THE CLAIM OF LANGUAGE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by

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This dissertation develops an interpretation of Martin Heidegger's philosophical project in *On the Way to Language* and some of his earlier works that pave the way for this text and offers criticism of Heidegger's project in light of this interpretation. *On the Way to Language* stands apart from most twentieth century philosophy in arguing that, although human beings are *within* language in one sense, our relationship to language is nevertheless an estranged one. Heidegger often describes this condition as "lacking the word for the word." Because we are constantly speaking, we rarely if ever stop to wonder about the nature of language itself. Heidegger calls this our "entanglement" within language, a concept rooted in *Being and Time*'s exposition of the human being's thrownness. Read in terms of language, thrownness describes how we inherit concepts and find ourselves entangled in words prior to our reflection upon them.

Heidegger presents what motivates us to bring the word to word in two ways. First, this need is rooted in the human being's fundamental structure of thrownness. Second, the need makes itself manifest through translation. My reading expands upon these two explanations of how we come to experience this entanglement, arguing that everyday communication regularly offers such experiences and demands that we modify, therefore temporarily distancing ourselves from, given language inheritances. The dissertation employs three other theorists, Roman Jakobson, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva, to flesh out how this need naturally arises in ordinary language development.

Though he underestimates the extent to which everyday communicative situations require ongoing transformations of ordinary language, Heidegger nevertheless considers social encounters to be an important vehicle for language transformation. In this way, the goal of bringing our thrownness into language to word is not to disentangle ourselves from social relations, as some commentators have suggested. The last chapter shows how Paul Celan's poetics, in its inheritance of Heidegger's project, expands upon the role of social relations in language entanglement.

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To my sisters and my mother, through whom I am perpetually finding language and joy.

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CHAPTER I

FINDING OURSELVES IN LANGUAGE:
HEIDEGGER AND THE LINGUISTIC TURN

When one speaks of the philosophy of language, Heidegger is probably not the first figure that comes to mind. In fact, one cannot locate any definition of language in Heidegger's work, let alone a sustained description of the qualities, modes, and rules which would distinguish it from other phenomena. What's more, the prospect of bringing Heidegger's engagement with *Sprache* (language) into conversation with language theorists from other traditions seems like an awkward effort motivated by no more than a coincidence of words. Is it not foolish to insist on a dialogue between figures on the basis of the fact that they use the same word? Why not admit that, for example, Saussure and Heidegger are addressing two entirely different matters and limit Heidegger's comparators to other explicitly ontological thinkers like Aristotle or Hegel?

Indeed, Heidegger sought to speak about language in a way that systematically departed from the philosophical history of the word. Though this effort can be tracked throughout the series of lectures and essays that comprise *On the Way to Language*, an instructive example can be found in the "Dialogue on Language" (1953-4). In this exchange, Heidegger discusses with Professor Tezuka whether there is a word in Japanese for language. The richness of the dialogue hinges on the thoughtful way in which Tezuka responds to the question. After much consideration, Tezuka appears to find his answer in what we are inclined to perceive as a sensuous image: *Koto ba*.[1] He offers it, however, not as an image but, he says, as a hint. The enthusiasm Heidegger displays in response to Tezuka's answer is revealing for understanding where his interest in language

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[1] It is particularly difficult to give a summary explanation of this phrase. Tezuka first notes that *ba* means leaves, especially blossom leaves. Having already described *Iki* as the "pure delight of beckoning stillness," Tezuka explains that *Koto* names that which gives such delight in an event. It is the happening of the graciousness which brings forth and allows flourishing. *Koto ba* names the petals that stem from *Koto*.

does and does not lie. "That is a wondrous word," Heidegger rejoins, "and therefore inexhaustible to our thinking. It names something other than our names, understood metaphysically, present to us: language, *glossa, lingua, langue*. For long now, I have been loath to use the word 'language' when thinking on its nature."[2] Here we see Heidegger's weariness of speaking about *Sprache* and his enthusiasm, instead, for what is hinted at in this word.

It is through an attempt to loosen words from their sedimentation, understood above as that which "names, understood metaphysically, present to us," that Heidegger seeks to distinguish his approach to *Sprache* from others who aim to orient themselves by way of the ready-to-hand, unquestionable presence of words. Rather than edifying the concept of language that is available to us, *On the Way to Language* tracks the withdrawal of language from the word "language," a withdrawal which, as I shall later address, Heidegger considers the very essence of language. As such, these meditations are not easily incorporated by a philosophical approach whereby, on the basis of a common term, one assumes the continuity of a subject matter across a wide range of authors. For this, critics from Adorno to Carnap charge Heidegger's texts with a level of encryption which makes it, at times, nearly impossible to evaluate their claims through comparisons with other authors who treat "the same" theoretical subject matter.[3] Part of the worry, as I see it, is that in loosening the word from its historical sedimentation, and following it toward the region of its withdrawal, Heidegger unsettles the grounds for communication, which, in some part, lies in this historical sedimentation. Further, if language's withdrawal means that it fundamentally eludes our ability to know it, then Heidegger's approach to language seems to result in a skeptical position: a comportment

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[2] Martin Heidegger, "A Dialogue on Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971), 47.

[3] I am drawing a comparison between Adorno and Carnap's criticisms of Heidegger only on this point. It is worth noting that in *The Jargon of Authenticity*, Adorno actually faults Heidegger on the same grounds as he charges positivism. "Neither of them bother," he observes, "about the dialectical moment in which language, as if it were something else, wins itself away from its magical origins, language being entangled in a progressive demythologization. That particular neglect authorizes the social using of linguistic anachronism. The jargon simply ennobles the antiquity of language, which positivists just as simply long to eradicate – along with all expression in language." – Theodor Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. Knut Tarnowski and Frederic Will (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 42-43.

to knowledge which is perpetually haunted by the separation of λόγος and being, and which, thus, continually rediscovers the impossibility of knowing and speaking.

In this chapter, I hope to show how Heidegger's attention to the need for an approach to language amounts to something more significant than a disregard for clarity and something other than the melancholic alienation of the philosopher from his language. For, as the first two sections of this chapter show, in tracking with Heidegger the withdrawal of language from the word "language" as it has come to operate metaphysically, we may discover the way in which our familiar relationship to words is the site of unacknowledged and unresolved contradictions. In the first section, I describe these contradictions in our familiar relationship to language as thought's entanglement with language, one that involves our inheritance of a historical tradition but is not reducible to it. This entanglement spurs us to transform our relationship to language, which involves rethinking the immediacy of our relation to it. It is this attempt to find ourselves in language again through such reconstruction that I call *the turn to language*.

The second section of this chapter addresses one important aspect of how we might find ourselves estranged from language, namely, as the experience of what Heidegger calls "un-readiness-to-hand" (*die Unzuhandenheit*). Here I argue that the experience of language that Heidegger describes in "The Nature of Language," which seemingly emphasizes passivity and casts language as a kind of sovereign signifier that one cannot question, should instead be read as prompting us to rethink our immediate relation to language.

In the third section, I look at one attempt to characterize the site of language's claim. The focus here is on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* in its attempt to establish a relationship between word and being that illegitimates philosophical questioning of language, including but not limited to skepticism. By exploring the irony of Wittgenstein's own discourse, I show how, as Heidegger says, language proves to be more than the conceptual framework of our thinking. There is something inexhaustible, I will argue, in the difference opened up in our questioning of language, which proves

difficult to incorporate into any metaphysical conception of language insofar it attempts to ground and limit language to what is ready-to-hand.

Language consistently proves to be more than what we've taken it for. In the last section, I develop this point further by looking at poetic experience and, in particular, at Heidegger's reading of a poem by Stefan George. The poet's turn to language is not unlike Wittgenstein's in that language appears in unforeseen ways, for example, as silence. Only this time, this possibility is not illegitimated but, on the contrary, emerges as the voice of the poem – the event of its unique speaking – precisely that which the poet in his turn to language hopes to effect or encounter.

Thinking and Speaking Through Entanglement

Our familiarity with speaking, for the most part, keeps us from reflecting much on language. As conceptuality, language is the general form in which things give themselves to be thought, and insofar as we are regularly thinking, this general form seems both familiar and obvious. We take it as constantly present and understand our thinking – for some, even our primary experience – as linguistic. Linguistic concepts are the way in which we immediately organize our experience. I look out of the window and I see "house," "truck, "gray," "mud," "rain." Such concepts aren't limited to the grammatical form of the noun. As I continue to gaze, I reflect momentarily on the scene's effect: "I am calm." Language organizes and synthesizes my experience. Such conceptualization happens so quickly – perhaps even immediately – that it is difficult to fathom that these concepts themselves are the result of mediation, construction, or work.

Though sometimes innocuous, such realizations can result in a disturbance of the way in which language functions "behind the scenes" of reflection by alienating language in its immediacy from the work of which it results and which it continues to enact. For the most part, we fail to synthesize or to negotiate this alienation of our primary experience. For example, if what we take from the fact that what appears as our immediate experience has actually been mediated via historical and cultural inheritances

is that our primary experience is simply an *illusion*, this easily leads to a disposition wherein the world organized by our concepts is a false world, or that our thinking merely repeats a history and a culture without possibility of revision.

But philosophy, having frequently involved dispute over the true meaning of terms, seems in part predicated upon the possibility that these inheritances which shape our reflection require rethinking and that, in doing so, we may revise these errors and understand the *truth* of the words we use. When Socrates asks about the meaning of justice in *The Republic* or the meaning of love in *The Symposium*, he aims to critically examine the way that these words are frequently used. Such meditations make us question the working knowledge that we have of our language, not simply in order to undermine this working knowledge but – through ἀπορία (impasse) perhaps - to effect some change in the way that we think about the words we use.

These efforts are difficult, because it is not as though one can simply abandon usage in order to get to the truth of, say, justice or love. Our thinking is always already immersed in and making use of language when we find ourselves in need of a new approach. At the same time, however, breakdowns do occur in various forms that require us, midway through the course of our speaking lives, to question just how this conceptualization occurs. Upon learning the cultural history of a word, for example, I may find myself reoriented in the way that I hear it. Knowing its origins are tied to the lynching of Blacks in America, I may not hear the word "picnic" as innocently as I did as a young girl. These cultural histories stand to be forgotten when we experience language as ahistorical and, by virtue of this, innocent. Conversely, the lack of historical awareness with which many speak may be upsetting if I admire the history attached to a word. For instance, I may have to remind myself of the intellectual labor and the nuanced thought that went into shaping the concept of democracy in America when, given the way it is used for the most part in our political discourse, I may be inclined to regard the word "democracy" as meaningless.

Such historical awareness is an important way in which we can relate to our language as something which requires and has always rested upon mediation. But one

could also see the experience of writing as providing a similar insight. In sitting down to write, I experience my relationship to language as requiring effort. I must make choices among different ways of formulating what I want to say. Not only this, but having made a decision, I may look back at it and realize that that a formulation I chose failed in the end to say what I had hoped, and then I must revise it. This is a reciprocal process; my thoughts and intentions don't directly express themselves into language, perfectly worded, because it in the struggle to express our ideas that we are able to determine what thoughts are worthwhile and, thus, what intentions we have. As a form of inquiry, the process of writing invites us to question the initial relationship between our thoughts to our words. Language ceases to operate merely as the immediate framework in which my thoughts come to me. Instead, it appears as the destination my thoughts strive to reach.

What these examples show is that a complete phenomenological description of language would have to address both ways that language operates in our lives: (1) as the immediate, given framework of our thinking, and (2) as that destination toward which thinking finds itself oriented for various reasons. Notice that in the latter case the phenomenological description would itself encounter language as a practical question, and, in this, it would cease to be purely description.

Throughout *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger emphasizes the need for, as the title suggests, a *way to* language. For, as the experiences above make evident, as much as it seems a constant presence in our existence, we must work on our relationship to it. "The way to language is impossible," Heidegger claims, "if indeed we are already at that point to which the way is to take us. But are we at that point? Are we so fully within language such that we experience its nature, that we think speech as speech by grasping its idiom in listening to it?"[4] A way to language would not be needed if language did not seem to call us away from the way it operates as innate or transcendental structure and as the inscription of culture upon the individual.

But as I have suggested, we experience this claim upon our being in manifold ways. Moreover, apart from this or that experience we may have, there are a number of

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[4] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 112.

weaknesses with these paradigms simply as theoretical descriptions of the phenomenon. For instance, in conceiving of language as an innate or transcendental structure or a cultural inscription, one leaves out any first-person account of the way that language becomes (and in some cases fails to become) significant for individuals. For to be claimed by language and to be embedded in a signifying system are two different things. Recall my description of conceptual language as the immediate form in which things give themselves to be thought. We could rephrase this point by saying that language is the form in which determinate, significant experiences give themselves. Now, asking how the significance of language emerges seems nonsensical if one takes language to be the source of all significance. For whatever then moves at the margins of language enters immediately into the realm of the indeterminate and meaningless.[5]

To note, there seems to be a significant contradiction in the way that we conceive of language. For example, despite its *a priori* significance, words are still *mere* words, that is, epiphenomenal. A word is at once the most determinant form that thought can take and a mere shadow compared to what is beyond them. Real and unreal, sign and signified, the status of the word – and, for that matter, our relation to it - is anything but coherent.

One can see this in philosophy's ongoing struggle with rhetoric. When Gorgias claims to teach the art of *logos*, Socrates questions whether such an art can really exist – distinct from the study of, say, medicine or political science. To know how to speak well on a subject would seem to require that one has some genuine knowledge of that subject. Without this, the art of rhetoric appears to be little more than smoke and mirrors, sophistry in its propensity for deception. At the same time, any philosopher knows the value of studying formal argumentation. Replaying a move that Aristotle makes in his *Rhetoric*, we trust that, by nature, arguments will tend toward truth and goodness rather

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[5] See, for example, Rudolf Carnap's "On the Character of Philosophical Problems" in *The Linguistic Turn* edited by Richard Rorty (Evanston: University of Chicago, 1967). Here Carnap understands himself to be giving a "positive" account of the character of philosophical propositions, in place of Wittgenstein's at the end of the *Tractatus*. As I shall try to argue for the importance of this negative account for the place of silence in the linguistic turn, I find it interesting that Carnap's project, while understanding itself as a continuation of Wittgenstein's work, seems on this point to leave behind this aspect of his project.

than deception and ill will.[6] In this, we maintain a place for self-evidence and intuition, which cannot be derived from reason, even as we emphasize the need to submit all of our assumptions and values to rigorous critique.

Philosophy's relationship to language today is an especially conflicted one. On the one hand, we can be historically hyperconscious, by which I mean that we have a strong sense that the way we think is determined by a history that we cannot escape. Coupled with whatever lingering distrust of rhetoric there may be (perhaps dwindling in response to the anti-intellectualism of the day), this suggests that we harbor some degree of reluctance about how language affects our thinking. On the other hand, numerous efforts have been made to rethink the concept of language that we have inherited. Recurrently, philosophy seems to rearticulate the way that language structures our lives.

And yet, these assumptions are so deeply entrenched in our thinking that they've appeared even in my own attempt to describe the history of language as the history of its concept. When I say that there has been a history of efforts to rethink the way that language *structures* our lives, I am presuming that these efforts have all aimed to describe the way that language functions as a medium. In this and other ways, it seems inevitable that when we ask for the essence of language, we inevitably seek the concept. In other words, we seek the concept of language stripped of the historical baggage of the concept.

There seems to be no way of untangling language from the history of the concept. As much as we can see this history as contingent, we cannot leap out of it in order to get a more objective idea of language.

It is from this situation of entanglement that Heidegger speaks in "The Nature of Language." In the first lecture, for example, he writes:

> We speak and speak about language. What we speak of, language, is always ahead of us. Our speaking merely follows language constantly. Thus we are continually lagging behind what we first ought to have overtaken and taken up in order to speak about it. Accordingly, when we

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[6] See Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Book I, Chapter 1, Line 1355a 21: "Rhetoric is useful, because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites . . . ." and 1355a37: "No; things that are true and things that are better are, by their nature, practically always easier to prove and easier to believe in." These remarks are taken by many commentators as a response to the Platonic suspicion of rhetoric.

speak of language we remain entangled in a speaking that is persistently inadequate.[7]

Language is historical. And this means that our thinking does not originate *ex nihilo*, not only because we inherit certain concepts from the past but because the very concept of the concept is one such inheritance. Our thinking and our language are largely the sedimentation of the past. In allowing this inheritance to come to light and in bringing out the historical entanglement of any philosophical questioning of language, Heidegger's own line of questioning opens up a space in which to rethink our relationship to what seems impenetrably obvious. This space, however, is not the uncontaminated space which results from what Sartre called accessory reflection. It is not that of a mind considered in isolation from these assumptions. Rather, our entanglement with the metaphysical language of the concept reveals the intractable inheritance of a historical tradition.

As Heidegger says in "The Way to Language": "There is no such thing as natural language, a language that would be the language of a human nature occurring of itself, without a destiny. All language is historical, even where man does not know history in the modern European sense."[8]

One can see that the conception of language as a historical inheritance could easily lead us back to an attitude wherein language no longer seems question-worthy. In truth, the image of sedimentation used earlier does not go far enough to describe the relationship of history and thought, since in questioning our comportment to the constant presence of language, our comportment to history is transformed as well. In experiencing our own thinking as the scene of historical inheritance, history becomes more than a block of events that are fixed in the present as "the past."

This is why, in "The Nature of Language," Heidegger writes, ". . . (W)here we already are, we are in such a way that at the same time we are not there, because we

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[7] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971), 75.

[8] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 133.

ourselves have not yet properly reached what concerns our being, not even approached it."[9] What concerns our being (*was unser Wesen belangt*) requires some approach (*erlangen*). Whether we are talking about history or language, our deepest inheritances remain only alienated parts of our lives unless we find a way of experiencing them in such a way that we are called to think about how their presence is convened in our lives. Such an experience is precisely what Heidegger understands his lectures to work toward.

Undergoing the Event of Language

According to Heidegger, exploring the *Wesen* of language calls for us to have an experience with language. The character of this experience requires explanation for a few reasons. First, it is not obvious how an experience which (a) is not something universal to all people and (b) is potentially anecdotal can be the most important thing for an effort to arrive at the *Wesen* of language. Secondly, I have emphasized the way that Heidegger's approach makes us question language's immediacy, but experience seems to be relatively pre-reflective – not in the sense that it isn't mediated by concepts in the way that I've described – but in the way that is revealed when we, for example, talk about doing something with a purpose vs. doing something just for the experience. We tend to talk about experience as something that befalls us vs. something that our thoughts strive to reach. Indeed, Heidegger at times speaks this way as well.

For example, Heidegger begins the first lecture of "The Nature of Language" with a description of the nature of this experience. Here he contends that:

> To undergo an experience with something – be it a thing, a person, or a god – means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us and transforms us. When we talk of 'undergoing' an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. It is this something that comes about, comes to pass, happens.

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[9] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 93.

> To undergo an experience with language, then, means to let
> ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language by entering into
> and submitting to it.[10]

> *Mit etwas, sei es ein Ding, ein Mensch, ein Gott, eine Erfahrung machen
> heißt, daß es uns widerfährt, daß es uns trifft, über uns kommt, uns
> umwirft und verwandelt. Die Rede vom »machen« meint in dieser
> Wendung gerade nicht, daß wir die Erfahrung durch uns bewerkstelligen;
> machen heißt hier: durchmachen, erleiden, das uns Treffende vernehmend
> empfangen, annehmen, insofern wir uns ihm fügen. Es macht sich etwas,
> es schickt sich, es fügt sich.*
> > *Mit der Sprache eine Erfahrung machen heißt dann: uns vom
> *Anspruch der Sprache eigens angehen lassen, indem wir auf ihn eingehen,
> *uns ihm fügen.[11]*

To experience language means to experience it as an event that we somehow undergo and that is "not of our own making." As I've said, what is especially important about this passage for my purpose is that it seems to contradict my earlier account of what often causes us to question language: an experience of language as mediated and requiring mediation. The insight, as I have described it, is precisely that language *is* of our own making, both in that it is historical and in that one must make a way to it. Is this evidence of yet another paradox in our conception of language?

Heidegger offers some clarity on this when in "The Question Concerning Technology," written four years earlier, he explains how modern technology positions nature as a standing reserve (*Bestand*), which he describes as the way that "(e)verywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering."[12] Nature becomes not only synonymous with what is *a priori* and innate but what has no meaning in itself other than what we make of it. Likewise, we understand words to be arbitrary containers for the meaning we

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[10] Ibid., 57.

[11] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe, Band* 12: *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 159.

[12] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 322.

insert into them. Like nature, we are oblivious to language as long as it functions. The relationship here, in fact, goes beyond analogy, since any technological enframing of nature requires a technical language.[13]

But as Heidegger describes in *Being and Time*, the breakdown of the tool can be an extraordinarily disclosive occurrence, the kind of transformational event that might lead us to experience it as more than whatever we utilize it for. In such an instance, the nature of the tool reveals itself as conspicuous, as un-readiness-to-hand (*Unzuhandenheit*). "Anything which is un-ready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us," Heidegger remarks, "and enables us to see the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else."[14]

The analysis is informative for understanding the relationship between our familiar dealings with language and the possibility of experiencing it differently. Whenever the invisible framework becomes suddenly conspicuous, we can experience our comportment to language anew. Language the tool suddenly appears as striking and transformational. But this doesn't mean that our everyday comportment to language is simply overcome. Rather, this breakdown "enables us to see the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance." The breakdown of a tool can be revolutionary, but not in such a way that we become utterly free of the tool. Revolution here is not so much a progress to something different but a return to the same in a new way, as suggested in the Latin root, *volvere*, meaning to turn or return.

The analysis of un-readiness-to-hand, then, suggests that an experience of language as strange and overwhelming, while disrupting our everyday comportment to language in a way, does not necessarily amount to an incapacitation of speech. While an

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[13] In *What is Called Thinking*, Heidegger writes: "But language is not a tool. Language is not this and that, is not also something else besides itself. Language is language. . . . The boundlessness with which such sentences can be abused corresponds to the infinity into which they direct the task of thinking." – Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 153. Heidegger's defense of tautology can be understood as a rejection of the kind of predicative logic whereby a term has content only through its predication. "Language is language" directs us back to the being of the word which is presupposed by such predicative activity. In logic, we begin when some terms are "given."

[14] Martin Heidegger,, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquirrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), §16, 103.

experience of language as an estranging, sovereign force in one's life can certainly result in such incapacitation at times, it can also prompt us to reorient ourselves to "the obstinacy of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance." "To let ourselves be properly concerned by the claim of language" would require that we turn ourselves to the event of language, returning to the site of its claim.

One can see the revolution of modern literature as exemplary of this kind of turn in the way it both preserves and radically transforms the history from which it departs. But perhaps this turn characterizes any and all attempts to write. Is it not the weight of what is present and ready-to-hand that spurs one to free language onto new possibilities?[15] If we take Heidegger's word that all language is historical and that there is no such thing as a natural language in the sense of a language wholly present to hand, then even realism should be viewed as a struggle to free speech from its sedimentation. But if we can see this struggle with entanglement present in literature in this way, this suggests that we needn't understand the experience we have been describing as limited to that of a single individual. Indeed, at the very end of "The Way to Language," Heidegger quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose "deep dark insights into the nature of language," according to Heidegger, "we must never cease to admire": "A people could," Humboldt says, "by inner illumination and favorable circumstances, impart so different a form to the language handed down to them that it would thereby turn into a wholly other, wholly new language."[16]

On my reading, this "wholly other, wholly new language" is not something that we encounter as separate from the struggle to disentangle language, opening up new possibilities for it. It is precisely in speaking from out of their entanglement in what is

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[15] Roland Barthes addresses the relationship between literature, revolution, and history in *Writing Degree Zero*, where he says: "It is not granted to the writer to choose his mode of writing from a kind of non-temporal store of literary forms. . . There is a History of Writing. But this History is dual: at the very moment when general history proposes – or imposes – new problematics of the literary language, writing still remains full of the recollection of previous usage, for language is never innocent: words have a second-order memory which mysteriously persists in the midst of new meanings. Writing is precisely this compromise between freedom and remembrance . . . ." – Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annete Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 16.

[16] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 136.

"handed down," that the freedom of language emerges. And insofar as such freedom –
here in the form of literary revolution – means that one finds oneself momentarily freed
from arbitrariness and released upon the possibility of speaking otherwise, this site of
struggle is essential to the nature of language.

The experience is a shared one, because the attempt to re-encounter one's
relationship to language demands that we explore new ways of speaking. One can find
this effort underway throughout Heidegger's writing and speaking career, in that he
continually sought ways to draw our attention to language as it came to pass, not merely
as a set of instrumental signs, but as an event of thinking itself. Note that this does not
mean that we stop *using* words, only that our use changes.[17] What speech does changes. I
will return again to address poetic transformation of language at the end of the chapter.
For now, I want to make a new approach to understanding the situation of entanglement,
this time through the example of philosophical inquiry.

To Say Nothing Except What Can Be Said

So far, we have looked at a few important examples of experiences in which our
working knowledge of language becomes disrupted. These problems arise, not only
during philosophical inquiries into the nature of things, but on a day-to-day basis for all
human beings trying to orient themselves in the world. The disruption has the character
of both a theoretical and a practical problem: we may speak of contradictions in our
conception of and our attitudes toward language. From these examples, we can also see
that disruptions of language in its immediacy needn't lead simply to an incapacitation of
speaking; instead, they offer opportunities for the sort of transformation and enrichment
that language often needs. The breakdown of language may push us toward a more
authentic way of inheriting what, in the first instant, we find ourselves always already

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[17] As Heidegger writes in "The Origin of the Work of Art": "Of course the poet also *uses* the word not,
however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to consume them, but rather in such a way that the
word only now truly becomes a word and remains a word (my emphasis)."

immersed in. Rather than an obstacle to our arrival at the truth of language, entanglement seems to be the site of a difference that is essential to the nature of language.

In the end of the previous section, I suggested that we could see modern literature as an example of how it is possible to speak from out of our entanglement in language, and in so doing, to preserve the site of difference opened up in this situation. In this section, I want to explore the efforts of philosophers to think from out of the same entanglement. What I hope to demonstrate is: (a) how this entanglement motivates the philosophical turn to language, and (b) how, insofar as this turn tries to establish language as a ground for thinking, and thus to disentangle itself from skepticism and other infelicities, it finds itself once again encountering contradiction. Though I will briefly mention other thinkers, my analysis will ultimately focus on Wittgenstein, and more so on his early project so as to: (1) in this section, compare how Wittgenstein and Heidegger understand the importance of transgressing beyond the limit that language gives us, and (2) in the last section, compare Wittgenstein's understanding of the kinship of word and being to Heidegger's account of the experience of this kinship in Stefan George's poem "Das Wort," showing how a transgression of the limits of language is at play in both texts.

Only two years before Heidegger began his lectures on "The Nature of Language," J.L. Austin was captivating his Harvard audience with his seminal work on speech-act theory, "How to Do Things with Words." The result of Austin's efforts: a sense that for a long time now, philosophy has conceived of language too narrowly by treating all statements as constative (true or false) and a belief that by paying closer attention to the performative function of language, we could get a fuller picture of how language works.[18] Indeed, there were many philosophers at this time for whom language

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[18] One of the important things to note about Austin's lectures is that they demonstrate how the question, "Is that true?," is not an appropriate question to ask of all statements. In this way, the kind of knowledge that language provides us is not the kind of knowledge in every case that we can doubt. Wittgenstein's treatment of skepticism – in the *Tractatus* and in the *Philosophical Investigations* – paves the way for Austin's anslysis. In the *Tractatus*, for example, he writes: "Scepticism is not irrefutable, but obviously nonsensical, when it tries to raise doubts where no questions can be asked." – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. (London: Routledge, 2001), §6.5, 81.

had become positively captivating in that it returned them again to the cite of language's claim upon their thinking.

Just as language presents a question for individuals who seek, as Heidegger puts it, to "properly reach what concerns (their) being," language presents a question, theoretical and practical, for philosophy in its historical becoming. Nowhere is this more evident perhaps than in what has been called the linguistic turn. For the purposes of my argument, the linguistic turn describes a philosophical movement wherein the analysis of discourse, especially the laws which govern it, is preeminent and wherein this activity is understood as a radical departure from previous philosophical methods.

To what extent does the linguistic turn of the twentieth century have its roots in earlier epochs, as in Greek philosophy? For many Greek thinkers, from Heraclitus to Plato's Socrates to Aristotle, λόγος (language, speech) is fundamental to philosophical investigations. I do not intend to give a scholarly historical account of that connection here. The answer I have to give has already been provided. First, insofar as I understand any effort to re-orient oneself to language as an attempt to come to terms with inheritance, including, for example, the concept of the concept, I believe that nearly any twentieth century philosophical project on language struggles with its inheritance from the past and especially from Greek thought. Second, Greek thinkers found themselves *concerned* with their relationship to language, and this seems to suggest that their language was perhaps no more unproblematically present at hand to them than modern thinkers. They took language as a question: one which confronted them at least as much practically as theoretically.

This is to say that the intense concern with language in the larger philosophical world during Heidegger's time was not an isolated movement. And though the particular features of the linguistic turn in the twentieth century may have certain qualities which exemplify modernity, it cannot be wholly limited to the modern age. The movement is a continuation of an ongoing effort to position thinking vis-à-vis the entanglement with language in which it finds itself.

Yet the historical self-understanding of the movement as a radical departure from previous philosophical methods seems to be one of its defining characteristics. What is peculiar, however, is that this new method, rather than discovering new possibilities, requires that one encounter language as an absolute, sovereign, and natural limit to thought. For the linguistic turn is, as we shall see in Wittgenstein, an attempt to break away from the philosophical history of metaphysics, from the attempt to address the nature of concepts and things in themselves apart from the way that we speak about them.

Through the linguistic turn, philosophy becomes conscious of its activity as limited in a new way: limited to responding to a discourse that it inherits, the dictates of which, in the best case, it willfully *submits*. In the words of Richard Rorty, the linguistic turn finds that "philosophical problems are problems which may be solved (or dissolved) either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use."[19] Whether by articulating an ideal philosophical language or discovering the rules that regulate our everyday spoken language, through this turn it was thought that philosophy could avoid the pitfalls of metaphysical discourse. And so, philosophy was in many ways heeding Heidegger's call to *submit* to the experience of language (*uns ihm fügen*).

In one sense, Heidegger's engagement with *Sprache* seems to exemplify this philosophical movement: his thinking becomes increasingly oriented toward language in the later half of his life, and he insists that seeking the nature of language requires us to explore nature on its own terms by bracketing paradigms borrowed from other kinds of inquiry. There are important differences though. Despite this affinity, in the discussion that follows Heidegger's initial remarks on experience (*Erfahrung*), Heidegger distinguishes his goal from certain manifestations of the linguistic turn. He writes:

> But this, to undergo an experience with language, is something else again
> than to gather information about language. Such information – linguists
> and philologists of the most diverse languages, psychologists and analytic
> philosophers (*Sprachphilosophie*) supply us, and constantly increase the
> supply, ad infinitum. Of late, the scientific and philosophical investigation

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[19] Richard Rorty, ed. *The Linguisitic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method*, (Evanston: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 3.

> of languages is aiming ever more resolutely at the production of what is called 'metalanguage.' Analytical philosophy (*wissenschaftliche Philosophie*), which is set on producing this super-language (*Übersprache*), is thus quite consistent when it considers itself metalinguistics. That sounds like metaphysics – not only sounds like it, it *is* metaphysics. Metalinguistics (*die Metalinguistik*) is the metaphysics of the thoroughgoing technicalization of all languages into the sole operative instrument of interplanetary information. Metalanguage and sputnik, metalinguistics and rocketry are the Same.[20]

In its totalizing and globalizing effect, Heidegger contends, metalinguistics, the construction of a philosophically perfect language, is no different than metaphysics. The construction of a super-language, ever the symbol of man's hubris since at least the story of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), here constitutes a kind of technological megalomania, transgressing any heretofore recognized boundaries of human dwelling. But was not this revolution in philosophy's activity, the linguistic turn, supposed to break away from metaphysics once and for all? Indeed, the argument that analytical philosophy is consistent with the metaphysical tradition, from which it aims to disassociate itself, can be read as a challenge to a prevailing understanding of metaphysics at that time. This understanding had been long in the making. Following Hume, Kant took metaphysical inquiries to be those that extend beyond experience and transgress the reach of its tribunal. Likewise, the philosophy of the linguistic turn draws a line across human inquiry in order to set off questions that transcend the limits of knowledge. The difference is that, in this twentieth century tradition, metaphysics is contrasted, not with empirical knowledge, but with language. The dictates of language are its tribunal. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, for example, Wittgenstein describes the task of philosophy as the effort:

> to say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science – i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy – and then, whenever someone else wanted to say something *metaphysical*, to

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[20] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 58.

> demonstrate to him that he had failed to give a meaning to certain signs in his propositions (my emphasis).[21]

As Wittgenstein understands it, metaphysics is an illegitimate use of language, a form of gibberish whose incoherency results from the fact that it has rushed past the restrictive limits of thought. The activity of philosophy, once purged of its lofty ambitions, becomes no more than "to say nothing except what can be said," (*Nichts zu sagen, als was sich sagen lässt*), understood here as the propositions of natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*). as opposed to metaphysical speculation. But how does one come to know the limit at which philosophy must stop asking questions? Wittgenstein's answer changes throughout his career. In the *Tractatus*, the analysis of how meaning attaches to propositions determines this point. As A.C. Grayling explains, the philosopher's task, as enacted by Wittgenstein, is:

> . . . to reveal the nature of language and its relation to the world, which in effect amounts to explaining how meaning attaches to the propositions we assert. . . . And this, for Wittgenstein, is as we have seen the same as identifying the limits of thought; since the limits of language and thought are the same, an investigation of the former constitutes an investigation of the latter.[22]

Thinking through the nature of language in this case means carrying out an analysis of how meaning attaches to propositions.[23] Moreover, it involves analyzing the conditions in which propositions (and questions) are meaningless. As we have seen, Wittgenstein identifies such utterances as metaphysical.

In the later years of his life, Wittgenstein seems to rethink the way language's limiting of thought is established. In the *Philosophical Investigations*, there is a

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[21] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001), §6.53, 89.

[22] A.C. Grayling, *Wittgenstein*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 15.

[23] At first glance, Wittgenstein seems to view language as thoroughly descriptive, or, in Austin's words, *constative*. Upon closer inspection, though, Wittgenstein's interest in the meaning of propositions is actually an interest in how meaning comes into effect, how it is activated. Meaning, therefore, means more than a property of a proposition. It is an occurrence, which, in fact, correlates with other occurrences, most notably, successful communication, or in Austin's terms, successful speech-acts.

significantly lesser portion of the text dedicated to explaining in a technical way how meaning attaches to propositions and almost no mention of *Naturwissenschaft*. Instead, Wittgenstein's approach to language is more phenomenological, as is evident from the book's refrain: "Look and see." The difference between meaningful and meaningless speech is something that we become familiar with through our everyday practical affairs, only that we have a stubborn tendency to stray from this mode. Wittgenstein writes:

> We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in its trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between – so to speak – super-concepts. Whereas, of course, if the words 'language,' 'experience,' 'world,' have a use, it must be a humble a one as that of the words 'table,' 'lamp,' 'door.'
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> *Wir sind in der Täuschung, das Besondere, Tiefe, das uns Wesentliche unserer Untersuchung liege darin, daß sie das unvergleichliche Wesen der Sprache zu begreifen trachtet. D.i., die Ordnung, die zwischen den Begriffen des Satzes, Wortes, Schließens, der Wahrheit, der Erfahrung, u.s.w. besteht. Diese Ordnung ist eine Über-Ordnung zwischen – sozusagen – Über-Begriffen. Während doch die Worte 'Sprache,' 'Erfahrung,' 'Welt,' wenn sie eine Verwendung haben, eine so niedrige haben müssen, wie die Worte 'Tisch,' 'Lampe,' 'Tür.'*[24]

Like Heidegger, Wittgenstein here in the *Investigations* charges philosophy – and, in particular, philosophy as metalinguistics - with an attempt to construct a super-language. Such a language is, on Wittgenstein's view, illegitimate insofar as it disrupts the usefulness of language. The meaning of our words, according to Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* (§43) lies in their use; moreover, our practical knowledge of this use is not furthered by thinking about what is "peculiar, profound, (or) essential" about language. Here the philosopher is made "humble" before the limits of his or her power. In this, there is continuity between the early and the later phases of Wittgenstein's thought, in that, in both texts, philosophy runs up against its limits, and the limit in each case is the criteria for meaningful speech.

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[24] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), §97, 38.

When Heidegger says that the attempt to secure these criteria by way of metalinguistics is an example of metaphysics, however, he does not mean metaphysics as opposed to meaningful, useful speech or as opposed to the propositions of *Naturwissenschaft*. In order to get a better sense of Heidegger's general discussion of metaphysics, let us recall the description Heidegger gives in "What is Metaphysics?," where he addresses the nature of metaphysics through a single metaphysical question: "What is nothingness (*das Nichts*)?" After describing what motivates many of us to ask after such seemingly impossible questions, Heidegger concludes that, "Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings that aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp." He adds: "In the question concerning the nothing such an inquiry beyond or over beings, beings as a whole, takes place. It proves thereby to be a metaphysical question."[25] On this point, any positivist would agree. If "beings" indicates the mundane, empirical realm of *Sinn*, of tables, lamps, doors, and so on, then metaphysics is the effort to transcend just this.

In light of the description from "What is Metaphysics?," we can now better understand Heidegger's association of metalinguistics and metaphysics. Metalinguistics is inquiry beyond or over (*meta*) the study of particular languages which aims to recover the diversity of these language differences as such and as a whole for our grasp. Language differences are automatically recovered into an identity. In this way, all of the world's spoken and written languages can be understood according to a single grammar, a single logic, and a single privileged system of signs. It was for this reason that Tezuka struggled to articulate his word for language, and, in light of this, the association of metalinguistics and globalization does not seem so far-fetched.[26]

Moreover, since linguistic conceptuality is the way that things give themselves to be thought, in ordering words "as a whole for our grasp;" metaphysical inquiry shapes

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[25] Martin Heidegger "What is Metaphysics?" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 93-4.

