

PETER  
SLOTERDIJK

Not Saved

Essays  
after  
Heidegger





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# Peter Sloterdijk

## Not Saved

Essays after Heidegger

Translated by Ian Alexander Moore  
and Christopher Turner

polity

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# Translators' Introduction

The present text represents the first complete English translation of Peter Sloterdijk's 2001 *Nicht gerettet: Versuche nach Heidegger*. Alternate translations of two of Sloterdijk's essays or attempts (*Versuche*), namely, "Rules for the Human Park: A Response to Heidegger's 'Letter on 'Humanism'" and "'An Essential Tendency toward Nearness Lies In Dasein': Marginalia to Heidegger's Doctrine of Existential Place," can be found, respectively, under Peter Sloterdijk, "*Rules for the Human Zoo: A Response to the Letter on Humanism*," trans. Mary Varney Rorty, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27 (2009): 12–28, and Peter Sloterdijk, "'In Dasein There Lies an Essential Tendency towards Closeness': Heidegger's Doctrine of Existential Place," in Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres*, vol. 1: *Microspherology*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 333–342, 648–649. Other than using language consistent with other chapters in the volume, our new translation of "'In Dasein There Lies an Essential Tendency towards Closeness'" does not substantially improve upon Hoban's able rendering in *Spheres*. Our new translation of "Rules for the Human Park," however, rectifies numerous errors and omissions in the previous English version. We have opted in favor of "Rules for the Human *Park*," rather than "*Zoo*," because Sloterdijk means more by the German *Park* than simply the enclosure of animals. He speaks of city parks, national parks, state parks, political theme parks, and eco-parks. He also speaks, on occasion, of zoos and zoological parks. We have therefore preserved the distinction between zoo and park throughout the volume.<sup>1</sup>

Brief selections from "Luhmann, Devil's Advocate: Of Original Sin, the Egotism of Systems, and the New Ironies" and "The

Domestication of Being: The Clarification of the Clearing” are also available, respectively, in alternate translation under Peter Sloterdijk, “The Devil’s Advocate, between the Ethical and the Systemic,” in *The Future of Values: 21st-Century Talks*, ed. Jérôme Bindé, trans. John Corbett (New York/Berghahn/Paris: UNESCO, 2004), 34–40, and Peter Sloterdijk, “Anthropo-Technology,” ed. Nathan Gardels, *New Perspectives Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 17–20; the latter was republished in *New Perspectives Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (November 2004): 40–44, and *New Perspectives Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (January 2014): 12–19. “The Time of the Crime of the Monstrous: On the Philosophical Justification of the Artificial” was originally translated by Wieland Hoban and first appeared in *Sloterdijk Now*, ed. Stuart Elden (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), 164–181, 201–202. We have modified Hoban’s translation slightly for inclusion in this volume.

The most challenging aspect of translating Sloterdijk’s book has been the Heideggerian terminology he frequently employs and creatively appropriates. *Sein* has been rendered as Being (with a capital ‘B’), in order to distinguish it from the present participle and from the latter’s nominalized form, *das Seiende* or *ein Seiendes*, which appear respectively as ‘beings’ or ‘a being’ (with a lowercase ‘b’). We have translated the German *Seyn*, an archaic spelling of *Sein*, with the archaic English ‘beyng.’ When appropriate, the term *Wesen* also appears as ‘being,’ such as in the terms *Menschenwesen* (‘human being’) and *Lebewesen* (‘living being’). *Dasein*, Heidegger’s term for the human being, or that being whose Being is an issue for it, has been left untranslated and unitalicized, except where Sloterdijk employs it in its more common sense of ‘existence.’

The distinction Heidegger makes between *existenzial* (to refer to ontological structures of Dasein and the theoretical understanding of them) and *existenziell* (to refer to particular ways in which Dasein carries out its existence) has also been preserved by the terms ‘existential’ and ‘existentiell.’ *Ereignis* has been translated as ‘event,’ except where Sloterdijk uses it in a more Heideggerian vein, in which case it has been rendered as ‘appropriative event’ to highlight the valence of bringing something into its own (*eigen*) or what is proper to it. Heidegger’s *Lichtung* (and its cognates) appears throughout as

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the discussion in Peter Sloterdijk, with Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs, *Neither Sun nor Death*, trans. Steve Corcoran (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2011), 59. Cf. also the French translation, which uses *parc* and not *zoo*: “Règles pour le parc humaine,” in *La domestication de l’être: Pour un éclaircissement de la clairière*, trans. Olivier Mannoni (Paris: Éditions Milles et une nuits, 2000).

'clearing' (and its cognates). *Gelassenheit* appears as 'releasement' or, in its adjectival form, as 'serenely released.'

We have translated *ungeheuer* as either 'monstrous' or 'immense,' or used a hendiadys when Sloterdijk seems to intend both senses. The adjective *monströs* always appears as 'monstrous.' Depending on context, we have rendered the term *technisch* sometimes as 'technical,' and sometimes (as with *technologisch*) as 'technological.' *Technik*, for its part, appears as 'technology,' 'technique,' or 'technics,' as in the term 'anthropotechnics.' The reader should bear in mind that it has a much broader sense than the modern apparatuses developed from scientific knowledge. 'Science,' for its part, translates the German *Wissenschaft*, which refers to any domain of systematic research, including the humanities.

Unless otherwise indicated, bracketed text in the body and endnotes of the translation is our own.

