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Echoes of No Thing: Thinking between Heidegger and Dōgen

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Introduction

*Younger Man: In waiting, we are purely
“present” as literally “waiting-toward.”*

*Older Man: And nothing else. We are this so purely that from
nowhere else does something stand over against us, to which we
could cling and into which we would still want to escape.*

*Younger Man: In waiting, we are in such a manner as though we
were to have passed away unnoticed and unnamed — not there
for all who still await this or that and still expect from this or that
something for themselves, Waiting is in essence otherwise than all
awaiting and expecting, which are basically unable to wait.*

— Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*

*Entirely worlding the entire world with the whole world is thus called
penetrating exhaustively. To immediately manifest the bodying of
the tall golden Buddha with the body of the tall golden Buddha
as the arising of religious mind, as practice, as enlightenment, as
nirvana — that is being, that is time. One does nothing but penetrate
entire time as entire being. There is nothing remaining left over.*

— Dōgen, “Uji”

John Cage’s 4’33” remains an echo, a repetition of the space of
silence and all silence entails. Performed for the first time by

pianist David Tudor in 1954 during a piano recital in Woodstock, New York, it asks of the performer to sit at the piano, and to “perform” a piece of music. Tudor interpreted the instructions Cage had written and sat at the piano, with the lid raised, for two minutes and twenty-three seconds. He then closed the lid, checked his watch, and raised it again. He sat for another two minutes, and then left the stage. Whereas the music created during a conventional concert, in effect, banishes the sound of the world by filling a discrete space with a sequence of pre-selected notes, Cage’s 4’33” — performed *as* silence — beckons sound forth, to come forward, to intrude or even to rest in the space. Sound, noise, voice, music are all made present through silence’s *be*-coming. An echo of silence shelters and holds itself as silence as a vessel or form holds itself. In the destruction of silence, noise creates the piece. Noise presencing is allowed to be revealed through the absencing of action, through the absencing of the intentional making of a note, of composed, ordered music. In English, the verb “to make” remains the same whether one is making a building or work of art. In Latin, however, we can separate the two terms; *facio*, which refers to the making of material things, is contrasted to *creo* which, as its name implies, refers to the creation of a thing. Creation carries with it a semblance of the divine, something which is primordial, unmade. Allowing noise to come forward as an incipient irruption into the silence, to *be*-come, is an unmaking of its original form. Though criticized as a sham and a farce at the time, 4’33” has become an iconic¹ piece of “music” and inscribes perfectly a silence between words (without language) as the space between notes, between intentional noises. What is important about the piece, however, is not its shock value, but rather the attempt Cage made to say, or to think, silence within sounds, to think the unsignable within an architecture of signs, to say — or give voice to — the unsayable, that which refuses to be said, and

1 There are numerous videos online “recreating” the silence(s) of Cage’s 4’33”, including a death metal version by Dead Territory, <https://youtu.be/voqC-QSDAcn8>.

which emerges in the space between, and which makes noise qua noise impossible.

Heidegger's Echoes

Like the dynamic silences in 4'33", the world itself seems to be defined by the movement of objects within the lacunal spaces of nothing, objects that are both in relation to each other and to *no[special]thing*. Martin Heidegger describes this movement as a resonating, or the play between withdrawal and unconcealment, a resonating which allows for the "essential occurrence of Being [*Seyn*] in the abandonment of being."² Like the anticipated withdrawal of formal composition in 4'33", Heidegger describes a space between, the abandonment of the absolute in favor of the unconcealing of that which remains covered. Like sounds emerging in silence, things come to be in their absence(s) and withdrawal. The phenomenological appearance of the object in the world both shields itself as it appears and disappears from the stage in its coming to be. Everything seems, on one level, to be in doubt, and like *The Republic's* grand puppet show, in which the assumed reality of the phenomenon quite literally disappears epistemologically up what could be termed a rabbit hole, so our attempt to understand the object similarly resists definition, defying language even to make sense of a senseless world. Like the sounds that come to be during 4'33", unrehearsed, uncoordinated, un-curated, chaotic, and cluttered, so things, and even beings, suddenly loom large in our world, unpredictably defying absolute definition as quickly as they come to be. What is a cloud in the sky against the autumn leaves of a yellowed tree? What is the ocean under this sky, against this land? And, more importantly, what do we, as beings, mean under this sky and in front of this sea, and, in Levinasian terms at least, as beings "here below"? For Heidegger, beings in the world take

2 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 85.

place in the house of language. But the object (for me if not for Heidegger) — the thing in itself — incessantly, even violently, resists definition, resists naming. So how to describe that which remains unnameable?