[26] See Heidegger's 1960 address entitled "Sprache und Heimat" (in *Gesamtausgabe Band* 13) for a more sustained discussion of the dangers of creating a unified language. Here Heidegger addresses the profound significance for our time of the disappearance of languages and the domination of certain languages over others. He also argues in this address that language is irreducibly plural and bound to multiple dialects.

our experiences of things at the most fundamental level. It organizes the way things give themselves to thinking, which in calling a framework I've already metaphysically framed in a particular way. In this way, metaphysical inquiry into language is an attempt to ground not only our speech but our thinking. It is an attempt to "recover" an originary encounter with that into which, in the first instance, we find ourselves always already thrown.

Toward the end of the first lecture, Heidegger calls the search for a ground philosophy's *radical* stance:

> Thinking is more thoughtful in proportion as it takes a more radical stance, as it goes to the radix, the root of all that is. The quest of thinking always remains the search for the first and ultimate grounds. Why? Because this, that something is and what it is, the persistent presence of being, has from of old been determined to be the ground and foundation. As all nature has the character of a ground, a search for it is the founding and grounding of the ground or foundation.[27]

The effort to think from out of the entanglement of thinking and language is, in its metaphysical form, an attempt to recover language as a ground and a root: a ground for knowledge, a root for thinking. In this, it discovers the being of thinking and speaking as emanating from one and the same source.[28] As Heidegger explains in the essay "On the Essence of Truth," this concordance secures language in the sense of securing the condition for propositional truth. And it is precisely this concordance that, for many, structures the limits of philosophical inquiry. It is in reaching this □ρχή-limit, that thinking discovers the parameters of its world and the way it belongs to this world. On the other hand, the absence of this belonging – discordance – is what Wittgenstein

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[27] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 71.

[28] Here Heidegger speaks of the way that truth comes to be unquestionably a matter of *adequatio intellectus et rei*. He describes the way that a theological order enables a modern framework of truth within which the "capacity of all objects to be planned by means of a worldly reason [*Weltvernunft*] which supplies the law for itself and thus also claims that its procedure is immediately intelligible (what is considered 'logical'). That the essence of propositional truth consists in the correctness of statements needs no further special proof." – Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1977), 121.

articulates when in the *Investigations*, he remarks that the predicament of a philosophical dilemma has the character of saying: "I have lost my way."

But beneath every account of the kinship of word and being lies the experience of having lost this concordance. It is this experience of having lost one's way, after all, that propels us to search for "first and ultimate grounds," in whatever way we want to conceive this: nature, thinking, God, social life, or language. This is why, for Heidegger, metaphysics does not lie on one side of the line; it is the drawing of the line.

The description of language philosophy as metaphysics is, therefore, not simply pejorative. Indeed, immediately after this passage, Heidegger explains that such inquiry has its place. "Such investigation has its own particular justification and retains its own importance," Heidegger writes, "But scientific and philosophical information is one thing; an experience we undergo with language is another."[29] While, on my reading, the attempt to conceptualize language can be understood as a way of responding to the claim of language, relating to language as Heidegger's point suggests that there is something about the experience of language that remains excessive to scientific knowledge. In the experience of entanglement, language's immediacy appears as something which we must continually re-approach. For our relationship to language is as much one of mediation as it is of immediacy. Near and far, ideal and real, beyond and underfoot: these two aspects of language seem to cradle thought rather than simply provide a firm ground for it.

But in discovering one's way and, as it were, recovering one's beginning, the difference which allowed for us to make our way to language in the first place stands to be forgotten. Lines are drawn between legitimate and illegitimate language. In Wittgenstein's account, for example, after philosophical discourse leads thinking to run aground and find its home in language, it is abandoned. In the words of the *Tractatus*: "My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical (*unsinnig*), when he has used them – as steps –

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[29] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 59.

to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)"[30]

The search for a limit wherein philosophy would at last no longer transcend its bounds remains ever at odds with itself because the discourse by which it arrives at its ideal language is itself outside of the bounds of this ideal. This is the general irony of the linguistic turn: the question of how to ground language could not emerge unless language came to appear as unsettled, as in need of some grounding; and yet language appears as a ground, a limit, by which all philosophical questions will be, in the words of Rorty, "solved or dissolved." In this, the parameters of the world established in the discovery of the ☐ρχή -limit are always transcended by what does not appear to originate from that ground. In this way, the establishment of the confluence of word and being reveals an irreducible remainder for which it cannot account. Hence, the linguistic turn never manages to tear itself wholly away from the danger of illegitimate speech, of a language that emanates not from *radix* of beings but from out of the struggle to find it, out of the condition which I have called, following Heidegger, our entanglement.

Language's emergence as what is excessive to this metaphysical grounding can be seen through other examples as well. In the 1951-1952 lectures entitled "What is Called Thinking?," Heidegger tells us that:

> Language admits of two things: One, that it be reduced to a mere system of signs, uniformly available to everybody, and in this form be enforced as binding; and two, that language at one great moment says one unique thing, for one time only, which remains inexhaustible, because it is always originary, and thus beyond the reach of any kind of leveling.[31]

The remark is spurred by Nietzsche's prophetic and ominous statement: "The wasteland grows." Heidegger here describes that, in order to truly hear these words, one must go beyond interpretation, since, as he says in the passage above, there is something about this statement that is "inexhaustible . . . always originary, and thus beyond the reach of any kind of leveling." But how should one understand this aspect of language that is

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[30] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §6.54, 89.

[31] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 192.

excessive to interpretation? Is it the fact that this statement could mean many different things? Is its inexhaustibly simply a matter of indeterminacy?

A passage from Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* gives a clue. Here Merleau-Ponty writes:

> It is said again and again that sounds and phonemes have no meaning in themselves, and that all our consciousness can find in language is what it has put there. . . . But this is just what the experience of language refutes. It is true that communication presupposes a system of correspondences such as a dictionary provides, but it goes beyond these, and what gives its meaning to each word is the sentence. It is because it has been used in various contexts that the word gradually accumulates a significance which it is impossible to establish absolutely. A telling utterance or a good book impose their meaning upon us.[32]

In the "system of correspondences" that communication presupposes, language is established as "uniformly available to everybody" and as "binding," in other words, as a transcendental ground, the *a priori* condition of meaningful speech, or what I've called the □ρχή-limit. On the other hand, Merleau-Ponty describes a language that seems to arise precisely at the margins of communicability, where the event or occurrence of language is foregrounded. Such writing cannot be "reduced to a mere system of signs," for it seems to rigorously pursue an exemption from just this system. What makes a statement "beyond the reach of any leveling" is not an excess of objective or subjective meaning; in other words, it is not that the words have such a surplus of objective meaning that they exceed the subject's intentions, nor that the subject's intended meaning was too much to contain somehow. The statement is "always original," because its claim upon us seems to call for something beyond determining its meaning through the author's subjective intention or through a record of past usage. Its saying-power lies in its movement towards the margins of communicability, in its freeing of language toward a yet ungrounded possibility. I have spoken a lot about the writer's perspective; however, the claim of language belongs to the reader's experience as well. From the perspective of the reader, what is inexhaustible is not an infinite series of meanings which could

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[32] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* trans. Collin Smith, (London: Routledge, 2002), 452.

possibly be given but the claim of language, the call (*heissen*) of language, the way Nietzsche's words become originary precisely in our efforts to translate them and to determine anew their meaning.[33]

We see, then, two ways in which the delimiting project of metaphysics and metalinguistics is unsettled by the existence of a kind of speaking which transgresses the limits set down: (1) the way a philosophical relationship to language, which is excluded from legitimation, nevertheless serves as the condition for the discovery of the criteria of legitimacy, and (2) the way, despite a system of equivalences in place to connect new utterances to a history of past usage, a kind of speaking is possible which twists itself free from that interpretive framework. Language continually transcends the limits that we establish for it. This is not to say that it such limits serve no purpose. For whatever limits are put on thought by language do more than restrict speculations and curtail wayward speech; they open up the possibility for thinking to inhabit language in new ways.

Recall that I mentioned in the beginning that, for various reasons, incorporating Heidegger's remarks on *Sprache* into the general field of the philosophy of language presented difficulty. Now we have a better understanding of why this is. Heidegger questions to what extent the originary relationship with language that metaphysical inquiry recovers is truly originary, ultimately suggesting that not only the most familiar and immediate form in which we know language but also the basic way in which we reorient ourselves to this form covers over the originary role it plays in our thinking. The turn to language is not just a method whereby we set ourselves in the right place to gaze upon language in its immediate givenness; the turn to language belongs to the being of language itself.[34]

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[33] It is worth noting that Heidegger uses the same word, "inexhaustible" (*unerschöpflich*), to describe both Tezuka's *Koto ba* and Nietzsche's declaration.

[34] This idea recalls a section from "The Dialogue on Language" where Heidegger and Tezuka are discussing the place of hermeneutics in Heidegger's thought. When asked why the words "hermeneutics" and "phenomenology" disappear from Heidegger's vocabulary early on, Heidegger explains that "hermenutics means not just the interpretations but, even before it, the bearing of the message and tidings," adding that it was this original sense of the word that prompted him to use it in *Being and Time*. The two go on to discuss how language and hermeneutics are one and the same, since both bear up the relation of the

The Absurdity of Renunciation, The Silence of Language

Though language is familiar, our relationship to language is not fully encompassed by this familiarity. In the second installment of "The Nature of Language," Heidegger suggests that the *Wesen* of language is – not in its being present at hand – but its withholding. "If language everywhere withholds its nature in this sense, then such withholding is the very nature of language."[35] This is a difficult thought to wrap one's head around, since it seems that this kind of withholding means that we lack knowledge of the thing that withdraws. How then can a lack of knowledge also give us the nature of something? What is striking, however, is that this formulation is the reversal of what one might expect of an expression of skepticism. For it is not that things in themselves withdraw from our language, knowledge, and experience. It is language itself that withdraws. What then does this withdrawal mean for the turn to language as I have developed it?

In this holding back, language brings itself to language (*bringt sich die Sprache selbst zur Sprache*). Heidegger writes:

> But when does language speak itself as language? Curiously enough, when we cannot find the right word for something that concerns us, carries us away, oppresses or encourages us. Then we leave unspoken what we have in mind and, without rightly giving it thought, undergo moments in which language itself has distantly and fleetingly touched us with its essential being.[36]

> *Wo aber kommt die Sprache selber als Sprache zum Wort? Seltsamerweise dort, wo wir für etwas, was uns angeht, uns an sich reißt, bedrängt oder befeuert, das rechte Wort nicht finden. Wir lassen dann, was wir meinen, im Ungesprochenen und machen dabei, ohne es recht zu bedenken,*

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human to the two-fold, that is, ontological difference. The discussion reiterates the point that the way to language is something more than a method taken by a subject in order to access an object of inquiry.

[35] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 81.

[36] Ibid., 59.

Augenblicke durch, in denen uns die Sprache selber mit ihrem Wesen fernher und flüchtig gestreift hat.[37]

In a way, the thought here resonates with the common presumption that I described earlier, namely, that words are mere shadows of reality, since when words fail us, our being is given to us immediately and, for that reason, intensely. But Heidegger describes this experience, not as one of language's ineffectiveness, but as one that brings us to the essence of language. On this point, Heidegger's thought is markedly different from that of positivism. Whereas the claim of language there appears as a silencing of thoughts that exceed the boundaries of meaningful language, Heidegger presents the *Wesen* of language as emerging in this silence.

An experience of language is an experience of this silence. The meaning of silence here is not restricted to the cessation of all speech though. Dennis Schmidt observes:

> In the light of claims, such as one finds in Heidegger, that language needs to be heard precisely as that which emerges out of the unsayability of silence, the need to 'speak' of silence becomes all the more pressing. And yet no direct discourse on silence is possible, no word summons it as word. It only appears obliquely. Only at the margins of the word do we become sensible of it.[38]

To say that silence's appearance is oblique is not, however, to say that it exists only in opposition to speech, for wherever there is speech, there is also silence. The grant of silence enables the occurrence of speech just as the grant of space enables time. This is more than just an analogy. Synchrony is the condition for diachronic speech-acts. Because these acts, whether spoken or written, are gestures in time, and, as Kant argued, any intuition of time entails one of space, language always unfolds in a kind of space. The white paper is the space upon which ink is organized (a space that is foregrounded by Concrete poets). It recedes into the background in order to let the ink take on shape and

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[37] Martin Heidegger, *Gesaumtausgabe, Band 12: Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 136.

[38] Dennis Schmidt, *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 91.

relation. Likewise, it is the silence between sounds which allows one to hear them each as distinct from one another.

But space and silence are more than transcendental conditions of language. Silence, as the limit of language, is that which language presses toward in its withdrawal, a withdrawal that, as we have seen, Heidegger understands as the emergence of language in its essence. Just as in the previous section we traced how language emerges beyond its metaphysical limits, we may talk about silence (along with space, inarticulability, and other limits) as an appearance of language that moves beyond its initial familiar form. Note that this, the essence of language, cannot ultimately be separated from the speech in which we find ourselves entangled. As Heidegger says in *What is Called Thinking?*: "As we are drawing toward what withdraws, we ourselves are pointing toward it . . . (D)rawn into what withdraws, drawing toward it and thus pointing into the withdrawal, man first *is* man. His essential nature lies in being such a pointer."[39] What this passage tells us is that the withdrawal of language, for Heidegger, cannot be understood as the cause – efficient or final – of our speech. The withdrawal of language is not the □ρχή of language. Nor does the withdrawal of language mean that we lose the capacity to speak. In fact, according to the passage above, the withdrawal appears only insofar as we bring it into view by pointing to it, indicating it.

The possibility of pointing toward this withdrawal is what Heidegger understands as the unique comportment of *Dichtung*. Our entanglement within language, which – if you will recall – is in part our entanglement in the history of language, pushes us to find a way of coming into our own from out of this inheritance. Here there is the potential for a significant transformation, since poets (Heidegger uses the word *Dichter*) retrieve an original possibility vis-à-vis the comportment to language in which they find themselves.

Does the turn to language then amount to the conversion of philosophy into poetry? Not quite. Poetic comportment, in terms of my argument, involves any sort of turn to language whereby one aims to experience the claim of language in an original way. Philosophy may also make such turns and have these experiences. For Heidegger

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[39] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 9.

too, *Dichtung* refers to more than poetry as a specific genre of writing (*Poesie*). Much could be said on this. Wanting to remain close to the text I am concerned with primarily, however, I will not venture into Heidegger's larger discussion of poetry. My focus instead will be on the poem that Heidegger discusses the most in *On the Way to Language*: Stefan George's "Das Wort" ("The Word").

Before turning to the poem in "The Nature of Language," Heidegger makes clear that he does not wish to *exhaust* what is said in the poem by way of an interpretation that would aim to lay bare the meaning of the poem without remainder. Thus, he contends, "we must be careful not to force the vibration of the poetic saying into the rigid groove of a univocal statement, and so destroy it."[40] Vibration here marks the site of difference. We can understand this in at least two ways: first, as the polyvalence of any word in the poem, given the multiple ways that we could interpret it; second, as the irreducible doubling of the word as immediate, given sense and the hermetic signature of its event – as givenness and withdrawal. Here is George's poem:

The Word

Wonder or dream from distant land
I carried to my country's strand

And waited till the twilight norn
Had found the name within her bourn –

Then I could grasp it close and strong
It blooms and shines now the front along . . .

Once I returned from happy sail,
I had a prize so rich and frail,

She sought for long and tidings told:
"No like of these depths enfold."

And straight it vanished from my hand,

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[40] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 65.

The treasure never graced my land . . .

So I renounced and sadly see:
Where word breaks off no thing may be.

Das Wort

Wunder von ferne oder traum
Bracht ich an meines landes saum

Und harrte bis die graue norn
Den namen fand in ihrem born –

Drauf konnt ichs greifen dicht und stark
Nun blüht und glänzt es durch die mark . . .

Einst langt ich an nach gutter fahrt
Mit einem kleinod reich und zart

Sie suchte lang und gab mir kund:
>So schläft hier nichts auf tiefem grund<

Worauf es meiner hand entrann
Und nie mein land den schatz gewann . . .

So lern ich traurig den verzicht:
Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht.

In what way does language bring itself to language in this poem? Heidegger's initial answer to this question is peculiar. He claims that it is the final line of the poem that brings about this transformation and that this becomes apparent when we transform the content of this line into a statement, which the poem apparently allows for (*Der Inhalt der Schlußzeile läßt sich in eine Aussage umformen*). The meaning of the poem is finally suggested by the last line: "The word alone gives being to the thing."[41] Such an interpretation might then conclude that the fruit of the poet's experience is that the world is thoroughly mediated by language, by concepts. The point of the poem, then, seems to

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[41] Ibid., 62.

be that the poet experiences the fullest power of language and renounces the entanglement of natural consciousness, where word and being seem separable.

But shortly after starting off on this path of interpretation, Heidegger begins to rethink the final line. He observes, first of all, that the line does not say "no thing is," but "no thing may be" (*kein Ding sei*). In order to understand the sense of this phrase, Heidegger turns back to the penultimate line, which speaks of a renunciation (*So lernt ich traurig den verzicht*:) What is being renounced? It would seem to be, as Heidegger suggests, his original relationship to language. The last line, thus, names what the poet has learned, a sad insight that what had been present at hand is now lost (line 11).

But the character of this renunciation requires some deeper consideration, as it arises out of an experience, and it is only in light of this particular path that the renunciation is a sorrowful one. The poet has gone on a voyage. Urged by a discordance – the "prize so rich and frail" (*reich und zart*) – he has sought to "grasp" (*greifen*) something that, once held "close and strong" (*dicht und stark*), he longs to regain. "The poet experiences his poetic calling," Heidegger writes, "as a call to the word as the source, the bourn of Being."[42] He visits a woman, sovereign and foreboding – perhaps a goddess – who announces to him that what he seeks cannot be unfolded from its depths. The prize of his journey: the sorrowful realization that "where word breaks off no thing may be (*Kein ding sei wo das wort gebricht*)."

And yet the journey leading up to the announcement of this sovereign proposition seems to suggest that the breakdown of the word plays an important role. To take the statement in the last line as a theoretical claim and to turn it into a truth proposition, we might say: word and being are one. But throughout the poem, language has been at work in a different way. It has given only traces of the journeyer's story, letting lines six and twelve trail off into an ellipsis, into the empty space of the page. It leaves encryptions: what is "it" in lines five, six, and eleven? What exactly is the "prize" in line eight and the "treasure" in line twelve?

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[42] Ibid., 66.

Indeed, the whole poem seems to end with an ellipsis. Immediately after reading the last line in George's poem, one allows the silence that follows it to linger, pregnant with the intimation of a journey still underway.[43] Where there is no word, there is – what? It is nothing (*kein Ding*), but not in the sense of negation, an act of the intellect. As Heidegger argues in "What is Metaphysics?," there is a more original sense of nothing (there, *nicht* and *das Nichts*), one more primordial than its sense as negation.[44] As I developed in the last section, we can see here how the turn to language comes upon what is excessive to the metaphysical grounding of being and language.

Notice how similar this is to the self-professed absurdity of Wittgenstein's philosophy, which is perhaps most palpable at the end of the *Tractatus*, when after a long discussion of how speech is bound to address only what is clear and manifest, Wittgenstein begins to talk about what he argues is transcendent of words (ethics, death, God, the world). "The sense of the world," he writes, "must lie outside of the world . . . . Hence also there can be no ethical propositions. It is clear that ethics cannot be expressed. Ethics is transcendental." (§6.42 – 6.41) *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.* What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence, but ironically silence has the last word.

This absurdity must complicate our initial impression of what is renounced. Heidegger observes that the last line "names the realm into which the renunciation must enter; it names the call to enter into that relation between thing and word which has now been experienced." Heidegger here interprets the subjunctive of *sein* as an imperative, a call which emerges after the undergoing of an experience. At the same time, Heidegger suggests that this command is always indistinguishable from other ways of hearing the subjunctive. In describing this polyphony, he writes: "Presumably one meaning and the other of 'may be' vibrate and mingle in the poetic saying: a command as appeal, and

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[43] One might compare George's poem to Parmenides' poem, where, while the goddess insists that only what does not come to be or pass away truly *is*, the poem unfolds as an account of education, which is in every sense a process of transformation.

[44] Heidegger, Martin, "What is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farell Krell, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1972), 99.

submission to it."[45] Here Heidegger is elaborating on the remarks on experience with which he began the first lecture and over which we troubled, where he spoke about experience as a kind of submission and an undergoing. But now we see that it is at odds with itself, this submission, in that neither the path before it nor the silence after it is ever fully reconciled to the sovereign truth that is compressed into the last line.

But the irony cuts both ways. For, in telling the story of this development, the whole complicated structure, its tensions notwithstanding, is held together and affirmed. As the poet tries to discover the nature of language, its language is pressed increasingly toward silence; ironically, in such speaking it both runs aground and finds its prize. This then is the relative degree of freedom that is achieved in trying to speak in a way that is "wholly other." In poetic experience, one takes upon oneself the precarious dwelling that we have with language, this way of finding ourselves within language, as one's ownmost possibility.

As Dasein is the being that asks the question of Being, the poet's language asks the question of language. This perhaps sheds light on the meaning of the enigmatic suggestion at the end of the last lecture in "The Nature of Language": "Mortals are they who can experience death as death. Animals cannot do so. But animals cannot speak either. The essential relation between death and language flashes before us, but remains still unthought."[46] Who speaks in the poem, after all? It is not the voice of this or that biographical subject, but a voice that comes to be and that passes away in the time of the poem, a voice born from nothing and which returns to nothing. The voice of my writing is my own only in the way that my death is my own. Each is both my unique possibility and the point at which my distinct identity disappears into anonymity.[47]

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[45] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language, 65.

[46] Ibid., 107. See also Giorgio Agamben's *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (University of Minnesota, 1991), which is a sustained meditation on this one passage.

[47] I am drawing here from the theory of shifters introduced by Beneviste, taken up by Jakobson, and discussed frequently by Barthes and Kristeva. According to this theory, the pronoun "I" plays a unique grammatical role in that it is both the way I refer to myself individually and also the way that everybody refers to his or her self. It is, thus, as much an indicator of anonymity as it is to my identity. I will return to this in Chapter Three.

The voice of the poem is the language which remains after word breaks off, that is after the breakdown of words in their familiarity draws us toward a "wholly other" way of speaking. And yet in this new way of speaking, the traces of entanglement remain. As Robert Bernasconi argues, the significance of the poet's activity for Heidegger is that, in studying this possibility, Heidegger:

> learns how the thinker, like the poet, can still speak and write after the word breaks off. For though the poet is without the word he sought, he still writes the poem that tells of this, and he does it by adopting the language of remembrance and of renunciation: remembering his previous relation to language and the quest based upon it, and renouncing it.[48]

But, again, the character of this renunciation is a complicated one. As I have tried to argue, all such turns require that we are as attentive to what has come before us, to what we inherit, as we are to what lies ahead. For, in many ways, it is my entanglement in language that draws me to its inarticulable limits. It is at that limit where a good number of writers, if not every writer, impassioned by their work want to speak. This, then, is one way of thinking through what it means to say that language brings itself to language. Through the discordance in which we find ourselves vis-à-vis our language, we strive to discover its limits. Language is brought back to itself, then, only when it has been stretched to this limit, where word breaks off.

Let me retrace the path that I have taken in this chapter. In the beginning, I described how language calls us away from its function as constant presence whenever we experience the need to revise or reflect on our relationship to it. I presented how philosophy in many ways has tried to disentangle itself from the twofold and potentially contradictory relationship that thinking has with language by renouncing its powers of reflection and revision. Through an analysis of the linguistic turn as read through Wittgenstein, I argued that any attempt to renounce this dimension of our relationship to language results in absurdity. This absurdity showed itself to be more than an error in calculation: it allowed us to articulate the way that language withdraws from the

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[48] Robert Bernasconi, *The Question of Language in Heidegger's History of Being* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities International Press, 1985), 58.

metaphysical origins to which we assign it. Whether we look at the text of Wittgenstein's *"Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen"* or the text of George's *"Kein ding sei wo das Wort gebricht,"* the dynamics of the texts themselves cannot be wholly reconciled with the metaphysical propositions presented. For each bears witness, if only as a vibration of an unreconcilable difference, to a being who has wondered about the nature of language.

In the next chapter, I will return in a new way to the concern that I presented early on in this chapter. In calling into question the immediate givenness of words, one may wonder about what happens to language's ability to function as a basis for social communication. I have said a lot about historical entanglement in this chapter, suggesting that the task of speaking from out of this condition pushes us to develop new ways of speaking. But is there a social entanglement involved in the way that we find ourselves sharing a language with others in our present lives? And if so, to what extent does this social entanglement presuppose a kind of skepticism toward those relationships? These are the questions that the next chapter will take up.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL BEING AND AUTHENTICITY:
INHERITING LANGUAGE WITH OTHERS

For the most part, language functions in our lives as inconspicuous equipment, conveniently ready-to-hand for the various practical uses to which we put it. But its practical utility in daily life in no way guarantees that we know language. In fact, for Heidegger, it is precisely this familiarity that makes it also strange and unknown to us. We have explored this theme so far in terms of Heidegger's most sustained reflection on *Sprache,* the set of texts entitled *On the Way to Language* and, in particular, the essay "The Nature of Language." There we saw how Heidegger expresses the need for a transformation in the relationship to language that we initially find ourselves in, and we looked at how the tension between philosophy and poetry is in part due to philosophy's disavowal of this need. But there is another dimension to the experience of finding ourselves entangled in language that we have not yet explored, namely, its social inflection. A list of questions come to mind: Does entanglement as I have discussed it normally take on a particular social behavioral form, and if so, is this form equivalent to skepticism toward social forms of knowing? Does the transformation that Heidegger deems necessary mean that one must stay perpetually at odds with the everyday discourse that one inherits? And, even if the answer is no and we assert that the goal is a reconciliation with the language we share with others, should we understand this task to be the work of an individual, or does it entail some collaborative effort?

In order to answer these questions, which I would like to call *the social problem of language entanglement,* I will trace the development of the problem through the course of Heidegger's engagement with the topic of language. To begin with, in the first two sections of the chapter, I will look at how the problem appears in *Being and Time* (1927). While there are many possible ways that one could address the relationship of

entanglement and social life in *Being and Time*, my engagement will focus on the concepts of de-distancing (*das Entfernen*), thrownness (*die Geworfenheit*), and authenticity (*die Eigentlichkeit*), in order (1) to deepen our sense for the existential characteristics of the being who has language – and, in particular, the peculiar temporal quality of its facticity and (2) to thus open up the relationship between Dasein's thrown possibility and its factical social life.

The third section looks to Heidegger's discussion of translation and interpretation in his 1942 lectures on Hölderlin, tracing the metamorphosis of Heidegger's earlier vision of *Eigentlichkeit* into a narrative about the dependence of what is "one's own" upon an encounter with the foreign. My interest here is twofold. On the one hand, I think that Heidegger opens up something about the way experiencing the need for translation or interpretation can effectively return us to the site of language's claim. On the other hand, I will argue that Heidegger's own attempt to translate the early concerns about language in *Being and Time* into the cultural historical concerns of the 1942 lectures is not entirely successful, because it subsumes the problem of the individual's path toward language into the problem faced by a cultural people (*ein Volk*).

The fourth and final section of the chapter gives a reconstructive account of where Heidegger may have located the scene at which an encounter with others gives us back to ourselves. Rather than envisioning this scene as an encounter between early twentieth century Germany and pre-Hellenistic Greece, I offer a phenomenological description of an experience that I call, playing with Heidegger's own language, *Mitbefindlichkeit*, where we find ourselves ethically concerned about our conduct in language insofar as it bears on the lives of other individuals. I describe how *Mitbefindlichkeit* belongs to our daily lives, while it also illuminates the way that our daily praxis of language holds sway.

De-distancing our Being-with-Others

In the last chapter, I had already suggested that we understand language as included in that domain of things to which *Being and Time* refers to as "equipment" (*das Zeug*). Thoroughly woven into our primary experience of the world and ourselves, language functions, for the most part, as equipment. We do not first perceive something and then put it into language. Things come forward as part of a world, as belonging to what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* a referential totality, as significant in terms of the purposes I weave out of my historical and cultural situation. The referential totality of such a situation is a system of signs. For example, I know the table before me as serving a particular cultural function – dining. Furthermore, I know the table as a symbol for many things in my culture – sustenance, sociality, family, perhaps hierarchy – associations which have been communicated to me in idiomatic expressions, paintings, traditional activities, etc. From the very beginning of my contact with it, I do not encounter the table as neutral of purpose or meaning. I see it in terms of its use, the way it functions in my life as I orient myself toward my goals . . . sustenance, happiness, and so on. As a system of such signs, discourse is equiprimordial with our understanding and the way we find ourselves – what Heidegger calls *Befindlichkeit*. These signs allow us to organize our experience: to track causal relations, to organize our desires and our perceptions, etc. What's more, they serve as an important basis for social communication by providing us with shared worlds of meaning and a wealth of pre-reflective understanding.

But by describing the place of discourse in the praxis of our lives, we have told only half of the story. Like the road beneath one's feet, language is something we use without paying it much mind. But as the last chapter argued, we are nevertheless the kind of being for whom such equipment can and does become a question, indeed, a problem. In the last chapter, I explored various ways that we can describe the disruption of language's readiness-to-hand. I suggested that this disruption takes the form of both theoretical contradictions in our way of understanding language and practical impasses. In most cases, though, the two go together. For example, we commonly experience

language to be at once the immediate form of our thinking and a form into which we strive, in vain sometimes, to present our thoughts. At once the conceptual reality of a thing and an arbitrary label attached to it. Such contradictions characterize the way, phenomenologically speaking, we find ourselves within language – a condition that I have called, following Heidegger's use of the term in *On the Way to Language*, our entanglement.

On some occasions, the condition of entanglement entails that language suddenly takes on the character of the present-at-hand; it confronts us as a suddenly unfamiliar object in the world rather than behind-the-scenes equipment. An excellent example of this is the aptly named "writer's block." Here the easy flow of language stemming from our familiarity with speaking (what Heidegger calls pre-understanding and average intelligibility) becomes obstructed, and we find ourselves frustrated, at a loss for words. Language comes to stand before us conspicuously, and in its breaking down appears as something other than the immediate, given framework of our thoughts.

This observation about the human's relationship to language, I suggested, has been largely ignored by twentieth century philosophy. Instead, the focus has been on the opposite, that is, on the limits to philosophical questioning established by language, as in Wittgenstein's philosophy. This is to say that the tradition has been much more interested in how language functions normatively than the ways we may experience dissonance with this normativity. But experiences of such dissonance with one's language do occur, and they can be in themselves very meaningful. Take, for example, the way the term "woman" has become problematic within the movements of second and third wave feminism. Throughout history, the term has functioned to organize social relations and to provide many individuals with an identity that they feel no urgent need to question. But for some women, despite the term's ability to work in this way, the word "woman" has lost any real explanatory power – both because it speaks of the contrary of man (Beauvoir, for example) and because it labels drastically disparate experiences with the same name (Denise Riley, for example). Such feminist explorations of language show us the need for continually reflecting on the words we use, and by and large they do so by

describing the inadequacy of normative language to recognize some experiences which nonetheless make themselves apparent. When we consider this example alongside the statement by Wittgenstein that we analyzed last chapter, namely, that the limits of language are the limits of thought, the problem seems clear. While philosophy of language has often dismissed any attempt to radically transform language in its insistence upon the pre-reflective, praxis-bound role of discourse in human experience, it has in turn neglected to account for the practical conditions from which an experience of words as incongruous with praxis emerges.[1]

Let me provide another example of how we might experience language as a source of alienation. The situation I have in mind comes from a passage at the end of Roland Barthes's *Writing Degree Zero*, where Barthes presents writing as symptomatic of a "tragic disparity," one which seems to call into question the writer's sense of himself as the agent of the writing. The passage reads:

> In front of the virgin sheet of paper, at the moment of choosing the words which must frankly signify his place in History, and testify that he assumes its data, [the writer] observes a tragic disparity between what he does and what he sees. Before his eyes, the world of society now exists as a veritable Nature, and this Nature speaks, elaborating living languages from which the writer is excluded: on the contrary, History puts in his hands a decorative and compromising instrument, a writing inherited from a previous and different History, for which he is not responsible and yet which is the only one he can use. Thus is born a tragic element in writing, since the conscious writer must henceforth fight against ancestral and all-powerful signs which, from the depths of a past foreign to him, impose Literature on him like some ritual, not like a reconciliation.[2]

The birth of writing's tragedy, as Barthes presents it, lies in the disparity between what he describes as a living language of Nature that he has before his eyes – not in his hands or

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[1] Here one exception deserves mention. Stanley Cavell has developed a very compelling account of how and why we stray from our everyday relationship to language. Cavell weaves together Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Emerson, and Thoreau, among others, to describe how human existence is such that we find ourselves in need of making some turn, some transformation, in order to, as Wittgenstein says, "leave everything as it is," or, for Heidegger, *lassen sein*. See Cavell's *This New Yet Unapproachable America* (Albuquerque: Living Batch Press, 1989), 45.

[2] Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annete Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 86.

at his lips – and an instrumental language (*Werkzeug dienend*) inherited from a foreign past which allows him to write only if he undergoes a ritual whereby the compromise of that other language is dubiously presented as genuine reconciliation with it. Thought in this way, the struggle of the writer exemplifies the condition of entanglement.[3] In entanglement, we experience our language as uncanny, simultaneously familiar and strange. Familiar in that, as I've explained, linguistic concepts frame our thoughts and perceptions pre-reflectively. Strange when, for instance, we perceive the intricate system of signs within which we find ourselves enclosed as a shadow world, both totalizing and lacking in reality. For the writer described above, the instrumental language does not just appear as an alien imposition. It is an intricate part of his life. It is near to him in a way that perhaps few things are. And it is on account of this intimacy maintained with language that he struggles.

In such cases, one must choose how best to work with the language for which one is not responsible but which nevertheless seems so formative for one's sense of who one is that it cannot simply be discarded. We may develop a critical distance to these concepts and begin to use them differently – more reflectively, more purposively. We may choose to let go of certain terms entirely. These are just a couple of the various strategies that feminist authors have suggested, for example, for dealing with the inadequacies of the word "woman." But regardless of whatever strategy one chooses, there is a common situation which prompts the motivation for action in each case, namely, a sense of finding one's entangled in the history of language.

Now, for Barthes's writer and – I will argue – for Heidegger, nearly all of language must be reckoned with in such a way. This is because language in general – not just this or that word – comes to us as part of a cultural inheritance that, as much as we are bound to it, will appear strange at times. Heidegger's explanation of this is to be

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[3] To avoid potential confusion, it might be helpful to indicate that I am not using this term in my project in the same way as Heidegger uses the term *verfängt* (translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as "entangled") in *Being and Time*. The latter occurs in section 38 of *Being and Time*, where Heidegger writes: "The alienation of falling – at once tempting and tranquillizing – leads by its own movement, to Dasein's getting entangled (*verfängt*) in itself." Though there is a large overlap in meaning, the phrase that Heidegger uses in *On the Way to Language* is *verstrickt sein*, to be entangled or ensnared.

found in what he calls in *Being and Time* Dasein's de-distancing (*Entfernen*). In de-distancing, what is proximally ready-to-hand for *Dasein*, existentially speaking, regularly appears as the most distant. Heidegger writes:

> When for instance, a man wears a pair of spectacles which are so close to him distantially that they are 'sitting on his nose,' they are environmentally more remote from him than the picture on the opposite wall . . . Equipment for seeing – and likewise for hearing, such as a telephone receiver – has what we have designated as the inconspicuous-ness of the proximally ready-to-hand.[4]

Again, I am suggesting that we classify language in its ready-to-hand character as an instance of such "equipment" (*Zeug*). Making this connection, we can attribute the uncanniness of language to the fact that we are always already disclosing the world through the language-instruments that we find ready-to-hand, while, at the same time, continually finding ourselves at a distance from these instruments. From this one can see the scope of the claim Heidegger wants to make. It is not that there are certain words which prompt us to take our distance from them because they fail us in some particular way. Every aspect of language which we use pre-reflectively and which therefore inconspicuously shapes our lives will occasionally appear to us, according to Heidegger, as strangely distant.[5] This basic existential fact of our being carries with it the seed of a more bewildering thought: in going about our everyday affairs, we are strangers to ourselves, for those structures which sustain our familiar engagements with the world are too close. Their readiness-to-hand makes them strange.

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[4] Heidegger, Martin, translated by Macquarrie and Robinson, *Being and Time* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), §23, 141.

[5] I realize that a lot may hang on this difference, namely, whether we understand our estrangement from language to be generally limited to a word here and there (as in my example of the term "woman") or whether there is something about language as such that we become estranged from (as in the example of the writer). Both scenarios seem possible, as I hope my examples make evident. While I concede that trivial slips and the like may not mean much to our general relationship to language, I am inclined to interpret occasions where a word occupying an important role in organizing our experience begins to fail us as disclosing to us the larger issue, that is, of the instability of language as such. I am inclined toward this reading, because it allows us to account for how the failure of a single word or an isolated experience of language inauthenticity can produce much greater, more generalized feelings of alienation.

Notice how different this is from the claim that the limits of what is to-hand (*zuhanden*) determine the limits of what I can think. In de-distancing, thinking hovers above what is near, paradoxically maintaining an intimacy and a separation from the immediate dimension of our being. With this description, we can appreciate how close something like the mood of de-distancing is to the philosophical *Stimmung* of reflection or meditation. In de-distancing, we experience ourselves both absorbed in the world and separated from it.

But here is where the question of social relations emerges. For if we accept Heidegger's account of *Entfernen* as a good phenomenological description of the way we are sometimes estranged by what is most near, what role are we allocating for those social relations which are also fundamentally characterized by nearness? In other words, how should we understand the role of a community in the life of a being whose most proximal ties are simultaneously "environmentally remote"? This is the first question I would like to address on the road to a full analysis of the social problem of entanglement.

Let me elaborate on the concern by addressing it from two angles. First, the concern has an epistemological dimension. We are asking if Heidegger's account of the way we become separated from the immediate relations in which we are otherwise absorbed entails skepticism towards the knowledge we inherit through our social imbeddedness. There are, after all, good reasons for wanting to cling to the world of pre-determined meanings that I find myself in. For the most part, when I speak, for example, I can presume the available forms of communicative praxis do their job – my point is understood and I understand what others tell me. To doubt this beyond a certain extent would be to fall prey to a kind of skepticism that betrays the pre-reflective intelligibility of speech-acts, to experience discourse as an arbitrary set of conventions and labels that one learns after one has already encountered things in the world, rather than as a formative part of one's self.[6] Second, the concern has an ethical or political dimension. If

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[6] It may be interesting to pursue such a question in terms of the so-called problem of other minds as it is taken up by Descartes, J.L. Austin, and others; however, as I will address in the fourth section of this chapter, I think that Heidegger's account of how others come to appear alongside one's own entanglement is a unique approach – best studied apart from the terrain of this problem – since it does not seek only to

one believes, on ethical or political grounds, that the most powerful claims upon us come from our unmediated relations with those people who share our world, an account which illustrates our freedom to mediate these relations may seem undesirably individualistic.