We have occasionally used different translations of the same text, such as with Heidegger's *Being and Time*, depending on which version we thought best captured the particular context under discussion.

Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Henry Dicks, who kindly read through the manuscript and offered countless suggestions for improvement.

# Preface

*Essays after Heidegger*—the subtitle of this collection of lectures and essays—simply means that the author, through no fault of his own, finds himself in a time after the thinker, such that he can take up the man and the work historically and compare them with other eminent figures of the twentieth century's intellectual history, of which the essays reprinted here on Luhmann and the older Critical Theory furnish examples. Somewhat less trivially, the subtitle wishes to indicate that not everything which concerns Heidegger's work belongs to the past; rather, it is always still possible, advisable, fruitful, and perhaps scandalous to pursue Heidegger's indications and follow up on some of his suggestions. This circumstance can be most readily observed in the "Human Park" speech and even more so in "The Domestication of Being," which completes it. Lastly, the formulation *Essays after Heidegger* means that a theoretical terrain is opened up after Heidegger that one only encounters when—thinking with Heidegger against Heidegger, to cite a turn of phrase of an erstwhile reader of Heidegger, as well known as it is inconsequential—one has freed oneself from the master's hypnosis, so as to arrive, not least thanks to his strengths, at a position that, according to everything that we know of him, would have displeased him. This stance, both near and distant, is most readily expressed in the introductory piece "The Plunge and the Turn," which essays an intimate portrait of the thinker and at the same time, as from a great distance, sketches him into a tableau of Old European intellectual culture. We need not comment on the title itself. The god who could still save us is taking his time.

If anything estimable has resulted from the fact that Heidegger is becoming infamous on account of books that have exposed and

incriminated him, such as Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism*, then perhaps it is because the question concerning the possibilities of drawing on a blameworthy thinker was thereby radicalized. More than is customary, they compel later authors to give an account of the conditions of didactic relations between the philosophical generations of the twentieth century. By their one-sidedness they testify to the fact that in the ongoing "Age of Suspicion" the relations of power between distrust and trust are still out of balance. Whoever wants to draw on Heidegger today must pass through a flaming wall of suspicions without being certain in advance that the discoveries on the other side of the fire are worth the cost.

The present speeches and essays are on the lookout for the place where the bond of common learning can perhaps be rejoined, beyond accusation and apology. This would be nowhere more helpful than in the 'social philosophy' of the present moment, which only tentatively emerges from the shadows of extremism. One has still not paid sufficient attention to the extent to which the terror of grand politics has stamped the intellectual physiognomy of the past century. We are still waiting for a suitable presentation of its reflection in the terror-mimetic constructs of grand and critical theory. In a few passages in the present book, I allude to what such a presentation would have to achieve;<sup>1</sup> beyond this, I attempt to conceptualize which efforts are needed to free thought from its fixations on standards from the "age of extremes." Heidegger's accomplishment—and because of it the indispensability of his voice in the conversation of the present age with the future—in my opinion consists in the fact that, under the title of the question of Being, he worked for his entire life on a logic of commitment that, even before the division of ontology and ethics, remained on the trail of the antagonism between liberating and compulsory tendencies in the Dasein of those who die and those who are born. Heidegger's investigations thus belong to the ascendance of a problem that is the most serious thing to be thought today, that is, they belong to the development of a theory of participatory relations that is combined with a critique of emergency reasoning [*Ernstfall-Vernunft*].<sup>2</sup>

The essays in this volume are collected renunciations of exhaustive detail. They present findings from the 1990s, with the exception of the text "What Is Solidarity with Metaphysics at the Moment of Its Fall?" whose oldest parts can be traced back to a lecture held in Rotterdam in 1989 on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Adorno's death. They originated between 1993 ("*Alētheia* or the Fuse of Truth") and 2000 ("The Domestication of Being"), and were as a rule contributions to conferences and symposia. Hence all of them are elliptical, if one defines the ellipsis as the art form of

precipitousness. Only the third text, for substantive reasons, comes a little closer to the conventional ideal of exhaustive detail. More recent additions have been included in footnotes and as additions to the texts. In addition to the speech “Rules for the Human Park,” which achieved a distorted renown by being taken out of context, a few other texts from this collection have been published here and there, among other places in a French anthology that contained older versions of the speeches “The Plunge and the Turn,” “Wounded by Machines,” “The Time of the Crime of the Monstrous,” and the Cioran essay.<sup>3</sup> I would like to mention that the two introductory pieces, the one on Heidegger’s “Thinking in Motion” (1996) and the other on Luhmann (“Devil’s Advocate,” 1999), had their baptismal debut at the Freiburg City Theater. They trace back to invitations from the Institut für soziale Gegenwartsfragen [The Institute for Contemporary Social Questions], which during the second half of the 1990s conducted a series of matinees in collaboration with the Städtische Bühnen Freiburg [Urban Stages of Freiburg] and what was then Südwestfunk [Southwest Radio] under the title “Denker auf der Bühne” [Thinkers on the Stage]. For these impetuses and for including me in such stimulating contexts I am grateful to the organizers in Freiburg, especially Christian Matthiessen. As a token of this I have retained certain rhetorical figures in both texts, including the address “ladies and gentlemen.”

