

# PARENTHESES OF RECEPTION

## WHAT ARE PHILOLOGISTS FOR IN A DESTITUTE TIME?

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*Abstract*

The encounter between received poetic traditions and rational critique appears to characterize reception itself as an interruption. The tradition impinges on present discourse and calls for an evaluation in terms of the present. Regarded as such, reception requires a translation that would negotiate the relationship. The consequence of formulating the question of reception in this way is that the received past subsists parenthetically, inserted into the present while remaining somehow apart from the

present. An especially provocative illustration of the disruptive and parenthetical nature of reception, including the strategies of translation that it instigates, can be found in the life and work of Martin Heidegger who, perhaps more than any other philosopher of the twentieth century, persistently reflected on the interchange between poetic tradition and thinking.

*Keywords:* tradition, reception, translation, parenthesis, M. Heidegger.

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### **Parenneze recepcije. Čemu filologi v ubožnem času?**

#### *Povzetek*

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Zdi se, da srečanje med sprejetimi pesniškimi tradicijami in racionalno kritiko recepcijo samo zaznačuje kot prekinitev. Tradicija se dotakne sedanjega diskurza in kliče ovrednotenje z vidika sedanjosti. Kot takšna, recepcija zahteva prevod, ki se spoprime s tovrstnim razmerjem. Posledica takšne opredelitve vprašanja recepcije je, da sprejeta preteklost obstaja parentetično, vključena je v sedanjost, čeprav je od nje hkrati nekako razločena. Posebej provokativno ponazoritev prelomne in parentetične narave recepcije, zaobsegajočo tudi strategije prevajanja, je mogoče najti v življenju in delu Martina Heideggra, ki je vztrajno, morda bolj kot katerikoli drugi filozof dvajsetega stoletja, reflektiral medsebojni odnos med pesniško tradicijo in mišljenjem.

*Ključne besede:* tradicija, recepcija, prevod, parenteza, M. Heidegger.

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The encounter between received poetic traditions and rational critique (what Plato's Socrates memorably referred to as "the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy" [παλαιά τις διαφορὰ φιλοσοφία τε καὶ ποιητικῆ, *Rep.* 10, 607b]) would appear to characterize reception itself as an interruption. The tradition impinges on present discourse and calls for an evaluation in terms of the present. Regarded as such, reception requires a translation that would negotiate the relationship. In the *Republic*, this translative management consists in receiving the *what-is* of the past and conceiving it in terms of a present *what-for*. Accordingly, Socrates's interrogation of the traditional poets *in absentia* turns on the question of purpose: What are poets for in the ideal city?

As the following essay suggests, the consequence of formulating the question of reception in this way is that the received past subsists *parenthetically*, inserted into the present while remaining somehow apart from the present: a relationship of "difference" or "variance" (διαφορὰ) between the *what-is* of the past and the *what-for* of the present. An especially provocative illustration of the disruptive and parenthetical nature of reception, including the strategies of translation that it instigates, can be found in the life and work of Martin Heidegger who, perhaps more than any other philosopher of the twentieth century, persistently reflected on the interchange between poetic tradition and thinking.

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## 1.

On December 29, 1926, the writing of poetry and the act of thinking—*Dichten und Denken*—suffered a temporary setback. In the early morning hours of this winter's day, at the Clinique Valmont, a sanatorium nestled in the Swiss Alpine landscape of Glion-sur-Montreux, Rainer Maria Rilke passed away gently in the arms of his doctor. Three days later, on the New Year, Martin Heidegger learned of the poet's death while paying a visit to Karl Jaspers in Heidelberg. It had been Heidegger's intention to finish reviewing the galleys of the first volume of his major work, *Sein und Zeit*, as well as complete the draft of the project's continuation; but that plan suddenly came to a halt.

Fourteen years later, in 1941, during his lecture course on the *Metaphysics of German Idealism*, Heidegger interrupted his conceptual presentation to recount what happened:

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(The decision to break off the publication [of *Sein und Zeit*] was made on the day when the news of R. M. Rilke's death reached us. —Certainly, at the time I was of the opinion that over the course of the year I could say everything more clearly. That was a delusion.)<sup>1</sup>

The casual remark to his students, sequestered within the brackets of a parenthesis, is striking. Heidegger's terseness and the light cover of the passive voice, the misguided conviction and the acknowledged self-deception—all invite conjecture. What, we might ask, is the parenthesis for?

The bracketed reminiscence poses at least three principal questions.

The first is *intrinsic*: How should we read the coincidence between Rilke's death and Heidegger's decision to stop writing? Is the relation causal or are the two events merely fortuitous? Is the intrusion from real life simply accidental or does it not, perhaps, point to something more essential, something more substantive in regard to the philosophical work?

