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Echoes of No Thing: Thinking between Heidegger and Dōgen

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A New Thinking (Towards)

A New Form of Thinking

In order to begin to approach the idea of a new beginning with Heidegger in the history of thinking, we have to acknowledge certain endings. Something new, Heidegger seems to indicate, cannot begin while we continue to harbor and shelter old concepts, concepts which have by now — in the bright light of technology’s unparalleled dominance — become antiquated and outmoded and which restrict, to Heidegger, “the possibility from which the thinking of philosophy would have to start.”¹ For Heidegger, philosophy has become endlessly enmeshed with the advances of science and an increasing technicalization of the world, and this enmeshment has “foreclosed” the project of philosophy, a project conceived perhaps first in the inchoate imagination of pre-Socraticic thinking. Philosophy, as a discipline, has been appropriated or replaced by the more “rational” disciplines of physics and, in general, the sciences. Physics now claims knowledge of, and provides answers to, the question of being, a “field” traditionally investigated by philosophy as metaphysics. The project then of philosophy — born out of the essential thinking *that there is something rather than nothing* — is

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 432.

brought to a sudden and possibly premature end. The wonder and awe that so encaptured Parmenides and Heraclitus has been co-opted by a rational “empirical science,” which, whenever humans try to think themselves in the world, establishes them not as authentic individuals capable of an original encounter with truth, but rather “on the basis of and according to the criterion of the scientific discovery of the individual areas of beings.” The raw possibility of infinite thought is brought to a sudden, premature end; suddenly enclosed, thought is captured by empirical, logical fact, unquestioned and unquestioning in its dominance.

In one of his last formal essays written in 1965, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, Heidegger describes philosophy as a metaphysics “that thinks beings as a whole [...] with respect to Being.” This thinking — which is the only issue for philosophy, and which, since the beginning of philosophy, “has shown itself as the ground (*archē*...)” — has become foreclosed by the advent of science. What the sciences have now taken over “as their own task” are the questions that philosophy, in its history, has traditionally grappled with; “the ontologies of the various regions of beings (nature, history, law, art).”² Rather than spheres of wonder and thinking, “the arts [have] become regulated-regulating instruments of information.”³ The radical arguments of ontology, of being, of the wonder(ful) awe of something, have, through technology, been reduced to mere repositories of information — mere gathering places of facts. World becomes constrained by *technē*, and there *for us*, and not beside us, or with us in it. In turn, world becomes a mundane puzzle, able to be solved, contained, answerable (*to us*), something we are always already opposed to, removed from. The task, then, is to think a new beginning, a new relation. This beginning, which, at the risk of sounding supercilious, must begin at a beginning that is always unsurpassable, and that, as Heidegger writes, “must constantly be repeated and must be placed [in]

2 Ibid., 435.

3 Ibid., 434.

confrontation”⁴ with its own uniqueness. This confrontation with itself is precisely what is lacking in the thinking of what philosophy has become.

The foreclosure of philosophy, however, is not an entirely bad thing; for Heidegger, it represents a completion of the project of philosophy and clears the way for this new beginning, or, in the language of *The End of Philosophy*, a “first possibility.” But can we, Heidegger asks, think this new possibility in an authentic, originary way, exposing or opening ourselves to a thinking which is “neither metaphysics nor science?” Here Heidegger refuses, as he so often does, an explicit answer; this thinking, he responds, remains “unassuming” for it is only preparatory, it is not (yet) fixed. An answer to this new possibility, this new beginning, remains elusive and avoids a “founding character.” For Heidegger, this thinking, as opposed to so much of its history, is “content with awakening a readiness in man for a possibility whose contour remains obscure, whose coming remains uncertain.”⁵ But how do we ready ourselves for this preparatory thinking, how do we attune ourselves to the task of thinking (as opposed to falling back on the known, the calculable, the already understood, the safe)?