Only in reading the texts can one learn about their internal coherence. I would like to note that I find satisfaction in being able to present together what belongs together. The speech “Rules for the Human Park,” which for extrinsic reasons I have reprinted nearly unchanged (with minor improvements of a stylistic nature), benefits from this in particular. It now appears, as planned, alongside its neighboring essays “*Alētheia* or the Fuse of Truth” and above all “Wounded by Machines.” The note “The Time of the Crime of the Monstrous” also belongs in their vicinity. The micro-historical critique of humanism in the human park speech is now to be considered together with the macro-historical definition of humanity in the “Wounded” essay. The remarks on ‘anthropotechnics’ are recontextualized with references to Western culture’s calendar of truth and the continuum of the phantasms of a technological imitation of nature. The anthropological and techno-philosophical implications of the human park speech are developed more broadly in the central essay of this volume, “The Domestication of Being: The Clarification of the Clearing,” which was initially written for an international colloquium on questions of biotechnology that took place at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris in March 2000.<sup>4</sup> The concluding section of this essay, “The Operable Human Being,” was delivered

as a lecture and discussed separately in various forums, such as at Harvard University's Center for European Studies in Cambridge, at a conference on questions of the biotechnological formation of the human being at UCLA and the Goethe Institute in Los Angeles in May 2000, at the Philosophical Seminar of the Universidad Autonoma in Madrid in October 2000, and at a forum organized by the newspaper *Le Monde* concerning technophobic and technophilic tendencies of modern society in Le Mans in November of the same year, as well as a meeting of the working group *Wissenschaft und Verantwortung* [Science and Responsibility], held by the Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker-Gesellschaft in Munich. On the whole, "The Domestication of Being" sums up a series of lectures and seminars from past years that were devoted to historical anthropology, paleo-psychology, media theory, and the philosophy of cybernetics.

In the third section of the lecture "On Critical and Exaggerated Theory" there is a reference to the hyperbolic dynamic of philosophical texts, which can perhaps be read *pro domo*. If, following the rhetorical tradition, one understands hyperbole as a "proper exaggeration of the truth,"<sup>5</sup> what then is philosophy other than the search for the proportion between that which is exaggerated and that which is not exaggerated that would be convincing for the present day?





# 1

## THE PLUNGE AND THE TURN

*Speech on Heidegger's Thinking in Motion*

### 1. Prelude in the Theater

Ladies and gentlemen, a few years ago, while walking around the campus of Bard College, one of the academic institutions in the state of New York favored by students from the upper-middle classes, which is situated a hundred miles north of New York City on the eastern bank of the Hudson River, I discovered—almost accidentally—the resting place of Hannah Arendt, that admirable and provocative philosopher, whose early love for Martin Heidegger is today not only a secret that has been disclosed, but was also able to be portrayed as a chapter of recent intellectual history—lately in Rüdiger Safranski's rightly much-praised biography of Heidegger. Hannah Arendt's grave is distinguished by its unusual simplicity—if one may speak in such contradictory terms: a stone slab on the flat earth with her name and the dates of her birth and death. One step to the side is the gravestone of her husband, the philosopher Heinrich Blücher, just as simple, taken back to the trinity: name, dates, stone. What touched me about Hannah Arendt's gravesite was the extraordinariness of its location. I do not mean the inconspicuousness of the place, nor the dignified lack of fuss that these two stones on the earth evinced. What astonished me was the fact that I found myself obviously at a campus cemetery at which the earlier presidents of the college and a number of professors, who no doubt had felt especially connected to the college, were laid to rest. A small island of the dead in the midst of the college grounds, a *locus amoenus*, planted with conifers and evergreen bushes, a meditative enclave, hardly a hundred steps from the library.

Apart from that, the small cemetery was an almost unmarked

space, without surrounding walls, as if, for the inhabitants of this region, there were no reason to distinguish the living and the dead in such a way as to necessitate a wall that would divide them. Thus a cemetery of professors—I must admit that a certain amazement overcame me at this sight, an amazement that in retrospect I would like to call Old European and that was perhaps equally both disconcerting and exhilarating. At the time I was in the process of beginning to contemplate whether I should take up the expected call for a professorship in Germany. Here in America it was now discreetly shown to me how far one can go as a professor. Up to that point it had not been clear that a session of the faculty senate could last an eternity—assuming that one had been a member of American academia during one's life. What European professor would today be laid to rest at a university's own cemetery? What university in the Old World possesses so much *esprit de corps* and community spirit that it would be embodied as a virtual community of dead and living teachers, as was so clearly revealed by the small campus cemetery on the Hudson River? In today's Europe, who would be so identified with his teaching position that he would take up the call beyond the end and wish to be interred among only colleagues and schoolmasters?

In light of Hannah Arendt's grave, a few aspects of American spatial planning have become somewhat more understandable to me. I have learned to observe at least three boundaries more attentively than before, boundaries that in the United States were sometimes drawn differently than in the Old World: the boundary between the city and the countryside; the boundary between the university and the city; finally, the boundary between the cemetery and the world of the living. It became clear to me that the philosopher, in allowing herself to be laid to rest next to her husband, a charismatic teacher who had belonged to the college for decades, had not chosen to be buried in a village, as did her former teacher and lover in Marburg, Martin Heidegger, when he decided on the cemetery in Messkirch as his last resting place. According to statistical criteria, there is no more remote province than Annandale-on-Hudson; one can scarcely imagine a place where the village, the first thesis, as it were, of humanity vis-à-vis nature, contrasts with the countryside so tentatively and almost helplessly as it does here. And yet the campus cemetery is not a village cemetery. The campus is the university abstracted from the urban body; the university, for its part, embodies in an ideal form the place where cities are most of all urban.