32 The second question is *extrinsic*: How does this personal anecdote of 1927 connect to the 1941 lecture, in which it is recounted? Is this autobiographical information useful, illustrating the matter under discussion, or is it just a curious digression, possibly seductive, leading us down a false path or *Holzweg*? Incidental or not, it is immediately clear that both questions, intrinsic and extrinsic, entail an interruption of sorts. Just as the death announcement in 1927 interfered with Heidegger's publishing agenda, so does the personal recollection in 1941 detain the philosophical presentation at hand. Just as Rilke's passing coincided with the suspension of Heidegger's project, so does the recollection of this postponement, fourteen years later, temporarily delay the professor's explication of German Idealism.

The brief story about an interruption in the past thus interrupts the philosophical argument in the present, which leads finally to the third question: How do these two disruptions relate to each other? Are they thematically analogous, somehow complementary, or are they merely structurally similar?

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1 "(Der Entschluß zum Abbruch der Veröffentlichung wurde gefaßt an dem Tage, als uns die Nachricht vom Tode R. M. Rilkes traf. – Allerdings war ich damals der Meinung, übers Jahr schon alles deutlicher sagen zu können. Das war eine Täuschung.)" (Heidegger 1991, 40.)

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The complexity seems to lie in the general nature of *parentheses*. Like every *parenthesis*, the note is placed *into* the text, *en-thetically*, yet as something that appears simultaneously *off to the side*, *para-thetically*. The positing or *thesis* is both *in* and *beside* the current discourse, both *en* and *para*, a part of the whole while being apart from the whole. This double aspect makes it difficult to ascertain how any parenthesis relates to the main argument. For this reason, Pierre Fontanier advises that one should always be cautious in employing a parenthesis, since it “tends necessarily to produce encumbrance, obscurity, confusion.”<sup>2</sup> Again, what purpose, we might ask, does Heidegger’s parenthesis serve? Is he trying to confuse us? Is he trying to be obscure? What are the grounds for this encapsulated account, which ventures to overstep the very boundaries of the discourse, in which it is embedded? Does the anecdote offer anything more than a simple case of synchronicity, a somewhat uncanny concurrence, a *by-the-way* that Heidegger pauses to say on the way to thinking?

On the face of things, the interruption in 1941 is perfectly justified. Within the context of his lecture on the “concept of existence,” the parenthetical note helps Heidegger explain why his mode of ontological inquiry became subject to gross misinterpretation. The reason, he claims, is quite simple: he never published the subsequent parts of *Being and Time*, his most well-known work. As he explains, on the day he learned of Rilke’s death, he shelved the project; and if he had persisted, he might have pre-empted the confusion that followed. All the same, the turn to this autobiographical episode is somewhat odd, insofar as Heidegger opened this very lecture by warning explicitly against conflating the concept of existence with ontic notions of human “subjectivity” and “personality.” Thinking, Heidegger just insisted, must be directed towards Being and not towards the personality of the thinker. The philosopher’s life must be bracketed out in considering the philosopher’s work. And yet it is precisely at this point in his lecture that Heidegger inserts a bracketed account from his personal life.

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<sup>2</sup> “Mais par cela même qu’elle interrompt le discours, et qu’elle détourne pour un moment l’attention de son objet principal, elle [la Parenthèse] tend nécessairement à produire l’embarras, l’obscurité, la confusion.” (Fontanier 1977 385.)

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34 It is often presumed that Heidegger consistently discouraged appeals to biography in philosophical investigations. The evidence for this claim is invariably taken from the introductory lecture to his course on the *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, held during the summer semester of 1924 at Marburg: “Regarding the personality of a philosopher, this alone is of interest: he was born at such and such a time, he worked and died.” (Heidegger 2009, 4; translation modified.)<sup>3</sup> The particular circumstances of the thinker’s life are taken to be inconsequential, irrelevant for understanding a thinker’s thought. Needless to say, for later critics of Heidegger, divorcing the philosopher’s work from his personal history can only be seen as a ruse. The political stakes, of course, are high. Should one dismiss the news of Rilke’s death as an insignificant coincidence in regard to the trajectory of Heidegger’s thinking, then one might go so far as to feel justified in separating Heidegger’s philosophy as a whole from the circumstances of his life, including, above all, any complicity with the National Socialist regime. Heidegger’s many detractors, to this day, would argue otherwise. That Heidegger’s parenthetical reminiscence occurs in 1941 should give one serious pause. Even if, or especially because, Heidegger would reject seeing any causal link between his work and his personal life, the fact that he inscribes an autobiographical remark, parenthetically, in the midst of his lecture, should be taken into account. After all, what Heidegger wants to bracket out, appears, but appears, of course, in brackets. The phenomenological *epochē* is performed, but not so that one may regard a matter more purely. Rather, the bracketing takes place so that what is bracketed itself stands in full view, hiding in plain sight.

Quintilian defines *parenthesis* as a figure of thought (*figura sententiae*), which occurs “when some thought in the middle interrupts the continuation of a discourse” (*cum continuationi sermonis medius aliqui sensus intervenit, Inst. orat.* 9, 3.23). In modern typography, this interruption is generally marked by brackets which introduce a further element of difference or heteronomy vis-à-vis the body of the text (cf. Authier-Revuz 1984). If a parenthesis does indeed always constitute some kind of intrusion, then the news of Rilke’s death has

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3 “Bei der Persönlichkeit eines Philosophen hat nur das Interesse: Er war dann und dann geboren, er arbeitete und starb.” (Heidegger 2002, 5.)