In order to begin thinking anew, in the wake of the disaster of foreclosed thought, Heidegger would have us leap. Unlike Nietzsche’s *Twilight of the Idols*, which is subtitled *How To Philosophize with a Hammer*, and in which an active motion is taken against the idols of modernity, Heidegger has us throwing ourselves into the unknown; rather than an active act, he describes one of almost profound surrender. The effect is the same. Faced with the clearing of a destroyed temple, or a space opened in the forest, we are able, as though for the first time (and perhaps, since Plato’s *eidos*, it *is* for the first time) to begin to think in an incipient *enlightened* way, especially if we allow the path

4 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 45.

5 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 436.

of *die Lichtung*, or the lightening of Heidegger's later writings, to open us to an opening.

Heidegger's thinking — from the early lectures on time and phenomenology through the ontological circular hermeneutics of *Being and Time* and “turning” towards the incipient, preparatory thinking of *Contributions* and later writings — returns us, again and again, to the incredibly simple yet equally elusive question of the idea of being (and beings). His work is not a systematic elucidation (declaration) on what Being is; rather, Heidegger is seeking the “question” rather than an answer. It is worthy of the question to ask whether we can read Heidegger not with the technical sobriety of academics (who over and again try to systematize Heidegger) but with a passionate response to the call of the question. It is in this sense that the most interesting work of Maurice Blanchot and Jean-Luc Nancy has been done; when we allow ourselves to open to the possibilities of original thinking, those possibilities possibly can open.

In *What Calls for Thinking*, from a series of lectures delivered during the winter and spring semesters of 1951–52, Heidegger gives us some sense of where he wants his conception of thinking to take us; he is opening thinking towards “questions that seek what no inventiveness can find.”⁶ This aporetic questioning acknowledges, inevitably, failure. Traditional thinking — the thinking of metaphysics and science — directs us towards answers, towards categorical certainties; traditional thinking claims the conceit of there even being an answer. Heidegger's later works — writings produced after what is normally referred to as the “turn” in Heidegger's thought from thinking — are, in essence, products of the exact opposite of the certainty of scientific, rational thinking; of a moving towards a thinking in which what is known becomes — in knowing it authentically — strikingly unknown, becomes unfamiliar, and what is unknown is *known to be unknown*, at the very least. In effect, Heidegger is urging on the very “withdrawal” of a scientific world that

6 Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 9.

clouds our experience of being — of the event of truth in becoming — in order to facilitate the clearing (*Lichtung*) through which the event of being can take place. This is the least (or the most) that we can do; in a preparation for a new beginning we must accept the known to be unknown or *not yet known*. Like phenomena, knowing — as thinking — must be seen to be in a constant state of withdrawal; the point is not to encapture thinking, as to do so would be to deny its liquid state, to restrict it, and even to enframe it (*Gestell*). Thinking withdraws and we fall in behind it, pulled along by a “draft.” We are caught in “the draft of what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal.”⁷ In *Thinking*, Heidegger writes that this movement is “quite different from that of migratory birds.” We are not seeking, migrating between known points, but rather surrendering, allowing ourselves as possibilities to be drawn along. In thinking, we are not pointing towards a known destination, but rather leaving behind an erroneous assumption of the known in order to allow it to remain unknown, or at least undeclared; it is the *possibility of being* that remains the question, not the hypostatized conception of a static reality. This is the creative act of thinking, and in the disastrous remnants of scientific and technological thought, it is all we can do to begin, again; *the incipient beginning of thinking the beginning beginning again begins again now*.

