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Dwelling in Difference as Sameness:
Understanding Essence and Technology in Martin Heidegger's *Bremen Lectures*
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Introduction

Martin Heidegger's *Bremen Lectures*, collectively entitled *Insight into That Which Is*, while nominally concerned with "what is," are coextensively concerned with the ways that human thinking is forgetful of "what is."

The first two lectures focus respectively on giving accounts of the essence of things and of the way that this essence is obscured by technology. In *The Thing*, Heidegger further introduces the concept of "world" as the "thinghood," or essence, of the thing. In *Positionality*, we see how the world is forgotten and concealed through what he calls *Gestell*¹, or the essence of technology. World and *Gestell* seem entirely to oppose one another, but in the third lecture, *The Danger*, Heidegger argues that world and positionality are the same, although not simply so. He writes,

World and positionality are the same. But once again: the same is never the equivalent. The same is just as little a merely undifferentiated confluence of the identical. The same is much more the relation of differentiation. In the taking place of this relation [*Verhältnis*], what is the same is necessarily held [*gehalten*] in it, i.e., is protected in it, i.e. is preserved in it, and thus in the strong sense of the word remains reserved [*verhalten*]. World and positionality are the same and thus, to the very extremes of their essence, set against one another. (49)

In light of the fact that, for him, world and positionality are held in this relation of sameness and differentiation, I ask: how are world and positionality the same in Heidegger's *Bremen Lectures*?

Section one aims first to orient us in an understanding of how "essence" has been conceived by other thinkers in Western thought as well as clarify what we mean by essence, since it is an important term in these lectures and my own project here.

¹ Translated by Mitchell as "Positionality" and referred to as such in this essay

Secondly, section one traces Heidegger's account of the essence of things through his description of "the fourfold" or the "worlding of world."

Section two examines the idea of positionality by examining the second lecture in the series. We come to understand positionality here as both the principle of "presencing" as "standing reserve" and as "the essence of technology." Positionality, developed in these ways comes to represent a total opposition to world.

Section three mobilizes the analysis from the previous sections to provide an initial answer to the question: how are world and positionality the same? I will argue that world and positionality exhibit the same structure and both provide fundamentally *relational* accounts of being. This section attempts to explain *how* world and positionality are the same—not *why* they are so.

Section four examines Heidegger's understanding of the Greek word *Ἀλήθεια* as an answer to the latter question of *why* world and positionality are differently the same. It explores the way that his ontological system itself posits the sameness of the two. *Ἀλήθεια* represents the possibility of human thinking coming to an awareness of its own dwelling in a forgetfulness of "the world," and in this awareness the possibility of a turn out of *Λήθη* (concealment, forgetfulness) and into a revealing of the fact of concealment.

I am primarily concerned in this essay with cultivating an attentiveness to Heidegger's thought in *Bremen Lectures* rather than expressing my conviction that his world-historical viewpoint is broadly correct or offers some complete solution to the questions that seem to naturally arise through close examination of ourselves in the present age.

Section 1 - World

Heidegger's first essay, *The Thing*, asks "what is a thing?" (5). In following his account of thinghood, we encounter a concept that he calls world [*Welt*]. When we think of a thing and of the world, we might already conjure a picture that places a thing *in the world*. The stone sits on the surface of the earth under the sky and in the solar system: a particular thing surrounded by its world. "World" for Heidegger is more complicated than this and ultimately represents the essence of things, not merely the summed totality of what surrounds them. We attempt to enter into this understanding of world for him through asking "What is a thing?"

I aim here to understand Heidegger's accounts of thinghood, the connection between thing and world, and world itself as forming a relational ontology² whose relations positively express the essence of things rather than obscure it. I aim further to show the ways that these relations lead to an understanding of world as an expression of these relations.

1.1 What do we mean by "the thinghood of the thing" and "essence?"

Heidegger's representation of the world is essentially tied to his representation of "The Thing." What is a "thing" for Heidegger? In what does its "thinghood" consist?

We can first take our notion of a "thing" in an everyday sense. A "thing" is an inanimate part of the world that we might encounter in our movements through life. Heidegger explores the being of things through the example of a clay jug or pitcher. He writes:

Neither the long-used-up general meaning of the noun "thing" as employed in philosophy, nor the old High German meaning of the word *thing*, however, help us in the least in our predicament of experiencing and

² Account of the being of beings

sufficiently thinking the factual essence of what we now say concerning the essence of the jug. (15)

On Heidegger's terms, to ask what a thing *is* is to ask about its *essence*—it is to ask: “how does the thing essence?” (12) Or, it is to attempt to “experient[e] and sufficiently think... the factual essence” of the thing (15). Thus, to understand the “thinghood of the thing” we have first to understand what Heidegger means generally by *essence*.

Heidegger adopts the term “essence” from the history of philosophy. Although he will provide an entirely new account of what the essence of a thing *consists* in, he expects his readers to understand the ontological “work” an essence is supposed to do. Thus, to understand what Heidegger means by essence, we can look first to the tradition Heidegger inherits, that is, to what other authors have said about the being of beings, or what we name essence. We have no problem, in encountering a variety of things in the world, suggesting that they “*are*” or that they “have being” in some capacity. When we ask seriously about what it means to *be*, we ask about the essence of something. I will focus on Plato, Aristotle, and Kant here as giving three distinct and prominent accounts of essence in the history of western thought.³

For Plato, the essence of each thing consists in its unchanging “form” [εἶδος] (*Republic*, 596a-c). The form is what really “is” and it exists independently of the human being. Every distinct object in the world has meaning just insofar as it refers to its specific εἶδος which is, in this way, the source of its being. From our perspective here, this structure importantly casts the essence of things as unconditioned by the human

³ The following characterizations are extremely brief and therefore lacking significant nuance compared to the authors' actual thought. They serve mostly as a way of entering into a meaning of essence and to roughly orient Heidegger in some of the thinking that he inherits.

subject—establishing itself as an account that leads to a distinction between subject and object. The object is only what it is through its reflection of its metaphysical form.

Aristotle's account of essence follows a similar structure, although differing through his account of τέλος. For Aristotle, the object "is" insofar as it fulfills its end (τέλος), or engages in the activity which is essentially proper to it (*Physics*, 194b32). The τέλος of a given thing is undetermined by the human subject for Aristotle, and in this way, the being of beings remains essentially referred to a kind of formal property similar to Plato's thought, although referred differently.

Kant, in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, follows Plato and Aristotle with an account of essence that aims to unify the human subject with the structure of its representations. Essence, for Kant, lies in the accordance of all objects of human experience to "concepts of the understanding" (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 111). These "concepts of the understanding" play much the same role relative to the object as Platonic forms, but lie in the human subject for Kant instead of in the metaphysical firmament, as they do for Plato. Concepts of the understanding are concordant with the structures of human thinking in Kant, and thus the essence of things for him is their participation in a particular activity of human thinking. The rules of human thinking, for him, completely condition and determine the essence of those objects insofar as they appear as objects at all. Kant helpfully leaves us with the understanding that all objects, insofar as they appear as objects, are conditioned by the subject that represents them to itself in encountering them. In this way, Kant revolutionizes the subject-object distinction but introduces a new distinction between human and thing-in-itself.

Thus, we see that to ask about the “essence” of a thing is to ask what it *is*—to ask what its being consists in. In asking about the essence of the jug, Heidegger signals that he does not find the historical explanations of essence sufficient. He therefore aims to provide his own novel account. As we will see in what follows, Plato and Aristotle fall short⁴, in part, because they do not recognize the role of the human being in constituting essences, while Kant falls short because his account cuts human beings off from the world “as it is in itself.” Here, it seems, is where Heidegger aims to pick up the mantle in his account of essence in *The Thing*. That is, to give an account of essence that more closely enfolds the human subject with the objects that it encounters. This distinction has taken place in human thinking as the imagined rift between the human subject and the world, the natural, the thing in itself, the divine.

