The Poetic Experience of the World

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Abstract

In this article I develop Heidegger's phenomenology of poetry, showing that it may provide grounds for rejecting claims that he lapses into linguistic idealism. Proceeding via an analysis of the three concepts of language operative in the philosopher's work, I demonstrate how poetic language challenges language's designative and world-disclosive functions. The experience with poetic language, which disrupts Dasein's absorption by emerging out of equipmentality in the mode of the broken tool, brings Dasein to wonder at the world's existence in such a way that doubt about its reality cannot enter the picture.

Keywords: poetry; Heidegger; external world scepticism; language; phenomenology; linguistic idealism

There are three concepts of language at work in Heidegger. The first one – the designative view of language – is the view whose predominance Heidegger challenged all his life. The second – what Cristina Lafont calls the world-disclosing view[1] – is the conceptualization of language that played a crucial role in the hermeneutic, quasi-transcendental philosophy set up in *Being and Time*. The third, poetic concept is importantly different from both. In the experience with poetic language there is a temporary suspension of Dasein's entrapment in world (understood as a historically conditioned horizon of understanding). Consequently, the phenomenology of poetic experience has the potential to help absolve Heidegger's philosophy of the charge of linguistic idealism (and *ipso facto* of the charges of relativism and radical incommensurabilism). This conclusion is especially interesting because the Heidegger of the late works is often read as a fetishist of language, so that any idea of the objective existence of the material world disappears behind a cloud of pseudo-poetic obscurantism (indeed Lafont's position is that it is the nascent idealism of the early works that eventually led Heidegger to the linguistic dead-ends of the late texts on language). I want to show that things are less obvious than this, and that the poetic experience that so obsessed the late Heidegger is best understood as an

experience of the emergence of something that lies on the boundary of the linguistic/equipmental world of Dasein. Perhaps surprisingly, then, the late Heidegger's philosophy of poetry consists less in the 'reification of language'[2] than in an attempt to show how a certain experience with it can lead the human to the material edge of its linguistic encasement: the very fact of the world as that which can never form part of it.

First we need to consider the view of language that Heidegger worked against right through his career. The late essay 'Language' gives perhaps his single clearest formulation of this 'current view',[3] which Heidegger says is predicated upon three core presuppositions. The first of these is the idea that 'speaking is expression'.[4] This is the notion that language is the means by which a subject can express mental states to other subjects. It is the ideal of intersubjective communication: I have something I want to convey, so I use language to convey this something to another, listening subject. Heidegger's point is that this presupposition itself relies upon many other presuppositions characteristic of the philosophy of consciousness and its separation between subject and object, including the notion of a division between inside and outside, or between the interiority and exteriority of the subject. The second presupposition is that 'speech is regarded as an activity of man'.[5] The most useful way of understanding this claim is to insert something like 'just another' into it: this idea is founded on an understanding of speech as *just another* activity of man, like walking, eating or picking up a pen. Such an understanding does not ascribe to language the essential import for human experience that Heidegger believes it possesses. We should also approach this claim in terms of its instrumentalism. Speaking, according to this understanding, is a thing one does, where the word 'does' is understood as an action one carries out as a means for bringing about a certain end: 'pass me the milk', 'open the door', 'fill out these forms'. Within this understanding, language is tied to will: it is something the subject uses in order to bring about certain effects in the world. The third presupposition, 'that human expression is always a presentation and representation of the real and unreal',[6] places language within the sphere of propositional truth; even commands or requests can be understood according to this paradigm as propositional: '*I want you to* pass me the milk', '… open the door,' '… fill out these forms.' For reasons that will become clear, this presupposition is perhaps most problematic for Heidegger.

It is worth noting that Heidegger's critique of the 'current view' of language is a very broad one, and cannot be reduced to a specific attack on (say) referentialist, verificationist or truth-conditional theories. Heidegger's critique is instead aimed at what he takes to be the basic image of the function of language that permeates modern philosophy. It is an attack on what one might call a 'cat is on the mat' understanding of language, in which it is assumed from the outset that language is a tool for the transmission of information. Heidegger's critique is both radical and very general, and rests on

the quite counterintuitive idea that language is not primarily a means of conveying how it is with one, or how it is with the world; that language is not primarily something human beings use to communicate. Of course, this isn't to say that Heidegger fails to recognize the obvious fact that we can and indeed often do use language to communicate: he simply claims that this instrumental, communicative function of language is derivative of its more fundamental (or 'primordial') function.[7] In this paper, I will follow Cristina Lafont in referring to the view that Heidegger attacks as the 'designative' view of language, and his first alternative as the 'disclosive' view of language.[8]

Lafont identifies the latter idea as one of the conceptual bedrocks of *Being and Time*, claiming that the philosophical grounding for the late Heidegger's elevation of language into an object of central concern was already present in nascent form in *Being and Time*; that 'the basic premises of Heidegger's view of language … are already anchored' in that text's 'hermeneutic transformation of philosophy'.[9] Lafont's Heidegger is a transcendental thinker who works as a strange sort of successor to the Kant of the critical works, inheriting and radicalizing the idea that experience is conditioned by factors that are not themselves experienced. One of the basic claims of the early Heidegger is that there is no apprehension of beings without a pre-existing system of understanding. This is Heidegger giving a transcendental twist to the intentionality thesis of Brentano, who famously claimed that consciousness is always *consciousness of* something: Heidegger's argument is that phenomena do not first appear as simple sense objects for the perception and/or interpretation of the human subject, but that the very condition of the possibility of their appearance is that they are always apprehended *as* something. He rejects the picture of the world as a totality of physical objects available for the perception of human subjects, showing instead how every act of perception is always already predicated on a pre-existing structure of understanding (Heidegger writes: '"Initially" we never hear noises or complexes of sound, but the creaking wagon, the motorcycle. … It requires a very artificial and complicated attitude in order to "hear" a "pure noise".'[10]) Heidegger's inheritance from Kant, then, is what we might call the constitutivity thesis: the claim that there are deep structures forming the conditions of the appearance of phenomena that on a superficial ('pre-critical' or 'dogmatic' in Kantian terms; 'metaphysical' in the terms that Heidegger will develop after *Being and Time*) glance appear to be 'objectively' given for our perceiving.

