



## 2012 Issue No. 21 — Rethinking the Seasons: New Approaches to Nature

### Heidegger, nature philosophy and art as *poietic* event

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#### Introduction: Heidegger, nature philosophy and Kant's thing-in-itself

This paper examines Heidegger's later writings in terms of nature philosophy. A nature philosophy is not a philosophy *of* nature. A philosophy of nature presupposes nature as a substratum of being already existing, independent of philosophy. By way of contrast a nature philosophy is a thinking *with* nature as an open possibility [1]; a possibility to be thought about in the philosophy itself. Given that there *are* things of nature, then nature philosophy is a thinking with these things in terms of what they could be; what they make possible.

As a thinking with nature, nature philosophy partakes of the very thing that it thinks. As the German idealist philosopher Schelling suggests in developing his own nature philosophy in response to Kant's systematic reduction of nature to categorical thought: "to philosophize about Nature means to create Nature" (*First Outline* 14). A nature philosophy is concerned with the "active . . . principle" of nature (14) – the primary creative activity or *poiesis* that runs through all things. A nature philosophy "creates nature" by reflecting on this primary activity as the starting point for thinking about the possibility of a renewed human-nature relation released from the "dead mechanism" (14) of scientific thinking and technological systems.

Heidegger's philosophy can be understood in relation to nature philosophy through his invocation of early Greek thinking about things as beings with ontological veracity (i.e. their truth is revealed in their being). [2] This can be compared with the Kantian "thing-in-itself" which cannot be known "in itself," but only insofar as it appears to a subject who thinks about it according to the categories of reason (*Critique of Pure Reason* A30/B45). For Kant, nature as Being-in-itself can never be truly known because there is always a gap between the subject who knows and the thing-in-itself; nature is collapsed back into what the subject can know about it (its transcendent conditions of possibility). [3] Nature becomes an "empty signifier" (Laclau 36), signifying a constitutional lack in the knowledge system, and invoking repeated attempts to make its true being equivalent to the system itself. Nature is either completely knowable in the system, or it is nothing at all.

Arguing against Kant, Heidegger says that the thing-in-itself is not limited to the subject who thinks it, but is itself a revelation of the truth of Being [4] (*aletheia*), which he understands as ontological openness. Through an analysis of things as revelations or "announcements" of ontological openness, Heidegger makes available a way of thinking *with* things without reducing them to objects of a thinking subject. [5] From this perspective, nature is revealed as an event of Being in possibilities opened up in thoughtful encounters with things. [6]

In what follows I will outline some key ideas in Heidegger's thinking about things in relation to

technology during his turn (*Kehre*) from an ontological analysis of *Dasein* (the self-fated to free existence) to a reflection on the historical emergence of Being as event (*Ereignis*). [7] For Heidegger modern technology orders nature into “standing reserve” – material made ready for technical use (“The Question Concerning Technology” 17). Unlike premodern technology (*techne*) which works with nature, modern technology “sets upon nature” (15) which yields to it. [8] Humans do not control technology; rather human being is delivered over to (“destined” or made fit for) technological enframing (*Ge-stell*), so that thinking about nature is limited to “lend[ing] a hand to the coming to presence of technology” (“The Turning” 37). This leads to the “danger” that the “truth” of technology – its essential revealing of what it is – will be hidden from humans who only see nature through technological means, and thus fail to see the “saving power” of technology which opens to “a special moment that sends it into another destining” (37). Technological enframing (*Ge-stell*) “turns” into otherness through an epochal event of opening in the technology itself (*Ereignis*), where “another destining, yet veiled, is already waiting” (37). In following Heidegger’s thinking about the things of nature, we need to address this sense of other destining; this “other beginning” (*Contributions* 53) within and through technology, calling for a human-nature relation other than the one already enframed in modern technology.

To gain a sense of this epochal aspect of technology, I will turn to Heidegger’s analysis of things in relation to art and the artwork which has a special place in his thinking about the turn into otherness through technology. In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger returns to things as singularities or “whatever is not simply nothing” (“The Origin of the Work of Art” 21). Heidegger is here critiquing Kant’s “thing-in-itself” (the unknowable absolute posited as the limit of what the subject can know) by proposing the idea of things as revealed entities in excess of *logos*. Grasped *as* things, things announce or “say” the possibility of worldliness as the openness of Being in the breaching of the ordering of discourse (*logos*).