Thus, the question is: Do the people, history, and culture that I am bound to through my language require such de-distancing, and if so, to what end? A sense of self transcendent of these social relations? A language all my own? In the context of the feminist example, the issue could be posed like this: Is there a tension between the interest in recognizing the claim of social relations upon us (an interest generally characteristic of feminism) and the idea that one should twist free of any language that does not mesh with one's individual experience or speak at the limits of language, which is to say, at the frontier beyond the discursive world that one shares with others?

My response to this concern in the next section is twofold. I will look at the intentional structure of de-distancing, that is, how the experience of self-alienation can actually be a vehicle for self-disclosure. But, reading de-distancing alongside Heidegger's concept of thrownness, I will argue that the self that is disclosed by such experiences is not a self untethered to its relations in the world through its capacity for reflection, because the way it is disclosed is contingent upon finding oneself immersed in a world, in practices and relations that remain a limit for our self-knowledge.

Thrownness and Facticity

Heidegger tells us at the beginning of "The Way to Language" that despite the fact that we are "within language and with language before all else," language remains strange. Returning to this claim that appeared in the first chapter, we can now understand the issue in terms of de-distancing. Language remains strange in that our reliance on a discourse that can continually outrun the intended uses to which we put it marks us as other to ourselves. Discourse is, in this sense, the site of Barthes's "ancestral, all-

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evidently establish the fact of our being in common with others, but to explore the intricate ways that we come upon and respond to this fact.

powerful signs." Even when it seems like a second skin, it can also be a source of alienation.

But there is an important temporal aspect to this strangeness as well. It appears in the two examples that I offered in the previous section. For both the feminist problematic of the term "woman" and the writer's struggle with inherited literary forms, the discovery of language's limitation comes late. It appears after one has already been using language. This means that any deliberation on how one might authentically inhabit these inheritances comes only after already inhabiting it *in*authentically.

I use the terms "authentic" and "inauthentic" here, because their appearance in *Being and Time* occurs within an exploration of Dasein's imbeddedness in the everyday language that brings things *near* to Dasein. Our fallenness into what Heidegger describes as our primary inauthenticity becomes a problem when we intimate the limitations of this language. This inadequacy may entail, as I have emphasized, the inability to speak for oneself in the system of representation available, or, as Heidegger stresses, the leveling down by which the meaning of whatever is spoken is understood in advance, fit into a ready-made frame of "average intelligibility." And what is wrong with that? – one might ask. Isn't it the proper function of communicative language to unify the way we experience things and thereby to offer a shared system of meaning to a large number of people? Yes, but it is also the case that language's ability to enable communication can be impeded when one feels its operation to be purely mechanical, stuck in a single function without the possibility of transformation.

Consider the following example. Most philosophers I know have had the experience of watching as a word that they once found very powerful and disclosive slowly becomes jargon (or maybe even comes to be revealed as already having been jargon). We notice the word increasingly replacing an argument in papers that we read or hear read. And rather than simply functioning to indicate a phenomenon that one would like to address, the word seems imbued with other powers – the power to include some people into and exclude others from the conversation, the power to invoke all at once the presence of the philosopher from whom the word is borrowed and to invoke his or her

authority by specifically not engaging their arguments beyond reference to a single word. And this can happen not only with the use of terms but with a rhetorical style as well. A style that I once experienced as mind-blowing in all of the subtleties of reflection it suggested might over time come to seem like a crutch for feeble thought. This disappointing experience is certainly not restricted to philosophers. A concept or form of expression that once resonated with me may quickly turn hollow after hearing it used in commercials and advertisements. Its function then changes. It has become transformed into a commodity, no longer attached to the site that gave it meaning. No longer saying what it once did.

I offer this example as another way of appreciating how the inauthenticity of one's relationship to language can come into relief, that is to say, how the facticity of our "having language" can actually entail, rather than a seamless absorption into our everydayness, the emergence of a critical distance from it. The example is similar to the description of the writer struggling with his inheritance of literary history in that in both cases one becomes alienated from language and language ceases to be meaningful for that person when it ceases to bring new ideas or styles of thinking into being. Not that this issue of jargon is exactly the way that Heidegger addresses the issue. He could have been perhaps more precautionary about the dangers of jargon; though nobody in the end controls the fate of his or her text in the hands of posterity. Nevertheless, throughout his career, from *Being and Time* to *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger tracks how it is possible for us to experience something as intimate as language as inauthentic.

This question is difficult, because it's not as though we are ever in a situation where we are not influenced by the discourse which has shaped our world. This issue came up already in the first chapter in the discussion of the breakdown of language as tool. There we asked whether, in the event of this breakdown, we cease using language as a ready-to-hand instrument of communication and strive toward a more reflective relationship to it. In this case, then, we would transform language from pre-reflective structure into an object of reflection and thereby, it is thought, come to really *know* it. The answer given in that discussion was that the breakdown of the ready-to-hand *Zeug*

does not eject us from this kind of comportment entirely. Instead, it returns us to the event of language in a new way: rather than appearing as immediate and constant, it takes on the character of a problem.

What does this mean for the question of whether perceiving language inauthenticity requires us to occupy a reflective space uncontaminated by social, cultural, and historical influences? I would like to address this over the course of the next few pages by considering to what extent our relation to language remains pre-reflective even as it comes to appear as a problem.

When language comes to appear as a problem, we can say that it is no longer wholly pre-reflective, since some part comes to appear conspicuously. At the same time, it is clear that such a breakdown by no means transforms the instrument into something entirely conspicuous, fully known to us. Why? Not because we cannot develop a scientific understanding of how pre-reflective behaviors work. It is entirely possible to present this kind of data by taking recourse to concepts like instinct or social conditioning, for example. But such a means of gaining knowledge of the ready-to-hand remains limited, because it always comes after the fact. In other words, what is disclosed by such knowledge remains, in effect, always prior to that knowledge; in this way, time marks such knowledge as other to itself. In this way, the social biologist, the feminist, the writer, and the jargon-critical philosopher are all in the same boat: their reflections on the pre-reflective force of language in our lives cannot possibly accomplish a full reversal of the fact that they each come upon.

But this is not to say that nothing is accomplished in bringing language into the light of reflection. It just means that the consequence is not a complete disentanglement from the situation being diagnosed. What then is accomplished? What I would like to suggest is that the breakdown of language allows us to encounter ourselves as, proximally and for the most part, immersed in a pre-reflective praxis. In this way, the ready-to-hand remains a kind of limit to our self-transparency, but a peculiar one. Because finding myself shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts is still a way of finding myself, that is, it is still a form of self-revelation. To put this differently, the limit of my self-

transparency shows up only after this boundary has been transgressed, after it has already taken the shape of a question for a subject, albeit a subject-in-process.

Attending to the different ways of hearing the expression "finding oneself at the limit" broadens and transforms the way we relate to the *facticity* of the limit. Let me explain my meaning by considering the difficulties that arise when we try to pin down the factical point at which language begins, thus drawing a limit between the pre-linguistic and the linguistic phases of development. Often times, the onset of language is understood to occur at a particular moment in the course of human development. For example, some claim that we organize our experiences linguistically from birth. Others posit this moment of inscription as coinciding with a particular empirical event, for example, in many of Lacan's descriptions of the instantiation of the Name-of-the-Father, where the entrance into language coincides with the separation from the mother and the experience of castration anxiety.[7] Other theorists suggest that we already begin to learn language when we hear our mother speaking to us in the womb. But regardless of when we establish the fact of our linguistic inheritance, it always remains the case that we must continue to learn our language until we become fully mature speakers and writers, if such a landmark can ever really be reached. Sure, one might say, but the earliest learning of language establishes a deep-seated structure that remains firmly in place, no matter the trajectory that follows. Still, even if the basics of a language that we learn as young children provide a root from which language naturally grows as we develop, it is quite possible for one to view this structure, no matter how deeply implanted in our thoughts, as artificial (in the sense of a convention which we inherit after the basic emergence of a self) and to imagine the self as containing depths that exceed the reach of such a structure. (This is what Lacanian psychoanalysis identifies as the imaginary and object-relations psychoanalysts identify as the preoedipal, categories I will return to in the next

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[7] Lacan himself appears to be of two minds on this matter. At times he stresses that one's entrance into the symbolic order occurs in conjunction with particular paternal utterances -- a real, physical event in the course of childhood development. At other times, he describes this as an ongoing process, never fully completed (since, he stresses that there is always some psychical remainder left out of the organizational whole constructed by the Name-of-the-Father.) See, for one, *Ecrits* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2006), 688.

chapter.) In other words, there is something tricky about pinpointing how and when this inheritance occurs.[8] Putting this in terms of the temporality of our facticity that I have been developing, we can say that the fact of our linguistic inheritance is never just behind us. First of all, because we have never fully graduated from this acquisition. But, secondly and most importantly for our purposes, because whenever we turn to this origin in order to assert that language has definitively been acquired, we are already in a situation where this origination has occurred to us as a problem, and this suggests that some degree of dissonance has already occurred. We may have had experiences, for example, which, because we were unable to express them within the normative language available, revealed the limitation of language, even after we had long since supposedly graduated from the pre-linguistic phase. For this reason, the origin of language, developmentally speaking, is never simply behind us. While we may continually experience something like the inscription of language behind us, the temporality of how we come upon this fact is much more complicated.

But one must still deal with the fact that our experience is always already discursive. This is why I have suggested that we need to understand the facticity of the limit at hand (the inheritance or acquisition of social, cultural, and historical forms of discourse) in a different light, one which maintains our relationship to language as both pre-reflective and reflective.

In order to better understand this, I will turn now to Heidegger's discussion of Dasein's thrownness (*Geworfenheit*) in *Being and Time*. This will offer us another way of thinking through the relationship in question, that is, between the pre-reflective practical usage of language and this other possibility. By deepening our understanding of these two, we can then better address the relationship between the normative language of everyday communication and those moments in which one finds oneself at a distance

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[8] This difficulty is echoed by the fact that linguistics often considers the question of the origin of language to be out of bounds for the field. I take this to mean, for one, that such origins are beyond the limits of what can be established by empirical observation. The question then arises: if we wish to talk about these origins, how else can we proceed if not by empirical investigation? This seems to me to motivate exploration of the existential-phenomenological approach to the question.

from such language, which will help us to think through the problem of social entanglement at issue in this chapter.

In section 29 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces the term "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*) in order to distinguish Dasein's character of facticity from "the factum brutum of something present-at-hand."[9] For Heidegger, we miss the important aspect of the factical dimension of our being if we overlook the way that we come upon it. And the most primordial form of this disclosure is not a kind of cognitive processing, according to Heidegger – it is mood. The reason for this is because, as Heidegger says, "the 'that-it-is' of facticity never becomes something that we can come across by beholding it."[10] It is revealed to us, instead, as we turn away from it, that is, in our attempt to evade it. Heidegger continues: "In a state-of-mind (*Befindlichkeit*) Dasein is always brought before itself, and has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by perceiving itself, but in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has." Moods disclose for Dasein its thrownness, that is, the way that it is delivered over to its "there." And the way one finds oneself in this way differs from how one finds oneself as, say, the product of historical or biological forces. Heidegger explains:

> Even if Dasein is "assured" in its belief about its "whither," or if, in rational enlightenment, it supposes itself to know about its "whence," all this counts for nothing as against the phenomenal facts of the case: for the mood brings Dasein before the "that-it-is" of its "there," which, as such, stares it in the face with the inexorability of an enigma.[11]

Why, according to Heidegger, does Dasein encounter the facticity of its being-there as an enigma? Because it has fled from this, its basic existential character as *Da-sein*, and fallen into the They (*das Man*). Heidegger calls this condition of perpetual falling into the They "inauthenticity." If we recall the passage from *Writing Degree Zero*, we can see this

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[9] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquirrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1962), §29, 174.

[10] Ibid., §29, 174.

[11] Ibid., §29, 175.

falling into inauthenticity as part of the way that the writer finds himself. To this writer, according to Barthes's account, "History puts in his hands a decorative and compromising instrument, a writing inherited from a previous and different History, for which he is not responsible and yet which is the only one he can use." What is important here is that the writer does not locate, through – say – a process of transcendental reflection, a self that exists apart from history and a set of projects. The self of the writer is entangled within these factical conditions, as what Heidegger would call "fallen" into a set of conditions that he did not choose and so which remain for him alien – and, indeed, alienating.

But despite the negative and normative connotations of the word, Heidegger explains at some length that he does not intend the term "inauthenticity" as a moral condemnation of any sort. Inauthenticity is a basic existential condition of Dasein's being. And this is what is most important for our purposes. Dasein does not find itself in any other way. Rather, we find ourselves always already having taken flight – this is how the "that-it-is" of Dasein's "there" is disclosed to us. And it is "disclosed" (brought from obscurity into the light) because it always involves a movement of revelation from what is strange to – not what is wholly unfamiliar – but what is uncanny.[12]

Because of this, Dasein is perpetually thrown – continuously finding itself, and therefore, continuously having lost itself. As Heidegger makes the point in section 38 of *Being and Time*, "Thrownness is neither a 'fact that is finished' nor a fact that is settled. Dasein's facticity is such that as long as it is what it is, Dasein remains in the throw, sucked into the turbulence of the they's inauthenticity."[13] To imagine that thrownness is merely an event of the past, that at some point prior to reflective awareness, thinking was

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[12] Heidegger at one point uses the imagery of darkness and light to describe the way one is thrown upon one's being-there. While this could suggest that Heidegger intends a very traditional, perhaps Manichean analogy between authenticity/inauthenticity and light/darkness, one should keep in mind the way that Heidegger complicates the symbolism of light and dark in his discussion of concealment and unconcealment (particularly poignant in *The Origin of the Work of Art*). Like Schelling, Heidegger points out, for light to illuminate, there must be darkness. I find this helpful in thinking about the relationship between authenticity and inauthenticity, because it makes clear that authenticity is not simply the lack of inauthenticity.

[13] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §38, 223.

set up within language would not in itself, after all, lead one to the "tragic disparity" that Barthes presented as motivating the writer. For the human subject's failure to coincide with itself is itself something that we come upon as our factical condition. In this way, our facticity is something that only ever shows up "after the fact," after we've transgressed the limit, since being-ahead-of-ourselves is part of our facticity. Put another way, the condition of being perpetually thrown, as Heidegger describes it, suggests that primary experience (which we can call immediacy, pre-reflective experience, or our "being there") is never simply a brute fact; rather, it is always a repetition in which we find ourselves.

It is this feature that allows Heidegger to distinguish early on in *Being and Time* between the Cartesian subject and Dasein. Dasein is not a subject isolated from its worldly involvements – thoughts, perceptions, activities, human relationships, etc. In section 13, Heidegger writes: "When Dasein directs itself toward something and grasps it, it does not somehow first get out of an inner sphere in which it has been proximally encapsulated, but its primary kind of Being is such that it is always 'outside' alongside entities which it encounters . . . ."[14] Here Heidegger echoes the founding phenomenological insights of his teacher, Edmund Husserl. And like Maurice Merleau-Ponty will later develop extensively in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Heidegger is critiquing the tendency in Descartes, for example, to separate the subject of thinking from its object. In Heidegger's case, I believe we can understand this in two ways. As stated above, we can point out that there is no subject who remains if we bracket all of its involvements, that, as Merleau-Ponty says, there is no perceiver without the perceived. At the same time, Heidegger does not seem as much to want to invalidate reflection entirely but, rather, to show how reflection is also mooded. Finding language as the limit of one's own self-transparency is still a form of *Befindlichkeit*, still a way of being thrown onto our being-as-possibility. The reason we cannot reflect back onto the event of language's inscription and determine once and for all the "whence and whither" of the nature of our

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[14] Ibid,, §13, 89.

language is not, in the end, because this inscription occurred at a time before the advent of consciousness. Rather, language is only ahead of us, because Dasein is ahead of itself.

What we have addressed in this section continues an important thread from the last chapter concerning limits. There we explored the contradiction in the argument that, in challenging that form of discourse into which we find ourselves problematically entangled, we are transgressing beyond certain regulative boundaries of what we can make sense of, since – as Wittgenstein set out to prove – the limits of language are also the limits of thought. This contradiction consisted in the way that the critique of metaphysical language relied on that very language, an absurd precondition which suggests that the relationship between thinking and language is more complex than Wittgenstein makes it out to be. In this chapter, we have looked at how experiences of separation from normative language differ from reflection as it is often understood, in that the subject of these experiences is not an autonomous power separate from the contexts which precipitated the entanglement in the first place. And so, we have come back around in a sense to the tradition of ordinary language philosophy which highlights the bond of any speaker to his or her social context. But we have inflected this bond with the Heideggerean tropes of de-distancing and thrownness, teasing out the important difference between having one's language shaped by a social context and *finding oneself* and one's language claimed in this way. The latter case carries with it an important dimension of self-discovery, where, rather than experiencing the weight of normative social ties as a diminishment of one's being, one experiences one's rootedness in these relations as an expansion of one's being.

Let us go back to Barthes's description of the writer. On the one hand, we could read this lament as indicative of an inverse correlation between overcoming one's alienation from language and sharing a language with others. Then, we would conclude that the writer will continue to suffer from a sense of inauthenticity as long as his language does not originate solely from him alone. On the other hand, maybe his articulation of this "tragic disparity" is only possible given language's presupposition of others, of potential addressees who might hear him. If this is the case, then we could

suppose that the experience of alienation was a moment of self-discovery for him. That it was an experience of self-othering in two senses. First, he experienced the influence of the history of literature on his writing as a burden and as a loss of his sense of self. And maybe he just stopped there. But it seems more likely, given that Barthes describes him as having a strong desire to write, that the new foreignness of his native language inspired him. That his sense of intimacy with his language was actually intensified through experiencing it as distant, not a ready-to-hand tool that one can pick up and use for one's purposes without thinking about it, but an uncanny presence in his existence, both familiar and foreign.[15]

It is this sort of encounter with one's language that Heidegger takes up in his discussion of translation and interpretation in his 1942 lectures on Hölderlin. There he describes the need to experience one's own language as foreign. In the next section, I will present the basic argument that Heidegger gives for this claim in the lectures, relating it back to the problem of social entanglement throughout.

Translating What Is One's Own

According to what I have developed in the previous sections of this chapter, then, entanglement cannot be thought of simply as an incidental conundrum that we have gotten ourselves into over the course of human history. For despite what sounds like a quintessentially modern "anxiety of influence," such entanglement is not exclusively a modern problem. To say so would be to suggest that, at some point in history, human life was void of the character of thrown possibility, that at some point we did not find ourselves already underway. As Heidegger says in "The Way to Language": "There is no such thing as natural language, a language that would be the language of a human nature

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[15] This is where readers of Freud may see a connection with his description of language as organized like the unconscious. For Freud, like Heidegger, language is uncanny in that its force in our lives far exceeds the intentional (conscious) purposes for which we use it. The estrangement that I have described through Heidegger is similar in this respect to Freud's dream-analyses where he describes dreams as the language of the unconscious.

at hand in itself and without its own destiny. Every language is historical."[16] We looked at this claim previously in the context of the first chapter. But after further clarifying the character of Dasein's thrown projection, it now becomes clearer how linguistic inheritance must be understood in terms of this thrownness and not as a "factum brutum" of the human species.

Nowhere does Heidegger demonstrate this point more than in translation – both in his remarks on *Ubersetzung* and his practice of translating. Perhaps his most notoriously radical remarks on the topic of translation are to be found in the 1942 Freiburg lectures on Hölderlin's poem "The Ister." Here Heidegger argues that Hölderlin's poetry emerges out of an intimate dialogue that he has undergone with ancient Greek culture. This point seems, in itself, beyond dispute, given how often Hölderlin's poems reference figures and places from the ancient Greek world. What is less clear is just what motivates the dialogue. Perhaps Hölderlin attempt to describe the world of the Greeks by imagining himself a part of it. Or, maybe his poems attempt to bear witness to the influence Greek culture has had on 18th Century Germany. Or is it, rather, an indication of a caesura between the two cultures – a source dried up?

Heidegger argues that Hölderlin turns to the Greeks because his poetic activity is concerned with the essence of history as the task of becoming at home through venturing into the foreign; and, according to Heidegger, it was the Greek world which "poetized the essence of human beings with respect to their becoming homely."[17] The discussion foreshadows the later remark from "The Way to Language" regarding language's historicality in that it suggests that one's historical being is tied to one's relationship to language. Moreover, it echoes the thought that we ended with in the previous section, where we considered how it could be precisely the foreignness of one's own language that excites the strongest connection to it. In the lectures on "The Ister," Heidegger presents a two-fold claim about the relationship of one's native language to foreign

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[16] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971), 133.

[17] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: The Ister*, trans. William McNeill and Julia Davis, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996), 65.

language (I leave the term "foreign language" ambiguous at the moment. I will pick back up on this soon.)

First, translation requires interpretation. So, for example, when Heidegger offers a translation of the choral ode from Sophocles' *Antigone*, he insists that we cannot simply go to the lexicon for the definition of *to deinon* and feel as though we've genuinely heard what is being said in the poem. This is because, when one grabs the closest equivalent in one's own language for a foreign word, one renders the event of that word immediately intelligible, and in so doing, fails to let the text speak on its own terms.

In this way, understanding involves going one step beyond the understanding as it is presented in *Being and Time*. There Heidegger explains that Dasein always has a "co-understanding beforehand of what is said-in-the-talk,"[18] that is, it is impossible to simply hear utterances (even, Heidegger says, in a foreign language) without understanding something, for example, that someone is speaking to one in a foreign language. We have always already interpreted what we encounter in the world. This is a significant part of what it means to be fallen into the public discourse of the They. At the same time, Heidegger argues that something is missing in our preliminary understanding of discourse: ". . . (B)ecause this discoursing has lost its primary relationship-of-Being towards the entity talked about, or else has never achieved such a relationship, it does not communicate in such a way as to let this entity be appropriated in a primordial manner. . . ."[19] To "appropriate in a primoridal manner" here means to open a space in which a text can come to appear as its own event, not restricted to the domain of what has always already been understood. Heidegger's concern over idle talk in *Being and Time*, understood as the leveling of everything one hears into what one has always already understood, thus appears in his later thought as a claim about the necessity of translation and interpretation. Heidegger's example in *Being and Time* makes the connection even more explicit. There he says: "The average understanding of the reader will never be able

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[18] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §34, 207.

[19] Ibid., §35, 212.

to decide what has been drawn from primordial sources with a struggle and how much is gossip."

In the context of translation, this might speak to the common habit of projecting certain presumptions about an author's relationship to their language in one's translations of a text. This is not to say that it is ever possible to read without importing presumptions. At the same time, we still recognize a virtue in the kind of reading which allows a text to speak for itself. This means, for one, being able to distinguish between what a text says and what we figure the author intends to say. No person, no matter the historical circumstance, has complete control over what he or she will have said in writing. The text that he or she produces will have a life of its own, one not reducible to the author's intentions, or for that matter, other parts of his or her psychology. Every author works within a language that remains always shared and always, in some part, strange. Barthes's writer became anxious in the face of what he perceived as his obligation to testify to his place in history, as though he did not find himself thrown into this context, burdened with a need to find out what it means that he arrived in this way, at this time, to the question of his being. His text will require, not that we dismiss the historical context altogether, but that we hear the voice of the writer entangled in its history, problematizing its history.

For this reason, Heidegger's translations of Sophocles do not aim to bring to light the author's intended meaning. Nor is it right to say that his readings try to reveal the unconscious of the author or the unconscious of the text. For the meaning that he wishes to disclose is not something present-at-hand. Rather, what is intended is a dialogue whereby one allows the voice of a work its own historical becoming.[20] This is how Heidegger explains Hölderlin's choice of the German term, *das Unheimliche* (the

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[20] My claim here positions me in opposition to Luce Irigaray's reading of Heidegger's work on language, in that Irigaray argues that dialogue between subjects is missing in Heidegger's work. Because she understands Heidegger's concept of appropriation as opposed to the spirit of "letting be," she sees Heidegger's emphasis on appropriation in his dialogue with the poets as monological. In fact, Irigaray's and Heidegger's explorations of language share many features, most notably their mutual interest in unearthing the primordial claim of language that is prior to language's calculative or technological function. Moreover, the site of the primordial claim coincides with what each takes to be the region of ethical claims. But Irigaray insists more explicitly that the presence of another subject is a condition for entering this region; whereas, as the project of my own essay makes clear, one has to reconstruct to some extent the presence of other subjects in Heidegger's account.

uncanny) for the Greek, τὸ δεινόν in the poet's translation of Sophocles' choral ode. Hölderlin's project, according to Heidegger, must be understood as an attempt to find home – or what is his own – through venturing into the strange.

This brings us to the second way that experiences of translation can affect our relationship to language. In translating the work of another, Heidegger argues, one finds oneself in one's "own" language in a new way, namely, as similarly in need of translation. Heidegger writes:

> Every translation is interpretation. And all interpreting is a translating. To the extent that we have the need to interpret works of poetry and of thought in our own language, it is clear that each historical language is in and of itself in need of translation, and not merely in relation to foreign languages. This indicates in turn that a historical people is not of its own accord, that is, not without its own intervention, at home in its own language. It may therefore be that we speak "German," yet talk entirely "American."[21]

Heidegger's argument is not that one must translate one's own language in order to understand what people's words refer to. For, according to Heidegger's discussion of interpretation in *Being and Time*, this is already a feature of everyday understanding. No special effort is required. Instead of this kind of understanding, Heidegger is concerned with the prospects of truly inhabiting language, such that one can call it one's "own." For though my language is a deeply-seated inheritance at the foundation of how I encounter beings in the world, this disclosure remains also an alien force if the necessary "intervention" is lacking.

Heidegger's own relationship to language in his work can be understood as such an intervention. As Jan Aler has argued, one can track an increasing commitment to the use of everyday terminology throughout Heidegger's career.[22] His analyses aim more to

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[21] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn:The Ister*, 65.

[22] See Jan Aler, "Heidegger's Conception of Language." According to Aler, "the combination of a scientific philosophy and a philosophy that remains close to life is what is so striking in (Heidegger's) use of words." – Jan Aler, "Heidegger's Conception of Language" in On Heidegger and Language, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Northwestern University Press, 1972), 39. What exactly counts as "close to life" is not something that I think can be determined in any general way by any definite criteria. Heidegger draws from

change the way we hear our words than to change which words we say. This commitment, however, remains an intervention of sorts. Heidegger messes with words in order to draw our attention to them. Take, for example, the hyphenation of the word *Da-sein*. This word was not particular to the German philosophical world at the time. Moreover, Heidegger found resonances in the etymology of the word that provided him with grounds for a new interpretation of what the word says – existence as being-there. Or consider the word *Befindlichkeit*, one of Heidegger's neologisms. In this case, Heidegger takes a common expression, "befinden sich," which one normally uses to ask another person how he or she is doing (*Wie befinden sich Sie?*), and he considers it in noun form. With this form, it is easier to think about what essentially occurs with this act of finding oneself in a particular state-of-mind. In such ways, Heidegger enacts in his own use of the German tongue what he describes as the need to interpret one's own language.

Having explored Heidegger's two claims, (1) that interpretation is necessary for translating the language of another and (2) that translation is necessary for interpreting one's own language, let us see how the points relate to our earlier response to the social problem of entanglement coming out of *Being and Time*. There we saw how finding myself at a distance from the language I inherit from my social and historical context can actually facilitate a new disclosure of my intimate attachment to this context. In such cases, it is the uncanniness of the language that lies so near to us, its problematic character, that draws me in closer and compels me to attend to it. As I see it, the experiences identified in the two claims listed above can accomplish something similar. For example, the effort to let a text speak for itself and not to rely entirely on ready-to-hand word equivalents in interpreting it is an exercise that can cause me to question the forces of normativity in my own language. My experience of these forces will cause me to use language differently, because I will recognize that a given thought or concept in the text I am working with (let's say, for example, *ethos* in Aristotle's *Ethics*) does not translate easily into the instrumental language that I have at hand. I then might have to

discourses that are near to him, including many words related to a relatively rural environment, which may be perceived as "provincial" and therefore distant to many readers.

explore the language available to me in ways I hadn't before to try to articulate this foreign thought. And in exploring my own language in this new way, it may become that uncanny companion that I spoke of previously – both familiar and unknown to me. I may be able to find a way to say something like *ethos* in my modern English, but it will likely require that I find associations, current usages, and maybe even etymologies previously invisible to me. So, I might have to play and de-normalize my own language in order to, say, create the conditions for a philosophical dialogue between Aristotle and contemporary American philosophy.

But I don't think that one needs to be translating Aristotle to have the kind of experience Heidegger is pointing to in his discussion of translation. Interpretation is, after all, not an activity that we reserve wholly for those times when we travel across oceans or read a Platonic dialogue. We take on an interpretive attitude whenever we find ourselves concerned about reading or listening properly. To what extent such a comportment can be observed in everydayness seems difficult to determine, but I will venture to say that it does not lie entirely beyond the bounds of the everyday. We may not encounter the absolutely foreign Other in the everyday context of interpretation, but most of us have experienced the need to question our understanding of someone's words. One might ask, however: Is this concern for understanding the same as the orientation toward appropriation previously outlined? Yes and no. Yes, in that an interpretive attitude is one wherein one tries to make oneself an instrument of disclosure, one which facilitates another being's ability to express itself, and in this way, which "lets beings be." No, in that, without any further effort to conserve this interpretive mood, such instances will be fleeting, momentary experiences whose lessons do not remain with us.

Therefore, I suggest that Heidegger's description of translation should be understood as an intensification of the need for an interpretive comportment which we may, in fact, experience in an "everyday" way, but only in passing. The point echoes section 34 in *Being and Time* when Heidegger says that "the possibility of interpretation" is "the possibility of appropriating what is understood."[23] One relies on interpretation all

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[23] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §34, 203.

of the time to build for oneself one's own understanding of things, but we often forget how much the most basic understanding rests upon the need for interpretation, and that all interpretation involves to some degree a willingness to become estranged from the familiar.

Consider, then, the following passage from the lectures on "The Ister," where Heidegger writes:

> Translation [*Ubersetzen*] is not so much a 'trans-lating [*Uber-setzen*] and passing over into a foreign language with the help of one's own. Rather, translating is more an awakening, clarification, and unfolding of one's own language with the help of an encounter with the foreign language. Reckoned technically, translation means substituting one's own language for the foreign language, or vice versa. Thought in terms of historical reflection, translation is an encounter with a foreign language (*Fremdsprache*) for the sake of appropriating one's own language.[24]

The passage makes the point that one cannot reflect or work on one's own language apart from encounters with others. But I am suggesting translation can put this into effect, not by inserting a need for interpretation that was entirely absent before, but by deepening the interpretive mood which occasionally characterizes even everyday communication, and that the activity of translation as Heidegger describes it is but one way that such an effect could occur.

Moreover, the activity of translation that Heidegger describes could be more or less effective for different individuals, depending on what precisely they find "foreign" given their specific situation. After all, the "foreignness" of language as I have discussed it is not limited to or even primarily to be found in a foreign language (*eine Fremdsprache*) or a foreign culture. This raises the following important question: Is the effort that I have described here as an individual's encounter with his or her own language the same thing as how Heidegger describes the effort of a historical people (*ein Volk*) to come into its own language? The difference, I believe, requires some comment. Because we are attempting to borrow ideas from a text entangled in a history of its own, it would behoove us to address how these ideas relate to the rhetoric of nationalism

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[24] Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymn: The Ister,* 65-66.

apparent in this passage from Heidegger's lectures on "The Ister." To neglect this aspect of the passage would, after all, mean ignoring part of the history that makes up the complex gesture of this utterance and ignoring the limitations of a discourse that continues to shape philosophical discussions of translation. Throughout the lectures, readers will find that Heidegger's presentation of the need for homecoming is inflected with a concern for the national identity and integrity of the German people – concerns which the Germany of 1942 rendered urgent. And while the problem of a national identity had been abuzz in Germany since the time of the French Revolution and had been taken up regularly as a banner under which the people hoped to achieve democracy and constitutional rights, the concern for German integrity – understood as requiring the exclusion of some other people – is unambiguously a hallmark of the ideological climate of the Third Reich.

The question impressed upon us who wish to take up Heidegger's argument in the lectures on "The Ister" is whether we can distinguish how we have tried to understand the emphasis on coming into one's own from an imperialist desire for national grandeur and ethnic purity. My answer is yes, and in fact, I would argue that the two are even incompatible with each other, because the end desired in the former is not the enrichment of oneself over and against other beings that one encounters in one's world.

Taking our cue from Heidegger's discussion of de-distancing and thrownness in *Being and Time*, we have seen in the previous two sections how the truth of Dasein's being cannot be grasped as a substantial self, constantly present as set over and against the world. As Otto Pöggeler argues, Heidegger's ongoing interest from *Being and Time* through the end is to bring us toward the experience of Being's claim upon us, which in *Being and Time* Heidegger describes in terms of solicitude and concern, and which in *On the Way to Language* appears as the Saying of Being which we have always already heard.[25] Dasein is the mode of being attending to what solicits it. In this way, the

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[25] According to Otto Pöggeler, the world in which Dasein finds itself, for example, is "a world in which something encounters us to which we correspond more properly through request, wish, and command than through mere assertions." – Otto Pöggeler,"Heidegger's Topology of Being" in *On Heidegger and Language*, ed. Joseph J. Kockelmans (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 111.

ontological project has an important ethical dimension, since it leads us to the insight that our very being lies in a concernful openness, a primordial letting-be (*lassen sein*).

This is not in any way, however, to deny the "self" in Heidegger's project. This should be apparent from my earlier emphasis on the self-disclosure that occurs in finding oneself estranged from language. Rather, the way that Heidegger brings us to an understanding of the self is as something neither distinct nor as indistinguishable from others. This statement would be a logical contradiction if the two terms here were fixed referents, present-at-hand in the world. But, again, the self is not this kind of referent for Heidegger. While being-in-the-world is an essential component of Dasein's being, Dasein is, strictly speaking, that which discloses the world and the beings in it, including itself.

On my reading, the best way to understand the meaning of the self in Heidegger's thinking is in terms of the responsibility that one inherits in receiving the claim which ushers forth from being-in-the-world. In this, I find myself rejecting Kwame Anthony Appiah's interpretation of the self in Heidegger.[26] For Appiah, Heidegger falls into one side of a popular dichotomy with which philosophers have tried to peg the self as either entirely pre-determined or entirely undetermined. In the first case, which Appiah labels the "essentialist" view, a successful search for oneself would conclude when one uncovers a nature that was present, though hidden, all along. In the second case, the "existentialist" picture, there are no limits restricting who one may become – the self is a blank slate. Appiah mentions Heidegger as an example of the "essentialist" view – curious, since Heidegger is most often associated with the existentialist tradition. While Appiah is right to note the way that Heidegger's philosophy differs from the existentialist picture as he presents it, I think one misunderstands how the question of the self appears in Heidegger's project if one sees Heidegger's work as simply promoting its opposite. While the path toward authenticity requires a return to the primal scene of our existence, what is significant is not that we find a being whose nature is all laid out for it and is thus devoid of possibility. This was my earlier point about the peculiar facticity of any origin for Dasein.

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[26] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 2005.

In Heidegger's own words, the task of authenticity involves "not a matter of tracking down and inspecting a point called the 'self,' but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world throughout all the constitutive items which are essential to it, and doing so with understanding."[27] We saw this to be the case in de-distancing and thrownness in *Being and Time*, where these experiences can disclose and intensify one's social and historical connections, for example, to inherited discourse.

Thus, what counts as one's own is neither entirely predetermined nor entirely undetermined. And the same goes for one's own language. The language one inherits comes with a particular history, a history which puts forward a particular set of claims. To this extent, there is always something of language that is "given" rather than forged. We always find ourselves within a particular discourse or set of discourses rather than others. But what *is* radically up for question is the way we relate to this inheritance, this scene of origin.

Framing this point in a different way, it does not necessarily follow from the fact that our language remains bound up with our social life that what is given pre-reflectively to individuals who speak German, for example, is the same for all. This seems like a hasty assumption on a variety of fronts. For one, it seems to take for granted that there is a one-to-one correspondence between a nation and a language; whereas, the reality is that no such correspondence exists. A nation needn't expect or require that its citizens all share the same language; and it certainly seems naïve to suggest that all people who share a particular native language automatically have enough in common such that they should form a single nation together. Language does not single-handedly define a nation. Second, different languages – traditionally defined – are not necessarily different worldviews, particularly insofar as they become responsive to the same worldly influences. In our globalized world today, one would be hard-pressed to insist on any fundamental difference between modern German versus modern American English. In both cases, language is tailored more and more to technological environments, with the predictable effect of homogenizing vocabulary across the board. This brings me to the

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[27] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §37, 187.

third point: it seems that what is given to individuals depends on exactly how each person finds himself or herself claimed by language. Something like the inundation of a language with technical vocabulary and innovations in communication technology produce affects which can be seen quickly – in the case of text messaging, most people see significant affects within the course of a single generation. But technology is not the only form in which we see this contingency. People growing up in first-generation immigrant families often have a different relationship to the language than others, even if they share a native language in common. This contingency follows from the nature of our existential facticity as we considered it in the previous section. Even people who share "the same" pre-reflective social or linguistic practices may have drastically different ways of relating to these inheritances, different ways of responding to being thrown upon them as their own.

If it is true that language is ahead of itself in whatever particular ways Dasein is ahead of itself, each way always taking a particular historical shape, then there is no guarantee that the "foreign" which one must venture into must be understood in terms of a foreign culture. For this reason, I find Heidegger's reliance on the categories of ancient Greek and modern German identity cumbersome at times. For as Heidegger himself points out, one needn't journey beyond the boundaries of "one's own" culture to experience an alien language.