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always been parenthetical: first appearing concretely, in 1927, at the moment when Heidegger abandoned his plans; and then appearing as a memory, in 1941, at the moment when Heidegger digressed from his lecture. In both the recounted episode and in the recounting, Rilke's death, including the impact it might or might not have had on Heidegger's personal life, infringes on thinking. But again, what purpose might this intrusion have? What might it tell us about the connection between poetry and thinking, *Dichten und Denken*, or, for that matter, between thinking and life, between thinking and death?

To be sure, a bracketed statement need not be interpreted solely as an included exclusion. In the rhetorical tradition, a *parenthesis* is generally regarded as a type of amplification that assumes many useful, integrative functions: to provide supplemental information, to make a relevant qualification, or to furnish a clarifying specification. At times, a parenthesis can be employed to announce a theme to be expanded afterward, at some later point. In all these examples, the parenthesis is a rhetorical technique that fills in the text. Still, precisely by supplementing the text, the parenthesis implies that the text would be otherwise deficient or wanting, in need of completion. Moreover, the bracketing of a portion of the past is emphatically selective: it brackets out the rest of the past. This gesture is typical for any classical program which selects from the entirety of antiquity only that which is deemed of superior value. In formulating its canon and prescriptive poetics, the classicizing poet implies that antiquity would be deficient without his artistic-critical labor.

Tellingly, in the 1941 lecture, Heidegger leads up to the parenthetical anecdote by confessing that, in 1927, he came to realize that his draft for the continuation of *Being and Time* was "insufficient" (*unzureichend*). Was it the news of Rilke's death that caused Heidegger to come to this difficult assessment? And is the later evocation of the obituary meant to address this insufficiency? In hindsight, could Rilke's passing finally be taken as a sufficient reason for thinking otherwise, as *ein zureichender Grund* for a project once deemed *unzureichend*? The question now is: What is the poet for? Or rather: What is the poet's death for? What kind of ground might it supply? As Heidegger himself might ask: Is the author in full control of this technique or does the technique threaten to undermine his intentions?

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## 2.

Regarding the personality of a philosopher, this alone is of interest: he was born at such and such a time, he worked and died. As mentioned, Heidegger's notorious restriction on biographical criticism comes across as a parenthetical aside in the introductory session of his 1924 course on Aristotle's fundamental concepts or *Grundbegriffe*. The opening methodological comment on Aristotle's life is intended to dissuade his students from striving to construct a coherent philosophical system based on the notion that the philosopher was a masterful subject exercising complete technical control over his concepts. Instead, Heidegger wants to investigate how many of Aristotle's terms came to be formed from words that already existed in customary usage and how this common usage, rooted in a distinctively Greek experience, continued to qualify the terminological usage in essential ways. To this end, Heidegger endorses an approach that differs from conventional philosophy:

36           What must be seen is the *ground* [or *soil: Boden*] out of which these fundamental concepts have grown, and *how* they have grown, i.e., the fundamental concepts should be considered in their *specific conceptuality*, so that we may ask, *how the matters themselves meant here are seen, whereupon they are addressed, in which way they are determined*. If we bring this point of view to bear on the matter, we shall enter into the setting [*Milieu*] that is meant by concept and conceptuality. The fundamental concepts are to be understood in regard to their conceptuality, and specifically with the purpose [*Absicht*] of *gaining insight into the fundamental demands of all scholarly research*. Here, it is not philosophy being offered or even a history of philosophy. If *philology* means: the *passion for knowledge of what has been expressed [and of what expresses itself]*, then what we are doing is philology.<sup>4</sup>

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4 "Es muß gesehen werden der *Boden*, aus dem diese Grundbegriffe erwachsen, und

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The phenomenological thrust of these remarks is clear. The concepts that are to be examined—“the matters themselves,” *die Sachen selbst*—must be allowed to show themselves. This passive imperative—*es muß gesehen werden*—cannot be accomplished by regarding Aristotle’s key terms solely as abstract expressions that have been cognitively deployed by the philosopher. Rather, the words must be seen as subsisting within a concrete context and possessing a certain degree of agency. In Heidegger’s view, the aim is *philological*, insofar as it engages in a reading that directs us toward the midst of things, to the living *milieu*, where we may attend to the very soil that underlies and nourishes philosophical research. It enables us to draw closer to what Aristotle confronted, to enter upon the path that his thinking has opened up for us. We must detect not simply meaning, but rather how that meaning initially came to be formed. As Heidegger underscores throughout the lecture course, we are too distant from the being-in-the-world that pervades Aristotle’s language. And so, we must approach the distinctive soil that gave rise to the concepts that appear in his texts; we must approach the original Greek experience of Being; and we must do so, finally, from our own historical position, motivated by philology, by “the passion for knowledge of what has been expressed and of what expresses itself.”