Heidegger also uses another term to describe this “saying” of things in the openness of Being. He uses the verb “to thing.” A thing “things” (announces or “says” possibility) by gathering other things to it to form a world of meaning (“The Thing” 177). Here it is important not to confuse things with objects. While an object can always be replaced, a thing is irreplaceable (we cannot replace one thing with another without sacrificing its singularity – its being there at *this* place and time). In modern formations, things “thing” by resisting objectification, while objects themselves become “thingly” when materialised into singularities. [9] According to Heidegger, anything that “things” is a work of art. In Western antiquity and premodern cultures, the work of art *maintains* a world of already shared meaning, whereas in modern cultures the artwork is the *beginning* of otherworldliness announced by the singular fact that it *is*. [10]

My aim is to trace the outlines of a nature philosophy in Heidegger’s later writings insofar as they address art’s capacity to make things “thing,” thereby opening up other-world possibilities in resistance to technology. Heidegger’s writings on technology ask that we think of things from the standpoint of art as *poiesis* – the “bringing forth into appearance” of both human-made and natural things (Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” 10). *Poiesis* is the active force of nature as primary becoming. For Heidegger (and Schelling), this active force does not precede things as their motivating cause but is immanent to them. Consequently, things are not the end product of overarching natural forces, but finite beginnings or singularities, opening up possible ways of being. *Poietic* immanence is not a substrate of Being with its own internal dynamism that pushes things along, but an “event” of the openness in Being (Ziarek “Powers to Be” 163). As *poiesis*, art actively enables the thing to “thing” by resisting technological ordering, thereby affirming its “thingliness” in the singularity of the artwork, and announcing that the thing could always be otherwise. To explain this kind of affirmative resistance Heidegger uses the term *Gelassenheit* or the “letting be” that releases things from technological enframing in readiness for *poietical* becoming otherwise: where “freedom reveals itself as letting beings be” (“On the Essence of Truth” 144). Art is the exemplary case of *Gelassenheit*: the releasing of the thing from capture by

the power of technological ordering to “be itself” otherwise. Art participates in the epochal event of the turning of technology out of itself and into the “other beginning” of open possibility when it hears the “call” of Being otherwise.

### **Not poetic dwelling, but being open to *poiesis***

My argument counters that of Bruce Foltz who, in his book *Inhabiting the Earth*, also makes a claim for Heidegger’s later philosophy to be taken as a nature philosophy. Foltz offers a reading of Heidegger’s philosophy that leads to an ethics of “dwelling” on the earth with a concern for developing a care-full or pastoral relation with nature. His idea of dwelling with nature, drawn from Heidegger’s later essays and lectures, is proposed through a “leap out of technology” (*Inhabiting* 105) and back into nature as poetic dwelling – a dwelling with nature in the manner of pre-Socratic Greek *techne*, where human techniques for making things were “attuned” to the *poiesis* of nature in a non-exploitative way: “the revealing of *techne* is always attuned to self-emergence – remaining in the harmony with the self-disclosure of *phusis* and cooperating with it” (102). For Foltz, the attitude towards things required by *techne* is associated with poetic dwelling on earth and attuned (in harmony with) nature, which he sees as an alternative to the attitude required toward things by modern technology: “There is also the possibility of a very different bearing and comportment toward entities than that prescribed by technology. . . . this possibility is simply that of dwelling poetically upon the earth” (169-70).

Foltz’s reading of Heidegger overlooks crucial points regarding the concept of *Gelassenheit* – the releasing that comes from “turning” within and out of technology; a releasing “for the possibility of” that exposes the thing released into *poietic* openness. [11] Dwelling in this openness should be understood not as a leaping out of technology and back into another space of poetic dwelling, but as a “twisting free” (Davis 180) within technology itself. [12] Twisting free involves a “sojourning within the open space of destining [where] we find ourselves taken into a freeing claim” (“Question” 25-26). This “freeing claim” concerns the “saving power” (The Turning” 42) of technology – its counter-capacity to open up free space for the “other beginning” of human destiny (*Contributions* 289) as part of *poietic* becoming. Heidegger identifies this twisting free in terms of art’s capacity to both resist and affirm technology at the same time.