Campus, academy, university, college: these are the names of institutions or spaces that testify to the irruption of the world that has been extended by theory into cities. They indicate where plain

human settlements were used for great purposes. Where universities and academies are established, provincial towns change into cosmopolitan cities. The United States of America, the hyperbolic European colony, has even managed to disconnect the logical heart of the city from the urban body and to isolate it under the name 'campus,' field of studies—not seldom like a backdrop in a countryside in which professors emerge as the first human beings.

I would thus like to say that Hannah Arendt's grave, in a manner different from that of Martin Heidegger's, in spatio-logical terms, lies in the midst of the cosmopolitan city, in the center of that academic space in which Western cities could become cosmopolitan cities and native sons could become world citizens, so long as they did not misuse universities as extensions of provincial life. Viewed in this light, the emigrant Hannah Arendt never left European soil behind; when in the 1930s she immigrated first to France and then to the United States, she simply relocated from a tainted province to a more open zone—from a Europe in the hands of the Nazis to a metropolis that was manifestly called New York but whose latent name could be nothing other than Athens. Athens was the real country to which Hannah Arendt immigrated, on the one hand because the first academic city symbolizes the reformatting of thought in the transition from the village to the city, on the other hand because the Greek right to hospitality kept the necessary resources available for Jewish and other exiles. Thus it comes about that the philosopher lies interred in one of the noblest cemeteries on earth, on the fringes of the campus that signifies the world, in a corner that we may not even call a village, in a hamlet that, because it is a part of Athens, nevertheless bears in itself the *universitas*.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would not have permitted myself to reminisce on Hannah Arendt's transatlantic last resting place in this typifying manner if I had not intended to characterize Martin Heidegger's place in the history of ideas and problems in the century that is now coming to a close by way of contrast to this choice of place. I would not have ventured this suggestion were I not of the opinion that Heidegger's position becomes immediately and vividly discernable when we think of the imaginary line that leads from the grave on the American campus to the grave at the Messkirch cemetery. I do not hesitate to claim that Heidegger's burial arrangements also testify to something that is philosophically significant. If the master from Germany did not choose any other site for his last resting place than the rural town's church cemetery, whose native he wished to remain—under a gravestone adorned not by a cross, but rather by a small star—then there is a piece of information here that is ignored only by one who preemptively refuses to believe the

lessons that lie in that decision. One must explicitly note, as though it were a proposition, that Professor Heidegger's grave is not found on a campus but rather in a rural cemetery, not in a university town but rather tucked away in a little town with a pious name, not in the vicinity of lecture halls and libraries where the philosopher had been at work but rather not far from the houses and fields of his childhood, as though the tenured professor at the illustrious Albert-Ludwigs-Universität refused moving to the urban world even *in extremis*.

In what follows, I sketch a philosophical physiognomy of Heidegger, the thinker of motion, which takes its point of departure from this discovery: the thinker, whom many, without doubt rightly, consider to be one of the movers of philosophy at the end of this twentieth century, is someone who in terms of his personal dynamic refuses to move, who can only be at home in the vicinity of his original landscapes, and who even as a professor never actually relocated to the city where he held his chair.

It is not hard to see the contradiction to which this diagnosis would like to call attention. For if Western philosophy, as was sometimes claimed, actually emerged from the urban spirit, if it was an eruption of the city into a world-function and an irruption of great world-dimensions into the local soul, then what are we to make of the theoretical temperament of a man who never concealed his aversion for the city and his stubborn attachment to the spirits of the rural world? From where does this odd professor speak when from his chair in Freiburg he claims to inquire beyond the history and fate of Western metaphysics? What province does Heidegger mean when he takes it to be a relevant philosophical act that he of all people remains there instead of following the call to the big city? Is there a provincial truth of which the cosmopolitan city knows nothing? Is there a truth of the field path and the cabin that would be able to undermine the university, together with its refined language and globally influential discourses?

I will not attempt to answer these questions here. Only this seems certain to me: Heidegger was not a thinker on the stage, at least not if one proceeds from the everyday understanding of this formulation.<sup>1</sup> He is not a thinker on the stage in a twofold sense: on the one hand, because the theater and the stage are at home in the religion of the city and in urban culture, thus in the political formation that, although a professor, Heidegger obstinately opposed like a visitor from the country—at best like an ambassador from a region without cities or from a community of shared problems that is grounded not in space but rather in time; on the other hand, because every stage, metaphorical and real, implies a central position, an exposure to

the front-and-center of visibility. However, that is a position that Heidegger, even at the height of his fame, could never have seriously sought, according to his whole mental disposition, because his place, inside and outwardly, remained that of someone on the margins and a collaborator. He does not think on the stage but rather in the background, at best on the side stage, or in a Catholic context, not before the high altar but rather in the sacristy. Because of influences that are older than his thought, he came to the conviction that what is visible and prominent, what is right in the middle, lives from the inconspicuous preparation of assistants backstage and in the wings. He too is such an assistant, and that is what he wants to be: a pioneer, a second, someone who blends into a greater event—in no case, or at least only momentarily and awkwardly, is he the hero standing center stage. Heidegger is never actually a protagonist who exposes himself in exemplary battles to the heroic risk of being seen on all sides. Moments of apparent deep emotion cannot change anything in this regard. A hidden power was at work in him, which was neither exhibited nor explained, let alone admitted or apologized for. When distressed or embarrassed, he tended to fall silent, and no god gave him the words to say how he suffered.