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For Heidegger, the task of the translator does not merely consist in transposing concepts from one language into another. Rather, it is the translator who must be translated, transported into a foreign domain of experience, while remaining aware of the gaps that prevent any perfect, transparent translation.<sup>5</sup>

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*wie sie erwachsen sind, d.h., die Grundbegriffe sollen betrachtet werden auf ihre spezifische Begrifflichkeit, so daß wir fragen, wie die da gemeinten Sachen selbst gesehen sind, woraufhin sie angesprochen werden, in welcher Weise sie bestimmt sind. Wenn wir diese Gesichtspunkte an die Sache heranbringen, werden wir in das Milieu dessen gelangen, was mit Begriff und Begrifflichkeit gemeint ist. Die Grundbegriffe sind im Hinblick auf ihre Begrifflichkeit zu verstehen, und zwar in der Absicht, Einblick zu gewinnen in die Grunderfordernisse jeglicher wissenschaftlichen Forschung. Es wird hier keine Philosophie oder gar Philosophiegeschichte geboten. Wenn Philologie besagt: die Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis des Ausgesprochenen [und des Sichaussprechens], dann ist das, was wir treiben, Philologie.” (Heidegger 2002, 333; emphasis in text; the bracketed phrase is taken from Heidegger’s handwritten note.)*

5 See Heidegger’s remarks in his 1942/1943 lectures on Parmenides (cf. Heidegger 1992, 16).

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The dismissal of the thinker's biography and personality, therefore, does not reject the role of history or especially the meaning that history should have for us. The philological aim is most emphatically *our* aim, *our* passion. It encourages us to read what is there in its being-there within the limits of our own facticity, which together comprise the "hermeneutic situation." Philology, Heidegger would say, is historical without being historiographical. It does not strive to accumulate information objectively and neutrally in a technical, calculating manner.<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, philology is an impassioned enterprise that remains fully aware of its "presuppositions," including above all a pronounced "faith in history," by which "we presuppose that *history and the historical past, insofar as the way is made clear for it, have the possibility of giving a jolt to the present or, better, to the future.*"<sup>7</sup> For Heidegger, this collision of the present and the past is precisely what motivates the "passion"—the *Leidenschaft*—that is philology.

Thus, Heidegger reiterates his approach:

38           The lecture has no philosophical aim at all; it is concerned with understanding fundamental concepts in their conceptuality. The aim is *philological*; it intends to bring the *reading* of philosophers somewhat more into practice.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger's intention to replace philosophy with philology belongs to an overarching project that would continue to characterize his career—namely, the dismantling or de-structuring (*Destruktion*) of the philosophical and theological systematizations that have been layered upon original events of thinking. The case of Aristotle is exemplary, insofar as the Aristotelian corpus

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6 Heidegger's definition of the historiographical is provided in the Parmenides course (cf. Heidegger 1992, 94).

7 "[...] den *Glauben an die Geschichte* in dem Sinne, daß wir voraussetzen, daß *Geschichte und geschichtliche Vergangenheit, sofern ihr nur die Bahn frei gemacht wird, die Möglichkeit hat, einer Gegenwart oder besser Zukunft einen Stoß zu versetzen.*" (Heidegger 2002, 6.)

8 "Die Vorlesung hat gar keine philosophische Abzweckung, es handelt sich um das Verständnis von Grundbegriffen in ihrer Begrifflichkeit. Die Abzweckung ist *philologisch*, sie will das Lesen von Philosophen etwas mehr in Übung bringen." (Heidegger 2002, 5.)

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has been entirely integrated into a formidable metaphysical tradition beginning with Aquinas and continuing across the centuries. Aristotle, so to speak, has been buried alive; and Heidegger, in an Orphic key, wants to recover the event of his thinking—to bring the ancient philosopher, and with him the Greek experience of being-there, back to the light of day.

To this end, Heidegger explicates key terms through textual cross-references and etymological speculations. At times, he turns to the ancient glosses of Themistius or the late antique commentaries by Simplicius of Cilicia; he occasionally considers the critical apparatus prepared by modern textual critics; yet he brackets out, so to speak, all the scholastic interpretations and philosophical histories that have gathered around Aristotle's language and smothered it beneath the weight of cogent erudition. In this regard, Heidegger's philology is not only Orphic, but also resonates with the Lutheran criterion of *sola scriptura*. Aristotle thus comes across as "his own interpreter" (*sui ipsius interpres*).<sup>9</sup> Leery of any universal or Catholic authority that aims on fixing the discourse and stabilizing its terms, Heidegger insists on listening to the text as he hears it, philologically and passionately, in the hope of grasping some trace of Being, even if Being, like Eurydice, withdraws in the moment of self-revelation.