Yet there is a caveat: where Kant was concerned with thinking the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, the Heidegger of *Being and Time* is primarily concerned with thinking the conditions of the possibility of meaning. Thus we have a transcendental philosophy that is also hermeneutic in its basic orientation. What allows Heidegger to make this hermeneutic turn within a broadly transcendental framework? Lafont is clear on this point:

'[I]n order to bring about a hermeneutic transformation of philosophy, Heidegger substitutes the *ontological difference* for the empirical/transcendental distinction.'[11] On this reading of *Being and Time*, Heidegger's distinction between being and the multiplicity of beings grounds his version of transcendentalism. To quote from Lafont:

> The ontological difference (the distinction between being and beings) is established by Heidegger in such a way that it follows that there can be no *access* to entities without a prior understanding of their being. It is for this reason that entities appear to us as always already understood in one way or another (as thus or thus), or, as Heidegger puts it, why 'we always already move about in an understanding of being'. This is the *fact* from which Being and Time starts, and which lies at the basis of Heidegger's philosophy as a whole.[12]

According to this schema, it is the historically conditioned understanding of being that is constitutive for the apprehension of particular beings. This is what Heidegger means when he speaks of 'the elemental historicity of Dasein'[13] and claims that 'Dasein is determined by historicity in the ground of its being'.[14] Heidegger's point is not just that there is no apprehension of beings without a pre-existing structure of understanding, but that this structure is itself a historical product. Here, then, we can see another point on which Heidegger diverges from Kant. For the latter the constitutive categories are universal and atemporal; for the former they are determined by the irreducible temporality of Dasein and its specific place in the history of being. Heidegger's constitutivity thesis results in a different sort of transcendentalism (one should really call it a quasi-transcendentalism, because the transcendental structures Heidegger identifies are by no means atemporal, universal categories[15]), which is perhaps more problematic than Kant's for its essential connection to historicity. As Lee Braver aptly puts it: 'Heidegger's argument takes the form of a Kantian-style idealism transcribed into a temporal key.'[16]

The keystone of Heidegger's hermeneutic quasi-transcendentalism is the claim that *understanding is constitutive*: that it is the historically conditioned understanding of being that makes the appearance of particular beings possible. Bound up in this claim, then, is a certain conception of the entity. As we have seen, the entity for Heidegger cannot be the empiricists' sense datum, because *Being and Time* is built upon a foreclosure of the very possibility of a simple 'sensory' object existing in isolation from a historically conditioned system of meaning. If the condition of the appearance of objects is such a system, then each object is what it is in virtue of its place in a particular historico-temporal field (the hammer is a hammer in virtue of its specific relation to other tools, and to the referential/practical context in which tools have their place: it is what it is, in other words, in virtue of its

being in relation to our dwelling). This is why Heidegger cites the ancient Greek term for things – *pragmata* – with such approval: the thing *is* for Dasein only because it participates in a broader structure of meaning. 'Handiness' – each being's potentiality for use as a part of Dasein's historically conditioned contexture of intentionality – thus becomes the being of the particular beings encountered by Dasein.[17] As Heidegger writes, '[t]he specific *thisness* of a piece of equipment [is] … its equipmental character and equipmental contexture'.[18] An object is ready-at-hand for Dasein in virtue of its place in a historico-temporal context, and all objects that turn up in the referential context of Dasein's in-order-tos and for-the-sakes-of-which are by definition ready-at-hand: turning up, we might say, is just being *zuhanden*.

From here we can begin to understand the crucial Heideggerian concept of world. Here I'll cite a key early passage from the text:

> It is not the case that human being 'is', and then on top of that has a relation of being to the 'world' which it sometimes takes upon itself. Dasein is never 'initially' a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up a 'relation' to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is only possible *because*, as being-in-the-world, Dasein is as it is. This constitution of being is not first derived from the fact that besides the being which has the character of Dasein there are other beings which are objectively present and meet up with it. These other beings can only 'meet up' 'with' Dasein because they are able to show themselves of their own accord within a *world*.[19]

World is the opening at the heart of human being that forms the condition of the possibility of the appearance of phenomena, the historically conditioned horizon of understanding that is constitutive for the equipmental contexture in which Dasein apprehends particular entities. With this quasi-transcendental concept, Heidegger wants to sidestep the whole philosophical problematic of the existence of 'external reality'. Where for Kant the scandal of philosophy was its failure to have provided a proof of the existence of the external world, for Heidegger the true scandal of philosophy consists '*in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again*'.[20] 'Correctly understood', he writes, 'Dasein defies such proofs, because it always already is in its being what the later proofs first deem necessary to demonstrate for it.'[21]

Yet Heidegger's deflationary attack on the problem of the external world raises some important questions for his project. First, Heidegger's quasi-transcendentalism opens up a problem of idealism: if the condition of the appearance of objects for Dasein is a historically conditioned horizon of meaning, then how can Daesin ever encounter the kind of *material*

resistance that would provide a sufficient condition for establishing the correctness of its statements about those objects? Or again: if objects are what they are because of their place in a particular historico-temporal field, how can we ever claim to have knowledge of those objects, if knowledge is taken to consist of access to facts that would transcend any such field? Indeed, as the Fichtean liquidation of the Kantian *Ding an sich* indicated (a liquidation that in retrospect seems inevitable, where the external world drops out like one of Wittgenstein's beetles), this is a familiar problem for any transcendental project. Herman Philipse puts it like this: 'In the past, all … transcendental theories turned out to imply a specific variety of the problem of the external world: the problem of the *Ding an sich*. … We may wonder how Heidegger can be a transcendental philosopher and also claim that he eliminates this problem'[22] (indeed, Heidegger will arguably have more difficulty than Kant regarding this, for where the latter wants to save knowledge by showing the logically necessary status of a universal subject, the former's commitment to historicity bars him from this option). Of course, Heidegger takes himself to have sidestepped these questions with the claim that the very existence of Dasein always already implies its being-in-the-world, but as the continuing debate over the status of science in Heidegger's philosophy shows (Philipse, for instance, argues against Hubert Dreyfus's claim that Heidegger 'sought to establish a robust realist account of science',[23] claiming instead that the philosophy of *Being and Time* represents an 'ontological disqualification of science'[24]), it is at the very least unclear whether Heidegger's system leaves room for knowledge as traditionally understood.[25]

And there is a further problem, less explored in the literature but no less interesting for that. It is that Heidegger himself admits that the problem of the external world is something more than a pseudo-problem characteristic of the philosophy of consciousness, and has consequences extending further than one may expect in the light of his critique. He writes:

> It is not a matter of proving that and how an 'external world' is objectively present, but of demonstrating why Dasein as being-in-the-world has the tendency of 'initially' burying the 'external world' in nullity 'epistemologically' in order first to prove it. The reason for this lies in the falling of Dasein and in the diversion motivated therein of the primary understanding of being to the being of objective presence.[26]

Here Heidegger indicates that the tendency to objectify and then doubt the existence of the world is something inherent in Dasein itself, a tendency that coincides with its falling. This is therefore not just a problem for the establishment of knowledge, but also one that (to step out of a Heideggerian register for a moment) presents as a problem for human life. And if we take seriously Heidegger's assertion (or admission) that Dasein is 'essentially

falling',[27] then it will become clear that this is a problem of some impor-
tance, indeed a problem inherent in Dasein's very being (it will also give
weight to the Cavellian reading of Heidegger as a philosopher with a serious
concern for the problem of scepticism, as a thinker who like Wittgenstein
was concerned with 'the truth of scepticism'[28]). The urge to prove the exist-
ence of the external world may be the result of a theoretical quagmire that
would in principle be resolvable with recourse to a new and more originary
conception of being-in-the-world, but our falling into that quagmire is
nevertheless a tendency inherent in everyday Dasein itself. Consequently,
the problem of the external world is a real one for Heidegger, both in its
epistemological variant, in which the key question is how Heidegger can
ground statements of knowledge regarding things in the world, and in what
we might call its 'existential' variant, in which the issue is how Dasein can
extricate itself from a sceptical threat that stems from its very being as the
kind of being that falls.