1.2 The Path to the Thinghood of the Jug

In following his account of thinghood and its connection to world or the fourfold [*Das Geviert*], we start with the everyday object: a jug. Heidegger opens *The Thing* by writing, “The jug is a thing. What is a jug?” (5) He begins by discussing ways of conceiving the thinghood of the jug that fail to lead us to its essence. While it is true that the jug may stand before us and even stand objectively (7)⁵, that it may be produced (6)⁶, that it may be made up of certain molecular structures (8)⁷, that it may have sides and a base, none of these lead us to the jughood of the jug for Heidegger. He writes,

The thinghood of the jug lies in that it is as a vessel. We become aware of what does the holding in the vessel when we fill the jug. The base and

⁴ Heidegger does see their thinking as “correct” in that each, for him, attains an understanding of the structures of intelligibility dispensed to their respective world-historical epochs

⁵ “All representing representing of what presences in the sense of something standing here and of something objective, however, never reaches the thing as thing.” (7)

⁶ “The producing lets the jug freely enter into its own.” (6)

⁷ “The physical sciences assure us that the jug is filled with air and with all that constitutes the compound mixture of air.” (80)

siding obviously take over the holding. But not so fast! When we fill the jug with wine, do we pour the wine into the sides and base? We pour the wine at most between the sides and upon the base. Sides and base are indeed what is impermeable in the vessel. But the impermeable is not yet what holds. When we fill up the jug, in the filling, the pour flows into the empty jug. The empty is what holds in the vessel. The empty, this nothing in the jug, is what the jug is as a holding vessel. (7)

How does an account of the jug as being a vessel help us experience the essence of the jug and the essence of things in general? The moment of refusal to see the base and sides as what primarily hold what is poured into the jug is an important one here, and shows the way that Heidegger leads us away from an effectually explanatory engagement with the jug as a holding vessel and into what might be a more ontological engagement. Instead of giving a physical or scientific explanation of why the jug can hold the water or wine we pour into it, we look at the ontological condition for its acceptance of a pour: an emptiness that admits of filling. To the extent that the emptiness is what allows the jug to express itself as a holding vessel—that is, express its thinghood—we can see the way that it is fundamental to the jug’s being. We still draw this conclusion from a sort of physical analysis of what it means for a jug to *hold* liquid by imagining what is required for this. Yet Heidegger wants to focus our attention on the kind of readily understandable requirements for the holding of the pour such that they point us towards an account of the jug that goes beyond an effectual description.

In looking carefully at what it means to hold, Heidegger suggests that “the empty” of the jug holds in a twofold manner: it takes the pour of water or wine and retains it (9). In breaking up the holding into taking and retaining he opens the possibility for the pour as a unifying action: “The taking of what is poured in and the retaining of the pour nevertheless belong together. Their unity, however, is determined by the pouring out, to

which the jug as jug is correlated. The twofold holding of the empty consequently lies in the outpouring.” Here we see already the way that the pouring out of what has been poured into the jug can—in one action—gather and fold a multiplicity. In this structure lies a hint and a suggestion of the way that the pour will similarly fold the four into their single fold. The gathering is reflected in Heidegger’s characterization of the pour as a gift. He writes, “We name the collection of the twofold holding in the outpouring, which together constitutes the full essence of giving, [*des Schenkens*]: the gift [*das Geschenk*].” In the German here the prefix *Ge* denotes a gathering and thus all future reference to the pour as a “gift” invokes this gathering and uniting of the twofold holding. It simultaneously suggests the possibility of this gathering of multiplicity generally in this way, whether twofold or fourfold. The thinghood of the jug is now understood as the simultaneous expression of two kinds of holding through the activity of the pour. He writes “The jughood of the jug essences in the gift of the pour” (10).

The final movement of this section is from the above understanding of the jug to an understanding of it in which earth and sky, divinities and mortals are gathered in the gift of its pouring out. Heidegger introduces these four over two paragraphs across pages 10 and 11, beginning with this sentence which expands into his discussion of them individually: “The gift of the pour can be a libation. There is water, there is wine to drink.” From the water or wine we get the earth and sky, and from the pour as libation we get divinities and mortals. He writes,

In the water of the gift there abides the spring. In the spring abides the stone and all the dark slumber of the sky. In the water of the spring there abides the marriage of sky and earth. They abide in the wine that the fruit of the vine provides, in which the nourishment of the earth and the sun of the sky are betrothed to each other. In the gift of water, in the gift of wine, there abides in each case the sky and earth. (10)

We come to understand through his expression here that the pour—in that it pours water or wine—dwells in a complete saturation with its *relations*. The being of water and wine as outlined here each incarnate their own singular kind of “betrothal” of earth and sky.

We are shown the way that the essence of the jug—insofar as it pours—already implicates the being of water and of wine which in turn imply the cohabitation of sky and earth. This cohabitation, or the fact that they unitedly “abide” is thus what we mean when we say the jughood of the jug.

The abiding of divinities and mortals is expressed in the fact that the pour can be at once a libation and an oblation⁸.

In the gift of the pour that is a libation, the mortals abide in their way. In the gift of the pour that is an oblation, the divinities abide in their way, divinities who receive back the gift of the giving as the gift of a donation. In the gift of the pour, the mortals and divinities each abide differently.
(11)

Here, Heidegger draws our understanding of the pour as the essence of the jug into its social and religious sphere of relations. The pour expresses the fact that these relations dwell together in their difference in that the pour is potentially both a libation (for mortals) and an oblation (for the gods). The pour as a gift [*das Geschenk*] gathers and expresses both of these possibilities.

Having established how the thinghood of the jug, through the pour, ties itself to and gathers both sky and earth, divinities and mortals, we can understand the thinghood of the jug as nothing other than the expression of these and their particular relation in the pour. In this way, we say that the jughood of the jug (its essence) *is* the fouring of the four for Heidegger.

⁸ “the act of making a religious offering” (Merriam Webster)

1.3 How is the fourfold, in its fouring, an account of essence in the world?

More specifically, how does Heidegger's representation of the fourfold as a united fold of four, as a mirroring, and as a gathering account for the essence of things? My project here is to understand his concept of the fourfold more concretely and in a way that lends itself to dissection and argument. For the sake of this, we take the poetic and conceptual presentation of the fourfold seriously and do not read it as something that merely stands as a secondary representation of something behind it. We take the language not as a mask to be removed, but as the full poetic expression of thinking.

The fourfold [*Das Geviert*] is first of all and immediately linguistically, a gathering of four things. In its translation by Mitchell as a fourfold, the word *Geviert* is given the concept of folding which is not present from the prefix *Ge* or the word *viert*. *Geviert* most importantly represents the way that the earth and sky, divinities and mortals essence simultaneously as four and as gathered—that is singly folded. “The gift of the pour lets the single fold [*Die Einfalt*] of the fourfold [*Das Geviert*] of the four abide.” Here we can see the way that the four and the single fold are related in Heidegger's discussion of them. The single fold is a quality of the fourfold, and thus fourfold is used to refer to the abiding four and their single fold. Yet the fourfold does not merely represent any four things, and the particular things that he chooses have obviously not been chosen at random. Why earth, sky, divinities and mortals?

The four parts of the fourfold are discussed in two different ways in *The Thing*. First, we become aware of earth, sky, divinities and mortals as we think into the essence of the pour from the jug. They seem to arise from the particular qualities of pouring water or wine from a vessel, and we discover them by looking into the ways that the activity of

pouring is connected to the history and relations of its contents, as well as to the historical spiritual and cultural meanings of the activity of pouring and of libation (10-11). Thus the first discussion of the four is directly tied to a singular example of essence, and the four entities might even appear to proceed from the unique relations of the example. Yet the four as the earth and sky, divinities and mortals become the universal four which the fourfold always refers to.

Several pages later, Heidegger proceeds through a discussion of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals individually (16-17). He takes a more universal route through them here. He describes the earth as “the building bearer, what nourishingly fructifies, tending waters and stones, plants and animals.” The earth here, instead of being tied specifically to the contents of the jug and the activity of the pour, is freed into its own entire sphere of possible relations. As the building bearer, what fructifies, and what tends, we are given a sketch of the earth’s modes of relation. Heidegger almost seems to be granting the earth a domain here by poeticizing it into lordship over a kind of natural folk kingdom. While my discussion here is limited to the earth, we can see how each element of the fourfold in their unified distinction, while practically arising from a very particular discussion of the jug, get generalized into a totalized account of essence. Having understood the thing in this way, I aim to trace the connection between the fourfold and his concept of world [*Velt*].