It seems important to me, in everything having to do with Heidegger's spiritual physiognomy, to take into consideration his father's occupation as a sexton. If, in his biographical studies, Hugo Ott has plausibly argued that much in Heidegger's thought is only understandable as a metastasis of southwestern German Old Catholicism circa 1900, then we should add that it was not so much a priestly Catholicism, thus a Catholicism of the high altar and the nave, that formed Heidegger's disposition; it was rather a Catholicism of the side aisle, a Catholicism of the sexton and altar boy, a religiosity of the quiet assistant on the periphery, desperate for acceptance.

One could only in a very precarious sense characterize Heidegger as a thinker on the stage, by imputing to him the dream of an impending state of exception that would convey him to his destiny. One might perhaps do that if one lends credence to the suspicion that the sexton's son was incapable of doing anything other than day-dreaming that, one day—through a wondrous, deeply grounded reversal—his diligent father would be transformed into an acting priest, so that, on a fateful day not far off, all power would issue from the sacristy. One would have to further assume that the fantasy must have arisen in the son that he himself had been called to take up the heritage of an official sexton. Only in this sense can Heidegger's hazy political philosophy—above all his gauche agitation in the eleventh month of his rectorship from 1933 to 1934 and his ministrations for the fateful

chancellor in far-off Berlin—be interpreted as thinking in the form of a High Mass on a phantasmal stage. Here, as sexton in charge, he would have thus become a liturgical revolutionary, who administers to an unredeemed people an astoundingly ancient sacrament—non-Catholic hosts and Presocratic wine. In this heterodox rite, that which was previously inconspicuous would be brought forward triumphantly, what was an accessory would become the main thing, the courtyard would be transformed into the central structure, the sacristy would become the lecture hall, and the lecture hall would become the logical Chancellery of the Reich. To make such a dream seem plausible only one additional assumption is necessary, which, so I believe, has quite a bit going for it. This can be obtained by interpreting the Catholic Mass in terms of theater studies. In these terms, the Mass and High Mass are mystery plays of a Catholic kind in typological proximity to, and with a historical line of succession from, the Athenian Dionysia. If this is granted, then the Mass would appear to be tragedy returned to the rite once again, the de-dramatized goat-song, static and without the aspect of expression, as unsuitable for upswell as it is for subsiding. In light of this analogy it becomes conceivable why the mass could never have developed into a Catholic religion of the theater: Catholicism recoils from the introduction of the second actor into the Mass. It never found the power to repeat Aeschylus's bold innovation, after which the dramatic genius of the Greek playwrights, who were at that time called *theologoi*, was first able to break ground. The goat-song, in Catholic terms, had to remain hierarchical and centered on priests. It could not renounce the monarchy of the first actor in the Mass. No second individual separated itself from the chorus. It is thus obvious why Catholicism neglected to transition from the drama of the Mass to a theatrical culture of the cathedral, perhaps to the detriment of European civilization as a whole. Now if it is true that Heidegger half-consciously and subconsciously arranged to take over the sanctuary from the position of the sacristy, in order to set a monstrous sexton alongside the undermined priest, a thinking sexton who at the same time held the rectorship of a mobilized university, then, seen from a distance, this would correspond—yet only on the stage of the dream—to an Aeschylean reform of Catholicism and the introduction of a second actor into the Mass. Thus it remains the case: Heidegger is no thinker on the stage.

That is not a surprising statement, but rather boils down to the well-established observation that European philosophers, even twentieth-century ones—insofar as they stand within an academic succession—as a rule presuppose philosophy's break with the theater that was carried out by Plato. None are thinkers on the stage

and all are satisfied not to be, because they have been able to inherit from Plato the calm conviction that God stands in a relation of privilege to thinkers in the Academy or the Peripatos and no longer reveals the truth to imaginative theater persons who are full of lies.

How it could come about that European philosophers were able to understand themselves *ex officio* as thinkers on a non-stage, and that they were able to do so for more than two thousand years, merits a short explanation. I want to suggest one such explanation by recalling the fateful Athenian years of 387–386 BC, in which two initially inconspicuous events occurred in the city, which was grievously scarred by war, pestilence, and civil war; they both had world-historical consequences, and both were intimately connected with each other—events, incidentally, that to my knowledge have nowhere been considered in terms of their connection. The first is well known, because it belongs to Plato's *vita* and directly concerns the prehistory of the ancient Academy. The second is almost unknown and concerns the moment when the theater became historical—if one can speak in such terms.