But to think what remains unthought or unknown is a difficult, almost impossible task; to remain decisively in a space of radical indecision requires a practice of careful maneuvering if we are not to descend into a solipsistic maw. Thinking is not a *non-philosophy*, and yet, for Heidegger, authentic thinking comes only after philosophy, comes only in the wake of philosophy’s suddenly foreclosed project. What is authentically unthought can only begin to be thought after philosophy’s end. Thinking, when reduced to the discipline of philosophy and treated as one discipline among many, becomes an ossified and artificial practice, rendered scholastic by its unwilling coopting by the sciences. The sciences, by thinking within rigid disci-

7 Ibid.

plines, by thinking within specialized spheres, inevitably omit the very foundations on which they are built; they ignore the ground from which their edifice is built. Philosophy as well, when taken captive by the sciences, according to Heidegger, does not look deeply enough, does not examine the *Urgrund* on which, or from which, it comes to be. The task then of thinking is to think *with* philosophy towards its *beyond* as well. Thinking itself must be unthought in order to free itself. Heidegger writes, in *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking*, that “questioning in this way, we can become aware that something that it is no longer the matter of philosophy to think conceals itself precisely where philosophy has brought its matter to absolute knowledge and to ultimate evidence.”⁸ That something is concealing itself within and without the project of philosophy — within the draft of philosophy’s withdrawal — is precisely the issue for thinking, and it is what thinking must think.

But to think in this open manner within the jostling crowd of things, of appearing phenomena, seems nearly impossible. Things (whether computers, airplanes, mugs of beer, beds, Heidegger’s (and Nietzsche’s) apocryphal hammer, or larger “things,” what Timothy Morton calls hyper-objects, such as geographic formations, glaciers, solar systems, universes, relations, and even time itself) gather around us and are ready-at-hand, and to discuss or think the essence of these myriad things is a difficult task indeed. What appears is generally easily thought and dissimulated; the task of thinking, for Heidegger, is to think that which does not easily appear, that which remains concealed in the miasma of radiating phenomena and thus remains unknown to us, secluded within its active withdrawal. This is the task of thinking — to think the remainder of things, to think the things actively withdrawn. To do this, to bring the concealed to present (*Gegenwart*) itself, we need space, a space which Heidegger writes must be “something open, something free,” a space in which the up-to-now-concealed is allowed to come

8 Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 64

forth. “Whenever a present being encounters another present being or even lingers near it [...] there openness already rules, the free region is in play.”⁹

Heidegger calls this region many things over the years: a *Lichtung* to describe both a lightening, as well as a “forest clearing”, and *Offen* to describe “the open.” It is within this clearing that the “brightness” of the present (*Gegenwart*) can illuminate itself, where being can have an authentic encounter with truth. *Brightness plays in the open and strives there with darkness.* The brightness of the concealed suddenly illuminated requires as contrast the darkness of what was once concealed. Only within this clearing can what has been heretofore withdrawn presence itself, come to be, and (en)lighten. (It is important to note that Heidegger only reluctantly allows “light” to be associated with brightness or luminosity; he is at pains to say that “what is light in the sense of being free and open has nothing in common with the adjective ‘light’ which means ‘bright.’”¹⁰ Heidegger points us, in a footnote, to a secondary use of the word, which means, ‘to alleviate’; however it seems impossible, as many commentators have already noted, to deny — within a history of the enlightenment — the importance of recognizing that *die Lichtung* is indeed a space of light and air, a space made through the very disclosure of the absence of things.) Heidegger writes that “the clearing is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent.” Free openness is, and here he uses a “word of Goethe’s,” an *Urphänomen*, a primal phenomenon. The primal phenomenon of the cleared region itself sets us to the task of learning and lets “it say something to us.” But for Heidegger, it is precisely the clearing itself which, within the history of philosophy, has remained without a question, without interrogation, has remained unthought, except at the very beginning of philosophy. We are to think the presence of the clearing in order to allow what is to be present to come forth indeed. What is allowed to be said, or to come forth, is *alētheia*, or the event, or

⁹ Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 441.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

presencing, of truth. As the a-privative of the root word referring to the river Lethe, the river of forgetting, *alētheia* means, as much as truth, a remembering of what has always been there, only hidden, forgotten.