Lafont, who is concerned with the epistemological variant of the problem
of the external world as it presents itself for Heidegger, sets up her criti-
cisms on the basis of a reading of *Being and Time* in which the concept of
world is shown to be predicated on an understanding of language as disclo-
sive. Her claim, which is erected on the basis of a laborious but not unper-
suasive re-reading of the text in the light of the later Heidegger, is that
'language alone lends plausibility to *Being and Time*';[29] that it is 'unaccept-
able to ascribe a minor role to language in *Being and Time*'.[30] Her argument
rests on her interpretation of the key Heideggerian theme of understand-
ing, which she takes as 'owing to the existence of a symbolic medium'[31] that
would distribute the various possibilities of Dasein as thrown projection:
'the facticity of Dasein consists in being-in-the-world, and the world as a
"whole of significance" is therefore of a symbolic nature'.[32] For Lafont, the
crucial Heideggerian claim that the condition of the possibility of our access
to entities is an *a priori* perfect system of understanding (the 'always
already') is intelligible only if we take understanding to be linguistically
constituted. Thus her claim is that the elevation of language characteristic
of the works after Heidegger's *Kehre* was already present in nascent form
in *Being and Time*, and that '[t]o see this by no means requires projecting
from the later Heidegger back onto the earlier writings. *Being and Time*
provides a continual stream of evidence for this claim.'[33] In other words,
Lafont wants to show how the foundations for the understanding of
language that Heidegger puts forward in the later work were laid in *Being
and Time*. On this model, language is what gives structure to the world: it
makes possible my experience of it as intelligible. As Lafont puts it, 'as a
consequence of [Heidegger's] turn, the traditional view of language as a
mere instrument for the designation of independently existing entities was
overcome. That amounted to a recognition of the constitutive role of
language for our experience and understanding of the world.'[34] There are at

least three reasons why Lafont's reading of the work is persuasive: it is consistent with the text, and in particular with the otherwise enigmatic section on discourse, where Heidegger asserts that '[d]iscourse is constitutive for the being of the there, that is, attunement and understanding';[35] it explains something of why the later Heidegger became so obsessed with language; and it produces a version of Heidegger's claims which is philosophically plausible. The last assertion is clearly the most dubious of all three, and part of the task of this paper is to show how one might go about defending Heidegger from Lafont's own criticism of linguistic idealism (and in doing so to show how her Heidegger is more persuasive than she gives him credit for).[36]

It is important that from here any strict distinction between language and equipment in the early Heidegger will start to look untenable. This is because the equipmental context must now be understood as symbolically structured: after all, equipment is what it is because of its place within a horizon of understanding, and that horizon is itself linguistically constituted. In *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* Heidegger writes that '[t]he world comes not afterward but beforehand, in the strict sense of the word. Beforehand: that which is unveiled and understood already in advance in every existent Dasein before any apprehending of this or that being, beforehand as that which stands forth as always already unveiled to us'. He goes on:

> [e]ach particular equipmental thing has … a specific reference to another particular equipmental thing … the functionality that goes with chair, blackboard, window is exactly that which makes the thing what it is … The functionality whole, narrower or broader – room, house, neighbourhood, town, city – is the prius, within which specific beings, as beings of this or that character, are as they are and exhibit themselves accordingly. … A specific functionality whole is *pre*-understood.[37]

The critical point here is that what Heidegger here calls pre-understanding would not be possible without the linguistic. To claim this is not only fair to the texts themselves, but also the most philosophically plausible way of taking understanding: after all, what could an *a priori perfect* understanding of the world conditioning our access to entities be, if not a condition for the world's intelligibility, and how could it be such a condition without being linguistic? As Heidegger puts it, the referential totality that is the equipmental contexture 'must be previously disclosed in a certain intelligibility'.[38] Importantly, this is not quite to say that particular ontic languages *themselves* are constitutive, but rather that the referential totality of a particular 'functionality whole' gets its structure from a particular ontic language. And crucially, both are constituted by *discourse,* which is the ontological ground of any particular referential totality: of that which *expresses itself* as the

linguistic/equipmental contexture (as Heidegger writes, '[*t*]*he existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse*'[39]). Lafont is uncharitable to Heidegger on this point, and tries to link his view to the linguistic determinism characteristic of nineteenth-century German romanticism, claiming that Heidegger's own attempts at casting the ontological difference in terms of a distinction between discourse and language fail (thus leading him into a Sapir–Whorf style linguistic idealism, in which 'what things are becomes thoroughly dependent on what is contingently "disclosed" for a historical linguistic community through a specific language'[40]). But this distinction, in which discourse appears as the ontological horizon expressed by an ontic language structuring a particular equipmental contexture, is crucial for Heidegger.[41] As Stephen Mulhall writes: '[a]t the heart of understanding we find the formal-existential framework of meaning; but this framework is bequeathed to us not through language but rather through the existential-ontological foundation of language, i.e. "discourse"'.[42] Discourse expresses itself as a particular ontic language in a particular locality, in and as a particular equipmental contexture. Mulhall again: 'Language is the way in which discourse is expressed, but it is discourse which – in grounding the intelligibility of the world – accounts for the comprehending modes of perception (the hearing of wagons and words rather than tone data).'[43]

We can now break Heidegger's position down into three basic claims:

(1) World constitutes the disclosure of beings: it is 'that *in terms of which* things at hand are at hand for us'.[44]
(2) The linguistic horizon (discourse) is the crucial component in this process of disclosure by which beings show themselves in language as part of a particular equipmental contexture.
(3) This contexture is always historically conditioned, because the linguistic horizon is historically contingent (Heidegger: 'Discourse is *in itself* temporal'[45]).

The combination of these three theses may be the most important conceptual innovation of *Being and Time*. Taken together they provide the basis of Heidegger's critique of modern philosophy in the name of a more primordial notion of being-in-the-world.