While 4'33" is clearly a rehearsed movement (even the movement of non-movement), an act of pure artifice and theater, there exists this play of emergence and withdrawal — perceptive and palpable — within the world, outside of the hall (concert or otherwise). It acts as a stain of being, a trace of beings' withdrawal. This essay will seek to understand the play Heidegger describes between things and beings, and beings and beings. Using as guides the initially improbable bedfellows of Heidegger and the Zen Patriarch Eihei Dōgen of 12th-century Japan to help explicate these inexplicable movements, it will attempt to chart the space — the silences — between things in an effort to understand the things themselves. As a traversal across disciplines and cultures, time and place, this thinking will anticipate conflicts and disturbances within the joining of two distinct thinkers. This play of *be-coming* can seem Heraclitean (*as something is coming to be, it is becoming something other than*) in its movement; it is also, with Dōgen, *within* the actual movement of things themselves. Dōgen writes, *even though you study movement, it is not what you think it is*. To Martin Heidegger, the world worlds in the pulsing movement of withdrawal and unconcealment of being, and, echoing again the movement of water, describes truth as *alētheia*, drawing on, and contrasting the root-word — *lēthē* — which refers originally to something covered up, concealed, or latent and is symbolized by mythological river Lethe, the river of forgetting. Language speaks, says Heidegger. *Die Sprache spricht*. Language, to Heidegger, resides in the house of being, yet too often this language fails to bring being forth, fails to name and summon that which comes forth. So often, we do not allow language to speak — whether to us or to others, or even to itself — we *fail* to listen. Instead we *speak* the language, we inscribe the eventual phenomenon with words, and we cover it with a saying, a chattering, which, though it claims an authority to explain and describe, is instead a babble

of noise rather than a listening — not for words but for a presencing of world — and which acts as a cover, or as a fogging of the world, and the word.

Christopher Fynsk, in writing on Blanchot's *Infinite Conversation*, describes an alternative to “the speech of the everyday” (which is what language all too commonly remains) when he describes Blanchot's desire for something “entirely different, a cold interruption, the rupture of a circle.”³ Fynsk writes that this interruption is “to will something that communicates or affirms itself in that break.”⁴ It is this rupture of the shared quotidian space where language as language seems to fail and which both Heidegger and Dōgen, as we shall see, are directing us towards. The interruption is a violence in that it destroys the veneer of commonality, yet precisely because shared commonality is a mere veneer, it “allows” for another truth, an originary experience of the event of *alētheia* to emerge. This interruption serves to illustrate the vital contrast between *lēthē* and its a-privative counterpart, *alētheia*. *Lēthē* is the covered up, the forgotten meaning that rests below the surface; as its negation, *alētheia* becomes that uncovering, that restitution of the original sense, that calling forth that the practice of thinking *as practice* allows. This is an explosive interruption. In bringing the practice of thinking forth, it, in Fynsk's treatment, opens “the fragmenting force of an infinite conversation and to will disappearance, in friendship, from the common space of achieved understanding.”⁵

The world is made of things, it is filled with objects sitting in near and distant connection and relation to each other. Language, used properly (responsibly), binds these relations and allows us to make sense of them (*if we can make sense*). Language speaks and in speaking makes the world apparent, gives form to the phenomenon. According to Heidegger, we dwell as language in the house of being. Language, again used responsibly, creates

3 This is from Blanchot's *Infinite Conversation* cited in Christopher Fynsk, *Last Steps: Maurice Blanchot's Exilic Writing* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 77.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Ibid.*, 78.

order in the world; it controls and makes *ready* the world. But language, used another way, irresponsibly though not destructively, sought not as a unifier but as a disruptive, irruptive force, as a force that withdraws instead of suffocates, allows for things to be, to come forth, to assume their own selves, and not the projected self. This, however, is a language that does not come from a subject, that does not make (*facio*) and order in the way music, composed and rendered, orders noise, or in the way words on a page order things, but rather language as a primordial, originary force allows to be, or lets be (*gelassen*) in the world. We are dealing now with two different languages; we dwell in two houses. The first is the language of logic, of the ordered, controlled world of scientific, rational thinking. The second language (and still a language) draws from the primordial ground of worlds worlding, of things coming to be; it by necessity must remain on the edge of thinking, resting on the outer fringes of thinking and always seeking a further interruption. This language is never still and always perpetually reopened. Objects come to be without language; mountains become, as do oceans and beings, before language (and will come after) but it is language, used both responsibly and otherwise, used to describe and order but also to recognize, experience, which sets them in motion in *our* world, which make them of significance to *us*. The languages of the sciences delineate and order, but primordial language *sets free* objects into the world, allows things to *be-come* of the world. Without language, how does a thing — in the world — or in our world, come to be understood? And, perhaps more importantly, how do we (as things, as beings) come to be understood to ourselves? Can we understand, perceive without language? Can we, as pure being, encounter world without language?

Not only does language always seem to fail us in the world, objects in the world fail us as well. With, or through, language, objects inevitably seem to withdraw to a further horizon of intelligibility. An object in one place seems always ready to relocate itself to another, and indeed does always withdraw from us knowing it entirely. (By objects, it is important to note that I include, with coffee cups, jet airplanes, computers, clouds and

scenic overlooks, also thoughts, ideas, conceptions, beliefs, ideologies, environments, universes and universities, and even beings themselves.)