In the year 387, Plato returned to Athens from his trip to southern Italy, where he had sought contact with the Pythagoreans. It is the trip that is also known as the first Sicilian one and that brought the philosopher, who was at that time forty years old, into the acquaintance of the King of Syracuse, Dionysius I, an acquaintance that resulted in the philosopher supposedly later displaying a nervous reservation about everything that reminded him of this name. Back from Syracuse, Plato bought a piece of land in Athens, as far as we know, on the edge of the city, which was dedicated to the demigod Akademos, in order to open a new kind of school on it. Legend and reality may coincide in the fact that this undertaking was immediately an extraordinary success. Even if, based on their own experience, folks today will scarcely believe it, the first of the academies was a place where the word 'school' must have been tantamount to enchantment through instruction. Only thus can one understand why Plato's garden developed into a magnet for gifted young people who dreamed on the one hand of transfiguring knowledge and on the other of public careers, mainly youth from Athens's middle and upper classes, not a few with homoerotic tendencies, as it corresponded to the didactic concept of the institution. For the moment, I do not want to say any more about this school's success than that it is supposed to have been forcibly closed down, after nearly a thousand years, by a Christian emperor from Constantinople—only to be reanimated after an interruption of another thousand years in the Florentine Renaissance. Incidentally, one may draw from these dates the conclusion that in

Europe the idea of a community of thinkers is considerably older than the Christian church, which wants to be a community of saints, or at least of the faithful, and is much older than the modern state, which presents itself as a community of beneficiaries of bourgeois legal relations. The only social formation of the European tradition that could make the ancient precedence of the academy a matter of controversy—and in certain respects even the claim to priority regarding questions of the public use of reason—is that of the gathering of people for debate in Athens, which perhaps represents the oldest attempt to give collective intelligence a political form. Accordingly, the quarrel between school wisdom and popular intelligence has also been institutionalized since Plato.

The second event occurred a few months after Plato's acquisition of the academic garden—it belongs to the secret dates of European culture. One has to suppose that long debates had preceded it, debates which could not possibly have remained hidden from someone as interested in literature and almost desperate in regard to politics as Plato, although these discussions in large part may have been played out among a group of elite Athenians consisting of the so-called *chorēgoi*, rich citizens who were responsible for the financing of the 'goat-song,' the tragic festival in honor of the god. In the year 386, almost the same time as Plato's installation of his logical-erotic school, these *chorēgoi*, the sponsors of the Athenian theater, made the decision, to the acclaim of the citizenry, to allow the restaging of pieces in the future that had been particularly successful at earlier festivals for Dionysus.

It is almost impossible for contemporary human beings to appreciate the consequences of this decision, precisely because no modern reader or author can be transported back to a time in which the rule obtained that each piece, the most poetically perfect as well as the most cathartically effective, was only allowed to be played a single time. Recalling this prescription suffices to indicate that Old European dramatic poetry did not begin under the auspices of autonomous art and literature, but rather as a practice of the political cult and as a civic-religious community effort. When, in the year 386, the Athenian citizenry decided to allow the restaging of pieces across the board—certainly also under the impression that the standard of pieces produced in the cult suddenly began to decline after the heroic age of Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides—they were acting as cultural revolutionaries in the genuine sense of the word, though with hardly any knowledge of what they were doing. Athenian citizens set an ambivalence into the world that has inhered ever since in all courtly, later bourgeois, and ultimately museumized and mass-mediatised cultic and aesthetic practices: namely, that



what was religion becomes an aesthetic phenomenon, while art presses ahead to supersede religion. To supersede religion, however, means to parody it, that is to say: to undercut its seriousness or its irreplaceability. The right to restage ancient pieces of the cult brings in its wake something that today might be called a revolution of the media landscape; and, so that we rightly understand, the media at that time were always and above all religious, or, put better, religio-political and group-forming media. In them lay the power to attune and stamp human beings in such a way that they could become halfway consonant participants resonating within their social ensemble. Through what is designated in Europe by the Roman-tinged term religion, all ancient societies regulated their tonal synthesis, one could even say their mytho-musical integration and their moral balance. With the decision of 386, the Athenian cultural politicians ran the risk of altering the tunings in their city in an uncertain and potentially dangerous way.

It seems that Plato was the first one to grasp the significance of this intervention and to react against it with precise insight into the new conditions of cultural formation [*Bildungsbedingungen*]; he thereby became the first conservative. He immediately braced himself for the danger of a nihilistic-aesthetic education from the semi-religious, mythico-veristic repertory theater. The *Republic* is the great testament to Plato's resistance to the divergence of the polis into deregulated educational relations. What, to the present day, we call philosophy, is directly and indirectly a consequence of Plato's novel media offensive. It signifies the invention of the school from out of the spirit of resistance to the unbounded theater. And one readily understands, precisely as an admirer of Greek stagecraft, what the philosopher had to do, if one submits oneself to the wonderful effort of again working through the greatest of the classical pieces that have been handed down,<sup>2</sup> above all in view of their theological messages and their possible influences on those youth who at the time of the intact tragic cult were *eo ipso* excluded from the one-off stagings and who, according to the new circumstances, would now sooner or later obtain access to the pieces.

One probably does not say too much if one notes that even today's reader of tragedies finds himself in a landscape of metaphysical horror populated by questionable gods. Whoever looks at the piece *Ajax* by Sophocles gets to know a goddess, Athena, who with impenetrable malice taunts the deluded warrior and derisively, willfully drives him to his doom. Whoever devotes himself to Aeschylus's *Eumenides* encounters a god, Apollo, who had incited Orestes to matricide in order to subsequently demand, like a scrupulous defense lawyer, acquittal for his client. Whoever studies

Euripides' *Bacchae* witnesses the manifestation of a Dionysus who finds satisfaction in bloody vengeance and thinks it right to evince his divinity by having one who denies it torn to pieces by a pack of women in estrus, until at the end a mother carries the bloody head of her own son across the stage like some mad proof of the god's existence. Such images may have struck a public of adult spectators like numinous flashes of lightning during the time of one-off stagings, provoking a shudder and lamentation, *phobos* and *eleos*, as a reminder of the superiority of the divine over the human and as a warning to mortals of their dispensation under an incommensurable power. But who would keep the corrupting influences of such repeatedly performed representations of divine violence under control? Who was supposed to compensate for the damages to the body politic when dismay and spiritual devastation escalated on account of the theater's compromising of the gods?

