue with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological description of trying to fall asleep – a poetic passage in its own right.

but a *physical* phenomenon in the widest sense. The evidence most often cited in support of this interpretation comes from the first two lines of Heraclitus' proem:

Although this account (*logou*) holds forever (*aiei*), men ever fail to comprehend, both before hearing it and once they have heard. Although all things come to pass in accordance with this account (*kata ton logon*), men are like the untried when they try such words and works as I set forth, distinguishing each according to its nature (*kata phusin*) and telling how it is (I, D 1).

The indexical expression that introduces this passage, "tou logou toude" (this account here) evidently corresponds to "ton logon" (this account) in line 2, and indirectly to "epeon kai ergon" in line 3, which "words and works" Heraclitus ascribes to himself in the first-person (*hokoiōn egō diēgeumai*). Taken together, these coordinate constructions indicate that the word *logos* is being used to refer to *his own discursive account*. In a Heideggerian turn, Kahn gleans from beneath this explicit layer of meaning a *huponoia* that "hints at a deeper ambivalence in the status of Heraclitus' *logos*." Namely, the adverb *aiei* (forever), which modifies the *logos* described in the first line. Kahn's term for this type of hint is 'resonance': "the relationship between fragments by which a single verbal theme or image is enriched when they are understood together."<sup>73</sup> Inter-textually, *eontos aiei* (being forever) resonates with the Homeric epithet of immortal divinities. Intra-textually, it resonates with *aeizōon* (everliving), ascribed to "fire" (*pur*) and the phenomenal "ordering" (*kosmon*) that "ever was" (*en aei*) in D 30 (XXXVII).<sup>74</sup> When coupled with the detail in the second line of the proem that all things agree with it, these resonances lead Kahn to surmise that Heraclitus uses *logos* in the proem to refer to "both his discourse and something more: something universal (all things occur in agreement with it), even eternal and divine (*eōn aiei*)."<sup>75</sup> In addition to designating "the intentional structure of his *thought* about the world," Kahn concludes that *logos* intimates "the eternal structure of the world."<sup>75</sup> Moreover, he eschews the reading first promulgated by the Stoics, who would have us equate that *kosmos* with "some kind of theoretical entity posited 'behind the phenomena' as a cause of rational behavior" or thought.<sup>76</sup> This order is instantiated rather by the phenomena

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<sup>73</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 89. In what follows I shall append to Kahn's term the word 'intra-textual' to mark resonances between disparate parts of Heraclitus' extant writings, and 'inter-textual' to mark to resonances between Heraclitus' writings and others.

<sup>74</sup> The fragment in its breadth: "The ordering (*kosmon*), the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was (*en aei*) and is and will be: fire everliving (*aeizōon*), kindled (*haptomenon*) in measures and in measures going out (*apobennumenon*)."

<sup>75</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 93f., 97f.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

themselves as they emerge into appearance.<sup>77</sup> According to Kahn, Schindler, and other phenomenologically sensitive scholars, the Heraclitean *logos* is not a metaphysical construct, nor is it *merely* anthropological (human discourse or reason). It is an unfolding phenomenal structure pervasively lived through or, as Schindler puts it, “a concrete whole like the *kosmos* itself.”<sup>78</sup>

In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger’s treatment of the ambiguity of *logos* as it occurs in the proem is less equivocal than Kahn’s and, on that score perhaps, somewhat overstated. For Heidegger occasionally seems to discard its overt meaning altogether: “*Logos* here does not mean sense, or word, or doctrine, and certainly not ‘the sense of a doctrine’” (IM 135/GA40 136). This verdict is reached on the basis of the parallel between “this account” (*kata ton logon*) and “its nature” (*kata phusin*), which he thinks – by way of a rather circuitous and painstaking detour into Parmenides – to bespeak the originary unity of thinking and being qua *phusis*. On Heidegger’s reading of the proem, “*kata ton logon* means the same as *kata phusin*. *Phusis* and *logos* are the same” (IM 138/GA40 139). This is not to scumble the difference between them. It means that “being, *phusis* . . . is originary gatheredness: *logos* (IM 171/GA40 169). Both essentially figure into the ontological givenness of phenomena, the *emergence* of which *gathers* the stability of presence (stasis) and the instability of absence (hyperstasis) into the lived truth of their ambiguous appearance (heterostasis). Though Kahn and Heidegger part ways on the degree to which the equivocality of *logos* can be resolved, they both stress how we must actively listen to the hints that beckon us toward its richer meaning. More important are the complementary strategies they employ to justify their respective interpretations. Each boils down to an inference from the inter- and intra-textual resonances of the words *logos* and *phusis* to the conclusion that the Heraclitean *logos* is not exclusively anthropological.

We needn’t go so far as to countenance Heidegger’s ontological reduction to appreciate the wider sense of the Heraclitean *logos*. But if *phusis* and *logos* are co-originary for Heraclitus, how does his own account manifest the *logos* of *phusis*, as his proem implies? Turning to other fragments, we find that what allows anthropology and physiology to co-respond is less knowledge, or even speech, so much as wisdom: “Thinking well [*sōphronein*] is the greatest excellence and wisdom [*sophiē*]: to act [*poien*] and speak [*legein*] what is unconcealed [*alēthea*],

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<sup>77</sup> We shall set aside discrepant translations of *logos* as “principle,” which crop up from time to time in Kahn’s exegesis, so as to maintain the dialogue we have opened up between him and Heidegger.

<sup>78</sup> Schindler, “The Community,” 422.

perceiving [or hearing, *epaiontas*] things according to their nature [*phusin*]” (XXXII, D 112)<sup>79</sup> Apposing this aphorism to Heraclitus’ remark in D 50 that it is wise (*sophon*) to listen to the *logos*, we may extrapolate that human wisdom involves listening to and perceiving how *phusis* gathers into un-concealment. In his commentary Kahn points out that *sōphronein* in D 112 resonates with D 116 (XXIX), where it is said that it “belongs to all men.” *Sōphronein*, which combines the ideas of *sophia* and *phronēsis*, could be translated along the lines of ‘thinking wisely directed toward due response’, which Heraclitus equates with the *logos* of the few in D 2 (III).<sup>80</sup> This diapason of resonances betokens the density of the *logos*. Not only does it configure the phenomenal structure of nature as established above; it is reconfigured by human being, who manifests it by thinking wisely and duly responding to that configuration.

On these grounds, I propose that the Heraclitean *logos* refers to *both*: (1) the auto-emergent, heterological eventuation (revealing-concealing) through which *phusis* selectively gathers itself into an emerging, orderly arrangement (*kosmos*) of phenomena; *and* (2) the distinctive way human being partakes in 1, being exposed to and selectively disclosing, and wisely regathering this orderly arrangement through thinking directed towards due response (*sōphronein*, *phronēsis*). Namely, a response that conserves the heterological truth of that phenomenon by maintaining revealing and concealing in heterostasis.<sup>81</sup> Something like 2 I take it is intended by Heidegger when he claims that “to be human means to gather . . . to govern unconcealment, preserving it against concealment and covering-up” (IM 186/GA40 183). Consider, as an instance of 1, the first blaze of a forest fire. To give rise to this concrete phenomenon, *phusis* must gather itself into a proportionate arrangement of heat (lightning) and combustible materials (wood and air) in such a way as to spark and sustain their deflagration. Thus gathered, the fire takes up the gathering; it begins to build upon itself and grow (*phuein*) on its own. Its *logos* is thereafter gathered and dispersed, “kindled in measures and in measures extinguished” (XXXVII, D 30). Now consider an instance of 2: firegathering as practiced by the Ephesians. By exposing themselves to the burning emergence of *phusis* and bringing that

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<sup>79</sup> Here I have slightly modified Kahn’s translation of *alētheia* à la Heidegger.

<sup>80</sup> I.e. “Although the account (*logou*) is shared (*xunou*), most men live as though their thinking (*phronēsin*) were a private (*idian*) possession” (III, D 2).

<sup>81</sup> Notably, insofar as *anthrōpos* stands in the being of *phusis*, anthropo-*logos* does as well. In other words, the *logos* of human being, qua (natural) self-emergence, is always: (a) gathered *by* nature, *and* (b) a *regathering* of nature’s gatheredness. To borrow a locution from William James, we might say that the *logos* is a “double-barreled” notion. It means gathering (2) that which has already been gathered (1).

exposure to bear on their abilities and concerns for light and warmth, they learned how to conserve its hidden *logos*: the proper arrangement of what kindles and extinguishes it. By turning this wisdom to account toward due response, they were able to tend the fire, caring for its earthly measures of self-concealment, the sheltering glow of its embers, within the radiant clearing they had built.<sup>82</sup> What is said of Heraclitus' elemental *archē* can also be said of the air that replenishes it. Air is gathered into wind, regathered by the billows in the breast – the seat of inspired vitality – then respired. This density carries over to *psuchē* in A 15 (CXIII A-B), where it hovers ambiguously between wind and sentient “exhalation” (*anathumiasis*).<sup>83</sup> Crouching before the sawing flames, the Ephesians wakefully attuned themselves to the volatile heterology of fire, its self-gatheredness and dispersal. Only when it had begun to disperse from the world (“in measures extinguished”) did they stoke and billow it in due measure, with a deference to a *logos* (1) both generative and potentially destructive. As caretakers of the *logos*, they fed the everliving fire by taking up the gathering where *phusis* left off, adding to it in mortal store.

*Phusis* and *logos* essentially belong together, but that is not to say that they are indistinguishable. To reconcile Heidegger's and Heraclitus' language with our own, one might say that *phusis* is phenomenally (re)generative; through its heterostatic cycles beings emerge (world) and recede (earth) from presence. Meanwhile, *logos* is phenomenally discriminative; it cooperates with *phusis* by gathering those moments into some measure of stasis: a layout of senses or identities. It enables beings to lie collected before us coherently. As Heidegger puts it, *logos* is that by virtue of which any being “stands evenly and distinctly in itself [*in sich gerade und ausgeprägt steht*]” (IM 138f./GA40 139). On his mature account, forecast by his analysis of D 1 in this text, he recovers from the Presocratics the thought that all beings manifest the

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<sup>82</sup> Here firegathering is approached as an expression of *phronēsis* and *sōphronein* rather than *tēchne*. In this we are guided by the Heraclitean emphasis on wisdom directed toward practices attuned to the *logos* of *phusis* rather than the know-how required to make an artifact.

<sup>83</sup> On Aristotle's alternative interpretation, *psuchē* is the *archē* “from which Heraclitus derives everything else.” Like Thalesian *hudos*, however, *psūche* is neither a theoretical *archē* (principle), a metaphysical *archē* (material substrate), nor a physiological *archē* (cause of life). For Heraclitus it is an elemental phenomenon, manifested through lived exposure and disclosure, as evidenced by its ambiguous sense as both ‘wind’ and ‘breath’. Note that these two dimensions are also present in his descriptions of fire as “ever-living,” which expresses both the sense of an eternal arrangement (*kosmos*) of *phusis* and an arrangement of *zōe* (cf. Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 259). The connection to the elemental is borne out by Kahn's note that *anathumiasis* was commonly used to describe smoke or steam. *Thumiasthai* means literally ‘billowing’, conjoined with *ana-* here to emphasize its upward movement. The connection to affective exposure is borne out by a deeper derivation from Homer, a theme to which we shall return in chapters 4 and 6. By way of preview, *thumiasthai* is cognate with *thumos*, which first appears in the *Iliad* in reference to the most “vital” and “spirited” part of the body, and comes to denote something like mood (*Stimmung*).

gathered “bringing forth” (*Hervorbringen*) of *phusis* as such – a word consistently chosen to render *poiēsis* in Heidegger’s later writings – and only derivatively from that of human *physiology* (i.e. anthropology) (BW 317/GA7 12).<sup>84</sup> Much as he did for disposition in *Being and Time*, Heidegger underscores the non-anthropocentric orientation of this dynamic by expressing it in the intransitive middle voice. *Phusis* “emerges from out of itself” (*von-sich-her Aufgehen*), “gives itself” (*es gibt*), and “gathers itself” (*es sammelt sich*) (ID 57/GA11 65). At this elementary register, we are hyper-ecstatically exposed to the truth of *phusis* only by *giving ourselves over* and listening to the silence – the evocative *ab-sense* of sense. In so doing, we allow phenomena to emerge and gather themselves into the clearing of unconcealment as summons toward the regeneration of our *logos*, our *phusis*, in the unfolding layout of our own historical world.

#### §24. Tending to Disperse and Gathering into Difference: The Quaking Contention of Earth and World (*polemos*)

Only poetically and by seizing upon what is communicative and magnetic in the principles of all the arts can we, by shapes, sounds, music, and volumes, evoke . . . not the primordial directions of the mind, which our excessive logic of intellectualism would reduce to merely useless schemata, but states of an acuteness so intense and so absolute that we sense, beyond the tremors of all music and form, the underlying menace of a chaos as decisive as it is dangerous.

-Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*<sup>85</sup>

Though he holds the *logos* to be shared by all (III, D 2), and the *logos* of the oracle not simply to conceal (*kruptei*, XXXIII, D 93), Heraclitus does imply that it somehow beckons us toward concealment. As he famously declares: “*phusis kruptesthai philei*” (X, D 123). This fragment has traditionally been rendered as “nature loves to hide.” In light of the analysis of *phusis* laid out above, Heidegger translates it as: “being (emerging appearance) intrinsically

<sup>84</sup> The line in its entirety: “*Phusis*, also, the emerging of something from out of itself [*von-sich-her Aufgehen*], is a bringing forth [*Her-vor-bringen*], *poiēsis*” (translation modified). Following his renewed engagement with the Presocratics in the 1930s, when Nietzsche enters the conversation he had begun with Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger will no longer think *poiēsis* as “production” (*Herstellen*) but as “bringing forth” and *Dasein*’s share of that poietic event as “regathering letting-be-present or letting-lie-before” (*versammelnden Vorliegenlassens*). Like all ‘letting’ in Heidegger, this poietic regathering is grounded on attunement. For a thorough assay of this development see Alexander Ferrari Di Pippo’s essay, “The Concept of Poiesis in Heidegger’s An Introduction to Metaphysics,” 1-33.

<sup>85</sup> Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 50.

tends [*neigt*] toward self-concealment” (IM 121/GA40 122, trans. mod.). Later, in his essay on the concept of *phusis* in Aristotle, Heidegger brings this tendency into sharper focus with another translation of fragment 123: “Self-concealment belongs to the [essential] predilection [*Vor-liebe*] of being” (P 229/GA9 300). In this, it seems Heidegger has retrieved from Heraclitus a decidedly ecological thought. Yet everything hinges on the relation between the earthly self-concealing of nature from the world and its emerging appearance into it. For this to be a heterological relation, maintaining its ecstatic relata in heterostasis, then *phileō/philein* must allow for earth’s hyperstatic self-concealment to emerge into world *as* self-concealing. Heidegger suggests it does when he adds that this “tendency” (*Neigung*) or “predilection” (*Vor-liebe*) toward self-concealment is to be thought as intrinsic or essential to being qua *phusis*. This would also follow from his conception of truth as un-concealment (*Un-verborgenheit*), which eventuates as the intertwining of these two moments (viz. “*phusis* is *alētheia*, unconcealment, and therefore *kruptesthai philei*”) (P 230/GA9 301). But what does *philein* itself tell us about the ecological difference? In his commentary on D 123 in *Der Satz vom Grund* (1957), Heidegger scrutinizes the original meaning of *philein*. His findings call to mind the unity of *phusis*, *logos*, and *alētheia* (cf. §21 above): “It [*philein*] means belonging together in the same [*zusammengehören im Selben*]” (PR 64/GA10 95). For Heraclitus, he elsewhere explains, this “in no way says being is nothing other than self-concealing,” but that “being is the self-concealing revealing, *phusis*, in the original sense” (P 230/GA9 301). This points to an understanding of being qua *phusis* that would think it as abyssally *not* the same, but rather difference all the way down. That it tells us no more about *philei* itself than does the copula (‘being qua *phusis* is self-concealing’) is of the essence here for Heidegger. However, we might still wonder how this relation is experienced and what bearing it has on the *logos* that gathers earth and world into their difference.

The earth resists our willful efforts to penetrate it. “Seekers of gold dig up much earth [*gēn*] but find little,” Heraclitus states (VIII, D 22). As are so many of his aphorisms, this one too is generatively ambiguous. On the face of it, he would seem to be saying that those who round the world in search of that which proverbially makes it go round often turn up nothing underground. Those who seek what is most cherished in the world may be surrounded by the elements, may even hold them in their hands without ever recognizing them for what they are. But if we approach the ambiguity heterologically and read that nothing as a (peri)phenomenon in its own right, we unearth a richer meaning. The words of a more recent poetic thinker point the



way. After enjoining his readers to “just pick up a clod,” Francis Ponge, self-styled “miner poet,” turns to this matter in “The Earth”:

This moving mixture of the past of the three kingdoms, all of them trampled, all permeated, all crisscrossed as well by their seeds and roots, their living presences: that’s the earth.  
This mincemeat, this pâté comprising the flesh of the three reigns.

Past, not as memory or idea, but as matter.

Matter within reach of all, of the least baby; that you can seize in handfuls, shovelfuls.<sup>86</sup>

But it takes someone who is not afraid to lose his or her world to dig up the soiled yet coruscating aperçu Ponge finds at the heart of every clod, as does anyone who clutches earth in ways open to being cradled by it. “What diamond could be more precious!” he writes. If this *trouvaille* is within reach of all, abject manners of seizing it – anthropostatic retrojection or hypostatic comprehension – upturn only *diamanté*, baubles, and other dim counterfeits of earthen things. Expanding his commentary on Heidegger’s vision of mass-mechanized agriculture, Bannon explores the response-*inability* of such seizures by plowing up the underside of that tract of farmland he lead us to in §16. Imagine, he says, that “a valuable resource such as oil or a rare earth metal” has been discovered there:

The earth in the field in this case will even cease to be viewed as earth at all, becoming disclosed as a depository for that resource, an obstacle in the way of extracting it. The soil recedes into the background and is no longer disclosed as a complex, organic phenomenon.<sup>87</sup>

As Bannon notes, this is the mode of disclosure Heidegger calls *Ge-stell*, enframing, which challenges-forth the earth. But it is important to see that any understanding that regathers earth into our worldly horizons, no matter how it conserves the ecological difference, comes up against some measure of resistance to disclosure. It’s as though there were a tension running through the very core of nature, through the gatheredness of earth and world. If nature tends to hide, this is at once a contention with the world, spanning its past and permeating every mincemeat clod we work into words, tillage, or built foundations.

On Heidegger’s interpretation, Heraclitus’ name for this contention is *polemos*, a word that derives from *pelemizō*, to ‘shake’, ‘tremble’, or ‘quake’. In being gathered into the world, earth *quakes* it, rupturing our horizons of significance. Significantly for us, Heidegger renders *polemos* into German as *Streit* (strife). Its is the same concept we linked to *heterostasis*: the ecological differencing which plays out in the rift of the earth-world (see §11). In these lines

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<sup>86</sup> Francis Ponge, *Francis Ponge: Selected Poems*, trans. Margaret Guiton, C.K. Williams, and John Montague (Winston-Salem, NC: Wake Forest Univ. Press, 1994), 159.

<sup>87</sup> Bannon, *From Mastery to Mystery*, 61.

from the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger equates *polemos* and *Streit* with *Auseinandersetzung*, literally ‘setting apart from one another’ but usually rendered by translators as ‘confrontation’ (PLT 65/GA40 66). Orthodox scholarship identifies *polemos* as the mainspring of Heraclitus’ doctrine of the so-called “unity of opposites.” If this has been couched in *terms* of a metaphysical dialectic of hypostatic differences (categories), it reveals itself to us as the gathering together of the ecological difference. In the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger enters the doctrine by way of fragment D 53.<sup>88</sup> In this fragment *polemos* names: (1) the “father [*patēr*] of all”, which Heidegger interprets as the “creator” (*Erzeuger*) of all “that comes to presence” and who “lets [them] emerge (*läßt aufgehen*); (2) the “sovereign (*basileus*) of all,” which he interprets as the “prevailing preserver” (*waltender Bewahrer*); and (3) that which “shows [*edeixe*] some as gods, others men; some it makes [*epoiēse*] slaves, others free,” which showing and making he interprets as “letting appear” (*läßt erscheinen*) and “setting forth (*her(aus)stellen*)” respectively (IM 65/G40 66, trans. mod.).<sup>89</sup>

In translating it into his own ontological idiom, Heidegger sets out to disentangle the fragment from metaphysical and political interpretations of it. He maintains that Heraclitean *polemos* does not refer to “war in the human sense” (a common interpretation), but to that “originary struggle” which first gathers emerging (*phuein*) beings into stable senses *differentiated* from one another. As Heidegger explains, “struggle . . . preserves beings in their constancy” (IM 65/GA40 67). It enables them to be identified *as* the beings they are. “In such stepping-apart [*auseinandertreten*]” in differentiation, “clefts, intervals, distances, and joints open themselves up” in being – in “the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought.” Having been drawn hyper-ecstatically out of the world to encounter elements that beggar the understanding in the region of its source, we experience originary strife as what “first allows position and standing and rank to establish themselves in coming to presence” (*phusis*). To wit, gods and men, slaves and freemen. The earth manifests itself in beings as difference from the world – absence, ab-sense, and absurdity. Taken on its own, this difference is altogether hyperstatic, wholly devoid of sense, of any worldly correlate of our abilities, circumspective, inspective, or discursive. Sheer elementality is an unstable plurality of disjointed and singular

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<sup>88</sup> Heidegger had examined this passage a year earlier in his lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “The Rhine,” where it receives a less careful treatment (HHGH 112f./GA39 125f.).

<sup>89</sup> The entire fragment translated by Kahn: “*Polemos* is the father and sovereign of all; and some it has shown as gods, others men; some it has made slaves, others free (cf. LXXXII, trans. mod.)

no-things, what Heidegger sometimes calls “nonbeings” (*Unseiende*). *Polemos* gathers that disunity into the *possibility* of static difference – equipmental assignments, affordances, perceptual senses, and meanings. A key remark, which Heidegger interpolates into the 1953 edition of the text, must be read in this light:

Confrontation [or ‘setting-apart’, *Auseinandersetzung*] does not divide unity, much less destroy it. It builds unity; it is the gathering (*logos*). *Polemos* and *logos* are the same (IM 65/G40 66).

Setting-apart builds unity? At this stage one might demur. Has Heidegger not led us considerably far afield of what Heraclitus could have ever meant by this concept? But notice how the tension and conflict of this formulation effectively reinscribes the differential unity of *polemos* itself. The proof of the pudding is not in the ingredients but in the eating. For what better case could be made for the notion that Heidegger has *come to terms* with Heraclitean thinking than the fact that his *confrontation* with *polemos* has reenacted it at the level of *discussion* or *argument*? The same can be said for the term *Auseinandersetzung*, which not only connotes the words just emphasized; it nominally performs *polemos*, setting (*setzen*) one (*ein*) and another (*andere*) together (*einander*) while also setting them apart (*aus-einander*). Recall what Heidegger had said about the strife between earth and world in his essay on the work of art (§11). Strife is not merely a “discord” that gives rise to “disorder and destruction.” Instead, earth and world “each carries the other beyond itself”: the heterostatic contention between hyperstasis (disorder) and stasis (order) destroys old orders and generates them anew. Thus does it establish and maintain the unity between earth and world. Heidegger’s claim that “*polemos* and *logos* are the same,” then, is yet another way of saying that *logos* is *heterological*, or ecological (see §21). Within the rift of the earth-world, *logos* gathers the nonsensical dispersal of being into hints, drifts, or traces of sense (ab-sense). These heterologues inceptively *engender* static differences (full-fledged senses and meanings). But that genostasis is only conserved by holding beings open to the heterostatic difference between stasis and its hyperstatic grounds. Regarded *in extenso* as a movement underway toward sense, *logos-polemos* sustains the tension between sense and non-sense as the ontologically generative source and limit of the possibilities for sense-bestowal.<sup>90</sup> By virtue of this differencing movement of being, Heidegger says, “world comes to be” (IM 65/G40 66).

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<sup>90</sup> As Heidegger puts it, “con-frontation . . . sets the essential and the unessential, the high and the low, into their limits and makes them manifest” (IM 120/GA40 121).

## §25. Intimacy, Harmony, Reticence: Attunement in the Rift of the Ecological Difference

All the junk that goes with being human  
drops away, hard rock wavers  
Even the heavy present seems to fail  
This bubble of a heart.  
Words and books  
Like a small creek off a high ledge  
Gone into the dry air.  
—Gary Snyder, “Piute Creek,”<sup>91</sup>

In the final section of the *Contributions*, Heidegger rethinks language, “spoken or silent,” as the “eventuation” (*Ereignis*) or “joining” (*Fügung*) of what we have been calling the ecological difference. *Polemos* is straightforwardly presented here as “the strife” [*Streit*] of world and earth,” which is governed by the earth’s silent “measure” (*Maß*). Just as quaking *polemos* was said to open “clefts” or “joints” in being, so is strife now thought to designate the “original sheltering” of the “rift” (*Riß*), described as the “open place” (*offene Stelle*) between these two dimensions of being qua difference (i.e. beyng). On his assessment, we in-habit this interplace to the extent that we apprehend the language of the world as a “resounding” (*Widerklang*) of the elemental “sounding forth [*Aufklang*] of the earth.” As world is grounded on earth, so is “language grounded in silence,” an undertone whose drift (*Aufriß*) is said to beckon Da-sein toward the “possibility of the *dehumanization* [*Entmenschung*] of beings” (CP 401/GA65 510, emphasis mine). In this thought of our exposure to the pregnant silence of the earth, I would like to suggest that Heidegger cuts a hyper-ecstatic path out of the anthropostatic disclosure of being, a way out from under the human shadow of ecumenism (cf. §10).

Seldom does the unsuppressed ecstasy of being resound in Heidegger’s writing as it does in these words. Permit me to sound out their meaning by way of contrast. In letting the clamor of *human* voices drown out the silent summons of the earth, we effectively abdicate the ecological rift, where the originary strife of the earth-world unfolds and language contends with the otherwise than human. According to Heidegger, when we no longer involve ourselves in this struggle, which renews the unfinished mystery of things, regenerates their difference, “beings indeed do not disappear, but the world turns away” (IM 65/GA40 67). To the degree that we turn away from the *earth* the world turns away from *us*. In such a world we encounter beings as “already found [*vor-gefunden*]” or “merely what is finished.” They appear as readymade “objects . . . for observing,” for instance, or articles of inventory already “made for calculation.” By

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<sup>91</sup> Snyder, *Riprap*, 8.

turning away from their hyperstatic difference, we opt out of the heterological movement that regenerates new and different ways they could be given. We abandon their generative grounds. Having done so, we find ourselves enclosed within an impoverished world, enstatically crystallized. In this world all phenomena are given hypostatically, anthropostatically, homologically. Or, to borrow Heidegger's example, they come prepackaged in the anthropological difference of subject and object. In this world, he concludes, "*phusis degenerates into a prototype for reproduction and copying*" (IM 66/GA40 67). Reading this world-picture in the context of his later writings, we find it lays the groundwork for the challenging-forth and devastation of the earth, all within the modern technological framework of machination.

How then are we to sustain the conflictual gatheredness (*logos-polemos*) of earth and world? If we turn back to the *Contributions* for an answer, we read that the measure of language is first set by silence. And insofar as we are able to take our measure (*Maß*) from that unworldly absence of sense – the “silent force of being as element” (see §20 above) – Heidegger gives us to understand that our language undergoes a certain *Mäßigung*, a word ordinarily used in musical contexts to refer to the “moderation” in the tempo (*Zeitmaß*) of a rhythmic measure (CP 401/GA65 510). Moderation also bears a close affinity to the proportionate or due measure of response said by Heraclitean *sōphronein* and *phronēsis*. When the “sounding forth [*Aufklang*] of the earth” is allowed to set the measure for and thereby moderate the “resounding” (*Widerklang*) of the world, language acquires what Heidegger calls “harmony” (*Einklang*).<sup>92</sup>

Significantly, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, this is the same word Heidegger selects to resound another Heraclitean fragment. A standard translation reads: “The hidden harmony [or attunement, *harmoniē*] is better than the obvious one” (LXXX, D 54). As he interprets this aphorism, what is most “obvious” is the way in which harmony “shows itself to the habitual way of seeing [*gewöhnlichen Blick*]” as either: (a) a “harmony which is always a mere equalizing, the elimination of tension, leveling”; or (b) “merely a divergence of opposites” (HHGH 111/GA39 124; IM 141f./GA40 141f.). By way of contrast, Heidegger distinguishes “the gathered harmony [*gesammelte Einklang*]” as one that “is *not* easily available . . . but rather *concealed*” (IM 141/GA40 141, emphasis mine). Heraclitus himself makes reference to this contrast in another fragment, where the hidden *harmoniē* is bound up in the tension of the bow and lyre. Referring

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<sup>92</sup> Cf. “What is great and constant in the thinking of a thinker consists in its expressly giving words to what always already resounds [*anklingt*]” (PR 24/GA10 37).

perhaps to those who would discard the tensed contention inherent in *the logos* for homology (cf. *polymathiē*), he warns us:

They do not comprehend how a thing agrees [*homologeēi*] at variance [*diapheromenon*] with itself; it is a harmony [*harmoniē*] turning back [*palintropos*] on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre (LXXVII, D 51).<sup>93</sup>

What allows the bow to manifest itself *as* a bow, the lyre *as* a lyre, is the tension integral to each: its *polemos*. Whether it resounds in the vibrant thrum of an arrow being shot or the well-tempered glissando, the harmony of these instruments emerges from a moderated tension of the countervailing (*palintropos*) material tendencies they gather together – one whose measure is *felt* by any hand capable of releasing that tension harmoniously.<sup>94</sup> On Heraclitus' own assessment, the homological (*homologeēi*) is shot through with the heterological (*diapheromenon*) in the *differential* unity of *logos*. As Kahn notes, the word *diapheromenon* connotes “‘moving apart’, ‘diverging’, hence ‘differing’.” Heraclitus conjoins it with its apparent antithesis again in fragment D 10: *sumpheromenon diapheromenon* ‘convergent divergent’, which resonates with *sunaidon diadon*, ‘consonant dissonant’ (CXXXIV).<sup>95</sup> Felt in the stringed tension (from the Latin *tendere*) of the well-tuned bow or lyre, this convergence/consonance and divergence/dissonance are manifested together in materials that simultaneously resist and afford the intentionality (*intendere*) of the mark and note. Correlatively, in the tensed body of the practiced marksman or lyrist, the harmony of each of these two countervailing tendencies is conserved by a responsibility that moderates the adroit projection of centerlines or songlines through an attunement to the deviant and the strident. These lines converge in yet another Heraclitean fragment, handed down to us from Aristotle. Here we read that *harmoniē* and strife co-operate in *logos* as the generative ground from which all things emerge into appearance as the beings they are:

The counter-thrust [or opposition, *antixoun*] brings together [*sumpheron*], and from tones at variance [*diapherontōn*] comes perfect harmony [*harmonian*], and all things emerge [or are generated, *ginesthai*] through conflict [*erin*] (LXXV, D 8, trans. mod.).

As a “consonant dissonance” of “tones at variance,” this harmony could be described as contrapuntal, not unlike a fugue (cf. §48 below). It bears mention that fugue (*Fuge*) is the very

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<sup>93</sup> Heidegger's brief commentary on this line moves in a direction extraneous to our discussion (HHGH 111/GA39 124).

<sup>94</sup> A metaphysical variant of this lived metaphor appears in Plato's *Republic* (439b). As Kahn notes, the etymology of *harmoniē* points to both ‘joining’ or ‘fitting together’ and the tuning of a musical instrument (Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 196).

<sup>95</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 197. Kahn translates this fragment as follows: “Graspings [seizings or comprehensions, *sullapsies*]: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.”

style of composition surmised by some to be the po(i)etic formula for the seven “joinings” or “junctures” (*Fügungen*) comprising the structure (*Gefüge*) of Heidegger’s *Contributions*.<sup>96</sup> But in his generative interpretation of Heraclitus, the word Heidegger expressly adopts is “conflictual harmony” (*widerstrittige Einklang*) (HHGR 113/GA39). To begin to think Heidegger’s notion of conflictual harmony ecologically, let us collate passages from three different texts. The first, from “The Origin of the Work of Art,” finds him describing the strife between world and earth. The second, from a lecture on Hölderlin’s hymn “Germania,” contains a parallel description of harmony. Finally, a passage from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* enriches the parallel by elucidating how strife and harmony collaborate in the gathering of *logos*.

1. The world grounds itself on the earth, and the earth juts through the world. But the relation between world and earth does not wither away into the empty unity of opposites uninvolved with one another. . . . The opposition of world and earth is a strife [*Streit*]. But we would surely all too easily falsify its essence if we were to confound strife with discord and dispute, and thus see it only as disorder and destruction. . . . In essential strife, the conflicting parties [*die Streitenden*] raise each other into the self-affirmation of their essences . . . each carries the other beyond itself (PLT 47f./GA5 35, trans. mod.).
2. This *harmonia* – harmony [*Einklang*] – is not some indifferent accord [or consonance, *Einstimmigkeit*], that is, one without tension; it is not at all an agreement that comes about by leveling and setting aside oppositions, but the converse: Opening up genuine conflicts [*Widerstreite*] opens up the harmony. It places the conflicting powers [*widerstreitenden Mächte*] into their respective limits (HHGH 112/GA39 124f., trans. mod.).
3. Gathering is never just driving together and accumulating [*Anhäufen*]. It maintains in a belonging-togetherness that which contends and strives in confrontation [*Auseinander- und Gegenstrebige in eine Zusammengehörigkeit*]. . . . As maintaining, *logos* has the character of the all-pervasive, of *phusis*. It does not dissolve what it pervades into an empty lack of opposites; instead, by unifying what strives in contention, the gathering maintains it in the highest acuteness of its tension (IM 142-3, trans. mod.).

Taken together, these excerpts distinguish the conflictual harmony of ecology (the *logos* of the earth-world) from both:

- a. a *homeostatic* unity that *resolves* the tension of conflicting differentia by reducing them to the consonance (or homology) of same (e.g. the “indifferent accord” in 2); and
- b. a *hyperstatic* disunity or “empty unity” that *dissolves* the tension by inducing the dispersal of differentia into a dissonant cacophony (or cacology), of phenomena that are

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. CP 64f./GA65 81f. On the fugal character of the *Contributions* see: Iain Thompson, “The Philosophical Fugue: Understanding the Structure and Goal of Heidegger’s *Beiträge*,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 34, no. 1 (January 2003): 59-63.; *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011), 169-91.; Robert E. Wood, “The Fugal Lines of Heidegger’s *Beiträge*,” *Existentialia* 11, no. 3-4 (2001): 253-66. We shall return to the figure of the fugue by way of Merleau-Ponty in §48.

either utterly unrelated or internecine (e.g. either the “empty lack of opposites” in 3 or the “disorder and destruction” in 1).

What we have unraveled thus far is an elaboration of Heidegger’s treatment of harmony *via negativa* from his commentary on fragment D 54: its two “obvious” or “easily available” semblances. But what of the “hidden” or “concealed” harmony that *logos* gathers?

On the basis of our schematization of the ecological difference (§11) and its refinement in our analysis of dwelling (§§13-16), I propose that these passages present the conflictual harmony of the earth-world as an *ecstatic* and *heterostatic* relation. Earlier we defined an ecstatic relation as one whose terms must each stand out from itself, from its essence, and into the other to enter into that relation. Analogously, Heidegger has it that earth and world are “conflicting parties” of the essential strife, where “each carries the other beyond itself” (1). The earth is carried ecstatically beyond its self-closure or self-concealment when revealed in the openness of the world. This eventuates through our exposure to its outlandish presence, an unworldly *absent-presence* that traces out inceptive affordances for dwelling. And it happens through listening to the silent, hinting summons of the unsaid elements of language, which trace out generative possibilities for inceptively saying the world. At the same time that the hyperstatic difference of the earth is revealed, world is carried ecstatically beyond its openness into the non-horizonal closure of the earth. Either its horizons are perforated by an utterly impenetrable no-thing, closed in upon itself and “essentially devoid of sense” (§15), or they are deepened by response-abilities to that no-thing as a generative phenomenon. In waiting as conservative use, for instance, we enrich the significance of the world while duly heeding the earthly measure of what is possible, deferring to its sheltering power to conserve the harmony of the ecological difference (§16).<sup>97</sup>

Now, we just saw that Heidegger clearly distinguishes this reciprocal ekstasis from both the homeostatic implosion of earth into world and the hyperstatic explosion of world into earth. Each vitiates the ecological difference in its own way, effecting the slackened *resolution* or *dissolution* of the tension between revealing and concealing, familiar and outlandish, presence and absence, sense and non-sense, affordance and resistance, mastery and mystery. Contrariwise, conflictual harmony sustains that tension; it holds it in *heterostasis*. Recall that we defined a

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<sup>97</sup> Concerning the latter, Heidegger has it that originary saying “is a hinting . . . in which what is in conflict [*das Widerstreitende*] intimates the harmony [*Einklang*] that it is, and the harmony intimates the conflict within which alone harmony oscillates (HHGH 114/GA 39: 127f.).



heterostatic relation as one in which each term is differed through the other. This is what Heidegger means when he says in 1 that the “essential strife” is one in which earth and world “raise each other into the self-affirmation of their essences.” To restate a previous point, Heidegger is no essentialist. For him, essence does not entail apodictic factuality, substantial actuality, categorical universality, or any other immutable form of beingness. For him essence is open-ended and relational all the way down, since the ontological possibilities of anything, those delimited by its relation to everything else, historically contract and expand in proportion to the clearing of unconcealment, the experience of being-there. Bearing this in mind, one can see that the “essential strife” of 1 is equivalent to the “genuine conflicts” of harmony in 2. The “self-affirmation of [the] essences” of world and earth entails that “respective limits” have been placed on these “conflicting powers,” limits on the possibilities for revealing and self-concealing, disclosing (*entbergen*) and sheltering (*bergen*). In 3 the conflict of these powers is redescribed as a contentious *striving*. In the lines between those quoted in 1, lines we’ve already addressed (§12), Heidegger states that “world, in resting on the earth, *strives* to elevate it.” Meanwhile, “the earth . . . *tends* [*neigt*] always to draw the world into itself and hold it there” (PLT 47f./GA5 35). It is worth recalling that *neigen* was the very same verb that Heidegger used to translate *philei* in Heraclitus’ fragment D 123. In light of the above, this fragment says that however the world may strive to open and reveal it, *phusis* tends toward earthly closure and self-concealment.

As was the case for the bow and the lyre in Heraclitus’ illustration, each of these counter-tendencies is necessary for harmony. According to 3, the originary *logos* of *phusis* is an “all-pervasive” gathering that “unifies what strives in contention” by “maintaining it in the highest acuteness of its tension.” Only by attuning ourselves to the earth are we able to expose the due measure of our disclosure. Only through a response-able *moderation* (*Mäßigung*) of our striving, which allows for the exposive disruption and deferral of revealing, are we able to conserve the heterostatic tension of the strife.

A. and b. are brought into sharper relief when we consider how their heterostatic deficiency stems from an *immoderate* measure of either disclosure *or* exposure. On the one hand, when reason or man attempts to set its own measure, the result is an *immoderate* pursuit of full-disclosure. A pursuit that deprives earth of its essential difference and drives it beyond its limits of possibility. In the ecumene, the tension is *resolved* in favor of the world in this way. As on a lyre whose every string is tuned to the same sharp pitch, the world plays on, *prestissimo* as it

were. But its dynamism has been lost, drowned out by the eternal recurrence of the same note. An emphatic proclamation of something, always, yet nothing new under a simulacrum of the sun. In the ecumene, beings are given in the same ways to the same self-understanding. “Johnny one note.” Human being asserts itself as the sole measure of all, as master over nature, an agent of unbridled striving, willing, producing, but also as the same human resource, a mere means to superfluous ends, a casualty of ecological abjection. On the other hand, if we were to relinquish the understanding in the immoderate pursuit of *overexposure*, the world, deprived of its essential difference, would withdraw into the brute and senseless closure of *its* possibilities. In this case, the tension *dissolves* into earth. Again like the lyre, our world becomes an instrument that is out of tune, its strings now slack, now taut, then broken by the dark unmeasured whims of what inhuman power but the elements. The pitapat of million-footed downpours treading water through the leaves. The torrents drawing all things sodden into their erosive flows toward dead sea-level. Silent chains of lightning breaking for the trundling thunder, sudden, unbidden, and discordant. Such are the wayward tendencies of elemental nature. Hyperstatic events that would swiftly carry us away were it not for our ability to moderate how it “stirs and strives“ in us by disclosively “striving in confrontation” with it. This reveals another aspect of moderation unmentioned thus far: the moderation of *exposure*. In other words, our conservation of the *logos* of the earth-world, the conflictual harmony of nature gathering itself into difference, rests on the *coordination of elementary disposition and understanding, exposure and disclosure*.

This interpretation is borne out by a concept Heidegger frequently invokes to resound the harmonious rift of the earth-world wherein their strife unfolds. Dwelling in that open place, he offers, means finding oneself in an atmosphere of *Innigkeit*, a word that commonly connotes the poignant intimacy elicited by music. Heidegger recurrently returns to this concept and develops it ecologically. In “The Origin of the Work of Art,” he characterizes the earth-world strife as one in which “the conflicting parties go into the *intimacy* [*die Innigkeit*] of simple belonging to one another” (PLT 48/GA5 35, emphasis mine). Similarly, in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he says of Heraclitus’ fragment D 123 that the “immediate nearness of *phusis* [i.e. self-emerging] and *kruptesthai* [i.e. self-concealing] reveals the *intimacy* . . . of the strife” (IM 121/GA40 122, trans. mod., emphasis mine). And in the *Contributions*: “The fissure is the self-contained unfolding of the *intimacy* of being itself [*Innigkeit des Seyns*],” an intimacy requiring “detachment from every ‘personal’ domain” (CP 192, 6/GA65 244, 4, emphasis mine). In view

of the parity we have established between Heidegger's thought of being, being qua difference, and difference qua ecological, it would seem to follow that we only enter into and remain in the rift through an intimate attunement to the earth. This attunement would open a place for exposures *in extremis*, not merely to human anonymity but to an otherness so world-breaking that "all the junk that goes with being human" would simply drop away, as Snyder puts it, just "like a small creek," or a rolling river, "off a high ledge." It would be akin to the hyper-ekstasis of the poets, who derive the essence of their art from the rivers on behalf of which they speak. In that intimacy, says Heidegger, "the poets *are* these rivers" (HHI 166/GA53 204). For they have attained a response-ability that defers homeostatic appropriation, defers the return to personal belongingness, and drifts without drowning in the existentially eccentric middle of the river, which they regather into words that lend buoyancy and fluency to the world. After describing *logos-polemos* as the "originary struggle" through which "world comes to be," Heidegger submits that "this struggle is then sustained" not only by poets, but by all "creators," by "thinkers" and "statesmen" too (IM 65/GA40 66). Whatever their work might be, whether curd or word, concept or precept,

the contestation of the strife is the continual self-outdoing *gathering* [*übertreibende Sammlung*] of the work's *way-making movement* [or affective elicitation, *Bewegung*]. The restfulness [*Ruhe*] of the work thus has its essence in the *intimacy of the strife* (PLT 48/GA5 36, trans. mod., emphasis mine).

The original strife, the *logos of phusis, ecology*, eventuates through us when we nourish an intimacy with the darkly simple side of things in the nethermost reaches of experience. It abides in those open places where the understanding retreats from stage center to allow for a gathering that plucks the hidden strings attuning us to wild being. For this retreat is at once an allowance, making way for unprecedented creative feats by letting things rest in their elemental possibilities. To let things rest, we have said, is to take refuge in that biding place where we wait for things to command their due. It is to follow their drift along the trace underway toward significance, and this with no expectation and no intention other. It calls for a mindful repose that does not give voice so much as shape to things, through gestures that shape their silence. It conserves that silence by making allowances for exposures that make questions of our own familiar voices, our own morphologies, the semantics of civilization and the syntax of reason. Once more, Heidegger grounds this responsive praxis in none other than fundamental mood, the same unveiled in our discussions of dwelling on the margins and origins of language. As that by virtue of which "nature first bears, preserves and threatens us," mood "determines and disposes the ground and

soil and permeates the space upon which and within which poetic saying finds a way of being.”  
So is reticence set forth as the all-permeating atmosphere of the ecological difference itself:

Therefore the great stillness [*Stille*] must first come over the world for the earth. This stillness arises only out of silence [*Schweigen*]. And this holding the silence [*Erschweigen*] grows only out of reticence [*Verhaltenheit*]. As fundamental mood, reticence permeates [*durchstimmt*] the intimacy of the strife between world and earth . . . (CP 29/GA65 34, trans. mod.).

In reticence we dwell as we say po(i)etically. Against the compulsion “to set or seize upon the measure” of silence, which would be to contravene the “hidden law of the earth,” we hold the silence, “which means bearing and suffering” that measure (HHI 167/GA53 205).<sup>98</sup> Thus was the earthward measure first borne and suffered by those who inhabited the Cimmerian dark of yore. And when at last, in an epiphanic moment of vision, they emerged from the night that swallowed them up and rent them asunder it was by regathering, in due measure to their suffering, a trace of that wisdom which *phusis* had summoned. In so doing they came to stand in the *logos* of fire, harnessing and tending it to gather earth and world together within its sheltering glow. The evidence for and import of this will only become apparent in the chapter to come, once we have unearthed the ecological sense of *phileō* from ancient history. At this stage we can only say that our present discussion has released a hint suggestive of a new and regenerative translation of that most celebrated and mysterious of the Heraclitean fragments. Simply read, D 123 reads most simply: “nature and hiddenness are cared for together.”

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<sup>98</sup> This line appears under the heading, “Is there a Measure on Earth?” in Heidegger’s concluding remarks on Hölderlin’s “The Ister.”

## §26. Furrows, Kerfs, Tree-trunk Coffins: Following the Fossilized Traces to the Deeply Dug Birthplace of Philosophy in the West

The river takes it from almost anywhere, trims branches with floating logs, smoothes edges on miles of rocky bottom and sandy bank, distorts the shape of the former tree by sucking it down at a hundred eddies of swirling murk, then spewing it back to the polishing touches of the everlasting current. Sometimes the river leaves the driftwood on a sandbar's lip, or jabbed into a dike – a present for me. I transport such gifts to my workshop. There I take my Barlow and ease it against the wood, scraping gently at the layers, taking substance away to reduce the piece to the design I see in it. I labor on it for days, and I have been laboring thusly for years, but humility commands an admission – many times the river's hand carved more truly, and I bring no improvement.

–Daniel Woodrell, *The Outlaw Album*<sup>99</sup>

I can't give anyone secrets, something that I promise will work. . . . But I can give hints, the benefit of some experience in the things that have happened to me. . . . Try to become attuned to wood. Wood with luster, with depth of tone, with delicacy; coarseness – masculine woods, feminine woods. It's a matter of mood and method, and the whole thing becomes a cycle and a way of working, with wood as the beginning of it all.

–James Krenov, *A Cabinetmaker's Notebook*<sup>100</sup>

“What happened?

My own collected thought

Encountered the hidden potential in the wood;

From this live encounter came the work

Which you ascribe to the spirits.”

–Chuang-Tzu, “The Woodcarver”<sup>101</sup>

Having sketched the signature features of the Presocratic understanding of *logos* we are now prepared to narrow our sights on the ecological truth of its derivation from *legein*. Earlier we established that *logos* elementally gathers itself into hints: *sēmainei* (Heraclitus) or *Winke* (Heidegger). At once disruptive and generatively eruptive, these periphenomena are not confined to poetic summons toward new ways of saying. They are more generally *poietic* occasions for renewing the ways we work and dwell in nature in the widest and wildest sense. At bottom, they stand to challenge and amplify our understanding of the being of difference and the difference of being: the relation between earth and world. In this light, Heidegger's notion of the hint is

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<sup>99</sup> From the short story “Woe to Live On,” in Daniel Woodrell, *The Outlaw Album* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2011), 109f.

<sup>100</sup> James Krenov, *A Cabinetmaker's Notebook* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976), 12, 16.

<sup>101</sup> Chuang-Tzu, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Thomas Merton (New York: New Directions, 1965), 124 (XIX. 10).

closely affine with the *Aufriß* experienced by those who occupy the ecological rift (*Riß*) of the earth-world. The representational connotations implied by standard translations of *Aufriß* as ‘outline’, ‘draft’, or ‘tracing’ are likely to mislead. A better fit for Heidegger’s word would be ‘drift’, in the sense of being moved like Krenov or steered toward a destination that is neither foreseen nor predetermined, like Woodrell’s wayward course of driftwood. Like the hint, the drift is an ab-sense essentially *underway* toward sense, which it makes way for and permeates but always falls short of in itself. The ways it has been shaped by the elements of nature *expose* us to unanticipated ways it *could* be given. Inceptive possibilities. Accordingly, as Heidegger describes it in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” a drift “draws the fundamental features [*or outlines, Grundzüge*], of the emergence [*Aufgehens*] of the clearing of beings.” This remark is liable to put us in mind of sketches and blueprints. Yet the age-grounding truth of the artwork is anything but a depictive correspondence to what is already (f)actually present for perception and/or the imagination. It is not through detached observation that Woodrell’s craftsman “sees” the design the river has carved. It reveals itself when his hands get a *feel* for the wood, hands guided by a humble attunement that defers to the work of the river. Similarly for Heidegger, the drift is the initial *impetus* for what is possible in the work, which is neither “in” the artist nor on the canvas; it is of the earth and commensurably out of this world. This point is clearly drawn in the essay. What makes way for the inceptive, age-grounding significance of the work is precisely the drift of the elements: “the heavy weight of stone, the dumb hardness of wood, the dark glow of colors” (PLT 61/GA5 51). As was the case in his earlier treatment of heaviness of stone (§11), drifts are not pre-given affordances or properties of beings. Instead, they are what *engenders* these, but only if we allow for their resistance and impropriety.

Again like hints, which beckon *anyone* reticently attuned to the outlandish summons of elemental silence, drifts are not confined to the poet’s garret or artist’s studio. On the contrary, they abound in the wild outlands as they do in every mincemeat clod. By way of illustration, in a particularly fecund passage of “The Way to Language” (1959) Heidegger links the *Aufriß* of language to the “rupturing and cutting” (*auf- und umreißen*) of “a furrow into the soil to open it to seed and growth” (OWL 121/GA12, trans. mod.). If Emerson tells us that “language is fossil poetry” because poetry is “language in its infancy,” the hint or the drift could be any vestige of

nature in its infancy. Such is the fossil pure and simple, as upturned by the plow on occasion.<sup>102</sup> A fossil exposes us to the breathing emergence of life in a past that was never present to us, a past that nature has entombed in its most breathless element. It is life become still life in petrified intaglio, an anthem sung in stone. But as Ponge reminds us, this petrographic self-impression of nature is at once “the image of what we are to become. / And thus the past and future made present” – or perhaps not quite presented, represented, but rather *intimated*, *presaged*, *foretokened* by what always remains hidden to our gaze.<sup>103</sup> Even so, the graver point remains engraved in granite. Time makes fossils of us all. John Sallis mines a parallel vein in *Stone* by observing how “one senses [in fossils] a kind of natural history,” a kind of *eoniac* or indefinite past, which is “unassimilable to what philosophy delimits as history and sets in opposition to nature.” As he develops the thought:

In the fossil one finds perhaps a reminder that what can be manifest in what is called nature, addressing our eyes, ears, legs, in a language largely untranslatable to speech, drawing us mutely to its forests, rivers, and mountains, is irreducible to a content experienceable in the living present.<sup>104</sup>

The fossil adds a layer of concreteness to what we have dubbed heterologues and what Heidegger variously calls “words,” “hints,” “drifts,” and sometimes “traces” or “trails” (*Spuren*, described as ambiguous intimations of the future) (CP 372/GA65 472). For sake of simplicity, let us subsume these under the common rubric of the *trace*. At the elementary level of *phusis* and *logos*, traces address our eyes, ears, and legs, but in a primitive mode that conceals them from routine manners of seeing, hearing, and moving in the living present. At the same time they solicit us toward manners of saying, building, or dwelling that only partially bring them forth and regather their possible senses. At these higher levels of stasis, beings are resolved into discriminate objects, signs, meanings, concepts present-at-hand for inspection and interpretation, or habitual affordances ready-to-hand for circumspective explication. All these activities regather beings into the world. But these accomplishments are only regenerative to the extent that they are attuned to how the “silent force” of earth, of “being as element” gathers itself into that clearing hyperstatically, i.e. in ways unassimilable to what is already sayable, buildable, or inhabitable. A response-ability to the *logos*, exemplified by farmers no less than artists and artisans, is one that is constantly deferred and reinflected by the passivity of exposure. In Heidegger’s words, it

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<sup>102</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Nature,” in *Nature, Walking*, 26. In §48 we shall return to the phenomenon of the fossil by way of Merleau-Ponty.

<sup>103</sup> From “The Earth,” in Ponge, *Selected Poems*, 161.

<sup>104</sup> Sallis, *Stone* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 9.

would be a “versammelnden Vorliegenlassens,” an active-passivity that *lets* beings lie before us in their originary presence before we regather them into the human household (ID 57/GA11 65).

Against those who would later misinterpret the privilege he grants to the poet in the “house of being” as a logocentric conceit, against the notion that nature is a text and all of us merely disembodied writers or speakers, Heidegger insists in the *Contributions* that “words fail us; they do so originally and not merely occasionally.” The statement appears under the heading of “Restraint, silence, and language.” And it should come as little surprise by now that in the lines that follow, Heidegger will go on to equate this failure with the “event as hinting summons [*Ereignis als Wink*]” and “the inceptive [*anfängliche*] condition for the self-unfolding possibility of an originary – poetic – naming” (CP 30/GA65 36, translation slightly modified). If we couple this train of thought to his later writings, which link *Wink* to gesture, it would seem to follow that originary, poetic naming, or saying, eventuates through a decidedly embodied response-ability. It would be, as Sartre puts it, a “poetic attitude, which considers words as things, not as signs” and moves through a medium of gestures that spontaneously give shape to the silence by enacting the impossibility of giving voice to it through conventional utterance or inscription.<sup>105</sup> Rather than taking philosophers at their word, as they so often oblige us to do in pretending to speak *for* the artist by speaking *above* her, permit me to let words fail us by deferring to those of a poet. Someone who sounds out the silence of the body and its unguessed kinship with poetic gesture. Confronted with the daunting and – for a writer of such extraordinary sensitivity, discernment, and compassion – embarrassing task of speaking for his part on behalf of indigent southern tenant farmers and their families at the fell height of America’s Great Depression, James Agee articulates the poetic struggle, at once futile and fertile, to meet that task with words that would not just describe, but embody the truth of things:

‘Description’ is a word to suspect.

*Words cannot embody; they can only describe.* But a certain kind of artist, whom we shall distinguish from others as a poet rather than a prose writer [W.M.: said in a book since hailed as a modern paragon of prose-poetry], despises this fact about words or his medium, and continually *brings words as near as he can to an illusion of embodiment*. In doing so he accepts a falsehood but makes, of a sort in any case, better art. It seems very possibly true that art’s superiority over science and all other forms of human activity, and its inferiority to them, reside in the identical fact that art accepts the most dangerous and impossible bargains and makes the best of it, becoming, as a result, *both nearer the truth and farther from it* than those things which . . . science and scientific art, *merely describe* . . . like human beings and their creations and *the entire state of nature, merely are, the truth*.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Sartre, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Frechtman (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 6.

<sup>106</sup> James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men: Three Tenant Families* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988), 210, emphasis mine.



If we consider the word ‘describe’ in the twofold sense of inscription and marking out the limits of what something is or how it matters, then Agee’s poetic gesture would be one that transgresses those limits, thus defined, while courting the impossibility of becoming expressive vessels for things that cannot speak for themselves – things whose voices have been silenced, or simply silent things – by allowing them to speak through the poet’s medium, but always in their element. It would be a gesture that lets things rest in their own essential possibilities – no more, no less – while laying itself to rest within those bounds. Of themselves, words cannot gather things into presence, but only regather the wordless phenomena of nature. Yet it is precisely by virtue of a *responsive* gesture, one that relents from description and seeks instead to regather our primitive exposure to things, that words embody their elemental truth. The side of truth that withdraws, conceals itself the moment we begin to interpret or manipulate it. These words move us bodily as do the things themselves, “human beings and their creations and the entire state of nature.” Such is their compresent truth. Agee’s ambivalence toward truth in this passage bespeaks the undecided vocation of the poet who must grapple with the falsehood of our age. An age that has abandoned the truth of our lived congress with phenomena in their nascent state for the truth of factual correspondence secured by “science and scientific art.” But we should not let Agee’s humility or his conciliatory gestures blind us to the veracity of this so-called “illusion,” which is nearer the former truth and truly distant from the latter.

To steer us back to *logos* in the somewhat narrower straits of the philosopher’s idiom – albeit one that emphatically lays no claim to offering the final word – let us hand the helm over to Sallis once again. Echoing Agee’s call for a poetic truth that is not to be institutionalized by science, or by the unpoetic if not anti-poetic worldview it has unwittingly spawned, Sallis calls for “a sensing that is not to be domesticated by an experience circulating between percept and concept, thing and meaning.” And where Agee invokes a gesture that aspires to embody the “state of nature,” Sallis appeals to “a more ancient saying” to convey this “exorbitant sensing of wildness in nature.” It would be a saying

that has been heard echoing in the words of *Heraclitus*: saying as responsiveness to a gathering that will always have preceded it and that, in evoking speech, will always remain aloof, withdrawing under cover so as to forestall any definite appropriation by and to the living present of speech, *the moment in which speech itself would gather what is said into presence*. The gathering to which speech would be thus submitted is a *wild* one.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Sallis, *Stone*, 15, emphasis mine.

If poetic saying is fostered by and so fosters a renewed exposure to Wolfe's wild song of the earth, then Heraclitus is poet *par excellence*. His words regather that song into wild discourse, rife with traces, with myriad flickering tongues that entice and scald as their meaning is kindled in measures and in measures extinguished. It is as though his words fuel the very fires they conjure, embodied as one in the everliving *logos*.

To extend these insights more earnestly beyond the medium of utterance and inscription, we can say that *dwelling* poetically would require that we do not simply negotiate the world as a human household replete with given affordances for mastery and accommodation. It would rather require that we accommodate ourselves to the inhospitable yet beckoning mysteries of the earth, exposing thereby its sheltering possibilities. The dweller is neither landowner nor occupant. To dwell is to be a caretaker of earth.

Bringing all this together, Heidegger gives us to understand that the "house of being," language, "must not be taken as a hasty image which helps us in imagining what we will," nor for that matter as the "catchphrase" it has regrettably become in recent decades. It must be taken as a hint in its own right, one that "beckons us [toward] a thought-worthy matter for which the fitting mode of thinking is still lacking" (HHGR 26f., 96/GA12 111f., 191). Whether they beckon us toward poetic writing or dwelling, "hints seem to indicate a trace [*Spur*]" (OWL 26/GA12 111). And so long as they are "heeded mindfully," we read, these "traces direct thinking back into the region of its source" (OWL 37/GA12 124). In each case, the poetic task is to "bring the trace . . . passing on the hints of the gods," or those of the earth, into the world (HHGR 272/GA39 188). This means that the house of being is not to be erected through canny ingenuity, conceptual or technical mastery. Rather, in a way unattainable by these means, that task begins by unearthing the traces of the elements of building, dwelling, and thinking from what is essentially unsaid and uninhabitable. And it is only in having done so that the "hard path," over which Heraclitus guides us, through "gloom . . . and darkness devoid of light" might eventually reveal itself as a "path [that] shines brighter than sunlight."<sup>108</sup> Evoking those restful, wooded clearings poetized by Wendell Berry and philosophized by Heidegger, it would "clearly and simply" lie before us, "radiant as though a light in the ground has become visible."

That *phusis* gathered itself into discursive meaning in the historical clearing of the *phusikoi*, who understood themselves to be no less physical for being *anthrōpoi*, is apparent from

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<sup>108</sup> D.L. 9.16.

their extant fragments. As we saw, however, *phusis* also gathered itself for them into the traces that they in turn regathered into *works* beyond words. *On the Way to Language* (1950-51) reveals Heidegger broaching this idea when he links the *Riß* of *Auf-riß* to the kerf made by a handsaw, as he did to the furrow of the plow (OWL 121/GA12 240). And he returns to it in his discussion of the journeyman cabinetmaker or joiner (*Schreinerlehrling*) in the contemporaneous lecture course *What Calls for Thinking?* (1951-52). Like Krenov, who speaks of dispensing with predetermined measurements” that “tell [wood] what it must do” so as to “listen to what it wants,” Heidegger says that “to become a true cabinetmaker” one mustn’t simply impose one’s know-how or “facility in the use of tools” (*techno-logy*) on the matter at hand. Nor will it suffice to “merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build” (*epistemo-logy*).<sup>109</sup> Rather, one must become po(i)etically responsive to the *logos* of the wood. Dovetailing with Krenov again, Heidegger tells us that the cabinetmaker “makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within the wood – to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling [*Wohnen*] with all the hidden riches of its essence” (BW 379/GA8 17).<sup>110</sup>

In a lecture in Bremen from 1949, Heidegger had hewn a similar grain in his reflections on Chuang Tzu’s parable of the bell-stand. As Otto Pöggeler relates it, the discussion gathered round the Taoist sage’s account of a woodworker who, having engaged in meditation and extended fasting, is able to become responsive to material phenomena in such a way as to select from the forest “the one tree which is already the bell-stand yet to be made.”<sup>111</sup> In other words, the woodworker’s ecstatic releasement from the concerns of the world, notably from productivity and sustenance, attunes him to what Chuang-Tzu calls the “hidden potential in the wood,” to the myriad traces that slumber within it, to a *logos* that solicits an unpremeditated sense for the self-emerging manifestation of the wood as an inceptive work.<sup>112</sup>

In the same lecture, Heidegger recasts the tale to foreground another dimension of how work regathers the elemental *logos* of *phusis*. He tells of another carpenter or cabinetmaker

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<sup>109</sup> Krenov, *A Cabinetmaker’s Notebook*, 75, 126.

<sup>110</sup> It bears mention that the Greek word *hulē*, usually translated as matter, originally meant ‘wood’ – a suggestive detail in view of Heidegger’s frequent allusions to woodwork.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Graham Parkes, *Heidegger and Asian Thought* (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1987), 56.

<sup>112</sup> A similar discussion appears in the *Country Path Conversations*, where another poem by Chuang-Tzu is quoted to illustrate the necessity of being exposed to the useless or unnecessary manifestation of the earth – Heidegger expressly invokes a “rift” (*Riß*) by way of example – in order to stand within the world (CPC 156/GA77 239).

(*Tischler*) from a mountain village. The cabinetmaker is commissioned to build a coffin in which a local farmer will be laid to rest. So unlike manufactured products (*Angefertigten*), this is not to be a generic, placeless box for an anonymous corpse (*eine Kiste für eine Leiche*), but “something brought forth and placed here [*Her-gestellte*] . . . into a nearness [*in eine Nähe*].” As Heidegger elaborates, “that which is placed here [*ins Her Gestellte*] stands in the precincts of that which matters to us.” As it once mattered to the farmer so too does it now to the cabinetmaker. How do matters stand there in those precincts close at hand? And how does it matter? In answer to these questions, Heidegger tells us that the work “is placed there *in advance* [*im vorhinein hin-gestellt*] onto a preferable spot of the farmstead, in which the dead farmer still lingers [*verweilt*].” He then goes on to summon the name of this trace, this work placed there in advance for the cabinetmaker. It is a name familiar to those who dwell in such places, he says. They call it a “*Totenbaum*,” a ‘tree-trunk coffin’ or, more literally, ‘death-tree.’ Also known as *Baumsärge*, these rough-hewn works, which resemble something between a modern wooden coffin and the bole of a tree, have been excavated throughout Europe and China from burial mounds dating back as early as the Bronze Age. In some coastal cultures of both regions they were even carved into dugout canoes and commended to the sea during funereal rituals.<sup>113</sup> In that singular *Totenbaum*, forelaid by *phusis*, the dead farmer is not simply contained, like those present-day corpses hermetically sealed into mass-manufactured capsules contrived to exempt their contents from the cycles of decay and regeneration without. Instead, “the death of the deceased flourishes [*gedeiht*] in it,” as only nature can in propinquity with the flourishing of “house and farmstead,” of the “dwellers and their kin and the neighborhood” (BFL 25/GA79 26, trans. mod.).

In Heidegger’s story, human being and the greater wild being of *phusis* are gathered together in a *dwelling place*, one that forms the abiding, bounded lay-out into which beings emerge from concealment and recede. A tree emerges from the soil into the wider, green precincts of the homestead, where it is selected, felled, bucked, and sawn into planks, hove into

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<sup>113</sup> In the Celtic *Todtenbaum* tradition, certain regional funereal customs dictated that the coffin was to be either incinerated in a pyre, buried, hoisted to top of the tree (planted when the deceased was born), or turned over to the river or sea. Turning to this tradition in *Water and Dreams*, Gaston Bachelard reflects on these final resting places. In being “placed once more in the heart of the vegetable [kingdom], given back to the living heart of the tree, the corpse was delivered up to the fire or else to the earth; or waited among the leaves, in the treetops, for dissolution in the air, helped along by the Night birds [recorded to have devoured the body], the thousand phantoms of the Wind. Or finally, more intimately, still stretched out in its natural coffin – its vegetable *double*, the living, devouring sarcophagus – in the Tree, between two knots, it was given to the water, set adrift on the waves” Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, trans. Edith R. Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1983), 72.

the household workshop, then planed into true as the shavings fall like hair to earth. In equal measure does this place offer itself as the generational clearing for the birth, growth, convening, and dispersal of kith and kinry, guests and hosts, for the animal, elemental, and the equipmental.<sup>114</sup> Heidegger curiously fails to invoke the older name for the locus of “house and farmstead,” familiar to its bygone residents, an ancient Greek name that spoke dwelling place together with resting place eternal. The place where nobles dwelled and worked with commoners and slaves in Homer’s Ithaca. Odysseus with his mowers at the scythe. Penelope with her handmaids at the loom. But also the tomb (*tumbos*) of Sophocles’ Antigone, which she calls her “deeply dug” and “everlasting home.”<sup>115</sup> The name of that open place was *oikos*.

Our discussion of the early Greek understanding of being has recovered a trace of the place in which birth and death, saying, working, and dwelling, were gathered together ecologically. This way of being-there, of being-in-place, was already some centuries old by the time it was philosophized by Thales and his fellow *phusikoi*. Like timelost potsherds recouped from the surf on a foreign strand, some small fragment of this way of being can still be pieced together from his salvaged words. When gathered up and laid out in propinquity with the place from which they issued – its outer shores and central well, its dwellings and all the trails between and out beyond – those words suggest in faint and broken contour a philosophical work as it might have been. A work of no mere human contrivance, but wrought of and holding still in its open interior an *archē* that seeps through every contrivance but replenishes the dwelling of the caretaker. By allowing that earthly no-thing to dictate its own shape and outpour into saying through him, Thales reshaped it into a vessel not unlike the cabinetmaker’s coffin or the potter’s jug that would take shape in Heidegger’s lectures in Bremen over two millennia later.<sup>116</sup> And if we listen closely at one of the many indefinite mouths of Thales’ discourse, we might just catch an amphoric echo of an elementary wisdom. A wisdom that flourishes within that vessel now as

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<sup>114</sup> As Heidegger writes, “place” [*Ort*], which “gathers” (*versammeln*) the essence of things, “only shows itself under way” (*unterwegs*) (PR 60/GA10 88).

<sup>115</sup> Hom. *Od.* 1.356-58, 2.97; 18: 366-80; Soph. *Ant.* 892. “Everlasting home” translates *oikēsis aiephrouros*. The connection between tomb and *oikēsis* (a synonym for *oikos*) is made with much éclat by Derrida when, toward the beginning of *Margins of Philosophy*, he compares the silent ‘a’ of *différance* (marking it off from the word *différence*) to *oikēsis*: the “familial residence” and, by way of the pyramidal shape of ‘A’ – and perhaps a tacit etymological link to this line in *Antigone* – the “tomb of the proper [*le propre*].” Harkening back once more to the *oikēsis/oikos* at the root of ‘economy’ (*oiko-nomia*), Derrida proceeds to equate *différance* with “the *economy of death*.” Jaques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Heidegger’s discussion of the jug in his 1950 essay “The Thing” (PLT 161-180/GA79 5-23).

it did perhaps so very long ago. From at least one of his mouths *philosophia* echoes back to us as *logos oikeios*, a way of dwelling that gathered *phusis* into the affiliation of earth and world. It is to his *oikos*, then, that we shall come a calling. But if we are to avoid the trespass of the uninvited interloper, we must first gain a footing on its native soils. Where history has forced entry to these premises by anachronistic leverage or else simply passed them by, ours will be a different tack. In lieu of heavy- or empty-handed entrées, we shall come bearing gifts, guest-gifts, fittingly gathered from the root cellars of an earlier ontohistorical epoch in which caretakers of the dwelling place rose to their vocation by responding to the invocation of the mythic earth.

## Devoured by the Mountain

The great philosophies are towering mountains, unscaled and unscalable. Yet they endow the land with what is highest and point to its primeval bedrock. As they stand they focus the gaze, and in each case they form an ambit of vision; they bear sight and concealment. When are such mountains that which they are? Certainly not when we have supposedly surmounted them by climbing their peaks, but only when they truly *stand* there for us and for the land. Yet how few of us are capable of letting the liveliest elevation rise up in the repose of the mountains, of standing in its locality.

–Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*<sup>1</sup>

The wolf is a being of great order and it knows what men do not: that there is no order in the world save that which death has put there.

–Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing*<sup>2</sup>

Adopting by turns the three pedal postures invoked by the Sphinx, I crawled, walked upright, and hobbled from stalkhold to limbhold down that tunneled draw. If other human bodies had gone this way, no trace of them was evident. But for a staggered run of curious, meniscal depressions, the ground appeared unbroken. As I harrowed the earth underfoot, so steep was my descent that I was constantly pawing for some firmer anchorage in it, my outreached hand groping then seizing clods of rich, loamy soil imbued with the odor of time itself. And as I shambled downward, by turns stumbling and rolling clodlike, it adhered and accrued to my body. Sorely scraping its scabrous surface at first, I gradually came to feel myself moving intimately *through* the nether. As though by a journey far back or forward in time, when its borrowed flesh was as it will be buried, my soiled body seemed ever more deeply of the earth.

Amid the verdant profusion of that tumbling terrain, all things were rendered ephemeral, amorphous, protean. Try as I might to prise this from that by sight or touch or clutch, I was unable to disentangle any one thing from the sensuous vegetation that burgeoned apace with the swiftness of my passage. No sooner did I see an imbrication of would-be branches and leaves than it swept across my face to blind me. No sooner did I grasp an apparent rock or root than it dislodged or crumbled to disrupt my balance. Encumbered, outnumbered, blundered by unseen

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<sup>1</sup> CP 147/GA65 187, trans. mod.

<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Crossing* (New York: Picador, 1994), 45.

excrescences that scoured my body on all sides, I would list and recover only to fall back into the thresher. Still inertia gathered.

All the while I struggled simply to orient myself and stay the course by the stroboscopic light of way where everything flashed on the verge of no-thing. Of those sun-scorched swathes of desert due southeast of Yosemite, Cormac McCarthy writes that “all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence.” But where the “neuter austerity of that terrain” imposes the “optical democracy” of all things shining with like intensity, the lush phantasmagoria of the precipitous, sylvan passage breeds anarchic revolt against the demotic tyranny of vision. What the former achieves by austerity the latter achieves through excess. A sensuous charivari erupts into a phenomenal melee from which no thing can extricate itself to figure against a stable, coherent horizon. Not unlike some hallucinogenic jornada, my journey delivered me over to the same sort of bewilderment novelized by McCarthy. One in which “all preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships.”<sup>3</sup> In being swept up by the detritus, rolling each as one avalanche down the trace, such kinships emerged through the acute sensation of my flesh being barked like wood, spalled like stone, through inflammation and abrasion.

“In its swells and peaks, its rounded earth and rocks, a mountain is belly and teeth; it devours the cloudy sky; it swallows storms, bones and all, and even bronze thunderbolts whole,” writes Bachelard.<sup>4</sup> Forged by the prehistoric work of the lithosphere, mountains range across the earth’s surface. Underneath us their fault lines lie in wait, with diamantine patience, to spring again to seismic life, to swallow up the land over which we tread, on which we dwell, from which we take our harvest. They range across the globe these voracious, tectonic herds, a constant migration in geologic time that we humans – mere hiccups of heart – are too fleeting, or simply too fleet, to envisage. And yet we know it in our bones. A calcified knowledge released by tremors and fractures.

During brief respites on the trace I often half-expected the mountain to rear up beneath my feet and scrape me off its back. Stricken by bouts of vertigo, I imagined myself losing my footing and plummeting down the ridge. My crestfallen skull cracking like a geode or eggshell, yoke oozing unctuous into some unnamed crevice to become petrified there, entombed in stone.

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<sup>3</sup> *Blood Meridian; or, the Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 247, 259.

<sup>4</sup> Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will*, 143.



Whatever such misfortunes I managed to avert, this did little to quell the mounting feeling of being flensed of what I had come to recognize as my own body, which was being broken down and broken open, dislocated, devoured. All as its exfoliating flesh broke common ground with the foliate earth.

On a starless and stirless evening one weekend, long before the midsummer influx of hikers, I made camp in opulent solitude in a similar clime. The place was Merced Lake. Ensnared at the heart of the Yosemite wilderness, miles from the nearest road, telephone, or ranger station, this lake pools beneath a pass at an elevation of 7200 feet. The sun retires early at such altitudes. Just after it disappeared behind the peaks to the west, I cleared a spot for my bedroll, settled down, and fed on a modest spread of granola and cold beans. Exhausted from the day's climb, I then collapsed into a soundless sleep.

Long had I grown accustomed to being woken of nights by animal stirrings and sylvan suspirations. In the past I had dreaded those derelict hours. Those purgatorial hours when the shadows were wrested from the obsidian sky and began their nocturnal parade, leaping madly across the camera obscura of the imagination. Only after many wild nights did my body gradually attune itself to the subtle traces of the nocturnal soundscape, which ranged from indifference and curiosity to those rare occasions when darker portents moved. In the unanimous dark the eyes are apt to abdicate. The sensorium shifts its allegiance. Awareness is funneled into the stereophonic collectors at the sides of the head, as though two giant severed ears, cavernous and vigilant, stand sentinel over the stertorous body in absentia. So that when I was torn from my slumber that night at the lake by sounds without cognate, already their sense had been intimidated. The crepitation had lacked the desultory innocence of a deer, the passing curiosity of a black bear, the careless, disinterested report of an animal indifferent to my presence. It was more measured, more interested, intent, the silence punctuated *stealthily* as if to defy the ear. These were eager sounds, stalking sounds, the unmistakable indiscretions of the hunt. I rose, cast about. Until these intimations found confirmation. A beacon there in the absolute dark, the beam of my flashlight returned from a stand of trees behind me two piercing emerald eyes. But it wasn't until those eyes shot suddenly upward into the boughs that *I* made the inferential leap. I was being stalked by a mountain lion.

Sound is a gift twice given to the prey. Not only does it betray the presence of the predator, it offers itself as one of the surest expedient to challenging its claim to one's flesh. So

did I proceed to raise the most hellish bruit I could muster from a set of camp cookware and healthy set of vocal cords. Twice the lion fled and twice it returned until at last I gave chase, a foolhardy bluff that would surely be my last if called. After some time waiting, listening, I returned to my camp dismayed to find my box of matches missing. Absent the sheltering glow of the firelight, there was nothing to deter an ambush while I slept. It was then that I resigned myself to a wakeful night of panicked vigilance.

Imagine, then, my surprise when I gradually came under the spell of a kind of humor and humility in the face of all this. As absurd as it must sound, I admit that the prey even came to empathize with the hunter. Having intruded upon its dwelling place, I could not resent its claim to my flesh. For my own was no longer inviolable there, where the Kingdom of Ends cedes place to the animal kingdom. Into it I entered much as any other animal, eating and being edible to others. Next to the atrocities we have inflicted on other species, to say nothing of our own, being consumed seemed to pale in comparison. What's more, there was something in me that assented to that modest restitution. Reclaimed by the wild metabolism from which we humans routinely stand exempt, one in which death feeds life and each is promised to others as nourishment, my flesh would become the food and so the very flesh of that animal. If I personally recoiled at the prospect of a bloody reincarnation, it was also somehow reassuring. All this cast my panic-stricken bluster in a strangely humorous light. Such was the somniferous slide of my thoughts as I slipped back into my bedroll and promptly lost consciousness. Next morning I woke laughing from a dreamless sleep, astonished at having nodded off. Counting my limbs for good measure, I found myself entirely unscathed. To this very day, however, there is still some part of me that cannot eat without pausing to think from the belly of a mountain lion.

**History Untold.**

**The Homeric Roots of *Oikos*, the Other House of Being**

Let us retrace our steps. In the first phase of our historical grounding of ecology, we retrieved from Heraclitus an understanding of *logos* as the contentious yet generative gathering of being into the ecological difference manifested in the self-emergence of all beings, *phusis*. Through such elemental attunements as reticence toward the outlandish, one allows for exposures to the sounding forth of the pregnant, earthward silence, thus to traces of what *could be* underneath the clamor and bustle of what has been said and done. In so doing, one keys into the conflictual harmony of earth and world. An ecological response-ability to the earth-world requires an ability to moderate the ossified reductions of disclosure *as well as* the stochastic seductions of exposure. It maintains the tension between these countervailing tendencies. In first being affected by then understandingly conserving the earthly measure of what is possible, we foster inceptive ways of saying, working, and building that resound the silence and regenerate the horizons of significance wherein we dwell.

It is now come time to way onward to the second phase of our historical study. Early on in our investigations we examined idea of ecology in the restricted, epistemological sense. We saw how it has come to designate a branch of natural science and, concomitantly, the “natural world” carved out by the concepts, theories, and knowledge it secures. And we saw how that homological reduction of the *phusiologos* made its historical debut as early as Aristotle and the Stoics. Namely, in their subordination wisdom to scientific knowledge – *philosophy* to epistemophilia – and the disclosure of earth into *oikoumenē*. Must we then abandon our pursuit of a source or precedent for the ontological sense of ecology set forth in chapter 2? Does this philosophical novation bear but a tenuous, *ad hoc* connection to Heraclitean heterology, having no more claim to historical legitimacy than Haeckel’s *Oecologie*? And if science already owns the rights to the term, is it not ill-gotten, if not an outright misnomer for the relation between earth and world? Whence and why *ecology* then?

In this chapter we commence the second phase of our historical investigations by peeling back the folds of time to reveal the radicle from which stems the *logos* of *phusis*. Before it was prefixed by the modern sciences of ecology and economy, and even before it was hypostatically annexed by the *oikoumenē*, *oikos* issued from the earth-world sung by Homer. Historians, classicists, and political philosophers of every stripe have devoted volumes to the anthropological intricacies of the Homeric dwelling place.<sup>1</sup> But to my mind, the ontology of the *oikos* has never received the treatment it deserves. Heidegger, for instance, has much to say about the sense of being and the ontological difference in Homer.<sup>2</sup> You will also recall from chapter 2 the etymological deconstruction of dwelling and its ontological reconstruction as being-in, which Heidegger confines to the nested horizons of the world. In reading Homer we discover that the root of ‘dwelling’ and that of ‘dwelling place’ run deeper. Down into the indefinite abyss of being where *oikeioō* and *oikos* wait. Time and again, Heidegger takes up the historical thread of the ontological difference only to lose the ecological. Consequently, he fails to raise the question as to whether being-in-the-world exhausts the early Greek experience of *oikeioō* and *oikos*. He simply takes this for granted. Make no mistake. This is no mere historiological indiscretion. It is much more important for the critical light it casts on Heidegger’s depreciation of ecology, whose scientific acceptance he takes for granted. What’s more, it alerts us to the ways his thinking betrays an ecumenical forgetfulness of earthliness. In Homer we are provided an occasion for extending the thought of ecology where Heidegger’s falls short, reopening its place within the history of being and that history to an elemental past we share as dwellers both in the world *and* of the earth.

Let us begin with some concessions. It must be admitted that the historical verisimilitude of the two epics, composed by the Ionian bard in the eighth or seventh centuries BCE, is difficult to vet and subject to endless scholarly reappraisal. In recent decades, amid the heated debates

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, ‘Homeric’ will be used to mark places, events, and other items as depicted in Homer’s works. Unless otherwise noted (viz. the discussion of Laertes’ farm below), this should not be conflated with the period in which the historical Homer flourished.

<sup>2</sup> In his essay on the Anaximander fragment, for instance, Heidegger offers an extended commentary on several lines from the *Iliad*, where the seer Calchas is described as one “who knew all that is, is to be, or once was.” Heidegger goes on to interpret these words in terms of emergence and withdrawal from unconcealment, which he positions against the universal constant presence, or beingness in Plato and Aristotle. He argues that their language covers over the ontological difference between *Sein* (*on/onta*) and *Seinde* (*eon/eonta*) observed in this passage (EGT 32-8/GA5 344-50) Cf. Michael Naas, “Keeping Homer’s Word: Heidegger And The Epic Of Truth” in David C. Jacobs, ed. *The Presocratics after Heidegger* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999). See also: Charles H. Kahn, *The Verb “be” in Ancient Greek* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973).

over the canons of literature and philosophy, the matter has become fraught in ways unprecedented. Some remarks on how Homer fits into this controversy will help to clarify the approach and intent of our study in the pages ahead. In the “culture wars” that broke out in the at the close of the twentieth century, a number of commentators have argued, against the opposing ideological camp, that if Homer should be read at all, the lifeways he sung are not to be enshrined as a source of timeless wisdom, but presented as a record of historical and cultural particularity, warts and all. Reading the heroic epics chiefly through the lens of the politics of identity, partisans of this reformist approach allege that this culture was not merely blemished but deeply disfigured by such iniquities as racism, sexism, nativism, and xenophobia. Moreover, many of these scholars contend that some if not all of these disfigurements propagated from its exclusionary conception of *genos*, which carried a rich ecological significance we shall soon sift out. According to these scholars, an interrogation of this concept reveals that it contained in germ the politics exclusion, oppression, and subjugation of the other pandemic to modernity. While I wholeheartedly endorse the egalitarian spirit and historicism of the reformist view, I am inclined to think that historical truth rests somewhere in the undefended middle of these two extremes. Between romantic iconolatry on the one hand and pedantic iconoclasm on the other is perhaps a hermeneutics that finds in Homeric society an abiding wisdom that each has overlooked. A wisdom that may not even be “authentically” Homeric, but retains perhaps a vestige of an older truth that was on the decline even then and about which one can only speculate. A wisdom revived thereafter infrequently, improbably, in the interstices of the ecumene, untimely and misplaced. Whenever and wherever there have been earth-poets and earthworkers, like those who grace these pages, that wisdom has been resurrected.

Into these debates we shall not venture far, as this would take us far afield indeed. I certainly do not wish to detract in the slightest from discourses of such enormous social import, whose top-down conceptual approach to political abjection must be met and engaged by the ecological wisdom we seek, once it has ascended to that complex stage of inquiry. With that said – and this cannot be stressed enough – our chief concern is not the ideology of the *oikos*, i.e. how its *ideas* or dialectically materialist eidetic logic stands to inform a political theory or anthropological analysis of dwelling there, in that place – however historically self-conscious. It is rather to uncover from Homer a *pre-theoretical* understanding of the earth-world, one that gives full measure to the *ontological* sophistication of that epoch, marred as it was by undeniable

inequities and cultural chauvinism. This is no mean task. Not only does it require an impetuous historical leap across languages, through the printed word, and into an experience dramatically different from our own, it puts our entire investigation at risk of misinterpretation and misrepresentation. Genetic fallacies and other free-associative incriminations by academics prone to tribal loyalties and seekers of digestible philosophical recipes. Just the same, our task cannot be carried out so long as we are unprepared or unwilling to undertake a phenomenological suspension of the ideological. In this it must be conceded that no phenomenological (r)eduction is impervious to the contaminating influence of such epiphenomenal de-posits. Aspirations to methodological purity are purely aspirations, no more. Be that as it may, it is only by halting the unscrutinized procession of ideas that we allow for an elementary experience of being-in and dwelling place to show itself in early antiquity.

We shall begin our discussion of the Homeric *oikos* by mapping out its “economic” and topological coordinates on the ontological axis of *phusis* sketched in §19. An examination of the building and stewardship of this place will bring to light a way of dwelling that responsively cultivated the allotments of the earth in the construction of house and farmstead and the tending of crops and livestock. Our focus here will be on how these practices were guided by an attunement to the unbuilt and uncultivated, which promoted the conservation of a metabolic exchange with beings evergreen and immortal. In *Getting Back into Place*, Edward Casey traces our words ‘cultivation’ and ‘culture’ back to the Latin *cultus* ‘to worship’, and further back to *colere*, meaning ‘till’, ‘dwell’, and ‘care for’.<sup>3</sup> We shall find that each one of these senses had a place in the rituals and customs of dwelling in the *oikos*. Indeed, on our appraisal, the practical understanding demonstrated by its caretakers must be recognized as part of an allocentric care-structure: oriented toward the otherness of earthly being and the earthly being of others. Having consolidated these findings, we shall defend the thesis that the Homeric epoch was grounded on an understanding of being that was neither physical nor metaphysical, nor even strictly *physical* in the Presocratic sense. Significantly, the *self-emergence* and *gathering* of *phusis* into the temporal-spatial horizons of the earth-world was a *mythological* happening. In filling in the contours of this **mythophysical** understanding (shorthand for *muthikos-phusikos*) we embark on the path to recovering the ecology of being from the age of Homer, thence from Thales’ own.

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<sup>3</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 173; 229f.

## §27. Entry to the Mythophysical Earth-World (*oikos*)

The hero is a hero of the earth; he is mythic, rather than being a hero of the people.

–Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>4</sup>

The Homeric Age (c. 1150-750 BCE), also known as the Greek Dark Age, names the era generally agreed to be depicted in Homer's epic poems. In this era the *oikos* was the predominant Greek fixture of social and economic organization. The beginning of this period was marked by the precipitous collapse of the Mycenaean Empire in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries. A conjuncture of foreign invaders, internal conflict, and environmental catastrophe have been posited as precursors. But there is no scholarly consensus on its root causes. What *is* known is that it precipitated: the erosion of centralized government and bureaucratically regimented agricultural systems; a breach in the written record; the decline of monumental architecture, of industrial textile production, of cultural and commercial exchange with the Near East; and a dramatic depopulation of the Greek peninsula.<sup>5</sup> At the other end of the timescale, as the Homeric Age gave way to the Archaic, we find a cultural and political revolution that spread inland from the Ionian coast in the ninth-century, inaugurating the rise of the city-state and the repopulation of the region. In the intervening centuries of “darkness” Greece was an ethnically and culturally polymorphic, politically polycentric, and economically decentralized region undergoing a process of increscent transformation.<sup>6</sup> A nonmarket society dispersed into nomadic, pastoral chiefdoms that gradually coalesced into sedentary agrarian communities. The far-flung, idioloal settlements of these peoples were arranged into dwelling places called *oikoi*. At a glance, the *oikos* comprised a house and farmstead on which some noble family group resided. But closer inspection reveals that those precincts and that household were opened to include hired laborers and craftsmen, servants and slaves, animals, even strangers, outlanders, and gods.<sup>7</sup> These others

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<sup>4</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 340.

<sup>5</sup> Hanson, *The Other Greeks*, 28-30. Cf. Birgitta Eder, “The world of Telemachus: western Greece 1200–700 BC” in Sigrid Deger-Jalkotzy and Irene S. Lemos, eds., *Ancient Greece: From the Mycenaean Palaces to the Age of Homer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2006), 549.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christoph Ulf, “The World of Homer and Hesiod” in Kurt A. Raaflaub and Hans van Wees, eds., *A Companion to Archaic Greece* (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell, 2009), 97.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ulf, “World of Homer and Hesiod,” 86; Moses Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (New York: Pelican Books, 1979), 60f. See Hom. *Od.* 1.356, 360; 2.45, 48; *Il.* 24.471 for key references to *oikos* as household and dwelling place in Homer. Quoted translations of Homer's *Odyssey* are from *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Richard Lattimore (New York: Harper Collins, 1967). Translations of the *Iliad* are from Homer, *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Richard

did not merely sojourn or reside on the premises, they were considered very much a part of that close-knit community, whose openness and concomitant resilience is scarcely conceivable today. So that if this social institution was aristocratic and patriarchal in structure, it also retained some notable egalitarian features of earlier tribal cultures, about which we shall have more to say shortly.<sup>8</sup> While they survived in one form or another into later periods, particularly in rural regions, the Homeric *oikoi* were in many ways dramatically different from their counterparts in the synoikistic *poleis* of Classical and Hellenistic market societies, and even more so from those of the imperial *oikoumenē*.<sup>9</sup> To shed light on the distinctive features of the *oikos* in its earliest recorded incarnation, permit me to offer a brief glimpse of its economic outlay and topological layout before we narrow our sights on their ecological underlay.<sup>10</sup>

### §28. A Natural Economy: Apportioned Shares in the Metabolism of Care (*nomos*)

When the ancient Greeks speak of the open space of the *nomos* – nondelimited, unpartitioned; the pre-urban countryside; the mountainside, plateau, steppe – they oppose it not to cultivation, which may be a part of it, but to the *polis*, the city, the town.  
–Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>11</sup>

From an anthropological perspective, Homeric society was a subsistence economy.<sup>12</sup> Yet this had little to do with the efficient management of “natural resources” generally evoked by the

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Lattimore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1951). Wherever modifications are made to translations of lines from Homer’s and Hesiod’s works, I have consulted the Greek versions from The Perseus Project electronic texts originally published by Loeb Classical Library. These texts are available at “The Chicago Homer,” Northwestern University, <http://homer.library.northwestern.edu>. Direct quotations of Hesiod and Homer in this chapter are parenthetically abbreviated throughout.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Walter Donlan, “Reciprocities in Homer,” *Classical World* 75 (1982): 138.

<sup>9</sup> While it is true that Homer uses the same word to refer to the emerging cities at the end of the Greek Dark Age, one cannot overstress the social, political, and economic differences that separate the Homeric “city” from the Classical city-state. A nascent political formation for which citizenship bore little relevance or importance, the *polis* of the late Greek Dark Age is characterized by K.A. Raaflaub as “a community of persons, of place or territory, of cults, customs and laws, and capable of . . . self-administration (which presupposes institutions and meeting places).” Kurt A. Raaflaub, “Homeric Society” in Ian Morris and Barry Powell eds., *A New Companion to Homer* (New York: Leiden, 1997), 630. Similarly, in his historical essay of the Homeric society, J.V. Lice stresses the “informal and somewhat rudimentary nature of its political organization and legal system,” when compared to classical Athens. J.V. Lice, “The Polis in Homer and Hesiod,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 78 (1978). So while less careful philosophical scholars have been given to adopt the term “ancient Greek *polis*” as a historically static concept, importing assumptions about its Attic and Hellenistic exemplars back into the Archaic period and late Greek Dark Age, we should regard such a move from the outset with due measure of suspicion.

<sup>10</sup> Section to be expanded with stage-setting from the *Odyssey*.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 481.

<sup>12</sup> Ulf, “World of Homer and Hesiod,” 86f.



term today. In fact, *pace* Marx, the *oikos* cannot be classified as an economic institution at all if by this we mean a political economy of human needs that establishes itself as a para-site on the natural order, which it arrogates and transforms to satisfy those needs.<sup>13</sup> Contrariwise, the homestead was founded on *oikonomia* in the original sense of the word: the careful stewardship of nature's greater household. *This* household granted tenancy to those who safeguarded it, saw to its cultivation (in all the senses rooted in its etymology). This *natural* economy was based on the dispensation or distribution (*nomos*) of *phusis* in its cyclical growth and decline within a specific locale. Among that dispensation's *sine quibus non* were arable land, potable water, and livestock, on which the household primarily subsisted. In the case of pastureland – the prototypical (meaning of) *nomos* – there was not yet an inalienable allocation of parceled tracts by law or custom. Evidence points instead to a distribution of land, over which flocks ranged freely, by the casting or drawing of lots (*moira*).<sup>14</sup> For their apportioned share of nature's outlay, the *oikonomoi*, or caretakers of the *oikos*, reverently acknowledged their indebtedness. This was accomplished through cooperative customs and rituals of reciprocity integral to all aspects of life in the household, ensuring it partook *in* the intertwining orders of *phusis* and *theios/theos* (the divine or godly) whenever it partook *of* their gifts.<sup>15</sup>

To bring this dynamic into sharper relief one might say that the natural economy of the *oikos* was governed by a metabolic equivalence of *care* rather than a market-based or monetary equivalence of value. Although it would not carry common intellectual currency until Pindar (c. 522–443 BCE), and only accrued epochal interest with Aristotle, the concept of metabolism is both relevant and fruitful for understanding the form of exchange that sustained this economy. From its earliest known usage the term *metabolē* has bore a range of meanings, including 'change', 'overturning' and 'exchange'. Famously, Marx offers "man's metabolism with nature"

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<sup>13</sup> In his classic study, *The Ancient Economy* (1973), Moses Finley attributes the absence of economic language in the Homeric Age to the absence of a full-fledged political economy in this period. Moses Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: Univ. California Press, 1999), 22f.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Casey, *Getting back into Place*, 267. For pertinent descriptions of *moira* in the *Odyssey*, see Hom. *Od.* 14.64, 14.208f., 19.592, 20.76). As Ulf surmises of the Homeric Age, "not only common land but also uncultivated and unallocated land of lesser quality seems to have been available." This might explain the conspicuous absence of any hint of conflict over land between rich and poor." Ulf, "World of Homer and Hesiod," 87. Along the same lines, and against those who smuggle what is known about Athenian culture into the issue, Cynthia B. Patterson points out that "there is . . . no clear evidence that inalienability of land [apportioned as *klēros*] was typical in early [Homeric] Greece." Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 240f.

<sup>15</sup> For sake of simplicity and legibility, we shall hereafter adopt the standard Attic orthography in place of Homer's except where this would distort an originary translation or epithet (e.g. *theos* for *theios*, *xenia* for *xeinia*).

as the definition labor. On Marx's view, man's labor "sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his own body . . . in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs."<sup>16</sup> Arendt, who will go on to challenge Marx's inconsistent conception of the general form in question, upholds this definition on her own terms.<sup>17</sup> In *The Human Condition*, for instance, she claims that by reproducing the "means of subsistence," "laboring always moves in the same circle," the "ever-recurrent cyclical movement of nature." This cycle "manifests itself in human existence through the circular movement of our bodily functions" and in the human world – and only there – through "growth and decay."<sup>18</sup> Arendt's allusion to a natural *cycle* beyond the world is belied somewhat by the insight we have developed in previous chapters. As Arendt puts it, the "durability and relative permanence" of the world "makes appearance and disappearance possible." Without appearance and disappearance, which underlies sameness ("single individuals") and change, it is difficult to see how a *cycle* would be conceivable.<sup>19</sup> What we have been calling the *earthly* being of nature is less problematically presented as "changeless," as she does way of contrast with the metabolism of the life-world:

Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of the small, single, life processes, returns into the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition.<sup>20</sup>

For the Homeric Greeks, this "changeless, deathless" source of creation and destruction, growth and decay, was mythophysical. The metabolism of the *oikos* was bound up with the care of the deathless gods, still immanent in nature, in which (mythophysical) being as such – and not mortal existence – was primarily at issue.

We shall examine this proto-ecological sense of care at length in §36. At this juncture, permit me to clarify my thesis. To say that the Homeric natural economy was governed by a metabolic equivalence of care means that the concerns underpinning labor *and* work in the world, concerns centered on the self-concern that Heidegger equates with care (*Sorge*), were de-centered, mediated, and regulated by a geocentric qua theocentric determination of care. A care

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<sup>16</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (Penguin, 1982), 283.

<sup>17</sup> Arendt argues that Marx tends to conflate the durable use-objects fabricated by work and the ephemeral objects of consumption produced by labor. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), 99f., 102f., 105, 165.

<sup>18</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 96-8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 97. Arendt's adherence to the language of "cycles" in describing nature beyond the worldly horizons of human life (*bios*) indicates perhaps that these descriptions implicitly retain the perspective of "mere" life (*zōē*).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

owing to which the mortal world had come to be and continued to endure. The bio-psychological conception of “wants” and “needs” and their distinction is existentially grounded on care, in which that distinction breaks down.<sup>21</sup> Juxtaposing it with the “sphere of freedom” in the *polis*, Arendt characterizes the “household sphere” of the Classical period as one in which “men lived together because they were driven by their wants and needs.”<sup>22</sup> In the sphere of the Homeric household, by contrast, I am proposing that mortal concern and solicitude, was not ultimately grounded on care for one’s own life, the life of one’s family, or human life as such. Rather, in a way more congenial to Heidegger’s later ruminations on care-taking (*Be-sorgung*), the conservation (*Schonen*) of the earth, and the stewardship of being than to the existential analytic of care, these concerns were ontologically allogenic and allotropic. They were born of and directed toward the otherness of being, earth qua Gaia. Instead of caring primarily for the “inalienable” self-giveness of existence, the dweller of the *oikos* understood herself foremost as a caretaker of what had been given and could be taken away by the other, ageless or no, but earthbound all the same. Rather than designating some static, intraworldly change (between aspects or properties, places, spaces, or things), this sense of *metabolē* is partly captured by Heidegger as “change [whereby] something heretofore hidden and absent comes into appearance” (P 191/GA9 249). Ecologically thought, this change eventuates in the clearing of the world as a cycle of emergence from and demergence back to the self-concealing earth. Such were the nested horizons of care for the Homeric Greeks. Thus does *metabolē* name *heterostasis*: the strife and conflictual harmony of the ecological difference.

In the earth-world of the caretaker, the distinction that Arendt sets up between labor and work breaks down “from the viewpoint of nature.” From the viewpoint of nature’s *ecology*, that is, *homo faber* is essentially a prisoner of the ecumene, which did not emerge until the late-Archaic and Classical periods (see §18 below). Only in the ecumene does one dwell as “man the maker and fabricator, whose job is to do violence against nature in order to build a permanent

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<sup>21</sup> Setting aside the mythophysically allocentric determination of care just introduced, the point can be made succinctly under Heidegger’s early rubric. Insofar as existence is at issue for us, the most basic biological “needs” or “drives” become “wants,” contingent on our thrown projection of the sense of our own “life” and “life” as such – viz. whether we have a concern for life at all. Moreover, if “wants” and “desires” have their source in the mind of the subject, this concern originally derives from existence, stamped to its core by coexistence, in its *prejective* relationality to the sense of being and the significance of its world.

<sup>22</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 30.

home for himself."<sup>23</sup> Only in the ecumene does the worker “take matter out of nature’s hands without giving anything back, as though to exempt his works from the metabolic cycles of growth and decay.”<sup>24</sup> High indeed are the walls that separate *homo faber* from the Homeric *oikonomos*, who has even less in common with *homo economicus*.<sup>25</sup> In the mythophysical earth-world announced by Homeric *oikos*, we shall see that the concern for work and labor derived at bottom from the extent to which they maintained the metabolic equivalence between elementally divine care, manifested by the prolific gifts of being (*es gibt*) such as shelter and growth; and fundamentally mortal care, bestowed through conserving that shelter and recompensing those gifts in due measure and timely proportion. This equivalence was never actually attained by mortals, for the gifts of the earth were beyond measure, inexhaustible, and therefore impossible to fully requite. As in the world-historical metabolism of *Being and Time* (see §8), it is precisely our finite failure to fully explicate and expiate our thrownness that drives the movement. Unlike that vocation, however, the caretaker is not simply set the task of owning up to being thrown into a pasthaunted *world* so as to project herself toward the destiny of *self-being*. If the ipseological understanding of care demands the impossible requital of the factual gifts of other mortal *selves*, the ecological understanding of the Homeric Greeks implicates us in having been thrown into a world that is abyssally othered and infinitely beholden to the earth. Theirs was not the tragedy of being-in-the-world, but the ecological epic of earthly finitude.

Unlike the pastoralist, the agrarian farmer who first appeared in Greece at the end of the Homeric Age devoted himself to cultivating the same locale for all his days. Seeing to its cultivation necessitated an elemental attunement to the metabolic cycles of growth and decay within it. The mythophysical dispensation of these cycles was accorded deferent pride of place in the hierarchy of practical and existential concerns. Dwellers deferred those concerns to allow for exposures to what was most essential to the stewardship of the *oikos* because it most mattered to

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>25</sup> In the political economies of the late-Archaic and Classical periods, *metabolē* would come to mean ‘barter’, defined as the lawfully sanctioned exchange of inalienable commodities between ecologically independent transactors. In the Homeric Age, however, when humans belonged to their communities as ecologically interdependent beings bound together by their dependence on the dispensation of nature, the predominant form of economic exchange assumed a very different shape. In the next section we shall return to this theme in examining the ritual custom of gift-giving (*didōmi*): the exchange of alienable non-commodities between humans and other humans or humans and gods. So far from an economy legislated from the top-down by a politically established authority, we shall find that this reciprocity was forged and maintained from the bottom-up by affective affiliation.

the gods, who had given all things shining in it. They thereby uncovered the metabolic measure of nourishment supporting all beings therein, anthropological and otherwise-than. The conservation of the metabolism entailed a response-ability to the delicate balance between the generation (e.g. birth and growth) and destruction (e.g. hunting, consumption) of other inhabitants and elements of the homestead. The cycle was perpetuated as these others were carefully digested and recycled (e.g. in dung, middens, sacrifice) for the sake of still others, nourishing *their* generation and growth.

The response-ability to the metabolic equivalence demanded that nature's gifts be reciprocated, in kind or otherwise in-kind, according to the due measure (*metron*) or timely proportion (*kairos*) of their allotment to the caretaker. You will recall this language from the dialogue we opened between Heraclitus and Heidegger in chapter 3. In that exchange the *phusical* measures of the fiery *logos* were said to set the measures for responding phronetically (Heraclitus) to the hidden law or *measure* of earth (Heidegger). In Homer the word *metron* represents primarily the timely measure of nature's outlay requisite to subsistence and growth. Thus does it appear in reference to food (*Od.* 2.355), water (*Od.* 9.209), and longevity, or the time in the world allotted to each mortal (*Il.* 1.225; *Od.* 11.317, *Od.* 19.532). But *metron* also represented the measure of recompense for that apportioned share through expressions of reverence (*aideomai*, *aidōs*) and guest-friendship or hospitality (*xenia*). As guest and tenant of the cosmic *oikos*, the caretaker made these requitals to her immortal hosts by means of worship and sacrifice. And she conserved the measure of that exchange when hosting others in her own dwelling place, recompensing the dispensation of nature, the gods, by bestowing joyful favor (*charis*) and gifts of honor (*dōra*, *gera*) such as wine and feasts on any stranger whose presence good fortune happened to bestow (*Il.* 7.471).<sup>26</sup>

The word *kairos* would eventually signal an understanding of time that bears certain affinities to the Heideggerian notion of timeliness (see chapter 1).<sup>27</sup> In contrast to linear

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<sup>26</sup> We shall explore this theme more thoroughly in §32. Suffice it to say here that the human requital of mythophysically allotted *klēros* to the *oikos* demanded that hospitality be shown to all its guests. Far from an unmediated human transaction, it was *theos* and *phusis* that set the ultimate measure for the exchange of gifts and joyful favors between household members and their guests. The word *charis* itself is mythically charged, referring also to one of three Goddesses (the *Charites*) of good cheer, mirth, or splendor, hence 'joyful favor'.

<sup>27</sup> Germane here is a comment Heidegger makes in the Heraclitus seminar he co-taught with Eugen Fink in 1966-67. At one point, in reply to Fink's allusion to *chronos*, Heidegger cautions: "it is important for us that there is no theoretical conceptual determination of time as time with Homer and Hesiod. Rather, both speak of time only out of experience" (HS 61/GA15 103). Heidegger's conception of timeliness is broached in chapter 1 (§8).

chronologies (from *chronos* and *logikē*), kairotic time consists in cycles, punctuated by moments of crisis that are also moments of opportunity. Defined by the metabolic disjuncture of past and future, *kairoi* were pivotal occasions or *seasons* (an ancillary meaning of the word) when the vitality of the *oikos* was at stake and an appropriate response was called for. Hesiod's *Works and Days*, composed in roughly the same period as the Homeric epics (c. 750-650 BCE), yet more depictive of that period by comparison, presents a hortatory model of an agricultural order responsive to *kairos*. In Hesiod's time the granges of the *geōrgoi* (or non-landed farmers) were still prevalent in outlying regions. The volatility of the weather, the growing season, and the tasks involved in maintaining these *oikoi* concurrently motivated their caretakers to attend closely to constellations of hints in the skies and nests of traces left by flora and fauna. Mythophysically intimated, these *sēmainei* were widely accepted to mark and portend kairotic moments for the enactment of specific ecological concerns (cf. §22 above)

The connection between *kairos* and care is evident from *Iliad* 8.325-6 where the word is first attested. In these lines Homer adopts it as an adjective to describe a "pivotal," "vital," or "lethal" part of the body where the neck meets the torso at the collar, a place necessitating careful protection owing to its vulnerability to injury.<sup>28</sup> In this respect *kairos* originally emerges in close proximity to *thumos*, meaning 'breast' or 'heart,' the seat of vitality and affection, hence 'spiritedness' as well.<sup>29</sup> A residue of this connection appears in *Works and Days* when Hesiod advises against overloading an ox-drawn cart with provisions owing to their *vulnerability* to spoiling over time and the vitality of the animal *collared* by the yoke. He follows this advice with the oft-cited metabolic maxim: "Keep due measure [*metra*] in all things, always observe timely proportion [*kairos*]" (*Op.* 692-4).<sup>30</sup> Here we learn that this specifically entails a *timely* sensitivity to the *vitality* of the animal. It is important to bear in mind that here, as elsewhere,

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of these themes see: Phillip Sipiora and James Baumlin, eds., *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory, and Praxis* (Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> *Thumos*, in the sense of 'spirit' or 'spiritedness', recurs throughout the Homeric epics and hymns to express a range of affective dispositions (viz. emotions, moods, and desires). In view of its connection with vitality, Homer frequently equates death with losing one's *thumos* (*Il.* 1.205, 10.452; *Od.* 12.350). Recently, Barbara Koziak has called into question the convention of associating this term in Homer with (oftentimes agonistic) masculine virtues, e.g. righteous anger of the sort that rouses one to defend the honor of oneself, one's family, or one's country. Koziak culls numerous passages from the *Iliad* to argue that *thumos* was seen to motivate both sexes, implied restraint, and in many contexts suggests a disposition at odds with that interpretation. Barbara Koziak, "The Early History of Gender, Emotion, and Politics," *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 4 (Nov. 1999).

<sup>30</sup> All quotations of English translations of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, *Theogony* (as well as the *Homeric Hymns*) are from Hesiod and Homer, *Works of Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns*, trans. Daryl Hine (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 2005).

Hesiod expressly derives the authority and merit of his dicta from divine and natural ordinance. Only by “keeping the days that derive from Zeus in appropriate fateful order [*moiran*]” while heeding his “will” and “wise counsel,” are the “seasonal fruits of the earth [*gaia*]” duly reaped and requited (766, 4, 51, 32). The poems speak to an age in which the metabolism of the mythophysical order has been compromised and those fruits no longer come as easily (42). Hesiod attributes this state of affairs to the fact that his coevals have followed in the footsteps of Prometheus by hubristically reaping more than their allotted shares with neither requital nor compunction. A perfidy he takes to have bred distrust and parsimonious accounting in the exchange of gifts among mortals, leading to the proliferation of “homegrown misfortune” and misery (48, 58, 353-5, 399f., 453f.). Hesiod sets himself the task of redressing the balance by consolidating the ecological wisdom of the past and transmitting it to the farmers and workers of his society, communities beset with increasing instability, debt, and dispossession. Gainsaying the venality and injustice of the juridical system of the early *polis*, he makes his appeal instead to divine justice: the allotment of fate (*moira*) meted out to mortals in due measure and timely proportion to their care of Zeus’ dispensation (36, 39).<sup>31</sup>

Insofar as the metabolism was maintained by the natural economy, this could plausibly be surmised to have obviated the accumulation of surplus that would progressively breach that reciprocity in the coming centuries. Much of the increasingly unequal redistribution of *klēroi* by institutional mechanisms of power, already to some extent underway in Homeric Greece, can be traced back to a breakdown in that regulative mutualism with the nonhuman elements of the dwelling place. Mining a parallel vein, Christoph Ulf considers how the works of Homer and Hesiod can be read as critical responses to that decline:

At all events, both poets were attentive observers and keen analysts of their times, so that they came to very similar conclusions about the questions and problems of their age. An experience they evidently shared was the effect of an unprecedented increase in social differentiation, which led to “power,” based on wealth and prestige, gaining an autonomous status which was felt to be unjust.<sup>32</sup>

We might refine this interpretation by examining how this injustice would have been experienced as a *felt* imbalance in the mythophysical metabolism. The complex mythopoetic and more broadly symbolic dimension of this model of exchange should not blind us to how the obligations, commitments, and prohibitions it generated bore an authority that trumped the top-down valuations of human judgment, and not simply as a mythic noble lie or unpremeditated

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hes. *Th.* 520, 607.

<sup>32</sup> Ulf, “World of Homer and Hesiod,” 97.

sublimation of anthropogenic power structures. However robustly authoritative, ethical responsibility in the rationalist sense, as one finds in Kant and Hegel, inevitably derives from a more basic response-ability to the other (in the broadest ontological sense).<sup>33</sup> While an ideological analysis may indeed yield insights into how rights and laws augment that ability, only phenomenology can explain their genesis from it. We shall see that this method is exceptionally equipped to account for how an elementary form of wisdom, pre-scientific and politically incipient, gave rise to the hardwon material subsistence and historical resilience of the *oikos*. If the values of this institution forestalled the wholesale deracination of the conditions for surviving the alleged blight and famine of the Greek Dark Age, and if they did so in spite of the remarkably limited, fragmented, and competing authority that scholars attach to its isolated leaders (*basileis*) and councils of elders (*gerontes*), it is incumbent on us to inquire into how these values could have been formed from the bottom up.<sup>34</sup> This inquiry will be made in §32, where we entertain the idea that this more basic normative register in Homeric society consisted of a nexus of metabolic affordances correlated with an unthematic concern for being gripped and guided, affectively, toward timely responses to what mattered and how it mattered to the earth. Suffice it to say at this juncture that the natural economy of the *oikos* was founded less on a codified axiology than it was on an attunement to the due measure and proportion of caring for the ontological otherness of beings.

## §29. A Natural Topology: Epimethean Building and Deferent Cultivation

An act of cocreation manifests itself in a stone wall. Nature makes the shapes and the wall builder puts them into relationships. Assembling stones in a landscape, the builder strives to be in harmony with the materials and prevailing conditions. A dry stone wall is both a human work framed by nature, and a work of nature touched by humanity. . . . To feel fully a part of the earth's workings I have to get myself in gear with it. I need to be one of its agents in the process of building up and breaking down.

—Dan Snow, *Listening to Stone*<sup>35</sup>

As Norman Austin gathers from phusiomorphic tropes of the *Odyssey*, which “blend the human figure entirely into its natural landscape,” Homeric society did not position itself outside

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<sup>33</sup> A sense comparable to that articulated more recently by Levinas. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1969).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ian Morris, “The Eighth-Century Revolution” in *A Companion to Archaic Greece*, 74.

<sup>35</sup> Snow, *Listening to Stone*, xii-xiii, 3.



of the natural order. But neither was that order believed to be entirely immanent to its own. Even as it exceeded his understanding and powers, “man, as a part of nature, was already of that order, but it was also his task to contribute to the maintenance of that order by imitation.”<sup>36</sup> Nowhere is that mimetic engulfment in the phusiology of wild place more evident than in the building practices of the *oikos*.<sup>37</sup>

Harvesting the ancient concepts rooted in the word, Edward Casey surveys the lived breadth of cultivation before reaping the insight that not only labor but building too has a role to play in caring for a place. As did Hesiod before him, Casey gleans admonitory wisdom from the myth of Prometheus. But here the censure targets the assumption, endemic to the digitally versed yet manually unpracticed (sub)urban mindscape of latterday ecumenism, that “building is an exclusively Promethean activity of brawny aggression and forceful imposition.”<sup>38</sup> The abjection besetting those who labor under this assumption was explored in chapters 1 and 2. Adding a historical cornerstone to that analysis, it is far from trivial that Casey delves Epimetheus from the quarries of oblivion to which Heidegger had abandoned the Titan.<sup>39</sup> The name Pro-metheus, meaning literally ‘forethought’, evokes a hylomorphic model in which working follows thinking. Building in this way begins from either disengaged intellection, which antecedently imagines the hypostatic idea of the product, or an unthematic projection of operant significance from one’s own self-understanding. The fact that Prometheus’ brother would become a historical afterthought, was a fate foretold by his name yet unforecast in Homer’s time, when *thinking followed exposure* in steering the plow or grafting scion to rootstock. Brought under this latter, *Epimethean workway*:

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<sup>36</sup>Norman Austin, *Archery at the Dark of the Moon: Poetic Problems in Homer’s Odyssey* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), 104. Austin’s interpretation here turns in particular on the seasonal and local tropes with which Homer portrays Laertes retiring to the outlying areas of the *oikos* in the autumn of his life (cf. Hom. *Od.* 11.187f.) and Odysseus on his homeward course as the promise of winter’s regeneration (e.g. “seed of fire”) (*Od.* 5.488-91).

<sup>37</sup> In this section we shall be focusing on the configuration of house and farmstead, or grange, commonly denoted by the term *oikos* in Homer. However, it bears mention that he also uses the word to refer by extension to the itinerant dwelling of Achilles at Troy (*Il.* 24.471) and the cave in which the Cyclops Polyphemus dwells (*Od.* 9.478). Even more suggestive for our purposes are occasions when *oikos* is used to refer to the dwelling places of nonhuman animals (e.g. *Il.* 12.167, 16.261). This sense lingered on as late as Herodotus’ *Histories*, in which we find an account of desert ants that “make their dwelling under ground [*oikēsin poiēsthai hupo gēn*]” (*Her.* 3.102).

<sup>38</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 173.

<sup>39</sup> On Heidegger’s high esteem for Prometheus and his forgetfulness of Epimetheus, see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford, CA: Standord Univ. Press, 1998).

Building is most effectively cultivational in character, for it seeks not to exploit materials but to care for them. In building-as-cultivating, the builder respects the already present properties of that from which building begins. . . . That from which the building starts includes not only the actual construction materials – adobe or wood, concrete or metal – but the immediate locus of building and, indeed, the entire surrounding landscape. The builder also starts from the intentions and wishes and practical purposes of those who are to live in the dwelling [including the transient guest, see below]. Instead of being unquestioned, all of these initial elements of building, including those that are nonmaterial, are *there to be cultivated* by the builder who constructs in an Epimethean way. . . . We get back into place – dwelling place – by the cultivation of built places. Such cultivation *localizes caring*.<sup>40</sup>

Casey's analysis of building in these lines adds a layer of concreteness to our discussion of the metabolic equivalence of care. Even before the willful mind forged ahead in working out the significance of its layout, our claim is that the construction of the *oikos* had already commenced in the attunement to the due and timely measures of the mythophysical metabolism. Casey cites numerous examples from around the globe of pre-building rituals, bygone and ongoing, devised to auspicate the working process and prepare for *mindful* cultivation and edification (from the Latin *aedes* 'dwelling' or 'temple' and *facere* 'to make').<sup>41</sup> The sacred ecstasy of these rites elicited something like a mood of reticence, whereby allowances were made for affective exposures to that which was not readily afforded to the understanding. The unbroken stone and soil, the free-flowing stream, the unfelled tree, and the cycles of all things dwelling thereabouts – and not just up on high.

The language of reticence is Heidegger's (see chapter 3), yet we could have made use of our own. For what is reticence but **deference** for the other, enacted through a *deferral* of one's own concerns? A deferral that *defers to* the other in the hierarchy of care? We should stress again that this 'other', in the ecological sense developed in these pages, is invoked to mark the position of the wild, the outlandish, in short, the earthly otherness of being manifested by all beings, be they mythic or natural, emigrants, mendicants, ruminants, or those of simpler elements. The elemental attunement of deference does not *disclose* this otherness so much as promote and establish the conditions for our *exposure* to it. Consider the Homeric builder. Having been deferently attuned to the alterity of the locale, she became an ecstatic passageway for its inbound intentionality, for an affective allure, repulsion, and restraint that set to work on her, through her. To be sure, she deployed her own practical know-how within her self-projected horizons to build upon what was already there. Yet this deployment was kairotically moderated by its deferral to the allopathic directives from which the building began, ensuring that her activity responded in

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<sup>40</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 173f.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 173, 367.

due measure and timely proportion to the earthly resistance she exposed.<sup>42</sup> Assuming that care is originally caring-for and originally practiced as caretaking, then it is not projective thinking but the prejective ability-to-be-affected that is elementary. So that if the body attains a synergic exchange with locales underway toward dwelling places, those working affordances wouldn't have solicited her body in the first place were it not for the more elementary reciprocity of the flesh and the mythophysically wild interbeing of the earth-world. These nuances will become clearer in the chapters ahead. Suffice it to say at present that the possibility of implacing ourselves in the world finds its generative grounding in our displacement from it, occasioned by the hyper-ecstasy of the flesh, its being-of-the-earth.