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By considering Aristotle's terminological usage in vital relation to customary usage, Heidegger's philology follows a different path of thinking, a *Denkweg* that departs from the method of formal logic established by scholasticism and upheld in the work of Immanuel Kant. Logic, as Heidegger portrays it, consistently distinguishes between *intuition* and *concept*. Whereas an entity perceived by intuition is a mental representation of the singular (*representatio singularis*), an entity understood as a concept is a generalized representation based on features held in common among multiple entities (*representatio per notas communes*). The concept thus acquires a definition, which determines the purpose or use of the entity. To illustrate, Heidegger paraphrases Kant's own example:

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9 Cf. Michalski 2005, 65–80.

A savage sees a house, whose *what-for* [*Wozu*] he does not know, quite different from us [...]. To be sure, he sees the same entity, but the knowledge of the *use* escapes him; he does not understand what he should do with it. He forms no concept of house.<sup>10</sup>

Conceptual clarity requires bifocality: the definition comprises both intuition and concept, it sees the entity in its singularity and simultaneously understands its technical purpose, its *Dasein* and its *Wozu*, its *what-is-there* together with its *what-for*. However, in a phenomenological mode, Heidegger charges that the scholastic definition causes the singularity of *what is there* to dissolve entirely into the technical possibilities of the *what-for*. In Heidegger's view, the scholastic definition of definition is a reduction and hence "a symptom of decline, a mere technique for thinking that was once the basic possibility of human speech."<sup>11</sup> Scholastic logic traffics with a repertoire of definitions that have been abstracted from the purposes once embedded in a distinctive context. The original τέχνη, which once revealed an entity's use within historical, concrete experience, has become "a mere technique for thinking [*eine bloße Denktechnik*]."

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In contrast, philology strives to engage with the incipient ground that continues to determine concepts in a concrete and vital sense.<sup>12</sup> A philological reading of the philosophical text is called for in order to attend to each concept's "autochthony" or *Bodenständigkeit*. Aristotle's fundamental concepts

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10 "Ein Wilder sieht ein Haus dessen *Wozu* er nicht kennt, ganz anders als wir [...]. Er sieht zwar dasselbe Seiende, aber ihm fehlt die Kenntnis des *Gebrauchs*, er versteht nicht, was er damit soll. Er bildet keinen Begriff von Haus." (Heidegger 2002, 11.) Heidegger is referring to Kant's introduction to his lectures on Logic: "In jeder Erkenntniß muß unterschieden werden *Materie*, d. i. der Gegenstand, und *Form*, d. i. die Art, wie wir den Gegenstand erkennen. — Sieht z.B. ein Wilder ein Haus aus der Ferne, dessen Gebrauch er nicht kennt: so hat er zwar eben dasselbe Object wie ein Anderer, der es bestimmt als eine für Menschen eingerichtete Wohnung kennt, in der Vorstellung vor sich. Aber der Form nach ist dieses Erkenntniß eines und desselben Objects in beiden verschieden. Bei dem Einen ist es bloße Anschauung, bei dem Andern Anschauung und Begriff zugleich." (Kant 1923, 33.)

11 "[...] eine Verfallserscheinung [...], eine bloße Denktechnik, die einmal die Grundmöglichkeit des Sprechens des Menschen gewesen ist." (Heidegger 2002, 13.)

12 For further discussion, see Kisiel 1993, 286–295.

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are emphatically indigenous, having grown from the native Greek soil. To take a single brief example, when Aristotle says οὐσία, which Heidegger translates as “being-there” (*Da-sein*), the term should still be heard as a word rooted in customary usage and thus in the particular lifeworld of ancient Greek culture, in which οὐσία denotes “property or real-estate, a personal possession.” In order to come closer to what Aristotle meant by οὐσία, it is necessary to explore this common ground which continues to steer how the concept is meaningful. As Heidegger concludes: “It can only be a matter of understanding the customary meaning in such a way that we take from it *directions* on the terminological meaning.” (Heidegger 2009, 18 f.)<sup>13</sup> In other words, the concept in its conceptuality is set in the ground and yet detached, both embedded in customary *life* and removed in terminological *work*—life and work, intertwined yet apart, parenthetically, as it were.

### 3.

On December 29, 1946, to mark the twentieth anniversary of Rilke’s death, a small group of acquaintances gathered in Heidegger’s cabin in Todtnauberg to listen to an informal lecture from their host. Although the theme announced was Rilke’s poetry, Heidegger chose for his title the well-known line from Friedrich Hölderlin’s elegy, *Brod und Wein: Wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?* (“What are Poets for in a destitute time?”) Hölderlin’s poetic question concisely rehearses the conditions for Heidegger’s earlier philological investigations—namely, how the technical conception of purpose (the *Wozu*) should be seen within the factual experience of a specific epoch and culture. Here, however, it is not some historically distant time that must be read, but rather the present time of the thinker himself, a time, moreover, that is represented as somehow deficient, impoverished, and feeble—*eine dürftige Zeit*.