Another clarification seems prudent. The event of appropriation that I seek to understand must be distinguished from a particular political goal at issue in Heidegger's 1942 lectures, namely, the strengthening of a national identity, however this is construed. The movement toward appropriation that I have sought to articulate in this project is not motivated by a desire to secure a foundation for political identity or political action, particularly not by way of locating a pre-reflective lifeworld shared by people who share a common language. My line of argument would suggest, on the contrary, that this attempt to establish once and for all the relationship between the human being and its language appears almost systematically blind to the complexities of (a) how Dasein finds

itself entangled in language, and (b) the transformations it must undergo in order to reconcile itself to this language.

Before moving onto the final section of this chapter, let me review the ground covered so far. In the previous sections, I argued that de-distancing language, understood as an instance of entanglement, needn't entail a slighting of our social relations because of the ecstatic character of this form of disclosure, a character that de-distancing shares with the structures of thrownness and mood. What finds itself problematically tangled up and estranged in the experience of de-distancing or entanglement is not an ego separated from its world but being-in-the-world itself. This addressed the worry that allocating a place for alienation in the human's relationship to language might not take seriously the claim of our social relations upon us. In this section, I have considered Heidegger's argument that encountering the language of others can help us to enrich our own by allowing us to see our own language as strange. In this, I have chosen not to follow Heidegger in all senses in which he invests the distinction between one's own language and a foreign language, because, as I have tried to show throughout, an encounter with a foreign language is not something we need to seek out – it is part of the way even the language closest and most native to us comes to appear. Putting the conclusion of these last three sections together, we can say that we have not arrived at our *own* language properly until we come to hear it as a repetition whose source can never be a brute fact before us, present-at-hand, and which *is* only insofar as we *intervene* by offering thoughtful interpretation enriched by social interactions.

In what follows, I will tease out the way that intervening in one's own condition must nevertheless rely upon that which others provide for us. In the first case, we cannot make sense of much, including our own condition, without relying upon the paths of interpretation made available by culture and history. I will approach this point by showing how it bears on the general method of Heidegger's approach to language. For fundamental to this approach is the way Heidegger's attempt to speak to the *Wesen* of language – that is, language *as language* – is entangled in the way the concept of language has historically been interpreted. Rather than suggesting that such entanglement

invalidates the inquiry – on the presumption that it makes the inquiry bias and thus non-objective, my argument is that following the paths of interpretation gifted to us by others gives one's approach an attunement to the way the language of others discloses for us the truth of our own condition. What I find interesting on this point is that, even for Heidegger, who tends – as we saw – to identify the individual with his or her historical culture, it is often the entangled language of a particular voice (e.g., Nietzsche, Novalis, or Rilke) that claims Heidegger most powerfully. Arguably, the voices that claim Heidegger most are those that appear to push the limit of what can be said in their respective cultural and historical situations. They appear, in other words, as individual voices. This, then, is the second way that the upcoming section will address our dependence on others for working through our own entanglement with language; for it is not only what is gifted by an entire culture or history that I find myself claimed by – it is also the language that comes to me from particular individuals.

Tracks of Interpretation, Voices Underway

In order to address how Heidegger's work on language responds to the social problem of entanglement, one must look to *how* this work attempts to bring to light the bond between our language and our being-with-others, not only to *what* it asserts. In various ways, philosophers have attempted to speak of sociality as an essential element of human experience. Just how this essence becomes manifest, however, differs significantly from tradition to tradition. In Anglo-American philosophy of language, for example, J.L. Austin presents linguistic utterances as intricately bound up with social practices, such that one can evaluate the felicity of performatives by looking to their practical effects and vice versa.[28] In Austin's approach, the essence of our social bond

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[28] One example that Austin gives is that of naming a ship. He points out that if someone who is not designated to name a particular ship walks up and smashes the bottle hung at the stem, proclaims 'I name this ship the Mr. Stalin" and then kicks away the chocks, "we can all agree: (1) that the ship was not thereby named; (2) that it is an infernal shame." He goes on to say that the action taken of naming the vessel is "void or without effect." Here the felicity of the speech-act depends on whether the social systems in place permit the speech-act to be meaningful, or more precisely, to work. But one could also see how this can work the other way around. The power invested by a society onto a speech-act may then be capable

becomes manifest through a concern for felicity. But Austin's innovation is not only the presentation of a new propositional truth to be inserted into the pre-existing theoretical apparatus; it is a modification in the way of revealing – a switch away from concern over propositional truth to the disclosure of a world of social regulations (as opposed to logical axioms).

There is an interesting affinity between the projects of Heidegger and J.L. Austin. In *The Essence of Truth*, Heidegger argues that propositional truth depends on a more primordial unity, what in *Being and Time* he'd presented as the being-there of Dasein, which is the condition for the disclosure of being. In *Being and Time*, he writes: "But if the world can, in a way, be lit up, it must assuredly be disclosed. And it had already been disclosed beforehand whenever what is ready-to-hand-within-the-world is accessible for circumspective concern."[29] Heidegger's Dasein analysis, like Austin's speech-act theory, looks at how disclosure occurs beyond the bounds of propositional truth. Neither simply discredits the validity of such inquiry; however, both can be said to attempt a phenomenological reconstruction of the ready-to-hand environment and the world disclosed therein where discourse is a basic element.

We have already explored certain aspects of how Heidegger suggests that the sociality of the human being becomes disclosed. In looking to how we find ourselves continually thrown into language, Heidegger suggests that the disclosure of oneself and the disclosure of world come hand in hand. In finding ourselves thrown, we discover inheritances which become our *own*. Finding oneself in language is one such way of being thrown. And while one might understand this to mean that we do not know our relationship to the world or to others until we first find ourselves, or that finding oneself is the condition for finding others, according to my argument, Heidegger's point is that these two disclosures happen together at once. This is readily apparent in Heidegger's

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of granting some recognition that would otherwise be withheld. An entertaining example of this would be the comedic resolution that occurs at the end of the film Miracle on 34th street, where, through some chance series of events, the judicial court deems that the defendant is Santa Claus, despite widespread skepticism among the local population, thus effecting a precedent in the judicial system, where fictitious characters can be recognized as real before the law.

[29] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §16, 106.

treatment of translation, where he argues that it is only in the encounter with another –
whom he conceives through the concept of the "foreign" – that one can be brought to
genuinely search for and, hence, discover what is one's own.

Conversely, in every fact that Dasein unveils about the world it finds itself within,
there is some self-disclosure. Thus, when we consider the fact of our having language,
the nature of this facticity is changed. We might ask ourselves: How do I relate to this
fact? How do I preserve it, or do I not? But oftentimes we ourselves do not pursue this
line of reflection. Consider how the sciences have influenced the way we hear the famous
dictum characterizing the human being as *zōon echon logon*, the animal that has
language. We take the phrase to be asserting the fact as something objective and
universal, and furthermore neglect to flesh out phenomenologically what it means to *have*
(language, science, etc.). In allowing our reflections on human life to take this course, we
have come to view the human's relationship to language in the all-purpose biological
terms of "instinct." We then hear the phrase *zōon echon logon* as describing an innate
quality of the human animal – a brute fact of its being. But, as we saw earlier, for Dasein,
it is precisely the immediacy of language that can actually lead us to challenge the
whence and whither of the discourse into which we are thrown. To *have* language means
to experience its claim as still underway.

But how does this observation stand when we consider that Heidegger's
arguments often proceed deductively toward an indication of language conceived of as
prior to any experience? Throughout *On the Way to Language*, for example, Heidegger
speaks of a primordial listening to language itself that is the condition for our belonging
to language. In the essay "Language," for example, Heidegger famously argues that
"Mortals speak insofar as they listen," and listen not to what this or that person wants to
say with language but to language itself.[30] Heidegger goes to such lengths to disabuse his
audience of the impression that language is something that each individual person or
culture controls that he attributes to language an essence which seems in many ways to
pre-exist the human's consciousness of it. The speaking of language itself is something

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[30] Martin Heidegger, "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York:
Harper Collins, 2001), 206.

categorically different from human speaking, and that must also mean from human interpretation. It grounds our saying-power and our ability to interpret – it does not result from these things.

On the one hand, this is nothing new. The experience of an originary belonging to language which remains, because of its being primary, always excessive to our reflection has already been a part of the way we've depicted entanglement. But whereas I have described this consistently in terms of social inheritances, Heidegger often describes what we are entangled in as language *itself*, understood as something prior to any given historical or cultural institution. "In order to be who we are, we human beings remain committed to and within the being of language, and can never step out of it and look at it from somewhere else." Heidegger writes in "The Way to Language." He continues: "Thus we always see the nature of language only to the extent to which language itself has us in view, has appropriated itself to us."[31] What this tells us is that language is something so formative and basic to our experience that we can never get a full view of it as an object of experience. In this way, it has a quasi-transcendental character. But there seems to be a tension between this transcendental motif in Heidegger's thinking and the claim that we are brought to authentically inhabit our own language through encountering the language of others. In the latter case, social engagement is requisite for properly belonging to one's language; whereas, in the former case, our belonging is established as a fact of our being regardless of what experiences we have or how we undergo them. The question is then: Given that Heidegger's account describes the primordial appearance of language as distinct from the way language comes to appear through human speech, to what extent can we say that this account describes how others are bound up with the way we find ourselves in language?

Heidegger does seem to want to distinguish the figure of primordial language from a transcendental condition in two ways. (1) First, because Heidegger – especially in his later work – so often describes absence as an intensive form of presence, that which is beyond what we can directly experience paradoxically takes on a vivid experiential form.

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[31] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 134.

As Heidegger says in *What is Called Thinking?*: "The event of withdrawal could be what is most present in all our present, and so infinitely exceed the actuality of everything actual." Thus, Heidegger considers it possible to experience the primordial claim of language, even in its transcendental form. (2) Second, the primordial source disclosed is not construed as something constantly present, as is the case, according to Heidegger, with an *a priori* condition. Our belonging to language can be jeopardized – it is not a sure thing. So, though Heidegger's line of thinking often leads us to the disclosure of what looks like transcendental conditions, the nature of his project can nevertheless be differentiated from that of philosophical deduction on at least these two points.

Nevertheless, Heidegger draws a distinction (albeit a complicated one) between language in itself and (a) language according to how human beings have historically taken it up and conceptualized it and (b) according to how humans *use* it. These two clearly hang together, since conceptualization is a form of use. Moreover, on both accounts, we can say that the distinction being made is between language in itself and language as it is given to us through our relations with others.

Heidegger seems, in part, aware of this tension. And the complexity of how the distinction is maintained may be viewed as symptomatic of the fact that Heidegger had not explicitly formulated a social problem of entanglement in his work. We have to reconstruct the problem through the various aspects of his work that seem to pertain to it. Thus, it is to be expected that there are some unresolved tensions in the path Heidegger lays. Consider, for example, "The Way to Language." The goal of the lecture is, according to one pronouncement, a way of getting to language *as language*, rather than in terms of something else.[32] To this end, much of the first part of the lecture involves trying to isolate what language is from other phenomena with which it is intertwined, which Heidegger identifies as metaphysical categories that we tend to import in order to have a grasp of the phenomenon of language. Heidegger steers the inquiry toward a point at

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[32] One finds a related formulation in *What is Called Thinking?*, originally published in 1954, where Heidegger writes: "But language is not a tool. Language is this and that, is not also something else besides itself. Language is language. . . . The boundlessness with which such sentences can be abused corresponds to the infinity into which they direct the task of thinking." – Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 153.

which these various categories reach their limit, and this is where, according to Heidegger, language shows up. Language as language appears at the point where all of our approaches to it have been exhausted. And only then, through the presentation of this limit, does Heidegger find it possible to address the place of appropriation (*Ereignis*), a concept that I will take up here only insofar as its description involves a primordial listening, an originary openness to the claim of language.

The complex relationship that Heidegger has to the above-mentioned distinctions is evident when we consider that, while the lecture has the general shape of the argument described above, Heidegger meanwhile also concludes that language is not something that can be separated out as a discrete entity. He says that the goal of reaching language as language must lead us to the web of relations within which the unity of the phenomenon lies. One aspect of this web that appears particularly impossible to separate is the factor of human speaking, not least of all because philosophical inquiries like that underway in "The Way to Language" rely fundamentally on human speaking. This should sound familiar by now, as it corresponds to the way we have been talking about entanglement. But what I am pointing out now is that this insight is in tension with a parallel tendency to posit language as transcendental, as prior – in other words – to the convening of the manifold relations which co-emerge as language.

Heidegger's interest in reserving a place for language prior to human speaking in this lecture has in part to do with his criticisms of the Idealist approach to language, which he argues reaches its apogee with Wilhelm Humboldt. According to Heidegger's reading, this approach takes language to be essentially a mode of human activity, that is, a worldview (*Weltanschauung*) posited by a subject. In this, Heidegger argues, idealism exemplifies a "change of the nature of truth" since the Greek meaning of a sign. Drawing on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*, Heidegger argues that – for the Greeks – the sign is that which *shows what allows itself to be shown*. According to the lecture, "The kinship of Showing with what it shows – a kinship never developed purely in its own terms and those of its origins – later becomes transformed into a conventional relation between a

sign and its signification."[33] The word "conventional" is important here. The Greek conception that Heidegger presents suggests that signs facilitate the disclosure of a world beyond them, not entirely unlike the work of translation as it was described above. Here human speech operates within a web of relation, entangled in the work of disclosing what is. In the latter conception, however, the sign is not in kinship with anything other. The world is simply a world of signs, where concepts are the most actual. The world appears, from this vantagepoint, as something that is purely of our own device – an aggregate of worldviews where the question of truth becomes meaningless.

But hidden within this inverted world, Heidegger claims, is evidence of this lost kinship. For, according to Heidegger, "Even when Showing is accomplished by our human saying, even then this showing, this pointer, is preceded by an indication that it will let itself be shown."[34] The second lecture ends with the presentation of this evidence, what are essentially ontological conditions for the possibility of the sign-signified relationship. Here we may want to say that Heidegger has resolved the tension between the transcendental condition of language and that which is experienced only through social engagements, since we can reformulate the point this way: it is language in itself that allows for there to be social institutions (historical, cultural) of language. And, in turn, preserving what is opened up by these institutions goes to preserve language itself. The institutions of language are then the traces of a more original ground, signs of a structure that is not itself an object of experience.

But in the very next section, at the beginning of the third lecture, Heidegger questions what has been reached via the route taken thus far in the inquiry. Has language spoken *as language*, to recall the stated goal of the lecture? Not, he argues, if it has become revealed strictly as a transcendental condition governing our reflection through the topic. For if the goal is to listen to language on its own terms, it is not clear that the inquiry at that point has accomplished this, since it has presented language in light of reflection, which Heidegger has associated with Idealism. This approach presumably

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[33] Heidegger, Martin, "The Way to Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971), 115.

[34] Ibid., 125.

misses something of the nature of language, because it cannot say much about this nature insofar as it enables and is prior to the very subject of reflection itself. And so, Heidegger attempts to articulate what is beyond the horizon of reflection, or more precisely, what appears within that horizon only as, again, a trace – but a trace in a different way. Here his description proceeds in largely negative terms, except that he names it. In his own words:

> We can do no more than name it, because it will not be discussed, for it is the region of all places, of all time-space-horizons. We shall name it with an ancient word and say: *The moving force in Showing of Saying is Owning* . . . . What Appropriation (*Ereignis*) yields through Saying is never the effect of a cause, nor the consequence of an antecedent. The yielding owning, the Appropriation, confers more than any effectuation, making, or founding. What is yielding is Appropriation itself – and nothing else.[35]

Because we so rarely concern ourselves with the ontological character of language and thus do not often consider its full depth, Heidegger urges us to recognize how little we know of language when we perceive it as only the instrument of our subjectivity. But in this description Heidegger goes so far in that direction that *Ereignis* appears as though it had no direct link with what we bring into being through our speech. Language appears, in other words, as almost entirely *alien*, not *uncanny* in the way that we earlier explored. It is entirely strange except for a single linking thread running towards us that allows us in the slightest way to take it up as our own: the ability to name it. "The peculiar property of language, namely that language is concerned exclusively with itself – precisely that is known to no one," Heidegger announces.[36]

One can see how commentators like Luce Irigaray get frustrated with Heidegger's presentation of language. Heidegger sometimes speaks about primordial language, like in the passage above, as so thoroughly separate from the economy of cause (and with that,

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[35] Ibid., 127.

[36] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 111. Heidegger is invoking Novalis's *Monologue* in this passage. It is not easy to determine where Heidegger's interest in Novalis in this lecture really lies, since the 1959 lecture was part of a series where Martin Buber also spoke, and it seems to some extent an imbedded criticism of Buber's dialogical theory.

purpose or use), that it is hard to understand how this quasi-transcendental figure relates to language as we know it through human interaction – where causes (and purposes and uses) are always present.[37] Irigaray raises this concern when she writes of Heidegger's project in *On the Way to Language* that:

> (T)he philosopher's partner is speech itself – of which he says moreover that it speaks only with itself. Like him, in a way? He interweaves, interlaces with the speaking of speech caring little, it seems, about interweaving, interlacing when speaking with someone, at least someone who is living and present. He is on the way toward the call of speech, not toward the call of another subject.[38]

Irigaray's frustration is not that Heidegger neglects to attend to the primordial, pre-reflective site of this claim, but that he overlooks how (a) this claim issues from others whose lives are bound up with ours and how (b) responding to this claim entails concern for these others. For Irigaray, we never listen to language as such – we listen to the language of others with whom we are entangled in manifold ways. And to the extent that we find ourselves concerned to listen well to language, we are demonstrating concern for those beings who are attempting to communicate to us.

I believe we can see the first point at work in Heidegger's discussion of language as a primordial condition, even if this way of thinking about things goes in a different direction than he intended. The connection I have in mind lies with the role interpretation

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[37] In both "Building Dwelling Thinking" and "Poetically Man Dwells" (both lectures given in 1951), Heidegger sharply condemns the attitude in which one takes language as an instrument of one's own will. In both essays, he charges humanity with subverting the order of things. In "Building Dwelling Thinking," he writes: "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation." – Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 144. While Heidegger's remark gets at the point that language can outrun our intentions and thus take on the role of an uncanny companion to the self, the claim seems to go too far. Heidegger's willingness to see the relation between a human and language as one of domination (where language commands and people obey) seems to leave behind all the nuances of entanglement that I have presented earlier in the chapter in terms of thrown facticity. Furthermore, it shows the limits of importing such remarks into the domain of human-to-human dialogue, since many problems arise if we try to conceive of these conversations as hierarchical relationships of dominance, or even if we try to imagine what it would mean to perceive the voice of another person as one's master.

[38] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen (London: Continuum, 2002), 31.

plays in the discussion. For example, it must strike one as strange that, on the one hand, Heidegger insists on drawing a stark separation between *Ereignis* and what can be brought to light by discursive description, and that, on the other hand, (1) he had immediately prior to this spoken about the kinship between human speaking and what allows itself to be seen, and (2) he put such an emphasis on the need for interpretation in his earlier lectures on Hölderlin. Why hold onto an ideal of addressing language as language then, rather than showing that language can only appear through the interpretive paradigms made available to us by our given social-historical situation? Is it not the case that, like the pre-reflective situation into which one is perpetually thrown, this is another instance of a boundary which has always already been transgressed? The fact that Heidegger's positive descriptions of *Ereignis* in the lecture could easily be interpreted as carrying forward paradigms foreign to the region of language itself (*language as language*) supports this point. For example, Heidegger attempts to describe this event (despite the fact that he says "we can only name it") as "the plainest and most gentle of laws," "the most inconspicuous of inconspicuous phenomena, the simplest of simplicities, the nearest of the near, and the farthest of the far in which we mortals spend our lives."[39] These descriptions appear to borrow, for one, from theological paradigms that have historically been used to interpret the being of being. In using such metaphors, have we not failed in allowing language to speak for itself?

On the other hand, is it not mistaken to view the presence of such "paradigms" in terms of an imported, merely subjective interpretive apparatus, since it is – as Heidegger himself has argued – never the case that things disclose themselves immediately to us without the need for interpretation? It seems that part of what is suggested by the lecture's early image of language as a web of relations comes back to entanglement, in other words, how we find ourselves speaking before we ever encounter our comportment toward language as a practical question.[40]

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[39] Heidegger, Martin, "The Way to Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1971), 128.

[40] This is the hermeneutic situation of Dasein as Heidegger presents it in section 33 of *Being and Time*.

How does the relationship between *Ereignis* and interpretation presented here bear on how we understand the site of language's claim and, in particular, *the way we find ourselves alongside others in this claim*? All attempts to listen to language in a spirit of openness, so as to let language (a text, a voice, etc.) speak for itself, require that we work within the paths of interpretation available to us. For these paths are not just arbitrary paradigms or worldviews; they preserve a kinship with whatever is disclosed.

Again, this point should bear on how one relates to the language that one inherits. To position oneself toward the claim of language needn't entail, on this reading, that one turn away from the history of language and seek out some point from which language speaks independently from human speech and the history of the human being's interpretive efforts. Rather, attending to the claim of language, as I am suggesting that we hear it, requires that we turn to what is already underway in that history in order to authentically inhabit that project. This is, as I will explore later in the last chapter, the way Heidegger describes the task of dwelling in two lectures from 1951, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" and "Poetically Man Dwells." There he describes dwelling as the activity of caring for and cultivating what one finds in the region of one's abode. Such dwelling, on Heidegger's description, shares with poetic language the feature of making meaningful connections for us, inhabiting the world symbolically, poetically. In other words, it is not in Dasein's abandonment of the discourse it inherits – be it "everyday" or otherwise – that "language as speaking comes into its own and thus speaks *qua* language."[41] It is through the continual enrichment of how one undergoes that inheritance.

As I've said before, this path can take many forms. In reference to my earlier example of discovering once inspiring discourse to be the façade of jargon, one has to choose how, if at all, to preserve the meaningfulness of the discourse. Does one cut what is salvageable away and then avoid the rest like the plague in one's philosophical work? Or, does one stay loyal to it, working to loosen it from the force of jargon?

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[41] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 124.

But there is another side to this. For in saying that one cannot abandon the ways in which we dwell on earth – through, for example, traditions, histories, and habits; we should not neglect to acknowledge the important role played by social conditions which may either enable or disenable an individual's ability to work through this task of inheritance. This isn't to say that one's social context as a whole works either for or against a person's entanglement. Individual relationships may provide the dialogue one needs to work through moments of alienation from the discourse of a culture more broadly construed. Having another who is willing to recognize my voice emerging in the space between how I find myself and how I attempt to inhabit my thrownness can be a precious source of encouragement.

This brings me to another point about the role of meaning shared between individuals, rather than between an individual and a society as such. It is strange to consider that even in cases where one experiences a dissonance with something as general as a cultural system of representation, it is still often the case that individual opportunities for communication prove exceptionally therapeutic. Not that such instances of communication would ever be sufficient in themselves to effect a complete reconciliation. Nevertheless, recognition from individuals can play a crucial role, and so much so that it may make us wonder whether complete reconciliation (where perhaps I speak as clearly to a stranger as to a friend) is even desirable. For it is in tuning our ear to the voice of an individual that many of us find ourselves to be our most interpretive, which means – as I argued in the last section – our most concerned with language.

This brings me to the second dimension of Irigaray's criticism that I noted above, the suggestion that what is at issue in our relationship to language goes beyond one's own authenticity – it expresses a concern for the condition of others. The voice of the individual other demands that I listen for how it is at odds with the normative framework of recognition. And listening in this case often means intervening on behalf of the emergence of that other voice. Whether I am reading an anonymous text that has somehow found its way to me across great time and distance or listening to my sister speak during a regular visit, I may be struck by the similar precariousness of the process

in each case. These situations enlighten me to the fact that listening and reading are not passive experiences. For if I do not allow the voice of my addressor to come into its own, I cannot possibly listen to that person. Therefore, the need for interpretation is not just a condition for knowledge – it is also an ethical condition. We must know how to assist others in giving accounts of themselves in order to be responsive to those accounts.

This is a different sense of finding myself entangled with others. The debt presented to me when I find myself already underway in this case is a debt toward others – others I have listened to, others whose own entanglement involves my use of language, whether habitual or more mediated. But in this situation, it is impossible to fully separate the subject of one's own entanglement from the subject of another. This is why answering the claim is difficult. Take the case of reading a philosophical text. If we value the freedom of people to speak for themselves, then we will want to facilitate this freedom for the author of the text. And yet, as we demonstrated with Barthes's writer, the subject of entanglement is not identical to the biographical subject that we might access through historicism and psychologism. Therefore, in order to attend to the particular event of the text, we must intervene as interpreters and, moreover, rely on paths of interpretation made available to us by others. Thus, though we find ourselves wanting to release this text to its unique possibility, this goal is complicated by another aspect of our social entanglement, namely, the fact that our interpretive efforts are never just our own. They repeat to a large extent the ideas and concerns of those who have influenced us. This is the way that finding myself claimed by another's entanglement brings me once again to the question of my own entanglement. I call this double claim *Mitbefindlichkeit* – finding myself with and through others.

Unlike the process of inquiry whereby one deduces the fact of a social inheritance, *Mitbefindlichkeit* is occasioned by a claim that issues to me from a particular other. It is occasioned by the experience of another entangled voice. As I suggested earlier, despite his tendency to see thinkers as thoroughly attached to their historical culture, it seems that Heidegger was also very much claimed by individual voices at odds with their historical moment. One can read his dialogue with Nietzsche in *What is Called*

Thinking? as an example of this.[42] The possibility of such an occurrence suggests that the way people find themselves entangled side-by-side is not constricted by the linear development of history. Separation works here in history like it works between a curious reader and a dense text – it affords a distance to Dasein that Dasein can reach out and dissolve. So is the nature of the human being's existentiality which Heidegger himself had described in *Being and Time* as *Entfernen*. And throughout *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger continues to develop this existential structure by theorizing a separating-binding relation. In "The Way to Language," he writes: "precisely in the solitary [*Im Einsamen*] there unfolds essentially the lack of what is in common [*der Fehl des Gemeinsamen*], as the most binding relation to what is in common."[43] Applying this statement to the problem of social entanglement, we can say that the occurrence of *Mitbefindlichkeit* not only cultivates the kind of communication that is essential to having a dynamic community, but it does this at the same time as it deepens the unique relationship that individuals have to language.

If we can understand *Mitbefindlichkeit* as a way of finding ourselves in common that is facilitated by – rather than opposed to – our existential condition of *Entfernen*, then we have answered the question with which we began, namely: How is community possible for a being whose most proximal ties are simultaneously "environmentally remote"? What seems apparent now is that it is precisely the individuating quality of *Befindlichkeit*, of how I find myself – entangled in and responsible for a life that I inherit underway, that makes the experience of *Mitbefindlichkeit* such a profound one.

By the same token, then, the absence of such an occurrence not only weakens the fabric of communication but inhibits the development of an individual with his or her

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[42] Heidegger writes of his engagement with Nietzsche's writing: "People still hold the view that what is handed down to us by tradition is what in reality lies behind us – while in fact it comes toward us because we are its captives and destined to it . . . That self-deception about history prevents us from hearing the language of the thinkers. We do not hear it rightly, because we take that language to be mere expression, setting forth philosophers' views. But the thinkers' language tells what is. To hear it is in no case easy. Hearing it presupposes that we meet a certain requirement, and we do so only on rare occasions. We must acknowledge and respect it. To acknowledge and respect consists in letting every thinker's thought come to us as something in each case unique, never to be repeated, inexhaustible – and being shaken to the depths by what is unthought in his thought." – Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 76-7.

[43] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," 134.

language. For just as we may facilitate the ability of others to speak authentically, we may inhibit this possibility when we fail to recognize the plight of individuals to inhabit their language freely. As Luce Irigaray describes it:

> The obligation to speak 'like everyone else' or according to what has been taught does not awaken, or quench, human consciousness. If the subject does not have, in himself, the source of his movement, he loses his quality as subject. He is a mechanism started up by an energy already fabricated, not free. He speaks but has, as it were, nothing to say that he could say, or no longer has anything to say, paralyzed as he is between repetitions and silence.[44]

In order for language to be meaningful, it must allow the individual to speak, something that is much harder than it sounds. Irigaray's description recalls to us once again the series of examples that we've explored in which we struggle to find our own voice amidst the conditions of inheritance. With the right support, we may take up this entanglement as our own possibility and give voice to the silence that we experience; without it, however, we may go no further than a sense of paralysis, an experience of impossibility within an inherited symbolic order. Then, the obligation to "speak like everyone else" leaves us unfree, our lives indistinguishable according to our perception from a mechanism set into motion from an unknown, alien source. Language then loses its usefulness both as a tool of expression and as a form of disclosure. Thus the paradox: the less a language can function as giving voice to singular experiences, the less universal it is.

While the suggestion that we ought to deepen our individual relationships to language might sound antithetical to how we normally understand the foundations of community (as in the "one nation – one language" concept), we can see that this practice plays an essential role in our political system today. For without any account of how one appropriates and authentically comes to emerge in language, it is not possible to have a political system based on individuals' ability to speak for themselves, for the source of any utterance – including "I" – is not then a self but merely an anonymous system of discourse. In this way, liberalism depends on the ability of people to speak for themselves

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[44] Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London: Continuum, 2002), 62.

– to speak in their own voices. Indeed, insofar as any healthy human relationship is based on mutual understanding and most of these arrive at this by way of some kind of language, the possibility of speaking for oneself seems to be a feature required by most human relationships if they are to function properly.

This is not to say that it is necessary ever to have complete mastery over one's speech, that every utterance should be understood as stamped with the guarantee of a transcendental "I." As many twentieth century philosophers, including Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, have argued, language is never merely an instrument picked up in response to some need that exists prior to it. We find ourselves thrown into language, its roots reaching far beyond what we have immediate knowledge of.

Because of this entanglement, the relationship between the self and language must be thought in a different way. In the line of thinking developed through our discussion of translation, we saw the need for an alternative way of hearing the language of "one's own," taking this neither as pre-determined essence or pure unfettered self-creation. We concluded that the goal of arriving at one's own amounts to a return to one's "being-there," that is, one's original insertion into the world as a being of concern. From this perspective, it is not in disentangling oneself from one's inheritances that one accomplishes authenticity, but in turning toward the claim of those inheritances and translating them faithfully. But, as we saw in the context of Heidegger's description of appropriation, one never does so outside of the lines of interpretation opened up by others.

It might seem strange that the end of this chapter should focus on the individual. But it is, nevertheless, through the intervention of an individual or a smaller community that we are most often brought to our language. And, just as importantly, it is for the sake of individuals that we often find ourselves concerned to listen and to speak properly. The goal of reconciling ourselves to language is not just the betterment of our own condition. The path that we have developed as the turn to language, notwithstanding one's desire for authenticity therein, has been all along an activity concerned with enabling others.

In sum, we have reached two conclusions about the social problem of entanglement with which we began. First, (1) deep social relations are the *a priori* condition of any experience of entanglement. They are, to invert the schema of *Entfernen*, what allows distance to be near. In the case of Barthes's writer, this is to view the very experience of his alienation, what he calls the "tragic disparity" as presupposing a structure of communication. For though he has lost faith in the efficacy of the discourse which aims to reconcile him to its history, his silence (in this case, the stillness of his pen) was nevertheless meaningful – to him, as a way of understanding himself, and – as far as he suspects – to others too, since he makes the effort to write about the entanglement. But it is not *just* the case that a meaning that automatically inheres in our social being remains *a priori* present in entanglement, because (2) there is a creative meaning-making at work in these moments. From out of these highly individuating (even solitary) moments of dissonance, a powerful form of writing may emerge, one that discloses the limits of those "all-powerful signs" and thus sets language underway again. Thus, it is precisely *because of* and not *in spite of* its emphases on one's ability to feel removed from and question normative language that Heideggerean philosophy can shed light on the relationship between language and social life. Not that one can find a coherent social theory of language in Heidegger. Nevertheless, as I hope this chapter has demonstrated, following Heidegger's concern about entanglement in its various forms (*Entfernen, Geworfenheit, Stimmung*, the hermeneutics of translation, etc.) entails that we address the myriad way that our relations with others are at issue in this entanglement.

CHAPTER III

TRACES OF ABSORPTION ON THE WAY TO LANGUAGE

A study of the way that Heidegger begins most of his lectures on language in the 1950's, those collected in the volume called *On the Way to Language*, reveals the following pattern. The majority of the works collected in this volume begin by invoking language as a ubiquitous yet indeterminate presence in our lives, something with which we are in a constant yet indeterminate relation. "Language," for example, begins by suggesting that we are constantly (*ständig*) speaking in a variety of ways, even when it seems as though we are not, since language does not first originate from a particular will.[1] "The Nature of Language" begins by illustrating how, despite its ubiquity in our lives, we fail to experience (*erfahren*) language, a failure that undermines any scientific knowledge of it that we might develop. While, in the "The Way to Language," Heidegger begins by describing the tension between the mystery of language and the belief that we are "within language and with language before all else," that "a way to language is not needed."[2]

Each of these essays begins by recognizing a certain absorption of the willing, thinking, desiring subject in a network of discourse equiprimordial with the world and thus excessive to each of these ways of thinking about the unity of the self. Speech, a pillar of our pre-reflective activity in the world, functions well – perhaps best – when we pay it no mind. This means that if I dwell primarily with my thought, I am not where my word is. And thus when Heidegger directs readers to this obscure relationship, the effect is an unsettling of the subject.

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[1] "Es entspringt nicht erst aus einem besonderem Wollen." – Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 11.

[2] "So sind wir den allem zuvor in der Sprache und bei der Sprache. Ein Weg zu ihr ist unnötig." -- Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, 241.

An unsettling of the subject, but maybe also an intensification of the reader. For if I, the thinker, am not where my word is, then who is it that I encounter only within and at the same time as the words of the book? An alter-ego (another-I), the secret life of the reader can seem separated from the thinking "I" by an unspoken abyss. This is because, from the perspective of the thinking "I," our absorption into "the They" of everyday discourse appears to be an endpoint, an annihilation. It is a void, the kind that Heidegger describes in the opening passage of "The Word," where he invokes a stanza from Hölderlin's elegy, "Brot und Wein," that asks about silent ancient theatres bereft of joyful dance. Bereft, Heidegger suggests, of the word ("*Dem einstigen Ort des Erscheinens der Götter ist das Wort verwehrt . . . .*"[3]).

Heidegger does not forget in these opening passages that there is a mood proper to the condition he describes. He names it on occasion in the lectures, though the name seems to have no more than a cameo role in the texts: melancholy. Why melancholy? Melancholy has often been described as the inability to properly mourn a loss. In melancholy, loss is all-encompassing – one is unable to do anything with it, since one lacks a means of reintegrating the event of loss into one's life. This is pertinent to the pattern outlined above in that it is precisely the inability to recognize the loss suffered in our relationship to language that gives this non-experience its peculiar quality. Heidegger tells us in "The Nature of Language" that we lack the word for the word. One suffers the absorption in silence. The whole movement is frozen, enveloped by a void.

This brings us to the following question: If the condition Heidegger describes in these opening passages is indeed a melancholic one, is it possible to understand the path taken thereafter by the lectures, the path leading toward an encounter with language in its mystery and otherness, as a therapeutic effort? This question, while seemingly too psychologically invested for Heidegger, has the benefit of offering us a new perspective on a couple important interpretive questions that confront readers of Heidegger.

Heidegger's discussion of authenticity, for example, like his emphasis on the foreignness of language, has been severely criticized for devaluing our social bonds with

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[3] Ibid., 219.

others and even advancing the ideal of a heroic protagonist who negates all social inheritance as the model of authenticity. Within *On the Way to Language*, there are several themes that could support such a reading. In the last chapter, I described these moments as quasi-transcendental moments in his thought and pointed out the problems that they present to interpreters of this text. For example, in urging us to think and experience language outside of the normal ways in which we conceive of it, Heidegger tells us that the goal of the inquiry is to find *language as language*. If we take this to mean, as it often seems we should, that the inquiry seeks language apart from our way of conceptualizing it, we will soon reach a difficult impasse, since, as readers, we inevitably read Heidegger's text through the working set of concepts that we use for reading all texts. Another example of the quasi-transcendental role of language in this body of work is his rejection of the idea that language is, first and foremost, a human activity. In "The Way to Language," this rejection takes the form of a disagreement with Humboldt, whom Heidegger takes to be a paradigm of idealism, and an alignment with Novalis, who perceives the history of language as asymptotic to the history of self-consciousness. Looking at these moments altogether, the worry is that language appears to have an essence separate from how we have used it, interpreted it, and described it throughout our history. If this is true, then listening to language itself means precisely blocking out all of those voices that merely utilize language and do not hearken to its command. Heidegger's approach to poetry would seem to confirm the charge. In his reading of a poem by Trakl in "Language," Heidegger seems particularly strong-willed about holding apart the human voice and the voice of language itself. Before turning to the poem, he reminds his audience: "Who the author is remains unimportant here, as with every other masterful poem. The mastery consists precisely in this, that the poem can deny (*verleugnen kann*) the poet's person and name."[4]

Though Heidegger does not use the term *Eigentlichkeit* (authenticity) in these discussions, a parallel is apparent. In *Being and Time*, the voice of conscience (*Stimme des Gewissens*) – that which breaks us out of our non-thinking absorption and illuminates

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[4] The important term "verleugnen" here can be translated as deny, disavow, negate, or renounce.

our fundamental care, solicitude, and concern for the world, is precisely a voice that appears to belong to no one, or more precisely, that belongs and does not belong to the one who hears it. In the words of *Being and Time*, it is a voice that "comes from me and yet beyond and over me," one that calls the addressee back from "the They" and "into the reticence of his existent potentiality-for-Being."[5] This is clearly parallel to the voice of the poet as Heidegger understands it in the example above. The poem comes from Trakl and yet also from beyond and over Trakl.

The criticism against Heidegger's depiction of ethics as non-discursive in *Being and Time*, which many attribute to the argument's solipsistic focus on anxiety about one's own death, directly parallels the criticism against Heidegger's vision of language, for here too the concern is that authentic language requires absolute removal from the absorption that characterizes everyday discourse. The discussion of *die Gerede* in *Being and Time* section 35, Heidegger's deprecating remarks on "idle chatter," already anticipate the way that Heidegger will treat this type of speech in the later work. The attitude is still evident in the 1952 essay, "Building Dwelling Thinking," where, criticizing the gossipy speech that circulates via newspapers and radio shows, Heidegger declares that "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion (*Verkehrung*) of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation. (*Vielleicht ist es vor allem anderen die vom Menschen betriebene Verkehrung dieses Herrschaftsverhältnisses, was sein Wesen in das Unheimische treibt.*)"[6] In suggesting that our everyday discourse, our concepts, our person, and our name must be disavowed in order to encounter language as language, one wonders where the way to language leads.