Casey sets forth two necessary conditions for dwelling place. First, it must afford return, however transient. Second, it must do so in a way that shelters a “felt familiarity.”<sup>43</sup> The Homeric *oikos* was constructed to meet these two conditions. What's more, we shall discover that its metabolic dispensation required the heterostatic cultivation of these two features. In other words, they were to be differentiated, re-cycled, and renewed by the inaccessible, unfamiliar, and outlandish. And because it so relied on nature's outlay, the built layout of the dwelling place entailed a third, essentially Epimethean, condition. Homeric society broke from the long-established plotting and building traditions established by the Mycenaeans. This is evidenced by the archeological record as it is by the topology of settlements in the epics, which bears little resemblance to the monumental architecture and vast networks of collectivized farms from the fallen empire.<sup>44</sup> Nor was the topology of the Homeric dwelling place imposed on the earth in the manner of form on matter, say, by indiscriminately leveling denuding, and supplanting wilderness, as would later be routinely done in ecumenical Greece and Rome. Instead it followed the fundament, as did the pathways and roadways that connected *oikos* to village and village to

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<sup>42</sup> In this context, Casey refers to “present properties” belonging to materials as to the immaterial locus of building, suggesting by contrast a kind of detached, thematic apprehension of what is already there. While such phenomena are not to be ignored – indeed, they may be of pivotal importance in precision drafting by rule and level and surveying equipment – it must be stressed that these are epiphenomena, built up from the materiality and locality uncovered through unthematic involvement, viz. affective and circumscriptive experience. For this reason, I opt instead for “intentions” or “directives,” which better capture the precursory phenomena, or periphenomena, primitively correlated with building-as-cultivation, or -caring-for. Whereas properties are always present-at-hand determinations given to inspection geared toward theoretical interpretation (Heidegger), or noematic correlates of egoic conscious acts (eidetic intuitions) geared toward judgment and reasoning (Husserl), intentions run the gamut from these thematic or active correlations (including deliberately scripted intentions-of-action) to unthematic or passive correlations at the level of affection, association, and spontaneously unscripted intentions-in-action.

<sup>43</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 116.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200-479BC*, Second Edition (London: Routledge, 2009), 44.

untold other “tribes of the earth.”<sup>45</sup> More precisely, the *oikos* was built in accordance with how *phusis* had already gathered itself into topological traces of places that furnished shelter and afforded cultivation. By means of cultivation affectively responsive to their *heterology*, wild places were transfigured yet conserved through a process of mutual accommodation. Most emblematic here is perhaps the marriage bed of Odysseus, which he crafts from an olive tree placed there in advance. As he recounts that undertaking:

There was the bole of an olive tree with long leaves growing  
strongly in the courtyard, and it was thick, like a column.  
I laid down my chamber around this, and built it, until I  
finished it, with close-set stones, and roofed it well over,  
and added the compacted doors, fitting close together.  
Then I cut away the foliage of the long-leafed olive,  
and trimmed the trunk from the roots up, planing it with a brazen  
adze, well and expertly, and trued it straight to a chalkline,  
making a bed post of it, and bored all holes with an auger.  
I began with this and built my bed, until it was finished (*Od.* 23.190-9).

In a way that recalls our earlier discussion of Chuang Tzu’s bell-stand and its Heideggerian offshoots, Odysseus selects the one tree that is already a marriage bed yet to be made. As it stood footed in the soil, so too is it remade to stand in the innermost chamber of the house. If the generative ramifications of the Homeric household stem from an *oikonisus*, this is consummated as much through the coupling of two humans in their sexual difference as it is through one that allows the differentiation of human being and its sheltering elements to flourish. Provided it is worked into true and cultivated by hands well-trued to its dendrology, ecstatically opened to and coadunating with its measure of self-emergence, the olive tree will continue to emerge into ecological unconcealment. Except now it will gather together into the strength of growth and union the branches of a household that shelters human together with the otherwise-than. Contrary to the homogenizing mandate of the *ecumene*, this was synergy and synecology in the oldest, richest sense of these words.

From high altitudes the geomorphology of Greece comes into view in furcate chines of mountains with an eastward crook and southward declination. Upon reaching the Aegean sea the lower vertebrae of the cordillera continue to rise and fall into the archipelago. Seismically and

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<sup>45</sup> The expression ‘tribes of human being on earth’ (*epi chthoni phul’ anthrōpon*) is collocation adopted by both Hesiod and Homer (cf. Hes. *Th.* 556, *Op.* 90; Hom. *Od.* 7.307). Notably, ‘tribe’ (*phulon*) also appears in Homer to name a grouping of nonhuman animals (*Il.* 19.30). Fraziska Lang draws attention to archeological evidence of such building practices from Emporio on the island of Chios and Zagora on Andros. “House – community – settlement: the new concept of living in Archaic Greece” in Ruth Westgate, Nicolas Fisher, and James Whitley, eds., *Building Communities: House, Settlement and Society in the Aegean and Beyond* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 2007), 183.

volcanically active, some of these bones have shaken for eons while others have recurrently broken to release their fiery marrow. Draped over this limestone ossature from summit to sea level is a diverse ecological integument. To make that descent is to encounter rapid changes in temperature and climate, soil and water conditions. And every one of the numerous pores in that vast membrane contains a unique biotic niche whose own conditions can fluctuate appreciably in seasonal cycles, but also from year to year. To better appreciate this synecology let us adopt the perspective of a farmer, that of a historian who has long tilled the earth himself:

Greece is not a flat territory of wide-open expanses, with regular precipitation, plentiful rivers, and ubiquitous lakes. Yet it is not a poor country either. The soil is rocky but rich, the harnessing of water possible but only through ingenuity and toil. The growing season is long, predictable, and dry, rarely humid or unsettled, accelerating more often than endangering the maturity of fruit and vegetable. Winters are cold, not harsh, and so provide critical dormancy for trees and vines rather than frosts that stunt limbs and kill canes. True, mountains and hills predominate; but slopes are more often gentle than jagged, and can shelter as well as isolate villages. Stones discourage the ploughing of broad expanses, but can be managed by the hoe and spade in more modest gardens, orchards, and vineyards. Unlike flat land, elevation encourages diverse soils and micro environments, rather than ensuring crop specialization, monotony, and vulnerability. Pasture land can be scarce for horses and cattle, but more than adequate for less impressive sheep and goats.

In agricultural terms, then, Greece offers opportunity but does not guarantee bounty. In any given year trees, vines, and grains neither uniformly fail nor inevitably flourish. . . . The successful harvest leads not to security, riches, and leisure, but simply the guarantee of yet one more year to come.<sup>46</sup>

This description, culled from Victor Davis Hanson's *The Other Greeks*, sets the backdrop for a ground-level assay of the typical farmstead at the end of the Greek Dark Age. Enlisting contemporary anthropological clues, archeological and literary sources, as well as his own first-hand experience in small-scale agriculture, Hanson draws a detailed panorama of a landscape in transition from nomadic pastoralism to the widespread propagation of diversified crops through stabile, intensive farming. On this view eighth-century population pressures and the scarcity of arable bottomland set the conditions for an agricultural revolution involving the reclamation of *eschatia*, or "marginal" newground by a new class of farmer (the *geōrgoi*) in the uplands and outlands of Greece. The *geōrgoi* were not, strictly speaking, nomads. Yet the outlandish regions in which they dwelled retained much of the local sense of *nomos* recovered by Deleuze. Significantly, Hanson finds a prototype for this agrarian pioneer, who was neither serf nor aristocrat, in Laertes, the father of the *Odyssey*'s eponymous hero. With Hanson as our guide, let us take stock of the layout of *eschatia* showcased by Laertes' farm.

After trouncing the vulturine suitors, Odysseus strikes out for his aged father's *oikos*, sited on the coarse and rugged "high ground" a right smart distance from Ithaca (*Od.* 24.212; *Od.*

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<sup>46</sup> Hanson, *The Other Greeks*, 26.

1.193). Laertes had long ago quit the family homeplace. Appalled by the ignominy transpiring there, he resettled himself in the uncultivated outlands of the district, where he has been eking out a living for some two decades. Hanson's suggestion of the scene's historical verisimilitude finds support in its quotidian presentation. In this "brief hiatus from the epic pageantry of the poem," he remarks, "gods, monsters, and feats of superhuman heroism are for a time absent."<sup>47</sup> The vivid details of Homer's description are at best tangential to the drama. Yet they receive independent confirmation from other sources such as Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the ruins of Archaic *oikoi* excavated (e.g. from Attica) by twentieth-century archeologists.<sup>48</sup> Taken together, this evidence lends credence to the idea that Homer was likely drawing from his own experience of rural eighth-century settlements in his portrayal of Laertes' farm. Here, in Book 24, that farm is described as a marginal place built up through laborious cultivation:

The others went from the city, and presently came  
to the country place of Laertes, handsomely cultivated.  
Laertes himself had reclaimed it,  
after he spent much labor upon it (*Od.* 24.205-7).

Starkly drawn is the contrast between the austerity of the countryside and the excesses of the suitors in Odysseus' stately halls and courtyard. Observes Hanson: "There are no references to feasting, gaming, and the acquisitive arts of plundering, raiding, and thievery, which had characterized so much of the lazy suitors' life in the banquet hall while the master was away."<sup>49</sup> During that time, Laertes is said to have been "away by himself on his own land," leading a "hard life" and making "his toilsome way" on the slopes of his *eschatia* (*Od.* 1.189-93). If we consider the size of the Phaeacian king Alkinous' luxurious, lowland estate – merely four acres or so (*Od.* 7.113) – it stands to reason that Laertes' plot is, by today's standards, even more modest (if comparable to highland terrace farms still prevalent in certain parts of Greece). And though it includes several slave quarters (*Od.* 24.208-12), this is clearly no manor lorded over by an absentee landowner who exploits his serfs for profit. Instead Laertes lives among his servants: working beside them at similar tasks, breaking bread together during meals, and later taking up

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 49f. Hanson acknowledges the scholarly controversy surrounding the authenticity of Book 24. Those in the skeptical camp have traditionally cited the unHomeric diction of its final lines and its "unheroic" depiction of Laertes as reasons to ascribe it to a later oratory bard. Hanson points out that whether this position is tenable is inconsequential to his argument, since he situates Laertes' farm in the *oral* tradition at the end of the Greek Dark Age (*ibid.*, 443).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

arms alongside them against the families of the suitors (*Od.* 223-27; 387-90; 400-409; 495-500).<sup>50</sup> After weighing evidence from the aforesaid sources, Hanson enumerates a host of time-consuming obligations that would have gone into cultivating this *oikos*:

Clearly, the presence of a farmhouse reflects greater investment in the agricultural infrastructure of Laertes' farm – fruit trees, vines, vineyard stakes, pens, outbuildings, livestock, and slaves. Laertes needed close supervision to ensure against damage, theft, or vandalism from both men and animals. Capital crops such as trees and vines demanded constant attention when planted, protection against browsing animals, extra irrigation and fertilization. In addition to the construction of costly fencing, this frequently required the agriculturalist to spend the evenings, nights, and early mornings on the farm.<sup>51</sup>

Laertes' painstaking work and labor, his meticulous stewardship, and his class-flouting commitment to those concerted efforts, can be read in every feature of the farmstead and in every aspect of his own appearance. Arrayed in a soiled tunic, goatskin hat, heavy gloves, and tattered oxhide gleeves to protect his shanks, Laertes cuts a humble figure (*Od.* 24.227-231). To the poet's audience, among whom aristocrats likely predominated, the attire of this former military leader and sire of a *basileus* would have been received as an outlandish emblem of déclassé prestige. The emphasis on social abasement is undeniable. Indeed, his son no less than *weeps* to behold him (*Od.* 24.232)! Finding his father stooped over the earth and gingerly attending to a small plant, Odysseus goes unrecognized by Laertes, whose son gently reproves him and, what's more, addresses him as a slave:

Old sir, there is in you no lack of expertness in tending your orchard;  
everything is well cared for  
and there is never a plant, neither fig tree nor grapevine nor olive  
nor pear tree nor leek bed uncared for in your garden.  
But I will also tell you this; do not take it as cause for anger.  
You yourself are ill-cared for; together with dismal old age, which is yours,  
you are squalid and wear foul clothing upon you.  
It is not as if for idleness your master had cast you by,  
and nothing of the slave shows  
in your form and stature, since you look like a royal person;  
like one who after taking a bath and food  
might sleep at ease, as is the due of age (*Od.* 24. 244-55).

Having for so long grieved the loss of his son and the untimely death of a wife, Laertes appears much older than his years, receiving far less of that ease than is due. But we should not let this or his son's sorrowful reaction distract us from the fact that his dress is altogether in keeping with the pragmatic, down-to-earth sensibility of an *Epimethean* caretaker who accords the earth pride of place in the order of concerns. All things cultivated in Laertes' *oikos* bear the mark of his

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-65.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

expertise, but also his deference, indicating that he has discarded the worldly incentives of power and status for the surety that “everything is well cared for.” Meanwhile, he wears the sum of that care-driven toil on his sleeve, on his very flesh. While the former is wrinkled to the shape his life, the latter not only retains its prior “form and stature” but retraces every arduous scarp and swale of that terrain like some crinkled, carnal map.

One summer afternoon, while on a hike through the heart of Germany’s Black Forest, I fetched up to a remote clearing, nestled between two densely wooded mountains. At the center of that clearing was a solitary farmhouse and several smaller outbuildings surrounded by a carefully tilled field of crops awaiting harvest. In passing, I caught sight of something that stopped me in my tracks. On the edge of the field stood an aged farmer, shirtless and threadbare but standing true as a fir tree. Turned away from me and gazing out over the breadth of his labors. Although it was early, the sun had already begun to drop below the high horizon, so that everything there trailed a slightly lengthened shadow. And as the light slanted down upon that setting, I was suddenly struck by how its multiform layout found an unexpected replica in the flesh of its dedicated caretaker. The steep shoulders of the surrounding terrain lay upon the frame that had recurrently scaled them. The rows he tirelessly worked, over seasons, had furrowed the contours of his back. Cast in relief, it was knotted with tuberos muscle beneath a slack and pleated carapace. More bark or rind than parchment, his skin had been weathered by the skies of that place in their panoply, dappled and parched by the sun in its circus, coarsened by mountain gales, the winter’s day benumbing. And had he stirred, I do believe he would have moved with the same fluent ease and steady persistence of those streams he flumed to slake the earth before him. Shaping the land as it wore him down until, like a living fossil, his body was graven in *its* image, the old farmer incarnated the elements of place as few of us can and fewer ever do. In a story as old as Laertes, the land had cultivated him, its earthen Epimetheus, a fleeting vision I am grateful to have been granted from the inner edges of a world well lost.

Hanson draws attention to another important feature of the natural topology of the Homeric farmstead, largely unremarked or understated by ancient historians. The frequent references to water cultivation in Greek literature of the time – most notably in the *Odyssey* the elaborate irrigation complex in Alcinous’ countryside estate (*Od.* 7.112-130) – indicate that this practice was already quite common. Homer himself seems to have had been well acquainted with irrigation techniques, a point that Hanson illustrates by citing this allegory from the *Iliad*:



as a man running a channel from a spring of dark water  
guides the run of the water among his plants and his gardens  
with a mattock in his hand and knocks down the blocks in the channel;  
in the rush of the water all the pebbles beneath are torn loose  
from place, and the water that has been dripping suddenly jets on  
in a steep place and goes too fast even for the man who guides it.  
so always the crest of the river was overtaking Achilles (*Il.* 257-263).<sup>52</sup>

Hanson goes on to argue that irrigation technologies must have extended into the *eschatia* as well, where evidence points to diversified and intensive farming in exigent soil and climate conditions. He observes that, even today, extensive irrigation is required for all cultivated trees and vines in these areas before their root systems have reached maturity.<sup>53</sup> Like the topology of the house and *oikos* more broadly, these structures were built to conform to the lay of the land:

One must not envision the vast communal projects and hydraulic dynasties of the ancient Near East – elaborate dams, ditches, level fields, and watering-lifting devices – in order to establish use of irrigation in the ancient Greek countryside. Predictably, the Greeks had no desire for the complexity of the palace. Instead, they fashioned *new irrigation practices to reflect their native terrain*, with its absence of enormous rivers running through flat expanses . . . For the Greek *geōrgoi* this meant rudimentary, private efforts – small diversion of streams, wells, retaining basins, springs, dams – on modest plots devoted to gardens and the nourishment of young trees and vines in newly established orchards and vineyards.<sup>54</sup>

In sum, the built layout of the Homeric *oikos*, and especially those tended by the agrarian outlanders at the close of the Dark Age, was tried to a metabolism at world's edge, where crisis constantly coincided with opportunity at vital moments in the wild cycles of generation and destruction. In the initial stages of synergic cultivation, such *kairoi* included the construction of the house, the digging of wells and irrigation channels, as well as the development of fields, orchards, and vineyards. The fertile yet volatile Greek lowlands, and even more so its diverse but fickle highlands, allotted due portions of prosperity to those who cared for them by cultivating what was already there. So far from a Promethean undertaking that agonistically strove to conquer and subdue the land, this called for Epimethean workways that localized care by deferring and then moderating the might of mind, will, or body, through a deferent attunement to the topological foretraces of dwelling. Even before the first stone was laid, the builder keyed into that lived topology through sacred rites and almsgiving, which summoned the ethereal and terrestrial together into the gift of place. The heterostasis of earth and world was impressed into every built feature of the dwelling place and folded into the flesh of its lifelong stewards. Grafted to the elements of a wild layout, the *oikos* grew in measures by their measure, like a scion vine

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Il.* 21.257-62; 346-47; 5.87-92; 16.384.

<sup>53</sup> Hanson, *The Other Greeks*, 60.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

holding fast to the rootstock of another. To better ascertain what made that fastness possible, we now turn to the ecological underlay of the *oikos*, the modalities of dwelling that distinguish it from its ecumenical epilogue in the Classical *polis*.

### §30. The Modalities of Ecological Affiliation (*logos oikeios*)

Philosophy, beginning in wonder, as Plato and Aristotle said, is able to fancy everything different from what it is. It sees the familiar as if it were strange and the strange as if it were familiar.

-William James, *Some Problems in Philosophy*<sup>55</sup>

In §9 we mentioned that a classical echo of *logos oikeios* can be heard in the doctrine of Antisthenes, albeit one transposed to the epistemological register. In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, Antisthenes insists on the ontological underdetermination of definition. According to him, to define something is not to give an exhaustive *horos* or *horismos* presumed to fully encompass what something is or could be, but rather its *logos oikeios*: an account that identifies an essence that is open-ended and ecstatic. Although this expression does not figure into Homer's idiom, its original sense can be traced to *oikeioō*, a word that occurs with some frequency in the epics. In Homer *oikeioō* means both 'dwelling' and 'affiliating with dwelling place (*oikos*)', hence 'dwelling-with' in the broadest sense of cohabitation. The epic poems contain tokens of this word referring to dwelling-with and so affiliating other humans (e.g. family, *Od.* 4.4, *Il.* 14.116; tribe *Il.* 2.668; slaves, *Il.* 14.4, 15.330), other animals (*Od.* 14.528-534), and even elements (e.g. water, *Il.* 20.218). In what follows, we educe from such passages two essential conditions of gatheredness (*logos*) into the *oikos*, whereby others were originally affiliated (*oikeios*) with it: (i) generation (*genesis, genos*) and (ii) care-for (*philō, philotēs*).<sup>56</sup>

As shorthand for Homeric *logos oikeios*, ontologically construed as being-with-others, let us adopt the term **ecological affiliation**. The merits of this translation will become clearer as the discussion unfolds. At this stage let us simply note that the root meaning of 'affiliate', from the Latin *affiliare* 'to adopt', points to an orientation or disposition *toward* the other (by the Lat. suffix *af-* as in 'affect') that *stands in for* a filial blood-relation (Lat. *filia* 'daughter', *filius* 'son'). We shall see how, in the Homeric earth-world, dwelling-with derived from the modalities of

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<sup>55</sup> William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>56</sup> A third modality, work (*ergazomai, ergon*), is projected for an expanded version of this manuscript.

ecological affiliation, which founded and disposed one toward relations of synecological kinship that were neither strictly consanguineous nor broadly biological.

The sense of *oikeios* uncoupled from ‘dwelling’ (*oikeō*), ‘dwelling-with’ (*oikeioō*), and ‘dwelling place’ (*oikos*) is a later development. That this paradigm would eventually come to connote inalienable closure into the ‘ownness’ or ‘belongingness’ of beings can be attributed to its gradual displacement and disinvolvement from that quondam place wherein beings were affiliated otherwise. Read in this way, Heidegger’s own early conception of *Eigentlichkeit* exudes the unmistakable taint of the corrupted sense of *oikeios* passed down from Plato and Aristotle. Antisthenes, to whom we shall return in §45, was one of Plato’s earliest detractors. Historically characterized as a sophist, Antisthenes marks the transition from the conception of *oikeios* as partial and porous to its world-locked closure in the Classical period. Whereupon it was anthropologized in terms of autonomy/autochthony and hypostatized as substantial essence (beingness). The corruption of the *oikos* paradigm accordingly coincides with the decline of the ecological understanding of being in the first ecumenical epoch. In other words, the semantic mutation of *oikos* into *oikoumenē* signals the enstatic dysclosure of being and the homological reduction of *logos* to *epistēmē logikē* (see §9-10). Put simply, the historical advent of ecumenism, and with it the oblivion of the ecological difference, are clearly legible in the story of ‘*oikos*’ no less than they were in that of ‘*logos*’.

A sketch of the meaning of *oikeios* in Plato and Aristotle will prove illustrative. Though traces of its older sense occasionally factor into their thinking, as when juxtaposed to *polis* and *politikos* (e.g. Pl. *Ap.* 23b), chiefly use *oikeios* to designate an item of epistemological and lexicological “affiliation.” Where ecological affiliation is grounded on ways of dwelling-with, this homological relation is strictly established through rational inference. Accordingly, Plato and Aristotle reconstrue *oikeios* in terms of: what can be known as belonging to the essence of a thing or subject matter (Pl. *Leg.* 772e, *Rep.* 468d; Arist., *Eth. Nic.* 1098a29); and the literal rather than the metaphorical meaning of a word (Arist. *Rh.* 1404b35). Taken together, these considerations do much to explain the Stoic transposition of *logos oikeios* into *oikeiōsis*, the appropriation of all things into the essential ownness of individual living beings (*zōa*), and preeminently human beings, inasmuch as they possess the power of reason (*logikon echon*) and instantiate its universality in the homogeneous community it governs (*hegemonikon*). In contradistinction to *oikeiōsis*, which is based on a hypostatic power to assimilate all difference

into the same (homeostasis), it is my contention that ecological affiliation was heterostatic and heterological at its core. It admitted of *logoi* other than *epistēmē* to conserve the difference between world and its elemental other, earth. And it did so through modalities that gathered others into a dwelling place, where they were to be welcomed and cared for *as others*. The purpose of this section will be to substantiate these claims by examining how generation and care together conditioned dwelling-with in the lived ecology of the Homeric Age.

In broader compass, our aim here will be to set the stage for retrieving Thales' thought as the culmination and critical reexamination of an earlier ecological epoch in the history of being. This will involve a phenomenological eduction of the Homeric experience of the ecological difference of being from epic descriptions of dwelling. With that said, in the following sections, we shall seek to establish how, in Homer's Greece, dwelling-with (*oikeioō*) evinces:

(1) the *ontological difference* between

- (a) *being* as the self-concealed (*muthos*) emergence (*phusis*) of beings in the earth-world (*oikos*); and
- (b) *beings* as affiliate-strangers (*oikeion-xenoi*), received as allotments granted by being;

(2) the *ecological difference* in (a) and (b) between

- (c) *world* (being-in) as im/mortal dwelling place, i.e. the horizons of understanding; and
- (d) *earth* (being-of) as mythophysical origin (*genos*) of the dwelling place and sustaining source of ecological affiliation (*logos oikeios*), i.e. the horizons of care-for (*philotēs*).

If Thales' doctrine marks a philosophical departure from the mythological elements of this understanding of being, our central claim will be that it retains its ecocentric orientation by thinking being as earth-world. On the assumption that Western philosophy begins with Thales, its Homeric point of departure would not be knowing how to know : the appropriation of the unknown into the universal validity of homological affiliation. It would rather begin from knowing how to dwell other-wise, that is, by *taking care of* the otherness of being. By virtue of maintaining that ecological affiliation in accordance with the metabolism of the earth-world, this wisdom conserved the ecological difference of earthborn others within the horizons of the dwelling place. Accordingly, we shall seek to illustrate that ecological affiliation placed a constraint on dwelling-with that Antisthenes would later place on Plato's doctrine of knowledge.

One of sheltering the unfamiliar under the aegis of the familiar without collapsing their mutual difference. So that if both Plato and Aristotle would have us see that the vocation to philosophy issues from a wonder before all things strange, places outlandish, and peoples foreign, Homer offers a glimpse of a summons more wondrous yet, a song of the wild earth in a mythical mode undampened by logical certainty and the certainty of logic's claim to wisdom.

### §31. Being-of as Being Born of Earth: Affiliation Engendered (*genos* as *gē-genesis*)

The earth is [for the clan] before all else the matter upon which the dynamic of lineages is inscribed. . . . Everything changes with State societies: it is often said that the territorial principle becomes dominant. . . . What moves to the forefront is a "territorial" organization, in the sense that all the segments, whether of lineage, land, or number, are taken up by *an astronomical space or a geometric extension* that overcodes them.  
–Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>57</sup>

Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?  
–Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*<sup>58</sup>

When Odysseus returns to Ithaca disguised as a stranger, he bids his son Telemachus to identify himself, to tell him who he is. Telemachus replies by identifying his *genos* and *oikos*. "I am from Ithaca by birth [*ex Ithakes genos*], and my father is Odysseus" (*Od.* 15.267). Elsewhere, Odysseus identifies himself in like manner, claiming not only "to be a son born of a good father [*patros d' ek agathou genos*]" but "from Ithaca by birth" and "from wide Crete by extraction [*ex men Krētaōn genos*]" (*Od.* 21.335, 24.269, 16.62).<sup>59</sup> In Homer the word *genos*, which often marks the kinship (*synergeia*) relations between members of the family, bears reference primarily to birth or generation (*genesis*). But since the family was bound together not merely by blood ties but essentially by those of ecological affiliation, this had as much to do with *where* one was born and *whereof* one's generation descended as it did with *who* one's parents and ancestors were.<sup>60</sup> That *genos* was implicated in divine generation, moreover, meant that every

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<sup>57</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 388.

<sup>58</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second Edition (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, *Od.*9.562, where Odysseus identifies himself to the Cyclops Polyphemus in this way, an encounter that turns on the Homeric understanding of identity.

<sup>60</sup> This point is borne out in Book 17, for instance, where Antinous identifies Odysseus (in disguise) as a stranger (*xeinos*) on the grounds that "I don't know clearly *where* [*pothen*] he claims his *genos* comes from" (*Od.* 17. 370-73)

where and every who bore the mysterious birthmark of a sacred past in which all things were first begotten by Gaia. These three dimensions, family, place, and myth, were inseparably conjoined in the Homeric earth-world.

In the epics, to claim one's *genos* (*genos euchomai*) is to reveal one's identity. Yet this is all but incommensurable with the way in which personal identity is commonly understood in the modern world: a self-constituted enstasis or nuclear self essentially prior to or independent of its relations to place and other. The modern language of personal identity and selfhood are altogether lacking in Homer. From a contemporary perspective, we might say that his world is peopled with radically extended, eccentric, or ecstatic selves, engendered and maintained in stasis – in the sense of place and cohesion – only through their affiliation with (others of) the dwelling place, and by extension village (*kōmē*), district (*dēmos*), town or city (*astu, polis*), and fatherland (*patra*).<sup>61</sup> Odysseus is a notable case in point. Much though he is characterized as exceptionally wise and resourceful, he periodically forgets altogether who he is over the course of the forlorn exile that vengeful Poseidon has visited upon him. His is therefore primarily a journey toward hearth and home and only secondarily a return to himself. So far from being a testament to the primacy of the ego, the personal, or “the Same,” then, the arc of the *Odyssey* attests foremost to the primacy of the dwelling place and the resilience of its affiliations. As the familial nucleus of the natural metabolism, its continuance rests on the hero's memory of that place and his commitment to restoring the measure of caring for the earth disrupted by the suitors. Insofar as the *oikos* represents an allotment bequeathed by the gods to mortal heirs of earth, his return follows a metabolic pathway leading through the wilds of the divine order as well. In this it is no accident that Odysseus owes his eventual homecoming above all to Athena, divine affiliate and patroness of Ithaca.

These mythological considerations point to another defining yet underrated feature of generation. One likely to be overlooked once we succumb to the homological blindness of the culture warrior, political affiliations notwithstanding. In their efforts to pigeonhole Homer into some prepackaged ideological framework in which *genesis* collapses into *genos* and this into the modern understanding of ‘lineage’, ‘race’, ‘sex’, or ‘gender’, its *mythological* significance is frequently obscured. Either an appeal to the anthropomorphism of the Greek gods is made in

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<sup>61</sup> It is noteworthy that Homer frequently refers to tribes (*phulē*) yet the word for tribal village, *kōmē*, is absent from the epics. It does, however, appear in Hesiod (e.g. *Op.* 639; *Sc.* 18).

order that the politics of a divinely chosen lineage, race, or sex be (de)legitimated, or else the concept is wholly demystified with like intent as one pertaining solely to *human* generation, race, sex, etc. In either case mythology is presumptively reduced to anthropology.<sup>62</sup>

Instead of grounding *genos/genesis* ideologically and erecting from that modern scaffolding of ideas the identity politics of Homeric Greece before the rise of the *polis* proper, we shall attempt to ground it on the ecology of being. What part, if any, might this phenomenon have played in the metabolism of the earth-world? To even begin to address this question we must try to hear in the word ‘fatherland’ not simply an augury of patriarchal atrocities, but primarily ‘land’ and ultimately ‘mother earth’ – and this while unequivocally acknowledging that theirs was a land that mustn’t be romanticized, that it was anything but sown with Elysian Fields. In doing so we quarry from the cosmogonic core of Homer’s earth-world a lost sense of *genesis*. At once divine and elemental, this manner of generation laid the elementary foundations for care even as it enticingly receded from the understanding of the begotten. My contention is that the *generative grounds* of the *oikos* lay in being born of earth.

As late as the fifth century, according to Herodotus, the identity of a person was *principally* determined by specifying the god/s from whom his or her family descended. And this could be established by observing the rituals of the household, specifically those devoted to honoring its genetic affiliation with the divine.<sup>63</sup> Within this greater ecology of being, wherein gods also dwelled, *genos* was not restricted to human generation at all. It implied an immortal lineage. And since the gods themselves descended from a common source, *genos* bore more elementary reference to *gēgenēs*, to being born of earth (*gē*), from which *all* beings had sprouted. The farthest-reaching elsewhere and the primeval whereof, earth was also a who of sorts. It was personified by the goddess Gaia: “Mother of All” and “firm-grounded nourisher of all things” in the Homeric hymns (*Hom. Hymn Gaia* 1-3); and in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the child of uninhabitable Chaos, but also the primordial mother and “forever immovable seat of all the deathless gods who inhabit the heights of Olympus” (*Th.* 5, 12, 117f.).

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<sup>62</sup> Patrick J. Deneen is one scholar who offers a critical appraisal of how this tendency to rationalize, secularize, and humanize Homer plays out in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s widely influential *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Not only is their interpretation called into question by its tendentious demystification of the epics; as he argues, they themselves “finally side with the enlightenment inasmuch as they deny for myth a place of esteem in modernity.” Patrick J. Deneen, *The Odyssey of Political Theory: The Politics of Departure and Return* (Lanham, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 170.

<sup>63</sup> Hdt. 5.66. Herodotus identifies Isagoras as the Athenian from Carian Zeus based on his ritual worship of the god.

In this anthropomorphic guise, Earth was said to have given birth to Sky (Ouranos), in which the gods came to dwell, and together they conceived the world between. So that if mortals now resided in that world, its horizons were surrounded by and permeated with all the wonder and splendor and mystery of the past held sacred (*Th.* 126-138).<sup>64</sup> Beekes' *Etymological Dictionary of Ancient Greek* informs us that the most plausible etymon of 'Ouranos,' a cognate of the Greek *oureō* 'to make water' or 'urinate', is the Proto-Greek *worsanos*, which stems from the Proto-Indo-European root *wers-* 'to moisten' or 'to drip' in reference to rain (cf. Sanskrit *varsa* 'rain', *var* 'water', and Hittite *warsa-* 'fog, mist').<sup>65</sup> As the rainmaker and fertilizer of Gaia, Ouranos already bore within him the seed of Ocean (Okeanos), thus the source of all the waters of the world. And from the admixture of water and earth there was fashioned two vessels: one containing the source of hope and prosperity, the other misery and hardship, which lay in store for mortal beings (*Il.* 24.527-30; cf. *Op.* 60-105; *Th.* 590-7).<sup>66</sup>

The *allohistorical* horizons of this earthborn, cosmic *oikos* transcended those of the mortal dwelling place. Yet the latter was deeply implicated in that sacred time, not principally by virtue of the understanding, which fell well short of comprehending it, but through the affective ecstasy of religious customs, rituals, and art – from veneration and celebration to procreation and poetry. These folkways found their hinting summons and unforeseeable consummation in an attunement to the earthly *genos* of mortals. By being moved within a deferently silent atmosphere of earth-exposure, mortals reopened the affiliation with their mythophysical origins. And by giving alms and making sacrifices for the sake of upholding and safeguarding the careful measures of the earth-world *metabolē*, they conserved and renewed that affiliation, recycling

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<sup>64</sup> In the epics, Ouranos and Olympus are each described as the home of the gods (e.g. *Il.* 1.497); the mysteries of the chthonic realm will be plumbed in chapters 5 and 7.

<sup>65</sup> Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, vol. 2 (New York: Leiden, 2009), 1128f. Etymologically noteworthy is *Varuna*, the name of the Vedic god of water. It is also speculated that *ouranos* might be cognate with the Hittite *wara* 'to burn', derived from the PIE *uranu* 'the burner or giver of heat'. See Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* (New York: Routledge & K. Paul, 1966), 753. The apparent inconsistency of these linkages is resolved when we consider how the sky is the source not only of moisture (rain) but also heat (sun). All four of the elements thought by the Presocratic *phusikoi* thus converge in the primordial coupling of Gaia and Ouranos.

<sup>66</sup> Notably, the older myth of Pandora from the *Iliad* deviates from Hesiod's version. Where she had lived up to her name (meaning 'giver-of-all-things') as a goddess in former, Pandora is cast in the latter as the first mortal woman and a bringer of all *evils*. Concerning Hesiod's apparently misogynist revision Christoph Ulf points out that "there are some indications that this woman, created as a punishment by Zeus, does not represent womankind *per se*, as is generally assumed," but rather stands as a cautionary foil, alongside the men of avarice and hubris (*Hes. Op.* 24), to the "hard-working, sensible" member of the rural farmstead (*Op.* 694-704) and the virtuous Gaia and Hecate. Ulf, "World of Homer and Hesiod," 95.



generative processes of cosmogonic provenance. In this way, *genos* temporally thickened the memorial past of the mortal world, embedding it in the far deeper past of its immortal progenitors. Through this double movement of history, the *kairotic* present reemerged in cycles. Having been seized upon by these timely moments, mortals seized upon them, consecrating the sacred past in ways that chastened the conceit of mastery with mystery. To bear witness to these deeds, works, and words was to be *thumotically* disposed by them to the hope and hardship, prosperity and precarity, and above all the vital reciprocity of dwelling in a world *of* the earth.

The several senses of *genos* – birth, generation, sex, race, and gender – all stem from a common ontological understanding of being-of (*einai ex*) as being born of (*genesis*) earth and thereby affiliated (*oikeios*) with the dwelling place. To amplify an earlier point, this gave rise to a self-understanding, an *ecology* of identity predicated on being-of a mythophysical origin. More so than ‘from’, the preposition ‘of’ captures the stative sense of having being born into a past that belongs to the present by virtue of genetic affiliation. The expression ‘I am a child of the South’, for instance, says something much stronger than ‘I am from the South’. The former is an assertion concerning my identity, implying that my birthplace is an non-incidental feature of who I am, a place to which I continue to belong and with which I am affiliated, wherever I am and regardless of explicitly recollection of it as my own – let alone land-ownership. ‘Being from the South’ does not necessarily bear these connotations; this statement would conceivably hold true of a Kaspar Hauser. For the Homeric Greeks, being born of and thereby implicated in a sacred place and time, suppositious though it was, grounded who one was. Next to these markers, the coordinates of identity set by being of a certain anthropic birthplace, family, sex, race, and gender were decidedly secondary.

This structure of genetic affiliation grounded not only the possibility of individuation and personhood. It grounded the identification of beings as such. To be a phenomenon was to have been engendered by the self-concealing (mythic) earth, whence it emerged into the world as an *oikeion*: an affiliate of the mortal dwelling place that retained traces of its mythic origins (cosmic and cosmogonic). Thus the identities of beings bore an essential relation to the nested horizons of dwelling-with: *being in* the mortal *oikos*, the cosmic/immortal *oikos*; and *being of* earth/Gaia.

An attempt to express a trace of *gē*-genetic affiliation is apparent from Homer’s congenetic identification of *mortal* beings with “tribes *of* the earth.” Another appears in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, where specific “races” or “generations” (*genē*) are identified by age-grounding,

mythophysically allotted elements that distinguish their ways of dwelling (*Op.* 109–201). To anticipate a direction we shall soon pursue in depth, Homeric *genos* reveals itself in these terms as something of a mythological precursor to the philosophical concept of *archē*. Each of these two separate ways of articulating how something *is of* the earth is rooted in an ecological understanding of being. For in both epochs world was understood as *oikos*, earth-world. Their difference lies in whether earth figured into the lived truth of unconcealment as *mytho*-physical (Gaia-*gē*) or stochio-physical, i.e. elemental (*gē*). Aside from this discrepancy, we shall find that the Homeric and Presocratic clearings converge in the rift where earth is exposed as generative ground of the world: the mysteriously self-concealing origin and regenerative source of phenomenal emergence. In each case, earth and world are metabolically affiliated in a way that outstrips the understanding yet solicits a response-ability to conserving the ecological difference of beings, existent and intraworldly. In this respect, the rituals of dwelling in Homer’s Greece as well as his own poetics bespeak not ideological mentalities or anthropocentric activities but mythopoetic archetypes of an anthropo-eccentric way of being, an ele-mentality that makes way for the utmost passivity of exposure to that which shelters all beings *gē*-genetically *of* it.

If nothing else, the vulnerability of this mythological experience of *genos* to ideological appropriation should alert us to its anthropological ambivalence. In the conjuncture that would define the ensuing onto-historical epoch, the fledgling science of philosophy would demystify that ambivalence by disaffiliating generation and *oikos*, placing the *gē*- of *genos* under erasure, then hypostatizing generation. On grounds theoretical and macropolitical, Plato banishes the poets from his ecumenical ideal of the *polis*, accusing them of parading human unreason as divine order. Meanwhile, he derogates their verses to the status of second-order appearances, twice removed from the eidetic truth – agreement or correspondence (*homoiōsis*) with reality (Pl. *Rep.* 595a5, 398a1-b4). Disburdened of these irrational elements of thought, the stage was thereby set for Aristotle’s reduction of generation to the coming-into-being of theoretically knowable beings understood as *ousiai*, and *genos* to genus: a class of *eidē* that capture the hypostatic essence (*horismos*) of a being when further specified by that being’s eidetic difference (*diaphora*) from others of its class (Arist. *Met.* Book 5, *Top.* 102a31, 102b12. Cf. Pl. *Prm.* 129c.). For the Homeric Greeks, however, the horizons of beings had not yet suffered the hypostatic closure attending the understanding of being as *eidōs/idea*. The being of beings, in other words, had yet to be dysclosed as universal constant presence (beingness), crystallized in

space and time. On the contrary, theirs were horizons ecstatically open to the hyperstatic difference of beings, which surpassed the *locality* and *timeliness* of human dwelling. And it was through their deferent attunement to that mythological dimension of the lived truth (*heterologos*) that they were hyper-ecstatically exposed to their gē-genetic affiliation with the deathless gods and all things born of earth. That exposure intimated a sacred past that impinged on the present, setting the due measures and timely proportions for dwelling other-wise with the otherwise than human. So that if the “true blood” of this people would be decanted by political ideology, it also bore traces of an indissoluble ontogony from which hemorrhaged in spate an otherness that cut across and leveled the hierarchies of human power that would siphon it into the *political* differences of race, sex, gender, and noble descent. Before it was siphoned, that blood was but a stream, one among many, manifold and protean, emanating all from the earthborne waters of the world. If this ecological truth was domesticated and diluted by the very myths that resounded it, it also divulged some measure of the othermost source of generation coursing through the innermost keeps of human being, indeed, through the body that sutured it to place. Infused more potently in this people than any mortal will to power was, quite simply, the *water* in the blood.

### §32. Being-in as Dwelling-with: Affiliation Reborn of Care (*philotēs*)

We are inundated by nature, but we do not care about nature.  
. . . The wild is keenly sensual. In a true wilderness we are  
like that much of the time, even in broad daylight. Alert,  
careful, literally “full of care,” Not because of principles, but  
because of something very old.

–Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild*<sup>67</sup>

Rivers of ink have been spilled over the ancient Greek concept of friendship. If we shall only briefly glance the surface, it is to stir up a second modality of ecological affiliation (*logos oikeios*). We first touched on this when alluding to how attunement, said by the word *thumos*, could afforded an ecstatic channel through which the mystery of earth manifested itself as itself in the mythophysical *oikos* of Homeric Greece. Howsoever that generative ground withdrew from the understanding, its ramifications were exposed, then cultivated through a congenial reciprocity with congenetic others. Instantiated between mortals as philanthropy, this reciprocity was more allopathic and heteropathic than commonly assumed, rooted as it was in a response-ability to the elemental otherness of all things born of earth.

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<sup>67</sup> Jack Turner, *The Abstract Wild* (Rucson, AZ: The Univ. of Arizon Press, 1996), 36, 27.

*Philia*, the ubiquitous term for friendship in the Classical period, was unspoken by Homer and uncommon before Euripides. The word *philos*, however, is a fixture of both traditions. In Homer we find this word used as a noun in reference to: family relatives (*Il.* 4.155, 13.427, 15.439, 21.587; *Od.* 1.194, 3.352, 15.59); personal friends (*Il.* 1.345, 17.655); even gods (*Od.* 24.514). We also find it occurs as an attributive noun meaning ‘kindred’, ‘dear’, ‘beloved’, or ‘friendly’. So modified, it is invoked by Homer to describe: house-servants (*Od.* 2.361, 19.21, 22.480); fellow members of one’s fatherland (*Il.* 2.178, 5.318, 10.533, 19.178; *Od.* 2.410, 9.63); and strangers visiting the home (*Od.* 1.158, 19.351, 21.40); and god-favored mortals (*Il.* 2.628, 10.527, 18.203, 24.67; *Od.* 6.203, 10.2, 24.92).<sup>68</sup> Significantly for us, under certain conditions *philos* could be attributed to *any* being of the earth, earthborn or simply earthen. So does it crop up in the epics to characterize: other animals (*Il.* 24.293, 24.311); gifts (freq. *dōra*) such as food and drink (*Il.* 19.307, *Od.* 8.545, 9.211, 13.41); and works such as ships (*Od.* 14.224) and beds (*Od.* 8.277, 8.292) – suggestive in light of our earlier discussion of Odysseus’ marriage bed.

What do all these referents share in common? Well, as late as Plato the nominal form of *philos* is used as though interchangeable with *oikeion* (‘an affiliate’) (e.g. *Euthphr.* 4b, *Rep.* 463b, *Phd.* 89d). His usage also suggests a close affinity with *oikeios* (‘affiliated’) (e.g. *Phd.* 89e, *Lys.* 210d), an association that can be traced back to the epics. Homer’s word for the relation itself – the manner in which *philoī* or *oikeioī* are affiliated – is *philotēs*, ‘affection’ or ‘care’. *Philotēs* derives from the verb *phileō*: ‘to have affection for’, ‘to care for’, ‘to love’, or ‘to welcome someone’ (*Il.* 3.445, 6.25, 14.237, 20.304; *Od.* 5.126, 8.313). Signally, Homer adopts it in reference to welcoming and caring for guest-strangers (*xenoi*) in the dwelling place (*Il.* 3.207; *Od.* 4.29, *Od.* 4.171, 5.13, 8.42). This latter bevy of references gives the lie to the shibboleth that would have us compress Homeric *philotēs* into erotic love. After reviewing the evidence, Christopher Faraone concludes that

this seems to be a mistaken inference, for the word most regularly appears in the dative with the verb of sexual congress (*misgein*), where it may simply describe the emotional state of the person during intercourse, e.g. ‘she lay with him *affectionately*’ (i.e. she was not raped), rather than ‘she lay with him *passionately*’.<sup>69</sup>

Better said, erotic love is merely the tenacious reinlection and thickening of the broader

<sup>68</sup> *Philos* also appears in Homer in reference to the fatherland (*Od.* 8.21; 24.266), as well as matters dear to one’s heart (*Il.* 11.342, 18.114, *Od.* 14.405) and parts of the body (*Od.* 5.482, 5.493, 8.233, 11.211).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Il.* 4.83; *Od.* 10.43, 15.55, 24.476. Empedocles famously contrasted *philotēs* (= *philia*, ‘friendship’, not lust) with *neikos* (‘strife’). Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 97.

meaning of *philotēs*. The texts recurrently bear this out. In the *Odyssey*, for example, Telemachus promises “affection and many gifts” (*philotēta te polla te dōra*) to his shipmate Theoclymenus should the good omen they witnessed come true, an utterance that is not a sexual proposition but a pledge of hospitality contingent only on Odysseus’ return (*Od.* 15.535-38). And in the *Iliad* *philotēs* frequently signifies a bond of friendship, juxtaposed in the same lines to fighting and warfare (e.g. *Il.* 4.16, 4.83).

Before *philos* was reconceptualized as *philia* under the rubric of *epistēmē* (viz. ethics and political science), the unitive context for this entire paradigm was of course the *oikos*, a place where every *stranger* entered as a *guest* – the dual meanings of the word *xenos*.<sup>70</sup> However unfamiliar that other happened to be, the economy of the dwelling place dictated, as a matter of course, that the appearance of the other there was a careful matter, a *kairos* that mattered considerably to its stewards. For this reason, the *xenos* was to be received as a gift bestowed by the mythophysical order, with care, solicitude, reciprocation. In *Greeks Bearing Gifts* Lynette Mitchell observes that in pre-classical Greece “there was always a positive discrimination towards someone becoming a *philos*.” Naturally, she continues, “the stranger can choose to be *echthros* [hostile, *hostis*, an enemy], but there is a sense in which he can be a *philos* by right” – or perhaps more fittingly, by *gē*-genetic affiliation. On Mitchell’s appraisal, this positive discrimination is attributable to the more permeable boundaries of the *oikos* in the centuries before the *xenos* would come to stand “outside the political community” of the Classical *polis*. Mitchell goes on to stress that “this is not to disregard or diminish the Greek polarity between Greek and Barbarian, but there is an element of personal identification with the barbarian *xenos* which transcends this distinction” – or again, perhaps an elementally congenetic one. These points are made in reference to archaic Greece, but one can readily see how they would apply *a fortiori* to the age that Homer chronicled. Where we might expect to find that the scientific and cosmopolitan disenchantment of that world brought about a progressive move away from xenophobia, there are some respects in which xenial relations eroded apace. Contributing to this erosion was the privatization of the *oikos* as *domos*, synoikism (homeostatic dwelling that literally domesticated the other), and the emergence of a Panhellenic identity with no essential ties to the *xenos*. In fact, by the time that Athens rose to power, the foreigner was excluded as a

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<sup>70</sup> Accordingly, in Homer, *philotēs* often accompanies mentions of the homeplace (*oikos*) and homeland (*patra*) (*Il.* 3.244, 4.180, 9.428; *Od.* 4.262, 7.320, 10.66, 18.421). The thrust is that it was only possible for *xenos* to bear both of these senses at once within the context of ecological affiliation (*logos oikeios*).

rule or else, as in the case of the metics, abjectly assimilated into society through oppressive legislation devised to protect the market economy and the political status quo, these being the essential placeholders of identity for the Attic everyman.<sup>71</sup>

As illustrative of the xenial customs of the Homeric Age, consider the following scene from Book 6 of the *Odyssey*. Having been shipwrecked off the coast of Phaeacia, Odysseus emerges, naked and starving, onto the banks of a river to encounter Nausikaa engrossed in the ritual washing of clothes – a jovial scene accompanied by song and dance and sport. When her handmaids show reluctance to properly attend to the stranger for his outlandish appearance (“disfigured with brine, he seemed horrific to them”), Nausikaa reproves them. “This one arrives here as a wretched wanderer whom we ought to take care of [*komeein*]” – suggestively, *komeō* elsewhere occurs in reference to the tending of horses and dogs (*Il.* 8.109; *Od.* 17.310). “For all strangers and beggars [*xeinoi te ptōchoi*],” she explains, “are from Zeus, and a gift [*dosis*] both small and welcome [*philē*]” (*Od.* 6.208). In other words, the presence of the stranger in the *oikos* was regarded as a boon. And much like the gifts of nature examined above, this called for a response that took its allopathic measure from the mythophysical metabolism. To reiterate, political authority did not decree this careful equivalence. Likewise was it underdetermined by human concerns, altruistic or self-interested. At bottom, it was on the basis of an exposure to the prime mover, earth, that one was *moved* to respond in due measure and timely proportion to others in the dwelling place. The meaning of *philos* and its cognates thereby suggests a deeper, ecological insight. The heterogeneous beings of the Homeric *oikos* were affiliated not only by earthly homogeny, but also through an ontologically allopathic and heteropathic disposition toward the earthly being of beings, hence the alterity and difference of others. Such is the hidden source of Heraclitus’ claim that “nature and hiddenness are cared for together” (see §23, §25).

Generation and care were ecologically co-requisite. For if a being emerged into the dwelling place through (*gē*)*genesis*, *philotēs* was the mode of affiliation through which the genesis, hence the identity, of that being was recognized by mortals. An illustration of this is provided by Telemachus, who claims to be guest-friends through and through [*xeionos de diamperes*]” with Nestorides of Sparta. Without their having descended from a common human father or fatherland, he claims this affiliation on the basis of what he calls their “fathers’

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<sup>71</sup> Lynette G. Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts: The Public Use of Private Relationships in the Greek World, 435-323BC* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 17. See also chapter 2 of Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*.

affection [*ex paterōn philotētos*]” (*Od.*15.197). This suggests that affection or care for others was in some sense heritable, a transmission in no wise limited to blood kinship within the family proper. Generation established the coordinates for ecological identity in the earthly nexus of affiliation. Caring-for exposed *kairoi* for strengthening those ties, which recycled it from one generation to the next. If two ancestors were affectively affiliated, then their decedents were born into a friendship that fostered that relation. Moreover, as Christoph Ulf points out, the reciprocity that affection solicited was “essential to the functioning of Homeric societies as a whole, not only of their elites.”<sup>72</sup> For if *genos* and *philotēs* co-operated within the cultural metabolism of human communities, this was grounded on the mythophysical metabolism of the earth-world.

This perhaps explains to some extent what might otherwise be chalked up to credulous naiveté on the part of the Trojans for having accepted the Achaean gift of the wooden horse. What made that treacherous subterfuge so unexpected, indeed incomprehensible even as the ensuing *coup de main* unfolded, was that it contravened not just human custom, but the mythophysical orders undergirding it. Despite the positive discrimination toward *xenoi*, the customs of hospitality and guest-friendship among humans (philanthropy), did not hold for others who threatened to undermine the careful equivalence of the dwelling place. Such was the Homeric essence *ecthros*, which was less an affront to other humans than it was a betrayal of *theos* and an abrogation of human being qua steward of *phusis*. It was not primarily xenophobia, then, but ecophobia, theophobia, and phusiophobia that accounts for how exclusionary and antagonistic modes of dwelling-with were perceived.

We can begin to see how caring-for extended beyond philanthropy by considering an illustrative vignette from the *Odyssey*. While Homer does not explicitly mention *philotēs* when describing their relationship, it is implied by the empathy and solicitude that Odysseus demonstrably nourishes for his dog Argos and the mutual recognition they share. Upon returning to Ithaca under the consummate guise of a beggarly foreigner, he chances upon his faithful companion, disguised for his part by infirmity and neglect. Yet it is Argos and no other who recognizes his master there and Odysseus him. In the scene that transpires, one whose pathos is seldom matched in hymn or either epic, Homer recites how Argos expends his dying breaths in an untethered dash of affection toward his caretaker, over whom he once stood worthy guard. So distraught is he by this abjectly unsparing gesture, Odysseus struggles to mask his tears in the

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<sup>72</sup> Ulf, “World of Homer and Hesiod,” 87.

presence of others, kith and kin, who know him not as does this faithful friend (*Od.* 17.300-26).

To sum up these points, in Homer affective affiliation, or caring-for, runs the gamut of dwelling-with, encompassing what we would call friendship, familial love (*storgē*), erotic love (*eros*), and camaraderie among tribes, coevals, and companions, including other animals. But let us narrow our sights on the ecological sense of *philotēs*. An unscripted enactment of care formed the basis for dwelling with others who were not necessarily affiliated in the abovesaid ways, but regarded as *philoio/oikeioi* just the same. Their mere presence in the mortal *oikos* commanded due measures of allopathic response-ability, enmeshed in rites of reciprocity that conserved the earthly difference of others. Among dwellers these practices were typified by the ritual hospitality of guest-friendship (*xenia*).

We already saw this reciprocity in the encounter between Odysseus and Nausikaa. To bring it into sharper relief, consider another scene from the *Odyssey*, taking up where we left off in §29. Having arrived at farm of Laertes and finding him hard at work, Odysseus spins a yarn for his unwitting father about how he (the unrecognized stranger speaking to Laertes) had previously received a stranger (known to the reader as Odysseus himself) into the *oikos*. More than simply recounting just any hospitable occasion, *his* words convey a sense of its heroic ideal:

I welcomed as a guest [*xeinissa*] in my dear [*philē*] fatherland, once upon a time,  
a man who'd come to our place, and no one, no other mortal,  
of strangers [*xeinon*] from far away, ever came to my home more welcome [*philion*].  
He claimed he was from Ithaca by birth [*genos*], then said  
Laertes Arcesius was his father.  
I brought him to our home and entertained [*xeinissa*] him well,  
welcoming him kindly [*endykeōs phileōn*] from the plenty there was throughout our house [*oikon*].  
And I gave him gifts [*dōra*], guest-gifts [*xeinia*], the kind that were fitting (*Od.*24.266-73).

What compels the favorable reception of the stranger here? How does the practice of gift-giving factor into the wisdom of dwelling-with-others? And what determines whether such gifts are fitting? Above we drew evidence from Homer telling against the assumption that the Homeric meaning of *philotēs* is exhausted by sexual love. The competing assumption, espoused most often by scholars unduly influenced by the Classical acceptance of *philia*, is that philanthropic hospitality was basically an instrumental form of exchange. As Mitchell encapsulates the trend: “In recent years a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the part of reciprocity in *philia* and the part of affection has been undermined.”<sup>73</sup> Of itself that emphasis is altogether warranted in

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<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts*, 7. Mitchell finds this bias typified by Goodhill, 1986: 82, Benveniste, 1973: 273-88; and Millett, 1991: 114.



Homer as long as we account for discrepancies between his view of *philos* and the later notion of *philia*. It is the *diremption* of these intimately interpenetrating dimensions that should give us real pause. The inordinate focus on claims, duties, and obligations that characterizes this diremptive approach effectively paints a quasi-modern diptych of ancient Greek society. In it caring-for is allocated to the private sphere, reciprocity to the public. In the latter an implicit self-concern prevails alongside a practical understanding of scripted compacts and the means best suited to seizing power. Indeed, according to Mitchell, this division is already extant in Aristotle, who characterizes friendships (*philiai*) between fellow citizens as “associations” (*koinomiai*) based on a calculus of mutual advantage and utility, “for these seem to be, as it were, according to some agreement” (*Eth. Nic.* 1156a14-30, 1161b11-14f.).<sup>74</sup>

The modern tendency has been to disregard the anachronistic origins of the binary and to insist on regarding Homeric society as a public sphere cut off from the private. Scholars then proceed to interpret *philos* as a primitive form of *philia*, the proper locus of which was the *agora* of the Classical *polis*. The interpretation would have us see *philotēs* solely through the lens of anthropology, and gift-giving (*didōmi*) as a modified form of transaction. But this in a symbolic medium of debts and obligations, where the objective is to advertise one’s power over the other, ensuring she remains beholden and thus subordinate. Conducive though it be to the common advantage of all in a manner congenial to modern utilitarian thinkers, it is important to see how reciprocal care-giving is converted into a transaction of power on this speculative account. As Mitchell characterizes this degenerate form of reciprocity, it was a

practice of incremental giving, where the relationship was maintained by giving a return greater in value than the original gift. This in turn placed the recipient under an obligation to return the favor.

Mitchell then quotes from Chris Gregory, who infers that:

the gift in an incremental gift-giving sequence combines the two gifts: one part of the return-gift cancels the original debt, the other part creates a new debt.<sup>75</sup>

Christoph Ulf encapsulates the symbolic transaction in broader strokes:

According to this principle [of reciprocity], the exchange of goods and services simultaneously creates social and economic obligations between individuals or groups, which are to be discharged immediately or at some later point.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> It should be mentioned that this form of friendship is but one of the three examined by Aristotle. And he takes it to differ in crucial respects from those based on pleasure, and even more so from those based on virtue. See Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1156b9-244.

<sup>75</sup> Mitchell, *Greeks Bearing Gifts*, 6f. Cf. Chris A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Griffith, 1982), 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ulf, “World of Homer and Hesiod,” 87.

By my lights, these interpretations are beset with at least two rather nettlesome problems. Firstly, they cannot account for the prevailing counter-tendency in pre-classical Greece to forgo if not disdain the calculative understanding of obligation and the accounting of debt. Hesiod's abovementioned lament in *Works and Days* is a notable case in point, indicating that instrumental reciprocity only rose to prominence in the course of the Agrarian crisis in the centuries following the Greek Dark Age. Secondly, because they presume a strictly philanthropic (read anthropological) model of exchange, they fail to explain the original source and measure of the obligation, the first gift. More pointedly, I would claim that they *cannot* do so, since it was neither given nor received on the basis of care qua self-concern (even in the existential sense). For the Homeric Greeks, the originary gift of fate (*moira*) was allotted by the ontological other, the cosmogonic other. And only in being exposed to and thereby othered by elemental side of *theos* (Gaia) and *phusis* (gē) was it then possible to reciprocate it in measures due. In other words, the type of exchange involved in ritual hospitality was not primarily based on the understanding, let alone its calculative aptitude. It was based on one's *care for* the earth.<sup>77</sup> And the measure of one's indebtedness to earth, thereby to earthborn others was registered affectively, soliciting a con-genial response attuned to the what was required to sustain the careful equivalence of the mythophysical metabolism. In this, however, *there was no question of "canceling" the original debt*. This is confirmed most clearly by cases in which the gods were said to demonstrate *philotēs* for mortals by bestowing the carnal allotrope of *klēros*: bodily genius. Endowments of natural gifts such as strength and fertility, as well as inborn aptitudes for spiritedness and nurture, confound the calculus proposed above. While these allotments clearly elicited a sense of gratitude and reverence, there was simply no expectation of – much less an obligation to – supererogation or even final recompense. The point is driven home when we consider the *infinite* debt that mortals unremittably owed to earth. The aloofness of *Gaia* from the arena of human affairs is hardly incidental. For hers was the self-concealing largesse of being as such. "All-nourishing" Gaia was no one of service to mortals, even as they remained, fruitfully, interminably, in her service and debt.<sup>78</sup>

Just as the Homeric understanding of mortal *genē* was grounded on that of immortal

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<sup>77</sup> As was hinted by the mention of *genos* in the scene between Odysseus and his father Laertes.

<sup>78</sup> 'All-nourishing' (*pouluboteira*) is a common epithet of earth in Homer and Hesiod (e.g. *Il.* 3.89, 3.195; *Od.* 8.378, 12.191; *Op.* 157, 510).

generation stemming back to *Gaia/gē*, so too was *philōtes*. The cultural metabolism of hospitality was conserved through xenial relations between individuals, households, or communities thereof. But care for others in the mortal world was generatively grounded on caring for the earth, whose dispensation was indirectly served and reciprocated. Earth's dispensation was inexhaustible. It replenished the stores of affection between mortals as it did their shares of place and time in the world. In this mythophysical exchange, philanthropy thus took its measure from the gods' care for mortals on the whole. If not divinities in human form, all strangers, be they pariahs or favorites among their fellows, were favored guests of the gods and tenants of their keep, simply by being born of earth. The belief that all dwelling places were invigilated by Zeus Xeinius, or Xenagogue Zeus – an epithet inspired by his role as arbiter of hospitality and guardian of guest-strangers – seems to have been a deterrent against violating xenial custom. For instance, when the swineherd Eumaeus entertains Odysseus in his home, he relates how his munificence is bestowed both out of “pity” (*eleairō*) and “in fear of Zeus, the tutelary god of guest-strangers [*Dia xenion deisas*].” Reciting a common *doxa*, Eumaeus considers the gift of the foreigner to have possibly been bestowed by this divinity. More than any fear of retribution, the swineherd's hospitality stems from his deferent alacrity to requite that allotment (*Od.* 14.389). A similar case arises at another point during the hero's covert reconnaissance, when Antinous falls well short of the divine measure of hospitality in receiving the hungry stranger. Against the xenophobic interloper – Antinous being the bullgoose among Penelope's horde of cadging suitors – Odysseus declaims:

You wouldn't even give a lump of salt to your suppliant, from your house [*oikou*],  
 you who sit now at another's, and can't bring yourself to pick  
 any of the bread and give it to me, though there's much beside you (*Od.* 17.455-57).

And when Antinous retaliates by hurling a stool at his accuser, Odysseus allusively invokes none other than Zeus Xeinius and chthonic vengeance by his imprecation: “If here are for beggars gods and furies somewhere, may the doom of death meet Antinous before his marriage!” (*Od.* 17.475-76). The other suitors reproach Antinous in fear of that baleful invocation of Zeus. But its prophecy is already assured by the words of Athena Xenia – a stranger to Greece herself in some traditions. Hers is a revelation dictated less by the cultural metabolism than it is by the hidden law of the earth. Finding Telemachus in Sparta, where he continues to search for his father, Athena gives forewarning of the suitors' conspiracy to ambush him upon his return to Ithaca. She then offers a consolation: “Sooner earth [*gaia*] will swallow down a few of those mortal suitors

who devour your sustenance [*bioton*]!” (*Od.* 15.31-2). Here we find the entire mythophysical economy of the Homeric dwelling place expressed in scarcely two hexameters. The suitors’ unregenerate destruction of more than the share apportioned to guests of the *oikos* is to be recouped in like manner and in kind by the ground and measure of all generation, all destruction, all dwelling-with. As much as they have given offense to a noble family’s household, their fate is sealed by their careless disaffiliation from the immortal ecology of being, hence human being’s ancestral reciprocity with the earth.<sup>79</sup> Thus do the ill-gotten dividends of the ecologically abject come due, their flesh remanded prematurely to the very soil that had nourished the fodder for their transgressions, their gluttonous hunger for political power.<sup>80</sup>

Permit me to summarize the ecological conclusions of our historical investigations in this chapter. In the Age of Homer the ecological difference bisected the difference of being and beings, eventuating through the affiliation (*logos oikeios*) between the immortal earth and the mortal world, outlandish creatures of myth and nature’s familiar creations. This affiliation manifested itself in the nested orders of the mythophysical *oikos*, the divine house of being and the mortal household, bound each to each by generation and care. Before the Presocratics would reconceive these modalities of ecological affiliation some centuries later, they were originally expressed in Homer’s mythopoetic idiom. But in each case the ecological difference is maintained: the generative ground that tends toward hiddenness, earth, is exposed affectively but closed off from disclosure. In each case, the horizons of generation and care extend beyond those of the understanding. The caretaker of the *oikos* did not merely master but ministered to the mystery of earthborn others allotted to it, be they crops or outcroppings, intimates or strangers, animals, humans, or divinities. She requited those gifts at opportune – and by no means opportunistic – moments in the co-inhering cycles of bountiful nature and god-bestowed nurture. The philanthropic and theophilic customs of gift-exchange did not stem from noble lies. Nor were they based on a political calculus of power. Instead, they derived from a deference to the earth. At bottom, this allopathic attunement to the unworldly otherness of being enabled the dweller to conserve the philanthropic equivalence of care within the mortal *oikos*. For it solicited responsive deeds that resowed what its tenants had reaped from the earth by accommodating all earthborn guests in measures due.

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<sup>79</sup> In Book 16 we learn from Telemachus that most of Penelope’s 108 suitors hail from places other than Ithaca.

<sup>80</sup> We shall return to these transgressions in chapter 5, and again in chapter 7.

## History Retold.

### The Ecological Watershed of Western Philosophy

Philosophers have long presumed a yawning gulf to have divided the age of Homer from the advent of philosophy in the West. In this chapter we set out to bridge that gulf by way of Anaximander of Miletus, who invoked the careful dispensation an indefinite *archē* much as Homer had the caretaker's vocation to the generative earth. This bridge will eventually lead us back to Thales. Where Aristotle muddied his waters, our study of the ancient earth-world will clarify them. So shall I defend my earlier thesis that philosophy first issued from an ecological thought. A thought of water as (a)periphenomenal archetype of the indefinite self-concealment of the earth that replenishes the world. The transition from mythophysical genesis to physical *archē* is one that dehumanized the elements and reapproached time as elemental allohistory: the stochastic time of stone and water, ash and dust. Philosophers have traditionally defended their own mythoclastic territory by co-opting Anaximander and his teacher Thales. The former they regard as the first proto-rationalist metaphysician, the latter the first proto-scientific empiricist. Against the grain of that tradition, I contend that their wisdom was rooted in *pre-theoretical* experience, an elementary experience of time and the river, earth and its waters, mythic or no but wild all the same. Not until we give full measure to their deference for and deferral to the subterranean mystery of being do we come to appreciate their age as a watershed in which *philosophia* named caring-for (*phileō*) and dwelling other-wise (*oikeioō*, *sophon*) in the rift of the earth-world. We accordingly enlist the *oikos* of Homer and the *logos* of Heraclitus to decipher their ecological thought while embarking on a journey back to the lived ecology of archaic Greece: through the the layout of Thales' sixth-century dwelling place and the global topology of Anaximander's map of the world. Along the way we shall seek to rehabilitate the elementary sense of *philosophia*, eco-phenomenologically, by reprising the lived experience of the elements, from the tumultuous seas and the time-spanning sun of yore to the codex, obsolescing now under the digital horizons of the twenty-first century.

### §33. Bridging the Indefinite Gulf: Earthly Dispensation and Ecological Conjunction in Anaximander's Doctrine of *Apeiron*

The desert, sky, or sea, the Ocean, the Unlimited, first plays the role of an encompassing element, and tends to become a horizon [when] the earth is thus surrounded, globalized, “grounded” by this element. . . . Then to the extent that the encompassing element itself appears at the center of the earth, it assumes a second role, that of casting into the loathesome [sic.] deep the abode of the dead, anything smooth or nonmeasured that may have remained.

–Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>1</sup>

In the Western course of the Ecumenic Age, the word *oikoumene* changes its meaning. The *oikoumene-okeanos* symbolism of the Homeric period still expresses man's experience of his foothold on the land that rises from the waters and of the horizon at which this habitat of the mortals borders on the mystery of the gods. The compact experience, however, disintegrates under the impact of the imperial drives, of expanding geographical knowledge, and exploratory passions.

–Eric Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*<sup>2</sup>

#### (i) *The Ecumenical Interpretation*

“Sooner earth will swallow down a few of those mortal suitors who devour your sustenance!” Centuries after Homer uttered these words, the ethos of earthly dispensation would come into its own in Anaximander's thought. Whereas his predecessor and reputed mentor had identified water as the ontological *archē*, Simplicius tells us that Anaximander “said that the *archē* and *stoicheion* [element] of beings was the *apeiron*.” A word commonly rendered as ‘indefinite’, ‘boundless’, or ‘infinite’. In chapter 3 we learned to be leery of the reflection of such concepts in the crazed glass of Aristotle's homological methodology and hypostatic ontology. And the same goes for the notorious distortions of such doxographers as Simplicius. Proceeding with due caution, then, let us begin to consider the marked affinity between Anaximander's “material *archē*,” its mythophysical precedents, and the being of earth set forth in chapter 2.<sup>3</sup> In this we venture to cross something of an earthen bridge – Gaia willing – from the Homeric wisdom just laid bare to the elemental archeology of Thales.

In the longstanding hermeneutic instated by Classical thought, Anaximander's *apeiron* has been hypostatized as: a “material substance” and theoretically explanatory “principle”

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<sup>1</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 495.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Voegelin, *Order and History IV: The Ecumenic Age*, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin, vol. 17 (Columbia, MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2000), 93.

<sup>3</sup> Simpl. in *Phys.* 24, 13 (DK 12A9, KRS 101 trans.).

(Aristotle); “matter” as opposed to form (Aëtius); “incorporeal and eternal *causa materialis* of all existing things” (Gottschalk); “a pervading natural law that rules the universe” (Burch); or something “immaterial, absent, beyond the senses,” which furnishes an “explanation of the world by the most formal thought possible – mathematics” (Serres).<sup>4</sup> Thus has Anaximander garnered the dubious distinction of being the first metaphysician. I would like to call this high-altitude judgment into question. To my mind, such formulas are no more consistent with the simple, unassuming meaning of Anaximander’s hallmark concept than they are with one another. Forgoing an itemized rebuttal of each of these interpretations, let us explore how *apeiron* might address us phenomenologically with an eye to the ecological origins of philosophy in the West.

In our ecumenical age, we all too readily associate boundlessness with the mathematical infinite, indefiniteness with conceptual abstraction or imprecision. But what if the way of being that Anaximander struggled to articulate was no abstraction at all? What if the word *apeiron* was rather intended to express a concrete, lived-through exposure to *phenomena as such*, to their naked boundlessness and indefiniteness beneath the garb of *pragmata* and *ideai* tailor-made by *technē* and *epistēmē*? What if this was at once an exposure to *our* limitations, the (inde)finite nature of being-in-the-world?

Kirk, Raven, and Schofield inform us that *apeiron* originally meant ‘without boundary, limit, or definition’. In its earliest usage, the word bore “spatial” and elemental connotations. To wit, Homer’s references to the “boundless sea” (*pontos apeiritos*), and Xenophanes’ claim that the earth stretches downward “indefinitely” (*es apeiron*).<sup>5</sup> As Aristotle interprets it in his treatise *On Generation and Corruption*, Anaximander’s indefinite is “no one of these things [elements]”; it is an *archē* “from which comes all beings.” In this it presumably falls under Aristotle’s gloss on the Presocratic *archē* as that from which things first come into being (*gignetai*) and are destroyed (*phtheirō*) (see §17 below).<sup>6</sup> Into his reading *apeiron* figures as the source of

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<sup>4</sup> Arist. *Cael.*, 303b10, *Met.* 1013a15. *Aët.* 1.111, translated in *Of Those Sentiments Concerning Nature with which Philosophers Were Delighted*, In Plutarch’s *Morals*, trans. John Dowel (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1871), 3.106. H.B. Gottschalk, “Nature, Philosophical Ideas of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. P. Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 455. G.B. Burch, “Anaximander: The First Metaphysician,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, no. 3 (1949-50): 137-160. Michel Serres, “Anaximander: A Founding Name in History” in *Presocratics After Heidegger*, 135.

<sup>5</sup> Hom. *Od.* 10.19. Xenophanes, 28 (KRS 3). This discussion appears in KRS p. 110.

<sup>6</sup> Arist. *Met.* 983b6-10.

“opposites” (*enantiotētas*), or perceptual distinctions such as hot and cold, dry and wet.<sup>7</sup> A Homeric echo of *genesis* finds its way into Simplicius’ paraphrase as well:

[Anaximander] says that it [i.e. the material *archēs*] is neither water nor any other [one] of the so-called elements, but some other indefinite nature [or indefinite self-emergence, *phusin apeiron*], from which come into being [*ginesthai*] all the heavens and the worlds in them. And the source of generation [*genesis*] for beings [*ousi*] is that into which destruction [*phthoran*], too, happens . . .<sup>8</sup>

Allow me to offer a preview of an ecological reinterpretation of *apeiron*. This interpretation will be informed by the historical grounding of *phusis*, *logos*, and *oikos* in chapters 3 and 4. But it is helpful to consider first how it might fit into the ontology of nature qua the earth-world (chapter 2). Like the “originary presence” of nature in *Being and Time* and the being of earth in our ecological schema, Anaximander’s *apeiron* does not describe some one element as opposed to others. Nor does it represent a totality of objects of a kind (e.g. elemental, natural) or concepts of a class (e.g. mathematical). Instead, I propose that it names earthliness as such: the *boundlessly* generative ground of beings and the *indefinitely* self-concealing mode of phenomenal manifestation, which is archetypical of the elements. An interpretation of *apeiron* as earthliness does much to account for its relation to (*gē*-)*genesis* in this passage from Simplicius. Translating it into the multistatic criteria of the ecological difference, its “indefinite self-emergence” (*phusin apeiron*) points to *hyperstasis*. Meanwhile, its being the “source of generation” points to *genostasis*. As indefinite (Anaximander), self-concealing (Heidegger), or *hyperstatic*, earthliness remains ingredient in the beings it grounds. At the same time, it resists and recoils from our efforts to fully gather it into an inner or outer *horismos*, i.e.: into any definite sense (affordance, purpose) toward which to comport ourselves within an operant field of contrastive assignments; and into any definition, determinate concept, or meaning within a linguistic context of contrastive terms. As boundless *archē* (Anaximander), abyssal ground (Heidegger), or *genostasis*, earthliness is the origin and sustaining source of *stasis* in these double horizons, hence for beings in “all the heavens and the worlds in them.”

The two standard translations of *apeiron*, ‘indefinite’ and ‘boundless’, are therefore co-requisite to understanding this periphenomenal – or better *aperiphenomenal* – aspect of all phenomenal self-emergence (*phusis*). It is *at once* the inexhaustible wellspring *and* the

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<sup>7</sup> Arist. *Gen. corr.*, 332a19; *Phys.* 187a20.

<sup>8</sup> Simpl. *in Phys.* 24, 13 (DK 12A9, KRS 101A trans.), continued below. This translation slightly modified in line with Kahn’s: “out of those things whence is the generation for existing things, into these again does their destruction take place.” Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins*, 166.



undifferentiated residuum of every explication of beings into our worldly layout of significance. Meanwhile, its indefiniteness places limits on the possibilities of such achievements. Our exposure to the enticements of the elemental side of things – the unguessed *textures*, *sounds*, and *smells* spontaneously released in carving wood, for instance – unleashes extemporary possibilities for working or saying them as they have never been before (see §26). Such (a)periphenomena are not projected by the understanding. For what manual, lingual, or mental dexterity could deposit the profusion of sensibilia ingrained in wood, petrified in stone, immersed in water? The material engagement of one who gears into the fluency of the elements derives from a deferral of the understanding. Deferring dis-closure to open exposures to their earthliness, one makes allowances for elemental hindrances before pressing into affordances for acquired competencies, techniques, and erudition. Integral to this ecological understanding of being, this *response-ability* to the earth-world, is the humble acknowledgment that we only carve out, chip away, steep or say the possibilities for what a thing can be by closing others off. To do something with or say something of it is to conserve its indefinite elementality in a world of stable edifices shorn up by senses and meanings, beings ordered and separated within our layout of significance. In such wise is the indefinite earth dispersed, or as Anaximander says “separated off” (*apokrinomenōn*), into fire, water, soil, etc. and these into the beings we make, use, and know – campfires, baths, and mineral compositions.<sup>9</sup>

In his only extant fragment, transmitted from Theophrastus to Simplicius, Anaximander states that the indefinite is also a source of “destruction.” In a remarkable echo of Athena’s prophecy of earthly reclamation in the *Odyssey*, delivered in the same vatic mode, Anaximander is quoted to have said that the generation *and* destruction of beings by *phusin apeiron* eventuates:

“according to necessity [*kata to chreōn*]; for they pay [*didonai*] penalty [*tisin*] and retribution [*dikēn*] to each other for their injustice [*adikias*] according to the assessment of time [*chronou taxin*].”<sup>10</sup>

From their earliest reception these lines have been a source of boundless perplexity for scholars. The apparent ascription of purposive agency and retributive justice to *apeiron* is so fantastic as to

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<sup>9</sup> Simpl. *in Phys.* 24, 21 (KRS 119 trans.); Cf. Arist. *Phys.* 187a20 (KRS 118).

<sup>10</sup> Simpl. *in Phys.* 24, 13 (DK 12A9, KRS 101A trans.), miniscules used for ‘time’ as indicated in original. Kahn’s translation runs as follows: “according to what must needs be; for they make amends and give reparation to one another for their offense, according to the ordinance of time.” Kahn, *Anaximander and the Origins*, 166.

be deemed “surely . . . intolerable” by Kirk, Raven, and Schofield.<sup>11</sup> Surely, it was not so intolerable to Anaximander’s poetic predecessors, who looked to the indefinite past of the gods as the source and measure of all generation, all destruction, and for whom Time was divinely personified. What is so unacceptable to Kirk, et. al. is the humiliating thought that the “rational science” of philosophy was not only born of mythology but embraced its irrational legacy.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally, commentators have defended one of two proposals for resolving the paradox. Both rely on anthropomorphic metaphors that domesticate the wild ambiguity of Anaximander’s *archē*. One strategy has been to read such words as “penalty,” “retribution,” and “injustice” into a metaphysics of one’s choosing. Accordingly more tolerable to Kirk et al. is the idea that Anaximander is availing of “a legalistic metaphor derived from human society” to explain “the constant interchange between opposed substances.”<sup>13</sup> Nevermind that these concepts are entirely foreign to the Ionian school. Inexplicably, Aristotle’s presumption that *ousia* captures the underlying meaning of *archē*, *stoicheia* (elements), or *rhizōma* (roots), continues to be taken as gospel by modern scholars.

The second strategy has been to read these “anthropomorphic metaphors” as expressions of widely accepted mythological *doxai*. As he did for Thales’ doctrine, Aristotle endorses this approach (cf. §17). According to him, Anaximander equated *apeiron* with the “the divine; for it is immortal and indestructible,” and it is said to “encompass all and to steer all [beings].”<sup>14</sup> This reading is reinforced by Hippolytus’ paraphrase of the fragment: “this [i.e. *apeiron*] nature is eternal and ageless, and surrounds all the worlds.”<sup>15</sup> Taken together, the expressions “immortal and indestructible” (*athanaton gar kai anōlethron*) and “eternal and ageless” (*aidion kai agērō*) resonate quite closely with “immortal and ageless” (*athanaton kai agērō*), a common Homeric

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<sup>11</sup> KRS p. 119.

<sup>12</sup> For a bold and original phenomenological reappraisal of Anaximander’s doctrine within the wider context of the Presocratic experience of time, see Peter Manchester, *The Syntax of Time: The Phenomenology of Time in Greek Physics and Speculative Logic from Iamblichus to Anaximander*, Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> KRS p. 119f. G.E.R. Lloyd offers a similar interpretation: “the idea of cosmic order as a balance of power between equal opposing forces goes back to Anaximander, who describes the relation between cosmic forces in legal terms.” G.E.R. Lloyd, “Analogy in Early Greek Thought,” in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. P.P. Wiener (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973), 60b. Likewise, Jean-Pierre Vernant postulates the Anaximandrian idea of a geometrically isometric universe ordered “by analogy alike to a well-organized political system.” Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Structure geometrique et notions politiques dans la cosmologie d’Aximandre,” *Eirene*, no. 7 (1968): 5-23.

<sup>14</sup> Arist. *Phys.* 203b7-b15.

<sup>15</sup> Hippol. *Haer.* 1-2, 6 (KRS 101B).

epithet of gods and other god-like beings.<sup>16</sup> Although Kirk, et al. do not champion a strict mythological reading, they do admit that

Anaximander seems to have applied to the Indefinite the chief attributes of the Homeric Gods, immortality and boundless power (connected in this case with boundless extent); it seems not improbable that he actually called it 'divine', and in this he was typical of the Presocratic thinkers in general.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, because they take it for granted that the Ionian doctrines were “the first really rational attempts to describe the nature of the world” according to a “*systematic account of reality*,” Kirk, et. al. would have us see that “between [the mythological thinkers of the past] and Anaximander, there is *an enormous gulf*.”<sup>18</sup> John Burnet sounds a similar refrain. Leaving room for neither reservation nor equivocation, he declares that “it would be *completely false* to seek the origins of Ionian science in some mythic conception.”<sup>19</sup> Heidegger adopts an entirely different hermeneutic in his essay on the fragment. Nonetheless, he announces with the same ironclad conviction that “philosophy did not spring from myth.”<sup>20</sup> To think it did is to fall into the “baneful destiny of being” he deems to err from the phenomenal “presencing of what is present.” As Heidegger sees it, this destiny has led to “the collapse of thinking, into the sciences and into faith” – he cites Burnet’s commentary as an instance of the former.<sup>21</sup> That myth is preeminent among philosophy’s long suffered anxieties of influence has become a meta-philosophical platitude. More surprising is the peremptory authority with which this influence continues to be dismissed, a conceit that crimps its own credibility.

Preemptively ruled out by this mythoclastic approach is the very possibility of a dialogue with the likes of Homer, Hesiod, and Aesop on the nature of place and time. A bottom-up reappraisal of experience from the wisdom of dwelling is disqualified from the outset. In its stead is an abrupt break and rarefied flight from the past, as though the Ionian philosophers soared over the onto-historical stage like some full-fledged parliament of Athenian owls – birthless,

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<sup>16</sup> Hom. *Od.* 5.218, 7.257; *Il.* 2.447, 8.539 (cf. KRS p. 117).

<sup>17</sup> KRS p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> KRS p. 73, 75, emphasis mine.

<sup>19</sup> John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 13, emphasis mine.

<sup>20</sup> Compare this with the claim uttered by the Teacher in *Country Path Conversations*: “Mysticism and primal origins are both foreign to the Greek world.” His further insistence that in that world “all is presencing, gathering, Simple,” etc. seems to baldly presume that mysticism and primal origins are excluded from that lived truth (CPC 120/GA77 186).

<sup>21</sup> EGT 40/GA5 352f. One might be left wonder whether Heidegger’s mythoclastic aplomb here doesn’t bespeak an underlying reduction of its own: one that collapses the Archaic experience of myth into Classical, if not Judeo-Christian apologetics.

self-taught, and omnivoyant.<sup>22</sup> In the far-sighted eyes of the latterday ornithologist, the epithets of *apeiron* stand to those of the Homeric gods as but another clod of abstract metaphors, *homologies*, residues of Gaia still clinging to the philosopher's humble *baxae*, no more.<sup>23</sup>

Occupying the opposing camp are those who endorse Marcel de Corte's conviction that Anaximander's philosophy "rests securely on the foundations provided by ancient mythological traditions."<sup>24</sup> Oftentimes, however, their efforts to bridge the "enormous gulf" between mythology and philosophy only widen it. Either they vaporize the doctrine of *apeiron* into a mist of obscurantism and pseudology (e.g. pseudoscience) or they drain it into artificial basins, using anachronistic homologies with rationalist theology to dilute the mythic density of the Anaximander fragment. An inventory of some of these mythological interpretations will prove illustrative. De Corte takes Anaximander to be describing how the "the universe is held together by a divine cosmic force." But short of divulging how "force" is to be unpacked, this concept is left to exude the aura of physics, becoming something of a pseudologous cipher of the concepts posited by, say, Newton (the product of mass and acceleration) or Aristotle (active and passive *dunameis*). The literature on Anaximander is no less rife with anachronistic *homologies*. What Kirk et. al. dismiss as a philosophically antithetical metaphor, Elizabeth Asmis regards as a synthesis of divine and natural "law." On her appraisal, *apeiron* is an *a priori* postulate, a universal principle governing "a system of monism in which the 'Infinite', that is, the eternal and unchanging 'Deity', is ultimately one with the succession of things and processes which constitute the universe."<sup>25</sup> Finally, there are those who attempt to fit the mythemes in the fragment to the Procrustean bed of Classical and Hellenistic theology: to Plato's idea of the "Soul of the World" or Aristotle's "prime mover" (Solmsen); even to the conception of God

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<sup>22</sup> This is naturally not to be confused with the radical "political, social and religious" changes that Kirk, et al. consider among the cultural catalysts of Ionian philosophy. On their view, the "old divine and heroic archetypes" were rendered "obsolete" and largely "irrelevant" by "the growth of the *polis*, the independent city-state," the "development of . . . a monetary system," and the "values" of this newly "open society" (KRS p. 73f.). In view of the persistence of mythological elements in the doctrines belonging to this philosophical school, one cannot help but wonder if we have not overstated Classical continuities in the social arena while understating the discontinuities between it and what was regarded, as late as Socrates, to be a suspiciously unconventional if not anti-social vocation.

<sup>23</sup> Or *Baxae*, sandals made of leaves, twigs, or fiber: the fashion of philosophers of ancient Greece.

<sup>24</sup> M. de Corte, "Mythe et philosophie chez Anaximandre," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 14, no. 9 (1958): 9-28.

<sup>25</sup> E. Asmis, "What is Anaximander's Apeiron?," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19, no. 3 (July 1981): 279-97.

advanced by Plotinus (c. 205-270 CE) (Sweeney).<sup>26</sup> In speaking the language of “universal natural laws,” “systems,” “processes,” and *causae sui*, Anaximander becomes quite the oracle, albeit one who only augurs ideas palatable to Scholastic apologetics or modern science.

A common thread runs through all these interpretations. They discount the Homeric traces in Anaximander’s fragment and with them its time and place of origin. In effect, they explain the old by the new and trade lived insights for theoretical oversights. Rather than look to the wisdom, folkways, and rituals that rooted earlier tribes of the earth in their generative grounds, these commentaries construe the mythic elements of the fragment as mere articles of faith. Either his doctrine is regarded as primitive *epistēmē* and swiftly cast aside for want of rational merit; or its mythological sources are salvaged only to be cloaked by a thin veneer of modern mysticism; or else it is tendentiously pigeonholed into subsequent theological doctrines more rational in spirit. The same holds true for conventional metaphorical readings, which run roughshod over the *pre*-Classical understanding of *logos* as *legein* and *kosmos* as *oikos*. Rather than regather this mobile army of tropes from a theoretically indefinite exposure to the source of generation and destruction as to the assessment of time, they disperse them among readymade conceptual schemes. As a result, the concrete metaphorical relation between the vehicle/figure (the meaning of such words) and its originary tenor/ground (the gatheredness of *muthos* and *phusis* into conceptually underdetermined sense) is replaced with an abstract metaphor, a homology between figures floating free of lived experience. The resemblance posited between a well-organized legal system and the cosmic interchange of opposing substances is a case in point; the latter is arrantly untethered from the phenomenological *Sache selbst*.

#### (ii) *An Ecological Reinterpretation*

Instead of corresponding to the metaphysically posited entities of reason or the anthropologically characterized entities of Olympus, what if the juridical figures in the fragment stand in for an (a)periphenomenal experience of time and its exactions, the same once consecrated in the myths of Homer and Hesiod? What if these words were written with no pretension to scientific knowledge of logical binaries, but with the intention of conveying the wisdom of dwelling ecologically according to the just and final measure of the earth? And what

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<sup>26</sup> F. Solmsen, "Anaximander's Infinite: Traces and Influences," *Archive for the History of Philosophy*, no. 44 (1962): 109-31. Leo Sweeney, *Infinity in the Presocratics: A Bibliographical and Philosophical Study* (The Hague: Martin Nijhoff, 1972), 222. For these and several other sources from this section I am indebted to Hans Willer Laale, *Hans Willer Laale, Once they Were Brave, The Men of Miletus* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2007).

if the laws of dwelling according to the assessment of human being were subordinate to that earthly dispensation? If the mythemes of the fragment are *meta-phorical*, I propose that this must be grasped in an elementary sense. The words of Anaximander, like all testimonies in the Archaic court of man, are to be understood as *phoroi*, tributes, to the hidden *logos* of the earth, which carry it over (*meta-phoreō*) into human discourse. *More so than the songs of Homer, however, this would be a translation that conserves the ecological difference of that elemental archeology, supplanting the pageantry of titanthropomorphic clashes with the unassuming nature of being as such in its indefinite manifestation.*

Anaximander, whoever he was, may have held Homer in high regard. Then again, he may have shared Heraclitus' disesteem for the bard's mythopoetic conceits. Clearly such matters cannot be decided on the basis of a single extant fragment. Yet when entered from the threshold of the *oikos*, from the common place of their thinking, Anaximander's *logos* emits a flash of insight that burns through the murk of anachorism and anachronism and theoretical abstraction. By resituating the fragment within the ecology of being, where the caretaker (*oikonomos*) dwells with others (*oikeioō*) on the basis of their common affiliation (*logos oikeios*) with earth, we can begin to gather traces of its elementary meaning (see chapter 4).

Let us return to the fragment with an older, ecocentric set of eyes. Anaximander tells us that *apeiron*, the *archē* of all beings, apportions generation and destruction:

according to necessity [*kata to chreōn*]; for they pay [*didonai*] penalty [*tisin*] and retribution [*dikēn*] to each other for their injustice [*adikias*] according to the assessment of time [*chronou taxin*].

How to understand this necessity? How is it experienced? And with what authority does it stake its claim on beings? The word *chreōn* predates Anaximander. Translators typically render it as 'fate' or simply 'that which must be'. In Homer the older *chrē* and *chreō* frequently appear in reference to what *must* be done by mortals to conserve the order of the gods: either by heeding their words (*Il.* 1.216); enduring the fate they dispense (*Od.* 3.209); duly seizing a kairotic opportunity (*Il.* 9.608); or by "giving recompense" (*tinein*) when receiving a god in one's dwelling place (*Il.* 18.406f.). In each case, "necessity" is imposed by divine dispensation in the dual sense of ordinance and allotment. In Heidegger's analysis of the fragment, he declares that "*chreōn* originally signifies nothing of constraint and of what 'must be'," much less "to ratify or ordain." As though he would have us take this claim on faith, however, he presents no evidence for it, confining his discussion of Homer in this essay to the ontological difference between *eon* (being) and *eonta* (beings). On the other hand, one finds in Homer strong support for

Heidegger’s derivation of *chreōn* from *chraō*, “to hand over, thus to deliver, to let something belong to someone.”<sup>27</sup> What Anaximander’s *to chreōn* suggests, then, is not the logical modality of a proposition or the force of human laws. It suggests the dispensation of *apeiron* nature: a generative condition of all beings that calls for a careful response. But how is it that this call might issue from the being of the earth if its nature be indefinite and therefore faceless, anonymous, godless? How to make sense of a summons so unlike divine injunctions, one uttered by no mouth in any tongue of human being? Plutarch’s paraphrase of the fragment provides a clue to an answer. On his simple reconstruction, the dispensation of generation and destruction has happened “from ages indefinite [*ex apeirou aiōnos*],” transpiring “in cycles [*anakukloumenōn*].”<sup>28</sup> Thus do we circle back to the kairotic metabolism of the *oikos*, its allohistorical cycles turning the tides without and these to blood within.

To borrow a Heideggerian *façon de parler*, my contention is that Athena’s prophecy and Anaximander’s fragment say the same. But what the former expresses in the mythophysical idiom of a theo-cosmogonic dispensation, the latter philosophically depersonalizes and elementally renovates. Anaximander’s philo-sophy enlists the *wisdom (sophia)* of dwelling-with (*oikeioō*) by caring-for (*phileō*) otherness to think the ecological difference as the metabolism (heterostasis) of world ((en)stasis) and earth (hyper(ek)stasis, genostasis). *Such is the elementary sense of ‘philosophy’ in the ecological age of the phusikoi*. According to the dispensation of *gē*, which both limits and generatively grounds their possibilities, all things have been thrown into a metabolic exchange governing their static distribution (*nomos*) in the world. In this exchange beings are generated in measures and in measures destroyed, constituting their phenomenal emergence from and withdrawal (*phusis*) back into their self-concealing (*apeiron*) source (*archē*) in the allohistorical fullness of time. In contrast to mythophysical history, which unfolds in the *world* of the gods, the Anaximandrian “assessment of time” spans the indefinite reaches of an eonic immemorium (*apeirou aiōnos*) that was never present to any existent, mortal *or* immortal. To adopt his language (*chronos*), we might call this an *aperichronological* or *geochronological* conception of time. This way lies the boundless, indefinite time of the earth, metabolically recycled by the world and eonically (*aiōnos*) implicated in each kairotic moment of the story (*ainos*) of human being. We shall develop these themes when we revisit Thales’ archeology. At

<sup>27</sup> EGT 51f./GA5 366. Hom. *Od.* 8.81, 10.492, 10.565, where *chraō* denotes being *given* a prophecy by an oracle or god. Cf. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, 1648 (entry for *chrē*).

<sup>28</sup> Ps.-Plut. *Strom.* 2 (DK 12A10, KRS 101C trans.).

present let us turn the name Anaximander adopts for the earthly measure of care underpinning the ecological metabolism: *dikē*.

Two independent sources come to our aid in establishing a connection between *dikē* and the indefinite being of the earth. The first is from Solon (c. 638-558 BCE), the earliest recorded Athenian poet and a notable versifier of elegiac iambics. In a remarkably similar account of a “trial conducted by Time,” Solon reinforces our interpretation of *apeiron* by calling upon “Gē,” as Homer does Gaia, to serve as the deciding measure of *dikē*:

The great mother of the Olympian deities would be my best supporting witness . . . in the court [*or trial*] of Time [*en dikē Chronou*] – dark Earth [*Gē melaina*], whose boundary-stones, fixed in many places, I once removed; formerly she was enslaved, now she is free.<sup>29</sup>

The description is at once mythopoetic and juridical. Yet the allusion to “dark earth” betokens perhaps an ecological thought of the self-concealing marker of the boundary between *dikē* and *adikia* in the Anaximander fragment. To the boundless sweep of elemental time, in the eons before the advent of the world, only earth bears witness. It therefore sets a measure for *dikē* that outweighs all mortal testimony. Kahn informs us that *dikē* stems from *deiknumi* ‘to point *or* indicate’, used in the legal sense of a decision or ‘indication’ of a judge. He goes on to note that *dikē* may refer to (1) “the decision itself”; (2) “the punishment or compensation decided upon”; or (3) “the trial itself.”<sup>30</sup> Anaximander avails himself of 1 in opposing injustice (*adikia*) to the *assessment* of time (*chronou taxin*). Kirk et al. offer insight into the nature of that assessment by linking *taxis* to the ordinance of *restitution* in particular.<sup>31</sup> In light of this, Anaximander’s expression *didonai dikēn*, translated above as “pay penalty,” is more literally rendered as restitution, or giving what is due (i.e. 2). Finally, Solon adopts 3 in reference to the “trial conducted by time.” For the philosopher as for the poet, time inevitably exacts from beings some restitution of the gifts (dispensation) they have received from the earth. It restores what has been granted to the grantor, redressing by destruction the debt of generation. Drawing from Heidegger, Gary Shapiro interprets the Anaximander fragment along these very lines:

Everything that comes to be would from the very start owe a debt simply for having come into being, a debt that could be repaid only by its passing away. To use up time, to linger, to *verweilen* is to exist on credit; however, all debts will eventually fall due.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Sol. fr. 24 (KRS 111 trans.), translation slightly modified (‘dark’ for ‘black’ [*melaina*]).

<sup>30</sup> Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 185, 323.

<sup>31</sup> KRS p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Gary Shapiro, “Essay V. Gifts,” quoted from Laale, *Once They Were Brave*, 238.



Rather than implying a political or metaphysical economy, these lines acquire their lived truth from the place in which these “debts” command their due. We needn’t endow earth or time with numinous powers or purposive agency to appreciate this experience of *dikē*. For we have already seen it at work in the early ancient life-world. The natural economy of the Homeric and early Archaic *oikos* hinged on the caretaker’s ability to respond in due and timely measure to how beings came to be and passed away in the time each was allotted. Crops, sown and cultivated at propitious seasonal intervals (*kairoi*), became fodder for livestock, passed through their bodies, and back into the earth. Over longer cycles of time, these animals would likewise pay their debt to nature, as would all who tended them. Death and birth suffused the silent, pregnant atmosphere of the dwelling place. And they were constantly conjoined with near Humean consistency. To appreciate this one need only consider the voluminous records of maternal death, infant mortality, and the brevity of human life in Ionia before the advent of medical science.

As with the living, so too for all the elements of the ecological metabolism. The waters of the *oikos*, channeled and flumed to replenish and regenerate, they too came to pass with rains and pass away come seasons dry. To remove any one of these phenomena from the cycles of generation and destruction was to deny the world its earthly largesse. And to break that cycle through overindulgence or ab-use would have only brought havoc upon the *oikos* – if not at once, then in due time. Such misdeeds were *adikia* in the sense that they carelessly transgressed the dispensation of the earth, denuding the generative grounds of the dwelling place.

Contrariwise, to the degree that the *oikonomos* cultivated the earthliness of beings gathered there, restoring and renewing their differential possibilities, she ensured that the *oikos* would receive its allotment of shelter and time. In stark contrast to our high-minded ethico-juridical notions, hers was a sense of justice conceived from the ground up through a deferent attunement to an indefinite dispensation. What distinguishes Anaximander’s wisdom from both the mythological enchantment of the Homeric period and the homological disenchantment of the Classical is that for him this attunement defers neither to divine will nor willful reason, but to the will-less order of *phusis*, which invariably redresses night with day, winter with summer, the death of one with the birth of another. All while birthless earth outlasts and shelters all.

To bring *dikē* into clearer view, let us turn our sights to the second source, to Heraclitus, who has us redirect them to the skies. As Kahn translates fragment D 94 (XLIV): “The sun will not transgress its measures [*metra*]. If he does, the Furies, ministers of Justice [*Dikēs*] will find

him out.” So long as we cleave to an ecumenical sense of *dikē* as the willful administration of justice, this saying can only point to vengeful discord. But an ecological reading suggests otherwise. Pertinently, Heraclitus is said to have reproached Homer for ventriloquizing a prayer through Achilles: “Would that strife [*eris*] might vanish from among gods and men.” Against this plea, *ho skoteinos* contends that such a world, “without high notes and low notes” would be one with “no harmony [*or* attunement, *harmonian*]” (see §25).<sup>33</sup> To the tune of Anaximander’s discourse, Heraclitus completes the thought as follows:

One must [*chrē*] realize that contention is shared [*polemon eonta xunon*] and strife [*erin*] is *dikēn*, and all things are generated [*ginomena*] in accordance with strife and dispensation [*or* what is ordained, *chreōmena*(?)].<sup>34</sup>

What, if anything, does this tell us about Anaximander’s conception of elemental justice? Firstly, it bears mention that Heraclitus adopts the same language of generation and dispensation. Except that where Anaximander identifies *apeiron* as the origin of all things, Heraclitus points to strife or contention (*polemos*). Recall from our earlier discussion (§24-5) that Heraclitean doctrine weds *polemos* and *logos*, archetypally manifested by the element fire. Strife names how being qua *phusis* is gathered into the ecological difference. Such is the generative (genostatic) contention of the earth-world. Through it “all things are generated,” gathered into static senses (stasis), differed from one another and stabilized by their conflictual harmony (heterostasis) with the ab-sense (hyperstasis) whence they emerged.<sup>35</sup> Now, Heraclitus’ remark that “strife is justice” is often read as a studied rebuttal of Anaximander’s supposed view that justice is served and all accounts settled once beings have indemnified their generative allotment.<sup>36</sup> But neither ever says the “debt” is paid in full (cf. §32). Even as things are being destroyed, dispersed into others beyond all recognition, even as their senses are dedifferentiated through decay and corruption, even as they are resorbed into the indefinite mincemeat and temporal deposition we

<sup>33</sup> XXXIA, D A22, clauses reordered; cf. Arist. *Met.* 28c; Hom. *Il.* 18.107.

<sup>34</sup> LXXXII, D 80, translation slightly modified. Kahn speculates that this fragment begins by reframing Homer’s claim in the same book of the *Iliad*: “Enyalios [*i.e.* the war god *Ares*] is common [*xunos*], and the killer gets killed” (*Il.* 18.309). Kahn also notes that the papyrus containing this fragment was badly damaged. This has led to disputes over the last word, which has been read as *chreōmena* (Kahn), *chreōn* (Diels), and *krinomena* ‘to judge’ (Bywater). After presenting strong syntactic and stylistic objections to Diels’ choice, Kahn concludes that “there is really no justification for Diels’ reading beyond the wish to find an exact echo of Anaximander’s wording.” Kahn, *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 207, 326. All the same, given that Heraclitus was presumably acquainted with Milesian philosophy – about Thales, for instance, he allegedly expressed his views (XXIV, D 38) – and given the other Anaximandrian resonances in the fragment, we needn’t presume a *verbatim et literatim* echo to defend our interpretation of *chrē* and *kata chre\**? (Heraclitus) as *kata to chreōn* (Anaximander).

<sup>35</sup> See Heraclitus fragments: LXXV, D 8; LXXXIII, D 53; LXXVII, D 51.

<sup>36</sup> See *Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, 206, where Kahn defends the position of Gregory Vlastos.

call earth, they are metabolically recycled into other beings. In other words, their decomposition is at once recomposition and recompense, in flesh and bone or fossil stone. Every stage of the metabolic cycle relies on the tension and contention through which the indefinite manifests itself in beings. Every moment of their dwelling or lingering (*verweilen*) is tautly stretched between generation and destruction, emergence and demergence, constancy and inconstancy, revealing and concealing. But for that polemical harmony, no lyre or bow could be strung, no thing grasped or comprehended or made present to our concerns. In short, no world would ever come to be. Here we would do well to remember Heidegger's corrective to the received interpretation of *polemos*. According to him, Heraclitus' concept is not primarily defined by "war in the human sense," but by the "originary struggle" that "preserves beings in their constancy" (see §24-5). The same must be said for the complementary strife between *dikē* and *adikia* in Anaximander.

How then do we account for *adikia*, for trespassed measures and requitals in arrears? What of that transgressive fire in the sky described in D 94? In what sense might it exceed its due and timely measure in the ecological metabolism? And how could the sun itself be called to account, if not by the winged Furies or some other divine power? It is with no mere poetic flourish that Heraclitus has summoned the old gods – older than any Olympian. In it we catch an intimation, a trace, a hinting summons of a deeper meaning. Known to the Greeks as *cthoniai theai*, the Furies (or Erinyes) were goddesses of the mythic netherworld, or underworld. In Homer they appear to exact retribution from those who swear false oaths.<sup>37</sup> As instanced by Odysseus' imprecation of them upon Antinous, they acted in concert with Zeus Xeinius (Xenagogue Zeus) to settle disputes between guest-strangers and their hosts within the *oikos* (see §32). Before Solon, in the court of time beyond the vale, the Erinyes bore earthly witness. They decided Athena's prophecy concerning whom will be swallowed down and whom will be spared according to how they measure up to the xenial equivalence of care (*philotēs*). As we saw in our discussion of Homer, this equivalence was conserved by caring for earthborn others in a way that strengthened their *gē*-genetic affiliation with the *oikos*. As a radiant manifestation of earthliness, the sun is implicated in the (re)generation of the dwelling place. As its self-concealing light source, it blinds the eyes and burns the skin while conditioning the emergence of visual phenomena and nourishing that of life. What Heraclitus' enigmatic allusion to the Erinyes could suggest, then, is not a transgression of Zeus' world order but an ecologically indifferent

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<sup>37</sup> *Il.* 19.259ff.

scorching or dimming of the horizons of care.

However the measures of the sun are manifested – its girth, its timely course through the sky, or its relative radiance over the course of that passage – their ecological sense is reflected in those horizons. The cycles of the sun apportion growth to crops and health to living beings in the dwelling place, where they delimit diurnal and seasonal timeshares of work and festivity, wakefulness and dormancy. Thus do they define the limits of a careful world, allocating kairotic opportunities for enacting the allothetic concerns of the worker, the reveler, etc. Should the sun transgress its elemental measures by disrupting the turn of days, of seasons, or by giving off too much or too little fiery luminosity, a correlative disruption of these concerns ensues. It's not only that all things once shining with life would begin to wither and die, but that the caretaker could no longer be responsive to their timely demands. If a being so exceeds its due proportion of earthliness as to confound all circumspection, all for-sight and with it all inspection, all oversight, it forecloses the very possibility of conservation. To the extent that the sun wreaks ecological destruction in this way, releasing the tension and dissolving the contention of earth and world into hyperstasis, each is deprived of its essential difference from the other. A *worldless* caretaker cannot replenish the store of significant differences within the dwelling place, cannot cultivate what the sun has given. For lack of disclosure, her horizons would sink into that which “tends always to draw the world into itself and hold it there,” in Heidegger's turn of phrase (§25). Correlatively, the caretaker would be transfigured into a being of pure exposure. Like some disembodied skein of feeble flesh, crushed by temporal resistance of the untimely heavens, she would languish beneath an empty vault of indifference. Within those horizons the sun itself would suffer a reprisal of indifference as well. In such limit cases as eternal night or infernal day, one could no longer distinguish the sun from the moon or any other skyward phenomenon. Its essential possibilities for manifesting itself *as the sun* would be nullified. To adopt Heraclitus' language, the furies of care would find it out, its heliotropic claims being snuffed out or else burned out of existence.

In his commentary on the Anaximander fragment, Heidegger renders *dikē* as kind of ontological “order” or “conjunction” (*Fug*), *adikia* as “disorder” (*Unfug*) or “disjunction” (*Unfuge*).<sup>38</sup> There his focus falls on the conjunction of being and beings. Contrariwise, I would like

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<sup>38</sup> EGT 43/GA5 357. Cf. “*Dikē* is thus ‘the conjunction [*Fug*] and the disjunction [*Unfug*] with regard to being” (N1 168/GA 6.1 171).

to suggest that *dikē* bears elementary reference to the conjunction of earth and world in the dwelling place between them, namely, the ecological rift inhabited by the caretaker. We shall not belabor the complexities of Heidegger's concept of the *Fug* – or for that matter its cognates *Fügung*, *Einfügung*, *Sichfügen*, etc. – except to say that it gathers sameness and difference into a single heterostatic thought.<sup>39</sup> To wit, the conflictual harmony of the Heraclitean *logos* (see §25). Just as he insists that the *polemos* heterologically opens “joints” and “clefts” in being, he now says of Anaximander's fragment that both conjunction and disjunction are requisite to the presencing of beings, *thus to caring for them*. Heidegger thus departs from the conventional translation of “*didonai . . . dikēn kai tisin allēlois*” – “pay penalty and retribution to each other.” Opting for the more literal ‘give’ for *didonai*, he construes *tisis* (i.e. what is ordained by *dikē*) as a kind of caregiving, or caring-for, reinforcing our ecological interpretation. On Heidegger's translation, “[beings] let conjunction [*Fug*] and thereby also *reck* [*Ruch*] belong to one another” (EGT 57/GA5 372, emphasis mine). The English ‘reck’, meaning ‘having care, concern, or regard for’, is a good fit for the German *Ruch*, sharing the same meaning, phonology, etymology, and old-fangled overtones. As Heidegger explains his choice of this curious *mot juste*, which enters into the fragment to “surmount” *injuste* “disorder” (*Unfug*):

We still use the word *ruchlos* [reckless] to mean something pejorative and shameful: something without *Ruch* [reck]. . . . The Middle High German word *rouche* means carefulness or care [*Sorgfalt*, *die Sorge*]. Care tends to something so that it may remain in its essence. This turning-itself-toward. . . toward [temporally] abiding particulars [*den Je-Weiligen her*] in relation to presencing, is *tisis*, *reck* (EGT 46/GA5 360, trans. mod.).<sup>40</sup>

From here Heidegger proceeds to reconstruct Anaximander's insight concerning the fundamental relation between *reck* and *Fug* (rendered hereafter as ‘ordered conjunction’):

Insofar as abiding particulars do not entirely destroy themselves in the boundless obstinacy of separation toward baldly insistent subsistence [*beharrenden Fortbestehen*], insofar as they do not share the compulsion to expel one another from what is presently made present [*gegenwärtig Anwesenden*], they let ordered conjunction [*Fug*] belong, *didonia dikēn*. . . . Insofar as abiding particulars give ordered conjunction, each being . . . lets *reck* pervade its relation with others, *didonai . . . kai tisin allēlois*.<sup>41</sup>

The thrust of this analysis squares with the conclusions we reached in our reading of D 94 as well as our initial assay of *apeiron*. Heidegger's periphrastic talk of “abiding particulars,” “insistent subsistence,” and “what is presently made present” are virtually incoherent unless

<sup>39</sup> As he puts it, *Fug* is to be thought as “being, *phusis*,” and its “original gatheredness: *logos*” (IM 171/GA40 178).

<sup>40</sup> In his essay on *phusis* in Aristotle's *Physics*, Heidegger clarifies what he means by *Jeweilige*: “We call an individual thing *das Jeweilige*, ‘that which is there for a while,’ because as an individual thing it ‘stays for a while’ in its appearance and preserves the “while” (the presencing) of this appearance, and, by preserving the appearance, stands forth in it and out of it - which means that it ‘is’ in the Greek sense of the word” (P 211/GA9 276).

<sup>41</sup> EGT 47/GA5 360, trans. mod.

grounded in caring-for, *reck*. The same can be said for Simplicius' paraphrase of the fragment, which unpacks Anaximander's ontological *archē* in terms of generation and destruction. The doxographers construed these concepts *hypostatically*. From Anaximander's pre-theoretical vantage point, these distinctions are essentially bound to care, just as order (*dikē*) and disorder (*adikia*) are on Heidegger's interpretation. Sartre approaches destruction in a similar way, with the crucial difference that he *anthropostatically* dyscloses care as a human "activity." The contrast will bring Anaximandrian disjunction (*adikia*) and caring-for (*tisis*) into sharper relief:

If . . . we consider *destruction*, we must recognize that it is an *activity* which doubtless could utilize judgment as an instrument but which can not be defined as uniquely or even primarily judicative. . . . In a sense, certainly, man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished. . . . In order for destructibility to exist, man must determine himself in the face of this possibility. . . . Thus it is man who renders cities destructible, precisely because he posits [viz. pre-thetically apprehends] them as fragile and as precious [in relation to that determination] and because he adopts a system of protective measures with regard to them.<sup>42</sup>

Sartre has it that the meaning of 'destruction' is determined by the unthematic disclosure destructive phenomena. This disclosure presupposes something present that is already at issue for concern. Otherwise, what is called destruction would be nothing more than a redistribution of phenomena, indistinguishable from creation or any other alteration in-itself-for-us. He grounds that concern on human being's self-shaping, essence-making activity, much as *Being and Time* does in the self-projective activity of Dasein. Against this strain of ecumenism, we have learned that care is *ecologically* grounded on the ability to be passively determined from without, affectively, and directed toward response. Caring-for the otherness of being (earth), thereby the otherness of beings (their earthliness), is the elementary response-ability of the caretaker, the ontological vocation of existence in the ecology of being. It is distinguished from anthropostatic care (concern for self-being) insofar as its concerned disclosure of phenomena as "abiding particulars" is not confined to the horizons of self-understanding. Instead, it begins from a hyper-ecstatic exposure to and summons by the homologically and anthropologically irreducible earth. This casts a dubious light on Sartre's claim that "man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished" – an arbitrary assumption indeed. Caring-for is no mere human possibility. Destruction befalls the city-dweller no more than it does the nest-dweller, who contributes to its sense by careful, preventative measures upon been exposed to the fragile claim of every egg.

Under this ecological rubric, *Fug* (*dikē*) designates conjunction of earth and world under the allopathic horizons of caring-for. By way of example, consider that once treasured thing we

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<sup>42</sup> Sartre, B&N, 39f.

call a book. Consider, that is, the codex (from the Latin *caudex* 'tree-trunk'). It is not *merely* made present, nor is its being exhausted by its readiness-to-hand as mere equipment for reading. Ecologically thought, the codex is an originary presence shot through with concerned absence. A periphenomenon (§11). A book manifests itself, in part, as what it's made of: wood and pigment and water, whose indefinite self-emergence grounds the possibility of carefully making or using it for reading, *as well as* its operant impossibility in cases of concerned disruption and destruction – e.g. when censored by nightfall, shaken, dampstained, or simply poorly made. Such cases expose us to the earthly otherness and resistance at the core of this thing. And the same holds true for the codex as it does for all beings. They are of the earth *and* in the world, elementally insignificant *and* concernfully significant. For any existent, the conjunction of these two modes of being maintains a static order where beings can be significantly differed, each from each, by their respective allotments of presence *and* absence. Should *adikia* or ecological *disjunction* prevail wholesale, then the indifferent disorder (*hyperstasis*) of phenomena would preclude the possibility of caring for them. We already examined this scenario in our discussion of the sun. Were it totally disjointed from our world, it would lose its abiding presence for us, its stasis. Heidegger's commentary on the Anaximander fragment focuses on the other way that phenomena themselves could manifest disjunction. Were the codex to grant *less* than its share of *apeiron*, then its being would collapse into what has been made present by our concerns. It would become a "baldly insistent subsistence" that expels all other possibilities for how it can be made, used, or written. In a world where the sun is nothing more than a timepiece or lightsource, the codex no more than a tool for reading, their difference from clocks or lamps on the one hand and stone tablets or signage on the other – in short, their difference from anything else that "gets the job done" – would be expunged. The sun could no longer generate the unlocked experience of the dawn that breaks anew each day and dawns on us in flashes of insight, exposing us to the boundless possibilities for renewing the world in ways heretofore unmade, unused, unsaid.

It requires no great stretch of the imagination to see how a comparable shadow could be cast over the codex, dwelling as we do in an age when reading is being disjoined as never before from the elementality of its medium. The shift from the durability of pigment on paper to the ephemerality of "digital content" has undeniably altered the reader's experience. It is an experience familiar to anyone who has browsed the Internet for long stretches. Essays and advertisements and stories and advertisements and headlines and advertisements reel across the

screen like roadside billboards from the windows of a speeding car. Words are ever close at hand, evanescent behind the blinking cursor in one of several open windows, on a screen backlit by a liquid crystal light source at our fingertips round the clock. But they are also fleeting things, indifferent things, dummies of that which they once were. Set off from one another by a casual swipe of the finger, walls of text are further leveled down to keywords and lesser trivia merging into a single constant stream of undifferentiated “content.” The voluminous concerns that books were bound to satisfy are being converted into the one-dimensional concerns for staying informed or cursor-y communication with our “social network.” We are unable care for the indefinite *meaning* of language, cultivated over kairotic timespans of undivided concentration. For our attention is divided between processing and relaying bits of information, readymade and disposable.<sup>43</sup> When responsive literacy, modulated by the exposure to the codex, is traded for a disclosure of fungible code detached from its elemental conditions, texts become indifferent to place and time. No longer does the written word find its place on the wooden shelf within the petrified forests of the study or library, settings set aside specifically for reading, setting the tune for the mindful deferral to what is read. No longer does the text assume the longevity of the trees felled into that setting of timber and paper, or the scintillating fluency of ink pouring forth from the pen, or the thought-provoking finality of a mark that cannot be deleted and revised, in haste or indecision, at a thoughtless click and keystroke. Finally, where once the unfamiliar word or phrase was as an occasion for partaking in and poetically renewing the immanent significance of the book, it is now become, in the digital medium, an occasion for copying and pasting old meanings borrowed wholesale from without. Reluctant to break the spell of wonder, insight, or intrigue cast by the volume in their hands, readers were not as quick to put it down to consult the dictionary or encyclopedia. Instead they were given to rely on their interpretation of the unfolding whole to decipher its parts. Circled hermeneutically round these poles as the pages turned, unfamiliar expressions were progressively deciphered by the reader, becoming for her like so many synecdochic souvenirs gathered from a distant world and transported to her own.