Heidegger argues that there is something about our relation to art that frees us up for rethinking our relation with nature in a different way. By being attuned to the saving power of art in its resistive stance towards technology, we are released towards the claim of *poiesis* in its “call” upon us (our *other* destiny as beings given over in the freedom of being-as-becoming) from within the “rift” (“Origin” 63) or disjuncture between earth and world opened up in technological “turning” – a call requiring our response. The claim is freeing because it releases us to *be free*, in the open possibility that *comes to us* as the beings that we could be in resistance to our subjectification to *Ge-stell* (modern technological enframing). In his commentary on Heidegger’s analysis of the relation between art and technology, Richard Rojcewicz concludes that “[a]rt reawakens trust” in Being as something other than technological production (Rojcewicz 206). The event of art *enables* truth in Being, thereby countering the distrust engendered by *Ge-stell* where Being is reduced to “nothing” or the meaningless *nihil* of standing reserve.

### **The face of nature**

In an essay entitled “Nature’s Other Side: The Demise of Nature and the Phenomenology of Givenness” Foltz argues that humans confront nature as a “face” (“Nature’s Other Side” 333). This face, according to Foltz, is the outside of an inside which is alive:

A face requires an inside. A face is inside-out – is the inside facing out. From what had once been a surface alone, not yet even an exterior, now and interior faces us. What faces us has an inside, and an inside is alive. (333)

The face of nature confronts us as the outward expression of an inner life concealed from us. To justify this claim, Foltz draws on precedents in phenomenology, leading to the claim for “an inner life to nature” (333) as mystery; that is, nature has a mysterious innerness, the meaning of which remains unknown except when revealed to individuals under exceptional circumstances. This inner life of nature is separated from humans in their ordinary existence in the same way that the presence of a face implies to some a living being secreted in “holistic ‘inner life’” (334) behind the face.

In developing this theme of the inner life of nature, Foltz suggests, a few pages on, that “in the perceptual realm, things face us only because at the same time they turn away” (335). To put this another way: a thing *withdraws* in revealing itself to us. But does withdrawal lead to innerness as Foltz suggests? To withdraw is not to disappear but to remain in the openness of revealing in a concealed way. In other words, to withdraw is to become concealed in such a way that *awaits* opening and revealing. It follows then that the “mystery” of things is not in the fact that they exist more truly in a separate “inner” world concealed from us, as Foltz suggests, but in the otherness that their concealment promises in *this* world – in the openness of possibility as such. [13]

Withdrawal does not reveal an innerness to the thing, but reveals yet more things in an opening and expanding of things into their many possibilities of being disposed in different ways. In his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” Heidegger offers the example of a stone lying on the ground. In appearing to us, the stone manifests withdrawal by pressing down on the earth. The stone “presses downward and manifests its heaviness. But while this heaviness exerts an opposing pressure upon us it denies us any penetration into it” (“Origin” 46). In lying there before us, the stone withdraws into the earth and in so doing, denies us any penetration into it. There is no question here that the stone *might* be penetrated; rather, penetration becomes fragmentation, dispersal, division and differentiation. Heidegger explains: “if we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display in its fragments anything inward that has been disclosed. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure and bulk of its fragments (“Origin” 46-47). By attempting to penetrate the stone, we have simply divided it into pieces, producing more stones withdrawing into the earth. The point Heidegger makes here is that the metaphor of innerness obscures the real mode of revealing of things; the breaking open of something does not reveal another thing inside the thing, but more things in different arrangements and dispositions. Things *are*, not because they have another thing inside them that makes them so, but because their being-a-thing is given to them as part of *physis* (physical emerging forth) as *poietic* becoming, which, in the case of the stone, redeploys the “penetrated” thing into different constellations of yet more thing-fragments.

The phenomenon of withdrawal does not lead to an innerness behind the withdrawal but to an openness leading out of withdrawal itself. Withdrawal is future-oriented, opening into possibilities of appearing yet to take place. In appearing, the thing also withdraws, and in this withdrawal it gives what it is. Withdrawal is part of the giving of *poiesis*, its offering of what comes forth as primary being-as-becoming. Without the open scission of originary withdrawal-advancing (*Ursprung*) everything would be already melded together in a monolithic whole with no separation between things.[14] However, as we have seen, Foltz wants us to accept that the withdrawal of the thing is really the concealment of a mysterious living innerness that remains separate from our encounter with the face of nature – an innerness that stays “back there” in its own world, away from the worldlessness of technological enframed culture (*Inhabiting the Earth* 105). This innerness of nature, with its religious overtones of an “indwelling” spirit that manifests the divine in the thing, leads Foltz to inevitable conclusions about the “demise” of nature (“Nature’s Other Side” 338) in technologically mediated modernity and the possibility of accessing the concealed “innerness” of nature through “noetic” (340) vision and insight. [15] For Foltz this is an “aesthetic and religious” vision of “nature’s beauty and integrity as entailing a disclosure of its own other-sidedness” (340) experienced through a pious contemplation of the

things of nature. Drawing from the same and similar writings by Heidegger, but with different emphasis and conclusions, I will counter Foltz's noetic-religious aesthetics with a critical-ontological aesthetics based on the work of art as a "saying" in its "decisive confrontation" with technology (Heidegger, "Question" 35).