Thinking towards a New Beginning

The incipient nature of thinking towards a new beginning is taken up by Heidegger in the strange *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*. Composed (and the enigmatic quality of the “text” seems as much a fugal composition as a written “text”) over the course of two years from 1936 to 1938, *Contributions* was, by its very nature, as provisional as the title implies; even Heidegger seemed unsure of its value, showing the text to only a few people in his lifetime (*Contributions* was only published posthumously in German in 1989). And yet it seems, despite its provisionality, there is a profound, if often unrecognized, necessity to the project of the *Contributions*, and indeed, within its pages there can be seen the foundations of a new groundwork being laid for Heidegger’s later works, even if this ground is provisional, not absolute and, importantly, abyssal.

If *Contributions* could be said to be written for someone, or for something, Heidegger writes, it would be for “the few” who “from time to time *question* again,” and it would be for “the rare,” those who have the strength and “courage” for “solitude,” those able to “think the nobility of Being and to speak of its uniqueness.”¹¹ To undertake this challenge towards solitude that questioning requires, we have to first look to Heidegger’s own words as a guide; in these words he, again and again, *refuses* the responsibility to say the absolute, to *declare* as such. Compared to the vital world-systems of Hegel’s *Weltanschauung* or the systematic philosophies of the Anglo-American academy, Heidegger’s words are mere utterances, whispered imprecations towards a new beginning, but this new beginning resists categorically a definition, or system. It is exactly this concealed

11 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 12.

definition which makes Heidegger's work so compelling, and so frustrating. For Heidegger, a "worldview" is a necessarily closed system, and "sets experience on a definite path and within a determinate range, and this in such a broad way that it does not allow the worldview itself to come into question; the worldview thereby narrows and thwarts genuine experience."¹² A worldview already projects its end, and as such "must forgo new possibilities in order to remain one with itself."¹³ Philosophy, on the other hand, "is always a beginning" and overcomes itself repeatedly. It is a "terrifying [...] questioning of the truth of Being."¹⁴

Instead of world-systems, *Contributions* offers ideas *towards* what Heidegger calls a new beginning, not ideas *from* a set of facts. To build *from* is to first acknowledge or accept the premise that there is a solid ground upon which to build an intricate series of causeways and bridges, engineered spans and controlled results; it is to accept that the acquisition of knowledge is teleological or at the very least progressive. To build *towards* is to not know a direction — it is to actively refuse a direction. It is to not already know, but to imagine, to think *towards*. We build from solid ground, but we build across the span, into an unknown. To think this way, we must allow ourselves — both in our own thinking (or in a thinking not of a single being but as a people) and in our approach to Heidegger's later writing — to venture into a willing not-knowing that is at once a gamble and irresponsible, even dangerous, but, in contrast to the disaster¹⁵ of modernity, utterly necessary if we are to think beyond our very (at best) limited wor(l)ds.

For Heidegger, "everything would be misinterpreted and would miscarry" if we attempted to provide "an analysis or even a 'definition.'"¹⁶ This stance of radical agnosticism is the neces-

12 Ibid., 31.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 30.

15 This is the disaster referred to by Maurice Blanchot in *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995), 1, in which he writes that the disaster "changes everything."

16 Ibid., 18.

sary “basic disposition” we must assume in order to think “the new beginning.” This basic disposition takes a variety of names: “shock, restraint, diffidence, presentiment, foreboding,” but each word “merely points to the ungraspableness of everything simple.”¹⁷ The shock exists in the literally other-worldly experiencing of the “abyssal in-between” amidst the “‘no longer’ of the first beginning [...] and the ‘not yet’ of the fulfillment of the other beginning.”¹⁸ How then are we to think within this shocking new beginning that resists analysis and definition?