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<sup>43</sup> Before the 1940s ‘information’ commonly signified a report about the state of affairs or instructions for modifying it (e.g. a recipe or blueprint). This sense was transfigured by Claude Shannon, a mathematician and engineer of Bell Laboratories, who appropriated the word as a strictly quantificational concept bearing primary reference to the *transmission* of meaning rather than meaning itself. Thus modified, ‘information’ could conceivably designate gibberish, provided it was carried by a signal across a channel to a receiver and admitted of some *quantity* of data governed by probabilistic laws (incipit entropy, redundancy, etc.). Shannon’s novation has bred much confusion, becoming so entrenched in our everyday language that one must take pains to preserve the notion of *meaningful* information.



But in our time, as the codex cedes place to the code and the “right” word is no more than a right-click away, that experience is fast obsolescing. Rather than solicit and develop the wisdom of negotiating the interstitial place between the lectorial world and the lived, *verba obscura* increasingly solicit only the know-how required to amass more factual knowledge or else mere information. As that ability operates in the space of “instant messages” composed of readymade *terms*, which it translates into others *salva veritate*, it erases the *word veritas in vivo* (cf. §20). The stream of content flows in spate. But make no mistake, this stream is a terminal one, evaporating in proportion to its disjunction from its source. It is become disjoined from the generative *elements* of meaning: the tree-trunks and waters that shelter the word in the inky nervure of a deckled leaf against the exactions of time. The consequences of this are legible in Heidegger’s interpretation of Anaximander. Texts “expel one another” from what has become a flickering span of attention only to “destroy themselves” in the concerns that have been engineered into the digital medium. Having been processed into information and converted into random-access memories, they swiftly cede place to others and recede apace from the horizons of what matters. On every indifferent screen, where no word abides long enough to “let reck pervade its relation with others,” readers become careless feeders, gorging themselves on the medium itself, on the indifferent content of its message.

Let us conclude with a paraphrase of the Anaximander fragment reflecting the foregoing conclusions. On our ecological reappraisal, Anaximander conceived indefinite self-emergence (*phusin apeiron*), or earthliness, as follows: it is *archē* in the sense of elemental source of generation (*genesis*) and destruction (*phthora*) for all beings according to its dispensation (*kata to chreōn*). For beings redress the disjunction (*adikia*) from the earth brought about by their emergence into world. They do so by letting care (*tisis, phileō*) conserve the conjunction (*dikē*) of the ecological difference. Where Homer’s Athena calls upon the wrath of Gaia, Solon the witness of “dark Earth,” and Heraclitus the contention of *logos*, Anaximander appeals to the geological order of time (*chronou taxin*) as the “just” and final measure of that earthly restitution. Thus does he rethink the natural economy (*oikonomia*) of the earth-world (*oikos*). In being disjoined from the earth to appear in the world, all things enter into a metabolic exchange that governs their static distribution (*nomos*) in that phenomenal layout. In this exchange beings are regenerated in measures and in measures destroyed, constituting their abiding emergence from and withdrawal back into their self-concealing grounds. Only by deferently attuning herself

to those measures in her congress with beings does the caretaker key into a harmonious response-ability to beings. Her way of dwelling lets reck hold sway by allowing them to rest in their heterological truth, heterostatically conserving their respective allotments of static presence and hyperstatic absence. She thereby fertilizes the genostatic possibilities for making sense of things in new and makeless ways. As a steward of the indefinite departure and destination of beings, the caretaker cultivates their generative grounds to nourish their boundless heterogeneity in the dwelling place, re-sounding their high notes, their low notes, and all the notes between.

### §34. Mapping Out the Birthplace of Western Philosophy

Our maps have indeed grown less speculative, less interested in the elemental possibilities of the Earth's skin. They are drawn by computers from satellite photos, and that suggests that the Earth has lost its capacity to keep secrets. The natural features are buried under the gridwork of roads and the blur of names. Maps become a means of getting past things, of threading through the ganglia and writ of modern life. We tend to look at them for what we want to avoid, rather than what, in good fortune, we might discover.

—Peter Steinhart, “Names on a Map”<sup>44</sup>

Water escapes me, runs through my fingers. . . . Ideologically this comes to the same thing: it escapes me, escapes all definition, but leaves traces, shapeless marks, in my mind and on this piece of paper.

—Francis Ponge, “Of Water”<sup>45</sup>

In the last chapter we followed a path back to Homer to uncover the roots of the ecology of being. At the beginning of this chapter we traversed the indefinite gulf from that age to Anaximander's own, discovering along the way that his thought was grafted to those deeply buried roots. When mated with the potsherds recovered from Heraclitus, what appeared as mere fragments upon the final shore of chapter 3 have begun to resolve themselves into a humble vessel for Thales' elemental *archē*. In that vessel is beginning to roil an untapped history. A story of how Western philosophy first emerged from the lived locus of the *oikos*, where wisdom derived from dwelling-with and this from caring for its earthly grounds. At last it has come time to reexamine the first Greek philosopher with fresh eyes. Having stoppered the pigeonholes of the ecumene, we shall seek to exhume Thales from the false grounds of metaphysics and the sepulchers of pseudoscience. Ecumenism incited the Furies of ecological abjection by its tragic

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Steinhart, “Names on a Map,” *Audubon*. Vol. 88 Is. 3 (May 1986), 8.

<sup>45</sup> Ponge, *Selected Poems*, 59.

denial the earthly finitude of existence. We shall absolve Thales of the charges still trumpeted by that tradition, irrational chauvinism no less than rational universalism, by laying him to rest in the element that sheltered his thinking. Finally, by regrounding his discourse on the lived simplicity of that element in the intimacy of his dwelling place, we shall open a space for an unexpected dialogue with the Presocratics on the *logos* of *phainomena*. The first step in this leg of our historical passage is taken, then, by stepping back to Miletus.

Our knowledge of archaic Miletus, the archetypal Ionian city that flourished from 800-500 BCE, is lifted from a scant ruck of earth, buried beneath the well-sifted strata of its Classical ectype, on a land once claimed and since reclaimed by water. To upturn deeper tracts of time is to unearth the titanic clash of that element with others of the region, fulminating for eons before its storied nomenclature, indeed all nomenclature, was. During the Pleistocene what is now the Milesian waterfront was submerged in the sea that would later be dubbed the Aegean – after Theseus’ father Aegeus, who hurled himself into its wine-dark depths and drowned. In the turbid ages dividing those elemental soundings from their mythic resounding, Miletus surfaced on the southwestern shores of Asia Minor along a promontory knuckle that had been rapping northerly into the Gulf of Latmus since roughly 18,000 BP. Across that embayment lay Mount Mycale, neighboring Priene at its hindfoot, and the silt-gorging mouth of the river Meander. Early settlers of these fecund, riparian wetlands believed they were “given by the river.”<sup>46</sup> But what water hath given, water would taketh away in due time. The rising and sinking of the coastline was, and remains, a conspicuous phenomenon throughout the region. Writing some centuries later, Strabo observes that “the whole of the territory in the neighborhood of the Meander is subject to earthquakes and is undermined with both fire and water.”<sup>47</sup> And as the centuries turned and empires overturned, the meandering soil would come steadily to glut the Latmian Gulf, making a morass of that territory, sealing all harbors, and with them the fate of Miletus.<sup>48</sup> Passing through the latterday aftermath, archeologist Barry Cunliffe bears witness to this deposition of ruin:

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<sup>46</sup> Hdt. 2.5; Strab. 1.2.23, 29. Translations of Strabo are from *The Geography of Strabo*, trans. H. L. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1924).

<sup>47</sup> Strab. 12.8.17.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Laale, *Once They Were Brave*, 3. In *Water Management in Ancient Greek Cities*, Dora Crouch elaborates: “In contrast to Ephesus, Smyrna, and other Anatolian ports situated at the opening of broad valleys leading to the interior, Miletus had mountainous terrain at its back. The city was therefore more completely maritime in character and when silt deposited by the Maeander River closed the gulf and extended the shore line (today it is ca. 10 km beyond Miletus), the economy collapsed.” Dora P. Crouch, *Water Management in Ancient Greek Cities* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993).

Visiting the ruins today, encircled by a somber, rather barren landscape of old marshland, it is difficult at first to see why, in the sixth century B.C. Miletus became one of the greatest cities in the Mediterranean world.<sup>49</sup>

As above so below in this vestigial place, entombed as much of it is beneath the treacherous gifts of the river and the risen sea. Partly because of this, archeologists have long turned their shovels on reaching the older, lowland settlement reduced to water level by the Persian Wars. Instead they have set their sights toward the high plateau, the site of the relocated, fifth-century acropolis.<sup>50</sup> Where once it clung fast to the surf-bitten headlands, Miletus came to roost on this limestone eyrie, sheltered on high from the tides below. Rebuilt on the orthogonal vision of its native son Hippodamus, the gridded layout of the new city-state would become the politically reconfigured prototype for its Classical counterparts throughout Greece.<sup>51</sup> Between its seaborne past and its climb into the historical record was the watershed town where Thales dwelled. So that if he and it reared up as one toward future-history, together they also lay humbled, past-haunted yet by the element that moved all things there at land's end. For every storm and spate recalled that theirs was a precarious estate, an open-ended and revocable endowment whose future was anything but settled on this our solvent earth.

In certain respects the *oikoi* of sixth-century Miletus were not so vastly changed from earlier Ionian settlements on the peninsula. The place once praised in the Homeric hymn as the “charming city by the sea” continued to prosper from it.<sup>52</sup> The karst-formed springs, which riddled the cliffs at its back, continued to fill its wells and cisterns.<sup>53</sup> And standing true as ever about its harbors were the several sacred temples built in honor to Athena and Apollo Delphinium, Dionysus and Demeter, assuring all seaborne guests that here too, as Thales declares, “all things are full of gods.”<sup>54</sup> Departing the town as they had entered, perhaps these visitors made the four-day voyage to the western delta of the Nile. Or perhaps they followed the Sacred Way overland toward Didyma, some half-day's journey south of Miletus. Upon their

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<sup>49</sup> Barry Cunliffe, *The Extraordinary Voyage of Pytheas the Greek* (New York: Walker & Company, 2002), 27.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Crouch, *Water Management*, 93.

<sup>51</sup> Describing that layout, Crouch observes how Classical Miletus “was laid out in either large blocks of small houses, or small blocks of large houses, but in either case in regular checkerboard grids, while the public spaces were fitted into multiples of a single block. This nuanced regularity was associated with the name of Hippodamus of Miletus, who carried the ideas to other cities that he laid out, such as Rhodes and Piraeus” (ibid., 44).

<sup>52</sup> *Hom. Hymn Apoll.*, 180.

<sup>53</sup> Crouch, *Water Management*, 92-3.

<sup>54</sup> Arist. *De an.* 411a7. Callimachus quoted from Laale, *Once They Were Brave*, 130. Voyages to the far-famed temple of Apollo on the island of Delos also played a significant role (ibid. 33, 37).

arrival perhaps they were greeted by the sight re-visioned by the poet Callimachus (c. 310-240 BCE), whose *iambos* relates how an Acadian “by happy chance found the old man Thales at the shrine of Didymean Apollo, scratching the earth with a staff.”<sup>55</sup> The rude scratch of earth that emerged from the Dark Age as a quaint fishing village had established itself as a prominent commercial port of the Ionian League. But even the Milesian mariners, famed for their temerity, found in the high seas a nemesis full of peril and casualty. Hesiod tells of the many “comfortless dangers of seafaring” amid the “malevolent blasts” of tempest winds.<sup>56</sup> And Archilochus (c. 680-640 BCE) – another iambic poet and close foregoer of Thales – recounts how “a fifty-oared galley . . . was on its way back to Miletus,” homeward bound, when it was seized “in the arms of the waves” and “lost in the strait of Naxos.”<sup>57</sup> About that tragedy historian Hans Willer Laale muses:

The well-manned galley undoubtedly was caught by down-rushing storm-winds and capsized between prosperous Naxos and Paros. All souls, save one [a man named Coeranus] washed away to a chilling death – perishing in the surging brine as the ship together with the Pleiades wrapped in clouds sank into the deep. To these luckless ones may be added so many others who powerless to soothe the savage waves . . . had turned their rudders over to fortune and suffered shipwreck. Being driven aground, battered by hidden reefs near surf-beaten rocky shores, washed away in nights black as thunder with no star to steer by – they perished and were cheated of all the rites of burial.<sup>58</sup>

Lands begot by the devious currents of the river only to be deluged, displaced, and replaced once more by faraway others; seeps and streams provoked from the porous nether; old stone sanctuaries too with rainworn façades where chiseled names grew dim over lifetimes; lodged in their striae fossil life, limestone molars gnawing at the floor of this once inland sea, gouged out and enshrined along the bloodred pathways; oversea voyages lost in the fog, steered haplessly awry by shifting gales, wracked by torrents, downcast to benthic graves where they rotted to the texture of mucilage. Can a droplet of doubt still fall upon the idea that the waters of this place would have left their traces, their shapeless watermarks, in the mind and writ of Thales?<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Callim. *Iambi* 1.57-9, Translations of Callimachus are from *Aetia, Iambi, Hecale and Other Fragments, Musaeus, Hero and Leander*, trans. Charles H. Whitman, et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1975).

<sup>56</sup> Hes. *Op.* 618-644.

<sup>57</sup> Archil. frs. 23, 114. Translations of Archilochus are from *Elegy and Iambus*, trans. J.M. Edmonds (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1931).

<sup>58</sup> Laale, *Once They Were Brave*, 35.

<sup>59</sup> There is evidence that the ancient Greeks not only displayed extensive knowledge of fossils, deep time, lithology, and seismic events, but enshrined fossils in bonebeds along pathways. Solounias and Mayor draw particular attention to the *Panaima* (‘all bloody place’) region of Samos, whose soils are attested in myths (transmitted by Plutarch) to have been stained red by immemorial bloodbaths (viz. the conflict between Dionysus and the Amazons). See Nikos Solounias and Adrienne Mayor, "Ancient References to the Fossils from the Land of Pythagoras," *Earth Sciences History* 23, no. 2 (2004): 283-296.

Piecing together numerous biographical clues, historian Mott Greene paints an aquarelle of the philosopher in his element, navigating the Phoenician searoute, diverting the Halys River, forecasting the rains to cultivate a famously prosperous olive crop, and meditating on the Nile flood. “As a resident of a hydraulic civilization,” submits Greene, “nothing could be less strange than that he developed his skills and his ideas on the basis of water.”<sup>60</sup> This is not to say that Thales’ thinking was marooned in the idioclocal. “The swiftest is the mind, for it speeds everywhere,” reads the apothegm credited to him.<sup>61</sup> Instead of veering off in its own direction, unguided by experience, evidence of Thales’ extensive roving and sojourns suggests that his broad-winged mind nested in the *multi-* and *interlocal*. This was no *paltripolitan*: a provincial urbanite maintaining a bulwark against the outlandish by walling himself like a murenger into the fortified precincts of the autochthonous. Nor was Thales a proto-*cosmopolitan* thinker, heralding those who would later disguise that autochthony as universality under the manifest destiny of reason. Under the banner of cosmopolitanism, the ecumenical provincialism of being would carry out that mandate by imposing the isotropic space of rational concerns onto the place of the other and the otherness of place. Kirk, Raven, and Schofield observe that the civilization that fostered the first wave of *phusikoi* was one in which material prosperity and exchange “were allied, for a time at least, with a strong cultural and literary tradition dating from the age of Homer.”<sup>62</sup> But the rise of this civilization also set in motion the intellectual and political assimilation of the *oikos*, a seachange that would come to burke that same tradition. If the political tragedy was already to some extent underway in sixth-century Miletus, as evidenced by its colonization and slave-trade, the doctrine of that city’s first recorded philosopher still bares traces of a way of dwelling other-wise. By seeing how Thales retained the old wisdom of *logos oikeios*, we shall begin to form a portrait an **ecopolitan** thinker. In this picture, developed in chapter 6, we shall find that Thales epitomized the philosophical caretaker of the *oikos*, one who spoke on behalf of the elemental otherness of that place and its affiliates in a way that counteracted their displacement and domestication by the *polis*.

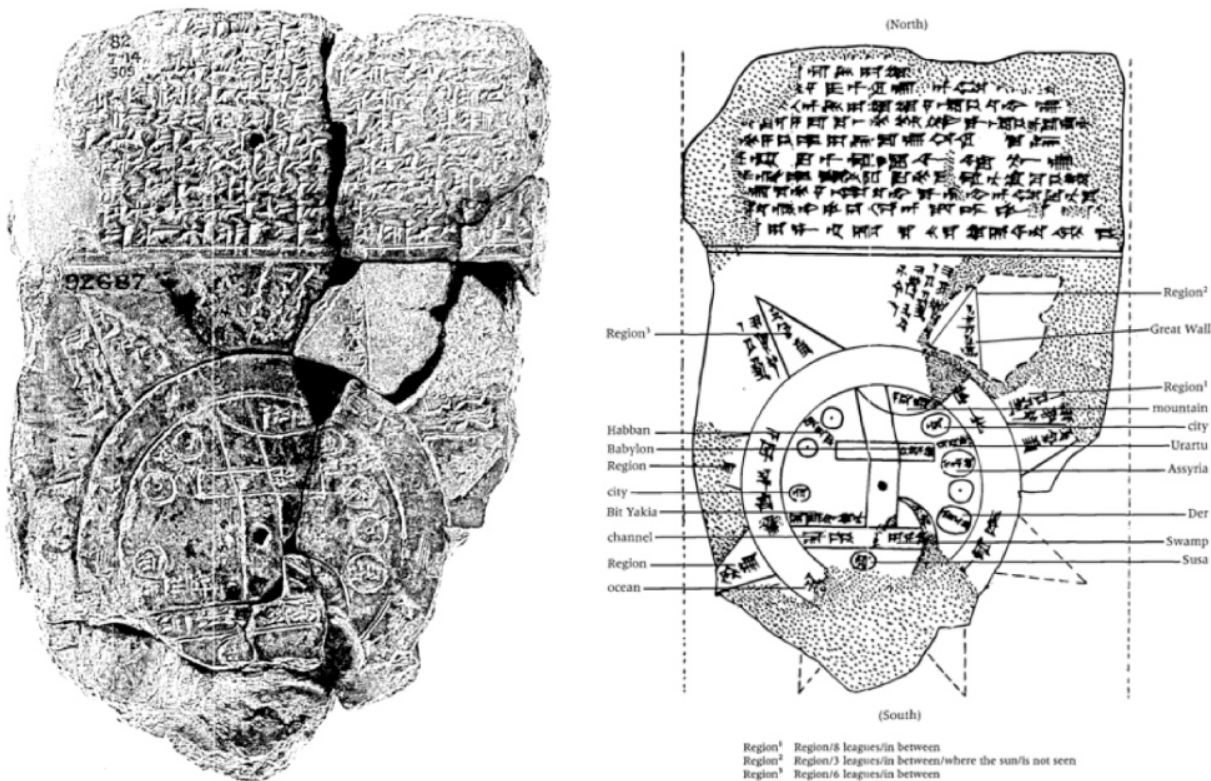
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<sup>60</sup> Mott Greene, *Natural Knowledge in Preclassical Antiquity*, 105. Quoted in David Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water as Environmental Ideas* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2010), 89f.

<sup>61</sup> D.L. 1.1.35.

<sup>62</sup> KRS p. 75.

Before bringing our historical investigations to bear on Thales' doctrine, we may begin to get a sense of his world by considering two topological tracings of the earth-world from the period: a map from Babylon and another from Miletus. The first, commonly referred to as the Babylonian Map of the World (BM 92687), is chiseled on a stone tablet accompanied by a cuneiform inscription dating from the seventh- or sixth-century (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).<sup>63</sup>



**Figure 5.1 (left)** Babylonian map of the world and distant lands; unbaked clay tablet with newly restored portion at center-right. (The British Museum. No. 92687)

**Figure 5.2 (right)** Identification of the major features of the Babylonian Map of the World as drawn by R. Campbell Thompson, amended by C. B. F. Walker, and translated by W. Horowitz. The dotted lines indicate the portions restored in 1995 by I. Finkel.

On this map *terra cognita* extends no farther than the boundaries of the Babylonian Empire at its greatest historical extent, with the city of Babylon enlarged and centrally depicted as the “hub of the universe” surrounded by Susa, Urtu, Assyria, and the Taurus mountains.<sup>64</sup> Yet the

<sup>63</sup> The map was purportedly copied from another created after 900 BCE.

<sup>64</sup> It is commonly accepted by scholars that the map is a depiction the whole known world. See D. Cosgrove, "Landscapes and Myths, Gods and Humans," in *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives (Explorations in*

presumption of the “political, ethnocentric, [and] propagandistic” character of its layout, as Michel Serres puts it, is called into question by the demarcation of and descriptive focus on the wonders beyond those boundaries.<sup>65</sup> Several *nagu* (districts or regions) are shown to emanate like stellated islands from the “Bitter River” wreathing the continent.<sup>66</sup> The underside of the tablet contains a mythopoetic account of these remote outlands, inhabited by legendary beasts and reached by none other than ancient heroes. There is a place “beyond the flight of birds,” another “where one sees nothing, and the sun is not visible,” and still another on which “the light is brighter than that of sunset or stars.” According to Babylonian cosmology, the *nagu* were passageways between Earthly and the Heavenly Oceans, the latter extending below the horizon of the sky and into the Underworld. The *Epic of Creation* identifies Heavenly Ocean as the dwelling place of Apsu, Tiamat, and all the “vanished” gods deposed by Marduk, who transformed them into animal constellations that wink in summons of the sacred past. Francesca Rochberg notes that in Sumerian and Akkadian poetry “heaven (divine AN) was paired with ‘earth’ (divine KI = *ersetu*).”

This parity is borne out by the map, where scholars have identified correlations between the insular *nagu* and the heavenly trajectories of the sun and stars, implying a three-dimensional layout in which the inverted bowl of the human world is mirrored above by the cosmic abode of the gods (Fig. 5.3).<sup>67</sup>

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*Anthropology*) ed. Barbara Bender (Oxford: Berg, 1993), 282f. See also Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 93f.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted from Michel Serres, “Anaximander: A Founding Name in History” in *Presocratics After Heidegger*, 136.

<sup>66</sup> The “river” corresponds to what we know as the Persian Gulf. Of the seven islands described only five are intact, while scholars speculate a total of eight were believed to exist.

<sup>67</sup> In this survey of the Babylonian Map of the World (BM 92687), I follow Francesca Rochberg, “Terrestrial and Celestial Order in Mesopotamia,” in *Ancient Perspectives: Maps and Their Place in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, ed. Richard J.A. Talbert (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2012), 32-6. Writes Rochberg: “The Sumerians and Babylonians probably had some knowledge, possibly acquired from other people, of the northern high latitudes and of the polar nights. Highly remarkable is the sixth island, *where a horned bull dwells and attacks the newcomer*. An exactly similar presentation, true to tradition, occurs in the same position in an astrolabe of the 17th century A.D. and has been used in the reconstruction of the tablet.”



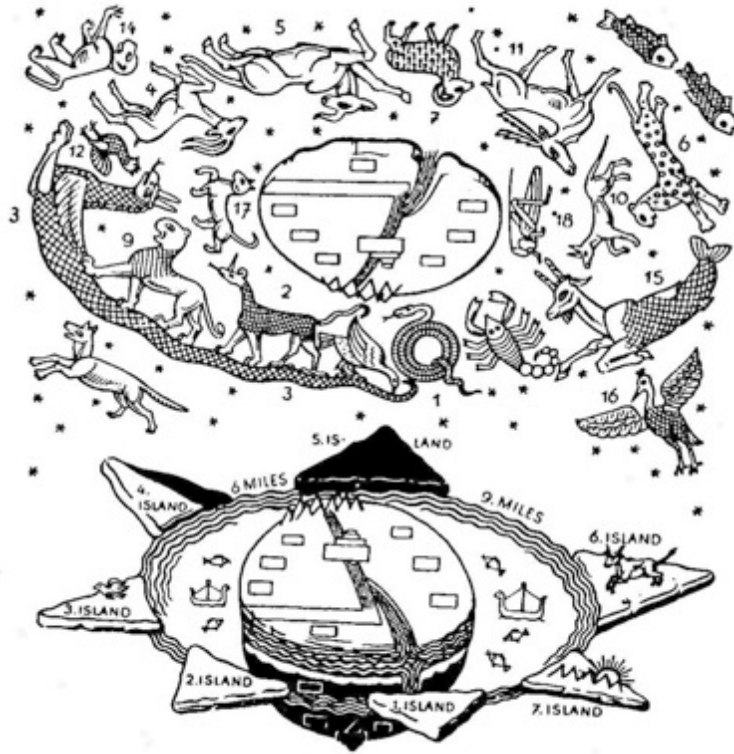


Figure 5.3 *The Babylonian Cosmos, reconstructed by Karl Maasz*<sup>68</sup>

In view of the idiosyncratic arrangement of places, which defies cardinal orientation, and reference to mythic toponyms and iconography, the map could not be more removed from Aristotle's high-altitude representation of the *oikoumenē* (§18).<sup>69</sup> Rather than *impose* geometric space onto the earth, encompassing it into the knowable, the Babylonian map *exposes* the viewer to the limits separating the mythic earth from the dwelling place of mortals – the two, co-originary referents of *oikoumenē gē*. Otherwise put, in terms laid out by Casey, the tablet is an exemplary case of *mapping out*. It is devised not as a theoretical model of objective space, but for the sake of “getting the experience into a format that moves others in ways significantly similar to (if not identical with) the ways in which [the mapmaker has] been moved by being with/in a particular landscape.”<sup>70</sup> With each chiseled mark the anonymous draftsman opened a

<sup>68</sup> "Babylonian World Map," [http://cartographic-images.net/Cartographic\\_Images/103\\_Babylonian\\_World.html](http://cartographic-images.net/Cartographic_Images/103_Babylonian_World.html). Both figures are sourced from this digitized text panel from the British Library, London.

<sup>69</sup> While the map is thought to be aligned in some measure *regional* tradewinds, historians attribute its dominant orientation to the favorable northwestern wind unleashed by the goddess Ishtar.

<sup>70</sup> Edward S. Casey, *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota Univ. Press, 2005), xxii.

passageway for an affective transposition: a lived journey through memorial places but also an encounter with their inner and outermost boundaries, where they gave onto the immemorial past. And to the extent that those whose fingers retraced that journey were deferently guided by its mythic intentionality, one might surmise that the edges between their own bodies, the map, and the experience it translated commenced to chip away and crumble into dust. The mapping out of that experience had already begun in the selection of materials for the map. In its own way the stone traced out that journey before the artisan had even set to work. In this element, which most tangible bears the weight of allohistory in quoin and fundament and engraved monument all, the Babylonians found a boundary marker of dwellings, mortal and divine, one that compressed the farthest reaches of time and place into a thing no larger than the hands that scribed and cradled it.

The second map, from the sixth-century Miletus, is attributed to Anaximander. Although the original has been lost, conjectural reconstructions of it appear in Herodotus' putative description of its features as well as in the doxographies of Anaximander's cosmology.<sup>71</sup> The map has been hailed as the first portrayal of the known world in the tradition emblemized by Ptolemy's *Geography*. Yet we mustn't forget that this science developed according to principles and observations unavailable to Anaximander. Availing of reports from the Ionian navigators together with a three-point coordinate system based on celestial cycles and the measures of the sun dial, Anaximander is said to have depicted a mainland shaped like a column-drum and divided into roughly equal continental segments (Europe, Asia, and Libya) dotted with the names of settlements, peoples, and bodies of water.<sup>72</sup> In contrast to the Babylonian map, foreign regions of anthropic settlement are clearly featured. The size and distribution of places bear closer resemblance to the maps we know today. Mythic iconography is notably absent.

Along with the *a priori* geophysical principles presumably evidenced by its composition, these features of Anaximander's map have led commentators as early as the Roman geographer Agathemerus to classify it as a proto-Aristotelian representation of the *oikoumenē*.<sup>73</sup> Setting aside the anachronism of the clipped word (§18), there is one significant topological feature that tells against this assumption. Anaximander does not collapse earth into the natural world as

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<sup>71</sup> Hdt. 4.36 (KRS 100 trans.). Cf. Ps.-Plutarch *Strom.* 2; Arist. *Cael.* 295b10; Hippol. *Haer.* 1, 6, 3 (KRS 122-4).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Robert Hahn, *Anaximander and the Architects: The Contribution of Egyptian and Greek Architectural Technologies to the Origins of Greek Philosophy* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 2001), 204. Hahn (2001, 204).

<sup>73</sup> "Anaximander of Miletus, the pupil of Thales, was the first to draw the inhabited world [or lands, *oikoumenēn*] on a tablet" (Agath. 1.1; DK 12 A 6).

known by science, speculated by metaphysics, or inhabited by man. Instead, his world is girded by ocean, Okeanos, which extends beyond the outer limit of those achievements. It is the same primeval body of water that Homer identified as “the origin of the gods” and firstborn among the Titans in the sacred past, and Hesiod as “the river surrounding the earth, and the source of all waters” in the present.<sup>74</sup> In *The Ecumenic Age*, Eric Voegelin decouples “*oikoumene*” from its Classical sense (~~earth~~-world) and recouples it to the world inhabited by Odysseus. He reasons that *okeanos-oikoumene* originally formed an indissolubly pair, since the latter was still surrounded by the abyssal, self-concealing horizons of the former. It is a conclusion that squares with our eduction of the mythophysical earth-world in chapter 4. What is essential, says Voegelin, is “the experience of [man’s] foothold on the land that rises from the waters and of the horizon at which this habitat of the mortals borders on the mystery of the gods.” This account of the “In-Between” of *oikoumene-okeanos* signals nothing so much as the equivocal (*zweischedeutig*) sense of being-there, on the ground-between (*Zwischengrund*) world and earth, in the rift of the ecological difference (§11). As Voegelin elaborates:

In the time of the epics, the *okeanos* marks the horizon where Odysseus finds the Cimmerians and the entrance to the underworld of the dead (*Odyssey* 11); it is the border of the *oikoumene* beyond which lie the Islands of the Blessed (4.56 ff.). In the epics, thus, the *oikoumene* is not yet a territory to be conquered together with its population. The experience of the “horizon” as the boundary between the visible expanse of the *oikoumene* and the divine mystery of its being is still fully alive; and the integral symbolism of *oikoumene-okeanos* still expresses the In-Between reality of the cosmos as a Whole.<sup>75</sup>

A contrast with the later vision of the *oikoumenē* is sharply drawn in Herodotus’ *Histories*, where the term acquires the first recorded sense of ~~earth~~-world. As he declares, “I know of no river called Ocean, and I think that Homer, or one of the earlier poets, invented the name.”<sup>76</sup> Alluding to earlier maps such as Anaximander’s, Herodotus goes on to deride their irrational layout:

For my part, I cannot but laugh when I see numbers of persons drawing maps of the world without having any reason to guide them; making, as they do, the ocean-stream to run all round the earth, and the earth itself.<sup>77</sup>

Although Herodotus speaks of what lay beyond the *oikoumenē* as *apeiros*, this is not the boundless ocean that filled his forebears with wonder. Instead, it wavers for him between the speculative possibility of inhabited territory – what the Romans called *terra ignota* – or an empty

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted from Hom. *Il.* 14.201, 18.607. Cf. Hes. *Th.* 127ff., 337ff.

<sup>75</sup> Voegelin, *The Ecumenic Age*, 97 (cf. §33 above), 264.

<sup>76</sup> Hdt. 2.23, emphasis mine.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 4.36.

(*erēmos*) wasteland of no historical worth – *terra nullius*.<sup>78</sup> Like all elements and earthly manifestations, Okeanos enters the first ecumenical epoch under erasure. Either its wildness is derogated or it is assimilated into the hypostatic and anthropostatic horizons of the world, where it is divided into the seas (*thalassa, pontos*) plotted by the geometer, empirically investigated by the historian, and navigated by the imperial explorer. But on Anaximander's map, Okeanos remains an unknowable affront to reason and an inhospitable underworld beyond all territorial fronts. Boundless and indefinite, it's as though it were featured as a monument to the mystery of the vanished gods.

Unlike Homer's Okeanos and the ethereal waters over Babylon, however, Anaximander has divested Ocean of its anthropomorphic and zoomorphic shape. It neither houses nor bears the face of any dweller, mortal or divine. Rendered here in its simple, elemental nature, it reveals itself as but a trace, a hinting summons of the earth from which all things came to be. Bearing in mind the connections already forged between mythic *gē*-genesis and elemental *archai*, might this depiction be taken to suggest that Anaximander was more closely aligned with Thales than is commonly assumed? Could it be that Anaximander too accords priority in the scale of philosophical concerns to water, the clearest *phenomenal manifestation* of the all-steering, all-encompassing being of *apeiron* nature? If so, then the map would not only illustrate the ecological implications of Anaximander's doctrine. It would offer a strong corrective to the Classical restatement of Thales' cosmological thesis (§17). Aristotle's admittedly indirect acquaintance with his predecessors does not prevent him from framing their doctrines in the ecumene and filling them with his own ecological indifference to the distinction between earth and world. But we need only look to Anaximander's map to see that Thales' thesis, "*the earth rests on water*," likely began as a statement about the fundament of *the world*.<sup>79</sup> Assuming the thesis is not entirely apocryphal and that Anaximander was *mapping out* an ecological experience, the idea that *world* rests on water would not have implied a theoretical determination of relative position in space. Nor would it have been a macrocosmic generalization based on some inference from the microcosmic arrangement of logs afloat on streams. More simply, it would have spoken to how water generatively grounds the world in the order of care.

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<sup>78</sup> Hdt. 5.9.

<sup>79</sup> Arist. *Cael.* 294a28; cf. *Met.* 983b20.

Whereas Michel Serres regrettably strays from the elemental truth in smuggling anachronistic preconceptions into the doctrine of *apeiron*, the lines he draws from the map to the archeological theses of Anaximander and Thales are fastened tightly to its lived layout. Serres offers a counterpoint to the sort of view typified by James Romm, who would have us see that “the terrifying *apeiron* of primal chaos was banished to the edge of the globe, where flowed the stream of Ocean.” Instead of confining it to “outer region,” “decisively fenced off from the rest of the world by natural impediments and divine sanction,” Serres underscores how the map depicts boundless Ocean streaming into the inhabited world, apportioning great swells of its indefinite nature across the land.<sup>80</sup> He thereby lends support to the idea that Anaximander *mapped out* the experience of dwelling in his earth-world, a world engulfed by and riddled with water from outland to inland. According to Serres, “what Thales announces about genesis over time,” Anaximander “schematizes in space”:

Water dominates, even unto the outer limits. Now if from the ocean, water laps at the surrounding land, it also reigns in the middle of inhabited lands; here is the Mediterranean; the water in rivers sometimes flows from one to the other, like the Nile, whose source is fed by the aquatic ring [Okeanos] and empties into the central lake. Surrounding, at the heart and traversing the land, as in the beginning and now, is water, from which come all things, in their unity and their diversity. . . .

Now then, if our origins are in water, all things come from it and no doubt return to it, so that the entire earth, this fragile island surrounded by the ring of ocean, encompassed by it or immersed in it torrential, streaming, overflowing awaits, suspended, a destiny of shipwreck. On Anaximander’s map, the Danube and the Guadalquivir flow into this watery matrix, as do the Black Sea, the Caspian, the Sea of Azov and the Red Sea, the Tigris and the Persian Gulf. One could say that as this island earth is being born from the waters, it is simultaneously disappearing beneath the waves. Overflowing rivers, floods, cave-ins, débâcle.<sup>81</sup>

If Anaximander departed from Thales by identifying the elementary *archē* of all beings as *apeiron* rather than some definite element such as water, Serres foregrounds how both thinkers conceived water in terms of “genesis over time.” That Anaximander shared this conception is borne out by his reputed espousal of certain zoogonic and cosmogonic beliefs. Namely, the ideas that life is born of moisture and that the cosmos was created from the *primeval mist* (watery air) and fire that emerged into difference from indefinite being (*apeiron*).<sup>82</sup> Independent confirmation that “water dominates” Anaximander’s cosmology is proffered by doxographical reports that he held wind to be *fluid* air, condensed and set in motion by evaporation.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Romm, *Edges of the Earth*, 32.

<sup>81</sup> Serres, “Anaximander,” in *Presocratics After Heidegger*, 136.

<sup>82</sup> Ps.-Plut. *Strom.* 2 (KRS 121); Aëtius, 5.19, 4 (KRS 133).

<sup>83</sup> Aë. *Plac.* 3.16.

As above the land, so throughout it, where “the waters, which are our mothers . . . come to us following their own paths and distribute their milk to us.”<sup>84</sup> Meditating on Bachelard’s gloss on this Vedic creation hymn, David Macauley – whom we shall revisit below – offers these pertinent remarks: “So important is this ‘milk’ to sustaining civilization that the quest for fresh water helped to draw the map of the world and to guide human settlement”<sup>85</sup> This is writ large on Anaximander’s map of the earth-world, where settlement is shown to follow and cleave to water’s earthward passage.

The veracity of Serres’ panorama, of his attempt to fathom the elemental streams of the *phusikoi* at their confluence, inheres no less in how it transposes us into the experience of being *moved* by the waters whose course the map retraces. Extending our local sojourn in the waterscape of Miletus, this global journey conveys what must have been a pervasive exposure to the transience and fragility of dwelling everywhere on the edge of this element, milk-white at times, wine-dark at others. From an ecopolitan standpoint that envisioned the urban inlands *as well as* the agrarian outlands, the Milesian *phusikoi* recognized that the rejuvenating rains of the growing season could suddenly give way to the scarcity, famine, and fatality of drought. That cities sprouting up to flourish beside the plenteous rivers and seas might one day fall to wracking floods – in one fell swoop, or stone by stone like archaic Miletus. Just as water defines the boundaries of the known and inhabited world on Anaximander’s map, so does it demarcate the finite horizons of existence in his age. As we shall soon discover, the understanding of generation and destruction (beings), emergence and demergence (nature), natality and mortality (existence) drew fathoms from the experience of emersion from and dispersion in water. As it does today – when one in five of the world’s population have no access to potable water and a child dies of dehydration every twenty seconds – caring-for entailed a way of dwelling-with that accommodated this element by humbly deferring to its stochastic, sometimes cataclysmic self-emergence and -withdrawal.<sup>86</sup> Only by standing out from the settled landscape and stepping forth to test the abyssal depths of what decides our fate might we determine whether our dwellings do, in truth, hold water. So far from the tragic attempts “to envisage the whole earth” (Plato) and

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<sup>84</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 118.

<sup>85</sup> Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, 47.

<sup>86</sup> Statistics from "Tearfund International," [http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps\\_71-80/footsteps\\_73/sanitation\\_and\\_the\\_millennium\\_development\\_goals/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_71-80/footsteps_73/sanitation_and_the_millennium_development_goals/). See also Marq De Villiers, *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

reduce it to graphically knowable limits (Aristotle), these considerations suggest that the philosophical hydrology of Thales and cartography of Anaximander derived from an experience of our earthly finitude that washes over us yet. Each in his own way exposes us to the ecological difference between the inhabited world and uninhabitable earth.

The scholarly consensus on Anaximander's critical break from Thales appears as though inevitable under the hypostatic rubric of metaphysics and the homological rubric of science. But once we approach their wisdom ecologically, another possibility rises to the surface. In the next sections we shall entertain the idea that Anaximander's *apeiron* is not a countercurrent to but the ontological wellspring of Thales' archeology. Taken together, and only together in the care-given horizons of the dwelling place, we shall find these two philosophical currents divulge: how it is that the boundless, indefinite being of the elemental is gathered into the self-concealing presence of water; and why this element must be thought as an (a)periphenomenal archetype of earthly generation and destruction. Having recovered its sources from the past, and gained admittance to the world wherefrom it issued, we are now at last prepared to test the waters of this wisdom, which clearly seethes, where once it lay as stagnant mud, in the broken vessel of Thales' discourse. Without further ado, then, let us take that long-awaited plunge into his element.

### §35. Replenishing Thales: The Resurrection of an Elemental Thought

A river . . . is one of those few, huge, casual and aloof creatures by the mercy of whose existence our own existence was made possible; and at the very least as much as it is good to hear the whining of dynamos, the artifactual hearts of our civilization, it is well to hear, to become aware of, the operations of water among whose spider lacings by chance we live: and above all it is well to know of it nearly as possible in its own terms, wherein the crop it brings up, the destruction it is capable of, the dams and the helmeted brains of generators thrown across it and taking a half-hitch on its personal energy, are small, irrelevant, not even noticed incidents in its more serious career, which is by a continual sagging in all parts of its immense branched vine and by a searching out of weakness, the ironing flat and reduction to dead sea level of the wrinkled fabric of the earth.

—James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*<sup>87</sup>

Though it gathers us into life, we dwell at our peril in water. In measures it refreshes, remedies, restores, but in scarcity or excess it may well spell our demise.<sup>88</sup> In water we *are* only

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<sup>87</sup> Agee, *Let Us Now Praise*, 222f.

to find ourselves out of *our* element, out of *our* depth, and all at sea. This is made most transparent to us when we find ourselves adrift in open water. As much as they abound in biota of species untold and sustain all life on the planet, the high seas form a region with no safe harbor for human being. No waters, however diminished in breadth or depth, are entirely innocent of that wild super-fluity. Yet the awesome power of this element is seldom acknowledged. Here we might call once more upon Michaux, who meditates on the deceptive “submissiveness” that many are given to find in lesser bodies of it. “Ponds, lakes,” he observes, “are pleasing to them. They lose their feeling of inferiority.” Oftentimes, “these great spaces of weakness go to their head as pride and sudden triumph.” But this high and dry superbia is just as suddenly revoked when the dormant, seaborne potential of this element bursts forth into superabundance, which “boots them off that extraordinary platform where they thought they would reign forever.”<sup>89</sup> The Tōhoku tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and the dire droughts in Syria, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, and Yemen are just a handful of recent events among the countless fell testaments to that humbling conclusion. In the stormsieged dark of the deep horizons we’ve manufactured as in what we emit beyond our earthly remit, the selfsame downfall awaits us all.

In defiance of the mighty march of our technologies, water more subtly uses time to its advantage. We set great store by the solidity of stone – concrete, brick, and asphalt. It forms the bedrock of every modern civilization. Too often do we overlook its unanticipated fragility on the banks of the River Time. Like some lozenge or lump of sugar, stone is lapped, dislodged, and broken by the prying tongues of its soft and slaverous suckling, whose momentary weakness belies its unreckonable strength on the geological timescale. The dam springs the inevitable leak. Bricklaid settlements are engulfed, destroyed by floods. Hurricanes cripple entire cities, in their wake a train of death and suffering. Through the core of every hearthstone a vein of water runs.

How curious that the very thing that whelmed us as we lay encradled in the womb, that gathered our progenitors into the cradles of civilization, would also condemn us to wander like misbegotten exiles of the world. Practically, intellectually, and ontologically, human being is simultaneously sustained and challenged by this element. As much as it slakes our thirst, rushes into the senses, corrivates our thoughts, and sets the fluent standard for words and deeds alike,

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<sup>88</sup> In this respect one might say it bears the watermark of Derrida’s *pharmakon*, by turns salutary *and* deleterious. See “Plato’s Pharmacy” in Jaques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> Quoted from Michaux, “Nature, Faithful to Man” in *Darkness Moves*, 52.



water also imposes limits of its own, exposing us to a finite estate over which no world-historical destiny can possibly prevail.

For being-in-the-world, then, being in water means being-in-question. We might avail ourselves of the resources of science to gain knowledge of its objective properties, its biological, ecological, and historico-sociological impact. About why and how it supports the life of all species and how it is put to use by our own. Each of these disciplines has much to tell us *about* water. Even so, we might wonder: do they speak *with* it, allowing for it to resound through them, or is its *logos* drowned out by their own? There are other questions indeed, unfathomed questions that overwhelm these bodies of knowledge and quicken the blood of the lived. To begin with: How am I not merely *in* but *of* this water? How, in other words, is water not merely unfolded, explicated, understood within the horizons of the world in which I dwell embodied, but always already implicated, prior to those attainments? How is it that my being-in-the-world is nourished by this earthdrawn way of being that resists inhabitation, incorporation, and the presumptive supremacy of all my enstatic concerns? How comes it that this being of mine is never entirely at home in the world or in itself upon this sodden earth? The deeper these waters, the more dubious we stand within a world that would keep their wildness at bay. So are we disposed to find ourselves somehow ill at ease in our travels by river, lake, and ocean. Ever underway from shore to shore across the surface, resolutely passing over the questions beneath. Over such routes, which may span great distances indeed, true passage is debarred so long as we stand huddled, each within herself or all together, like so many stormscourged creatures within safe havens of ownness – human households shorn up by the human element. At the core of this abject hydrophobia is an aversion to our elemental finitude, to our humiliating superfluity in the indefinite *where* and the boundless *when* of earth, whose untimely questions displace us.

In the following sections, we shall explore how Thales' doctrine of water, *hudos*, is underwritten by an ecological reckoning with such questions. This generative interpretation will be based on the insights we've assembled over the course of our historical study. Once again, I should stress that the aim is not to enter the textbound squabbles of interest to no one other than the sedentary pedant or mossback philosopher. It is rather to resuscitate the wisdom of Thales by renewing its vital claims upon our own. In §17 we set the stage by deconstructing the Presocratic charnel houses erected by Aristotle from his own ideas and shored up over centuries of homological scholarship. In the last section we returned to where the bones were buried beneath

the ecumene. We now fall to raising the dead, a task that cannot be carried out but for breathing new and wild life into those questions of old. Questions domesticated and desiccated by the ecumenical tradition.

### §36. Don't Forget Homer: An Ecological Interpretation of the Archeological Thesis

In our more correct writing, we give to this generalization the name of Being, and thereby confess that we have arrived as far as we can go. Suffice it for the joy of the universe, that we have not arrived at a wall, but at interminable oceans.

–Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Experience”<sup>90</sup>

“Don't despise the opinion of Thales of Miletus in [the] future,” said he. “He proclaimed that water was the beginning of all things. And don't forget Homer either, who said that all things derive their birth from the ocean. That road you see there was born of water and will return to it. A couple of months ago boats were passing down it, but at present it carries carts.”

“Really,” said Pantagruel, “that's too sad! In our world we see five hundred such transformations and more, every year.”

–Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*<sup>91</sup>

Aristotle makes a telltale observation in the *Metaphysics*. Among the *phusikoi* he classifies as material monists, not one of them identifies earth as the most basic element or *archē*.<sup>92</sup> To him this comes as strange, not least since, as he notes, the cosmogonic primacy of earth (Gaia) had been an “old and demotic opinion.” The conjectured rationale for this development reveals, once again, more about Aristotle's own ideas than it does about the doctrines of Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Heraclitus. As he speculates, their exclusion of the earth from consideration must have followed from observing its material complexity, which would preclude it from being for all things (*phainomenai*) a basic material cause (*aition*), a prime-moving efficient cause, an immutable substance/substrate (*ousia/hupokeimenon*), or for that matter a universal principle explaining their appearance – in short, an *Aristotelian archē*.<sup>93</sup> From here he boldly proceeds to assert that the Presocratic archeologists held their doctrines to be mutually exclusive. If, say,

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<sup>90</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Annotated Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2012), 241. Emerson describes Thales's water here as an “emphatic symbol” of being.

<sup>91</sup> François Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin), 663.

<sup>92</sup> At first blush, Aristotle appears to have disregarded Xenophanes, who does speak of earth in this way, but only in its generative covalence with water. Presumably, this would exclude him from Aristotle's inventory of the material monists.

<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Aristotle will define *stoicheion* (element) as that which is both compositionally indivisible and rationally universal (*Met.* 1014a26; cf. *Cael.* 302a16-18).

water were identified as the “first principle,” then on his interpretation this would disqualify the indefinite, air, and fire from being simple in composition and first in the order of generation.<sup>94</sup>

But what if the scientific and metaphysical ideas that Aristotle poured into the taciturn mouths of these thinkers have only muddied the waters, concealing a more abyssal truth? What if his homological reduction of their wisdom to scientific knowledge and his deracination of *oikoumenē* (world) from *gē* (earth) together conspired to camouflage from reason that mode of being which moved them to question the elemental conditions of dwelling with a finite understanding in a finite world? Suppose that the doctrines of the elements were not competing answers to questions concerning empirical knowledge of the indivisibly static material constituent of all beings, much less *a priori* knowledge of the hypostatic beingness underlying their appearance to us. Before there was ever a science of being qua beingness, before philosophers defined themselves by their enstatic attunement to the power of reason, there was the philosophical care for knowing how to dwell through a hyper-ecstatic attunement to the earth’s hidden law. On this supposition, the question of *archē* would have revolved less around *what* the elements are than *how* they generatively ground the appearance of beings in the world.

If this tack sticks, it would mean that the earth, which passed unnoticed directly under Aristotle’s epistemophilic gaze, was hardly forgotten by his predecessors as it is by him and his successors. For the *phusikoi* did not dysclose it as one among many beings, substances, or principles of the ecumene. And if they never named earth “proper,” this is because earth so ruptures the enstatic sense of *oikeios* (cf. *oikoumenē* and *oikeiōsis*) that it cannot be properly named. Instead they deferentially conserved the hinting silence of its being (§22), which flashes brightest but no less apophatically in Anaximander’s word *apeiron*. And the more definite modes of earthliness singled out as water (Thales), air (Anaximenes), and fire (Heraclitus), were not mutually exclusive *archai*. Like the polytheistic architecture of the Homeric cosmos, these elements were thought to be mutually *necessary* manifestations of earth’s emergence (*phusis*) into and gatheredness (*logos*) with the world. If the being of earth is out of this world, so to speak, the elements comprise its polyarchetypal modes of intraworldly self-concealment, generative and destructive. Contra Aristotle, their manifestation is not available to intellectual disclosure. For this reason, the elements mustn’t be conflated with its correlates, be they objects, natural kinds, material causes, substances, or universal explanatory principles. Rather, they

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<sup>94</sup> This paragraph paraphrases Aristotle’s analysis from *Met.* 988b-989a and 983b.

comprise, as it were, (*a*)*periphenomenal* manners of (absent-)presencing: expositions of the hyperstasis and genostasis of indefinite being (*apeiron*, *gē*) in our experience of beings.

To see how Thales' archeological thesis figures into the greater Presocratic ecology of being, it will be helpful to resituate it in the context of our historical investigations. In chapter 4 we traced the ecological difference back to the mythophysical earth-world (*oikos*) of the Homeric Age. For Homer Earth (*Gaia*) and world are affiliated (*logos oikeios*) with one another through metabolic measures (*metra, kairoi*) of generation (*genesis*) and destruction. If these measures were set in the sacred past, they were conserved by mortals who dwelled with (*oikeioō*) others (*xenoi*) from a care for (*phileō*) their earthly difference in the dwelling place. At the beginning of this chapter, we examined how Anaximander reconceives the ecological difference as the ordered conjunction (*dikē*) of the earth-world. Here we find the "who" and "where" of Homer's earth depersonified and rethought as indefinite and boundless self-emergence (*phusin apeiron*). The dispensation (*to chreōn*) of this elemental other determined the just and final temporal measures for generative allotment (*adikia*) and its restitution (*didonai dikēn*) through caregiving (*tisis*) within the dwelling place, the rift of the earth-world. On the interpretation we are building, Anaximander and Thales shared this ecological understanding of being. But where Anaximander turns his attention to earthliness or elementality as such, Thales distills a single off-spring of its indefinite being. Once it is recognized that mentor and pupil are expounding the same ontology at different levels (element and the elemental), their putative disagreement over the nature of *archē* begins to wash away. All the elements partake in the indefinite being and generative dispensation of the earth. So that when Hippolytus writes some centuries later that "Thales . . . said that *some such thing as water* is the generative principle of the universe," this should be read as a theoretical translation of what was in fact a rejection of monism in favor of ontological pluralism.<sup>95</sup> The point is not only that being as such is rifted into the plurality of earth and world, but that 'water', 'air', 'fire', and so forth are all ways of saying how the being of the former is diversely apportioned to the latter. Hippolytus' remark indicates that Thales is not concerned with the composition of water, but with how intraworldly beings instantiate its being. For Thales, water is of the earth in a definite way. But its indefinite manifestation in the world prevents it from congealing into hypostasis. Thales' *archē* does not exhaust the being of

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<sup>95</sup> Hippol. *Haer*, 1.1, emphasis mine. Translated in *The Refutation of All Heresies*, trans. J.H. Macmahon, vol. 1 (Andesite Press, 2015).

Anaximandrian *apeiron*. Water is not earth *tout court*. It is an (a)periphenomenal precipitate of earthliness, “separated off” from the elemental and set apart from other elements, distinguished each from each – vaporizing, conflagrating, petrifying, etc. – by our boundless exposure to and (inde)finite disclosure of them.

What is water’s distinctive way of manifesting elemental hyperstasis and genostasis? Is there any reason for privileging its manifestation as Thales seemingly does? Let us address this second question first. Consider our earlier discussion of the cosmogonic and cosmological significance of this element in archaic Greece and the Near East, its amplitudes and vicissitudes in sixth-century Miletus, and the enchantments and enticements it doubtless held for the seafaring philosopher at home and abroad. Taken together, these considerations link Thales’ doctrine to a person dwelling in a particular place at a unique point in history. But to *reduce* his wisdom to personalia, local peculiarities, or historical influences would be to diminish its philosophical immensity. Still, we would do well to follow Rabelais’ advice to remember Homer, since the question at issue specifically concerns the *ecological* primacy of water.

The notion that all things derive from water was a longstanding mytheme. It finds expression in the primeval waters of Orphic and Babylonian traditions (§17).<sup>96</sup> And it persists in the myth of Okeanos, which “is of all things the kind of genesis” according to Homer, who identifies it in the *Iliad* along with Gaia and Tethys as the origin of the gods.<sup>97</sup> In Thales’ time the poet Alcman (c. 672-612 BCE) espoused a similar view concerning Tethys, which was both an element (water) and a deity responsible for generating the order of things from “confused and unformed” matter.<sup>98</sup>

Aristotle may have had such sources in mind when he appealed to Okeanos and Tethys to decipher Thales account before reconstructing it empirically (§17).<sup>99</sup> The trappings of an empirically reductivist reading are no less seductive for modern scholars. To wit, Abraham Feldman, who suggests that the archeological thesis “may be explained simply in terms of . . . the maritime *milieu* of Miletus, where water from the Meander seemingly transformed into new

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Laale, 155; KRS, 92.

<sup>97</sup> Hom. *Il.* 14.201, 206, 271, 302. Cf. Aë. *Plac.* 1.3.

<sup>98</sup> Alcman fr. 2 col. 3. Translated in David Campbell, ed. *Greek Lyric: Anacreon, Anacreontea, Choral Lyric from Olympus to Alcman*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1988). For these connections I am indebted to Laale, who reasons that a similar position could be attributed to Hesiod based on Plutarch’s claim that ‘Chaos’ in the *Theogony* is “a term for water, because it flows (*chysis*).” Laale, *Once They Were Brave*, 155.

<sup>99</sup> Arist. *Met.* 983b30.

land and vegetation” (see §34).<sup>100</sup> Against the assumption of a historically inexplicable divide between mythology and Ionian philosophy, we have proposed an ecological watershed in which *philo-sophia* derived its vocation from what was once a divine invocation in matters of caring-for-others and dwelling other-wise (§33). We also defended the view that Thales’ thinking was shaped by the places he inhabited and over which he roamed. But perennial attempts to typecast him as an ecumenical thinker ride roughshod over the ecological significance his experiences. Scholars inevitably saddle him with primitive conclusions, crude counterfeits of his own insights, vacillating between scientific discoveries and theological vagaries, totalizing truths and parochial falsehoods. To see why Thales grants ontological primacy to water among the elements, we must look to how it manifests itself archeologically within the horizons of the dwelling place. In other words, the two questions raised above are hermeneutically interdependent.

At the outset of chapter 3, we analyzed Aristotle’s interpretation of the Presocratic concept *archē*: “that from which a thing first comes-into-being [*gignetai*] and into which it is finally destroyed [*mheirō*].”<sup>101</sup> Of the three formulations he offers, we concluded that this was the least tendentious. Neither his theory of causes, his ontology of substance, nor his hylomorphism are here invoked. In their stead is the older concept of generation (*gignomai*, *genesis*). This concept harkens back to Homeric ecology, recalling us to *gē-genesis*, and in particular the *genesis* of all things by Okeanos. What encumbered the Classical thinker were the insidious theoretical prejudices that tended to obscure the ecological sense of generation. Emblematic is Aristotle’s assumption that material cause captures the sense of *archē* and that Thales establishes water as *archē* on the basis of the observed moisture of living things and seminal fluids — or, according to Simplicius, the desiccation of corpses.<sup>102</sup> It is not the relevance of such observations that is dubious, but the presumptive context in which we are given to believe they were salient for Thales. Within the clearing of noegenesis – the production of new knowledge from empirical evidence or logical reasoning – the inference from water being a necessary condition for biogenesis to its being a sufficient condition for cosmogenesis betrays itself as a false generalization, category mistake, or both. Rather than question whether something is not lost in the effort to fit Thalesian genesis into this epistemological framework, scholars traditionally

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<sup>100</sup> Abraham Feldman, "Thoughts on Thales," *The Classical Journal*, no. 45 (May 1945): 4-6.

<sup>101</sup> Arist. *Met.* 983b9f.

<sup>102</sup> Simplic., in *Phys.* 23, 21 (Diels 11 A13, KRS 91 trans.).

extrapolate a lemma from his presumed animism, hylozoism, panpsychism, or pantheism. If “all things are full of gods,” as Aristotle paraphrases Thales, and the gods can be considered living beings, then the cosmos would be coextensive with life, mind, or spirit, the genesis of one entailing the genesis of the other. Yet when these same scholars fail to deduce a reasonable justification for this suppressed premise, the argument collapses, leading us once more to the unsavory choice between pseudoscience and religious dogma. Either Thales conducted the crude experiments recounted by Aristotle and others, and erroneously induced that all things were animate (alive, ensouled) from the apparent vitality of a single kind of thing, the Magnesian (magnetic) stone, or else the belief must be chalked up to an unwarranted article of faith.<sup>103</sup> The commentary on Thales’ archeological thesis typically ends there. Concluding that it falls grossly short of the systematic measure (*ratio*) of reason and *epistēmē*, critics relegate it to an item of some historical but little philosophical interest. Has the homological hermeneutic led us astray?

I think it has. And I propose that if we are to follow the path that Thales laid, we must shift the paradigm of *genesis* from the theory of knowledge and the truth of adequation to the pre-theoretical truth of ecology: the heterological unconcealment of the earth-world (cf. §21). This path is not paved with beliefs, shorn up by rational coherence and epistemic correspondence. Nor is it cobbled with objects set under or over against subjects. It is theoretically unobstructed, branching out into unthematic traces or drifts of sense, cleared from the trackless thickets of prejective experience (§26). It is not by knowing how to know that we embark on his path, but by knowing how to respond to beings other-wise. On this approach Thalesian *genesis* designates a way in which phenomena are given in their wild, (a)periphenomenal being, prior to their domestication into full-fledged objects, concepts, and judgments. And our access to this self-concealing manifestation is contingent on a response-ability that modulates their enstatic disclosure by a hyper-ecstatic exposure to what resists and exceeds the understanding. These suggestions bring us back to the controversial claim at the end of chapter 1. That this elementary philosophical wisdom is as ancient as Thales and as modern as eco-phenomenology.

We would be remiss to discard the anachronistic picture of Thales the epistemologist only to replace it with a portrait of the modern phenomenologist in ancient garb. The comparison must be qualified. The textbook phenomenologist is someone who has equipped herself, as she must, with a sophisticated methodological arsenal that is undeniably modern. Her methods are devised

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<sup>103</sup> Arist. *De. an.*, 405a19. D.L. 1.24.

to combat the empirical phantasms of theory, the cunning of reason, and all the fallacies of misplaced concreteness sedimented into lived experience from the inception of Western science and metaphysics. But the historical stratum of the Archaic thinker lies beneath these sedimentary layers. His was a pre-scientific and largely pre-theoretical world, comparatively unknown, unmastered, unbuilt. The abyssal truth, which twentieth-century phenomenologists progressively unveiled by means of an elaborate complex of epochés, reductions, transcendental arguments, and suspicious hermeneutics, was the very atmosphere and medium into which someone like Thales was born. He had no use for methodological dynamite and theoretical excavators since *the earth was not yet buried by the world*. Yet we can assume that there was no shortage of intellectual prejudice and thoughtless routines masquerading as common sense and conventional wisdom. As they do today, these imposters of the truth were not without a cunning of their own. If a “phenomenology” can be attributed to Thales, then, it wouldn’t resemble the technical, systematic academic discipline of today. Instead, it would bear a much closer affinity to the wisdom of artisans and poets, or artisanal poets like Snyder, who “live close to the world that primitive men are in” (§22).<sup>104</sup> Those whose ability to silence the patter and dispense with props of the cut-and-dried world enables them to respond to the unbroken soil of the earth, regathering its phenomenal exposition into inceptive words and works. On our reading, Thales was perhaps the first Greek thinker to voice this wisdom philosophically. But even before his *archē* flowed into the world as a philosophical concept, before it was decanted into science and metaphysics, it was regathered from the same elementary experience of *genesis* that inspired the deferent poetry and dwelling rituals of the Homeric Age. This was no mere concept at all, but an (a)periphenomenal percept, a trace of indefinite self-emergence.

By transposing ourselves into these pre-theoretical horizons, we disentangle *genesis* from homological conceptual schemes that dissemble its ecological manifestations under a ruck of epiphenomenal semblances. In being parsed and partitioned into such regional ontologies as those staked out by the sciences of biology and cosmology, the phenomenon of *genesis* gets split into disparate, positive categories (e.g. biogenesis and cosmogenesis). If these concepts converge, it is only by means of inferential relations, judgments. All this changes when we

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<sup>104</sup> On this point, Plutarch includes Thales alongside the likes of Hesiod and Orpheus in an inventory of those who “used to publish their doctrines and discourses in the form of poems” (Plut. *De Pyth. or.* 402F. Translations of this text are from Plutarch, *Plutarch's Moralia*, in Fifteen Volumes, trans. et. al. Frank C. Babbitt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1971).



redirect our inquiry toward wisdom in general and eco-phenomenology in particular. It bears repeating that we are not simply referring to another positive science. Nor, *contra* Husserl, are we referring to a philosophical science that would set these disciplines on sounder epistemological foundations. Reoriented toward philosophy's original vocation, **eco-phenomenology** entails: (1) *an experiential response-ability to the earthly being of phenomena*; and (2) *the consummation of that elementary wisdom in knowing how to dwell in ways that conserve the fertile possibilities of the earth in the world*. Against this backdrop, where knowledge is subordinated to knowing how to dwell, and the theoretical pursuit of cosmology to the originary meaning of *kosmos* (from *komeo*, 'to care for'), no inference from kinds of generation is necessary. This is because *genesis* precedes these categorial distinctions, exceeds beingness, and belongs ontologically to what we have termed genostasis: the generative ground for the emergence of static phenomena, beings as such, thus for the correlative structures of being-in-the-world. So that if Thales drew any insight from observing the moisture of seeds and the dryness of all things gone to seed, it was not an explanation that contributes to our knowledge of life, regarded as a objective totality, causal process, or substantial composite. It was rather that the elemental *being* of water, unthematically exposed, can also deplete that which it originally replenished: our lived experience and care for of all things of the dwelling place. Were we to turn to the ecumene for lingering echoes of this thought, our search would likely come to naught. But if we look to the margins of our world and listen to the voices it has marginalized, we shall always find faint whispers of such long forgotten truths. As Thales had in the long ago, Nick Thompson attests to the gift of water in the simple present. "It's good we have that water," he tells us. "We need it to live. It's good we have that spring too. We need it to live right."<sup>105</sup>

If *archē* must be thought together with *genesis*, it also says something more. Aristotle's first, metaphysically unvarnished definition bears this out, *archē* being not only "that from which a thing first comes-into-being [*gignetai*], but also that "into which it is finally destroyed [*phtheirō*]." The first clause points to genostasis, while the second marks its limits. When generation exhausts its possibilities it passes into *phthora*, destruction. For any being, destruction closes those horizons opened and held open by generation. Its unfolding emergence in the world is revoked as it was initially given, *hyperstatically*, i.e. by that which indefinitely precedes, exceeds, and recedes from the world. This earthly reclamation cycles back into generation as the

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<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 70.

destruction of one being fertilizes the grounds from which others will emerge. Summarily stated, for Thales (as for the other *phusikoi*) *archē* consists in both: a creative, ontogenic movement, whereby beings emerge into presence; and a destructive movement, which is heterogenic and allogenic, in the sense that whatever presence it exacts from one being provides the conditions for untold others to emerge.

Having filled in the structural contours of Thales' *archē*, we are finally prepared to return to our original question as to why it is that he grants ontological primacy to water. This question sharpens the archeological determinacy of our discussion, leading us from the elemental to the elements, from the world at large to its locales, and to the understanding of dwelling in the epoch preceding the ascendance of ecumenism. In this it is of no small consequence that Thales was reputed to have been a seasoned farmer – as Greene alluded to above.<sup>106</sup> If there is some truth to the notion that the first Greek philosopher harvested crops as well as ideas, then we can reasonably assume he would have been intimately acquainted with the ways of water not only in the coastal city of Miletus, where their cultural political impact ran deep, but in the outlands as well, where they remained vitally integral to nearly every aspect of agricultural subsistence. In such places this element was as much a matter of concern as it was in Homeric *oikos* some centuries prior and is increasingly becoming in many parts of the world today. A ubiquitous phenomenon affiliated with the dwelling place through its generation and sustenance of it, water has always intimated, in the experience of its every afflux and reflux, the debt exacted of all earthborn beings in the time of the earth itself, an agnogenic font whose flow knows no dispatch. Just as it gathers beings into life, life into bodies, and bodies into the lifeways of their communities, it can just as swiftly bring about their collapse. The ecological clearing for this *hydrogenetic* progression is defined by the contention between the affordances and hindrances of this element, its sheltering allotments and its cataclysmic exactions, in short, its conjunction and disjunction of the earth-world. In this way, water opens rifts in every place we build and in-habit, exposing us acutely to the earthly finitude of dwelling in the world. More than air or fire or stone, its indispensability, lability, and hazards together alert the caretaker to the necessity of duly accommodating and cultivating the dispensation of the earth. By regathering the ecological being of water into his discourse, Thales condensed that dispensation into the lived vicissitudes of rain and flood and drought. He thereby tapped into the simple undercurrents that have shaped

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<sup>106</sup> Arist. *Pol.* 1259a9.

existence for eons, from the first inhabitants of East Africa's Rift Valley millions of years ago to those dwelling in the present-day deserts of that region. And no matter how temporally downstream or displaced we are from such primeval wellsprings, our understanding of flow and change, of emergence, demergence, and renewal is owed to the archeology of this element.

## Immersed in the River

It's like being dismembered. When you wade into this dark fluid, a kind of milk without nurture, you disappear. Disappearance. That's why suicides are attracted to it. It's also why children fear it. It's a soft entrance to simply not being here. When I imagine the river it's something I can enter, something that will surround me, take me away from here.

—Roni Horn, visual artist and author, *Saying Water*<sup>1</sup>

Thus there is indeed a belonging to the rivers, a going along with them. It is precisely that which tears onward more surely in the river's own path that tears human beings out of the habitual middle of their lives, so that they may be in a center outside themselves, that is, to be eccentric.

—Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*<sup>2</sup>

By the time I reached the foot of the mountain the ringing in my ears had tapered off into a sibilant hiss. Before long I debouched from the narrow trace and the verdant walls about me broke like a thunderclap to reveal a wide-banked river gentling along a riparian corridor of light. The Tuolumne River. At this the acrid thirst, which had been cast off somewhere amid the passage, returned with renewed and heightened urgency. The moment I seized like a thing escaped. Peeling off my sweat-logged clothes, dancing out of my boots and, with the suddenness of a bottlerocket sky on the Fourth of July, the fuse was lit and the vascular pyrotechnics began. At this my dash became a bolt, adrenaline to boil. My muscles filled with searing acid, pores with sweat and oil. Stride, stride, stride, heave, slipstream, stride. At water's edge I sprang back, took flight, and hurled myself into the river deep.

No sooner was I immersed in the welter of those glacial waters than my sensorium shifted its allegiance. Struck blind, deafened and benumbed, my eyes, my ears, my very skin withdrew. And for a spell thereafter it was as if my body were become one massive, regnant mouth and throat turned maelstrom into which all the world was funneled. From that river these organs drank long and deep.

Even as my body's organs filled, restoring to it some felt integrity, the waters continued to rush into the senses. As on the trace but more immersive yet, this element subdued my activity

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Horn, "Saying Water," in *Focus*, ed. Art Institute of Chicago (Chicago 2004).

<sup>2</sup> HHI 28/GA53 32, translation modified.

and displaced it with a movement of its own. A liquescence of objects and objectives coincided with an attentive acquiescence to being arrested and redirected by the caress of the adagio currents. Relieved of its earthbound weight and resistance on land to be moved by the water, my body became buoyant, becalmed, disburdened. And so was lifted the incorporated weight of the and fatigue of the morning's drudgery, which had been compounded by the journey ensuing and amplified inestimably by the ponderous routines of the months preceding, leaving my flesh to float adrift through an all-embracing softness and ease. Disorganized, disembodied even, but far from excarnate, the sensation was one of being opened once more, if more gently than before. I felt myself diluted, dispersed, and carried away by that greater weight rendered fluent. And return to myself though I did at intervals, as when upturning my head to regain my breath, these were but incidental eddies in the anonymous stream. An experience that neither issued from nor broke upon the leveed shores of myself complete, but breached and overwhelmed them.

If the forest passage ruptured and dismembered my body, tracing out the lithic and ligneous ingredience of its flesh, its riverine immersion made of it a place of passage, a sensuous conduit of that watercourse that remained open for as long as I allowed. Borne along by the river, it was as though my body were thrown out of its element to flow away from itself. Not only was I not able to visually or tangibly apprehend where the water began and my extremities left off. So deep was my engulfment I could no longer even say that *I* sensed, perceived, or moved, but only that there was sensing, perceiving, or moving going on, somehow born of and sustained at the outermost edge of existence.

I had long grown accustomed to my body's absence from the stage of attention. Over the course of my morning hikes from camp to the section of trail I worked, my legs and feet had so readily adapted to the terrain that I seldom needed to attend to them. Their presence had withdrawn into my mobility, maintained by the intention to get somewhere. As a matter of course, it was only once I reached my destination that I would notice the beggar's lice hitchhiking to my trouser legs, my blistered feet encased in mudcaked boots.

In the river these organs joined others in one concerted evacuation. But this was maintained precisely by the absence of any expectation, conscious or not. For as long as I abstained from striving to ascertain the relative position of its parts by deliberately moving them, a dispersed awareness prevailed. In the absence of all self-governed movement, my natant body drifted into depths in which no organ could surface as discrete from any other and all were

interfused. The body with which I inhabited the world, an armamentarium of distinct *organa* set apart from phenomena they took in, dispersed into *ab-sence*, away from itself. In its place there emerged a single, synesthetic organ, an organ guided by and very much of that body of water conducting itself to nowhere. My own body, it seemed, had been macerated, becoming a pulp of undivided flesh that was grafted to the river incarnate: moving itself, touching itself, drinking itself in. Such was the intransitivity of this sensuous passage, eroding the transitive relations of my world as it ran its course. A delinquency and deliquescence of all such vectors from active agents to passive recipients, diminishing their integrity as distinct *relata*. Inner and outer, ego and non-ego, self and other, subject and object: washed away all by the ecstasy of water in the flesh, of flesh and blood in water.

If my body had once stood poised within itself upon the shore before leaping headlong, if I had occupied that standpoint from a centralized seat of perceiving and doing, my immersion in the river occasioned a distension of that standpoint unto its eventual dissolution. De-centered and unseated, my body was felt to sluice into the very waters it had quaffed. Recalling these intervals of dispersion, I can only now surmise from its gasping reemergence the breathless persistence of an embodied self apart. But to interpolate an 'I' back into that ecstasy would be to indulge in the confabulation of an experience that quenched it. It wasn't merely that I stood out from myself into an extension of my body, like the tools I'd wielded at the worksite. It was an effluence of my *own* being into fluminous earth. An intransitive experience *of* those waters brought to a sensuous consummation in the flesh.

Allow me to dwell on the moments I surfaced to return to myself. On these occasions, I do not recall being stricken by fear or trepidation. On the contrary, I felt myself enveloped by an atmosphere of equanimity that quenched and tempered my earlier moods. At the same time, I was keenly alert to the measured flux and reflux of the blood in my veins, the air in my lungs, the intermittent spooling of my empty stomach. To my visceral sensitivity there was added a newfound expansiveness, a heightened attentiveness to the delicate compositions of the valleyed soundscape. The invisible tolling of birds, formerly unremarked, intoned an unmeted counterpoint to the purling polyphonies sent forth by blemishes on the river's smooth integument. As if to close these open wounds, this surface teemed with ruffling cicatrices, labellate and linguiform constancies, euphonically curling and sucking and lapping at stones that kissed the surface. My awareness meandered with my body, dilating from my heart to the ebb

and flow of my inner ear before floating upward through the gentle breeze that pleated the skin of the water and buffeted sequent swaths of treespun leaves. Thence to the flurring, winged bodies borne aloft by those selfsame gusts, each aflutter with a cadenced composure against which our all too human haste had not as yet prevailed.

All too hastily had I put my shoulder to the Sisyphean labors of the trail. Recall that under the routine rubric of the task, this matter mattered only to the extent that it could be squared with my concerns and put to work toward the ends they dictated. But as the elements resisted, those ends began to fray. The work, shorn of its purposive nusus, unraveled into abject labor and time into tedium endured. At this my self-assertion gave way to self-defense and this to self-effacement. Until *I* was cast aside like any other broken tool. It bears mention that ‘comportment’, from the Latin *portare* (to carry), originally meant ‘to bear’, ‘endure’, or ‘suffer’ as one does a burden. Weighed down by its self-enclosed intentionality, one might say I shouldered the burden of comportment as far as river’s edge, where it was then sloughed off with my service garb.

While drifting away from myself in the river, all became weightless. Rather than being saddled with the concerns of comportment, I found myself carried *away* from them by a kind of *disportment*. In this ludic suspension, everything came into play with an enticing superfluity that laughed in the hard-nosed face of utility, willfulness, and all the vexations of the workaday world. As it does for the unfettered child, who always already finds herself in a world at play, *disportment* emerges from an atmosphere in which everything stands like a dog eager to play. So did I gear into the superfluous as a substantive matter, a matter worthy of its own extraordinary concern. So did I momentarily rediscover the inexhaustible malleability of phenomena, the modeling clay beneath their rigid exteriors. An elemental excess that broke the steely scaffolding supporting the things of this world.

While steeped in these waters of irreverence, I was surprised to find myself untroubled by the revelation that I was really quite lost. For some time now I had been floating downstream unknowing of where I was or was going. The sinuous course of the river occluded itself ahead and behind, dislocating the wooded littoral into series of broken vistas. I knew that relocating the trace would be as simple as swimming back upriver. Yet this did little to stanch the seep of memories, which bubbled up from below to trickle through my thoughts.

Lolling round the campfire one night early that season, I had listened to the voice of a crewmate who was once an auxiliary of a wilderness rescue team. When a youth was reported lost in the Yosemite backcountry, she recounted, the team would breathe sighs of relief on learning the child was younger than seven or eight years of age. For years of experience had taught them that the prospects for survival were far bleaker among those missing children who had reached the proverbial age of reason. Come nightfall, it simply never occurred to elder waifs of wilderness to burrow down in the funk of the elements to keep their bodies warm. Having been acculturated and disciplined in the ways of the human household, their bonds to the wild earth had commenced already to atrophy. How different this was for their younger counterparts, not yet bound to the world they'd lost. Untried in the ways of the ecumene, they were far less inhibited and commensurably more resourceful. Thus did they find in these places a wildness that answered to their own, places abounding in matters that afforded the instinct to seek shelter in the stink. These children thought nothing of bedding down in earth under layers muck since they were, quite simply, *of* it. And it saw them through to daybreak. Later on, when pressed by search teams to relate how they bided their time out there for days on end, their replies were astonishingly consistent. "You wouldn't believe it," said my friend, upturning her fanlight eyes from the fire. "They just played."

This perhaps explains why children disport themselves with an intensity that most adults recapture in no place other than their dreams. Untrammelled by the self-involved preoccupations of the serious man, the successful man, the canny man of resolute action, the child plays in the strictest, unadulterated sense. Put simply, her play is innocent of any underlying seriousness that might quash it. What strikes the serious man as superfluous or even inimical to survival affords no less than life itself to the worldlost child of the earth at play, who spontaneously gleans from its outlandish excess the vital abundance that ultimately sustains us all.

I cannot say I frolicked in the river. Yet it did more subtly loosen my body from its sober moorings. Like a child gone missing, I came to disport myself toward the trials of survival in the wild. Where I might have expected to be stricken by anxiety and dread at the prospect of injury or death, there was only the allure of open possibilities flowing out beyond myself. I came to envision the decomposing drift of my corpse from bight to bay and onward yet unto the indefinite future of the open sea. I saw its terminal demersion, its dead weight softened, then reduced by benthic scavengers until its vaulting ribcage, algaed and sandworn, would come to



harbor their spawn among those of other species untold. Even before these passages were imagined, I had felt them in the downward pull and forward momentum of the water, which exceeded the powers of my body. For as long as I let that draw and suck hold sway, my movements took on a wild fluency.

So far from the choreographed routines of the synchronized swimmer, these movements had about them a certain immoderate motility, like that of a body in free fall. On reaching the point of terminal velocity, the skydiver's body is relatively unimpeded in its lateral motions, which are liable to exceed their intended amplitude. In extreme cases, such overextension may send the body into an accelerating gyration about its axis. This is colloquially known as a "death spin." As recounted by those who've lived to tell about it, summoning the memory from the very brink of unconsciousness, it's as though one becomes a gust of wind incarnate, revolving apace and twining about itself amid a slipstream of uncontrolled momentum. To be sure, the risk of death there in the river was none too eminent. Yet my movements were likewise swept up in momentum beyond my control. After Melville's Ishmael, stooped over a tub of spermaceti and absorbed in the task of its manual rendering, I felt my limbs begin to serpentine and spiralize. Like excurrent eels, they came to mimic and converge with the currents.<sup>3</sup> Except in my case these movements had about them no industry, no intention other than to move in ways most open to being moved as the river ran its course. Beyond the point of my body's finite ability to adapt to this unsettling element, a point in the future sited not so far as river's end perhaps, the preservation of that openness ran counter to that of my life. Less a free falling than a gentle flowing unto death.

However dampened, this most vital of concerns was not extinguished. If I had been drawn by the concern for survival along the arc of my own lifetime, the plenipotentiary counterpull of the current drew me out of these horizons, and further, into an elemental future irreverent to my personal passage from birth to death as to my lifelong struggle in the world. In proportion to my exposure to this unforeseeable future, these cares approached a certain limit beyond which my survival seemed superfluous. At that outer limit, the solemn solitudes of self-preservation were diverted, leaving only a concern for the preservation of play.

If my humanity compelled me to comport myself toward the felt resistance of the river by swimming against it, something else moved me to relent. Naturally, there were intervals of

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: W, W, Norton & Company, 2002), 455.

acquiescence to the importunities of life, as when I came up for breath to stave off drowning. But this comportment seemed perfunctory, even humorous. To retrofit a concept from Peruvian-American author Carlos Castaneda, these actions had about them some aspect of “controlled folly”: the enactment of concerns with a playful seriousness that recognizes their ultimate futility. The controversy surrounding Castaneda’s dubious scholarship should not blind us to the plausible allure of this profound disportment, which is not to be mistaken for apathetic resignation or nihilistic dalliance. Again, it wasn’t that my survival no longer mattered. It was rather that it figured against a wider backdrop of elemental matters that exposed the ephemerality of life as such. Within these superfluous horizons, phenomena previously given as resistant to my concern for self-preservation came now to reveal the fluency and promiscuity of my flesh amid the elements. The challenge here was not survival per se, but a reconciliation of my ability to be with a response-ability to affordances for playful seriousness, making life itself an occasion for diversion.

By way of illustration, consider the controlled folly embraced by the titular Yaqui shaman of the Don Juan legends as he comes to the aid of his moribund son Eulalio, crushed beneath a rockslide while building the Pan-American Highway. In full cognizance of the futility of the act in the eyes of the onlookers whose hands he stays, Don Juan bears witness to his beloved son’s death, not out of a father’s concern for postponing the inevitable, for salvaging his child’s last moments from oblivion, or for mourning that child’s untimely passing. Such impulses are as understandable as they are human. But Don Juan is moved to see Eulalio’s “personal life disintegrating, expanding uncontrollably beyond its limits” so that it gives onto that greater, impersonal horizon of an indefinite future under which “life and death mix and expand” one into the other.<sup>4</sup> As portrayed throughout the legends, Don Juan’s life is fraught with like misfortune and hardship. In spite of this – or perhaps because of it – he is also an intrepid antinomian, a Janusian trickster of dubious intent, and an abderian spirit whose incessant laughter knows no bounds. It is this laughter in the dark, this rictus grin of death, that

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<sup>4</sup> Carlos Castaneda, *A Separate Reality*, Further Conversations with Don Juan (New York: Washington Square Press, 1991), 90.

distinguishes profound disportment from mere diversion.<sup>5</sup> And it is precisely what buoyed my flesh in the sidesplit belly of the river.

While of the water, prone, supine, suspended, then distended indefinitely, it was as though each step of life's vexed and troubled way were suddenly beheld at a deeper fathom where they grew faint, deadened by an element whose earthly passage outstripped their strongest and most plangent echoes through the world. Earth meanwhile, formerly regarded as but the scenic backdrop for my worldly drama, took to the stage as that drama receded. In contrast to thaumaturgies of occult or metaphysical design, this new dramaturgy involved no supersensuous force – the angels of reason or the aurochs of unreason – working from behind the scenes of world history. Instead, it drew its origin from the play of the senses, always at work, always in movement, and ever underway toward elsewhere. These experiences, off-scene and obscene, expose us to the traces of an elemental past and future, which never make their entrance as full-fledged objects of intention. Thrown onto this stage, the body projects itself toward the final curtain of its world by virtue of its carnal implication in a time with neither memorial prelude nor foreseeable finale. From the source of that River Time the ecological drama unfolds into the earth-world, where the body is ruptured, its flesh released, and all things flow downstream.

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<sup>5</sup> At one point, Don Juan contrasts this “roaring” laughter, prompted by a vision of the “funny edge of the world,” with the callow affectations so often displayed by serious-minded, worldly men who “don’t laugh,” but whose “bodies jerk with the ripple of laughter” (ibid., 89). Blind to anything beyond or in excess of a world they would master, the canned laughter of such men contains an emphatic proclamation of abjection, marked as it is by our inability to come to terms with the finitude of our world, with its implication in something that exceeds it.

## History Revived.

### Eco-Phenomenology from the Depths

At this stage we have made some progress toward reconstructing a suitable vessel for Thales' archeology. In recovering its historical traces, scoured and all but obliterated by the ecumenical tradition, we have reshaped the contours of an ecological understanding from the earliest songs of the earth in Greek antiquity. It is now time to fill that vessel with the *archē* that distinguishes it from others of its vintage. By unpacking the archeological thesis in terms of earthly hyperstasis (*apeiron*) and genostasis (*genesis*), we have already presented a rough outline of the being of water within the formal structure of the ecological difference. But we have yet to educe the distinctive way this element conceals itself from yet generatively grounds the correlative structures of being-in-the-world. Much like the language of *archē*, *apeiron*, and *genesis*, the multistatic paradigm articulates the relation between earth and world – correlatively, the relation between flesh and body (see §50 below). Yet here we are asking about an *element* of earth and *its* phenomenal truth, one side of which is always received from some *place* in the world. In particular, our question concerns how water manifests itself in the dwelling place, which in-habits us as we habituate ourselves to it, shaping our perception, comportment, and understanding. By inquiring into how the hyperstasis and genostasis of water bear on our experience of place, we shall simultaneously concretize the archeological thesis and modernize it in a way that *ecologically* extends and enriches phenomenology for the twenty-first century. If we thereby move beyond what history has handed down to us from Thales, it is to rediscover and revive the spirit of his thinking in our time. It bears repeating that we are not simply referring to biological phenomena, to how the birth or survival of every organism is contingent on the presence of potable water. Thales does not distinguish biological from other kinds of generation and neither do we. The ontological question raised by the *phusikoi* and resumed by the eco-phenomenologist pertains not to the observable conditions of *life*, scientifically understood. Rather, the question concerns how the *being* of water, manifested by its distinctive, hyperstatic

and genostatic exposition, conditions the unthematic *sense* (or stable presencing) of beings within the *life-world*. An ecological approach to this Husserlian concept begins by rethinking it as earth-world, unearthing that which precedes every “world possibility” of life. In his later writings, Husserl redirects his “thoroughly intuitively disclosing method” toward reducing the transcendental conditions of sense within the preconscious (or unthematic) horizons of the practical understanding (the classical life-world). Eco-phenomenology takes up that task and enlarges it. Thus do we set out to educe the *exposive* correlations that transcend and rupture all worldly horizons, including those of place.<sup>1</sup>

### §37. Getting Back into Water

The aim of phenomenology is the investigation of life itself . . . never closed off, it is always provisional in its absolute immersion in life as such.

–Heidegger, “The Idea of Philosophy and the Problem of Worldview”<sup>2</sup>

Existing is not just being-there, in the contingency known by anxiety, finding oneself here by extending a field of objectives out there. A living being, immersed in the elements, arises in the discontinuity of a new pleasure. Immersed in the superabundant plenitude of the elements, a sensuous life is itself an excess and a superabundance.

–Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative*<sup>3</sup>

The change is so constant, so pervasive, so relentless that identity, place, scale, all measure lessen, weaken, eventually disappear.

–Roni Horn, *Saying Water*<sup>4</sup>

#### (i) *The Ecstasy of Place and the Oversea Enstasy of the Body Proper*

Perhaps no one has done as much to revolutionize Husserl’s project in recent years than has Edward Casey, to whom we owe the great resurgence of philosophical questions concerning place.<sup>5</sup> In *Getting Back Into Place*, a work we have often revisited, Casey draws from an

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<sup>1</sup> Pointing in this direction is the provision Husserl adds to this methodological designation (“thoroughly intuitively disclosing”), which he contrasts with Kant’s “regressive procedure” of “constructively inferring” the transcendental conditions of experience. As Husserl stipulates, “the concept of intuition may have to undergo a considerable expansion in comparison to the Kantian one,” perhaps even losing its “usual sense altogether through a new attitude, taking on only the general sense of original self-exhibition” Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1970), 115f.

<sup>2</sup> TDP 165/GA56-7 220.

<sup>3</sup> Alphonso Lingis, *The Imperative* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998), 18.

<sup>4</sup> From a recording of a spoken-word piece transcribed in Horn, “Saying Water.”

<sup>5</sup> Since I cannot hope in these pages to approach the nuance and sophistication of Casey’s treatment of place, I direct the reader to his voluminous work on this theme: *Getting Back into Place*, Second Edition: *Toward a Renewed*

astounding array of ancient sources and lived experiences to demonstrate that body and place, are “*congruent counterparts*” of experience, so inextricably sutured together that there *are* no bodies without places or places without bodies.<sup>6</sup> On his assessment, philosophy has traditionally disregarded these intertwining dyads for its preoccupations with mind, time, and space. Situating his analysis within the phenomenological tradition, he submits that “place is the phenomenal particularization of ‘being-in-the-world’, a phrase that in Heidegger’s hands retains a certain formality and abstractness.” According to Casey, a phenomenology more sensitive to the local, “to its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us . . . in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are *not*),” would condense that abstractness into the “concreteness of *being-in-place*, i.e. being in the *place-world* itself” (*GBP* xv). The intentional relations that set our bodies in place, that concretely configure embodied being-in, are neither paradigmatically thematic (as in (meta)physics) nor strictly operant (as in Heidegger’s everyday *Umwelt*). Rather than an object contained in the isotropic physical space of quantified extension, or an organic assemblage of equipment locked into a region of serviceable significance, the lived body is implaced by virtue of a range of more basic sensorimotor aptitudes and ecstatic intentional arcs. “By means of arc,” writes Casey, “one moves not just *from* the body *to* a place [...] but more actively *away* from the body and fully *into* a place” (110). At the level of our tacit, corporeal awareness, this complex “arc of embodiment” is said to configure the pre-positional directions and dimensions “underlying every bodily action or position, every static posture of our *corpus*, every coagulation of living experience in thought or word, sensation or memory, image or gesture” (313).<sup>7</sup> Having schematized these transcendental correlations between somatic and topological conditions for the possibility of implacement, Casey draws a bold conclusion:

Taken in its summative force, the arc of embodiment demonstrates that the true *ecstasy* of human experience may not be temporal, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger both believed it was. Nor is it spatial, as Descartes and Merleau-Ponty thought. It is *placial*, for it is in place that we are beside ourselves, literally ec-static (*GBP* 111).

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*Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009). *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1997). *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2002). *Earth-Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota Univ. Press, 2005). *The World at a Glance* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 103. All further citations of this text, abbreviated as ‘*GBP*’, are parenthetical in this section. For a review of how Casey turns the tables on the tradition according to which place is derivative of space, see part two of *Getting Back into Place*, entitled “The Body in Place,” as well as “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Amount of Time” (appended to the second edition).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 65f., 84, 347.

These lines are instructive for what they reveal about the contrast between our *hyper-ecstatic exposure* to the elements and our *ecstatic implacement*. In chapter 2 the concept of affective exposure was introduced by way of a similar contrast with Heidegger's early notion of fundamental disposition (*Grundbefindlichkeit*) (§11). Whereas *Being and Time* construes disposition and the moods that inflect it as *ecstatic* modes of world- and time-disclosure, the exposure to the earth conveys the limits of disclosure as such by confronting us with its self-concealing excess, its generative ambiguity, resistance, adversity. Now, in chapter 1 we saw how the very moods to which Heidegger attributes our fundamental linkage to the world and its history (viz. willfulness or resoluteness in the face of outlandishness) effectively sever our elementary ties to the earth (§8). In more recent chapters we explored how a slew of exposures, fostered by an elemental attunement of deference to the generative grounds of the dwelling place, have curtailed the *nisus* to disclose the earth and solicited its cultivation. The contrast between our worldly and earthly ekstases is succinctly stated. Fundamental moods allow us to stand out into the world for the sake of taking a stand in it – as my own authentic Dasein, for instance, or as a willful participant in the destiny of a world-historical people (anthropostasis). In contradistinction, elemental moods allow us to stand out *from* the world, maintain that standpoint unto the verge of utter expulsion, and continually return to it, all for the sake of caring for the earth. Can a similar set of distinctions be made between the ecstatic structures of being-in-the-*place*-world and being-of-the-earth?

Much like Heideggerian being-in-the-world, being-in-place is not the work of eye and mind alone. Unlike Heidegger, however, Casey insists that this work requires nothing short of a full-bodied understanding. If our intellectual abilities enable us to find refuge “under the protective precision of concepts,” Casey has it that “standing under the ample aegis of place” requires the correlative stability of local affordances for the body's habitual activities.<sup>8</sup> Although being-in-place is an ecstatic structure, which the body can only achieve by directing itself from the here of its “proto-place” toward the multidimensional there of its surroundings, this achievement accordingly entails a measure of stasis (cf. *GBP* 173).<sup>9</sup> Put simply, our bodies must

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<sup>8</sup> *GBP* 65-6, 84, 347.

<sup>9</sup> According to Casey, a proto-place characterizes the “here of my own body,” my *Eigenlieb* (Husserl) or *corps propre* (Merleau-Ponty), as opposed to the dimensions of the “regional here,” which exceed its present range of movement, and the “interpersonal here,” which is constituted by other bodies given to perception and sensorimotor coupling (*GBP*, 52f., 55). See in addition p. 73 for his analysis of the pre-positions that configure the ambivalent, bi-local relations between one's proto-place and its “surroundings.”

be able to *link up with* senses correlated with their abilities. Such abilities run the gamut from sophisticated skills, gestures, and expressions to more basic competencies of perception, posture, and kinesthetic movement, which together enable us to reach into the “near sphere” of our “enactable doings” and “range” toward the perceptual horizons of the “far sphere” (60f.). This is most clearly instanced by the localities of signal concern to us: places we in-habit by residing, wandering, or building.<sup>10</sup> Casey has it that the co-requisite conditions of dwelling place (“felt familiarity” and the possibility of return) could not be met were it not for some minimal degree of *stabilitas loci* (stability of place). To use his quintessential example, the local basis furnished by solid ground directly affords the ability to stand while indirectly affording the sensorimotor accomplishments that make sense of zonal and regional dimensions of place (213, cf. 173). We needn’t project our thoughts into outer space to imagine the inept dislocation of a groundless body. Casey makes the point by returning to the (a)topos from which he launches his multilocal journey – the same that impelled us toward our return to the *oikos* and to Thales’ groundwaters. Whether we consider his own chronicle of the eighteenth-century British fleet that foundered off the Scilly Islands, Odysseus’ epic sea-voyage, or Archilochus’ record of the lost Milesian galley, the open ocean has historically swept place out from underneath us. As Casey elaborates:

To be on the high sea is to be constantly exposed in the midst of something constantly changing. Enclosed only by the horizon that lures even as it obscures, we feel we could go anywhere, yet we may be nowhere in particular. Any stability we experience is precarious. Even though we know where we are in relation to other places, we lack a sure sense of where *our own place* is. What we lack, therefore, is twofold: *stabilitas loci* . . . and inhabitancy in place (GBP 109, cf. 3).

Being deprived of the stasis of place means losing one’s footing in the world, the sea-world included. In finding our stable standpoints undermined, we begin to feel almost like helpless bystanders to our own bodies, “constantly exposed” no less to *their* precarity. This local embodiment of abjection from the world (§8), attended by felt degrees of disorientation, dispossession, impermanence, and desolation, Casey terms “displacement” (34, 192-5). “Displacement,” he tells us, “derives in large measure from” a “nonrecognition” or “failure to *link up with* places” in the ways described above (xiv, emphasis mine). If an utterly placeless body is no more conceivable than a bodiless place, displaced persons abound on this earth, roaming its surface like castaways or drowning in its senseless depths (cf. 104).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. chapters 5 and 6 of *Getting Back into Place*.

<sup>11</sup> Along these lines, Casey draws attention to how the placelessness of the modern scientific worldview (“all places are essentially the same”) has spilled over into postmodernity, an “age of spatial and temporal nihilism” expressed in our nostalgic longing for homeplaces well-lost to “cultures . . . become profoundly averse to the places they inhabit,



Yet we haven't quite gone under in the situation Casey describes. Not only is our head placed securely above the water, as is indicated by the presence of a visual horizon. He seems to have provisioned us with a craft on which to stand, without which we could not be "lured" toward horizontal vanishing points across the water's surface, let alone be so unhampered in our range of movement as to "feel we could go anywhere." This subtle domestication readily allows him to rule out the possibility of our outright displacement from the high sea. And though his argument does not ultimately rest on the steady decks of sea-worthy vessels, we should remember this detail when he goes on to identify "the sea [as] a paradigm of wild place." For if its wildness is supposed to derive from its "virtual uncontrollability," "protean mutability," and "elemental fury," one might be left to wonder why he places us above and not below its surface. From that above-deck position, what would otherwise be an unendurable exposure to the trebly wild sea tapers off into the occasional vicissitudes of storms and gales (*GBP* 204).

Casey will go on to hone the concept of wild place by contrasting it with dwelling place – a distinction admitting of degrees. Wild place, he tells us, is distinguished by a comparative "recalcitrance to human shaping," a resistance to "efforts to colonize it with cultural means," and indeed, "an instructive impenetrability, a permanent impassivity, an obdurate outsidership" to culture, whose comforts it "precedes and exceeds" (*GBP* 237).<sup>12</sup> Crucially, the resistance of wild places to being entirely "culture-bound" or "enculturated" does not mean that they are "acultural" in the sense of being untouched or utterly impervious to human interference. Although its "very existence constitutes a challenge to cultural hegemony," Casey maintains that even the high sea "lends itself to expression and representation in culturally specific objects"

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feeling atopic and displaced within their own implacement" (*GBP* 34, 36-7, 104). So does today's dromocratic global marketplace increasingly promote an uprooted, professionalized body perpetually *en route* from one site to another without ever having settled down long enough to in-habit them with a sense of felt familiarity and return. According to British artist Andy Goldsworthy, artisan of place *par excellence*, "change is best experienced by staying in one place" Andy Goldsworthy, *Passage* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2004), 6. Contrariwise, traveling apace at high altitudes *over* place produces a kind of invisibility or transparency in things that empties them out and levels all change into callow, decathected differences. No longer able to unite bodies and things in intimate familiarity, places become laden with dead objects carried over and existing still among the living, like shadows chained together by the shadow of a chain. And as we grow accustomed to this depthless way of experiencing the *same* differences through the *same* impatient eyes, it often happens *we* are emptied out in turn.

<sup>12</sup> Building on his analysis of the roots of the word (see chapter 4 above), Casey defines 'culture' as follows: "To be cultural . . . is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensely to cultivate it – to be responsible for it, to respond to it, to attend to it caringly" (*GBP* 336, cf. 230). He goes on to say that being cultural admits of degrees: from "acculturation," or "the first phase . . . by which something 'natural' or 'wild' comes into the ken of human beings to be assimilated to their intentions and projects"; to "enculturation," or "the full process of assimilation of nature into culture" (*GBP* 235, fn. 20).

(*ibid.*) Simply to imagine this expanse of wilderness is to transpose our bodies, intuitively or recollectively, into some place *organized* and in-habited by them. Regardless of whether it lay outside of territorial waters, then, the sea is ineluctably “acculturated” by human beings, partly “assimilated to their intentions and projects” (*ibid.*).<sup>13</sup>

On this score, even if we were to sink that phantom vessel in the scenario above and imagine ourselves cast naked *there* into the “elemental fury” of those waters, the very presence of a *there* implies a living, bodily vehicle of the *here*, making some sense of the place wherein it swims, floats, or sinks, as the case may be. Even so, whatever the conflict between my own body and its surroundings, and however *hyperstatic* those surroundings are, Casey shares Husserl’s insistence that the dissolution of my *here* into the *there* is no more conceivable than a wholly disembodied experience from beyond the grave. As long as I live I am always already *altogether* here in my corporeal proto-place, an “absolute here . . . that cannot be diminished or compromised” (*GBP* 51). Open waters lack the cultural affordances of full-fledged dwelling places. Indeed, given their “supreme indifference to human interests and concerns,” Casey appears to situate them toward the far end of the spectrum belonging to “altogether wild places,” which are not merely indifferent but “inhospitable to human presence” (225f.). But if the “true *ecstasy* of experience . . . is placial,” it would seem to follow that the high seas are nothing if not steeped with senses that afford some minimal measure of enstasis, if only in the persisting format of a localized and localizing body.

At this point, the phenomenologist might be compelled by her “thoroughly intuitively disclosing method” to raise a question as to whether some element of the sea has not been lost in this imaginary encounter. To fill the ocean with places as Casey does is to fill it with minimal affordances for “bodily ingression and action” (*GBP* 222). And to call such places *wild* is to say that we have not built their affordances; instead “our bodies connect with [these places] by means of a pre-configuration inherent in the natural world itself” (225). Yet Casey does at least entertain the prospect of finding oneself within a desolate stretch of wilderness that “fails to offer any obvious pre-configuration of my presence or any possibility of protection” (235). The

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<sup>13</sup> On Casey’s view, cases such as these give the lie to the timeworn antinomy of culture and wild nature. Traditionally approaches to this antinomy, he explains, have either assimilated nature into culture as a “human construct” or projected onto nature some disembodied, romantic vision of “utter wilderness,” which disregards the bodily-cultural conditions that make that vision coherent in the first place (cf. *GBP* 229-236). Against these antinomical approaches, he maintains that “the natural and cultural pervade each other utterly. . . . Everything is (incipiently) cultural *in nature* and everything is (ultimately) natural *in culture*” (*GBP* 238).

likelihood of this practical linkage being disconnected increases in proportion to the wildness of our surroundings. “This is why we feel so ‘exposed’ in wilderness,” he explains, “always at risk there to some degree,” feeling “the always lurking possibility of being undone at some unpredictable moment” (224). By way of illustration he considers the risk of disorientation in the wilderness. When scaling the face of a towering cliff, the climber may find it occasionally difficult to distinguish up from down. Similarly, when wandering through the tangled understory of a densely wooded area at night, one is often unable to orient oneself by visually reckoned directions or aurally determine those of sounds (*ibid.*). Returning to the fundamental directional dyad, Casey generalizes the point: “When I am bodily engaged in the here-there dialectic of wilderness, Husserl’s notion of the “absolute here” as a “null point” of orientation is continually contested” – albeit never entirely vanquished on this account (224f.).

Now, on Casey’s view “the sea epitomizes wilderness” (*GBP* 204). So does it epitomize in our terms the *hyperstasis* of earth. To this he points when mentioning how the wildest reaches of the sea are “radically independent of human corporeal intentionality,” destabilizing it “to the point of challenging and undermining this intentionality” (224). Casey interprets this challenge as a sort of “tension” to which *my own body* is exposed, a felt tension between its hereness and the inhospitable thereness of a wild place. But where he assumes the undoing of this dialectic would surely spell one’s own undoing, we shall explore how this challenge can actually break the tension, unsuturing the body from place as such and, consequently, disowning experience from the body proper. Specifically, I shall argue that a hyper-ecstatic exposure to the wild being of water *undersea* can bring about a displacement so intense as to rupture the “absoluteness” of the here. The body’s total immersion in this superfluous atmosphere – so different from its concerned absorption in its haunts and habitats – can not only disperse all stable senses toward which we are able to actively direct ourselves. It can enervate those activities and literally disorganize the arc of embodiment. No less lived for being disowned, this atmosphere is anything but a void. On the contrary, it forms a plenum of sensation, which wrests the body out of place and out of its own, delivering us over to a truly *carnal* experience of the earth (see §50 below). To enlarge on one of Casey’s key concepts, this exposure to the “ontological wildness” of the elements is not confined to wilderness. It lies dormant in every place on land or sea, however “culturally saturated,” as the formative otherness of its being. So that if this wildness threatens to dislodge our “bodily insertion,” it can also engender and regenerate a sense of being very much

of those places, otherwise than being-*in*, through our own excorporation and othermost incarnation (337).

One way to extend Casey's analysis in this direction would be to take seriously his suggestion that wilderness comprises that side of nature which is "*not on view*" to human beings. This he contrasts with the multidimensional side we face: the landscape. Namely, "the natural world as collected in coherent clusters and placed on view." Cognate with 'shape', which bears reference to similarity of form, the suffix '-scape' implies the compositional shape of such forms, or as Casey construes it, "an amassed grouping of entities of the same type" (*GBP* 203). To best discern how the sea epitomizes wilderness, then, it would seem to follow that we must be exposed to aspects of it that are neither placed on view nor compositionally homogeneous. But notice that in Casey's scenario we are positioned above the water's surface, where it unfolds before us, within our visual horizons, as the *same* body of water. This is no imagined landscape, to be sure, but a "seascape," which he tells us "connotes the specific ways in which oceans, seas, lakes and other bodies of water come into appearance" (*ibid.*). In being placed on view for the body, the "ontological wildness" of water, "absurd, amorphous, unaccounted for," gets transfigured into a perceptual physiognomy (337). It becomes a *body* of water distinct from others such as lakes, rivers, and different spans of ocean. We might compare this with the way that the elements in a landscape are never given as such to the body, but are always already carved out by its perceptual schemata into topographical features. Stone, air, and fire, for instance, become mountains, clouds, and stars. Yet Casey will later set domestic places apart from "land and sea in their wild extensions" by the degree to which the latter lack "any such reassuring resemblances" (224). Here he is evidently alluding to his earlier remarks on the congruent proportionality of the body to dwelling places built for it. The strong "empathetic-sensory interrelations" that configure these places enable us to incorporate their architecture and furnishings as extensions of our habitual bodies (118-20, 141). But is there not a certain domestication of the elements that occurs as soon as they are arranged into perceptual wholes *for our (human) eyes*? What seems to make implacement possible in the case of the imaginary seascape is again the phantom craft. If not a full-fledged dwelling place, it is at least a built place we in-habit to some minimal degree. In supporting our own standpoint, this place affords us a stable perspective between the sea and sky. It is certainly true that, historically, nautical equipment has furnished the most common vehicle for our experience of the open ocean –

supplemented in the twentieth-century by diving and film equipment. And it would be difficult to overstate the contributions these technologies have made to our understanding of the pelagic wilderness. Be that as it may, we mustn't forget that the ingression, familiarity, and knowledge they offer can often conceal how they tacitly take us out of its element and place us into our own.

The sense of remaining high and dry at sea begins to mount as Casey shifts the focus from wilderness “not on view” to wild place, which he seemingly models on landscape. Here he enumerates several moments or “leading traits” intrinsic to the structure of wild place. The first of these consists in grounds and things. Evoking his earlier remarks on “an amassed grouping of entities of the same type” within a landscape, Casey tells us that things are “constellated in various groupings within a *wildscape*,” which “come to rest on the ground” by an “indissociable bond” of felt weight. “For the most part,” he adds, grounds and things are “held immobile within wilderness and contribute to its impassive and stationary visage” – again a physiognomy (*GBP* 204, emphasis mine). When he proceeds to designate the ground of a landscape as the land itself, we can readily see how these features are exhibited. Less self-evident is his claim that the sea itself grounds the seascape (206). For it is difficult to conceive of an immobile or stationary sea – except perhaps at high altitudes when we are no longer *on* the sea at all but rather in the air. Moreover, things typically find little rest on the sea, emerging as they do from beneath its surface, floating weightless across it, or disappearing from view as they sink. Even these basic perceptual discriminations presuppose a view from above.

But suppose that we are really castaways, errantly drifting in a lifeboat – an inflatable dinghy perhaps – that scarcely accommodates our bodies and is entirely at the mercy of the ocean currents. In this case we would still be placed above the brawling waters. And despite our lack of *stabilitas loci*, we would remain in a locus that sporadically gives onto wider vistas. Yet our closer proximity to the water's surface would expose the already unstable grounds we had regarded on deck to be more atmosphere than substratum. An atmosphere not only adverse to the body's practical outreach and unfit for inhabitation but also *perceptually* inhibitive. Were these high seas afreight with flotsam and jetsam, as might be encountered after just having abandoned ship, we might find it difficult to track the static presence of anything in particular. In the words of artist Roni Horn, there is only “tumult everywhere endlessly, tumult modulating into another tumult all over and without end.”<sup>14</sup> As our visual horizons contract in the slatches between

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<sup>14</sup> Roni Horn, *Saying Water*.

waves, so does the seascape. Things might appear directly above our heads, then swiftly evanesce, only to reappear moments later below us at some unguessed distance. But all this merely skims the surface of water's true atmosphere, which vision scarcely penetrates.

(ii) *Displacement, Disorganization, and Simply Not Being-Here: The Atmospheric Ecstasy of Immersion and the Consolations of Desolation*

In Casey's schema, atmosphere figures along with arc as the second moment of wild place. Situated on the opposite end of the spectrum from the heavy solidity of grounds and things, he tells us, atmosphere imbues such places with aspects that are "transitory" and "ethereal" and "light" – "at once weightless (or seemingly so in our perception) and luminous (whether by natural luminescence or by contrived illumination)" (*GBP* 205). Provided our bodies are locally supported by the earth – regarded here as a ground-thing like topsoil or granite – atmosphere is said to "pertain to the overarching region of the *sky*" (206, cf. 204). Yet Casey also draws attention to how it "*permeates everything*," being a "more thoroughly pervasive feature of wilderness than any other factor [or leading trait]" (219). On the high sea, where we are deprived of ground support, this feature becomes acutely prominent, suffusing and diffusing the moments of wild place across a waterborne atmosphere that deranges their distinctness. Along these lines, Casey describes how an altogether unaccommodating "abyss of wilderness" gives rise to the "disequilibrium of a disrupted experience in which ground and things are lacking." There we are said to come up against a "structural displacement" that profoundly "disturbs bodily existence." When this happens, the "equipoise," "solace and serenity" of the wild landscape gives way to an all-pervasive atmosphere of "desolation," our bodily "ingression and action" in the wilderness to the utmost passivity of "immersion in its midst" (207, 238). In desolation, equated here with the "ultimate displacement," I wish to suggest we experience an ecstasy *beyond* the placial, an exposure that may even prompt our own atmospheric dissolution. To see how this could be possible, we must leap into the abyss, on whose surface we've been floating. We must become *immersed* in the unseen waters *below the seascape*.

Before taking that plunge, it will be worthwhile to bring into sharper relief the relationship between atmosphere, immersion, and desolation. Let us see how Casey delineates this triad. With regard to the first two concepts, we are told that atmosphere is fundamentally linked with the "predominant mood" of a wild place, "in which we find ourselves immersed from

the very start.” (We shall deepen this notion of immersion in a moment.) Now, this sense of always already finding oneself (*sich befinden*) there, *situated in a place*, leads Casey to characterize atmosphere as a “wildwise equivalent” of Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit* (GBP 219f.). But since Heidegger scales this notion to the world as a whole, conceiving it as an ability to disclose *that* it matters at all rather than *what* does or *how* it does in terms of our concerns and projects, perhaps the determinate mode of disposition he terms *Stimmung* better captures the “predominant mood” in question. Indeed, just as Heidegger stipulates that “moods are not placed in the subject or in objects” but that we are rather ecstatically “transposed” into their “all-enveloping force” together with beings (cf. §6), so does Casey construe “atmospheric envelopment” as a “felt presence” that encompasses and penetrates every moment of a wild place, including the body that in-habits it. Moreover, just as moods are said to constitute the fundamental disclosure of phenomena, prior to our practical explication and intellectual interpretation of them, Casey gives us to understand that atmosphere is the “first in the order of experiencing” and “in certain ways most formative of wilderness features (219).” This generative provision will become pertinent below when we turn to his discussion of the elements.

As for the third concept of the triad, desolation figures into Casey’s analysis as the overriding mood of displacement. Taken together, as he puts it, desolation and displacement are “primarily, if not exclusively phenomena of wilderness” (GBP 261). The connections just forged between atmosphere and mood are made apparent when we read that “the word *desolation* signifies an intensified solitariness,” hopelessness, abandonment, or forlornness, a “special form of despair” that envelops us together with wilderness – an intertwining of the psychic and spatial connotations of the word (192).<sup>15</sup> As Casey observes, each of these affective valences “has everything to do with displacement from one’s habitual habitat” (192f.). Here one cannot help but notice some rather close parallels between desolation, thus construed, and the Heideggerian “outlandish” (*Das Unheimlich*), “the existential ‘mode’ of the ‘not-at-home’” revealed through the fundamental mood of *Angst* in *Being and Time*. You will recall from our previous discussion that this outlandish inflection of *Angst* was featured there as “the most elemental way in which thrown Dasein is disclosed,” effecting a wholesale disruption of concern and involvement. When reinflected through resoluteness, *Angst* was said to “bring us face to face with our individualized

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<sup>15</sup> Casey informs us here that “the Latin root, *desolare*, means to abandon.” Meanwhile, ‘forlorn’ is cognate with the German *verloren*, ‘lost’.

potentiality-for-Being,” viz. *Selbstsein* (SZ 189, 276, 310).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, where other things and persons typically lend support to our concerns in the everyday dwelling places of manufactured landscapes, Casey tells us that being desolate means being “thrown back onto” or “abandoned *to myself*,” a solitary and ill-adapted self confronting a wildscape that “discourages settling or even sojourning in it” (*GBP* 192f.). Adhering to the abovesaid convention, he distinguishes such wildscapes by “*the look of the land (or sea) itself*.” The visible traits of “barrenness,” “vastness,” “impenetrability” and “isolation” co-operate and “actively contribute to the experience of desolation.” We read that these visibilia are intensified by affective co-valences not “elicited or encountered by our own actions and motions,” as when we feel them to be “forbidding,” emotionally vacant, or lacking in “human consolation.” But Casey’s propensity to generalize the “basic structures inherent in the environing wild world” from our experiences of *landscape*, our encounter with earth from the encountered countryside, shows through in his mundivagant, albeit conspicuously arid focus on the barrens and mountain ranges of Canada and Tibet (185, 187, 195f). Pertinent for our purposes is the “*loss of an accustomed center*” and concomitant disorientation he takes to mark such desolate stretches of wilderness as “dis-places”: unfamiliar locales which *unremittingly* forbid or be-wilder one’s habitual “bodily movement, visual perception, or active imagination” (195-7). In the following lines, which evoke his remarks on the high sea, Casey goes on to attribute such displacement to the body’s loss of stable grounds:

The stable ground of one’s primary place of inhabitation gives way [in desolate dis-places] to the uncertain soil of an unknown region, ec-centric in relation to the center of one’s habitual experience. To remove oneself from the proto-place of such a center . . . is to move into a region of counter-places likely to feel forlorn at first (195).

Earlier Casey had distinguished counter-places as those “that exists by opposing us” (55f.). Again, this opposition takes place as a felt tension between the proto-placial *here* of my own lived body – schematically extended into habiliments and instruments, expressive or utile, which afford its habitual competencies and expertise – and a zonal *there* that persistently resists and inhibits those abilities. Casey cites the “abyss” (Husserl) or “infinity” (Levinas) between myself and the other as a case in which “the here and the there are in such tension that they seem to break apart, even to repel each other” (55). Could we imagine being thrown into an abyssal

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<sup>16</sup> If there is a fundamental disagreement between Casey’s and Heidegger’s treatment of these themes, it is to be found in the latter’s endorsement of this resolute reinflection of *Angst*. To recite a line examined in chapter 1, Heidegger insists that “*Angst* can mount authentically only in a Dasein which is resolute,” for resoluteness converts it into a “mood which neither inhibits nor bewilders him” (SZ 344). Contrariwise, on Casey’s view (to be elaborated below), it is precisely by nourishing that be-wilderment that desolation can engender a “sympathetic reconnection” to wild place. On these grounds, there is good reason to think that Casey would consider Heideggerian resoluteness as itself a kind of flight, less from authentic selfhood than from what he refers to as “abyssal wildness” (*GBP* 238).



atmosphere of wildness so decentering and disorienting and alienating as to effect more than a *seeming* break but a full-blown expropriation of the bodily proto-place? Evidently not on Casey's view, for he appears to rule out this possibility of outright displacement on the basis of: the putative "absoluteness" of my own here in experiences, perceived *and* imagined; and the absolute integrity of the here-there dyad, a "definitive" either/or structure he takes to be "coextensive with the experiential field as a whole, leaving no remainder" (ibid.). As someone who lived the contingency of these *seeming* absolutes through the immersive experience of water – and lived to tell about it (see previous Waypost) – allow me to cast a few life-preservers to buoy that elemental ecstasy as a genuine philosophical possibility.

Casey takes a hesitant step in this direction early on when acknowledging certain "circumstances in which the here is apparently absent" (*GBP* 151). If this absence is merely apparent on his appraisal, the point is that this very qualification cannot be made by those involved. And although he largely relegates such episodes to momentary derangements or congenital abnormalities of the psyche, the fluent metaphors he summons to describe them are strikingly evocative of immersion in wild waters – not unlike the rivers of the Yosemite backcountry. Setting aside the speculative varieties of metaphysical and mystical ecstasy, Casey draws attention to experiences "such as euphoria, fugue states, and," most notably, "'charged' situations into which we are precipitated without having gained any secure sense of our own bodily hereness." In such states, he suggestively adds that "we find ourselves *floating* in an atmosphere *not anchored*, much less centered, in our own body [*emphasis mine*]." To clarify this idea, Casey culls a concept from the work of Elizabeth Ströker: each of these "instances of acute disorientation," he offers, is "occasioned by *immersion* in attuned space" (ibid.).

As Ströker defines it, "attuned space" designates a space where the lived body has "no center of reference from which it would be possible to order and separate the experienced things and determine them as there in relation to a fixed here" (*GBP* 51).<sup>17</sup> By her lights, all the correlations between my own body and place (as developed by Casey) would conceivably belong to the "space of intuition" and "space of action," in which the here-there dyad is first articulated by means of active, outbound intentions and projects. These modes of the understanding are ultimately derivative of what she describes as "the primordial and intransgressible bond"

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Ströker, *Investigations in Philosophy of Space*, trans. Algis Mickunas (Athens, OH: Ohio Univ. Press, 1987), 27.

between a passive and impersonal yet receptively open body and this “atmospheric dimension” of “expressively animated space.”<sup>18</sup> Ströker maintains that attuned space, so conceived, ubiquitously undergirds the intuitive and practical spheres, providing something of a generative ground for the lived body’s achievement of ownness. In this she admits that the experience of utter – and utterly anonymous – immersion in attuned space is exceptional indeed. Yet Casey’s assertion that such an extraordinary space cannot be taken as paradigmatic hedges the issue of whether these lived insights – uncommon, outlandish, but perhaps educed by a *thoroughly affectively exposing method* – might tell against the *a priori* definitiveness and comprehensiveness of the here-there dyad even as they account for its *genesis* (333, fn. 27).