That the present time was one of profound indigence and spiritual turmoil would hardly have required any persuasion among Heidegger’s German audience. Without question, the aftermath of the war had been personally devastating for Heidegger. In addition to having part of his home requisitioned

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<sup>13</sup> “Es kann sich nur darum handeln, die geläufige Bedeutung so zu verstehen, daß wir bei ihr *Anweisungen* auf die terminologische entnehmen.” (Heidegger 2002, 24.)

by the occupying forces, in addition to seeing the old town of Freiburg lying in rubble, in addition to witnessing the confusion and the desperation, the intolerable guilt and the unfathomable shame, Heidegger was dismissed from the faculty, banned from all university buildings, and had his teaching license revoked. Although the French Denazification Committee initially voted to treat the philosophy professor with leniency, the University Senate pushed for a harsher sentence, having been compelled by the testimony of Karl Jaspers who denounced his old friend's pedagogical approach as "unfree, dictatorial and uncommunicative." Twenty years before, it was at Jaspers's home that Heidegger resolved to curtail the publication of *Sein und Zeit*; and now it was Jaspers himself who played a direct role in curtailing Heidegger's career. By the spring of 1946, Heidegger suffered a complete mental and physical breakdown. It would take months to recover, and then, only after submitting to a prolonged course of psychosomatic treatment in the Sanatorium Hausbaden under the care of Victor Baron von Gebattel, a former student of Ludwig Binswanger, whose own brand of phenomenological psychiatry was indebted to Heidegger himself (cf. Mitchell 2016).

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Meanwhile, Heidegger further despaired, disingenuously or not, over misrepresentations and crude generalizations of his work through facile appeals to his personal life. In the private pages of the so-called *Black Notebooks*, Heidegger once expressed the wish that such biographical matters be bracketed out—a wish underscored, once again, by his own parenthetical gesturing:

That a thoughtful grounding again becomes a sort of collection of sayings, well protected against idle talk and unharmed by all hurried misinterpretation; that the works of twenty or more volumes including all the concomitant snooping into the author's life and utterances (I mean the usual "biographies" and collections of correspondence) disappear and the work itself will be strong enough and kept free from the disfavor of being explained by the inclusion of the "personal," i.e., from being dissolved into base generalization [*Vergemeinerung*].<sup>14</sup>

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14 "Daß dann das denkerische Gründen wieder eine Art Spruchsammlung wird, gut verwahrt gegen das Gerede und unverletzlich durch alle eilige Mißdeutung, daß dann

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Inevitably, long after appeals to the indigenous soil have lost any and all innocence, the publication of these carefully preserved notebooks in 2014, re-ignited debates over the complex relationship between the philosophical project and the philosopher's life. Heidegger himself appears to surrender to the notebooks' utterly parenthetical force. Destined, according to the author's own instructions, to be published as the final volume of his *Gesamtausgabe*, his most personal and at times most shameful admissions would be included within the work by remaining to the side of the work. In 1946, although consigned to the margins of Todtnauberg, Heidegger would continue to intervene, both as an insider and as an outlier—a self-styled philologist in a destitute time.

Yet, the impoverished time that Heidegger evokes in his Rilke lecture only indirectly alludes to the recent misery of the postwar period. For he views the present nocturnal state as the culmination of a much longer, more essential history. As Hölderlin's poem proposes, the destitute time begins with the disappearance of the gods—Dionysus, Herakles, and Christ—; a time of mourning, waiting, and vague expectation. Still, what makes the present moment especially abysmal is that God's "absence" or "failed presence" (*der Fehl Gottes*) is no longer even perceived as a failure or fault. In Heidegger's assessment, this obliviousness is symptomatic of rampant, all-encompassing technologization, the relentless exploitation of the earth at the will of the metaphysical subject. Heidegger's well-known critique of technology, which he will develop over the remainder of his philosophical career, is resumed here, in his first attempt to re-engage with poetry after Germany's defeat, having just emerged from what was arguably the most severe personal crisis of his life.

The critique of technology from this point forward will be fairly consistent. Modern technology regards nature as a "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*), which reduces *what is* to something ready-to-hand, something available for human use and human purposes. This technological reduction has left human being without ground. *Dasein* thus stands upon an abyss or *Abgrund*. To be sure,

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die 20-und-mehr-bändigen Werke samt den beigegebenen Lebensbeschnüffelungen und Äußerungen (ich meine die üblichen 'Biographien' und Briefsammlungen) verschwinden und das Werk selbst stark genug ist und freigehalten von der Ungunst, durch das Zutragen des 'Persönlichen' erklärt, d. h. aufgelöst zu werden in die Vergemeinerung." (Heidegger 2014, 328.)

