Horror Vacui  
(“That Nothing Is What There Is”)  

Julia Hölzl

[The following remains a draft, a/s sketch, does not provide answers, nor questions. It is a mere opening toward somewhere else: It is the elsewhere that is of interest here, a/s somewhere or other, but always other; anyway, but never anywhere.]

I.

The grounding-attunement of the first beginning is deep wonder that beings are, that man himself is extant, extant in that which he is not. The grounding attunement of the other beginning is startled dismay: startled dismay in the abandonment of being […].

— Martin Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)

Oscillating between and before Er-staunen (deep wonder), Er-schrecken (startled dismay), and Entsetzen (freeing dismay), this

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1 Martin Heidegger, Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning), trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 32.
essay begins to think, begins by thinking the (non-)relation of being, time, absence, and emptiness via yet another beginning, that is, a/s non-original origin and no/t event.

In this beginning, there is Blanchot’s primal scene (a/s primal scene?):

(A primal scene?) You who live later, close to a heart that beats no more, suppose, suppose this: the child — is he seven years old, or eight perhaps? — standing by the window, drawing the curtain and, through the pane, looking. What he sees: the garden, the wintry trees, the wall of a house. Though he sees, no doubt in a child’s way, his play space, he grows weary and slowly looks up toward the ordinary sky, with clouds, grey light — pallid daylight without depth.

What happens then: the sky, the same sky, suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing (as though the pane had broken) such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein — so lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond. The unexpected aspect of this scene (its interminable feature) is the feeling of happiness that straightaway submerges the child, the ravaging joy to which he can bear witness only by tears, an endless flow of tears. He is thought to suffer a childish sorrow; attempts are made to console him. He says nothing. He will live henceforth in the secret. He will weep no more.²

² Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 72. And this primal scene situates itself of course in relation to Freud: “What is striking is the way in which Freud is animated by a kind of passion for the origin […]. He thus invites each of us to look back behind ourselves in order to find there the source of every alteration: a primary ‘event’ that is individual and proper to each history, a scene constituting something important and overwhelming, but also such that the one who experiences it can neither master nor determine it, and with which he has essential relations of insufficiency. On the one hand, it is a matter of going back again to a beginning. […] It is not a beginning inasmuch as each scene is always ready to open onto a prior scene […]. It is as though we had access to the various forms of existence only as deprived
Although the term “scene,” as Blanchot continues a few pages later, “is ill-chosen, for what it supposedly names is unrepresentable,” it “is pertinent in that it allows one at least not to speak as if of an event taking place at a moment in time — A scene: a shadow, a faint gleam, an ‘almost’ with the characteristics of ‘too much.’”

Such an event does not originate, does not eventuate, is no/t event, is no/thing given, but is that which gives. Nothing is given: nothing gives, as we might see.

It is such an almost which makes us wonder — that which gives us to think. What it gives us is this: that nothing is what there is, that such an almost is no(t) beyond — such is not beyond, such is no beyond.

A/s horror vacui, (for) such is the horror of beyond. “It is the horror of being where being is without end,” as Blanchot writes.4

And how, then, to think such an elsewhere, as elsewhere, and always no(t) beyond — an elsewhere to no end; and how to bear such nothing, nothing beyond, such absence, such emptiness — you who live later, close to a heart that beats no more, how to affirm and dissolve this nothing that there is, and first of all nothing beyond?

But we must, first and foremost, question, call into question, adhere to the question, for it is within the answer that “we lose the direct, immediate given, and we lose the opening, the richness of possibility. The answer is the question’s misfortune, its

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3 Blanchot, The Writing of the Disaster, 114, emphasis deleted.
4 Blanchot, Infinite Conversation, 120.
adversity.” For “[t]he question places the full affirmation back into the void, and enriches it with this initial void. Through the question we give ourselves the thing and we give ourselves the void that permits us not to have it yet, or to have it as desire. The question is the desire of thought.”

And how to think such thought, and from where to affirm its void — perhaps such thinking is to be asked from within the “most profound question,” as an earlier Blanchot had named it, a question that the question of the whole (dialectical accomplishment), the question that bears everything, does not include. […] The One, the Same, remain the first and the last words. Why this reference to the One as the ultimate and unique reference? In this sense, the dialectic, ontology, and the critique of ontology have the same postulate: all three deliver themselves over to the One: be it that the One accomplishes itself as everything, be it that it understands being as gathering, light, and unity of being, or be it that, above and beyond being, it affirms itself as the Absolute. With regard to such affirmations, must we not say: “the most profound question” is the question that escapes reference to the One? It is the other question, the question of the Other, but also a question that is always other.