These angles can be sharpened into two acute points. First, to see how immersion could disperse “my own bodily here-ness,” we needn’t preoccupy ourselves with endogenous physiological and psychological pathologies – Casey invokes “Korsakoff’s syndrome, temporal lobe epilepsy, Parkinson’s disease” and “severe emotional distress.” For this we need only give full measure to the *exogenous* “charge” of those precipitant situations he alludes to. Here it is important to bear in mind that this admits of degrees of exposive intensity and outlandishness ranging from: Heidegger’s equipmental breakdowns in the everyday work-world; to Casey’s own examples of disoriented climbers and noctivagations in the wilderness; and still more acutely, to overwhelming currents of plenary sensation that seamlessly join with those of the sea in being precipitated into its “uncontrollability,” “protean mutability,” and “elemental fury.” The greater our immersion in the affective atmosphere of the elements, the greater our ab-jection from place *as from the body proper*, each ceding place to the abyss of ontological wildness.

This brings us to the second point previewed above. Before schematizing the moments of wild place, Casey assures us that he will “attempt wherever possible to respect the elemental origin of *landscape*” (*GBP* 203). That assurance presumably extends to wildscape, whether inland or oversea. In his preliminary analysis of body-place dimensionality in Part II of *Getting Back into Place*, Casey had stipulated: “If the body is an origin, it is one split against itself and seeking its own foundations elsewhere.” Yet the only elsewhere that bears mention at this early stage as a “source of [intentional] structures and values” is the “world outside” – i.e. “the place-world itself” (81, xv). But when he expresses his commitment to elemental origins in the “Wild Places” of Part IV, these joins forces with the arc of desolation to “point elsewhere than human

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<sup>18</sup> Ströker, *Philosophy of Space*, 19f.

subjectivity,” an elsewhere at once “*around* us” “*in* us” and “*under* us” as we stand in the place-world. In Casey’s words, capitalized to mark its “sovereign stature as an unassimilable Other,” the arc “points to a *Nature* that *resists* appropriation by human interests and concerns [*emphasis mine*]” (186, 199). In *this* nature, which he explicitly equates with “earth” and the “abyss of wilderness,” we encounter the (re)generative source – hence *archē* or *genostasis* – of the entire structure of body-place relations. It constitutes, as he puts it, “that which was there first, from which we come, [and] that which sustains us even as we cultivate and construct” (186, 238). The respect for our elemental origins now forms part of a general injunction to “respect Nature on its own terms, to take our lead from *it* rather than from our own inwrought personal selves and ingrown social structures” (187). Casey characterizes this deferent commitment as an “outright geocentrism or perhaps better an engaged ecocentrism,” which he says is a matter of “*letting* the earth be the guiding force, the first voice, the primary presence” (187, 260, *emphasis mine*). He goes on to claim that this deferral offers the most effective precaution against what we have been calling the ecological tragedy. Where we inculcated the anthropostatic dysclosure of ecumenism in the challenging-forth and devastation of the earth, Casey contests the “subjectivist” and “anthropocentric” closure of “humanocentricism”: the continual subjection of “Nature and wilderness . . . to the threat of reappropriation for human purposes” (199, *cf.* 186f.).

It is here, in the question over centric or eccentric orientations, that our second point becomes acute. Namely, we might ask if Casey would exempt his own analysis of the “acute disorientation” of attuned space when describing how “this threat [of humanocentric reappropriation] arises . . . when the arc of desolation . . . is interpreted as a merely psychological matter, as something we human beings *suffer* that has nothing to do with the natural world itself” (*GBP* 199). On the one hand, his call for an ecocentric reorientation leads him to suggest that it is precisely by nourishing the disorientation and bewilderment of desolation that we forge a “sympathetic reconnection” to wild place. That reconnection would obtain to the extent that I defer to wildness – within and without – as the source and measure of my own concerns and abilities. This deferent overture, which requires an attunement that invites and reprises the body’s most vulnerable exposure to desolation, would then give way to an ecocentric engagement whereby “the strangeness of a wild place disappears not just because I have become familiar with it but because I realize that I am bonded to it – and it to me – at the most primordial level” (246). On the other hand, Casey’s competing commitment to the absoluteness of my *own*

lived body seems by turns to preclude and pathologize a hyper-ecstatic exposure to this “most primordial level.”

By my lights, the generative grounds for the consolations of desolate wilderness, and what’s more, for a re-engagement with place that truly respects the sovereign stature of the elemental Other (its hyperstatic self-concealment), can only be attained on the basis of this hyper-ecstatic bond. Only by means of it are we awakened to how earth, or the wild abyss of otherness, is not merely unassimilable to enstatic closure into my own here but potentially assimilative of it. In a world where the denudation of wilderness and the devastation of earth have been normalized; where the body’s hardwon adaptations to the world so often come at the cost of ecological abjection; these very adaptations may betray themselves as complaisant to, if not complicit in that tragedy. In the ~~earth~~-world of the anthropocene, what falls under the banner of the “pathological” for its outlandishness, insecurity, and *placial* abjection could reveal itself, just before the closing of the curtain, as *ecological* mithridates.

In setting a course over the arc of desolation toward the othermost elsewhere, Casey supplies us with precious resources for recovering that remedy which would reconnect us with the elemental origins of bodily being-in-place. But here one should be wary of thinking that generative elsewhere, principally or paradigmatically, as “the macrolocus of the earth” (as he does on occasion) or a landscape (as he generally does). All this comes rather close to Heidegger’s ecumenical relapse into thinking earth as “inhabited landscape or territory,” a propinquity Casey would surely wish to dispel (cf. §12). To adopt an ecocentric approach, we must take seriously Casey’s insistence, against *this* Heidegger, that “the earth’s destiny is not to be the site for human habitation alone,” i.e. “the house *where mortals dwell*” (GBP 56, 266). Casey avers to the contrary: “Only if earth – the wild earth that includes uncultivated land *as well as unregerate sea* – is put first will the human and the natural conjoin in a common world” (187, emphasis mine). If we follow his suggestion to include in that conjunction the otherwise than human dweller, and read the “natural” as Nature (earth, the ontologically wild Other), then we arrive at a local concretion of the *earth-world*.

To my mind, Casey’s vision for according pride of place to the wild side of the ecological difference is, paradoxically, keenest when directed toward “what has every chance of being lost sight of” in place, on *terra firma*, and by virtue of sight itself. The periphenomenal atmosphere of the elements is impenetrable to directed vision and intractable to mundane claims to visual

primacy (384).<sup>19</sup> To gain this earthward insight we must learn to see without our eyes, discarding them for the ears, the skin, the belly, and all the dis-organized conduits through which this atmosphere most intensely enters us, absorbs us, displaces and dis-owns us. At the same time, we must venture into the archetypal arena of this exposure, hurling ourselves at last into the high sea whose surface Casey only glances. More so than wandering the desert landscape, sailing the seascape, or floating adrift, more so than being in any wild *place*, our total immersion in water exposes us to that “guiding force,” that “first voice,” that “primary presence,” which are *not* placed on view or solid ground for us. “In sharing the same atmosphere,” writes Casey, “body and place realize a common essence as well as their own most intimate unity” (219). I would like to suggest that this “common essence” is neither corporeal nor local at bottom, but elemental and abyssal. Sharing an atmosphere where “everything flows,” as Heraclitus first expressed it, the “congruent counterparts” of body and place, which are fundamental to the lived world, owe their congruency, as they do their mutual integrity and difference, to their elementary confluence in the being of the earth. Granted, the true profundity of this confluence is something that most have seldom experienced. But anyone who has ever lost her local moorings to find herself in the deeper desolations of water can attest to its veracity. In the experience of floating unanchored or sinking unbuoyed in water, its delocalized atmosphere not only decenters and dislocates the lived body but excorporates the body proper.

I have already sounded some of these depths in chronicling my immersion in the Tuolumne River of Yosemite. In the next section we shall resound them philosophically to better fathom their (re)generative possibilities. Here let us simply focus on how this experience could be brought to bear on Casey’s account of place, the earth, and the elements. And let us begin by considering an important development he appends to his analysis of wild place. Having expounded its six intrinsic moments, Casey goes on to say that all of the “leading traits under description here coalesce around the earth-sky axis” (*GBP* 206). Underscoring its phenomenological importance as well as its longstanding cosmological significance across cultures, he decomposes this axis into regional dimensions corresponding to the moments of wild place. The earth is divided into *ground and sensuous surface*, which he associates with “land and landscape, sea and seascape.” Meanwhile, as mentioned above, atmosphere is said to correspond

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<sup>19</sup> Apposite are Casey’s more recent remarks in *The World on Edge* (forthcoming): “In peri-phenomenological investigations, one finds directions out by indirection. By seeking the peripheries of things . . . one goes willingly into the margins of these things: one follows them out, out of themselves.”

(together with arc) “to the overarching region of the sky.” To this he adds “material things,” which are “found in between . . . regions of earth and sky” (206). In *Representing Place*, Casey intriguingly amplifies these ideas in his description of how “elements tie together landscape.”<sup>20</sup> He now asserts that “*water* is the in-between of the elements of landscape”:

Water is, after all, the go-between of earth and sky, their middle term. . . . Where air and light permeate the other elements, water exists in their midst. It is the ultimate elemental mediatrix.<sup>21</sup>

Suppose now that we were suddenly cast into this mediatrix to find ourselves in over our heads, our bodies entirely immersed in the sea. How would this bear on the structural correlation between the moments of wild place and the earth-sky axis?

First, the atmosphere of the overarching skyscape, with its visually and kinesthetically alluring horizons, would disappear into an atmosphere that is non-horizonal in both respects. Blurring if not blinding our eyes, the dark brine would disperse perceptual discreteness. Meanwhile, the inertia of our fall would initially disable us kinesthetically. Thereafter, the currents would continue to impair the body swept up in the undertow and drifting weightless, groundless, at their wild whims. Like Odysseus, cast into the waters off the coast of Phaeacia, where he would later be greeted by Nausicaa and her servants (§32), we are delivered over to an elemental fury no less furious than Poseidon, a stochastic *force majeure* that leaves even heroes “breathless and speechless,” their “flesh swollen” by the sea, which “oozed up through [the hero’s] nose and mouth.”<sup>22</sup> In effect, the seascape and landscape would be absorbed into the enveloping sensuous surface of the unseen, and that surface into the atmospheric depth of attuned space in which the arc of desolation is precisely not the arc of embodiment. To become desolate in this way is not to be abandoned to the void, but to a plenum of sensation that fails to resolve itself into perceptual parts and wholes, surface and depth, figure and ground. As Casey speculates, “without such a commonly contiguous surface, wild places might fall into *dispersion*” (*GBP* 205, emphasis mine). Quite so. But where it may be necessary to appeal as he does to “hallucinatory modes” of perception or to the extraordinary paintings of Soutine or De Kooning in order to envision such dispersion on land, that recourse is unnecessary if only we break the surface of that element which breaks upon its shores and on occasion overwhelms us.

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<sup>20</sup> Casey, *Representing Place*, 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 35, emphasis mine.

<sup>22</sup> Hom. *Od.* 5.400-457.

Second, we *know* that every sea, however deep, has a seafloor, is supported by earthen grounds. Yet in the midst of our pelagic immersion, these would not be our grounds, would not support our bodies as do grounds *on* land or *over*sea. And no amount of knowledge could restore them to us. From the groundless perspective of lived experience, the sea has become for us an abyss. The deeper we sink, the more our bodies' habitual abilities and sensorimotor competencies are literally *disorganized* and eventually expunged. A passage into the silent dark of grave and numbing depths. In immersion, the separate modalities of perception (visual, auditory, etc.) are funneled into the haptic. And as the water without commences to chill the blood within, synesthesia inevitably turns to anesthesia, kinesthesia to prosthesis and paralysis. Correlative to that corporeal disorganization is the structural dislocation of place itself. So that if the "elements tie together landscape" in our everyday experience, our immersive displacement in *this* element coincides with the absorption of all the other moments of wild place into a hyperstatically non-local atmosphere. Such is water's archeological destruction of place as such. Horn likens our immersion in it to a "soft entrance to simply not being-here," into "something that will take me away from here."<sup>23</sup> So does it dissolve the absoluteness of the *here* into the *there*, and *thereness* into *nowhere*. Crucially, to reframe an earlier remark, we mustn't forget that *every* stretch of water – every lake and pond and stream – contains some quotient of this seaborne potential, some residue of that ultimate desolation. And it is only by nourishing exposures to the desolate elements of place that we can possibly counteract its disclosure into the immanence of our own bodies and their habitual habitats, reopening place and strengthening its *generative* bond (the other dimension of *archē*) to the earth that transcends us.

Let us bring these ruminations on Casey's phenomenology to a close by drawing a series of ecological conclusions. To say that the true ecstasy of experience is placial is to capture one side of the heterological layout of unconcealment, where truth is revealed by (corporeal) disclosure (cf. §21). But insofar as we also stand out from place to the self-concealing side of truth, the ecstasy of experience is *elemental* as well. To the extent that I am truly exposed to the elements, I experience a displacement of my own lived body, a disorganization of its perceptual and practical abilities to localize itself. Against the assumption of the primacy of my own perception and the experiential vacancy of utter displacement in the most extreme of these encounters, we have explored how experiences of elemental immersion can reopen us, through

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<sup>23</sup> Horn, *Saying Water*.

the wild intensity of our utmost passivity, in the atmosphere of moods and plenary sensation (cf. §48 and §50 ahead), to the generative grounds of being-in-place. Invoking the axiom handed down from Archytus of Tarentum (428-347 BCE) who tells us that “place is first of all things,” Casey defends its ontological primacy: “to be is to be in place” (*GBP* 14).<sup>24</sup> But if we are to steer clear of the ecumenical disclosure of being into the place-world, this claim must be qualified by the ecological difference. Contra Heidegger, Casey emphasizes “the role of the human body in making the conflict between earth and world possible in the first place,” arguing that “the lived body is the concrete medium of this conflict, which is fought on *its* terms” (131).<sup>25</sup> Thus does he mitigate the abstraction of the strife played out in the rift of world and earth, rethinking it as the contention between the “proto-placement of the body” and the “counter-places” it comes up against “at every moment” (131). Contrariwise, in our ecological architecture, the earth itself is not a place – neither wild place nor counter-place nor dis-place. And if it manifests itself *as itself* in the place-world, it only does so through an elemental displacement of our bodies from their habitual habitats and landscapes. By degrees ranging from disoriented wandering to total immersion, the earth dislocates our bodies and disperses experience into an atmosphere of “simply not being-here.” Therefore, if Casey’s project is to lead us into the genuinely “ecocentric direction” he promotes, the conflict between worldly implacement and earthly displacement mustn’t take its sole measure from the body, mustn’t be “fought on *its* terms” (260). If we are to “let the earth be the guiding force, the first voice, the primary presence,” then we must allow for its forceful disorientation of, its silence to, and its primary absence from the body. That attitude of allowance is gained through elemental attunement, epitomized on our interpretation by *deference to the desolate*, which is at once an allowance for sensuous exposures to our elemental origins. Through this deferral to the generative grounds of the places we enter, build, and cultivate, they obtain their measure from the earth and we from it our consolation.

In this dark light, to exist is to in-corporate the place-world while being excorporated by the placeless, worldless earth. Though we can only offer a preview here, the chapters ahead will begin to educe this latter possibility from the contact of the flesh. In them we shall develop the notion of exposure as a carnal experience through which the body is *disorganized* by the sheer

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. *GBP* 313, 319.

<sup>25</sup> Namely, “were it not for the body as proto-place, existing in opposition to counter-places, the earth/world confrontation itself could not occur; there would be no “common ground” for this confrontation and no basis for the mediation effected by the work of art” (*GBP* 131).



otherness of the elemental. In proportion to the atmospheric dissolution of bodily hereness and our releasement from its enstatically retrojected horizons of thereness, the implications of the earth irrupt into awareness delocalized. In other words, this bodily being-in-the-world of ours is inextricably enfolded, involved, *im-plicated* in the earth. We are being-of-the-earth. But our response-ability to this implication, our ability to unfold or *ex-plicate* its significance in places of the world while conserving its sheltering hold, requires a way of comporting ourselves from our earthly finitude. For this we must allow ourselves to be fleshed out in ways responsive to how we were in-habited by the earth before we ever stood erect, over against it within our own bodies, our own places, a world of our own. Being a caretaker of place – be it a desolate span of desert, a crowded urban plaza, or the very body that brings us to these and all the places between – entails more than the cultivation of world-corporeal significance. It entails a care for ontological wildness, earthliness, wherever the sensible elements fold over into sentience.

(iii) *Saying Water: A Hydraulic Ecology of Place*

Posing Thales' question anew: how does water generatively ground the dwelling place and how is the ecological difference manifested, experienced, in their relation? We might begin to reconstruct the archeological thesis phenomenologically by recasting that manifestation in a hydropoetic idiom. As *archē*, water would say wellspring, fount, and *Ursprung*. More precisely, it would name the *fons et origo* for the emergence of beings in the dwelling place: both an ontological *origin* of their manifestation (their originary affiliation with the caretaker) and an ongoing yet limiting *source* of it (their cultivatable possibilities). When beings exceed these limits, they are displaced. Namely, they afford nothing to the concerns, abilities, and competencies of our own bodily in-habitation. But how is the experience of this *fons et origo* to be described? To properly answer this question, the broader multistatic criteria of the ecological difference must be amended to convey with minimal theoretical distortion how the lived truth of this element is disclosed in place and exposed in our displacement. This calls for a performative poetics, one that doesn't merely describe our commerce with springs, rivers, and tides, but *demonstrates* the ways of water through its discursive fluency. With this in mind, let us redescribe the conclusions we have drawn from our voyage through Casey's phenomenology of place, doing so in terms more fluent and demonstrative of our intimate contact with water.

Perhaps nothing compresses the *hyperstasis* of the earth so intensely as the *ecstatic* (dis)rupture of the earthquake, which shakes us out of the world and cracks the fragile crust of

immanence. As Merleau-Ponty observes, “one earthquake does more to demonstrate our vulnerability and mortality than the whole history of philosophy.” Just as the earth quakes the world it grounds, fracturing great edifices of significance, so can water engulf or blight those places it once made habitable. In each case it is destruction that acutely exposes us to finite limits of dwelling, global or local. New worlds begin at the earthly edges of the old, new places at the brink of displacement. For their limits teem with outlandish traces of being elsewhere and dwelling other-wise. Such is the metabolically (re)generative essence of destruction that was integral to Aristotle’s simplest statement of the archeological thesis (§36). Similarly, the true flow of water is most tangible to us in the ecstasy of **immersion**, a displacement that exposes us to an outlandish **dispersion** of solid senses **superfluous** to our concerns. Now, the concept *genostasis*, which we traced to the aboriginal sense of *genos* (*Gaia/gē*), bears primary reference to the earthly grounding of the world. In being of the earth, we stand out from the world, at the edge of an indefinite abyss (*Abgrund*, *apeiron*), unearthing grounds (*Gründe*, *archai*) that unsettle superficial standpoints. But these settle no questions, yield no final answers or unshakable foundations, so that we never quite reach primal ground (*Urgrund*). By the same token, the deeper our immersion in water the more unsettled we become – unto the point of asphyxiation. The displacement of its weight by our own comes at the cost of our deeper displacement from landward locales. It is not merely that the body is deprived of its *locus standi*. It is that it finds itself entirely out of its element and submerged in some other that depersonalizes it, disorganizes its abilities, affords little to nothing by way of security or familiar return, and precludes abiding on pain of certain death. Just as we can fall into the abyss, so too can we drown in the maelstrom. And if the ecumenical provincialism of being derives from an existential bathophobia, this elemental misattunement is also one of the main driving forces behind our primal **aversion** to water. Should we refrain from swimming against the resistance of the currents, if instead we release ourselves from an *unconditional* concern for getting back into place and let ourselves be borne along by the superfluous drift of asignificance, then we might just come into an immersion that makes way for the **emersion** of fluent senses and nascent replacements. Put simply, water is of the earth inasmuch as all grounds flow. As earthwork artist Andy Goldsworthy declares, ages after Heraclitus, “everything is fluid, even the land, it just flows at a very slow rate.”<sup>26</sup> Provided we are able to stand out from ourselves and into them,

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<sup>26</sup> Stone, 65.

letting them break through our own immanent standpoints, those flows break new grounds for places and shelter their generative differences, just as the Meander once did its lush littoral.

Allow me to raise three guiding questions, which will clarify what is meant by emersion in preparation for our phenomenological demonstration of Thales’ archeology. Have you ever cast your sights into waters so impenetrably deep that you lost them in a darkness that returned no self-reflection, dispersed all visibilia, yet moved you with wonder to reimagine the invisible? Have you ever stretched out beside a moonstruck stream and been lulled by its melliflence, by the song of its wimples and ruffles in concert over soil, stone, and wood? If lacking in the agglutinate articulations of the human tongue, was that polyphony not evoked thereafter in the sibilance, the consonance, and all the liquid consonants of your morning conversation? Or have you ever dove into the churning belly of a river and floundered at first, only to discover the all but weightless ease and motile grace of fish and underwater dancers? In the pages ahead we shall address these *heterostatic* response-abilities, imagined or bodied forth, under the heading of **condensations**. By way of preview, condensing the being of water means disclosing the generative possibilities emerging from a prior exposure to its superfluous dispersion of sense, perceptual and practical. Taken together, these concepts capture the general structure of our experience of water on the edge of place. A simple water table will serve to summarize the correspondence between this (il)local hydro-poetics and the ecology of being:

<b>Earth-World</b>	<b>Water</b>
enstasis	aversion (sitification)
(hyper)ekstasis	immersion (displacement)
hyperstasis	dispersion, superfluity
genostasis	emersion (implacement)
heterostasis	condensation (replacement)

**Figure 6.1** Saying Water In and Out of Place

### §38. An Eco-poetic Demonstration of Thalesian Archeology

Nothing in the world  
is as soft and yielding as water  
Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible,  
nothing can surpass it.  
–Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*<sup>27</sup>

What stirred? Where? In whose protection?  
Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning  
. . . all of this is water.  
–*Rig Veda*, “Creation Hymn”<sup>28</sup>

In the last chapter we ended our investigation of Thales’ doctrine of water by reconstructing from his sayings and their wider historical context the ecological difference of this element. It is now come time to demonstrate his archeological thesis by narrowing our sights on how the localized experience of this element is lived. Rather than build on the tenuous foundations constructed by Aristotle and bolstered by centuries of science and metaphysics, I shall advance a series of *eco-phenomenological* arguments for the archeological thesis. Compressing the scope from *all* things to things perceived, imagined, and spoken, I apply that affectively exposing method to elucidate the distinctive ways that water furnishes an *archē* for these intersecting ways of being. Because my arguments are premised on our lived experience of springs, rivers, and tides – as opposed to ontological posits, logical axioms, or “self-evident” tenets of common sense – I shall enlist poets of the earth, whose expressive condensations of such experiences transpose us into the moments we have thus far only tabulated.<sup>29</sup> In the doing I attempt to show that the elemental being of water averts the eye and defies the ear in proportion to the percipient’s *aversion* to its inexplicable otherness, its *dispersion* of perceptual sense and its concerned *superfluity*. Only through our synesthetic *immersion* in this element do we open the locks and sluice gates for the *emersion* of senses from it. By curtailing the urge to make sense of what is given to the organs of perception and giving full measure to our exposure to the indefinite being of water, the phenomenologist and the poet join hands in tapping the groundwaters of Thales’ archeology, extracting inceptive *condensations* that slake our thirst for wonder and engender novel ways of seeing, imagining, and saying.

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<sup>27</sup> Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Steven Mitchell (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), poem 78.

<sup>28</sup> *Rig Veda* 10.129, translated in Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, ed. *The Rig Veda* (London: Penguin, 2005), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Viz. Ivan Illich, Gaston Bachelard, Robert Penn Warren, Roni Horn, Novalis, Herman Melville, Lao-Tzu, Wislawa Szymborska, Gary Snyder, Henri Michaux, and Roland Barthes.

(i) *Aversive Visions and Immersive Re-visions*

It is often said that the human body is roughly sixty to seventy percent water. Oft remarked too is how this physiological fact, like most any of its kind, is the product of evolutionary adaptation over eons. How all this is *felt* is a matter seldom acknowledged, much less philosophized. Let us redress that oversight by narrowing our sights on sight itself. To see and think like water fills the eye is to come to terms with the elemental conditions of vision. It is at once something more and something more basic than the sciences of hydrology and ophthalmology, meteorology and physiology, or any of the beliefs they lay into the brickwork of theory and factual knowledge. Yes, we may dissect most any human ball of eye and find it brimming with H<sub>2</sub>O. Empirical evidence confirms that we would suffer infections and blindness were it not for the presence of that molecule, which glazes the cornea in basal seeps of salty tears. But these theoretical discoveries about present-at-hand objects presuppose and may even blinker us to lived insights into how the being of water replenishes the generative reservoir of difference within our visual horizons. Much like the cornea, H<sub>2</sub>O is a conceptually laden phenomenon whose distinct appearance as such presupposes a scientifically trained eye and a technical aptitude with certain imaging instruments and measuring implements. Or, insofar as the conceptual scheme of chemical formulae and their uses has trickled down into the commonsense gaze of the everyman, “H<sub>2</sub>O is a social creation of modern times, a resource that is scarce and that calls for technical management.” According to Ivan Illich here in *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness*, water that becomes no more than an “observed fluid . . . *with which archetypal waters cannot be mixed* . . . has lost the ability to mirror the water of dreams [*emphasis mine*].” It no longer serves as that “living water” with which “we come in touch” – be that dermally, orally, or intravenously.<sup>30</sup>

Getting back in touch with these archetypal waters requires we make an allowance in our perception for their unthematic phenomenal flux, deferring the ecumenical dysposition to dam and flume them into the categories, representations, and operant affordances of the world. It requires the elemental cleansing of the senses inherent in every lustral ritual that purges our minds of the congested the flows of sensibilia, congealed into objective particulars and circumspective wholes. And it requires an elemental attunement that promotes exposures to our

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<sup>30</sup> Ivan Illich, *H<sub>2</sub>O and the Waters of Forgetfulness* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1985), 7, 76, clauses reordered.

immersive displacement. An attunement that moderates the body's local abilities: in-habiting place, placing things on view, or conducting its own proto-place over a local region. In this we hyper-ecstatically open ourselves onto the elemental being of water, its periphenomenal manifestation. For as long as we are immersed in that atmosphere of streaming intensity, the distinctions between biological and chemical, active and inert, subject and object, present-at- and ready-to-hand, self and other, here and there, all become solvent. To emerge from that atmosphere and condense it is to cultivate the genostasis of place: an inceptive re-placement from the *being* of water that is possible in even the driest of deserts. We might liken this condensation, in a fashion, to an inversion and simplification of the fabulous Archimedean eureka (from the Greek *heuriskein*, 'to find'). Having found my own lived body displaced by water, I infuse that experience into an understanding that has less to do with the volumetric equivalence of these two "bodies" than it does with an ecological response-ability to their common, elemental essence. By receiving some instance of water as an occasion for educating its earthliness from its worldliness, we release that flowing essence from the utterly indefinite being of earth into the place-world at large. Neither element of the periodic table nor Platonic idea, this essence permeates all places and inner spaces, evincing the hidden fluency of beings as a whole. Such is the concentrated truth of Heraclitus' *panta rhei*, which Gaston Bachelard distills into his own hydropoetics of eyes and dreams: "everything that flows *is* water," he writes, "everything that flows participates in water's nature."<sup>31</sup>

Where vision is concerned we encounter a hydra endowed with at least three heads of deception: reflectivity, diffraction, and translucence. In modest pools and seeps the first has been the nemesis of narcissists (Ovid), the second a skewer of staves (Plato), and where *prima vista* depths have always imperiled summer divers, specious lucidity wrecks the modern winter driver. Only someone duped by the limpid stuff of bathtubs and icecubes or drenched in a pride as shallow as spit on the street would think it possible to funnel the entire branching lineage of Okeanos and Tethys into the shallow cisterns of the mind. On the contrary, those who court the Platonic injunction to "envisage the whole" scarcely break the surface. Water proves twice over that reflections are only skin-deep. It seduces us with a Janusian visage, a protean visage that averts the eye from the faceless truth of its invisible depths. The superficial translucence and stillness we cup in our hands and behold in our cups, even more turbid visions – riverine,

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<sup>31</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 117, emphasis changed.

lacustrine, epipelagic fathoms with pleasing hues suffused: all this weighs as nothing above the unfathomable deep of unanimous dark. Underground and undersea the currents flow unseen. A stygian realm of fluxive opacity, haunted in parts by nature's strangest prodigies – anonymous, anomalous, and noncommittal to species. Where netherstreams run the beds below the sunswathed keeps of vision. And where the utter absence of light and the covert presence of the sightless announce the self-concealment of water, which recedes from the visible in process to the boundless, the indefinite being of this dark earth. "Here be dragons" indeed.

Printed on medieval maps embellished with such monsters, this expression once signaled the mysteries and hazards of uncharted seas, the *mare ignotum* beyond the *terra cognita*. It is something of a commonplace that what defies and deceives the eye sets the imagination to work. Water, which challenges our vision in spate, simultaneously invites us to envision the invisible. Thus do such outlandish symbols and ciphers, no less than their more recent congeners – in poetry and prose, science fiction and horror – become true testaments to the fascinations of this element. Nowhere perhaps is this so comprehensively catalogued as in Bachelard's *Water and Dreams*. A self-styled "metapoetics" that decocts from a sea of metaphors and images the oneiric alembics of lived experience. The indexical "here" in *hic sunt dracones* marks chartless regions of experience by recalling us to the stuff of childhood nightmares. In like manner, Bachelard finds in the proverbial "leap into the unknown" an evocation of a more primordial "leap into water." Every daring breakthrough of the mind re-bounds the "*first* leap of the novice swimmer," he writes.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, one might say that we are all of us novitiates to the ways of water. So that however jaded or world-weary we happen to be, we submerge our thoughts in the depths of this element to discover our wonder replenished.

Many say that seeing is believing. When it merely glances the surface of what it expects to knowingly penetrate, the gaze of the single-minded knower is assisted by a cannily aversive and evasive disposition of the imagination. Superficially transfixed, narcissistically even, she freights the deep with what lay doubled on its surface, flotsam and jetsam smuggled in from the landscape. If "in our eyes it is *water* that dreams," as Bachelard cryptically muses, the abject visionary flees from the immersion of her watertight knowledge-box to retreat into a dream of the ecumene.<sup>33</sup> Unto the outermost shoals of reflection she cleaves to the clear and distinct

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>33</sup> Bach, *Water and Dreams*, 31.

landscape, to the extraordinary platform of the omnivoyeur. Ever watchful of the waterline. Ever careful to keep her head above it.

In putting a dry eye to these false depths, one fills them with the inverted images of the world as mirrored in the stillest surface waters. Vision is ordinarily privileged as that sense which allows us to take in the things of this world at a distance with greatest detachment, thus least interference and utmost perspicuity. And the paradigmatic optical field of the everyman – no less than the epistemophilic philosopher – is shaped by its orientation toward the anterior, centralized perspective of an immobile body set over against it. Streams of ink have been spilled over the *partes extra partes* arrangement of this derivative structure of perception. Anthropologically differentiated, the field of phenomena becomes a totality of objects over against which stands the subject as spectator. Homologically differentiated, they become knowable particulars given to cognition within the causal order of physical space, which is also an inferentially ordered space of reasons – or in Aristotle’s *chōra*, first principles.

Consider a thought experiment. We can imagine a world without eyes. This statement is trebly ambiguous yet true wherever we place the modifier and however we parse the modality. To say the imagination burns brightest behind a pair of shuttered eyelids is to utter a pillowtalk platitude. Less obvious but no less conceivable is how our other senses would fill in the dreaming contours of a counterfactually benighted world beheld by no one and in which sight itself were but a figment. Actual victims of congenital blindness are hardly exiled from the phantasmagoria of the dream world, much less the sensuous euphoria of the waking. And thanks to proprioception, hands and feet partake in a seeing of their own. But a waterless world leaves the imagination hanging out to dry. I am referring not to some planetary inferno inhabited by fire-quaffing lifeforms, nor to the short-lived prospect of a terminal drought besetting future tenants of the earth. Nor again am I speaking of some “twin earth” where H<sub>2</sub>O is “XYZ.” All of these scenarios can be envisioned, if dimly, by depictive feats of the ocular imagination. But this is not the case for an *ontological* Sahara where nothing has ever manifested the *being* of water, thus all the ways it has shaped our experience of local-temporal form, flux, and change. Like a *fata morgana*, such a “world” wavers and dissipates on closer scrutiny. For it forecloses itself from the *very possibility of imagining any thing at all*.

Form subtends and fills out the images projected by the ocular imagination. The being of water is formally indefinite. Yet it manifests itself, in Macauley’s words, as “a matrix of form for



other things, providing shape, contour, and texture to the landscape as well as more discrete objects.” The phenomenal traces of its morphogenetic influence are manifold. From snowballs to eyeballs, or as he submits, “hearts, ears, eyes, intestines, bones, and antlers . . . snails and shells.” Some reveal the outer flourishes of water, others its inner ingenuity. The visceral body is a plexus of such flows – circulatory, digestive, endocrinal, and so on – each of which are deeply felt on occasion. The abiding impress that all this bears on the imagination is spelled out in Novalis’ reveries, where the body is cast as nothing short of a “moulded river.”<sup>34</sup> Much as any other elemental *archē*, water is generative but also destructive here too, informing and dissolving what it has informed. The waterless world in our thought experiment, then, must be envisaged as commensurably shapeless and indissoluble. An impossible feat that desiccates the imagination.

More germane to our analysis are Macauley’s insights into how water likewise informs the experience of temporal changes such as rhythm:

Water may lack an innate rhythm, but it serves as a source of rhythm in the meteorological and physiological spheres, regulating the body temperature, mediating gravitational pulls and tides, and playing an integral role in the changes of weather and seasons.<sup>35</sup>

In the half-formed vision of a waterless world, such phenomena would become not merely arrhythmic but atemporal. The unfolding appearance and disappearance of each would be altered so dramatically as to undercut its discreteness from others. If we consider further how the body has evolved in sync with these rhythms, we might surmise a correlative impairment of some of its most basic ways of perceiving and negotiating the world. And this is to say nothing of the blood in our veins, which is not merely consanguineous with seawater in composition, but exhibits a cognate ebb and flow. We shall have much more to say about the aquatic implications of time in chapter 8. Suffice it to say at present that our understanding of temporal phenomena as pervasive as rhythm derives from a lived acquaintance and intimacy with the elemental fluency of being. Once more does our mental imagery wither when dehydrated. The temporal disorder of a torrid, tideless, incruent world is so sweepingly cataclysmic as to already verge on the worldless. But to extend that drought to all things intraworldly is to press the imagination beyond its possibility. Its engines run dry and eventually stall at the evaporation of waterborne changes from its horizons. In the very process of departure from the grounds of experience, then, our original thought experiment grinds to a premature halt. For if our bodies were born of the

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, 44.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

amniotic fluid in the womb, and life from the primeval soup of the earth, so too for the images formed by the gaze and reformed by the imagination. Except that this is not a mere fact of our biology or psychology. It is a lived truth, educed from an ecological variation that parches our imagination. Notwithstanding the perceptual presence of H<sub>2</sub>O, which floats like slag to the thetic surface, the masquerade of the visible world owes itself to a more elementary experience of water, recovered *de profundis* and boiled down to its flowing essence.

We needn't invoke the theoretical pyrotechnics of Husserl, Barthes, or Deleuze to appreciate how the ecumenical gaze can make us forget that still waters run deep. What the ecologically abject are all too prone to overlook is the summons to immerse themselves in a more concentrated yet unpremeditated vision of the benthos, the abyss of archetypal water. These grounds are only upstirred once we have been stirred by their outlandish resistance to being disclosed. And this cannot transpire unless we are elementally attuned. Sounding a similar depth, Henrik Ibsen remarks how

the sea possesses a power over one's moods that has the effect of a will. The sea can hypnotize. Nature in general can do so. The great mystery is the dependence of the human will on that which is "will-less."<sup>36</sup>

As counter-moods that release our gaze from willful aversion, elemental attunements open the floodgates of eye and mind to make way for a dispersal of perception into the outlandish atmosphere of water. Wonder, resignation, reticence, humility, and humor are among those we have mentioned. For the time being, we turn our sights on *deference* in the elementary sense (introduced in §29), the general features of which are in some measure common to all the others.

In place of the narrowly berthed imagination of the onlooker, which forms images moored firmly to what is already seen and believed, the deferent seer suspends thetic projection, judgment, and self-projection to set her sights adrift amid the unplumbed mysteries of the benthic dark. Like Horn enchanted by the river, her "gaze alights on the water" and "can't turn away" from that tumult, "where the currents turn the water in tightening circles." "I want to watch them turning from the surface," she says. "I want to twist with the turning water, turning down into the depths where I cannot see them," so as to "turn invisible with them."<sup>37</sup> Bachelard identifies the visual ability to respond to this immersive exposure as the "material imagination": an "open" and "intimate" ability solicited by "joy" or "pain" to "mould and refine" those

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<sup>36</sup> "The Lady from the Sea," in Henrik Ibsen, *From Ibsen's Workshop*, Vol. 12 of *Collected Works*, Henrik Ibsen (New York: Scribner, 1911), 331.

<sup>37</sup> Horn, *Saying Water*. We shall examine this passage more closely in chapter 8.

material phenomena which “only the hand truly knows.”<sup>38</sup> Permit me to set aside vexed questions concerning Bachelard’s hylomorphic metaphysics of the imagination, formal and material, by rendering the latter as “elemental.” Let us siphon out some of the representationalist and ocularcentric undercurrents of his philosophy to extract a simpler truth. Through the richly open-ended texture of Bachelard’s meditations, a litany of assembled voices reverberates at this lower octave, intoning the unsung feats of the elemental imagination. A responsive mindset that discards the detached eye *no less than* the knowing hand for a synesthetic exposure to the unseen, unmastered, and unknown. Let to float free, untethered to belief, this re-vision of what is given to perception would not merely see what could be on the basis of what has been seen. It would defer past expectations, present reflections, cast off fixed concepts, static images, and dare to “go beyond reality, sing reality” as tears from the sea fill the eyes with dark insights.<sup>39</sup>

To be drawn into this mesmerizing maelstrom is to find oneself othered and humbly transfixed by that otherness. In it the mind churns with the most outlandish of reveries. To quote Melville’s Ishmael, “meditation and water are wedded forever.”<sup>40</sup> *Here (where?)* below the ambit of vision, Da-sein’s *Da* is macerated, exoculated, obnubilated. And wherever it has swallowed reflection, darkness has perennially moved us to conjure wild children of dark earth. Here be things draconic, cetacean, pseudomorphic, leviathan yet verging on no-thing. That is their benthic nature. Hyperstatically transmogrified, these *(a)periphenomenal* creatures make their home in waters that forbid our inhabitation. Such is the inscrutability of the Charybdis, the Kraken, of *Moby Dick*, which “by its *indefiniteness* . . . shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation.”<sup>41</sup>

#### *(ii) A Condensation of the Elemental Imagination*

“Endless rapture awaits whoever trusts the sea,” writes Luce Irigaray.<sup>42</sup> In some measure, this avowal holds true for every body of water, emanating as they do from the wild being of the brine. By placing our trust in this element, deferring to its self-concealment, we open a fluent

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<sup>38</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 1-6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>40</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: W,W, Norton & Company, 2002), 19.

<sup>41</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 165.

<sup>42</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 13.

passage onto the immersion, emersion, and condensation of perception. This way of taking things in begins from being taken in and carried away – literally ‘enraptured’. Thus do we come to *feel* our way through an immersive, sensuously plenary atmosphere that dissolves distances and perspectives as it does the segregated *organization* of monesthetic senses. In the hyperstatic self-showing of water, which liquefies solid stases, eyes become passageways. But also water-pressure points. The exposure to the fluidity of earth exerts on the deferent complexion a salvo of haptic impressions, liminal jolts that break over the sensorium like phantom waves upon an undivided shore. Rather than travel through a hundred landscapes with the same pair of eyes, if I may be permitted the Proustian paraphrase, we journey underwater with a hundred protean eyes – eyes become hands, legs, ears, mouths, skin, and viscera – all participating in the indefinite flux of water. Emerging from that atmosphere, we condense it into visual disclosures inflected through *disorganized* exposures to the invisible. Here is the draught of insight to be taken from Bachelard’s optical poetics, where “the true eye of the earth is water” while “in our eyes it is water that dreams.”<sup>43</sup> At first blush, such figurations seem to corporealize, anthropomorphize, or spiritualize the earth and its waters – as if they formed vast bodies of organs or mindscapes cast in the image of our own. But an ecological appraisal would lay stress on how they “materialize” in the other direction: hydromorphize the body and elementalize the imagination. So that we come to plumb the anonymous reaches where another life dreams beneath our own.

To give due measure to the imaginative possibilities unleashed by our hyper-ecstatic immersion and dispersion in water would require world enough and time. Here we could do no better than begin with Robert Penn Warren, who *performs* them in this depiction of exposure to the elements amid the wild woodlands of the nineteenth-century Kentucky frontier:

Here a man might plunge into nature as into a black delirious stream and gulp it and be engulfed. Or he might shudder with horror at the very flesh he wore, at the sound of his guts or the pulse in his blood, because whatever of himself he could touch or feel was natural, too.<sup>44</sup>

Later on in the novel he follows this stream to its source, likening the protagonist’s dark durance once more to the flows of water:

It was dark, and in that darkness you could lie and not know the perimeter and boundary of your being if you did not lay finger to your face, for the darkness entered you and you dissolved into the darkness and were absorbed like a body thrown into the sea to sink forever and flow away from itself into the profundities of no intrusive light.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams* 31, emphasis removed.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *World Enough and Time* (New York: Random House, 1950), 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 312.

The abstract Manichean subtext of these descriptions – the advancing light of civilization contending with “the black delirious stream” and the dark “horror” of human nature – should not distract us from how it reenacts the rapturous exposure to the elements by bewildering the ocular imagination. If the inspection of the impartial observer “striates” space into objective entities, properties, measures, and magnitudes (Deleuze), or makes beings present-at-hand within the stable, disinvolved constancy of beingness (Heidegger), Penn Warren submerges that space in a kind of intensified absence.<sup>46</sup> In allowing the imagination to plunge after him into the stream, to sink into the sea, the reader reprises by proxy her own primordial leaps. So are we compelled to dredge up the memories of our own immersion, of being sunk in some like recess where flows of darkness move. On such occasions, lived or revived, we come to rely most on those senses that thrive in close proximity, taking in things that take them in commensurably. Most prominent among them is touch, unrivaled medium of exposure and intimacy. Heightened in proportion to the disparition of the landscape placed on view, the defamiliarization of the world, and our releasement from the personal, this sense tangibly deflates the abstraction of, say, Heidegger’s account of intimacy and reticence in the contentious rift of the earth-world (§25). In the absence of sight, touch single-handedly initiates an intimate contact with the earth, whether we conceive this after Deleuze as the sensation of a “body without organs,” “permeated by unformed, unstable matters, [and] by *flows* in all directions”; or after Heidegger, who submits that “all things of the earth, and the earth itself, *flow* together in reciprocal accord.”<sup>47</sup>

Unable to visually orient and center itself while lying within the wild dark, the body in the second excerpt discards its eyes for a finger to get a feel for its contours. This detail reveals privations more acute than even blindness. After all, it is seldom the case that we need enlist visual feedback, relying as we habitually do on our preconscious, proprioceptive awareness to ascertain the relative position of our body and its parts. When was the last time you contrived to lay a finger to your face in the dark of night to confirm that it was “here,” atop your shouldered neck, as opposed to somewhere else “over there?” So while it may be the case, as the passage implies, that the finger is able to accomplish this position-taking movement, that very recourse suggests a prior disorganization or, in Penn Warren’s words, “dissolution” of the body, and this at the most basic levels of awareness.

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<sup>46</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 475-484.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, emphasis mine; PLT 46/GA5 33, emphasis mine.

It is as though the finger and the face have been riven from the holistically felt body pre-given by proprioception, and it is only by conscious motor and tactile compensations that they can be reintegrated. Still, this reintegration is but *partial*. Because these two organs have been sundered from a common, bodily enstasis, digital sensations remain exteroceptive, the face's receptive, and their mutual belongingness to one and the same body is not given tangibly at all; it is merely inferred.<sup>48</sup> In a way that surpasses the scope of the Husserlian imagination, Penn Warren envisions a felt body always already othered to itself, a divergence that forecloses the possibility of self-touching. So that the finger he conjures points not just to an outer dark impervious to vision. It hints at an elemental darkness that undoes the binaries of inner and outer. On land we take it for granted that the body is able to secure its self-enclosure within the otherness of place. But we have seen that water's wild atmosphere can take away that which is granted by land (§37). Whether benthic, sylvan, aerial, subterranean, or eremic, our immersion in the elements gives rise to the dispersion of autoaffection and the anonymous flows of heteroaffection. It brings about the disorganization of the body and the disintegration of place.

What you are called upon to imagine by Penn Warren, then, is precisely the felt dissolution of your body, thrown out of its own element and absorbed by some "other" no longer discernible *as* other at all. But this is not to say that you would unilaterally incorporate, retroject, or inhabit the element as your own. "Flowing free! With you in me," as Gary Snyder expresses it in "Running Water Music II."<sup>49</sup> Instead, you are to imagine the darkness to "enter you" while you "dissolve into the darkness" such that distinctions illumined by egoic consciousness and reflected in the rational order of the world it constitutes – inner and outer, self and other, subject and object – withdraw into "the profundities of no intrusive light."

We first encounter the body at rest, lying supine in some dark place. Yet it is far from immobile. On the contrary, it is restlessly astir and continually underway, "like a body thrown into the sea to sink forever and flow away from itself." In the experience of immersion, land and sea, ground and water, converge in a common, hyperstatic movement. Consider the parallel descriptions of these two excerpts. In the first the man who plunges into wild nature as into the "black delirious stream" is said to "gulp" it in while being "engulfed" by it in turn. Likewise are we invited in the second to imagine the darkness of the forest "enter" us, but rather than simply

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<sup>48</sup> This might be likened to the experience of those who have lost their proprioception, and must rely on exteroceptive feedback from their body image to rebuild their body schema (e.g. the famous case of Ian Waterman).

<sup>49</sup> Snyder, *Look Out*, 31.

enter it in turn, we are “dissolved into the darkness.” In each case our expectations of equipareance and equipollence are thwarted by the preponderance of earth. The upshot in each case, once more, is a body taking in its environment only to find itself so utterly “absorbed,” “dissolved,” and “engulfed” by those surrounds that it no longer stands as a solid, self-enclosed entity apart from them. Here is a permeable body, ruptured and enraptured, a transparent body, neither returning nor refracting the intrusive light of this world. Which is to say that it is no longer lived as the body proper. The man has embarked on a hyper-ecstatic journey into an element he sought to incorporate only to be excorporated by it. Here I avoid calling this experience “disembodied,” a misleading term associated with the excoriation of the senses with an eye to the “pure” intellection of the mind or spirit. However much our senses are dispersed and resorbed by the elemental dark, they will not be liquidated. Something there is that continues to hear and be heard, move and be moved, touch, be touched, and touch itself. Something there is that fills in for the body, comes alive in its absence. Such is the sentient element, no less so for being-of-the-earth and no less natural for its worldly embodiment in human being. Penn Warren summons it here by name. The flesh.

We reserve a thoroughgoing inquiry into these carnal thoughts for the final chapter. But let us pursue this direction just far enough to round out this analysis of Penn Warren’s elemental imagination. Immersed in the being of water, the sensorium and motorium of the man are awakened and attuned to superfluous traces of the earth in the flesh. He who has suspended the enstatic operation of his body to be engulfed by the stream becomes acutely aware of the “sound of his guts” and “the pulse in his blood.” Notice that in each case he attends to visceral flows of water. Insofar as its darkness has entered and absorbed his body, these flows are more than corporeal; they are *of* the stream incarnate. What moves him to “shudder with horror,” is precisely this fluent inherence, this earthly ingredience: the way the sensations passing through his body breach its immanence, retracing a sensuous passage through those greater “bodies” of water, the “black delirious stream” and the bewildering sea. Strictly speaking, Penn Warren suggests that the sensations discerned by the auscultations and interoceptions of this man cannot be located within; but neither can they be without. As much as the perception of this body is dispersed and redistributed over the anonymous interzone of the elements, sensibilia are no longer experienced “here,” *within* the body proper. They are rather *of* the sensate element: water rendered in the flesh. Bearing all this in mind, the man’s dismay “at the very flesh he wore”

betrays itself as an abject, albeit all too human, response to the hyper-ecstatic *disorganization* of his body, disownment of his experience, and their genostatic endowment. A writer of drier visions would doubtless divert such waters, channeling them through the culverts of custom into unlived metaphors for objective entities or states of affairs, subjective experiences, or all in thoughtless combination. Penn Warren draws deeper. He draws from a lived immersion, common to anyone who has ever leapt into the elements and emerged to condense that experience into re-visions of a wild world.

(iii) *The Voices of Water and the Condensation of Fluency*

If I may stopper that thought with the promise to tap it again in the final chapter, I should like to stress that a quest for philosophical wellsprings needn't stop short at the Western tradition. We cannot venture far in this promising historical direction. Having listed already in the swells of the Aegean, our craft would surely capsize. Instead, allow me to merely plot the modest beginnings of a course, one of many to be sure, which leads us away from the imagistic and into the linguistic off-springs of water. In *Elemental Philosophy*, a broad yet meticulous historical study of the subject, David Macauley draws attention to the prominent place of water in early Eastern philosophy. He begins by adducing Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, which was composed in the same ecological epoch that produced the Presocratic *phusikoi*. In the course of this seminal Taoist text there emerges an express affinity between water and the Tao itself. The traditional interpretation of this liminal concept shares much in common with that of Thales' *archē*, vacillating as it does in modern minds between a hypostatic idea and a(n) (ir)rational principle. Like Thales' elemental *archē*, the Tao is "muddy and yet . . . limpid," "at rest and yet . . . slowly comes to life," and it is "a shape that has no shape."<sup>50</sup> In addition to these non-disjunctive ascriptions, Macauley notes how water and the Tao are each independently limned through "a form of *via negativa* – that is by way of what it is not." In place of the static signs and terms of ordinary language, this discourse draws from the silent reservoirs of language a poetic repertoire of generative ambiguities, drifts, and gestures. These enticing intimations and vatic exhortations are not unlike the hinting summons of Heidegger's word, soliciting a response to that which resists articulation even as it conditions our saying (§20, §22). Heidegger, whose later interest in Taoism is well documented, encapsulates a similar idea in relating the Tao to the ways

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<sup>50</sup> Macauley, *Elemental Philosophy*, 43; cf. Lao Tzu, *Tao te Ching*, poems 8, 14, 15.



of water, converging at the source and origin of philosophy itself. In his words, first quoted in chapter 1: “Methods are after all merely the water runoff of a great hidden stream which moves all things along and makes way for everything. All is way.”<sup>51</sup>

If words and concepts, no less than methods, fail us originally (cf. §26), one might say that water, which always finds a way, exposes that failure elementally. But it is also by dislodging and “dissolving the hard and inflexible” texture of meaning that this element makes way for inceptive moments of language, poetically underway, which renew the fluency of discourse in the fissures between its hardened volumes. Where we have adverted to Ponge in this vein – water “escapes all definition, but leaves traces” – Macauley concludes his analysis with an apostrophe from the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska:

There are not enough mouths to utter  
all your fleeting names, O water.  
I would have to name you in every tongue,  
pronouncing all the vowels at once  
while also keeping silent – for the sake of the lake  
that still goes unnamed.<sup>52</sup>

There is liberty, even frivolity in libation, but also restraint. To all the names of water, and all the mortal claims it makes on our abodes from womb to tomb, there is added the covenant of silence observed by every quaffing body. For as long as those floodgates are opened our own voices fail us and words sink like stones into the most breathless fathoms of awareness. We are dumbstruck by water, most vitally so. And should we seek not to deliver ourselves from but over to that covenant by allowing those stones to rest submerged, we might just catch an incarnate echo of that resounding litany of runnels, rivers, and tides without, the inexhaustible fount of elemental music wherefrom we draw our own. In its every purl and peristalsis we find the penetrating horror related by Penn Warren, but also the condensations that Michaux described as the “music to question, to auscultate, to approach the problem of being” (see §48 ahead).<sup>53</sup>

Dilating on the consonance between the blackbird’s song and “a cascade of pure water,” Bachelard observes how often “creatures answer each other by imitating elementary voices.”

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<sup>51</sup> OWL 92/GA12 187. In *Heidegger and Asian Thought*, Graham Parkes relates the details recorded by biographers concerning the following line from the Tao that hung from Heidegger’s wall: “Undertake way as underway to clarifying into stillness the turbulence of the water of life” (64). The resonance with Heidegger’s characterization of phenomenology as the “immersion in life as such” is suggestive (cf. §37, epigraph).

<sup>52</sup> Wislawa Szymborska, *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems*, trans. Stanislaw Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (New York: Harcourt, 1993), 28. Cf. Macauley, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Michaux, “First Impressions,” in *Darkness Moves*, 327.

Extending the thought, he tells us that “nature *resounds* with ontological echoes [*emphasis mine*]” – a claim that wouldn’t be out of place in Heidegger’s later writings.<sup>54</sup> Can it be true that not only creatures but elements too have voices? On the face of it, they are quite incapable of speech. And though we are occasionally conscious of them, they are certainly not conscious of us. Still, much like blackbirds they are anything but mute. For they make themselves felt in ways that so thoroughly sculpt our language that every utterance resounds their sonant being. We commonly ascribe speech to individuals, assuming it is only shared in a *distributive* sense – like having vocal cords is distributive. But below the registers of attention and reflection, where voices are formed and informed by the unmeasured sonance and cadence of elemental things, speech is shared much more like gestures in a conversation or, again, like an atmosphere, which are common in a *concerted* sense (see §47-8 ahead). Prior to its articulation into meaningful words and phrases, speech begins in sonic circumambience, a temporally thickened atmosphere of exposure. And for speech to be distributed into divergent bodies with their own distinctive voices, it must first partake of its ecstatic share in that concert, which is jointly made up by the hyperstatic undertones of all things sounding forth. That pregnant, earthly silence, semantically equivocal and ontologically polyvocal, rumbles underground of the ability to speak, setting the tone for our voices and the elemental measures of our language.

Betraying perhaps a certain complicity in what Levinas calls the tyranny of vision, Bachelard levels his sights on the reflective surfaces of water to elucidate its endowment to language. As though he stood before it on a stable plot of ground, he trades the ear for the eye and the tenor of the lived metaphor for unpolished catachresis. “Of all the elements, water is the most faithful ‘mirror of voices’,” he submits.<sup>55</sup> The apparent narcissism of this image should not distract us from how it might serve to deepen his earlier remarks. For no less faithfully do we give voice to water’s echo. It is something audible to all who listen simply, tangible to all whose mouths it fills with silence. Insofar as its flows have patterned our voices and sculpted their vessels into wet-lipped distilleries for verbal spirits, it could be said that water speaks us – as language does on Heidegger’s account. Water percolates from our murmurs, spills from our trills, croons from our crooning, gurgles in our gurgles, and drums the pulse-beat of the tunes to which we dance as it does our solemn chants. Even our calls for silence mimic in their ‘shush’

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<sup>54</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 193.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

and ‘shh’ the squelch and sibilance of breaking waves and distant waterfalls, which quench the human tumult on every crowded shore they dash upon. Ditto our desire to amplify that tumult, that clamorous world. On the waterfront – riverside or seaside – we are given to let our own voices fall and fall silent. Soothed by an elemental ab-sense, which drowns out the world, we become meditative. Bachelard brings these drifting reveries to a resounding close at this register with a call for deference to the silent voices of water he performatively condenses. If we typically speak in our own tongues, we may we learn to speak in tributaries. In streaming through our voices, water inspires new ways of speaking, clear and voluble and fluent, but only if we care enough to listen:

Come, oh my friends, on a clear morning to sing the stream’s vowels! . . . the stream will teach you to speak; in spite of the pain and the memories, it will teach you euphoria through euphuism, energy through poems. Not a moment will pass without repeating some lovely round word that rolls over the stones.<sup>56</sup>

Listening to and saying water is not a conscious act, but an ability to let attention drift unfocused through an atmosphere superfluous to what we intend to hear and utter. Intimately immersed in that atmosphere, we defer selective hearing, slackening its advertent purchase on phenomena whenever we find it compressing the effusion of polytonal flows and rhythms into a monotonous score of intentional objects, metered to the measure of expectation. In lieu of this epistemophilic attunement of the ear, which takes its cue from that score as written by the classical phenomenologist, we tune into a truly hydrophilic way of *eavesdropping*. Steeped from the rainwaters that drip from the eaves of houses, this word serves us well. For listening draws us outside: out of the human household and out of ourselves. Out there it waits, amid the atmospheric concert of the elements, without *and* within, as one listens in.

It is said that the sound of rain requires no translation. And when ‘it rains’ in our language ‘it’ defies reference, precipitating from neither subject nor object. If the elemental being of water threads itself through discourse in that impersonal voice, in the deponent voice (‘rain rains itself’), if it confounds the logic and grammar of subject and predicate, this is because it has always already dispersed the anthropological difference that keeps our propositional discourse unsteadily afloat. Recalling our discussions of the Anaximandrian dispensation of earth and the Heraclitean account of the originary self-emergence and gathering of being, water sounds forth in the ontological middle voice. *Es gibt* an intransitive voice, indefinite or equivocal, defiant of genitive ascription yet generative of description. In this amphiboly of being, between

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 195, emphasis mine.

the passivity of exposure and the activity of disclosure, between listening and being directed by the earth on the one hand, and aurally or vocally directing ourselves toward the world on the other, water waters itself, thereby all the seeds of our syntactic trees and their phonetic roots. Thus does it burble up into language from the rift valley of the ecological difference. On water we may eavesdrop, from it we may learn, but not without deferring to its silence, tuning our ear and moderating our voice to the subtle pitch and rataplan tempos raining down upon our heads.

**Carnal Comedy.**

**The Humiliation of Thales and the Humor of the Thracian Woman**

**§39. The Naked Lunch and its Earthly Desserts**

And as long as you haven't experienced  
this: to die and so to grow,  
you are only a troubled guest  
on the dark earth.

–Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “The Holy Longing”

Earth itself is the ultimate wild comedian.

It is Earth that makes the eternal precession of the stars a harlequinade, primordial carnival in the puritan black. Earth the maenad, drunk on her own juices in the sober cosmos. Earth the vagrant, the flagrant minstrel singing out her songlines to the universe. Earth in levity and gravity, rises and falls (and so holds her sway), jester to the stars. . . . Earth the revelry, Earth the circus, doing a turn every day, with the stars for footlights and the sun the spot. . . . Earth, the most entire and sublime joker in the ultimate subversion, subverted deadness, made life out of laughing gas and quickened creatures from slow rain, made puns of the galaxies on the spiral of the snail.

–Jay Griffiths, *Wild: An Elemental Journey*<sup>1</sup>

In Book 20 of the *Odyssey* a scene of ominous carnality unfolds. At the Ithacan *oikos*, over which Telemachus presides in his father's absence, the suitors gather for yet another profligate feast. Unbeknownst to them they are joined by Odysseus, arrayed once more in beggar's garb. Ctesippus has just added irony to the injuries heaped upon the stranger by the other suitors on the previous day, offering him the “guest-gift” of an ox foot in a reversal of xenial roles (cf. Hom. *Od.* 18.346–64). When the suitor proceeds to hurl this false gift at the head of his fellow guest, Odysseus is described to bear “in his heart [*thumō*]” as he dodges it “a quite sardonic smile” (20.301f.). Telemachus, emboldened by the omens gathering, rebukes Ctesippus in a more overt display of disdain. What follows is an exceedingly outlandish episode in which suitors are transmogrified by their laughter in a divinely orchestrated guignol:

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<sup>1</sup> Jay Griffiths, *Wild*, 350.

So said Telemachus, and Pallas Athena raised uncontrollable laughter [*gelō*]  
among the suitors and diverted their thoughts [*pareplanxen de noēma*].  
They laughed now with jaws not their own [*allotriosin*],  
ate meat spattered with blood, their eyes  
were filled with tears, and their hearts [*thumos*] were set on weeping (*Od.* 20.345-9, trans mod.).

The scene reprises the prophecy of earthly reclamation the goddess had conveyed to Telemachus in Sparta (15.31-2, cf. §32 above). In the terms laid out centuries later by Anaximander, one might say that receiving gifts of food and drink occasions a worldly disjunction (*adikia*) from the earth. And conjunctive restitution (*dikē*) must be made with care (*tisis*) in due measure (*metron*) and timely proportion (*kairos*) (cf. §33). But these unbidden guests do more than eat and drink. For some time they have been devouring the sustenance of their hosts. They have carelessly taken more than is due while giving nothing in return. According to the ecological dispensation, where disaffiliation must be met with reparation, the suitors must suffer an untimely fate and be devoured in turn. It is an expiry that follows with all the inevitability of respiration, just as each inspired breath returns to the air that will someday steal our last. But rather than anthropomorphize and corporealize earth as Gaia, endowing it with an organ that would “swallow down” the transgressors, Homer dehumanizes them and disorganizes their bodies. Raucously laughing with “jaws not their own,” it’s as though their gaping mouths were excorporated to become so many unmarked graves and, by extension, “part of the earth’s flow and growth” (Heidegger).<sup>2</sup> Where once their mouths were gorged with the stolen fruits of that generative endowment, they now entomb, in a gruesome image of autosarcophagy, the suitors’ own bodies at drama’s end: “meat spattered with blood,” and by extension, fertilizer.<sup>3</sup> The macabre and fatidic effect of all this reaches a crescendo when the seer Theoclymenus goes on to relate his vision of the scene. As if peering into those cachinnating maws while they dilate onto the precincts of the dwelling place, he sees the suitors benighted as tears stream down their cheeks, the walls stained with gouts of blood, and the courtyard thronging with revenants beneath a mist-darkened sky (20.350-7).

Each of these troubled guests of the dark earth nourishes an internecine hunger for power, cloaked under the thinnest veil of irony. But Athena has lifted that veil to reveal a darker cast of humor, a humiliating spectacle that not only lowers these human beings down to earth (*humus*)

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<sup>2</sup> OWL 98-88/GA12 194, see §21 above. A mordant intratextual detail is hinted by the word *allotrios* (literally, ‘belonging to someone else’), which reappears throughout the *Odyssey* in the context of the suitors’ misuse of another’s *klēros*, namely, the *oikos* (*Od.* 20.171) and *bioton* (subsistence) (*Od.* 1.160, 18.280) allotted to Odysseus.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 21.428-30, where the suitors’ death is equated with their dinner.

before our eyes, but down *into* it, spilling the blood that bonds them to Gaia. What begins as commensal tableau culminates in a proverbial *naked lunch*. A frozen moment when we are made aware of the truth that hangs on the end of every fork.<sup>4</sup> In this kairotic instant of gelastic ecstasy, *thumos* is no longer chambered in the body and masked by its concerns but intensified, reinflected, and released to quake and rupture these bodies in outbursts that dislocate and temporally distend them. Earlier we examined the relationship between *thumos* and *kairos*, which originally appear in reference to the most vital and vulnerable parts of the body, the corporeal foci of passion and spiritedness, or more neutrally, mood and affection.<sup>5</sup> As such, we saw how they afforded channels for exposure to critical peripeties necessitating the *timely* enactment of caring-for the mythophysical metabolism under the care-given horizons of the dwelling place (the temporal sense of *kairos*) (§28, §31). And it is by exploiting precisely these ecstatic channels that Athena Xenia enacts her role as divine partisan of earth, overseer of earthly tenancy, and protector of earthborn others.

At the philanthropic register, the laughter (*gelōs*) of the suitors has served throughout the *Odyssey* as one symptom of their reckless dissipation, anomie, and misanthropy. At the geophilic it has served no less as a marker of ecological abjection and (m)antic token of their earthbound fate. On the preceding day, for instance, the suitors wantonly contravene the customs of hospitality by staging a bloodsport brawl between two beggars, Irus and Odysseus (incognito). Antinous cannot suppress his brutal glee at the prospect of carnage, which he has unwittingly coerced his host to unleash (*Od.* 18.35). And when Odysseus inevitably delivers the decisive blow, we are told that all the suitors “threw up their hands and *died with laughter* [*cheiras anaschomenoi gelō ekthanon*]” (18.100, emphasis mine). Now, around the banquet table, Athena fleshes out this double entendre. In simply amplifying the homicidal mood (*thumos*) of the suitors, she rives their laughter from its intended target (Telemachus), evincing its suicidal, if not omniscidal import. In effect, her intervention opens a carnal-corporeal rift correlative to that of the earth-world. A kairotic rift in place and time as *organized* by the suitors’ concerns, making way for an intimate exposure to the grave traces of the elemental ingredience of the body (qua corpse) and its restitution to the earth. Their abject concern for nourishment in excess is converted into a concern for excessive self-destruction. The specter of auto-cannibalism suggests

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<sup>4</sup> William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*, The Restored Text (New York: Grove Press), 199.

<sup>5</sup> For the relation between *kairos*, *thumos*, and *humor*, see below.

a reinstatement of the metabolic equivalence previously upset by the suitors' unregenerate consumption of more than their allotted shares. For a moment, their abject *thumos* is restored to them, the anonymous rictus grin of death giving way to a heartfelt tears as each grieves the personal loss of his body. Meanwhile, in Theoclymenus' vision, the house and homestead that have sheltered and fed the suitors become for them an uninhabitable aceldama, bespattered with portents of their due desserts. Although the suitors soon regather their wits and resume their own misattuned merriment, their derision directed now toward Theoclymenus (20.358-60), *we* realize the joke is on them. Like some somatic incarnation of an earthquake, in which the carnal has opened beneath the corporeal, their sidesplitting paroxysms have affectively exposed them to the truth that hangs from every fork. The way of all flesh remanded to the mincemeat earth in an impersonal future, an incorporeal future on the other side of one's own death. If the suitors will not live to accept it, this vision of dying with laughter, conjured by a divine agent of care, has brought them face to funny face with their earthly finitude.

Who laughs? When directed by our enstatic concerns toward objects of mockery, abuse, exclusion, or purposive divertissement, and in accordance with protocols of social propriety and symbolic transactions of power, laughter is prone to degenerate into another operation of the will, defensively or offensively yet always understandingly retrojecting what is laughed at into its own sphere of influence. Such laughter is plainly distinguished by its docility, its obedience to the body, which applies it cosmetically for contrived effect or unaffectedly, like a subtle balm to the surface of the skin; or else wields it like a tool, a feather or a hammer that finds or misses its mark, but always within an inhibited space of human intentions – no less so for being unscripted. But to the extent that we are overcome with laughter, *beside ourselves* with laughter, it is no longer we ourselves who laugh. Like the (g)elastic jaws of the suitors, which come unhinged from their bodies, this laughter belongs to someone else (*allogrios*), or better said, to no one in particular. This anonymous effusion deranges (*pareplanxen*) the mind, unhinges the body, and detaches the will from the concerns of the world. A most vulnerable condition indeed. Literally self-effacing, it demonstrably disfigures the physiognomy. It convolves the visage and blurs all personal outlines. Swept up in its throes we become smothered, our wind pipes crimped to emit nothing more than inarticulate skirls and squawks and breathless squeaks. Rendering us perspirant, incoordinate, incontinent, it disables us, *disorganizes* our bodies with guttural



convulsions churning outward in compounding waves that pull earthward. Dismembered bellies heaving, rolling like clods into troubled water, salmon-hued pools of gelastic gelatin.

In his panoramic treatise on *Greek Laughter* Stephen Halliwell considers how this anonymous upsurge was conceived in antiquity. For the Greeks, he observes, “*gelōs* was not itself an independent deity, but something more like a force of nature that could show itself both inside and outside the human world.”<sup>6</sup> This, he adds, does much to explain “the application of gelastic vocabulary of laughter to large-scale effects of light, sound and even fragrance.” Halliwell notes here that *gelōs* bears some etymological and observable connection to luminosity – hence the enduring trope of the ‘radiant smile’. He then qualifies the idea, acknowledging that it is often difficult, especially in poetic works, to separate this atmospheric sense of laughter from its anthropomorphizing function.<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy here is the *gelōs* of *gē* in Homer’s poetry. In the *Iliad* (19.362), for instance, the whole “earth” (*chthōn*) is said to be “laughing” (*gelasse*) amid the resplendent bronze armor of the Greeks. Much like the initially convivial atmosphere of the suitors’ feast, however, a grimly portentous pall is cast over this bright mood. In the very next line we read of “thunder” trundling beneath the soldiers’ feet. What would seem to betoken a seismic peal of *chthonic* laughter turns out to foretoken their imminent demise, the thunder having issued from the stampede of the opposing army commanded by the bloodthirsty Achilles. Similarly, in the *Hymn to Demeter* – to be explored in greater depth below – earth (Gaia) erupts into laughter at the numinously fragrant bloom of the narcissus, a snare forelaid for the hapless Persephone. When Persephone plucks the flower for herself, the wounded ground breaks open beneath her. Out of that yawning chasm in the earth springs Hades, who seizes her then draws her darkly downward.<sup>8</sup> Once more the mood accompanying this laughter is ambivalent. As Halliwell puts it, “the divine-cum-natural world’s sensitivity to a luminous, fragrant flower is inescapably shaded by the dark events about to take place within this setting of beautiful fertility.”<sup>9</sup> He casts the ambivalence of these episodes in terms of irony (from the Greek *eironeia*,

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 13. Pertinent here is the local significance revealed by etymologies of gelastic vocabulary, implying a landscapes of laughter throughout Greece. The etymon of the English ‘sardonic’ *sardianos/sardonios*, for instance, referred to the laughter of one from Sardinia (Halliwell, 9). Cf. Hjalmar Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2. Vols. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1960-70), vol. 2, 678.

<sup>7</sup> Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 13f.

<sup>8</sup> *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 9-22.

<sup>9</sup> Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 15.

denoting assumed ignorance). However, we might wonder whether this high-minded classical concept isn't misapplied. For whom does earth intend to deceive and what does she stand to gain by laughing under false pretense?

While Gaia is clearly personified in some measure, Halliwell is too hasty to collapse the mythophysical order into the anthropological by presuming a thoroughly “psychologizing sense of divine mood” in Homer.<sup>10</sup> We would do well to remember the conclusions reached in our phenomenological investigations of water (§37-8). Namely, that elemental moods comprise an immersive, impersonal atmosphere – saturated by light, sound, and odor – before they emerge into discrete bodies and psyches with tempers and feelings of their own. As cruel or inhumane as “she” may seem in her indifference to the concerns of her progeny, earth’s bipolarity as both deific and elemental invites another interpretation of these episodes. To get a sense for their prevailing mood, we might begin with what Edward Abbey describes as the “finest quality” of such elements as one finds in the desolations of the desert: “the indifference manifest to our presence, our absence, our staying or our going,” and even “whether we live or die.”<sup>11</sup> Abbey is not, of course, suggesting that these matters are of no consequence but that their place in our order of concerns has been contested in a way that tends to humiliate us, to chasten our “humanity.”<sup>12</sup> In this *humble* light, the earth’s irreverent mood, like the hyper-ecstatic laughter of the suitors, would imply not a psychologized sense of irony, but a kind of geologized *humor* (another sense of *thumos* in Homer) at the prospect of *any* body’s inhumation in the *humus*. It bears mention that the root ‘hum-’, which the words just emphasized share in common with the English ‘human’, can be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European *\*(dh)ghomon-*, designating ‘earth’ or ‘earthly beings’.<sup>13</sup> Extrapolating from these guiding clues, we might surmise that for the Homeric Greeks, laughter may be dampened or diverted by worldly concerns and moods – as it is when the suitors recover their own *thumos*: a mortal *Angst* that dissolves their laughter into tears of grief. But these enstatic expressions derive from a more elemental ekstasis into the gelastic atmosphere of earth, which generates the first laugh and always has the last. If they

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. (cf. 14, 89f.).

<sup>11</sup> Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968), 301.

<sup>12</sup> Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, 300.

<sup>13</sup> Worth recalling is our discussion of the etymology of ‘humility’ in §8. Appositely, the Hebrew word *adam*, ‘human’ or ‘man’, which is also the Biblical name for the first man, is closely related to *adamah*, meaning ‘earth’, ‘soil’, or ‘ground’.

ventriloquize it, indeed, like some monstrous dummies – in the sense of *monstrum*, bodily disfigurement *and* divine portent – the suitors are incapable of laughing *with* the earth.<sup>14</sup> In their resolute drive to plant their seed in the *oikos* of another, they fail to nurture their exposure to the humor of the primordial other and so reap what they have carelessly sown.

To join in these *concerted* peals, this laughing-with, is to cast aside our all too human vanity. It is to hurl oneself into an abyssal exposure to the humorous folly of one's own superficial steps on life's vexed and troubled way, a worldbreaking rift in which their plangent echoes taper off into earthy gags and farts. Far from shoring up a stance of nihilistic resignation, the elemental attunement behind this jocose releasement heightens our sensitivity to what matters most in the world. For it reinfects our self-concern toward caring for others, within and without, as commonly ingredient in the humus of being, the elemental anonymity which has nourished our own and to which our ownness is promised in a time that belongs at once to everyone and no one but the earth. If our canny laughter falls silent in the face of death, *this* mood would incite an uncanny laughter unto death and out beyond it, trilling in the dark of our future having been. Underneath the pageantry of self-serving sneers and self-contained snickers there lurks this exorbitant laughter, this irrepressible laughter, utterly superfluous to the self-possessed (con)centration of the understanding. We needn't necessarily be moved by spiritual ecstasies or bear witness to theophanies to give vent to it. The quotidian quakes with the ecstasies of earth in excess of the world, of flesh in excess of the body, and this is ample provocation. So does *carnal humor* seep from every laugh and every laughing body, seething to a boil when we least expect it from the ticklish flesh of all things born of earth.

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<sup>14</sup> Ventriloquism was originally a sacral practice. The name derives from the Latin meaning 'to speak (*loqui*) from the belly (*venter, ventris*)'. The Greek word for this was this gastromancy (*engastrimuthia*). It was believed that the peristaltic sounds of the stomach were the voices of the dead, who spoke through the body in which they dwelled. By listening to and translating these sounds, the ventriloquist was thought to commune with the shades and communicate their vatic wisdom. Significantly for us, one of the earliest attested gastromancers was the Pythian priestess at Delphi. As noted in §22, the prophecies ventriloquized through her were said to emanate first from a stony rift in the earth, whose vapors she inhaled. One might speculate that the priestess swallowed those fumes as well, and/or they acted as a gastric stimulant. This sheds further light on the hinting summons (*sēmainei*) Heraclitus attributed to the oracle (chapter 3). If originally *geal*, the *logos* of *muthos/theos*, and by extension *phusin apeiron* in the Anaximandrian sense of earth, was *viscerally* regathered by mortals. In other words, the Greek caretaker auscultated the sounding forth of the earthquake in the flesh, whose obscene and outlandish resounding occasioned the partial evacuation of the body from the human world.

#### §40. Learning to Laugh with the Thracian Maid: Preface to an Unremembered Story

Now in front of Scythia in the direction towards the sea lies Thrace; and where a bay is formed in this land, there begins Scythia, from which the Ister flows. . . . As to what lies north of the [Thracian] country . . . beyond the Ister the territory seems to be empty [*erēmos*] and boundless [*apeiros*].

-Herodotus, *Histories*<sup>15</sup>

The Ister appears almost to go backwards. It appears as though it does not go forward from its source at all. . . . something presumably prevails here, something that flows from the foreign. . . . The Ister *is* that river in which the foreign is already present as a guest at its source, that river in whose flowing there constantly speaks the dialogue between one's own and the foreign.

-Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn, "The Ister"*<sup>16</sup>

Why this detour through Homer? And what does our discussion of humor tell us about Thales? About the historical grounds of ecology? In chapter 2 we examined several iterations of the parable of Thales and the well, from which figures as disparate as Plato and Heidegger have drawn remarkably similar lessons concerning the lot of all those who devote their lives to philosophy. We saw how history has found in that well a heroic emblem or cautionary omen of the tragic philosopher, mired in intellectual abjection, political abjection, or both. Meanwhile, the Thracian woman who infamously laughs at Thales is cast as a supernumerary, a circumspect everyman (Heidegger) or faceless emissary of the rabble (Plato). Her single spoken line is deemed of itself jejune yet instructive for what it reveals about the Socratic fate of the philosopher imperiled by the many or else the many depthless pitfalls of an existential fall. Time and again, the owlish seriousness of the world-historical thinker, the ecumenical thinker, has prevented him from laughing *with* the servant of the *oikos* personified by the Thracian caretaker (*therapainis, oiketēs*), much less from considering the possibility of the parable's humble and humorous origins – in the bestial fables of Aesop perhaps. Instead, he resorts to the oldest weapon in his rhetorical arsenal, tried but hardly ever true. To irony he turns. By laughing *at* the lowly slave from the lofty redoubts of reason or the solemn palaces of power, he strips *her* laughter of its profundity while turning it against her. And by projecting onto her his own xenophobia, commingled with the “intramural warfare” and “traditional persecution mania of

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<sup>15</sup> Hdt. 3.99, 5.9.

<sup>16</sup> HHI 143-6/GA53 178-182.

the philosopher” (Arendt), he mistakes the Thracian’s mood for one of open hostility (see §7). The ecumenical philosopher therefore gives little thought to the identity of his presumptive antagonist and far less to the hidden sources of her laughter. For him she remains a servile specter of the other, conjured up from the anonymous tribunals of classical Athens or some modern-day melee of ochlocratic terror. Little wonder that he fails to apprehend the wisdom in this woman’s glee, her ribald words. Believing he must hide to live, our philosopher lives as he thinks, in hiding. And his sober epimyth, which consign the Thracian to a second-order afterthought, together with his apologia in defense of untried thinking, do little to conceal the risible truth that he has tumbled into the very well he built for the philosopher. A well too shallow for Thales perhaps yet thick enough to muffle the laughter of housemaids.

Earlier we entertained the speculative hypothesis that Thales forwent the irony of his agelastic successors to humbly acknowledge his humiliation, that he laughed *with* the Thracian and thereby absolved himself of tragedy on all counts. After all, recall, he had just fallen into his element, the same that engendered his wisdom and would ultimately spell his destruction (§8). Naturally, this revision is not to be taken as a psychological revelation – as though Thales’ were a clairvoyant whose innermost thoughts we could divine some sixteen centuries thence. It is rather to be taken – with a grain of salt and copious amounts of water – as an overture to a generative interpretation, one devised to reattach the parable to the historical warp its expositors have all but broken. As was the case for Aristotle’s interpretation of Thales, Plato’s tangled exegesis opens a hermeneutic *Riss* for an ecological retelling. Our historical study led us to an elemental attunement, a *carnal humor* breaking forth from the earthy laughter of Homeric Age. Another hinting invocation of the earth. If we are to solve the riddle of the parable, I submit that we must come to find the carnal humor in the laughing *logos* of the Thracian slave-woman. In this concluding phase of our historical assay, we shall take up that task by foregrounding *her* untold story. What we shall find in retracing the parabolic allusions from Plato’s *Theaetetus* back to their Archaic and Homeric vertices is a heritage of such humor among the Thracians. The same people Herodotus locates at the edge of the *oikoumenē*, beyond which his dry eye saw only *wastelands* whose indefinite (*apeiros*) nature was historically vacuous (*erēmos*). In particular, the torch of carnal humor was carried by Thracian women and slaves, who released themselves from their abjection in the Greek world through an unfettered laughter, an abderian laughter (from the Thracian settlement ‘Abdera’) that simultaneously strengthened their bonds to the soil

and subverted the high-minded institutions and destitutions of that world. My central contention is that Thales' interlocutress stands at the wellspring of Western philosophy as heiress and literary personification of that heritage.

In broad strokes the story I shall tell runs as follows. The slave from Thrace who is celebrated in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, and more bawdily in its unredacted variant from the Thracian poet Orpheus, joins forces with Dionysus of Thrace while doffing her mythic garb to embark on a sacral pilgrimage along the coast of archaic Ionia. Her critical part in the hymns is replayed on a famous bridge on the edge of Eleusis during the Thesmophoric preamble to the Greater Mysteries, which were reportedly founded by a Thracian hero. Scurrilously, she sings and dances with Archilochus (the son of a Thracian slave-woman) through the first major wave of iambic poetry, her namesake. Mockingly, she addresses the *phusikos* in the parable related by Plato, the astronomer in the version attributed to Aesop (a Thracian slave himself on some accounts). Already in texts from the Classical period, however, we find her voice sanitized, her laughs silenced beneath the imperious voices of reason. Socrates hears only slander in the scoptic repartee of Antisthenes, whose mother was another Thracian slave. And the humor of Thales' inquisitor strikes Plato as nothing short of defamation, vulgar, coarse, and slavish. Later, Aristotle, will reinforce Plato's legislations against *iambos* (the performance, and the poetic genre) by condemning the iambically patterned "language of the many" as too common to stir the noble emotions. And by the time that ecumenism comes into its own, first in Greece then in Rome, the Thracian's earthy humor will be ironically trivialized, then transmogrified as she assumes a certain Gorgonian aspect, tinged with malice and evil.

Like the Ister, the Thracian's wayward journey curiously threads itself through the course these backward turning chapters have followed toward the origins of ecology: from Aristotle to Antisthenes, Homer to Thales. All the tributaries of that history, which issue from the primeval waters of the Orphic and Homeric traditions to briefly pool in Demeter's mythic well at Eleusis, continue their sprangled passage through the riverside rituals of Greece and Egypt to converge in the well of the philosopher and his well-drawn thought of *archē*. And wherever time is stilled into the annals of ancient Greece we encounter this radiant apotheosis of feminine obscenity, who acts off-scene (*obscaenus*) of that patrilineal drama to expose the mud (*caenum*) that hangs on the tip of civil tongues, humbling the rarefied heads from which they loll and humidifying

their arid words.<sup>17</sup> When its past-sunken sources are dredged, the parable of Thales conveys this humiliation through an immersion in and emersion from the waters of the earth. What transpires in that murk is an elemental ecstasy, one that disperses his faraway vision and, upon his muddy reemergence, condenses the humorous equivalence of womb and tomb in the carnal comedy of our earthly finitude.

If philosophy has averted those waters while forgetting the name of the one who evinced the *aischrologia* of its *archaiologia* – the obscenity of its origins – I propose that the Thracian boasted many names indeed, each one attesting to the notion that Democritus – yet another Thracian mind you – was hardly the first laughing philosopher. Long before Homer, in Sumer and much later in Phoenicia – whence Thales reputedly hailed and whereabouts he would journey – she was known as Bau or Baev, the Akkadian goddess of sexual fertility and earthly fecundity who guarded the well(spring), the dark waters of the cosmogonic abyss.<sup>18</sup> In Egypt – where Thales would study – she was known as Bast, the soul of Isis, a feline deity venerated by the women of Bubastis on the Nile, who honored her in festivals with ritual obscenity, jovial mudslinging, clowning, and exhibitionism.<sup>19</sup> But given their closer proximity to the Greek philosophical tradition, we shall turn our sights first to the Homeric and Orphic myths of Demeter. In them we meet a twin personage who would come to be cast and recast, first as house-servant and slave, queen and nurse, then as a maenad, priestess, ghoulish latebricole, and in some traditions a goddess in her own right. Let us learn to laugh, then, with Baubo and Iambe.

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<sup>17</sup> Following what is likely to be a folk etymology from the Latin grammarian Varro, the word ‘obscenity’ derives from *ob-scaenus*, off-scene or off-stage or, more plausibly, *caenum* ‘mud’ or ‘filth’. I hereafter adopt this word in reference to a double exposure of what is hidden by and aversive to the understanding owing to cultural, rational, and more generally ecumenical taboos. Such taboos conceal what is hidden while concealing themselves, whereas obscenity reveals the taboo in exposing is to what that taboo conceals.

<sup>18</sup> Winifred Lubell, *The Metamorphosis of Baubo: Myths of Woman's Sexual Energy* (Nashville: Vanderbilt Univ. Press, 1994), 22-4.

<sup>19</sup> Hdt. 2.60. Cf. Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 26.

## §41. Origins in the Myth of Demeter: Iambe and Baubo Exposed

The *pudency* with which Nature has concealed herself behind riddles and enigmas should be held in higher esteem. Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for *not revealing her reasons?* . . . Perhaps her name, to use a Greek word is *Baubo*?  
–Friedrich Nietzsche, “Nietzsche *contra* Wagner”<sup>20</sup>

The canonical version of the myth is to be found in one of thirty-three poems subsumed by the ancients under the title of the *Homeric Hymns*. But they are more than likely adespota, anonymously co-authored in seventh century BCE (the century of Thales’ birth). The *Hymn to Demeter* is devoted to the Greek fertility goddess, bringer of seasons and patroness of agriculture, as well as her daughter Kore-Persephone. From this myth, which spans the dwelling places of gods (Olympus), mortals (Eleusis), and the dead (Underworld), we learn of Persephones’ unwilling abduction and rape by Hades under Zeus’ worldly aegis, Demeter’s forlorn search for her, and her eventual reunion with her mother and homecoming. Yet it also bears apophatic reference to the Mysteries at the village (*deme*) of Eleusis, which are “unthinkable either to question or utter / Or to transgress: for deference to the gods checks the utterance of them.”<sup>21</sup> We shall delve into the Mysteries and seasonal rites of Eleusis in due course. Significant for us at this juncture is the notion, substantiated by ancient sources and modern scholarship, that the narrative structure of the hymn mirrors: the changing of the seasons and the greater mythophysical metabolism; as well as the deferent ritual sequence observed by the Eleusinian cult-followers, which served to requite Demeter’s bountiful largesse and thereby promote the arability of the earth.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case Of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner, Selected Aphorisms*, trans. Anthony Ludovici (Edinburgh: Foulis, 1911), 77, trans. mod. I have opted for ‘pudency’ to better convey Nietzsche’s double entendre, which is essential to understanding his allusion to Baubo (as clarified below). The German word *Scham*, italicized here by Nietzsche, primarily denotes ‘shame’ or ‘modesty’. But when hyphenated or modified by the adjective *weiblich*, (cf. “Die Wahrheit ist ein Weib”), it becomes a euphemism for ‘pudenda’.

<sup>21</sup> *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 477-80. Along with numerous inscriptions, artworks, and literary references, archeological evidence of the Eleusinian Demeter cult during the Mycenaean Period indicates that the Mysteries are far older than the hymn. Excavations have uncovered shrines and underground sanctuaries (*megara*) at the location dating back to roughly 1450 BCE (cf. Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 31).

<sup>22</sup> The strongest ancient evidence of this connection is from a scholion on Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Courtesans*, (*Dial. Meretr.* 2.1). See also Helene Foley’s commentary on the theme in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton, NY: Princeton, Univ. Press, 1994), 73.



Germane to this theme is the onomastics of the goddess' name. 'Demeter' derives from a combination of the words *mētēr* (mother) and *dē* (arguably a Doric form of *gē*, earth).<sup>23</sup> Digging beneath the Homeric hymn we even discover traces of her older equivalence with Gaia, the parthenogenetic "Mother of All."<sup>24</sup> Demeter's standing in the Homeric theogony as younger Earth Mother is inscribed in her epithets, which exhibit the generative and destructive ambivalence of the earth qua *archē* (cf. §36).<sup>25</sup> She is called *Chthonia*, 'of the earth' or 'subterranean', and *Chamyne* as the goddess of the underground realm where earth opens (*chainein*) for crops to spring up, but also for buildings to topple, or bodies to be downcast among the shades. Other titles point to her concomitant agricultural significance as the deity from whom mortals inherited the wisdom of earthly cultivation: e.g. *Anesidora* (bringer up of gifts), *Malophoros* (fruit bearer), *Himalis* (of abundance), *Chloe* (the green shoot), *Haloas* (of good crops), *Ompnia* (of grain), *Epogmios* (of the furrow).<sup>26</sup> The hymn has inspired interpretations too numerous to inventory. To an ecologically sensitive ear, however, we shall see that it rehearses the drama of earth and world that should be familiar by now: a drama of their metabolic disjunction and reconnection under the horizons of the dwelling place.

Before the rise of the city-state and its political appropriation of the gods, the mortal caretaker was cast into that mythophysical conflict between Zeus' world order and the mothers and daughters of earth. Whether the caretaker hit or missed her kairotic mark in that drama was

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<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, scholars have traced Demeter's name back to *Da*, the goddess associated with the primeval waters in older cosmological traditions. See, for instance, Marguerite Rigoglioso, *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity* (New York: Plagrave Macmillan, 2010), 101.

<sup>24</sup> In the Orphic hymn (*To Eleusinian Demeter*), Demeter is described as "the mother of all" (*Orph. Hymn.* 40.1) and, in the hymn *To Mother Antaia* (another name for the goddess), she is described as "mother of immortal gods" (41.1f.). Significantly, the hymns also apply these epithets to Gaia (26.1) much as Homer does (see §31), and to Rhea – who is equated with Gaia as well (14.8f.). References to the Orphic hymns will be abbreviated with hymn number followed by line number. All translations are from *The Orphic Hymns*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis and Benjamin M. Wolkow (Baltimore: John Hopkins Univ. Press, 2013). For more on the associations between Demeter and Gaia, see: Rigoglioso, *Virgin Mother Goddesses*, 100. Cf. Diodorus Siculus 3.62.7-8; Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 136.

<sup>25</sup> Many of Demeter's epithets are shared by Persephone and Hecate, lending some credence to the contentious idea that these three goddesses were one, nominally distinguished by age. One early partisan of this view was Lewis Richard Farnell in Lewis Richard Farnell, *Cults of Demeter*, *The Cults of the Greek States*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 121. For a careful treatment of the debate over the identity of these goddesses, see Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar Straus, 1975).; and Ian Firla and Grevel Lindop, eds., *Graves and the Goddess: Essays on Robert Graves's The White Goddess* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna Univ. Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> These epithets are sourced from: Farnell, *Cults of Demeter*, 31-38, 311-325; and Susan G. Cole, "Demeter in the Ancient Greek City and its Countryside," in Susan E. Alcock and Robin Osborne, eds., *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994), 201-2.

contingent on her attunement to critical opportunities for caring for the elemental other. In personifying this other as a goddess and the consummate caretaker as a foreign slave-woman, the hymn presents the ecological conflict on several nested levels: mortal and divine, profane and sacred, corporeal and carnal, masculine and feminine. It bears mention that this last level shatters the androcentric molds that define not only Zeus' willful order – engendered by Demeter in some traditions – but also those of many of the sources we have studied.<sup>27</sup> In its place is spun a yarn not unlike the parable of Thales, one in which the obscene earth is unveiled by the carnal humor of a female servant of the *oikos*.

The story goes that Demeter had quit the heights of Olympus upon learning of her child's disappearance to roam the mortal vale in crone's guise. Upon reaching Eleusis, the grief-stricken goddess took a seat beside the Maiden Well – on the “Mirthless Rock” (*Agelastos Petra*) in some versions – where her heart filled with sorrow.<sup>28</sup> There she was discovered by the daughters of the Eleusinian basileus Celeus and his wife Metaneira, who invite her back to their palace. In being received by her hosts, the “mirthless” (*agelastos*) stranger refuses their guest-gifts, refraining from food and drink (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 200). Seeing this, a “caring” (*kedna eiduia*) house-servant by name of Iambe – whose origins in wild Thrace are later attested by Proclus and Nicander – ingratiates Demeter with “jests” (*chleuēs*) and “mockery” (*paraskōptous*) (2.202).<sup>29</sup> The hymn reveals nothing about the content of these expressions but points to an earthy sense of humor. Whether this humor had a sexual tenor is a matter of contention among scholars, being consistent with but ultimately undecided by the text.<sup>30</sup> For this idea some commentators draw

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<sup>27</sup> Rigoglioso calls attention to a later version of the Orphic theogony in which Demeter transforms into her mother Rhea, the Orphic mother of all the gods. “After becoming the mother of Zeus,” Rigoglioso notes, “she who had formerly been Rhea became Demeter” (*Virgin Mother Goddesses*, 100f.) Cf. *Orph. frag.* 145.

<sup>28</sup> The same word, *phrear* (well), appears in both Homer's hymn and Plato's parable of Thales (*Tht.* 174a). Two noteworthy ancient accounts of the *Agelastos Petra* and the “well of fair dances” appear in Ps.-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (1.29-30) and Hesychius' scholium on Aristophanes (*In Eq.* 785c11).

<sup>29</sup> Procl. ap. Photius *Chrestomathia* 239.319b15; Nic. *Alexipharmaca* 132. The hymn twice applies the epithet *kedna euduia*, ‘careful’, ‘sage’, or ‘diligent’ to characterize Iambe (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 2.195 and 2.202). The connection to servants is made by Andrea Rotstein, who points out that in the *Odyssey* the same formula is used to describe Eurycleia, the old nurse of Telemachus and Odysseus. (*Hom. Od.* 1.428; 19.346). Andrea Rotstein, *The Idea of Iambos* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 168. Notably, the word *therapaina* (female slave or servant), which Plato selects to characterize Thales' Thracian inquisitor at *Tht.* 174a, is also used to describe Iambe by Proclus (*ibid.*), Choeroboscus in his commentary on Hephaestion's handbook on metre (*in Heph.* 214.8, 3.1 = Hipponax *Testim.* 21 Dg), and the scholiast on Aristophanes (*Plutus* 1013.11). The more general word for slave, *doulē*, is ascribed to Iambe by Nicander (*Alex.* 130a) and by the scholiast on Euripides' *Orestes* (*Or.* 964).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 163, fn. 20. Halliwell notes that the *chleu-* paradigm is “compatible with sexually course laughter,” suggesting in the broader context that Iambe's mockery “is probably to be understood as sexual in

support from Iambe's genetic affiliations: the disembodied mocking of her purported mother Echo and the uninhibited sexuality of her purported father Pan, the wild god of rustic music and dance.<sup>31</sup> Whatever its import, this unexpected gift leavens Demeter's spirits. She is roused "first to smile [*meidēsai*], then laughter [*gelasai*], and something resembling good humor" (2.204). The word rendered by the nominal phrase is *thumos*. The earthward roots of *thumos*, uncovered above, would seem to suggest that in laughing with *this* Thracian maid Demeter has momentarily returned to herself, to the generative essence consecrated by her name and sundry epithets. We shall develop this suggestion in the pages ahead. Although the goddess continues to refuse wine, she breaks her sorrowful fast with the *kukeōn*, a philter of considerable significance to the Eleusinian Mysteries. And she resumes her maternal philanthropy by agreeing to nurse Metaneira's newborn son Demophon. Apart from hinting at Iambe's subsequent role as attendant to the deity and priestess of her cult – "often for seasons thereafter she uplifted the goddess' moods" (2.205) – the text offers no further details about the slave-woman's identity or her irreverent yet somehow deferent act. But her peculiar place in the narrative is striking when we consider the contrast between the divine good graces she seems so effortlessly to win and queenly Metaneira, whose prideful defiance will ultimately incur the wrath of the immortal guest-stranger (2.248-68). Iambe's extraordinary position is underscored by the realization that this unassuming mortal, this subaltern of the human world, succeeds where even the gods have failed to sway Demeter's moods (*thumos*) (2.330). Having been stripped of the mortal son she was to rear as her own and finding no solace among the Olympians, Demeter Cthonia retreats to her newly-built temple in Eleusis, where she withdraws her fertility from the world:

Then a most terrible and brutal year over all places she  
 Caused for mankind. The soil did not let any seedlings  
 Come to the surface, for Demeter, once handsomely garlanded, kept them buried.  
 In vain did the oxen drag many a crescent-shaped ploughshare through furrows;  
 Much was the colorless barley that fell without fruit on the good earth.  
 She would have destroyed the whole mortal race by  
 Hardship and famine, depriving the gods who inhabit Olympus

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character." A later example of this usage is provided by the fourth-century iambic poet Aeschrius (*Anth. Pal.* 7.345.4). But Rotstein emphasizes the broader meaning of the word and its contextual ambiguity here (*Idea of Iambos*, 163). For further commentary on the sexual subtext of the hymn, see: Maurice Olender, "Aspects of Baubo: Ancient Texts and Contexts," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990), 88-110. Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 229f.; and Lauri O'Higgins, *Women and Humor in Classical Greece* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 43-5.

<sup>31</sup> This genealogy of Iambe is alluded to in Euripides' *Orestes* (*Or.* 964) and in the twelfth-century CE lexical encyclopedia *Etymologicum Magnum* (s.v. 'Iambe').

Of glorious honor gifts and sacrifices, had not  
Zeus pondered what ought to be done to prevent it. (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 306-14).<sup>32</sup>

Demeter's mood is one of deprivation, destitution, or dystrophy. And because her moods are divinely operative, they permeate her domain, imbuing the mortal place-world in its breadth so that all things there are blighted and bewintered – not unlike the hardscrabble hardships the Greeks would suffer throughout the Dark Age. In view of the privation this bodes for the gods, who can no longer be offered the sacrificial fruits of mortal cultivation (there being no new allotments to cultivate), Zeus dispatches a succession of immortal intercessors in a desperate attempt to pacify the goddess. Alas, to no avail. Only by ceding his power, rescinding his sanction to Hades, and reuniting mother and daughter does Demeter come to recover that lost part of herself, return to herself, to Olympus, and to the world her earthborne generosity. Zeus' reluctant brinkmanship reinforces the idea that what goes unrecognized by him is joyously enacted by the Thracian maid. That is, the preeminence of woman, from aboriginal Gaia to Demeter on high to lowly Iambe, in the ecology of being.

The version of the Demeter myth attributed to Orpheus is important for what it reveals about Iambe's Orphic counterpart and her mysteriously humorous overture. Although scholars have observed that its extant transcriptions – from Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Arnobius – postdate the *Hymn to Demeter*, many also suggest that this variant may well have been based on an Eleusinian Ur-myth that predates it.<sup>33</sup> Instead of the palatial estate of Celeus and Metaneira, most of these transcriptions place Demeter at the humble *oikos* of the poor swineherd Dysaules ('ill-housed') and his wife Baubo, inconsistently identified as queen and slave.<sup>34</sup> Baubo's name carried a range of meanings in ancient Greece, most of them associated with fertility: from 'belly', 'womb', 'vagina', or more generally 'body cavity' (*baubō*) to 'pacifier' and later 'dildo' (*baubōn*).<sup>35</sup> These associations are very much in play when we find Baubo cast as the woman kairotically moved to charm Demeter, demonstrating a timely celerity to care for the stranger as guest. Rather than euphemistic allusions to jests and mockery, we are

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<sup>32</sup> Translation slightly modified in line with Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 18/19 (English/Greek).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Clem. *Protrepticus*, 2.16-19. Euseb. *Praeparatio evangelica*, 2.3.31-5. Arn. *Adversus nationes*, 5.25. For a review of scholarship on the hymn's provenance, see Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 177.

<sup>34</sup> Asclepiades of Tragilus, DK 12 F 4.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Konrat Ziegler and Walther Sontheimer, *Der Kleine Pauly*, Lexikon der Antike in fünf Banden, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Drukenmüller, 1964), 843-5. (s.v. 'Baubo'); Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 22; Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 177; Rigoglioso, *Virgin Mother Goddesses*, 180; Olender, "Aspects of Baubo," 84.

now told that Baubo lifts the spirits of the goddess by bawdily “lifting her [own] dress, inappropriately exposing all of her body [*anesureto, deixē de panta sōmatos oude prepona*].”<sup>36</sup> The word for this obscene self-exposure is *anasurmos*. It is a gesture often found in connection with women’s initiation and agricultural rites in which it served to auspicate the generative promise of new members and seasons.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the discrepancies between the two versions of the myth, the description of Demeter’s reaction is remarkably consistent. As in the hymn, so too in the excerpt of the Orphic poem preserved by Clement (c. 200 CE) in his *Exhortation to the Greeks*, where the goddess smiles in a lighthearted mood of good humor.<sup>38</sup>

But what on earth could Baubo have exposed that would have consoled Demeter so? Not only is Demeter agonized by her daughter’s abduction and rape, but as a divinity she certainly wouldn’t have been moved by just any mortal jape, no matter how outré or ludicrous by the standards of human comity. How is it that this mere mortal – and a “sordid” swineherd’s wife at that – manage to enchant the divinely enchanted, awe the awesome, in simply baring her skin? Well, there is one detail in the Orphic passage we’ve yet to mention. Astonishingly, the author of the poem tells us that when Baubo parted her robes, “there was a child, Iacchus, and with his hand he, laughing, fondled it under her vagina [or womb, *kolpois*].”<sup>39</sup> What exactly “it” refers to is far from self-evident. But a later iteration of the story handed down from Arnobius (c. 300 CE) provides some carnal clues. As he retells it, Baubo’s *anasurmos* reveals “the sight of her privy parts, which Baubo, tossing with hollow hand – for their appearance was puerile – struck, handled caressingly.”<sup>40</sup> On the basis of the ostensible bowdlerization of the text and Arnobius’

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<sup>36</sup> Clem. *Protr.* 2.17. The Greek text is paired with English translation in *Clement of Alexandria*, trans. G.W. Buttersworth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1999). Robert Parker has argued that the author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* substituted Iambe for Baubo to avoid this obscene detail of the story (and the obscene reputation of Baubo more generally), which was presumably unbecoming of the hymnal genre. Robert Parker, “The Hymn to Demeter and the Homeric Hymns,” *Greece & Rome* 38, no. 1 (1991): 5.

<sup>37</sup> See Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Rituals of Women's Initiation* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 73.

<sup>38</sup> The line reads: “meidēse thea, meidesē eni thumō” (Clem. *Protr.* 2.17).

<sup>39</sup> Clem. *Protr.* 2.17f. My translation of these lines is largely in agreement with Georgopoulos, et al.. The word *rhiptaske*, which I have rendered here as ‘fondled’, could be translated more precisely as ‘tossed and jerked’ or ‘batted to and fro’. Cf. Neoklis Georgopolous, George Vagenakis, and Apostolos Pierris, “Baubo: A Case of Ambiguous Genitalia in the Eleusinian Mysteries,” *Hormones (Athens)* 2, no. 1 (2003): 72-5.

<sup>40</sup> Arn. *Adv. nat.* 5.24-26. Before reproducing the lines from the Orphic hymn, Arnobius offers the following gloss: “She takes that part of the body by which the female sex gives birth and on account of which woman is called ‘the bearer’ [*genetrix*] and, after long neglect makes it as neat and smooth as a little boy whose skin is not yet tough and hairy. She comes back to the grieving goddess. Then, in the midst of the other things that are customarily done to assuage grief and bring it to an end, she exposes herself, and showing her organs lays bare all the parts veiled by

note that Baubo's genitals were in the shape of "a little boy's, not yet hard and rough with hair," Georgopolous et al. have convincingly argued for there being "something like a little prepubertal phallus," depending from Iacchus *in utero* (or thereabouts) to protrude from "between Baubo's external genitalia." According to their emendation of the text: "with *her* hand Baubo, laughing [*gelōs*], tossed and jerked it [Iacchus' phallus] under (her) womb." Thus they conclude: "her appearance was that of a female, while her external genitalia presented elements of both sexes, both vulva and juvenile phallus."<sup>41</sup> What an outlandish spectacle to behold! Even in the impassive, world-weary eyes of an immortal, one can readily see that it would have redounded sensationally, effecting an otherwise inexplicable change of mood. The ambiguity of Baubo's name is hermaphroditically incarnated, her body literally disorganized to allow for the ambivalent intertwining of male and female, maternal and sexual, sacred and profane, body and flesh. Such is the ecological truth she exposes.

To this we might add the ambivalence of human and nonhuman. For Iacchus – or 'Iakchos', possibly a play on *choiros*, 'pig', and jocular slang for the female genitalia – enters into the Orphic myths as the nascent personification of the androgynous god Dionysus (e.g. OH 42.3f., 49.1-3). Attested by Pindar to have been chthonically paired with the Eleusinian Demeter, Dionysus co-governs the metabolic cycles of birth, growth, and death, releasing the fluid nourishment that sustains them (hence his affiliation with wine, water, milk, blood, semen).<sup>42</sup> In both Orphic and Homeric traditions, he is god of fluent fertility, hence transgressor of static boundaries and undoer of enstatic restraints (hence Dionysus Lysios).<sup>43</sup> In our terms, Dionysus is a mythological avatar of hyperstatic difference, splicing all identities and destabilizing the discreteness of things and their categorical taxa. Accordingly, in the Orphic apostrophes to him, he is said to have a "threefold nature," which is thought to refer either to his being thrice-born (of Semele and Zeus, Persephone and Zeus, then rent asunder by the Titans and reborn of Semele) or

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shame. The goddess' gaze falls on the pubis and feasts on the sight of this extraordinary sort of consolation. . . . the obscenity of a lewd act was able to attain what Baubo's modest behavior had long failed to accomplish." Translation quoted in Catherine Blackledge, *The Story of V: A Natural History of Female Sexuality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>41</sup> Georgopolous, et. al. "Baubo: A Case of Ambiguous Genitalia," 73f.

<sup>42</sup> Pindar *Isthmian Odes* 7.3-5.

<sup>43</sup> *Orph. Hymn* 53.1, 50 (*To Lysios Lenaios*). *Lysios* means 'he who sets loose, liberates, or redeems'. Cf. Athanassakis, et. al., *The Orphic Hymns*, 124, 157.

polyphyletic (incarnating the bestial, the human, and the divine).<sup>44</sup> In the latter context he appears as a many-named god (OH 52.1) who assumes the form of a bull (OH 30.3f.), a goat, a lion (HH 7.44), and even a grape vine (OH 30.5ff., 50.4, 51.3) – implying an added, vegetal extension of his being. In this respect, one might liken Dionysus to a Deleuzian body without organs: an assemblage of flesh noncommittal to and disruptive of corporeal *organization* and taxonomy, from phylum on down to the level of the individual organism and its sensory organs.<sup>45</sup> Added to his aforesaid avatars are the human forms that Dionysus/Bacchus took on by means of ecstatic possession in the rites of the maenads. “You burst forth from the earth,” runs the hymnal apostrophe, to “take raw flesh, and sceptered you lead us into the madness of revel and dance, into the frenzy of triennial feasts that bestow calm on us (OH 52.7-9, cf. 30.5).” As Athanassakis and Wolkow explain in their commentary on the *Orphic Hymns*:

A crucial element of [Dionysus’] worship is the process which the Greeks called *enthousiasmos*, ‘the god inside’ (whence English ‘enthusiasm’), the belief that the god enters into the worshippers and possesses them, which leads to a state of *ekstasis*, ‘a standing out (of oneself)’ . . . To a degree unmatched by other divinities, Dionysus is with his followers. The effacing of the distinction between divine and human, the strange encounter where someone at the same time is somehow both himself and not himself, coheres perfectly with the transitional nature of the god himself.<sup>46</sup>

A similar analysis is put forward by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Alluding to Schopenhauer’s account of the deformation of the phenomenal world that ensues whenever we find ourselves thrown without rhyme or sufficient reason into cognitive bewilderment, Nietzsche draws a comparison to “the ecstasy of the Dionysiac state, in which the usual barriers and limits of existence are destroyed”:

If we add to this horror the blissful ecstasy which arises from the innermost ground of man, indeed of nature itself, whenever this breakdown of the *principium individuationis* occurs, we catch a glimpse of the essence of the *Dionysiac*, which is best conveyed by the analogy of *intoxication*. These Dionysiac stirrings, which, as they grow in intensity, cause subjectivity to vanish to the point of complete self-forgetting, awaken either under the influence of narcotic drink, of which all human beings and peoples who are close to the origin of things speak in their hymns, or at the approach of spring when the whole of nature is pervaded by lust for life.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Allusions to Dionysus’ three births are scattered throughout the Orphic hymn and fragments: from Zeus and Semele (*Orph. Hymn* 45.1, 50.3); from Zeus and Persephone (30.6f.; 29.7f.); death and rebirth (*Orphic frag.* 57-9, 301-31). Cf. Athanassakis et al., *The Orphic Hymns*, 126, 162.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 4: “One side of the machinic assemblage, faces the strata, which doubtless make it a kind of *organism*, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a *body without organs*, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing asignifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate.”

<sup>46</sup> Athanassakis et al., *The Orphic Hymns*, 124f.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 17, 40.

The dispersion of identity induced by the mood of ecstatic enthusiasm, whereby one stands out of oneself to become soused in Dionysus' fluid essence, points to a subtler, more-encompassing sense of his threefold nature. For any worldly binary – from the theological difference (mortal-immortal) to the anthropological (subject-object), the ipseological (self-other) to the phenomenological (sensing-sensible) – the Dionysian constitutes a non-disjunctive *third pole*. It is not that the initiate's identity is totally assimilated or that the grape vine turns from object to divine subject, passive recipient to active agent, etc. In being perpetually reborn in others – be they human or divine, animal or vegetal – Dionysus displaces their standing in the dichotomous order of things *as such*. The god inside opens a rift in that order. From it erupts the disorder of hyperstatic difference, which dismembers self-identity. With each possession he reenacts his palingenesis while the hosts he in-habits become others to themselves.<sup>48</sup> Thus does Dionysus renew their genostatic possibilities, setting their earthly differences *from* all factual determinations underway toward inceptive consummations in the world. In other words, the being he in-habits progresses from hyper-ekstasis to heterostasis, from the death of the old to allogenic rebirth. For the ecstatic initiate, that renascence is concertedly condensed into rituals in which Dionysus came to speak and act through her. Echoing the hymn's mention of post-festum "calm," Nietzsche goes on to submit that "as soon as daily reality re-enters consciousness, it is experienced as such with a sense of revulsion; the fruit of those states is an ascetic, *will-negating mood*."<sup>49</sup> The enstatic agony and "blissful ecstasy" of Dionysian deference would thereby give onto an equanimous irreverence for the concerns of the self and the subject, making light of their serious role in the pageantry of human existence.

So does Baubo's enthusiastic gesture expose the scofflaw god inside her, visibly and affectively, shedding humorous light on theological and ipseological distinctions together with the *organization* of the human body. Against an antinomical conception of sexual difference, for instance, the elliptical style of the fragments opens a space for a kind of nested androgyny. One cannot be certain whether Baubo's anatomy is congenitally hermaphroditic, penetrated (from the inside) by the fetal deity's, or both. A penis (Iacchus') within a vagina (Baubo's *baubō*)? A

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<sup>48</sup> Athanassakis et al. describe the ritualized evocation of Dionysus in their commentary on the Orphic hymns as follows: "he entered the very breath of the initiates – an *enthusiasm* of language that transported the worshippers beyond their quotidian existence." On this basis they speculate: "performing the *Hymns* enables one, in essence, to become a god. The initiation ritual mirrors Dionysus: as the god is ripped apart by the Titans and is born again, so, too, the initiates, blasted by the vagaries of life, are reborn through initiation" (*The Orphic Hymns*, 125).

<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, 40, emphasis mine.



vagina (*choiros*) within a penis (*baubōn*)? The paronomasia reflects how the issue is further complicated by the well-sung androgyny of Iacchus/Dionysus, whose “two-natured” (OH 30.2) sex/gender actually points to an indefinite *tertium quid*. Another third pole, which is not a simple aggregate of male and female or masculine and feminine bodies but a complex coadunation of them in the flesh, the body without organs. Baubo’s exposure releases the hyperstatic and genostatic difference of the body from binaristic disjunction, be it hypostatic (e.g. the concepts male/female) or anthropostatic (e.g. the diremption of male and female experience). She enlarges what a body can be and how it matters by exposing its *heterostatic* truth, its generative reciprocity with its carnal excesses and excrescences. Such is the crux of Nietzsche’s statement from the epigraph to this section. “Truth is a woman” who conceals herself from the understanding even as she reveals herself. In doing so she unveils the truth of obscenity and the obscenity of truth, to which concealment is essential. Baubo, whose name Nietzsche summons in all its complexity and perplexity, retains the enigma of her (*weibliche*) “Scham” (her pudenda *and* her pudency) insofar as her flesh amorphously defies *organization* into zones of discretely stable significance – autogenous, erogenous, perceptual, rational, etc. As Nietzsche enlarges the thought: to enter this truth, to “understand the art of *living*” in the manner of the Greeks, would be to defer to the mystery “at the surface, at the skin, to worship appearance . . . the whole *Olympus of appearance!*” It is to be, like the Greeks, “superficial – from *profundity*”<sup>50</sup> Unable to penetrate the exposed surface of the skin, the gaze holds fast to the superficial. But provided we hold fast to that arrest, arresting the intention to disclose what eludes the eye and every other organ of perception, the truth does penetrate our bodies to tickle the flesh, moved *de profundis* by itself in the semblance of woman.

Perhaps we can attribute the regrettably longstanding gloss by translators and aversion of scholars to the unvarnished way that Baubo subverts the venerable taboos of motherhood as well, being simultaneously pregnant and pregnant with sexual enthusiasm. One needn’t be inclined toward chauvinism to find disconcerting this image of a mother gamesomely groping (stimulating?) herself and/or the member of her unborn child, who has somehow migrated from her womb. But provided we can set aside our human vanities, its carnivalesque obscenity exudes a profound humor that exults the mythic link between human procreation and earthly pullulation, thus the carnal core from which every earthborn child has emerged. Demeter, who nourishes no

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<sup>50</sup> Nietzsche, “Nietzsche Contra Wagner,” 77.

such vanity, laughs *with* this mortal affiliate who bares her flesh to expose their common generative essence: the parthenogenetic Ur-androgyny that contains both sexes within itself. Carnal humor is a gift that humbles its recipient by reinflecting her attunement from the abjection of being-in-the-world toward the “extraordinary consolation” (Arnobius) of being-of-the-earth. Thus does Baubo reawaken the Earth Mother to her divine share in the cycles of creation, destruction, and renewal that sustain existence, mortal *and* immortal, in the mythophysical ecology. When Demeter goes on to withhold that share from the world, an act that will eventually bring about her daughter’s release, it is because she has been moved from debilitating grief to a stance of will-negating *resistance* to the power of Zeus’ *world* order. A stance she takes by opting out of it as she regains her earthly footing. Contrary to the staid assumption that Baubo’s intervention is no more than a bit of “comic relief” and therefore extraneous to the arc of the myth, it is easy to see how it furnishes a pivotal catalyst, a kairotic turning point, for the affectively charged metabolism at its heart. As a quintessential act of caring for the elemental other, her gift indirectly instigates a regenerative process of divine requital, which restores growth and prosperity to the mortal dwelling place.

#### §42. From Flesh to Stone: Baubo Confirmed

A woman’s countenance, with serpent locks,  
Gazing into death or Heaven from those wet rocks.  
—Percy Bysshe Shelley, “On the Medusa of Leonardo Da Vinci”<sup>51</sup>

Gorgo recalls us to the primeval mother, who is always available to us and to whom all questions of return mean death; Baubo is the opening of the future, the reiterated promise of procreation that is stronger than widowhood or any sort of despair. Medusa is also a dismembered body, whose head and sex have been set apart by taboo, and who therefore must be continually dismembered, time and again, to prevent anyone from falling under her spell. Baubo is an entity complete in herself, a replete body, who, by joking, is reduced to the semblance of her pudenda, but whose totality convinces us of the innocence of her disguise.  
—Jean Claire, *Méduse*<sup>52</sup>

Were it not for ample independent evidence, one might doubt the authenticity of the Orphic account of Baubo and her mysterious gesture, transmitted as it was from two Christian apologists who had every reason to hyperbolize the salacity of the episode for rhetorical effect.

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<sup>51</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: John & Henry L. Hunt, 1824), 140.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted from Lubell’s translation in *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 113.

But such doubts are mitigated by numerous artifacts and ancient commentaries supporting a strong aetiological correlation between the Orphic myth and cultic rituals involving Baubo, identified nominally, somatotypically, and significantly, by the carnal hallmarks of her humor.<sup>53</sup> Her more civilized congener Iambe, on the other hand, goes missing from the archeological record. Yet the poets will continue to laugh with her in that genre which bears her name as it does the mackled stamp of Baubo's humiliating mockery and obscenity.<sup>54</sup> To this we shall return in due course. Now, as early as the fourth century BCE, historians drew overt connections between Baubo and Eleusis.<sup>55</sup> And if we turn to material culture, we find several rupestrian inscriptions confirming her enduring role in the Eleusinian cult of Demeter.<sup>56</sup>

Fifth-century Priene was a thriving *deme* on the Ionian coast, some half-day's trek from Miletus. The town was known throughout the ancient world for its temple erected in honor of Demeter and Persephone. In 1898 a crew of German archeologists unearthed from the site of that temple a handful of curious terracotta statuettes. The figurines are nothing short of corporeal paradoxes, featuring a pyknic form with dwarfish legs sprouting directly from the head. Some are nude while others are in states of undress – *anasuromai* perhaps. The face is spread over the torso entire and wears a tranquil mien with two sloe eyes in place of the breasts, a mouth slightly puckered or grinning in the position of the navel, and a cleft chin that doubles as a vulva. At sides of the head, many of the figures sport roughhewn arms bearing torches, lyres (staples of the cult of Demeter) or baskets full of grapes (*idem*, Dionysus).<sup>57</sup> Among those in attendance at the

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<sup>53</sup> There is also archeological evidence of an independent cult of Baubo: viz. a Hellenistic inscription from Dion (Macedonia). See Rotstein, *The Idea of Iambos*, 178 (cf. SEG 26.280, 34.610).