How are we to speak about this world then, this *logos* of connections and relations, beliefs, and things, bound and possibly unbound by language? This essay will explore obliquely the use of language, and, more importantly, seek an attempt to chart what it is we experience when we experience things (through language). How are we to describe such a world, if, as Heidegger argues, we acknowledge — and name — its continual withdrawal if its always already something else as well as language's innate failure to be able to apprehend it in its withdrawal? How do we describe the being of be-ings (all beings, all things) as Being while allowing for things to continue to *lassen*, or let be? How do we talk about things, exist with things, allow ourselves to be let into (*eingelassen*) objects that are already withdrawn? How do we avoid making (*plattō*) a world of descriptions and concepts on top of a world that exists before language? How are we to come to know the world, to exist, not in a web of notions, or behind a brutally effective scrim of names, but in its originary sense. Heidegger asks if such a language would say anything at all? With Beckett, as with Heidegger, we feel we must say words “as long as there are any,”⁶ but what are words in the wreckage of language, in the gap between saying and the thing? What are words in the irruption and interruption of being's *be*-coming? And yet, silence (acquiescence) is not an option either. *We must say words. We must say words as a practice.*

One of the central texts that this study will draw on is *Country Path Conversations*, a collection of three “conversations” that Heidegger wrote in 1944–45, but which were not published until 1995, nearly twenty years after his death. In the third dialogue, “Evening Conversations,” Heidegger describes an exchange taking place within a Russian forest in a prisoner-of-war camp during the closing days of a devastating war. The war is, of course, World War II, and Heidegger's two sons were then missing, pre-

6 Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable* (New York: Grove Press, 1958), 179.

sumed to be imprisoned in the East. The dialogue is not between brothers, however, but between two men — one young and one old — who describe, among other things, the process of waiting and of waiting's *Gelassenheit*, or releasement. Waiting, for the prisoners, is a waiting on no thing (as opposed to nothing which would still be a *something*), it is an attending *towards* a pure nothing. Only through this attuned, attentive waiting — Heidegger at one point refers to it as a meditation — can “what is healing draw near.” This drawing near is a drawing near of being to beings, a healing in a world of beings violently separated from being itself. The prisoners' conversation is a description of both the stupefying boredom of their imprisonment — the sense of endless awaiting, day giving way to night, work to sleep — and, at the same time, the absolute freedom of being that a recognition of one's captivity, whether behind barbed wire or as a fundamental condition of life as an existential subject, allows. “To simply wait,” the Younger Man says, “as though this compliance were to consist in waiting; and to wait so long, as though waiting would have to outlast death.”⁷ In Heidegger's words, the clearing, which happens literally within the vast swathes of the Russian forest, is attained through “pure waiting,” and not “awaiting.” It is objectless and waits for no thing, not even Nothing. Rather, waiting is defined by the Younger Man as “to wait on that which answers pure waiting [...] waiting is letting come.”⁸ This waiting is a practice, an attunement, towards a “letting come” of no thing as rationally ordered phenomena, but rather the eventual unconcealment of an authentic event of Being.

Waiting, then, is a letting appear of what can appear, or an allowing to presence of something seemingly not there, something resolutely withdrawn (but only temporarily). As the Younger Man puts it in “Evening Conversations,” that period of waiting is the period in which, while waiting for nothing but what is to come, “we release things precisely into where we are

7 Martin Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, trans. Bret W. Davis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 140.

8 *Ibid.*, 141.

[...] let ourselves into, namely into that in which we belong.”⁹ This process, which is at once a positive action, a doing (waiting) is also a stepping back, not in the form of passive submission, but rather in the form of letting things be. The notion that “waiting is letting come” is a releasement in the form of a letting be, of allowing things (beings, in the case of Heidegger) to rest in their own being.

But, in a form of double articulation familiar to Heidegger’s readers, not only does *Gelassenheit* (releasement) allow things to “be,” it also allows things to come, to emerge into their proper form, by allowing a thing its own disclosure. It creates a space, an opening within the noise of a world worlding. Allowing for a thing to come, whether a being or, as I will argue, a coffee cup, a football, or even Heidegger’s apocryphal hammer, takes time. It is a practice; it requires a waiting, a waiting that is a listening and not a saying, a waiting that preserves and shelters, that observes and “holds” the space, refusing to fill it with the chatter of the everyday. As a practice, it is a waiting towards what is not known, but intimated; it is an anticipation of what is to come, but still unnamed. It is a waiting that is both profound and, possibly, according to the prisoners, a little boring. Boring is, for Heidegger, at least in his *Being and Time*, precisely the moment of our fundamental encounter with Dasein in its basic state.

That Heidegger chose to speak about the nature of language and of the object not through a linear text but through a dialogue, can’t be ignored. A dialogue is a form of listening as much as it is a form of saying. It is a celebration of the multi-vocal plurality over the tyranny of the univocal author. It is a play between participants, both those written (named) as well as between author and reader; the dialogue exists *in between*. A dialogue, by its very nature is a series of interruptions and as such refuses to say the absolute and refers the reader to the gaps between the interlocutors, to the space between thoughts as much as to the actual sayings of the participants. Like Cage’s 4’33” in which the sounds of not playing allowed for echoes of

9 Ibid., 149.

nothing, in a dialogue, the space between utterances, the gaps, the stuttering of unuttered thoughts, the pauses, hold as much importance as that which is said. Silences, in effect, create the work as much as the babble and chatter of language.