In the *Contributions*, Heidegger takes up this theme of “the new beginning” explicitly guiding us *forward* and *towards*, though as such he writes that “the issue then is neither to describe nor to explain, neither to promulgate nor to teach.”¹⁹ Heidegger offers a chart, a plan towards a “transition to the other beginning” in the form of a “still unmastered ground-plan of the historicity of the transition itself.” In order to understand, we must surrender our vulgar, quotidian need for rigid definitions and analysis, to allow ourselves to be swept away, to be, as he writes in “What Calls for Thinking,” “caught in the draft of what draws, attracts us by its withdrawal.”²⁰ True thinking for Heidegger “turns away from man.”²¹ It is in an endless pattern of withdrawal, and “refuses arrival.”²² It can never be formulated into patterned techniques and controlled ideas; but that which withdraws—thinking itself—“may even concern and claim man more essentially than anything present that strikes and touches him.”²³ It is always perpetually open, perpetually in a state of movement. This thinking of thinking is radically different from the thinking of the sciences, in which what is known is built upon as solid fact; for Heidegger, science has refused to think the fundamental question of its—and everything’s—es-

17 *Ibid.*, 19.

18 *Ibid.*, 20.

19 *Ibid.*, 6.

20 Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 374.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*

sential ground — *that it is rather than is not*. The “ground-plan” for Heidegger remains “unmastered” and thus still unknown, still undisclosed. Heidegger’s call here is as much a practice as it is a system, and though it may be uncomfortable for an academic to accept, to understand it is absolutely necessary to take up Heidegger’s ever more insistent call towards a new beginning, to begin to practice *within* the leap.

While we will examine in depth the six steps that Heidegger describes in the Contributions — the *resonating, interplay, leap, grounding, future ones*, and, most difficultly, the *last god* — which will take us “along a way”²⁴ towards an understanding of being’s exposure of itself to Being within the event, it is important that we pause to examine first several of the words already used above; the words “transition,” “other [or new] beginning,” and “historicality” call us into the place of a temporality (and as such a position of finitude); they place us within time and yet with a future still to come, a future uncertain. The time they place us in, however, is not the time of the vulgar, quotidian day to day time of Aristotle; it is instead a “primordial time,” a time that is as unrecognizable to everyday time as the ocean is to a glass of water. Primordial time serves to allow the world of things to presence themselves not as a category à la Kant, but substantially through the eventual disclosure of truth. “Transition” is a movement, a passage, a moment of departure (and arrival); it evokes coming-of-age, the passage from one state to another. It speaks to the transit lounge, and to the trepidation of a voyage. But a voyage begins from a known point while Heidegger insists not on a different end, but a different beginning. This beginning is a new

24 The title of §1 is rendered by Rojcewicz and Vallega-Neu, in their 2012 translation of the *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, as “These ‘contributions’ question along a way” (Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 6). Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly render the same sentence, in their 1999 translation of the *Beiträge*, as, “Contributions to Philosophy’ enact the questioning along a pathway” (Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999], 3). The German reads, in the Vittorio Klostermann edition from 2003, “Die ‘Beiträge’ fragen in einer Bahn.”

“originary position,” a primordial return to an unknown source (though we know the source exists, we cannot know the source), an opening to the givenness of the question. “Historicality” is a technical term for Heidegger which refers us to the existential issue of our own finitude. We are not, according to Heidegger, bounded by a series of eternally occurring nows; rather (and this is one way he differs from Dōgen’s existential analysis of temporality) we are defined by a unity “stretched between birth and death,” a unit that is historically disclosed and determined. Beings are determined by their historical becoming-present through the disclosures of the event.

Dōgen’s “Wide Circular Sea”

While it would be deeply disingenuous to attempt to parlay Dōgen’s thinking into something on par with Heidegger’s thinking *towards*, it may be possible to pause and examine where Dōgen’s thinking leads us, or can lead us, and whether or not there is not something that accurately echoes some of the thinking that Heidegger would have practiced, in both *Contributions* and elsewhere. Our purpose in this study is not to prove that Heidegger is a secret Buddhist, nor that Dōgen is a Heideggerian; rather, our hope is to examine the two side by side, reading one through the other, allowing their thoughts to inter-penetrate each other, *to speak to each other*. While Dōgen’s²⁵ concern is not explicitly with the thinking of thinking nor philosophy, he is evoking a new form of thinking as a way to get to his own particular form of enlightenment. It is a popular mis-conception to simplify Buddhist teaching as mere nihilism towards the denial of Being, which risks a simplification that leads to an erroneous — or deeply constrained — way of thinking, and which denies to Dōgen — and substantial parts of the Buddhist can-