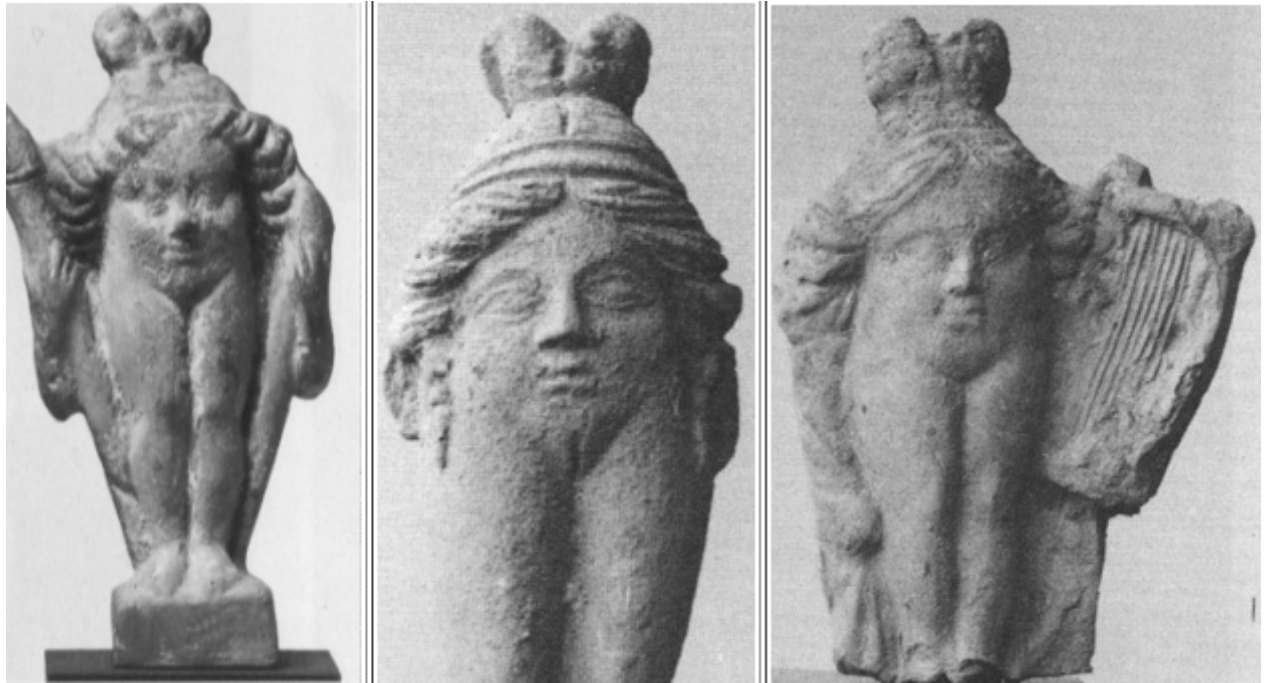
<sup>54</sup> Andrea Rotstein points out that “Baubo is attested in ritual, [whereas] Iambe appears to be a figure of literature, in the Homeric Hymn and in later literary sources that are dependent on it” (*Idea of Iambos*, 179). Cf. O'Higgins, *Women and Humor*, 2003, 51-3. In addition to the allusions that crop up among the iambic poets, Sophocles was reputed to have written play bearing the title *Iambe*, but no more than its title has been preserved (Rotstein, 174).

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Asclepiades of Tragilus DK 12 F 4.

<sup>56</sup> Three inscriptions bear special mention: (1) a dedication from the fourth century BCE at a temple on Naxos, which reveres Baubo along with Demeter, Kore, and Zeus Eubouleus (an epithet shared by Dionysus); (2) a monument from the first-century BCE to Demeter Thesmophoros on the neighboring island of Paros (home to Archilochus), where Baubo's name appears after those of the aforementioned gods as well as Hera's; and (3) another first-century inscription recovered from Magesia on the Meander near Priene (and Thales' native Miletus), which identifies Baubo as one of three maenads and a descendant of Ino, a wet-nurse to the infant Iacchus/Dionysus who raised him like a daughter. Scholars have reinforced Baubo's place in the ancestry of venerable wet-nurses on the basis of her nominal links to *baubon* (pacifier), *baubalidsein* (to rock), and *baubauein* (to lull to sleep). For a review of the literature on these archeological sources, see Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 22.

<sup>57</sup> Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns*, 145. Notably, in the Homeric hymn recited above, Demeter carries a torch while searching for her daughter (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 2.47-63).

expedition was the renowned classicist Hermann Diels, who instantly recognized the semblance and dubbed these artworks “Baubos” (Fig. 7.1) – a controversial designation that nonetheless persists. In each he found a kind of Russian doll, with the head of Iacchus behind the face of his nurse.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 7.1.** Priene “Baubos” (c. 200-100 BCE) *Antikemuseum Berlin, Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz.*

What to make of these outlandish figures? Tradition has circled round their significance as sexual symbols, taken either: to glorify woman’s erotic powers within the scholar’s own heteronormative projection of Greek society (Devereaux); or to trivialize those powers by means of profanation, perverting their sanctity as something that wavers uneasily between the “obscene,” the “pornographic,” and the “infantile” (Lubell).<sup>59</sup> What these approaches have in common is their humorless reluctance to think the sacred together with the obscene, the erotic, the monstrous, and, yes, the infantile as well. If we can reasonably assume that Baubo’s self-exposure, her *anasurmos*, is the subject of these works, then we must grapple with how these figures transcend such anthropological boundaries by apotheosizing genostasis in the carnal

<sup>58</sup> Hermann Diels, *Poetarum philosophorum fragmenta*, *Poetarum graecorum fragmenta*, vol. 3 (Berlin\_ 1901), 166.

<sup>59</sup> Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 103. Cf. Georges Devereux, *Baubo: La Vulve Mythique* (Paris: Jean Cyrille Godefroy, 1983), 30-104.

disfigurement of the human body. In these remodeled lithifications of the Orphic myth, Baubo reveals what is customarily concealed from view. Once more, however, this is no simple revelation. As what is revealed conceals itself from the understanding, exposes its limits, beggars comprehension. By virtue of the heterological interplay between revealing and concealing, disclosure and exposure, the figures are charged with an affective ambivalence more durable than their time-buried symbolism. Humor tickles the flesh in response to its improbable incarnation in these works while the unsettled body elbows in to stifle that laughter for the sake of maintaining its remit: the protocols governing gender identity, sexual norms, moral rectitude, hierarchical and hieratic anatomies of power, etc. But provided there has been at least a moment of corporeal transgression, a vein does open in the body, a vein that courses with generative possibilities for the *humorous* reinhabitation of the world. Such is the oft-noted apotropaic, therapeutic, or care-giving significance of the *anasurmos*, which is recorded to have been practiced among women across the ancient world to cure the sick and safeguard the fecundity of the earth.<sup>60</sup> Most relevant to our discussion is the prominent role it played in the Thesmophoria, the annual festival devoted to Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries. Seeing how *anasurmata* joined other elements of carnal humor in these rites will help to solidify Baubo's position in the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros, bringing us to the second leg of the Thracian woman's journey from Eleusis to Miletus. But before we proceed in this direction, another clutch of relics deserves our attention.

Among the 212 terracottas recovered from Priene are several pig figurines.<sup>61</sup> We know that pigs – particularly pregnant sows – were associated with female fertility. We know that they fell into the subterranean depths with Persephone in certain Orphic versions of the myth and – based on the porcine remains recovered from the *megara* at Eleusis – that this scene may have inspired the sacrifice of pigs to Demeter and Persephone as part of the Mysteries.<sup>62</sup> We also

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<sup>60</sup> In *The Bravery of Women (Morals)*, for instance, Plutarch recounts a battle between the Medes and the Persians in which the Persians fled in shame when women who had joined the opposing army lifted their gowns in storming toward them. Plutarch adds to this the tale of the Lycian women who defended their town against the Greek hero Bellerophon in a similar fashion. Plut. *Mor. De mul. vir.* 5.246a, 4.248.

<sup>61</sup> Lucia Nixon, "The Cults of Demeter and Kore," in *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, ed. Richard Hawley and Barbara Levick (London: Routledge, 1997), 84.

<sup>62</sup> Skeletal remains at sacral sites have confirmed the hallowed role of pigs in the Demeter cult attested by the scholion on Lucian (Schol. Luc. *Dial. meret.* 2.1). For more on these sacrifices and the skeletal remains of pigs recovered from the site, see: Blackledge, *The Story of V*, 20, 24; Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 67.

know that Iacchus' name is a paronym of *choiros*, 'pig' (joc. 'vagina'), and that Baubo may have tended pigs beside her husband Dysaules. In southern Italy, yet another anonymous terracotta was upturned, one which seems to integrate all these elective affinities. Seated astride a gravid sow is the figure of a smiling nude whose legs are candidly splayed to expose her pudenda. Apparently pregnant, she exhibits a childbearing posture with one hand bracing her leg extended. The other holds an object long subject to scholarly debate: a writing slate, or musical instrument, or ladder has been conjectured – though the latter is perhaps a bit of a stretch (Fig. 7.2).



**Figure 7.2** *Baubo atop a sow* (c. 100 BCE). *Antiksammlung Staatliches Museum Berlin.*

Some have equated this figure with the Egyptian goddess Isis while others insist on its connection to Baubo, whose name it officially bears. Hellenistic texts ascribe to Isis and Baubo a similar range of associations, portraying them in either the act of *anasurmos* or this “hocker” (squatting) position.<sup>63</sup> The image of Baubo *auf dem Schwein* has persisted into the modern era. To wit, the Walpurgisnacht scene from Goethe's *Faust*:

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<sup>63</sup> On the *anasurmos* and the connections between Isis and Baubo, see Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 117-19.

The venerable Baubo now  
Comes riding on her farrow-sow.  
Then honour be where honour's due:  
Dame Baubo up, and lead the crew!  
With a tough old sow, a mother as well,  
She'd marshal witches or shades of hell.<sup>64</sup>

Goethe's decision to cast Baubo as a bellwether of witches, ghouls, and demons is the culmination of an invidious process promulgated by Classical thinkers and, later, Judeo-Christian theologians, who incrementally expurgated and anathematized what features of her they deemed heretical to reason and/or church doctrine. Such dogmas are brought to light in another allusion to Baubo, which appears in *Goethe's Botanical Writings*:

One might point an *accusing* finger at the naturalists when they take as *ribald a delight in Mother Nature as in the goddess Baubo herself* – just because they have discovered a few little *weaknesses* in the good mother. Indeed, we recall having seen arabesques in which the sexual relations within a flower calyx were represented, in the manner of the ancients, *in an extremely graphic way* (emphasis mine).<sup>65</sup>

Winifred Lubell – to whom I owe these last references – foregrounds the two signature postures depicted by relics such as these. From them she is able to chart the metamorphosis of Baubo across times and cultures. By her lights, it is a progression from “a frank and proud personification of sexual energy” in “sacred ritual to emblem of contempt,” an “image of female pollution, lust, and evil.”<sup>66</sup> Whereas the earliest known *anasuromai* were regarded as obscene in the sense that they provocatively exposed the underside of prevailing social taboos, they were also associated with theophany, the unveiling of the sacred. Concerning the ranine hocker stance exhibited in Figure 7.2, Lubell draws attention to its evocation of “those hidden body functions we prefer not to mention – defecation, urination, the rigors of birthing – or with nearly forgotten rituals of moon-blood flowing onto the ground.”<sup>67</sup> As instanced by her allusion to the menstrual rites depicted in cave paintings dating back to 30,000 BCE, each of these metabolic flows held a prominent place in pre-Christian religions as they do in the myths we've explored. Consider an illustration. One of the only foods permitted during the fasts of the Thesmophoria (see below) was the pomegranate, the treacherous fruit Persephone accepts from Hades before departing his realm. As Lubell points out, “the pomegranate with its astonishing number of seeds and brilliant red juice has long been seen as a complex symbol, combining the womb and fertility with images

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<sup>64</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, Part One, trans. Phillip Wayne (New York: Penguin, 1983), 171.

<sup>65</sup> Goethe, “On Morphology,” in *Goethe's Botanical Writings*, trans. Bertha Mueller (Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1952), 336.

<sup>66</sup> Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 122, 131.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

of bloody death.”<sup>68</sup> In this context she quotes from Bruce Lincoln, who dilates on the early ancient confluence of that fluid with “mortal wounds” as well as “menstrual blood, the blood of defloration, and the blood of parturition: blood of life as well as death.”<sup>69</sup> Before these flows came to bear the tainture of sin and Baubo the mask of Medusa, who hemorrhaged panaceas then poisons, before the sublimated gynophobia of the Evil Eye – the gaze of menstruous woman become monstrous – there is evidence of a primordial deference to the synchronicity of the female body and the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction.<sup>70</sup> As William Irwin Thompson explains, the

miraculous nature of the vulva seems to have taken hold of the imagination of Paleolithic humanity. . . . the vulva is the magical wound that bleeds and heals itself every month, and because it bleeds in sympathy with the dark of the moon, the vulva is an expression not of physiology, but of cosmology. The moon dies and is reborn; woman bleeds but does not die, and when she does not bleed for ten lunar moths, she brings forth new life. It is easy to see how Paleolithic man would be in awe of woman, and how woman’s mysteries would be at the base of religious cosmology.<sup>71</sup>

If it *is* Baubo perched atop the sow with the god of fluent fertility cradled in her womb, then what we have is not only a monument to birth but a consecration of this *kairos* in the cosmic ecology. The metabolism of the mythophysical earth-world melds high and low, immaculate and maculate, organized body and disorganized flesh. We *disclose* from this artifact an embodiment of womanhood, motherhood, a pastoral caretaker in the world – if one had to guess at the item in her hand, a poet or minstrel too perhaps. Yet her posture *exposes* us to the abyssal earth incarnate, between her legs, where corporeally governed flows and cycles converge with the ungovernable turnings of the tides, the moon, and the seasons, precipitating the exchange of worldly effluence for earthly affluence, bodily depletion for carnal conception, mortal labor for god-bestowed favor. To this exposure the gynophobic aversion defining the ecumenical appropriation of Baubo and her sisters betrays itself as yet another instance of the bathophobic gaze, the gaze of the suitor, perhaps, haunted still by the abject fear of being sooner swallowed down by that which he would violate.

And what of the whole hog? Like some outgrowth of this superfetate assemblage of mother and earth, the pregnant sow not only mirrors pregnant Baubo; it literally grounds her.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 37f.

<sup>69</sup> Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis*, 85. Cf. Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 38.

<sup>70</sup> In effect, the substitution of the female genitals for the head of Medusa mitigates male anxieties by re-organizing the flesh: facializing and so familiarizing it.

<sup>71</sup> William Irwin Thompson, *The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality, and the Origins of Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 109. Cf. Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 5-7.



Standing bestride the mud (*caenum*) of her *oikos* and the celestial origins of the god invoked by its common name, the pig (*choiros*) announces at once the lowbred station of its keeper and the vagitus of Iacchus, the “child born of a cry” (Herodotus) and its sacral echoes in the Thesmophoric procession to Eleusis, which summoned him with squeals of “iakkhe!”<sup>72</sup> In this connection the pig conjures the bestial reincarnations of Dionysus, whose path through history intersects with that of Baubo at Eleusis on the Orphic papyri *and* like as not in practice. Since there is evidence that he too was celebrated in Eleusis, alongside Demeter and Persephone, during the midwinter fertility festival of the Haloa.<sup>73</sup> Of course, there’s no denying the burlesque effect of the swine. It’s really quite funny – is it not? – this image of a person, stark naked, piggybacked upon the proverbial butt of barnyard humor with such dignity and grace, such cavalier poise. Still, to deny her ecological difference and to laugh at her expense is make oneself the butt of the jest. For hers, as we have seen, is a humor that exposes the animal no less than the gods within us all. Thus does it exposes us carnal and earthly beneath the worldly concerns conditioning that self-defensive response. To the generative plurality beneath all corporeal orders and ipseocentric organizations, hieratical or otherwise hierarchical. Muddy yet limpid, at rest yet suddenly enlivened in carnal shapes that reshape the body, her humor travesties the fears of mortals no less than the powers of immortals, humbles the Jovian hubris of man and god alike. From the myth of Baubo-Iambe to the ritual reenactment of her exposure, thence to its poetic reenactment in the performance of *iambos*, this elemental attunement runs like a laughing river. Let us make our way downstream.

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<sup>72</sup> Hdt. 8.65. The ritual cry of the Thesmophoria is described in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (*Ran.* 340-53; 372-416). We shall discuss a likely variant of this chant, ‘ia!’, in the pages ahead.

<sup>73</sup> Foley, *Hymn to Demeter*, 74. Cf. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 172.

### §43. From Myth to Cult: Baubo Reenacted

Maidens and mothers repeat the cry!  
“Demeter, a great welcome, the nurturer of many,  
the provider of many bushels of grain.”  
And when four white-haired mares lead forth the basket,  
then the great, wide-ruling goddess will come to us  
bringing a propitious spring, summer, winter, and autumn,  
and will protect us for another year.  
–Callimachus, *Hymn to Demeter*<sup>74</sup>

O, come with the joy of thy festival song,  
O, come to the goddess, O, mix with our throng  
Untired, though the journey be never so long.  
O Lord of the frolic and dance,  
Iacchus, beside me advance!  
For fun, and for cheapness, our dress thou hast rent,  
Through thee we may dance to the top of our bent,  
Reveling, and jeering, and none will resent.  
–Aristophanes, *Frogs*<sup>75</sup>

The Archaic village of Eleusis lay approximately fourteen miles west of Athens at the edge of the “bread basket” of Attica known as the Thriasian plain. In a tradition possibly dating back to the Bronze Age, women of all stations and extractions throughout the Mediterranean paid tribute to Demeter and Persephone during an autumnal festival called the Thesmophoria.<sup>76</sup> The native venue of the Thesmophoria was Eleusis, where it was celebrated in conjunction with the Mysteries of the Demetrian cult. In a fragment from Euripides’ *Erechtheus*, we are told that the Mysteries were first bequeathed by Demeter Thesmophoros to the Thracian hero Eumolpus – twice mentioned in the Homeric hymn – who brought them to Eleusis where he founded the cult.<sup>77</sup> The epithet Thesmophoros generally refers to Demeter’s province as divine legislator of agrarian rites of cultivation (sowing, plowing, harvesting) and arbiter of the metabolic

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<sup>74</sup> Callim. *Hymn Dem.* 118-23; trans. from Susan A. Stephens, *Callimachus: The Hymns* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015), 275.

<sup>75</sup> Ar. *Ran.* 398-406; trans. from *The Peace, The Birds, The Frogs*, trans. B.B. Rogers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1927), 333-5.

<sup>76</sup> The Thesmophoria was the most widely celebrated festival of Demeter. It is likely that the festival dates back to before the great migrations of the eleventh century BCE given its attested presence in more than thirty Archaic settlements in Greece, Sicily, Southern Italy, Asia Minor, Scythia and North Africa. See Farnell, *Cults of Demeter*, 328-332 for an inventory and description of these sites. Archeologists have uncovered from the majority of these a Thesmophorion, or temple where the rites were culminated. See Kevin Clinton, "The Thesmophorion in Central Athens and the Celebration of the Thesmophoria in Attica," in *The Role of Religion in the Early Greek Polis*, ed. R. Hägg (Stockholm: P. Astroms 1996), 111-125.

<sup>77</sup> Eur. *Erechtheus* 102ff.; *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 154, 476; Marmor Parium DK F 12, 14-15.

equivalence governing these careful practices (see §28).<sup>78</sup> More specifically, the epithet marks her distinction in the festival itself, which coincided with the fall planting of crops such as barley and winter wheat. As Jennifer Larson says of this critical time of year in her study of Greek cults: “Great anxiety surrounded the fateful question of when to plough and sow, for the farmer must plant late enough to coincide with the fall rains, yet early enough to allow the shoots to become established before the onset of winter cold.”<sup>79</sup> Seasonal and religious *kairoi* therefore coincided, just as they did in the mythophysical ecology represented in the Homeric epics (§28). By deferently attuning themselves through worship and sacrifice to the Earth Mother, mortals came to cultivate the earth and earn their subsistence in ways that conserved the equivalence of care in the dwelling places of the world.

According to multiple ancient accounts, the Thesmophoria was patterned on episodes from the hymns with special emphasis on the encounter between Baubo-Iambe and Demeter. A Byzantine scholion to the *Dialogue of the Courtesans* by Lucian (second century CE) traces the sacrifice of pigs during the ceremonies to incidents in the Orphic myth (noted above), recalling us to its pastoral setting.<sup>80</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus (first or second century CE) links female “mockery [*skōptein*] at the Thesmophoria” to *Iambe’s* overture to Demeter.<sup>81</sup> About the Thesmophoric revelers of Sicily, Diodorus Siculus (first century BCE) sounds a similar refrain: “it is their custom during these days to indulge in obscene language [*aischrologein*] as they associate one with another, the reason being that by such obscenity the goddess, grieved though she was at the Rape of Corê, burst into laughter.”<sup>82</sup> Centuries earlier, these types of ritual humiliation were remarked by Callimachus, the iambic poet to whom we owe another hymn to Demeter and – lest we forget – the tale of Thales at Didyma (§34). Adopting the vocabulary of the Homeric hymn, he imputes a kind of licensed jesting (*chleuē*) to the Eleusinian worship of the goddess, echoing the description of *Iambe’s* intervention.<sup>83</sup> Finally, several ancient historians

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<sup>78</sup> As we read in the scholium on Lucian’s *Dialogue of the Courtesans*: “Demeter is named Thesmophoros, since she established allotted distribution (*nomos*) or *thesmoi* according to which men must labor to get their food.” Schol. Luc. *Dial. meret.* 2.1: H. Rabe, ed. *Scholia in Lucianum* (Leipzig: 1906), trans. mod.

<sup>79</sup> Jennifer Larson, *Ancient Greek Cults, A Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 72.

<sup>80</sup> Schol. Luc. *Dial. meretr.* 2.1.

<sup>81</sup> Ps.-Apollodorus, *Bibl.* 1.5.1.

<sup>82</sup> Diod. Sic. 5.4.7. Translation modified from *Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes*, trans. C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1963). Diodorus’ source appears to be Timaeus DK 566 F 164.

<sup>83</sup> Callim. *Aitia* fr. 21.8-10.

and poets – most notably Aristophanes – arguably make reference to another ceremonial practice at the Thesmophoria: the *gephurismos*. Masked and arrayed in buffoon’s motley, (a) figure(s) would participate in this ritual by making lewd gestures and lampooning the cultic procession from the sides of a bridge (*gephura*) that spanned the river Cephisus.<sup>84</sup> Descriptions of the affair have led some scholars back to Baubo’s obscenely humorous exposure.

As unreliable as some of this testimony may be, it is hard to deny that the Eleusinian rites incorporated many key elements of the Demeter myth. Of signal importance to our ecological interpretation of these two off-scene dramas of the flesh, meeting earth in the mythophysical house of being, is that they both seem to follow the same kairotic-cum-thumotic sequence. Namely: anxiety and mourning, followed by scoptic and/or licentious exposure, laughing-with, and finally regenerative exuberance and consolation. In each case we find that carnal humor constitutes both the fulcrum of the movement and its intended outcome. When directed by that elemental attunement as opposed to being misdirected by worldly concerns, the humorous practices enumerated above – aischrology, mockery, jesting, obscene gestures, humiliation – became live options with sacral valence. More precisely, for participants of the agrarian cult these practices served to humble one another much as they had the goddess, reawakening them to the earthly ingredience of their borrowed flesh as to its exuberant endowment to the intercorporeal cycles of birth, nourishment, growth, death, and rebirth. In other words, it was by virtue of this attunement that initiates geared into their true vocation as caretakers of the earth. A discussion of how the Eleusinian Thesmophoria could have been inspired by carnal humor will bring these ideas into sharper relief.

The ceremonies of the Thesmophoria were divided into two phases: exoteric and esoteric. During the first, which bears striking parallels to the revelry in Bubastis, initiates, or *mustai*, were summoned, immersed in the sea, and took part in other forms of asceticism and purification. After Demeter they observed fasting and mourning.<sup>85</sup> Having purged their personal attachments to mundane affairs and concerns, the *mustai* then joined a public procession over the Sacred Way from Athens to the temple of Demeter in Eleusis. On this day of celebration, known as “The Iacchus,” those in attendance danced and sang amidst chants invoking the eponymous god. They

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<sup>84</sup> The most commonly cited ancient sources linking the *gephurismos* to the Thesmophoria include: Ar. *Ran* 416-30; Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 1015; Strabo 9.1.24.

<sup>85</sup> Ar. *Thesmophoriazusae* 985, 1150; Schol. Ar. *Thes.* 376; Schol. Soph. *Oedipus* 681.

went bearing gifts, including vulviform and/or phalloid wheatcakes and sacred effigies of the deities.<sup>86</sup> And as they processed the pilgrims swung leafy branches (*bakchoi*) to a ritualized rhythm.<sup>87</sup> Could this rhythm have been the original template for the performances of the iambic poets? One can only speculate. Were we to seek to bridge these traditions, we might look to that bridge just mentioned, over which the procession crossed the boundary from Athens to Eleusis. As interstitial passages between places and regions, bridges were fixtures of ritual practice throughout the ancient world. They served to commemorate transitions from profanity to sanctity, youth to adulthood, oneness to otherness, life to afterlife. So was the bridge over the Cephissus, this *kairos* wrought of stone, approached by the cult as an entryway into the sacral setting where they would be brought to confront their deathbound implications in the earth. On the interpretation we are building, the outlandish debauchery on the bridge served as preparation for the transition toward this second, esoteric phase of the Eleusinian Mysteries by reenacting the myth of Baubo-Iambe. Aristophanes claims that the *gephuristai* of the Thesmophoria, which one iambic poet includes in Dionysian festivals as well, would “jest,” “jeer,” and engage in “obscene buffoonery” for sake of “joy” and “mirth.”<sup>88</sup> Otherwise put, these obscene words and/or gestures were apparently devised to uplift the *thumos* of the initiates from enstatic anxiety and sorrow, the same tragic moods Demeter had suffered. Ancient reports of who exactly practiced the *gephurismos* are fraught with abridgements and inconsistencies. The Byzantine *Suda* provides a survey of possibilities under separate encyclopedic entries. In one the processioners were harried by a panoplied passel of women, men in a second, while a third attests to a solitary man in a veil.<sup>89</sup> A much earlier lexicon from Hesychius (c. fifth century CE) places a female prostitute on the bridge and/or a man in women’s garb.<sup>90</sup> We have encountered these ambiguities before. So have some modern scholars drawn from the Orphic myth to interpret this scurrilous lampoonery

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<sup>86</sup> Schol. Luc. *Dial. meretr.* 2.1; Athenaeus 14.647a; Cf. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 175; Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 32f.

<sup>87</sup> Cleomedes *Caelestia* 2.1.498-500. Cf. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 174-5.

<sup>88</sup> Ar. *Ran.* 358f.

<sup>89</sup> *Suda* s.v. ‘gephurizōn’, ‘ta ek tōn hamaxōn skōmmata’(mockery from wagons). On these entries see Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 170f.

<sup>90</sup> In Hesychius’ *Lexicographorum Graecorum* (s.v. ‘gephuris’) we read: “Some prostitute on the bridge, according to Herakleus; but not a woman, but a man there seated, completely veiled calling jokes [*skōmmata*] at the distinguished citizens by name.” All translations of Hesychius are from *Hesychii Alexandrini*, trans. Peter Allan Hansoer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).

as ritual mimicry of Baubo.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, given the aforementioned aetiological parallels to the myth and their putative literary confirmation (e.g. Aristophanes' allusion to dresses being "rent" by Iacchus), it is not beyond the pale of plausibility to suppose that this figure or figures might have performed the *anasurmos* to enthusiastically welcome the Eleusinian guests. And that these guests, who had accepted Demeter into their hearts by sympathetically attuning themselves to the agelastic mood that had beclouded *her* arrival, would have laughed their way into Eleusis. A condition for receiving the mysterious gifts that awaited *them* there.<sup>92</sup>

Precious little is known of the second, esoteric phase of the Eleusinian Thesmophoria: the *teletē*, or consummative rites, of the Greater Mysteries. "Unthinkable either to question or utter," their details remain cloaked in secrecy. That the "mysteries concerned the unspeakable" leads Arendt to suggest that they "were non-political and perhaps antipolitical by definition."<sup>93</sup> Indeed, we shall see that by holding the silence, they withheld itself from the exchange of power in the world, supplanting it with the careful equivalence of the earth-world.

From the shreds of secondhand evidence disspread over later texts and graphic artworks, we gather that the arrivants broke their fast, after Demeter, with the *kukeōn* – most likely a salutary concoction of water, meal, and mint. Whether or not this potion was fortified with some psychoactive substance, as some modern historians suggest, remains uncertain. The *mustai* then assembled in the Telesterion, a large, windowless hall where the hierophant presided over the rites in a darkness breached only at intervals by *torchlight* (§42). The hierophant is said to have conducted a series of revelations during a mute reenactment of the Demeter myth. This was followed by the *epopteia*, a crowning vision reserved for those already initiated.<sup>94</sup> There are

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<sup>91</sup> Francisco R. Adrados, *Festival, Comedy and Tragedy: The Greek Origins of Theatre*, trans. C. Holme (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 300. Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> Xavier Riu develops the idea that the *gephurismos* served as a gesture of hospitality, welcoming the initiate into the place where the Greater Mysteries transpired. Xavier Riu, *Dionysism and Comedy* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 238.

<sup>93</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 63, fn. 61.

<sup>94</sup> The hierophant's revelations were said to comprise things done (*drōmena*), things said (*legomena*), things shown (*deiknumena*), and the *epopteia*. We know nothing about what was said. According to some testimonies, *drōmena* involved a silent reenactment of the Demeter myth, a passion play of sorts beginning with Persephone's descent into the Underworld and culminating in her re-ascent and reunion (Clem. *Protr.* 2.12.2). The *deiknumena* were sacred relics revealed to the initiates by the hierophant – the Christian fathers advert to phallic totems but modern research points to figurines and ritual vases, handed down perhaps from the Mycenaean period. Plutarch *Demetrius* 26; Schol. Ar. *Ran.* 757. Cf. George E. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1961), 261f., 273f.; Michael B. Cosmopoulos, *Bronze Age Eleusis and the Origins of the Eleusinian Mysteries* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 21-4.

scattered clues that this vision involved the birth of a child, possibly Iacchus, and that this may have been emblemized by an ear of grain, numinously harvested in solemn silence.<sup>95</sup> A fragment of Euripides' lost *Hipsipyle* is thought to yield insights into the epiphany. Here we find the cultivation of one's own death likened to that of the ear of grain:

One buries children, one gains new children, one dies oneself; and this men take heavily, carrying earth to earth. But it is necessary to harvest life like a fruit-bearing ear of grain, and that one be, the other not.<sup>96</sup>

Whether contrived to reenact the mortification and rejuvenation of Demeter, the descent and resurrection of Persephone, or these in combination with the rebirth of Dionysus as Iacchus, reliable ancient testimony suggests that the Eleusinian *mysterium tremendum* exposed the well-tempered initiate to her mortal inherence in the mythophysical cycles of death and rebirth. Just as a grain must die if it is to bring forth fruit, so do others reap personal dividends and bodily nourishment from the existential and material decomposition of the deceased. Death hangs like a dead weight upon the self-enclosed body. But in "carrying earth to earth" we commit our flesh to that elemental compost, fertilizing its indefinite otherness, and thereby the definite being of others in a future beyond the vale of understanding. Neither expectation nor spectation, practical prehension nor intellectual comprehension, can disclose the identity of those others, anticipate their harvest of one's fate, recuperate that future. Our egress from the abject immanence can only be won through deferring all disclosure and commending our selves, our own bodies, to the earth through *affective* hyper-ecstasy.

Bolstering this interpretation is a fragment attributed to Aristotle. In it we read that the Eleusinian *mustes* did not learn (*mathein*) something; she was rather was *affected* (*pathein*) by something that changed her disposition (*diatethenai*).<sup>97</sup> To elucidate this change, we might look to Plutarch's complementary account, which describes an affective progression he thinks compulsory to the philosopher's novitiate as well. In the course of the *teletē*, he offers, "fear and deferent silence" turn to "silence and amazement (*siōpēn kai thambos*)" whereupon the initiates submit themselves "humbly" (*kekosmēmenōs*).<sup>98</sup> Noting the kinship between the Greek verbs

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<sup>95</sup> Hippolytus *Refutatio omnium haerisium* 5.8.39f.; cf. Eur. *Supplices* 54.

<sup>96</sup> Plut. fr. 757N: trans. from Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion: Archaic and Classical*, trans. John Raffan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 290. Cf. Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 69.

<sup>97</sup> Arist. fr. 15 quoted by Synesius *Dion* 8.48a. Cf. Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 81de, translation modified from Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia* (I). Cf. Plut. *Mor.* 47a.

*teleutan* (to die) and *teleisthai* (to be initiated), Plutarch elsewhere expatiates on what it was that elicited such moods. According to him, it was an experience that rehearsed one's own death:

The soul suffers an experience [at the moment of death] similar to those who celebrate great initiations . . . Wandering astray in the beginning, tiresome walkings in circles, some frightening paths in darkness that lead nowhere; then immediately before the end all terrible things, panic and shivering and sweat, and amazement. And then some wonderful light comes to meet you, pure regions and meadows are there to greet you, with sounds and dances and solemn, sacred words and holy views.<sup>99</sup>

Given that details of this passage are consistent with Greek myths about the soul's passage from Hades' realm to the fields of Elysium, it probably expresses popular views more so than it does any first-hand acquaintance with the penetralia of the Mysteries. Still, the idea that the rites entailed a profound reckoning with death and rebirth is something recurrently constated by reliable fifth-century commentaries. Isocrates (436–338 BCE) reports that the rites inspired the initiates to “have more pleasing hopes for the end of life and for all eternity.”<sup>100</sup> Similarly, we read in Pindar's dirge devoted to an Athenian *mustes*: “Blessed is he who has seen these things before he goes beneath the earth; he beholds [*oiden*] the end of mortal life, and the god-given source and origin [*archan*] of (new) life.”<sup>101</sup> Finally, a marker from the tomb of a hierophant from the Imperial Age declares that he revealed to the *mustai* the truth “that death is not an evil but something good.”<sup>102</sup>

What it was that the initiates saw during the last rites of the Mysteries is conjectural, as is the wisdom it presumably imparted. Clearly, we must be wary of any attempt to homologically reduce this silent experience to some summative set of propositional assertions. When we consider the carnal preliminaries of these rites together with their agricultural elements, however, a faint impression begins to emerge. The deferent attunement to the Earth Mother, achieved by ceremoniously sloughing off one's own concerns and honoring her somber memory, was gradually reinflected over the course of the Thesmophoric pilgrimage, and abruptly perhaps at the bridge. The obscenity and ribaldry of these rites uplifted the *thumos* of the initiates, transposing it into an irreverence for that importunate triune of mortal immanence: the self, the body, and its world. Then, “having left their own identity,” as Proclus (c. 412–485 CE) puts it,

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<sup>99</sup> Plut. fr. 178 (Stobaeus *Anthologium* 4.52.49): trans. from Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 289.

<sup>100</sup> Isoc. *Panegyricus* 4.28: trans. from *Isocrates with an English Translation in Three Volumes*, trans. George Norlin (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1980).

<sup>101</sup> Pindar, fr. 137: trans. mod. from Pindar, *The Odes of Pindar, including the Principal Fragments*, trans. Sir John Sandys (London: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1937), 590-3.

<sup>102</sup> IG II/III<sup>2</sup> 3661.5-6 = Peek, *Griechische Vers-Inschriften*, 879: quoted in Foley, *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 70.



they entered the dark hall of the Greater Mysteries to “become completely established in the gods and experience divine possession,” a “sympathy (*sympatheia*) of souls . . . that is incomprehensible to us yet divine.”<sup>103</sup>

By virtue of a hyper-ecstatic attunement to death, very much in the spirit of Baubo, the Eleusinian *mustai* fostered a carnal humor toward death, a laughter in the dark of their future having-been. In that atmosphere of humor, anxiety gave way to awe and humility, not merely toward death but *beyond* it toward a time marked by their own absence: the time of others born of them and, ultimately, the time of the earth itself, of which all is born anew. While the autoptic framing of his testimony is suspect, a fourth-century CE rhetorician captures the spirit of this ecstasy with these stark words: “I came out of the mystery hall feeling like a stranger to myself.”<sup>104</sup> As do the guest-strangers in the naked lunch guignol from the *Odyssey* (§39), the *mustai* cracked up the concentric spheres of enstasis by laughing with flesh that was not their own, even as they wore it. But unlike the suitors, theirs was a return to themselves deferred, their understanding moderated, by a careful reattunement to being-of-the-earth in their passage through and from the world.

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<sup>103</sup> Proc. *In Platonis Rempublicam commentarii* II 108, 17-30: trans. from Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1987), 114.

<sup>104</sup> Sopatros, *Rhetores Graeci* 8.114f.: trans. from Burkert, *Ancient mystery Cults*, 90.

#### §44. From Cult to Text: Iambe Versified and Fabled

Aesop the storyteller had nothing in particular to do, so he strolled into the workshop of some shipbuilders. The workers began to taunt Aesop, provoking him to speak, so Aesop replied with this old story. “Once upon a time,” said Aesop, “there was only Chaos and Water. God then wanted to make a new element emerge, *Gaia, the Earth*. So he ordered the Earth to swallow the sea in three gulps. Earth did as she was ordered: the first gulp caused the mountains to appear, and the second gulp caused the plains to be revealed. And if she decides to take a third gulp,” said Aesop, “that will be the end of all you shipbuilders and your entire profession!”  
–Aesop, “Aesop and the Shipbuilders”<sup>105</sup>

His story was that *Charybdis* had twice sucked in the sea: the first time she made the mountains visible; the second time the islands; and when she sucks it in for the last time she will dry it up entirely. Such a tale is appropriate enough to Aesop . . . but not to serious inquirers.  
–Aristotle, *Meteorology*<sup>106</sup>

Before we can legitimately bring the story of the Thracian woman to bear on the parable of Thales, one final piece of her puzzle remains. By way of forecast, I shall argue that the episode in Plato’s *Theaetetus* presents a philosophical re-staging of the old carnal comedy we have seen performed by Baubo-Iambe and reiterated by the Eleusinian cult. But this prompts the question: How is it that this complex figure descends from that enchanted setting onto the fabulous stage of Aesop and into the limelight of the philosophical parable? As already hinted, the answer to this question lies in Baubo’s literary counterpart Iambe, the eponymous figurehead of *iambos*. An art form that drew its roots from agrarian rituals, ripened into iambic poetry and fables during the Archaic period, and disseminated into the Socratic dialogues in spite of Plato’s most earnest attempts to extirpate it. The reconstruction of this tripartite development, which unfolds apace with Iambe’s own transformation, will prove fruitful to understanding Plato’s appropriation and treatment of her in his version of the Thales parable.

The ancients provide us with several competing etymologies of the Greek words ‘iambos’ (iambus) and ‘iambeion’ (iambic), usually in an attempt to account for the origins of their referents. The majority of these derive the words either from the eponym ‘Iambe’, etyma

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<sup>105</sup> Aes. fab. 557 (Perry 8): trans. from Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*, trans. Laura Gibbs (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 256.

<sup>106</sup> Arist. *Mete.* 356b10-16, emphasis mine. As in previous chapters, and unless otherwise noted, all translations of Aristotle are from Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, and conform to the Bekker numbers provided therein.

suggestive of her role in the Demeter myth, or both. Though they never *invoke* her name, other ancient derivations *evoke* ritualized aspects of Iambe's Orphic doublegoer. The most influential etymology comes from Aristotle's *Poetics*. Throughout his corpus tokens of 'iambos' appear in reference to a rhythm found in music and speech (*Rh.* 1408b32–1409a6), particular poems (*Rh.* 1418b29–31), and a kind of public performance (*Pol.* 1336b12–23). Here, in the *Poetics*, *iambos* figures into his historical teleology of poetry as a gelastic (*to geloion*) genre (*Pol.* 1336b12–23). Introducing *iambos* by way of contrast with the noble genre of comedy he takes to have superseded it historically, Aristotle develops a convoluted argument for the idea that this development is rationally warranted: comedy “produced mimesis of noble actions and the actions of noble people”; *iambos* was an offshoot of a “more vulgar [*eutelesteroi*]” tradition, which “depicted the actions of the base [*phaulōn*] . . . by composing invectives [*or* abuse, *psogous*].” He goes on to propose that this poetic genre “is called ‘iambic’ [*iambeion*] now, because it was in this meter that they [the poets] lampooned [*iambizein*] one another” (*Poet.* 1448b24–32).

In her recent summa, entitled *The Idea of Iambos*, Andrea Rotstein contests this derivation. Not only is the verb ‘iambizein’ unattested before Aristotle, but *iambeion* (an adjective denoting metrical features) actually derives from ‘iambos’ in the rhythmic and performative sense, which is even older than the generic sense it accrued in the Classical period (i.e. the iambic genre of poetry). Compelling evidence for these conclusions leads her to infer, contra Aristotle, that ‘iambizein’ (and the cognate ‘iambeion’) stems from ‘iambos’ rather than the inverse.<sup>107</sup> Vexed questions can be circumvented here. As Rotstein advises, “etymologies do not take us much further than the definition of *iamboi* found in Hesychius’ lexicon: ‘iamboi are certain rhythms and songs and a kind of poem’.”<sup>108</sup> Most central to our problematic is that, despite his lethonomia, Aristotle’s account is laden with traces of the figure with whom we are concerned. The signature features of Baubo-Iambe are plainly recognizable in the elements of his etymology and conception of *iambos*. Regarding the first, we saw that a form of *lampoonery* in the presence of those aghast at or aggrieved by death – their own or another’s – is practiced physically/verbally by Baubo-Iambe vis-à-vis Demeter as it is in the Thesmophoric bridge ritual (*gephurismos*). Regarding the second, the vulgarity and baseness attributed to *iambos* here in the *Poetics* fits easily with the social standing of Iambe and Baubo no less than it does with their

<sup>107</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 100 (argued in ch. 7, sec. 3).

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. Cf. Hsch. (s.v. ‘iamboi’).

sense of humor. To this we might add the obscene language (*aischrologia*) and ritual scurrility (*tōthasmos*) he elsewhere attaches to the performance of *iamboi*: a putative elaboration of *iambizein* that corresponds to their respective exposures (*paraskōptos* and *anasurmos*) (*Pol.* 1336b). The only incongruity is Aristotle’s addition of abuse (*psogos*), which is not associated with Iambe or *iambos* until Plato and is quite likely an inherited ideological embellishment of these other features.<sup>109</sup> We shall expound on the Classical reception of *iambos* and the attendant recuperation of Iambe in due course. Suffice it to say that Aristotle’s disesteem for the iambic genre, as for the ways it became sedimented into colloquial discourse, could explain why he never mentions the eponymy reiterated by so many of his Peripatetic followers, who trace *iambos* and *iambizein* back to ‘Iambe’ of Eleusis.<sup>110</sup>

If the etymological question concerning ‘iambos’ remains unsettled, most contemporary classicists agree that the art form emerged from song and dance, often in the context of agrarian festivals and fertility rites from the Demetrian and Dionysian cults.<sup>111</sup> Etymological support for a Thesmophoric connection is tendered by the derivation in medieval lexica of ‘iambos’/‘Iambe’ from the ritual cry ‘ia!’, which possibly accompanied that of ‘iakkhe!’ in the chants of the Eleusinian procession. Some modern scholars have forged a notable further link from ‘ia’ to ‘iomai’, meaning ‘to heal’, which comports with the apotropaic and ecological significance of carnal humor to the Demetrian myths and worship we have studied.<sup>112</sup> Others proceed by way of morphological and semantic affinities with ‘dithurambos’ and ‘thriambos’ to develop a

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<sup>109</sup> Plato, *Laws* 935e; Cf. Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 209f., 343. Note that *psogos* was also a genre in its own right for Aristotle, forming one of the primitive antecedents of comedy in his teleology.

<sup>110</sup> E.g. “*iambos* derived from Iambe” (Choerob. in *Heph.* 214.9, s.v. ‘iambos’); “Iambe: from her [is derived] *iambizein*” (Hsch. s.v. ‘Iambe’, cf. s.v. ‘iambizein’). In the aforementioned commentary to Hephæstion’s metrical handbook, Choeroboscus supplements his eponymic theory with the singular – and seemingly fanciful – claim that Iambe’s jests to Demeter were spontaneously uttered in iambic rhythm. Cf. Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 120, 175. Proclus’ account squares with Hesychius’ and sheds some additional light perhaps on Aristotle’s spurious etymology. Writes Proclus: “Some say [that *iambos* derives] from a certain servant Iambe, of Thracian origins. They say that when Demeter was in pain because of the capture of her daughter and went to Eleusis, Iambe moved the goddess to laughter through some jokes [*chleuasmata*], as she was seated on the stone now called Agelastos. But it seems that in ancient times the *iambos* was equally used by writers of abuse and praise, but because some [poets] used the meter to excess for ill-speaking, thence *iambizein* turned into *hubrizein* [to insult or mistreat] by habitual use, as from the *komikoi* [i.e. comic poets] [derives] *komoideisthai* [ridicule]” (ap. Photius *Chrest.* 319b15ff.: Rotstein’s translation, *Idea of Iambos*, 133).

<sup>111</sup> E.g.: Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 229-78; Francisco R. Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 253-64.; Ippokratis Kantzios, *The Trajectory of Archaic Greek Trimeters* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 12-20.

<sup>112</sup> The *Etymologicum Magnum* (s.v. ‘Iambe’) posits the propinquity with ‘ia’. For the link to ‘iomai’, see Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 118, 121. Cf. Krystyna Bartol, *Greek Elegy and Iambus: Studies in Ancient Literary Sources* (Poznań: Adam Mickiewicz University Press, 1993), 37, 89.

complementary connection to the melic hymns and chants from festal processions in honor of Dionysus Thriambos.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, strong evidence for the ritual origins of *iambos* is provided by the early iambographers: Semonides, Hipponax, and foremost, Archilochus.

The first extant reference to *iambos* appears in a fragment from Archilochus of Paros (c. 680–645 BCE). Although iambic poetry – distinguished by its meter – is known to have flourished in the oral culture of Ionia from at least the seventh century, this is the only Archaic token of the word that survives.<sup>114</sup> In the fragment (215W) *iamboi* are apposed to *terpolai*, “pleasures.”<sup>115</sup> If we follow Rotstein’s reconstruction of the original context of the statement, it is principally the convivial and commensal pleasures on the occasion of religious festivals, symposia, and public celebrations which the poet has in mind.<sup>116</sup> Drawing from numerous ancient commentaries and allusions to generalize the point, Rotstein maintains that “*iamboi* were a performance framed by ritual,” developing from an early religious setting into informal, sympotic and festal presentations, thence to more formal traditions: theatrical, rhapsodic, and competitive.<sup>117</sup> Most salient to our discussion is the figure she takes to have been a model for this frame. Writes Rotstein: “The effect of Iambe’s actions within the narrative of the Hymn,” to which we might add those reenacted by Baubo’s adherents in the cultic setting, “can shed light on the nature of the early *iambos* in respect of its audience. Laughter, a good mood, and a disposition to share food, drink, and conversation, were perhaps the expected effects of *iamboi*

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<sup>113</sup> In support of this connection, Hesychius mentions *iambos* in the entry for ‘thriambos’: “thriambos: a procession, a victory parade or a Dionysian hymn, an iambos” (cf. Photius *Lexicon Theta* l. 25). And in the entry for ‘pariambis’ *iamboi* are characterized as sung. See Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 118, 120; Bartol, *Greek Elegy and Iambus*, 37f.; Christopher G. Brown, “Iambos,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets*, ed. Douglas E. Gerber (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 25.

<sup>114</sup> The earliest mention of *iambos* as the name of a poem comes from Herodotus, who alludes to “a three-metre *iambos* of Archilochus” (Hdt. 1.12.5-8). For commentary, see Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 188.

<sup>115</sup> All references to Archilochus’ fragments correspond to the numbers codified by M. L. West’s translation (abbreviated as ‘W’): M. L. West, ed. *Greek Lyric Poetry: The poems and fragments of the Greek iambic, elegiac, and melic poets (excluding Pindar and Bacchylides) down to 450 BC* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993). For the Greek text and translation I have consulted *Greek Iambic Poetry: From the Seventh to the Fifth Centuries BC*, trans. Douglas E. Gerber (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press (Loeb), 1999).

<sup>116</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 151-66. The fragment in question reads “I do not care about iamboi or pleasures [*iambōn oute terpolōn*]” (Archil. 215W). Rotstein draws support from a coordinate statement concerning *terpolai* in Archil. 11W and the context in which Johannes Tzetzes quotes Archil. 215W (viz. Hom. *Il.* 24.125-34).

<sup>117</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 255. As evidence of this thesis she cites: Arist. *Pol.* 1336b (symposia and theater); Lysanias ap. Athenaeus 620c, Clearchus ap. Athenaeus 620c (rhapsodic performance – the Rhapsodes’ repertoires included the works of Archilochus); Pl. *Ion* 534c, *Laws* 935e (competition).

upon their audience . . . the therapeutic effect of mitigating pain and sorrow.”<sup>118</sup> In view of his distinction in the first major wave of iambic poetry, his plausible connection to the cults and festivals of Demeter and Dionysus (for whom he too composed hymns), his ancient reputation as a musician, his Thracian extraction, and finally the strong thematic and stylistic affinities between his poetry and the Aesopic fable, I argue that Archilochus provides an arterial avenue for Baubo-Iambe’s journey from religious ritual to the philosophical parable. An overview of these themes will therefore prove instructive.

With Archilochus iambic poetry comes into its own as the genre later thematized by Classical typologies and post-Classical lexica. In addition to its distinctive meter (short syllable followed by long), which Aristotle likens to that of “the language of the many,” the genre is distinguished by family resemblances of style and substance.<sup>119</sup> Namely: dialogue, fable, parody, maxims, political satire, autobiographical focus and dramatic impersonation, and all manners of mockery, vulgarity, obscenity, and bestiality (*in omni sensu*).<sup>120</sup> In the fifth-century BCE treatise *On the Ancient Poets and Musicians* Glaucus of Rhegium credits Archilochus with having had a momentous impact on Greek music, a role elaborated by a fragment in which the poet lays claim to being the “leader” (*exarchōn*) of the melic dithyramb.<sup>121</sup> Archetypally, the dithyramb arose in a ritual milieu from choral songs dedicated to Dionysus. Among the fragments belonging to the Archilochean corpus are hymns devoted to Dionysus *and* Demeter, whose worship we are told the poet brought to Paros.<sup>122</sup> While an inscription from the third-century BCE attests that he sung in a Dionysian festival having received a lyre from the Muses; and a scholium to Aristophanes’ *Birds* records him singing a victory hymn to Demeter; another source suggests that it was not Archilochus but his grandfather Tellis who introduced Demeter to the island.<sup>123</sup> On the whole, our knowledge of Archilochus indicates a strong affiliation to the

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<sup>118</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 182.

<sup>119</sup> Arist. *Rh.* 1408b–1409a.

<sup>120</sup> As Rotstein notes, iambic meters include: stichic iambic trimeters, stichic trochaic tetrameters, stanzas called epodes, and by extension stichic hexameters (*Idea of Iambos*, vi).

<sup>121</sup> Archil. 119–120W. Cf. D.L. 9.7.38; Plu., *De Musica* 1134d. See Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 230–34 for a discussion of Archilochus’ ancient reputation as a musician.

<sup>122</sup> Archil. 251W, 322W. Notably, many of the iambic poets composed hymns to these gods and/or participated in their cults (e.g. Callim. *Hymns* 1–6; Hipponax, fr. 39), which lends credence to the idea of the cultic and sacral origins of the genre.

<sup>123</sup> Mnesiepes inscription (see below, cf. fr. 251W); Schol. Ar. *Av.* 1764 (324W). It bears mention that we owe the first extant transcription of an iambic poem to Aristophanes (*Frogs* 661). Although he expressly quotes Hipponax,

cults of these two deities, and further perhaps to the emergence of iambic poetry from songs of praise – rather than exchanges of blame as Aristotle leads us to believe.

This is not to understate the scopic dimension of this outlandish figure's output, which would be identified as a prototype of invective poetry as early as the fifth century BCE.<sup>124</sup> Scholars have long puzzled over the apparent coincidence of sacred paeans and profane imprecations in the Archilochean *iamboi* – occasionally within the space of a single extant fragment. The gradual secularization of the genre in the ensuing centuries seems to have contributed to its deterioration into defamatory discourse *tout court*. The question as to whether iambic poetry first arose from divine reverence and komastic/sympotic entertainment on the one hand, or irreverent derision on the other, is an antinomical point of dispute among classicists. But the ecological lesson we drew from mythic and cultic exposure was that this is a false dichotomy. For deference to the earthly entails a humorous attunement to the folly of the world.

To be sure, there are some marked dissimilarities between Iambe's benevolent words and the pugnacious insults that Archilochus jabs like bloody fists into his adversaries. There is even a legend that he drove a traitorous family to suicide, so baleful was his slander.<sup>125</sup> His recurrent incitements to violence, his polemics against lascivious women, and his virile scorn for his effeminate rivals are all together antithetical to the congenial mood and xenial care she incarnated. But when we look to the victims of his vituperation, travesty, and satire, the commonalities among them are striking. They typically belong to the city's intellectual, political, and economic elite. As a rule they are dissipated proto-cosmopolitans who have risen to that station and defend it by venally exploiting the economy of the *oikos*, not unlike those whom Hesiod reproached for wreaking "homegrown misfortune" in his *Works and Days* (see §28). As a self-proclaimed protector of Paros who stands under the protection of Dionysus and Demeter, Archilochus humiliates in an effort to humble those mortals who uphold the ecumenical order in defiance of the first god as they withhold due gifts from the second.<sup>126</sup> Though his poetry represents something of an androcentric appropriation of its distaff religious sources and, commensurably, an anthropological attenuation of the ecological difference, I would like to

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scholars have disputed this identification since antiquity, suggesting that these lines belong to Ananius (1W) instead (cf. Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 201-210).

<sup>124</sup> Pindar, P. 2.52-5; cf. Arist. Rh. 1418b29-31.

<sup>125</sup> Archil. 172-181W.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Archil. fr. 51 (Diehl) from the *Monimentum Parium*.

suggest that it reincarnates carnal humor by giving voice to the *destructive* valence of the earth: voracious, immane, an affront to human supremacy, yet ultimately regenerative.<sup>127</sup> In effect, Iambe's kairotic mode of utterance is translated into *iamboi*, performed by those attuned, as she was, to the ecological metabolism. Archilochus' ties to (in)fertility are borne out by the Mnesiepes inscription. In the legend it relates he is cast as a cult hero whose composition is deemed "too iambic" by his contemporaries. After putting him on trial and condemning him, the polis suffers a pestilence that ravages their genitals and can only be remedied, says the Oracle, by duly honoring the poet.<sup>128</sup> This is no mere injunction to anthropolatry. Rather, by paying tribute to the spokesman of Dionysus and Demeter the city honors them by proxy.

Archilochus' propinquity to both Baubo-Iambe and the flesh of the earth is underwritten by how he presents himself to us. A self-described bastard (an extraction deprived of civil rights under fifth-century Attic law), Archilochus was the son of a Parian nobleman and a Thracian slave. According to multiple sources he was indigent and eventually exiled from Paros, in part, on that account.<sup>129</sup> Positioned on the margins of society, he expresses disinterest in amassing wealth and property (Archil. 19W), discards his shield for a lyre (5W), and embraces an antinomian *ethos* positioned against the hypocritical values of the Parian aristocracy, be they friends (e.g. Glaucus) or foes (e.g. Lycambes). Yet his sardonic view of others' faults often extends to his own, and he is criticized in Critias' notorious philippic for having publicized

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<sup>127</sup> Against the misogynistic seeming of Archilochus' appropriation, "for which Iambe was felt to represent a feminine 'mocking' prototype," Laurie O'Higgins surmises that the primary object of the poet's disdain was not women per se, but the symbolic position of a certain class of women in prevailing hierarchies of political power. Her reasoning is worth quoting at length: "The answer in part lies in the crucial role women played within the aristocratic cultures targeted by iambic. A primary marker and obligation of elite status was intermarriage with other aristocratic families. Women constituted the currency of exchange within this closed circle. Thus elite wives betokened both the privileged class, and its means of perpetuating itself and excluding others. It is no coincidence that the defining story of the life of the famous iambicist Archilochus concerns a promised marriage [to Neobule], subsequently revoked [by Lycambes]. His response is to drag the girl [and her father] down in his verse." According to O'Higgins, iambic poetry must therefore be regarded to have served "paradoxically, both as a potent instrument of social control" exercised over men and women alike, "and as a catalyst of upheaval and revolution" (O'Higgins, *Women and Humor*, 64). This is not to downplay the iambic invective directed toward women. Archilochus' virulent objurgation of his beloved Neobule mustn't be equated with his verbal assaults on her father. But it is important to recognize the diversity of the Parian elite he disparaged, none of whom were beyond the pale (see para. below). O'Higgins qualifies her position by noting that there were no female iambographers. But Nancy Worman challenges this claim, drawing evidence for an uncelebrated tradition of female iambographers from Alcman (fr. 1), the *Delian Hymn to Apollo*, Sappho, and Corinna. Like O'Higgins, she stresses the symbolic significance of prominent female voices and appetites in the poems, which epitomize the iambic style and its subversion of aristocratic values. Nancy Worman, *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 43f.

<sup>128</sup> Mnesiepes inscription SEG 15.517: Tarditi, *Archilochus* (Rome: Edizioni Dell'Ateneo, 1968), 4-7.

<sup>129</sup> Critias 88 DK (fr. Aelian, VH 10.13); Pind. *Pythian Odes* 2.52-6.



shameful details of his own life.<sup>130</sup> Most prominent among these is his libertine indulgence of “low” appetites, the carnal desires of the “debased” body, whose orifices, vocal and erotic, open onto the “obscenities” of the flesh.<sup>131</sup> In an orgy of metaphors *in more ferarum*, defiant of Greek sexual mores and human exceptionalism, Archilochus takes a cue from Baubo-Iambe by speaking, in a fashion, from between his legs.<sup>132</sup> As he does, phalli become “horns” and “eels,” the vagina an *andonion*, a word denoting a nightingale’s young.<sup>133</sup> High among his poetic expedients is a fanciful menagerie, deployed erotically and scoptically, evoking both Aesop’s fables and the swine and satyrs of agrarian ritual. Francisco Adrados joins a host of scholars who take the zoological tropes of the iambographer and the fabulist to bespeak a common heritage:

It is in [the] festival environment – which gave rise to the iamb, the comedy and other types of poetry that tended to set themselves in opposition to the tragic types – that the animal themes, the small animal myths, were developed, based on the model of the heroic myth on one hand, and of the Oriental fable on the other, to create the literary fable. This fable was told at the festival and at the meals that accompanied it, to satirize, censure, exhort. It relied, of course, on animalistic elements, which were sometimes ritual, sometimes literary. . . . Poets such as Archilochus did no more than continue this custom, but with a new literary development.<sup>134</sup>

Adopting this idiom to agonistic effect, Archilochus transforms himself into a fox, a hedgehog, an ant, and a chattering cicada made more strident still when caught by the wing; in these myriad guises he is embroiled in conflicts with others turned eagles, bearded vultures, and lions.<sup>135</sup> The fable of the fox and the eagle, in which Lycambes is equated with the latter (174W) and man as such with beasts (177W), also appears in the Aesopic bestiary – as does the fable of the fox and the monkey.<sup>136</sup> Just as the ritual cries of the enthusiastic processioners summoned Demeter, Dionysus, and Baubo to enter them, so do the words of Aesop and Archilochus conjure wild animals to expose the wild being of all, regardless of station and civilized status. In the face of the many-headed tragedy we confronted in chapter 1, both poets revived and reappropriated that older spirit, wedding wildness to humor and revelry, then humiliation and rebellion. Theirs was a carnal comedy, born of a sacred past, reborn of the sacral, and renewed to subvert the secular

<sup>130</sup> Critias 88 DK (fr. Aelian, VH 10.13); self-mockery: fr. 166 (warring behavior).

<sup>131</sup> See, for instance, Archil. 25W, 43W, 48W, 67W, 118W, 119W.

<sup>132</sup> Describing Baubo-Iambe, Clarrisa Pinkola Estés adopts the Spanish expression *dice entre las piernas*, ‘she speaks from between her legs’. Clarrisa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine, 1992), 336.

<sup>133</sup> Archil. 227W, 189W, 263W. Cf. Hsch. (s.v. ‘andonion’), which explains the sense of the trope.

<sup>134</sup> Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, 255.

<sup>135</sup> Archil. 172-181W, 35W, 185W, 187W, 201W.

<sup>136</sup> Archil. 172-181W; Aes. fab. 154f. (Perry 1); Archil. 185-7W; Aes. fab. 24 (81 Perry).

seriousness of their age. In an age that was fast on its way to adopting the Protagorean measure of all things, they sought their humble countermeasure in the humus beneath the human. Where we would say the two Archaic poets had an ecopolitan sense of humor, Jay Griffiths exalts the “ecocratic” revolt of comedy in the same carnal sense:

Wildness and comedy share a love of rudeness, tickling the pink with a horn of plenty. . . . Comedy is rude, very vulgar, that sensible word, of the common people. Comedy is of the underclass, the stage-for-all . . . inclusive as common land, or a wilderness. Tragedy is exclusive – it has enclosed the common stage and privatized it for the aristocracy. . . . Comedy amuses itself by knocking all pretensions of rank, in the natural world as in the human. . . . Comedy is as ecocratic as life itself, all wild weeds welcome. . . . What is wild is rebellious, breaks the rules, subversive and quintessentially revelrous. Comedy rebels against tragedy, reverses it, subverts it. Life rebels against death.<sup>137</sup>

The wild weeds of the agrarian cults and festivals are discernible in the environs, inclusivity, and style of the vulgar poets. Adrados claims that the ritual model, which we have applied to iambic poetry, sheds equal light on the verses of Aesop, whom he takes to be a direct descendent of the cultic revelers. On his view, nothing can be understood of the Greek fable or its seminal appearance in iambic poetry if we discount its roots in the “festive, satirical, deviant aspect of certain festivals or parts of certain festivals, always within the sphere of the agrarian festivals.”<sup>138</sup> In many cases, Archilochus and Aesop were not authors so much as narrators transmitting that older tradition in an increasingly secular setting of *sumposia*, *komoi*, theater, and competition.<sup>139</sup> So were these performances, as Rotstein’s puts it, “framed by ritual.” Against the idea that the aristocratic *sumposion* was the sole setting of iambic performance, or even the predominant one, she enlists multiple ancient testimonies to make a compelling case for this broad range of performance scenarios “in which food, and especially wine, was shared thus creating a social bond between participants, be they *philoï*, *hetairoi*, members of a club or association, or participants at a festival.”<sup>140</sup> On these occasions philotic affiliation, inflected through the mythophysical equivalence of care inherited from ritual, undercut political hierarchies. On this matter, Rotstein suggests that “not only attendants to the feast but also slaves or hired professionals could be performers of *iamboi*” on this stage-for-all.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Jay Griffiths, *Wild: An Elemental Journey*, 342f.

<sup>138</sup> Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, 284f.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. “Aesop was originally no more than a character who was mimicked at the festival and who narrated fables. Hence the custom of sometimes not narrating the fable directly, but attributing it to Aesop” (ibid., 255).

<sup>140</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 254. Cf. Pl. *Ion* 534c, *Laws* 935e (at competitions); Arist. *Pol.* 1336b20, Lysanias ap. Ath. 620c, Clearchus ap. Ath. 620c, Semus ap. Ath. 622a. (at theaters).

<sup>141</sup> Rotstein, *Idea of Iambos*, 254.

The carnal poetry of Archilochus (son of a Thracian slave) and Aesop (himself an attested Thracian native and slave) emerged out of this anti-authoritarian milieu defined by the celebration of the vulgar, the bestial, the grotesque, and our libidinous share in the regenerative tenacity of nature. This carnival of the flesh reinstated the earthgrown humor of agrarian rites, which were becoming politically sterilized by the city-state. And it opened the way for the biting, seriocomic wit of the Socratic dialogues, Old Comedy (e.g. Aristophanes), Menippean satire (e.g. Lucian), and eventually the “degradation” that Mikhail Bakhtin finds in Medieval folk traditions (e.g. Rabelais). Fertilizing the earthy sense we released from the words ‘humiliation’ and ‘humility,’ Bakhtin characterizes degradation as a “the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract . . . a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity.”<sup>142</sup> This way lies a bottom-up humor, one that brings the high down to the low, the talking head to below the waist, the firmament to the fundament. As we saw in our discussion of the genostatic grounds of bodily implacement (§37), and the metabolic equivalence of bodily death and allogenic rebirth in the Eleusinian Mysteries (§43), that “indissoluble unity” is won by no body, but by the flesh. Just so, Bakhtin’s “grotesque body” thrives on a diet of *profound* impropriety that *disorganizes* and dislocates the body proper (*oikeios*), which gets excreted through garrulous orifices and passed into manure. Here is the subversion of death that Griffiths finds in comedy. It is not the Nietzschean refusal of life for the afterlife of the ascetic ideal. Nor is it a Heideggerian flight from death into the sham eternity of the living-dead. It is a laughing affirmation of that (im)pudent truth unveiled by Baubo, uplifting from below. The earthward ecstasy of one’s own life disowned and delivered to the carnal compost of life as such.

If death terminally displaces kings and desperate men in the same fell stroke, and carnal humor exposes the tragicomic shadow of that fate looming over those who would dispel it with gleaming crowns and armor, “then may this earth (gape open) for me,” sings Archilochus, who draws them into his *danse macabre* to an accompaniment of the darkest of laughter.<sup>143</sup> In the muddy complexion of flesh and earth, consummated by bodily death but continuously rehearsed by the carnal poet, kings become beggars, fools wise, and aquiline eyries are shaken to their foundations by vulpine wiles and the stings of mean insects. Difficult as it is to parse their respective biographies from hagiographies embroidered by their transcribers, who mimicked the

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<sup>142</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968), 19f.

<sup>143</sup> Archil. 220W.

mimics of satyrs and swine, permit me to delve deeper into this connection between *iambos* and Aesop, one of the earliest attested reciters of the Thales parable.<sup>144</sup>

Nothing is certain about the life of Aesop. Some have even doubted his existence. Yet our central focus will be on how the Aesopic fables – whatever their authorship – and the folklore surrounding this literary – if not historical – figure disseminated the elemental attunement of carnal humor while conveying the Thracian maid toward her philosophical destination. Herodotus claims that Aesop was also from Thrace and later enslaved on the Aegean island of Samos. Thanks in part to his wit and humor, his master Iadmon eventually manumitted him.<sup>145</sup> By and large, such fifth-century testimonies maintain that the fabulist flourished in the sixth century BCE. But there are Aesopic fragments attested by Greek and Roman sources as far back as Archilochus (see above) and Hesiod. According to the legend handed down to us from the *Life of Aesop* (an anonymous folkbook written by a Greek-speaking Egyptian (c. 400 BCE–100 CE), Aesop cut a figure not unlike that of Socrates for being both a pauper and depauperate:

The fabulist Aesop, the great benefactor of mankind, was by chance a slave but by origin a Phrygian of Phrygia, of loathsome aspect, worthless as a servant, potbellied, misshapen of head, snub-nosed, swarthy, dwarfish, bandy-legged, short-armed, squint-eyed, liver-lipped – a portentous monstrosity. In addition to this he had a defect more serious than unsightliness in being speechless, for he was dumb and could not talk.<sup>146</sup>

The legend continues by relating how the mute was working the fields one torrid summer day when he chanced upon a wandering priestess of Isis, the Egyptian goddess of fertility and language. After bringing her gifts of vittles and leading her to a spring for water, it is said that Aesop helped her find her way, bid her farewell, and returned to the field to rest. The ensuing tableau is stirring in its portrayal of Aesop's mute contact with the wild being of those precincts:

There was much humming of cicadas from the branches, and the song of birds of many kinds and many haunts was to be heard. There the nightingale prolonged her plaintive song, and the branches of the olive murmured musically in a sympathetic refrain. On the slenderest branch of a pine-tree the stirring of the breeze mocked the blackbird's call. And mingling with it all in harmony, Echo, the imitator of voices, uttered her answering cries. The combined sound of all these was soothing to hear and Aesop, lulled by it, drifted off into a pleasant slumber.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> The fable of the anonymous astronomer and passerby is reproduced in the *Life of Aesop* (*Vit. Aes.* 110, cf. fn. 149 below). For a discussion of the provenance and history of Aesop's version of the parable, see Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian Woman*, 140f.

<sup>145</sup> Hdt. 2.134f. Cf. Aristotle *Rh.* 1393b. Herodotus' claim about Aesop's origins chimes with the *Life of Aesop* (*Vit. Aes.* 1), where he is described as a Phrygian. According to Herodotus, Phrygians were in fact Thracian Brygians who had immigrated (Hdt. 7.73). This idea is also defended by Strabo (8.295, 10. 471). The Phrygians were commonly held to be one of the oldest nations in Asia Minor (Hdt. 2.2).

<sup>146</sup> *Vit. Aes.* 1: trans. Lloyd Daly, *Aesop without Morals (Aesop Romance)* (New York: Yoselhoff, 1961). Reprinted in William F. Hansen, ed. *Anthology of Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998), 111.

<sup>147</sup> *Vit. Aes.* 6: Hansen, ed. *Anthology of Greek Popular Literature*, 114.

As the very trees became eloquent where they stood, the priestess had been making a prayer to Isis in supplication to show the kind slave mercy. The goddess responded with “recompense” to Aesop: not only the gifts of speech but by persuading the Muses to bestow their gifts in turn. “They conferred on him the power to . . . conceive and elaborate tales in Greek.” Aesop awoke to a newfound ability. A response-ability to the hypnotic harmony of every field, in tune with Echo, in time with the cicadas – winged emissaries of the Muses but also Pan, filling the other branch of Iambe’s family tree (see §44 below). Through Aesop’s wild fables would resound the ontological echoes of elementary voices: the nightingale and the olive tree, the blackbird and the pine tree – or the cascade from our conversations with Bachelard (§38). They would give expression to the psithuric call of all things sounding forth of silent earth and, from the vegetal and animal kingdoms, every vital response. Or so the legend goes.

The ancient affiliation between Isis (Iset/Aset) and Baubo leads us back to the agrarian festivals of the Nile River Delta. Isis, whose significance to the Egyptians was inwrought with their dark soils, shared many of Demeter’s distinguishing attributes, being worshipped as mother-goddess of fertility. In §40 we mentioned the celebration of Bast and Isis at Bubastis, which prominently featured both ritual mockery and ritual obscenity. In his purported eyewitness account of the festival, Herodotus describes rites strikingly reminiscent of the Thesmophoria:

Now, when they sail on the river to the festival of Bubastis, men and women together crowd into each barge. Some of the women carry castanets and make much noise, while other women play flutes; both men and women sing and clap their hands. Whenever they pass close to a town, they bring the barge in nearer to the river bank, and then the women do various things that I have described. They also *shout out abuse and yell mocking jests and jokes at the village women standing along the river’s edge*. Some of the women on the barges perform dances, then, standing up, *they hitch up their skirts*. On arrival at Bubastis they make a festival with many sacrifices, and more wine is said to be drunk at this feast than during all the rest of the year.<sup>148</sup>

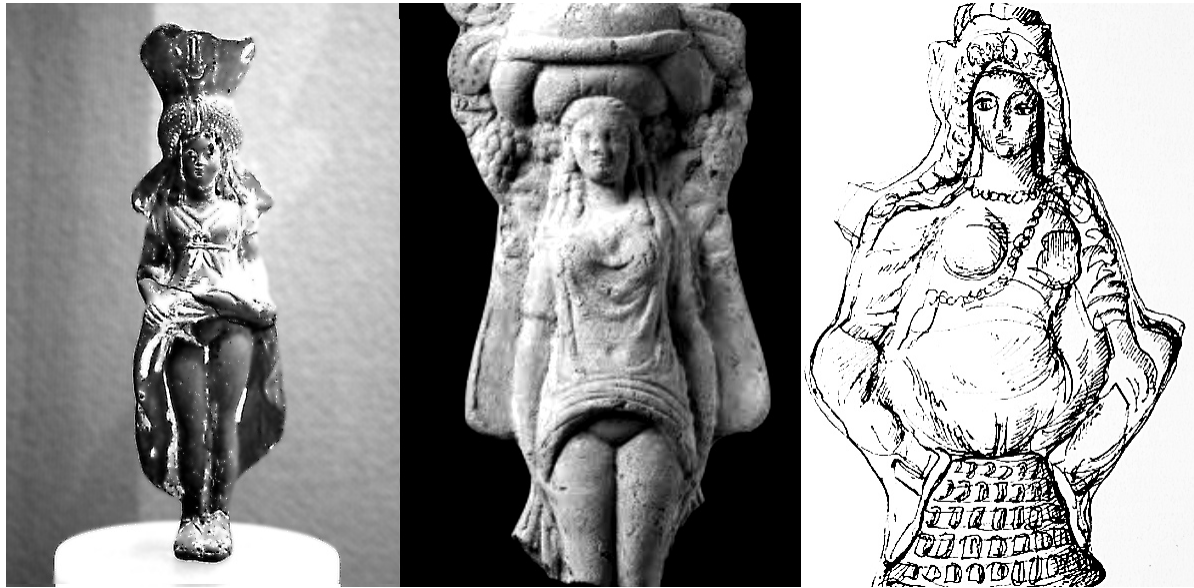
With its jovial dance and song, its lampoonery along the river (*gephurismos*), and its exhibition of the flesh (*anasurmos*), the festival on the Nile shared in that carnal humor we encountered on the Sacred Way to Eleusis. And there is reason to think that Isis and Bast (or Bastet), whose name was equated with the ‘soul or spirit of Isis’ (*ba-Aset*), may have in-habited the revelers much as Baubo and Demeter had the Eleusinian initiates.

In *The Metamorphosis of Baubo*, a book from which we continue to draw insight, Lubell sifts through the archeological evidence for unitive traces of these two traditions. In addition to several Isis myths, thematically and narratively consistent with their Demetrian counterparts,

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<sup>148</sup> Hdt. 2.60, emphasis mine.

Lubell points to numerous Hellenistic artifacts recovered from the Nile delta region. As if to synthesize the goddess with her festal followers, the statuettes combine the iconic coiffure of Isis with agrarian symbols (harvest baskets, leaves, grapes) together with the ritualized gestures of the celebrants in attitudes of obscenity we have come to associate with Baubo (Fig. 7.3).



**Figure 7.3** Left and center: *Hellenistic Terracottas of Isis Bubastis in anasurmos pose. Alexandria, Egypt (left: c. 200 BCE, Ägyptisches Museum Leipzig; center: c. 100 BCE, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston).* Right: *Sketch of a Hellenistic Terracotta of Isis seated upon a harvest basket by Winifred Lubell.*<sup>149</sup>

The first two figures evoke the *anasurmos* displayed by the Priene Baubos (Fig. 7.1) while the third, reproduced here by Lubell, exhibits the gravid, ranine posture of Baubo (or Isis) atop the sow (Fig. 7.2). It bears mention that Isis also appears in contemporaneous graphic renderings as an anguiform creature; in others a disquieting third eye opens from her head. Thus we find that she too transmogrifies as the ages unfold, from goddess to Gorgon and witch.<sup>150</sup>

Given that our storied Aesop has acquired his artistry from Isis Bubastis, is it any wonder that his fables would be teeming with feral voices? That through these voices he would pay due tribute to her with humorous mockery, obscenity, and humiliation? Obviously we mustn't conflate the myth of Aesop with the supposed historical figure. But if we accept the ritual model championed by such scholars as Adrados (cited above), the legend is important for what it tells

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Paul Perdrizet, *Les Terres cuites Grecques de l'Égypte de la collection Fouquet* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1921). Lubell, *Metamorphosis of Baubo*, 117-20.

<sup>150</sup> Lubell explores this parallel development in depth (*ibid.*, 120-135.).

us about the original setting and subtext of Aesopic performance. Much as iambic poetry emerged from and continued to bear the impress of the ritual worship of Demeter, so too is Aesop the beneficiary of the carnal humor associated with the Isis cult. Moreover, bearing in mind the cross-fertilization of these two cultic traditions, it's hardly surprising to find: that certain fables are common to both of their literary offshoots; that Aesop embraces a vulgar sense of humor geared toward the chastening of noblemen; that his fables were said to have been sung; or that many betray the vestiges of iambic meter.<sup>151</sup> Nor is it surprising that the third-century iambic poet Callimachus would recite an Aesopic fable to preface his account of Aesop's Archilochan demise, unjustly sentenced to death by the Delphians in retaliation for his biting mockery.<sup>152</sup> These mythic, ritualistic, and literary traces commingle to form the forgotten backdrop to Aesop's parable of his Milesian contemporary and his Thracian compatriot. With this thought we have finally reached the end of our journey from Eleusis to Miletus. Where others have resiled from its profundity while filling his well with displaced sediments carried over from modern thinking, we can already begin to appreciate the historical depth of Thales' fall. And when we turn to reexamine laughter of the Thracian maid, we shall find that its profundity was far greater than thinkers as early as Plato had presumed. Before we can flesh out this voice of carnal humor as it issued from the Thracian, we must first attempt to separate it from *his* imperious voice. Let us set about that task by considering the foreign slave and her poetic consort were received by their aristocratic hosts in the courts of Classical thought.

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<sup>151</sup> For a discussion of the last two affinities, see Adrados, *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* 77, 283-6.

<sup>152</sup> Call. *Iambus* 2 (fr. 192 Pfeiffer). Callimachus characterizes Aesop as a singer in this fragment, bolstering Adrados' argument.

#### §45. From Archaic Poetry to Classical Philosophy: Laughing at the Thracian Slave

Where the vulgar laugh, the philosopher admires; and he laughs where the vulgar open their big, stupid eyes in astonishment.  
–Voltaire, “Mountain Fable”<sup>153</sup>

In the opening scene of Plato’s *Phaedrus* Socrates finds himself out of his element. The dialogue takes place in the extramural outlands of Athens. We find the philosopher and his patrician companion traipsing barefoot through the shoals of the river Ilissus, having veered from road and path into these bucolic surrounds. Arriving at a “resting place,” a certain shadetree sanctuary to which Phaedrus has led him, Socrates delights in the setting. He takes notice of the tree’s bloom, breathing in its heady fragrance, the statues and votive offerings to the river god and Nymphs, and a gurgling spring, which is not espied so much as felt as its cool waters run over his feet (*Phdr.* 230bc).<sup>154</sup> Socrates’ keen discernment makes it apparent that *this* philosopher at least appreciates “what lies near at hand” and “under his feet.” Yet the ensuing exchange seems to give the lie to his token admiration for the scenery, betraying an underlying disposition toward ecological abjection that is only magnified by his own complacency. Addressing his friend, Phaedrus observes that “you . . . appear to be totally out of place,” for “not only do you never travel abroad – as far as I can tell, you never even set foot beyond the city walls.” Socrates confirms in reply that this isn’t so far from the truth. In his own words: “I am devoted to learning; landscapes and trees have nothing to teach me.” Indeed, were Phaedrus not “waving in front of [him] the leaves of a book” containing Lysias’ speech, which presumably offers more of an incitement to wisdom than do any windswept leaves of grass, Socrates avows he would sooner turn back for the *agora* to trade words and ideas amid civilized commerce (230de). In view of his *atopia* – his displacement from this wild keep and the ecstatic trance he was periodically observed to enter – it is fitting that Socrates will subsequently be dissuaded from returning to the city by his *daimon*, a wild spirit, divinely sent, who inhabits this self-ascribed “seer” (*mantis*) from time to timely time (242bc).

It is precisely the kairotic ecstasy of god-bestowed madness (*theia mania*), introduced as “finer than self-control of human origin” (*Phdr.* 244d), that sets the *topos* for this dialogue in the

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<sup>153</sup> Voltaire, *The Portable Voltaire* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 164f.

<sup>154</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Plato are from Cooper, ed. *Plato: Complete Works* (cited parenthetically by Stephanus number).



extramural outlands of Athens. Over the course of his conversation with Phaedrus, Plato's Socrates develops a sophisticated conception of philosophy as a *logos* inspired (*enthousiazon*) by madness. This *logos* is said to bear a resemblance to the heterological arts, to rhetoric and poetry for instance, which can be divinely inspired as well. But the resemblance is deceptive. Always the dutiful murenger of his newly claimed territory, Plato insulates philosophy from these and all other arts by fortifying its sovereign standing as a homological discourse, set apart from all others by its care for wisdom *qua* reason geared toward knowledge of the truth (the *idea* of *agathon*).<sup>155</sup> Thus he reasons in the *Ion*:

Every individual poet can only compose well what the Muse has set him to do – one dithyrambs, one encomia, one hyporchemata, one epic, *one iambi* [*iamboi*]. They are no good at anything else. This is because their utterances are the result not of art but of divine force (*Ion* 534bc, emphasis mine).

In other words, what essentially distinguishes the poet's madness from that of the philosopher is that the latter is moderated and redirected by the totalizing power of reason. The oft-noted irony of the *Phaedrus* is that Socrates himself indulges in the irrational excesses of myth, rhetoric, and poetry in order to persuade his interlocutor of this truth about philosophy.

On closer scrutiny, we find this predilection to be present from the outset of the *Phaedrus* as Plato sets the *dramatis personae* against the backdrop of the wild place in which their conversation will unfold. As is often the case in the dialogues, such stage setting is important for what it reveals about the historical Socrates. For such liminal places, where the pupil pays homage to his mentor *in propria persona*, effectively frame the philosophical space of reasons and arguments into which Socrates is inevitably recast as the dramatic mouthpiece for Plato's ideas. Like many another *parergon*, the preclusive vignette of the *Phaedrus* is neither part of the work nor is it wholly separate from it.<sup>156</sup> Thus, when Socrates poetically exclaims, "how [the air] echoes with the summery, sweet song of the cicada's chorus!" the catacoustics are equivocal

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<sup>155</sup> It bears mention that for Plato here and elsewhere, poetry *just is* a kind of rhetoric (*Phdr.* 259d; cf. *Grg.* 502c). At *Gorgias* 503a, Plato appears to acknowledge the possibility of philosophical rhetoric. Namely, rhetoric that uses technical expertise and knowledge of one's audience's susceptibility to persuasion as expedients to transmitting knowledge in matters of right and wrong, justice and injustice. In the *Phaedrus*, by contrast, Plato's position seems to be that rhetoric of this kind would no longer be rhetoric at all, but rather philosophy (*Phdr.* 261a, 272b, 274a).

<sup>156</sup> Here I draw from Derrida's influential study of the *parergon* from "The Truth in Painting." As he describes it there, the *parergon* is "neither the work (*ergon*) nor outside the work (*hors d'oeuvre*), neither inside nor outside, neither above nor below, it disconcerts any opposition but does not remain indeterminate and it *gives rise* to the work. It is no longer merely around the work. That which it puts in place . . . does not stop disturbing the *internal* order of the discourse on painting, its works, its commerce, its evaluations, its surplus values, its speculation, its law, and its hierarchies." Jaques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), 9.

(*Phdr.* 230c). Having followed our story closely, one hears the extramural echoes of Aesop's furrowed resting place ("the hum of cicadas filled the air") together with the strident chirring of Archilochus, the self-styled cicada poet. But we also hear the intramural reverberations of these echoes: the mythic origin of that species, which Plato drops like a needle into the dialogical groove of the *Phaedrus* at 259a. At their chiasmic convergence these two trills of resonance yield precious insights into the Classical displacement of the poet and the marginalization of carnal humor to the outlands of the ecumene. A place where the world gives onto the ~~earth~~ and a time when life cedes place to the lengthened shadow of its enstatic double in the earthtorn regions of the *underworld*. We shall see that each of these determinations, local and temporal, serves to frame the appearance of the Thracian maid in the *Theaetetus*. To get a sense for the first, let us start with an ear cocked to that outlandish song of the cicadas.

Socrates has just raised the question as to philosophical need to inquire into the distinction between the good writer of "poetic verse or plain prose" and the bad or shameful one. For Phaedrus this verges on a rhetorical question. Were we to forgo the pleasures of such inquiry, he reasons, this would leave only what "we call the pleasures of the slaves," namely those attending the relief from bodily pain and suffering (*Phdr.* 258e). At this Socrates launches into an extraordinary excursus, one which simultaneously grounds their conversation in the ambient, local backdrop of the present while bringing it down from the Platonic Heavens to the fabled wilds and mythic earth of yore:

It seems we clearly have the time [for the pleasures of philosophy]. Besides, I think that *the cicadas, who are singing and carrying on conversations with one another in the heat of day above our heads, are also watching us*. And if they saw the two of us avoiding conversation at midday like most people, diverted by their song and, sluggish of mind, nodding off, they would have every right to *laugh at us, convinced that a pair of slaves had come to their resting place to sleep like sheep gathering around a spring in the afternoon*. But if they see us in conversation, steadfastly navigating around them as if they were the Sirens, they will be very pleased and immediately *give us the gift from the gods they are able to give mortals* (*Phdr.* 258e-259b, emphasis mine).

In answer to Phaedrus' question concerning the nature of these gifts, Socrates relates a myth explaining how the "race of cicadas came into being." When the Muses were born and song was first invented there lived a tribe of human beings who were literally "unhinged" (*exeplogēsan*) by and perished from the pleasures of singing. In delivering themselves over to that ecstasy they were irrevocably dissociated from their bodies, which they lost all interest in nourishing and maintaining. When these people died, their souls transmigrated. They became cicadas. Onto them the Muses bestowed the gift of self-nourishment that they might sing forever, untroubled by bodily concerns. In recompense, the cicadas keep watch over the world, apprising each Muse

of those mortals who have honored her. And in exchange for their due deference, they are rewarded the god-bestowed madness from which flows their inspiration – poetic, musical, or philosophical. Socrates closes the mythic with an *epimuthium*. He reiterates that he and Phaedrus mustn't allow themselves to be lulled to sleep by the cicada's song, but be inspired by it to engage in wakeful philosophizing (259bd).

What to make of this myth? Of the cicadas and their laughter? Cicadas were ubiquitous fixtures of the rural soundscapes of ancient Greece and popular symbols bound up with Greek cultural identity. The lore surrounding these beings provoked from the earth, in particular their molting metamorphoses and their cyclical inhumation and resurrection, invited affinities with the gods – especially Pan who was believed to drowse midday, like Aesop in the fields, and makes an appearance in the *Phaedrus* at 263d6. Again like the gods, who required no sustenance but for nectar and ambrosia, the cicadas were believed to feed on nothing but dew and air or else nothing at all. Meanwhile, the spellbinding serenades of their courtship, which coincided with the wild superabundance of the meridian hour during the dog days of summer (e.g. heat, growth, estrum), engendered a nest of sexual, erotic, and procreative associations.<sup>157</sup> By adopting the mythological idiom of Homer and the zoological tropes of Aesop, Socrates amplifies these associations for us with intimations of the Sirens and the laughing poets, affiliated by their seduction and mental derangement (viz. *theia mania*). Consider the cicadic Archilochus, whose songs simultaneously court, pillory, and unhinge the minds of his audience, which they surfeit with humorous scurrility. Then there is Aesop, the slave who succumbed to the cicadas' seductions in the fields, which narcotized him and spirited him away to a dream – did he dream of sheep? – from which he woke inspired with god-bestowed humor. As in the myth, so too for the poets. Each receives the gift of his art from the Muses and breathes his last for his devotion to it only to be reborn through the cycles of history with the god-favored gift of immortal fame (or infamy). On this interpretation, the myth of the laughing cicadas reveals itself as a myth of how the laughing poets came to be, shedding their skin to metamorphose from the pre-cicadic tribes of earth in Homer, to the cicadic singers of *iambos* and fable, to the poets of classical Athens who have received from these the gift of inspiration.

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<sup>157</sup> See Daniel S. Werner, *Myth and Philosophy in Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 135-7.

This is anything but a eulogy to the laughing poet however. On the contrary, Socrates looks upon the myth as a cautionary tale. Instead of an apotropaic harbinger of fertility or humility, he hears only a tocsin in their excessive laughter. For him its spiritual derangement is symptomatic of the irrational excesses of poetic *logoi* and those who devote their lives to its composition. Suggestively, in his words, their laughter signals the threat of unreason in “the kind of madness that is possession by the Muses, which takes a tender virgin soul and awakens it to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry” (*Phdr.* 245a). It is telling that Socrates equates the poetic souls who embrace that affective frenzy with slaves and these in turn with docile animals. Were Aesop and the slavish iambographers featured in the myth, it is not without a certain irony that they too would be cast among the herds, just as they had embraced that estate in their own fables.

But the slaves and animals we find in Plato are not of the same stock as those revered by the carnal poets. Although he recurrently expresses his distaste for agonistic derision and defamatory discourse, Plato’s Socrates recurrently avails himself of these ploys, usually to libel others in their absence. And whenever other animals enter the picture alongside humans, the comparison is almost always pejorative. A line from the *Theaetetus* is illustrative, not least for its allusion to swine. Socrates gibes that Protagoras would have been speaking more truly had he made a “pig” or “baboon” the “measure of all things” (rather than *man*) in the celebrated dictum, for this “would have made clear to us at once that, while we were standing astounded at his wisdom as though he were a god, he was in reality no better authority than a tadpole” (*Tht.* 161cd). In keeping with his characteristic irony and self-deprecation, the snub-nosed Socrates will later concede that had he cast these false pearls of bitter wisdom before his rival in person, Protagoras would have surely reproached *him* for “behaving like a swine” for resorting to such smears (166c). Yet this does little to detract from our overarching point. Divested of its sacral ties to fertility (cf. §42), the pig gets corralled along with the baboon, the tadpole, and the sheep into the meat grinder of Classical thought, which minces them into little more than insults, insinuations of swinish intemperance, affronts to noble human dignity.

We shall speak forthwith to the analogous plight of the slaveborn poets of wild Thrace and the Thracian slaves of Plato’s Athens. Suffice it to say at this juncture that Socrates’ invidious disavowal of the mean and brutish proclivities of the poetically sensitive soul underwrites his derogation of the poet to the subaltern status of the *philosopher’s* muse. One whose *logoi* and vocation are illegitimate but for their service to the one true vocation: the

homological contemplation of the truth of being qua beingness (*idea-morphē-eidos*). In last analysis, the *Phaedrus* accords the art of poetry the ambivalent essence of all writing. It is a *pharmakon*, a mithridate, both remedy *and* poison (*Phdr.* 274e, 275a). Only in promoting care for “wisdom” (i.e. *epistēmē logikē*) by inspiring the dialectical passions of the philosopher, who must then temper that inspiration with care, does poetry minister to the needs of the soul and the poet to the wisdom of his master. The *Phaedrus* reserves a place for the poets after all. It is the place where cicadas drone, flocks roam, and slaves labor, while Socrates waxes poetical, passionately acclaiming its beauty before promptly reining in that passion to declaim it for its dearth of intellectual pabulum. As it must be for Plato, who instates a kind of intellectual xenelasia against all things foreign to the rationally ordered ecumene, that wild place is a province of expulsion and exile. Set far out beyond the walls that protect the inner and outer citadels of reason, the place of the carnal poets is proscribed to the outlandish fringes of the mind imprisoned in its body, as it is to the outlands of the *polis*, its walls being built and fortified to maintain a bulwark against the Bacchic frenzy of the flesh amid the ecstasy of the elements.

Such is the abject displacement of the iambic poets from Plato’s ideal state. But for “hymns to the gods” and “*enkomia* to good men,” the performance of poetry is prohibited in the Republic (607a). Referring specifically to the performance of *iambos* in the *Laws*, Plato decrees:

No composer of a comedies, or of [lyric] songs or iambic verse, must ever be allowed to ridicule [*kōmōdein*] either by description or by impersonation any citizen whatever, with or without passion [*thumos*]. Anyone who disobeys this rule must be ejected from the country that same day by the president of the games. If the latter fail to take this action, *they must* be fined three hundred drachmas, to be dedicated to the god in whose honor the festival is being held (*Laws* 935e-936a, trans. mod.).

One gathers from these lines that iambic performances evidently took place as late as the fifth century in competitions as part of festivals devoted to certain gods. In addition to the support this lends to the ritual model of *iambos*, the passage is important for what it tells us about Plato’s hostile stance toward iambic poetry. The interdiction appears in the context of a law against defamation (*kakēgoria*), which Plato attributes to the mood of anger (*dia thumou*), madness of human origin (*hupo nosēmatōn anthōpinōn*), and associates with curses, insults, and significantly for us, *utterances typical to women* (*Laws* 934e-935a; cf. *Phdr.* 265a-c). At *Laws* 935e the meaning of defamation is seemingly generalized from false accusations incited by pathological passions and applied to any poetic performance that uses *kōmōdein* to damage a citizen’s reputation – truly or falsely and irrespective of malice prepense. Plato consistently adopts this

verb in reference to ridicule or any humor at someone else's expense. Given the defamatory turn of iambic poetry from Archilochus onward, this restriction would have outlawed its performance.

It is indisputable that Classical thinkers overtly condemned the carnal humor of *iambos* (cf. §44), particularly the verbal mockery and uninhibited laughter they saw in it.<sup>158</sup> We can identify two interlocking sets of factors in play here. One is psychological (read *psuchē logikē*), the other ideological (in the political sense). We have already touched on the first in our discussion of the *Phaedrus* and the second in that of Aristotle's etymology of *iambos*. For Plato, derision is symptomatic of a deformation of the soul (*psuchē*) that often stems from madness of human origin – as opposed to *theia mania*. Similarly, laughter is suspect owing to its tendency to take on an unruly life of its own, beyond the governance of the rational mind and the body it conducts. Regardless of whether it is divinely inspired, the carnal humor that solicits such laughter from the poet and his audience is consequently equated with a kind of spiritual disease (*nosēmatōn*) with reason as the only cure. Plato's suspicions are exemplified in the third book of the *Republic*, where we read that the young guardians “mustn't be lovers of laughter [*philogelōtes*],” since being “overcome” by “powerful laughter” brings about a “powerful change [*metabolēn*] of mood” (*Rep.* 388e). Plato goes on to quote a line from Homer's *Iliad* describing “unquenchable laughter,” which figures into his larger argument against the malign representations of poetry. These qualifications highlight a distinction implicit in Plato's position. He does not of course object to laughter per se. On the contrary, many of the dialogues do promote a kind of worldly laughter, oftentimes displayed by Socrates himself. His is a laughter moderated by temperate moods, inflected through irony, and ultimately governed by concerns concomitant to caring for reason. What Plato takes exception to is laughter beyond measure (*ratio*), solicited and potentiated by what falls outside the boundaries of that psychological order. An earthy laughter that “overcomes” the rational soul and disorganizes the body with an uncontrollable power and “unquenchable” allure. In being delivered over to those gelastic paroxysms which burst forth from the flesh of the earth, we key into carnal humor, which diverts care away from hypostasis and toward a response-ability to earthward hyperstasis and genostasis. On the Platonic picture, however, all this is superfluous if not egregiously inimical to reason and

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<sup>158</sup> Rotstein's encapsulation of the Classical view of *iambos* runs as follows: it “is a type of content (humorous), of language (rude or dirty), and of purpose (abuse of individuals), which are unacceptable in everyday life, as being against etiquette and in some cases open to legal action. Hence we can infer that for Aristotle *iambizein* [from which he derive ‘iambos’] covers the cluster *skōptein* (mock), *chleuazein* (joke), *loidorein* (abuse), *aischrologein* (use shameful, i.e. obscene language), and *kakologein* (speak ill of), *psegein* (abuse, slander)” (*Idea of Iambos*, 100).

the philosophical vocation to it. On these grounds, I think it fair to say that the ecological wisdom we harvested from the “uncontrollable laughter” of Homer’s naked lunch would have been entirely lost on Plato (§39).

In Book 7 of Aristotle’s *Politics* we find an echo of Plato’s restrictions on certain kinds of poetry from being instilled in the impressionable minds of the youth. Aristotle takes stock of a number of obscenities that have no place in the education of children. Significantly, *iamboi* are featured alongside aischrology, representations of ritual scurrility, and slaves:

The Directors of Education should have an eye toward their [children’s] bringing up, and in particular should take care that they are *left as little as possible with slaves*. For until they are seven years old they must live at home; and therefore, even at this early age, it is to be expected that they should acquire a *taint of meanness [aneleutherian]* from what they hear and see. Indeed, there is nothing which the legislator should be more careful to drive away than *obscene language [logous aschēmonas]* . . . And since we do not allow obscene language, clearly we should banish *pictures or speeches from the stage which are obscene* . . . except in the temples of those gods at whose festivals the law permits even scurrility [*tōthasmon*]. . . . But the legislator should not allow youth to be spectators of *iambos* or of comedy until . . . that time [when] education will have armed them against the *evil of such performances* (*Pol.* 1336a40-b23, trans. mod., emphasis mine).

That Aristotle extended this “taint of meanness” to the *iamboi* of the slave-poets is discernible not only from the “evil” effects he imputes to them here, and his tendentious derivation of the word from ‘iambizein’ (lampoonery) qua invective (*psogos*) in the *Poetics* (§44), but from his disesteem for the formal elements of the genre. Commenting on “the various rhythms” of the poetic genres in the *Rhetoric*, he observes that “the iambic is the very language of the masses” and for that reason lacks the “dignity” of more noble genres like the epic (*Rh.* 1407b33-36).<sup>159</sup> These considerations bring us to the second, *ideological* basis for the Classical aversion to carnal humor. Under the ecumenical horizons of Plato and Aristotle, where caring for others is subordinated to caring for what is “proper” (*oikeios*) to reason, the distinction between worldly (enstatic) and earthy (hyper-ecstatic) laughter is perversely transposed into genderbound and classbound hierarchies of the rationally-ordered society. Under those horizons, where the ecological difference is dys-closed into the ~~earth~~-world as projected by the human understanding (viz. *dianoia*), the humor which had been cultivated by the agrarian cults and Archaic poets for the sake of deferently bringing human being down to earth (humiliation, humility) came to be seen as a symptom of human debasement and moral depravity among the slavish multitudes.

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<sup>159</sup> Aristotle’s ideological reasons for this judgment are bound up with his observation that “the iambic trimeter, more than any meter, has the rhythm of speech: an indication of this is that we speak many trimeters in conversation with one another” (*Poet.* 1449a21-8).

Plato's political animus against carnal humor can be attributed, in part, to the derision and humiliation philosophers had suffered, tragically so in the case of Socrates but also the Academy itself, which was lampooned in poetry and comic theater. Aristotle largely follows suit, subsuming "joking" or "mockery" (*skōptein*) under the category of "abuse" (*loidorēma*) (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a30) and "the laughable" (*to geloion*) under that of the "obscene" or "shameful" (*aischros*) (*Poet.* 1449a32-33), while declaring that no happy life could consist "in play" (*in paidia*), for "serious matters are better than [the] laughable" (*Eth. Nic.* 1177a2-4). After Plato, Aristotle deems mockery and uninhibited laughter to be marks of obliquity and vulgarity. In effect, they indicate that one is lacking in the moral and cultural refinement of the aristocratic elites. People who cultivate a virtuous, cosmopolitan sense of humor that trades in urbane wit (*eutrapelia*) and irony rather than lampoonery and earthy gibes. This political stratification of humor is evident in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where "those who carry humor to excess" are characterized as "vulgar buffoons." Aristotle's language is telling: "the buffoon is the *slave* of his sense of humor" (emphasis mine). Meanwhile "those who can neither make a joke themselves nor put up with those who do are thought to be coarse [*literally* rustic, *agroikoi*] and hard [*or* harsh, *sklēroi*]" (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a5-35). Ostensibly, the term *agroikos* appears in Plato and Aristotle in reference to *psogos*, abuse.<sup>160</sup> And in the *Republic* it had been coupled with *sklēros* to designate traits unworthy of the philosopher. One famous passage from the *Poetics* may shed light on how these *abusive* connotations accrued to the agrarian sense of *agroikos*. In Book 4 Aristotle considers the belief that Attic comedy (*kōmōidia*) may have originated from the coarse and rustic rituals of farmers who ventured into the village (*kōmē*) at night to ridicule the wealthy – and presumably oppressive – urban elites (*Poet.* 1448a29-b1).<sup>161</sup> But the connection is also implicit in his disavowal of the "abusive" lampoonery of the iambographers, which we have traced back to agrarian festivals and cults.

The aim of Aristotle's educational constraints on *iambos* and other manifestations of rustic humor is primarily to codify the conditions for promoting a kind of free, civilized, or well-bred (*eleutherios*) character, conceived as a virtuous mean between the extremes he ascribes to the demotic herd: the vulgarity (*phortikos*, *agroikos*) and slavishness (*andrapodōdēs*, *sklēros*) of

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<sup>160</sup> Pl. *Phdr.* 260d, 268d; *Grg.* 508d. Arist. *Rh.* 1418b26.

<sup>161</sup> For a discussion of the role of comic theater and poetry in the agrarian "shame cultures" of archaic and classical Greece see: D.L. Cairns, *Aidōs: The Psychology and Ethics of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 1-47.



unpolished humor on the one hand; and the irrational excesses of ritual scurrility (*tōthasmos*), buffoonery (*bōmolochia*), lampoonery (*iambizein*), and uninhibited laughter (*gelōs*) on the other.<sup>162</sup> Between these two territories of exclusion from Aristotle’s socio-ethical ideal runs the rationally tempered path of *epidexiotēs*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (4.8), *epidexiotēs* is introduced as the kind of tactful humor “proper” (*oikeion*) to “civilized” (*eleutheriō*) and “educated” (*pepaideumenou*) men who enjoy one another’s company in contexts of “leisure” (*anapauseōs*). According to Aristotle, this setting – elsewhere designated as most proper to contemplation – is set aside from the business and busyness of life befitting “slavish” (*andrapodōdous*) and “uneducated” (*apaideutou*) men (*Eth. Nic.* 1127b34-1128a22). And it is in this worldly atmosphere of temperance that laughter too finds its proper place. Provided it is well-attuned to the “movements” (*kinēseis*) of the civilized “character” (*ēthous*), Aristotle has it that gelastic and even scoptic exchanges can foster an intercourse that is “refined,” “cultured,” or more literally, “harmonious” (*emmelēs*) (1128a1-13). The word *emmelēs*, which appears twice in this passage, is a musical metaphor derived from *emmeleia*, a dance performed in Greek tragedy.<sup>163</sup> In the *Laws* Plato admires the solemnity and stateliness of this art form, taking it to be emblematic of moderation and *emmelōs*, being ‘in tune’ with or ‘well-tuned’ to the measures of decorum and virtue (816a-b). This range of meanings garners further support from the *Sophist*, where Plato explicitly contrasts *emmelēs* with what is “uncultured” (*amousos*) and “unphilosophical” (259e). And again in the *Critias*, where the term describes a *logos* in tune with philosophy (106b). In this connection we would do well to recall Antisthenes, arch critic of Plato and pioneer of the *epistemological* doctrine of *logos oikeios* (§30). Although Diogenes Laertius confers on him the distinction of being *emmelēs*, Antisthenes is also commonly described as “dog-like” (*kunikos*) perhaps owing to his biting mockery and irreverent disregard for the norms of polite society.<sup>164</sup> There are even reports that he wrote a dialogue lampooning Plato, which was obscenely entitled *Sathōn* (Pecker).<sup>165</sup> In *Abusive Mouths*, Nancy Worman notes that “many commentators treat Antisthenes as a sophist, [but] he is also credited with inspiring the foundation of the Cynic school of philosophy, which came to be associated with iampos in

<sup>162</sup> See especially *Eth. Nic.* 4.8, 8.3. For Halliwell’s lucid commentary on these themes, see *Greek Laughter*, 307-33.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. chapter 1, fn. 1.

<sup>164</sup> D.L. 6.13-14. Cf. Arist. *Rh.* 1411a24. Xenophon’s *Symposium* develops this appraisal of Antisthenes’ elocutionary style as boorish (2.10, 2.13, 3.6), argumentative (4.2, 6.5), and abusive (*loidoria*) (6.8).

<sup>165</sup> D.L. 6.16; Cf. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* 507a.

Hellenistic and later tradition.”<sup>166</sup> In our story this would make him something of a philosophical counterpart of Archilochus. Filling out our portrait of the Antisthenes – in miniature, to be sure – as an untimely stalwart of ecological horizons, a thinker who supplemented dialectic with a dose of carnal humor to breach those of the incipient ecumene ideally projected by Plato.

As already indicated by the enstatic sense of *oikeios* introduced by Aristotle in the *Eth. Nic.* 4.8, the world-chambered harmony of the rational virtues, which just so happen to chime with the ethos of the Athenian aristocracy, is discordantly out of key with the raucous songs of the Demetrian Thesmophoria, the vulgar verses of the iambographers, the ecological *harmoniē* of the earth-world strife, from which all things emerge for Heraclitus (§24). *In contrast to the porous horizons of ecological affiliation, in which the philosopher answered his vocation by plying wisdom for the sake of caring for the earthliness of others in the widest sense, the worldlocked horizons of the ecumene militate against an elemental attunement to whatever or whoever makes mockery of the powers of the intellect.* Gone is the ecstasy of carnal humor through which the deferent caretaker once found consolation in being-of-the-earth. In Plato as in Aristotle, that experience suffers the same fate as the slave, the slave-poet, the outlander, and every other other from whom they disaffiliate themselves. It is banished to outlandish wilds beyond the *terrae cognitae*, to the extramural outlands of the *polis*. And as a misattunement to knowledge and reason, carnal humor is for them an abdication of the philosophical task.

But what of Socrates? Scholars have long acknowledged the difficulty in prising this historical figure from Plato’s dramatic and philosophical appropriations. Yet there are at least a few cases in which Plato’s homology breaks down to reveal a genuinely dialogical (or in our terms heterological) Socrates. One of these scenes unfolds in the *Phaedo*. This text is especially pertinent to our discussion. Not only does it contain no fewer than nine instances of laughter but, as Halliwell points out, it is the only dialogue in which Socrates openly laughs.<sup>167</sup> This is even more remarkable when we consider the melancholy themes of the dialogue, which chronicles the final hours of the philosopher as he awaits his execution. Socrates’ imperturbable good humor throughout is set in stark contrast to the fear, grief, and sorrow of his friends, who have assembled in the Athenian jailhouse on this day of his death. Halliwell notes how “Phaedo himself signals near the outset that, counterintuitively, laughter will be a leitmotif of the

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<sup>166</sup> Worman, *Abusive Mouths*, 162. Diogenes Laertius mentions this association when alluding to Antisthenes’ epitaph (D.L. 6.19.5f.).

<sup>167</sup> Halliwell, *Greek Laughter*, 278, 283.

extraordinary story he has to tell.”<sup>168</sup> To Echecrates Phaedo relates the “unaccustomed mixture of pleasure and pain” he felt to see his ill-fated mentor strive to lift the spirits in the cell, moving each of his companions “in much the same way, sometimes laughing, then weeping” (*Phd.* 59a). In the same way, humor is very much ingredient in the philosophical *pharmakon* that Socrates will administer to them in the hours before he imbibes his own lethal yet remedial concoction. If laughing in the face of death is a symptom of the god-bestowed madness of the philosopher we encountered in the *Phaedrus*, the ultimate significance of this is announced in Socrates’ famous declaration from the *Phaedo*. “A man who has really spent his life in philosophy is naturally fearless [*tharreïn*] in the face of his own death,” he claims, for “those who are *touched* [*haptomenoi*] by philosophy in the right way [*or truly, orthōs*] are in practice for dying and being dead” (63e-64a, emphasis mine, trans. mod.). So that when at last he takes the cup of hemlock from the jailer, “very cheerfully” (*mala hileōs*) while wearing a mocking frown (117b), we know that this philosopher is practiced indeed. Touched by the ticklish fingers of Thanatos, Socrates accepts the gift of the *pharmakon*, so like that other guest-gift, the *kukeōn*, with carnal irreverence and – lest we forget – due recompense to Asclepius. Thus does he lightheartedly honor the hospitality shown him by the divine caretakers of the inhabited world, auspicing in the same gesture his admittance to the absolute dark of the earth’s *greatest* Mysteries.

Would that it were so simple. That it’s not becomes evident over the course of Phaedo’s story as we discover that that Socrates has given expression to a less than harmonious medley of voices. Prominent among these is Aesop, who had shared the fate of Socrates in being sentenced to death on false accusations of impiety. For the ecumenical thinker as for any civilized Athenian, death was the ultimate obscenity. If Socrates’ actions just before his own are any indication, it was altogether unfit for the eyes of women and children (*Phd.* 116b). Relegated like the slave to the furthestmost outlands of experience even as it enters the inner chambers of the household, death withdraws from intellectual comprehension. Yet it appears that Socrates recovers Aesop’s voice from beyond the pale of civil propriety to infuse it into the humorous mithridate of the *Phaedo*. Like the *gephurismos* and *kūkeon* of Demeter’s cult, this concoction of smiles, laughter, and good humor is seemingly dispensed to elicit a death-defying attunement, one that purifies the soul by releasing it from its worldly concerns. In effect, it is brewed for the souls in Socrates’ company to *harmonize* them with their earth-promised fate on the bridge

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 278.

toward the incomprehensible beyond (*harmonian*, 93a-94e). In view of the foregoing, this is a truly momentous development, for seemingly entails that Socrates embraces the death throes of carnal humor. But as the dialogue is unfurled in its breadth, one comes to realize that it is not Aesop but Plato who administers these last rites. As a result of this substitution, Socrates' *pharmakon* is diluted into nothing more than a tragic nepenthe. For the *ecological* harmony it appears to invoke is ultimately resolved into an *ecumenical* monody to the tune of eternal immanence. A denial of earthly finitude. Let us see how this transpires.

Commentators have traditionally noted with astonishment how Socrates, "who had never composed any poetry before," is said to have tried his hand at the art in *durance vile*, "putting the fables of Aesop into verse and composing the hymn to Apollo" (*Phd.* 60d, cf. 61b). And many an ecologically sensitive reader has made an effort to foreground the equally astonishing detail that follows. After confirming that he had been compelled in a dream – by his *daimon* perhaps – to "practice and cultivate the arts," Socrates proclaims "that a poet, if he is to be a poet, must compose fables." Ironically, he explains that in being "no teller of fables" himself, he turned to versifying those of Aesop – ironic because much of the remainder of the dialogue consists in fables told by Socrates (61b). Here is where things get even more interesting. Socrates proceeds to enjoin his friends to convey what he has just said to Evenus, the philosopher-poet from Archilochus' native Paros. To this Socrates adds another request: "tell him, if he is wise, to follow me as soon as possible" – evidently to the grave – for "Evenus will be willing, like every man who partakes worthily of philosophy" (61c). Then, having prefigured this thanopractical wisdom he will soon expound in depth, Socrates second-guesses himself: "Yet perhaps he will not take his own life, for that, they say, is not right." Are we to infer from this that the philosopher is not only called upon to rehearse the possibility of death but is called toward its effectuation? Would this make the philosophy of those truly touched a suicidal vocation, practiced in defiance of what *they* say? Is Socrates' own refusal to flee the city in the face of certain death not itself a kind of suicide? If those in his company receive an answer to these questions from the fables he will tell, we modern readers are not so easily palliated. We shall return to this matter in a moment. Of utmost significance for the ecological thinker is the portentous gesture, starkly depicted, which accompanies Socrates' reflections on poets and suicide. "As he said this," we are told, "Socrates put his feet on the *earth* [*gēn*] and remained in this position during the rest of the conversation" (61d, emphasis mine).

What are we to make of this? In planting his bare foot on the surface of his body's final resting place, Socrates embodies the wisdom of his words. In drawing him closer to the soil, his gesture pre-enacts that reclamation. At the same time, the description seems to imply that his parting words to his friends will remain grounded on the earth. That Socrates makes this gesture having just paid homage to Aesop is striking. In effect, the connection forecasts precisely *how* the ensuing conversation will be grounded. Later in the dialogue, Socrates rhetorically adopts an Aesopic idiom – replete with a bestiary and irreverent asides – to tell a kind of bedtime story from the deathbed. A fable of the soul and its *earthly* dwelling places here and hereafter (*Phd.* 107d-115a). This fable draws as much from Orphic myths as it does from the poets, among whom Aeschylus and Homer are summoned by name (108a, 112a). And concede though he does the unknowable nature of this metempsychotic narrative, this fabulous travelogue of the soul, Socrates insists “it is fitting for a man to risk the belief – for the risk is a noble one” (114d). These words ring true in the details of the fable as they do in its intent. Socrates co-opts the style and substance of myth and poetry, denatures its carnality no less than its earthliness, and reframes it as a dubious philosophical argument for an elaborate noble lie in the venerable Platonic tradition. A lie devised to redirect the mortal attunement of his philosophically unpracticed attendants from sorrow, pity, and fear (anxiety), to fearless irreverence toward death.

In the centuries to come, Aristotle will liken Socratic analogy to fable (*Rh.* 1393a23-1394a8). So begins the fable in the *Phaedo*, with an analogy to other animals and their habitats. “The earth,” says Socrates, “is very large, and we live around the sea in a small portion of it . . . like ants or frogs” (*Phd.* 109ab). As if to retract in words the standpoint of his body, he then declares these plots of the ground beneath our feet are not the “true earth” (*alēthōs gē*) at all but subterranean “hollows” we mistake for its surface (109c-110a). Extending the Aesopic analogy to what can only be another rendition of Plato's spelean allegory, Socrates compares our experience of the sky to that of fish who confuse the surface of the sea for the uppermost limit of the earth. The comparison takes on a bathophobic and, by analogy, misanthropic inflection when we read just a few lines down that “nothing worth mentioning grows in the sea” (110a). Just so, for nothing but falsehoods proliferate on his view. Only if we could release our groundward bonds and ascend to the heavens above the earth would we experience its true nature. According to Socrates:

If anyone got to this upper limit, if anyone came to it or reached it on wings, just as fish on rising from the sea see things in our region, he would see things there and, if his nature could endure to contemplate them, he would know that there is the true heaven, the true light and the true earth (*Phd.* 109e-110a).

We have thus arrived at a high-altitude vision of the ecumene, or as Plato's Socrates puts it, "the nature of the earth as a whole" (111c). It is ~~earth~~ disclosed at a distance by discarnate souls who inhabit it purely through contemplation of its worldly form (*idea*), its hypostasis. Socrates goes on to enlarge that territory to encompass those otherworldly regions inhabited by disembodied souls in their postmortem transmigrations. Incurribly wicked souls are hurled into the nethermost regions of Tartarus. Meanwhile, pious souls are "released from the regions of the earth," now likened to a "prison" just as Plato does the cave, whereupon they ascend to the true surface of the ~~earth~~. Socrates concludes with "those who have purified themselves sufficiently by philosophy," who "live in the future altogether without a body" in "even more beautiful dwelling places" (111c-114c).

If Socrates reaches this point in the future history of the *Phaedo* as a virtually disembodied voice, we would do well to recall his putatively humble posture. While one of his feet has been grounded the other has been raised aloft. And it is no longer of the earth but from the idea of the deathbed that he now speaks. Plato's ethereal voice grows strident as Aesop's grows ever more obscure amid the improbable chorus assembled into Socrates' fable. And the true author of the dialogue gives himself away twice over in the rarefied humor that envelops the cell thereafter. One of the *epimuthia* that Socrates attaches to the fable is to always "take care of your own selves [*humōn autōn*]" (*Phd.* 115b). For it has been argued that the enstatic kernel he calls "soul" is indestructible, immortal, and therefore fated to receive its just rewards and punishments long after its mortal departure (cf. 106b). This prompts Crito to raise an earnest question, which inadvertently betrays his misunderstanding of the fable and its lessons. "We shall be eager to follow your advice, says Crito, but how should we bury you?" To which Socrates replies by "laughing quietly" and making a joke: "In any way you like, if you can catch me and I don't escape!" While his body is interred beneath the hollows of the ~~earth~~, Socrates explains that his "own self" will be delivered from that double confinement to "enjoy some good fortunes of the blessed" (115c). This philosopher's soul has been duly cared for, proficient as it is become in the *theatrum mortis*. Who would dare to doubt, then, that he will find his just reward in the true and only Platonic Heaven? Discarnate, earthless, hollow to the core.