Heidegger first introduces the world as the name given to the mirror-play of the fourfold. This is in reference to the “playing” itself of the mirror-play.

The relation between the thing and the world is not one of mere causality. It is expressed maybe most simply when Heidegger writes, on page 19, that “The thing lets

the fourfold abide. The thing things the world.” In the idea that the thing, through its self-expression, simultaneously expresses itself and the world, we can begin to understand the depth of the connection between the thing and the world for Heidegger. The world is not merely the sum of the things in it as added up mathematically. It is, however, a kind of grounds for the thinging of the thing (essencing) in that the thing things “from out of the worlding world.”

When we let the thing in its thinging essence from out of the worlding world, then we commemorate the thing as thing. Thoughtfully remembering in this way, we allow the worlding essence of the thing to concernfully approach us. Thinking in this way we are met by the thing as thing. We are, in the strict sense of the word, conditioned [*Be-Dingten*]. We have left the arrogance of everything unconditional behind us. (19)

The characterization of the thing as thinging from out of a worlding world protects the world from being represented here as a merely static ground or a sort of Platonically formal realm from which the thing shines forth. The world does not represent an unconditioned noumenal⁹ precursor to the thinging of thing that silently stands behind it. In attentiveness to his description of the thing as having a “worlding essence,” we see the level at which the thing and world are connected. Thinging and worlding are represented as occurring simultaneously and as symbiotically conceptually dependent on each other. Thus thing and world are essentially undifferentiated from each other yet maintained as conceptually different. It seems that Heidegger wants to say that when we commemorate this or that thing in its particularity, we, if we are thinking, also commemorate the whole world. This helps us better understand the way that the world is conditioned for Heidegger: since Kant we have conceded the conditioned nature of objects before us but maintained a concept of the unconditioned world, resisting an image of ourselves as

⁹ In the Kantian sense of “thing in itself.”

cast-off from the iron cleat and ontological safe-haven of unconditioned being. The world here is remembered by the human in allowing “the thing to concernfully approach,” and this concerned approach is—in the very fact that is an approach which is allowed or not—conditioned.

Heidegger’s world differs from past accounts: the essence of all things is both relational and conditioned. The thing as the gathering of relations is necessarily conditioned, but the relations themselves need not be entirely constituted by the human subject. In this way, we may not have quite left the arrogance of everything unconditional behind us despite essence being conditioned by human representation. The fouring of the four is described as a kind of dance, as a round dance that at once represents the individual uniqueness of the four, their relation to each other, and the strong flexibility of their living connection.

The mirror-play of the world is the round dance of appropriation. For this reason the round dance does not hug the four like a hoop. The round dance is a ring that rings by its play as a mirroring. Appropriating, it lights up the four in the gleam of their single fold. Gleaming, the ring everywhere brings the four into the ownership of the riddle of their essence. The collected essence of the mirror-play of the world, ringing in this way, is a circling. In the circling of this playfully-mirroring ring, the four nestle into their united essence and nonetheless each respectively into its own essence. Supple in this way, they join pliantly and worldingly the world.”
(18)

The circular dance of the four is helpful first because this circling is a dance that happens, it seems, as a matter of essence rather than human determination. It is, however, up to the human to allow the world to appear this way, as has been mentioned above. But this account of essence, as a dancing circling mirroring of earth, sky, divinities and mortals seems to have its mythical basis in something beyond the sphere of human concerns and projects.

In looking deeper into the circular dance, we are placed in the middle of a nuanced account of relationality. Sitting in the center of a circle of dancers, we watch them circle us as their feet rhythmically release from the firm earth. As they spin, the dancers' movements blur together, and from our stationary position, we try to pick out a single dancer. They are spinning so quickly that the green eyes of one blur together with the brown eyes of another. Their hands grasping each other mark the edges of bodies asserting their real connection to the next. One dancer's face and flowing garments are simultaneously wholly their own and rise and fall with that dancer's own movements yet are whisked along by the movement of the circle and the other three. The dancer's face and flowing garments are their own, yet animated by the movement of their feet in relation to the rhythm and grasping of the whole onto each other. They, in their dancing, are differently the same.

Thus the way that each of the four of the fourfold relates to the others gives us a glimpse into the way that things relate to the world. Their being—our being—is at once made up of our relations but not lost in them. Particularity is retained. The whole sphere of relations to the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals allows for a true commemoration of ourselves and the world and our relationship to the world.

By identifying the fourfold [*Das Geviert*] as the *thinghood* of the jug, Heidegger is arguing that its *essence* consists in the totality of its relations. His view first of all rejects thinghood as a static objectivity. The thing is not, for Heidegger, that which merely stands independently or even across from us as an object (7). Rather, we understand his version of presencing as the playing out of the interplay of any given object's relations to its world. This presencing isn't an activity that proceeds from a static

formal origin, such as the way that the platonic world of sense is a shadow cast by the form of a thing into human experience. The world of things, the objective world, is undivorced from the subject. And the gathering of the fourfold which unites heaven, earth, divinities, and mortals in its representation as both a gathering and as the mirroring relation of the four, lets us understand essence as something which is constituted by the active relating of relations. This activity would constitute, for Heidegger, an authentic “presencing” of the “thing as thing.”

“The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s duration each time into something that abides: into this or that thing.” (12)

In suggesting that “worlding” is the essence of things, Heidegger does not suggest that we actually access it even by describing it here in this way. He writes at the end of *The Thing* that “[Things] do not come [as things] through the machinations of humans. But they also do not come without the vigilance of the mortals. The first step to such vigilance is the step back from merely representational, i.e., explanatory thinking into commemorative thinking.” For the thing to come as thing would be for it to come *towards the human* as thing—it would presence as nothing other than its own essence. While it seems we cannot simply and willingly step back into “commemorative thinking,” Heidegger does suggest a possible human attunement that is at least open to the coming of “the thing as thing” or the “worlding of the world.” What remains true is the fact that we live, for him, almost totally submerged in forgetfulness of this essence, and that things presence as something other than themselves for the most part. It is in awareness of this forgetfulness that we aim to understand the essence of technology for Heidegger.

Section 2 - Positionality [*das Ge-stell*]

This section seeks to analyze Heidegger's account of positionality [*das Ges-Stell*] as characteristic of a specific kind of presencing that stands opposed to his previous discussion of "world" in *The Thing*. Further, we aim to understand positionality as the essence of modern technology for Heidegger (31), and better establish our stake in his questioning here.

2.1 What is positionality?

In trying to enter into Heidegger's account of positionality, I aim to proceed with the same carefulness as into that of the thing and world. The goal here is to form a more concrete enunciation of what is translated by Mitchell as positionality [*Das Ge-Stell*] and its relation to presencing as standing reserve [*Bestand*]. In pursuit of this goal, we begin with an inquiry into what Heidegger means by this standing reserve as the reigning mode of presencing in the technological world-era.

In the previous section, we examined Heidegger's account of authentic presencing. Here we turn to standing reserve as the mode of presencing characteristic to the technological epoch (world era) for him. Presencing as standing reserve is ontologically deficient in that the very mode of presencing as standing reserve obscures the authentic being of things. The thing does not presence "as thing" in standing reserve but rather as a piece of inventory for the creation of other pieces of inventory. For example, he suggests that the earth in our present age has been violently transposed out of itself and positioned as something entirely different: "Through such requisitioning [*Bestellen*] the land becomes a coal reserve, the soil an ore repository" (26). The land is no longer allowed to approach us as the full meaning and expression of land—in its very

appearance to us, we already understand it as a potential piece of the ever-turning industrial machine. Things only stand in standing reserve insofar as they have been drawn into the circuit of requisitioning and assigned there, and this, for Heidegger, is not standing as we have established in our reading of *The Thing*. Consequently, the standing of the standing reserve is its not standing. On page 31, Heidegger writes:

In positionality the presencing of what presences becomes standing reserve. Positionality constantly draws what is orderable into the circuit of requisitioning, establishes it therein, and thus assigns it as something constant in the standing reserve. The assignment does not place what is constant outside of the circuit of positioning. It only assigns it, but off and away into a subsequent orderability, i.e., back and forth into a requisitioning. (31)

Here, we can see standing reserve as the expression, in presencing, of the positioning done by *Ge-Stell*. It is how things presence that have been positioned by the essence of technology. This positioning takes the form of what he calls an “assignment” in the circuit of requisitioning. We can read this as a sort of assigned task that keeps the circuit running. How does Heidegger connect this concept of standing reserve to positionality? The standing reserve takes part in the simultaneous activity of positionality and requisitioning. And what do we mean by positionality and requisitioning?