And still, from where are we to ask such a question? From and within absence, a/s moment of presence: such moment might be the instant of affirmation, such moment might be its site of dis-solution.

II.

Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when

5 Ibid., 13.
6 Ibid., 12.
7 Ibid., 439–40n3.
the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder — the revelation of the nothing — does the “why?” loom before us. Only because the “why” is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds, and ground them. […] The question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, in question. It is a metaphysical question.


That nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond, that such nothing is (a/s nothing, and first of all nothing beyond); that such nothing might be elsewhere, outside of absence, outside of presence, that it would not situate itself in an and as event, never, but in and as a scene, a/s scenery toward this elsewhere where nothing is revealed. Its mode of presence would be absence, and vice versa.

Following Heidegger, “we shall find in absence — be it what has been or what is to come — a manner of presencing and approaching which by no means coincides with presencing in the sense of the immediate present. Accordingly, we must note: Not every presencing is necessarily the present. A curious matter. But we find such presencing, the approaching that reaches us, in the present, too.”

But where does such matter lead us, where is that nothing that there is, where does it reside — what is such nothing, and why to ask this primal question? Why grant nothing a being, why not grant nothing nothing itself?

“The nothing is neither an object nor any being at all,” Heidegger reminds us; rather, we ought to re-turn to “the basic question of metaphysics which the nothing itself compels: ‘Why are there beings at all, and why not rather nothing?’” A few

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8 Martin Heidegger, “What Is Metaphysics?” Basic text of Heidegger’s inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany, 1929, §52.
11 Ibid., §54.
years later, Heidegger would begin his *Introduction to Metaphysics* by asking “Why are there essents rather than nothing?,” this “obviously” being “the first of all questions, though not in a chronological sense.”

This very “question takes in everything, and this means not only everything that is present in the broadest sense but also everything that ever was or will be. The range of this question finds its limit only in nothing, in that which simply is not and never was. Everything that is not nothing is covered by this question, and ultimately even nothing itself; not because it is *something*, since after all we speak of it, but because it *is* nothing. Our question reaches out so far that we can never go further.”

But it is not from here where we must move to, toward the void, *absolutely empty*, toward this “nothing is” that there is — and even Heidegger contends — “when we wish to apprehend being, it is always as though we were reaching into the void. The being after which we inquire is almost like nothing, and yet we have always rejected the contention that the essent in its entirety *is not*. But being remains unfindable, almost like nothing, or ultimately *quite so*. Then, in the end, the word ‘being’ is no more than an empty word. It means nothing real, tangible, material. Its meaning is an unreal vapor.”

The emptiness of being (“Can it now surprise us that ‘being’ should be so empty a word when the very word form is based on an emptying and an apparent stabilization of emptiness?”) reveals its mode of presence, its mode of absence, and we remember, *not every presencing is necessarily the present* — but *such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein*.

Such a mode of presencing, in turn, reveals the mode of emptiness: in presence and absence, and above all outside both. Emptiness is no/t nothing but might be a silent echo of being.

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13 Ibid., 2.
14 Ibid., 35–36.
15 Ibid., 69.
We take emptiness for “nothingness” in the sense of mere absence of beings and do not experience the reverberation of the still invisible bridge that refers new shores to new shores.\(^{16}\)

And what does it mean, “to think nothing as nothing”? Would such thinking allow for (a) nothing outside the nothing? For Heidegger, “the nothing is nothing, and, if the nothing represents total indistinguishability, no distinction can obtain between the imagined and the ‘genuine’ nothing. And the ‘genuine’ nothing itself—isn’t this that camouflaged but absurd concept of a nothing that is? For the last time now the objections of the intellect would call a halt to our search, whose legitimacy, however, can be demonstrated only on the basis of a fundamental experience of the nothing.”\(^{17}\)

What does it, then, mean to think nothing— as nothing? Would such thinking lead us to a thinking of being, a thinking from wherein such question can be asked—would it not be from here that being is (to be) thought, that being exists? “Only on the ground of the original revelation of the nothing can human existence approach and penetrate beings. But since existence in its essence relates itself to beings—those which it is not and that which it is—it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already revealed. Dasein means: being held out into the nothing.”\(^{18}\)