25 Dōgen was not always treated as a “philosopher,” and it was not until the work of Watsuji Tetsurō (1889–1960) and Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962), both influential thinkers of the Kyoto School, that his ontological and phenomenological import was recognized. Prior to this, the treatment of Dōgen’s work was limited primarily to the work of Soto exegetics.

on — the richness and subtlety that this thinking inspires. Like Heidegger, Dōgen rejects systematic answers in favor of leaving “open” the questions of existence to the dynamism of a “leapt” thinking. Both Dōgen and Heidegger, as we have already seen (and will continue to see) direct us towards a thinking that is at once deeply familiar, though endlessly withdrawn, from our inauthentically constrained world.

Dōgen is thought to have written — or included — “Genjōkōan” as either the first or the second fascicle of the *Shōbōgenzō* in mid-autumn of 1233. Though written for a layperson, the highly enigmatic and ambivalent style of “Genjōkōan” leave it open to interpretation and yet it is at times utterly impenetrable. It has been hailed as the core of Dōgen’s work, the “skin, flesh, bone, and marrow” of his thinking according to Nishari Bokuzan (and cited by Waddell and Abe²⁶) of the Meiji era. The entire *Shōbōgenzō* is variously said to contain 60, 75, 12, or 28 books, though in its entirety, and published as the *Honzan* edition, it contains ninety fascicles. In two of the collections (the 60-book and the 75-book), “Genjōkōan” leads the collection, while it is dropped from the 12- and 28-book editions, and appears as third in the complete *Honzan* edition. Despite the discrepancy, Dōgen himself is thought to have put together the two larger editions of the fascicles, and thus we see him prioritizing “Genjōkōan” by placing it at the beginning. Though written early in his life, Dōgen is said to have reworked “Genjōkōan” for most of his career, and indeed, according to Steven Heine,²⁷ the “Genjōkōan” was one of the final pieces that Dōgen undertook, even half a decade after work on the entire *Shōbōgenzō* was completed.

The title “Genjōkōan” is difficult to translate. According to an introduction by Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, *Genjō* literally means “becoming manifest” or “immediately manifesting

26 Eihei Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, trans. Norman Waddell and Masao Abe (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002). P.39

27 Steven Heine, ed., *Dōgen: Textual and Historical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

right here and now.”²⁸ Waddell and Abe translate *Genjōkōan* as “Manifesting Suchness,” while Steven Heine prefers to title the fascicle “Spontaneous Realization of Zen Enlightenment,” and Hee-Jin Kim, another prominent commentator and translator on Dōgen’s works, translates it as “The Kōan Realized in Life.” For our purposes, we must respect that the *kōan* is an essential aspect of the title, and points towards a manifesting that cannot be understood except to a few (*to the rare*). To Waddell and Abe, and importantly, for us, “immediately manifesting right here and now” does not mean that something not already manifest is suddenly manifested; rather, the *immediate presence* “of all things as they truly are in their suchness, untouched by our conscious strivings”²⁹ is suddenly made apparent. “Genjōkōan” means, to Dōgen, that all things become apparent in their legitimate (and authentic) *manner*. It is in this sense that we can begin to read back and forth between Heidegger and Dōgen. Truth, or world, or Being, has already appeared; it is our misconceptions and inauthenticities that constrain the event (or *dharma*) to concealment. Clearing the way through practice or leapt thinking has the effect of bringing the concealed and withdrawn to the fore, into the site of disclosure.