The verb *stellen* means “to position, place, set” (25). Its modifications with prefixes *Be* and *Ge* in requisitioning and positionality respectively offer insight into the corresponding modifications of its meaning that each of these words represent.

We now name the self-gathered collection of positioning [*des Stellens*], wherein everything orderable essences in the standing reserve, *positionality* [*das Ge-Stell*].

This word now no longer names an individual object of the sort like a bookcase or a water well. Positionality now also does not name something constant in the ordered standing reserve. Positionality names the universal ordering, gathered of itself, of the complete orderability of

what presences as a whole. The circuit of ordering takes place in positionality and as positionality. (31)

Here, Heidegger names *das Ge-Stell* most importantly as a “collection of positioning” and a “universal ordering.” It thus takes on the form of a universal reference to and conceptual gathering of all positioning that is done. It is, similarly to the world, simultaneously the already present defining principle of all positioning yet active and present in all positioning and ordering. *Ge-Stell* names, universally, the activity of positioning [*Stellen*].

The other concept here is translated by Mitchell as requisitioning or “to beset with positioning” [*Bestellen*]. It seems to be a gathered part of *Ge-Stell*, but *Bestellen* is that which specifically recruits all presencing into presencing as the standing reserve. More explicitly, it is what makes things orderable or positionable, and is “only directed at one thing” (30). It is the activity of making any particular thing a piece of standing reserve. In this way the activity of requisitioning is the condition for the possibility of all positioning of standing reserve as standing reserve and what renders things positionable. In order for an object to be given a position or have its position changed, it must first appear as an object with a position. Requisitioning is the kind of positioning that places an object into the coordinate system (besets it with coordinates) while simultaneously sweeping it up in the movement of the circuit. In this way, we see requisitioning both as the basis for the standing reserve and the activity of existing pieces of standing reserve insofar as the standing reserve exists to create more standing reserve. An example of this might be a diamond which is brought into the circuit of requisitioning to be part of a drill bit that drills an oil well—a piece of the earth becomes standing reserve which is used to procure more standing reserve.

While the above example takes a very concrete route, essentially the same process is mirrored on the metaphysical level for Heidegger. Modern technology is only the disclosedness of this process which has occurred in secret until now. He writes, on page 25, “The standing reserve persists through a characteristic positioning. We name it requisitioning.” As *Be-Stellen*, requisitioning is a certain kind of positioning. In the translation of *Be-Stellen* as that which besets the world with positioning, we can understand requisitioning as the part of positionality that “makes” the world what it is while positionality refers to the wider power that reigns over being as standing reserve. This understanding is further solidified by an examination of the German prefix *Be*, which makes an otherwise intransitive verb directly transitive—that is, it gives it a specific object (*Durrell* 111). And we see this reflected in Heidegger’s discussion of *Be-Stellen*: it is the way that positionality takes specific objects and recruits them into a positioned mode of being: being as standing reserve.

Thus we have three words stemming from the same German base, that is *Stellen*, *Ge-Stell*, and *Be-Stellen*. *Ge-Stell* represents what is gathered into the most universal reference to the entire process of *Stellen*, while *Be-Stellen* represents the specific yet universal process of besetting things with the quality of *Stellen* in the first place.

2.2 How does positionality represent a destruction of essence?

The language used throughout *Positionality* suggests that, for Heidegger, all presencing as standing reserve constitutes a destruction of the essence that we examined in *The Thing*. The language of “reaping [*raffen*]” is used throughout *Positionality* to refer to the activity of besetting things with positioning and making things into standing reserve. All of this organizes itself around the “circuit of requisitioning” that follows

upon itself without end. The basic argument for positionality as a destruction of what Heidegger has previously established as the essence of things follows from the characteristics of positionality we have already discussed. Ultimately, this process of *Be-Stellen* and the entire framework of *Ge-Stell* reign over the way that things “presence”—that is—approach the human subject.

Presencing is subject to the power of various structures of intelligibility for Heidegger, and thus presencing does not necessarily reveal the authentic essence of things: it does not always (or maybe ever in the history of western consciousness) allow the fouring of the four in their ringing-appropriating mirror-play. In this way what presences through positionality seems to be an actual obscuring or destruction of essence. When the Rhine River presences as standing reserve it is not presencing authentically—its essence is obscured and already destroyed in experience. This distinction between the kinds of presencing maps onto his discussion of nearness and distance that forms a thread through both *The Thing* and *Positionality*. He begins *The Thing* with the question: “How do things stand with nearness? How can we experience its essence?” (5). The whole first essay can be understood as an answer to this question. *Positionality* opens with:

“All mastery of distances brings no nearness at all. With Nearness there likewise slips away the remote. Everything is leveled down to the distanceless. Now we see more poignantly: Nearness essences insofar as the thing things. The thing things the world. Thinging is the nearing that holds the world as world in nearness” (23).

If we read *The Thing* as an insight into the essence of nearness, *Positionality* represents an enunciation of the way that nearness—and thus the world—is destroyed. Nearness is identified with the thinging of the thing, whereas the distanceless is identified with

presencing as standing reserve—the standing reserve is “distanceless” because it is, by definition, constantly available. Heidegger connects the distanceless and standing reserve more explicitly two pages later where he writes, “Whatever presences without distance [*ohne Abstand*] is nevertheless neither without concerned approach nor without a standing. Its constancy makes the rounds in the uncanny concerned approach of what is everywhere of equal value...The distanceless is never without standing. It stands insofar as everything that presences is standing reserve [*Bestand*] (25).” The above quote further illuminates how the distanceless [*Das Abstandlosen*] and standing reserve [*Bestand*] are connected: the standing reserve is the positive designation of the totality of presencings which are uniformly without distance. In this way the standing reserve represents the total distancelessness of all presencing in the technological age for Heidegger. Thus we can understand the first sentence of the quote as positing that what concernfully approaches us in distanceless presencing is not the thing itself but the fact of its distancelessness. From this insight, we name this universal distancelessness of all that presences the standing reserve.

And in using the name standing reserve [*Bestand*] we reference the fact of the presencing of things as standing reserve, i.e. without distance and without nearness, i.e. without expression of their essence through the fourfold, i.e without the world. Positionality, as gathered positioning [*Ge-Stell*] is instantiated as both requisitioning and presencing as standing reserve. Having examined the way that both of these concepts represent a destruction or forgetfulness of essence and thus the world, we can more clearly understand the fundamental opposition between Heidegger’s concepts of “the world” and “positionality.”

2.3 How are the relations of things to the world in positionality equational?

In attempting to understand *The Thing* in the section on “the world,” we came to understand the essential being of things as fundamentally relational. We now ask about the status of these relations under positionality. The relations of the thing to the world are what allowed the pouring forth of its essence and what constituted the fouring of the four of the fourfold. In *Positionality*, we encounter a different kind of relationality of beings presencing as standing reserve.

Nonetheless, *Positionality* offers a relational sketch of being that is worth representing for the sake of comparison with that found in *The Thing* and the eventual understanding of “the world” and “positionality” as the same for Heidegger.

He writes on page 38 that “positionality orders what is present into standing reserve. What is constant of standing reserve are the pieces of standing reserve. Their constancy consists in the orderable replaceability of the steadily equivalent, which is in place and at the ready.” In this description of the essence of technology we see the quality of the relations that the standing reserve partakes in. The equivalency and replaceability of pieces of the standing reserve are the most significant aspects for their relations to each other and to being in general. The totality of relations for pieces of standing reserve are for the sake of ordering, replacing, and finding equivalency to those pieces. We can understand this mode of relationality in the way that a wire relates to any basic electronic device. The being of wire is at once constituted by its relation to the working of the machine and in this way, it implicates and is implicated by every other piece of the device. But under positionality, the functioning of the device is further depended upon for

the functioning of another machine or process which is further required for the success of some further process, and this chain of requirements runs on infinitely.