Indeed, in two of the texts to be discussed in this essay, in the *Country Path Conversations* (which the above dialogue is taken from) as well as in *A Dialogue on Language*, Heidegger will limit himself to the use of dialogue; in another, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, the hesitancy and wonder — the pure experiencing of thought — is dialogic in its rendering, disordered in its multivocality. More will be said of this further on, but it is important to note that even in Heidegger's essays, the mode or construct of the univocal is questioned to such a degree that the hegemony of the author — and thereby the said — is, to a large degree, broken down, subtracted, elided from the text itself, leaving a more pure space for thought, for things to emerge, for things to come. Heidegger's writing, especially in his later work, offers itself as pure thinking rather more than it seeks to declare a world; his thinking is meant as a gift and not as an absolute. The place where this thinking occurs, indeed where anything comes to be, Heidegger will call a "clearing" and a lightening (*Lichtung*); it is, for Heidegger, a place (though placeless) where, importantly, truth (*alētheia*) can for the first time come forward, can presence itself.

In "The End of Philosophy," Heidegger describes this opening, as a physical event; the forest clearing is not mere metaphor:

The adjective *licht*, "open," is the same word as "light." To open something means: "to make something light, free and open, e.g. to make the forest free of trees at one place." The openness thus originating is the clearing. What is light in the sense of being free has nothing in common with the adjective "light," meaning bright — neither linguistically nor factually.¹⁰

10 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 442.

For Heidegger, lightening means an opening: to shed light means to open a path through and into something. The opening which opens as a clearing operates as a clearing away, a making space, and becomes “the open region for everything that becomes present and absent.”¹¹ What appears as be-coming becomes only through the clearing and opening of being becoming Being between things; like sounds between silences, beings become between.

The Unnecessary Necessary

That this waiting and this releasement should echo a vaguely Buddhistic sentiment should come as no surprise to the attuned reader of Heidegger. For much of his life, Heidegger watched, and was watched, by Taoist and Buddhist thinkers in Asia, primarily in Japan. Indeed, in “Evening Conversations,” the dialogue between the prisoners ends with a retelling of an unattributed story of another dialogue between “two thinkers” of “Chinese philosophy.” Heidegger doesn’t disclose the identities of these two thinkers in his dialogue (the names of the two “escapes” the Older Man), but we know it to be a discourse between a Master Hui Tzu and, more notably, the great Taoist thinker Chuang Tzu of the 4th century BCE. Heidegger writes:

The one said: “You are talking about the unnecessary.”

The other said: “A person must first have recognized the unnecessary before one can talk with him about the necessary. The earth is wide and large, and yet, in order to stand, the human needs only enough space to be able to put his foot down. But if directly next to his foot a crevice were to open up that dropped down into the underworld, then would the space where he stands still be of use to him?”

The one said: “It would be of no more use to him.”

¹¹ Ibid.

The other said: "From this the necessity of the unnecessary is clearly apparent."¹²

The necessity of the unnecessary is apparent as well to the two prisoners who struggle in their conversation with the concept of waiting on that which is a "waiting on coming" (and its resultant releasement, or *Gelassenheit*.) It is only through the attuned thinking (and waiting) on the unnecessary that what is to come, can come. Life, from an early stage, teaches us to ignore and to wall off the unnecessary; it teaches us to privilege the necessary instead. Whether it is through education or learned experience, the unnecessary is elided too often by the quantifiable existence of bare life. To the Younger Man, "the burning pain is that we are not permitted to be there [*da sein*] for the unnecessary," the Older Man, warning against ignoring the unnecessary, says, "it is not that the unnecessary is in a state of abandonment, but rather that we — we who do not pay attention to the unnecessary as that which is a necessity — are those who are abandoned."¹³ The necessity of the unnecessary is, to the prisoners, like a sound which "even if it should fade away unheard — requires the instrument which gives it off." The unnecessary — even neglected and often damaged — gives life — *vita* — to the denuded existence of the everyday.

A traditional formulation of the necessary can, in itself, be seen dialectically. There is a necessary, so therefore, there must be an unnecessary; if there is something, there must be nothing, for a thing to be there must also be a (no)thing. This is the basis of traditional Western thinking, beginning with Aristotle and the concept of the excluded middle. It is the basis of a logic and a thinking which is scientific and rational, and, at a bare minimum, is all that is necessary to explain to us the world, or at least, a world. Heidegger's two prisoners, in contrast to the above, point us to conceptual thinking that requires something else, a thinking that orients us in a direction that does not lie

¹² Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 156.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 155

between two poles of thought (that there is or that there is not), but that, as Jean-Luc Nancy has written, *creates* a world that “is never still” and always “perpetually reopened.”¹⁴ The possibility that Heidegger directs us towards is inconceivable, though not, perhaps, inexperienceable, and it is the experience of this inconceivable to which Heidegger orients us in his conceptual thinking on *Ereignis* — the event of being — and *Gelassenheit* — or releasement.