If Socrates is able to find the humor in inhumation, it is anything but carnal. Rather than expose the obscenity of death it cloaks it under a deathless shroud, under the eternal recurrence of the same self. And rather than induce the hyper-ecstatic laughter of the flesh, which humbles the other, moves her toward caring for the earth, this humor re-encloses the other within the contracting horizons of enstasis, from the inhabited world to the insular soul. Only in death does Socrates take leave of the *polis* he had long disdained to forsake. But while his well-grounded tribute to Aesop and the poets initially suggested a death-defying ecstasy whereby Socrates, qua other, might finally join their company within the earthly wilds without, his highflown humor precludes that possibility. What first appeared as fearless irreverence, then, reveals itself in last analysis as an flight from the humus to hubris. Granted, we cannot know the extent to which the historical Socrates shared in Plato's laughter. We can only pronounce judgment on the attunement toward death he outwardly professed: a world-smothered humor whose palliative spirit is belied by its ecological abjection.

To reverse Nietzsche's dictum, one might say the laughter that issued from the first ecumenical epoch in the history of being was profound *from superficiality*. Such is the unwitting revelation of Aristotle's generalization: "the laughable [*geloious*] floats on the surface [*epipolazontos*]" (*Eth. Nic.* 1128a13-14, trans. mod.). Instead of being supported by the profundity of the earth, that surface reached only as deep as the hypostases antecedently informing the production of civilized humor, only as deep as the inverted world of the worldly philosopher. In other words, the laughter of the Classical triumvirate cloaked a profound and unshakably serious concern for maintaining the barriers between reason and unreason, the philosopher and the poet, the self-enclosed soul and the alterity of the elements. And if there is anything to be taken from the foregoing discussion, it's that the intrepid caretakers of reason left little room in their expanding territory for the laughing *logoi* of women, much less the humiliations exacted by others pressed under the yoke of the cosmopolitan ideal. But before the earth had been roundly territorialized and ironized, there were those who answered to the vocation of the caretaker by laughing with it. Dwelling about the margins and interstices of *polis*, they embraced the carnal humor of initiates, poets, women, and slaves. Such is the hidden backdrop to Plato's *Theaetetus* against which our nameless Thracian makes her entrance, bearing the gifts she received from Baubo, and Iambe too. Before Plato, before Socrates, this guardian of the well and humble servant of the *oikos* instructed the philosopher in the practice of dying,

steering him away from the ecological tragedy and guiding him toward the carnal comedy of our earthly finitude. It is to that well in Miletus that we now come to pay our last respects.

#### §46. Dying with Laughter: The Ecological Wisdom of the Thales Parable

Time is wisest, for it brings everything to light.  
–Thales<sup>169</sup>

To look at the river made of time and water  
And remember that time is another river,  
To know that we are lost like the river  
And that faces dissolve like water.  
–Jorge-Luis Borges, *Ars Poetica*<sup>170</sup>

To laugh at oneself as one would have to laugh  
in order to laugh out of the whole truth – to do  
that even the best so far lacked sufficient sense  
for the truth, and the most gifted had too little  
genius for that. Even laughter may yet have a  
future. . . . Perhaps laughter will then have  
formed an alliance with wisdom, perhaps only  
“gay science” will then be left.  
–Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*<sup>171</sup>

There is an old and sourceless spark of lore about wells. It holds that on certain propitious occasions a backturned glimpse into their still waters may reveal, as through a glass darkly, the face of fate reflected. The face of a true love to be or one’s own visage at the moment of death. A glance back to the past traces out an underexposed future on the periphery of the present. So does the fabled well in Miletus evince in the blindspot of history the ecological origins and ecumenical destination of philosophy. In chapter 1 we surmised that within the allegorical world of the parable, the fate of Thales had been augured in the well. On some accounts it portended his fatal fall to earth, on others his farcical death in thirsting for the very element that had nearly drowned him even as it replenished his thought of *archē* (§8). But there is something untimely about the laughter of the Thracian too. It carries humorous echo of her mythic, cultic, and poetic predecessors as well as a foreboding of the humorless expulsion they would suffer in the ecumene. In this concluding section we shall bring to light those hidden traces of the *Theaetetus* that link Thales’ anonymous inquisitor to the story we have told. After reexamining Plato’s

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<sup>169</sup> D.L. 1.1.35.

<sup>170</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Poems* (New York: Penguin, 2000), 137.

<sup>171</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 74.



*epimuthium* to the parable, we shall then set forth a generative alternative, one which revives the Thracian's laughing *logos* and explains why Thales might have been moved to laugh *with* her where Plato could only laugh *at* her.

It will be helpful to revisit the version of the parable recited in the *Theaetetus*. The context is a discussion between Socrates and Theodorus on the nature of the philosopher's vocation. In remarks that evoke the winged souls of the *Phaedo*, Plato's Socrates submits that the philosopher is one whose "body . . . lives and sleeps in the city" while his mind "pursues its winged way . . . throughout the universe." Moving from the "deeps below the earth" to the "heights above the heaven," it "geometrizes" the former and "astronomizes" (*astronomounta*) the latter. In the doing, he concludes, the philosopher seeks to know "the entire nature" (*pantē phusin*) of things without ever "condescending to what lies near at hand" (*Tht.* 173e-174a). Theodorus wonders what on earth is meant by this. So Socrates supplies an illustration by recounting the well-known parable:

Well, here's an instance: they say Thales was studying the stars [*or* astronomizing, *astronomounta*], Theodorus, and gazing aloft, when he fell into a well [*phrear*]; and a refined and witty [*emmelēs kai charieissa*] Thracian servant-girl [*therapainis*] mocked [*apokōpsai*] him. In his eagerness to know about what was up in the sky, she said, he fails to see what was in front of him and under his feet (*Tht.* 174a, trans. mod.)

Plato will go on to ascribe to her the "imperceptive" (*ou gar aisthanontai*) and "uneducated" (*apaideutō*) attributes we've mentioned. These are qualities he applies in general to "slaves," *andrapodētois*, a word that distinguished human from quadrupedal livestock (*tetrapodon*) (175d). It is a commonplace that Thracians were among the most numerous "barbarians" trafficked as slaves in Plato's Attica.<sup>172</sup> Names such as 'Thratta', meaning literally 'female Thracian', were even synonymous with 'slave'.<sup>173</sup> Still, this Thracian slave enters the picture curiously ennobled. Although she remains nameless, she is also distinguished from the "common herd" (*ochlō*) by her witty refinement (*emmelēs kai charieissa*). Already we have noted that *emmelēs* carried some cultural prestige in connection with the arts, especially music and dance. And just as it was often paired with laughter and lighthearted jesting, so was *charieis* a mark of 'witty', 'charming', or

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<sup>172</sup> Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1983), 227. Yvon Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1988), 46f. Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 153.

<sup>173</sup> Notably, "Thratta" is the name Hippolytus of Rome gives to the Thracian woman in his version of the parable. Given her anonymity in earlier variants, it is likely he availed himself of the twofold sense of the word to construct an aptronym of his own invention. Hippolytus *Philosophumena* 1.1, V 11: "a certain servant maid, of the name of Thratta [*famula Thratta nomine*] laughed at him and said: 'While intent on beholding things in heaven, he does not see what is at his feet'." Hippolytus, *Philosophumena*, trans. F. Legge, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan, 1921), 36.

‘graceful’ play, repartee, or banter.<sup>174</sup> Addressed to Thales in the “the language of the many,” the Thracian’s well-tempered *logos* strikes a chord at once mocking, humorous, poetic, and perhaps even philosophical. Such are the resonances of *emmelēs kai charieissa*.

Plato provides a further clue to the Thracian’s persona with another epithet: *therapainis*, conventionally rendered as ‘servant-girl’, ‘housemaid’, or ‘slave-woman’. These translations are accurate, but imprecise. As late as the fifth-century, the word occurs in cultic or ritualized settings to designate someone who heals, cures, or generally takes care of someone or someplace. In Euripides’ *Ion* (c. 410 BCE), for instance, the young hero lays claim to “taking care of” (*therapeuō*) the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Moreover, a fifth-century Attic inscription attests to the importance of “taking care [*therapeuetai*] of the sacred precincts” of Apollo to preserve their beauty.<sup>175</sup> Most significantly for us, *therapaina* is the very same word that Proclus uses to identify Iambe in the Demeter myth.<sup>176</sup> But the only other instance of the term in Plato appears in reference to enslaved caretakers (*doulon te kai doulēn*) of the “dwelling place” (*oikos*), an institution that had been politically domesticated, root and branch, into that of house (*domos*) in classical Greece (*Laws* 808a). Bearing all this in mind, it stands to reason that the Thracian figures into the parable foremost as *caretaker* – in the broader sense encompassing both bonded servant of house as well as steward of the greater *oikos* of the gods. Why would Plato introduce the Thracian as a *therapainis* instead of enlisting the far more common *doulē* (slave) – a word that better chimes with “andrapodētois” in a subsequent paragraph? Who or what does the Thracian care for? Could her mockery have had some therapeutic effect perhaps?

Decidedly not according to Plato’s Socrates. In the speech that follows the parable – already touched on in chapter 1 – he comes to the defense of the philosopher in a manner that recalls nothing so much as Plato’s ideological animadversions on the carnal humor of slaves, poets, and women. So far from the therapeutic or care-giving significance that defined mockery (*paraskōptō*) in the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the Thesmophoria (*skōptein*), the Thracian’s mockery (*apuskōptō, skōmma*) is presumed to be an abusive assault (*psogos, loidoria*) on “all who spend their lives in philosophy.” Not without relevance here is the defamation (*kakēgoria*) associated with the *logoi* of the iambic poets and women in the *Laws* (§45). *This* woman’s

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<sup>174</sup> Cf. *Pl. Rep.* 452b; *Arist. Eth. Nic.* 1095a18, 1095b22, 1102a21, 1127b31.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. *Inscriptiones Graecae* I<sup>3</sup> 1-2 138.17.

<sup>176</sup> Procl. ap. Photius, *Chrest.* 239.319b15 V.

ridicule has hit its mark. But it is humorlessly received from the very outset, as evidenced by the Plato's politically abject defense of his vocation (§7). His apologia, inspired perhaps by Socrates' own before the jeering Athenian assembly, is at bottom a territorial entrenchment. It is devised to put the Thracian in her proper (*oikeios*) place in the hierarchy of reason, meanwhile turning her laughter against her. In a desperate attempt to fence off her gregarious *logos* from philosophy qua *epistēmē logikē*, Plato invokes the very same term he and Aristotle enlist to describe "vulgar" and "slavish" forms of humor. Ostensibly lumped together with the Abderites of Thrace – the hayseed simpletons known for their inveterate, scopic laughter – the slave-woman is counted among the anonymous multitudes deemed "agroikon," coarse, likened in the same breath to "pigs or sheep, or cows." (*Tht.* 174d). This comparison issues from Plato's mouth as abuse in no uncertain terms. Far removed are we indeed from Baubo atop her sacred sow, the sacral pigs of the Demetrian rites, and the humbling bleat and bray of the poet's bestiary. For Plato all such livestock are but a laughing stock, the common man "a more difficult and treacherous animal" (174d). He must be brought to heel or else be prodded toward the heavenward fields of knowledge. Only then may he join his high-minded shepherd, the philosopher "gazing down from his place among the clouds" (175d).

The hubristic distantiation of the philosopher from the abattoirs of the masses only grows as Socrates makes an emblem out of starstruck Thales to exalt the "winged way" of the philosopher's mind, even as his body "tumbles into wells and every other difficulty through lack of experience" (*Tht.* 174c). As though able to ascend to the heights of the ecumene from the *Phaedo*, the philosopher is wont "to envisage the whole earth," the so-called "true" earth, which the many cannot "endure to contemplate" for their "lack of education" (174e-175a).<sup>177</sup> What's more, his calling to care for the "true" horizons of reason by "taking a steady view of the whole" from such heights appears to invite and legitimate a careless disregard for others "near at hand," who remain grounded on the earth within the hollows of falsehood. "It really is true," says Socrates, "that the philosopher fails to notice his fellow countryman and neighbor [*plēsion kai ho geitōn*]," being "not only ignorant of what the other is doing" but "hardly knowing whether he is a human being or some other kind of animal [*thremma*]" – a term that Plato elsewhere associates with slaves (174b).<sup>178</sup> Whether his fellow tenants of the earth are livestock (*tetrapodon*) or slaves

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<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Phd.* 109e-110a

<sup>178</sup> Trans. mod., cf. *Laws* 777b. Also see §7 below.

(*andrapodētois*) is indeed a matter of indifference to Plato's philosopher. This must be so since he recognizes no essential affiliation to the other beyond reason, beyond its proper (*oikeos*) ecumenical territory. And certainly no ecological affiliation (*logos oikeios*) with others through *being of* and *caring for* a common earth. Instead of caring for the elemental otherness of others, his disclosure of it has the effect of domesticating them, rationally and politically. On Plato's final appraisal, the cultivation of ecological affiliation by the earth's humble servants is reduced to "menial tasks." These tasks properly "fall upon the slave," never upon the man of "freedom and leisure," the rational organ without a body he appoints to the office of philosophy (175e).

Philosophers from Plato to Heidegger have failed to find the humor in the Thracian woman's laughing *logos*. Haunted by the injustice suffered by his teacher at the hands of the many, Plato takes her words most seriously indeed. But what if his abject disavowal of the earthly grounds of thinking, his homological reductionism, and his paltripolitan confinement of experience to the leisured havens of the *polis* together conspired to deafen him to her therapeutic wisdom? What if the epithets he selects to describe her were inherited from an older tradition he misunderstood? Otherwise put, what if the Thracian's were the last dying laugh in that longstanding lineage of caretakers, well-attuned and artful, stretching back from "laughing" Baubo to "caring" Iambe?<sup>179</sup>

I would like to suggest that what Plato mistakes for poisonous vitriol was originally administered to the philosopher as a pharmacological dose of carnal humor. A therapy so humiliating, so humbling, as to stitch a caesura in the homological discourse that would come to define the Platonic "dialogue," a tear he hastens to mend by hypocritically poisoning his words with slander and abuse. Only by overcoming Plato's aversion may we immerse ourselves in the dialogical rift she opens. Only then are we made privy to the earthly consolations of her

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<sup>179</sup> To my knowledge, this connection has no scholarly precedent but for the correspondence of Peter Damian, the eleventh-century monk and *homme de lettres*. Dilating on versions of the Aesopic variant of the parable, Damian leaves the astronomer-philosopher anonymous while associating the Thracian woman with Iambe. Yet his own theological conceits serve merely to sanitize their relationship. The former he takes to "deserve applause," but only for censuring the philosopher's "vice of curiosity," the sinner's *fall* into the "filth lying under his feet" being foreordained. Pietro Damiani, *Epistola V 1* (Migne, *Partologia latina* 144.336 sq.: quoted from Blumenberg, *The Laughter of the Thracian*, 44f. In his commentary on this iteration of the tale, Hans Blumenberg takes Damian's "disfigurement" of the anecdote to task. Writes Blumenberg: "the earthly is not confronted as the reality close at hand . . . but rather the lowly muck, into which he falls, who does not declare himself satisfied with the offer in the Revelation. The well comes to resemble the pit of sin, and not without reason (*Grund*), since the sky explorer's theory has been written up in the catalogue of vices as curiosity. Then, in light of the repellent circumstances of the sinner's fall, the figure of the maid appears particularly excessive with her lyric. Lacking a precise function in the anecdote, she gains that of poetic invention in order to keep her role at all" (*Laughter of the Thracian*, 45).

exposure. An exposure to the mysteries, diluted by the *Phaedo's* fable of enstasis everlasting, yet concentrated in her *logos*. Having marked these Platonic pitfalls, let us now place ourselves after Thales, and Demeter before him, in the care of the Thracian slave.

Commenting on the Thracian in his historical survey of the parable, the seventeenth-century French philosopher Pierre Bayle infers that “people have twisted that woman’s thought in many ways.”<sup>180</sup> We encountered this distortion firsthand in both Plato’s and Heidegger’s commentaries (§7). In their eagerness to jettison her *logos* from their high philosophical platforms, such thinkers fail to see the slave-woman’s philosophical acumen. More precisely, their own vocational preoccupations blind them to the vocation she and Thales shared. In spite of the conspicuous role of water and place in the episode, neither her genealogy nor his archeology is given the slightest consideration. Our historical investigations have laid the groundwork for an ecological corrective, an interpretation that gives full measure to their kinship as caretakers.

Our chronicle of the Thracian caretaker’s journey begins to bear fruit when we recall how the wild highlands and bountiful lowlands of her home had sprouted Orpheus and the mythic origins of the Demetrian cult (§43). The gods most eminent to the Orphic religion of the Thracians were Demeter, Dionysus, and later, Isis. Each ubiquitously appears on Thracian currency and artworks, most notably tombal friezes and pottery.<sup>181</sup> Historians have placed special emphasis on the presence of Demeter and Dionysus in works depicting funerary rites and customs. In contrast to the ritual mourning and lamentation so central to popular Greek thanatopraxes, the Thracians celebrated the death of kith and kinry with gay processions, feasts, and merrymaking.<sup>182</sup> Just as it was rehearsed in the Mysteries of Eleusis, death was celebrated in these Thracian rituals much as we moderns do pregnancy and birth. Where we find joy in the fetal nascence of life and the inception of a singular personal history in the world, we sorrow in that person’s fatal disappearance from it. The Thracians, by contrast, found consolation in the body’s reclamation to the anonymous flesh of the earth and the allohistorical possibilities of renascence that entailed. As divine avatars of the regenerative metabolism of nature, Demeter and Dionysus were together worshipped as protectors of these possibilities. And wherever they

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<sup>180</sup> Pierre Bayle, *An Historical and Critical Dictionary*, vol. 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1826), 2864 (s.v. ‘Thales’).

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Julia Valeva, Emil Nankov, and Denver Graninger, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Thrace* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 185, 446-8.

<sup>182</sup> On these curious observances, Herodotus reports: “when a man is dead, they cover him up in the earth with sport and rejoicing” (Hdt. 5.4).

were honored, carnal humor set the tone. Such is the overture of this well-attuned child of Thrace, this latterday *mustes* and wet nurse of fluent fertility. As did the initiates on the bridge to Eleusis and the raucous women on the Nile, the caretaker of the well at Miletus laughs and mocks at water's edge. She rejoices in the philosopher's sudden brush with death in his *archē*, a kairotic moment that will be recycled, parabolically, in the lore surrounding his watershaped demise. Diogenes' report of the philosopher's death on that scorching, festal day, is a dehydrated inversion of Thales' immersion. Alternatively, his account of Thales' lethal fall in the dismal dark of night is a repetition of it (§8). If water is the element in which time most clearly flows for the Presocratics, then one might say that the sacred past of the Thracian, the fabled death of Thales, and his subsequent evaporation in the ecumene all coalesce and effervesce in the portentous well of the parable.

In chapter 6 we examined how immersion in the affective atmosphere of the water can dis-organize experience and displace us from the horizons of immanence that emanating from the self, the body, and its world. Whether we are whelmed by the river or, like the foundered and floundering Odysseus, by the benthic desolations of the sea, this most transitory element seeps into enstasis to expose us to the brevity of *our own* existence. For the ancient Greeks, and even for Plato, all waters converged in the River of the Dead. The fate of our waterskin bodies is faintly traced in every drop that seeps toward dead sea level and ethereally evanesces. But that fate is made all the more tangible when our bodies are immersed in, their skins punctured by, the indefinite depths of time instilled in water.

Here we might take another draught of Bachelard, whose poetic *Denkweg* so often intersects with the unburied paths of the Presocratic philosophers. Bachelard finds in Heraclitus no metaphysical vision, but a “concrete philosophy,” from which the author of *Water and Dreams* de(s)cants this broth of insight. “One cannot bathe twice in the same river because already, in his inmost recesses, the human being shares the destiny of flowing water.” In being “dedicated to water” he is “a being in flux” and “dies at every moment.” From these reflections Bachelard proceeds to draw a pertinent conclusion about the darker ecstasies of that immersion. “To disappear into deep water . . . to become a part of depth or infinity,” is to find one's destiny in that of water, which “always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death.”<sup>183</sup> So does Thales fall to find himself at the bottom of a well, laid out like a corpse underground in a watery

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<sup>183</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 6, 12.

grave. What he “fails to see,” what is “in front of him and under his feet,” is precisely this solvent of identity and every enstatic embankment, this enticement of suicides, this river of death “made of time and water” in which, blind Borges sees “faces dissolve like water.”

Like Anaximander, Thales was a watershed thinker, standing bestride the mythophysical earth-world of old and the ecumenical ~~earth~~-world of Classical thought. His germinal contributions to the latter can be gathered from his widely attested studies in astronomy and geometry much as they are from his activities as statesman and martial engineer (§7).<sup>184</sup> It is admittedly not so great a leap from the Thalesian dictum concerning the mind that “speeds *everywhere*” and to Socrates’ statement about the “winged way” of the philosophical mind toward the “heights above heaven.”<sup>185</sup> In chapter 5 we demonstrated that the ecocentric vocation to wisdom pursued by the Archaic philosopher, his search for the heterological truth, was unassimilable to the Classical philosopher’s homological quest for theoretical truth (hypostasis). Yet here, at the outset of Plato’s parable, we find Thales “studying the stars” (*astronomounta*) or, in Aesop’s fable of the “astronomer” (*astrologos*), “with his mind wholly fixed [*ton noun holon*] on the heavens,” as was his “habit.”<sup>186</sup> It is not at all trivial that Plato finds in this a meritorious model of philosophical contemplation. Instead of being ensconced in the leisured enclaves of reason, however, Thales walks the earth before it, beneath it, exposed to the elements. So that as he tumbles, smoking head over muddy heels, his flesh answers what his mind averted: a call back to the archeological essence of water. By virtue of the destructive dimension of that heterological truth, the hyperstasis infused in well’s dark waters, his fall precipitates a *dispersal* of the objects of his theoretical inspection and a splash of death that renders this thinking *superfluous*. “To contemplate water,” writes Bachelard, “is to slip away, dissolve, and die.”<sup>187</sup>

In Thales’ doctrine water participates in each of the moments of *archē*, being the origin and continuous source of destruction but also generation. Recall that the Greeks once held that all waters *ultimately* converged in the immemorial past of Okeanos, the primeval wellspring from which all things came to be. A present tributary to Okeanos and Styx was Lethe, whose waters preserved no footprints. As Plato famously describes it, Lethe is the subterranean river of

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<sup>184</sup> See ch. 1, fn. 75. On Thales’ mathematical and astronomical discoveries, see: D.L. 1.1.23-27; Proclus, *in Euclidem* (DK 11a20).

<sup>185</sup> D.L. 1.1.35 (cf. §34 above).

<sup>186</sup> *Vit. Aes.* 110.

<sup>187</sup> Bachelard, *Water and Dreams*, 47.

oblivion (*lēthē*) from which souls came to drink before returning to the world of the living, reborn and reincorporate. To sip of it was to forget oneself, release oneself from one's own personal history, and embark on a new and othered path from womb to tomb. If water is as Bachelard says "an invitation to die," an invitation to fall and so return to our elemental origins, it also springs up in "an irresistible birth, a *continuous* birth."<sup>188</sup> To enrich an earlier insight, this element is verily saturated with the essential possibilities of the *pharmakon*, being both concealing (*lēthē*) and unconcealing (*alētheia*), destructive and regenerative.

Up from the well the Thracian caretaker draws a bucketful of therapeutic humor, brimming with mockery *and* mystery, irreverence *and* caring-for. In her laughing utterance the pharmacological truth of water resounds as *logos oikeios*, ecological affiliation. The gelastic eruptions of her flesh respond to the *kairotic* moment of disjuncture between the ideated world of the philosopher-astronomer and its elemental dispersion, issuing a provocation toward the possibilities of emersion and condensation.

There is an allegory attributed to Aesop entitled simply "Kairos," a word we have rendered as 'timeliness' (§28, §39). Here the "momentary nature of *kairos*" is personified, as it was in Lyssipus' celebrated statue. Timeliness, we are told, is a man "running swiftly, balancing on the razor's edge." And "if you grasp him in the front, you might be able to hold him," if only momentarily. But "once he has slipped away not even Jupiter himself can pull him back."<sup>189</sup> We have often marked this careful sense of timing. From Heidegger's valorization of the poets who regathered their words from the hinting summons of the earth (§22); to the Homeric caretaker who deferred to those of Gaia to gather how to cultivate the *oikos* and welcome others there (§29, §32); to Baubo, Iambe, and the *mustai*, who grasped a tear in the temporal fabric of the world and pulled it back to unveil the regenerate Earth Mother beneath the pall of degenerate struggles for power (§41-3). In each case an attunement to the metabolism of the earth-world in its eonic flux and reflux fostered an alacrity to expose and recycle our relation to death, destruction, and ecological abjection into rebirth, regeneration, and earthly consolation. And it is an elemental attunement primarily to the temporal currents of water that keys the Thracian's laughter to what could be called the *geokairology* of Thales' dwelling place, which has just

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 55, 14.

<sup>189</sup> Fable 536 (Phaedrus 5.8 = Perry 530), Gibbs, cit., p. 246 (translation slightly modified).



opened beneath him as though to swallow him down.<sup>190</sup> To be swept up in those currents is to be swept beyond the local and temporal horizons of the world. In that elsewhere one's words and deeds are not one's own, do not issue from one's own body. They emerge from the anonymous being of the flesh in fluent contact with the earth.

Such is the deeper anonymity of the Thracian woman and the transdermal profundity of her laughter, of all laughter in which the human face dissolves. She enters the scene enveloped in an atmosphere of carnal humor, a mood that assumes all the buoyancy of water. On it floats the ponderous world of the ponderous philosopher, whose sidereal vision prefigures a world peopled with such agelasts who never condescend to feel the earth beneath their feet. On it floats death, which weighs so heavily on their dry minds that to alleviate its ponderous burden they must freight their heavy tomes with tales of disembodied ghosts wafting high above their deeply buried tombs. *Condensed* in the laughter of the Thracian is a ludic, *disportmental* way of being-toward-death, here, in flesh erumpent rather than hereafter in thoughts discarnate.<sup>191</sup> Her laughs perform an obscene exposure to the obscenity of that decomposing-recomposing truth, exhumed from off-scene of the ecumene and laid out before us with no shroud of irony, no cloak of civility. Elicited by a deference to the River Time and its dispensation to the dwelling place, her self-effacing irreverence announces the superfluity of enstatic existence in the unforeseeable way of all flesh. Flowing beyond "my death" as the "possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped" (Heidegger), is a mortality that circles back, metabolically, through being-of-the-earth, into natality: the birth of the other. And insofar as every river and tide conveys some archetypal trace of that movement, the waters of the earth engulf the world to fulfill an abyssal temporality that reinfects world-history. An elemental time, indefinite, allohistorical, giving onto an immemorial past (prehistory) and unforeseeable future (posthistory) never fully present to us but *implicated* in our experience.<sup>192</sup> By condensing the ecological wisdom of carnal humor from the temporal abyss of water, the Thracian incites Thales to undertake a multiplex emersion: from theoretical explication to pre-theoretical implication; conceptual mastery to inexplicable mystery; lumbered comportment to the levity of disportment; caring for one's own to caring for the other; thus from the ecological tragedy and every abject

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<sup>190</sup> Cf. the "geochronology" of Anaximander in chapter 5 (§33).

<sup>191</sup> I bring the notion of disportment (literally 'being carried way') into sharper focus in §47 by contrasting it with Heideggerian comportment.

<sup>192</sup> Elemental time will be explored at length in §50.

provincialism of being toward playing a part in the carnal comedy of our earthly finitude.

Having travestied the Thracian, philosophy has long usurped the parable to ventriloquize Thales. As a result, Thales is left to fall under the scythe of Chronos into one pitfall after another filled with humorless ideas. Against the grain of ideological reconstructions from Plato to Heidegger, however, there are at least three grounds for counter-speculation, which support an idea we flirted with as early as chapter 1. Three bodies of evidence attesting to the philosopher's share in the carnal humor of his ecological affiliate. On our retelling these two caretakers laughed *together* unto death, laughed *together* under the permeable horizons of a world afloat upon the waters of the earth. Let us disinter those bodies, then, one by one and part by part.

The first source of interest to us is an anecdote from Plutarch's *Dinner of the Seven Wise Men*, which yields some insight perhaps into Thales' sense of humor. The dialogue is a fictitious homage to a Corinthian gathering of the Seven Sages of Greece. Revising the aristocratic guest-list to be found in Plato's *Protagoras*, Plutarch adds humble Aesop and two women, Melissa and Eumetis, to those in attendance.<sup>193</sup> If the dinner is a symposium, it's not the *Symposium*, for it bears a closer affinity to those in which *iamboi* were performed and fables recited by slaves. The scene is a convivial one and its jovial spirit dramatically heightened by the author, who has assembled the aphorisms of the sages into something of a pastiche, pitting one against the other to humorous effect. But it is Thales whose humor prevails, time and again, as his quips do strike their careful marks. To a degree and frequency unrivaled by his peers, Thales is said to jest (47b-c, 157d), smile (146d, 149d), and openly laugh (146f, 148c). And at least on one occasion his humor takes a turn for the vulgar, the bestial, the *carnal*. On their way to the dining hall, Thales, who has come on foot, joins Alexidemus and the seer Diocles (Plutarch's narrator) in a conversation about the meaning of hospitality and friendship. Their conversation is suddenly cut short by the entrance of a servant, who comes to convey an astonishing message:

Periander bids you, and Thales too, to take your friend here with you and inspect something which has just now been brought to him, to determine whether its birth is of no import whatever, or whether it is a sign and portent; at any rate, he himself seemed to be greatly agitated, feeling that it was a pollution and blot upon his solemn festival" (*Conv. sept. sap.* 149c)<sup>194</sup>

At this the nameless servant conducts them to an outbuilding near the fields and gardens, where they bear witness to an outlandish spectacle indeed:

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<sup>193</sup> *Conv. sept. sap.* 343a (hereafter cited parenthetically).

<sup>194</sup> Translation from Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 2, 365.

Here a youth, a herdsman apparently, beardless as yet, and not bad-looking withal, unfolded a piece of leather, and showed us a newly-born creature which he asserted was the offspring of a mare. Its upper parts as far as the neck and arms were of human form, and the sound of its crying was just like that of newly-born infants, but the rest of its body was that of a horse (*Conv. sept. sap.* 149cd: Babbitt, p. 365).

Neiloxenus, who cannot contain his revulsion, averts his gaze at once from the *lusus naturae*. But Thales nourishes another propensity. Plutarch tells us that he “fixed his gaze on the youth for a long time, and then, with a smile (for he was in the habit of joking with me about my profession),” inquired whether the herdsman would make “ritual atonement” to the gods and thereby dispel the misfortune this portent foretold. Diocles takes it as a “sign” (*semeion*) of the “dislocation” (*diaphoras*) of the “place” (*staseōs*) and the “wrath” of the “goddess,” which will surely cast a pall on any “marriage or offspring” (*gamou kai geneas*) there conceived. Diocles does not summon the goddess by name. Yet there is reason to think Demeter is implied. According to one Arkadian myth, Demeter metamorphosed into a mare to elude the god Poseidon. When she was apprehended they conceived immortal Arion, characterized in Homer’s *Iliad* as the swiftly running stallion of Adrastus.<sup>195</sup> Conceivably, then, the deformed “offspring of a mare” in the Corinthian stable may have been divined to be a scion of Demeter. Diocles and Thales offer contrastive interpretations of this *semeion*. What the former takes for a hinting summons of godsent death and destruction the latter receives with agnostic humor as a gift of fertility. In a manner that recalls pregnant Baubo’s bawdy exposure of the *monstrum*, the bestial god within, Thales goes on to deliver the punchline:

To [Diocles’ mantic counsel] Thales made no answer, but withdrew, laughing all the while. Periander met us at the door, and inquired about what we had seen; whereupon Thales left me and took his hand, saying, “Whatever Diocles bids you do you will carry out at your own convenience, but my recommendation to you is that you should not employ such young men as keepers of horses, or else that you should provide wives for them” (*Conv. sept. sap.* 149e: Babbitt, p. 367).

On hearing this Periander is said to be “mightily pleased, for he burst out laughing and embraced Thales most affectionately.” Now, some have read Thales as the voice of reason here, chastening Diocles’ conceit about numinous omens and prophecies. But if an argument is to be made for the herdsman having sired this centaurian creature, it would surely speak from between the legs.<sup>196</sup> Given that Plutarch has elected to distinguish Thales among the Seven Sages as their laughing

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<sup>195</sup> Hom., *Il.* 23.344-8. Cf. Pausinas, *Description of Greece* 8.25.4, 7. The *mens auctoris* is far from self-evident here, but it is also worth noting that one king *Diocles*, “driver of horses,” was attested to be an early initiate to the Eleusinian Mysteries and, together with Eumolpus, one of the first priests of Demeter (*Hom. Hymn Dem.* 474f.).

<sup>196</sup> It is possible and even likely that Plutarch’s anecdote is apocryphal from head to tail. But hasn’t ours been, after all, a path of such tales, such fables, parables, and allegories? When veering from the straight and narrow routes of ecumenical history, there is perhaps no other way to proceed.

doyen, we might wonder if *this* naked lunch does not encapsulate, in some measure, a carnal bent of humor for which he was renowned. As in the other myths and legends we've explored, so too here do we witness a kairotic movement from enstatic mood to elemental ecstasy. Anxiety and aversion are disrupted by an obscenely humorous exposure of the fecund possibilities of the flesh. Mutual laughter that ensues, strengthening affective affiliation with promises of earthly consolation. So that if neither Demeter nor Dionysus is named, Thales has nonetheless humorized the hyperstatic and genostatic aspects of their essence just as he archeologizes the waters of *gē*, nee Gaia, within his ecological doctrine. That doctrine is restated here by Cleodorus, for whom it speaks to the conditions of subsistence, hospitality, and friendship. "Thales says that, if the earth (*gēs*) be done away with, confusion will possess the *kosmos*, so this is the dissolution of the dwelling place (*oikou*)" (158c, trans. mod.). Seldom has Thales' thought been expressed with such concision.

These considerations lead us to the second grounds for thinking that *this* philosopher laughed with the foreign slave-woman where others would laugh at her. Here we recur to the political precipitates of Thales' ontology. In chapter 5 I proposed that Thales occupied a place between paltripolitanism (irrational chauvinism) on the one hand and cosmopolitanism (rational chauvinism) on the other. Common to these two ideologies is a carelessness toward alterity. An ontic dysposition we traced back to ecological abjection, or earthward misattunement. Arguably, this abjection lay dormant in the very concept of politics, traditionally conceived. Historically, it has honored its origins in classical Greece by defining itself *primarily* in relation to a closed community of ~~others~~ like us. Other human beings or rational beings whose claims to being cared for derive from their membership in congeneric social institutions. In this "kinship ethic" even cosmopolitanism betrays itself as a provincialism of being: a dysclosure of the wild otherness of being that leads to the domestication of the otherness of beings. Contrariwise, Thales' philosophy, his care for ecological wisdom, was shown to conserve the difference between world and its (m)other, earth, a relation which grounds every collateral difference between I and thou, us and them, human and nonhuman, beings and non-beings. For it renews the open-ended, heterostatic relations between these terms, preventing the collapse of one into the other, difference into the same. On these grounds, we recast Thales as an *ecopolitan* thinker (§34).

As the coinage suggests, ecopolitanism is a stance maintained at the margins and interstices of politically consolidated territories of power (viz. retrojection), from the ancient

ecumene to the modern anthropocene. It flourishes wherever and whenever these territories most intensely open onto the untracked outlands of place and the outlandish temporal cycles of the elements. The autochthonies of universal reason and parochial unreason mandate a politics of exclusion that is hypostatic and/or anthropostatic. Abjection dysposes the paltripolitan as it does the cosmopolitan to persist in disclosing nothing more of other beings than what can readily afford or affirm the outreach of the understanding, nothing more than what I/we can concernfully project as my/our own in the world. The ecopolitan, by contrast, is disposed toward deferring that disclosure. Only after allowing for affective exposures to the undisclosable alterity of beings does she begin to make sense of how they figure into her horizons of significance. Furthermore, she retains that allowance and moderates her disclosure in praxis through elemental attunement: a chord of deference composed of humor, humility, and all the silent notes we've mentioned. By virtue of this attunement to the *earthborne* otherness of being, which constrains and delimits the operation of her understanding, the ecopolitan conserves a response-ability to every *earthborn* other. *This response-ability, defined as caring-for and set forth as the essential vocation of the caretaker, is the elementary determination of existence in the ecology of being.*

Insofar as he releases himself *and* owns up to the heterology of existence, to *being-of-the-earth-in-the-world*, the caretaker remains hyper-ecstatically open, allopathically open to the intimate fissures and rifts concealed in other beings, yet hinted in their drifts (§11, §22). He remains so even as they defy practical prehension and intellectual comprehension, concealing themselves the moment he comportmentally takes them up against the background of the operant world or perceptually takes them in against the visible. In the face of the abjection of ecumenism, against the devastation that Heidegger imputes to scientism, technologism, and machination, our first line of resistance is to be sought in being-with-others-of-the-earth. A community bound together by a nexus of ecological affiliations contracted through our primal contact with the self-concealing excess over worldly immanence. If a politics of the earth holds any promise, if it is to twist free of the political abjection of our ecological tragedy, then it must discard the xenophobic legacy of the ecumenical polis for this inoperant, this invisible community. An anonymous community of the earth, bound together by a commitment to safeguarding difference against the hegemony of the same where the inverse has perennially obtained. Only in caring for the elemental origin and sustaining source of all otherness may we truly care not only for the others in the midst of ourselves but beyond ourselves, our kind, and beyond reason. The point of

departure for such a politics is not, strictly speaking, the *place* of the other. Nor is it even the site of the *displaced*. For such false, if admirable, starts effectively resist the enstasis of the ego, self, or person (egocentrism, ipseocentrism) only to reinforce the centrifugal immanence of self, body, place, and world (ecumenism). Ecopolitanism, by contrast, begins on the edge of those horizons. It begins from an exposure to what is *essentially* placeless and historically out of joint. Deferring explication of the elsewhere and elsewhen, it is moved centripetally toward their implications in the here and now of the dwelling place, where every word, work, and deed of the caretaker remains to be said, made, and done on behalf of all things foreign, outlandish, inexplicable. To be someone on the edge of no one, somewhere on the edge of nowhere, cultivating something on the edge of no thing is to respond to the elemental edges of being. Such is the ecopolitan imperative of the caretaker, who dwells other-wise in the rift of the earth-world.

If we follow the watermarks of the parable and see the man who fell to earth as an emblem of his doctrine, it stands to reason that this ecopolitan thinker would have reciprocated the outlandish laughter of the foreign slave-woman. The arc of the narrative exemplifies thalesian archeology, which regathers the being of earth into the destructive and generative moments of its most fluent element. By way of recapitulation, the philosopher's immersion in these groundwaters precipitates the dispersion (hyperstasis) of his world. And the Thracian's intervention infuses him with levity, a lightened disposition that nurtures his emersion (genostasis) from that experience as it does its condensation (heterostasis) into wisdom. That wisdom has left its watermark on the drifting fragments attributed to Thales. To the apothegm about the swiftness of the mind, Diogenes appends another. "Time is wisest," says Thales, "for it brings everything to light" – a lambent thought that cannot be understood unless refracted through time's archetypal manifestation.<sup>197</sup> Water. Since past and future are commixed into the storied waters of the well, it shouldn't surprise us to discover that certain elements of Thales' writings informed the composition of the parable and the lessons it conveyed. And it is to one of the tributaries of this time-drenched wisdom – introduced in chapter 1 and elaborated in chapters 5 and 6 – that we now return in the *third and final phase of our interpretation*. By exposing his ecumenical penchant for forgetting the elemental *archē* close at hand and underfoot, the Thracian caretaker reawakens Thales to the ecological difference of existence brought to light by his philosophy. Striking is the parallel to Baubo-Iambe, whose gesture/words recalled Demeter to

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<sup>197</sup> D.L. 1.1.35.

her earthly essence, her generative promise to the world. As it was in Eleusis, so too in Miletus, where a Thracian slave laughs in the face of death, incarnating and propagating an irreverence for the world and a humorous response to the inexplicable future of our being-of-the-earth.

On the shores of the Black Sea, from the buried Milesian colony of Olbia, a team of twentieth-century archeologists unearthed a charnel house of words inscribed on tablets wrought of bone. On one of these tablets, dating from roughly 500 BCE, the following was written: “Life-Death-Life” and below this “Orphic” and “Dionysus” followed by the word “Truth” (*Alētheia*).<sup>198</sup> The Orphic belief in palingenesis, apotheosized by thrice-born Dionysus, was inherited by Classical philosophers who sought to undergird it with rational arguments for the immortality of the insular soul. Long before that eschatological myth was recuperated into a homological understanding of one’s own future, and even before *psuchē* was divorced from the elements, nonsentient (air) and sentient (flesh), and immured in the body, *palingenesia* drew its meaning from *genesis*, hence from *gē*. To be born again (*palin*) was to be reborn of earth. Much as a breath (*psuchē*, *pneuma*) is expired into the ether, so was death thought to deliver those who breathed their last to the elements. And if some part of that gust were inspired anew, *redivivus*, it was not the same breath at all but an admixture of these elements with the breath of the departed and that of others leeward, begotten more longwinded or yet to be conceived.

“The surrounding world of nature, which preceded us and will succeed us, offers us the spectacle of a longevity and an endurance that are denied us,” writes Robert Harrison. “This spectacle can be a source of anguish or of reassurance, depending on the relation we maintain with ourselves.”<sup>199</sup> If we understand that relation in Platonic terms, rationally hypostatizing care into the immortal soul’s concern for its own formal progeny (Justice, The Good, etc.) and death into deliverance from the material conditions of earth as a whole, then the longevity of nature is bound to register as nothing next to the timeless presence of the *idea* within a wider context of faith. Whether it is grounded on faith in the powers of reason or in myths arrayed in reason’s garb, every metaphysics rests on some teleology of beingness. In a farce that unfolds behind the back of reason, the metabolic cycles of the earth-world are supplanted by a linear progression toward a de-finite, ahistorical absolute. A worldlocked reality projected *sub specie aeternitatis*

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. Marcel Detienne, *The Greeks and Us: A Comparative Anthropology of Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2005), 69.

<sup>199</sup> Robert Harrison, “Toward a Philosophy of Nature,” in William Cronon, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 436.

by the finite intellect toward the devastating impossibility of earth. One who maintains this relation to himself becomes like a man who swallows his own hot air, then holds his breath unto the grave, believing with dead certainty that he will return to the very world he holds within his breast – albeit purer, free of imperfections. In that just reward, he reasons, his breathless, deathless mind will not want for air or any other element. It will sustain itself on ideas alone.

If instead we adopt Heidegger's early conception of care as concern for being one's own self-chosen, historical whole, and if death marks the closure of this enstasis, then nature's longevity is bound to be a source of *Angst*, overcome by self-mastery within a wider context of allohistorical futility. Even tombstones are unplumbed by weathers, their names erased by rains, and all words eventually scatter to the winds of time. Here the caricature is different but no less tragic. The image is one of a desperate man, gasping into a bag unto the point of hyperventilation so as to recover his *own* breath from the unforeseeable cyclones of elemental time.

What then are we to make of the fragment introduced in chapter 1? How do matters stand with the indifference toward death that Thales takes to follow from there being “no difference between life and death” (§8)?<sup>200</sup> It is easy to see how one could find in this a precursor to Platonic, Epicurean, and Christian expressions of what the Stoics called *adiaphora*. The same virtuous indifference toward death impugned by Nietzsche as a slavish devaluation of life masquerading as the will to truth – an ethos he also denounces for its “hatred of the earth and the earthly.”<sup>201</sup> Given Thales' pursuit of the examined life, it is more difficult to glean from the fragment the “misattunement” (*Ungestimmtheit*) of “indifference” (*Gleichgültigkeit*) laid out in *Being and Time*. For the early Heidegger, recall, misattunements are *inauthentic* moods that conceal our existential vocation (§6). As he puts it, the mood of indifference fuels our fallenness into everyday concerns “in a way which ‘lets’ everything ‘be’ as it is,” an inauthentic allowance “based on forgetting and abandoning oneself to one's thrownness” (SZ 345). As a forgetting of our thrownness toward death, indifference abandons the authentic appropriation of the past from an ownmost future. It thereby abandons us to our natality, or in his terms, historicity. So far from a relation to the earth, indifference figures into Heidegger's account as a misattunement to the world-historical destining of self-being. This explains why he will go on to contrast it with resoluteness and elsewhere liken it to a kind of “non-deciding” (SZ 345; CP 80/GA65 102). In

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<sup>200</sup> D.L. 1.1.35.

<sup>201</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989), 202-8.



chapter 1 that resoluteness, or willful decisiveness, can also misattune us to the earth, sowing the seeds of the very devastation that Heidegger later takes to task. An ecological understanding of our thrownness reveals that we are not only born into the world but also born of earth, whose allohistorical conditions are stitched into world-history at the limits of its possibility. It is not entirely true that Dasein never laughs. Yet the “unshakable joy” in our “individualized potentiality-for-Being,” said to accompany our “sober anxiety” toward death in *Being and Time*, is not the joyful irreverence of Thales and the Thracian (SZ 310). As Heidegger reframes it years later in his lectures on Nietzsche, joy is precisely that which “announces the power attained” by Dasein’s willful ability to thrust its self out beyond itself, and the “sense of mastery” Dasein gains from this “resolute openness.” In “finding itself out beyond itself” Dasein retrojectively rejoices in maintaining that outreach. Before his ecological turn, Heidegger thus maintains that authentic “joy” is “something that brings us [back] to ourselves” (N1 52f./GA6.1 51f.).<sup>202</sup>

If our ecological reassessment of Thalesian philosophy holds water, neither of these interpretations do. Perhaps the fragment is apocryphal, an invention of Classical provenance or of such Hellenistic hagiographers as Diogenes himself. Then again, perhaps there lay concealed in these words some deeper truth about mortality, a truth with which one can start to think the Epicurean nothing, and about which slave-women and caretakers all necessarily laugh.<sup>203</sup>

I would like to suggest a new approach to deciphering the fragment, one more faithful to Thales’ wider doctrine. To appreciate his indifferent attunement to death and to begin to understand the therapeutic laughter of the Thracian one must to extract carnal humor from the humors of water. We already touched on this connection in chapter 6, where we examined the atmospheric immersion in the “attuned space” of this element. Whether stagnant or smoothly flowing, lesser bodies of water envelop us in an atmosphere of buoyancy, levity, and composure. And if we move from ponds and lakes and streams to rivers and tides, we find ourselves affected besides with a sense of the mercurial, the transient and transitory. Should we dare to venture into wilder waterways, be they cascades or cataracts, maelstroms or the high seas, what is most

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<sup>202</sup> More generally, as late as the *Contributions* Heidegger will say of our mortal vocation that “the task is to draw death into Da-sein so that Dasein might be *mastered in its abyssal breadth* and thus the ground of the possibility of the truth of being might be *fully measured*” (CP 224/GA65 285, emphasis mine).

<sup>203</sup> According to the Epicurus, “when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not,” therefore “death is nothing to us” and “foolish, therefore, is the person who says that he fears death” (Epicurus. *Letter to Menoeceus*, ll. 124-127; trans. from Russell M. Greer, ed. *Letters, Principle Doctrines and Vatican Sayings* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill, 1981), 54.. Cf. Lucretius. *De Rerum Natura* 3.870f., 3.898f.

intensely felt is nothing so much as their all-consuming indifference. It is the same prevailing mood of “indifference manifest to our presence, our absence, our staying or our going,” which Abbey attaches to wilderness and Casey terms desolation. The wild River Time cannot be stemmed or stilled. It flows apace and ever onward with indomitable persistence. Like some thing loosened from the shores of the past, we are born into this river and borne along. Set adrift among the flotsam of the world, we separate from the anonymous aggregate and congeal into discretely stable bodies, swimming with or against the currents and trailing behind us a wake of singular biographies. But like all things in this passage from otherness to otherness, not yet ourselves to having been ourselves, we retain the permeability and instability of our metamorphic origins. Yet human being has long nourished a peculiar nîsus to insulate itself from this fluidity. From hospital room to coffin and catacomb, we exit the womb and enter the tomb as though to exempt ourselves from the full sweep of the fluent metabolism. Like the eponymous angler and riverside dweller of Cormac McCarthy’s *Suttree*, we take our own parts against the “slander of oblivion,” against the “monstrous facelessness of it” by boldly striving to install an ineffaceable monument in the void where all may read our names.<sup>204</sup> But there is no preventing our body’s terminal immersion and dispersion, no stopping their reclamation by the earth. Only an insensible void devoid of lived experience could preserve our names and faces against their future dissolution. And only the earth-forsaken find defamation in oblivion.

Early on we underscored the elementary primacy of the ecological difference to the manifold differences that order our world. Could it be that Thales’ so-called “indifference” stems precisely from a silent consent to this elementary insight? If so, this would suggest that his mood is neither adiaphorically nor aversively indisposed toward death. Rather, it would be an indifference elicited by dwelling in the difference of being, in the intimate rift where the truth of death eventuates. Enstatic moods, which operate within the confines of the understanding, attune us to death as an outer limit of disclosure: the local-temporal closure of being-in-the-world. But the caretaker’s irreverence for the world is elicited by the elemental ecstasy of death: a worldbreaking rupture that delivers us over, beyond the point of no return, to our being-of-the-earth. Long after I pay my debt to nature and my body is commissioned to the great moving compost of being, my decomposing flesh pays elemental dividends. As George Meredith poetizes it: “Earth knows no desolation. / She smells regeneration / in the moist breath of

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<sup>204</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *Suttree* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 414.

decay.”<sup>205</sup> The caretaker finds a kind of therapeutic humor in this. Her response is an aftershock of the flesh-gorged earth, which always has the last laugh in the dark closure of destruction, which reopens onto generation, mortality onto natality. It is not a spiritual transubstantiation or re-corporealization that prompts this response, but a *terrestrial re-incarnation* that leaves no more than an anonymous trace of who we were. The caretaker is therefore indifferent to the project of self-recuperation, sustained by the abject resolve to own up to one’s own cherished place in the world’s future history. For her that project betrays an impassive disregard for the claim laid on each of us by the elemental other, whence and wither we are thrown into existence. Any projection toward death that crimps our exposure to that indefinite whence and wither leaves fallow the fecundity of this othermost possibility. Death does anything but individuate us, make us whole. It anonymizes us and wholly remakes us. To cling to the world-historical destiny of a community of self-enclosed wholes in the face of our own allohistorical oblivion is to deny our earthly finitude while being denied its postmortem consolations. Thus does the caretaker laugh from an allohistorical indifference to the tragedies, farces, and ironies of the world.

*We understand* the difference between life and death within the corporeal horizons of the world. It is a distinction predicated on the distinctness of beings. But the earth, to which we are always already opened through the carnal ekstasis of our bodies, is only ordered and separated to the extent that the understanding steps in to actively appropriate what is exposed, to disclose and thereby enclose it into its horizons. Our elemental ecstasies afford egress from enstasis and ingress to the hyperstasis of the elements, to which we forfeit our immanence at the moment of death. The possibility of condensation inheres in every experience of hyperstasis. Lightning flashes with insight. Floods teach us to live right. And earthquakes can be groundbreaking. To allow for these possibilities is to move from being-toward-death to being for after my death, that is, to caring for the birth of the other. It is to become responsive to how the inexplicable future of the other affectively rebounds on the arc of my existence. And it is to disport oneself from each moment as a kairotic opportunity to care for the other, to nourish that anonymity of being that nourished our coming to be.

Coursing beneath and beyond the local-temporal horizons of being-in-the-world, the waters of the earth still offer themselves to experience as perhaps they once did to its ancient caretakers. In their cyclical ebb and flow between absence and presence, concealment and

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<sup>205</sup> George Meredith, *Poems*, vol. 1 (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2006), 191.

unconcealment, resistance and affordance, they loosen our moorings from the anthropocene to convey us elsewhere and otherwhen. For those who stand out from it into that elemental ecstasy, the being of water sluices the dwelling place with uncanny traces that imply an inexplicable excess over their canny understanding, a superfluity that replenishes the cultivation of building and saying and thinking by immersing them in the unbuilt, the unsaid, the unthought. As the archetypal trace of time's allohistorical passage, water overflows world-history to humble the caretaker, whose indifference toward her *own* death derives from a humorous acceptance of the comedy of existence against the backdrop of the carnal hereafter. To laugh and dwell as water flows, bubbling up from the hardened soil of the past and breaking new ground for the nameless ones to come. Therein lies the ecological wisdom of Thales, the Thracian, and their communion at the well. A hidden source that echoes still – if we still care to listen – with a laughter out of the whole truth of our existence, in the world *and* of the earth.

## A Vocation to Earthwork

And yes . . . the stones began to lose their hardness;  
they softened slowly and, in softening,  
changed form. Their mass grew greater and their  
nature more tender; one could see the dim beginning  
of human forms, still rough and inexact,  
the kind of likeness that a statue has  
when one has just begun to block the marble.  
Those parts that bore some moisture from the earth  
became flesh; whereas the solid parts -  
whatever could not bend – became the bones.  
What had been veins remained, with the same name.  
And since the gods had willed it so, quite soon  
The stones the man had thrown were changed to men,  
and those the woman cast took women's forms.  
From this, our race is tough, tenacious; we  
work hard – proof of our stony ancestry.  
–Ovid, *Metamorphoses*<sup>1</sup>

It is death that fixes the stone that we can touch, the return of  
time, the fine, innocent earth beneath the grass of words.  
–Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*<sup>2</sup>

Having swam some length upriver to the foot of the trace, then squelched from shoal to foreshore, I gathered up my clothes and outhook them before climbing back into their clammy shell. I could not manage quite to stand upright as firmly as I had. In truth I did not really stand so much as totter there upon the sand, the scree, like something stranded on floods retreat in the branches of a marcid tree. After casting one last glance at the Tuolumne, I set off downshore light-headed and vaporous. Even as my pace picked up my gait still quaked with the phantom spooling of the currents I had quit. A feeling of unsteady buoyancy, of being somehow under tow, evoking those tidal tremors that linger late of nights after swimming the day away at the beach. These phantom traces of the riverbed reverbed through my body on each leg of my return to the workplace. And they shook me yet upon reaching my section of trail to find my unfinished work somehow not where I had left it. What I had taken before to be an utterly arid place, devoid of the faintest suggestion of water, I now found sopped with traces in spate. The loosened soil above the trail, guttered and perforated. The fissures of an old retaining wall built to hold the soil

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<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1993), Bk. 1, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic, An Archeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1994), 197.

in place. The pitted, rutted surface of the tread for leading up to that trailside channel where roots were naked and underbrush sparse. Even the rake of grade itself in its meandering descent. All things visible bore an elemental impression, the watermarks of the watercycle.

Something there is that does not love a trail. If it was water that cut Pate Valley from the Sierra some 10 million years ago, that replenished the glacial flows which forelaid the grade along icehewn lateral moraines, if it invited passage in its more recent career with streams that furrowed and refreshed the terrain, water also engulfs the trail as fluid agent of its ruin.

The winters are harshest in Yosemite where clouds come to rest, above the treeline. From November to March the snow falls steadily, reaching smothering depths on the slopes and shoulders near peak altitude. At these higher elevations, the trail must bear the enormous weight of the snowpack as it shifts and breaks and sporadically slides. Come spring the snow begins to belly and melt, releasing fleet filigrees, displacing the sediment in their myriad downfall. Snowstorms give way to heavy rains. And before long this surface runoff swells and ramifies, forming sheetwash down the suant slopes. Or else it converges by way of colluvial channels into diffluent networks of ephemeral streams. Well into spring these streams will hemorrhage into freshets, fed by torrential downpours condensed from the snowmelt of seasons past.

The downslope course of this runoff is ever one of minimal resistance over maximal descent. In the trade this is known as the *fall line*. To cut a trail along this line from summit to valley floor is to create an imminently self-closing passage. For much of the year in Yosemite – especially at higher, wetter elevations – such a trail would cede place to rushing waters that thwart all footholds. A right of way become no more than a waterway that widens and deepens apace with its erosion of the soil. For this reason, and not simply to bypass sheer drop offs, well-laid trail does not a fall line follow. Instead it wends its way circuitously, at angles to the slope, so as to ensure that water runs across instead of down it. The same considerations dictate the grade, or steepness, of the trail. When first constructed, a trail is advisedly graded to no more than half the (cross) slope of the mountainside. Absent this provision, the fall line is diverted to the trail, where it entrenches itself. The more runoff, the greater the erosion. This steepens the grade, drawing more and ever more rapid runoff and erosion in an unrelenting cycle of closure until that watersunken passage is reclaimed and the trail is but a rumor of a trail.

However aligned, well-graded, and fortified, every trail must be made to reckon with the passage of water. As if by a searching out of weakness, like some animal trying to find its way

in, water laps and nibbles at the grade, bringing it ever closer to the fall line for to swallow down the passage whole. And once it has made its point of entry, it proceeds to wreak havoc. Where it flows it gutters the tread, pots where it pools, and I have seen walls reinforced with concrete that were reduced to rubble when built with undue regard for the ways of water.

In making the journey from trail to cairn, over trace on to riverrace, and back again to trail, I essentially retraced in an afternoon the seasonal cycle of waters through the region. What began as a straightforward search to quench my thirst had deviated, as does every untamed watercourse. In being guided by the work of these waters, there opened a passage in my world for the onrush of elemental matters that eroded routine lifeways. The cairn of stones I washed up against had crushed my compass. The forest trace, down which my body cascaded, dislocated it and dispersed it over a sensuous cataract. And the ecstasy of the river, which drew that body out from itself into elements, my personal route from birth to death into an uprooted future, had quenched my own moods and concerns. Resolve turned to humility and humor, comportment to disportment. Throughout this fluent reenactment, the body I inhabited was progressively engulfed, mimetically, in those waterways, until they inhabited it. Whereupon that body's every stroke, step, and saccade came to express and respond to their impress on the places it once coursed over or broke upon.

What I caught was but a stationary glimpse, prepared by the bone-deep intensity of that headlong journey and enriched by hand to earth for years to come. At a glance I saw how this trail, like any other of its kind, was a trace evincive of a work far older than my own, our own, a trace of the immemorial ingenuity of the elements. The trail and its surrounds are anything but formless, anything but inert. As I began to move about the watermarks of this place, began to retrace its waterways, they solicited some movements and afforded others that resisted my body. By virtue of that very resistance, these traces tickled my flesh with the phantom momentum of the river, awakening an ability to move much as water had through that place.

Beyond Bachelard's provocation, this way lay the call to a new vocation, inviting what would become for me an errant journeyman'ship, one whose consummation would be not mastery, but passage through it toward fluency. Here was the way of a journeyman who quits his master's household for the manuduction of the river, meandering from dwelling place to dwelling place with no fixed ends, no destinations, no settlements. Far from a summons adjuring the erudite scholar in the cloven syntax of knowledge, the anchorite in the *Logos* as *verbum Dei*,

or even the rational agent in the argot of freedom and responsibility, this calling made its intransitive appeal to the flesh, the sentient element, in the silent medium of brute experience. On that momentous day, I was manumitted, released from abject drudgery, and commissioned to rework the earth that had gone to work on me. Thus would I find my way to earthwork.

The adept of this vocation, as I came to see it, must grow attuned to an *oikos* beyond the *oikoumenē*, to a *logos* beneath the semanteme. For it calls for a response-ability to the ways in which others – elemental, vegetal, and animal – have moved through the trail, embedding it with traces of their journeys. In this one treads the finest line between working with earth and working against it, a line that is difficult to define. Perhaps this was why my foreman traced it out for me one morning with a hint that beggared that discourse and boggled the mind. His advice to me then, as though plucked from a Zen koan, was to “learn to think and work like water.”

Every stone and patch of soil on the trail has been sculpted by the flows, forces, and rhythms of water. So too are these traced in every train of footfalls and bootfalls winding from switchback to switchback, rushing gracile down the roughest declivities as only water can. And anyone who seeks not merely to cut a human route must be guided by the ways this element has shaped it. She must learn to think and work like water, retracing and reworking what *it* has made. In time her skin, muscle, and bone are inured by this work, taking on the strength and resilience of granite while retaining the fluency of the stream. Earth is transfigured in turn, acquiring the suppleness of yielding flesh becoming ever more malleable and sensibly indistinguishable from her own. In this way, earthwork is not a matter of unilateral, calculative adaptation. It is a sensuous co-authorship with the elements, entrusted to one who allows her body to become a passageway for their expression, forgoing its suppression. Like shifting sands in a kinesthetic current, this work assumes an unexpected motility beyond the body’s governance.

However well designed and built, backcountry trails bear an impact. The earthworker’s task is to minimize this impact so as to safeguard *common* passage. It is not by holding the wild in abeyance that this is achieved, but by approaching the grade as a place of ecological reconciliation. Through the delicate work of digging beneath and cutting across nature and culture, animality and humanity, earth and world, earthwork gathers these together while conserving their mutual difference.

For the trailworker this reconciliation demands an acute sensitivity to the water in the flesh of the soil and the flesh and blood in water. But if she whelms her senses in the waters of



the workplace, she mustn't become *overwhelmed*. Thus is she tasked to gear into the ways of water with an eye to anticipating how they might forestall the passage of other beings, human and nonhuman, that have left their trailmarks too. In order to reconcile the trail's competing rights of way, she must retrace them all. Wherever the sum of traces foretokens displacement, the presence of an earthwork suggests itself. Her first marks are made in these places on the edge of common passage, places she holds open by sculpting water in the negative and conveying it back to the basins below.

At every stage, then, this vocation is a delicate art of compromise. This holds true of meticulous chisel work as it does for simply moving stone. Rolling a heavy stone to the grade requires no less than an embrace. Since no two boulders are ever the same, one begins with getting a feel for its anomalies and eccentricities. At the end of two outstretched arms, that bond tightens as the fingers creep into their invisible cinches. It grows tighter as one clenches one's flesh against the belly of the stone. Balance shifts from squarely set heels to the balls of the feet, with every muscle poised yet pliant. Finally, the embrace is consummated. An upheaval, beginning in the lungs and rolling outward from the core, then upward from the earth, bursts forth to break the stillness of the stone. The weight and center of that flesh-draped rock are instantly intimated when the body is fully leveraged against it. Tautly stretched as the membrane of a drum, the pulse is felt to beat against the scabrous surface of the stone, so closely are they pressed. But to lock that embrace is to risk being overturned in full tilt. Crushed. Instead of holding fast to the trundling mass for to muscle it home, one simply guides its earthward fall. The hands rush over the stone in streams, gaining purchase on its upper bulk, while the feet replant themselves below. With an intimate feel for its weight and direction, the body fluently moves from control to concession, then compromise, which sets the stone in place.

There is music to this art. Consider the digging of a swale, a simple trailside trench for water, which is more about listening than it is about strength or stamina. Like the susurrant purl of a brook, there is a certain syncopated refrain that issues from the shovel as it cuts into the soil. A cadenced accord of steel and sediment. As the day wears on, the body incorporates the shovel as its living extension, an ancillary tongue, lapping at the soil, making the project speak in lashing or lauding tongues of its own. Should the blade carom, as when striking rock or root, a halting dissonance resounds. But when the motions of the shovel cohere with the consistency of the ground it staves, the harmony is clear. For as long as it is sustained, the trailworker's body is

delivered over to the elemental possibilities of the place. It *becomes* this swaling, this thinking and digging of water. An emergent swalesong evokes the sound and feel of slicing into ripened rinds. Its tone is unmistakable, the sensation indelible. And when shovel sings and soil sighs, and each stroke becomes a fluent culmination of the last to carry the senses tensely forward, the earth then comes to turn and churn like a thing alive. It digs *itself* into the swale.

In working the trail before, my resolute commitment to completing the task at hand was attended by a constant dread of the unforeseeable outcomes of my every deed. Looming over even the most productive of days was an inescapable sense of being ever on the brink of expulsion from this vocation. Each work was for me a step toward mastery that would somehow legitimate the whole. This sort of anticipatory stance is widespread among aspirants of every vocation. But it finds special resonance in the demiurgic dream of the artisan whose life is so worked into the architecture of the built world that they stand and fall together.

Nowhere perhaps is this aspiration so clearly described as in *The Stonemason*, a play by Cormac McCarthy. Pondering why it was that someone would embark on the path laid out by his father, the tale's eponymous master, the apprentice reflects:

The work devours the man and devours his life and I thought that in the end he must be somehow justified thereby. That if enough of the world's weight only pass through his hands he must become inaugurated into the reality of that world in a way to withstand all scrutiny. A way not easily dissolved or set aside.<sup>3</sup>

Far from inaugurating me into the reality of a world that would abide my passing from it, my works could not be claimed to withstand the scrutiny of a season, let alone that of future generations. Instead of stone worked into the world to bear its memorial weight, my works were collapsed under their very own weight and I with them. What filled me with dread out there was the prospect that these stones, hove up with a loamy yawn like things summoned out of earthen hibernation, would pass through my hands only to be remitted without the slightest trace of my artistry. Like the works that marked my historical presence, my being in the built world of which they formed a part was dreadfully slight. So slight that I shrank before the unforeseen. Some mischance or blunder that would bring me that much closer not merely to a sublimated death of some kind, but to a life that ultimately withstood no scrutiny at all.

Journeying over the trace down the mountainside, that dread had risen to a terrible crescendo. Every broken limb and crushing blow that brought me to my knees led me to reckon with the frailty of my existence. And even as I pressed onward, I trembled at the thought that one

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<sup>3</sup> Cormac McCarthy, *The Stonemason* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 111.

false step might well spell my last. Each of these dreadful dyspositions stemmed from some self-enclosed concern. But my waterborne journey unfurled itself into a vaster temporal breadth, in which death no longer figured as the feeble sputter of the biological clockwork or the culmination of my personal narrative, but against the horizons of an irrecoverable past giving onto an intractable future. Into these horizons death reemerged as the passage of my body into the faceless flesh of earth. If the open possibilities of this passage bewildered the mind and travestied the will, they also replaced that dread with humor and humility.

The moods that had first engulfed me in the river continued to linger on the ridgeside as I resumed the work of laying stone, trued now to the elements of the trail. Disported from my own contracted ambit of operation, I now saw how the unsigned stoneworks out there were anything but personal monuments. After so much of the earth's weight had passed through the hands of those masons, they too passed to make way for those to come. The works and those who built them were each ingredient in each and forever joined in a passage through the ecology of being. Having emerged into the world, they took their place within it. And yet, just as rains flatten mountains over time, and erode all names engraved in stone, these artisans would be remanded to the earth, leaving aught but a trace of their bygone presence. Yet traces are enough to withstand the scrutiny of this vocation at least, promised as they are to that ensemble of silent voices from which its heirs will one day draw their own. Drystone masonry is not held together by the cement of a Promethean mind, the force of a Jovian will, but by the weight of that past rendered fluent in a world well-trued to the rudimentary work of the elements, the songs of wild earth.

**Temporality.**

**Fleshing Out Finitude and Being-of-the-Earth after Merleau-Ponty**

**§47. Gestures toward an Archeology of Existence: The Problem of Finitude as the Paradox of Expression**

No philosophy can be ignorant of the problem of finitude without thereby being ignorant of itself as a philosophy; no analysis of perception can be ignorant of perception as an original phenomenon without thereby being ignorant of itself as analysis; and the infinite thought that one would discover immanent to perception would not be the highest level of consciousness, but rather a form of unconsciousness.

–Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*<sup>1</sup>

*(i) The Gestalt Being of the Natural World in Merleau-Ponty's Early Writings*

The ramified problem of finitude runs like a rhizome through the rich soils of Merleau-Ponty's thought.<sup>2</sup> And the abject mark of tragedy, first laid bare in chapter 1, receives its most developed expression in the half-formed leaflets – so like those half-buried ancient fragments – which appeared just before the philosopher's sudden fall to earth. In the working notes to his posthumously published manuscript *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), Merleau-Ponty speaks not as Kant once did to the “peculiar fate” of human reason per se but to that of life itself. “With life,” we read, perception emerges to enclose itself within a “universe of immanence” that “tends of itself to become autonomous, realizes of itself a repression of transcendence” (VI 213). The philosophical stakes of reversing that tendency are initially made explicit in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945). There he tells us that the “fundamental philosophical act” would be to “return to the lived world” and discover “the limits of the objective,” simultaneously “thwarting the ruse by which perception allowed itself to be forgotten as a fact and as perception to the benefit of the object that it delivers to us and the rational tradition that it establishes” (PhP 57). In

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<sup>1</sup> PhP 40. All further citations of Merleau-Ponty's works in this chapter appear parenthetically and conform to the abbreviations on page xiii.

<sup>2</sup> For an introductory summation of this chapter, see page 31.

proportion to our forgetting of that “originary perception,” that “non-thetic, pre-objective, and preconscious experience” which first opens us onto the lived world, objectivity either collapses into the subjective universe of immanence (idealism, constructivism) or vice-versa (realism, empiricism) (PhP 252). Detached from their *prejective* genesis, each of these epiphenomenal domains is liable of itself to appear autonomous, dichotomous in relation to the other, and hypostatized as an autogenous reality, for itself or in itself. What gets repressed – or in our terms dysclosed – in this case is the world’s transcendence of the anthropological difference engendered by thematic perception and filled in by thetic acts. This repression denies our intellectual finitude.<sup>3</sup> We shall eventually explore how Merleau-Ponty’s reckoning with intellectual abjection sets a course toward the ecological tragedy: the forgetfulness of *earthly* transcendence, thereby *earthly* finitude. In order to follow his path to the ecology of being, it will be important to see how his *Denkweg* was informed *ab initio* by the guiding principle in the epigraph to this section: “No philosophy can be ignorant of the problem of finitude without thereby being ignorant of itself as a philosophy.”

In his ever lucid commentary, Ted Toadvine points out that *The Structure of Behavior* (1942) is the sole text among those their author lived to see published that overtly sets out to develop a philosophy of nature.<sup>4</sup> And because *Structure* sows the seeds for the ecological difference that sprouts from Merleau-Ponty’s mature writings, we would do well to consider the newground it breaks while foregrounding how it is parceled off from the “wild being” he will come to harvest. The philosophical task of Merleau-Ponty’s first book is set forth from the very first sentence. “Our goal is to understand the relations between consciousness and nature: organic, psychological, or even social” (SB 3). But because he evidently begins from the assumption that “what we call nature is already consciousness of nature,” thematized from the standpoint of an outside observer, that goal will only be realized by contracting nature’s being in a way he will ultimately call into question (SB 184). Owing to a competing methodological orientation toward expression, we shall see that Merleau-Ponty’s adherence to this constraint is ambivalent. Moreover, we find that *Structure* leaves largely undeveloped the elementary

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<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty makes the target of his critique explicit here in *Phenomenology* when he levels a charge against “intellectualism” to the effect that its “reflective analysis makes all possible knowledge above and beyond our current knowledge actual through anticipation, encloses reflection within its own results, and *cancels out the phenomenon of finitude*” (PhP 44, emphasis mine).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature* (Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 2009), 21.

modalities of experience that expose us to nature's transcendence of the "natural world" as thematized by classical phenomenology (the enstatic, correlational rubric of consciousness and its intentional objects). As a result, we never truly reach the grounding question concerning the unassimilable otherness of Nature (Casey): how it is that earth generatively transcends the entire nested structure of noetic-noematic correlations even as it remains within the scope of lived experience (cf. §37).<sup>5</sup>

Over Merleau-Ponty's continually evolving treatment of finitude, his concept of *transcendence* is generally consistent. What transcends enstasis is not what amplifies it metaphysically (hypostasis). Nor is it to be confused with the human activity of transcendence and retrojection (anthropostasis). Rather, it genetically subtends immanence (genostasis), grounding its lived opening (ekstasis) onto being in excess of its own (hyperstasis). In his hands the phenomenological reduction becomes an expedient to uncovering that basal opening and

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<sup>5</sup> Merleau-Ponty sometimes departs from Husserl's sense of "lived experience," which designates the self-awareness accompanying conscious acts, by equating it with the acts themselves. Challenging its conflation with self-consciousness, Husserl brings this self-awareness into view as the lived-through (*leibhaftig*) character of all conscious experience (*Erfahrung*). Accordingly, in the lectures on inner time-consciousness, he tells us that "every experience is "consciousness," and consciousness is consciousness of . . . But every experience is *itself lived-through* [*erlebt*], and *to that extent* also "conscious" [*bewußt*]." Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 1893–1917*, trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2008), 301. Cf. *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins, 1893–1917*, Husserliana 10 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff), 291. This lived-through character of consciousness is that implicit, unthematic awareness belonging to any explicit, thematizing act, which is always directed toward some (thematic) intentional object - or in the case of self-consciousness, another act. As Donn Welton suggests, with a nod to Dan Zahavi: "Explicit awareness is really attention and it is truly lost in the matter at hand. While our acts are not in focus or 'thematic,' we are cognizant or mindful of them. In attending to objects we are simultaneously aware of our experiences of objects" Donn Welton, "Affectivity and the Body: Prologue to a Theory of Incarnate Existence," in *transcribed lecture* (Northwestern University April, 2 2004), 6. Cf. Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2003), 5. Such is the pervasively *reflexive*, as opposed to the intermittently reflective or self-conscious, structure of experience: "in grasping the object, the act returns to itself," but not as a second act whose object would be the first. Rather the act includes a non-objective awareness of itself. "In order to explain the occurrence of reflection," Zahavi points out, "it is necessary that that which is to be disclosed and thematized is (unthematically) present." Zahavi, "Inner Time-Consciousness and Pre-reflective Self-awareness," in Donn Welton, ed. *The New Husserl: A Critical Reader* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2003), 163.

The upshot, to retrofit Kant's terms, is that without this awareness to retain its content, any subsequent reflection on our acts would be empty, even if acts without reflection would be epistemically blind. Of itself this awareness yields no intentional object, no determinate sense. Thus, lived experience is not to be conflated with such mythical givens as the *Erlebnisse* of phenomenalism or the qualia its partisans unwittingly fill with content from the act. Yet the further assumption that there is no awareness that is not act-awareness, or no lived experience in the absence (the presentation) of an object with intentional content, is one I have recurrently sought to overturn throughout this treatise. Against Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, who accordingly impose the teleology of epistemic achievement onto the structure of experience as an *a priori* constraint, I attempt to broaden the notion of lived experience to include our passive exposure to periphenomena that arrest the homological progression from perceptual, conceptual, and judicative accomplishment, as well as the anthropostatic progression up the scale of comportmental accomplishment, toward intellectual mastery. I argue that it is precisely this awareness, accompanying our *inability* to actively disclose the self-concealing side of nature, that awakens us to the earthly finitude of existence.

thereby reinstating the transcendence of being over existence.<sup>6</sup> What distinguishes the critical investigations of his early and later work is precisely the profundity and extremity of the reduction. With every new revision it becomes more heterologically *eductive*, dislodging ever more insidious and deeply rooted avatars of immanence. Where *Structure* offers primarily a third-person genetic reduction of the immanence of intellectual consciousness to describe how nature prereflectively transcends its hypostatic givenness, *Phenomenology of Perception* applies that procedure to the immanence of egoic consciousness, active synthesis, and “act intentionality,” thematizing their genesis from the operative intentionality of the phenomenal body in the first-person (*le corps propre, le corps vécu*).<sup>7</sup> And once we reach the *Visible and the Invisible* – hereafter ‘The (In)Visible’ – we encounter an eduction that roots out *all* avatars of “psychological or transcendental immanence,” hypostatic *and* anthropostatic, hence enstasis as such. Whereupon the genesis, or “institution,” of the lived body from the “pre-personal or anonymous level” of existence, which is merely adumbrated in the *Phenomenology*, receives its deepest, most radical expression as a “dehiscence” of being in the flesh (*la chair*).<sup>8</sup>

Merleau-Ponty’s early assessment of the empiricist and constructivist horns of the intellectual tragedy forecasts his mature statement of the problem of finitude. Anticipating his claim about life’s tendentious dysclosure of transcendence in *The In(Visible)*, *Structure* contrasts the body’s unthematic openness to things as such with two abject offshoots of that tendency:

To do justice to our direct experience of things it would be necessary to maintain at the same time, against empiricism, that they are beyond their sensible manifestations and, against intellectualism [or constructivism], that they are not unities in the order of judgment, that they are embodied in their apparitions [or appearances]. The “things” in naive experience are evident as *perspectival beings*: it is essential to them . . . to reveal themselves gradually and never completely (SB 187).

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<sup>6</sup> While he is given to subsume the two methodological principles he inherits from Husserl under this heading, a more careful distinction between them will prove instructive for our purposes. The procedure of bracketing the nested levels of enstasis so as to gain access to the experience of their (hyper)ecstatic rupture is roughly equivalent to what Husserl calls the *epoché*. But in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings, he moves beyond Husserl through a suspension of the natural attitude *and* the *teleology* of the classical phenomenologist – what could be called an ecological *epoché*. I argue that he thereby avoids the enstatic dysclosure of phenomena into possible intentional objects on a rational scale of achievement (from advertence to judgment). The result is a deconstruction of these achievements that lets the inadvertent, inoperant, self-alienating, displacing, and resistant aspects of phenomena (i.e. periphenomena) show themselves in themselves. The bottom-up reconstruction of enstasis is roughly equivalent to the version of the phenomenological reduction programatically developed by Husserl from the early 1920s onward under the rubric of genetic and generative phenomenology. But we shall find that here too Merleau-Ponty eventually moves beyond Husserl, as well as his own early work. For the ecological *epoché* makes possible a reconstruction of the heterostatic possibilities of enstasis, and not merely its anthropostatic or hypostatic closure.

<sup>7</sup> As we shall explore below, this latter eduction is already incipient in Merleau-Ponty’s first book, in his analysis of the “immanent” sense of “the gestures and attitudes of the phenomenal body” (SB 157).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. PhP 96f. 191f; VI 23, 117, 363.

By antecedently enclosing the phenomenal world within the horizons of theoretical experience and remaining uncritical of this homological operation, Merleau-Ponty has it that empiricism and constructivism each represses the “bodily reality” of things and thus their transcendence of our finite perspectives. According to him, things are no-thing if not “mediated by their perspectival appearance” to embodied perception. The very notion of a non-perspectival appearance is self-contradictory. Still, the thing always outstrips my perspectives in ways inaccessible to me from the standpoint of reflection and theoretical inspection while remaining “open to my knowledge” (SB 89, 187). All the aforementioned trappings of ontological positivism and intellectual abjection should be recalled here (§3, §5). Empiricism fails to acknowledge how the thing always transcends my actual perspectives. The thing’s lived transcendence gets translated unwittingly into the purportedly non-perspectival concepts of theory-laden perception. Constructivism fails to acknowledge how the synthetic unity constitutive of the thing is not the product of conceptualization or judgment. Here it is the ideal, teleological equivalence of reason and reality that stands in for transcendence.

According to Merleau-Ponty, both forms of ontological positivism “carry over into primitive modes of” phenomena such as “behavior structures which belong to a very high level,” mistaking the theoretical *a posteriori* (epiphenomena) for the experiential *a priori* (phenomena) (SB 124). In the process, he argues, “every theory of ‘projection’ . . . presupposes what it tries to explain” (SB 156). By positing its own genesis from above, intellectualism cannot account for the pre-theoretical conditions of its own theory-building process. Instead it raises naive experience to the level of theory-laden perception and takes what is given to the latter for granted as self-evidently primitive. In so doing, intellectualism falls prey to what Merleau-Ponty dubs the “retrospective illusion”: the assumption that nature always already exists “in itself” (in the realist sense) or “for itself” (in the idealist sense) as a totality of things and events “external to each other and bound together by relations of causality,” logic, and other theoretical projections (SB 218f., 3). Merleau-Ponty encapsulates this repressive “universe of immanence” in the second chapter of *Structure*: “All the sciences situate themselves in a ‘complete’ and real world without realizing that perceptual experience is constituting with respect to this world” (SB 219). To this we might add that every rationalist metaphysics commits the same error by antecedently situating itself within the self-completing ideal world. The motor driving the movement of intellectualism was laid out in chapter 1 under the heading of the homological reduction. When



the pursuit of knowledge (epistemology) is decoupled from perceptual wisdom (phenomenology), this motor “tends of itself to become autonomous.” Running on experiential empty, it generates its own fuel. In its tragic acceleration toward an omniscient “view from nowhere” or the absolute end of history encompassing all views, the finitude of the intellect is transgressed by the yearning to press beyond the lived conditions of its possibility.

Already in *Structure* we encounter the first iteration of that “fundamental philosophical act” which would reopen the lived world, awaken perception to its unthematic contributions, and thereby curtail the predilection toward intellectual disclosure. Here Merleau-Ponty expressly unpacks the phenomenological reduction as he will in the *Phenomenology*. “To return to perception as to a type of original experience” of world-constitution, he writes, “is to impose upon oneself an *inversion of the natural movement of consciousness*” (SB 220, cf. 249, emphasis mine). In *Structure* that movement is said to begin at an advanced stage of what he calls “intellectual consciousness,” whence it proceeds from the projected space of concepts and judgments toward the chimeras of non-perspectival truth and absolute knowing. After Husserl, the first moment of this movement’s phenomenological inversion consists in the *epoché*: a methodological suspension of theoretical projection and a suspicion of the self-evident givenness of all things so projected. Having done so, Merleau-Ponty observes that “we find ourselves in the presence of a field of lived perception which is prior to number, measure, space and causality and which is nonetheless given only as a perspectival view . . . of an objective world and an objective space” (SB 219). Once we have bracketed the theoretical attitude (sedimented into the natural), the full-fledged object unfurls itself before us as an incremental accomplishment of perception. But because this implies an embodied perspective with local-temporal thickness and limitations, all such feats are manifestly incomplete and every thing constitutively inexhaustible.

Consider once more Husserl’s remark from the *Crisis* discussed in chapter 6. Phenomenology avails itself of a “thoroughly intuitively disclosing method”: “intuitive in its point of departure,” the *epoché*, “and in everything it discloses” through the reduction. To this he adds that “the concept of intuition may have to undergo a considerable expansion in comparison to the Kantian one,” perhaps even losing its “usual sense altogether through a new attitude, taking on only the general sense of original self-exhibition.”<sup>9</sup> Such is the sense of the “primordial opening upon a field of transcendence” proposed by Merleau-Ponty: a *prereflective* and

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<sup>9</sup> Husserl, *Crisis*, 115f.

*prejudicative* form of intuition he will come to equate with perceptual “ecstasy” (*extase*) in the *Phenomenology* (PhP 395). It is by honing this perceptual wisdom, this ability to stand out from the distinctly human order of reflection, judgment, and reason that we allow for the self-exhibition of nature in its cumulative genesis. What is given to intellectual consciousness is thereby broken down into nested structural relations, revealing genetic gradations of perceptual achievement resolving themselves into self-standing wholes, stable *senses* within a wider “physiognomy” of significance.<sup>10</sup>

In Merleau-Ponty’s early writings the structural physiognomy of the “natural world” is modeled on the *gestalt*, a concept he borrows from empirical psychology.<sup>11</sup> As he frames it in *Structure*, “the truth is that there are no things, only physiognomies” (SB 168). So that if his first book implies an understanding of being, it would be, to borrow from Toadvine, a “*gestalt ontology*,” understood as a nest of holistic structures of intentionality inherent in the “natural world.”<sup>12</sup> In the self-organizing aggregate of *gestalts* Merleau-Ponty equates with nature, each order of being – physical, vital, and human – lays down the transcendental conditions of sense(-making) for the next. As he explains, “matter, life, and mind must participate unequally in the nature of form [or *gestalt*]; they must represent different degrees of integration and, finally, must constitute a hierarchy in which individuality is progressively achieved” (SB 133). In this hierarchy of integration and individuation, organic life emerges from the physical order, from the very matter of which it is composed, by organizing it into *milieux* of specifically individuated

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<sup>10</sup> “The truth is that there are no things, only physiognomies” (SB 168). Merleau-Ponty’s ensuing allusion to how psychedelic drugs (*viz.* mescaline) grant us access to such truths attests to the tremendous discipline and open-minded inquisitiveness demanded of the phenomenologist. For she must pursue through methodological channels the cognitive inhibitions and perceptual disinhibitions that such *pharmaka* induce chemically. By implementing the simple perceptual wisdom of her method, the phenomenologist curbs the *nisus* toward intellectual closure and peels back the preconceived and prejudicial layers of experience, where the hyperstatic play of periphenomena defies all routine manners of perceiving, doing, and thinking. The crucial difference lies in the phenomenological reconstruction of the preconceptual and prejudicative grounds of experience *as grounds*.

<sup>11</sup> Toward the beginning *Structure*, *gestalts* are operationally defined as “total processes whose properties are not the sum of those which the isolated parts would possess.” This means that their properties are modified by changes in those parts yet “conserved when [the parts] all change while retaining the same relationship among themselves” (SB 47). The conventional connotations of the term “properties” can be misleading. It is important to bear in mind that Merleau-Ponty not principally concerned with items of predication but with structures of “signification” (or what we have been calling significance).

<sup>12</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature* 21-25. When Merleau-Ponty claims that *gestalts* do not exist “in nature,” his correlative claim about perception should be kept in mind. In each case, he is referring here to the empiricist sense of nature as “a multiplicity of events external to one another and bound together by relations of causality” (SB 145, 193, 3). The interpretation of the *gestalt* as a causal structure within a billiard ball universe proceeds at an entirely different level analysis that says nothing little about how it unthematically configures experience.

vital norms toward which its behavior is discriminatively directed. At the most basic levels of life, material phenomena are differentially animated with affective valences for the organism. Each is perceived as alluring (e.g. food) or repellent (e.g. toxins) to the degree that it affords or inhibits the organism's instinctive maintenance of its identity in the face of material change (cf. SB 154). Human consciousness emerges from this vital order to re-organize it into "symbolic" milieu of *objectivity* with greater constancy and cohesion (or self-identity). At this level the noematic correlates of intellectual consciousness, its intentional objects, become objects and use-objects in the conventional sense of self-standing wholes that maintain their identity, qualitative or functional, through perspectival and behavioral variation over time, across different situations, and between subjects. Furthermore, by reflecting on lived perceptual relations (e.g. visual and kinesthetic orientation in a region), intellectual consciousness is able to adopt second-order behavioral relations to this milieu, reconstituting it as a "virtual space" of stable, transposable significations that integrate a multiplicity of perspectives (e.g. orienting oneself in a region by a map) (cf. SB 117-19). And it is owing to its capacity for virtual constitution that Merleau-Ponty takes consciousness to be the "universal milieu," or most comprehensive gestalt (SB 184). Through reflection human being acquires knowledge of the "structure of structures," the gestalt configuration of nature as such, and adaptively integrates that knowledge to modify its perceptual norms and field of action (SB 122).

Now, the integral orders of this hierarchy are not to be conflated with ascension toward the ontological primacy of objectivity, structures of signification, or bodies of knowledge. As Toadvine reiterates, sharpening Merleau-Ponty's earlier point: "what exists are not present 'things' or forces but systems of differential relationships in an ongoing process of integration, disintegration, and reformulation."<sup>13</sup> What is basic, then, is the relational whole, the transposable structure of the gestalt through which sense and sentience accrue to nature at increasing levels of complexity (SB 47). This is why Merleau-Ponty sometimes describes gestalts as "phenomena," and "significations," or "planes" and "unities" thereof, yet distinguishes them from "things" and "ideas." The gestalt is at bottom a *prejective* mode of being, "belonging neither to the external world nor to internal life" (SB 47, 159, 201, 182).

But what are we to make of his inconsistent restriction of truth to the "adequation of the signifying and the signified" in the human order of symbolic behavior and, in the vital, to an

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<sup>13</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 33.

“immanent . . . unity of signification, a phenomenon in the Kantian sense” (SB 122, 159)? Claims such as these prompt the question as to how his method could deter the hierarchical progression toward absolute intellectual immanence, or the total virtualization of nature’s gestalt configuration. Commenting on the latter claim, Toadvine takes Merleau-Ponty to be saying that the gestalt’s “meaningful character arises from its relationship to a subject, a consciousness.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, this does seem to be implied by the methodological principle cited above, which relegates his ontology of nature to consciousness of it. If it is integration and individuation that “teleologically” preconfigure the structure of structures from the bottom up, yet these are conceived to be mere precursors to the phenomenologist’s knowledge of the entire unity of signification, has Merleau-Ponty not succumbed to the anthropostatic prejudice that finds nothing more in nature than approximations and realizations of human being?<sup>15</sup> What’s more, wouldn’t this picture naturalize the tragedy of the intellectualist who retreats from the life-world to enclose herself within the virtual space of the reduction? In other words, does his ontology of nature account for the denial of intellectual finitude only to deny us an alternative?

*(ii) So Many Ways of Singing the World: The Hetero-Teleology of Expression*

Merleau-Ponty’s first step toward resolving this predicament is succinctly retraced by Toadvine: “The problem from which *The Structure of Behavior* set out, namely, how to understand the relationship between nature and consciousness, reappears now as the problem of relating . . . two levels within consciousness.”<sup>16</sup> In Merleau-Ponty’s gestalt ontology, the vital and virtual orders of nature both adhere to human experience in the complex relationship between “perceptual consciousness” and what he has called intellectual consciousness. Perceptual consciousness, which shares many of the features Heidegger ascribes to circumspection and the disposition of its accompanying moods, remains unthematically absorbed in the affective milieu of organic life, where phenomena are “lived as realities . . . rather than known as true objects” (SB 168). Merleau-Ponty clarifies this basic mode of givenness as a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 38.

<sup>15</sup> As indicated by the scare quotes, the “teleology” in question is not to be mistaken for the hypostatic models of the idealist metaphysician, in which ideated experience is projected toward ideals. Rather, on my interpretation, it is an anthropostatic model defined by a methodological orientation that contracts the hyperstatic richness of projective phenomena into possibilities underway toward being-constituted or disclosed by *us*.

<sup>16</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 39.

“unique impression of the ‘sensed’,” which announces itself through a “direct manner of *taking hold* of me” (SB 211, emphasis mine).

Its embeddedness in the vital order means that human consciousness is directed by how matters instinctively matter to perceptual life in general. The objective, epistemic, and rational achievements of intellectual consciousness emerge from this passive response-ability to organically sedimented directives. It is by this path that problem of nature leads Merleau-Ponty to the correlative “problem of perception.” How, he asks, “can one conceptualize perceptual consciousness without eliminating it as an original mode; [and] maintain its specificity without rendering inconceivable its relation to intellectual consciousness?” (SB 224). Every recursively founding condition of the latter the reduction reveals is a partial solution to this dilemma. For every set of conditions is also a set of limitations that must be taken into account by the phenomenologist if she is to avoid the retrospective illusion that conflates the phenomena originally given to perception with the epiphenomenal byproducts of the intellect. The vital order, for instance, is a possible theme for intellectual consciousness. But bracketing those thematic correlates to gain access to the unthematic affordances of perceptual consciousness evinces manners of givenness transcending the human order. More specifically, our bodies exhibit habitually primal responses to organically specified “norms,” which can be neither fully captured nor substituted by deliberation and reflective endorsement. Furthermore, the material ingredience of the body bears coefficients of resistance that place insurmountable limits on our own lives, life-projects, and intellectual projections. In effect, the apprehension of each order’s hyperstatic withdrawal from total integration into those above it chastens the conceit of a complete reduction as phenomenology constantly runs up against its own theoretical limitations.

To circumvent the hypostatic closure of the homological tradition, Merleau-Ponty will eventually modify his method with greater sensitivity to its constitutive failure, repurposing it to uncover the conditions of *expression*. Furthermore, early texts even show him making some headway toward dispelling the *anthropostatic* closure of classical phenomenology by rethinking expression as a movement immanent to nature as a whole, whose being transcends that of conscious subjectivity.<sup>17</sup> Expression is not posited by speculatively subtracting the intellectual

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<sup>17</sup> When Renaud Barbaras offers that Merleau-Ponty “situates the world in the dimension of expression,” he cautions that this is “not to dissolve it into ideality,” but to “to recognize . . . its transcendence.” My claim is that Merleau-Ponty will come to recognize the expressive transcendence of nature over human being as well. Renaud Barbaras,

limitations that situate us in nature. Rather, it derives from a lived exposure to our limitations, to the unthematically interrogative incompleteness and pre-thetically imperative renascence of nature's self-exhibition. In this "natural teleology," set against the homological reduction as a *hetero-teleology*, the consummation of the interplay between perceptual and intellectual consciousness is not knowing how to know. Nor is it necessarily realized by the theories of the phenomenologist. A philosophy of nature geared toward knowing how to *express* the pre-theoretical world would be, as Merleau-Ponty later puts it, "not the making explicit of a prior being [or] the reflection of a prior truth." Instead, it would "actualize itself by destroying itself as an isolated philosophy"; "like art" it would add in store to the possibilities of expression (PhP lxxxiv, 483). Indeed, like Heidegger's artist the philosopher would become, "a passageway that destroys itself in the creative process for the work to emerge" (PLT 39/GA5 26).

By releasing the *mens auctoris* to the work of the senses, perforating the text with generative ambiguities and elliptical gestures, Merleau-Ponty's mature writing reflexively performs that auto-destructive creation. As we read and witness in *The (In)Visible*, "philosophy [must] use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification":

The words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon Being, because they most closely *convey the life of the whole* and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin (VI 102f., emphasis mine).

This way lies Étienne Souriau's vision of philosophy as "supreme art," described in *The (In)Visible* as "a creation that is at the same time an adequation": not factual or significative correspondence but an expressive reenactment of our "contact with Being precisely as creations [of it]" (VI 197, emphasis mine).<sup>18</sup> Yet that which he will later *enact* from within the expressive "teleology" of nature *Structure* merely *describes* from the standpoint of an outside observer. Life most energetically eventuates as the expression of the material world, and thought as that of the life-world. Each is examined from the third-person standpoint of the theorist: the former under the lens of phenomen(eth)ology, the latter by thematizing the performances of musicians (e.g. Beethoven, SB 205), painters (e.g. El Greco, SB 203f.), and literary writers (SB 210).<sup>19</sup> But this inaugural deferral to the arts is suggestive. Could it be that what Heidegger found in Hölderlin,

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*The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2004), 61.

<sup>18</sup> What exactly Merleau-Ponty means by "contact with Being" and "creation" will be elucidated in the sections ahead as we explore how his later work moves beyond the enstasis of my own lived body toward the hyper-ecstatic releasement of carnal exposure.

<sup>19</sup> Toadvine reaches a similar conclusion through other avenues (*Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 45).

Rilke, and Van Gogh, as in the poets, builders, and sculptors of ancient Greece, Merleau-Ponty goes on to discover in the expressions of Claudel, Valéry, Balzac, Proust, Cézanne, Matisse, and Klee? It would seem that for both thinkers, the artist not only leads them to the source of the intellectual tragedy but also furnishes a way out of it. By reenacting the birth of sense, art awakens the philosopher to his disjunction from expression and his compression of life into theory. Thus does it convey him toward a reckoning with his own historically contracted deafness, a deafness to what Merleau-Ponty will later identify as a “*logos* . . . realized in man, but nowise as his *property*,” a “*logos* that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” (VI 274, 208). In this way, art guides philosophy to *ecology*.

We shall probe deeper into this line of thought as we round the ecological turn in Merleau-Ponty’s thought. To help guide us on the way, let us pause to consider the unexpected crossroads we have reached with an eye to elucidating his notion of expression. Let us reflect, that is, on the rich if largely unacknowledged affinity between it and Heideggerian saying, the po(i)etic movement of being through language expounded in chapter 3 (§20). Recall that for Heidegger too that movement begins not with human production or discourse but from *phusis* as such. What is brought forth (*poiēsis*) from concealment through phenomenal emergence is always already underway toward gathering itself (*logos*) into sense, larval and *sui generis* (QCT 10/GA7 12). Terminological differences can swiftly be set aside here. Heidegger recurrently denies that “expression” (*Ausdruck*), *in the sense of the public communication of private mental content*, plays any part in the essence of language.<sup>20</sup> Yet this shares little in common with what Merleau-Ponty means by expression.<sup>21</sup> Just as saying begins at semantically and semiotically indeterminate registers of language by disrupting the meaningful structures of “terms” (*Wörter*)

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<sup>20</sup> In “Language” (1950) for instance, Heidegger disputes the idea he takes to have “prevailed for thousands of years,” insisting that “in its essence, language is neither expression [*Ausdruck*] nor an activity of man” (PLT 194/GA12 16). This position can be traced back to *Being and Time*, where “assertion” (*Aussage*) and “patter” (*Gerede*) are designated as forms of “communication” (*Mitteilung*) and distinguished from their grounds in the unthematic “explication” (*Auslegung*) of “discourse” (*Rede*) (see §20-1).

<sup>21</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of the discrepancy is evident from his deliberate adoption of Heidegger’s terms, which he always sets apart from his own. For instance: “Language is neither *Außerung* of the organism, nor *Ausdruck* of life, nor even signs, nor even *Bedeutung*.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours, 1959-1961* (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1996), 148. English translation quoted from Leonard Lawlor, *Early Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2012), 142. Similarly in the *Phenomenology* we read that “speech cannot be considered as a mere clothing for thought, nor expression as the translation of a signification, already clear for itself, into an arbitrary system of signs. . . . This is precisely what the experience of language testifies against.” Namely, “for the speaking subject, the act of expression” allows him to “transcend what he had previously thought, [to] find in his own words more than he thought he had put there, otherwise we would never see thought, even when isolated, seek out expression with such perseverance” (PhP 408).

or “word-signs” (*Wörterzeichen*) ingrained in everyday discourse (*Aussage, Gerede*), Merleau-Ponty comes to set “primordial expression” apart from “that derivative labor which substitutes for what is expressed signs which are given elsewhere with their meaning and rule of usage.” And just as saying eventuates through the asignifying hinting of “words” (*Worte*), whose heterologous drifts make way for inceptive possibilities for rearticulating the world, so does Merleau-Ponty go on to define the features of expression. Following the line just quoted from “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (1952) he unpacks “primordial expression” as

the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs, makes that which is expressed dwell in them through the eloquence of their arrangement and configuration alone, implants a meaning in that which did not have one, and thus – far from exhausting itself in the instant at which it occurs – inaugurates an order and founds an institution or a tradition (S 67).

Again like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty maintains that this “primary operation” of “true speech,” “speaking speech,” or “creative language” takes the form of a response to the *pregnant silence* of being (cf. S 44).<sup>22</sup> As before, this silence is not to be equated with the absence of sound (cf. §20). As we read in *The (In)Visible*, it rather resides in what is “simply perceived” in the “absence of speech due [*parole due*]” (VI 263). The meaning of this is clarified in the context of the above-cited passage. Responding only to what can be rendered in the common currency of “spoken speech” or “empirical language,” described in this essay as the “opportune recollection [and communication] of a pre-established sign,” the speaker pays her dues to the listener in “worn coins” whose expressive value has been effaced (S 44).<sup>23</sup> The “repression of transcendence” and specious autonomy, with which we began this section, reveal themselves in spoken speech as a homological closure to and counterfeit substitution *in specie* for “what is simply perceived.” One might compare this pinchbeck exchange to that which Heidegger finds in “hearsay” (*Horensagen*). On his account, leveled-down discourse of this sort discards the matters *under* discussion for a free-floating patter of platitudes, which merely pass the word along *in terms* of what has already been said (SZ 155, 168). Merleau-Ponty points out how the “*logos* that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” calls into question the fallow grounds of such

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<sup>22</sup> In the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty had cast the distinction between empirical and creative, or primordial, expression as one between constituted “languages” (*langages*) and “speech acts” (*parole*). The former, conceived as “constituted systems of vocabulary and syntax, or the various empirically existing ‘means of expression’,” form “the depository and the sedimentation of acts of *speech*, in which the unformulated sense . . . acquires existence for itself, and is truly created as sense.” From here Merleau-Ponty goes on to recast the same distinction in terms of “*speaking speech*,” where “meaningful intention is in a nascent state,” and “*spoken speech*,” where meaning itself becomes an intentional object (PhP 202f.).

<sup>23</sup> Suggestively, Merleau-Ponty contrasts this with speaking speech, or “true speech,” which is “*silence* with respect to empirical usage, for it does not go so far as to become a common name” (S 44, emphasis mine).



“derivative labor.” But “when it gives up trying to express the thing itself . . . language speaks peremptorily,” responding only to spoken speech (S 44, clauses reordered). Otherwise put, it lays claim to grounding itself and *commands* what is due. Long overdue, meanwhile, is its debt to the unspoken groundwork of the senses. As Merleau-Ponty extends the metaphor in the *Phenomenology*, “spoken speech . . . enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune” (PhP 203). A wealth of expression that obsolesces when stockpiled in the vaults of language past. To opportunely withdraw signs from that vault and exchange them without replenishing the unrefined ore from which they are silently forged is to eventually be left with only spurious derivatives of the lived truth. After all, were it not for “the background of silence,” of “speech before it is spoken,” Merleau-Ponty concludes that language “would say nothing,” *express* nothing but non-sense (S 46).

If instead we forfeit the peremptory claim of spoken speech, abstain from homologous exchanges in its standard currency, and make way for “the voice of no one . . . the very voice of the things,” then their silence is later said by Merleau-Ponty to manifest itself as a “pregnancy of possibles,” which is “without express signification yet rich in sense [*sens*]” (VI 155, 250, 268). Because we draw our own voices from that genostatic reservoir of burbling senses, “language transcends us,” transcends what we ourselves project through and discover in it, as an “excess of the signified over the signifying” (PhP 410). And provided “this intrinsic pregnancy [*is*] maintained within the zone of transcendence,” allowed to express its hyperstatic difference from what has been signified, we are told in *The (In)visible* that the “body *obeys* the pregnancy, ‘responds’ to it,” as “flesh responding to flesh” (VI 213, 209).

Earlier in the manuscript Merleau-Ponty had described the world of silence as an order that founds a “style” of expression (VI 171). Style was laid out in the *Phenomenology* as a schema of corporeal existence, a general structure of basic sensorimotor habits. Through it the body incorporates, or extends its perceptual and practical outreach in expressive space according to the latent norms of its projects at the preconscious level of “operative intentionality” (*intentionnalité opérante*), where sense-making eventuates prior to conscious acts (e.g. advertent, thetic, and conative) (PhP 102; 453). There we find him using style to refer to the ability to link up with the “affective value,” which adheres to all speech as the implicit surfeit of sense over explicit meaning (PhP 188). Now, in *The (In)Visible*, Merleau-Ponty’s focus falls on the deeper reaches of this order, where phenomena are not yet integrated into full-fledged perceptual

wholes, or intentional objects immanent to “the framework of ‘cognition’ or ‘consciousness’” and “signification” (VI 205f.). The gestalt reappears here as a style of nature’s own self-expression through the lived body (“my body *is* a *Gestalt*”), which is opened and perpetually reopened to the world by the “flesh of the *Gestalt*” (VI 205; cf. N 223). The latter is said to comprise the “affective texture” that “animates the contour” as it does “the grain of the color,” giving rise to and reprising the “perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality” of sense (VI 205, 207, 115). Of this we are told “the painter’s stroke – the flexuous line – or the sweep of the brush is the *peremptory evocation*” (VI 207f., emphasis mine).

Momentarily setting aside the flesh, let us narrow our sights on that which has come to challenge spoken speech’s peremptory claim to expression. In the painter’s brushstroke, we return to those “hints and gestures” which Heidegger recovered from the *logos* of Heraclitus, from the *Totenbaum* placed in advance onto the farmstead, and the *words* of every poet of the earth. Recall that for Heidegger, hinting (*Winken*) breaks through the clamor of readymade signs and rote terminology. It gives shape to the silence they smother while concealing itself from ready apprehension – as in selective acts of hearing. A fitting response to hinting, saying is a matter of waiting by listening in an atmosphere of stillness, reticence, or in our terms, deference. Only by deferring to the outlandish absence of significance it invokes are we provoked to follow the ambiguous (d)rifts between and out beyond the settled regions of language (§26).

Merleau-Ponty describes the primordial expression of creative language in much the same way. In his eponymous essay, he tells us that “all language is indirect,” and silently “allusive” (S 43). And in the *Phenomenology* it is in particular artistic expression that “rips the signs themselves – the actor’s person, the painter’s colors and canvas – from their empirical existence” (PhP 188). “For the painter or the speaking subject,” he explains, “the painting and the speech are not the illustration of an already completed thought,” a “univocal thought” translated into signs that would signify *it*. Rather, it is precisely “by bending the resources of constituted language to a new usage” that such primordial expression “first brings . . . thought into existence” (PhP 409). On Merleau-Ponty’s view, there is no “pure” (ideal) thought “in the head” of the speaker, let alone a “complete” (absolute) thought lurking “behind” the sonant utterance, the printed word, the painted shape. In the *Phenomenology* the intellectualist model of thought as “private language” is everted by the insight that thought is essentially accomplished *in* speech qua bodily gesture. “Speech is a genuine gesture, and, just like all gestures, speech too

contains its own sense” (PhP 189). In other words, no intellectually deliberative or interpretive distance is required to articulate or decipher the sense of a gesture (manual, facial, or verbal).<sup>24</sup> For it somatically enacts what spoken speech can only point to.

In the oft-cited example, there is no need for premeditation on one’s emotions to express one’s anger in a gesture. Nor must I turn inward and reason by analogy to my own emotions to ascertain that anger in the gestures of another. As Merleau-Ponty expresses the point, “the gesture does not *make me think* of anger, it is the anger itself” just as “the sense of [a] facial expression is not behind its eyes, but upon them” (PhP 190, 337).<sup>25</sup> In each case, the materiality of the expression is not an inert medium contingently containing it, but the message itself: an embodied configuration of sense “without reference to a signification that exists for itself in the mind of the spectator or the listener” (PhP 409). Merleau-Ponty contends that all utterances and inscriptions operate in this way inasmuch as they countermand the common currency of impoverished expression to mint new meaning from the prodigal ore of sense that is simply perceived. This is why subtle, preconscious shifts in vocal inflection can say more than we intend by our utterances, why the printed text conveys a stylistic, meaning-shaping durability unequalled by its digital reproduction. And moving from page to canvas, it explains why a “touch of color more or less is enough for the painter to transform the facial expression of a portrait.” With this last observation Merleau-Ponty launches into a commentary on Cézanne’s development as a painter, which I reproduce at length for the new light it casts back on *Structure*:

In the works of his youth, Cézanne sought to paint the expression first, and this is why he missed it. He gradually learned that *expression is the language of the thing itself*, and is *born of its configuration*. His painting is an attempt to connect with the physiognomy of things and faces through the complete restitution of their sensible configuration. This is what nature effortlessly accomplishes at every moment. And this is why Cézanne’s landscapes are “those of a *pre-world* where there were still no men (PhP 337, emphasis mine).

Cézanne had once plied the brush like a pen poised with set prepense to reinscribe onto the canvas the virtual space of signification as though it lay “behind the eyes” (his own or his subject’s). By clearing the canvas of this intellectual cliché, he came to learn how to spontaneously release the integral expression of the things he painted from their gestalt

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<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty writes by way of illustration: “When I motion to my friend to approach, my intention is not a thought that I could have produced within myself in advance, nor do I perceive the signal in my body . . . If, for example, I realize that my friend does not want to obey, and if I thereby modify my gesture, we do not have here two distinct conscious acts. Rather, I see my partner’s resistance, and my impatient gesture emerges from this situation, without any interposed thought” (PhP 113).”

<sup>25</sup> “We can, for example, see quite clearly what is shared between the gesture and its sense in the expression of emotions and in the emotions themselves: the smile, the relaxed face, and the cheerfulness of the gestures actually contain the rhythm of the action or of this joy as a particular mode of being in the world” (PhP 192).

physiognomy. His brushstrokes participated in the expressive genesis of sensation and perception, incorporating the hands, the eyes, the body whole in one synesthetic gesture. Unthematic and unscripted, Cézanne's mature painting derives from a fluency in that copious language we culled from Thoreau in chapter 3, "the language which all things and events speak without metaphor." Or in the francophone tradition nearer to Merleau-Ponty, one might say that Cézanne's later works render in terms of pigment the "new Art of Poetry" set forth by Paul Claudel, who calls for a return to *poiēsis* in the elementary sense of all *phusis*. To the "autochthonous art used by all that which is born," which is "practiced before our eyes [and upon them!] by nature itself."<sup>26</sup> Or again, retracing our steps back to American soil, Cézanne's po(i)etic gestures are nothing if not tokens of assent. They accept the "impossible bargain" of Agee's artist in their effort to surpass description – in both senses – and *embody* that truth of things which "the entire state of nature" simply *is*. (cf. §26).

Peripheral to one's own personal control center as to the ambit of distinctly human mechanisms of control, gesture leads life of its own, ulterior and unscripted. Reaching out to us, through us, from a life of greater longevity than our own, it anonymously orchestrates the expression of existence while beckoning us back to its inception and intussusception in the phantom bodies haunting its institution (*Stiftung*). In the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty proposes that all forms of gestural expression, from painting and poetry to birdsong and courtship dance, are *concerted* performances with a temporal thickness we shall soon explore in depth. There is no "I think" that accompanies the gesture. Nor does it figure among my conscious acts without losing some of its preconscious hold on me. Strictly speaking, then, I do not gesture. Having failed to establish its provenance in a past that has never been my present, I can only say that gesture gestures through me.

This middle voice of confluence recalls us to the fluent streams of chapter 6, to Bachelard's "elementary voices" and their "ontological echoes." Echoing the echo, Merleau-Ponty tells us that gestures join in that concert through a kind of "existential mimicry" of what he will later call the "voices of silence" and equate with the "very voice of the things" (PhP 188, S 39ff., VI 155). Just as Bachelard had said that "nature resounds" in these echoes, so does Merleau-Ponty underscore the ubiquity of expressive mimicry in all "gestures necessary for the

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Claudel, *Poetic Art*, trans. Renee Spodheim (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1984), 31f. Here I am reframing a point made by Toadvine, who quotes these lines in "Natural Time and Immemorial Nature," *Philosophy Today*, *SPEP Supplement*, no. 53 (2009): 218.

conservation of life [and the] biological world around us” (PhP 147f.). To wit, the blackbird’s cascading song and its epigamic allure. If that mimicry is largely *initiated* by instinct, and culturally protective mimicry by the second-nature instincts of blind custom, primordial expression unfolds through what he calls “initiating gesture,” a re(in)novation of sense on a continuum with the improvised meta-mimicry exhibited by more complex forms of perceptual life (PhP 200). If blackbirds emulate the voices of water, their polyvocal song also condenses an entire repertoire of birdsong into its singular refrain. This repertoire includes not merely the songs it has already expressed but variations on the themes of its species and others. On Merleau-Ponty’s account the gestures of the human arts occupy a highly integral place on the spectrum of such “existential mimicry,” to which every cascading glissando attests. As he completes the thought above, it is by “playing upon these first [initiated] gestures and passing from their literal to their figurative sense” that the body “brings forth a new core of signification through them – this is the case of new motor habits, such as dance” (PhP 147f.). Whether we join in the dance *bras dessus*, stand enraptured from the sidelines, or raptly peruse a description of it, Merleau-Ponty claims that its expressive essence “installs this signification” in us “like a new sense organ,” which “opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience” (PhP 188).

The moving envelope for the latent sense at the “core of signification” conveyed by the artwork comes into starkest relief when Merleau-Ponty dilates on *acoustic* expression, a sensory modality that brings his poetics of the mimic voice into even greater consonance with Bachelard. Directly following his allusion to a re-organization of the senses, Merleau-Ponty submits that “this power of expression” is also discernible in *music*. As was the case in painting and writing, so too for the “musical signification of the sonata,” he says, which is “inseparable from the sounds that carry it.” Again, these sounds “are not merely the ‘signs’ of the sonata.” They cohere in what he calls its “*affective value*” (PhP 188, emphasis mine). The *Phenomenology* fills in some of the undeveloped contours of this concept from *Structure*, where it was largely couched in terms of the instinctively founded and behaviorally reconstituted “internal norms” of the vital order. Now, having adopted the methodological standpoint of my own lived body, Merleau-Ponty amplifies his earlier account of affectivity. In addition to the affective values at the level of operative intentionality, correlated with the hedonic co-valences of pleasure and pain attending perceptual allure and repulsion, kinesthetic solicitation and inhibition, he extends his analysis to a range of emotions built up from these. By availing of numerous studies on the vanguard of

midcentury empirical psychology and submitting them to phenomenological scrutiny, this treatment exhibits a subtlety seldom reached from the philosopher's armchair, gaining much ground indeed over Descartes' "six simple passions."<sup>27</sup> And it is within the context of emotion that we reach the celebrated passage describing the gestural elements of speech as "so many ways of singing the world." The traditional focus on the conventional meaning of words, their "final sense," has led thinkers to assume that their meaning bears an arbitrary relation to the paralinguistic style with which they are expressed – *inter alia* rhythm, pitch, bodily posture, facial expression, and gesture in the narrow sense. Against this assumption, Merleau-Ponty points out:

This would no longer hold if we took the *emotional sense* of the word into account, what we have above called its *gestural sense*, which is essential in *poetry*, for example. We would then find that words, vowels, and phonemes are so many ways of *singing the world*, and that they are *destined to represent objects*, not through an objective resemblance, in the manner imagined by the naïve theory of onomatopoeia, but because they are extracted from them, and literally express their *emotional essence* (PhP 193, emphasis mine).

We sing the world insofar as our voices incorporate gestural elements into a style that integrally partakes in the expressive movement of nature (the so-called "natural world"). And if we follow Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that "speech is just as mute as music, and music is just as eloquent [*parlante*] as speech," then the music of poetry would be speech at its most mutely eloquent and integrally expressive (PhP 411).

Be that as it may, one might doubt whether these lines give due measure to the restraint, reticence, or deferent irreverence that conserves the eloquence of the poem in its "emotional essence." Our ecological soundings of poetic language have pointed to a greater tension between the objective-representational "destiny" of the word and its expositive intensity than is here implied.<sup>28</sup> Is it not precisely by words that deter referential closure and perpetually defy a "final sense" that the poet not only revives but sustains the nascent ambiguity of what they express? Mustn't they rather elicit from her reader a certain irreverence in the face of that peremptory claim, that manifest destiny of language, if they are to awaken a reverence for the unmanifest? The silent aspects of everything resist reference. Their expressive intensity spills over

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<sup>27</sup> Namely, wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. See Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 2 Vols., trans. et al. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 1.353 (sec. 69).

<sup>28</sup> Merleau-Ponty betrays a more general commitment to an ecumenical teleology as follows: "We will have to ask how existence simultaneously projects around itself worlds that mask objectivity from me and yet sets this objectivity *as a goal for the teleology of consciousness* by making these 'worlds' stand out against the background of a unique natural world" (PhP 307, emphasis mine).

determinate extension, effervescing in our experience as a superfluous, asignifying residue. Only speech that deviates from the teleology the understanding can truly open new fields of experience to these mysterious outlands of language, which mutely call the old into question. But if poetic expression originarily emerges within the atmosphere of elemental attunement, this would seem to entail more than a deviation from intellectual comprehension (“I think that”) but from bodily prehension (“I can”) as well (PhP 139). To reopen the world of the reader by plucking the strings of the heart only to fill that world with fixed, named, objects, or replicas of familiar perceptual wholes, or else places that gladly afford her body’s ingress and ask nothing in return: this is to croon the song of the poetaster. A treacle that strives not to express what is unthought and undone but only to please at any cost. Ecologically stated, it is to sing the world while the wild song of earth lies silently fallow (cf. §21). Restated in Merleau-Ponty’s later idiom, new sense organs are not simply transplanted from bodies more sensitive, as from those of the artists themselves. They are harvested from a synesthetic soup of disorganization, from a carnal ecstasy that undermines the habitual residences and perceptual self-evidences of body and mind alike. We shall return to this critical theme ahead.

Like a kind of verbal dance, speech is expressive of the silent truth of things to the extent that oversteps the mastered choreography of language. Rather than take the lead herself, guided only by what she strives to articulate in those pre-established terms, the artist keys into the song of the world, allowing it to take the lead. Along these lines, *The(Invisible)* adds this variation to the theme from the *Phenomenology*:

The performer is no longer producing or reproducing the sonata: he *feels himself*, and the others feel him to be *at the service of* the sonata; the sonata *sings through him* or cries out so suddenly that he must “dash on his bow” to *follow* it (VI 151, emphasis mine).

Here the Heideggerian *Wink* winks through the performer’s gesture, which defers to the middle voice of the music to “sing through him.” Much like the hint was said to set the tone for the novation of sense, the *Phenomenology* proposes that initiating gesture, “sketches out the first signs of an intentional object” (PhP 191). In chapters 2 and 3, these “first signs” appeared under the rubric of traces: absent- or periphenomenal presences that expose us to the limits of lexical meaning, homological discourse, and all routine performance. Similarly, in *The (In)visible*, where the German ‘Winke’ is expressly summoned, Merleau-Ponty submits that “the drawing, the touch of the brush, and the visible work are *but the trace* [*tracé*] of a total movement of Speech [emphasis mine].” Like the concerted performance of birdsong but graphically rendered,

“this movement contains the expression with lines as well as the expression with colors, *my* expression as well as that of the other painters” (VI 183, 211).