Heidegger describes what this chain of requisitioning looks like on page 27, writing,

“The hydroelectric plant is placed in the river. It imposes upon it for water pressure, which sets the turbines turning, the turning of which drives the machines, the gearing of which imposes upon the electrical current through which the long-distance power centers and their electrical grid are positioned for the conducting of electricity. The power station in the Rhine river, the dam, the turbines, the generators, the switchboards, the electrical grid—all this and more is there only insofar as it stands in place and at the ready, not in order to presence, but to be positioned, and indeed solely to impose upon others thereafter.”

This circular and unending chain of constant requirement of the successful functioning of the previous step at once constitutes a kind of being for the wire in the electronic device or the hydroelectric dam and requires something of them. Should a copper wire between the turbines and the dam break or stop properly conducting electricity, it must be replaced, and that replacement must be at the ready. We see how this same thing might apply to the flowing of the Rhine through the turbines of the dam as well: the water serves primarily, in reference to this series of requirements, as the thing that effectively turns the turbines to generate electricity to send to the grid etc. etc. In this way the relation of pieces of standing reserve constitute their being as standing reserve yet are ultimately relations of orderability in that the Rhine is ordered into uniform circular motion by the turbines or the wire is ordered into replaceable conductivity that can be fulfilled by any conducting substance with equivalent properties. Each piece gets its meaning from the others but remains completely exchangeable. All future consequences require the constant readiness of new water as moving molecules with a

certain viscosity to flow over the turbines and the similarly constant replacement wires which are perfectly exchangeable and functionally equivalent to the one connecting the turbine and the power grid.

Thus all things under positionality presence as orderable and replaceable standing reserve for the successful functioning of one link in the circular chain of running, functioning machinery.

2.4 How is modern natural science an example of positionality?

Heidegger specifically designates what he calls “modern natural science,” as a locus of positionality’s power and application. What is meant by “modern natural science”? His usage seems to include the whole canon of modern sciences, but he specifically references atomic and classical physics (41), chemistry (39), psychology (24). In general, he sees all of these disciplines as essentially the same in their goal of predicting natural processes, and of requiring potential predictability of their objects as a precondition for the presencing of objects to those sciences at all (41). The atom can only appear to atomic physics as an atom if its activity is at least potentially predictable in advance: an atom about which no calculation of future behavior can be made is nothing at all for atomic physics. And the already potential predictability and orderability of all things for natural science is the presencing of all things as standing reserve. In this way, natural science’s basic requirements for the presencing of its objects are the same as standing reserve.

An example of this is the way that, as a feature of its drive to calculation and instrumentation, science approaches nature as something that inherently admits of equational relationships. We see this in the modern expression¹⁰ of Newton’s second law,

¹⁰ Newton himself does not set force equal to mass times acceleration, instead saying that they are proportional: “The change of motion of an object is proportional to the force impressed; and is made in the direction of the straight line in which the force is impressed.” (*Pincipia*, 62)

Force = Mass x Acceleration. This forms a kind of instrumental understanding of force in that it asserts the fundamental equivalency, in their calculable effects, of force and the product of mass and acceleration. And for the sake of this, they *are* the same. This follows the way that, in the context of a car engine, two bolts made of slightly different alloys but that share the same physical properties are fundamentally equivalent with regard to the running of the car insofar as they have exactly equivalent calculable effects in the machine's operation. Science gives an already fundamentally mechanical account of the world, where calculably equivalent effects can be exchanged for one another as pieces of the standing reserve. While instrumentally effective, this mode of presencing allowed by science gives what we might find to be a deficient account of the being of its objects. We can understand force as ontologically different from mass and acceleration. Is there not something fundamentally different in what we mean when we say "force" than what we mean when we say "an accelerated mass?" $F = ma$ maybe represents the ultimate sameness of effects and objects under scientific representation: we could read it as the suggestion that an accelerated mass only has being insofar as it has the potential to exert a force which is equivalent to the product of its quantified mass and acceleration. What do we mean when we say "force" except for some effect which is calculable in advance? In this way "modern science" remains confined to instrumental discourse that might be understood as obscuring the being of its objects by construing them only in terms of their effective relations.

He writes on page 40 that "the essence of modern technology begins its reign with the commencement of natural science some three and a half centuries ago... The

essence of modern technology, positionality, in accordance with its essence, began with the fundamental act of requisitioning insofar as it first secured nature in advance as the fundamental standing reserve.” We see the specific role of natural science in positionality outlined here: the role of securing nature as standing reserve. Heidegger’s position that the essence of modern technology began its reign simultaneously with the commencement of modern natural science expresses the true primacy of their relationship and coextensivity of their power. Thus, where we see the power and application of natural science in the world we are able to notice and name the expression of positionality.

“Modern natural science” is, however, both fundamental to the application of positionality but still subordinate to positionality in that natural science proceeds from it. It is important for Heidegger that natural science is an application of the essence of technology (positionality) and represents the activity of positionality securing the standing reserve for itself as applicable (40). Thus in answer to our question about the role of modern science in relation to positionality, we see it for Heidegger not as one of several means by which positionality renders the world as standing reserve but as the cardinal force responsible for securing *all* presencing as standing reserve. The way that we casually and commonly understand all experience and even ourselves as potentially penetrable by psychology, quantum physics, neuroscience, biology, astrophysics, and such disciplines testifies to the fact that everything for the human can be understood as already requisitioned in advance by natural science.

2.5 What are the consequences of Heidegger's account of positionality for our thinking about being in the modern world?

As is already apparent from the contemporaneity of the reign of positionality with that of modern natural science in *Positionality*, Heidegger's account of the essence of technology is situated in a definite world-historical "era" (39). It seems that he aims, from the outset, to engage with what he perceives as a present problem: the fact that as our ability to transport ourselves and ideas through space and time rises to ever-increasing degrees of perfection through innovations such as airplanes and cars, televisions, and now the internet, we seem to gain no nearness to being itself. He writes at the end of his foreword, "The horrifying is what transposes all that is out of its previous essence. What is so horrifying? It reveals and conceals itself in the way that everything presences, namely that despite all overcoming of distance, the nearness of that which is remains outstanding" (4). That is to say—our apparent mastery of distance and time is no mastery at all over our nearness to being but that instead the being of things and ourselves has been transposed into a universal distancelessness, which is fundamentally different from nearness. I have used the word "world" previously in reference to the mirror-play of the fourfold, but I will use it colloquially here in reference to the "all that is" above. The basic suggestion from the outset of the lectures says that we live in a world that *is* positionality.

An initially obvious consequence is the suggestion that a fundamental misunderstanding underlies the way that the Western world has primarily thought about its own use of science and technology over the past two centuries. Heidegger rejects the essence of technology as its being merely a tool in the hand of the human, and more

strongly suggests that this kind of thinking is technological itself. Thus the *Bremen Lectures* aim to do something fundamentally different from a description of the mechanics or the morally variant ways that modern technology is used; instead, Heidegger wants to consider what he terms the essence of modern technology, which is itself “nothing technological” (33). Thus in trying to take Heidegger’s thought seriously, I am writing with direct reference to two connected but distinct notions of technology: 1. the everyday understanding of technology and the full spectrum of connotations it evokes (this remains the initial grounds for our entire inquiry), and 2. this aforementioned “essence of technology” that aims to represent what is most essentially at work in technology beyond microscopic silicon resistor-transistor connections or the necessarily linked turning of gears.

The two connected but distinct notions of technology mentioned above have a proportional relationship to the way that we might engage with being in our own “age” while trying to think with Heidegger: we at once take seriously the material everyday experience of inhabiting our particular place in human and world history yet simultaneously attempt to stand outside of this consciousness for the sake of insight into what is essentially active in it. We can understand Heidegger’s account of presencing in this way as well, such that presencing as standing reserve in our current age is merely one mode presencing among others (38) that we aim to describe accurately but that are all ultimately in forgetfulness of a real essence that stands behind them. Remaining confined to a discussion of *Positionality*, we come to see the modern world as more deeply imbued with technological thinking and being (as standing reserve) than we would have even imagined considering the almost omnipotent social and material power it wields today.