At the end of the telling of the story of Chuang Tzu, the Younger Man says that we should “think of what poetically condenses.” This is vague and difficult, at first glance, to apprehend; Heidegger remains elusive and refuses, perhaps, the necessary definitions that one is tempted to place on his words, but this only serves to underline the poetically condensed necessary unnecessary that the prisoners are calling for, and which the Older Man urges the Younger to teach: “Thus, we must learn to know the necessity of the unnecessary and, as learners, teach it to the peoples.” The Younger Man replies that “the need and the necessity of the unnecessary [...] may perhaps be the sole content of [our] teaching” for years to come.¹⁵

In a later work, “What Calls for Thinking,” Heidegger declares that true thinking is necessarily unscientific, and that science itself famously does not think. For Heidegger, thinking is a leap into the abyssal unknown, into the lacunal space between. In “What Calls for Thinking,” Heidegger writes that “there is no bridge here — only the leap,” and further, that “we must let ourselves be admitted into questions that seek what no inventiveness can find.”¹⁶ To do this, we must “let” ourselves unlearn what we have learned, to let go of scientific knowledge, of what is known on the knowable materialist plane and fall into the “draft” of that which withdraws from us, to make way for a thinking that always pulls away, that always denies interpretation in place of

14 Jean-Luc Nancy and Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Retreating the Political*, ed. Simon Sparks (London: Routledge, 1997).

15 Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 155.

16 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 374.

a more originary event, the event of being-thinking. Authentic thinking, for Heidegger, is a pointing towards (what has withdrawn), and therefore, humankind's essential being is a pointer and a sign, but as a sign "remains without interpretation." Authentic thinking for Heidegger allows for the unnecessary to appear as the necessary. It allows re-orientation towards the ambiguous, rather than remaining in the known. It allows to be *unnamed*, rather than to be *named*.

A concern in this study is to examine what we speak about when we speak. How are we to speak, ontologically (or otherwise), of (a) something (being) which continually pulls away, something that has already necessarily withdrawn, and that only by bearing witness (acknowledging, allowing through releasing) to its withdrawal comes forth? To speak would be to interpret it, to name it and call it forth. This naming would be a challenging, a holding in reserve of the thing, and yet, we must wait in order to allow for a letting come. Naming isolates and separates; (a)waiting is an allowing to come forward. (A)waiting makes the space — clears a clearing — for the emergency of being becoming, for the event of *alētheia*. Using Heidegger as a guide (as a pointer and a sign) towards that which withdraws will be our only way forward, and yet here, too, Heidegger warns us away from using — or saying — a language that "is ever more widely misused and destroyed by incessant talking."¹⁷ In *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, Heidegger writes that a language of beings can never reveal truth directly, and even the invention of a new language is impossible. It is only through "transformed saying" that "domains [which] are still closed off to us" can be pushed into. "Thus," writes Heidegger in *Contributions*, "only one thing counts: to say the most nobly formed language in its simplicity and essential force, to say the languages of beings as the language of be-ing."

The play between East and West continues in *A Dialogue on Language*. Written nearly two decades after *Country Path Conversations*, Heidegger continues to explore this saying *that is not*

17 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 54.

a saying. This time, rather than prisoners, Heidegger's dialogue takes places between "an inquirer" (Heidegger) and "a Japanese." The dialogue is a fictionalized account of a meeting Heidegger had with Tezuka Tomio in 1954, and picks up on a conversation on aesthetics that Heidegger had begun with Count Shuzo Kuki in the 1920s. That this "Japanese" is engaged in a questioning with Heidegger is not insignificant, given the difficulty of what they are attempting to talk about. At the start of the text, Tezuka invokes Count Shuzo Kuki and Kuki's teacher Nishida, the primary thinker identified with the Kyoto School, a group of philosophers associated with Kyoto University, which flourished both before and after World War II.¹⁸ It is at this point where the leap (*for there is no bridge*) between Western philosophical thinking and the East becomes most apparent (*comes to be*). Though it is true that Heidegger argues from a place of being, and Eastern philosophical thinking originates from a place of nothingness (*mu*), the two seem to point towards, especially in Heidegger's late thinking, an in-between, a being, or *be*-coming, of no-thing. Nishida's student, Keiji Nishitani, takes up this question of no thing in his *Religion and Nothingness*, a text we will explore more fully in a later chapter. For Nishitani, the concept of relative nothingness, so threatening in a Western context as nihilism, is, when radicalized in Eastern thought as Absolute Emptiness, or the "emptiness of emptiness" (*kūkyō*), becomes a point of practice through which we can (re)assume a radical authenticity, or presentness.

In Heidegger's *Dialogue*, the "Japanese" and his interlocutor attempt to understand a single Japanese word: *iki*, which normally refers to aesthetics, but which the "Japanese,"¹⁹ claims Heidegger, describes as "the pure delight of the beckoning

18 Like Heidegger's political past, the history of the Kyoto School is one of a series of mistakes as the thinkers associated with the school found themselves deeply drawn into the political and nationalistic issues of the Imperial Government in the lead up to Japan's imperial expansion and World War II.

19 Here, we cannot be sure if Heidegger is referring to Tezuka Tomio, Count Shuzo Kuki, or using "Japanese" as a collective noun.

stillness.”²⁰ So, like the younger man and the older man who call forth the “pure waiting [that] would be like the echo of pure coming,”²¹ so *iki*, to Heidegger, explains the delight of no thing. For Heidegger, again in the words of the “Japanese,” *iki*, or that “pure delight” as “the breath of stillness that makes this beckoning delight come into its own is the reign under which that delight is made to come.”²² In response to this, the interlocutor attempts to use *iki* to explain *koto ba*, or language. The “Japanese” translates *koto ba* as “the happening of the lightening message of the graciousness that brings forth [and which holds] sway over that which needs the shelter of all that flourishes and flowers.” Heidegger claims that this “wondrous” word which “names something other than our names, understood, metaphysically, present to us: language, glossa, lingua, langue.” Heidegger states that this *koto ba* “brings forth” a more fitting word for language, which is “saying” and which “let[s] appear and let[s] shine, but in the manner of hinting.” Thinking then, is, through a saying which is not a name for “human speaking,” but which “hints and beckons...and is like a saga.”