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technology in itself is not the problem. For τέχνη, like ποίησις, allows beings to appear and therefore very much belongs to the history of Being. Aristotle is explicit on this point: ἔστι δὲ τέχνη πᾶσα περὶ γένεσιν (“All art [*technē*] is concerned with bringing into existence [*genesis*],” *Nic. Eth.* 6, 1140a10–11). Yet, whereas “poetic making” (ποίησις) lets something come forth of its own accord, τέχνη renders it conducive to a determined end. Τέχνη, in other words, is pragmatic and clearly a part of human being-in-the-world, insofar as it allows human beings to make ordered sense the world. In Heidegger’s account, when τέχνη is allied to ποίησις, it manifests itself as a craft or an art, as a mode of unconcealment that is inherently differential. Yet, modern technics foregoes its poietic kinship and thus imposes itself as a reductive totalization.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the current era is precipitating to the point where technical, calculative thinking will dominate over all other possibilities for interacting with the world. With increasing persistence, modern technics is occluding alternative ways of unconcealment; above all, by suppressing ποίησις. And precisely by precluding poietic and other modes of transacting with the world, technology

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leaves us with a yawning deficiency, lost in a meager and needy nighttime. To address this desperate situation, Heidegger turns the technical question, *Wozu* (“what for”), back on itself. What are poets for in a destitute time? Heidegger’s response is both immediate and simple: true poets, like authentic thinkers, reach into the present abyss, into the present absence. Analogous to the *philological aim* outlined in the early lecture course on Aristotle, the *poetic aim* returns to the ground of being, where the *what-for*, the *Wozu* of technical conception, is concretely bound to the *being-there*, to the historical *Dasein* that determines this conception. Heidegger’s legerdemain is as brilliant as it is seductive: If the thinker is more a philologist than a philosopher, then the philologist is also a poet.

Within the first page of his essay, Heidegger has already answered the title question. In fact, he is less concerned with the answer, if only because we have not yet understood the question properly. Hence, Heidegger poses a fresh question: “Ist R. M. Rilke ein Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” (“Is R. M. Rilke a poet in a destitute time?” [Heidegger 1977a, 274.]) Does Rilke’s poetry, like

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15 Cf. Fóti 1992, xvi.



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Hölderlin's, trace the absence of the gods? Can it guide us to the ground or soil, where thinking may encounter the revelation of Being? Can Rilke assist us in "turning away from the abyss" that has resulted from the total technologization of the world? To think on this series of questions, Heidegger adduces a poem from Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (*Sonette an Orpheus*, I, 19):

Wandelt sich rasch auch die Welt  
wie Wolkengestalten,  
alles Vollendete fällt  
heim zum Uralten.

Even if the world changes swiftly  
like shapes of clouds,  
everything consummated falls  
home to the primeval.

Über dem Wandel und Gang,  
weiter und freier,  
währt noch dein Vor-Gesang,  
Gott mit der Leier.

Above change and passage,  
farther away and freer,  
your fore-song still endures,  
god with the lyre.

Nicht sind die Leiden erkannt,  
nicht ist die Liebe gelernt,  
und was im Tod uns entfernt,

Not recognized are the sorrows,  
nor is love learned,  
and what removes us in death,

ist nicht entschleiert.  
Einzig das Lied überm Land  
heiligt und feiert.

is not unveiled.  
Only the song above the land  
sanctifies and celebrates.

(Heidegger 1977a, 274–275.)

In Heidegger's view, the sonnet suggests that Rilke certainly recognizes the time's destitution, in which the tyranny of technical, calculative thinking detaches us from nature, deluding us into believing that we stand *apart* from the world rather than *in* the world. Technical thinking is *parathetic* without being *enthetic*. In a destitute time, sorrows are not recognized, love is not learned, death is not unveiled. Like Rilke, Heidegger has always insisted that death individuates human being authentically, by defining the finite temporality of human existence. In its attempt to master nature, modern technology presumes to triumph over death, to gloss over its inevitability. Enthralled to technology, Dasein acquires but a delusional immortality. Thus, the sonnet's movement from transience to endurance should not be confused with the calculated

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ordering that characterizes technical thinking, since Orphic song unveils the finitude that technology conceals. What remains is poetic song. What endures is poetic language, attending to the trace of the holy, abiding mournfully until, like Orpheus himself, it reaches into the abyss to retrieve what has been buried, even though Being, in its unconcealment, withdraws from the Orphic gaze that strives to grasp or comprehend it.

Beginning with his first lecture course on Hölderlin in 1934, held immediately after he resigned from the university rectorate, Heidegger's engagement with poetry employed his own idiosyncratic brand of philology, one that limits itself to focused, if not tendentious comments, rather than offer a comprehensive reading of the text. His parenthetical-philological method is tellingly selective in that he adduces specific verses for his interpretation while bracketing out the rest. Accordingly, Heidegger's discussion of Rilke's sonnet readily yields a message that accords closely with the account of death that Heidegger outlined in *Being and Time*, death as "one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality for Being" (Heidegger 1977b, 406), but also death as one's ultimate impossibility, when being-there is no longer there. For Heidegger, death is, so to speak, parenthetical, included in Dasein by always remaining outstanding. Death is projected into a future that never arrives, neither phenomenologically (for it never appears) nor ontologically (for it does not exist).<sup>16</sup> In reading Rilke's sonnet, Heidegger attends to the poet-as-Orpheus who reaches into this abyss, but fails to grasp the love he aims to retrieve. What Heidegger overlooks in the poem, however, is the death of Orpheus himself. It is the slaughtered Orpheus, whose scattered limbs spread "farther and freer." It is Orpheus's death that results in an apotheosis, where the poet, post-mortem, is transformed into a heavenly constellation, *la lyre d'Orphée*, the "god with the lyre." For Rilke, death is not something forever unachievable, forever beyond grasp, but rather a completion, a sublimation.