Section 3 - The Sameness of The World and Positionality

“World and positionality are the same. But once again: the same is never the equivalent. The same is just as little a merely undifferentiated confluence of the identical. The same is much more the relation of differentiation. In the taking place of this relation [*Verhältnis*], what is the same is necessarily held [*gehalten*] in it, i.e., is protected in it, i.e. is preserved in it, and thus in the strong sense of the word remains reserved [*verhalten*]. World and positionality are the same and thus, to the very extremes of their essence, set against one another.” (49)

Having attempted to represent Heidegger’s concepts of “world” and “positionality” in the previous two sections, how are we to understand them as the same and “yet, to the very extremes of their essence, set against one another?” This question aims primarily to understand similarities and differences of the way that they are expressed by Heidegger, which I will follow with a more systematic account of their relation in Heidegger’s structure of *Beyng* and dispensation. But what does Heidegger mean by sameness? In the quote above he clearly states that sameness does not mean a simple conceptual confluence or equivalency. Rather, it seems that for him there is a sameness which is preserved in the very relation of differentiation that they take part in. It might appear immediately from the passage above that the sameness is merely a kind of rationally necessary fact of their being in relationship, and is relinquished to being a kind of background precondition to their differentiation. Yet parallels and similarities are noticeable throughout his accounts of both world and positionality that ask this statement of sameness to be taken more seriously. I aim to lay several of them out here in an effort to further understand how his ideas of world and positionality are in the expressed relation above. Thus, from an interpretive standpoint, what points of sameness and differentiation can be seen in the discussions of “world” and “positionality” taken from *The Thing and Positionality*?

3.1: Relationality

In looking at their similarity, we can read both Heidegger's discussion of essence in *The Thing* and of standing reserve in *Positionality* as fundamentally relational accounts of the being of beings, or as possessing characteristics of relational ontologies. This does not mean to say that Heidegger's account of positionality plays the same role as that of the fourfold for him: it has been previously discussed that he sees positionality as primarily a mode of forgetting essence or the being of beings (the world). *Positionality* nonetheless does give an account of the way that presencing occurs in our current world era, and thus holds real ontological significance for us. Despite their different roles in Heidegger's account, both "world" and "positionality" admit of comparison and he seems to clearly encourage their comparison in his characterizing them as "the same" at all.

How does relationality represent a sameness of world and positionality? We established in Section 1 on "world" that a primary feature in Heidegger's account of essence and a particular point of its differentiation from previous accounts is that the essence of the jug lies in its complete involvement in and implication of the totality of its relations to other things. This gathered totality of relations is expressed in the ringing mirror-play of the fourfold or what Heidegger terms the "worlding of world" (20, 46). Thus the "truth of the essence of being" (46) or world, lies in the playing out of the relations between things and their referential totality. This basic relational structure is similarly followed by the presencing of standing reserve in *Positionality*.

Each piece of standing reserve similarly only presences insofar as it completes or potentially contributes to the moving-forward of the unending chain of requisitioning. Taken in the concrete example of the machine, Heidegger's concept of a piece of standing

reserve can be represented by a given component of the machine. The component or piece only stands in relation to the machine insofar as it contributes to its continuous running. Further, the being of the component is, from the perspective of the machine, constituted by its relations to the totality of other parts in the machine in that the machine can only run when they all work. In this way, the fact of the part's contribution or potential future contribution to the running of the machine is its only grounds for being at all. The being of the piece is fundamentally relational in this way: it implicates the being of all other pieces in the machine in that they are all required for the machine's running which is the very grounds of the initial piece's being. Positionality [*Ge-Stell*] represents the gathering and taking place of all positionings as standing reserve—that is putting in relation with other pieces of standing reserve. Thus we can see the similar active gathering of relations that takes place in Heidegger's concepts of world and positionality. Because both the thinging thing and standing reserve consist essentially in nothing other than their relations, they both stand opposed to the static "object" of metaphysics, which consists by definition in its self-standing, fully independent character. This similarity represents a sameness in their conceptual structures but leaves room for their being simultaneously essentially set against one another as the second feature of their sameness.

But, how are the relational aspects of world and positionality "set against one another to the very extremes of their essence?" In order to clarify precisely *how* world and positionality are set against each other, Heidegger writes,

"But the contrariety of world and positionality is no mere present-at-hand antagonism, something representable between present-at-hand objects. The contrariety takes place. It takes place within the same as what essences of being itself."

It is important in his structure that the differentiation between world and positionality is a relation that occurs through their respective essential activities as opposed to a statically qualitative difference between the two. And this makes sense as the relations between pieces of standing reserve and between things as things for Heidegger both occur differently. In the way that their shared relational structure results in very different respective activities in the worlding of world and under the reign of positionality, we can see their activity as forming a “relation of differentiation” that simultaneously “reserves” their sameness (49).

3.2 Gathering

“We name the appropriating mirror-play of the single fold [*Einfalt*] of the earth and sky, divinities and mortals, the world.” (18)

“We now name the self-gathered collection of positioning [*des Stellens*], wherein everything orderable essences in the standing reserve, positionality [*das Ge-Stell*].” (31)

The idea of a “gathering” is instrumental to the concepts of both world and positionality. In *Ge-Stell* or positionality, we see the gathering expressed by the prefix *Ge*. It is the gathered collection of positioning (*stellen*), or the gathered totality of the activity through which everything that presences as standing reserve presences. And this gathering is done “never belatedly” (30). That is, this gathering denoted by the *Ge* is always done already and inherently so that the reference to a “self-gathered collection” is not the gathering of disparate activities after the fact but instead refers to a kind of principle of all action. Thus we can remember positionality is essentially a gathering and uniting of many singular activities that at once represents them as gathered yet expresses their particularity.

In this remembrance of positionality we can see its similarity to the fouring of the four, thinging of the thing, and worlding of world. In naming the appropriating mirror-play of the fourfold “the world,” we can identify the concept of world with the mirror-play as has been done previously. The mirror-play is specifically in reference to the mirrorplay of the fourfold or [*Das Geviert*]¹¹. The word fourfold represents the gathered (*Ge*) four (*viert*) of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Thus the world is the play of the mirror-play that gathers the four in their united fouring in the single fold [*Einfalt*] of the four.

Both world and positionality can be read as gatherings. In this further common conceptual structure, we see again their sameness. But this sameness is again, in what is gathered by each, “much more the relation of differentiation” in that the one gathers all positioning which is itself the very forgetfulness of the essence gathered by the world.

3.3 Circling

References to circular movement and imagery appear throughout Heidegger’s discussions of both world and positionality. These references give the account a point of contact with every facet of our experience through the geometrical-experiential invocations of the circle, of the round dance, of oscillation, of infinitely running, and of circular chains. This imagery of circling thus provides another point to see the sameness between world and positionality in *Insight Into That Which Is*.

In *The Thing*, “The mirror-play of the world is the round dance of appropriation [*Reigen des Ereigens*]. For this reason the round dance does not hug the four like a hoop. The round dance is a ring that rings by its play as a mirroring” (18). Here the ringing is

¹¹ *Das Geviert* does not actually have the world fold in it as mentioned before, but Mitchell translates it as fourfold. Rather, it explicitly refers to a gathered (*Ge*) four (*Vier*).

integral to fouring of the four, not subordinate to it as a means but rather the play itself of the mirror-play is the round dancing of the four. Thus the circling-dancing is the very activity by which essence is expressed for Heidegger in *The Thing*. The circular motion is the sort of conceptual instrument by which the note of the united fold of the four is played. It is maybe precisely the point that allows some glimpse of “insight into that which is” for Heidegger. The importance of the ringing or circling to the worlding of world finds its clearest expression when he writes, on the final page of *The Thing*,

“Whatever becomes a thing, it takes place from out of the circling of the mirror-play of the world. Only when, presumably suddenly, the world worlds as world does the ring shine forth that ringingly releases the circling of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, into the nimbleness of its single fold.” (20)

The idea of a circling and ringing lets Heidegger walk the line between representing essence as a collapsed unity of all things and an entirely particular account that severs the connection between the essence of things and their relations. The “nimbleness of the single fold” can be read as the fact that it rings. Ringing and circling share a visual and geometric sameness that I aim to highlight here to show the instrumental role of circling for “insight into that which is” on Heidegger’s terms.

This important role of circling in the very revealing of essence for Heidegger is almost exactly mirrored by the way that positionality constitutes a very forgetting of essence through the very same shape.