For Lafont, the problem with the project of *Being and Time* consists not in Heidegger's transcendentalism as such, but in the combination of transcendentalism and historicity that results from his commitment to the constitutive role of the linguistic horizon (to put it crudely, what troubles her is the 'quasi' nature of his transcendentalism, in which the *a priori* becomes historical). As she puts it in a recent essay, 'one may well wonder whether Heidegger's aim is really to transform the notion of apriority or rather to simply reject it altogether'.[46] Or as she writes in her book, after Heidegger's hermeneutic transformation of the transcendental '[t]here is no

way to step outside of our understanding of being in order to check its validity, to test whether or not our understanding of being coincides with the being of things themselves, for there is no being without an *understanding* of being'. This is because in Heidegger understanding 'is not the (eternal) endowment of a transcendental ego (which would guarantee the objectivity of experience and, thereby, the possibility of valid knowledge for all human beings)'.[47] More specifically, Lafont's claim is that Heidegger's quasitranscendentalism – consisting as it does of a transcendental that has been unmoored from the universal subject and placed under the condition of contingent history – results in a sort of linguistic idealism, in which '[w]hat things are becomes thoroughly dependent on what is contingently "disclosed" for a historical linguistic community'. This is because 'that which constitutes the objects of experience … can no longer be understood as a unique synthesis of apperception, valid for all rational beings' but rather simply as 'the plurality of linguistic world-disclosures resulting from the contingent, historical process of projecting meaning for interpreting the world'.[48] On this account, Heidegger inherits the obvious problem of the linguistic idealist position: a disqualification of the possibility of knowledge, and potentially a linguistic incommensurabilism that soon collapses into relativism (if my world is constituted by my language, and my language is different from yours, then we live in different worlds). While Lafont's transcendental/hermeneutic reading of Heidegger is a perceptive one, I nevertheless want to show that placing Heidegger here is to make a mistake, and that this mistake is the result of forgetting the importance for him of the question of being. Indeed, the simple question raised by the *fact that there are things* acts as a sort of counterweight to the problems stemming from Heidegger's quasi-transcendentalism, effectively pulling it toward a strange universalism that may provide a minimally sufficient condition for establishing criteria of epistemological validity (indeed Lafont herself seems to acknowledge this when she writes that '*that* there are entities has nothing to do with us, but *what* they are depends on our prior projection of their being'[49]). The *Seinsfrage*, in other words, may provide a pathway out of the linguistic idealist tendencies implicit in Heidegger's work. To begin to understand this, we need to move toward the later Heidegger, but only after working through his phenomenology of the tool.

A defining trait of the tool is its material inconspicuousness. Handiness, or a tool's potentiality for use within a particular equipmental context, always entails a recession of the presence of the tool as object. 'What is peculiar to what is initially at hand', says Heidegger, 'is that it withdraws, so to speak, in its character of handiness in order to be really handy.'[50] A working tool is a tool that dissolves into the hermeneutic tapestry that it partly constitutes; a hammer is useful as a hammer precisely insofar as its user remains unaware of its objective presence. Heidegger goes on: 'What everyday association is initially busy with is not the tools themselves, but the

work.'[51] The artisan does not busy himself with his hammer and saw; rather he uses his hammer and saw as he busies himself with his work. Graham Harman sums this up nicely, writing that in use entities are '[d]issolved into a general equipmental effect', losing 'their singularity' and operating 'in an inconspicuous usefulness, doing … work without our noticing it'.[52]

Yet there are moments at which Dasein is confronted by the presence of the tool. In these encounters, the handiness structure is interrupted and Dasein is temporarily thrown out of its immersion in use. Harman: 'When the tool fails, its unobtrusive quality is ruined. There occurs a jarring of reference, so that the tool becomes visible *as* what it is.'[53] As a brief example, the reader could consider these very pages. If all has been going well, you will not have consciously registered the presence of the paper in your hand until this point in the exposition: your use of the pages had made them materially invisible to you. Perhaps only now will you notice their qualities: their thinness, the smooth feel of their surfaces, the sharpness of their edges, the sounds they make when rubbed together (or, if you are reading this on a computer, you may now notice the presence of the mouse in your hand or the keyboard against your fingertips, the glow of the screen in front of you or the background hum of the cooling fan). Of course, all this has been objectively present for the entire time; you had just failed to notice this fact because of your absorption in use. This is the experience of what Heidegger calls the 'broken tool'.

Here there is another important distinction to be made. On the ontic level, a broken tool is obviously just that: a tool that has for one reason or another become unusable. On the ontological level, however, any tool that draws attention to its presence is a broken tool, because in doing so it throws Dasein out of its immersion in use. Harman again:

> [T]he visibility of Heidegger's 'broken tool' has nothing to do with equipment not being in top working order. Even the most masterfully constructed, prize-winning tools have to be regarded as 'broken' as soon as we consider them directly; the broken/unbroken distinction does not function as an ontic rift between two different sorts of entities. Thus, as ought to have been expected, Heidegger teaches us not about smashed-up blades and chisels, but only about beings in general.[54]

The experience of the broken tool is not just an experience with a useless chisel, but an experience of ontological hiatus in which '[t]he contexture of reference and thus the referential totality undergoes a distinctive disturbance'.[55] In these encounters, Dasein can become newly stunned by or plainly *aware* of objects, which now emerge from inconspicuousness in and as equipment to confront Dasein in their materiality. As Heidegger shows, the experience with the broken tool sees Dasein break out of the referential

structure of the ready-to-hand (*zuhanden*) as objects temporarily appear in the mode of objective presence (*vorhanden*). It is an experience with what one could call the mute 'thereness' of things, in which they show up in their 'thatness' as opposed to their 'whatness'. The very *being here before me* of things jumps out to claim me in this experience, and shows itself as something with no inherent regard for or connection to human Dasein: things in their thereness, one might say, are simply there, and would still be there without us.

It is here that Heidegger clears the pathway on which he may be able to escape the idealist trappings that inhere in any theory of language as disclosive. As we saw above, the early Heidegger sets up a theory of the relation between object and language whereby the former is in a crucial way supervenient on the latter: against the designative theory of language, Heidegger claims that objects do not exist for Dasein apart from the equipmental/linguistic contexture that it dwells in. They do not appear to a subject as simple 'sense objects' for interpretation because the condition of their first appearing is that they appear *as something*. The phenomenology of the broken tool, however, shows that this does not have to entail the rejection of the claim that objects have a sort of 'independent' existence (even if Heidegger's system problematizes this sort of language). Indeed, the crucial point is that what temporarily emerges in the breakdown of the equipmental/linguistic totality occasioned by the experience of the broken tool is objects freed from their subsumption in use, objects as materially resistant to the equipmental world of Dasein. To put this in terms that I will work toward refining, what emerges in this experience of breakdown is a kind of outside in which Dasein's intentional projects lose their purchase on things. A materiality emerges here that shows itself as a kind of remainder, a residue that is left over after the world-constitutive movement of discourse. Hence it is no accident that Heidegger understands science as blind before or forgetful of the referential context of Dasein, as necessarily passing over the worldliness of human life to reveal things as objective presence. Indeed, it is in precisely this sense that we can understand Heidegger as giving us a realism robust enough to account for scientific knowledge. In the event of Dasein's demise things would lose their 'whatness', but not their 'thatness': meaning that in Heidegger's system objects do have an 'objective' existence. Yet of course things are complex here, for in Heidegger's system science itself cannot be understood except as derivative of Dasein's self-understanding, which (as we have seen) is always primordial. In Heidegger, science has access to a reality that exists independently of Dasein's understanding (things are really real!), but that access is always already tempered by that understanding (things become what they are because of the as-structure). To put it another way: things exist independently of us; it is just impossible to escape the *a piori* perfect status of our thrownness into a particular historical world, and hence impossible for science to proceed

from out of some trans-historical view from nowhere (hence Newtonian physics produces accurate predictions, but has to make those predictions from within a particular historical situation, and thus ends up reproducing (indeed reinforcing) a particular understanding of being). Lafont, then, may be right in attributing to Heidegger the claim that there is no access to the 'whatness' of things outside of a linguistically structured equipmental world, but this needs to be supplemented with the recognition that it can be breached and temporarily suspended, such that things show themselves as existing without regard for human Dasein. In other words, the charge of linguistic idealism that she levels at Heidegger wrongly attributes to him the claim that the equipmental/linguistic contexture in which Dasein dwells is impermeable. This is not the case: the world of Dasein is not seamless and can be disrupted. My claim, upon which I hope to make good in the remainder of this article, is that we need to move toward Heidegger's late works if we want to understand the phenomenological structure and philosophical consequences of this rupture.