As in the evental site in Heidegger’s writing, there is a “moment” of clarity in Dōgen — which he will call, in the Zen tradition — *satori*, meaning, in general terms, enlightenment. However, it is critical to note that *satori*, sometimes called *kensho*, is not a one-to-one translation as enlightenment; rather, *satori* is, broadly, a conscious insight into the essential nature of the universe. While exact interpretations of *satori* vary between Buddhist traditions, for Dōgen, *satori* was not considered to be the pinnacle of practice; rather, *satori* provides a momentary glance into the reality of the world (that it is empty). In this way, *satori* could be seen to work in a similar way to the clearing or opening in Heidegger’s thinking of *alētheia*. Like the evental site, *satori*

28 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 40.

29 Norman Waddell and Masao Abe, Introduction to Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 39.

defiantly is not transcendental in that it is not a permanent state, nor does it “transport” one anywhere (at least not permanently); *satori* is instead a transitory state in which reality is perceived as suddenly denuded of our own expectations. Dōgen saw the event of *satori* as not a final, teleological end point of practice, but still as an essential part of it. For Dōgen, true enlightenment involved an integration of one’s perception of the world and one’s actions within that world. He writes in the “Genjōkōan” that, “acting on and witnessing oneself in the advent of myriad things is enlightenment.”

In Dōgen’s opening paragraph of “Genjōkōan,” he describes a world that is always already in flux, always already in the full throes of becoming, whether we attune ourselves to this world or not. He writes,

When all things are Buddha Dharma, there is illusion and enlightenment, practice, birth, death, Buddhas, and sentient beings. When all things are without self, there is no illusion or enlightenment, no birth or death, no Buddhas or sentient beings. The Buddha Way is originally beyond any fullness or lack, and for that reason, there is birth and death, illusion and enlightenment, sentient beings and Buddhas. Yet for all that, flowers fall amidst our regret and yearning, and hated weeds grow apace.³⁰

In the context of Dōgen’s thinking, “Buddha Dharma” refers to what he calls the “samādhi of self-fulfilling activity.” This *samādhi* (which can in itself best be described as a position of abiding in, or resting into) signifies a total freedom of self-realization without dualisms or the constraints of dialectical aporetic blockages. It describes a moment of self-realization in which inauthentic notions of an individual, concrete self melt away and one is left immediately present *within* a world (whereas before one was *without* a world). This is not simply an abstract principle but rather a practice, or activity, in itself. As we have seen

30 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 40.

with Heidegger's leap (developed later into *Gelassenheit*), there is, in this practice, a profound surrendering of the control we normally exert, with a sometimes manic desperation, in regards to the world around us. This surrender is not, however, drawn from a place of weakness or timidity; it is rather, with Heidegger, the willed leap, and with Dōgen it is total exertion (*gyoji*). What Dōgen directs us towards in the above passage is the position of the practitioner in relation to a world of flux and change, a world of birth and death in which we, on one level, cannot take part. In the first place, when all things are Buddha Dharma, within the world of prosaic, everyday experiences, there are the horrifying dichotomies of birth and death, enlightenment and sentient beings; life is an uncontrolled, unpredictable and chaotic place. Through an initial encounter with Buddha Dharma — with the *samādhi* of self-fulfilling activity which at once destroys and devours inauthentic experiences of self and others — these dichotomies seem to dissolve, only to reappear in the third and final state when these dichotomies — no longer feared or denied — are accepted with an equanimity through an authentic exposure of the selfless self to the inherent emptiness of all *dharma*, or eventing phenomena. Despite our deepest desires to the contrary — in whatever form of wishes, prayers, incantations, manias, and distractions that we choose to manifest them in — flowers fall and hated weeds grow apace; life, in its most primordial and originary form, unfolds as it is, not how we wish it to be.