Plato appears to have been the first who attempted to envision the political-pedagogical seriousness of the new situation, even in its far-reaching consequences. Just as society today has reason to be worried about the plague of information that is disseminated by the mass media in the form of endlessly repeatable images of violence and solicitations of prostitution, so Plato saw a great danger for the body politic in the emergence of the all-too-human, indeed, bestially engaged gods in the media of his time. His battle against the poets, the theater-theologians, was actually a politico-theological safeguard for the city under threat, aiming to offset the blasphemous laying bare of the divine in the newly established theater with repeat performances.<sup>3</sup> At that time, so one can surmise, the epochal idea of a philosophical school opened up before him, a school that offered itself to the god as a new medium through which the god, as it suited him, could become manifest in his restored perfection, as unconditioned truth and goodness, with conscious disregard of the gruesome interventions of the poets' gods in the human world. The task for Plato is thus to shed light on revelation, and this is entrusted to philosophy for the future. Among the Pythagoreans, the pious logicians, Plato had just experienced that the philosophical sect of truth-seekers wished, in substance, to find itself on the right path but settled into injustice because the form of their doctrines was split off from common life. On the trip home Plato had a momentous thought: where there was a sect, a school should be. Truth finds its way back to the city through the school—hardly different than the Trojan Horse, but manned with subversive interrogators of customary life. In the name of truth the sect of teachers makes a bid at power.

Philosophy as school-power, however, is above all one thing: a

new medium—more precisely: a new medium of theophany. Plato instantly brought to prominence the acute danger of the collective neglect of the affects that a mere education by myth and drama evoked. As a new medium philosophy is an emphatic non-theater, its program is the non-portrayal and the non-laying-bare of the god on the stage; its ambition is to provide the god with a purified, internalized, and logicized channel for more subtle epiphanies. That is the reason why, as was just said, philosophers—all the way to Heidegger—are for the most part and as a matter of course thinkers on the non-stage. For they are, as long as they are good for anything in their field, admittedly and happily academic. If someone should ask what a happy academy might be, then the answer is: nothing other than a school that is animated by the conviction that it is the preferred space for the manifestation of the god, the improved temple, the illuminated oracle, the theater overcome, the *mysterium* rendered precise. In this sense, the oldest academy is completely happy. It is assured of its new theophanic mandate, as though it were an evangelical secret. It would proclaim it loudly, were it not evident that strong words obstruct subtle manifestation—that is why from Plato's day, at the latest, onward, the god learns to keep silent and to hardly ever manifest himself, except in an intimate presence that dazzles without speaking.<sup>4</sup> His true name is evidence. Hence, the rumor of an unwritten doctrine in Plato is consistent; it involves the discrete theophanic competence of the academic pursuit: Plato's garden is full of gods. To those who are fortunate, the god allows himself to be shown in the resonance of an exact thought.

That all has a clear point: after 386 philosophy surpasses tragedy as the medium of divine manifestation. This is the intellectual-historical sense of original academicism. As powerfully as Attic tragedy may have treated of gods and heroes, over the long term it will still be philosophy that keeps open the theophanic space at the heights of the civilizing process. It is likely that what one calls the history of religion and intellectual history is for long stretches identical with the shifts of theophanic space in cultures. This space had its most ancient focus in oracles and trance-cults,<sup>5</sup> before it gained among the Greeks, as well, the Dionysian theater, and later occupied the academy as we have characterized it here. Its legacy was appropriated by the Christian church and melded with the mystery-theology of the sacrificed God-Man, from which a melancholy hybrid, Christian Platonism, is supposed to have arisen, which proved its viability all the way up to German idealism.

The process of shifting the theophanic realm is not concluded with the transition to Christianity. If one looks back into European intellectual history since the late Middle Ages, it is hard to escape

the impression that, beginning with the thirteenth century, it continually increases in momentum after the mystical, the evangelical, and the early Protestant movements had begun to bring the language games and cultic practices of a god breaking through from within to the urban masses. New spaces are progressively opened up for receiving new manifestations of the Absolute in the European civilizing process all the way into the twentieth century. Such spaces were established in the innermost depths of individuals and in shrines for works of art. They were frequented by political secret societies and neo-religious sects, and placed on the fringes of the affluent world; one wished to discover them in trash, in misfortune, in excrement. But one can interpret this movement as broadly as one wishes: to speak of thinkers on the stage would only first be meaningful when it could be shown that the theater had been instituted with a new theophanic function. However, that is a demand that, with the exception of Richard Wagner, does not seem to me to be met anywhere in our time.