Here I want to return primarily to the essay 'Language', where we find Heidegger carrying out one of his most useful engagements with the question of language *as such*. The (apparently tautological) question guiding the inquiry is 'In what way does language occur as language?'[56] As we have seen, Heidegger wants to move away from the 'current view'[57] of language: the instrumentalist/designative paradigm. As is the case in *Being and Time*, this isn't to say that he rejects this view of language outright. Indeed, Heidegger does not even question the 'correctness' of this paradigm of language even in this late essay: 'No one would dare to declare incorrect, let alone reject as useless, the identification of language as audible utterance of inner emotions, as human activity, as a representation by image and by concept.'[58] Here we are reminded of the claim in *Being and Time* that the apophantic statement is itself parasitic upon the hermeneutic contexture of Dasein: the designative understanding of language is not wrong, as such, but it is an abstracted image of language that, if taken as the only image of language, works to conceal its other dimensions:

> We still give too little consideration, however, to the singular role of these correct ideas about language. They hold sway, as if unshakable, over the whole field of the varied scientific perspectives on language. They have their roots in an ancient tradition. Yet they ignore completely the oldest natural cast of language. Thus, despite their antiquity and their comprehensibility, they never bring us to language as language.[59]

But importantly, Heidegger is also attempting to move beyond the equipmental understanding of language that we find in *Being and Time*. As with the early criticism of the designative paradigm, Heidegger has become

convinced that there is more to language than *Being and Time* may have indicated. In particular, he is concerned in this text with what he calls 'language as language', and he turns to poetry in an attempt to explicate its excesses over designation and equipment. In particular, he turns to Trakl's *A Winter Evening*.

There is something striking about Heidegger's reading of this piece. It is that it is not really a 'reading', at least according to the usual understanding of the term. Of course, he does spend three paragraphs explicating the 'content' of the poem, but after doing so reneges on the project:

> The content of the poem might be dissected even more distinctly, its form outlined even more precisely, but in such operations we would still remain confined by the notion of language that has prevailed for thousands of years. According to this idea language is the expression, produced by men, of their feelings and the world view that guides them. Can the spell this idea has cast over our language be broken? Why should it be broken? In its essence, language is neither expression nor an activity of man. Language speaks. We are now seeking the speaking of language of the poem. Accordingly, what we seek lies in the poetry of the spoken word.[60]

After this point there is a break in the style of the presentation, as Heidegger leaves typically philosophical language behind to slip into a more allusive, metaphorical and indeed pseudo-poetic register. Tautologies appear more frequently and key phrases begin to be repeated as Heidegger unfolds images from the Trakl piece and sets them alongside his own concepts, which he now introduces quite abruptly and without real explanation. It is an alienating and at times exasperating reading experience, and it is easy to see why some commentators make the mistake of either ignoring certain writings from the later Heidegger or condemning him for wilful obscurantism. Here, however, it is worth extending the Davidsonian principle of charity and giving Heidegger the benefit of the doubt. What are the reasons for this stylistic development? Answering this question means turning first to a set of other, closely related ones: what is missed by philosophical language? What is the unrepresentable, and why is Heidegger concerned with it? What does 'poetic' language do that philosophical language does not?

I would like to give the answer to the last question first, and will start by saying that for Heidegger, poetic language is potentially transformative in a way that philosophical language is not. This is because it can produce a particular sort of 'experience with language', where an 'experience' is something that 'overwhelms and transforms … we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it'.[61] How? First, it is clear that poetic language is able to effect such a transformation because 'man finds the proper abode

of his existence in language'.[62] This metaphor of language as dwelling place is of course a very common one in the late Heidegger, but one can find its seeds in the quasi-transcendental, hermeneutic system of *Being and Time*. After all, if my reading of this text holds good, then it should be clear that its key theses are predicated upon a theory of the world-disclosing nature of language, and thus on an image of the human dwelling within a hermeneutic totality that is itself (ontologically) constituted by discourse and (ontically) structured by bits of linguistic equipment. These theses spring from the same basic commitments that drive the late Heidegger's claim that the human being is 'always speaking':[63] the point is that the human is *involved* in language even when it is not literally speaking, and indeed even when it is not reading or listening to speech. There is immersion in language in 'attending to some work or taking a rest',[64] because these engagements are always carried out within a wider linguistic/equipmental context. This is why Heidegger claims that 'language belongs to the closest neighbourhood of man's being'; that '[w]e encounter language everywhere'.[65] In the late and early Heidegger, language is the elemental stuff of the world. It is equipment for dwelling.

Yet equipment functions only insofar as it remains inconspicuous to its user. As we have seen, this is because the broken tool calls attention away from work and toward itself, and in so doing, breaks the chain of intentionality, which functions because of a tool's referring back to other tools and projects in the linguistic/equipmental context. In this emergency, Dasein is confronted with the object freed from its equipmental background, and thus temporarily expelled from immersion in use. And this is precisely how we should understand the poetic experience with language that so obsesses the late Heidegger. In this poetic experience, language does not just communicate a predicative meaning-content (designation) or work to constitute the equipmental contexture of a particular world (world disclosure), but also 'brings itself to language'.[66] Heidegger's experience with language is an experience of temporary breakdown, where language draws attention to itself, and thus stops 'working' in the usual way. This is why he points out that language only functions to the extent that its essential nature remains veiled: 'Only because in everyday speaking language does *not* bring itself to language but holds back, are we able to simply go ahead and speak a language, and so to deal with something and negotiate something by speaking.'[67] Poetic language is language that draws attention to itself: it is not perfectly 'clear' and refuses the ideal of transparent inconspicuousness so as to remain and linger on the page. It is a broken language that erupts out of equipmentality, forcing Dasein into a confrontation with its sonorousness, its material qualities. In the terms of the artwork essay, poetic language is language that foregrounds its 'thingly character',[68] drawing attention to itself as a material thing.