Dōgen’s Penetrating Exhaustively

Allowing for something to hint and beckon — to come to be — is not a concern for Eihei Dōgen, the 12th-century Japanese Buddhist thinker, however. Though of an obviously radically different era and culture than Heidegger’s, and Nishitani’s, many of Dōgen’s concerns are similar, and will prove useful (at least in this study) in clarifying some of Heidegger’s ideas (and vice versa).

In contrast to a traditional Western concept of things coming to be, things, for Dōgen, already are, and, in being already, the world is “penetrated exhaustively”; the world already is, and

20 Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: HarperCollins, 1971), 47.

21 Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations*, 147.

22 Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, 45.

doesn't *come to be*. Our perception of the world remains on the surface; we imagine things to be or not to be, we imagine death and birth to be separate occurrences, absence and presence to occur in relation and against one another. For Dōgen, these things are always already occurring (though not *be-coming*). Being happens not along a teleological path, but as occurrence. Drawing heavily on a concept of time that is the eternal now, or *nikon*, and more importantly on a sort of *timelessness(time)* — a time which occurs without (outside of) time — things in this world simply are. An object, to Dōgen, is its own “independent” being only in the time that it is in right now. This coming to be of an object is a form of stepping back or letting be, of “allowing” something (being or object) to be the object or being that it is at that moment, and not enframing it in what it was, or what it might become. Timelessness(time) does enframe the object, the thing, but only in its own moment (a moment which is not a moment in time, but instead a presencing, an occurring of being-now) as both worthy of that specific time, and as a recognition that there is literally no other time than the time of just now. This acts in exact opposition to the traditional Western metaphysical view of time which sees a series of seriatim, discrete moments stretching forwards and backwards as they pass through the rigid, inevitable portal of the now of present time. Time in the West frames and denotes, capturing objects in order to hold them at bay (in reserve), mining and forming them, making them into something other than what they are in their authentic, primordial self. This ordering or enframing for Heidegger “drives out every other possibility of revealing.”²³ For Dōgen, a thing may have a past and a future, but there is no “becoming” of something; things just are already (as they have always already been) in an event of timelessness(time). It is not a “revealing” that takes place so much as a deep recognition that things already are as they are.

In the prosaic Western view, a thing becomes something for us, or at least in relation to us, based on the conceptualization

23 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 332.

and objectification of the relationship between us and things, or things and other things. A building is there to serve a purpose, as a church or bank or home, as is an ice cream cone, enjoyed, bartered, imagined, as am I. A thing in the world perdures until it no longer does. There is, in this telling, a *telos* to all things and being; being which in its unfolding is temporally located, and centered on a thing's relation to the perceiver. For Descartes, his existence was proven — despite his doubt — through his having thought. For Berkeley, the perceiving of the thing gives it its beingness, its essence. Either way, being remains a subject in an objectified world; things are, and around them lies a world of objects as *res extensa*.

For Dōgen, however, things just are in the time that they are in. This is the essence of the world in the timelessness(time) that is every moment of the absolute now (*nikon*). In his fascicle “Genjōkōan,” Dōgen writes:

Once firewood turns to ash, the ash cannot revert to being firewood. But you should not take the view that it is ashes afterward and firewood before. You should realize that although firewood is at the dharma-stage of firewood, and that this is possessed of before and after, the firewood is at this time independent, completely cut off from before, completely cut off from after. Ashes are in the dharma-stage of ashes, which also has a before and after.²⁴

While causally there needs to have been firewood to make ash (and Dōgen, importantly, does not deny this) the actual ash — right now — is just ash; it is not ash that will be used to make lye to make soap, nor is it ash that was once a tree that was once in a forest and that was once an acorn. All these things may have been, but, to Dōgen, in the absolute now (*nikon*) it is just ash, as firewood is just firewood in its own moment, and I am just I, just being, not becoming, not on the road to something.

²⁴ Eihei Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen's Shōbbōgenzō*, trans. Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 42.

Dōgen denies the primacy of causality, emphasizing instead the immediacy of the immediate now. Things are in the moment they are, and not in some undetermined future or already determined past. *This is, but only now.*

This study is not a study in comparative philosophy. It will not attempt to create a synthesis between the ideas of Martin Heidegger and Eihei Dōgen through Keiji Nishitani, nor will it attempt somehow to map those ideas onto the thinkers who follow (in this case I write in the long shadows of Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, and Jean-Luc Nancy, as well as several thinkers associated with the Kyoto School). This essay instead intends to examine certain key ontological and phenomenological questions concerning being in time, as well as to attempt to read, with Dōgen and Heidegger, how one experiences being itself. It takes up the question which is the question of all questions, and which is never very far from Heidegger — *why is there something instead of nothing?* In this, I will expand the possibly narrow concept of being as being-only-human to include a being of all things, from the paper cup thrown away by a child at a county fair, to the fair itself, the environment, the sky, the earth, the Ferris wheel and, of course, also, but not exclusively the “beings” inhabiting the fair. This study will be an attempt to argue both the “autonomy” of objects (both beings as traditionally conceived and the beingness of a rock, of a mountain, of an ecosphere) and the essential interpenetration of all objects in all things. I will examine these possibilities not from the position of subject, with the world laid out in array, separate but accessible, but from within object-hood itself. Things find both their autonomy and their interpenetration outside of a time of causal relations (past to present, now to then) and in the lacunal present of a timelessness(time), which, for Eihei Dōgen, as for Martin Heidegger, I will posit, are deeply similar, though encompassing important differences.