I must admit that, after everything I have suggested here, I can only honor my responsibility for the formulation 'thinker on the stage' if I make clear that it was reserved for Friedrich Nietzsche.<sup>6</sup> I see in him an erratic figure who emerged as a theologian of an undetected god. Nietzsche had reason, if not a factually correct then at least a psychological one, to pose as the belated medium of the divine life that goes by the name of Dionysus, because he combined in himself the Dionysian extremes: existence under continuous torture and the overcoming of torture in the euphoric states of art and thought. For him and, as far as I can see, only for him, is the formulation of thinker on the stage appropriate, and even for him it should not be taken literally, since it is not a matter of imputing to him a direct relation to the theater, but rather of characterizing an existentiell tension and its 'world of expression.' Even Nietzsche is not a thinker on the stage, but rather a thinker who is a stage. He has the experience that a god who is not one, the fragmented Dionysus, manifests himself in him as a clairvoyant, frenzied life raging against itself. Nietzsche was a theater for powers that battled within him and whose struggle is supposed to have made away with the unity of his person. Now one may think what one will of Heidegger's fundamental attunement; one may highly esteem his share of the manic resources of philosophy and not underestimate his familiarity with depressive phases—still, in his whole bearing he lived far removed from Nietzsche's cycles of torture, secure as he was in a disciplined and grim normality. Hence for the last time, and set against the backdrop of the case of Nietzsche: Heidegger is not a thinker on the stage.

## 2. The Plunge

Now, in order to segue from this negative result to a positive definition, I would like to suggest a formulation that summarizes, in a compact expression, Heidegger's spiritual physiognomy and his philosophical project: Heidegger is the thinker in motion. His original thought or virtual action [*Tathandlung*], as it were, is the leap or letting-himself-go into a disposedness [*Befindlichkeit*] in which he finds [*findet*] nothing more in himself and 'under his feet' than movement. In his case, kinetics precedes logic, or, if one will allow a paradoxical turn of phrase: motion is his foundation. The impulse of his discourse is to express movement—or rather, to 'follow' actual and unavoidable movement with the motion of discourse. Thus, like no philosopher before him, he deserves to be characterized by this unfamiliar and not fully clarified formulation: the thinker in motion.

What that means and where it leads I explain in what follows, at least suggestively. I forgo supplying another commentary on Heidegger's mythos of his 'path of thought' and limit myself to a structural observation of the form of his thought. Thanks to the concentration on the architectonic or formal side of Heidegger's thought, it can be shown that his professed path of thought is itself only the incessantly repeated and modified elaboration of a schema of motion that remains the same. From this perspective, the motions of thought of the master from Germany can be characterized as a primordial complying that comports itself by 'corresponding' to a threefold ontological movement. If I see things correctly, and if I may avail myself of these extreme and almost lyrical abstractions, in Heidegger's thinking and in general there are three universal and fundamental motions, three kinetic features of Being that are operative at all times in human existence, yet in each case differently according to cultural and epochal nuances. I here call these features, first, the *plunge*, second, the *experience*, and third, the *reversal*. Their permeation of or incursion into existence happens 'always already,' in each case and everywhere, without it being the case that anyone, including the classical hermeneuticists of fate, had ever observed this in a sufficiently clear light—unless we say that it was precisely Heidegger who began to do so.<sup>7</sup> It was this thinker who like no other before him laid emphasis on the fact that Dasein is always already 'set' in motion and pervaded by motion and cannot be secured against pervasive movement by anything. Its movement is the ground of its historicity and its relation to the open. Varying the famous formulation of the lecture *What Is Metaphysics?* from 1929, one could say: Dasein means being held into the incursion of motion.

It now thus appears as though Heidegger expressly turned to this sweeping contingency [*Zufall*] and developed a form of philosophical discourse that corresponds to Dasein in the grip of contingent incursion [*zufälligen Überfalls*]*—*a discourse on the plunge, a tale in the fall [*Fall*]. Whoever attempts to think in motion must show what it means to provide an example of the fall. Thus thinking becomes the serious case [*Ernstfall*] of movement.<sup>8</sup> Now, the one thinking must resolutely and calmly project himself in his discourses in his own person—since he no longer imitates an unmoved mover. Philosophy is no longer possible without speaking of oneself. Heidegger chooses this gesture with exemplary resolve, like an ontological gym teacher who provides guidance to his subjects who are stuck in their principles and worldviews by giving them exercises to be able to consciously abide in movement.

All discourse that develops along these lines emanates from a kinetic cogito: I exist, therefore a movement precedes me. I do not stand firm, for I am ‘thrown.’ It is given to me to think, to the extent that and for as long as I correspond to the incursion of movement. I am the *Fall*, because a movement—a history, an interconnected fabric of contingency and necessity—has carried me along and brought me here, into this situation, this insecurity. Thinking then means: developing a reflection within the incursion. Discourse is the gathering of the fall. In speaking in a thoroughly interrogatory way we retrieve [*wiederholen*] the contingent movement that has borne us to this place. That is not all: through the retrieval we deepen the contingent fall so much that it begins to verge on a necessity, perhaps even a ‘truth.’ Thus does retrieval become the mother of reflection; reflection responds to the unavoidable, the irreversible, the singular event. If I think and think again the fall that I am, I can no longer give myself over to theoretical illusion: the old dream of a distance without cost is shattered; the autistic phantasm of a contemplation that commits the contemplator to nothing has come apart. I have convinced myself that I am entirely permeated by movement, that I am included in the primal features of motion. I can no longer act as though I had not fallen into this, my situation. We no longer begin with stationary appearance, with the idea, with things, with the subject, with the system, with consciousness, with the facts, with what is objective, with timeless values. We can only begin with essential movement in ourselves, with our temporality, our temporariness, our situatedness and relatedness. Thus everything for us starts with ‘Dasein,’ which is interpreted as Being-in-the-world, and this is correct so long as we read this formulation as follows: to have reached, through the incursion of movement into us, the ‘place’ at which we most often disperse and only in exceptional