This is why Heidegger became so fixated on poetic language. More specifically, it is why he is so unconcerned with the 'content' of the Trakl piece he wants to analyse, focusing instead on what he variously calls its 'speaking',[69] 'calling'[70] and 'naming'.[71] Heidegger's claim is that language has two different and perhaps incommensurable faces; that words can disappear in communication or refuse such transparency to show themselves more essentially as the material things they are. Here we find Heidegger running up against a crucial phenomenological limit (and thus reason to be wary of any too-neat pragmatist or reductive linguistic idealist reading of him), a point at which the linguistic context of Dasein – the structured totality of meaning in which it dwells – is disrupted by an event of exposure. In this event, words start to signify themselves, bringing attention to language as a material thing, as marks on a page or screen.[72] 'Only at the level of materiality do words connect with things', as Gerald Bruns puts it, before going on immediately to quote Ponge: 'O infinite resources of the thickness of things, brought about by the infinite resources of the semantical thickness of words!'[73] This is what Heidegger means when he writes of the 'bidding' that takes place in the first stanza of the Trakl piece. 'Bidding', he says, 'is inviting. It invites things in, so that they may bear upon men as things.'[74] The poet's task is to invite things into a presence in which they viscerally bear upon us.

The key distinction here is between the experience of breakdown occasioned by the confrontation with the broken tool and the experience of breakdown characteristic of poetic experience. What must be explained is why poetic experience is more fundamental than the experience of the broken tool, which is not transformative for Dasein. Phenomenologically, we can identify the difference in terms of the *novelty* essential to any poetic experience with language, drawing a contrast between this and the familiar annoyance and relatively boring low-level anxiety that usually accompany the experience of the broken tool: the difference between poetic experience and the mute experience of breakdown it so closely resembles consists in the elements of surprise and astonishment inherent in the former. So there is an important structural isomorphy between these two experiences of breakdown, but in poetic experience I am able to follow the experience of breakdown to a conclusion: poetic experience, one could say, completes the experience of breakdown. Think of the difference between encountering someone speaking a language over which you have an imperfect grasp and reading a poem: in the former, there might be a sense of frustration as you do your best to understand what is being said, as the materiality of language, the sounds of the words themselves, jumps out at you as a disturbance. In the experience with poetic language, there is a structurally similar encounter with the material resistance of words (with language as a broken tool), but, in the case of a successful poem at least, it appears not as a disturbance but rather as *something's becoming intelligible*, where the sound and even physical shape of words[75] start to become evocative, and something previously

unarticulated to you (and until now inarticulable for you) shows up and surprises. Whereas an unknown foreign word emerges materially as a disturbance, the language of a successful poem (and by successful I mean successful-for-the-reader, the kind of poem that produces a poetic experience) emerges materially in a way that grants access to the worldliness of the world, the ontological ground of intelligibility itself. If in the experience of the broken tool we are jarred by a sudden awareness of the cracked hammer in our hand, then in poetry we are struck by a sudden awareness of the transcendental condition for encountering things in general. When my hammer breaks, the fact of the world jars me as a brute meaningless presence. In poetry, the world's existing appears as something speakable.[76]

In one of his more enigmatic moments, we find Heidegger stating that '[t]hinging, things are things'.[77] At this point we should be able to understand both why Heidegger resorts to a tautology and exactly what he intends to 'express' by it: in everyday life, things are not truly things, because they remain inconspicuously involved in the equipmental contexture; through poetry they are able to 'thing' and become what they are. A successful poem lets language itself emerge in the mode of the broken tool, and because language is constitutive for equipmentality, allows Dasein to follow through on that experience in a novel way. A poem turns an experience of breakdown into an experience of *the intelligibility of the fact of existence* (of what J. H. Prynne calls 'the eloquence, the gentility/of the world's being'[78]): it renders inoperative the chain of references that constitute Dasein's world, but at the same time lets things become things again, bringing our attention back to their existing in a way that reveals it as something other than objective presence. As Prynne writes in a prose piece: 'the reality of the external world may be constituted … on the basis of the world's perceived existence, the resistance it offers to our awareness'.[79] Poetry offers a particular kind of resistance to our awareness, a resistance that makes the 'thereness' of the world newly intelligible to us. We have to understand the later Heidegger's obsession with poetry not as the fruit of a linguistic idealism that had its roots in *Being and Time*, but rather as an attempt by him at resolving one of the basic problems of his hermeneutic philosophy: an attempt, we might say, at breaking out of our being-in-language, or more accurately, an attempt at tracing an experience in which our being-in-language is temporarily suspended. Poetic experience is not an experience in which Dasein learns that it is forever closed off in some hermetically sealed linguistic sphere, but an experience of a materiality that prevents the closure of that sphere. It provides an opening onto reality that allows for a returning to it.

The condition of the possibility of this experience is that Dasein is a being that forgets itself (a being-there that forgets its being there): the kind of being that, to use the Heideggerian term I invoked earlier, *falls* into existing as though its existing is not an issue for it. After all, something can be surprising to me only if I don't know of it, and if the fact of the world's existence

can surprise me, then this fact (which in a sense is entirely 'obvious') must not be something that I can know. As Mulhall writes: 'the world's existence – unlike the existence of a given object in the world – is not something in which we "believe", not an "opinion" that we hold on the basis of evidence'.[80] So in the emergency of language characteristic of poetic experience, something comes to be experienced by Dasein that exceeds every form of knowledge. After all, what is imparted here is precisely not a fact about the world (a 'state of affairs') that could itself be expressed more or less accurately with a corresponding propositional claim. This fact is absolutely singular: it is the fact of the world, not a fact in the world. Thus it isn't quite that the world appears in poetic experience with a vividness that undermines all doubt, but that what appears here is of a wholly different order from the dialectic of doubt, belief and knowledge (encountering the world's existing is not the same as 'knowing that P', or coming to know it). What emerges in poetry is an experiential or phenomenological *proof-for-Dasein* of the existence of the world, which arises for a moment and then recedes as Dasein is reabsorbed. In the terms I introduced earlier, the poetic experience with language temporarily resolves the existential variant of the problem of the external world, leading Dasein up out of its falling and into a confrontation with that from which it fell. Of course, this experience cannot be finally or wholly transformative in its resolution of the problem (after all, it does not present any propositional content that could be retained and remembered at will). But it seems that the limitedness of this experience, the fact that the transformation it accords is temporary, is one of its conditions of possibility. After all, this is how it can be surprising each time: it is why each poem seems to be saying something new to one; the condition of poetry's imparting the kind of novelty that differentiates it from the prosaic experience of the broken tool. The speakability of the world is quite literally *renewed* with every poetic experience.

So while it may be true that the existence of the external world can't be known beyond all doubt, perhaps it can be *touched* in such a way that doubt doesn't enter into the picture. This would come to more than the claim that pre-theoretical Dasein does not face the epistemological problems characteristic of post-Cartesian philosophy, beginning as they do with a passing over of being-in-the-world and a move into abstraction. My claim is not simply that the retreat into abstraction causes us to miss the richness or thickness of being-in-the-world, but that everyday being-in-the-world can itself be suspended by a poetic experience of the word/world *as such*, which is a kind of touching against the materiality of existence. What takes place in this touching is an escape from both everyday equipmentality and the philosopher's cage of representational knowledge. It is a breath of air occasioned by the poetic experience of the world.