But what precisely is it that this path requires us to renounce? Is it our absorption in "the They"? Is it the way language functions inconspicuously in the presencing of the world, intermixed with mundane things – a pencil, chair, or street? Is it language's

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[5] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1962), 322.

[6] Martin Heidegger, "Bauen Wohnen Denken" in *Gesamtausgabe Band 7: Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 148.

worldliness – or more precisely, its thingliness – that must be renounced? The diverse scope of answers to this question that one gets just from the passages above suggests that the best answer to this question is not a simple one. The way to language is clearly a path of renunciation (recall the significant role of renunciation in Heidegger's reading of Stefan George's poem that we explored in Chapter One), but of what?

I propose that the melancholic mood surrounding the beginning of many of Heidegger's essays on language gives us a clue. As I sketched above, the distinctive feature of this mooded situation is the unsayability of the loss undergone. Coupling this with Heidegger's claim that we lack the word for the word, we are brought to consider how language in the very first instant could be perceived as a kind of loss, one that Heidegger entreats us to experience, to confront, and to *bring to language.*

In what follows, then, I will develop an interpretation of the way that our absorption into language resists thematization by way of a comparison between (a) some of the key moments in Heidegger's work that describe or enact language entanglement and (b) the way that absorption and loss are understood by two traditions, namely, structuralism and psychoanalysis. Finally, I will argue that listening to language as language need not be heard as a heroic recovery of propriety, but – analogous to the psychoanalytic process by which one treats melancholy – can be understood as a transformation away from an attachment to the lost origin of one's speaking toward a more poetic, aesthetic, and historical sense of the unthematizable beginning of language.

The Limits of Mastery

In "The Way to Language," Heidegger reminds readers of the debt all speaking owes to hearing. He tells us that:

> Speech, taken on its own, is hearing. It is listening to the language we speak. Hence speaking is not simultaneously a hearing, but is such in advance. Such listening to language precedes all other instances of hearing, albeit in an altogether inconspicuous way. We not only *speak* language, we speak *from out of it*. We are capable of doing so only

because in each case we have already listened to language.[7]

Heidegger's refrain that language is present in our lives prior to our intentional use of it strongly echoes the focus that some language theorists give to the constitutive role of address. Like Heidegger, Jacques Lacan sees the fact of address at the origin of our relationship to language as the source of a gap that from then on characterizes this relationship. How does this gap arise? For Lacan, one first starts to speak only in response to the address of others, and this includes all the language which will allow one, for instance, to make known one's desires or to refer to oneself in speech. This means that prior to the world of communicative exchanges through which I exercise language as "mine," I have already been bespoken by the language of others. Another analyst in the Lacanian tradition, Judith Feher Gurewich, explains it this way:

> Even before a child is born he or she is already assigned a place in the world of language in the sense that he or she is expected by the parents and thus already symbolized in their minds. He may already have a name; she may already be the bearer of many of her parents' expectations. In that sense the parents' unconscious and conscious signifiers will be projected onto this imaginary child and will continue to surround the baby after its birth . . . . (T)hese signifiers – these words, sentences, affects, attitudes of the other – will become the hallmarks of the child's existence much before the time she can impute her own subjective meaning to them. By the time the child learns how to speak, these signifiers will already have made inroads in what will become the subject's unconscious. We can understand at this point Lacan's famous dictum to the effect that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, or, as he also puts it, that the Other is the keeper of the signifiers.[8]

In one sense, the point here just repeats in a different way what I have described in Heideggerean terminology as our thrownness into language. The signs that shape my experience – of the world and of myself – and which, in the first instant, I experience as the spontaneous products of my own thinking and being, have their origin in another and

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[7] Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language" in *Basic Writings – Revised and Expanded Edition*, trans. David Krell (New York: Harper & Collins, 1993), 411.

[8] Judith Feher Gurewich, "Who's Afraid of Jacques Lacan?" in *Lacan and the New Wave in American Psychoanalysis: The Subject and the Self*, (New York: Other Press, 1999), 9.

thus are never "mine" alone. But what Gurewich's account adds is that this other is not just culture or history on a grand scale, which is how we've considered it for the most part so far, but a more particularized other – those speaking subjects who have been charged with bringing one up and teaching one to speak. There are a couple reasons why this is important. First, paying attention to the particular, finite situation of what compels me to identify myself in language sheds light on how the power of its claim issues not only from language's ability to organize experience but from its connection to another upon whom I am dependent and through whom my own identity must emerge. Second, it lets us distinguish between two different "others" in which we may find ourselves linguistically entangled: (a) the voice of a particular other – more thingly, more bodily – in whose address I first learn the basic words and grammatical structures of a language, and (b) the set of norms that are never embodied in this or that individual but are precisely what allow us to deploy these primitive utterances as *meaningful*. Lacan describes the series of events that separate these two phases of the subject's relationship to language castration and oedipalization.[9] Before castration, one exists in a state of absorption wherein one lacks any sense of "I" beyond the repetition of the word in the most basic exchanges between the child and the parent. After castration, language functions largely in the service of creating a supplementary and substitute reality for that which is left behind.

Speaking of the preoedipal is understood to be impossible, because this state of absorption is considered inaccessible not only to memory but to language as well. The loss of the origin of language – what we could understand as the "inconspicuous" nature of our absorption in the address of language for Heidegger– takes place immediately. The event vanishes from the scenes of memory, because the means by which we build a memory for the "I" (*ego*) – narrative, description, dialogue – require language. In this way, the origin of language is unthematizable. And yet, just as one can discern traces of our absorption within the originary address of language in Heidegger's work (for

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[9] There is still much debate among psychoanalytic philosophers about how to understand the nature of these events. Without getting into those debates, I will simply point out that the way I believe them to be most useful, and the way that I will be using them in this chapter, is as descriptions of what occurs in language entanglement.

example, in his discussion of *legein* as an originary showing that enables the indication of what allows itself to be shown), one can find the traces of the preoedipal within the psychoanalytic account of language development.

Take, for example, Freud's famous discussion of the "fort" and "da" game in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, an exploration which exemplifies in many ways the postoedipal relationship to language. In this account, Freud observes a child's game, where he thrusts a ball away from him and utters a sound that Freud interprets as "*fort*," German for "gone" or "away." Then, the boy brings the ball back and exclaims a sound that Freud interprets as "*da*," "there." Freud sees in this game a way of exerting some control over the mother's going away, which had recently become distressful to the boy. Freud observes: "The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's great cultural achievement – the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting." He adds: "He compensated himself for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach."[10] Language development is shaped here by the need to retain a part of something even when it leaves, by the need for object permanency.

Let us examine the ontological construction of language at work in this game. While the boy uses language as a tool with which to reorganize his experience, which would suggest – recalling our previous discussions of tool-being in Heidegger – that this language belonged already to a world that he finds himself in rather than one he himself forges, Freud emphasizes in this discussion the way that language plays the role of substitute for the world, or more specifically, for the part of the world and the self that must be renounced. Is this just an inconsistency in Freud's theory, suggesting that he has not given a cohesive description of the phenomenon? Or, could this ambiguity also belong to the subject matter itself? In order to perform the role of permanent-substitute-for-the-impermanent, language must be absolute, indestructible, even self-referential. In this new world, names are the essence of things, the most real, because they do not go

[10] Sigmund Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 600.

away – they stay put. On the other hand, the words that he learns are never *just* names and never wholly attain the position of omnipotence. This is because no one individually produces these words out of thin air. We come across them and begin to *use* them before even having the *logos* necessary for voluntary action. Thus positioned within language, the boy's complicated relationship to language can be said to exemplify a more general condition of the speaking *and* hearing subject. Hidden beneath the name that we have eventually come to perceive as the thing itself is the trace of something heard, silent now like the light of a star whose presence indicates the death of the origin. Language is at once that primordial praxis into which we are thrown and, as the means by which we attain to the inverted world set up by this substitution, the denial of that thrownness.

This dual role of language is one way that we can account for the failure of the child to win a completely permanent object out of this strategy. For in taking on language as a tool for his purposes, little Hans actually takes on something that can never be his. The words he uses betray his involvement in a primordial disclosure of the world, a presencing that is not subject to the relation between naming and being that he initiated in his game of repetition.

We can understand Freud's account of the boy's struggle with language in this sense through a comparison with the phenomenological concept of *being-in-the-world* (*In-der-Welt-sein*). For the phenomenologist, systematic philosophies that attempt to describe all presencing as governed by the principles of reflection and self-consciousness – figures of mastery – cover over our pre-reflective activity of disclosure.[11] Said otherwise, they obfuscate the absorption of speech – the impossibility of any private

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[11] Heidegger says: "The kinship of Showing with what it shows – a kinship never developed purely in its own terms and those of its origins – later becomes transformed into a conventional relation between a sign and its signification." – Martin Heidegger, "On the Way to Language," 115. For Heidegger, it is not erroneous to say that beings in the world allow themselves to be indicated and expressed by language, but the way he speaks of this correlation between being and language has been the object of interesting critiques, like Derrida's in "Differance" and Rorty's in "The Contingency of Language." But it is worth noting that he does not describe what is expressed in language as other to language. The discussion is not presented in the terms in which it is criticized, namely, as a unification of language and nature or the real. Looking at the quote above, we could say that Heidegger echoes a point that Wittgenstein makes in the *Tractatus*. According to Remark 4.12, no propositions "can represent what they must have in common with reality in order to be able to represent it – logical form [*logos*]." In the next remark, he elaborates: "What finds its reflection in language, language cannot represent."

language. Here is where phenomenology deeply resonates with the leading axiom of psychoanalysis, namely, that the ego is not master in its own house. For both ways of approaching language, despite their differences, seem to indicate naming's indebtedness to something prior. Both thus offer insight into what the child attempts to discipline through his game, what – in the vocabulary of psychoanalysis – we can call the preoedipal relation to language. Recalling for a moment the line from Stefan George's poem that Heidegger discusses, "Where word breaks off, no thing may be," the child's game of repetition subjects the presencing of things to the mantra of his "cultural achievement": where the word (read: ego) is, there the thing is.

The limit of this mastery is to be found, however, in the significance that the tools of language passed on by others naturally have, as Gurewich says, "before the time that (one) can impute (one's) own subjective meaning to them." Because this inheritance does not altogether disappear, even when the naming game turns into a generalized comportment toward the world, language becomes the site of a tension. On the one hand, the word marks the positing of the thing. On the other hand, the word is already a thing, and thus not the result of such an act of positing. From the perspective of the subject who expects the world to comply to the subjective meaning that he or she imputes, the traces of absorption – having always already first listened before one has spoken – can seem like the very limit of *logos*.

This dilemma does not disappear in adulthood. It seems to confront us all of the time when we read and interpret texts. Using the psychoanalytic vocabulary again, the postoedipal comportment toward a text is manifest in the conviction that, without the signification imbued by interpretation, the text is an empty, void reality. And yet, however inconspicuously, the text does not cease to affect those exposed to its address. The preoedipal relationship to language is manifest in the vulnerability of the reader to this address, before it is organized as "the text that *I* read" or "the text that *we* read."

For, going back to the schema of language development, even when words have a referential function in the preoedipal language stage, they do not yet operate as self-referentially as later speech constructions will. Creating a noise that sounds like "hungry"

may be a way of referring to a sensation or giving the signal that is expected to initiate a desired action (being provided something to eat), but it is not yet the act of one who understands himself or herself as the subject of speech in its fullest sense. The child does not yet equate the origin of the speech-act with a reference in the world, saying "I," the one who speaks and the one you hear, "am hungry." Such connections come later.

Roman Jakobson observed this pattern in language development in his theory of shifters, noting what a different picture of language development it suggests from that presumed by most philosophers.[12] According to Jakobson, "shifters" are a category of words that have a dual role in language. On the one hand, a shifter is an index, a word that is "in existential relation with the object it represents." It has a vocative function. On the other hand, a shifter is a symbol in that it "cannot represent its object without being associated with the latter by a conventional rule." Thus, it also has a nominative function. Personal pronouns are one type of shifter. To say that "I" is an index is to say, in a sense, that it *is* immediately what it represents. At the same time, however, every shifter "possesses its own general meaning. Thus," Jakobson writes, "I means the addressor (and you, the addressee) of the message to which it belongs."[13]

The significance of these dual function words has, according to Jakobson, been neglected by philosophers. Citing Edmund Husserl and Bertrand Russell, he points to their mistake when, in conceiving of the personal pronoun merely as an index, they conclude that it lacks meaning. Russell, for example, calls index words like the personal pronoun "egocentric particulars" that cannot apply to more than one thing at one time. But they are "egocentric" from only one vantage point: when we recognize them as also having a general meaning, this omnipotence vanishes. In our ability to say "I," we have at once the conditions for the experience of an individuated subjectivity and, at the same time, the impossibility of complete individuation.

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[12] While Jakobson's discussion of shifters borrows from other language theorists like Peirce, Jespersen, and Beneviste, I will restrict my discussion to Jakobson, because he synthesizes the others and best articulates the import of the theory for philosophy narrowly construed.

[13] Roman Jakobson, "Shifters, Verbal Categories, and the Russian Verb," in *Word and Language, Volume 2 of Selected Writings* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 132.

Furthermore, Jakobson argues that, in neglecting the dual function of shifters, these philosophers have mistakenly imagined that these words belong to the simplest phases of language development, when, in fact, they are among the latest acquisitions in child language development and, as he elaborates on in another article, among the earliest losses of aphasia. Sticking with the example of the personal pronouns, Jakobson writes:

> … it is quite obvious that the child who has learned to identify himself with its proper name will not easily become accustomed to such alienable terms as the personal pronouns: he may be afraid of speaking of himself in the first person while being called *you* by his interlocutors. Sometimes he attempts to redistribute these appellations. For instance, he tries to monopolize the first person pronoun: 'Don't dare call yourself I. Only I am I, and you are only you.' Or he uses indiscriminately either I or you both for the addressor and the addressee so that this pronoun means any participant of the given dialogue. Or finally I is so rigorously substituted by the child for his proper name that he readily names any person of his surroundings but stubbornly refuses to utter him own name: the name has for its little bearer only a vocative meaning, opposed to the nominative function of the *I*.[14]

While social maturation and adaptation most often meliorate these difficulties, the ambiguity of personal pronouns and demonstrative adjectives may still cause frustration in adult language use (e.g., the "vague pronoun reference" that composition textbooks warn against). And the potential for confusion presents itself also in the fact that many jokes turn around this ambiguity.

Despite his comments about the way that philosophers have overlooked the complexity of shifters, Jakobson's analysis of the dual function of shifters – like the tension that I described between the preoedipal and the postoedipal relationships to language – finds an early precedent in the critique of sense certainty in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Both demonstrate how the initial experience we may have of language as a tool for communicating what is to us the most vivid and clear of phenomena – "this," "now," "I," "here" – can become complicated by the realization that these words are universals, applicable to an infinite series of "I"s, "this"es, and so on. But

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[14] Ibid., 132-133.

an important difference – maybe the most relevant difference between structuralism and phenomenology on this point – is that Jakobson does not comply with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*'s chronological organization to these moments. "This," "now," "you," and "I," from the perspective of the linguist rather than the Hegelian phenomenologist, would have to come *after* knowledge of and use of abstract universals in language, since on account of its dual function, the shifter is more complex, more mediated.[15] Ability to use proper nouns comes before the ability to effectively use the more meta-linguistic indices. In light of this, it is more likely that little Hans was saying *Fortreise* (departure) or *Fortschritt* (progress) and *Dafürhalten* (opinion) or *Dachshund* than he was simply *fort* and *da* (though some of these examples introduce the further issue of what level of language capacity one needs to have in order to effectively use compound words where index words appear as roots within symbols that no longer function as indexes at all, e.g., the presence of "fort" in *Fortreise*.)

As previously mentioned, on account of the relatively complex rules governing their two intertwining functions, it is not uncommon for mature adult language users to struggle with the processes required for effective use of dual-function words. The clearest example of this occurs in cases of aphasia, the topic of Jakobson's famous article entitled "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasiac Disturbances." Though the concept of the shifter is not central in it, the analysis hinges on a distinction between two modes of arrangement necessary to language, that of combination or contiguity and that of selection or substitution, a deficiency in either corresponding to one of two varieties of aphasia. There are many interesting aspects of each variety; however, I will restrict my remarks to a few observations on the two, mostly on what Jakobson calls selection or substitution deficiency insofar as it helps us to better understand the tension between the two scenes of language outlined above – on the one hand, that of our pre-reflective

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[15] There is some debate about what the sequencing of the forms of knowledge means in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. While it would be insufficient to understand the sequence to describe factual individual and societal development, describing the sequence as rational seems nevertheless to rely on such description. For an alternative to the two, John McCumber's discussion In *the Company of Words* of the role of narrative construction in Hegel's account is helpful, for McCumber distinguishes Hegel's project of phenomenology from other ways of doing history in that it maintains the contingency of a narrative among other narratives.

absorption within address, and, on the other hand, that wherein language is (re)fashioned as a world of meanings substituted for a prior, more unpredictable presencing. Both kinds of aphasia that Jakobson discusses are, on my reading, problems that occur in the process of trying to deal with the absorption that I have described as an important structure for both psychoanalysis and Heidegger.

In the case of selection or substitution deficiency, Jakobson observes the following interrelated phenomena. This deficiency shows up as an inability to let the meaning of words transcend a given context, an incapacity for naming (the nominative function), an incapacity for metaphor, and a loss of metalanguage. One's speech regresses back to a fantasy of remaining within the preoedipal relation, where there is no need to substitute out the idiom in which one has always already found oneself. One retains a kind of speaking position but one that appears frozen, locked into the position of the hearing subject.

Insofar as it is a basic foundational principle of any language use – disappearing only in extreme cases of aphasia – substitution is a key feature of the everyday interpretive attitude that I described in the last chapter. And yet, for reasons that Jakobson does not speculate upon, theorists have often overlooked the implications of substitution's fundamental role in language. "According to an old but recurrent bias, a single individual's way of speaking at a given time, labeled idiolect, has been viewed as the only concrete linguistic reality," Jakobson notes.[16] Is this the philosopher's prejudice again that says that we start off in language as egoists and then gradually get accustomed to the idea of shared meaning?[17] Jakobson gives the following example to convey just how often "everyday" speech employs substitution. He writes:

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[16] Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasiac Disturbances" in *Word and Language: Volume 2 of Selected Writings* (The Hague, Mouton, 1971), 248.

[17] One of the most interesting discussions of idiolect and its opposite is to be found in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, who asserts that we belong to multiple discourse communities, and only in so doing, have a relative freedom from the ideological condition that we inhabit whenever we think within a single language (idiolect). It is not clear, however, that in heteroglossia there are multiple languages per se, since – on Jakobson's account – there must be some equivalence in any situation in order to have meaningful difference.

> Obviously such operations, labeled metalinguistic by the logicians, are not their invention: far from being confined to the sphere of science, they prove to be an integral part of our customary linguistic activities. The participants in a dialogue often check whether they are using the same code. 'Do you follow me? Do you see what I mean?' the speaker asks, or the listener himself breaks in with 'What do you mean?'[18]

Here Jakobson describes the common use of metalanguages – of translating beyond a given idiom – as a necessary tool with which we constantly negotiate the differential which is the norm in any speech exchanged with one another. We must be able at any point to put ourselves in the place of another and reevaluate the way we say things, to say the same but in a different way.[19] In this, the practice of substitution entails something different than the "cultural achievement" that Freud perceived to be at work in the child's game. Here substitution is not simply a matter of replacing that absorption from which I am cast out with a word that remains steady and obedient. *I translate away from the immediate language into which I am thrown in order to experience myself found again by the other with whom I speak, to find myself in a scene of mutual address.*

The requirement of "code-switching," as Jakobson sometimes calls it, has far-reaching philosophical implications that recall the argument in the previous chapter that a concern for one's own language must, in some respect, imply a concern for others . . . in this case, let us just say for the understanding of others, noting that such efforts to include others in a discourse may have virtues beyond simply expanding understanding. Like the theory of shifters, the theory of selection or substitution contests the notion that language at any point appears as a tool of a single, unified ego. It suggests that to speak is always to speak (at least potentially) for the sake of another. As Jakobson says:

> Everyone, when speaking to another person tries, deliberately or involuntarily, to hit upon a common vocabulary: either to please or simply to be understood or, finally, to bring him out, he uses the terms of this addressee. There is no such thing as a private property in language:

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[18] Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasiac Disturbances," 248.

[19] Of course, there must still be some commonality between two interlocutors in order for this to work. "Do you follow me?" does not help to move a conversation along if the addressee of this phrase cannot understand it as an offer to rephrase a point just made for the sake of his or her own understanding.

everything is socialized. Verbal exchange, like any form of intercourse, requires at least two communicators, and idiolect proves to be a somewhat perverse fiction . . . This statement need, however, one reservation: for an aphasiac who has lost the capacity for code switching, the 'idiolect' indeed becomes the sole linguistic reality.[20]

As obvious as the point seems, one can appreciate its significance if one considers the frequency with which people today treat different languages as different world-views that are like isolated islands floating in the void. Perhaps as a consequence of some mixture of lay relativism and constructivism, it is quite common to oppose a language in itself and a language as it is used to communicate to others who do not speak that language. But even within a single language, one must always render the meaning of one thing into the meaning of another thing to clarify it. When one puzzles over a word, one can go to a dictionary and find substitutions for that word. If this kind of substitution doesn't work, another act of transposition – metaphor or simile – might. "I don't understand your point," one says. "It's *like* this . . . ," another responds.

Turning briefly to the other aspect of language and the corresponding variety of aphasia, we see that substitution alone ceases to function, according to Jakobson, if it is not complemented by a capacity for combination. In contiguity or combination deficiency, one has lost the ability to propositionalize or "generally speaking, to combine simpler linguistic entities into more complex units." In this case, the capacity for substitution and metaphor is preserved – one can readily say what a given word is like; but one cannot perform the combinatory functions necessary to build propositions or, to recall our earlier example of *Fortreise*, etc., to perceive words as combinations of different phonemic constituents.[21] Again, I will not go through this form of aphasia, except to mark that in this form as well one can detect a regression of one's language back to an early stage in child development.

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[20] Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasiac Disturbances," 248-249.

[21] Though Jakobson himself does not analyze the relationship between the two aspects in quite this way, we could say that, for any functional language, one aspect is the condition for the other. Without the ability to build propositions out of basic nominative units and also to unpack the word-groups one learns into its constitutive parts, one will have a significantly reduced range of sentences, for example, that one is capable of uttering.

In spite of the many examples that we may enlist to make his point, Jakobson's characterization of substitution disorder as an inability for metalanguages, an inability for metaphor, and an over-reliance on context might strike some philosophers today as the bias of a metaphysician over and against, for example, the significance of context in ordinary language and the situatedness of our speech. But Jakobson argues that the aphasiac's loss of these capacities distances him or her from ordinary language use. In order to communicate effectively, Jakobson says, we must be able to substitute one way of saying something for another. The aphasiac who lacks the ability for selection cannot substitute a word for its synonyms, let alone, Jakobson says, its heteronyms, "equivalent expressions in other languages."

But there are theories of language that argue for this impossibility as a general condition of language. Heidegger seems a likely candidate given the caesura of meaning dramatized between, say, Greek discourse and our own, his general suspicion toward many aspects of *Metasprache*,[22] and his insistence on the geo-political propriety of the relationship between one's language and one's home (*Heimat*). As I argued in the last chapter, Heidegger presumes a quasi-natural connection between the people who belong to or identify with a given nation or culture and some particular language. In his work on Hölderlin, for example, he makes liberal use of the category of "the German language," which he seems to understand, not as something which every German possesses by nature, but which nevertheless has a unified historical destiny, one that only comes into being through a dialogue with another *Volkssprache*, that of the Greeks. To this extent, it seems that Heidegger is willing to acknowledge that language is most meaningful, even most defined as a language, when it undergoes translation toward another.

Some commentators have missed this part of Heidegger's work in an effort to fit him into the larger trend of linguistic turn philosophy. Richard Rorty, for example, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, presents Heidegger as a spokesperson for the view that we are trapped within a particular historical language that limits our thinking, a

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[22] Recall that in Chapter 1, I discussed Heidegger's condemnation in "The Nature of Language" of *Metasprache*, which he took to be synonymous with the scientific project of analytic metalinguistics. *Metasprache*, Heidegger says there, is *Übersprache*.

condition that Rorty says we should embrace – with irony – rather than seeing any particular language as connected to any other through the unifying force of reason. Rorty writes: "For there will be no way to rise above the language, culture, institutions, and practices one has adopted and view all these as on a par with all the others." After invoking Donald Davidson as a proponent of this view, Rorty goes on to say that Heidegger's understanding of language is exactly the same: "Or, to put the point in Heidegger's way [notice the metadiscursive move], 'language speaks man,' languages change in the course of history, and so human beings cannot escape their historicity."[23] But, if the need to translate what is one's own is really an important feature of Heidegger's discussion of language, the capacity for substitution seems to be operative in Heidegger's reflections on what it means to have a language. And, if we take Jakobson's argument against the assumption of egoism in language seriously, then we have reason to complicate Rorty's argument that we cannot rise above our language, since to have a language is to be continually able to step away from it and come to it anew. I say to step away, not rise above, because such maneuvers needn't entail adopting the view from nowhere. In fact, it is the particular, concrete situation where another person makes a demand on me that motivates me to make this step. So, when we make such a step, we find ourselves more situated in a particular context than usual. We may be engaged in a face-to-face conversation, or, in writing, we may be trying to anticipate the particular ways that our readers will find our words, reformulating when we think it may be necessary for the sake of making our work accessible to a diverse audience.

In this way, Jakobson's analysis of substitution presents a way of hearing Heidegger's dictum that "language speaks man," not as *resignation* in the face a language's or a culture's unthematizable origin, but as a revolution in what it means to thematize. Recall the passage that I quoted at the beginning of the chapter where Heidegger writes that we have "lost the word for the word." In light of Jakobson's criticisms of the egoistic assumptions within the philosophy of language, we may rephrase the point in the following way: by assuming that a language is entirely self-

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[23] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge), 50.

referential, connectable neither to things in the world nor to other language users beyond the walls of the particular idiom, we have lost the ability to account for how language exists *in the world*, forcing it back into a position of isolated subjectivity. On the other hand, reading Heidegger through Jakobson in this way gives us even more justification for the conclusion that we drew in the previous chapter, namely, that it is as much a dialogue with one's neighbor as it is with an ancient people where we see the important place of translation for language. And in this way, Heidegger falls short of offering an exemplary philosophical version of Jakobon's insights.

In general, however, I believe that we can use Jakobson's analyses of shifters and substitution aphasia in order to describe the need for making one's way beyond a subject-oriented, ego-bound relationship to language, not in order to twist free of the address of others in which we find ourselves, but to rediscover this scene of address elsewhere – namely, in the event of communication. Heidegger's descriptions of language as beyond the intentions of an individual or even a group of people needn't suggest an other-worldly phantasm, the invisible hand of a divine speaker. Instead, we might see language's withdrawal from any given code as the way that language ex-ists, the way that it is – that Dasein is – thrown into the world beyond itself. Thus, Jakobson helps us to understand the nature of what some have called the metaphysical component of Heidegger's description of language.

Jakobson's linguistics shows how, despite the philosophical theories of the day, ordinary language proves to be adaptive, creative, and almost self-*over*coming (*meta*phorical, *meta*linguistic, etc.) But this leaves a lot unsaid. Despite his frequent and insightful comments about how ways of theorizing language have historically gone awry, Jakobson's success in tracing out the philosophical implications of the two poles of language is, I believe, incomplete. This is because he says little about why the philosophers he criticizes perceive language the way they do, why these disorders arise, and what we have to gain by normalizing this understanding of language and the procedures it describes.

As for the first two questions, we might ask about how intersubjective social conditions (i.e., practices and institutions of *Sittlichkeit*), affect the propensity of an individual or a group to embrace or reject the type of language practices Jakobson describes, and how social forces might, in turn, contribute to a rectification of these "disorders." This may sound like a strange point to question Jakobson on if we understand aphasia in a purely clinical sense, but, remarkably, Jakobson's work shows that not only individuals but also whole rhetorical cultures can adopt linguistic *styles* that privilege one or the other function. This is especially apparent, for example, in Jakobson's criticism of trends in the history of philosophy that put into effect a widespread tendency toward one or the other aspect of language, and in his description of art and media forms that bend toward one or the other in different ways. But he does not say much about lesser-scale social relations, that is, the linguistic interactions that one has in one's life with particular friends, lovers, authorities, strangers, etc., nor about how social relations on either scale might harmonize the two aspects rather than privilege one over the other.

In terms of the third question, we want to know what is to be gained by rectifying this imbalance. Jakobson does not give us a positive description of this and instead tends to describe it only as that which takes place in normal, everyday communication, which, at the same time, he admits is not a given and may even be rather difficult to achieve. Thus, it is not easy to say what, after reading Jakobson, we have to hope for other than the preservation of a normative system that exists already for most – though not all – people. Would synchronizing the two poles mean that we communicate better with one another? And would it signify some advance in terms of the individual's entanglement with language that we have explored in the previous two chapters? I propose to answer these questions by exploring phenomenologically a couple of ways that each of us may find ourselves unthematizable from time to time.

But first, let me recap where this section has brought us. In this section, we began by looking at the complicated situation of the speaking *and* hearing subject, whose mastery of words as a speaking subject is limited by the conditions in which she first

finds herself in language. We then went on to consider how Jakobson's theory of shifters echoes the point about non-mastery, bringing it to bear even on the word "I," which would seem to be the very origin of the mastery that it in fact denies. Despite the role it plays in everyday language, though, the complicated maneuvers exemplified in shifters are not regularly taken up as a way for people to understand their relationship to language. This was suggested by Jakobson's analysis of language structures and his interpretation of data on language disorders. We explored Jakobson's analysis for the implications it bears on the relationship between being and language, particularly in terms of the ontological significance of language's transcendence of private meanings, and in terms of what it means to be bespoken by language for one's being in the world. What Jakobson's work shows us is that, while language must contain structures of transcendence, as in the metalanguage that he describes, this does not mean that such transcendence should be opposed to language's communicative function. Whenever we speak, we do so by stretching across a spectrum of different speaking positions and across different languages. It is this openness of language that leads Jakobson to call idiolect a fiction.

To conclude this section, allow me to go back to our earlier example of the way that we read texts, as it will offer us another perspective from which we can appreciate the way that we are thrown into language. For both Jakobson and Heidegger, to have a language is to have the possibility of interpreting what is said in that language. Thus, in encountering a passage from a given text, for example, both authors would say that to know what the passage says is to know how to venture an interpretation of it, rather than to see it is as indicating a single meaning which would inhere regardless of circumstance. There is something quite evident about this claim if we think about what the practice of reading a longer body of writing (a few pages, a chapter, a book) involves. When engrossed in the practice of reading, we enter into a dialogue with the text. In order to carry this out, we cannot pin every sentence down to a single absolute meaning. On the other hand, we must certainly take a stab at what each passage *plausibly* means, but we do this without abandoning other possible interpretations. We keep these other

possibilities open along the way. Following this line of thought, we can understand why Heidegger says that language is not in the rows of letters printed on the page, nor in a set of universal forms to which the printed words refer, but in the event of transposition by which they are said together.

Transference and the Rhetorical Structure of the Performative "I"

Concerning the issue left untouched by Jakobson's linguistics, we would like to know what role others play in affecting how absorption and substitution take place in our speech, and what might result from the correction of an overly egoistic and idiomatic relationship to language. Luckily, some philosophers have filled in the blanks left by Jakobson. In the upcoming sections, I turn to the work of two philosophers who have drawn from the psychoanalytic tradition to answer this question. First, I look to recent work from Judith Butler who takes up the transference relation in psychoanalysis as a way of rethinking the conditions necessary for giving an account of oneself, conditions Butler wants to distinguish from the problematic criteria of absolute self-transparency and self-mastery popularly upheld in society today. Second, I turn to Julia Kristeva's work on language loss in cases of melancholy and depression in order to examine the quasi-sublimatory processes that Kristeva suggests are crucial for cases where one is incapable of renouncing the loss that forms as a reaction (a narcissistic substitute) to the event of castration.

Both of these discussions, Butler's but especially Kristeva's, also make a unique contribution to the conversation in that they speak to the affective dimension of the unthematizable origin of language. Because language – in its association to reason – has regularly been opposed to feeling or affect throughout history, there are often strong bodily affects that accompany alienation from discourse. Psychoanalysis, particularly once transformed by feminist commentary, is particularly well-suited to describe the affective features of the condition where one becomes unspeakable to oneself, because psychoanalysis focuses on the persistence of primary bodily drives, which are always in

negotiation with the demands of the symbolic order. This allowed Freudian psychoanalysis to perceive types of suffering that were previously ignored or understood as cognitive disorders (for example, the frequent silent, affectively intensified suffering of women in the nineteenth century). While Freud and others in the tradition certainly did define many forms of suffering according to observable behaviors, by theorizing the way that drives go into hiding, they developed a way of listening to and interpreting those silences. Describing the affective dimension of language loss in its various forms "fleshes out" the structuralist theories of Jakobson, who does not speak about the embodied dimension of language structures and who, in his descriptions of aphasia, limits the symptoms he describes to observable behaviors.

Yet Jakobson's analyses do allow us to appreciate the structural dimension which leads to affective symptoms. One of the things that Jakobson's linguistics show is that, paradoxically, what I may often perceive as the grounding intuition of my ability for speech, the "I," is a late development. This is a central point for how language can seem to both encompass everything and maintain a strange, alien character at one and the same time. Rhetorical theorists have drawn from linguistic analyses of language like Jakobson's in order to better describe, not just how language systems work, but how communication more broadly occurs among speaking subjects. And one of the ways that rhetorical theory has benefited from the concept of dual-function words is the way it has understood shifters like "I" to hold together a performative or vocative character and a nominative or symbolic character, that is, its being something that we can refer to in the world.

Judith Butler has taken up this perspective on interlocution as a challenge to prevailing ethical norms that hold that each of us should be able to narrate our lives in such a way that we can be held accountable for each of our desires, values, and perceptions. Butler offers this challenge in her recent book, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, an exploration of the limits of narrative in light of the rhetorical structure of the "I" of the speech-act. According to Butler, we can never be fully known to ourselves, because who we are is bound up with the "I" which is as much performative as it is a

reference in the world, and, as performative, is not properly something we know (since it lacks any properties) but something we do or enact. Indeed, for reasons we have already discussed, to say that the "I" is my own deed or action is even misleading. There is no self-same subject behind the performance of this "I" acting as its agent. It emerges as a response to the expectations, demands, and addresses of others. And to take it on as "ours," which in many ways we must, is to be *thrown* into these structuring conditions, which will always remain external to the "I" emerging as a response to these things, but which will nevertheless have an enduring presence for the speaking subject as the irrecoverable origin of its speaking. But prevailing ethical norms demand that we be able to know ourselves as an object in the world so as to be able to narrate, for example, the causes of our actions. But, for Butler, this expectation is never fully possible given the limits of our ability to narrate the full scope of our existence:

> The 'I' can tell neither the story of its own emergence nor the conditions
> of its own possibility without bearing witness to a state of affairs to which
> one could not have been present, which are prior to one's own emergence
> as a subject who can know, and so constitute a set of origins that one can
> narrate only at the expense of authoritative knowledge.[24]

Putting this in terms of Jakobson's categories (which Butler herself does not employ but seem nevertheless relevant), we may say that the moment of self-discovery described here is one where a speaker has lost hold of the nominative function of the shifter and is only capable of the vocative (for Butler, the performative). One has become incapable of setting the "I" forth as a reference to a thing in the world. On the other hand, Butler's attention to the social organizational context in which others demand more of one or the other from us – the performative "I" or the referential "I" – fills in some of what Jakobson's theory did not touch on. For as we saw, Jakobson does not explain what the ultimate causes are for why some people – individually or collectively – tend to speak more one way or the other. By bringing Butler's analysis to bear on Jakobson's categories, we can begin to see how, for example, the existence of certain ethical norms in a society may privilege the capacity for similarity ("I" am one and the same "I" as I

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[24] Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 37.

was a year ago) over the capacity for substitution where, depending on the audience, the narrative I give might be drastically different. A demand for similarity might manifest itself as a concern for proper self-referential speech, speech guaranteed by the act's reference to the speaking subject as an object at hand in the world.

Now the metaphysician might insist that, even though we are thrown into our language, we *must* nevertheless be able to take it on as our own and give an account of ourselves within it. This would be one answer to the problem that I raised in the last chapter about authenticity and political representation. Given that both our current political and legal systems, not to mention less institutionalized ethical systems, require us to speak for ourselves, it would seem that we need a theory of language that gives the speaking subject agency rather than one that takes it away.

But Butler is skeptical of this argument, insisting that we cannot dismiss the actuality of our speaking condition – the estrangement and uncertainty therein – simply because things *must* be otherwise. Thus, Butler criticizes a tendency among some therapists to see the goal of therapy as the shoring up of the ego, as insisting that everything be brought to language and to consciousness. To put the point in Heideggerean terms, Butler rejects the idea that authenticity requires the complete disavowal of our fallenness into "the They" or our absorption within a set of discourses that could never be mine and mine alone. In other words, she does not want to hold up as a goal the renunciation of the unthematizable. One of Butler's most important reasons for this stance is that she finds it absurd to suggest that, in order to be ethical, we must deny those primary, pre-reflective relationships that we have with people.

Butler does not conclude from this that we should give up altogether on the goal of speaking for ourselves. Instead, she suggests that the history of psychoanalysis offers an alternative for how the speaking subject might take shape, such that our being situated as linguistic points of reference needn't strip us of all possibility of transformation or demand of us a disavowal of the way language makes us vulnerable. According to Butler, psychoanalysis has the unique goal, while always incorporating narrative, not simply to

bring everything into narrative and into what she describes as the egoistic mastery of the unconscious.