While Heideggerian concepts will never be enough to explain Dōgen’s ideas, nor will Dōgen suffice to explain completely Heidegger, there are corollaries — affinities — and, importantly, echoes of each in the other’s thinking. Dōgen’s writing on *uji*,

or being-time, seems to echo (and to be again echoed by) Heidegger's terms for *Ereignis* and *Gelassenheit*. (N.B. The echo here is not unilateral, omnipotent, univocal — the voice of G-d — but always multivocal, omnidirectional, always repetitive, always already heard, again). In *uji*, according to Dōgen, “we set the self out in array and make the whole world as so many times (*uji*). We must see all the various things of the whole world as so many times (*uji*).” This setting out of the self is done through sustained exertion (*gyoji*), and in doing so “allows” for the whole world to “presence” itself there in that site or clearing where a setting out can occur. This presencing is similar in scope, as I posit, to the event of *Ereignis*, of being becoming, or appropriating itself, to Being. In setting the self out, the “draft” of thinking's withdrawal turns being into being-a-pointer towards that which withdraws. According to Heidegger, “man is the pointer” toward that which withdraws. Withdrawal, for Heidegger, is “an event” and the event of this withdrawal “may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him.”²⁵ This is not to say that the event of *Ereignis* is the same as the event(s) of *uji*, but that one can inform the other. When we attune ourselves to echoes — to the corollaries between the two thinkings — we may better understand the one.

The object of this essay is not to find a synergy between the East and the West, but to use the available tools of a thinking which is global in scope to analyze a problem in the world, the problem of the world itself. In this I seek to attend to the antiphony of difference, of the other, in divergent traditions; I desire no less than to open up spaces for things to be-come, to attempt to traverse landscapes of thinking, searching for new approaches. It is the echo, then, that we seek, and not so much the source. As an example, we can see in the presencing of the absolute now (*nikon*) of the ash described above an approach which perhaps can only be initiated from the West through Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*. To understand the ash in the now, we must

25 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 375.

allow (*lassen*) for the ash to be simply present, but we must also allow the ash to allow us into (*einlassen*) its essential presencing.

A key difference between Heidegger and Dōgen (besides the most obvious difference of something versus nothing which we will address later) in thinking this world is that Heidegger (at least initially) finds death as the thing that concerns us as beings (*Dasein*). For Dōgen, life-and-birth are the same occurrence, and are both a duality and singularity at once. Life-and-death are life and they are death; one cannot be without the other (and even here we split the concept too much). Dōgen imagines the world to be becoming through sustained exertion. Thus the rock becomes itself in an array, much as the empty cup does, in the same way as I do. This setting out, however, does not just happen; like the movement occurring in *Gelassenheit*, like the effort it takes the two prisoners to call forth the unnecessary necessary, sustained exertion (*gyoji*) takes just that—hard effort, or practice. Further, as I will argue, sustained exertion requires space; this manifests both as literal space for Heidegger, as in the opening in the forest in which a lightening (*Lichtung*) can take place, or, for Dōgen, within a space in which to practice, as in the meditation hall (a place in which the presencing of all that is can be realized).

For both thinkers, it seems clear: We must respond to the call of thinking, *if only with more thinking*. We must make our mark, even if our mark is far off, even if it is wrong. The emphasis of this call to thinking is not so much on explication, on logic and rational, pragmatic thought, but on a response, or a series of responses. It is in this same spirit that I have tried to engage these thinkers; the facticity of our finitude is a horrifying thing to imagine, as is the notion that this brief time may be wasted. In this vein, it is the doing of philosophy that should concern us; it is the thinking-beyond, which should absorb us utterly. Meister Eckhart, an influence on both Heidegger and Nishitani, writes, “Whoever has understood this sermon, let it be his. Had no one been there, I would have had to preach to this poor-box.” With Eckhart then, we imagine a “sermon” that is precisely unfounded, ungrounded, a sermon open to all, the better to begin

a traverse across disciplines and traditions. And, again, as Heidegger writes in “What Calls for Thinking,” “There is no bridge here — only the leap.”²⁶ This leap, then, is a leap into a thinking that is at once absolutely necessary (*for we have not yet begun to think*) and irresponsible (with Derrida we can say we are at the moment of highest irresponsibility in a deep responsibility).²⁷ It is a form of thinking which has no answer, not even a name. It is as much an activity as a practice of thinking as it is a spatiotemporal particular of thought. It is both geographical (an open space) and a practical activity as a practice of doing; it requires exertion, a refusal to name which is, in its exact negation (refusal), a positive letting be (permission) of all that is, or possibly can be.