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Notes

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1 See Cristina Lafont, *Heidegger, Language and World Disclosure*, trans. Graham Harman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

2 Ibid., p 104.

3 Martin Heidegger, 'Language', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Row, 1971), p. 192.

4 Ibid., p. 192.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 *Being and Time* presents an early version of this critique when Heidegger distinguishes between hermeneutic and apophantic discourse (*SZ* 154–60; pp. 144–50). The latter functions according to designation; 'this hammer is too heavy' is Heidegger's example. Heidegger's claim is that the apophantic statement is parasitic on the hermeneutic world of Dasein: 'the statement's pointing out is accomplished on the basis of what is already disclosed in understanding'; that the statement 'always already maintains itself on the basis of being-in-the-world' and 'cannot disclose entities on its own' (*SZ* 156; p. 146). A more originary understanding of the function of language – the hermeneutic understanding – places such a statement within the equipmental contexture of Dasein (which terms I will define shortly): 'The primordial act of interpretation lies not in a theoretical sentence, but in circumspectly and heedfully putting away or changing the inappropriate tool "without wasting words"' (*SZ* 156; p. 146). As such, the statement 'the hammer is too heavy' is not to be understood as a simple designative claim that follows the structure of 'the object X possesses the property Y', but rather as another part of Dasein's equipmental contexture. Its meaning, then, is best interpreted as 'too heavy, the other hammer!' (ibid.). This is Heidegger working to show that the designative paradigm of language is an abstraction (even if it is a sometimes useful one).

8 In using the term 'designative' to describe this theory of language I am following Lafont, who is herself following Charles Taylor (Charles Taylor, 'Theories of Meaning', *Man and World*, 18 (1980), pp. 281–302). In this important paper Taylor gives a historical account of the designative theory of language as arising contemporaneously with the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. The reader will also note that I sometimes use the term 'instrumentalist' in this context; this is because the term 'designative', while useful in its clarity, is problematic in its exclusivity. Heidegger was concerned to critique not only the designative or predicative understanding of language, but more broadly the understanding of language as an instrument that humans use for communicating information.

9 Lafont, *Heidegger*, p. 1.

10 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), *SZ* 164–5; p. 153.

11 Lafont, *Heidegger*, p. 13.

12 Ibid.

13 *SZ* 20; p. 18.

14 *SZ* 20; p. 18.

15 See the recent book edited by Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas for a series of illuminating discussions about the role of the transcendental in Heidegger:

Transcendental Heidegger, ed. Crowell and Malpas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

16 Lee Braver, *A Thing of This World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), p. 222.

17 See *SZ* 83–9; pp. 77–83.

18 Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 292.

19 *SZ* 57; pp. 53–4.

20 *SZ* 205; p. 190.

21 *SZ* 205; p. 190.

22 Herman Philipse, 'Heidegger's "Scandal of Philosophy": The Problem of the *Ding an sich* in *Being and Time*', in Crowell and Malpas, *Transcendental Heidegger*, p. 178.

23 Hubert Dreyfus, 'How Heidegger Defends the Possibility of a Correspondence Theory of Truth with Respect to the Entities of Natural Science', in Theodore Schatzki, Karin Cetina and Eike von Savigny (eds) *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 151.

24 Philipse, 'Heidegger's "Scandal"', p. 198.

25 For a recent contribution to this debate, see Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

26 *SZ* 206; p. 191 (translation modified).

27 *SZ* 222; p. 204 (translation modified).

28 Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 241. As he puts it earlier in the book:

My major claim about the philosopher's originating question – e.g. '(How) do (can) we know anything about the world?' or 'What is knowledge; what does my knowledge of the world consist in?' – is that (in one or another of its versions) is a response to, or expression of, a real experience which takes hold of human beings. It is not 'natural' in the sense I have already found in the claim to 'reasonableness': it is not a response to questions raised in ordinary practical contexts, framed in a language which any master of a language will accept as ordinary. But it is, as I might put it, a response which expresses a natural experience of a creature complicated or burdened enough to possess language at all.

(p. 140)

29 Lafont, *Heidegger*, p. 23.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., p. 47.

32 Ibid., p. 48.

33 Ibid., p. 25.

34 Ibid., p. xi.

35 *SZ* 165; p. 154.

36 This reading of *Being and Time* relies on a distinction crucial for Heidegger but which is not always recognized in the literature on his work: the difference between the pre-predicative and the pre-linguistic. As is well known, part of Heidegger's innovation in *Being and Time* was to show how the philosophy of consciousness passes over Dasein's being-in-the-world because it takes knowing to be fundamental, reducing human interaction with the world to propositional attitudes and missing as a result the myriad everyday practices that are not reducible to them. One of the great merits of Dreyfus's hugely influential

reading of *Being and Time* lies in his insistence on the importance of Heidegger's insights regarding the severely limited nature of most traditional theories of human action, and his clarity in elucidating his alternative model, which is based on a series of phenomenological descriptions of 'everyday concernful coping' (Hubert Dreyfus, *Being in the World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 61). As he puts it in a recent text, 'when I enter a room I normally cope with whatever is there. What enables me to do this is not a set of beliefs about rooms, nor a rule for dealing with rooms in general and what they contain; it is a sense of how rooms normally behave, a skill for dealing with them, that I have developed by crawling and walking around many rooms' (Hubert Dreyfus, 'Heidegger's Critique of the Husserl/Searle Account of Intentionality', in Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (eds) *Heidegger Reexamined* (New York: Routledge, 2002), Vol. 1, p. 153). Yet Dreyfus holds onto the assumption that this coping is somehow 'prelinguistic' (Hubert Dreyfus, 'Responses', in Jeff Malpas and Mark Wrathall (eds) *Heidegger, Coping and Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 330). Typical as this is of the various pragmatically inclined readings of Heidegger, in which our concrete worldly practices are taken to be constitutive and primordial in themselves, it is reliant on an important misreading of the text in which Heidegger's critique of the designative paradigm of language is taken as a critique of the very idea of understanding as linguistically constituted. Yet insisting on the linguistically grounded nature of our practices for our being-in-the-world does not mean falling back into a paradigm in which human action can be reduced without residue to propositional attitudes, provided we take into account Heidegger's work in establishing a concept of language that escapes the designative paradigm. In other words, while Dreyfus is right to be zealous in critiquing the propositional paradigm of human action, to claim that pre-predicative absorption is pre-linguistic is to overshoot the mark, and relies on the mistaken assumption that language always functions in its designative mode. Coping, on this reading of Heidegger, cannot be boiled down to propositional attitudes, but nevertheless has its condition of possibility (i.e. the very intelligibility of the world in which we cope) in the discursive constitution of understanding.