Following this paragraph, Dōgen describes the world as it *presences* itself to us. He writes that the “practice that confirms things by taking the self to them is illusion: for things to come forward and practice and confirm the self is enlightenment.”³¹ If we exert our *selves* forward or towards something in an inauthentic way, we remain in delusion (and inaccessible to the ground of truth); if we allow for things to come forward, to allow things to become what they already are, we support things in their authenticity and we allow ourselves to experience truth

³¹ Ibid., 40.

manifesting as such. Dōgen continues: “When they realize one side, the other side is in darkness.” That which appears to us on one hand is always enclosed in a darkness on the other. To put it in Heideggerian terms, what comes forward into the clearing is already receding into an ever encroaching darkness. As with Heidegger, we cannot stay in this place for long; the clearing grows dark as does the *enlightening* moment in which we perceive all things as Buddha-dharma. Dōgen continues in the next paragraph:

To learn the Buddha Way is to learn one’s self. To learn one’s self is to forget one’s self. To forget one’s self is to be confirmed by all dharmas. To be confirmed by all dharmas is to cast off one’s body and mind and the bodies and minds of others as well. All trace of enlightenment disappears, and this traceless enlightenment continues on without end.³²

To engage with one’s self we must first forget the self, first cast off delusional misunderstandings about a concrete, perduring permanent self, a self which exists in any way separate from others or other phenomena. In recognizing that the self has no inherent perdurance, we rescue that self from a false constraint of the self. In this same way, we cast off ideas of enduring entities of any sort (whether infinite beings or existent selves). Only in this way do we come to be “confirmed” as no-self, and only in this way does enlightenment (which we see as the eventual event of truth presencing itself,) or *satori*, occur, becoming, in its very coming to be, traceless, unstained. It is important to note that despite this “traceless enlightenment” continuing without end, Dōgen is not giving enlightenment a special, permanent designation; enlightenment “happens” in a sort of timeless time, what in the West might best be described as a form of primeval, *kairological* time or, with Heidegger, in a primordial, originary

32 Ibid., 41.

site which exists beyond or before our prosaic conceptions of *chronological* time.³³

In “Genjōkōan,” Dōgen describes the experience of encountering the *samādhi* of self-fulfilling activity, or Buddha Dharma in nearly *kairotic* terms. The experiences of self-fulfilling activity fills the body and mind, yet we experience lack. He writes,

It is like boarding a boat and sailing into a broad and shoreless sea. You see nothing as you gaze about you but a wide circle of sea. Yet the great ocean is not circular. It is not square. It has other, inexhaustible virtues. It is like a glittering palace. It is like a necklace of precious jewels. Yet it appears for the moment to the range of your eyes as an encircling sea. It is the same with all things [...]. If we are to grasp the true and particular natures of all things, we must know that in addition to apparent circularity or angularity, there are inexhaustibly great virtues in the mountains and seas. We must realize that this inexhaustible store is present not only all around us, it is present right beneath our feet and within a single drop of water.³⁴

What we see around us is only what is most apparent. Beneath the phenomena of appearances — the jostling crowd of things coming to be, the “myriad dharmas” — lies an “ocean” of inexhaustibly great virtues of things manifesting which are only hidden from us because of our own lack of insight. In the same fashion, each thing as it comes to be has infinite myriad events coming to be within it (and through it) at every moment. As in Heidegger’s evental thinking towards a new beginning, if we think differently, or again, or begin again, we begin *again* to experience a world not yet disclosed to us, but which is already there. Dōgen compares this essential ignorance towards the

33 Heidegger uses the term *kairos* to describe a “moment” (*Augenblick*) between past and future, a time which cannot be mapped or defined, but only predicted and anticipated.

34 Dōgen, *The Heart of Dōgen’s Shōbōgenzō*, 43.

“ocean” of phenomena, enigmatically, to the environs of a fish, or a bird. A fish is unaware of anything beyond the water; its world is, infinitely, the waters. So it is for the bird whose world is finitely constrained in the air, which it views as infinite. For beings *in their world*, our world seems similarly “known.” To begin to think again, to open ourselves to the essential opening of the clearing, as in the practice of *satori*, is to begin again, with what Heidegger calls a new beginning, and Dōgen’s Zen tradition a “beginner’s mind.”