The equation of initiating gesture and hinting is further confirmed when we recall how hinting exhorts us to listen precisely by calling into question what is merely heard. Along these lines Merleau-Ponty tells us that “gesture is in front of me like a question, it indicates to me specific sensible points in the world and invites me to join it there” (PhP 191). In the case of the philosopher’s gesture, this would be to raise the dialectic of call and response endemic to all perceptual life to the level of questions that lure us right back into it. According to Merleau-Ponty this can only be done by “making the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the text” (PhP 188). In this way, gestural inscription lends itself to the deferent listener as an enticement to engage the text as we do the unscripted things themselves. In our efforts to embody them we in-habit the world they open. But it is only by placing “the body’s audio equipment” (Heidegger) in question that we allow the text to in-habit us in turn (cf. §21). The re-organization of perception, which Merleau-Ponty likens to the growth of “a new sense organ,” is only possible once the self-evident significations registered by selective hearing (or reading) have been problematized by the ambiguity of the gesture.

In order to enter the new field of experience opened by the text, we must therefore stand out from the familiar physiognomy of our own world and become, as Heidegger puts it, “all ears.” The most reticent of texts reprise the voice of things through gesture to solicit a way of listening involving the whole body synesthetically. They do not abuse things by handling them like terms or signs. They conserve their semantic opacity and incompleteness in the word by taking *it* up “in the manner of a thing.” Tapping into the *affective* registers of language, they marshal a heterologous array of vocal and graphic gestures to gear into the ambiguous textures of meaning, the generative grounds of language.<sup>29</sup> In so doing, the text displaces the reader from her bookish environs and replaces her in settings brimming with all the blooming, buzzing, confusion and intersensory profusion of the life-world. Such texts thereby gather into thinking the concepts they summon, the things that have summoned them, and *this* thing, this text, which has summoned the reader to release its ramified senses from the petrified forests of meaning.

In this light, the ultimate *philosophical* gesture would be one of assent to the task of expressing the thing in its own idiom. It would be a summons in the interrogative mode of all

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<sup>29</sup> We might compare this to Heidegger’s later style of writing, as discussed with Ziarek in §20.



phenomenal emergence. Philosophy would thereby become a vessel for the self-expression of nature – the *hetero-telos* of Husserlian self-exhibition. As Heidegger puts the point, elementary saying is not an appropriative frame of reference but essentially a “showing” (*zeigen*) in which we partake as beings caught up in the “self-showing” (*Sichzeigen*) of *phusis* (cf. §20). Toward the end of his meditations on language in *The(Invisible)*, Merleau-Ponty sounds a remarkably similar refrain. He declares that “philosophy cannot be total and active grasp, intellectual possession, since what there is to be grasped is a dispossession” (VI 266). In that zone of dispossession, where nature transcends our horizons of meaning and the voluble mind falls silent, we run up against our intellectual finitude. We may repress that transcendence by tragically projecting our voice with greater persistence and hearing only that which answers to it. But a philosophy that draws its voice from the silence of the world does not utilize language to refer and recuperate, apprehend and comprehend in its own terms. It conserves the silence. Following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty says it simply “*shows by words*” (VI 266, my emphasis).

In our earlier analysis of the *Phenomenology* we pointed to a certain tension between the teleology of expression and that of intellectual integration, which is said to govern all speech insofar as it is “destined to represent objects.” Surely this cannot be what Merleau-Ponty means to *show* through expression. For him the gestural trace isn’t necessarily underway toward an object of representation. Nevertheless, he does seem to suggest on occasion that it finds its *telos* in the *intentional* object of embodied behavior. Having been sketched out by the gesture, he claims, the “object becomes present and is *fully understood* when the powers of my body adjust to it and fit over it“ (PhP 191, emphasis mine). Contrariwise, in his unfinished manuscripts, Merleau-Ponty will suggest that “the trace of a total movement of Speech, which goes unto Being as a whole” is *never* fully understood, never entirely coincides with what is spoken (VI 211). Its excess over being-understood enervates active intentionality even as it solicits further expression. These considerations are significant for what they tell us about Merleau-Ponty’s ecological turn after the *Phenomenology*. The problem of intellectual finitude, conceived as the repression, or significative closure, of nature’s expressive transcendence, is enlarged to problematize all manners of corporeal immanence. At which point he begins to grapple with the question as to whether my body mustn’t continually relinquish its own powers, based on the operative intentionality of the “I can,” to retain the transcendent absence of the “I cannot” retraced by every gesture.

(iii) *The Melody of the Organism, the Fugue of the Life-World, and Their Immemorial Time Signature*

At this stage let us revisit *Structure* one last time with an ear to how it sets up the hetero-teleology of expression that sets the tone for the song of the world in the *Phenomenology*. In this our aim will be to gain a greater understanding of how the historical implications of expression, merely hinted at above, set the stage for an ecological understanding of time in Merleau-Ponty's later work. As early as *Structure*, the gestalt structure of life is patterned on melody and the entire gestalt arrangement of nature is likened at one point to a symphony (SB 132). So far from metaphors afloat in a cloud of associated ideas, these lived metaphors of concerted expression yield insights into how nature's hetero-teleology is performed. In the same way that Merleau-Ponty will later allude in the *Phenomenology* to the "melodic character" of gesture, which is lost when voluntary thetic acts (epistemic intentions) take the place of preconscious motricity (operative intentions), so does he espouse in *Structure* the melodic character of animal behavior set forth by Jakob von Uexküll. "Every organism is a melody which sings itself," to which Merleau-Ponty adds by way of caution that "this is not to say that the organism knows the melody" (PhP 107; SB 159).<sup>30</sup> Allow me to unpack this in detail.

Merleau-Ponty's decision to model the organic structure of behavior on melodic performance forecasts his later work on expression. What a melody expresses in being played by a musician is greater than the sum of its parts and materially multistable. For the sense of each note and the significance of the whole are reciprocally co-informing, recursive, and open-ended across material conditions. Summarily put, melody unfolds through a kind of hermeneutic circle, or in Merleau-Ponty's terms "dialectic." As he explains it in *Structure*:

The first notes of a melody assign a certain mode of resolution to the whole. While the notes taken separately have an equivocal signification, being capable of entering into an *infinity of possible ensembles*, in the melody each one is *demandé by the context* and contributes its part in expressing something which is not contained in any one of them and which binds them together *internally*. The same notes in two different melodies are not recognized as such. Inversely, the same melody can be played two times without the two versions having a single common element if it has been *transposed* (SB 87, emphasis mine).

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<sup>30</sup> Merleau-Ponty draws evidence for the primacy of motor intentionality from pathologies of aphasia and apraxia (e.g. the Schneider case). In such cases, the patient is capable performing "concrete movements" (e.g. grasping, catching), whereby her body habitually responds to situational cues within some affective milieu. But she is incapable of performing "abstract movements" (e.g. pointing, saluting) in the virtual (e.g. imagined) space beyond actual lived experience short of relying on deliberate conscious acts in the space of reasons and beliefs. Here is the context in which Merleau-Ponty observes that "gesture loses the melodic character that it presents in everyday life and quite clearly becomes a sum of partial movements laboriously placed end to end" (PhP 107). Like all pathologies, however, the epistemic closure of the phenomenal body admits of degrees. And it is not without critical significance that intellectualist theories of behavior seem to model themselves on and thereby normalize pathologies of the body.

From this excerpt we can identify *four* structural features of melody that carry over to behavior in general. First, each note or gesture is *infinitely compositional*. Resolved only gradually and incompletely by its contribution to the performative whole, its sense is larval and promiscuous, comprising in germ a profusion of possibilities for expression in any number of melodies, accomplishments, and situations. C-sharp can issue from the songbird in the bough or the music hall concert much as we can sidestep a pathbreaking root or in breaking a move on the dancefloor. Second, each phase of such performances is pre-thetically governed by an *internal normativity*. It responds to “affective values” which solicit notes or gestures that facilitate its expressive consummation, and inhibit those that do not (e.g. the wrong note or the misstep).<sup>31</sup> The strength of this normative allure, this affective attraction or repulsion, is context dependent and subject to degradation, promotion, and redirection at every moment of the movement.<sup>32</sup> The more unscripted the performance, the greater its responsiveness to revisions spontaneously traced out by the problems posed by new affective milieux – even if creativity always presupposes mastery of a repertoire of habitual competencies. To be unresponsive to the milieu – say, by falling back upon initiated solutions to problems already solved – is to become like the player piano drumming out a melodic score. An initiating or “creative” response, by contrast, executes a coherent deformation of norms and habits to meet the singular demands of the situation. It alters and amplifies the expressive range of the performance. Otherwise put, improvisation requires of the performer a response-ability to that which resists persistent adherence to routinized expression. Where it previously emerged as a hindrance, contravening the norms internal to the birdsong or concert, hike or dance, the wrong note or misstep now reemerges as an affordance for expressing the world anew in singing, playing, walking, or grooving it.

In the closing lines of the passage above, Merleau-Ponty points to a third structural feature belonging to both melody and behavior: *transposability*. Just as the same melody can find

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<sup>31</sup> Note that Merleau-Ponty uses the terms ‘norm’, ‘affective value’, and ‘expressive value’ interchangeably. Consider, for instance his description of the organist’s performance in *Structure*: “The new correlation of visual stimuli and motor excitations must be mediated by a general principle [i.e. internal structure of normativity] so as to make immediately possible the execution . . . of an improvised piece.” Rather than “inspect the organ part by part; in the space where his hands and feet will play,” Merleau-Ponty has it that “he ‘recognizes’ sectors, direction markings, and curves of movement which correspond . . . to *expressive values*” and participate “in certain musical essences” (SB 121, emphasis mine).

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger had also used the figure of melody to thematize this affective dimension. In *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, for instance, he writes: “An attunement is a way [*eine Weise*] . . . in the sense of a melody that does not merely hover over the so-called proper being at hand of humans, but that sets the tone for such a being, i.e., attunes and determines the manner and way of their being” (FCM 67/GA29-30 101).

expression in different keys, on various instruments or separate occasions, and even on a printed score, the behavior of the organism expresses the same style of response across times and places, with different sensory organs and modalities, and even when taking up life within thought.<sup>33</sup> Crucially, for Merleau-Ponty the gestalt correlations between acts of expression and what they express are maintained in the face of changes in the “materiality of the terms which [these correlations] unite” (SB 87). The melody resounds as a refrain with the same “musical essence” when transposed into another key “without the two versions having a single common element,” namely, a single auditory tone of the same pitch (cf. SB 121). Likewise is our behavior directed toward the same concern for walking in the sidelong glance that foresees a way round the root and the sidestep that kinesthetically follows that line of sight. This intermodal gestalt can be transposed across sensory organs and manifold situations irrespective of their material discrepancies. In the rootless, trackless desert we might enlist our eyes or legs to steer clear of a sidewinder in like manner, albeit by a wider berth, or when making way for a pedestrian on the city sidewalk. Every intellectual detour, every lemma that meets a dilemma in logically roundabout steps, re-plicates these sensorimotor maneuvers into the virtual space of concepts and reasons. What links all these situations together is a certain mindful or cautious behavioral style. This body schema, composed of a complex of habitual abilities and sensitivities, sounds its refrain over migrant horizons, allowing materially, locally, and temporally disparate phenomena to manifest commutable norms of expression. But new norms, governing novel walkways for instance, can scarcely break through those horizons so long as we overstep all hindrance to retread the path of least resistance, pacing forward with persistence. In order to make a untried strides toward pathbreaking styles, untrod breakthroughs, we must make allowances for the most treacherous of footing and find in it a trace of heterologous expression.

To introduce a concept contrapuntal to the Heideggerian theme of comportment (*Verhalten*), these periphenomenal perambulations would divagate from rigid structures of

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<sup>33</sup> In other words, when passing from the lived immediacy of perceptual consciousness to the virtuality of intellectual consciousness. As an illustration of transposability, we might again consider Merleau-Ponty’s account of the organist. As he explains, “the character of the melody, the graphic configuration of the musical text and the unfolding of the gestures participate in a single structure, have in common a single nucleus of signification” – i.e. holistic sense or gestalt (SB 121). Here I expand on Toadvine’s exposition of this concept from *Structure (Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature, 31)*.

behavior by way of what I call **disportment**.<sup>34</sup> Colloquially, we say that someone disports herself when diverted from her troubles and solitudes by engaging in some frivolous amusement, recreation, or play. But when play is derogated to mere diversion, when it degenerates into a game whose implicit objective is to flee from or cope with what is adverse to one's own rigid concerns, then the lusory betrays itself as illusory, a play of deception. Next to that pell-mell rush for diversions, next to the compulsion to make oneself useful and get things done, win a title, or defeat the competition, *genuine* play is utterly superfluous. It is specifically this practical superfluity, won only with the greatest difficulty against oneself, that defines disportment. Erring from the affordant pathways of comportment, this style of praxis would entail a ludic or humored suspension of affordance that concurrently makes allowances for being carried away (literally 'dis-ported') by the ab-sense of what is superfluous to our concerns. Or in more kindred, Gallic parlance, we might say that disportment is not a matter of projection and retrojection but of drifting and detouring, like the *dérive et le flâneur*.

The fourth melodic affinity is present from the very first line of the excerpt in the observation that "the first notes of a melody assign a certain mode of resolution to the whole." Merleau-Ponty goes on to extrapolate the inverse, implying that each note leading up to the last is wholly "equivocal" in isolation and partly equivocal when played, for its sense is only solidified – if never *entirely* resolved *in sensu stricto* – once the entire melody has actually come to an end. Some pages later he subsumes the vital order more generally under this non-vicious or *auspicious* circle of expression. Moreover, on his view it is impossible to understand these mereological dialectics without an appreciation for how the dynamic co-emergence of expressive parts and wholes unfolds in *time*.

As opposed to some flattened picture of circular causality, the circle of expression reveals itself by virtue of this vertical dimension as a helical movement composed of metonymic moments. This final, and indeed most basic, dimension of the musical metaphor is only indirectly alluded to in our key passage. Yet Merleau-Ponty's frequent slippage from parts to first notes and beginnings, wholes to resolutions, provides a clue. If time is a conspicuous hallmark of melody, the *ecstatic temporality* of its performance is typically unremarked by the composer even as it underwrites her score. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said of the

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<sup>34</sup> The literal meaning of the German 'Ver-halten' dilates into 'holding forth' and contracts into 'holding back', reinscribe the movement of we have been calling retrojection (enstassis→ekstasis→enstasis).

behavioral theories composed by the empiricist. In thematizing their subject matter, such theories tend to abstract from the embodied perspective of the performer, leading to a non-perspectival spatialization and quantification of the time she incarnates, embodies, and sculpts. We already adumbrated the distinction between static and ecstatic temporality when discussing Heidegger's conception of the latter under the heading of *timeliness* (§6, §8). According to Merleau-Ponty's critique in *Structure*, the problem is that empiricist theories of behavior forget how intellectual consciousness has always already converted time into virtual extension, yielding an objective series of undivided moments, consolidated into serial intervals with a linear, unidirectional orientation toward the future. To avoid the retrospective illusion that conflates this perceptually sedimented achievement (the synthesis of *static* temporality) with the "reality" of time "in itself" as viewed from nowhere, we must sift through the reflective sediments whose luster has deceived us and begin to educe how time is lived through perceptual consciousness.

The behavior of the organism is a melody that sings itself at this register. Whether that melody expresses the animal *Umwelt* or the humanimal household as well, its time signature is not simply perceived as a static juxtaposition of "now" points. As Merleau-Ponty puts the point in *Structure*, organic behavior "does not unfold in objective time and space like a series of physical events; each moment does not occupy one and only one moment of time." Instead, the "'now' stands out from the series of 'nows'" into a past that ecstatically adheres to it by generally (viz. habitually) initiating the behavioral gesture, a gesture which "summarizes the groupings [or habitual correlations] that have preceded it." On his account every such gesture "engages and anticipates the future of the behavior." And in the case of initiating gesture, "at the decisive moment of learning" for instance, the "now" "acquires a particular value" from a futural "projection . . . of a possibility," a norm for the organism that not only summarizes but *recomposes* the holistic sense of the gestalt (SB 125).

In a development he will continue to refine over the course of his investigations of the body and the flesh, Merleau-Ponty segues from this genetic analysis to a generative phenomenology of existence. Following Husserl, from whom we borrow the distinction, these two levels of inquiry are most simply distinguished in terms of scope. Broadly applied to the present context: genetic analysis approaches the dialectic of behavior from the ecstatic temporal horizons of the living present of an individual organism; whereas generative analysis enlarges those horizons to approach that dialectic from the wider arc of a generational past and future, or

the interspecific history of life as such. At their intersection, these paths of inquiry establish how the living present of given behaviors, the lifetime of a given organism, and the history of a given order all participate in the temporal gestalt of nature.

Summarily stated, Merleau-Ponty's eduction of the being of nature, the structure of structures, ultimately draws forth a time that variably orchestrates the song of the world at every register. After following a line of thought adjacent to ours, Toadvine reaches a similar conclusion, professing that "the gestalt is fundamentally temporal" for Merleau-Ponty. Toadvine proceeds to qualify this conclusion:

The gestalt is not merely arrayed temporally; we must also recognize that the integrative gestalt process proceeds historically, such that each gestalt *enfolds* within itself, *as a structure*, the entire history of its becoming and the *field* against which it stands out. Just as every physical gestalt refers ultimately to the entire history of the universe as its *background*, so each organism *enfolds* within its "organic memory" (to use Bergson's expression) the entire history of life of which it is the culmination.<sup>35</sup>

According to Toadvine, we can only approach the gestalt in this way if we resist "the temptation to hear 'form' or 'structure' [i.e. gestalt] in primarily spatial terms." The same to rings true, of course, for 'time'. This nuance is essential to understanding the temporal sense in which each gestalt "enfolds within itself" the historical "background" of its becoming. Clearly these terms do not bear *primary* reference to spatial extension – the objective layout of the environment or the anatomical morphology of the organism. To see how this works, we might start by extending Merleau-Ponty's musical motif to the "integrative gestalt process" as a whole. Despite the catachrestic slippage of this trope in Toadvine's commentary, where melody is equated by turns with *a* gestalt of nature and *the* gestalt of nature, Merleau-Ponty consistently pairs it with the former (viz. organic behavior) in his first major treatise.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, as we have mentioned, he adduces a more complex and integral musical performance as a closer analogue of the latter. Bringing Merleau-Ponty's metaphor into harmony with Heidegger's, permit me to expand on this suggestion by recasting the historically "integrative gestalt process" of nature as a *symphony* with a *fugal* structure (cf. §25).

The three gestalts of nature's canon – material, vital, and mental – comprise increasingly integral ensembles of this symphony, composing together the musical theme of the world. From the interrogative "subject" of the fugue's primeval exposition, life has emerged from matter, and

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<sup>35</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 46 (emphasis mine).

<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that Toadvine's equivocation is mistaken. For it is partly on the basis of the recursivity of melody that Merleau-Ponty takes it to be paradigmatic of the gestalt.

mind from life as “answers” to it, each with its own distinctive rhythms, contours, and instrumentation, its own temporal, expressive, and material array. As the fugue progresses, the exposition of the theme by any one ensemble is implicated (“enfolded”) in that ensemble’s subsequent contributions to its development, tacitly thickening the sense of what is to be played with what has been. Whereupon the original theme returns as the retentive prelude (“background”) to an explicative variation on it, a refrain that modulates what the theme has expressed. As an *integrative* process, moreover, the fugue develops the theme polyphonically, so that harmony is achieved through tonal and contrapuntal variation across ensembles. By the same token, the implication of each more integral gestalt, and every voice that sings it, contains not only the expository and developmental phases that *it* has performed but those from which it has primevally developed. Much like a fughetto, a fugue within a fugue. Such is the upshot of Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “higher behavior retains the subordinated dialectics in the present depths of its existence, from that of the physical system and its topographical conditions to that of the organism and its ‘milieu’.” Ostensibly, this chimes with what he has already said about the historical movement of nature. Far less clear is the sweeping latitude he seemingly attributes to the retention of those dialectical depths. “For life, as for mind,” he tells us, “there is no past which is absolutely past” (SB 207f.). If we take Merleau-Ponty’s methodological starting point at face value by assuming the ontology of nature must be restricted to consciousness of it, this would evidently entail its horizons are confined to what is retrievable from the past as a full-fledged intentional object, given within the horizons of practical affordance, perceptual advertence, and intellectual ascendance.

But how on earth do we account for the intellectual retention of a past that precedes human existence (the institution of virtual signification), or the vital retention of a past that precedes organic existence (the institution of perception)? None of the anamnestic achievements traditionally attributed to the body or mind of the subject – neither procedural nor episodic nor semantic – may be enlisted to explain that retrieval since each presupposes the transmission of an original experience precluded from prehistoric non-existence. Has Merleau-Ponty fallen into the retrospective illusions of science and metaphysics by *confabulating* the immemorial past? Has he not conflated it with the past as posited by evolutionary biology, the idealist movement of “self-alienated spirit,” or the disembodied senses and mindless meanings conjured out of the realist view from nowhere? Would he then subscribe to A.J. Ayer’s belief in a sun that rose before the



dawn of man, falling prey to that unwitting sleight of hand that pockets its being for beingness, phenomenal absence for conceptual presence?<sup>37</sup>

In the paragraph following his allusion to the absolute past, Merleau-Ponty gives some suggestion of a phenomenological alternative:

For us consciousness experiences its inherence in an organism at each moment; for it is not a question of an inherence in material apparatuses, which as a matter of fact can be only *objects* for consciousness, but of a presence to consciousness of its proper history and of the dialectical stages which it has traversed (SB 208).

This excerpt anticipates his seemingly inconsistent treatment of the “absolute past of nature” in the *Phenomenology* and subsequent works (PhP 139, cf. N 120, 125). On the one hand, the absolute past of matter and life precedes the institution of perceptual and intellectual consciousness respectively, thus the horizons of their possible intentional objects. On the other, as Merleau-Ponty later suggests, “there must be a presence of a past which is *absence*,” for otherwise the past would either be given entirely in the living present of active conscious or entirely cut off from it” (IP 193, emphasis mine). In the *Phenomenology* he sharpens point, reframing what he had said about “higher behavior”: “there would be no present – namely, the sensible with its thickness and its inexhaustible richness – if perception did not . . . preserve a past in its *present depth*, and did not condense that past into the present” (emphasis mine). Moreover, on his express insistence here, the greater part of that “inexhaustible richness” we owe to “pre-history” (PhP 250). Bearing this in mind, we could say that consciousness is haunted by the *absent*-presence of an absolute past, a prehistoric past that conditions its embodied activity without ever being presented through explicit recollection. *What* this ambivalent presencing amounts to, *how* it is experienced, and by *whom* – if not the nuclear subject or the transcendental ego – are questions unresolved by Merleau-Ponty’s first treatise. Owing to his methodological commitment to proceed “always from the point of view of the ‘outside spectator,’” *Structure* does little to clarify these issues from the side of the inquirer situated within the gestalt-historical framework it programmatically describes (SB 162).

Not until Merleau-Ponty makes the methodological turn from consciousness of nature to the nature of the lived body does a more developed picture come into relief. And not until he

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<sup>37</sup> From a conversation between Bataille, A.J. Ayer, Merleau-Ponty, and the atomic physicist Georges Ambrosino the night before the lecture to the *Collège philosophique*, Jan. 12 1951. Recounted by Bataille in “The Consequences of Nonknowledge,” as translated in *The Unfinished System of Knowledge*, trans. Michelle Kendall and Stuart Kendall (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Univ. Press), 111. We shall explore Merleau-Ponty’s solution to the problem in the *Phenomenology* below.

makes the ontological turn toward the indefinite *archē* of the body is this picture truly fleshed out. In the next section we shall pursue each of these questions and the sinuous path they break. Having set that course, let us return to the theme that launched our discussion.

The expressive and temporal dimensions of nature adumbrated the *Structure of Behavior* give rise to a deeper formulation of the problem of finitude. Although it fails to offer any clear-cut solutions, this work maps a constellation of philosophical problems round which Merleau-Ponty's thinking will continue to orbit over the course of his career. Thus do we find in this text the first glimmer of the "natural time" of ensuing works, a time whose originary institution (*Urstiftung*) reaches back to "prehistory" while encroaching on – if never fully coinciding with – the generational and personal history of human existence (PhP 361f., 250). Deep time ecstatically envelops the human order in the *puncta caeca* of the mind's eye. Yet those "present depths" may even stretch beyond the limits of perceptual consciousness. This is what Merleau-Ponty begins to consider when he notes how "the alleged conditions of existence are indiscernible [i.e. imperceivable] in the whole with which they collaborate *and reciprocally the essence of the whole cannot be concretely conceptualized without them and without its constitutive history*" (SB 208). Assuming that consciousness must always be consciousness of something, and that this something can be more but no less than a static presence – a definite sense belonging to a discrete, self-standing perceptual whole – then perception, conceived as *noesis*, must also founder to present this historical abyss on its own terms. On Toadvine's interpretation, the task that our intellectual finitude sets for us is primarily one of "recognizing reflection's ineliminable debt to a prereflective history that always exceeds its reach."<sup>38</sup> But if we follow Renaud Barbaras's reading of the transitional thought of the absolute past in Merleau-Ponty, and ours is an "infinite historicity," intimating depths of nature "whose being exceeds all presence," then the problem of perception must also become a problem *for* perception.<sup>39</sup> In other words, we must not only return to the perceptual origins of reflection, whereby sense gives birth to signification, but to the institution perception itself.

Much as reflection tends toward the virtualization of its dialectical history, so can perception imprison itself within a world of inherited norms geared toward the teleology of

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<sup>38</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature*, 122.

<sup>39</sup> Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, 61.

homological integration (objectivation—signification—judgment—knowledge).<sup>40</sup> Responding to nothing more than what can be thematized, presented, converted into that framework, such perception essentially relives what has been constituted by intellectual consciousness and sedimented into the perceived. To recognize our debt to the absolute past requires we come to terms with its non-coincidence with what is presented by these achievements. That past encroaches on the present as a hyperstatic difference from them – what Merleau-Ponty later comes to designate as divergence. The *nisus* toward coincidence with our lost origins spells dystrophy for the soils of perception. For the genostasis of sense takes root in an arable ab-sense that does not seduce the eye and enliven the mind unless one defers presentation and consents to the limits imposed by the *unpresentable*.

If instead we approach the constitutive failure of consciousness as an occasion for deviating from the wayworn route to signification, a divergent path is opened. This way lies the “good error“ of expression (cf. VI 125). To press into perception as the historical unfolding of expression is to adopt a hyper-ecstatic orientation toward being. It is to become a conduit for the concerted creation of sense aborning, prolific, and superfluous to what is actively intended in one’s own perceiving. Rather than exhaust itself in “something positive *in front of us*,” expression thus proceeds behind the back of consciousness to puncture positivity with generative ambiguities (cf. VI 124f., 239). Emerging from “a past that has never been present” to consciousness, this creation flows through our preconscious lives, through the operative intentionality of the body *and* the fluent intensity of its flesh (PhP 282; VI 238, 244). It is not a matter of disclosure of the given, round which enstasis congeals, but of being given over, passively exposed to the institution of a pre-given excess concealed by that very disclosure. We find ourselves, despite our selves and outside of them, swept up in the throes of “the emergence of the flesh as expression” (VI 145). By the time Merleau-Ponty will come to pen these words, the origins of that emergence will be sought in “Earth as *Ur-Arche*,” conceived as that which “brings to light the carnal *Urhistorie*” at the “root of our history” (VI 259; N 77). Now the tragic denial of finitude, rethought as the Ur-repression of the “wild being” of nature, its elementary transcendence, prompts him to rediscover what he calls a “mythical time,” or “time before time,”

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<sup>40</sup> Merleau-Ponty’s lingering commitment to this progression is revealed in the *Phenomenology*, where a heterological understanding of truth is traded for the idea “that neither error nor doubt ever cut us off from truth, because they are surrounded by a horizon of the world, where the teleology of consciousness invites us to seek out their resolution” (PhP 419)

whose forgotten roots reach as far back as Anaximander's indefinite *archē*, and farther still, to the ancient Greek songs of Gaia and her daughters (VI 243). In the next sections, we explore how Merleau-Ponty's archeology of the body sets us on a course toward the "flesh of time" and the time of the earth. In the process we shall see how he cuts a path out of the ecumenical order of the "natural world" and into the temporal undergrowth of the ecological difference, where the branching descent of the historical stands footed in the fertile grounds of the allohistorical, and the body stands out from itself into carnal being-of-the-earth.

#### §48. Being Timely in the World: Retracing the Rhythmic Life-Time of the Phantom Body

The rhythm of the winds, the migration of mackerels and swans, the greenery or the snow, the awakening of the vegetative power, the knowledge of the little shrub, waiting for its humble moment to bloom, the rut of quadrupeds and the song of all birds, the scorching heat of summer, the rich cadence of autumn, all these remain within the boundaries of measure, keep *time*.

–Paul Claudel, *Poetic Art*<sup>41</sup>

The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness. Although the two are identical twins, man, as a rule, views the prenatal abyss with more calm than the one he is headed for (at some forty-five hundred heartbeats an hour).

–Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory*<sup>42</sup>

For there was something living on in the land at night. There was a dark tide moving in the hearts of men. Wild, strange, and jubilant, sweeping on across the immense and sleeping earth, it had spoken to me in a thousand watches of the night, and the language of all its dark and secret tongues was written in my heart. It had passed above me with the rhythmic sustention of its mighty wing, it had shot away with bullet cries of a demonic ecstasy on the swift howlings of the winter wind . . . and it had brooded . . . over the tremendous and dynamic silence of the city, stilled in its million cells of sleep, trembling forever in the night with the murmurous, remote, and mighty sound of time.

–Thomas Wolfe, "Death the Proud Brother"<sup>43</sup>

##### (i) *The Anonymous Life of Embodied Existence*

We return, then, to the cluster of questions surrounding the "absolute past of nature," as a past that has never been present to consciousness. *What* of it is it retained, *how* so, and by *whom*?

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<sup>41</sup> Claudel, *Poetic Art*, 24f.

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Wolfe, *Complete Short Stories*, 62.

Proceeding from the last of these questions toward the first, we shall focus on how they are addressed, if never fully settled, by the phenomenology of the body in Merleau-Ponty's middle period. Then, having identified the ecumenical shortcomings of this approach, we shall examine how his later ontology of the flesh is devised to redress them ecologically.

In middle works such as the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty famously adopts the methodological starting point of *le corps propre* – the phenomenal body I live as my own. As in Casey's phenomenology of place, which bears its unmistakable impress, Merleau-Ponty's philosophical investigations construe the body as a schema of sensorimotor pre-positions, dispositions, and competencies that intentionally organize the phenomena themselves into an ecstatic physiognomy of local and worldly significance. These corporeal schemata (or *gestalts*), which are mobilized by every perceptual and intellectual act, condition the possibility of inhabiting place and dwelling in the wider world. In Merleau-Ponty's words:

My body is not an object, but a means, an *organization*. In perception I *organize* my body and through my body an association with the world. With my body and through my body, I *inhabit the world*. The body is the *field* in which perceptions *localize* themselves.<sup>44</sup>

Merleau-Ponty is careful to point out that this organization is older than anything *I* have accomplished. If my body has a stable standing in the place-world, this is only because it is firmly rooted from the outset in the corporeal field, which has been fertilized by untold others buried in its structure. Just as his early investigations had led him from the enstasis of intellectual consciousness to the ecstatic perception of its transcendent grounds, so is Merleau-Ponty led in this new direction from my own body to its temporally ecstatic inherence in the prepersonal *who*, the anonymous life of embodied existence in general. In the *Phenomenology* this “bodily existence, which streams forth through me without my complicity,” provides a “sketch of a genuine presence in the world” (PhP 483). Owing to this prepersonal ekstasis, says Merleau-Ponty, “I am from the start *outside myself* and open to the world,” which is never merely “the human world that each of us has fashioned” but “a general world to which we must first belong in order to be able to enclose ourselves within a particular milieu” (PhP 168, 86). To say that one stands out from ipseo- and anthropostatic immanence “from the start” is to say that my own

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<sup>44</sup> From Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Husserl et la Notion de Nature (Notes Prises au Cours de Maurice Merleau-Ponty),” *Revue de Metaphysique et de Morale* 70 (1965): 261. Translation quoted from Suzanne L. Cataldi and William S. Hamrick, eds., *Merleau-Ponty and Environmental Philosophy: Dwelling on the Landscapes of Thought* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007), 241.

existence is syncopated. *My* body only emerges from anybody in general after being thrown into the prepersonal world, the prehuman world, as one organism among others.

Considered in its greater temporal breadth, the general schema of the lived body lends itself to Merleau-Ponty as a fugal middle entry. It arcs the prehistoric exposition of elemental and organic ensembles and their expressive development over the course of human history, out of which one's own personal lifetime emerges. If we may be permitted to expropriate these terms from Heidegger, wresting them from his anthropostatic grip, we might accordingly speak of a *historicity* and *destiny* of the organism at the very heart of my own body. Preparing and continually reinflecting my passage between Nabokov's "two eternities of Darkness," these temporal trajectories belong to the diachronic field of intercorporeity into which *all* life is thrown – i.e. *every* mode of embodied organization. Rather than the memorial departure and self-projected destination of a world-historical *people*, historicity and destiny mark the allohistorical horizons of a life-time that not only outstrips my lifetime but the entire arc of Dasein's timeliness. The anthropostatic anonymity of *das Man*, which Heidegger links to the de-historicized flight from thrownness into inauthentic being-with-others, is dehumanized by Merleau-Ponty, who recasts anonymous existence as a concert of intercorporeality, which must be affirmed if we are ever to grasp how, "in addition to . . . history . . . perception confirms and renews in us a 'pre-history'" (PhP 250).

Like a specter from the unthought past of disembodied Dasein, "the One" thus returns to the pages of the *Phenomenology* as "*one* [who] perceives in me" (PhP 223). Rather than merely calling me to account for a human past, it confronts me with the fact that my body is perceptually preconfigured to respond to the prehistorically founded physiognomy of that "pre-world where there were still no men." Much as Heidegger speaks of *das Man-selbst*, Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to this prepersonal seat of experience as the "natural self" (PhP 174, 362, 464). The natural self is neither fungible placeholder in the public *Umwelt* ("everyman does"), transcendental subject of active constitution ("I perceive," "I think"), nor personal identity ("I am"). Instead, we find it equated with the "anonymous life" of the prepersonal body and organic existence in general (PhP 362.).

*In statu nascendi* the body figures as one among others "for whom a world exists before I am there, and who marks out my place in that world" (PhP 265). "Because I am swept along into personal existence by a time that I do not constitute, all of my perceptions appear perspectively

against a background of nature” (PhP, 265). Such is the “natural world” of the *Phenomenology*. Defined as “the horizon of all horizons,” and “the style of all styles,” it comprises a spatial domain of prejective being, anterior to constitution and “foreign to my personal life” (PhP 345, 363).<sup>45</sup> Temporally, it unfolds in the “natural time” of organic existence, about which we shall have more to say ahead. These two dimensions demarcate the situatedness of the “natural self” into which *I* am thrown and to which I am always already passively related. Writes Merleau-Ponty: “The counterpart of the natural world is the given, general, and pre-personal existence in me of my sensory functions,” (PhP 345). This natural correlation undergirds what will become my place and time in the human world, “ensuring my experiences have a given, not a willed, unity beneath all of the ruptures of my personal and historical life” (PhP 345).

Beneath the anthropological horizons of constitution, within which “personal acts create a situation,” are horizons of organic institution, within which *one* first perceives at birth and continues to perceive in us, “*expressing* a given situation” in ways “never entirely our body’s or entirely ours” (PhP 223, 174, emphasis mine). Likewise, “beneath myself as a thinking subject (able to place myself at will either on Sirius or on the earth’s surface), there is thus something like a natural self who does not leave behind its terrestrial situation” (PhP 464). In each case, the ‘beneath’ bears temporal reference to a ‘before’, that is, to a complicated past sedimented into the basal layers of the correlational structure of present experience. In digging beneath the impressional present of egoic consciousness, the phenomenologist thus gains access to the overlapping plications of a “natural history” at the root of our own.

Recalling Toadvine’s allusion to Bergson in the previous section, and setting aside for the present those un-lived timespans preceding the emergence of life as such, we might say that the prepersonal body retains an “organic memory” of the “absolute past of nature”: immemorial in the sense that it cannot be retrieved by conscious acts of recollection; impossible in the sense that it does not figure among the possibilities projected by my own understanding; inexplicable (*unausgelegbar*) in the sense of being implicated – enfolded and at stake – in the present without ever being fully unfolded, ex-plicated into significance and staked out by my personal concerns.

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<sup>45</sup> In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, these phenomena are the “pre-objective” correlates of perceiving. The examples he offers (e.g. a patch of white on a sheet of paper) invite a comparison with what Husserl calls “object-like formations” (*Gegenständlichen*), to be contrasted with objective wholes (*Gegenstände*), i.e. the (back)ground against which they appear as figures within the “inner” horizons of the object (cf. PhP 251). Merleau-Ponty’s occasional expression “natural object” is misleading then; it refers *in sensu stricto* to pre-objective phenomena (PhP 363).

Such is the thrust of Merleau-Ponty's memorable allusions to a "past that has never been present" (PhP 282; cf. VI 123). The modality of experience that preserves this memory remains to be specified. Given what has been said thus far, however, we can already rule out the possibility of a faculty of depictive recall distributively common to self-enclosed minds or nuclear subjects, like some metaphysical power of the "psyche joined to an organism" (cf. PhP 90). Instead, this *concerted* memory would flow through a more primitive awareness of the generalized body ankylosed to our own, living in the veins and xylem, lungs and leaves, nerves and nervure of anonymous existence as it circulates between bodies, respire through them, and innervates each with others bygone.

(ii) *The Allohistorical Ecstasy of Sensation*

How then is this memory transmitted, retrieved, and preserved? How does *one* live it? According to Merleau-Ponty, the immemorial past of life is given neither through recollective acts nor primarily as a matter of fact to reflection. It is pregiven by virtue of "a more ancient pact," involuntarily entered but inviolably upheld by the body. Our organic historicity entails that we are thrown into the "natural world" with a heritable endowment of prehuman life-styles. Splicing one's body to it from the moment of birth, these styles are made up of umbilical strands of "latent intentionality," which Merleau-Ponty claims is "more ancient than the intentionality of human *acts*" (S 165). In his later lecture on "Institution in Personal and Public History" (1954-5), he defines 'birth' along these very lines: it is "the passage from the moment where nothing was for X to the moment where everything is also for X." This X cannot be an instance of egoic consciousness, he explains, since "consciousness has no consciousness of being *born*" (IP 8). Rather, it marks the position of the prepersonal body before it becomes my own, a body anterior to the ipseological difference, *organized* by life-styles of anonymous existence. This is the sense in which "my life always precedes itself and always survives itself" in the *Phenomenology* (PhP 382). Bringing the concepts above into play, Merleau-Ponty infers accordingly: "my first perception and my first hold on the world must appear to me as the execution of *a more ancient pact* established between X and the world in general; my history must be the sequel to a pre-history whose *acquired results* it uses" (PhP 265, emphasis mine). But what exactly do these "acquired results" amount to, these expressions of prehistoric impressions?



Part of the answer appears in the chapter of the *Phenomenology* entitled “Sensing” (*Le sentir*), where Merleau-Ponty attempts to elucidate this “originary acquisition”:

Each time that I experience a sensation, I experience that it does not concern my own being – the one for which I am responsible and upon which I decide – but rather *another self that has already sided with the world*, that is already open to certain of its aspects and *synchronized* with them. Between my sensation and myself, there is always the thickness of an *originary acquisition* [italics in original] that prevents my experience from being clear for itself. I experience *sensation as a modality of a general existence*, already destined to a physical world, which *flows through me without my being its author* (PhP 224, emphasis mine).

These lines give the lie to how some critics have mishandled the primacy Merleau-Ponty assigns to perception, defended implicitly in this text and overtly thereafter. Over the course of that treatment, from “The Primacy of Perception . . .” (1946) essay to the lectures collected in *Institution and Passivity* (1954-5), we learn that this is not to privilege *constitution*, whereby “the past exists for . . . consciousness only as consciousness of the past” or what “makes sense only for me” (IP 5, 8). For the possibility of such achievements is contingent on the originary acquisition of a past that “makes sense without me,” an *institution* of sense that “resides in the same genus of being as birth and is not, any more than birth, an act” (IP 8). The lived envelope of that institution is *sensation*, distinguished in the *Phenomenology* as “the most basic of all perceptions” (PhP 251). This modality opens onto an asubjective archeology of existence encompassing both generation and destruction. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “I have no more awareness of being the true subject of my sensation, than I do of my birth or my death” (PhP 223). Yet “I still live within an *atmosphere* of death in general,” to which we might add birth as well (PhP 382, emphasis mine). Sensation casts us away from ourselves, up against the limits of perceptual presence, and into the affective atmosphere of anonymous existence. As our “organic inheritance,” writes Toadvine, it is “the *generative ground* of experience, even as it remains for each of us, in our reflective lives, a past that has never been present” (emphasis mine).<sup>46</sup>

Sensation is perception in its ecstatic mode: prejective, prepersonal, preconscious, and concerted. It defines the primal openness of the natural self, the concerted “one” who resides in me, to the sensible as such. That sensate openness of anonymous life has established for me the general background of nature necessary for the solicitation of perceptual acts as such. Thus we are told that “perception is always in the impersonal mode of the ‘One’” (PhP 249). Exemplary for Merleau-Ponty is how blueness of the sky is experienced in the unthematic background of a visual act. “I cannot say that *I* see the blue of the sky in the sense that I say that I understand a

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<sup>46</sup> Ted Toadvine, “The Elemental Past,” *Research in Phenomenology* 44 (2014): 275.

book” (PhP 223). This holds true for gradations of understanding ranging from my interpretation of what the book means on opening it to my perception of it *as* a book, lying closed upon the nightstand. Nor do I decide to see blue in the sense that the book’s author decided to write it. Rather, “I see blue because I am *sensitive* to colors,” or more precisely, “insofar as I have a body and insofar as I know how ‘to see’” (PhP 223, 250). Neither the sight of that color, my sensitivity to it, nor my visual aptitude is constituted by egoic consciousness or correlated with my personal life. Both are passively disinvolved from the periphery of vision whence the blue emerges, like an adespoton. On Merleau-Ponty’s view, even a book is “a series of institutions,” co-authored by nameless, faceless others. Implicated in my organic and cultural sensitivities and revived in the ecstasy of writing, this menagerie of relicts and revenants – from sentient ruminants to sapient primates – guides my pen like ghost writers. Recalling us to the sonata that sings itself through the violinist to hasten his bow, Merleau-Ponty astutely observes that these anonymous institutions are “where the impression comes from that the book produces itself” (IP 11).

In contrast with a flux of punctate *Erlebnisse* or *qualia* (à la empiricism) and the enstatic activity constitutive of “closed signification” (à la constructivism), sensation comprises that mode of a general existence by virtue of which the lived body is *affected* by what “happens beyond what is willed, experienced, known” first hand (IP 5, 10). As the envelope of institution, it comprises the “nascent logos” of perception in the concerted sense, thickened by the past and sedimented in the present (IP 25). Its institution is passively undergone as the inverse of perceptual constitution. Merleau-Ponty’s language fits easily with our own here. The outbound intentionality emanating from disclosure (constitution) is said to be reversed in the latent, inbound intentionality of being sensibly “*exposed*,” as when the body is “solicited by hunger, cold, weight” (IP 8, emphasis in original). These sensuous propensities for being affected are passively inherited by the lived body as the general condition for the possibility of its static organization of the world through segregated sensory modalities. The ecstasy of sensation itself, however, is a kind of synesthetically *disorganized* perception. This is the thrust of Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the problem of *seeing* sound, which can only be solved “if vision or hearing are not the simple possession of an opaque quale, but rather the experience of a modality of existence, the synchronization of my body with it.” Accordingly, “when I say that I see a sound, I mean that I echo the vibration of the sound with my entire sensory being,” which is correlated with the hyperstatic phenomenal field that pervasively subtends the static order of

intentional objects (PhP 243). Simply put, sensation lays the grounds for the incorporation of affordant entities by the activity of my own lived body and the constitution of perceptual wholes by the ego.<sup>47</sup> So that before I ever move, look, or think to enclose the world into significance responsive to my personal concerns and abilities – or those of my significant others – anonymous life has attuned my senses to the natural world, making me responsive to what is most vital to organic existence in general – however I personally take it for granted.

To the degree that I defer conscious advertence I am able to *immerse* myself in the “*atmosphere of generality*” that Merleau-Ponty equates with the “natural world” of the organism: a hyperstatic field of prejective phenomena “presented to us as anonymous” for being outlandishly decoupled from space of distinctively human acts and actions (PhP 223, emphasis mine). Striking are the parallels between this “originary field” of sensation and the atmosphere of “attuned space” discussed in chapter 6 (§37) (PhP 251). Just as Casey likens our “immersion in attuned space” to a kind of dissociative fugue, wherein “we find ourselves *floating* in an atmosphere not anchored, much less centered, in our own body,” so does Merleau-Ponty say that “every sensation includes a seed of dream or *depersonalization*, as we experience through this sort of *stupor* into which it puts us when we truly live at the level of sensation” (PhP 223, emphasis mine). And just as Ströker characterizes attuned space as having “no center of reference from which it would be possible to order and separate the experienced things,” Merleau-Ponty says much the same of the sensuous field: “Nothing here is thematized. Neither the object nor the subject is *posited*” (PhP 251). Here too in the *Phenomenology*, words become wet and language fluent as he describes the softening and dissipation of this dichotomy in an atmosphere of generality where “life *flows* back upon itself and history is *dissolved* into natural time” (PhP 168, emphasis mine). Finally, as if to dispel all lingering doubts about the liminal ubiquity of this experience, Merleau-Ponty insists that this flow of “anonymous life is merely the limit of the temporal *dispersion* that *always* threatens the historical present” (PhP 362, emphasis mine). As he later elaborates, the nascent logos, or archeology of perception we live at the level of sensation is by no means limited to the *pathological*. On the contrary:

Even when the subject is normal and *engaged in inter-human situations*, insofar as he has a body, he continuously preserves the power to *withdraw from it*. At the very moment when I live in the world and am directed toward *my projects, my occupations, my friends, or my memories, I can close my eyes, lie down, listen to my blood pulsing in my ears, lose myself in some pleasure or pain, and lock myself up in this anonymous life that underpins my personal life*” (PhP 168, emphasis mine).

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<sup>47</sup> All this bears a suggestive affinity to the way disposition grounds the understanding in *Being and Time*.

It must be said that this endogenous immersion, this depersonalized ekstasis into the sensuously attuned space of the visceral body, is not entirely comparable to the elemental immersion explored in chapter 6. In that abyss of desolation, where all was absorbed into the sensuous surface of the all-absorbent element, for instance, the here and there into the nowhere, we found the body groundless. With no place to stand or worldly horizon by which to orient or even return to ourselves, we become dislocated, perceptually and practically *disorganized*. Contrariwise, the immersive experience of anonymous life doesn't leave us altogether worldless and excorporated, even momentarily. Instead, I withdraw from my own world in process to another "underpinning" its linkage to my own body. My egress from the human household is simultaneously an ingress – from the inside out, as it were – to the "natural world" we co-habit with all forms of life "solicited by hunger, cold, weight," pulsing as *one* with pleasure or pain.

The depths of immersion are manifold, ranging from the familiar shoals of practical engrossment to unfamiliar gulfs of carnal intensity that forbid our own abiding on pain of certain death. In light of our earlier analysis, this offers a temptation to further thought. Could it be that through listening to the outlandish melodies of anonymous life, which issue from the vestibular silence of our bodies (as in the passage above), we gain entree to the antechambers of earth where its silent summons resounds more starkly than it ever does through the shuttered human household? Could it be that the immersive experience of the animal and vegetal otherness of our bodies indirectly exposes the *elemental* otherness of a wider life-world, opening an autoecological entryway to the intimate rift of the earth-world itself?

Here we might return to Penn Warren, who enters that dark passage much as Merleau-Ponty does but follows it to an elemental extremity the philosopher would only later reach (cf. §38). In *World Enough and Time*, he who plunges into the wild life within, the "sound of his guts" and "the pulse in his blood," finds it reverberant with ontological echoes of the song of the earth without, as though his organs were no more than *carnal* tributaries of that "black delirious stream" from which all things feeding, bleeding, once emerged. While human being sinks out of its element in the pelagic wilderness, others do thrive there in places scarcely fathomed, places impervious to the unassisted human body. Yet to these others we are kindred if distant relatives, intimately bound by the same "ancient pact" which tues our bodies to the tides the nearer we reside, just as it entices us to loosen, disport, and lose ourselves in all the amphibious pleasures of water, from wading astray and floating adrift to riding the waves and swashing, plashing play.

Naturally, that ancestral kinship is stronger among synecological forms of life, those whose bodies evolved and flourished mutually during the Pleistocene and dwell even now on some common ground. Insofar as they have been grafted to coadunate regions of the life-world, their bodies sensuously intertwine and interpenetrate. Whenever these beings interact, as if to renew their ancient pact, the melodies they separately embody spontaneously tend toward certain harmonies. While engaged with feral forms of life in synergic, venatic, or ludic congress, we may withdraw into the recesses of our bodies and discover this intercorporeal accord. And provided we curtail the disposition to domesticate them, their bodies may re-open ours to rifts in our world as to a time we thought we left behind. Anyone whose heart has galloped in stride with an unsaddled heart between his knees, or simply fluttered with the whisking of a shagged tail, gains some sense of a world unbridled, some scent of a time unleashed from our own. The elemental limits of the human world do not impede all other bodies so, even if every last one of them is mortally promised to the earth and carries that element of death at the resistant core of its being. In attuning us to the anonymous life we bear in our hearts and the nonhuman existents we extend our hearts to, the organic ecstasies of sensation can reattune us to the earth that quakes in their breast as it no longer does in ours.

Merleau-Ponty adds much to our previous investigations of worldly attunement. Until now we have largely glossed over its temporal character to better focus on its co-operation with the understanding in the lateral ekstasis into place (*topos*) – particularly dwelling place (*oikos*) – as well as its wider role in the self-emergence (*phusis*) of phenomena gathered into sense (*logos*). When we did broach at intervals the temporality of worldly attunement, this was predominantly in the context of ecumenism, where critical focus fell on how its subordination to the understanding could cast us away from the time of the earth, heightening our ecological abjection. For Heidegger too, we have seen that dispositions are equated with the temporal ekstasis of the past. Conceived as Dasein's historicity, this ekstasis bears ultimate reference to the crystallized projections of a world-historical people. By enlarging the concept of worldhood to include the milieu of the organism, and existence all embodied forms of life, Merleau-Ponty deepens that vertical dimension. He is thereby able to account for lateral ekstases widely attested, even as they remain unprocessed by Heidegger's anthropological machine.

(iii) *Carvings, Footprints, Fossils, Lungs: The Temporal Shape and Thickness of the Trace*

Having identified *whom* life-time is retained by (the anonymous existence of the prepersonal body), and *how* this dimension of “natural time” is experienced (the organic ecstasy of sensation), we are now prepared to take up the question of *what* its sensible manifestation amounts to. According to Merleau-Ponty, the phenomenal expressions of this time have an “actual transcendence – they exist in my life before appearing as objects of my explicit acts” (PhP 381). As we have seen, they belong to the sensuous atmosphere of prejective phenomena with an implicit *affective* valence, encompassing basic somatic sensations (cold, weight) and responses (pleasure, pain) as well as emotions and moods (anger, joy). To fill in the contours of an earlier idea, even if transcendent events such as “my birth or my death cannot be for me objects of thought,” Merleau-Ponty will say that I “live within an *atmosphere* of death in general,” through the “*anxiety* of being transcended” (PhP 381f., emphasis mine). The unforeseeable future (e.g. death) and the immemorial past (e.g. birth) are unrepresentable, noetically transcendent. Nevertheless, the prepersonal body is exposed to them at every moment. It is this sense of being affected by a time that cannot be presented through recollective acts or habitual actions that is meant when he carves out a place for organic memory, or sense memory, in which “the transcendence of the past . . . plants its arrow in me like a wound” (IP 198).

This remark brings us back to the very beginning. From Nick Thompson we learned that the Apache people receive stories like arrows shot down from the ancestral past. When aimed at the sensitive listener, they are thought to leave *wounds*. By examining one’s ways and heeding their wisdom, one may live right by the stories, treat the pain they have dealt. Even then the past continues to haunt a storied place. It stalks the people there. And as Thompson avows, you can “replace yourself” but you can never cut the arrow out.<sup>48</sup> Building on Bakhtin’s concept of the *chronotope*, a place in the “geography of community” where “time takes on flesh and becomes visible for human contemplation,” Keith Basso observes how “the Apache landscape is full of named locations [these toponyms are stories in their own right] where time and space have fused and where” this fusion reappears “through the agency of historical tales.”<sup>49</sup> But how are we to mend the wounds of a past displaced from *our* history, a “natural time” into which “history is dissolved” and the “historical present . . . dispersed” into anonymous life, unstoried and untold?

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<sup>48</sup> Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

Are we not thrown into this outlandish atmosphere as one cast into a desolate bleak of wilderness, dolorously dislocate and temporally out of joint? Hurling us once more into the wild dark, Penn Warren expresses this infliction in a strikingly similar idiom:

Every gully and ditch was a bleeding wound, and every solid object, tree or stone or house, seemed to be losing itself in the vast irremediable deliquescence. Human strength and human meaning seemed to flow away, too, to bleed away with the dissolving world.<sup>50</sup>

On the basis of Merleau-Ponty's claims about it, the vital yet immemorial past would seem to puncture the historical present so deeply as to bleed all human meaning from it. If the wry aim (*intendere*) of time's originary arrow conceals from us its source, if it works hand in glove with death, like an anonymous assassin delivering its unrepresentable quietus, it's far from clear how we could make it visible, intelligible, much less nurse its mortal wounds.

One angle of approach to this problem reveals itself through Merleau-Ponty's analysis of a comparable pain, that of the phantom limb. Described in the *Phenomenology* as a "quasi-present" or "a previous present that cannot commit to becoming past," the phantom limb is a liminal extremity born of extremity, an organ so severed from the *Körper* as to be absent from the image of the body objectively perceived (PhP 115). Yet it lives on through *leiblich* sensation as a disarming tear in the fabric of time. Although the original trauma is accessible to recollection and reflection, the patient who reminds herself of her dismemberment finds no relief in her efforts to suppress the pain through rational judgment. Only by transposing herself into the sensuous atmosphere of the time before the wound does she re-suture her body, kinesthetically, to the untroubled present.<sup>51</sup> The generalized and anonymized existence of the organism is born of a past that is precisely not a "previous present" for us. Be that as it may, we might liken it to a kind of phantom body haunting every body, ob-scenely "sketching out" the organization of existence before my own arrives on scene to fill its contours (cf. PhP 90). Recall that Merleau-Ponty had adopted the same formulation to describe gesture, which "sketches out the first signs of an intentional object" (PhP 191). More broadly, he tells us that "natural time, in every instant

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<sup>50</sup> Penn Warren, *World Enough and Time*, 100f.

<sup>51</sup> Such is the procedure underlying the mirror box therapy developed by Vilayanur Ramachandran to treat phantom limb pain. By creating the illusion that the patient is moving her amputated limb when she is actually moving its intact counterpart, this specular situation fosters a preconious substitution that gradually re-integrates the spectral appendage into the kinesthetically sensuous space of her benign body schema. In this way, a vitreous reflection of the personal past is administered behind the back of reflection as its image feeds back into her sensuous grip on the world in the present.

that arrives, ceaselessly sketches out the empty form of the genuine event” (PhP 168). We have encountered this sketching before.

As early as chapter 2 we approached it in the context of outlandish periphenomena that perforate our own world with absence while eliciting attunements to it. And in chapter 3 we examined it under the Heideggerian rubric of the silent “drift” (*Aufriss*), which summons saying, dwelling, and thinking toward unearthing the generative grounds of the world from the earth unsaid, unbuilt, unthought. A sketch, a drift, a hinting summons. All were gathered into our exposition of the *trace*, conceived as: the absent-presence of originary nature qua “‘nothing’ of the world” (Heidegger); the mythophysical manifestation of Earth (Homer); the phenomenal manifestation of elemental *archai* such as water (Thales), the fiery logos (Heraclitus), and that of the indefinite *archē* of the elemental as such (Anaximander). Finally, in our review of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of expression, the heterologous birth of sense was found in gesture, itself a trace of the silent *logos* of the thing. After Leder, who enlarges Merleau-Ponty’s project by exploring the “radical paradox of the present-absent body,” let us take a similar tack by bringing the absent-presence of the phantom body to bear on the problem of life-time.<sup>52</sup> In answer to the question of *what* its arrow exposes, Merleau-Ponty temporally sharpens our extensive treatment of the trace, spalling it down to “a presence of the past which is absence.”

Much like Heidegger trued the drift to the kerf of the handsaw, Merleau-Ponty hews into the pith of the trace in the *Phenomenology* by considering a carving worked into wood. To wit, initials scrawled into a varnished tabletop. Of itself, he reasons, this phenomenon does not signify the past (e.g. the stretch of time I expended to inscribe them) in the way the initials denote my name, enable me to identify *this* table, or refer to what a table is used for. Merleau-Ponty claims that we could not recognize such traces as occasions for recollection or habitual reenactment unless we had a “sense of the past” that directly opens us to it (PhP 435f.):

Our individual past, for example, cannot be given to us by the actual survival of states of consciousness or of cerebral traces, nor by a consciousness of the past that would constitute it and arrive at it immediately: in both cases, we would lack the sense of the past, for the past would be for us, strictly speaking, present. If something of the past is to exist for us, then this can only be in an *ambiguous presence*, prior to every explicit recollection, *like a field that we open onto* (PhP, 381, emphasis mine).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Leder, *Absent Body*, 21.

<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere he restates his position interrogatively, thinking this “ambiguous presence” as a trace of the past: “But how would these traces be recognized as traces of the past if we did not otherwise have a direct opening upon this past?” (PhP 413).



In other words, without an exposive sensitivity to the trace in the originary field of sensation, an “ambiguous presence” which beckons us by virtue of its *resistance* to the futural thrust of the understanding in our lived confrontation with it, we would not be solicited to retrospect or circumspectly retroject the past into horizons of the present *as* something already perceived or involved against the backdrop of the world. “We believe that our past, for ourselves, reduces to the explicit memories that we can contemplate,” notes Merleau-Ponty. But this very assumption closes “a direct opening upon the past” that eventuates in the sensuous field. Rather than allowing for its absence to *seize upon us* in that affective atmosphere, “we cut our existence off from the past itself, and we only allow our existence to seize upon the present traces of this past” (PhP 413). In other words, as he later concludes, the “thetic consciousness *of* time that dominates it and that encompasses it” actually “destroys the phenomenon of time” (PhP 438).

What resists the present in the case of the table is precisely the absence of the past, which is always a sensible ab-sense. The sensuous texture, color, and depth of the carving aberrantly recede from the shiny, immaculate surface of things of newer vintage, exuding a timeworn atmosphere that draws attention toward it by dint of its allure. In that moment of suspenseful arrest the world becomes a palimpsest. A pentimento of durations peeled back through sensations. In Merleau-Ponty’s words:

My body, which assures my insertion within the human world through my habitus, only in fact does so by first projecting me into a natural world that always shines through from beneath the others – just as the canvas shines through from beneath the painting – and gives the human world an air of fragility (PhP 307).

On this point he elsewhere invokes Proust’s remembrance of things. Against the assumption that memory emanates from the mind, Proust observes how “the better part of our memories exists *outside us*, in the blatter of rain, in the smell of an unaired room or of the fist crackling brushwood fire in a cold grate” (IP 197).<sup>54</sup> Borrowing Whitehead’s expression in his lectures and writings from the late 1950s and early 1960s, Merleau-Ponty will likewise speak of “the memory of the world” (N 120, VI 194). The ‘of’ here expresses the possessive genitive *as well as* a reflexively “subjective” of-ness. Otherwise stated, sensible things belonging to the world bear traces of the past in their sensuous relation to life in general. The life-world’s remembrance of itself is embodied in this correlation. Every memory begins as a trace. The crucial difference between the lost time that preoccupies Proust and Merleau-Ponty’s immemorial counterparts is

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grover*, In Search of Lost Time, Vol. 2, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: Random House (Modern Library), 1998), 300.

whether it traces out the intentional object of one of my previous perceptual acts. Unlike the former, the latter refuses to ever resolve itself into a rainstorm I weathered, a room I occupied, or a fire I kindled, in short, into *my* memory of the world.

The immemorial trace reveals very little, almost nothing. Unaffixed to the timescale of personal projects and concerns (e.g. when I was a student, before I became a father), its temporal sense disperses into an atmosphere of outlandish enticement commingled with anguish, wonder, or humor, depending on our attunement to deep natality. In this respect, the immemorial trace has about it the unsettling air of *déjà vu*, or else the air of pregnant silence that might surround my efforts to wheedle a word from the tip of my tongue when it so happens it's one I've neither uttered nor heard, and only resides in a dead language. In the viable language of the *Phenomenology*, which does yet retain some ecumenical baggage (e.g. "natural world") and scope ambiguity ("natural time"), such traces fall under the hypostatized nomenclature of "natural objects" made up of sensible "qualities":

While I am perceiving – and even without any knowledge of the organic conditions of my perception – I am conscious of integrating distracted and *dispersed* "consciousnesses," namely, vision, hearing, and touch, along with their fields, which are anterior to and remain foreign to my personal life. *The natural object is the trace of this generalized existence.* And in some respect, each object will at first be a natural object; if it is to be able to *enter into my life*, it must be made of *colors and of tactile and sonorous qualities*" (PhP 362f.).

In stark contrast to my memories of the world, however, the immemorial trace would be one that can only "enter my life" as a prejective intimation, a sense memory holding fast to the passage of eons, indefinite durations rendered sensible. It would be a rupture in my past as well as human history, divulging a longevity and endurance denied us.

Nothing more clearly manifests the atmosphere and ab-sense of the immemorial past than does perhaps the fossil. This periphenomenon has appeared and reappeared at tantalizing intervals throughout our investigations. From the conception of language as "fossil poetry" (Emerson) and the fossilized *logos* of "natural history" (Sallis), to the bonebeds enshrined by the early ancient Greeks as remnants of mythic bloodshed (§26, §34). When Merleau-Ponty takes up the fossil and the trace together in his *Collège de France* lectures, recorded and published under the title of *Nature* (1956-1960), it is not these sources so much as Husserl's spadework that probably frames his inquiry. In the first of Husserl's *Logical Investigations*, "fossil vertebrae" are cited as instances of indication, signifying "the existence of antediluvian animals."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge Paul & Kegan, 1970), 184.

Anticipating Sallis, who lays stress on how the fossil first addresses us as something “irreducible to a content experienceable in the living present,” Merleau-Ponty digs beneath the signs of history to uncover the asignifying traces of fossilized life. Drawing attention to a whorl of ammonite, he finds in our pre-theoretical encounter with it a “survival of the past” that cannot be reduced to a “present substitute of a past that no longer is,” a “present effect” of it, or for that matter, a determinate sign. The fossil is, in his words, an “enjambment” or encroachment, pre-theoretically implicating an immemorial life-world in the living present while remaining enticingly inexplicable. At a glance we are said to be exposed to life immobilized but by no means inert. For its petrified expression continues to move us as though it were revived, as if its life were *with* us there, in the present world. Merleau-Ponty proceeds to limn this exposure as follows:

The living thing is no longer there but is almost there; we have the negative of it, which [negative] is related to it, not as the sign is related to the signification, the effect or the cause, but something for itself (N 276).

To bring this into sharper relief, we might begin by contrasting the fossilized trace of allohistory with the “trace of the footstep” mentioned just a few lines on. In the “Indirect Language” essay, Merleau-Ponty advances a *prima facie* inconsistent claim, at least if one thinks that footsteps and fossils are fungible traces. “Language bears the meaning of thought as a footprint *signifies* the movement and effort of the body” (S 44, emphasis mine). Like our footprints, much of our language retraces bodily gestures that accrue to the history of the life-world. As such, their power to signify is conditioned by our practical understanding, which establishes the background in which they take on perceptual sense and discursive meaning. We could not perceive the footprint or conceive ‘the footprint’ *as* the movement and effort of the body were it not for some basic, sensorimotor linkage to a world *for itself*, organized by ambulatory bodies in general. This holds true whether the phenomenon comes to signify my prior kinestheses or those of another. By virtue of our empathetic and kinesthetic intertwinement with other bodies, walking, standing, and negotiating places that afford their footing, the sensible aspects of a footprint I discover in the sand have a tendency to haptically affect me with the movement and effort that made it, as though my foot were planted in that very spot. What it comes to signify or represent of the past I recollect, imagine, or conceptualize develops out of this *affordant* sense belonging to the past it traces. The intentionality of the body that made the footprint remains operative in the present, impressed in the negative of the perceived.

Merleau-Ponty sheds little light on the contrast. But the situation is altogether different in the case of the fossilized ammonoid, a cephalopod mollusk we know to have thrived in the

benthic dark of the Devonian and Cretaceous periods. Whether or not I am schooled in paleontology, and before thetic consciousness imposes such scientific explanations on it, the fossil and footprint impinge on my senses in a similar way. Except, as Merleau-Ponty points out, the trace of the past the fossil exhibits at this pre-thetic level of perception fails to signify a determinate style of embodied existence for us – as the footprint does the motricity of ambulatory being-in-the-world. We are affectively impacted by the compacted intentionality of the body that made the footprint to the degree that we *know how* to walk – or at least have some perceptual sense of the weight, movement, and effort of others perambulating various terrains. But in confronting the otherworldly style of aquatic life sung in stone, we are practically out of our depth. So unlike the marrowy memory of tantivy melodies that rattle the bones of the equestrian on happening upon the excoriated skeleton of a horse in the desert, the shell of the ammonoid remains silent and unsettling. Rather than affording the transposition of our bodies, its world inhibits that transposition, resisting and remaining all but closed. We are distantiated from that world not only by its watery depths – outlandish to us still – but by some 60 million years of environmental and evolutionary sea changes. Even if the soft tissues of this strange creature were somehow preserved in their tentacular convolutions, our understanding of how it lived would be limited to theoretical speculation – as it actually is by paleo-ethological analogy – as opposed to an unpremeditated transposition of kinesthetic memories from some familiar style (e.g. equine) onto that traced out by the fossil. If it has, in Merleau-Ponty’s terms, a certain “theoretical immanence,” its “actual transcendence” of our embodied, historical perspective riddles such theories with a conspicuous incompleteness (PhP 381). Simply put, we cannot understandingly *incorporate* the allohistorical trace into our own world. It does not signify like the footprint a specific intentionality for us. Instead, the sense memory of the prepersonal body is roused by an autoaffective self-impression of anonymous life, being for itself in general. Our sensuous contact with the fossil yields only the barest sense of something having dwelled there, in the shell, we perceive not what or how or when or wider whereabouts specifically. From a half-erased “score” engraved into the earth in a body language we scarcely understand, we catch only the disperse half-notes of the dirge of a world that inexplicably echoes through our own.

Unlike the phantom limb, the ammonite is an exogenous trace, cherished in an element of far greater longevity and endurance than the flesh of my body or, for that matter, that of *any* body. These qualities have made that element suitable for memorializing the temporal

boundaries of lifetimes and marking the immemorial passage of life-time. Without it, not only the fossil but our sense of the deep past would be divested of its sensible support. We find the exoskeletal creature twice interred: in its body and in the earth. After withdrawing from its world to die in the coiled carapace that had sheltered its existence, it was gradually entombed in stone, whose weight has come to condense the atmosphere of eons by accretion and lithification.<sup>56</sup> Sensation empathetically reenacts this withdrawal from the world, exposing us to a trace within a trace: the organic trace sensibly enveloped in the *elemental* trace. What I experience as the quasi-presence of a lifetime absent from my own is, within the wider weft of life-time, a previous present for itself – the “natural self,” the organism, the phantom body who cannot commit to becoming past. But the geological institution of the “mineral,” which “remakes the animal *in quasi*,” stretches back to a deeper past, which has never been present to life as such (N 276). In a recent essay, Toadvine excavates an adjacent tract. About “our sensible encounter with the fossil,” he writes of an “invitation and a refusal” of our “efforts to fill out its content.” He points out that this tension “is intensified by the paradoxical intersection of two different pulses of time, that of the evolutionary past of life, on the one hand, and that of the rock, of the elements themselves, on the other.”<sup>57</sup> Using methods of radiometric dating and stratigraphic correlation, geologists have approximated the age of some stones on earth to be as old as 4.4 billion years, corresponding to the Hadean and Chaotian Eons, aptonyms for the infernal and chaotic durations over which the earth’s crust and atmosphere were formed. Of course, neither evolutionary nor geological knowledge is contained in our pre-thetic exposure to the stone. Toadvine’s claim is that, more subtly, “we are first motivated to provide an account of the fossil . . . precisely because it confronts us perceptually, viscerally” – namely, in our “lived, pre-scientific experience of time” – “with an immemorial past” that is “constitutive of” it, “even as it outstrips that very experience” and “strains the very limits of conceptual elucidation.”<sup>58</sup>

We shall delve deeper into the elemental side of this paradox in the pages ahead. At his juncture, allow me to offer a preview. Like the earth to which it belongs, stone only supports the standpoint of our bodies, shelters our dwelling places, and concretely grounds our world by closing itself from them with adamant resistance. So that for any given slice of duration, it

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<sup>56</sup> As Merleau-Ponty will later put it in the problematic terminology called into question above, “the weight of the natural world is already a weight of the past” (VI 123).

<sup>57</sup> Toadvine, “The Elemental Past,” 272.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 272-4.

marks an untimely edge impervious to enstasis, to the centrifugal horizons *under* which we *stand* in a body, a place, and a world of our own making. Organic historicity bears primary reference to the temporal depth of those horizons, where the ‘we’ marks the coexistent position of *all* embodied forms of life. But I would like to suggest that the stone itself exposes us to *elemental* historicity: the temporal profundity of *out-standing* existence retraced in the very materiality of our bodies – among other sensible things of this world. To truly experience this materiality is to run up against the allohistorical conditions of what I have chosen to call our being-of-the-earth, which unfolds in the *disorganized*, displaced, and outlandish crevices of being-in-the-world.<sup>59</sup> In the rift of the earth-world itself. If water manifests the ecstatic flow of the living present from a past and toward a future beyond life as such, then stone, shoring up that stream, evinces the *durability* of sentient expression. What is preserved of the elemental past is not something understood, explicated into our world, even in the minimal sense of “something having lived.” Instead, the expressed is retained as nothing more than an indefinite sensible impression, noncommittal to sense but implicated in the earthward weight of the flesh through the excorporeal ecstasy of sensation.

Having noted this temporal complication, let us turn back to the organic trace. Our exposure to the prehistoric institution of life is not confined to remnants mortified and lithified. By Merleau-Ponty’s lights, the body itself is a kind of living fossil, remade in that “element of being” he will come to name ‘flesh’ (VI 139). In addition to exogenous traces of anonymous life, we find organic institution retraced, endogenously, wherever the sensible side of this element folds over itself into sensing. Such is the interoceptive zone of transcendence entered through my sensuous immersion in the pulse of my blood and throb of pain or pleasure. In these periphenomena, recusant to conscious control, we rediscover the pulsation of life-time, anonymous and virtually autonomous with respect to my personal past and its generational imbrication into *human* history. Life-time resonates through the prepersonal body, forming the time signature for the melody of one’s sensuous being in the “natural world” as for the intercorporeal harmony of being with others whose bodies are likewise sided with it *ab origine*. Where classical phenomenology all but ignored this liminal dimension, Merleau-Ponty underscores how it resonates through the “organs of perception” traditionally privileged by that

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<sup>59</sup> In other words, the time of the earth is precisely that which disperses the “unity beneath all of the ruptures of my personal and historical life,” just as it does the general temporal unity of the organism.

analysis. Without this affective reciprocity, which viscerally attunes one's body to the blatter of rain without and the pumping heart within the other, he argues that we could not account for our "gaze gearing into the visible world" or "why another's gaze can exist for me" (PhP 367). In these sections of the *Phenomenology* devoted to the theme of "coexistence," Merleau-Ponty weaves everything we have just said together by tying it back to the trace:

When I turn toward my perception itself and when I pass from direct perception to the thought about this perception, I reenact it, *I uncover a thought older than I am at work in my perceptual organs and of which these organs are merely the trace. I understand others in the same way* (PhP 367, emphasis mine).

A couple pages later, he attributes this work to none other than anonymous life, which conditions the lateral ekstasis involved in understanding others qua coexistent. In "perceiving the other's body" my own "finds there something of a miraculous extension of its own intentions, a familiar manner of handling the world," precisely because

the other's body and my own are a single whole, two sides of a single phenomenon, and *the anonymous existence, of which my body is continuously the trace, henceforth inhabits these two bodies simultaneously* (PhP 370, emphasis mine).

Uncovered by the thought of "the one" who perceives in me and conditioning all intercorporeity is the prehistoric phantom body, "of which my body is continuously the trace." Human history does not simply dissolve into "natural time." The latter works through the former, in-habits it, *organizes* it. By the same token, life-time does not simply disperse my own sense of time, configured by my concerns and projects. Its traces furnish occasions for condensing prehistoric ab-sense into a future that renews my intransgressible bond to the organic "unity beneath all of the ruptures of my personal and historical life."

What is the general structure of this temporal unity? Merleau-Ponty already provided a clue in describing how those released from enstasis (hypostatic or anthropostatic qua ipseological) live "natural time" at the level of sensation as a "pulse" of anonymous life that is "synchronized" with the "natural world." "To catch sight of this formless existence that precedes my history and that will draw it to a close," Merleau-Ponty claims that "all I have to do is see, in myself, this time that functions by itself and that my personal life makes use of without ever fully concealing" (PhP 362). Not until later does he bring the temporal "shape" of this synchronized, but by no means synchronic, pulsation into sharper relief. To us it is a familiar shape indeed, congruent with the kairotic time of the ecological metabolism: from that of the Homeric dwelling place (§28) as well as ancient agrarian mysteries and festivals (§43) to that of the untimely laughter of the Thracian (§46). Like the ambivalent dispensation of Thalesian *archē* (§36), the

flux and reflux of indefinite Okeanos (§34), and the conflictual harmony of the backward-turning bow in Heraclitus (§24), the flight of time's arrow circles back on itself. Far from an empty repetition, however, Merleau-Ponty has it that this "general flight outside of Self" renews the generative difference of every moment of perception (PhP 442). It is the poietic time of nature, defined by Claudel in the epigraph to the "Temporality" chapter as "the *sense* [*sens*] of life (as in direction [*sens*] of a stream, the sense of a sentence, the sense of smell)" (PhP 479, emphasis mine). Merleau-Ponty identifies "this time that functions by itself" with the "*time of our bodily functions, which are cyclical,*" being synchronized with the cyclical "time of nature with which we coexist" (PhP 433).

As the sensuous cradle of intentionality and meaning, one's "bodily functions" continuously retrace the movement of the allohistorical metabolism: the cyclic concurrence of living existents and these with the self-emergence of elemental phenomena. What does this synchronicity amount to? As before, the answers we gather from the *Phenomenology* resonate strongly with the musical textures of *Structure*. Combining a couple measures of that score, the trace of our temporal "inherence in the organism" plays out accordingly:

My life is made up of *rhythms* that do not have their *reason* in what I have chosen to be, but rather have their *condition* in the banal milieu [of the organism] . . . My organism – as a pre-personal adhesion to the general form of the world, as an anonymous and general existence – plays the role of an *innate complex* beneath the level of my personal life . . . [It] sketches out the movement of [human] existence . . . this back-and-forth of existence, that sometimes *allows* itself to exist [prepersonally] as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts (PhP 86, 90).

Ecstatically open to each of the three modes of being we find adumbrated in *Structure*, the lived body rhythmically oscillates between a prepersonal past and a personal future in a temporal movement reaching back to the institution of the material, vital, and human orders. The primary retention of these temporal dialectics is neither spiritual nor posited by the mind but sidereal and viscerally deposited. Before it is ever calculated, dated, laid out as a number on a line of succession, time is duly kept by the "innate complex" of our so-called biological clocks, whose rhythms have been regulated by the cosmic escapement over unclocked cycles of the earth-world (PhP 86). Amid the meddlesome life that thrives beneath the drumbeats of our thoughts, our very bowels are thus aclamor with the profundities of a silent past, the sounding forth of the elements and the resounding refrains of organic existence.

If there is any truth to the proverbial music of the spheres, it resounds at this register. Not a mathematical theorem or metaphysical doctrine, but an intestinal truth, liminally felt and



stethoscopically ascertained. Therein lies the “music to question, to auscultate . . . the problem of being,” which Henri Michaux found lacking in the “human music” of Western Europe yet bountifully beating in “the breast of the earth” wherefrom he took his pulse. A poet who spoke as Merleau-Ponty does of life’s melody, “the way an old, one-eyed rheumatic hound is . . . a melody,” Michaux hearkens to it in an effort “to auscultate myself with Time.” And “in my music” he discovers “there is silence above all.”<sup>60</sup> That silence “drinks me up,” he writes, “consumes me.” It disrupts my own habitual rhythms and effaces whatever visage I have chosen. It opens a temporal rift, a personal arrhythmia in which one is exposed to an indefinite body of others stretching back to an immemorial past that has literally *organized* the senses over eons of coexistence. Echoing the call for an “*auscultation*” of that timely “depth” in *The (In)Visible*, Merleau-Ponty comes to plumb the radical non-coincidence between the body and the self (VI 128). There he will acknowledge that poetry too “rediscovers what articulates itself within us, unbeknownst to us,” *de profundis* (VI 208). As often happens, the phenomenologist and the poet form a two-part arrangement around a common truth. The overture to this truth had already been made some years before.

The first part of that arrangement issues from the *Phenomenology* as Merleau-Ponty has us lie down again, and fall asleep. The analysis sheds much light on how our “bodily functions” recycle the rhythms of “natural time.” He begins by describing the effort of trying to go to sleep as kind of invocation of the unconscious body, which I strive to become through an emulation of its posture and respiratory rhythms. But he goes on to observe how the attainment of this end entails a deferral of all my efforts, my ends, a withdrawal from my world, and an open allowance for the anonymous one to enter. Like the ecstasies of the Dionysian rites, whereby the personal barriers and limits of existence broke down, I only fall asleep by falling away from myself and into an immersive atmosphere, permeated with something comparable to the “will-negating mood” that Nietzsche ascribed to the maenads:

I lie down in my bed, on my left side, with my knees drawn up; I close my eyes, breathe slowly, and *distance myself from my projects*. But this is where the power of my will or consciousness ends. Just as the faithful in *Dionysian mysteries* invoke the god by *imitating* the scenes of his life, I too *call forth the visitation of sleep* by *imitating the breathing and posture of the sleeper*. The god is there when the faithful no longer distinguish themselves from the role they are playing, when their body and their consciousness cease to be opposed to their particular opacity and are *entirely dissolved into the myth* (PhP 166).

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<sup>60</sup> “First Impressions,” in Michaux, *Darkness Moves*, 321-328.

You may recall from chapter 7 that Dionysus and Demeter were once revered as mutual overseers of the metabolic cycles of birth, growth, and death within the mortal dwelling place. On that basis, rites in their honor were historically conjoined, the worship of one coinciding with the invocation of the other. Most notably, during the Eleusinian mysteries, the ecstatic reenactment of Demeter/Persephone's symbolic death was rumored to have concluded with the rebirth of Dionysus/Iacchus (§43). From at least the time of Plato's Socrates, who likened death to an eternal dreamless slumber – or for as long as there have been insomniacs – the specter of mortality has disturbed the thought of sleep to filled our heads with deathbeds. Under the covers of our “prepersonal horizons,” one might say that sleep and death are bedfellows inasmuch as each begins “where the power of my will or consciousness ends” (cf. PhP 223). It is something like this which Alphonso Lingis has in mind when noting how “insomnia suffers from not being able to put an end to itself, not being able to die.”<sup>61</sup> On his insomniac “watches of the night” in the “silence of the city,” Wolfe likewise hearkens to the “mighty sound of time” and plunges into the “dark tide moving in the hearts of men” across the “sleeping earth.” Time and again he comes face to face with death, visited upon those who sleep the streets, never to wake, their bodies cold, dry, and hard as the stones he treads. Feeling the “terror” and “loneliness” of their abject demise, Wolfe marshals a wild, desperate exuberance to salvage their lives, their deaths, from oblivion. “My heart,” he declares, “was with the hearts of all men who had heard the exultant and terrible music of wild earth, triumph, and discovery, singing a strange and bitter prophecy of love and death.”<sup>62</sup> When it stems from mortal angst, however, insomnia may instead betray an aversion to that very music, an inflected disposition of earthly abjection. Against the backdrop of a willful attunement to the impracticable future as something to be taken hold of, mastered, re-enclosed into the world, sleep defies us. For sleep is not at all an act(ivity). It cannot be projected, much less retrojected. And the tighter I clench my body into the fist that would seize it, the farther it slips away. Only by releasing my grip on the world and surrendering conscious control of my “bodily functions” does sleep descend on me from without, spiriting me away “with the rhythmic sustention of its mighty wing.”

Like the outlandish guest-stranger in the mythic night of old, arriving from out of this world of mine, “the visitation of sleep” is a mysterious gift bestowed by the otherness of

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<sup>61</sup> Lingis, *The Imperative*, 10.

<sup>62</sup> Wolfe, *Complete Short Stories*, 62.

existence. Part of what makes Merleau-Ponty's theophanic analogy so compelling is that it reinscribes the mythological economy of the ancient Greek *oikos* into the hypnological economy of the body. Just as Nausicaa welcomed the haggard hero of the *Odyssey*, so am I to receive the uninvited guest who drowsily raps at the backdoors of consciousness, yawning unbidden through me. The yawn, the night, the nocturnal rallentando of ambient and somatic rhythms all herald a *kairos*, a *critical moment* demanding the *timely measure* and *proper proportion* of deference to and caring for the phantom body at the *vital core* of my own.<sup>63</sup> So is hospitality exhibited by the imitative gestures above. As the Thesmophoric arrivants attuned themselves to Demeter by pantomiming her downcast sojourn in Eleusis (§43), so do I phantomime the dormant other, inviting the stranger to settle into my body. Once I deferently discharge the guest-gift of my person so generously as to no longer be able to distinguish the donor from the recipient, the stranger requites my xenial gestures by initiating me into the ecstasy of sleep. Merleau-Ponty depicts the mysterious consummation of this ritual as follows:

Sleep "arrives" at a particular *moment*, it *settles* upon this imitation of itself that I *offered* it, and I succeed in becoming what I pretended to be: that *unseeing and nearly unthinking mass*, confined to a point in space and *no longer in the world except through the anonymous vigilance of the senses* (PhP 166f., emphasis mine).

Where the ancient caretaker looked to Zeus Xenios or Athena Xenia in her efforts to observe the divine measure of caring for the guest-stranger (*xenos*), whom they were storied to embody, Merleau-Ponty ascribes this tutelary role in the economy of sleep to anonymous life, which inhabits the body whose agency has been offered in exchange for the immemorial repose of the organic world. In each ecstasy, spiritual and organic, the affiliation with the other is renewed through *philotēs*, affection.

The outbound rays of intention that prolong my daytime outreach already begin to shorten as the shadows lengthen into night. At the same time, those senses most permeable to the affective incursion of the sensible are heightened. The local and temporal breadth that separates me from things and things from one another implodes into an indefinite depth of atmospheric intensity.<sup>64</sup> Lingis, who follows Merleau-Ponty and Levinas into these nocturnal provinces,

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<sup>63</sup> Each of the stresses of this sentence captures part of the polysemy of 'kairos' uncovered in chapter 4 (§28).

<sup>64</sup> In the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty contrasts these dimensions as follows: "whereas breadth can, at first glance, pass for a relation between things themselves in which the perceiving subject is not implicated," depth "announces a certain indissoluble link between the things and me by [virtue of] which I am [or can be] situated in front of them" (PhP 267). In the all-encompassing atmosphere of night, which some phenomenologists have conceived as an element in its own right, it is precisely this "indissoluble link" that makes itself felt. If, *ceteris paribus*, the ground still supports the body in that atmosphere, our "implication" in the things is felt all the more palpably to the extent

speaks in like manner of an “incessant oncoming” of “sensuous elements,” experienced as “depths without surfaces or boundaries” within a “duration which moves without breaking up into moments.” From there he proceeds to sound the sensuous depths of sleep as a kind of “involution in a medium” that disinvolves the body and deactivates its intentions. In falling into the arms of Morpheus – or the sedative swoon of Dionysus Lysios, transgressor of boundaries, releaser of enstatic restraints, splicer of identities – “the night invades, it extinguishes our personality, our efficacy, and our identity.” Borrowing fire perhaps from the passage above, Lingis suggests that in *my* place “an anonymous vigilance subsists in the heart of the night.”<sup>65</sup> Even as my candlelight is immersed and quenched, the senses burn the midnight oil, old flames kindled and flickering still in the primeval dark.

Later on Merleau-Ponty revisits this moment, laying greater stress on my rhythmic mimesis of the sleeping body:

*I breathe slowly and deeply to call forth sleep, and suddenly, one might say, my mouth communicates with some immense external lung that calls my breath forth and forces it back. A certain respiratory rhythm, desired by me just a moment ago, becomes my very being, and sleep, intended until then as a signification, turns itself into a situation (PhP 219).*

In an earlier chapter we cast Dionysus in the role of a body without organs in the sense that the god appeared to waver between bodies – divine, animal, and vegetal – while defying static closure into any one of them. This undecided nature carried over into Dionysian ecstasy, whereby the god was thought to enter the body of the well-attuned host (*enthousiasmos*), exposing it to a generative disorganization that undermined the segregation of its sensory modalities while decomposing its identity and its very subjectivity – its ipseological and anthropological difference. The free variable previously assigned to mark the phantom body in its pact with the “natural world,” the same position occupied by Dionysus in the earlier analysis of sleep, is now filled by an organ apparently without a body. An “immense external lung that calls my breath forth and forces it back.”

What are we to make of this? One promising hint can be gleaned from Merleau-Ponty’s lecture course on passivity, where the prepersonal body is styled as an organic timepiece, not in the mechanistic sense to be sure, but an organ of temporal *expression*. “The body is not an instrument,” he writes, “but an organ . . . not a mass of *einmalig* [singular] givens, but a

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that the anteriority of the ob-ject is swallowed up by an indefinite, sensuous depth, which bewilders perceptual distinctions between interiority and exteriority.

<sup>65</sup> Lingis, *The Imperative*, 10-15.

spatiotemporal structure . . . i.e. time is incorporated, sedimented in it through its generality” (IP 196, clauses reordered). Once we append this to a complementary thought in the *Phenomenology*, namely that “one’s own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism,” the outlandish image of the lung begins to assume a more recognizable shape (PhP 209). As much as it remains external to mine, whose respiratory rhythms are susceptible to willful modification, this organ is not without a body after all. It belongs to the general structure of organic intercorporeity, to which respiration owes its institution. Like the songs and migrations of birds and the efflorescence of the shrub in the epigraph from Claudel, respiration is one way in which time has been *organized* into the concerted rhythms of life-time. The life-world owes its expressive unity to this synchronicity, or better said perhaps, this kairotic concurrence. Like our lungs, our hearts “keep time” with those of others, from antelope to artichoke, thrumming and fluttering as one in the stillness of night and the windswept day. Thus is the irrecoverable past of the first pulse, the first breaths, sedimented into our bodies, which retain that “rhythmic sustention” in the syncope of consciousness and all the unwilled off-beats of the understanding. Thus do the preconscious pulsations of nature, prelusive to human nature, recycle and mutely respire through every interspecific organ of the world. To rehash a motif from Gary Snyder, one might say that we are synced to “the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive” (cf. §22).

This brings us to the second variation on the theme of sleep. Where we drifted off with the philosopher, the poet now wakes us. Merleau-Ponty sets the tone with a final remark about the “anonymous vigilance of the senses,” thanks to which the dormant body is alerted to disturbances in its surroundings. On his assessment, being wide asleep in this way “is surely what makes waking up possible: things will return through these half-open doors, or the sleeper will return through them to the world (PhP 166f.). In chapter 3 we bid to enter these half-open doors through “Trying to Wake Up,” a prose poem by Michaux. You may recall his evocative portrayal of the dissociative aspects of that experience, which we have recurred to from time to time. “The night leaves me cadaverous,” he begins. And “the corpse has to be revived.” Upon waking from a dreamless, deathlike sleep, however, *I* do not take the place of that “unseeing and nearly unthinking mass” (Merleau-Ponty) the instant I open my eyes. For the most part, I am still submerged in the atmosphere of sleep, into which every punctilio of personal existence is sensuously dispersed. In other words, the day is begun anonymously before it dawns on me. In

the predawn fog of these moments, Michaux muses, one is “indeterminate,” “uncircumscribed”: “Neither leaf, nor man, nor anything” but “a sea of clouds” or “a globulous sea” or an “immensely gigantic chloroformed amoeba” – a primeval congener of Merleau-Ponty’s “immense external lung.” Then, as though to reenact the embryonic movements leading up to the birth of my person, *I* gradually emerge from that atmosphere. Redivivus! Compelled by an inkling of personal possibilities “to become active again, definite,” yet “reduced in size,” “I gropingly aim at becoming a shape with feet or legs or pseudopods” that *organizes* my body, “dividing my being up and down.” As Michaux concludes suggestively, “I begin to bud.”

But because I remain in the vegetative state of a “semicorpse” afloat in semisleep, whose “one indisputable reality” is paralysis, I yawn and yaw through the seacloud under “layers” of benumbing resistance to arousal. Because I am not yet anchored by “the weight of the center of my person,” the body floats free of it, back into that atmosphere which threatens to redisperse me. Michaux offers that you lie half-buried by these layers of sleep “the way you sometimes lie in the bed of a constantly repeated melody without being able to get out of it.” Every measured breath repeats that nocturne of the pre-world as you inhale its atmosphere, involuntarily exhale yourself, and dissipate again into vaporous anonymity. More often than not he succeeds in facing the music of man in the key of Michaux through a “vertical surge” in which his center returns, “easy, strong, willful.” But this is by no means assured. Michaux relates how he sometimes wakes “on four legs,” as though the upright thrust of *homo erectus* were not strong or willful enough to raise his head above the heady atmosphere of indefinite existence. Noting the lifelong fascination with “quadrupeds and multipeds,” which this matutinal rebirth has come to instill in him, Michaux observes how, even into morning while still “drunken” with sleep, “I am still undecided.” So that things present themselves to a noncommittal future, one that vacillates between ecstatic possibilities. One is reminded of the way the enthusiastic maenads reeled between the ecstasies of Dionysus’ polymorphic renascence in them. As Michaux recounts this bleary bacchanal, it is “as if I were being asked to have a career as a pigeon, a leaf, a little girl, a hedge, a pebble, and I say neither yes or no.” So does each new day recycle my natal emergence from what will later become “the not me’s” – animal, vegetal, elemental.<sup>66</sup>

We sleep as we snore in the time of the other. And each morning, in trying to wake up, we reenact an allohistorical ascent through the circadian cycles of the earth and the many-layered

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<sup>66</sup> “Trying to Wake Up,” in Michaux, *Darkness Moves*, 97-100.

rhythms of the world beneath our own. Only after climbing out of bed and finding *my* stride do I recover that song of myself which fell silent in the silent night.

Just as the heart does not stop at the start of *my* day but continues to beat with a life-time of its own, so does the phantom body subsist, standing vigil, at the wakeful heart of the everyday. As Lingis attests, there are “moments when the night summons us in the high noon of a world.” Provided one is able to suppress the “orders shouted by and to others and stamped on things” in one’s everyday dealings with them and “hearkens to the wakefulness of sensibility in the inner night of one’s organism, one can sense the summons of the night itself.”<sup>67</sup> As we learned from Merleau-Ponty, I need only close my eyes, lie down, and immersively listen to the cadences that attune my body to the voices of things I would otherwise fail to hear. But I can also perform this auscultation in the very midst of my exertions and excursions, upright, with eyes wide open: while running midstride, for instance, or scaling a mountainside. Or whenever the allegros of the circulation, respiration, and muscle flexion all stridently vie for our attention. From the wake of sleep and into our waking lives, prehistory welters “like a dark tide through the hearts of men.” About this “current of existence,” which surges beneath the surface of advertent and affordant presence, Merleau-Ponty writes that “we never know if [its] forces carry us belong to us or belong to our body” (PhP 174). Customarily they disappear into the visceral depths of the “absent body” – to retrofit Leder’s seminal concept. But the surface can be broken, indeed, by the forces themselves. If fractured by physical exertion, it is shattered by the breakdown of the body. As Leder points out, in sickness and in death the same vital rhythms, which normally disappear from our conscious horizons, can acutely “dys-appear” in the dull throb of the ache, the anguished heave of the paroxysm, and all the pulsations of pain. In his idiomatic sense of the word, protracted “dys-appearance” intensifies the “recessive” dysposition occasioned by pain and discomfort.<sup>68</sup> A patient who suffers chronic pain is cast into the innermost recesses of her body to find herself within an inescapable atmosphere of agony, an incorrigible mood of somatic abjection. But for us whom fate has spared such torments, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the phantom body, which “appears around our personal existence” (viz. beyond its horizons) just as it disappears into the visceral depths, “is taken for granted,” even if “I entrust [to it] the care of *keeping me alive*” (PhP 86, emphasis mine).

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<sup>67</sup> Lingis, *The Imperative*, 11, 54.

<sup>68</sup> See chapter 2, “The Recessive Body,” in Leder, *Absent Body*.

Granted to me by a lineage of anonymous others, organic existence literally breathes life into *le corps propre*. The intakings and outgivings of the lungs, the systole and diastole of the heart, circadian and menstrual cycles. As much as these rhythms sync with our running stride and with lovers or pets asleep at our side, so do they also rise and fall with the sun, wax and wane with moon, the tides, the turnings of the seasons, and much besides. These cycles too have accrued to the body. But where life-time revives a past that was never present to me, they intimate a past that was never present to *any* sentient being, the time of the earth itself. So far from being cut out of whole cloth, the world-historical fabric of our own personal and generational existence is woven from the wider temporal weft of the organic past and the deeper temporal warp of the elemental. Our lives are rather recent and miniscule folds in the temporal tapestry. Even so, one might say, they never cease to re-plicate its design.

#### §49. Time out of the River: The Ecumenical Floodgates of the *Phenomenology*

There is no need to personify a river: it is much to literally alive in its own way, and like air and earth themselves is a creature much more powerful, much more basic, than any living thing the earth has borne.  
—James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*<sup>69</sup>

In the last section we explored how the account of “natural time” in the *Phenomenology* circumvents the ecumenical closure of temporality. By educing the traces of anonymous existence, Merleau-Ponty evinces an organic time configured not by conscious acts or the projective activity of the understanding, but by the intersensory rhythms of the prepersonal body, which ground our kairotic concurrence with other forms of life and with it the expressive unity of the life-world. Although he does not thematize it in our terms, we also saw how his analysis of our sensuous exposure to the lithification retraced by the fossil and the circadian rhythms of sleep open spaces for the passage of elemental time. But when we come to the “Temporality” chapter of the *Phenomenology*, where the theme is ostensibly brought to a close, none of these new directions is pursued. The prepersonal body, the organism, the cyclical pulse of “natural time” all fall by the wayside. Instead, Merleau-Ponty largely confines himself to recapitulating Husserl’s theory of inner time-consciousness, viz. the passive, transition synthesis of the living present, with a handful of emendations from the early Heidegger thrown in for good measure.

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<sup>69</sup> Agee, *Let Us Now Praise*, 222.



“Time must be understood as a subject,” he notoriously claims, “and the subject must be understood as time” (PhP 445). Merleau-Ponty recognizes that neither Husserlian time-consciousness nor the extemporization of Heideggerian Dasein – never a subject but only a “subject” – should be conflated with thethetic constitution of time as an objective series or an a priori form of transcendental subjectivity. He also makes an attempt to distinguish his view by insisting that time cannot be thought apart from the *embodied* perspective of the subject, pre-thetically engaged in the world. Into that perspective, however, Merleau-Ponty smuggles an implicit teleology, which is at once homological (Husserl) and ipseocentric (Heidegger). That time is ineluctably perspectival means that it never entirely congeals into a hypostatic construct: e.g. idealized space-time, “absolute self-presence,” or “immobile self-identity” (PhP 450). But if it flows, we are told this is only because it is always *underway toward* constitution by “ultimate consciousness” or self-projection, which effectively stems the hyperstatic dispersion of that flow by ensuring it is made present to itself (i.e. statically actualized) (PhP 448, 450). As Merleau-Ponty articulates this teleological commitment, “it is essential to time to be not only actual time or time that flows, but also,” – viz. as the precondition of these – “time that *knows itself*,” by “constituting itself” or “projecting itself in the present” (PhP 450, 457, emphasis mine).<sup>70</sup>

To all appearances, the conclusions this leads him to draw in this chapter confirm our suspicions concerning his usage of the terms: “natural world,” which we have continued to mark as a cypher for the ecumene; and “natural self,” which outwardly anthropomorphizes anonymous existence; as well as the equivocal “natural time.” Simply put, his conclusions tell against a disambiguation of any of these terms that respects the existential and temporal determinations of the ecological difference.<sup>71</sup> Citing Heidegger’s allusion to the *lumen naturale*, reinterpreted in *Being and Time* as the clearing of disclosure, *there (Da)*, in the world, Merleau-Ponty returns that light to its Cartesian source. With nary a mention of its hidden side, he equates nature with that which “perception shows to me” by the self-giving “light of consciousness” (PhP 456, cf. SZ 133). And where he elsewhere upholds the “absolute past of nature” as the “presence of a past

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<sup>70</sup> To avoid the idealistic connotations of this assertion, Merleau-Ponty might have spoken more carefully here of a time that *perceives* itself, which would certainly fit easier with the interchangeable associations he sets up between temporal-subjective self-presencing and constitution. The constant slippage into Husserlian (and Heideggerian) terminology gives an indication of the undeveloped nature of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis in this chapter, which shows him still negotiating the tangled conceptual thickets of his predecessors before twisting free of them to arrive at his own remedial theory of time.

<sup>71</sup> Namely: earth and world; being-in-the-world and being-of-the-earth; world history and elemental allohistory.

which is absence” – affectively retained if never actively apprehended by personal existence – here he professes that “the distant past has . . . a temporal position in relation to my present, but only insofar as it itself has been present, insofar as it was ‘in its time’ traversed by my life” (PhP 438). For “we hold time *in its entirety* and we are present to ourselves because we are *present in and toward the world*” (PhP 448, emphasis mine). Just as the *Phenomenology* appears to be leading us toward an ecology of time that gives full measure to its transcendence of world history and its irrecoverable ab-sense from the present, Merleau-Ponty reinstates its immanence to subjectivity as being-in-the-world, to ekstasis under the wider rubric of enstasis (PhP 454).<sup>72</sup>

So far from an anomalous lapse into the ecumenical trappings of his predecessors, these conclusions are the direct result of the privilege Merleau-Ponty assigns to *le corps propre* as the methodological point of entry into the being of nature and the being of time. Any phenomenological reduction that falls short of bracketing all forms of enstasis, say by presuming the unassailability of my own embodied perspective on the world, is bound to fall back upon a teleology of immanence. My own body stands out from itself indeed, but only “in and toward the *world*” and this primarily by virtue of the understanding, which has already enclosed existence into self-presence set apart from other beings, and being into horizons under which these beings are made present (locally and temporally) as corporeal extensions of itself. As a result, nature is dys-closed as the “natural world” in the sense of “the horizon of all horizons” affording the body’s intentional activity, its inhabitation or incorporation. And insofar as operative intentionality finds its telos in act intentionality, nature becomes the horizons of possible constitution, the world qua “homeland of all rationality” in Merleau-Ponty’s homological turn of phrase (PhP 454). At the same time, the allegedly indefeasible mineness or ownness of the body feeds back into the purported identity of subjectivity and temporality as their common, ipseocentric orientation. Thus we read that “we are always centered in the present,” just as I am in my body, while the “dehiscence of the present toward the future is the archetype of the relation of self to self, and it sketches out an interiority or an ipseity” (PhP 450f.).

In the final phase of his thought, Merleau-Ponty will reformulate the phenomenological reduction of consciousness, which had ultimately reinstated subjectivity, as an ecological education that “de-centers subjectivity” (Toadvine) by methodologically “suspending” it

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<sup>72</sup> As Merleau-Ponty redraws the concept that Heidegger sought to erase: “The subject is being-in-the-world and the world remains ‘subjective’, since its texture and its articulations are sketched out by the subject’s movement of transcendence” (PhP 454).

(Barbaras).<sup>73</sup> Where the *Phenomenology* begins with *le corps propre* and ultimately relegates the ecstasy of existence to corporeal being-in-the-world, *The (In)Visible* recommences with the body standing out from itself, out from the world itself, in the carnal ecstasy of existence: being-of-the-earth. Only by grappling with the untimely relation of the body to a “time [that] is not the pulsation of the subject, but of Nature” does Merleau-Ponty eventually rethink the being of nature in its wild difference from the world (N 119). Thus does “natural time” receive its ecological determination as a complicated triad of temporal movements: the prehistory of the prepersonal body, the history of the personal, and the elemental allohistory of the flesh. In Merleau-Ponty’s ecology of being, each is implicated in the abyssal present, never fulfilled but ever infilled like a streambed with traces of the “immense latent content of the past, the future, and the elsewhere,” all of which the present “*announces and which it conceals*” (VI 259, emphasis mine). The aim of this section is to see how this turn develops out of the immanent critique (of immanence) that he will come to level against the teleology underpinning his earlier, subjectivist conception of time.

The figure of the stream launches us into the opening pages of the “Temporality” chapter where Merleau-Ponty gainsays the notion that time flows like a river (PhP 433-435). On his appraisal, this “famous metaphor,” which has “been able to survive since Heraclitus,” is “in fact quite confused.” Yet the metaphor in Merleau-Ponty’s sights bears little resemblance to the River Time into which Heraclitus enjoined us to tread.<sup>74</sup> The apparent target is the commonsense view of time as an “actual succession” of events flowing from the past toward the future. Merleau-Ponty also takes aim at the metaphysical conceit of time boiled down to a “fluid substance” in itself. For the naive as for the critical realist, time is metaphysically posited as a “real process” or

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<sup>73</sup> Toadvine, “Natural Time and Immemorial Nature,” 214. Cf. Renaud Barbaras and Paul Milan (trans.), “Merleau-Ponty and Nature,” *Research in Phenomenology* 31 (2001): 37.

<sup>74</sup> Much like the concept of *panta rhei*, to which Plato refers in the *Cratylus*, Heraclitus’ celebrated fragment concerning time and the river does not belong to the group of aphorisms whose authenticity is confirmed. Instead, it emerges from a nest of paraphrases, interpolations, and abridgments. “One cannot step twice into the same river . . .” (D 91, Kahn LI) is a paraphrase from Plutarch presumably inspired by turns by Plato and Cratylus. Emphasizing the perpetual flux of a river which is in no wise the same, Plato and Aristotle furnish strikingly similar paraphrases. Thus they attribute to Heraclitus the idea that everything is bound up in an *absolute* movement of change. On more careful inspection, however, such readings ride roughshod over the sameness that Heraclitus explicitly attributes to the river (see §50). This is conveyed by the unclipped fragment Plutarch likely had in mind: “As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them” (D 12, Kahn L). Merleau-Ponty’s *en passant* jab at Heraclitus, then, appears to be based on an unstudied acceptance of the paraphrastic eisegeses of the first ecumenical thinkers, a counterfeit that inexplicably carries currency to this day. This will prove important to bear in mind as we examine the shortcomings of his high and dry critique of the River Time.

an objective totality that absolutely transcends our relative perspectives.<sup>75</sup> Merleau-Ponty attributes the historical longevity of the metaphor to the fact that “we surreptitiously place in the river” – more precisely, *beside* or *on* it – “a witness to its flowing,” since “time presupposes a view upon time.”<sup>76</sup> As he reasons, any understanding of temporal succession entails a finite observer, situated in “a certain place in the world.” Only from this stable standpoint can temporal changes in objects (e.g. from present to past occurrence) be tracked over a linear series that integrates successive experiences of them. What follows is something of a *reductio ad absurdum* of the River Time, in which Merleau-Ponty examines the flow of the river’s waters through space from each of the two possible standpoints that could be implied by the metaphor. He then argues that each contradicts the homology to the passage of time. Considering first the experience of the observer who bears witness from the riverbank, Merleau-Ponty points out that the masses of water that flow by do not proceed downstream toward the future, but recede into her past. Relative to her lived perspective, what is perceived does not flow toward what will be perceived but subsides into what has been. From this vantage point the direction of the current is the inverse of the direction of time: what lies downstream has already happened; what lies upstream is yet to come. Merleau-Ponty then considers an observer *on* the river, “placed in a boat” that follows the current. In this case, the movement downstream is indeed a passage toward the future. Yet this future is not given in the flow of the current, for the same mass of water accompanies the spectator as what is presently perceived along the way. Rather, “the future is in those new landscapes that await [her] at the estuary,” which are yet to be perceived. From this line of reasoning, Merleau-Ponty concludes that the metaphor is based on a false equivalence. He generalizes this conclusion as follows:

If the objective world is detached from the finite perspectives that open onto it, and if it is posited in itself, then all that can be found throughout it are “nows.” Moreover, these nows, not being present to anyone, have no temporal character and could not succeed one another. The definition of time, which is implicit in the comparisons made by common sense and which could be formulated as “a succession of nows,” does not merely commit the error of treating the past and the future as presents: it is in fact inconsistent, since it destroys the very notion of the “now” and the very notion of succession (PhP 435).

A schematization of Merleau-Ponty’s refutation of the metaphor:

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<sup>75</sup> Such is the traditional interpretation of Heraclitus’ doctrine of flux (*panta rhei*).

<sup>76</sup> As Merleau-Ponty notes, we are given to say ‘the river flows’ when what we mean by this metonymy is that the river’s *current* or its *waters* flow (cf. PhP 434). The ambiguity, which meanders between the literal and figurative meaning of ‘the flowing river’, has been a perennial source of confusion, as we shall see.

1. Suppose that the flow of time is equivalent to that of a river current: *as time flows from the past to the future, so does the current flow from the source of the river to the estuary.*
2. “Time presupposes a view upon time.” More precisely, time’s flow presupposes a standpoint from which we can experience things (events) passing through it.
3. Therefore (from 1-2), the flow of the current must likewise presuppose a standpoint from which we can experience things (objects) passing through it.
4. But experiences of the things that pass through the river current from every possible view we might take toward it contradict its supposed equivalence to the flow of time (1).
  - i. If we are on the riverside, then our experience contradicts the supposed equivalence (1), because the posited flow of events through time is the inverse of the observed flow of objects through the current.
  - ii. If we are on the river, then our experience contradicts the supposed equivalence (1), because the posited flow of events through time does not correspond to the observed flow of objects *through* the current (but only outside of it).
5. Therefore (from 1-4), it is not the case that the flow of time is equivalent to that of a river current.

Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the River Time is perplexing, not least since his interpretation of it runs counter to how it was originally conceived. As a result, I contend that he deftly overturns the static and hypostatic equivalences of the realist only to return us to an ecumenical understanding that discloses the hyperstatic passage of time into the ecstatic structure of world history. Otherwise put, his analysis obscures the elemental dimension of time that Heraclitus and others first found *in the flowing waters* of the river. The hyper-ecstatic experience of that flow gives the lie to Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of the hypothesis (italicized in premise 1). And yet this experience is at the source of why the lived truth of the River Time has stood the test of time as something more, albeit more simple, than a metaphor.

The first indication that something is amiss comes when Merleau-Ponty pretends to place us back “in the river” while effectively leaving us high and dry (“in a boat”). We encountered a strikingly similar maneuver in Casey’s analysis of the high seas from chapter 6. There one’s sheer displacement by the elemental being of the ocean was obviated by the provision of a “certain place in the world,” namely, a sea-worthy vessel that served to ground the standpoint of one’s own body, giving it an air of inviolability out there amidst the desolate wilderness.

Merleau-Ponty's move from the riverbank into the riverboat yields much the same result. The river is placed on view for the bystander as it is for the navigator. Situated beside it, the first spectator observes the currents rushing by before her eyes in the form of static, homologous entities (e.g. "masses of water") that together compose the *riverscape* (cf. §37). Situated beneath and around the buoyant extension of her bodily standpoint, the water forms for the second the seemingly stationary foreground behind which other such entities grouped into landscapes (e.g. those "at the estuary") appear through a kind of induced movement to flow in the background.

For Merleau-Ponty's argument to be valid these two standpoints must capture, structurally, all the possible views we might take toward the river. I think they do, but only trivially. For the equivalence to the flow of time needn't be predicated on a view upon the river current from which to perceive things (events) passing through it. Contra Merleau-Ponty, the "primordial experience" of time does not reveal "a moving milieu that recedes from us, like the landscape from the window of a train" (PhP 443). Rather, since the original ecological formulation of the "metaphor" by Heraclitus, who has us "*step into the river,*" its force has derived from an elemental ekstasis, from the possibility of our immersion into the *hyperstatic* flow of water – hereafter distinguished by the term "flux" (see §50 below). The flux of time does indeed presuppose an experience of it. However, it does not necessitate the *structure* of experience built into the second and third premises. Merleau-Ponty overlooks the elementary experience of time for two reasons. First, it involves a dispersal of the presumptively impervious perspective of my own body and the displacement of its standpoint in the world. Second, it involves an exposure to an elemental *flux* that has not been placed on view therein, has not been actively organized into a *flow* of intentional objects. Namely, discrete perceptual wholes such as "masses of water," which enter into static (linear) or ecstatic (non-linear) spatio-temporal relations. This oversight, which stems from Merleau-Ponty's enstatic starting point (*le corps propre*) and its teleological inertia, betrays a deeper blindness to the entire range of lived experience he later dubs carnal. This does much to explain why the River Time of the *Phenomenology* is virtually interchangeable with such abstract temporal metaphors as pearls on a string, books on a shelf, and images reeling by on a filmstrip. Once we leap into the possibility he discounts here, that of immersion in the waters of the river, it will become clear that this is no metaphysical metaphor at all but a lived expression of the fluent being of time.

Before we make that leap (§50), it is important to clarify what is at stake in doing so. To re-hone the scythe of my critique, I accept that Merleau-Ponty's refutation of the naive and critical realist versions of the thesis (1) is valid and sound as it stands. On an ecological disambiguation of the thesis, however, I wish to argue that his argument misses its critical mark. What's more, the second and third premises, if taken as blanket assertions about the *flow* of time and water – including but not limited to its (hypo)static passage – are demonstrably falsified by lived experience of the interpretandum, specifically, by the hyperstatic *flux* it entails.

In order to understand how all this works, we must first come to grips with what Merleau-Ponty means by saying that “time presupposes a view upon time” (2). Note that his argument only requires that he defend this claim as it pertains to the realist conceptions of time he sets out to refute. Yet I contend that he commits himself to it as a general principle pertaining to time as such, which he defends on the basis of unscrutinized assumptions he borrows from classical phenomenology. To say that time presupposes a view upon it is not to say that we perceive the past, present, or future as we do, say, trees and tables. As outlined above, the principle rather asserts that the flow of time presupposes a standpoint from which we can experience particular things (events) passing through it. My contention, then, is that Merleau-Ponty believes this holds true however we understand the flow in question. The naive realist, who equates being with what is actually present in particular, conceives the flow as *static*, i.e. as a linear succession of undivided “nows” transpiring from a past, which is no longer, toward the future, which is not yet.<sup>77</sup> The critical realist, who equates being with what is universally present, conceives the flow as *hypostatic*, i.e. as a “fluid substance” underlying that appearance of linear succession without being part of it, since that substance contains the totality of possible “nows” within it. As Merleau-Ponty argues, each of these positions implies a perspective that “destroys the very notion of the ‘now’ and the very notion of succession” (PhP 435). If our view were confined to an imploded “now,” the *mens momentanea* (Leibniz), then its differentiation from the past and future and integration into succession would be impossible. If we assume the impossible “view from nowhere” presupposed by the second, then the “now” would explode into the *nunc stans* (Augustine), an eternity in which all times are simultaneously present, precluding succession behind the veil of its mere appearance.

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. “It is often said that in the things themselves the future is not yet, the past is no longer, and the present is strictly speaking merely a limit, the result being that time collapses” (PhP 434).

For Merleau-Ponty, time's static succession "from the present to another present" is not grounded on a supersensuous reality in itself whose "appearance" I might simply observe and record. It presupposes a perspective that is caught up in it. And this must be phenomenologically interrogated. Setting about that task, he explains that, contra realism, "I am not the spectator of this passage, I accomplish it" (PhP 444). Contra idealism, however, this is not to be mistaken for a judicative accomplishment. In lieu of these metaphysical alternatives, Merleau-Ponty follows Husserl in identifying this perspectival achievement of the conscious subject with the thetic constitution of static succession, which involves interconnecting the past, present, and future through explicit memories and expectations (or predictions). But this active temporal synthesis is not merely a matter of stringing together a series of atomistic "nows" already arranged like points in space. Instead, it derives its intentional objects from the *ecstatic* structure of lived time, which is *not* actively constituted but passively founded. Husserl's genetic account of the "living present" (*lebenhaftige* or *lebendige Gegenwart*) is expanded by Merleau-Ponty into a generative analysis of the "field of presence," in which each given present is tacitly pre-given as "an impending past and a recent future" within the wider horizons of some lived slice of my lifetime (e.g. "my day") (PhP 438f.). Likewise, every past is a "future that has already happened" and every future a "past to come," so that "whatever is past and present for me is present in the world" – more precisely, *appresented* (PhP 445, 447).<sup>78</sup> According to the Husserlian theory of inner time-consciousness expounded in this chapter, each perceptual "presentation," "presentation," or "primal impression" of what is actually present to consciousness is accompanied by the *passive synthesis* of implicit "apperceptions," "presentifications," or "adumbrations," of it (*viz.* retentions and protentions/anticipations), which extend the now-phase of the primal impression into the appresented horizons of its proximal past and future phases

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<sup>78</sup> This expansion from Husserl's living present to a field of presence is part and parcel of the move from genetic to a generative phenomenology mentioned above and overtly alluded to at one point in the chapter (PhP 452). The apperceptive horizons of the living present, correlated with passive temporal synthesis, overlap with the perceptual horizons correlated with the active temporal synthesis of egoic consciousness. Nevertheless, to underscore their difference, Husserl methodologically restricts his analysis to a genetic account of time-consciousness in his published works. His focus falls, that is, on the horizons of the living present, where the retentions and protentions emanating from the primal impression are affectively strong enough to convey a sense of the past and future without the intervention of explicit acts of remembering or expectation. Merleau-Ponty's *generative* analysis of the field of presence broadens the living present to include "this current moment that I spend working, along with the horizon of the day that has already gone by behind it and the horizon of the evening and the night out in front of it." On his view, my explicit recollection of the "distant past" is a not a matter of merely retrieving what was given to perception in isolation but of "placing myself back" into the pre-given field of presence, into the entire nest of appresented horizons in which it was originally given (PhP 438).



within consciousness.<sup>79</sup> That the synthesis is *passive* entails that these retentive and protentive phases are not the correlates of egoic acts. As Merleau-Ponty captures the point, “these do not emanate from a central I, but somehow from my perceptual field itself, which drags along behind itself its horizon of retentions and eats into the future through its protentions” (PhP 439). But where one might expect him to elaborate on this “somehow,” say, by appealing to his predecessor’s account of the affective/motivational and kinesthetic underpinnings of that emanation, the chapter leaves us in the lurch.<sup>80</sup>

Merleau-Ponty appropriates another Husserlian concept when he identifies the passive synthesis in question as a “synthesis of transition” (*Übergangssynthese*). By this he means a synthesis that yields the *passage* of each new moment from the imminently protended future to the impressional present and the passage of the just elapsed impression into the retentive past. In it the “dehiscence” of adumbrations propagates itself over the field of presence. Every protention in the futural arc is drawn closer to the impressional present while every retention is pushed farther back toward the distant past. At a stroke, then, each perceptual act indirectly prompts a passive synthesis that differentiates all the iterated retentions of what has been and all the iterated protentions of what is still to come from when they were just a moment ago (cf. PhP 442f., 451). Like a stone cast into a pool of water, the act ripples outward through all time.<sup>81</sup> As Merleau-

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<sup>79</sup> According to Husserl’s well-known thesis, the perception of a temporal object (e.g. a melody, a dance, a bird in flight) would be impossible if only a presentation (*Präsentation*) of the instantaneous now-phase of the object were given to experience; as though the stream of consciousness amounted to a series of discrete, atomistic points of experiencing – like a string of pearls – synthesized by acts of remembering and imagining. According to Husserl, once we suspend the natural attitude toward time as quantitative construct available for observation and necessary for calculation, we begin to see how static temporality is founded on a passive synthesis of the horizontal thickness, or ecstatic temporal structure, of the “living present” (*lebhaftige* or *lebendige Gegenwart*). On his analysis, every intuitive (e.g. perceptual) presentation, or “primal impression,” of the now-phase of a temporal object is also a “making-present” (*Gegenwärtigung*, presentation) that includes a lived yet non-intuitive presentification, (*Vergegenwärtigung*), i.e. and *appresentation* (*Appräsentation*) or apperception (*Apperzeption*), of its *retentive* and *protentive* phases. In other words, the primal impression is nested within two overlapping temporal horizons. Like a fishing lure reeled to skate across the water’s surface, it trails *in its wake* a *retention* that supplies consciousness with the just-elapsed phase of the temporal object, i.e. an apperceptive awareness of the now-phase as it flows into the past. And like another lure, this one *cast forth* from the pole of intuition, a *protention* apperceptively anticipates with increasing degrees of determinacy the imminent phase of that temporal object as it approaches the impressional present (cf. PhP 438-444).