37 Heidegger, *Basic Problems*, pp. 165–6.
38 *SZ* 86; p. 80.
39 *SZ* 160–1; p. 150 (Heidegger's italics).
40 Lafont, *Heidegger*, p. 7.
41 Of course, this is not to say that Heidegger's account is not in danger of collapsing into a kind of linguistic idealism: it is just not a linguistic idealism in which a particular ontic language constitutes our being in the world. Rather for Heidegger it is discourse as the temporally inflected ontological ground of language.
42 Steven Mulhall, *On Being in the World: Wittgenstein and Heidegger on Seeing Aspects* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 118.
43 Ibid., p. 119.
44 *SZ* 83; p. 77.
45 *SZ* 349; p. 320 (Heidegger's emphasis).
46 Lafont, 'Heidegger and the Synthetic A Priori', in *Transcendental Heidegger*, p. 107.
47 Lafont, *Heidegger*, p. xix.
48 Ibid., p. 7.
49 Lafont, 'Heidegger and the Synthetic A Priori', p. 106
50 *SZ* 69; p. 65.

51 *SZ* 69; p. 65.
52 Graham Harman, *Tool Being* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), p. 45.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 188.
56 Heidegger, 'Language', p. 188.
57 Ibid., p. 190.
58 Ibid., p. 191.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., p. 194.
61 Martin Heidegger, 'The Nature of Language', in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter Hertz (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1982), p. 57.
62 Ibid.
63 Heidegger, 'Language', p. 186.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Heidegger, 'The Nature', p. 59.
67 Ibid.
68 Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 145.
69 Heidegger, 'Language', p. 195.
70 Ibid., p. 196.
71 Ibid., p. 197.
72 Maurice Blanchot's description of a particular literary strategy is relevant here. In this strategy, which Blanchot doesn't quite name as such but could be called 'poetic', the goal of the writer is somehow to present the words themselves in their materiality. Blanchot writes:

My hope lies in the materiality of language, in the fact that words are things, too, are a kind of nature – this is given to me and gives me more than I can understand. Just now the reality of words was an obstacle. Now, it is my only chance. A name ceases to be the ephemeral passing of nonexistence and becomes a concrete ball, a solid mass of existence; language, abandoning the sense, the meaning which was all it wanted to be, tries to become senseless. Everything physical takes precedence, rhythm, weight, mass, shape, and then the paper on which ones writes, the trail of the ink, the book. Yes, happily language is a thing: it is a written thing, a bit of bark, a sliver of rock, a fragment of clay in which the reality of the earth continues to exist.

(Maurice Blanchot, 'Literature and the Right to Death', in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, trans. Lydia Davis et al. (New York: Station Hill Press, 1999), pp. 383–4)

73 Francis Ponge, quoted in Gerald Bruns, *The Material of Poetry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 83 (Bruns's translation).
74 Heidegger, 'Language', p. 197.
75 See J. H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers, and the Shapes of Words: The William Matthew Lectures 1992* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993).
76 Interestingly, the early Wittgenstein provides a useful reference point here. Of particular importance is his 'Lecture on Ethics', which turns on what he calls 'absolute or ethical value' (Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'Lecture on Ethics', in *The Wittgenstein Reader*, ed. A. Kenny (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), p. 254).

Now Wittgenstein is not a moral realist, which means he does not subscribe to the claim that value is a property that inheres in certain objects, people or actions: 'In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value' (p. 254). This is why he says that if someone were to write a book consisting of perfectly accurate descriptions of all the states of affairs that make up the world, then this book would not contain a single fact of real ethical significance. This is because value for Wittgenstein is something that can only exist outside the world. That this is the case is made manifest in a certain experience, which Wittgenstein describes as follows: 'I believe the best way of describing it is to say that when I have it *I wonder at the existence of the world*. And I am then inclined to use such phrases as "how extraordinary that anything should exist" or "how extraordinary that the world should exist"' (p. 254). For the early Wittgenstein, value is not to be found in or extracted from particular facts, because it is the very existence of the *world as such* that is valuable. To paraphrase note 6.44 of the *Tractatus*, the experience he is describing is not an experience of wonder at *how* the world exists (at, for instance, the complexity of the human body, the size of the Sun or the pyramids) but *that* it exists. Wittgenstein: 'If for instance I had this experience while looking into the blue sky, I could wonder at the sky being blue as opposed to the case when it's clouded. But that's not what I mean. I am wondering at the sky being *whatever it is*' (p. 255).

One of the remarkable things about this lecture, however, is the overall sense of hesitancy that permeates its rhetoric. Throughout the lecture, Wittgenstein's statements about value are always made with extreme caution, and often in the conditional mode. Indeed, Wittgenstein makes a number of claims in the lecture that he quickly rejects, and even points out that the experience of wonder he is describing is 'an entirely personal' (p. 254) one. It is as though Wittgenstein makes the claims he does about value despite himself, and despite his own sense of their questionable philosophical and semantic legitimacy. As the text goes on, the reader comes to understand that this is because the experience in question is one that calls philosophical language and even the possibility of 'expression' into question ('the verbal expression which we give to these experiences is nonsense!' (p. 255)).

The claim, after all, is that value is to be found not in the particular facts that make up the world, but rather in the very fact that existence exists. Part of the problem, then, is that the claims Wittgenstein wants to make about value rest upon a tautology. After all, not only is the clause 'existence exists' tautological, but it is so in two senses: first, and perhaps more noticeably, its verb corresponds exactly to its noun (as in 'singers sing' or 'writers write'). The second tautology is deeper, as it relates to the essence of the object in question, the fact that the simple truth that existence exists is actually presupposed by every utterance, including of course the utterance that 'existence exists'. And like every tautology, this clause is absolutely contentless. The difficulty consists in the fact that one can't express wonder before something that one can't conceive of being otherwise. It may be perfectly legitimate, for instance, to 'wonder at the size of a dog which is bigger than any one I have ever seen before', but if I say that 'I wonder at the existence of the world' then 'I am misusing language' (p. 255), engaging in a confused application of the concept of wonder. This problem stems from fact that, as Kant showed, being is not a real predicate. Designative language is always engaged in what we can follow Aristotle in calling a *saying something about something*. Therefore it cannot possibly express the fact of existence, because existence is not and cannot be a 'property' of existence. So there

is according to Wittgenstein an important experience: an experience that may even make life worth living. When one tries to describe this experience, though, one finds oneself confronted by the limits of propositional language: running, as Wittgenstein would put it, up against the walls of one's cage.

Yet consider the following: 'Now I am tempted to say that the right expression in language for the miracle of the existence of the world, though it is not any proposition *in* language, is the existence of language itself' (p. 257.) Wittgenstein reneges on this claim a few lines later, but the indication here is that if there is a way for language to evoke the miracle of the world's existence, then it will have to involve not the 'expression' of this fact (which is logically impossible) but perhaps its *display*. Wittgenstein is raising the possibility that an experience of the very fact of language could itself evoke a potentially transformative experience of the ontological question (or even, perhaps, that these two experiences could be one and the same).

77 Heidegger, 'Language', p. 197.
78 J. H. Prynne, 'On the Matter of Thermal Packing', *Poems* (Highgreen: Bloodaxe Books, 2005), p. 84.
79 J. H. Prynne, 'Resistance and Difficulty', *Prospect*, 5 (Winter 1961), p. 27.
80 Stephen Mulhall, 'Can There Be an Epistemology of Moods?', in Hubert Dreyfus and Mark Wrathall (eds) *Heidegger Reexamined*, Vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 33.