3.4 The Will to Explain

Both the world and positionality remain ultimately inexplicable for Heidegger. This impossibility of representing either concept completely clearly to human thinking is another important feature of their sameness and differentiation. Both world and

positionality partake in a realm that is—at least presently and for the most part—concealed from human thinking for him. World is what remains concealed (45, 47) and positionality is the activity of it concealing (49) that is itself generally concealed from human thinking. The concealedness of both world and positionality do not, however, prevent us from giving partial and or allegorical accounts of them, but rather puts them into a particular relation with human thinking which is important for our understanding of them in Heidegger's thought. Further, their concealedness from human thinking does not place them in a realm that we might fancy to be entirely independent of human thinking, as their very discussion by Heidegger in the lectures suggests the possibility of engagement with them through human thinking. Thus we, somewhat ironically, represent the concepts of world and positionality as unconquerable by human representation. On page 18, he more clearly explains how "world as world" is inexplicable in human thinking:

"The inexplicability and ungroundability of the worlding of world lies much more in the fact that things like causes and grounds remain unsuitable for the worlding of world. As soon as human knowing reaches some kind of explanation here, it does not somehow step over the essence of the world, but rather collapses beneath the essence of world. The human will to explain does not at all reach into what is simplistic in the single fold of worlding." (18)

We thus understand the world as in essence withdrawn from the realm of human representation and thinking. It only admits of representation insofar as we express its inability to be expressed fully to us. The human will to explain, in the total expenditure of its strength, collapses before it. There are no stepping stones to the essence of this world. We can understand this experience immediately when we attempt to think the single fold of the four. We can understand its possibility and even truth, we can imagine

experiencing it through the circling dance, but ultimately comprehension collapses before such a task in the same way that Western explanatory thinking has collapsed in supplication before the trinity since antiquity. It seems thus that for Heidegger essence must be something which is fundamentally out of reach of the will to explain, and this fact of its ultimate inexplicability makes its own argument for the concealedness of “world as world.”

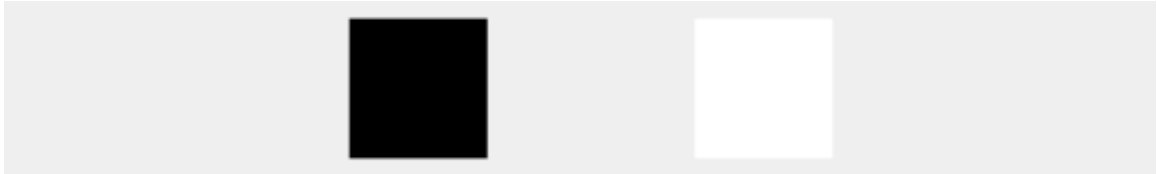
Positionality shares another facet of sameness with the “worlding of world” in that its fundamental activity, requisitioning [*Bestellen*], is similarly unexplainable. Although we don’t look its inexplicability in the face in the same way as the single fold of the four, we can see the way that requisitioning remains unexplainable on account of its ontological determining power in Heidegger’s system.

“Requisitioning cannot be explained at all, i.e. it cannot be lead back to something clear. We unwittingly pass off as clear everything that is readily and commonly known to us and generally held to be unquestionable. What we are in the habit of explaining by something clear is always merely rendered unconsidered and thoughtless.” (30)

What is “clear” or “readily and commonly known to us” always seems to be under the power of requisitioning and has therefore already been requisitioned into a certain kind of disclosedness to human understanding for Heidegger (48). Thus what is immediately and commonly held as true by human understanding would not be sufficient to explain the very thing that determines all presencing for humans. In positioning all presencing as standing reserve (30), requisitioning leads to two kinds of forgetfulness. Insofar as it conceals the world, it is the world’s forgetfulness of itself and insofar as it positions *all* presencing for humans, it leads to a human forgetfulness of the fact that all presencing is positioned or presences as standing reserve. Because of the immense determining power

that positionality yields over human thinking and experience, we lapse into forgetfulness of its power at all and accept standing reserve as what *is*. As a result of this forgetfulness, requisitioning similarly resists explanation as it is the principle of forgetfulness itself.

Heidegger's concepts of world and positionality present themselves as two unbordered squares, one black and one white. Each has four sides, all of equal length.



The forms of the two squares are the same. But this relation is much more a relation of differentiation. Their geometrical congruence is only expressed to the extent that the areas occupied by the black and white points have the same dimensions and cover equal areas. But every point in the black square that makes its form (and every point is implicated by every other point in their gathered expression as the black square) corresponds to a point of the opposite tone value in the white square. The very sameness of the forms of the two squares therefore expresses the way that they are, “to the very extremes of their essence, set against one another.”

Section 4 - Ἀλήθεια

Having explored several more formal modes of sameness as differentiation between the concepts of world and positionality through examinations of his arguments in *The Thing*, and *Positionality*, we can turn to *The Danger* for an account of their sameness and relation in Heidegger's explicit system. This section aims to answer more closely *why* world and positionality are the same for him as opposed to merely laying out the ways that they are the same and different or answering the *how*. This section can be

read as an attempt to understand the roots of both world and positionality in Heidegger's system more than to describe the efficient causes of their simultaneous sameness and differentiation.

The concept of *Ἀλήθεια* serves as a systematic connection between world and positionality in *The Danger*. If we see them as immediately opposed and thus cut off from one another, *Ἀλήθεια* represents the way world and positionality remain necessarily linked in human thinking and offers insight into Heidegger's understanding of their sameness. *Ἀλήθεια* ties together the concealment of world as world that we ascribe to positionality with the activity of world as world. Through an understanding of *Ἀλήθεια*, we can chart a path from the concealment and forgetfulness of essence that we experience in our present age to at least the hint of an essence beyond what is clear and known to us.

For Heidegger, the term *Ἀλήθεια* reveals the way that the very forgetfulness of world or essence itself—when understood as forgetfulness—can point us to the true origin of being. This argument rests importantly on the way that *Λήθη* (*lēthē*, “a forgetting, forgetfulness”) is contained within and negated (the *Ἀ* in *Ἀλήθεια* is a negative prefix) in the word *Ἀλήθεια*. He writes,

“To remain concealed is called in Greek *λανθάνειν*. *Λήθη* is concealment. World, in its self-refusing worlding, remains concealed as the essential provenance of being. Yet world remains in concealment (*Λήθη*) in such a way that its concealment precisely affords an unconcealment: the *Ἀλήθεια*. This is the lighting sheltering of the presencing of what presences in its unconcealment.” (47)

We see that *Ἀλήθεια* here represents the way that the world's concealment of itself through positionality is precisely what allows for an unconcealment. This unconcealment though is importantly not one where the true essence of beings reveals itself—it is rather

a revealing of the presencing itself. A part of what is revealed then is the fact that beings for us are a result of “presencing” and not “essencing.” And this unconcealment, for Heidegger, reveals and retains its essential source as a concealment or forgetting (Λήθη).

“Α-λήθεια, the unconcealment of what presences as such, however, essences only when and for as long as concealment, Λήθη, takes place. For Αλήθεια does not abolish Λήθη. Unconcealment does not consume concealment, but instead unconcealment constantly requires concealment and in this way confirms it as the essential source of Αλήθεια.” (47)

We can see in the structure of the word Αλήθεια that the λήθη is not abolished but carried in it, demonstrating the way that the world’s concealment of itself (“self-refusing worlding” above) is exactly what makes the unconcealment of the worlds activity possible. That is, the Αλήθεια requires λήθη. Λήθη here is importantly connected with concealedness as well as forgetting. Αλήθεια thus serves as a way into the understanding that, for Heidegger, the very same thing we have called “world” and set against “positionality” is, in fact, the very principle of positionality’s activity in that positionality comes to be understood as the world concealing itself (“self-refusing worlding”). The Αλήθεια represents human thinking’s ability to at once see its own determination by a greater power and to recognize the existence of that other, yet still-concealed world of what *is*.

But this understanding of the way that the world conceals and refuses itself “as world” is not immediately clear through experience or even commonly thought. For Heidegger, nearly all thinking, even that which aims to describe the order and being of things, ultimately constitutes a forgetfulness. This is because the world, in refusing itself, dispenses structures of being that are not the “thinging of the thing” or “the worlding of world” but are rather particular ways that being is disclosed to human thinking. As a

result of the dispensation of these structures, Western European thinking in general has remained confined to understandings of being in the world that do not access the true essence of being, or what he has referred to “the thing as thing.” This is to say that world conceals itself by the very act of revealing, but only revealing things in a particular way.