This letting-be is echoed, finally, by Dōgen, who writes, “Yet for all that, flowers fall amid our regret and yearning, and hated weeds grow apace.” By releasing ourselves into this present moment, we accept and even relish, being’s becomingness, its active objectless existence. By doing so, we accept our own powerlessness, not in the face of God, or in the face of metaphysics, but in the face of a physical world’s worlding, becoming which are always becominglessness at the same time. There is a soteriological impetus to accepting our own powerlessness; we *be-come* when we are no longer what we project.

In the next chapter, this project will look at Heidegger’s call for a “new beginning,” and specifically follow his argument towards a new form of thinking, a thinking that emerges in the wake of philosophy’s sudden end. Drawing extensively on certain key essays such as “The End of Philosophy and The Task of Thinking” from 1964, and “What Calls for Thinking?” from 1951, as well as his strangely intoxicating *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)* written between 1936 and 1938, yet unpublished in his lifetime, this chapter will look at how, according

26 Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. by J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 8.

27 Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret*, trans. Giacomo Donis (Cambridge: Polity, 2002).

to Heidegger, we must practice a different form of thinking. The thinking proposed here is a radical departure from what philosophy — in Heidegger's view having achieved its limit and become suddenly foreclosed by the rational arts — can any longer do; thinking as scholasticism has become an exercise in which what is to be known has already been plotted, archived, named. The thinking proposed by Heidegger is a return to the essential question of being through the transition to “the other beginning.” Heidegger writes, and we will attempt to follow him in this, that “in the transition, thought places in dialogue [...] [the] having-been of being and the extreme to-come truth of Being.”²⁸ We will attempt, throughout, to remain with Heidegger in transition, not to perdure or become static, but always to move, to be in the flow. In the same chapter, we will also take up Heidegger's challenge to thinking differently, contrasting it with Dōgen's conception of thinking, or experiencing, the immediate here-and-now of *nikon*, or timeless time. I will examine the two thinkers to find places in which, through reading one, we more fully understand the other. While neither can be entirely understood through the other, there are places where the difficult enigmas of each can be more fully explicated, or at least experienced, through a deeper understanding of the other.

Having prepared ourselves for thinking, chapter three will examine ontologically the presence of time as it manifests in both Dōgen and Heidegger. This chapter will continue to explore Dōgen's *nikon* as a site for the inter-penetration of being times while also examining Heidegger's alleged “turning” from the facticity of being to the imperative of the event, or *Ereignis*, as it manifests itself in the *Contributions*. This chapter pays special attention to the fact that we — that one — is always already in time, but that that time itself is precisely a question at play in the thinking of both philosophers. For both thinkers, the event of being occurs *within* time (and almost, for Dōgen, *as* time) and it is via the experience of primordial time as timelessness(time) that being, with Heidegger, comes into being-there. The event

28 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 7.

discloses itself as truth or *alētheia* through its presencing of time.

Having looked at the types of thinking that Heidegger's "new beginning" requires, chapter four will attempt to chart the "temporal-spatial playing field" that Heidegger, and it would seem Dōgen, both require. Heidegger uses several words to describe this "place," as both a space for beginning to think and also as a very real place of experiencing the transition. This chapter will read in close detail Heidegger's understanding of Nietzsche's "concept of the eternal recurrence of the same" as it relates to Heidegger's experience of the *Augenblick*, or glance of an eye. We will examine closely Heidegger's four volume lecture on Nietzsche from 1944.

Having allowed ourselves to leap with/in the abyssal new, beginning with Heidegger and Dōgen, we will begin again, thinking not the abyss, but the potent concept of Absolute Nothingness (*mu*) as contrasted to nihilism and explored by Keiji Nishitani of the Kyoto school, a movement deeply influenced by and in communication with Heidegger. Though directly influenced by Mahayana Buddhist thought, primarily the Zen tradition of Dōgen, there is much in the Kyoto School's work to recommend these thinkers to a global discussion of the *be*-coming of things. In this chapter, and using Dōgen as a guide, I seek to understand, through Nishitani, the abyssal between proposed by Heidegger.

Chapter six will investigate and follow the idea of practice as it relates, clearly, to Dōgen and Nishitani, and more obliquely to Heidegger. While Dōgen, of course, offers a sustained series of writings on *zazen*, or just sitting, as a practice, there are elements in Heidegger and Nishitani that seem to point us towards the readying of oneself in order to experience the abyssal leap. The concept of thinking as meditation, as a readying for — or towards — will be examined, challenging the notion that there are separate domains of thinking and practice, and that, indeed, thinking is, essentially, a practice in meditation.

Chapter seven, as a concluding chapter, will seek to open up the study as conceived so far. The chapter will examine how these

modes of thinking the space in between, of thinking the possibilities of the abyssal opening into which thinking the necessary unnecessary of thinking itself can be freed, and how through freeing them (possibilities) we can re-conceptualize our own relations to the world (*relation with-in the world*). Evoking new writings by Timothy Morton, with references to Nancy, Blanchot, and examining Dōgen's *Mountain and Rivers Sutra*, this chapter will seek to divine a line into the new beginning, the beginning again, that Heidegger insists must be possible. This will involve putting into practice the theory that we have grappled with, imagining a new direction forward.