Key to this discussion is Butler's argument that address is the interruption of narration, a claim that resonates strongly with Jakobson's theory of language duality. Butler describes the way that the performative and the narratival intersect in the analytic session in this way:

> And as I make a sequence and link one event with another, offering motivations to illuminate the bridge, making patterns clear, identifying certain moments or events as pivotal, even marking certain recurring patterns as fundamental, I do not merely communicate something about my past, though that is doubtless part of what I do. I also enact the self I'm trying to describe; the narrative 'I' is reconstituted at every moment it is invoked in the narrative itself. That invocation is, paradoxically, a performative and non-narrative act, even as it functions as the fulcrum of narrative itself. I am, in other words, doing something with that 'I – elaborating and positioning it in relation to a real or imagined audience – which is something other than telling a story about it, even though 'telling' remains part of what I do.[25]

This description of the exchange between the analysand and the analyst describes well how the other's receiving my story allows me to continually *find myself in it*. In the face of the other who listens, I must reformulate the origin out of which "I" arose. Butler's description echoes the need for substitution that we saw in Jakobson's discussion: to narrate something to another requires an interpretive attitude that can modify the form of a tale in order to bring about the best possible understanding for my interlocutor. The analytic relationship, Butler argues, provides a useful model for how certain forms of social interaction can enable a recuperation or reconstruction of this origin which exceeds the reach of narration. And for this reason she considers it a helpful reference in reframing the relationship between ethics and both narrative and self-knowledge.

As Butler herself points out, it is not only analysis in a limited sense that can offer the rhetorical conditions for the recovery of what appears lost in entanglement. Other dialogical situations, where one brings one's thoughts and experiences into language for another, can have the same effect. What is necessary is only that one enters into a

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[25] Ibid., 66.

situation where, by addressing another, one "does something with the 'I' other than telling a story about it." The dialogical practice of writing, for example, may also work toward this end. For, according to Butler, that which I position and elaborate the "I" in relation to may be either a real or imagined audience.

The demand to configure our language and self-relation toward the referential and not the performative "I" has no doubt contributed to those literary movements and impulses that celebrate the author as the purely performative and deny any relation between the "I" of a text and an individual in the world that we might reference as the author of the text. Perhaps one of the strongest celebrations of this non-referential subject of the speech-act is to be found in Roland Barthes's "Death of the Author" essay. In this essay, in which he explicitly invokes J.L. Austin's theory of performatives he describes writing as like the performative:

> in which the speech-act has no other content (no other statement) than the act by which it is uttered: something like the 'I declare' of kings or the 'I sing' of the earliest poets; the modern scriptor, having buried the Author, can therefore no longer believe, according to the pathos of his predecessors, that his hand is slower than his passion . . . . for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, born by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or at least with no origin but language itself, i.e., the very thing that ceaselessly calls any origin into question.[26]

On the one hand, considered against a culture which – if Butler is right – obscures the extent to which our relationship to language is an ecstatic one and stunts our capacity for transforming our speaking position through substitution, there is something liberating about what Barthes describes here. On the other hand, if we recall the concerns about Heidegger's claim that the mastery of Trakl's poem is that it denied Trakl his person and his name, we might have want to hesitate before following Barthes all the way. Does authentic language require the subjugation of the one who identifies with his name? Does authentic writing require the murder of the author? Doesn't such writing only work if

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[26] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berekeley: University of California Press, 1989), 52.

there is a reader (real or imagined) who recognizes the text produced as a creative origin unto itself?

These become urgent questions when we are talking about therapy. If the goal is to help someone speak, meaning to help that person identify as a subject of speech, one must respond to such writing or other varieties of this performativity with precisely this kind of reading, with an act that recognizes this work of inscription as an effort made by a subject to speak authentically, to rewrite the origin at which she was never present, not by subjecting all of language to the dominion of an isolated ego but by replaying the original scene of address.

Though Butler does not mention her in this book, Julia Kristeva's work on language and the speaking subject resonates profoundly with Butler's project in *Giving an Account of Oneself*. In her *Revolution in Poetic Language* from 1974, Kristeva describes how the subject's relation to language decenters the transcendental ego, cutting through it and opening it up to a dialectic.[27] A dialectic, on the one hand, in the sense that the semiotic drives always require and yet remain irreducible to their articulation by the symbolic. But a dialectic also in the sense that the other offers me something that I cannot provide myself, and vice versa, such that the speaking subject achieves its fullest form when directed beyond itself for another.

Like Kristeva's description of this dialectic, Butler's project in *Giving an Account of Oneself* has historical roots in an ongoing commentary on the subject of recognition in the philosophy of Hegel.[28] According to this tradition, Hegel powerfully articulated how the self exists in and through acts of recognition offered by others. In this view, while I may experience myself as the sole author of my story, my goals, etc., others play a

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[27] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 30.

[28] Butler has dedicated much of her work to the topic of recognition. The study that is most focused on this topic – apart from *Giving an Account of Oneself* – is *Subjects of Desire* (Columbia Press, 1987), which traces the thread of this theme through the works of Hegel, Kojève, Hyppolite, Sartre, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, and Deleuze. Though Butler is probably most readily associated with her work on the performative dimension of the self (including the performative aspect of the speaking subject), an equal focus in her work is on the conditions of recognition that structure performance.

pivotal role in what brings me to myself, in other words, in my identity. The insight is that our most intense, effective experiences of finding ourselves are those where, paradoxically, we are given to ourselves by or as another. This reading of Hegel fueled the renaissance of Hegel scholarship centered around the topic of recognition – as in Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* first published in 1947 – which was seminal for the development of post-Freudian psychoanalysis.[29] It offered a way of thinking about how the address of (an) other(s) is formative for the subject, giving it the split character indicated by Jakobson's theory of the shifters, for example. In effect, it filled in the gap within Freud's account of the genesis of desire and its relation to language. The other demands of me that I inhabit language as my own – that I, for example, can speak for my actions and communicate my will to others; but, my taking on this role is, from the beginning, something I do for the other.

This process by which I come to speech for another is what Kristeva calls identification (*Identifizierung*). According to Kristeva's account, one's openness toward the speech of the other – whether that of the child to the parent or the audience to the orator – requires a dramatic restructuring of the drives. For, in order to identify with the speech of another, I must repress the oral relationship to words, my desire to consume them, to take them into me; and in so doing find myself in a place where previously I was not. In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva describes this process in terms that will recall our earlier descriptions of the preoedipal and postoedipal relationships to language:

> Incorporating and introjecting orality's function is the essential substratum of what constitutes man's being, namely, *language*. When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other – precisely a nonobject, a pattern, a model – I bind myself to him in a primary fusion, communion, unification. An identification. For me to have been capable of such a process, my libido had to be restrained; my thirst to devour had to be deferred and displaced to a level one may well call 'psychic,' provided one adds that if there is repression it is quite primal, and that it lets one hold on to the joys

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[29] Lacan was in attendance at Kojèves lectures, along with other upcoming French intellectuals like Merleau-Ponty and Bataille, when Kojève outlined his understanding of Hegelian dialectic along the following lines: "*The concrete* Real (of which we speak) is both Real revealed by a discourse, and Discourse revealing a real. And the Hegelian experience is related neither to the Real nor to Discourse taken separately, but to their indissoluble unity."

of chewing, swallowing, nourishing oneself . . . with words. In being able
to receive the other's words, to assimilate, to repeat, and reproduce them, I
become like him: One. A subject of enunciation. Through psychic
osmosis/identification. Through love.[30]

The consumer of words recalls the figure of absorption with which we began, for

example, in Heidegger's description of the voice into which we are always already

thrown, and which marks the limits of the ego's mastery over language. In the course of

language development, Kristeva tells us, this absorption must be repressed if we are to

identify ourselves as the "subject of enunciation." Words and phrases must cease to be

things that I find in the world and become *nonobjects* instead. We saw something like this

earlier when we spoke about the relationship between postoedipal language and

nominalism. For little Hans, the word was not the thing but a world separate from things,

set up where things are negated. Here we can add that the repression of primary

absorption opens up a space of negativity not only in the sense that names may negate

things but in that, I (finite, not-One) become the interchangeable subject of enunciation

("I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation"). In the movement of this becoming,

a discursive *identity* is established in the place where there had previously been no

identity – nor difference.

For Kristeva, the psyche comes into being with the repression of the primary

drives and the splitting of the self into the symbolic subject of enunciation and the

reservoir of drives. Such fragmentation, she argues, is necessary, not only within the

context of a bourgeois and heterosexual family structure (that is, not only in a context

where I am forbidden to keep my mother as my love-object) but as a necessary feature of

all meaning and of all language. We can understand this point by recalling the place of

substitution in Jakobson's theory of language. In ordinary language, according to

Jakobson, one must be able to substitute one way of saying something for another.

Without this ability, one will be significantly limited in his or her ability to communicate.

The splitting of the preoedipal and the postoedipal establishes a similar dialectic whereby

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[30] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 26.

I return to myself in the words of another. It opens a space of negativity where words may or may not retain their original use, and if they do, where they do so only by finding new contexts.

This approach to the role of identity in the development of the speaking subject echoes Heidegger's insistence that *a way to language* is needed – not because we contemporary humans have lost the way – but always. (Recall the passage of Heidegger's that we examined earlier where he argues that there is no such thing as a natural language, that all language is historical.) A way bridges together. It discloses one thing by way of another. Language always involves this kind of way-making.

What then of Butler's concern, namely, that the need to completely identify our desires and experiences in language is just that – a *need* – that in no way guarantees that such an accomplishment is actually possible? Does Kristeva's insistence on the necessity of the splitting of the speaking subject amount to an agreement with the argument of linguistic turn theorists that nothing is "outside" of language?

On the contrary, Kristeva suggests that the individual, while structured by the symbolic, remains – through the preoedipal, semiotic drives – asymptotic to symbolic language. Because of this basic duality that characterizes the speaking subject, like Butler, Kristeva warns against the analytic method of bringing everything that is unconscious into symbolic discourse, arguing instead that analysis must attempt a unity of the preoedipal and the postoedipal, word and flesh, that is *not based on sacrifice, subjugation, or renunciation*. The purpose of analysis, for Kristeva, is not to subject the drives to the organization of language but to unite these two.

According to Kristeva's description in *Tales of Love*, the unification of affects and symbolic language is only possible through what she calls love. She explains how love compels us to bring to word, into the realm of co-disclosure, our bodily drives. When we cannot do this, these bodily drives seem ineffable to us. For example, when we think about amatory writing (Kristeva often mentions that of the troubadours), we can recognize the abundance of performative speech-acts like those earlier described by Barthes and Butler. Recall Barthes's description of the "I sing" of the early poets or

Butler's description of the role of narrative in psychoanalysis: "I do not merely communicate something about my past, though that is doubtless part of what I do. I also enact the self I'm trying to describe." To put the point in an Austinian way, we do not ask of one's original declaration of love – written or spoken -- whether it is true or not. Or, for Kristeva, I do not ask of my *own* declaration of love whether it is really I who makes the declaration. The vocative and the nominative are united together in such utterances, creating the kind of speech-act that Kristeva understands to be *sine qua non* for a meaningful life. Thus, Kristeva takes love as a model for the goal of psychoanalytic therapy.[31]

Kristeva argues that aesthetic experience allows this same bridging to occur, and thus she also retains aesthetic experience as a model for the goals of therapy. Works of art, for Kristeva, blur the distinction between the symbolic or conceptual and what we usually take to be the non-signifying material or corporeal. In taking in the canvas's deep pool of orange, a transubstantiation of a sort takes place, where the semiotic drives become participants in meaning. The therapeutic power of such experiences lies in the way it allows a performance and a transferal of the chthonic drives toward the realm of signs. In this way, like Heidegger, Kristeva sees poetry as encapsulating the basic function of all of the other art forms, since the power of art is that it brings into symbolic language the semiotic drives. The loss created by the movement from the preoedipal to the postoedipal then ceases to be an all-encompassing loss and becomes thematized, not in a wholly symbolic way but nevertheless in a meaningful way.

Again, these strategies for dealing with the precarious process of becoming and remaining invested in world of communication and mutual disclosure differ from that

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[31] While the suggestion that love is a necessary component to the kind of interlocutionary activity that bonds us to language may seem far-fetched, Kristeva is not alone in making this claim. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Axel Honneth weaves together a number of sources, including Hegelian phenomenology, Mead's social psychology, and Winnicott's object-relations theory, to show how love is a necessary condition for other forms of reciprocal recognition. For example, Honneth writes of love that "This fundamental level of emotional confidence – not only in the experience of needs and feelings, but also in their expression – which the intersubjective experience of love helps to bring about, constitutes the psychological precondition for the development of all further attitudes of self-respect." – Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 107.

therapeutic strategy that Butler warned against. It is not a sacrifice and disavowal of those parts of our experience that estrange us from the symbolic but a way of recognizing these parts as participating in meaning, despite their apparent exclusion. Kelly Oliver explains the uniqueness of Kristeva's strategy in this regard through the way it takes up the relationship between the body and language:

> Traditional theories which postulate that language represents bodily experience fall into an impossible situation by presupposing that the body and language are distinct, even opposites. Some traditional theories purport that language is an instrument that captures, mirrors, or copies, bodily experience. The problem, then, becomes how to explain the connection between these two distinct realms of language, on the one hand, and material, on the other.
> Instead of lamenting what is lost, absent, or impossible in language, Kristeva marvels at this other realm that makes its way into language. The force of language is living drive force transferred into language. The tones and rhythms of language, the materiality of language, are bodily. Signification is like a transfusion of the living body into language. This is why psychoanalysis can be effective; the analyst can diagnose the active drive force as it is manifest in the analysand's language. . . . (T)he psychoanalytic session inscribes flesh in words. . . . . Language is not cut off from the body. And, while, for Kristeva, bodily drives involve a type of violence, negation, or force, this process does not merely necessitate sacrifice and loss. The drives are not sacrificed to signification; rather bodily drives are an essential semiotic element of signification.[32]

Without experiences which bring the two together, one is not only estranged from language but also from one's body, the significance of which is doubly lost, since even its silence does not come to expression. In this sense, Oliver's observation about the failure of philosophy to theorize the connection between language and materiality echoes Heidegger's own claim in the Zollikon seminars, for example, that psychology has to think about the unity of the *psyche* and the *soma* in their difference.[33] In this regard, Kristeva's project responds precisely to the problem that Heidegger thought it crucial for

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[32] Kelly Oliver, "The Crisis of Meaning" in *The Kristeva Critical Reader*, ed. John Lechte and Mary Zournazi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2003), 38-39.

[33] Martin Heidegger and Franz Mayr, *Zollikon Seminars: Conversations – Protocols – Letters* (Evanston: Northwestern Press, 2001), 77-79.

psychologists to address. Rather than presuming these two regions as essentially different, Kristeva interprets the way that the semiotic (bodily but already linguistic) shows up within the symbolic as the other to which it is lovingly united.

As a theory of language or meaning then, Kristeva's project must be understood as a therapeutic one. Her texts indeed often draw attention to and affect the reader's physical sense of himself or herself, as though refusing to allow materiality to disappear from the text and the act of reading to devolve into an entirely scientific hermeneutic. For example, she makes frequent use of "I," "we," and "you" in vocative, performative gestures that reform the space traditionally observed between author and audience. On the other hand, her disruption of the conventions of scientific discourse does not go as far as others – Nietzsche, for example, or, perhaps more relevantly given the comparisons, Luce Irigaray. Her goal is not to do away with scientific discourse but to inflect it with the semiotic, to draw attention to the traces of absorption. The target of this therapeutic intervention is a discourse estranged from those conditions upon which it relies and yet which remain unthematizable within the symbolic economy set up.

A Phenomenology of Melancholy

Kristeva's diagnosis of the crisis of meaning in her culture (Europe since the Second World War) borrows from and informs her interpretation of individuals that she has treated who suffer from an analogous estrangement. Just as in culture, where the mechanisms of meaning can become detached from the agents of that meaning, the individual can become alienated from the source of language's vitality. It is the possibility of becoming unspeakable to oneself and thus incommunicable to others that brings Kristeva to examine melancholy and depression in her 1987 book *Black Sun*.[34] Responding to the apparent indifference of the depressed to language, Kristeva notes that, despite appearances, we should not perceive depression to involve a complete detachment from language. Instead, she argues that the depressed remain intensely attached, not to an

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[34] The terms "melancholy" and "depression" are used interchangeably in Kristeva's book. While there is a very different history to the two terms, I will follow Kristeva's choice to treat the two as one.

object of identification, but to what Kristeva calls sometimes the archaic preobject.[35] In focusing on the attachment hidden beneath the detachment, Kristeva takes her lead from Freud's 1917 work on melancholy. She begins with the assumption that melancholy comes about when one is unable to mourn a loss. For Kristeva, like Freud, this loss may refer to the death of a person, the loss caused by having been abandoned, or the loss of some ideal (Freud includes political examples like the loss of one's fatherland or the ideal of liberty). In the event of such losses, one may come to suffer a grief so profound that, in the words of Freud, it "leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests."[36] The difference between melancholy and the mourning of a loss, however, according to Freud, lies in the fact that melancholy involves an "unconscious loss of a love-object, in contradistinction to mourning, in which there is nothing unconscious about the loss."[37]

Kristeva follows Freud up to this point; however, rather than following Freud in saying that the unconscious character of the suffering comes from an aggression toward that object that has existed alongside and in spite of one's love, Kristeva argues that what has been lost is no object in the usual sense. Or, more specifically, the object that has been lost has become ineffable – unnameable. Thus, the withdrawal from ordinary speech that seems regularly to have characterized the condition of melancholia in the modern age. Emil Kraepelin, a contemporary of Freud's, for example, observes of the melancholic that "His sorrowful features show no play of emotion; the scanty linguistic utterances are laboured, low, monotonous and monosyllabic, and even the addition of a simple greeting on a postcard is not attainable or only after much urging."[38] As Kristeva

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[35] Kristeva uses a few different terms with which she names the object of the melancholic's attachment: notably, "the (archaic) preobject," "the lost Thing," and "the real." For the sake of clarity, I will stick primarily to the first term. That said, I believe that I understand her desire to use a rotating set of terms to describe this figure. While one could read her use of various terms as a lack of clarity on her part, it makes sense, given the therapeutic dimension of her project, to view these names as a series of substitutes for something that (properly speaking?) has no proper name.

[36] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholy" in *The Nature of Melancholy*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 284.

[37] Ibid., 285.

[38] Emil Kraepelin, "'Manic-depressive Insanity,' in Textbook of Psychiatry, 8th edition, 1909-1915" in *The Nature of Melancholy*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 263.

puts it: ". . . (T)he depressed person has the impression of having been deprived of an unnameable, supreme good, of something unrepresentable, that perhaps only devouring could represent, or an invocation could point out, no word could signify."[39]

This unnameable character of the loss contributes to the sense of void. The loss of language, Kristeva points out, is always also a loss of a meaningful life. This is because, for the speaking being, life is invariably meaningful life. When meaning shatters, one's life loses the quality of a life.[40]

Some may find this point too general. Surely there is much to a life that, try as we might, we could never put into words. Yes, but what is it exactly in a life that seems to recede from articulation? Particular things in the world, referential objects? Or, must we look to the structure of how the world appears? If so, then it is only in connection with a world of things that can be indicated by language that one can experience the void beneath such a world. Or, said otherwise, it is only after having already found oneself thrown into a world that one can ask these kinds of questions, questions that may be understood in terms of a concern for authenticity. In other words, to go back to Butler's way of posing the problem, to wonder about how to deal with the non-narratival origin of one's ability to speak, is already to be thoroughly involved in the expression of a meaningful world. Kristeva is making a phenomenological point here. Just as Heidegger describes the way that the appearance of things depends on *Dasein*'s being-there, its disclosure of beings, the argument here is that life takes shape through the disclosive power of language. This shape, as we know, unfolds over time. In a life, we experience things coming into words – including ourselves – and we experience these and other things recede again. So, Kristeva's point that, for a speaking being, life is invariably a meaningful life, should not be taken to mean that things are without significance until they are named. That life's meaningfulness depends on our ability to speak about it does not mean that all things must be subjugated to words. Rather, it means that things must be able both to enter and withdraw from our speech, and that each movement enriches the

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[39] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 13.

[40] Ibid., 6.

other.[41] Said differently, language allows there to be a world of presence and absence, unconcealment and concealment. This is the meaningful, expressible life that melancholy denies.

And yet perhaps Kristeva's boldest leap beyond the Freudian paradigm of melancholy is her claim that forms of meaningful disclosure are nevertheless taking place in the world of the depressed, which – however closed in and cut off – remains at least the shadow of a world. Kristeva bases this claim on her observation that, while the depressed lack interest in the normal sentential signification, they often retain interest in some of language's other features. The rhythm and intonation of sentences may remain very meaningful. The materiality of written words may be of interest.[42] This requires Kristeva to listen in a different way to her patients. She must listen for ways that they manage to express themselves apart from descriptive speech-acts. Kristeva offers an episode with one of her patients as an example.

> "I speak," she would often say, "as if at the edge of my skin, but the bottom of my sorrow remains unreachable." I may have interpreted those words as a hysterical refusal of the castrating exchange with me. That interpretation, however, did not seem sufficient, considering the intensity of the depressive complaint and the extent of the silence that either settled in or broke up her speech in "poetic" fashion, making it, at times, undecipherable. I said, "At the edge of words, but at the heart of the voice,

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[41] This is why Kristeva sees *mood* as pivotal for artistic and literary creation – exemplary of the way life appears as meaningful. In the first chapter of *Black Sun*, she writes: "On the frontier between animality and symbol formation, *moods* -- and particularly sadness -- are the ultimate reactions to our traumas; they are our basic homeostatic recourses. For if it is true that those who are slaves to their moods, beings drowned in their sorrows, reveal a number of psychic or cognitive frailties, it is equally true that a diversification of moods, variety in sadness, refinement in sorrow or mourning are the imprint of a humankind that is surely not triumphant but subtle, ready to fight, and creative . . . Literary creation is that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect -- to sadness as the imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway; to joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol, which I try to harmonize in the best possible way with my experience of reality." – Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 23.

[42] At one point in Emil Kraepelin's description, he adds an interesting observation to his description of melancholic behavior: "They do not give information on their own initiative, are immediately silent again, but, at the same time, occasionally display in their writings a fluent and skilful diction. Speech is mostly low, monotonous, hesitating and even stuttering. Calligraphy is often indistinct and sprawling." While there seems to be some disagreement about the affective quality of the voice, Kraepelin's description concurs with Kristeva's in that both see an activity of meaning-disclosure at work beneath the façade of muteness. – Emil Kraepelin, "'Manic-depressive Insanity,' in Textbook of Psychiatry, 8th edition, 1909-1915" in *The Nature of Melancholy*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 270.

for your voice is uneasy when you talk about that incommunicable sadness."[43]

Reflecting later on this scene, Kristeva adds:

> I believe the analyst can and must, through interpretation, reach that vocal level of discourse without fearing to be intrusive. By giving a meaning to affects that were kept secret on account of the mastery over the archaic preobject, interpretation recognizes that affect as well as the secret language the depressive patient endows it with (in this instance, vocal modulation), thus opening up a channel for it at the level of words and secondary processes. The latter – hence language – considered empty up to this point because cut off from affective and vocal inscriptions, are revitalized and may become a space of desire, that is, of meaning for the subject.[44]

For the most part, in cases of depression, the person's attachment to the lost preobject, their return to a preoedipal relationship to language, becomes all-consuming, impeding any possibility for a bonding identification elsewhere. And yet, given her theory that both the preoedipal and postoedipal, both the semiotic and the symbolic, are necessary elements for language, Kristeva sees in the secret affective language of the patient an opportunity to revitalize the analysand's relationship with words.

Moreover, Kristeva sees the need for such revitalization, not just in cases of depression, but in general throughout culture. *Black Sun* – like her more explicitly political texts – takes the individual's alienation as indicative of the alienation of the culture as a whole. This is both a historical and meta-historical claim. For example, Kristeva targets contemporary society's obsession with conveyability as contributing to the flattening out of the dynamic processes whereby we come to name ourselves and disclose things in the world. She also attends to the way that particular individuals undergo these precarious processes differently, depending on their embodied and political situation. Most of all, she attends to the many details that distinguish the way that females normally undergo the process differently than males. This is something that I touched on

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[43] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia,* 56.

[44] Ibid., 57.

in the previous chapter in briefly describing how our thrownness into language takes on different forms depending on different social-political conditions. Again, the point here is not that there are some linguistic beings who are not thrown into their language, but that, for example, what it means to speak in one's own voice will be different depending on to what extent one fits the cultural stereotype of the subject of enunciation. Thus, it is important to keep in mind the political context for Kristeva's goal of revitalizing language for those who experience themselves, like the woman above, as speaking "at the edge of their skin."

In regards to the question posed to Jakobson above, namely, how social conditions can affect one's recourse to substitution, Kristeva can be said to offer two responses. First, she offers an ontogenetic developmental account explaining the emergence of one's attachment to an ineffable sensoriality in the absence of conditions which enable one to properly mourn, going so far as to trace out how, for example, males and females tend to deal with this loss differently. Secondly, she develops a strategy for helping people identify as a subject of speech for another. Borrowing from and expanding upon the linguistic models of Jakobson, Beneviste, and others, she re-envisions the structuralist argument that language exceeds any subject's intention as a practical guideline for analysis. Referring to the distance between two bodies– be it two people (e.g., analysts and analysand) or the carrying over of the drive into poetic word – that allows one *to identify oneself in speech within the place of mutual co-disclosure*, Kristeva writes:

> Would the fate of the speaking being consist in ceaselessly transposing, always further beyond or more to the side, such a transposition of series or sentences testifying to our ability to work out a fundamental mourning and successive mournings? Our gift of speech, of situating ourselves in time for an other, could exist nowhere except beyond an abyss. Speaking beings, from their ability to endure in time up to their enthusiastic, learned, or simply amusing constructions, demand a break, a renunciation, an unease at their foundations. The negation of that fundamental loss opens up the realm of signs for us, but the mourning is often incomplete.[45]

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[45] Ibid., 42.

To rephrase the point in terms of intersubjective recognition, the space of mutual disclosure is a space where one is given to oneself in a new or modified form through the address and reception of another whose structural position as other is pivotal. In this space, all identification involves a degree of loss. In the fragmentation of the self that occurs in this space, one's absorption within a particular idiom is necessarily broken up and redistributed. When this loss occurs in connection with the act of identification, on Kristeva's reading, one has succeeded in working out a fundamental mourning necessary for any meaning. So, then, to return again to Barthes, if the death of the author coincides with the birth of a reader who can provide the space out of which the writer too can emerge, then this is an example of productive mourning, provided that the "renunciation" of authorship does not turn into a denial of the very conditions which allowed this space of mutual disclosure to occur to begin with.

The idea that the speaking being enduring through time requires an unease at its foundation brings us back to Heidegger, who, like Kristeva, argues that we miss the very being of language if we attempt to ground it in something else. This is not because speech comes from above and does not originate in human activity. It is not because it is a system unto its own independent of the world and experience. But because language is that activity by which we disclose the world. For this reason, this primordial act of disclosure itself resists thematization, not permanently in one and the same way, but differently through time.

I turn now to one of the few places that Heidegger names "melancholy" specifically in *On the Way to Language*, namely, in the lecture entitled "Words." In this particular passage, Heidegger has turned to an untitled poem of Stefan George's in order to shed light on the nature of renunciation as it appears in the poem discussed early in Chapter One, George's "Das Wort." The line from "Das Wort" that leads Heidegger to wonder about the character of renunciation invoked within it reads: "So I renounced and sadly see: // Where word breaks off no thing may be." In turning to the untitled poem,

Heidegger aims to show that the renunciation referred to in "Das Wort" is not a loss but a thanks.[46] The poem reads:

> What bold-easy step
> Walks through the innermost realm
> Of grandame's fairytale garden?
>
> What rousing call does the bugler's
> Silver horn cast in the tangle
> Of the Saying's deep slumber?
>
> What secret breath
> Of melancholy just fled
> Nestles into the soul?
>
>
> *Welch ein kühn-leichter schritt*
> *Wandert durchs eigenste reich*
> *Des märchengartens der ahnin?*
>
> *Welch einen weckruf jagt*
> *Bläser mit silbernem horn*
> *Ins schlummernde dickicht der Sage?*
>
> *Welch ein heimlicher hauch*
> *Schmiegt in die seele sich ein*
> *Der jüngst-vergangenen schwermut?*

Heidegger then comments:

> Step (that is, way) and call and breath hover around the rule of the word (*schwingen um das Walten des Wortes*). Its mystery has not only disturbed the soul that formerly was secure. It has also taken away the soul's melancholy (*Schwermut*) which threatened to drag it down. Thus, sadness has vanished from the poet's relation to the word. This sadness concerned only his learning of renunciation. All this would be true if sadness were the mere opposite to joy, if melancholy and sadness were identical.
>
> But the more joyful the joy, the more pure the sadness slumbering within it. The deeper the sadness, the more summoning the joy resting within it. Sadness and joy play into each other. The play itself which

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[46] "Renunciation owes thanks – it is a thanking. It is not mere refusal, still less a loss." – Martin Heidegger, "Words" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 152.

attunes the two by letting the remote be near and the near be remote is pain. This is why both, highest joy and deepest sadness, are painful each in its way. But pain so touches the spirit of mortals that the spirit receives its gravity from pain. That gravity keeps mortals with all their wavering at rest in their being. The spirit which answers to pain, the spirit attuned by pain and to pain, is *melancholy*.[47]

In this passage Heidegger describes renunciation, the poet's relationship to the word, as simultaneously both joyful and sad. The mood of melancholy holds the two together. Or, more precisely, melancholy, Heidegger says, is the spirit attuned to pain, pain being that which attunes both joy and sadness to one another. This takes us back to the relationship between the affects and language. Pain, we can say, is always at the limits of discourse, indeed, at the limits of understanding. It is truly a disclosure – of our finitude, of our bodies – but precisely because it is so intimate in this way, it resists thematization. If Kristeva's normative claim is right, then, and life is always given shape through meaningful linguistic disclosures, pain seems to play a pivotal role in the play of concealment and unconcealment that shape a life. Melancholy accesses this same dynamic without necessarily being accompanied by pain, since its connection to pain remains one of *attunement with*.

How does this discussion show us that the renunciation of the thing beyond language is not a loss? While Heidegger turns to this poem as a way of explaining this, the interpretation that he offers seems to tell a more complicated story. Because of the ambiguous character of the poet's mood, the way he finds himself with language, it would appear that he must, in fact, through his attunement, experience both gain and loss. There is gain in that, as Heidegger says in "The Nature of Language": "The poet could never go through the experience he undergoes with the word if the experience were not attuned to sadness, to the mood of releasement into the nearness of what is withdrawn but at the same time held in reserve for an originary advent."[48] Pain, the secret language of

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[47] Martin Heidegger, "Words," 153.

[48] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 66.

the body, lies at the heart of concealment and unconcealment. It belongs essentially to the mood (*Stimmung*) of disclosure. And yet, there is also loss, for pain itself resists the kind of expression that it grants to life. As a source of disclosure, it remains strange.

How then do we read Heidegger's insistence that the renunciation of the thing beyond the word is not a loss? One possible answer is that it is a lingering remnant of metaphysical thinking. If we think about the relationship between the poet and language as a dialectical encounter, then, from this perspective, Heidegger's insistence on renunciation as thanks is an attempt to construe the encounter as a one-sided sublation: the poet's desire for things in themselves gives way to his new nominalist commitment, loss gets redescribed as gain. One then reads Heidegger as offering an idealist metaphysics.

But if we approach Heidegger's treatment of melancholy above from the psychoanalytic perspective that Kristeva offers, we get a different story – a story not of sacrifice but of working through (Freud's *Durcharbeitung*). What Kristeva attempts to show in her work is how the dialectical encounter between the bodily drives and the symbolic need not take the form of a sacrifice of the former without remainder. Indeed, when we insist on such a split – and it seems like the linguistic turn in its attempt to renounce everything outside of language does just this – we become deaf to those pre-symbolic languages that are necessary for having a productive relationship to language's transcendence. For Kristeva, the insistence on conveyability and the denial of preoedipal significance contributes greatly to how people come to develop an attachment to the ineffable lost preobject. Each dimension that is not carried over by the symbolic sublation – in particular, bodily affects – then become a void, an empty place, as Kristeva says, "an inexpressible container." But this condition, Kristeva demonstrates, can be meliorated by the intervention of another who recognizes – and indeed – co-authors the meaning hidden beneath the withdrawal from the symbolic. Just as Butler develop a way of grounding Jakobson's theory of substitution in an activity of mutual disclosure, Kristeva also wants to transform her patients' sense of language as other into ground for an act of disclosure,

since, as we have discussed both structurally and phenomenologically, an act of disclosure requires some concealment.

If these parallels between Heidegger and the psychoanalytic project indicated by Butler and Kristeva do indeed describe an important similarity between the two, then we can understand Heidegger's redescription of the poet's relationship to language as one of a disclosive melancholy rather than a purely privative loss as a *therapeutic task.*

This alternative reading of Heidegger's treatment of melancholy as therapeutic has the advantage of clarifying a number of other dimensions of his project concerning language. First, it speaks to the important emphasis put on experience (*Erfahrung*) in the text. As he announces in the opening lines of "The Nature of Language," Heidegger's aim is not primarily to change the way we think about language but the way that we experience it. Heidegger is therefore asking his readers to attune themselves differently, to undergo the claim of language in a new way. More specifically, he wants to attune us to the unspoken dimension of language – to listen to silence – and to acknowledge its place in what allows there to be spoken language. While Kristeva does a much better job elaborating the political stakes of such listening, the act of listening to what remains concealed in ordinary speaking remains pivotal to Heidegger's project.

Second, the therapeutic reading gives us a better way of understanding the interplay of inauthenticity and authenticity. For Heidegger, absorption seems to characterize both. One might say that authenticity and absorption go together for Heidegger, that one is authentic when one gives up the idea that, as consciousness, ego, or human, one is the master of language. Authenticity then consists in returning to the primordial listening, that is, the absorption in the original addresses of language. But absorption seems to characterize inauthenticity too, since absorption in everyday discourse is a fundamental feature of inauthentic being. The therapeutic reading offers us a way to resolve this tension, by suggesting that, for Heidegger, we must overcome absorption in one way – for example, recognizing natural language as historical language – in order to open up the space in which, through mutual disclosure – we may be translated back into ourselves. But this requires not that we give up absorption but that

we revise the way it works. We must bring it to word, communicate it to another. This is the therapeutic aspect of Heidegger's project.

In the upcoming chapter, we shall leave behind the paradigms employed in this chapter – structuralism and psychoanalysis – which have helped us to flesh out the social and communicative features of Heidegger's philosophical exploration of language. And with this context in the background, I will turn to the philosophical and poetic work of one of Heidegger's contemporaries, Paul Celan, who for many reasons – not least of all, his close engagement with Heidegger's writings on language – offers an interesting way of translating Heidegger's therapeutic project into a reflection on *the poetic work as a place of mutual disclosure*.

CHAPTER IV

OPENING THE WORD: BETWEEN HEIDEGGER
AND CELAN'S POETICS

At the beginning of this chapter, I would like to take a moment to reflect on where the previous discussions have brought us. This project began by looking at the difficulties that arise whenever philosophers try to demarcate language as the endpoint of critical reflection and thus renounce the part of human cognition that historicizes, politicizes, and otherwise challenges language. As Heideggerean phenomenology demonstrates, language is never simply a natural "given." The more that one relates to it as a familiar tool, the more it will appear strange when the tool breaks down or when one brings it to light. This is not to deny that language appears reliable and ready-to-hand a lot of the time. Proximally and for the most part, Heidegger says, we do not consider our relationship to language, and instead assume that it will function normally independent of our concern for it. And yet the breakdown and defamiliarization of language brings to light the need for such concern. When the way we articulate something no longer works, we encounter a practical impasse. Moreover, if the unsettled part of language belongs to the foundational structure of self and world upon which we rely, the impasse will also turn to light what is directly underfoot – my basic sense of who I am, what the world is, and how to negotiate between the two. What is needed then is not a theory of language that cuts off the possibility of critical reflection intervening on behalf of language, which would deny the validity of such an experience of language estrangement anyway, but an account that addresses the transformative possibilities that belong to such moments of breakdown.

After tracing out how we come to discover our language as tied to a particular history – one with political and epistemic characteristics that we usually overlook, a discovery that estranges us from the pre-reflective praxis of our language use, we then

proceeded to ask how this estrangement affects and is affected by the facticity of social life. The second chapter answered this question, first, by outlining the general relationship between facticity and Dasein's thrown possibility; second, by describing through examples how we find the words of others deeply woven into our own most basic thoughts and experiences; and, third, by describing how even the experience of entanglement in which we seem thrust out of social relations actually depends on formative encounters with other speaking subjects.

In chapter three, we discussed how these formative encounters actually comprise the basic interlocutionary structures within which we learn how to communicate with others and to develop our own voice for communicating. Through Jakobson's linguistics, we considered the way that ordinary language usage requires ongoing substitution and metalanguage. The latter came to mean, not an ideal system of language into which every other language can be rendered without remainder or with which one's meaning is always immediately evident, but something that most of us use all of the time to interpret what we read or hear and, in turn, to help others interpret us. The need arises, not out of a desire to transcend the worldly situation of language practices, but from concrete communicative situations in which our thinking is imbedded. So, for example, when one is not getting one's point across, it is natural to substitute one formulation for another. And, in doing so, one may need to step back from the particular idiom that they're using and clarify – for example, with "What I mean to say is . . ." or "To put the point another way . . . ." And if we are listening to another, we might ask them to step back from the particular idiom that they are using in order to substitute alternatives. Thus, the distance that opens up when we undergo an experience of entanglement, while certainly bringing the limits of ready-to-hand language into relief, can actually work in the service of communication. But this is never a solo achievement. As Butler and Kristeva show, the existence or non-existence of enabling intersubjective conditions can significantly affect whether one relates to the need for substitution as a lost or gained possibility. Thus, both Butler and Kristeva describe the activity of mutual interpretation in the psychoanalytic

exchange, for example, as a way that one can discover new (performative or semiotic) possibilities within the discourses in which one is absorbed.

This is, in effect, the way that we naturally gain some ground apart from the entanglement in language that this project began with. We are always already entangled in discourses that we pre-reflectively use before we ever think about it. But, as we develop and the demands upon us as speaking beings become more complex, we have the opportunity to radically reorient ourselves vis-à-vis this entanglement. We develop the ability to see the absorption into discourse as occasionally problematic. Not because we float free from our social relationships but because we are claimed by a number of them, and a single, unchanging language will not enable us to tend to these myriad relations. Thus, what we first looked at as an existential need, the need to question our language, has now also come to appear as a social need.