In this essay composed in the aftermath of the war, Heidegger curiously rehearses the gesture made five years before. After his brusque reading of Rilke's sonnet, Heidegger, once again, silently sets the poet's death in brackets. Just as in 1927 and reported in 1941, the death of the poet coincides with an interruption

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16 Cf. Gosetti-Ferencei 2014.

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in thinking. And again, now in 1946, the bracketing allows his thinking to take a fresh turn—namely, towards the essence of modern technology, which evades the ontological structure of death. The move ultimately leads Heidegger to enlist Rilke, justifiably or not, in the metaphysical tradition. *What are poets for in a destitute time?* Rilke has been invited to respond to Hölderlin's question, but only in a way that the response stays extrinsic to the question.

#### 4.

If philology, as Heidegger once formulated it, is truly “a passion for knowledge”—*eine Leidenschaft der Erkenntnis*—, then the aim of philology, its *Wozu*, may be to counter the destitute time, in which, as Rilke writes, “sorrows are not known” (*Nicht sind die Leiden erkannt*). Heidegger's philology and Rilke's poetry share this conjunction of suffering and knowledge, *Leiden* and *Erkennen*. And should philology be understood as a passion, it would be impossible to divorce the philologist's work from the philologist's life, however much one might wish to place one's own life into brackets.

For the 1953 edition of his *Einführung in die Metaphysik* (*Introduction to Metaphysics*)—a lecture course that he gave in 1935—, Heidegger explains in a prefatory note that he has used square brackets to distinguish new additions from passages in round brackets, which, he claims, belonged to the original manuscript. This rather innocuous sounding typographic matter came to cause graver concerns towards the end of the book, where one reads the following passage:

What today is being passed around entirely as the philosophy of National Socialism, but what hasn't the slightest to do with the inner truth and greatness of this movement [*Bewegung*] (namely with the encounter [*Begegnung*] of planetary-determined technology and modern man), does its fishing in the troubled waters of “values” and “totalities.” (Heidegger 1959, 199; translation modified.)<sup>17</sup>

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17 “Was heute vollends als Philosophie des Nationalsozialismus herumgeboten wird, aber mit der inneren Wahrheit und Größe dieser Bewegung (nämlich mit der Begegnung der planetarisch bestimmten Technik und des neuzeitlichen Menschen)

The parenthetical amplification suggests that Heidegger, already in 1935, was critical of the Nazi regime, regarding it as the fateful and fearful alliance of modern humanity and planetary technologization. He cites one of Hitler's favorite tags—"the inner truth and greatness of the movement"—only to undercut the purported grandeur with a parenthetical aside. Heidegger's subtle use of the demonstrative pronoun—"the greatness of *this* movement"—like the use of *iste* in classical Latin, already seems to signal the thinker's critical distance. In a published reply to Jürgen Habermas's denunciation of Heidegger's complicity with National Socialism, Christian Lewalter cited this very passage as sufficient evidence for exonerating the old philosopher. Heidegger himself was so grateful for Lewalter's intercession that he fully endorsed his interpretation in a letter published in *Die Zeit* in September 1953.

48 The ensuing debate hinged on a decidedly philological matter. Did Heidegger in fact write the parenthetical remark in 1935, proving that he already held the regime in some contempt? Or was it inserted only much later, after the catastrophe, for the 1953 publication? How is it that Heidegger would have employed the phrase "planetary-determined technology" in 1935, when he adopted this phrase consistently only in the 1950s? Heidegger again, in the 1966 *Spiegel* interview, would refer to these "explanatory brackets," insisting they were, without question, written down in 1935.<sup>18</sup> Still, anachronisms have always triggered philological suspicion. The doubts would eventually lead Otto Pöggeler, in 1983, seven years after Heidegger's death, to consult the archives in Marbach.<sup>19</sup> Although the archived manuscript from 1935 was in excellent condition, the page in question was the only one that was mysteriously missing. The parenthetical critique of technology might have acquitted the thinker, but the positive evidence is gone, concrete proof will forever remain wanting, *dürftig*—and that, perhaps, after all, may be precisely what philologists are for.

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nicht das Geringste zu tun hat, das macht seine Fischzüge in diesen trüben Gewässern der 'Werte' und der 'Ganzheiten.'" (Heidegger 1983, 208.)

18 Interview with Rudolf Augstein und Georg Wolff, September 1966 (cf. Augstein, Wolff, and Heidegger 1976, 193).

19 Cf. Pöggeler 1988, 17–63.

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