<sup>80</sup> Of course, this is at least partly due to the fact that most of the pertinent portions of Husserl’s voluminous *Nachlass* were not published or even compiled during Merleau-Ponty’s lifetime. In §30 of *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, for instance, Husserl explores the relationship between affective propagation along the protentive and retentive trajectories of the primal impression, awakening respective tendencies toward explicit expectations and recollections. For Husserl’s account of the relation between originary time-consciousness, motivation, and kinestheses, see *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 428.

<sup>81</sup> Merleau-Ponty invokes a similar image when he compares the way the impressional now-point “shines through” its retentive phases to seeing a watersunken “pebble through the volumes of water that flow over it” (PhP 441).

Ponty sums it up, “here there is no multiplicity of interconnected phenomena,” arranged in the manner of static particulars, “but rather a single phenomenon of flowing” through “my field of presence” (PhP 442, 438). That is to say, each “moment” *is* nothing more than its ecstatic relation to others and that relation is constantly changing.

Merleau-Ponty brings the passive synthesis of lived time into sharper relief by comparing it to spatial apperception. At this level, he explains, the ekstases of the past and future “are not given to us through discrete acts” (viz. representations of the past, “conjectures and fantasies” of the future) but virtually emanate from what is given to intuition “just like the back of the house whose front I am looking at, or like the background beneath the figure” (PhP 439, cf. 70f.). Contrary to what one is led to believe from the relative immobility and disinvolvement of the body vis-à-vis the river, Merleau-Ponty modifies the Husserlian concept of intuition in this context just as he did in his earlier treatment of space, enlarging it to encompass the entire spectrum of comportment, or sensorimotor incorporation.<sup>82</sup> At the moving center of the field of presence we thus find the “current moment I spend working,” ecstatically incorporating “my tools” while unthematically “caught up in my task rather than standing before it” (PhP 438f.). Here is the lived body, in-habiting “a certain place,” that is “always present for me yet engaged” with things, “making the pulse of its duration reverberate through them all” (PhP 95). From this standpoint, the procession of protentions toward and recession of retentions from what is actually made present by my bodily actions (e.g. a cup I grasp) are conceivably pre-given through kinesthetic sensations as adumbrations of its affordant senses.<sup>83</sup> On Merleau-Ponty’s view, this comportmental complex configures all modes of perception beneath the threshold of attention (“to see an object is to come to inhabit it”), which allows him to translate passive synthesis directly into the operative intentionality of the body schema (PhP 71, PhP 441).<sup>84</sup>

Finally, Merleau-Ponty’s intercorporeal conception of the body schema, writ large in his institutional theory of gesture as the concerted expression of anonymous existence, enables him

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This metaphor forms part of his larger claim that the ecstatic structure of the living present is not bound together by signification, but through what we have been calling implication.

<sup>82</sup> Note that this development is already incipient in Husserl’s later published writings, from *Ideas II* onward.

<sup>83</sup> Once again, we must note however that Merleau-Ponty neglects to unpack this dimension here.

<sup>84</sup> This is evidently what he means when he compares our relation to “the present that is about to arrive” to how “my own gesture is already its goal.” But this rings true only if we recall that gestures themselves are preconscious residues of unscripted intentions unfolding through habitual action, which needn’t involve (consciousness of) a *deliberate* goal or effort (PhP 445, cf. 442).

to conceive of an ecstatic dehiscence of temporal adumbrations that disseminate beyond one's own lifetime.<sup>85</sup> In other words, the phenomenal correlates of my activities trace out the "intersubjective" horizons of a past and future that radiate outward: from the living present to my field of presence, thence to the possible objects of explicit recollection and expectation (or procedural memory and skillful projection), and finally toward the immemorial past of my "preexistence" and the unforeseeable (impracticable) future of my "afterlife" (PhP 434, cf.438, 457). As much as this account can be said thereby to accommodate the allohistorical horizons of life-time – or world history in the widest sense – it also prompts the ecological question as to whether it leaves room for an experience of elemental time. The upshot of Merleau-Ponty's claim that "time is born of *my* relation to things" is that the passive synthesis of lived time only eventuates in tandem with some full-fledged presentation of them (PhP 434). Such is the manner in which he remains committed to premise two of the schematization above. Although the flow of lived time is not itself incorporated or perceptually constituted, it presupposes the active standpoint of embodied consciousness. As the background requires the figure, so do the appresented horizons of time require an intentional object of an act(ion) from which to disperse. But if this is so, then it is difficult to see how my living present might ecstatically open onto a past that never was, a future that never will be, "lived" (presented) by *any* sentient being.

The problem arises when Merleau-Ponty follows in Husserl's footsteps by mistaking the teleology of active presentation with an *a priori* truth about lived time – a move he will later denounce. "We are always centered in the present," he insists (PhP 451). And "time only exists for me because I *have* a present," an (ap)prehension through which, he says, "a moment of time acquires its ineffaceable individuality" (PhP 447, emphasis mine). He goes on to extend these claims about perceptual constitution of the actual present to the field of presence, which he accords "a privileged status because it is the zone in which being and consciousness coincide" (PhP 447). Here he takes another leaf from Husserl by situating "consciousness of the present" (active presentation) at the center of that zone of immanence as the point at which the constitution of the temporal object (e.g. a tone or a bird in flight) coincides with "ultimate consciousness," the intentionally non-objective awareness through which the successive acts

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<sup>85</sup> Merleau-Ponty does not fully develop the concept of institution until after the *Phenomenology*, when the Husserlian notion of *Stiftung* is amplified and refined. Nevertheless, we have shown that this concept is already operative throughout the text, specifically in the context of gesture and life-time.

comprising that constitution are passively synthesized in their ecstatic breadth.<sup>86</sup> Whereas consciousness enters into the flow of lived time through its perceptual activity, we are told that this lived awareness of myself as continuous through the flow of experience establishes “itself all at once” as time’s being rather than a being in time. Insofar as it “reaffirms the presence of the entire past . . . and anticipates the presence of the entire future” in the apperceptive dehiscence of each lived now-point, it subtends the ecstatic structure of time *in toto*. Merleau-Ponty thus infers that “ultimate consciousness is ‘timeless’ (*zeitlos*).” That is to say, “it is not intra-temporal,” but rather personifies “a time that ‘perdures’ and that neither ‘flows by’ nor ‘changes’” (PhP 444-6).

After Husserl, Merleau-Ponty stresses how the being of time (as ultimate subjectivity) exceeds what is given through the activity of consciousness, since “perception is opaque and brings into play . . . my sensory fields and my primitive complicities with the world” (PhP 447f.)<sup>87</sup> Beneath the threshold of attention, these modalities of primary awareness open onto being beyond the horizons of perceptual givenness. Even so, he reiterates that there would be no such awareness, by virtue of which “we hold time in its entirety and we are present to ourselves,” were it not for “the actual gesture of ‘ex-istence’,” by virtue of which we are “present in and toward the world” (*ibid.*). In this way, temporality is indirectly predicated on the achievements of the understanding, conceived as a “relation of active transcendence between the subject and the world” (PhP 454). So that every temporal ekstasis is said to express “a single thrust that is subjectivity itself” (PhP 445). Consequently, even if the content of the present is not wholly positive and fully given to consciousness, the future and the past are wholly determined by that partial positivity. The overarching thrust of this analysis leads us to an ecumenical conception of time in no uncertain terms. If “time must be understood as a subject” (*viz.* ultimate subjectivity),

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<sup>86</sup> Husserl introduces “ultimate consciousness” in his early texts on time, originally published as “Supplementary Texts” (Part B) in the critical edition of his lectures on time. “There is one, unique flow of consciousness (perhaps within an ultimate consciousness),” we read there, “in which both the unity of the tone in immanent time and the unity of the flow of consciousness itself become constituted at once.” Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time, 1893–1917*, trans. Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2008), 390. The “ultimacy” of ultimate consciousness is said to consist in how it accompanies the constitutive acts as a lived awareness of their unity without becoming the intentional object of another act. Accordingly, Husserl refers to it at one point as “‘unconscious’ consciousness; that is to say, as ultimate intentionality it cannot be an object of attention . . . and therefore it can never become conscious in this particular sense” (*ibid.*, 394). As “a consciousness that would no longer have behind it any consciousness in order to be conscious of itself,” ultimate consciousness takes the place traditionally accorded to self-consciousness – the intentionally objective thematization of first-order acts – as a way out of the infinite regress of positing higher-order forms of consciousness to account for self-awareness (*ibid.*, 94).

<sup>87</sup> For Merleau-Ponty this is the crucial difference between ultimate consciousness and the transcendental subject, which presumably “catches sight of itself in absolute transparency” and is therefore “incapable of descending into time” (PhP 448).

and “the subject is being-in-the-world” full stop (viz. as projection of the world and thrown “*project* of the world”), then the being of time is ultimately dys-closed into being-in-the-world, conceived as horizons immanent to the history of the understanding (PhP 445, 454).

At this juncture, the objection might be raised that we have failed to consider the paramount importance that Merleau-Ponty attaches to affection in the “Temporality” chapter. He does after all assert that “the essence of living time” is not projection but rather “self-affection” (PhP 449). Framing this remark is an objection to Heidegger’s early commitment to the world-historical primacy of the understanding qua futural *ekstase* (“time flows from the future”) (PhP 451). What follows is an ill-founded criticism, which mistakenly imputes to Heidegger the belief that the understanding could therefore extricate itself entirely from the inauthentic present. Ironically, when collocated with his peculiar handling of the Heideggerian thesis that “time is self-affection of itself,” we find Merleau-Ponty hoisted by his own petard. For this idea, which is based on a generative interpretation of Kant’s concept of *Gemüt* (disposition), is expressly embraced by Merleau-Ponty at the very same time that he collapses affection into the understanding, hence time into the possibilities of being-understood. According to him, temporality (subjectivity) “is the one who affects” through “a *thrust* and passage toward the future,” which rebounds on itself as “the one affected,” constituted or retrojected “as a spread-out series of presents” (PhP 449f., emphasis mine). In view of everything that has been said about it over the course of our investigations, one wonders how affection could possibly be equated with a futural “thrust” unless it simply *is* a mode of projection.

While this thread appears at the nodal point in the chapter where Merleau-Ponty turns to unraveling aspects of Heidegger’s account of timeliness, it may actually be more tightly tethered to the Husserlian foundations reconstructed earlier. In his lectures on passive synthesis from the early 20s, Husserl advances a similar claim about affection. *Ceteris paribus*, he argues, affection has a “unitary tendency toward the future,” that is, one which follows “the protentional path of original time constitution.”<sup>88</sup> This does appear to capture a pervasive temporal texture of everyday experience. As we abide in or move between familiar habitats, where things are routinely available to inspection, circumspection, and readily reveal senses fixed in place and conducive to our projects, our experience is overwhelmingly tensed toward the future. This orientation owes itself less to explicit expectation than it does to a kind of inertia that sweeps us

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<sup>88</sup> Husserl, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis*, 205, cf. 119.

along – a *conatus essendi* in the face of adversity perhaps. If we find ourselves arrested, our work halted, by some reminiscent evanescence whose retentive allure directs us toward the past, or something so unprecedented and inexplicable as to bring time itself to a standstill as we stand agape, such experiences are clearly exceptional. But notice how much we must build into Husserl's *ceteris paribus* clause to establish this “unitary tendency toward the future.” It requires no less than an *ecumene*, “the world [as] the homeland of all rationality,” where that affective tendency merely confirms the teleology of the understanding (PhP 454).

If we tether Merleau-Ponty's description of self-affection to the Heideggerian pole instead, we reach the same result. Recall that for Heidegger it is not the future but the *past* that comprises the temporal ekstase of disposition. And he assumes that we can only be affected by a past that was once projected toward and actually made present in the world (§6-7). Even if the past is conspicuously missing from Merleau-Ponty's brief treatment of the affective dimension of time, he seems to share the assumption that affection is essentially world-disclosive. Under the full arc of life-time, or subjectivity as such, affection presupposes a prior act(ion), which provides the worldly anchorage for affect to become sedimented into the present. Affection is therefore subordinated to the understanding. Rather than “sketch out the empty form of the genuine event,” or the self-absence of an affective quasi-presence, our exposure to time is now reduced to nothing more than a “dehiscence of the present toward the future” said to “sketch out an interiority or an ipseity” while the “world's texture and articulations are sketched out by the subject's movement of transcendence” (PhP 168, 450, 454). This helps to explain the conclusion Merleau-Ponty draws from this analysis. Recasting his earlier description of time in terms of Heideggerian “ek-stase,” he tells us that “subjectivity is precisely this *ek-stase*, or *this projection*” (PhP 449f., emphasis mine). The other temporal ekstases of Dasein's care-structure, namely disposition (having been) and falling (making present), both cede place to the understanding (not yet), in which they are allegedly rooted. To restate Merleau-Ponty's contention, quoted at the outset of this section, we are affected by time in its entirety and the subject qua time affects itself because we understand the world (cf. PhP 448).

It is upon these foundations that he propounds in the final pages of the chapter a view of the earth that clearly aligns the *Phenomenology* with ecumenism. On the assumption that nature is nothing more than what “perception shows to me,” or more precisely what *can possibly be disclosed as* an intraworldly being, Merleau-Ponty expunges the ecological difference. Is it any

surprise, then, that he would deny that the earth, qua ~~earth~~-world, preceded man (PhP 456, sic passim)?<sup>89</sup> On the most charitable reading, this is wholly warranted. Merleau-Ponty's ostensible target is once again the metaphysical realist, for whom 'earth' and 'world' have roughly equivalent *theoretical* meanings. If he is merely adopting that acceptance for the sake of argument, then the claim that the earth or world is not "prior to man" would simply amount to another affirmation of the ontological primacy of perception against the belief that these *hypostatic concepts* correspond to the ultimate nature of reality in itself, or being(ness) beyond the possibility of experience. This reading is supported by his appeal to Laplace's nebula. Merleau-Ponty declares that "nothing will ever lead me to believe what a nebula, which could not be seen by anyone, might mean." On the one hand, he accepts that the term 'nebula' functions like 'nature', 'earth' and 'world', which validly signify a class or totality of entities known to predate the existence of human beings on the theoretical timescale. On the other, he is careful to remind us that from our lived standpoint in the perceived world, "Laplace's nebula is not behind us, at our origin, but rather out in front of us in the cultural world." Like the objective timescale it occupies, the nebula is laid out before us in the virtual space of concepts (objects of intellectual consciousness). Merleau-Ponty's overarching point is that each of these concepts "presupposes *our* pre-scientific experience of the world, and this reference to the *lived* world contributes to the valid signification of the statement": 'the earth emerged from a primitive nebula prior to human life'.

As much as this argument rings true for the phenomenologist, and setting aside its divisive reception among and ontological positivists of all stripes, its elisions serve only to underscore the fallow state of the earth in this chapter. The same could be said of the prehistoric world. In view of his earlier acknowledgment of the prehuman past of the life-world, we might wonder why Merleau-Ponty has elected to deconstruct a theoretical assertion about the prehuman world without one mention of *its* pre-theoretical retention in the sensuous depths of the present. Absent this provision, his avowal that "there is no world without an Existence that bears its [correlative] structure" is liable to be read as a claim about *human* existence *tout court* (PhP 456). Pairing this with the ontological precedence of "nature that perception shows to me," let us give Merleau-Ponty the benefit of the doubt by assuming that 'Existence' and 'me' refer to

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<sup>89</sup> That he adopts 'earth' and 'world' as interchangeable words in this discussion is symptomatic of its ecological indifference.

neither human being nor the *solus ipse* but to embodied life in general, or some instance thereof. This would allow him to maintain his commitment to a prehuman world, which was never actually present to us but only appresented, on the condition that it has been present to sentient being-in-the-world. But what of the earth? Does Merleau-Ponty maintain, against the metaphysical ecumenist, its difference from the world or give us any reason to think that it transcends the history of the life-world? On the contrary, the only other mention of earth in this chapter disappears into world, betraying yet another instance of the classical erasure of the ecological difference (*oikoumenē* *gē*, earth-world) whose course we have plotted from Plato to Heidegger. For Merleau-Ponty this “ground” takes on the Husserlian sense of *Erdboden* as *Urheimat* (cf. §12 above), or in his words, that which only “persists beneath movement and rest because *I inhabit the earth*” (PhP 453). Rather than be thought as the uninhabitable (self-concealing) basis for dwelling in the world, earth is grounded on it. As no more than the fundamental affordance for the body’s movement and settlement, it is indistinguishable from “the cradle of significations” and “sense of all senses” he identifies with world (PhP 454).

The ecumenical logic of the “Temporality” chapter likewise dys-closes the *time* of the earth. There is no room for an elemental past that is absolutely inexplicable yet affectively implicated in the present if the flow of time itself must be generated by our explication of the world. In a recent essay that reviews and renews the debate about the earth preceding man, Toadvine draws heavily from Merleau-Ponty’s later writings to obviate this conclusion. As the ground of time lived, he explains, the elemental being of the earth or sun “remains outside of time” disclosed, yet our “embodied *immersion* in” the “asubjective time” it implicates opens us to a “primordial prehistory that haunts the world from within.”<sup>90</sup> In the *Phenomenology*, however, we have seen that this temporal ground, which “neither ‘flows by’ nor ‘changes,’” is not earth, but subjectivity itself. An ekstasis circumvolving through the centrifuge of enstasis.<sup>91</sup> If there is any prospect, of fleshing out the ecological difference of time from Merleau-Ponty’s body of work, it must therefore be sought in those unfinished strokes and gestures leading up to his untimely reclamation by the earth.

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<sup>90</sup> Toadvine, “Elemental Past,” 266, 264, emphasis mine.

<sup>91</sup> Toadvine recognizes the problem when he notes that “Merleau-Ponty’s later work . . . in many ways complicates the subjectivist tendencies of this earlier text, and especially its treatment of time” (ibid., 268).



## §50. Untimely Wrinkles in the Flesh of Time: The Ecological Fourfold

Maybe nothing ever happens once and is finished. Maybe happen is never once but like ripples maybe on water after the pebble sinks, the ripples moving on, spreading, the pool attached by a narrow umbilical water-cord to the next pool which the first pool feeds, has fed, did feed, let this second pool contain a different temperature of water, a different molecularity of having seen, felt, remembered, reflect in a different tone the infinite unchanging sky, it doesn't matter: that pebble's watery echo whose fall it did not even see moves across its surface too at the original ripple-space, to the old ineradicable rhythm.

–William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*<sup>92</sup>

My gaze alights on the water, on this spot on the river, here where the water is turning around, where the currents turn the water in tightening circles. I can't turn away. I want to feel time twist as I watch these spirals forming. I want to feel time twist and myself turning as I watch them disappear. I want to twist with the turning water. I want to watch these spirals turn themselves invisible. I want to watch them turning from the surface, turning down into the depths where I cannot see them. I want to turn invisible with them. I want to turn with them, invisible and keep turning.

–Roni Horn, *Saying Water*

It is understood that water is the archetype of all links and connections, and that here the homogeneous intensifies, it produces life: water engenders skin, it is actually and ultimately the same surface.

–Roland Barthes, *Michelet*<sup>93</sup>

### (i) Merleau-Ponty's Ecological Turn: *The Flesh of the Body and the Earth at the Root of History*

“The problems posed in *Ph.P.* are insoluble because I start there from the ‘consciousness’-‘object’ distinction” (VI 200). “Results of *Ph.P.* – – Necessity of bringing them to ontological explicitation” (VI 183). “It is by the flesh of the world that in last analysis one can understand the lived body (*corps propre*)” (VI 250). Taken together, these three clippings from the working notes of *The (In)Visible* condense Merleau-Ponty's sweeping reappraisal of his earlier thought at the end of his career. The ontology of the flesh he develops over this period begins from a teleological suspension and methodological suspicion of all forms of enstasis, from egoic consciousness to corporeal mineness. In other words, the active intentionality of embodied (ap)prehension loses its presumptive privilege. In this radical eduction of “brute or

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<sup>92</sup> William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 210.

<sup>93</sup> Roland Barthes, *Michelet*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987), 33.

wild experience,” Merleau-Ponty returns to the elementary ekstasis of existence to rethink the being of time (VI 158).

By twisting free of the anthropostatic prejudice that had led him to regard transcendence as immanent to subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty discovers a temporal flow that abides in an “intentionality without acts,” from its immemorial departure to its unforeseeable destination and every moment between (VI 238).<sup>94</sup> Here is a time that does not emanate from the act, the “thrust that is subjectivity itself,” or the coincidence of being and consciousness in the present. Rather, it transcends subjective immanence, disrupts the timing of the body, and ruptures that coincidence as a “*movement toward what could not in any event be present to us in the original and whose irremediable absence would thus count among our originating experiences*” (VI 159). As he restates the point in the working notes appended to *The (In)Visible*: each “new present is itself a transcendent: one knows that it is not there, that it was just there, one never coincides with it.” Accordingly, “we have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference, i.e. as transcendence, i.e. as always ‘behind,’ beyond, far-off” (VI 196). The transcendence, or hyperstatic difference, of *time* takes on the indefinite shape of water in this last wave of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, just as it breaks on the shores of ecology. In the following passage, he delineates this watermark in the midst of a critique of the classical assumptions that had framed his earlier analysis:

The whole Husserlian analysis is blocked by the framework of *acts* which imposes upon it the philosophy of *consciousness*. It is necessary to take up again and develop the *fungierende or latent* intentionality which is the intentionality within being. That is not compatible with “phenomenology,” that is, with an ontology that obliges whatever is not nothing to *present* itself to the *consciousness* across *Abschattungen* and as deriving from an originating donation which is an *act*, i.e. one *Erlebnis* among others . . . It is necessary to take as primary, not the consciousness and its *Ablaufphänomen* with its distinct intentional threads, but the vortex which this *Ablaufphänomen* schematizes, the spatializing-temporalizing vortex (which is flesh and not consciousness facing a noema) (VI 244).

Dissolving the specious solidity of the “now-point,” which it renders “ungraspable from close-up, in the forceps of attention,” and ceaselessly decentering the body, the time of the earth whirls through the world as a vortex of absence borne in the abyssal depths of the present (VI 195). Recalling his earlier account of “natural time,” Merleau-Ponty stresses that the present “is not a segment of time with defined contours that would come and set itself in place.” It eventuates in

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. “The transcendental field is a field of transcendencies. The transcendental, being a resolute overcoming of the *mens sive anima* and the psychological, *goes beyond the subjectivity* in the sense of counter-transcendence and immanence” (VI 172).

the world instead as a “cycle . . . with indecisive contour” (VI 184). In last analysis, the *Phenomenology* takes those indefinite contours to mark an “inauthentic view” of the “generality of time.” As he had written there, “we cannot conceive of a cycle without temporally distinguishing its point of arrival from its point of departure,” namely, through an act that establishes their relation to the field of presence (PhP 447). But these points disperse and disappear into the vortex of time, where the inexplicable past and future never manifest the definite sense of intraworldly events, never acquire the “ineffaceable individuality” of (the) static presence (present). The indefinite departure and destination of this convoluted movement are implicated in every presentation as an *inexplicable surplus* over what is given by the act.

In Merleau-Ponty’s language, this “impossible past” and “impossible future” are “Ineinander,” intertwining in the present while remaining in “divergence” (*écart*) from it (VI 123, 268). Defined as the “*originating presentation of the unrepresentable*,” divergence is said to expose us to an unworldly “absence [that nonetheless] matters in the world,” for it sows in it the seeds of “differentiation” (VI 203, 228, 124). In the divergence of time, the *rift* between elemental time and life-time, he discovers “the mind quiet as water in the fissure of Being,” which “deepens in the exact measure that it is filled” by the understanding (VI 53, 235). In this Merleau-Ponty reiterates that time must always be experienced “from the point of view of someone.” Yet this someone no longer stands before it like the subject over against the river placed on view. In other words, he discards the assumption that time essentially *takes place* within the affordant and advertent horizons of embodied consciousness. Like Roni Horn drawn into the “tightening circles” of the rivercurrents, we can only “feel time twist” *allohistorically*, down into the invisible depths of the present, if we “turn invisible with them.”

In order to immerse ourselves in the profundity of a subjective time, Merleau-Ponty tellingly suggests we must adopt “the point of view of someone who *is of it*,” someone who essentially belongs to its invisibility, its unrepresentability, in the *chiasmic* present (VI 184, 267). This *prima facie* cross-eyed view of time will not come into focus until we have wayed through the wilds of Merleau-Ponty’s carnal ontology. Turning about his landmark concepts while crossing over the **phenomenological difference** (sensing-sensible) and the ecological difference, we take our footing from them in our ascent to the highest crest of these investigations: the ecological fourfold of being. From there we abseil down into the elemental folds and fissures of

the allohistorical geology, which figure into Merleau-Ponty's half-written manuscript like so many half-charted wrinkles in the flesh of time.

The tremendous philosophical ambitions of *The (In)Visible* conspire with its incompleteness to weigh against the pretense of a definitive reading – *a fortiori* its working notes, whose telegraphic obscurity frequently rivals that of ancient fragments we have met. Pocketing that pretense, I wish to advance an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's meditations on time, informed by the insights gathered over our investigations. On my reading, his turn toward ontology was not a metaphysical turn away from phenomenology, but an ecological renovation of it. Just so, he calls for a new (r)eduction, one which “leads beyond the alleged transcendental ‘immanence’,” hence “‘acts of consciousness’, ‘states of consciousness’, ‘matter’, ‘form’ and even ‘image’ and ‘perception’” insofar as perception “implies a cutting up of what is lived into discontinuous acts” (VI 172. 158).<sup>95</sup> By the same token, I claim he dispenses with the teleology of the understanding as the necessary direction of *sens*, with the body as primordial consciousness, and the contraction of existence into being-in-the-world. Thus does he set out to purge all lingering residues of that repression of transcendence which had crimped the phenomenological reduction, recurrently compelling its stalwarts to mistake their own operations for “our openness, our fundamental relationship with Being” and the phenomena themselves (VI 18). Namely, “to postulate that what is, is not that upon which we have an openness, but only that upon which we can operate” (VI 128).<sup>96</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's ecological break from classical phenomenology comes into stark relief in the lectures on nature he delivered shortly before commencing *The (In)Visible*. In his course on the concept of nature, he calls for a recovery of “the Earth as *Offenheit*, as opening, with horizons that are *only* horizons.” This openness upon the unpresentable defies (dis)closure.<sup>97</sup> Earth resists our operations – perceptual and practical, bodily and intellectual. Crucially, it is also said to “contain all the *ulterior* possibilities and serves as a cradle for them” (N 77, emphasis

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<sup>95</sup> Inviting confusion, Merleau-Ponty refers here to a “sufficient reduction.” On my reading, this would not be one that brings this interrogation to a close. On the contrary, he tells us, “the incompleteness of the reduction” that uncovers “wild and ‘vertical’ being . . . is to be understood not as an imperfection” or “an obstacle” but the motor of “the reduction itself” (VI 178).

<sup>96</sup> That is, what we have called “operant” as opposed to “operative” intentionality.

<sup>97</sup> Correlatively, he will characterize the flesh of the body as an inescapable “openness to things, with participation on their part, or which carries them in its circuit” (N 223). To merge Heidegger's language with our own, this openness is our elementary relation to being qua difference, being qua beyng (cf. VI 128).

mine). An ulteriority that is also a “pregnancy of possibles” (VI 250, cf. §47). Merleau-Ponty proceeds to spell out the temporal character of this hyperstatic (ulterior) *and* genostatic (pregnant) dimension of being. The word ‘history’ is mentioned only once in the “Temporality” chapter of the *Phenomenology*. In light of the foregoing, however, it’s hardly surprising to find in an earlier chapter that he had already identified the subject as “the fundamental mode of the event and of *Geschichte* [history]”, of which “impersonal events are derivative forms” (PhP 393). Now, roughly a decade later, he retracts and reforms his earlier position. As the womb and tomb of life, the cradle and crypt of every civilization, “the Earth is the root of our history” (N 77). Such is the root alterity and ulteriority of being, reached in *The (In)Visible* through “interrogating our experience precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is *not ourselves*,” to “the dimension of the *hidden*” or invisible “depth” by virtue of which things “oppose to my inspection obstacles, a *resistance* which is precisely their reality, their ‘openness’” (VI 159, 219, emphasis mine).

With this latter text, I propose that Merleau-Ponty brings his corpus down to earth, rendered there as “flesh” qua “‘element’ of being”: the “wild being” of beings (VI 139, 203). Furthermore, I propose that this incarnation of the elemental becomes for him the basis for rethinking the ecstasy of the body *out of place*, the anonymous archeology of existence *anterior to the organism*, and the *elemental implications* of life-time, all with respect to the *ecological difference*. Thus does he arrive at a wild logos, a heterology of being “realized in man, but nowise as his *property*,” his *own* (VI 211, 274). On this approach, sentience, existence, comes into relief as the heterological relationship between the lived body as disclosive being-in-the-world and the *flesh of the body* (FoB) as exposive being-of-the-earth. This relationship is further complicated by the sensible being of the body. Like any other phenomenal correlate of sensing, the *Körper* is ecologically differentiated as well. It heterologically oscillates between visibility and invisibility, static sense and hyperstatic ab-sense, intraworldly presence and the earthly absence he names the *flesh of the world* (FoW), or what we have been calling earth. Taken together, these insights add to the ecological layout of being a dimension that has implicitly informed our analysis for some time. By integrating the phenomenological difference (sensing-sensible) into the structure of the ecological difference, a formal topology of two heterological relations begins to develop orthogonally. The first consists of the relation between earth and world (sensible), originally laid out in chapter 2 as a multistatic assemblage. The second consists

of the relation between body and flesh (sentience). These are not two separate assemblages. As we partner with Merleau-Ponty to elucidate their complication, it will be important to keep in mind that the lived truth, the heterological truth, eventuates in the experience of everything in the rift where these movements cross. Whereas his phenomenology of the body solidified the rarefied nature of being-in-the-world, his onto-phenomenology of the flesh serves break through the specious concreteness of the body proper. Like a statue weathered by the elements, the body does not fall and crumble in these late works, yet crack it does from toe to head. The fissures unsettle its foundations. They breach its very core, in which the wild, petricolous vegetation of lived experience now flourishes between bewildered organs where it never had before.

Merleau-Ponty goes to great lengths to distinguish flesh from substance, spirit, mind, and unformed matter (VI 139). He also takes pains to disabuse the reader of its anthropomorphic seeming: “the flesh of the visible” regarded as “a world covered over by our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask” (PhP 136). So far from a hypostatic abandonment of lived experience or an anthropostatic closure of it, the flesh reveals itself in these pages as the hidden dimensionality of the sensible and sentience, things and perception of them. “Perception is not first a perception of *things*,” we read, “no longer a multiplicity of individuals synchronically and diachronically distributed”; it is rather “perception of *elements* (water, air . . .),” which is to say, “of things which are dimensions” of “a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation” (VI 114, 218). To the extent that the act(ion) fails to execute that “metamorphosis” of phenomena which flattens them and strips the “value” of their “absence,” he goes on to say that “I slip on these “elements” . . . from the ‘subjective’ to Being” (VI 218, 8, cf. 180). In Merleau-Ponty’s verbiage, these elemental dimensions of the sensible (i.e. tangible, visible, audible, etc.), in their divergence (or non-coincidence) with sentient disclosure, comprise the flesh of the world (VI 272). As he conceives it, the flesh of the world, “distinct from my flesh,” is “Being’s unique way of manifesting itself” as “a *general thing*” falling short of “positivity” and “without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent” (VI 139, 214, 171, 261).<sup>98</sup> In order to return to the flesh of the body’s elementary openness onto the carnal transcendence of beings, Merleau-Ponty insists “it is necessary that nothing detain me within myself far from them,” which would be to reinstate the immanence of the subject, mind,

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<sup>98</sup> Bringing hyperstasis and genostasis together, Merleau-Ponty describes “carnal being” more substantively as both “a presentation of a certain absence” and “a prototype of Being” (VI 136).

ego, or some other enstasis “with which the philosopher wishes to distinguish me absolutely from the things” (VI 152). To avoid this, we must come to countenance the body’s belongingness to the flesh of the world. Namely, how “my body is to the greatest extent what everything is: a *dimensional this*” (VI 260). Yet the sentience of the body makes it a “very remarkable variant” of the sensible. It is “a dimensional *of itself*” or “a sensible *for itself*,” at once sensible, sentient, and capable of sensing itself qua sensible (VI 135f., 260).<sup>99</sup>

(ii) *Being In and Out of Touch: The Intertwining and Divergence of the Phenomenological Difference*

Broadening Merleau-Ponty’s earlier analysis of sensation, *The (In)visible* foregrounds and recurrently returns to the reflexivity of touch as lived exemplar of the divergence, intertwining, and chiasmic reversal of sensing and the sensible.<sup>100</sup> On his view, these features carry over to every sensory modality in its relation to any possible sensible manifestation, be it my body, the other’s body, or non-sentient things. An examination of this richly complex experience will show how his carnal ontology entails an ecology of existence in which the relation between the body and its flesh on the one hand, and the tangible and intangible on the other, are defined by the multistatic ingredients of the earth-world set forth in chapter 2.<sup>101</sup>

The body (qua *Leibkörper*) is a tangible being capable of reversing that relation in the act of touching. But Merleau-Ponty stresses how this “reversibility is always imminent and never realized in fact.” For my attempt to grasp my body simultaneously as tangible and touching “always miscarries at the last moment”:

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. “If the body is a thing among things it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it is *of them*, and, accordingly, detaches itself from them” (viz. by virtue of its sentience) (VI 137).

<sup>100</sup> Here it should be noted that Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of this experience draws heavily from Husserl’s recurrent treatment of “double-sensation” (cf. *Ideas* II, §37). But whereas Husserl relegates double-sensation to touch, Merleau-Ponty will come to ascribe its chiasmic structure to all sensory modalities. Merleau-Ponty’s evolving treatment of the reflexivity of touch can be traced from his Husserlian analysis of it in the *Phenomenology*, to “The Philosopher and his Shadow” (1959), thence to his third course on the concept of nature (1959-60). In these lectures he brings the insights of that treatment to bear on the being of the thing, the world, and the sensible in general (PhP 85; S 16, 166f.; N 209, 223f.).

<sup>101</sup> I here make use of the tangible-intangible distinction where Merleau-Ponty would speak of the visible-invisible. The latter is not intended to refer to visibilia exclusively. Rather, it is used as shorthand for the phenomenological difference of things in general, be they touched, heard, etc. Though he does occasionally allude to the “untouchable,” this functions like the term invisible. Against the metaphysical and occularcentric acceptations of these words, they are not to be confused with some supersensuous domain of being beyond the possibility of experience. Furthermore, the methodological privilege Merleau-Ponty accords to touch tells against the primacy of vision among the senses.

My left hand is always on the verge of touching my right hand touching the things, but I never reach coincidence; the coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization, and one of two things always occurs: either my right hand really passes over to the rank of touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted; or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch *it* – my right hand touching. I palpate with my left hand only its outer covering [i.e. my right hand as tangible] (VI 9, 147f., cf, 249).

Let us break this experience down into the first two structures that Merleau-Ponty takes to be paradigmatic of the phenomenological difference. First, and of greatest emphasis in these lines, there is a non-coincidence or *divergence* between touching and being touched. As my left hand touches my right, the former feels tangible aspects of the latter (e.g. softness, smoothness, thickness). In his account of double-sensation, Husserl distinguishes these “outer” sensations of the intentional object of the haptic act by the term *Empfindungen*, translated as ‘sensations’. But I can also turn my attention away from touching to focus on the being touched. More precisely, I can attend instead to the sensations (e.g. pressure and movement) localized in the touched hand. Husserl refers to these “inner” sensations as *Empfindnisse*, ‘sensings’ (a portmanteau of ‘Empfindung’ and ‘Erlebnis’).<sup>102</sup> On his view, sensations and sensings belong to the “matter” of consciousness. They are not of themselves involved in constitution or “apprehension” (*Auffassung*); they are bearers of it, lived through at the intentionally non-objective register of implicit awareness (*Erleben*).<sup>103</sup> One can interpret the divergence of touch along these lines. Merleau-Ponty is not merely saying, as he often does, that it is impossible to touch myself touching because touching is not a tangible thing – just as vision isn’t visible. The more nuanced point is that I cannot simultaneously hold together in attention the sensings in the hand touched and the sensations felt by the touching hand. Consequently, my consciousness fails to apprehend *Leib* and *Körper* in the synthetic unity of a *Leibkörper*. Moreover, insofar as other bodies and even non-sentient things with which I come in contact give rise to sensings in my lived body, Merleau-Ponty will go on to extrapolate this conclusion to being-touched by and touching anything (VI 261, N 224; cf. PhP 95).

This is evidently the thrust of the working note devoted to the relations between the flesh, the body, and the world. There Merleau-Ponty maintains that one “does not apprehend oneself as an ob-ject” in self-touching, but remains “ignorant of oneself [since] the self in question is by

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<sup>102</sup> Merleau-Ponty points to this distinction when he separates “a touching of the sleek and the rough” from “a passive sentiment of the body and of its space” (VI 133).

<sup>103</sup> See, for instance, §36 and §40 of Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Book 2: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Andre Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989).



divergence (*d'écart*)” (VI 249).<sup>104</sup> The word “ignorant” signals an insurmountable aberration from the teleology of the intellectual understanding (knowing-that). But divergence runs through the teleology of the practical understanding as well, a know-how that needn't be accompanied by thematic acts. This is made apparent by the observation that my right hand's “hold on the world is interrupted” when manipulated by my left. When touched by the left hand, the “exploratory movements” and attendant kinestheses of the touched hand (right) either pass over to the sensations of the touching hand (left) whose grasp (*Griff*, not *Auffassung*) it affords, or they are in some measure inhibited by the touched hand's responsivity to being affected by the pressure and movement (sensings) of the touching hand (VI 148).

Another example, which Merleau-Ponty believes to admit of the same structures of tactile reversibility, will prove illustrative (VI 142). Consider a handshake between two strangers. The reciprocity of this gesture is maintained by a certain give and take, which is not contractual but contactual. In other words, it relies on an unthematic interchange, intracorporeal and intercorporeal, between touching and being touched. A delicate sequence of reversals unfolds in two shakes, during which each hand bestows touch in grasping the other, then receives it in being grasped, and then moderates its grip accordingly. What has been received (e.g. a felt degree of pressure) comes to mediate the next bestowal, which returns it in due measure to the donor. Whatever intimacy the spontaneously elicits derives from the otherward openness and responsibility of both parties at every stage of this sensorimotor coupling, this mimetic co-engulfment of extremities. Anyone who has tried to shake the hand of a man whose heavy-handed style of greeting occludes his openness and obtunds his responsiveness to being touched will be familiar with the sense of being pancaked, dismembered, and cannibalized by the carnivorous clutch of another. As he preemptively gains the upper hand, my hold on his is interrupted then foreclosed. On the one hand, my hand is all but reduced to a tangible thing I feel to be collapsing under/into pressure – if not whisked into some palmful of benumbed batter. On the other, my hand practically becomes a handle, a mere affordance for the misattuned intentions of his body, which is out of touch in the treble sense of being insensate, ungraspable, and holding itself aloof in its unshakable activity. All this might give the appearance of a handshake to a bystander. Yet it is only nominally so. The reciprocity essential to shaking-hands-*with* has been squeezed out. From

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<sup>104</sup> As he generalizes the point in one working note: “*The key is in this idea that perception qua wild perception is of itself ignorance of itself, imperception*” (VI 213).

the perspectives of those involved, one hand is shaken off while the other shakes (a manhandled extension of) itself, thereby any touch of intimacy from the atmosphere released by their contact.

Conversely, that intimacy can be stifled just as much by a style that is wary, diffident, or otherwise sparing in response. I clasp the hand of a stranger in a way that remains open to being touched, that invites this reversal. Were it overtly expressed, perhaps my overture would be accepted by his person. But his hand impersonally declines it. Instead of reciprocating my gesture, his hand hands itself over to mine as though to give itself away, which is paradoxically to give little, almost nothing, or nothing but a handled thing. The stranger has presumably received my touch. But I receive less than its due measure in return. As a result, my unrequited palpations yield only the sensation of something flaccid and inert, like a lifeless jellyfish laid by in a leather glove. Short of slackening its grip to the point of liquefaction, which would surely liquidate what has already become a token gesture, my hand cannot pass over to being touched, let alone respond to his touching.

Whereas the heavy hand withholds itself with an overactive hold, which compresses my own into something present-at-hand for me and ready-to-hand for it, the sparing hand withholds itself by holding off, detaching itself and remaining inactive, like some thing gone into deep hibernation. Whether this dormition stems from obdormition, an unsparing yet paralytic openness to being touched, an allergic closure to it, or from some deliberate intention of the stranger, I cannot fathom. Having sought and failed to divine the answer from his palm, I glance searchingly into his eyes or make an effort to read it in his countenance and mannerisms. Or else I simply look the other way and pay it little mind. After all, the answer will gradually reveal itself as the stranger does to me, through the style of being he embodies. Still, the jellyfish, ungloved, will continue to float through the inadvertent atmosphere between us, leaving its impassively amorphous mark on his every gesture and remark until the ice is broken.

These bad shakes are but limit cases of a divergence that always mediates my relation to the other. Ecologically thought, divergence is made possible by what we have been calling *hyperstasis*. The sensible exhibits a hyperstatic difference from static presence in the world that prevents it from entirely coinciding with or collapsing into what I perceive. Although he occasionally breaks with his convention by adverting to the “untouchable” in the case of manual contact, Merleau-Ponty consistently enlists ‘the invisible’ as a blanket term for hyperstasis. Much like the complementary concept of silence, it comprises the absent-present depth of the

sensible across sensory modalities (cf. VI 254). Accordingly, we learn from a handful of working notes that the invisible is not to be equated with the supersensuous; nor is it determined merely in opposition to what is actually visible as another visible thing *in posse*, or “non-visible” object entering among “what has been or will be seen and is not seen, or what is seen by an other than me, not by me” (VI 227f.). Rather, Merleau-Ponty suggests that “the invisible is *there* without being an *object*.” In other words, it is “what, relative to the visible, could . . . not be seen as a thing,” since “it is pure transcendence without an ontic mask” (VI 229, 257). The invisible forms an unsightly recess in our visual horizons, brimming with a periphenomenal excess over what is seen. It occupies a peripheral *there*, out there, back there “‘behind’ the visible,” intimated or appresented as an “elsewhere” that nonetheless resists ready-to-hand prehension, which would incorporate it into the bodily *here*, as well as perceptual apprehension and ostensive reference to something present-at-hand “here” or “there.” Nonetheless, he contends that “its absence counts in the world.” It is “*Urpräsentiert* precisely as *Nichturpräsentierbar*” (VI 228). In spite of being covered over by our disclosive activity, the invisible *matters*. For it contains an indefinite array ulterior possibilities to which we are exposed, “a fold in passivity” giving rise to dawning revisions through strange, new eyes or “what exists only as tactile or kinesthetically” for new sensory organs, which to touch and move in ways responsive to its hidden depth (VI 257).<sup>105</sup>

Consider together the scenarios above: touching oneself and touching the other. If, in each case, the tangible hand approaches presentness-at-hand for conscious inspection or readiness-to-hand for bodily circumspection, it ultimately slips away from those worldly determinations (“I slip on these ‘elements’”). But it is precisely that slippage which conditions the hand’s belongingness to my body in the first case and the genuine handshake in the second. Regarding the latter, the integral reciprocity and intimacy of the handshake – dis-integrated by heavy and sparing hands – relies on an exposure to the ulterior possibilities of being-touched, which opens an intangible difference of the other’s hand from my own touching and what is (ap)prehended through it (*ungreifbar* qua *unbegreifbar* and *unbegreiflich*). The moment I attend to touching (sensations) or being-touched (sensings), deliberately moderate my grip, or gear into the hand of the other as a mere extension of my *habile* body, this exposure is inhibited. A genuine handshake is consummated when touching and being touched are mediated through one

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<sup>105</sup> It bears mention that this passivity is essential to the invisibility of sentient being (“my invisibility for myself”), ensuring that it never fully constitutes itself as pure positivity (e.g. “a *positive* mind, or a *positive* ‘consciousness’”), but remains, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “a self-presence that is an absence from itself” (VI 250).

another recursively. Each party must give touch in a way that perpetually gives itself over to what can only be received through its own interruption and deferral.<sup>106</sup> In this manner, touching is deferred and differed through being touched. Our own sensings cross over into those of the other through a common flesh that releases our hold on the world, thereby from the contact of the hands an intangible *expression* of intimacy.

The divergence evinced by the handshake is not to be mistaken for a solipsistic estrangement of the self from the other. Rather, the upshot of the structural parity Merleau-Ponty sets up between it and self-touching is that the self is commensurably othered or differed from itself (and not merely by another self). As he puts it, I am invisible for myself (VI 250). This he conveys in the remainder of the working note quoted above, compiled under the heading of “Flesh of the world – Flesh of the body – Being.” “To touch *oneself*,” we read, is at once “to be open to oneself” and “to escape *oneself*,” since “the self in question is by divergence (*d'écart*), is *Unverborgenheit* [unhiddenness] of *the Verborgenen* [hidden] as such, which consequently does not cease to be hidden or latent” (VI 249). Where he avails himself of Husserlian terminology to discard the conceit of self-constituting consciousness for a “self-presence that is an absence from self” (e.g. “*Urpräsenziert* precisely as *Nichturpräsenzierbar*”), the language here is suggestive of the self-concealing essence that Heidegger attributes to being qua earth (VI 228, cf. 249f.). Just so, Merleau-Ponty identifies “our openness” as our “fundamental relation to Being” while insisting on the “infinity of *Offenheit*” to “what exceeds us,” described in different contexts as the wild being, “Nature [on] the other side of man,” and earth itself (VI 128, 169, 274; N 77). Sentient being never resolves itself into fully transparent self-presentation; nor does being-sensible resolve itself into static, self-standing presence, “pure individuals,” or a “multiplicity of spatio-temporal atoms,” which would be wholly autonomous from or immanent to experience (VI 114f.). Along these lines falls Merleau-Ponty suggestion that “we have to pass from the thing (spatial or temporal) as identity, to the thing (spatial or temporal) as difference” (VI 195). This is not to be thought as a (hypo)static difference between determinate particulars – intentional objects of act(ion)s or ob-jects set over against subjects – but a hyperstatic difference from such determinations. Sensing and sensible modes of being both manifest an inexpungible self-concealment, a dispersion from static senses which exposes us to the limits of (self-)disclosure. Such is the invisibility incarnated by the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world, or in our

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<sup>106</sup> Note that this was the same dynamic that figured into dwelling as waiting in chapter 2 (§16).

terms, being-of-the-earth and the earthliness of beings. As the earth rifts the world in Heidegger's ecology, so does Merleau-Ponty think being as difference in the flesh (VI 128, 146).

This brings us to the second condition for the reversibility of touch: the "intertwining" (*entrelacs*, *Ineinander*) or "mutual encroachment" (*empiétement*) of sensing and the sensible. Adopting the same ontological pre-position we have identified as the elementary relation of existence and earth, Merleau-Ponty consistently expresses the encroachment of the sensible onto sensing in terms of our 'being of', which he frequently emphasizes in italics. "If the body is a thing among things," he writes, "it is so in a stronger and deeper sense than they: in the sense that, we said, it *is of them*" (VI 137). As he specifies, the hand can only touch if it is "itself tangible," that is, if it "opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a part" (VI 133). Or again, "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it, unless he *is of it*" (VI 134f., cf. 100). If 'intertwining' and 'encroachment' ordinarily connote relations between particulars situated *in* objective space and time, Merleau-Ponty starkly contrasts being-of with the sort of contact and containment that obtains between the objective body and other *körperliche Dinge*. In this he narrowing his sights on vision, which is especially prone to overlook this ekstasis and distinguish me hyperopically from the things:

We have to reject the age-old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely, the world and the body in the seer as in a box . . . The world seen is not "in" my body, and my body is not "in" the visible world ultimately . . . the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it (VI 138).

In their own ways, Husserl and Heidegger pursue similar deconstructions of spatiality. But Merleau-Ponty's concept of intertwining not only takes us beyond "being in" objective/physical or subjective/mental space. It expresses a relation that falls outside of standard phenomenological *reconstructions*: the in-structure of consciousness (the worldly horizons of (ap)presentation); the deep structure of practical in-volvement (the Husserlian life-world); the in-structure of Dasein qua viz. *Sichverstehen als In-der-Welt-seinkönnen* (the horizons of the understanding); and dwelling as merely being-at-home-in. Merleau-Ponty's middle works fall back upon these ecumenical horizons by fundamentally privileging the body's sensorimotor abilities to in-corporate or in-habit "bodily space" and so *explicate* the world (being-in).<sup>107</sup> But

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<sup>107</sup> As we read in the *Phenomenology*, "the horizon . . . is the correlate of the imminent power my gaze has over the objects that it has just glanced over and the power it already has over the new details that it is about to discover" (PhP 70). Stress though he does that "the space and time that I inhabit are always surrounded by indeterminate horizons that contain other points of view," these intersubjective horizons are always regarded as possibilities for a (pre)personal body in-habiting "the total world as the horizon of all perception." (PhP 141, 317). Or again, the world as "open unity of the world" to which "an open and indefinite unity of subjectivity must correspond" (PhP 429).

his eco-phenomenology of the flesh reopens those horizons to make room for being *implicated* (being-of), incarnated, inhabited by that which potentially disables the body and impregnates it with ulterior possibilities. Only under these horizons does intertwining come into relief as *both* convergence with and divergence from the world, being-in and being-of.<sup>108</sup>

Allow me to restate one of the principal conclusions of chapter 2. To think existence ecologically is to recognize that the ecstatic spatial horizons (wherein and whereat, whence and wither) and the ecstatic temporal horizons (having-been and not-yet) of being-in-the-world are implications of the hyperstatic, extra-horizonal ecstasy of being-of-the-earth. In the chapter of *The (In)Visible* devoted to the intertwining and the chiasm, we begin to see the concept of horizon ecologized in a similar way:

No more than are the *sky or the earth* is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of “potentiality of consciousness”; it is a new type of being, a *being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality*, and he before whom the horizon opens is *caught up*, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same . . . visibility [or sensibility] in general, which reigns even *beyond the horizon*, beneath his skin, unto the *depths of being* (VI 148f., emphasis mine).

Merleau-Ponty brings the elemental side of encroachment to light by enlarging on how the seer, in particular, is not only “caught up in what he sees” but implicated in “the whole of the visible” beyond those horizons, thus in the invisible. “This fold,” this “coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body” forms the “hollow” or “cavity of the visible, which is my vision” (VI 146). For Merleau-Ponty, the visibility of the body entails that “activity is equally passivity” in vision, equally a being-seen. To be seen is to be “possessed” by the visible, affectively exposed to the undisclosed *of* which one is a part. In his words, it is “to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen” (VI 139). The carnal encroachment of sensible upon sensation begins

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More troubling still, he occasionally veers from ecumenical closure toward *solipsism*, claiming that “the other person’s experiences . . . do nothing but unfold what is indicated by the horizons of my present experience, and add nothing to it” (PhP 354)

<sup>108</sup> As stated in one working note, “the fabric of possibilities that closes the exterior visible in upon the seeing body maintains between them a certain divergence (*écart*)” (VI 272). In the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty sometimes makes a *prima facie* distinction between being-in and being-of, but it becomes clear that this boils down to two ways of being-in. Namely, objective, spatio-temporal containment versus in-habitation or in-corporation of “bodily space.” Thus, he asserts that “I am not in space and in time, nor do I think space and time; rather, I am of space and of time.” But in the same breath, he tells us this latter relation obtains if and only if “my body fits itself to them and embraces them” (PhP 141). Even in *The (In)Visible*, being-of appears to collapse into being-in on occasion. To wit, “I ‘am of the world’.” But context is crucial here. Against the identification or “coincidence” with the world, which he ascribes to metaphysics, he says that I am of it in the sense that “the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh,” which entails divergence (VI 127). It follows that ‘being of the world’ is properly understood in this context as being of the *flesh* of the world, i.e. earth.

from the ecstatic possession and disorganization of the seer's body by the elements (VI 135). "The sky or the earth" hollows itself out into a "brute vision" (VI 139, 36). At this brute level of experience, "it is not entirely my body that perceives" (VI 9). It is rather the sensible element, the carnal "anonymity innate to Myself" that perceives through me (VI 139).

Much as the *Phenomenology* had summoned Dionysus and the xenial rituals of ancient Greece to convey my body's deferral to the "anonymous vigilance of the senses" in the kairotic economy of sleep, so does *The (In)Visible* invoke the "anonymous one . . . the *self* of perception as 'nobody', in the sense of Ulysses" to mark the role of the flesh in the economy of existence (VI 201).<sup>109</sup> To begin to grasp this metabolic (or chiasmic) exchange between body and flesh, it will be helpful to revisit the discussion from the *Phenomenology*, where Merleau-Ponty argues that "I cannot say that *I* see the blue of the sky" at the level of sensation. Adding to the analysis broached in §48 and anticipating the lines just quoted in reference to the reciprocation of the seer and the visible, he gainsays those who would fill the sky with inert matter, passively receiving the senses bestowed by the active percipient. "In this exchange between the subject of sensation and the sensible," he counters, "it cannot be said that one acts while the other suffers the action, nor that one gives sense to the other" (PhP 222).<sup>110</sup> Rather, one is first exposed to the sky as an elemental other, which is affiliated with the sensible body inasmuch each "falls under a vision that is both ineluctable and deferred" (VI 137). The sky is a periphenomenon, pregnant with absence that invites an unanticipated vision, albeit one to whom "I *offer* my ear or my gaze with an anticipation of a sensation" *in general*. To the extent that I defer to it to direct my vision, an allowance is made for the sky's indefinite hues, a "vague solicitation" from that atmosphere to which "I *deliver over* a part of my body, or even my entire body."<sup>111</sup> Seduced, captivated by the sky, "I *abandon myself* to it, I *plunge into* this mystery." I allow it to alienate me, detaching experience from my own vision, and "suddenly the sensible *catches* my ear or my gaze" – or the

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<sup>109</sup> An allusion to Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, where we find Odysseus and some of his men held captive in the cave of the giant Polyphemus. When the Cyclops asks his name, the hero responds, "My name is nobody [*outis*]" (Hom. *Od.* 9.366). Having escaped and set sail, Odysseus subsequently reveals his true name, an act of hubris which spells ensuing misfortunes.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. "The sensible gives back to me what I had lent to it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place" (PhP 222).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. "My body *obeys* the pregnancy, 'responds; to it, it is what is suspended on it, flesh responding to flesh (VI 209, cf. §47 above).

entire sensorium. At which point Merleau-Ponty clearly prefigures the carnal intertwining of his ecological thought. Insofar as one's perception is condensed from the atmosphere of the sensible, he says, "I am this sky that gathers together, composes itself, and begins to exist for itself . . . in a hollow, or a fold . . . *saturated* by this *unlimited* blue" (PhP 219, 222, emphasis mine).

In the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty still hews to the idea that "the perceived or sensed sky [is] sustained by my gaze that glances over it and inhabits it" (PhP 222). More generally, he maintains that the sensible is sustained by the institution of anonymous *life*, or being-in-the-life-world as "organized ensemble, which is *closed*" into the horizons of in-habitation (VI 223). Now, in *The (In)Visible*, the body is reapproached from the side of the sensible *de profundis*. It becomes a "*Grund* [that] is *Abgrund*" (VI 250). Insofar as it is "caught up in the tissue of the things," the body is said to be the "*exemplar sensible*," instanced by a "set of colors and surfaces inhabited by touch, a vision" (VI 135). Thus does the flesh of the world engender and sustain the body, not as the substance subtends the object, but as an elemental atmosphere, which lends to "the *one* of the corporeal life and the *one* of the human life . . . that cohesion which cannot be denied them since they are all differences, extreme divergencies of one same something" (VI 84). One and the same element of being. One and the same flesh. In effect, the concerted *one* of sensuous existence in the *Phenomenology* is radicalized to implicate the elemental other, the carnal other, as *generative ground* of coexistence.<sup>112</sup> In this vein, Merleau-Ponty reiterates that "it is not I who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh" (VI 142).<sup>113</sup> From this we can extrapolate two key axes of mutual encroachment in the rift of the earth-world. Every experience involves *both*: the disclosive intertwining of the lived body and the sensible world (being-in-the-world); and the exposive intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world (being-of-the-earth). At the intersection of these movements, the latter ensures that the former maintains a divergence, or hyperstatic difference from outright convergence. In other

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. "The body unites us directly with the things through its own ontogenesis, by welding to one another the two outlines of which it is made, its two laps: the sensible mass it is and the mass of the sensible wherein it is born by segregation and upon which, as seer, it remains open. It is the body . . . that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world" (VI 136).

<sup>113</sup> As he elaborates in the working notes, calling us back to our discussion in §47: "I do not perceive any more than I speak -- Perception has me as has language -- And as it is necessary that all the same *I* be there in order to speak, I must be there in order to perceive. -- But in what sense? As *one* (VI 190).



words, being incarnated, in-habited, or exposed prevents beings from ever being fully incorporated, in-habited, or disclosed. Let us attempt to develop this picture in greater detail.

If the worldly ekstasis of the body is grounded on the understanding, Merleau-Ponty recurrently anchors its carnal ekstasis (hyper-ekstasis) to *Einfühlung*, ‘empathy’. To describe the “*flesh of the world*” as “encroachment,” we read, and to say that “we *are of* [being]” means “that between it [flesh or being] and us there is *Einfühlung*” (VI 248). Although it has a primitive status commensurable to that of Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit* (disposition), the “fundamental happening of our Da-sein” in *Being and Time*, this empathy with the things themselves in general does not disclose that they matter essentially within the horizons of the world into which we have been thrown (BW 100/GA9 110). On an ecological interpretation, it suggests rather an *elemental attunement* to the periphenomenal, the outlandish, the invisible, to phantom things or non-beings beneath or beyond those worldly horizons. Empathy exposes us to the opacity, silent ab-sense, the wild being of beings as such. As encapsulated in one working note:

Before *the other* is, the things are such non-beings, divergencies – – There is an *Einfühlung* and a lateral relation with the things no less than with the other: to be sure the things are not interlocutors, the *Einfühlung* that gives them gives them as mute – but precisely: they are variants of the successful *Einfühlung*. Like madmen or animals they are *quasi-companions* (VI 180).

Husserl had conceived *Einfühlung* as a “presentifying mode of experience,” which emerges from the act, opening the ego to the “many headed transcendental subjectivity [i.e. intersubjectivity] that spans its own.”<sup>114</sup> Merleau-Ponty resituates empathy in those passive folds of the flesh “beneath or beyond [the] antinomy” between “being-object” and “being subject,” and “prior to the distinctions of self and other” (VI 22). In that “formative medium,” that “interbeing” of static, intraworldly differences, “*Einfühlung* . . . with other bodies,” with humans and “with the animals,” is concomitant with (from the Latin *comes*, ‘companion’) empathy “with the things” in divergence from being-understood, things which “touch me as I touch them and touch myself” (N 208f., VI 261, cf. N 224). Thus, when Merleau-Ponty observes that “to feel one’s body is also to feel its aspect for the other,” this other should be understood in the widest ontological sense (VI 245). In empathy, one feels oneself come to be from the elemental otherness of being to which every intraworldly other is grafted, flesh to earth.

In the double sense of coming in contact and being affected, hence seduced and captivated, being touched takes us to the ecstatic heart of empathy. For Merleau-Ponty expressly

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<sup>114</sup> From Husserl’s 1922-1923 manuscripts: F I 29, 20a; F I 29, 23a; translation quoted from Welton, *The Other Husserl*, 153f.

considers the reciprocity of “touching touched [as] in the handshake,” to be “the major and perfect case, where there is *quasi-reflection (Einführung), Ineinander*” (VI 245). Returning to this intertwining of the hands, he advances a claim that apparently contradicts his earlier position. During the handshake, he tells us, “I can feel myself touched *as well as and at the same time as touching*” (VI 142, emphasis mine).<sup>115</sup> What is to be made of this? In the case of touching and being touched by oneself, which Merleau-Ponty believes to exhibit the same structure, he reminds us that these two moments “do not coincide in the body . . . ‘in the mind’ or at the level of ‘consciousness’. Something else than the body is needed for the junction to be made” (VI 254). Namely, “as soon as we no longer make belongingness to one same ‘consciousness’ the primordial definition of sensibility” – or by the same token the enstatic of mind and body – this something reveals itself as “a *carnal adherence* of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient” (VI 142, emphasis mine).

The givenness of this “adherence,” lived through being empathetically “caught up” in the hyperstatic flesh of the world, assumes for us a familiar character, one which brings the “plunge” into the aerial atmosphere above into alignment with the elemental ecstasy of the pelagic from chapter 6. Adopting the same word we used to designate one’s engulfment in the attuned space of the undersea, Merleau-Ponty redescribes primordial sensibility as an immersive experience: an “immersion of the being-touched in the touching being and of the touching being in the being-touched” (VI 243). Recall the conclusions of our previous analysis. In immersing myself in the elements, I become water touching itself, the sky seeing itself, but only insofar as I “escape myself,” no longer standing within my own immanent horizons. The self-enclosed, purposive center of my perceiving, willing, and thinking is encroached upon by and dispersed into an atmosphere of hyperstatic intensity. Whereupon my own body is dis-organized, delocalized, excorporated, and my innermost *here* permeated by an indefinite *elsewhere*. The relation between the liquefied or rarefied body and the element in which it dissolves cannot be rendered in terms of correlational coincidence. For the outbound intentionality of *noeses*, thematically constituting *noemata*, and that of the soma, unthematically incorporating the *pragma*, has been

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<sup>115</sup> Cf. “Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter [in the empirical or metaphysical sense]. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, *simultaneously*, as tangible it descends among them, as touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass” (146, emphasis mine).

arrested and overwhelmed by the inbound intentionality of being haptically/visually affected by the inadvertent and impracticable. This consideration applies in some measure to “the *touching itself, seeing itself* of the body,” which Merleau-Ponty claims “is not an act” – viz. not an act *tout court* (VI 249). What begins with an act(ion) is reversed into an exposure to that which holds itself aloof from it as “untouchable,” *ungraspable* as an intentional object of it (VI 254). To refine the definition from the lectures on nature, carnal empathy is “penetration, at a distance,” of the body by the sensible elements in which it is always in some measure immersed (N 218). If touching and being touched can be said to coincide in that interpenetration of the flesh, these moments are *embodied* as a “coinciding from afar, a divergence” (VI 125). The flesh of things recedes from the horizons of disclosure, even as they “haunt me at a distance,” maintaining a “divergence in relation to my body as zero degree of distance” (N 224). In this sense, one’s carnal immersion opens an abyssal distance, an atmospheric depth in the porous, pregnant surface of the sensible, which can even nullify the null-point of bodily here-ness. Merleau-Ponty ties all this together: “The world is what I perceive, but as soon as we examine and express its absolute proximity, it also becomes, inexplicably, irremediable distance” (VI 8). So does immersion empathetically expose us to the inexplicable otherness of being beyond the horizons of the understanding, thereby to the earthly finitude of bodily being-in-the-world.

### (iii) *The Chiasmic Structure of the Ecological Fourfold*

By examining Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of divergence and intertwining we have thus far delineated the hyperstatic and hyper-ecstatic dimensions of the ecological difference between the body and the flesh, which transects the phenomenological difference. In preparation for unpacking the temporal ramifications of these ideas, we now set our sights on the *chiasmic* reversibility and cross-fertilization of these differences. Chiasm is a double-barreled concept that zeros in on what has fallen under the banner *heterostasis* in our ecological schema. The word derives from the Greek *chiasmōs*, referring to a ‘cruciate configuration’ as in the Greek letter *chi* ( $\chi$ ) or the wrappings of a bandage.<sup>116</sup> Already in the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty had retrofitted the anatomical meaning of ‘chiasm’, designated by the French ‘chiasma’ and rendered into English as the same (pl. ‘chiasmata’, adj. ‘chiasmatic’). In scientific contexts, *chiasma* refers chiefly to the crossing or decussation of anatomical structures in the objective body: viz. separate

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<sup>116</sup> Also the Greek verb *chiazō*, which means ‘to decussate’ or ‘mark with the letter  $\chi$ ’.

chromatids of the chromosome at the cellular level; ligaments; and nerves, particularly the optic nerve fibers at the base of the brain. In the period stretching from *Phenomenology* to his 1951 essay “Man and Adversity,” Merleau-Ponty redeploys this concept phenomenologically. In these texts he adopts it to describe a crosswise exchange involving two or more ontologically distinct yet essentially interdependent openings onto the world, and yielding their intra- or intercorporeal unity-in-difference.<sup>117</sup> Thus conceived, it is said to define: the intracorporeal synopsis of two disparate, monocular phantom-images into the full-fledged object of binocular vision, the integration of multimodal sensations into the “inter-sensory object” of intermodal perception; the intercorporeal synopsis of visual perspectives between percipients observing the same thing; and the paradoxical “exchange” and “reciprocal limitation” of those perspectives in the experience of locking eyes with others (PhP 239-42; S 231f.).

The *chiasma* predominates in the preliminary phases of *The (In)Visible*, where it is invoked as shorthand for the divergent intertwining of sensing and the sensible, as of self and other, in all their manifold instantiations. It is by virtue of it, he says that these disjunctive conjuncts belong to a common world (VI 214f., 7f., 11).<sup>118</sup> In February 1960, however, a terminological and descriptive shift occurs in Merleau-Ponty’s writing, adding another layer of meaning to the chiasm. Thereafter ‘chiasma’ no longer appears. In its place we find the French word ‘chiasme’, a rhetorical term translated by the English ‘chiasmus’ (pl. ‘chiasmi’, adj. ‘chiastic’).<sup>119</sup> Chiasmus is a figure of speech whose phrases exhibit an inverted parallel structure (AB:BA). And as a rule, Merleau-Ponty’s chiastic inscriptions conform to the subtype known as antimetabole (from the Greek meaning ‘turning about’, ‘crossing over’, or ‘counterchange’). In antimetabole the same terms recur in each phrase. To wit, the “becoming-nature of man which is the becoming-man of nature” (VI 185).<sup>120</sup> Against the grain of some recent commentaries, which would have us discard chiasmata for chiasmi in an effort to cut the Gordian chiasm, I believe it

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<sup>117</sup> I borrow this formulation from Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 112.

<sup>118</sup> Merleau-Ponty unpacks the multiplex ramifications of this so-called “double chiasm” as follows: “The chiasm [*chiasma*] is not only a me other exchange (the messages he receives reach me, the messages I receive reach him), it is also an exchange between me and the world, between the phenomenal body and the “objective” body, between the perceiving and the perceived: what begins as a thing ends as consciousness of the thing, what begins as a “state of consciousness” ends as a thing” (VI 215)

<sup>119</sup> As Toadvine points out, it is ‘chiasme’ (not ‘chiasma’) that Merleau-Ponty adopts when drafting outlines for the proposed chapters of the manuscript in May 1960 (*Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 155).

<sup>120</sup> For these semantic and chronological details I am indebted to Toadvine’s exposition in chapter 5 of *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 110-115.

can only be disentangled by understanding how they are tied together, *mirabile dictu*, into something of a square knot. By attaching the *filis conducteur* of this chapter to the moorings already secured, we find the phenomenological difference (sensing-sensible) consists of a tetralogy of *chiastic* reversals between flesh and body (sensing), earth and world (sensible).<sup>121</sup> What emerges is a *chiasmatic* arrangement of chiasmi between four poles of being, the ontological double helix we share with the phenomena themselves.

Because, on my interpretation, the chiasma and the chiasmus form an indissociable pair, I hereafter use the term ‘chiasm’ (pl. chiasms, adj. chiasmic) to refer to them together. Only in discussing the distinctive features of each will I adhere to the distinctions just introduced.

*The (In)Visible* contains a host of chiastic reversals: touching oneself, another body, or thing and being touched by oneself, another body, or thing; the body in-habiting the world and the body in-habited by (the flesh of) the world; and on our interpretation, the disclosive explication of sense in the world and the implication of, or empathetic exposure to, the ab-sense of earth. I propose that such cases illustrate how the Merleau-Pontian chiasm marks a heterostatic relation in which each relatum *is* only insofar as it is differed through the other. This differencing proceeds in a movement of double reversal: A is AB and BA, thus A-B; and B is BA and A-B, thus B(A), where the copula does not represent the homological ‘is’ of identity (A=A) or predication (A(b) or B(a)). Rather, it expresses the heterological unity-in-difference of the lived truth of being (A-B, B-A, hence earth-world). Under this rubric, categorically dichotomous reason cedes place to the non-categorical ambiguity of brute experience as truly axiomatic. Otherwise put, the binary logic of identity, non-contradiction, and predication as well as the ternary logic of thesis–antithesis–synthesis are discarded for heterological relationals of (peri)phenomena, which are pre-predicative, pre-thetic, and (non-)self-identical.<sup>122</sup> To better understand this equivocal logic, a glance at Toadvine’s commentary will prove instructive. He points out that the “reversible movement of self-mediation” defining the chiasmus, where the being of each term is essentially mediated by the other, “maintains a close proximity with dialectic.”<sup>123</sup> Toadvine draws support for this comparison from Merleau-Ponty’s remedial exposition of dialectical thought in the “Interrogation and Dialectic” chapter of *The (In)Visible*:

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<sup>121</sup> Or in Merleau-Ponty’s language: FoB-body; FoB-world (see Fig. 8.1 below).

<sup>122</sup> In the pages ahead we shall see how this corresponds to something of a quaternary “logic” of being.

<sup>123</sup> Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy of Nature*, 115.

Whether in the relations within being or in the relations of being with me, dialectical thought is that which admits that each term is itself only by proceeding toward the opposed term, becomes what it is through the movement, that it is one and the same thing for each to pass into the other or to become itself, to leave itself or to retire into itself (VI 90f.).

Mating Merleau-Ponty's language to our own, we can begin to make sense of the chiasmus as a heterological "movement [of self-mediation] through which each term ceases to be itself in order to become itself" (heterostasis), by contrasting this phenomenological *hyperdialectic* with the homological movement of ternary logic as metaphysical dialectic, or *hypodialectic* (VI 92). The juxtaposition of "bad" and "good" dialectical thought in *The (In)Visible* redraws this distinction in like terms:

The bad dialectic is that which does not wish to lose its soul in order to save it, which wishes to be dialectical immediately, *becomes autonomous*, and ends up at cynicism, at formalism, for having eluded its own double meaning. What we call *hyperdialectic* is a thought that . . . is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the *plurality* of the relationships and what has been called *ambiguity*. The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by a *thetic thought*, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic is that which is conscious of the fact that every thesis is an *idealization*, that Being is not made up of idealizations or of things said, as the old logic believed, but of bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency, where the inertia of the content *never permits the defining of one term as positive, another term as negative* (VI 94, emphasis mine).

This passage reveals a number of discrepancies between hyperdialectical concept of the chiasm and hypodialectic. First, as Toadvine notes, the opposition between chiasmic relata (e.g. "in-itself" and "for-itself") is not sublated into an idealized synthetic unity (e.g. "in-itself-for-us") (cf. VI 95). As a "dialectic without synthesis," the chiasmus yields rather something akin to the synopsis of the chiasma, which retains the inexpugible divergence of its differentiae, the ambiguity of their being "not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross" (VI 94f., cf. 92, 264). Except that in the chiasmus, the topological trope takes on a stronger temporal inflection. The chiasmatic *place* of intersection is transposed into the chiasmic *non-coincidence* of reversible relations. In *The (In)Visible*, space and time constitute an intertwining in their own right (VI 117). Whether we construe it as a crossing (chiasma) or a syncopated reversion (chiasmus), then, the unfinished product of the chiasm remains the same. It engenders a hyperdialectical sublation, "concrete, partial, encumbered with survivals, saddled with deficits" (VI 95). Otherwise put, it establishes itself as a divergent intertwining, a heterological unity-in-(hyper)static-difference.

Second, since "there is' something," only where the two movements cross or when they reverse in this way, the terms of the chiasm do not germinate from or terminate in full-fledged positivities or thetic particularities (beingness, hypostasis) "opposed" to one another through

strict negation (thesis/antithesis).<sup>124</sup> Against the ontological positivist who begins from the hypostatic deposits of reason, against the antinomies of being and non-being, Merleau-Ponty follows Heidegger in thinking nothingness itself as integral to being. Much as anonymity is constitutive of the self, nothingness is precisely being's generative difference from itself, a differencing manifested by the no-thingness of the thing.<sup>125</sup> In Merleau-Ponty's words, "the force of being is supported by the frailty of the nothingness which is its accomplice . . . the obscurity of the In Itself [supports] the clarity of the For Itself in general" (VI 64). Rather than pure negativity or vacuity, "nothingness is nothing more (nor less) than the invisible," which figures into the chiasm of lived experience, the heterological truth of beings un-concealed, as "the limit or degree zero of visibility, the opening of a [hidden] dimension of the visible" (VI 258, S 21).<sup>126</sup>

In this way, the invisible riddles the visible, inviting exposures to being-in-question: an ontological equivocity that abyssally bounds and grounds the horizons of the understanding. By holding itself aloof in the midst of our proximity, it upholds the *sine qua non* porosity, pregnancy, and generality of those horizons against their collapse into impervious actuality, sterility, and particularity – or what we have previously called (homeo)enstatic unity ( §25). Accordingly, "the flesh (of the world or my own) is not" a hyperstatic disunity, or sheer "contingency [and] chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself" (VI 146). Merleau-Ponty's frequent appeals to texture signal the carnal cohesion of sensing and sensible as well as the archetypal and intermodal impact of touch, the most exposive, immersive, and promiscuous of all the senses. Tactile textures are re-plicated into the visual and linguistic layers of phenomena. They bark and burnish the expressive surface of sights and sayings beneath the garb of ideas and meanings, which either efface those textures peremptorily or deferently enrich them (cf. §47). So does the flesh trace out the silent implicature, the warp of the visible fabric hidden under the weft of things explicable to mind and body.

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. "The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by a thetic thought, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic," or "hyperdialectic" in his terms, "is that which is conscious of the fact that every *thesis* is an idealization, that Being is not made up of idealizations or of things said, as the old logic believed" (VI 94).

<sup>125</sup> For Merleau-Ponty these two "negativities" are deeply conjoined, such that "my 'central' nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is *who knows where*, which is 'nobody'" (VI 264).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. "When I speak of nothingness there is already being; thus this nothingness does not really [or completely] annihilate, and this being is not self-identical and unquestioned" (S 21).

This is why Merleau-Ponty will say that there is no categorical “identity, nor non-identity” in the chiasmus, but inversions, rotations, and eversions, which conceal the visible and reveal the invisible. Categorical predicates and connectives are discarded for decidedly perspectival relations between “obverse and reverse . . . in a process of differentiation” or “inside and outside *turning about* one another,” recurrent turns of phrase evoking the etymology of ‘antimetabole’ (VI 264, 262, emphasis mine, cf. 52, 61, 117, 152, 160). At any moment of their haptic counterchange, for instance, the touched and touching hands of a single body comprise its sentient obverse and sensible reverse. According to Merleau-Ponty, these phases amount to “segments of one sole circular course” in which they exchange their roles as it “goes above from left to right and below from right to left” (VI 138). Or again, applying this hyperdialectical movement to the worldly chiasmus between self and other, he surmises:

Perhaps the self and the non-self are like the obverse and the reverse and since perhaps our own experience *is* this turning round that installs us far indeed from “ourselves,” in the other, in the things. Like the natural man, we situate ourselves in ourselves *and* in the things, in ourselves *and* in the other, at the point where, by a sort of *chiasm*, we become the others and we become world (VI 160).

What of the relation between the self and the *elemental* other, the no-thingness of the things? Normally, I situate myself in something, in-specting or in-corporating its advertent or affordant obverse – the *static* reverse of my body. In my body’s ecstatic congress with the world, I pivot about the things I in-habit. I stand out from myself, extend my outreach over them, and return to myself as though never to have left. Matters are different on the elemental side of the thing. In its material resistance to incorporation, this *hyperstatic* reverse of the body forestalls my owncoming. In turning from (comport)mental allure to repulsion, solicitation to inhibition, affordance to hindrance, the invisible turns away from me and turns me away from myself. It conceals itself in the invisible *punctum caecum* of my own activity: the *sentient* reverse of the self made up of all the ulterior possibilities to *le corps propre* – or better said, its *impossibility*. In this *hyperecstatic* dimension of sentience the egological and ipseological are each ecologically inverted. Perceptual constitution turns over into sensate institution, personal striving into impersonal allowance, corporeal self-projection into carnal excorporation and enucleation. In short, worldly disclosure veers into earthly exposure.

Merleau-Ponty gives us to understand that “the chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception,” so that I cannot direct myself toward things without being affected-directed by them (VI 264f.). As long as it strengthens my perceptual linkage to the world, the role of “counter-perception” is analogous to that which the



early Heidegger assigns to fundamental moods, which increase the ambit of disclosure (§6). But in confronting the no-thingness of something, those inbound rays of affection do not reinforce my outbound intention of/in act(ion). They inhibit it from an undisclosed source. A body attuned to the sourceless enticements of the sensible forgoes its own enstatic *nisus*. It does not persist in comporting itself toward the wayward but gives way and gives itself away to it. Once I allow myself to be disported by and immersed in the elements, my path backward and meward is decisively diverted. My own body has been divested from me, excorporated. It passed over to the hyperstatic dimension of the *one* exposed, the one who is *of* the elements. This is the core idea behind Merleau-Ponty's assertion that "this Visibility, this *generality* of the Sensible in itself" is *also* the "*anonymity* innate to Myself that we have previously called flesh" (VI 139). Upon departing from myself, I pivot about the no-thingness of the sensible, crossing over to my body's elemental allotrope: the anonymous *one* incarnate in sensing, empathetically becoming earth – the flesh of the body responding to the flesh of the world (VI 209).

Yet the reversibility of the chiasm entails that, barring the terminal dispersion of experience by the elements, immersion too must reach a *volte-face*, reversing into emersion and condensation (§37-8). In this double movement of flesh and earth crossing back toward body and world, we enter the moment of *genostasis*, as described in our earlier discussion of the pregnant silence of expression (§20ff.). In its "perpetual pregnancy, perpetual parturition, generativity and generality," the elemental pole of each chiasmic reversal inaugurates and regenerates the structural correlations of bodily being-in-the-world (VI 149). That the inverse does not obtain introduces an asymmetry in the chiasmic structure of ecology. Likewise does Merleau-Ponty insist that being touched is a condition for touching in general, whereas every thing attests to the brute realization that touching is not a condition for being touched. Now, if this "intrinsic pregnancy [is] maintained within the zone of transcendence" on the elemental side of being, or carnal being-of-the-earth, it gives birth to inceptive act(ions) and larval senses by crossing over into immanence (VI 213). As the condensation of the invisible and visible, absence and presence, traces and faces, the thing continues to furnish the hinge for the chiasmi in their generative counter-movement from hyper(ek)stasis to (en)stasis. In the *genostasis* of the sensible, earth pivots about the thing onto world, which it fertilizes with outlandish traces of expression: affective enticements underway toward novel affordances and themes where there had been only hindrance to motricity and perceptual opacity. In the *genostasis* of sentience, the flesh pivots

about the thing onto the body, impregnating it with possibilities for responding to these enticements by disporting itself toward the thing in new and makeless ways. These two movements cannot be pulled apart. They essentially cross-fertilize. The flesh crosses over toward the sensible world, endowing it with a life of its own beyond the body's governance – as in the experience of being touched by that which cannot actively be grasped. Meanwhile, earth crosses over toward the sentient body, endowing it with a lithic yet friable posture, a fluent movement sometimes stagnant, a gaze burning into things and burned into by the gaze of the other, a voice by turns inflated and deflated, blustery and flatulent, carried by or scattered to the winds.

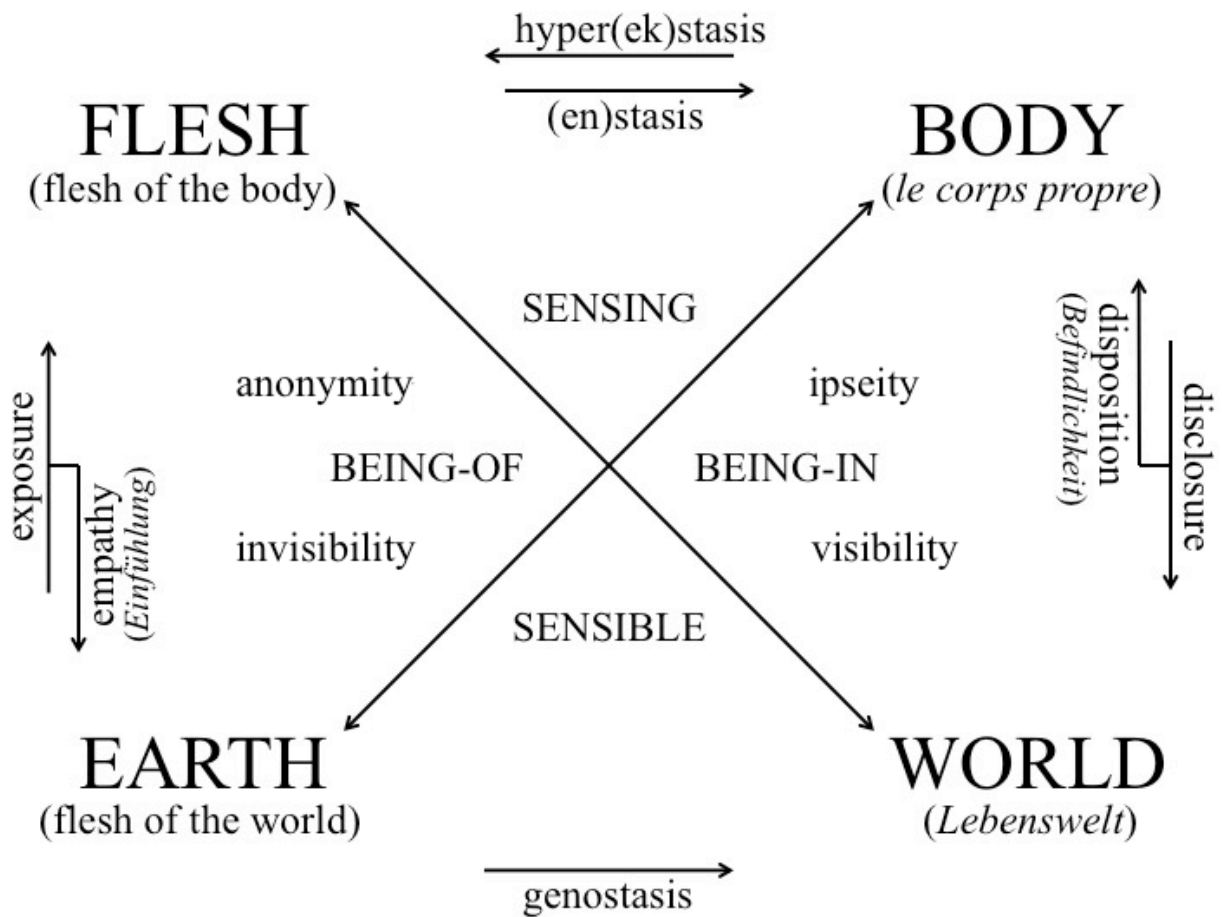
To stitch a broader conclusion out of these sundry strands, one could say that the ecological chiasm is woven from six basic *chiastic* movements, only four of which are heterological in the sense laid out in chapter 2. Together these form the *chiasmatic* arrangement of four ontological ekstases: flesh, body, earth, and world. Detouring an expression embroidered from the earthward turn in Heidegger's thinking and hoisting it here at the summit of our own, let us call this arras of being **the ecological fourfold**. It is not my purpose to unravel the common and broken threads between this and Heidegger's fourfold (*Geviert*), which points to the four regions (*Gegenden*) of world occupied by "earth, sky, divinities, and mortals."<sup>127</sup> Still, there are two important points of intersection that deserve attention. First is the *chiasmatic* point of intersection. Much as Heidegger holds that the thing, such as a jug or bridge, gathers the regions into a place where they converge by "bringing the four close to each other in their distances," *so does the thing lie at the origin of the ecological fourfold where the six chiasmi cross*.<sup>128</sup> Second, in order to mark the fourfoldness of being, Heidegger adopts a *sous rature* device in his writing. In a graphic gesture that performs the original meaning of *chiasmōs* (fr. *chiazō*, 'to mark with the letter χ'), he crosses out the word 'being'. For Heidegger this serves to extricate being from the anthropological difference embedded in the grammar of German and English, which requires all verbs be yoked to subjects and/or predicates. More significantly, it hints at that other undecidable gesture, 'Seyn'. Recall from chapter 2 that *Seyn* was our pivotal point of entry into the ecology of being. For it designated the attempt to think Dasein (enstasis

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Heidegger's essays "The Thing" (1951) and "The Question of Being" (1955): P 310f./GA9 411f.; PLT 171-8/GA7 175-182.

<sup>128</sup> In Heidegger's words, the thing gathers (*das Ding dingt*) the fourfold in a sense traced out by the etymology of the German *Ding*, from the Old High German meaning 'a gathering' or 'assembly' (PLT 172f./GA7 176f.). For a discussion of the ecological being of the thing in Heidegger, see §16).

qua anthropostasis) from beyng (hyperstasis, genostasis): a methodological inversion of the early analytic of Dasein. In line with these considerations, I shall apply a similar decussation to 'being'. By marking it with the ideogram  $\chi$  instead, my intention is to convey in addition to the ancient Greek origins of ecology the generative ambiguity of the chiasm (chiasma-chiasmus) within the texture of Merleau-Ponty's writing and thought, which are deeply rooted in those origins and fertilized by the same brute experience, the same wild being. A sight to behold, the ecological fourfold:



**Figure 8.1** The Ecological Fourfold, Be $\chi$ ng

Each double-arrow line represents a chiasmus: a heterostatic movement between two ontological ekstases. Allow me to enumerate these movements, beginning with the vertical axis, followed by the lateral and the transversal: flesh-earth, body-world, flesh-body, earth-world, flesh-world, body-earth. Each of these six chiasmi either crosses over or pivots about the thing,

which holds them all together. Yet the thing is essentially no less and no more than its ontologically ecstatic relations. It is ambivalently *mise en abyme*, caught up in the mirrorplay of non-disjunctive dyads, which alternate across the antipodal quadrants surrounding it on every side. There are two basic dyads: sensing-sensible, which defines the phenomenological difference across the lateral axis; and being-of—being-in, which defines the ecological difference across the vertical axis, or rift. In addition, the latter is supplemented by two ancillary pairs, which further articulate in Merleau-Ponty's idiom the essential features of the complex ecological difference between the flesh-earth (FoB-FoW) and body-world chiasmi. Dividing the diagram into quadrants brings these two differences alternately into focus. But a simple rotation effects a gestalt shift that reveals how they co-inhere, indeed, like "segments of one sole circular course." By rotating the diagram, or by simply shifting our visual focus away from the triangular quadrants toward one of the two transversal chiasmi (flesh-world or body-earth), the dyads suddenly appear in two groups of four terms on opposite sides of it. Whichever chiasmus is brought to the fore, the peripheral segments of the other liminally point to the ontological ekstasis to which the groupings refer. And in every case, these frames of reference conform to the way that sensing and the sensible each admits of degrees of ipseity *and* anonymity, visibility *and* invisibility on Merleau-Ponty's account. If we focus on the flesh-world chiasmus, one liminal arrow points to my own lived body: the *sentient* mode of *being-in* whose *ipseity* is *visible* for itself (e.g. in self-awareness of its acts, self-consciousness, caring-for-itself). Moving across to the opposite corner we find the arrow points to earth: the elemental other in the *sensible* mode of *anonymous* phenomena, or an indefinite abyss of non-beings that are *of* it. Concealing itself on the *invisible* side of the thing, earth registers as no-thing for the body, bearing neither face nor physiognomy but only obstacles, resistant to inspection as they are to circumspection. If now we shift our focus toward the body-earth chiasmus, one liminal arrow points to the flesh (of the body): the elemental other in the *sentient* mode of *anonymous* existence. As an infinite openness to passive exposure made up of all the ulterior possibilities to active disclosure, this phantom concert of the *invisible* for itself escapes from the self to hide beneath the act(ion). Finally, we pass over to the world: the *visible* horizons *in* which the *ipseity* of the *sensible* appears in the form of spatio-temporal particulars, self-standing perceptual wholes, or else ready-to-hand equipment conducive to the self-projections and self-understanding of *Selbstsein* or *das Man selbst*, as the case may be.

The ecological fourfold factors into every experience, however enstatic, hyperecstatic, or abject. No ontological ekstasis *is* in isolation from the others, so must we think the six chiasmi together as covalent counter-tendencies of being. But seldom does experience response-ably conserve them in due measure and proper proportion. Like the dendritic tree of the brain, albeit through different channels, the innervation and potentiation of some fibers can lead to the enervation and degradation of others at the blink of an eye, in the span of a lifetime, or over the course of the history of being. I am referring in the main to the vertical chiasmi on either side of the ecological difference, whose respective induration is prone to compromise the lateral chiasmi traversing that difference. Bodily being-in-the-world on the one side and carnal being-of-the-earth on the other each constitutes a heterostatic relation, meaning that the being of each sentient pole of these bipolar chiasmi only eventuates in its differential self-mediation through its sensible counterpole, and vice-versa. For sake of simplicity, I shall hereafter refer to these vertical double-arrows together as *phenomenological chiasmi* to distinguish them from the four *ecological chiasmi*. To embrace Merleau-Ponty's talk of circles, cycles, and circuits, one might say that the phenomenological chiasmi form two larger half-segments of one circular course, which arc in both directions from sensing to the sensible, bringing the dyads in the three quadrants between them into mirrorplay across the phenomenological difference (e.g. sentient and sensible modes of ipseity or anonymity, visibility or invisibility). In spite of being heterostatic, neither of these chiastic arcs is heterological when considered apart from the other. To see why this is so, we must bring into play the asymmetrical relations depicted by the single-arrow lines at the top and the bottom of the diagram, which reintroduce the other multistatic criteria of any given heterological relation across the ecological difference (running through both sides of the phenomenological). The deficiency in question boils down to a poverty of hyper(ek)stasis on the (comport)mental side of being and (en)stasis on the elemental, giving rise to the *anarchecologies* of ecumenism or chaos, dysclosure or dysposure (overexposure), aversion or dispersion *in extremis*, leading to earthtorn devastation or earthborne destruction. By way of specification, let us redirect our attention to the chiasmi themselves, retracing their circuit round the fourfold.

As it stands in the world, my lived body is moved to turn toward its sensible reverse, taking it up and/or taking it in. To the extent that the thing fulfills and affectively promotes these outbound intentions, it is disclosively turned over into the horizons of visible significance as I

return to my own body (hence the branched single-arrows on the right side of Figure 8.1). *Such is the phenomenological chiasmus of being-in-the-world.* On the other hand, to the extent that the materiality of the thing resists and affectively inhibits my body's activity, a certain *kairos* opens round the thing at the center of the fourfold. A critical moment emerges from the depths at the crossing of sensing and sensible, whereupon each chiasmatically bifurcates across the ecological difference toward the elemental ekstases (toward flesh and earth respectively). In running up against the taciturn earth, I may persist in striving to disclose that which can't be overturned only to retreat into disinvolved deliberation as it inevitably thwarts my body's dexterous advances. But insofar as it commensurably bewilders reflection, my calculations serve merely to augment my divergence from the sensible and our mutual detachment from the world. In effect, the chiasmic reversibility of sensing and sensible is impaired by the resolute activity of the former, which is unresponsive to the inbound intentionality of the (no)thing. The bodily ekstasis of being thereby withdraws into enstatic solipsism for me, a self-imprisoned inflection of ecological *and* existential abjection (cf. chapter 1). Of course, I can seek to reinstate the chiasmus of being-in-the-world by simply turning away from the elemental silence, or invisibility, of the thing. I can fall back upon the blind routines established by what has already been thought, said, or done to dys-close it into one of the fungible placeholders of static sense. But I cannot carry out this peremptory exchange without neutering its transcendence, its singular ab-sense, that hyperstatic difference which gives birth to new expression in the world. My relation to the sensible is reversed in being affected by it in this case, but only on the basis of what has been and can be disclosed. Like a chessboard on which the pieces are moved and exchanged in countless variations but always in conformance with an invariable set of rules, the world becomes checkered with (en)static difference to be mastered. So is the endgame played out in the ecumene, where expression as such is in *zugzwang*, forced into stalemate. When it invariably comes to stand in for carnal contact under the guise of our fundamental relation to the thing, when it attenuates the chiasmic fibers on the elemental side of being, this stillborn style of embodied existence disintegrates the chiasma, reprising the earthtorn tragedy of ecumenism.

If instead I defer to the wild being of the thing by making allowances in my activity for exposures to its wayward affordance, invisible absence and silent ab-sense, then the world turns over to the earth and my body to the flesh. The single-arrows on the left side of the diagram serve to represent how the flesh, qua sentient element of being, empathetically responds to

sensible elementality, to the indefinite earth that has gathered itself together and begun to exist for itself indefinitely. *Such is the phenomenological chiasmus of being-of-the-earth*, which has already been elaborated in depth.

Our investigations have unfolded in a planetary theater of wilderness where flesh takes center stage on earth, and exhilarates. We journeyed from the centerless dark of the forest to the sunbaked desert, braced ourselves at the epicenter of the earthquake. We scaled sheer escarpments and tumbled into rift valleys to break our heads on stone. We leapt from the lips into the belly of the river, were digested, then disgorged by its mouth to drift atop then sink beneath the sea, just as Miletus had been whelmed and Thales almost drowned in the mysterious well at its center. We entered worlds scorched by furious suns and others wracked by floods, mythic and historic. Thence we followed Thracians and joined in their processions to the outlands of the ecumene, where we learned to laugh obscene with Baubo and the foreign-born slaves, Iambe and foreign slave-poets *in more ferarum ad mortem*. We attended Eleusinian rites in sacral subterranean, rehearsed the death of the body and rebirth of the flesh in deference to the chthonic Earth-Mother and her earth-devoured daughter. Finally, we fell into the amoebic seacloud of a deathlike sleep and crawled out the other side of night renascent, reincarnate yet humorously indeterminate, wavering between a day in the life of a bird, a plant, a little girl, and the fossilized life of the ammonoid, whose rupestrian tomb drew us into the vertiginous abyss of time. In all these atopias we courted desolation and disorganization, bewilderment and disembodiment, destruction and death. Only on the homeward journeys back was rebirth won and renewal done. The conservation of the ecological metabolism requires that each antimetabole be cycled and recycled through the others. Short of this, the chiasma is bound to be rent with ruin. If it is to avoid the suicide, the omnicide of elemental overexposure, if it is to avert the utterly *chaotic* divergence of transcendence from immanence, and if there be a *via media* between ontological obscurantism and parochialism, then being-of-the-earth must return to being-in-the-world, hyper(ek)stasis to (en)stasis through genostasis. Once more, the chiasmi do chiasmate, this time from the wild side of being. Turning about, they double back and cross-fertilize with those on its lee at their divergent intertwining in the rift, at the heterological truth that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing.

This way lies the ecological response-ability of the caretaker, one who oscillates between her own body and its faceless flesh to conserve in due measure and timely proportion the

elementality of the body, the carnality of the world, and the harmonious strife of the earth-world. For her that measure has been set by carnal empathy with the elements, a manner of finding oneself out beyond the self and *of* them arche-ontologically. Finding one's self immersed and so displaced by these ecstasies, submerged beneath the horizons of the ecumenical landscape, this can happen most anywhere. Even on the city streets, for these too come of earth. In her emersion from the elsewhere to being-there-in-the-world, the affective intertwining of all earthflesh continues to reinfect her fundamental moods through elemental attunements such as deference, reticence, humility, or that deferent irreverence we call humor, which co-operate to moderate her saying, perceiving, and doing with outlandish exposures to things silent, invisible, and impractical. These exposures intimate the undisclosable. Yet it also leaves a trace, the absent-presence of the elements, a hinting summons which gestures toward their cultivation and expression. By singing the earth into the world, the caretaker dwells other-wise, in the other house of being. Somewhere between *there* and *elsewhere*, she takes her place in the *oikos* of the *heterologos*, where the everliving hearthfire she tends, and the wind and wood that feed it and the seaworn stones protecting it and the bodies they all shelter chance to gather, as one flesh, into *being-of-the-earth-in-the-world*.

(iv) *Ontological Origami: The Temporal Folds of the Fourfold*

We bring our investigations to a close by reopening the enigma from the beginning of this section: the allohistoricity of existence in the *chiastic* structure of being, or being-of-time.<sup>129</sup> Thus far we have plotted a circuit of two-dimensional movements through Figure 8.1. Such are the chiastic exchanges and counterchanges that circulate and interpotentiate chiasmatically through the ecology of being. To bring its *temporal* movements into focus, a third dimension must be added to the moving image. This requires another gestalt shift, readily attained through another simple manipulation of the diagram. By *folding* and *unfolding* the ecological *fourfold*, we can begin to see how the past im-plicates and the future ex-plicates the present, the crease which holds them together while being no less and no more than their com-plication and divergence. Rather than simply moving between the abstract spaces of the fourfold, these graphic gestures, this ontological origami moves them into one another to reveal their concrete

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<sup>129</sup> In the November, 1960 working note of *The (In)Visible* entitled "Time and chiasm," these are expressly equated (VI 267f.). The working note itself is brief and telegraphic. Aside from such hints, this text offers regrettably little to guide us in this promising direction.



overlapping, their temporal thickness. In so doing, it thematically duplicates what Merleau-Ponty refers to as the “Urstifting” of “transcendental geology,” described as a kind of (allo)historical “implication in a circle,” or more precisely a *helical* (three-dimensional) movement of “the very time that is space, the very space that is time,” which he says “makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history” (VI 158, 177, cf. 199). More precisely, the involution of this “spatializing-temporalizing vortex” is duplicated by twice folding the diagram: from the bottom up over the phenomenological difference, then left to right over the ecological. The fourfold thereby becomes a quarterfold representing the temporal complication of being. On Merleau-Ponty’s final appraisal, “the flesh is this whole cycle” of foldings and unfoldings through sensation, perception, action, thought, and language – “not only the inherence in a spatio-temporally individuated this” (VI 260). For *this* present thing just *is* that “cycle defined by [the] central and dominant region” of the spatio-temporal chiasma, a doublecrease in the historical world with the “indecisive contours” of the inexplicable past and future (VI 184). On this score, the chiasmic inscription of being that places it under erasure belongs neither at the foot of our diagram, as we have placed it, nor does it reside in the four double-arrows bisecting that flattened surface. Rather, it belongs on the layered quarto we are left with, which can only be *unfolded* philosophically through eco-phenomenology.

We first enter this helical cycle by folding the bottom of Figure 8.1 over the horizontal axis of the phenomenological difference. In this we duplicate the worldly implication of the body and the earthly implication of the flesh, whereby the prenatal past is folded onto lived experience. The first of these folds was covered at length in chapter 1 (§8) through our treatment of Heideggerian *historicity*. In the present chapter that concept was further developed, *allohistorically*. Rethinking it through Merleau-Ponty’s conception of life-time, we expanded historicity to encompass our implication in the immemorial institutions of *all* embodied modes of existence belonging to the life-world – vegetal, animal, and human. One is thrown into a world that has already been shaped by the concerted existence of this phantom menagerie over the indefinite eons before one was born. They too were implicated. And, to forecast a move we shall make in a moment, they *explicated* the past-pleated folds in their worlds by coherently deforming their bodily schemata to solve problems whose solutions would become enfolded into

*our* world.<sup>130</sup> The complicated history of corporeal explications and reversible implications between the body and its horizons of significance is sedimented into one's impersonal being-in-the-world. Owing to it, one is born with a body preconfigured to *affectively disclose* the traces of sense that anonymous others have organized into the sensible. Inversely, the sensible world has been preconfigured to afford the body's ingress and in-habitation, prehension and apprehension, in short, its disclosive explication. If we now *unfold* the present, the crease we made in folding the diagram from the top down, we duplicate that corporeal explication of the world, temporally construed as a movement from the past toward the future. To merge Heidegger's thinking with Merleau-Ponty's, we might say that bodily existence extemporizes itself toward its ownmost fate (being toward my death) and the world-historical destining of all forms of life (being toward the birth of the other, viz. the anonymous heirs to my world). We do so by explicating (*auslegen*) the readymade senses of the sensible into our own field of significance on the basis of a fundamental attunement to the allohistoricity of life conveyed through our organic memory. Whatever sensible obstacles we key into have been forelaid by the phantom bodies of life-world past. The thing condenses the sediments of the inabilities and unconcern of these bodies, which places limits on us, but upon which are able to build and concernfully improve. We thereby come to dwell in a stable world while enlarging the horizons of the understanding with a certain deference *to what has been understood. Such is the timeliness of being-in-the-world.*

Yet being-in-the-world is also untimely in an elementary sense. To prescind from that untimeliness by disregarding the fold on the wild side of being is to deny our earthly finitude, being-of-time as being-of-the-earth. By committing the ecumenical dys-closure of the past into world history, we miss our mark in the carnal comedy of existence and bear the mark of the ecological tragedy. As have philosophers from Socrates to Heidegger in the story we've told. The first steps out of that tragedy are made by recognizing how the earth im-plicates the flesh and appreciating the *inexplicability* of that movement. For this we must first traverse the ecological chiasmus of sentience. Pivoting about the thing qua no-thing, resistant to incorporation, the body passes over, hyper-ecstatically, to the flesh. In undertaking this two-staged departure, first from *le corps propre* then from the ecological tragedy, we resume the

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<sup>130</sup> In the origami of the diagram, we have just *unfolded* the chiasmus of bygone being-in-the-world on the right side of the ecological difference to duplicate the corporeal explication of the sensible world as it was in my immemorial past. We then re-plicated it from top to bottom, duplicating the incremental implication of this phantom concert of sentient bodies on the sensible world in which I have been thrown.

journey commenced last section by following in the untimely footsteps of Heraclitus. In so doing, we also reprise the leap into Thales' *archē* (§35-6) and reenact his humorous pratfall (§46). It is come time at last to step into the waters of the River Time. To plunge into Merleau-Ponty's "spatializing-temporalizing vortex" and to immerse ourselves in Barthes' "archetype of all links and connections" within the historical landscape. And to be exposed thereby to the flux that surges through the invisible depths of the present, where "the homogeneous intensifies" and "water engenders skin" to be perspired in turn from the surface of the surfaced body. So do we find ourselves – beyond our selves, out of our element, and in over our heads once again – dispersed by the time of the earth.

Writing about "this worldless prehistorical time, independent of any subject," Toadvine comes to equate it with the irrecuperable past and future of the elements in general, hence the "time of ashes and dust."<sup>131</sup> Indeed, if duly attuned, one could equally encounter it in the winds or sun in the sky as we have done in the fossil stone and the night that enters and exits the sleeper. But there is something exceptional about a for-itself plexus of visceral and intersensory flows immersed in its immemorial watersource, separated by the thinnest, most sensitive of permeable membranes, intensely touched from head to toe at once and unable to reciprocate. Like the invisible air we breathe and are vitally immersed in, all-enveloping water disperses from being a possible intentional object of our own touching. A thing. For the sensuous surface of this atmospheric phenomenon hemorrhages into hyperstatic depth with neither exterior nor interior. All that was said about elemental immersion in chapter 6 should be recalled here: the groundless perspective, atmospheric displacement, disorganization, and excorporation of the lived body as well as the correlative dispersion of kinesthetic affordance and advertent wholes. But how does all this relate to *temporal* flux and dispersion, to being-of-time and being untimely?

The answer to these questions is made palpable when Merleau-Ponty's insistence on the indissolubility of space and time is brought to bear on his earlier analysis. Namely, we should consider its bearing on how a "moment of time acquires its ineffaceable individuality" through a sense-bestowing act(ion) oriented toward the future, and time its historical flow through the adumbrational propagations of that thrust. Just as our immersion in the elements displaces our bodies and inhibits their lateral incorporation of local phenomena, so does it arrest our futural projection and render us untimely, or in other words, dislocated from the immanent field of

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<sup>131</sup> Toadvine, "Elemental Past," 266 (cf. chapter 5 above).

presence and the flow of making-present. When Merleau-Ponty assumed in the *Phenomenology* that I do not merely undergo the “springing forth of time,” he neglected to consider the inexorable passivity of one’s immersive exposure to its elemental flux, which does not spring forth from the static present of the conscious act or bodily action. It chaotically gyrates, like some nebula galaxy round the singularity of a black hole (PhP 451). When he now declares that “the sensible, Nature, transcend the past present distinction” and proceeds to equate this with the “time of sleep,” one can readily see that he has revoked his earlier subordination of that transcendence to subjective immanence (VI 267). By the same token, he has abandoned his waterborne riposte to the River Time: the *fountain* personified by the subject, whose “form is preserved” through the continuous “thrust” of the understanding whereby each “successive burst” springs forth only to be obtruded by the next. As though to rethink time from the “gap in the flow [that] would suffice to break up the jet,” the fountain collapses into the vortex and the self-imploded, asubjective “point of view of someone who *is of it*” in the flesh (PhP 445). As “the formative medium of the object and the subject,” we are given to understand that the flesh does not “reside in a unique place and moment” (VI 147). It is prejectively non-localized and untimely. In our carnal hyper-ecstasy (sans stasis), temporal ekstases do not congeal into the field of presence; they disperse from it apace with the displacement of sense by hyperstatic absence. This is not the dispersion of granular moments like particles of sand in the wind. Rather, immersion induces: a maceration of what has been understood in general, as retained through sense memory and explicit recollection; an absorption of the self-projected future; and a liquefaction of the now-point on which that future typically rebounds within the worldly horizons of life-time. Even so, the flux *affectively* commands its due.

To the figure of the vortex, Merleau-Ponty adds that of “a swelling or bulb of time,” the temporal “pulp” of being-of-the-earth (VI 184, 114). Were we to puncture that pulp, our interpretation suggests we might find it saturated with something like that elemental empathy that attuned Penn-Warren’s protagonist to how the flows in his “very flesh” were tributary to the immemorial ramifications of the “black delirious stream” of nature (§38, §48). Unlike the ecstatic immersion in the visceral body related by Merleau-Ponty, we are not thereby attuned to synchronicity between, say, the watercycle and the pulsebeat rhythms of life-time in the organs of our bodies. On the contrary, hyperecstatic immersion disorganizes the body, excorporates it into that “vast irremediable deliquescence” whereby life all but “bleeds away with the dissolving

world.” On the brink of terminal dissolution in that atmosphere of death, we become attuned to nothing so much as the fluxive *arrhythmia* of the elements, the flesh. Upon our emersion from it, this atmosphere does not instantaneously dissipate. It lingers on and weighs upon us in the untimely flutters of the heart and hyperventilation of the lungs, intimating the outlandish precarity of our improbable existence upon this quaking earth. Expositions of our elemental finitude.

What is exposed by immersion is being-*of*-time, the experience of which we have diagrammatically duplicated by pivoting about the no-thing into carnality, then folding earth onto the flesh (Fig. 8.1). In the eco-phenomenological sense we have released from it, ‘being-of-time’ bears primary reference to how the elemental past of the sensible has opened sensing and shaped it into a vortex of exposure. In it plenary sensation indefinitely circulates down into an abyss of ab-sense before being organized by the anonymous body in general and channeled into sense by one’s own – i.e. through my perceptual-(comport)mental activity. By “shaped” I do not intend a causal process leading to objective composition, much less some metaphysical hypostatization of that process, but allohistorical implication: a confluence of modes of manifestation to which experience owes its fluency, fugacity, permeability, and below all its depth (cf. §38). It is what disables the mover and thereby enables her to be caught up in what moves her, as it does the listener in the mute. It is what enables tangible drams of water to suffuse the entire sensorium in spate. In being of the flux, we are the sentient reflux of indefinite nature, the very waters of creation and destruction. As boundless Okeanos swelled beneath, beyond, and across the land on Anaximander’s map (§34), so does water flood and thus replenish the invisible stream of experience beneath the stable, solid masses that congeal on its surface. In duplicating this fold of being-of-time, we have uncovered not only the untimely finitude of being-in-the-world, but the first earthly wrinkle in the geo-archeology of existence.

Our ontological origami has reached an inexplicable implication on the wild side of being. This holds true in a double sense, descriptive and ontological. Our immersive experience of the elemental fold of time is not ineffable. Be that as it may, its prejective ambiguity and hyperstatic instability press language to its limits. It has therefore been necessary to ply a poetics and apply the words of the poets themselves in order to express that which not only breaches the watertight cisterns of the concept but also disperses from the culverts of conventional claptrap and technical twaddle. In addition, the earthly implication of the flesh is inexplicable in the sense

that our immersive exposure to the immemorial past of the elements does not turn it over into the world. For this we require a lived body standing footed on some stable ground, settled in place to some minimal degree, from which to explicate the senses of things into its own horizons of significance, projecting them toward its future possibilities. Yet each of these prerequisites is lacking in the excorporated flesh of time, just as they are lacking underwater. To reiterate, the flesh comprises the unobstructed openness and unarmed passivity of the body, the degree zero of its activity. If the body is exposed by virtue of its flesh, disclosure is only possible for the body. Disclosure presupposes a minimal degree of enstasis.

The dispersion of being-in-the-world occasioned by its hyperstatic immersion in the atmosphere of the elements, of the timeliness of being-in-time by the untimeliness of being-of-time, is only mitigated by our generative *emersion* from those abyssal depths, be that in the experience of coming ashore, waking up, or coming down. Rather than unfolding the left side of the fourfold from the top down, then, we must make second fold in the paper. By folding from left to right across the ecological difference, we duplicate a further complication of being-of, implicating the allohistorical thickness of being-of-the-earth, *genostatically*, in the historical thickness of being-in-the-world. We now hold in our hands the manifold of being, of-the-earth and in-the-world, which includes the second layer of meaning compressed into elementary temporal preposition (of-ness) set forth by Merleau-Ponty. Not perception or consciousness of. Not being-toward, being-in, or being objectively composed of. But our corporeal being of the flesh (FoW-FoB): the *archē* of sentient being-in-the-world, the *archē*-texture of the sensible thing, and the anarchitecture of ab-sense, whose hyperstatic flux differentially (re)generates the cycles of world-historical life. To reiterate, while the flesh does not “reside in a unique place and moment,” Merleau-Ponty underscores its genostatic largesse when he goes on to remark how it is nonetheless “adherent to *location* and to the *now*” precisely as “the inauguration of the *where* and the *when*” (VI 140). Thus do “Earth as *Ur-Arche*” and “carnal *Urhistorie*” serve together as the elemental institution “of time and space which makes there be a historical *landscape*” for embodied existence (VI 259, emphasis mine). In our terms, it furnishes the generative ground of being-there, in and toward the historical world.

It is not without a certain irony that Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of time in *The (In)Visible* resounds the ecological truth announced by that Heraclitean fragment he had once denounced as nothing more than a “confused metaphor.” “As they step into the same rivers,

other and still other waters flow upon them.”<sup>132</sup> So ran the aphorism before it was dammed in the first ecumenical epoch and incrementally diluted since. Misled perhaps by one of its scattershot paraphrases (e.g. “One cannot step twice into the same river . . .”), Plato and Aristotle each lays stress on the flux of the *river*, which they presume to be part and parcel of the Heraclitean doctrine of *panta rhei*.<sup>133</sup> According to modern scholarship, Heraclitus’ doctrine of flux, was a signature feature of his philosophy and the critical point on which he and Thales parted ways. On the standard view, if everything flows into what it is not, then all cannot be water, for it too would flow into something other than itself. Yet such readings ride roughshod over the sameness that Heraclitus more plausibly ascribed to the river, as in the undiluted version of the aphorism we originally quoted.

Considered as a land formation, or part of the *landscape*, the river gathers the flux of water into a bounded flow of definite shape and direction, a *body* of water with its own waterways. Inversely, the way the river gathers that boundless and indefinite (*apeiron*) being is shaped and continually reshaped by it. Each *is* only by sinuously intertwining with the other and divergently ramifying, even if the river is ultimately tributary to the being of water, as are all things for Thales. Therefore, it is not the river itself that expresses the flow of time – much less a succession of static “masses of water” through it – but the ecological chiasmus of the earth-world: the heterological relation between the hyperstatic flux of water and its static “incorporation” into the body of water we call river. As the river is to world history, its waters are to earthly allohistory. Just as any water cycle eventuates in bodies of water, from streams to rivers to seas and back again to streams, the time of the earth is organized into the physiognomy of the rhythm, the cycle, procession, recession, and static succession in its passage through world history. Here we move with Faulkner across the surface of time, in which existence is cast and time cast forth, ecstatically rippling through the organs of nature. Within this historical landscape, “nothing ever happens once and is finished” while everything, from seas to stones and all their living echoes, keeps time to the “old ineradicable rhythm.” However, were it not for the generative arrhythmia of the vortex in the depths of time, those physiognomies would stagnate, desiccate. Without the “ever new” of “Nature . . . at the first day,” writes Merleau-Ponty, their

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<sup>132</sup> Heraclitus fr. D 12 (Kahn L).

<sup>133</sup> Heraclitus fr. D 91 (Kahn LI). This is a paraphrase from Plutarch presumably inspired by turns by Plato and Cratylus. Strikingly similar paraphrases are furnished by Plato and Aristotle, each of whom emphasizes the perpetual flux of a river which is in no wise the same (as noted in §49).

rhythms would give way to repetitions of a moment that is “always the same” (VI 267). Time is precisely the helical movement of the ever new and always the same through the ecological difference: the generative flux of the earth, its condensations into worldly flows, and their earthly redispersion. Correlatively, existence is born of elemental allohistory, steps forth toward the stable historical world, only to be reclaimed by the carnal compost of being from which others are born. Im-plication, ex-plication, and re-plication that is anything but repetition.

One needn't be an avid swimmer to condense from the abyssal past a response-ability to the elemental eruption of the singular moment into the general field of time's flow stemmed. For its petrified traces abound in our waterlaced world. We encounter these traces in every watershaped stone. The currents that have sculpted it have left their mysterious mark, their ingenious impress. Yet these are not made present by perception as the gyrations of a spoon are given in the residual volutes of a tea-sunken sugar cube, much less to reflection as a series of volumes, vectors and coefficients of friction. Rather, they pre-given through our brute exposure to the unguessed textures of the stone. But for this we must we defer the handy grip, set our gaze adrift unfocused. With mind quiet as water in the intimate fissures of being, we simply wait. In allowing our skin to meditate on the surface of the stone, or by abstractedly running our fingers over it for a spell, the merest depression or polished facet can suffice to immerse us. The stone begins to lose its hardness. It takes on all the suppleness of flesh. And in the undecidable rift between touching and being-touched by no-thing but the elements, our experience slips from the body to the vertiginous flesh of the stone being sculpted, at the first day and over eons since, by the indefinite artistry of water. In being-touched by those lithic watermarks, we undergo a phantom detrition, empathetically, as though it were our body's flesh immersed. Finally, in passing back over to touching, we become this water, touching itself in the medium of flesh fossilized, so that we can no longer distinguish what or who is being shaped from what or who is shaping.

The stone bears deep time in the negative, not as a footprint does, but rather like some sensuous “gange” of the ore extracted by perception – Merleau-Ponty's petroglyphic cipher for the flesh (VI 9). It is in this negative, this residual excess of the ulteriority of being, that earthwork commences, for the sculptor and mason as it does for the philosopher. In deference to what the elements have wrought, they cultivate what is already there, if never fully present or ready to hand for being-there. And what store they add to its expression is born of a humility in



the face of the untimeliness of their own. The temporal manifold of the ecological fourfold unfolds for no one but the caretaker. In caring for the otherness of being, she works as she dwells in the rift at world's edge, breaking newground from wild being while cultivating the old. In this she never ceases to draw water from the blood, humor from water, and blood from the stone. Off-scene of the ecumene, the caretaker hits her timely marks in the comedy of existence by disporting herself toward her inde-finite nature in the elemental fullness of time. A fossilized past and a future. Having all but forgotten the wisdom of ecology, we now lurch toward the threshold of a new dark age. A time of cataclysmic devastation that brings us ever closer to nature on *our* last day. But there remain some who have never forgotten. With them we must stand. Resounding, resilient, beneath the abject clamor of the world, their voices toll the muted exhortation. "We are only caretakers. We're caretakers of the earth.

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