But this conclusion comes to us by way of Freud, Jakobson, Butler, and Kristeva – not strictly Heidegger. Only through these interlocutors in the last chapter were we able to assemble a reading of Heidegger's project as therapeutic. And, yet, truth be told, it was the first chapter that initially introduced us to the idea of an activity whereby one's absorption into language is transformed into a creative possibility. Recall our earlier discussion of Heidegger's reading of Stefan George's "Das Wort." While it was unclear at that time by what processes the poet manages to renounce his melancholic disposition toward language entanglement, it was clear that the language of the poem differed from the word eternally bound to the thing.

Let us return, then, to the topic of poetry and to the role it plays in Heidegger's broader understanding of language, approaching it this time from the point of view developed in the previous chapters. For, much more than his discussion of translation, it is in Heidegger's poetics that we most clearly see a connection between (a) the need for interpreting language and (b) the social and historical context in which such need arises. For Heidegger, the poem is a site similar to what we developed earlier as the scene of psychoanalytic transference – it opens up the interpretive possibilities within ordinary language that regularly go unnoticed and uncultivated. The poem does the interpretive,

reconstructive work that the analyst does. And this activity is fundamental to the way that ordinary language functions. For, according to Heidegger, insofar as the world in which we collectively dwell is a discursive world, it gains its sense from poems.

In what follows, then, I want to turn to Heidegger's discussion of poetic works, focusing particularly on the poem as a communicative act that attempts to transform our relationship to language's readiness-to-hand. As we shall see, for Heidegger, the poetic is an indispensable wellspring for language. It is, in fact, the origin of ordinary language, for Heidegger. And yet, on the basis of what I have argued throughout this project, I would like to suggest that such a pure origin could never exist and that poetry makes this point very clearly.

In the latter half of the chapter, I will expand upon Heidegger's reflections via the poetics of Paul Celan. For Celan's work (both his prose and his poetry), demonstrates well why it is impossible to describe the poem as the origin of the world that it opens up. I will focus on two main reasons for this claim. First, just as we saw in the last chapter how a language is most itself when it stretches beyond itself, poems for Celan are also ecstatic in this way – their communicative power is nothing other than their desire to communicate. This inadequacy of the poem is what many have identified as the place of loss or nothingness in Celan's poetry. But, parallel to our earlier discussion of the semiotic and performative possibilities hidden within melancholy, I would like to read the emptiness that characterizes Celan's work in terms of its positive dimension, that is, as a powerful act of communication that stretches language beyond its norms. This means that the poems withhold not just, as Heidegger argues, in order to let things be, but also in order to solicit readers to interpret the poem and thus to bring it even more beyond its origin. Second, even though the poem gains a fresh approach to the discourse in which it is entangled, it does not manage ever, in Celan's poetry, to decisively separate itself from the everyday language that it attempts to open up. Thus, ordinary language, for Celan, cannot originate in the poem, because much of the latter is, like stones and grass, already poetic. Thus, the words that appear in the poem are as much dialogical partners as they are the brute material of the poetic work.

Before moving into Celan's poetics, though, let us look more closely at Heidegger's discussion of poetry in order to see in what way Heidegger takes the poem to found ordinary language. In this section, I will draw mostly from the earliest and arguably the most well-known of Heidegger's lectures that deal with poetry, the 1935-1936 "*Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*" or "The Origin of the Work of Art."

Poetic Founding in "The Origin of the Work of Art"

In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger famously argues that the poem opens a world. It creates an *opening* where things first come to appear as they are. In this regard, the poem is like all works of art, for Heidegger. It opens up a world in the same way as the temple, which "in its standing there, first gives to things their look and to men their outlook on themselves"[1] ("*in seinem Dastehen den Dingen erst ihr Gesicht und den Menschen erst die Aussicht auf sich selbst*").[2]

Everything hinges on the word "first" in this statement. For Heidegger situates his claim relative to the prevalent belief that poems – as works of art – are derivative, parasitic on a more basic, originary presencing elsewhere.[3] Within this popular opinion, poems are often viewed as a failed attempt at clear descriptive speech, either of some inner or outer reality, one that is difficult enough to put into words that the author attempts to do so elliptically. Thus, one believes that in order to understand poems – one needs to straighten out what they are trying to say, rendering it into the kind of propositional speech that we are already familiar with. Heidegger rejects this view. For, as we saw in chapter one in the context of the George poem, Heidegger sees the attempt

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[1] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 42.

[2] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 29.

[3] In this way, Heidegger is entering into a conversation about art with Plato and Aristotle, the works of both which contain discussions of art – in particular, poetry – as imitation (*mimesis*). In Books II, III, and X of *The Republic*, for example, Socrates and his interlocutors in the dialogue determine that poetic craft tends to make bad imitations. For Heidegger, the artwork is not mimetic.

to render poems into propositional speech as misguided. In the context of this earlier discussion, we looked at Heidegger's attempt to respect the polyvalence of the poem. In light of the above claim from "The Origin of the Work of Art," it is also clear that Heidegger wants to think about the activity of the poem completely apart from descriptive speech, apart from the assumption of an inner or outer reality separate from what the work opens up. Like the Greek temple whose "firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air" and whose "repose brings out the raging of the sea,"[4] the poem is what first opens the world.

This is to say that the space of the air and the raging of the sea do not come to appear independently of the cultural works that put them into relief. They are at work only in the work. In this way, Heidegger extends upon the basic phenomenological exercise of describing the relational context in which things that are come to appear, or in which beings are preserved. Just as Husserl argued that the world never appears independently of consciousness, Heidegger points to the primacy of artworks for structuring the world in which we dwell.

In this way, Heidegger's argument in "The Origin of the Work of Art" is not unlike theories of poetry that suggest that the work of the poem is the creation of a world rather than description of a world. The two perspectives overlap in that both conceive of the artwork as the source of its own intelligibility. Because it first sets forth the relations between beings, the being of any artwork cannot be understood in terms of relations with things that pre-exist its activity. It is, in an important way, its own source, its own *Ursprung*. Thus, Heidegger says that the work is at home in the world that it sets up and nowhere else.

But there are some important points on which these two theories differ, since for Heidegger, it is not quite right to say the poem creates the world. That is, first of all, why he chooses middle-voice constructions like "allows beings to appear" and "allows beings to be" (*lassen sein*), suggesting a reciprocal rather than a unilateral action. Secondly, on this view, the world opened up by the work comes into conflict with what he calls the

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[4] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 41.

self-seclusion and the impenetrability of the *Erde*, the earth. This marks the basic difference, on Heidegger's view, between the tool and the artwork. Whereas the material of the tool is meant to disappear completely in its use, material in the artwork is not. As Heidegger puts it:

> In fabricating equipment – e.g., an ax – stone is used, and used up (*gebraucht und verbraucht*). It disappears into usefulness. The material is all the better and more suitable the less it resists perishing in the equipmental being of the equipment. By contrast the temple-work, in setting up a world, does not cause the material to disappear, but rather causes it to come forth for the very first time (*allererst hervorkommen*) and to come into the Open of the work's world. The rock comes to bear and rest and so first becomes rock; metals come to glitter and shine, colors to glow, tones to sing, the word to speak.[5]

The work of art is, on this view, whatever "causes (materials) to come forth for the very first time." Rock, metal, color, tone and *the word* are obstinate in the work. They stand out as more than just the medium for its message. The work lets them be[6]. In this way, the work accomplishes what our everyday habitual interactions with the world may occasionally chance upon, namely, that dimensions of our experience resist analysis. The stone denies analysis, for example, Heidegger argues, because its heaviness is instantly withdrawn as soon as we try to break it open to reach the inwardness of its being. We try to break down what causes it to be heavy, but as soon as we put it on a scale, we lose the heaviness in attempting to render it as a quantitative weight. Likewise, "Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it."[7]

In this way, Heidegger says, the work is "set back into the earth." This is what distinguishes it from a theory that understands the poem as world-creation and reality-

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[5] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 44-45.

[6] "What seems easier than to let a being be just the being that it is? Or does this turn out to be the most difficult of tasks, particularly if such an intention – to let a being be as it is – represents the opposite of the indifference that simply turns its back upon the being itself in favor of an unexamined concept of being?" – Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 31.

[7] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 45.

creation. For while the account given in *The Origin of the Work of Art* concurs in saying that the work is an originating source through which things come to be what they are, Heidegger does not argue that such works *make* being but that they *let* beings be. In this way, poetry serves the goal of phenomenology, namely, fidelity to *die Sache selbst*, the things themselves. The case of poetry makes the difference clear. For Richard Rorty, for example, the most compelling accounts are not those that hook into some universal and innate truths about human nature but those of the "strong poets" who invent their own vocabulary, incongruous to discourses of the past.[8] Rorty sees the work of the poet in this sense as indistinguishable from the development of scientific paradigms. Since, for the linguistic turn theorist, reality in all cases is a discursive reality, the scientist is no different from the poet – neither the strong poem nor the strong scientific paradigm is strong because it moves us closer to the reality "out there," which stays the same, but because their descriptions are more powerful – on their own terms – than previous descriptions. But, although Rorty solicits select lines from Heidegger as evidence that he approaches language similarly, as we can see from the passage quoted above, there is a significant difference. For words, for Heidegger, are like rocks, metals, colors, and tones. The poem's opening activity involves, not the coining of words, but letting words be, letting customary language that habit keeps hidden come to stand in the open.

Thus, the poet's language is not extra-ordinary. It is the same language as occurs in ordinary, habitual usage, but with a difference. "To be sure," Heidegger writes, "the poets also uses the word – not, however, like ordinary speakers and writers who have to use them up, but rather in such a way that the word only now becomes and remains truly a word."[9] The poem lets the word be. Words thus are in the position of "the things themselves," that originary presencing that both phenomenology and poetry attempt to bring forth.

One finds a similar understanding of poetic language in Kierkegaard's description of "transferred language." Kierkegaard writes:

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[8] See Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989).

[9] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 46.

> . . (E)ven though man is spirit from the moment of birth, he first becomes conscious as spirit later, and therefore prior to this he has lived for a certain time within sensuous-psychic categories. The first portion of life shall not, however, be cast aside when the spirit awakens . . . . The first portion is taken over by the spirit, and, thus used, thus laid at the base, it *becomes transferred.* Therefore the spiritual man and the sensuous-psychic man say the same thing in a sense, and yet there remains an infinite difference between what they say, since the latter does not suspect the secret of transferred language, even though he uses the same words, but not metaphorically. . . . Transferred language is, then, not a brand new language; it is rather the language already at hand. Just as spirit is invisible, so also is its language as secret, and the secret rests precisely in this that it uses the same language as the simple man and the child but uses it as transferred.[10]

Kierkegaard's description of transferal prefigures Heidegger's concept of the clearing activity in that both are ways re-approaching what has already claimed us in a way. This is, for Kierkegaard, "the first portion of life" which is not "cast aside" when the spirit awakens but is "laid at the base." Ordinary language, basic words, thus retain their primacy and density. But the poet relates and calls us to relate to this base in a new, "transferred" way. Taking the opening activity of the work as an intensification of Dasein's disclosive activity, we can appreciate the way that the poetic work is thrown into and entangled within "the first portion of (speaking) life." One can never leave behind the firstness of language, and yet one cannot remain there either.

Of course, as I have been developing throughout this project, this transferal is not always a pleasure to the individual speaking subject undergoing it simply by virtue of its aesthetic character. Recall, for example, the way that Barthes's writer struggled with the historical facticity of his language, which he perceived as an obstacle to his writing and to his own self-knowledge. But there is a difference between the entanglement of the individual and that of the artwork in this respect. While a person may perceive the movement through such a transformation as a disturbing estrangement from what was once most familiar, as Heidegger suggests, it is actually part of the goal or *telos* of the

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[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love,* trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 199-200.

work to get entangled like this. For only through such entanglement can the work let metals shine and words speak.

The work of art, therefore, helps us to better see the condition of entanglement. Kierkegaard's description of transferal, after all, like Heidegger's motif of way-making, makes clear just how easy it is to overlook need within our relationship to ordinary language. The poem helps us see that, because we are always within language, a way to language is needed. Recall, for example, how in the first chapter, we explored the difference between Wittgenstein's "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" and Stefan George's "Where word breaks off, no thing may be." On the face of things, these two statements appear to mean the same thing. However, when we take the latter, the poetic statement, in terms of the poet's *care* toward the bond between word and thing, we realize that the statement hardly describes a self-evident, unquestionable, immediate kind of impression. Nor, despite the lead-in "so," does it assert this as a conclusion reached via logical processes. Rather, it attempts to *let be* the impenetrability of the word. Or, to take a less complicated example, since the line from "Das Wort" is language about language, consider another poem that Heidegger references, "A Winter Evening" by Georg Trakl. Heidegger explains: "The poem's content is comprehensible. There is not a single word which, taken by itself, would be unfamiliar or unclear."[11] The first stanza in the first version of the poem reads:

> Window with falling snow is arrayed,
> Long tolls the vesper bell,
> The house is provided well,
> The table is for many laid.
>
> *Wenn der Schnee am Fenster fällt,*
> *Lang die Abendglocke läutet,*
> *Vielen ist der Tisch bereitet*
> *Und das Haus ist wohlbestellt.*

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[11] Martin Heidegger "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 193.

While the syntax might be a little different than how we usually talk, Heidegger does not seem too amiss in saying that the content of the poem is comprehensible, familiar, and clear. We might have occasion to report that a table is set for many or that the vesper bell is tolling long. Ordinary language seems, for the most part, intact. But many things evidence both the care that the poet took in bringing these words and utterances into the poem and the care that we as readers bring in attuning our ear to the verse. As mentioned above, the syntax differs slightly from the form of ordinary descriptive statements. Moreover, each line seems intentionally simple, due to the repetition of the very basic structure of the lines: "window . . . is arrayed," "house is . . . provided," "table is . . . laid." And, as Heidegger points out, the verses of the poem "manifest a particular beauty of imagery" that "heightens the charm of the poem and strengthens its aesthetic perfection as an artistic structure"[12] ("erhöht den Reiz des Gedichtes und bekräftigt die ästhetische Vollendung des Kunstgebildes").[13] But this is not to say that it is solely the formal elements of the poem that compel us to listen with more care than usual. Knowing that it is a verse from a poem, we search its shape and contents differently than we would an instruction manual. We anticipate coming across images in the poem, images that will relate to one another in ways that we cannot predict straight away. We read with more patience. But the point is that this poetic activity, in which a world is opened up where ready-to-hand things – window, house, table – appear anew, does not require the circumvention of ordinary, ready-to-hand language. Rather, any poetic devices simply serve to bring this language forward.

The poem, thus, does the work of the phenomenologist, leading us "back to the things themselves." And yet, it is worth noting, that the "things themselves" as approached by the poem do not comprise some brute reality that we have strayed from. The firstness that the poem tries to get at is never reducible to an independent and primary presence in this way. This is what Heidegger describes as the uncanniness of what the poem opens up, a description that recalls Kierkegaard's depiction of "transferred

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[12] Martin Heidegger, "Language," 194.

[13] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 12: Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Frankurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 16.

language" as both "the language already at hand" and, at the same time, as something that retains the character of a "secret." The poem is at home in ordinary language but its relationship to the ordinary is a unique one, not itself ordinary. For, on the one hand, poems aim to establish – again, not to obscure – our immediate, familiar relation to the world. They bring the everyday closer into view. But, on the other hand, they do not simply establish the realm of the ordinary once and for all. Rather, they catch a glimpse of the way the ordinary comes to pass as the ordinary. This is why, according to Heidegger, the work of art is uncanny – it presents the familiar as the unfamiliar. "At bottom, the ordinary is not ordinary," Heidegger says, "it is extra-ordinary, uncanny"[14] ("Das Geheure ist im Grunde nicht geheuer; es ist un-geheuer").[15] Trakl's poem presents a very everyday scene in a way that, like Heidegger says, appears not unclear or unfamiliar. And yet in letting be what is opened up in the world of the poem, we find ourselves as readers present to the scene in an unfamiliar way. Likewise, the temple brings forth the raging of the sea only then to return it to hiddenness. The painting of the peasant shoes offers a picture of a tool-being that is intimately connected to the context which gives it purpose that the painting illuminates and which simultaneously keeps it hidden.

This is why, for Heidegger, the work of art as well as the poem are not things like other things. They are, rather, the kind of things that first organize the dynamics of concealment and unconcealment, the disclosure of which characterizes our way of belonging to or dwelling in our environment. The work of art is a sacred space, akin to the space of rituals that bring forth nature as nature, the divine as the divine. But it is important to bear in mind here that it is precisely the degree to which the work distances itself from the world that it discloses the world. Its separateness serves only to gather and let occur the elements comprising our everyday environment. The work is at home, it has its place, in that which it opens up, and *not elsewhere*.

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[14] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 53.

[15] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege*, 41.

This motif of being at home in the activity of clearing or disclosure is echoed in two lectures from 1951, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" and "Poetically Man Dwells."[16] In "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger tells us that to dwell is "to save the earth, to set it free into its own presencing."[17] This dwelling can be manifest in the habitual attitude of people, according to Heidegger, who "leave to the sun and moon their own journey."[18] Again, while this may seem like a passive stance, Heidegger's aim is precisely to emphasize the *work* of this letting. As he explains, any dwelling is also a building. Not that dwelling requires building as a preliminary step, but that "to build is in itself already to dwell."[19] The essence of building, *bauen*, Heidegger suggests, is the work of the farmer, *der Bauer*, who cares for the earth and whose activity is one of *cultivation* rather than construction. To build is to cultivate. It is in the work of cultivation that beings come to appear and to recede. Van Gogh's painting of shoes, then, does not just reflect the appearance of shoes as we find them independently of the work. Likewise, the poem neither reflects nor distorts words that we access independently of poems. It builds and cultivates the way that things *first* come to appearance, first become what they are.

Let us look directly at the relationship that Heidegger sets up between this activity of cultivation and our social-political life. Following up on what I presented concerning social entanglement in my previous two chapters, I suggest that this opening activity should be understood in terms of its inter-subjective, communicative character. For Heidegger, the work opens up a shared world, and – again – what is important here is that it is not a shared world that exists independently of this communicative act, but one that first comes to appearance in such acts. Thus, *Dichtung* is an important part of how we as human beings share sources of meaning in common. For Heidegger, building and

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[16] Heidegger borrows from material used in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" for "Poetically Man Dwells." Thus, there is a lot of overlap in the two texts. I will be focusing on the former.

[17] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 148.

[18] Ibid., 148.

[19] Ibid., 144.

dwelling constitute a political *praxis*. The work of art opens beings and allows truth to happen, and according to Heidegger, so does the founding of a political state. These things can disclose beings in a way, Heidegger says, science cannot. Science must work in the wake of poetic-political truth. It gains its measure from such truth and not vice versa. Heidegger sees that the pre-reflective world in which we pursue our life goals day by day hinges on appeals made by individuals through the setting up of an aesthetic work. In his description of truth as what is cultivated through political and aesthetic works, one finds civic humanist tendencies in Heidegger's thinking that at other times he seems to deny. If our political life depends on the construction of works that allow us to share a world, then the kind of rhetorical study emphasized by thinkers like Aristotle, Vico, and Cicero do not seem too far off from Heidegger's line of thinking.[20] Furthermore, Heidegger's phenomenological approach seems to make an interesting contribution to this area of political philosophy. In developing how we are in need of a way to language, Heidegger indicates a universal motivation for seeking ourselves and our world in the words of another. By describing how this need for finding language belongs to our existential character, Heidegger provides reasons for why the search is an ongoing one, unfinished as long as we continue to experience ourselves thrown into and entangled within a social world. For example, Heidegger writes: "World is never an object that stands before us and can be seen. World is the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse keep us transported into Being"[21] ("*Welt ist das immer Ungegenständliche, dem wir unterstehen, solange die Bahnen von Geburt und Tod, Segen und Fluch uns in das Sein entrückt halten*").[22]

To be clear, Heidegger's view is not that nothing would really be what it is without poems and paintings in a narrow sense. This is why he tries to gather these

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[20] An Italian student of Heidegger's, Ernesto Grassi, has produced interesting studies of Heidegger's relationship to the tradition of civic humanism and rhetoric. While Grassi argues that Heidegger largely overlooked the rhetorical tradition, others argue that there were some deep connections between the two. See, for example, Hans-Georg Gadamer's interview "Heidegger as Rhetor" in *Heidegger and Rhetoric*, ed. Daniel M. Gross and Ansgar Kemmann (SUNY Press, 2005).

[21] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" 43.

[22] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege*, 30.

different kinds of work under the umbrella term, *Dichtung*. At root, building and dwelling belong to the habitual, everyday experience of the human being. "Building as dwelling, that is, as being on the earth, however, remains for man's everyday experience that which is from the outset 'habitual' – we inhabit it, as our language says so beautifully: it is *Gewohnte*."[23] But precisely because of its habitual character, it falls into oblivion. Thus, poetic and artistic works can awaken us to what habit pushes into the background: the clearing activity that allows things to be what they are, that brings forth our world as meaningful.

The idea that dwelling (in language) requires building echoes something that we explored last chapter, namely, Kristeva's phenomenological understanding of the relationship of language and life. A meaningful life, Kristeva argues, is a life explored and expressed through language. Thus, when life loses meaning, as in the case of depression and melancholy, one's ability to speak tends to collapse. One may retain the capacity for many basic language skills but one ceases to identify as a speaking subject and thus to unite one's experience with one's language. One loses the ability to build onto what they have absorbed, taking it on as one's own, and reforming it. Heidegger's call for building is in this way similar to Kristeva's insistence on the role of art and poetry in sustaining language. And yet these forms of (semiotic) signification, according to both thinkers, cannot function autonomously apart from the ongoing process of sedimentation. In other words, neither believes that poetry will ever cure us of the need for more poetry. Language will always be too close to bring it entirely within the opening of the poem. The tension between the two is what calls for us to re-found ordinary language through the work of the poem.

And yet, based on what we have seen in the previous two chapters, it appears difficult to draw a clear line between poetry and ordinary language. For, as we have seen, everyday communication constantly demands the need to rethink language's claim upon our lives. At one point, I described this as our everyday interpretive mood manifest, for example, in the way that we tend to take caution when we listen to an individual or read a

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[23] Heidegger, Martin, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 145.

text. Rather than assuming the speaker's or writer's meaning at the first clue, the prudent listener or reader keeps open multiple plausible interpretations, and continually bears in mind that he or she may need to revise the interpretation as the account unfolds. Similarly, the poem allows things to appear as they come to pass, not as they are from every angle at every moment, but in a particular manner. For example, the table in Trakl's poem comes to pass in a particular context. The ordinariness of the scene, which Heidegger comments on, contributes to the fleeting nature of the appearance: because the poem brings forth one context included in the stream of ordinary experience, the reader cannot and does not presume that a table appears this way and just this way – well-laid at evening time. Likewise, the word in the poem is brought forth in the particular context of the rest of the poem. It appears bound to the line of interpretation that one can develop out of the associations and usages that that single context invites. Thus, the way that we approach both kinds of language seem to require the same open comportment that allows a thing to come to appearance *as a possibility*. While we certainly bring different expectations to the two situations, and the two take on distinct cultural forms and values, there is, in fact, no firm principle or objective quality that distinguishes poetic language from ordinary language in this way. Revolution, reformulation – these are axiomatic to both everyday speech and poetry.

Granted, as chapter three argued, this description of ordinary language – while intuitive at a certain level for many of us – is not the way that many of us regularly perceive and experience ordinary language. For, the habits we develop in constantly using language (speaking and listening) have a way of working against the poetic dimension of ordinary language. But this habitual usage can break down on occasion, revealing the way that our lives become shaped around language habits. The poem offers this kind of experience, and as such, must both separate itself from and belong to ordinary language.

Heidegger insists on the need for this separation, calling it variably a "strife," a "rift," and a "thrust." It is this strife whereby art lets truth originate. In "The Origin of the Work of Art," he writes:

The more solitarily the work, fixed in the figure, stands on its own and the more cleanly its seems to cut all ties to human beings, the more simply does the thrust come into the Open that such a work *is*, and the more essentially is the extraordinary thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down. But this multiple thrusting is nothing violent, for the more purely the work is itself transported into the openness of beings – an openness opened by itself – the more simply does it transport us into this openness and thus at the same time transport us out of the realm of the ordinary. To submit to this displacement means: to transform our accustomed ties to world and to earth and henceforth to restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth that is happening in the work.[24]

Je einsamer das Werk, festgestellt in die Gestalt, in sich steht, je reiner es alle Bezüge zu den Menschen zu lösen scheint, um so einfacher tritt der Stoß, daß solches Werk ist, ins Offene, um so wesentlicher ist das Ungeheure aufgestoßen und das bislang geheuer Scheinende umgestoßen. Aber dieses vielfältige Stoßen hat nichts Gewaltsames; denn je reiner das Werk selbst in die durch es selbst eröffnete Offenheit des Seienden entrückt ist, um so einfacher rückt es uns in diese Offenheit ein und so zugleich aus dem Gewöhnlichen haraus. Dieser Verrückung folgen, heißt: die gewohnten Bezüge zur Welt und zur Erde verwandeln und fortan mit allem geläufigen Tun und Schätzen, Kennen und Blicken ansichhalten, um in de rim Werk geschehenden Wahrheit zu verweilen.[25]

It is in the strife of the poetic work or in the thrust of political decision that Heidegger says a true origin opens up. The apparent violence toward and displacement of us affected by the work, the restraint of all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, is in actuality, Heidegger says, the only genuine kind of beginning. Otherwise, our way of dwelling in the world is not properly founded.

But given the poetic character of ordinary language as we have described it, we may wonder: is poetry ever really in the position to found our dwelling with language? Is it necessary or even possible to leave behind ordinary language in order to open it up poetically? Heidegger seems at odds with himself on this point. On the one hand, the true poem is one that does not abandon everyday language but exploits the familiarity of the

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[24] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 64.

[25] Martin Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe Band 5: Holzwege*, 54.

most familiar moves of our language. Trakl's poem, for example, speaks ordinarily. It does not try to flee the original hermeneutic condition in which Dasein finds itself entangled, as in – for example – the attempt to create a logically perfect language, one that requires no interpretation. On the other hand, everything depends for Heidegger on this transformation, and its accomplishment is irreversible and decisive.

The political stakes of this ambiguity in Heidegger are worth commenting on. For as much as we might benefit from uniting Heidegger's phenomenology of language with a humanist politics of language, Heidegger's work regularly resists the prospect of this collaboration. Heidegger never backed away from his suspicion toward the linguistic forms of public debate (often tied to mass media like newspapers, radio, etc.). Nor did he acknowledge any poetic possibility within these conversations, and instead considered these to be the kind of "idle chatter" from out of which we yearn to be poetically disentangled.[26] Thus, Heidegger develops art's status as a genuine foundation for our historical lives at the expense of the kind of daily conversations that we tend to see as essential to democratic society. For Heidegger, "Whenever art happens – that is, whenever there is a beginning – a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again."[27] Idle talk is not capable of such radical transformation. But the separation of poetic language from ordinary language takes on an even more problematic political form. For Heidegger sharpens the line between poetic language and ordinary language – authentic and inauthentic political being – by describing the movement from the latter to the former in terms, not only of truth and political foundation, but in terms of "decision" (*Entscheidung*) and even "the essential sacrifice" (*das wesentliche Opfer*). Heidegger writes, for example, directly after his description of world as "the ever-nonobjective to which we are subject" (quoted above) that "Wherever those *decisions* of our history that relate to our very being are made, are taken up and abandoned by us, go unrecognized and are rediscovered by new inquiry, there the world worlds" (my emphasis). And to preserve these decisions means that one "submits to the *decision* of an historical

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[26] See, for example, in "Poetically Man Dwells," where on page 213 Heidegger writes: "As expression, language can decay into a mere medium for the printed word."

[27] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 74.

humanity the question of victory and defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery." Among these decisions of a historical humanity, Heidegger includes "the essential sacrifice." This has grave consequences. By prioritizing the aesthetic over the discursive in politics, and detaching the aesthetic from the discursive and intersubjective processes that support it, Heidegger turns away from the possibility of a liberal, civic humanistic poetics and toward the fascist interest in epochal discontinuity.[28]

But are there not politically meaningful relations in place, relations that claim us very profoundly, prior to the poem's opening up of a world? Is it only once we have set these relations forth and given ourselves distance from them that we can properly belong to them as genuinely political beings? Or do we stay within the discourses available to us, within the worlds opened up with them, as we undergo the work's transformative opening? The sea opened up by the temple is, after all, also the sea opened up by the port and the ship. The well-laid table in Trakl's poem may appear *as if* for the first time, but it is likely that this "original" event comes borrowed from others. So, although Heidegger's poetics is indeed promising in the way that it argues for the importance of poetic works for bringing forth shared worlds of meaning, there is clearly more to say about the relational character of the poem than that the poem founds and originates its relations. There is, after all, a kind of being-there that is prior to the origin established by the poem. Now, one could go about demonstrating this by appealing to worlds of meaning that are so deeply rooted for us that poetic reflection cannot dig beneath them. Our earlier analyses of primordial absorption would support this point. But there is another way of demonstrating this point as well, and that is by showing how the work's opening up of a world necessarily takes place in a world that is already set forth. In other words, we would have to show that the work only makes sense within a context of references that are already in place, references themselves that are not exactly un-poetic, but are lasting

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[28] The work of Carl Schmitt demonstrates well the connection between the thesis of epochal discontinuity, decisionism, and the fascist conception of political life. Schmitt famously claims that sovereignty means possession of the decision concerning the exception, and that such sovereignty can never be possessed by a general people. His criticisms of liberalism overlap in important ways with some of Heidegger's explorations of aesthetic and political truth. See *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).

impressions from other works (again, works here means practices of *Dichtung*). This means that the work does not bring things out from utter hiddenness but draws from the culture in which it is situated. The image of the temple and the sea may be misleading if it leads us to believe that sea, air, and stone have not already originated in a way when they are put into relief by the temple. This indicates that there is a relational character to the work, because it is in dialogue with how other works have presented a shared world of experiences. Besides borrowing from other works, this means also that the work relates itself negatively to other works. For example, the painting of the shoes brings forth the peasant's shoes in a particular way: (a) positively, by way of referencing other works and (b) also negatively, by indicating a region in which the shoes do not come to appear as they are. In sum, because the poem is also an act of communication with worlds already opened up, it is never a purely foundational act. It opens a world within a world that is already underway.

To say that the work opens a world within a world that is already underway is to insist on reading the poem as an instance of communication, that its origination is tied to the co-existence of multiple worlds. And in this way, rather than simply inverting the hierarchy that Heidegger sets up between poetic language and ordinary language, we press the point of their commonality further. It is not just the fact that they share similar features that unites the two, but that poetic language remains bound up with the relationality that constitutes our entanglement with others. With such a reading, we admittedly lead Heidegger away from some of his own tendencies. For the poem is then not that which grounds ordinary language anymore than ordinary language is that which grounds the poem. Accordingly, nothing actually *originates* in the poem outside of a communicative act, one which must reference things out in the world that are available to other independent subjects.

To be clear, Heidegger's thought moves very close to this insight at two points. First, he is very interested in how the work stays bound to what it cannot open up. The opening activity of the work is specifically the opening up of what withholds itself from complete disclosure. The strife between concealment and unconcealment opened up in

the temple is retained by the stone, the earthiness and thingliness of the work. Similarly, the word retains its opacity. The stone, the paper, the ink – all remain among the things of the world that the work of art attempts to disclose. The artwork and the truth event which is established thereby are returned to the earth, Heidegger tells us. In this way, the work contests itself. It remains but a partial clearing, because it cannot obtain the distance that it needs to take from the world in order to disclose it.

On the other hand, despite how Heidegger conceives of the poem as bound to what it cannot open, his poetics falls short of explaining how the poem is subject to social entanglement. For by grouping together the word with rock, color, etc., as the self-secluding "earth," we lose sight of how the limit of the poem's opening pertains to its communicative dimension, that is, its proximity to ordinary language. The work of art cannot ultimately be its own unique source, because like the ordinary speaker who must always open language when encounters with another demand it, it is never complete unto itself. It is, rather, impossible for the poem to independently decide on its relation to the world. Discursive relations in the world are what open the poem up.

From this perspective, what Heidegger calls the earth can be better understood as the poem's own self-othering, its openness to what lies outside of it. This outside appears within the poem as the tension among the multiple sources out of which it arises. For within the world opened up by the poem, there are traces of other worlds. Other worlds which cross paths with the poem but never come under the sway of its decision. Worlds with their own histories, their own truths. A plurality of worlds that converge in a poem that requires a plurality of interpretations. The earthly quality of the poem, the scene of its conflict, is just as much about the plurality of worlds as the withdrawal of materiality from the language of the poem. Heidegger acknowledges the dependence of the poem on what he calls preservers. This is the second way in which the work is seen as held in relations that it does not set up itself. "(W)hat is created," he writes, "cannot itself come into being without those who preserve it."[29] But the activity of preservation, for Heidegger, is again one of submission to the work itself, understood once again as the

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[29] Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," 64.

denial of multiplicity of works, worlds, and interpretations. Preserving, he says, "is a sober standing-in within the extraordinary awesomeness of the truth that is happening in the work . . . . (it) does not reduce people to their private experience, but brings them into affiliation with the truth happening in the work."

I offer these criticisms in light of one particular body of poetic work where I believe the traces of an encounter with Heidegger can be found. This is the work of Paul Celan. In what follows, I will present Celan's poetics in light of how it resonates with and responds to Heidegger's discourse on the poem as origin.

The Originlessness of Language in Paul Celan's Poetics

The words of Heidegger – like biblical, historical, and literary allusions – are a recurring material out of which Celan weaves his poems. At the same time, the place of Heideggerean discourse within Celan's poems goes beyond the place of material – the poems seem to be in dialogue with Heidegger's work. There have been many interpretations of this dialogue reconstructed through the poem "Todnauberg," the name of the village where Celan spent a day with Heidegger in 1967 a few weeks after he was released from the psychiatric hospital. But this poem, which has been the focus of nearly all of the comparative studies, does not seem to seek a dialogue with Heidegger's poetics *per se*. As most commentators have suggested, the poem seems, rather, to be engaged with Heidegger as a human being and an ethical agent. But there is another dialogue with Heidegger in which Celan is engaged, namely, a dialogue that was first and foremost about language. And it was indeed Heidegger's philosophical writings on language that first drew Celan to his work.[30] This dialogue is to be found most clearly in Celan's 1961 "Meridian" address.

The speech bears the name of the figure illustrated in one of the last passages, a figure whose meaning is not immediately clear, despite its proximity to many

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[30] This is not to say that there is not a significant relationship between Heidegger's poetics and his practical and ethical life decisions. But since all evidence suggests that Celan sought out Heidegger because he was genuinely interested in his philosophical explorations of language, it seems appropriate to me to try to reconstruct that dialogue as much as possible on its own terms.

philosophical ideas. Celan speaks about having found something, there in the presence of his audience, that "binds and that leads to an encounter, like a poem (*das Verbindende und wie das Gedicht zur Begegnung Führende*)," and which is "like language – immaterial yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, returning upon itself by way of both poles and thereby – happily – even crossing the tropics (and tropes) – the meridian."[31] ("*Ich finde etwas – wie die Sprache – Immaterielles, aber Irdisches, Terrestrisches, etwas Kreisförmiges, über die beiden Pole in sich selbst Zurückkehrendes and dabei – heitererweise – sogar die Tropen Durchkreuzendes --: ich finde . . . einen Meridian.*")[32] What he finds gives us an understanding of what Celan believes his poems seeks, his poetic goals.

Appearing at the end of the speech, Celan likens the figure of the meridian to the poem and to language. In so doing, he indirectly speaks to these things through this figure. The poem, Celan says, is something binding. There is a way in which language of any sort is binding though, as we have discussed, and Celan addresses one aspect of this in his portrayal of language as "immaterial yet earthly." Language binds together earthly things, perhaps the flow of perceptions that make up the bulk of human experience, and the part of our experience that intercepts this flow. It binds people together in communication. In this way, all language – but particularly poetic language – seems important for the connective work that makes our life experiences meaningful. But why then should the meridian – this language-like figure – appear at the end of the address and why does Celan say that the meridian, like language, is *etwas Kreisförmig*. What kind of loss, void, or wandering creates a need for such a binding?

Celan frequently expresses or otherwise tries to bring forth the experience of loss. Many of his poems address the loss of his parents, particularly his mother, who were deported during the Holocaust and died in Nazi camps. A number of others address the loss of close friends. Another, the loss of his firstborn son. And beyond these personal

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[31] Paul Celan, "The Meridian" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 413.

[32] Paul Celan, *Paul Celan, Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien*, ed. Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schmull (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1999), 12.

losses, there is good reason to read many of Celan's poems as mourning the loss of all the victims of the Shoah, of extinguished cultures, of hope for humanity in light of fascism as well as post-fascist Europe. And yet, despite the fact that many would assume that the list of these losses should include the loss of language, Celan's writings often suggest that he considers language in a different, almost opposite light. For example, in the "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," Celan writes:

> Reachable, near and not lost, there remained in the midst of the losses this one thing: language.
>
> It, the language, remained, not lost, yes in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, "enriched" by all this. [33]

Here language is not what is lost but what remains despite all other losses. It remains not by staying itself, and not by simply giving a word for "that which happened," but by undergoing a radical transformation. It must pass through its own limits – the limits of what it can answer. And when it has, only thus enriched, can it *remain*.

The passage from the Bremen address provides us with some insight into one of the mysterious tensions surrounding the figure of the meridian, namely, that it seems both present, if only on the horizon, throughout the speech, and, on the other hand, seems only to emerge at the end of the speech. It is continually sought but never absent. Heidegger's philosophy of language, as we have explored it, may shed light here.

In Heidegger's work, we have traced out how human beings often find it necessary to reapproach the discursive contexts within which we find ourselves thrown. These contexts make up our social facticity and our historical reality, but our relationship to them often appears inauthentic or otherwise problematic, often in response to a

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[33] Paul Celan, "Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 395.

demand from another that requires us to leave behind familiar forms of speech in order to communicate. Heidegger saw this clearly at issue in the activity of translation. But it also has an important role in his understanding of poetry, insofar as he sees the distance taken by the poetic work away from ordinary language to perform the same kind of disclosive work as Dasein in general. The poetic work, like the creative writer, finds itself entangled in ordinary, everyday words such that the distance it musters out for itself enables these words to appear *as if* for the first time. Likewise, the meridian appears at the end of the speech as if for the first time, though – insofar as it is "like" language and poetry – it is also taken up throughout the speech in Celan's description of poetry.