The unifying structural element of Heidegger’s systematic connection between world and positionality is his idea of *Beyng*. *Beyng* [*seyn*] refers to the “being” [*sein*] which stands behind all the dispensations of being. In this way *Beyng* *positions* itself in a certain mode of unconcealment. *Beyng* seems to represent what we might reductively call “the real being” for Heidegger. It references what we already understand “being” to be but is at the same time importantly different from this understanding of being. In a basic sense and for our purposes here, we can understand *beyng* as what would essence as the fouring of the four in the fourfold but what instead forgets and pursues itself through positionality. *Beyng* thus represents the systematic sameness of world and positionality for Heidegger in that it does both of these things. He sees world and positionality as two opposed ways that *beyng* discloses itself to human understanding. In *The Danger* he writes, “This essential danger is the way that what is same—world and positionality as the respective differentiation of what essences of *beyng*—displaces itself from itself in setting after itself” (51). Most importantly, he clearly establishes *beyng* here as the source of both worlding and positioning. *Beyng* essences, and its essencing is differentiated into world and positionality. Returning to the black and white squares from before, we can see “what essences of *beyng*” as the form of the square. What is the same though—the form of the square—is differently the same in its being black or white. Here though, we have

the added reason for why world and positionality are differently the same. It is the activity of beyng “displacing itself from itself in setting after itself.”

The “setting after itself” of beyng contains a reason for the sameness of world and positionality in *Insight Into That Which Is*. They must be the same for Heidegger in that they are two conjugate activities of the same entity: beyng. And in setting after itself, being releases these two aspects of essence as components of this activity. In something setting after itself, it is necessarily two things which are both equally true expressions of its being. With regard to beyng: the “itself” that gets pursued and the “setting after” seem to find representation for Heidegger in, respectively, world and positionality. This fundamental activity of beyng in *Insight Into That Which Is* is a more complex representation of one that we are likely already familiar with. We can already recognize the ways that our representation of “self” falls into this dual picture: we are immediately inclined to see ourselves as a definite being with certain essential qualities, but already in making this assertion we—through the act of “seeing ourselves” at all—are forced to acknowledge the equally real existence of the self that looks at or the self that pursues itself.

Heidegger takes the idea of pursuit farther than a mere standing outside of one’s self, however. For him, the pursuit as “the danger” has the particular quality of forgetting:

“The danger [*die Gefahr*] is the collected pursuit [*fara* in Old High German] as which positionality pursues the self-refusal of world with the forgetting of its truth through the unguarding of the thing.” (51)

Pursuit here, and in *The Danger* generally, thus takes on the very specific cast of danger and of forgetfulness. The forgetfulness is what, it seems, is the feature of the pursuit that allows it to be indefinite and results in the unending chain of requisitioning. Pursuit alone

is generally thought to have a particular objective. Pursuit “with the forgetting of its truth,” however, leads to a forgetfulness of the fact that one is pursuing at all, thus plunging all presencing into the flowing waters of Λήθη.

But where is the explicit connection for Heidegger between the danger [*die Gefahr*] and the essence of technology? The essence of technology has been named positionality [*Gestell*] or the gathered collection of positionings. To see the connection, we ask how Beyng goes about its pursuit of itself. We have established that Beyng sends or dispenses epochs of the forgetfulness of itself and of world. This dispensation is its forgetful pursuit of itself.

“This pursuit [*Nachstellen*] is the authentic positioning [*Stellen*], which takes place in the essence of positionality. In this pursuit there first rests that positioning of positionality that, in the manner of the standing reserve, places all that presences in the state of the unguardedness of the thing. The innermost essence of positioning, as which positionality essences, is pursuit as here characterized.” (50)

Here we can see the connection between the danger, pursuit, and positioning both etymologically and structurally in Heidegger’s argument. Pursuit is the way that positionality “essences” in human understanding and pursuit is the fundamental activity which is gathered in our concept of danger. Thus the essence of technology (positionality) understood as pursuit is the danger, or the activity by which world refuses itself in forgetful pursuit of itself. In this way we can see modern technology—in the sense that it reflects this pursuit through the positioning of all presencing in the world as standing reserve—as offering a kind of hint at the true activity of Beyng, which Heidegger sees as having been hidden until now. What do we stand to learn from a characterization of modern technology as the manifestation of a self-pursual that forgets its truth?

Conclusion

We end up looking at the world around us as one that is, for Heidegger, filled with ways of forgetting its own forgetfulness of itself. It is a world where, for the most part, the actuality of essence is concealed, and it is further forgotten that essence is concealed at all. We might see this in the myriad ways that current human organizations attempt to solve our issues with the very same thinking and mode of engaging with the world that created them in the first place. Heidegger paints contemporary reality as one that inhabits, for the most part, a determination of being that it is not aware of. Yet, a slight glimmer of metaphysical hope shines through in *The Turn*, which we have not discussed to this point.

The Turn represents a potential human openness to the worlding of world as we have discussed in Section 1. And although the worlding of world happens through “no human machination,” what we have said about world and positionality shows its possibility for Heidegger. In that the world and positionality, though set against each other to the extremes of their essence, are simultaneously the same, we see the way that an awareness of positionality can lead to an awareness of world. In looking at a photographic negative we are in one way systematically shown the exact opposite of the original photo yet at the same time made potentially explicitly aware of the possible being of the present image’s opposite. Through the very study of the way in which essence is precisely not itself, we come to an awareness of the existence of what obscures itself.

Thus we are offered a glimpse of hope in a world that feels accurately characterized as deeply submerged in the forgetfulness of itself. A world that—under the reign of scientific-technological apparatuses for penetrating and extracting knowledge

and materials from every facet of existence—finds pleasure in its self-dissection and annihilation. This glimpse of hope, for Heidegger, seems to lie in an awareness that the current mode of presencing is one actuality among others. It further lies in an understanding of the human as a being which is fundamentally capable of experience outside the reign of positioning.

The turn reaches a kind of crescendo where we see the worlding of world and the existence of modern technology as increasingly opposed to each other and yet, through this opposition, constituting an increasing proximity of the human to the truth of being. Heidegger's quotation from the Hölderlin poem¹² takes on a clearer meaning through this understanding of world and positionality:

“But where the danger is, there grows also what saves.” (68)

The very image of a turn which is invoked by Heidegger's use of it here, suggests this to us: that as one turns farther and farther away from that which they originally faced, they approach a turning all the way around that brings them back to face what they had originally turned away from. This quality of the turn as a circular movement is suggested when he writes:

“The self-refusal of the truth of beyng, pursuing itself with forgetfulness, harbors a still-ungranted grace: that this self-pursuit turn itself, that through such a turn forgetfulness turn itself about and become guardianship of the essence of beyng, instead of letting this essence lapse into dissemblance.” (69)

We can understand the “still-ungranted” grace as this possibility of being “turned about” into the worlding of world which is here called “guardianship of the essence of beyng.”

While we cannot actuate this turn through an act of will, we can dwell in its possibility by bringing ourselves into awareness of what is differently the same—that is,

¹² Friederich Hölderlin, *Patmos*

an understanding of sameness that does not merely collapse difference into what is identical and equivalent but inhabits the full fact of differentiation and sameness simultaneously. Human thinking often fails to do this for the most part: our world as one governed by the sciences and technological thinking generally asks about what has been actuated and thus asks about “which, of the several mutually exclusive paths, has been chosen?” There is no room for being differently the same in this kind of thinking. We also know that this thinking is fundamentally deficient for an expression of what we know to be true—we cannot exist entirely submerged in a world where what is real is what has been positioned beforehand as clear and actual only in effect. We need always and return always to something that holds and dwells in what is differently the same. Heidegger seems to suggest in his original essay *The Question Concerning Technology* that the human turn towards “what is” might be accomplished through poetry. I wonder if this is true for him in part because poetry is a way to think paradox, opposed truths, contradiction—a way to think what I have called here “different sameness.” What is illuminated by dwelling with poetry in this realm?

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