Nothing is. And while for Heidegger “such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself […] can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety,”\(^ {19}\) that is, “[t]he nothing reveals itself in anxiety—but not as a being,”\(^ {20}\) he concludes by questioning: “If Dasein can relate itself to beings only by hold-

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., §33.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., §21.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., §28.
ing itself out into the nothing and can exist only thus; and if the nothing is originally disclosed only in anxiety; then must we not hover in this anxiety constantly in order to be able to exist at all?"²¹

It is this “being held out into the nothing” that “makes man a place-holder of the nothing. […] Being held out into the nothing — as Dasein is — on the ground of concealed anxiety is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence.²²

This transcendence points us somewhere else, points us outside such a beyond, points us toward a different attunement, perhaps; beyond transcendence — outside such a beyond — we find an elsewhere — everywhere but nowhere: “Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference. This boredom reveals beings as a whole.”²³

Boredom, indifferent, always unknown, does not uncover but reveals. It reveals the abyss that Dasein is.

Boredom reveals our fear of the void, and it is for this reason, perhaps, that we must meet it with and by Gelassenheit:

This is what we must first learn: not to resist straightaway but to let resonate. Yet how are we to make room for this initially inessential, ungraspable boredom? Only by not being opposed to it, but letting it approach us and tell us what it wants, what is going on with it. Yet even to do this, it is necessary in the first place that we remove from indeterminacy whatever we thus name and apparently know as boredom. We must do this, however, not in the sense of dissecting some psychological experience, but in such a way that we thereby approach ourselves. Whom? Ourselves — ourselves as a Da-sein. (Ambiguity!)²⁴

²¹ Ibid., §36.
²² Ibid., §43.
²³ Ibid., §18.
Such **Langeweile** (boredom) designates the mood from within which we face the horror of being: boredom opens us to that nothing that there is. **Langeweile** is nothing but the knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond.

Boredom thus not only reveals the fundamental concepts of metaphysics, world, finitude, and solitude, but is much more fundamental/ist in that it points toward an essence “beyond” essentialism.

Being our time, boredom reveals the essence of nothingness, emptiness, presence, and absence — *an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein — so lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond.*

For the time being, “[b]oredom, **Langeweile** — whatever its ultimate essence may be — shows, particularly in our German word, an almost obvious *relation to time*, a way in which we stand with respect to time, a feeling of time. Boredom and the question of boredom thus lead us to the problem of time.”

The time of boredom. Boredom gives being its time: “boredom is only possible at all because each thing, as we say, has its time. If each thing did not have its time, then there would be no boredom.”

The time of boredom. Time is given by boredom: “Time for its part stands in a relation of boredom to us.”

It is thus through and by boredom that time is revealed, and yet, while “[w]e are increasingly tempted to pose the whole problem of boredom simply in terms of the problem of time,” “we ought not to give in to this temptation […]. We must stick with boredom, so that precisely through its essence we may take a look into the concealed essence of time and thereby into the connection between the two.”

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25 As Heidegger attempts in the eponymous book.
27 Ibid., 105.
28 Ibid., 81.
29 Ibid., 99.
It is thus from within boredom and, at the same time, by boredom that we might be able to touch, that we might be able to bear “our horror of emptiness,”\textsuperscript{30} for it is here, in and through this long while, that we might be able to encounter, to affirm, to dissolve the “empty intimacy of time.”\textsuperscript{31}

Such is the time Langeweile gives us.

III.

\textit{We’re not bored. — We’re not capable of it.}

— Maurice Blanchot, \textit{The Step Not Beyond}\textsuperscript{32}

What does it mean: to be bored?

What does it mean: to be capable of being bored?

What does it mean: to be able to be bored, to bear this nothing that there is?

As is well known, it is in \textit{The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude} (1929/30), that Heidegger explores in depth, but not for the first time, this Grundstimmung, and where he famously distinguishes three forms of boredom: “Becoming Bored by Something,” “Being Bored with Something and the Passing of Time Belonging to It,” and the last, deepest one, “Profound Boredom as ‘It Is Boring for One.’”

And while, as he writes of and for the first form of boredom, “time has become altogether enigmatic for us,” while “[\textit{b}]ecoming bored and \textit{boredom} in general are then evidently entirely rooted in this enigmatic essence of time,”\textsuperscript{33} the relation of this muffling fog to being remains nebulous.

As insinuated above, Langeweile gives us (to) time, but what is given by Langeweile?