Like poetry as Celan describes it throughout the speech, the speech itself searches. But the search aims in two directions. On the one hand, in writing a poem, one is, Celan says, on a path toward oneself. He writes:

> Then does one, in thinking of poems, does one walk such paths with poems? Are these paths only by-paths, bypaths from thou to thou? Yet at the same time, among how many other paths, they're also paths on which language gets a voice, they are encounters, paths of a voice to a perceiving Thou, creaturely paths, sketches of an existence perhaps, *a sending of oneself ahead toward oneself, in search of oneself . . . A kind of homecoming* (my emphasis).[34]

> *Geht man also, wenn man an Gedichte denkt, geht man mit Gedichten solche Wege? Sind diese Wege nur Um-Wege, Umwege von dir zu dir? Aber es sind ja zugleich auch, unter wie vielen anderen Wegen, Wege, auf denen die Sprache stimmhaft wird, es sind Begegnungen, Wege einer Stimme zu einem wahrnehmenden Du, kreatürliche Wege, Daseinsentwürfe vielleicht, ein Sichvorausschicken zu sich selbst, auf der Suche nach sich selbst . . . eine Art Heimkehr.* [35]

One can hear echoes of Heidegger here. Celan speaks of paths where language gets a voice and which also grant a homecoming. Likewise, Heidegger speaks of ways to language, whereby language may come to speak, and whereby we speakers can come to truly belong to what already claims us. Thus poetry's role as founding. Such parallels

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[34] Paul Celan, "The Meridian," 412.

[35] Paul Celan, *Paul Celan, Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien,* 11.

would be apparent to any reader, though there is little agreement in general about how to take references like these in terms of whether they suggest that Celan is thinking along with or somehow against Heidegger's poetics. But the italicized segment of the passage above is of special interest to our discussion. Celan calls the paths of poetry "sketches" or projections of an existence (*Daseinsentwürfe*). Why should the path whereby language gets a voice require a projective sketch of an existence? We can make sense of this if we recall our earlier discussion of substitution, translation, and metalanguage from the last chapter. Previously we saw how the possession of a language required being able to constantly extend beyond that language in response to the demands that arise from the alterity within any communication relationship. The poem requires that one bring one's speech beyond its limits in order to be enriched through an encounter with another. Celan thus says that the path is "a sending of oneself ahead toward oneself, in search of oneself." Or, as he says at another point: "Poetry hurries ahead." In the last section, we saw how, for Heidegger, language originates in and through the poem. Words, Heidegger says, come to be what they are in the world opened up by the poetic work. Likewise, the projective nature of the poem, for Celan, strives after a return to an origin, a homecoming. But this is only possible when the poem projects beyond itself. This brings us to the second direction that Celan tells us the paths poems take. "The poem wants to reach an Other," Celan says, "it needs this Other, it needs an Over-against (*ein Gegenüber*). It seeks it out, speaks toward it."[36]

This is also famously where Celan says that there is no absolute poem. "The absolute poem (*das absolute Gedicht*) – no, that certainly does not exist, that can't exist!"[37] What is this absolute poem that Celan denies? Many commentators hear this as a reference to Symbolist poetics, exemplified by Stephan Mallarmé. And while Celan did come very much to see his poetry as opposed to the Symbolist tendency, I think that we can hear this point more broadly as a resistance to the idea that a poem wins the truth of its beginning and sublates its original condition, that is, the condition of being thrown

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[36] Paul Celan, "The Meridian," 409.

[37] Ibid., 410.

into this or that point of origin outside of itself. This means that we must understand the meridian, the destination of Celan's address which is "something circular, returning upon itself" otherwise than a reflection on language which attempts to secure its origin in the poem.

For Celan, the return of the meridian neither authenticates nor founds language. It is as much characterized by incompleteness as it is by rootedness and belonging. So too with Celan's poems. Many commentators have examined how the void, emptiness, and rootlessness appear to be the goal of Celan's poetry. In what follows, I will consider how some of these commentaries explain this goal and come back in the end to the description of the meridian in Celan's poetics.

Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, for example, has argued compellingly for the need to hear Celan's work as articulating the limits of the kind of experience that seems rooted in subjectivity. Experience names, for Lacoue-Labarthe, precisely what our subjectivity cannot stand as absolute witness to. Poetry, he says, attempts to recall experience, but also ends up reaching a limit to what it can recall for the subject, since – as we described in the last chapter – one's memory never has access to the origin of one's words. As Lacoue-Labarthes writes: "to speak, to let oneself be caught up and swept away by speech, to trust language, or even, perhaps, to be content to borrow it or submit to it, is to 'forget oneself.'"[38] Language is always rootless in this way. Even when we use it to identify ourselves as precisely as we can, as with the pronoun "I," we still use a borrowed, general word. The poem seeks to recall the mood of perpetual thrownness into language, our having missed the origin. It recalls this limit but in so doing reaches another limit. Take, for example, "Tübingen, Jänner" – a poem that Lacoue-Labarthe takes up to describe the limits of subjective memory and experience in Celan's work. The poem reads:

> Eyes talked in-
> to blindness.
> Their – "a

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[38]Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, trans. Andrea Tarnowski (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999),48.

riddle, what is pure-
ly arisen" – , their
memory of
floating Hölderlintowers, gull-
enswirled.

Visits of drowned joiners to
these
plunging words:

Came, if there
came a man,
came a man to the world, today, with
the patriarchs'
light-beard: he could,
if he spoke of this
time, he
could
only babble and babble,
ever- ever-
moremore.

("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.")

Zur Blindheit über-
redete Augen.
Ihre – "ein / Rätsel ist Rein-
entsprungenes" – , ihre / Erinnerung an
schwimmende Hölderlintürme, möwen-
umschwirrt.

Besuche ertrunkener Schreiner bei
diesen
tauchenden Worten:

Käme,
käme ein Mensch,
käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute mit
dem Lichtbart: er dürfte,
spräch er von dieser
Zeit, er
dürfte
nur lallen und lallen,

immer-, immer-
zuzu.

("Pallaksch. Pallaksch.") [39]

Lacoue-Labarthe takes the poem to mimic Hölderlin's own search for the source – his own obsession with homecoming (cf. e.g., "Heimkunft"). But in this attempt to recall Hölderlin, whose shadow Celan always felt that he labored in, he becomes disoriented. He cannot find the origin that Hölderlin pursued, Hölderlin who Heidegger always held up as the most authentic, the most genuine of poets. Of the dizziness the poem encounters in trying to recollect Hölderlin's Tübingen, Lacoue-Labarthe writes:

> Dizziness is an experience of nothingness, of what is, as Heidegger says, 'properly' non-occurrence, nothingness. Nothing in it is 'lived,' as in all experience, because all experience is the experience of nothingness: the experience of dizziness here, as much as the anquish Heidegger describes, or as much as laughter in Bataille. Or the lightning recognition of love. As much as all the infinitely paradoxical, 'impossible' experiences of death, of disappearance in the present. [40]

On this view, the poem strives for an experience of nothingness, because it is in this void that the poem truly speaks. For Lacoue-Labarthe, the poem in this way taps into the nothingness at the heart of *all* experiences, by virtue of the subject's limited penetration of them. In this way, the dizziness here could be called phenomenological vertigo – dizziness before *the things themselves* whose way of appearing resists the kind of analysis whereby we subsume things under general categories. The limits of what one can know, what one can see, and what one can say: these mark not just what is beyond one's disclosive ability, but make up the very fabric of disclosure. The poem attempts to get to the asubjectivity out of which all experience, language, and memory originates. In the breakdown of vision ("eyes talked into blindness"), balance and orientation ("drowned,"

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[39] Paul Celan, "Tübingen, Jänner" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 158-9.

[40] Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Poetry as Experience*, 19.

"plunging") and language ("he could only babble and babble"), the poem tries to recall what Lacoue-Labarthe describes as this nothingness from which we are thrown.

Peter Szondi explains the way that originlessness characterizes Celan's poetry in a similar but slightly different way, emphasizing how the experience at issue for Celan's poems is often one of being forcibly moved or uprooted. In his reading of "Engführung," for example, he looks at the text's formal elements as they bear on the response of the reader. The poem's first two stanzas are:

> Taken off into
> the terrain
> with the unmistakeable trace:
>
> Grass, written asunder. The stones, white
> with grassblades' shadows:
> Read no more – look!
> Look no more – go!

> *Verbracht ins*
> *Gelände*
> *mit der untrüglichen Spur:*
>
> *Gras, auseinandergeschrieben. Die Steine, weiss,*
> *mit den Schatten der Halme:*
> *Lies nich mehr – schau!*
> *Schau nicht mahr – geh!*[41]

It is a long poem. The spacing of the print slides from the left margin clear across the pages at points. In the end, and after many sudden shifts and jarring departures, it returns to the image it began with: "Taken off into / the terrain / with the unmistakeable trace: // Grass, / Grass, / written asunder." One might say that the mention of being "taken off" is a metaphor for or an expression of the deportation of Celan's parents, Celan's own emigration around Europe and the loss of German culture as an intellectual home, or Jewish diaspora. Szondi insists that we fill in too many blanks when we offer such

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[41] Paul Celan, "Engführung" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: Norton, 2001), 118-119.

explanations though. This is not because these literal and historical uprootings do no bear on the poem at all, but because, according to Szondi, the poem leaves all these different sources open and decides ultimately on none of them. In this way, if the poem does try to remember in the way that Lacoue-Labarthe describes, Szondi concurs that the poem fails at such memorializing, because what first set the poem into movement, the meaning beneath the language so to say, is not given. The language of the poem, rather, feels rootless. In the imagery of "Engführung," the language leaves only a "trace" and a "shadow." It affords only a glance ("Read no more – look! / Look no more – go!") Szondi explains:

> This is why we should stop wondering for the moment what is meant by the 'unmistakeable trace' and instead note that these first three lines do not tell us what it is . . . . The opening of 'Engführung,' then, is characterized less by the (potential) meaning of the expressions used in it than by the fact that the reader finds himself being at the same time drawn into a context he does not recognize and treated as though it were familiar to him; or, to be more precise, he is being treated like someone who has no right to know. From the very beginning, the reader has been deported – *verbracht*, 'forcibly brought' – to a terrain that is both foreign and strange . . . . Here, too, then, we should stop asking ourselves to whom the phrase 'Deported to the/ terrain/ with the unmistakable trace' refers and instead note that the information is being withheld . . . .[42]

While, because of its focus on philosophical history, Lacoue-Labarthe's reading requires that we presume that certain philosophical intentions guide Celan's work, Szondi reads the poem for how it engages with what he presumes are the reader's expectations. Szondi explains that the poem pushes the reader out of that position in which everything in the poem makes sense as an expression of the poet's feelings and experiences. Suddenly it is the one who is reading, interpreting, and critiquing who has no ground to stand on. This is what is set to work in the poem. Szondi's reading also contains a positive description of what the poem does. Its language is not representative. Szondi writes, "The text itself is refusing to serve reality, to go on playing the role that has been assigned to it since

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[42] Peter Szondi, *Celan Studies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 28.

Aristotle. Poetry is ceasing to be mimesis, representation; it is becoming reality."[43] In this way, the language in Celan's poems get closer than we are accustomed to. It violates the distance between reality and language that we customarily reserve while reading.

In its attention to the hermeneutics of readership, Szondi's reading illuminates the limits of the understanding of readers and listeners – those who seek to know whence the poem springs. Furthermore, because we cannot isolate whence the poem issues, Szondi suggest that it is its own reality. What Szondi does not elaborate on, though, is the way that the emptiness or negativity of the poem is structured from the very start by the presence of others. This is a connection that perhaps only becomes apparent when we read poems like "Tübingen, Jänner" or "Engführung" alongside Celan's theoretical remarks on poetics where he speaks to the intention of his poems. In this way, Celan dramatizes the dynamics that we have been exploring over the last few chapters and which Celan indicates when in the "Meridian" he tells us that poetry "runs ahead of itself." As we have seen, in both the "Meridian" and the "Bremen" addresses, Celan speaks about the poem making its way toward another. Language in the poem stretches to its limit not solely on account of the way that the poet experiences originlessness on his own. The language of his poems can only bring this emptiness to word in the presence of a reader who will receive it.

This social exchange, the writing of the poem for another and the reading of the poem for another, is a version of the therapeutic activity that we examined in the last chapter, where we looked at the psychoanalytic transference relationship and the role of interpretation therein. There we saw how Kristeva locates love and identification as playing pivotal roles in language development, citing the way that amatory language reconfigures the relationship between the speaker and the tool, the meaning and the expression, and in so doing opposes the skepticism that otherwise often accompanies our speech (the speech act "I love you" is both descriptive and performative). We looked at an example from Roland Barthes, where he describes modern literature as departing from the kind of writing that expresses an author's ideas. For Barthes, modern literature is a

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[43] Ibid., 31.

speech act which "has no other content (no other statement) than the act by which it is uttered: something like the 'I declare' of kings or the 'I sing' of the earliest poets," explaining that the modern writer "can therefore no longer believe, according to the pathos of his predecessors, that his hand is slower than his passion . . . . for him, on the contrary, his hand, detached from any voice, born by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin."[44] I described this in terms of the amatory character of writing, where in the presence of the other's demand, or Kristeva would say – through love, *one finds oneself at the surface of one's words*.[45] In describing how poems simultaneously seek both a self-recovery *and* a cancellation of identity in anticipation of their addressee, Celan's poetics suggest that we can read his poems as motivated by an experience of an ever-renewing demand.

Lacoue-Labarthe offers a different version of this insight. For in addition to identity, what comes into being through the poetic speech-act, for Lacoue-Labarthe, is memory and history. As previously discussed, the poems try to recall that to which the author could not be present. Echoing Heidegger's description of the poem as opening up a site of meaning that was not previously there, Lacoue-Labarthe describes the poem as the place where memory and history actually originate. The stream of perceptions into which we are proximally and for the most part thrown are only first ordered and put together when poetized. Prior to that, all experience, Lacoue-Labarthe argues, is singular. As singular, it is non-discursive and overwhelming. But through the poetic work, one can gain a new look. This does not mean that the poem manages to subsume this excess to the order of memory and history completely, for as we saw earlier, Lacoue-Labarthe argues that the recollective ability of the poem is also limited. But there are strong resonances between the way that Heidegger and Lacoue-Labarthe conceive of poetry. Heidegger

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[44] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berekeley: University of California Press, 1989), 52.

[45] Derrida's commentary on Celan, which I will turn to later in the pages ahead, is relevant to this point. Derrida argues the recurrence of dates in "The Meridian" marks the way that the author's experience becomes doubled and transformed through each act of reading. Veronique Foti explains: "Precisely insofar as the poem is inscription, writing, or text (rather than language speaking, in the Heideggerean sense), it remains indissociable from the date." – Veronique Foti, *Heidegger and the Poets* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1992), 104.

argues that *Dichtung* is the mode of proper political dwelling, because it is only through *Dichtung* that worlds of shared significance are brought into appearance. Without poetic activity, we would not share a world in which we could pursue common goals and deliberate over common problems. Likewise, for Lacoue-Labarthe, there would be no historical being nor individual – let alone collective – memory if it weren't for poetic works.

But the difference between the two readings is stark at points. While Heidegger emphasizes the *de-cisive* difference between the poem and what it brings forth, Lacoue-Labarthe emphasizes precisely the difficulty of making such a distinction. The poem dramatizes our thrownness into language, the originlessness of what we have called entanglement, but these characterize our everyday condition of being-ahead-of-ourselves anyway. In fact, if it is the artwork in some way that de-cisively transforms life, it is poetry that interrupts this movement, or so Lacoue-Labarthe argues in his essay "Catastrophe."[46] Furthermore, the poem does not succeed in refounding or authenticating this initial condition. And yet, the two do not seem too far apart if the point of origin for Heidegger and the point of asubjective originlessness for Lacoue-Labarthe look very much alike. In both accounts, poetry allows us to experience beings coming forth in their own way, not coming forth as caused by this or that other thing – but as the nothingness of Being.

Some commentators have taken Celan's interest in the ungroundedness of poetic language as an attempt to think about truth as resisting systematicity. This is what Adorno describes as a negative truth, the function of which is the unconcealment of the untruth from which it arises. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno writes: "Celan's poems want to speak of the most extreme horror through silence. Their truth content itself becomes

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[46] Reading Celan in "The Meridian" as reenacting the ancient abandonment of *mimesis*, Lacoue-Labarthe differentiates what he sees as poetry's interruption of art's catastrophe from art's catastrophic imitation of reality. In one sense, the difference is about nature. From the perspective of art, nature is something that can really only be presented through representation. In poetry, though, something returns which resists this. "Art wants to expand itself; it clamors to be expanded. It wants its difference from the things and beings of nature effaced. Art is, if the word can be risked, generalized, never-ending 'estrangement' -- the Medusa's head, the robots, the speeches -- without end." In this, the tendency of art is also the tendency of language. Poetry is an interruption of both, as what contests art/language's desire to make everything its analogue.

negative."[47] The idea of a negative truth makes sense of Celan's comparison in the "Meridian" of poetry to the "counter-word" (*Gegenwort*). The concept comes from the story of *Danton's Death* by Georg Büchner. In Büchner's story, Danton and his comrades, Lucille and Camille, are disenchanted with the culture of Revolutionary France and are horrified by the perversity that has overtaken the revolution. The old heroes of the revolution now face the guillotine as the purge of counter-revolutionaries takes on a life of its own. The play shows the way that the Reign of Terror is fueled by a popular obsession with the progress of humanity including its advancement in the arts and the ethical substance, the *Sittlichkeit*, of France. As Camille and Danton head toward the guillotine, about to be executed by Robespierre, Camille says something that Celan explains sticks with him. He cries out: "Ach, die Kunst!" – Alas, art! Celan calls this a "counter-word" (*Gegenwort*), a "word that snaps the 'wire,' that no longer bows to 'history's loiterers and parade-horses,' . . . an act of freedom. It is a step."[48] On this view, the poem is like the counter-word. It is only as powerful as the loss of memory or the loss of truth that it sets forth.[49]

But, like Heidegger (and unlike Adorno), Lacoue-Labarthe does not elaborate on the intersubjective character of history or memory; he only shows that they must be constructed and deconstructed poetically. This may be due to the fact that Lacoue-Labarthe also focuses on the singularity of experience, its non-discursive, extra-historical, and extra-conceptual character. After all, if the basic form of experience defies description by way of general concepts, it is easy to see why we have a hard time communicating our experience. And yet, it is important to see that Lacoue-Labarthe *does* in fact claim to recognize Celan's experience, however singular. This is more through his deed than his word. For, first, Lacoue-Labarthe cannot help but generalize from the

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[47] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 322.

[48] Paul Celan, "The Meridian," 403.

[49] According to James Lyon's research in Celan's personal library (detailed in *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation*, 2006), Celan had read Heidegger's "Wozu Dichter?" carefully and enthusiastically, and had marked the line that speaks of the poet's task as being to "attend, singing, to the trace of the fugitive gods (*singend auf die Spur der entflohenden Götter achten*)."

singular experiences he sees at issue in the poems in order to make broader claims about the nature of experience, memory, and history in general. This seems to indicate that Celan's descriptions resonated with him or at least that he could identify Celan's experience as like others that he'd observed. Second, he stands in as interpreter of Celan's poems and speeches, which requires inhabiting them in such a way that they become windows to his own world to some extent. We have said as much already of Heidegger's interpretations of Hölderlin when we suggested back in the second chapter that the interpretations demonstrate what I described there as *Mitbefindlichkeit*. Because it strongly solicits the reader to step in and participate in the construction of the event, a poem is one way that we find ourselves entangled with another through language.

One might raise a couple objections to the claim that Celan's poems can be and seek to be shared like this. For one, one might hesitate to embrace a theory of experience in poetry which generalizes from the specific historical life of Celan. If all experience is a sublime experience of nothingness, what weight does the specific historical situation that Celan lived through have? We do not survive an experience of "the lightning recognition of love" or being cast into a foreign language the same way someone survives deportation and genocide. Related to this, a second possible objection – one raised by Dominick LaCapra at a conference I attended a few years ago – concerns the need to distinguish between primary and secondary forms of witness and experience. Such a need arises, for example, in the procedures of law, where firsthand experience of crimes, no matter how unspeakable, need to be legally recognized.

Derrida's essay "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing" offers further insight on this point, in that it explains how, in the very structure of bearing witness for the witness, one must *believe* the other's experience, not have experienced or lived it. Speaking of the lines "Nobody/ bears witness for the/ witness" ("*Niemand/ zeugt für den/ Zeugen*") from the poem "Aschenglorie hinter," Derrida writes:

> The judge, the arbiter, or the addressee of the testimony is thus not a
> witness: he cannot and must not be. And yet, in the final analysis, the
> judge, arbiter, and the addressee *also* have to be witnesses; they have to be
> able to bear witness, in their turn, before their consciences or before

others, to what they have attended, to what they have been present at, to what they have been in the presence of: the testimony of the witness at the witness stand. Only on the basis of this testimony will they be able to justify, in just this way, their judgment. The judge, the arbiter, the historian also remains a witness, a witness of a witness, when he receives, evaluates, criticizes, interprets the testimony of a survivor, for instance, a survivor of Auschwitz. Whether he accepts or contests this testimony, he remains a witness of the witness.[50]

Derrida's argument holds the reader's experience of the poem and the experience that the poem originally testifies to together in their difference, disallowing, for the aforementioned legal reason among others, a conflation between the two. The power of Derrida's argument lies not only in its broad-minded sensitivity to the metaphysical requirements of the legal system but in its powerful phenomenological description of what it is to engage with and respond to a poem. His description of the need for the judge, the arbiter, and the historian to receive, evaluate, criticize, and interpret testimony re-envisions what Heidegger in "The Origin of the Work of Art" called the task of preservation. Whereas Heidegger sees that the work needs others outside of it to step in and preserve the happening of truth in the work, he specifically avoids suggesting that the preserver has an independent ground separate from the work. For Derrida, by contrast, the opening up of a testimonial work requires that one must bear witness "before one's conscience" (which, as we know from Heidegger himself, nobody can do for us.) It requires an evaluative, critical, and interpretive attitude that engages discursively with the work and insists on thinking it through in terms of relations that it did not itself set up.

Of course, the legal system operates as much as possible by precedent, by arranging testimonial procedures and arriving at decisions through precedent. Though the singularity of experience, memory, and interpretation comes into play, a legal system – *qua system* – cannot rewrite itself with each case. Poetry, on the other hand, is a system that is constantly transforming. We approach poems with a concern for letting its voice expand beyond precedent. The poet cannot know who his or her audience will be. Celan writes: "A poem, as a manifestation of language and thus essentially dialogue, can be a

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[50] Jacques Derrida, "Poetics and Politics of Witnessing" in *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. by Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 89-90.

message in a bottle, sent out in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief that somewhere and sometime it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps. Poems too are underway: they are making toward something."[51] Why is the poem written "in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief" that someone will be there to receive it? As Celan reminds us, the internal limits of a poem correspond directly to its external possibilities opened up through its readership. A poem attempts to communicate at the limits of the intelligible. Only in this way can the other that it seeks be found. But this means that there is then an intrinsic singularity and limitation to its address. A poem must always be unfinished, underway.

Let me review where this engagement with Celan has brought us with respect to the question of poetry's relationship to origins developed earlier in our reading of Heidegger's poetics. We began this section by asking about the figure of the meridian at the end of Celan's address, that which Celan announces that he has found in the presence of his audience and which is like a poem. We saw that Celan describes this as something circular, returning upon itself. And this resonated strongly with Heidegger's description of poetry as founding for the first time those conditions (history, language, political life) into which we are thrown. But from Celan's descriptions of poetry throughout the address, we know that this is only one way of describing its destination. Celan adds that the path of the poem, in addition to leading back toward oneself, also leads toward (a) a void and (b) another, an unknown addressee. Having explored in previous chapters language's ecstatic identity (being beyond itself) and the communicative contexts that condition language this way, we were in a good position to develop how these two directions belong together. The figure of the meridian, like ordinary language and like the poem, is both a circle that maintains a single, cohesive identity and a circle that drastically changes as it revolves.

As such, the poem's opening up of a world is never complete unto itself. Its opening depends on the existence of others who co-open it. This is why the distance that the poem takes from worldly relations is never that of the "absolute poem" (*das absolute*

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[51] Paul Celan, "Speech on Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen," 396.

Gedicht). The poem, I would like to say, rather, finds itself placeless, rootless – "pointing into the open and void and free" *only in response to the presence or the demand of another*. Only from this angle is the ecstatic character of the poem (what Lacoue-Labarthe describes in terms of its asubjectivity) a path of homecoming. "Here too, in your presence, I've taken this path. It was a circle"[52] ("*Ich bin, auch hier, in Ihrer Gegenwart, diesen Weg gegangen. Es war ein Kreis*").[53] This is, in the sense developed in the last chapter, a therapeutic path – one where communication is enriched precisely through the limits of speech. Here the basic act of communicative exchange is the poetic appeal, one that is not divorced from discursive norms, but an act that nevertheless insists on redefining the criteria for communication at every instance of communication.

In the following respect, Heidegger's and Celan's poetics resonate with one another. For both, the distance that the poem takes from experience and the ready-to-hand world is different from the skepticism toward communication that often accompanies many experiences of language estrangement. The mood of the poet is neither one of skepticism nor of certainty. It is simultaneously one of hope and despair. Celan calls this, as we saw earlier, a projection of existence. Poetry runs ahead of what it can be certain of. Thus, the poet finds himself or herself projecting the path upon which he or she hopes to communicate, not anxious before the uncertainty of the protocol for the desired communication. Likewise, as we saw in the last chapter, Heidegger chooses to describe the poetic mood as one of a pain that is attuned to both joy and sadness. Thus, when Heidegger says that the poet "could never go through the experience he undergoes with the word if the experience were not attuned to sadness, to the mood of releasement into the nearness of what is withdrawn but at the same time held in reserve for an originary advent,"[54] he is near to the spirit of Celan's poetics. Throughout Celan's poems, the withdrawal of the origin is near. One could see this in "Engführung," the poem we looked

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[52] Paul Celan, "The Meridian," 411.

[53] Paul Celan, *Paul Celan, Der Meridian: Endfassung, Entwürfe, Materialien*, 11.

[54] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper Collins, 1971), 66.

at earlier through Szondi's analysis. There the ground quickly disappears and the poem gives the reader the sense of continual displacement. But an even stronger example of a poem that resonates with Heidegger's insight is "Tenebrae." The first three stanzas of the poem read as follows:

> Near are we, Lord,
> near and graspable.
>
> Grasped already, Lord,
> clawed into each other, as if
> each of our bodies were
> your body, Lord.
>
> Pray, Lord,
> pray to us,
> we are near.
>
>
> *Nah sind wir, Herr*
> *nahe und greifbar*
>
> *Gegriffen schon, Herr,*
> *ineinander verkrallt, als wär*
> *der Leib eines jeden von uns*
> *dein Leib, Herr.*
>
> *Bete, Herr,*
> *bete zu uns,*
> *wir sind nah.*[55]

As Gadamer's reading of the poem points out, the confrontation in the poem oversteps the boundary generally set up between the human and the divine.[56] It speaks "into the nearness of what is withdrawn." What precisely has withdrawn has no simple answer, I believe. Gadamer and others look to the title of the poem for a clue. "Tenebrae" refers to the extinguishing of Christ's breath during the crucifixion as well as a special service

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[55] Paul Celan, "Tenebrae" in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 102-103.

[56] See "Meaning and Concealment of Meaning," a reading focused entirely on "Tenebrae" in the book *Gadamer on Celan: "Who am I and Who are You?" and Other Essays* (SUNY, 1997).

during Catholic Holy Week commemorating the crucifixion. Gadamer thus uses the title in order to pinpoint Christ's death as the withdrawing at issue in the poem. Other accounts of what has withdrawn point to the losses described earlier: the loss of a culture, the home of a religious tradition, faith in humanity, etc. But again, as Szondi points out, when the poem leaves all of these meanings and motivations in play, it does not just decide on one. The one thing that we can say for sure is that the theme of a withdrawing ground is prevalent throughout Celan's work, and – as we have said – the poems' power of articulation is tied to this void. Thus, both authors speak to the poetic mood as a volatile one. In "The Meridian," for example, Celan writes: "The poem is lonely. It is lonely and underway" ("*Das Gedicht ist einsam. Es ist einsam und unterwegs*"). The poem always occurs in conjunction with a withdrawal of something in the world. But, for Celan, as we have said, it nevertheless remains always tied to worlds outside of its own as well. The multiplicity of possible interpretations, each of which connect the poem to different contexts, confirms this continuing relationality.

In conclusion, I believe that it is, in the end, possible to argue that through the participation of different interpretations which open up the work, a kind of originality occurs. For it is in the encounter with each addressee that the poem reaches an origin. But such interpretation must always involve tying the work back to relations which co-exist alongside it and do not emanate directly from it. Moreover, the poem itself is no longer the place where this origination occurs. Rather, it is in the *encounter* between the poem, in its attempt to speak at the limit of what can be said, and the listener, who runs ahead to meet it, that an original event takes place.

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE: THE CLAIM OF LANGUAGE

In different ways, each of the chapters within this project has turned around the following tension. Language's claim upon our lives is, on the one hand, relentless and all-encompassing. Our thoughts and our experiences are structured by discursive elements that we inherit from others, and we absorb them as we absorb culture and history. Language is thus one of our most basic forms of knowledge. To a significant extent, it is through it that we develop ways of understanding our world, ourselves, and others. Thus, it makes sense that philosophical science has turned its sights to language systems in order to better understand the rules internal to them. For if language mediates between our knowledge and all objects of knowledge, it makes sense to look to the medium in order to set down the grounds and the limits for thought. On the other hand, when out of our desire to know the medium, we inch our way closer toward language, the system up-close is full of holes. The net of language that seemed at first relentless and all-encompassing appears held up at its most foundational points by experiences of language as placeless, lost, or lacking.

The first chapter demonstrated how philosophical and poetic processes of discourse – both which question or otherwise unsettle our familiar use of words – are pivotal to certain accounts which otherwise seem to announce the permanence and stability of words in ordinary language, namely, in the *Tractatus* and *Philosophical Investigations* of Ludwig Wittgenstein and in a poem, "Das Wort," by Stefan George. From a certain perspective, these works strongly denounce philosophical and poetic discourse on account of the way they unsettle and try to transform the relentless net of language. But what George's poem plainly reveals and what Wittgenstein's work obliquely admits through its confession of absurdity is that the process by which one

finds oneself determined by inherited discourses is also a path upon which language appears contingent on what it receives from the outside. History itself makes this point when we consider that philosophy's turn toward the task of grounding language betrays its own purpose, since a language that needs grounding from the outside can only ever have something external as its ground, something that in a way also ungrounds it.

Martin Heidegger's work on language, especially the essays and lectures from the 1950's collected in *On the Way to Language*, provided us from the very beginning with ways of describing the complex dynamics of language's being. While most philosophy of language at that time, like much of it later, focused on the immediate way in which language determines our existence, appealing often to the notion of a common sense about words that language users share whether they know it or not, Heidegger resisted such appeals. Heidegger acknowledges that we are entangled in language usage prior to any attempt to thematize what this entanglement means. As such, our relationship to language is, he tells us, "vague, obscure, almost speechless."[1] But this does not mean, for him, that we should not attempt to thematize it. Everything depends, for Heidegger, on bringing our relationship to language to word. What this will require, however, is not approaching language scientifically and explaining it in terms of concepts borrowed from the *topos* of, say, human activity or spirit. Rather, throughout *On the Way to Language*, Heidegger urges us to come face-to-face with the experience of language and, in so doing, to let it appear on its own terms. His approach is therefore a phenomenological one, and based on what we have explored in the fourth chapter, also a poetic one. It draws our attention to the groundlessness of our relationship to language, to its independence from any subjective ground from which we might suspect it derives.

The second chapter looks more closely at how our entanglement within language, the way it always exceeds the individual subject's use and intention, pertains to our entanglement in factical social life more generally. The chapter asked whether the argument that we must find a way to language and therefore that we do not truly dwell with it in our normal usage entailed some kind of skepticism toward our social being. By

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[1] Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language" in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 58.

looking back at a few sections from *Being and Time*, we saw how Heidegger understands our thrownness into language and the social relations that go along with it in terms of Dasein's general condition. The environmental remoteness of what is most near, those tools, habits, and contexts that we use and live through everyday are, Heidegger says, the most hidden and obscure for thought. As for the issue of skepticism, our journey into *Being and Time* led us to see that being perpetually thrown – through moods and other ways of finding ourselves (*Befindlichkeit*), Dasein no more immediately dwells with its own thoughts or experiences than it does with the world "external" to it. Heidegger makes this point most clearly in his discussion of translation in his lectures on Hölderlin's "Der Ister." There Heidegger writes that we must translate what is our own in order to dwell with it.

It was at this point in the project that my own attempt to bring our obscure relationship to language to word first diverged from Heidegger's path. For while Heidegger's discussion of translation definitely carried forward the concept of perpetual thrownness from *Being and Time*, applying it to the practice of cross-cultural translation, it also underemphasized the need for translation between those speakers who speak "the same" language. The difference at issue in translation was construed again and again by Heidegger as the encounter between national peoples – specifically those of Ancient Greece and modern Germany. Did not our everyday conversations with people in our own communities require an interpretive mood as well? Moreover, was it not this sort of encounter that conditioned us most of all to experience language entanglement in the first place?

The third chapter pressed on along this path, parallel but separate from Heidegger's own. In order to work out how exactly normal, everyday encounters require an interpretive attitude toward and a critical distance from our own language, this chapter drew from structuralist linguisitics and psychoanalysis, two discourses often kept separate from phenomenology. Echoing Heidegger's idea that we find ourselves always already using language prior to our reflections on it, psychoanalysis claims that our entrance into language is from the beginning always in response to others to whom we

remain deeply entangled as we mature and otherwise develop as individuals. It is for this reason that language is never our own, nor is it – psychoanalysis says – under the dominion of the ego. Language is, instead, other to the ego. This may often take the form of an antithetical relationship between one's sense of oneself and the world of language, the world out there accessible to all. Such a condition, according to Julia Kristeva, is characteristic of melancholy.

But through his research in language development and linguistic categories, Roman Jakobson argues that this tension is actually fundamental to all language systems. For all languages depend on what he calls shifters, words which have both a singular and general meaning. Shifters are thus complex linguistic categories, and it is no surprise that in cases of aphasia, where one's speech capacities regress, one loses the ability to hold both functions together at once. This capacity for dual-function speech, for Jakobson, is also tied to the capacity for substitution. Ordinary communication requires that we be able to switch from one code to another and, in order to do this, we must be able to let go of a given idiom, our absorption into a single language, and translate for another.

We only do this, though, in response to another. In other words, we switch codes when communication requires it. There are, therefore, intersubjective conditions which enable us to engage in translation or substitution, which are, again, basic to any language. Thus, some theorists have pointed to the importance of dialogical rhetorical conditions in helping individuals estranged from language to invest again in communication. Through the kind of dialogue that is exemplified, for example, in psychoanalytic transference, others can help us work through the tension between feeling absorbed in single, idiomatic speech situations and feeling at a distance from our words. The therapeutic process outlined by Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva takes advantage of the difference between the descriptive and performative aspects (Butler) and the semiotic and symbolic aspects (Kristeva) of language. Since one's estrangement from language often entails an inability to locate oneself in the symbolic order or in the normative descriptions available, both thinkers see tremendous therapeutic possibilities in those aspects of language that are structurally other to the symbolic and the descriptive. Both Butler and Kristeva thus

develop how disclosing one's life through language involves the caring recognition of others.

This is not something that one finds thoroughly developed in Heidegger's work; however, I argued in this chapter that there are nevertheless strong parallels between Kristeva and Heidegger that justify the hypothesis that Heidegger's project, insofar as it is a desire to recognize the fundamental tension in the speaking subject, is also a kind of therapeutic project. Heidegger's claim that poetic work requires an attunement to both joy and sadness in any case strongly echoes Kristeva's argument in *Black Sun* that there is only meaning when there is also melancholy.

Chapter four returns to Heidegger again, this time focusing on his discussion of poetry. While the previous chapter had used the example of psychoanalytic transference to describe how individuals can work through language entanglement, the fourth chapter describes how poetry can accomplish this task. Because of the extensive focus on social conditions in the previous chapter, the important question here is to what extent social interaction is involved in the way that poetry brings forth language. Heidegger's poetics powerfully articulates how shared worlds of meaning or norms of communication emerge through poetic works. In this way, he demonstrates again ordinary language's need to be grounded by what will always remains outside of that system. Going back to the language of *Being and Time*, we can say that Heidegger's poetics shows that ordinary language is always thrown outside of itself into the always-external, always-marginal space of poetry. It is this kind of perpetual thrownness that Heidegger calls the poem's founding activity.

But while Heidegger insists that *Dichtung* has a vitally important role to play in establishing discourse communities, he does not fully consider how the poem maintains ties to worldly relations that it itself does not open up. The last chapter, therefore, turned to the poetics of Paul Celan, a poetics that is very much in dialogue with Heidegger's writings on language and poetry. For Celan, we saw, the distance that the poem takes from worldly relations, from ordinary language, is aimed not at the establishment of a decisive truth event discontinuous from others but at soliciting the participation of its readers. As such, it does not attempt to achieve the status of an original ontological event.

It remains within the world opened up by others – other interpreters and other works. Celan's poetics therefore offers an alternative path from Heidegger's *way to language*. For he insists more strongly than Heidegger that poetic language maintains a deep kinship with ordinary language, a hypothesis that the second and third chapters explored in some depth. Moreover, Celan offers us a different measure for coming to terms with the human relationship to language, in that the figure that he offers is not quite a circle that returns back to its origin. For on its path toward language, it transforms each time it encounters the possibility of a new communication.

The path of my own project has taken a similar route. In trying to give a phenomenological description of how we find ourselves in language, I have encountered voices and inherited concerns that have made my own route back to this conclusion an imperfect circle. But what has originated through this project, I believe, is a rich description of why human beings find it necessary for various reasons to enrich the way that they initially relate to language. Whether we describe this as an existential necessity or a political necessity arising from our deliberations with others, it falls upon philosophy to open up a space for individuals to find their own paths into language.

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