\textsuperscript{30} Blanchot, \textit{Infinite Conversation}, 121.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{33} Heidegger, \textit{The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics}, 98.
It is the “being left empty that is emerging in boredom”\(^\text{34}\) that scares us; but “this being left empty cannot mean that in boredom we are transformed in such a way that all things disappear entirely, as it were, so that nothing remains before us or around us. […] For how can we become bored by something, i.e., be left empty by something, if nothing at all is at hand? […] To leave empty does not at all mean: to be absent, not to be present at hand; rather things must be at hand in order to leave us empty.”\(^\text{35}\)

Outside presence, outside absence, this is where being is in time, this is when being is given.

It is from the analysis of the third form of boredom, Heidegger affirms, that we can give the word boredom, ‘Langeweile,’ a more essential meaning. In boredom, Langeweile, the while [Weile] becomes long [lang]. Which while? Any short while? No, but rather that while whilst Dasein is as such, the while that measures out that tarrying awhile [Verweilen] which is allotted to Dasein as such, i.e., the while whilst it is to be in the midst of these beings, in confrontation with them and thus with itself. It is this whole while — and yet a short while; and so every Dasein in turn is a short while. […] With this time what is at issue is not the time of the clock or chronology, but the lengthening or shortening of time proper.\(^\text{36}\)

Again, boredom points us to time, time proper, the enigma of time, which reveals the nothing that there is, and not least because of this “we cannot possibly treat boredom as an object of

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 101.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 102.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 152, emphasis in the original. And he summarizes his analysis of profound boredom as follows: “Boredom is the entrancement of the temporal horizon, an entrancement which lets the moment of vision belonging to temporality vanish. In thus letting it vanish, boredom impels entranced Dasein into the moment of vision as the properly authentic possibility of its existence, an existence only possible in the midst of beings as a whole, and within the horizon of entrancement, their telling refusal of themselves as a whole.” (Ibid., 153).
psychology. And that is precisely why we cannot draw conclusions with regard to man as a whole from such an object of psychology. We do not even need to draw such conclusions, given that this attunement brings us to ourselves in a far more fundamental and essential way. In attunement we are in such and such a manner. And profound boredom shows us what that means. The Dasein in us manifests itself.”  

In boredom, Dasein dis-closes itself.

The “essential moments of profound boredom,” namely “being left empty and being held in limbo in the specific concrete form of our boredom, being entranced and being drawn into the moment of vision,” “showed us how the utter abyss of Dasein in the midst of Dasein discloses itself in this attunement.”

Langeweile points beyond beyond. It points to the abyss of Dasein. It points us to nothing beyond. It is in and through Langeweile that we might be able to bear that nothing is what there is. And it might be within and from another Stimmung that boredom reveals, that boredom is revealed:

Attention waits. It waits without precipitation, leaving empty what is empty and keeping our haste, our impatient desire, and, even more, our horror of emptiness from prematurely filling it in. Attention is the emptiness of thought oriented by a gentle force and maintained in an accord with the empty intimacy of time.

Such thought is to be spoken from a language that does not aim to unveil but that reveals, a Blanchotian “speech such that to speak would no longer be to unveil with light. Which does not imply that we would want to go in search of the joy, or the horror, of the absence of the day: just the contrary; we would want to arrive at a mode of ‘manifestation,’ but a manifestation that would not be one of unveiling-veiling. Here what reveals

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37 Ibid., 283.
38 Ibid.
39 Blanchot, Infinite Conversation, 121.
itself does not give itself up to sight, just as it does not take refuge in simple invisibility. — This word reveal, I fear, is not quite suitable. To reveal, to remove the veil, to expose directly to view. — Revealing implies, in fact, that something shows that did not show itself. Speech (at least the one we are attempting to approach: writing) lays bare even without unveiling, and sometimes, on the contrary (dangerously), by revealing in a way that neither covers nor uncovers.”

— revealing (as though the pane had broken) such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein —

To reveal, then, is to affirm and dissolve this nothing that there is, and first of all nothing beyond.

And this is why, following Blanchot, “the ultimate conclusion should be: one must dwell in ignorance, in illusion, and lose oneself in incomprehensible affliction. Certitude, become once again inaccessible and nearly confounded with the emptiness of the sky, might, on this basis, recover its ‘reality.’”

Its reality: the sky, the same sky, suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty.

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40 Ibid., 29–30.
41 Ibid., 118.
Bibliography