### The "thinging" of things

If things are singularities with no innerness to them, then in what way do they have their being? As I have indicated already, Heidegger argues that a thing has its being by gathering other things to it. Heidegger calls this gathering capacity the "thinging" of the thing ("The Thing" 174). [16] He uses the example of an earthenware jug which gathers other things to it – wine, someone to pour the wine, and all the other things that allow the jug to be the jug that it is, including the earth on which it stands and the sky that opens up space to allow it to volume forth in its particular shape and size, as well as the use to which it is put, perhaps to provide refreshment, to give thanks to the gods, or to share cordiality with others. There is no inner "jugness" concealed by the appearance of the jug, but simply a range of uses whereby the jug can *be* the jug that it is. That is, the jug's thing-being is ineluctably future oriented in the opening of the "void" of possibilities: "the vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists but in the void that it holds" (169). [17] The thingness of the thing is its attunement to future possibilities hidden or concealed in its "withdrawal" from presence; its "turning away" as Foltz terms it; its sinking back into the earth (its supporting material) while simultaneously opening up to the skies (its opening into the void of possibility). In its gathering of other things to it, the jug "things": "the jug is a thing insofar as it things" ("The Thing" 177). The action of drinking from the jug is not to be understood in terms of human intentions, but as an enabling possibility enacted in the "event" of the jug's thinging with respect to its attunement with the fourfold: "the whole gathering of the drink as what is offered abides in the wine, which abides in the grapevine which abide in the earth and the gifts from the sky" (*Country Path Conversations* 87).

The human is not the cause of the event of drinking the wine from the jug, but insofar as the event of the jug is meaningful in its fundamental attunement with the fourfold (i.e. insofar as the jug is able to thing), the human is "called forth" to drink by the event itself. Human meaningfulness is related not to wilful intentions, subjective desires or needs, but to the event itself, in the revealing of its fundamental "truth" as a gathering of meaningful things. Thinging is a bringing near of whatever is distant; a grounding in local events of disclosure (*Ereignis*) that affirms things as placed in their thingness – in their "originary" attunement to the world as part of *poietical* becoming, including the human being itself as part of the event enacted. Human being *receives* its meaning from the event and not the other way around.

The thinging of the jug reveals a world already opened up with its own mode of being. The jug "things" in such a way that maintains the meaning of this world in attunement with the "fourfoldedness" of being: the configuration of earth, sky, divinities and mortals that prevail for any given world. Unlike objects, which gain their meaning from their position in the universal coordinates of space and time, things gain their meaning by thinging from their finite *place* on the earth in configuration with the sky, and with regard for the divinities and mortals that dwell there. While objects have *value* within infinitely exchangeable positions in abstract space, things have *meaning* in situated *places* of the finite world in its coming-to-be, as part of the material (earth) and ideational (sky) terrain of *poietic* becoming. [18] Meaning as original attunement is always relative to the world in which the thing is capable of thinging: a world in which the earth, the sky, the mortals and divinities are aligned in particular ways. If a thing things in one world, it cannot do so in another (Wrathal 208-09).

The relativity of meaning to the world in which things are able to thing means that there can be no stepping out of the present world and back into a relation with things from a past world in the hope of retrieving lost meaning. Meaning is never fully lost across epochs; rather it is *recapitulated*

in, through and ahead of them as part of *poietic* becoming. [19] To access meaning in this originating sense, one does not step out of the present world and into another world separated from it; rather, one must “step back” within the constraints of the present world, to “glance ahead to what comes”:

The “step back” (the step that retreats from metaphysics) has the sole meaning of enabling, in the gathering of thinking upon itself, a glance ahead to what comes. It means that thinking begins anew, so that in the essence of technology it catches sight of the heralding portent, the covering pre-appearance, the concealing pre-appearing of enowning itself. (Heidegger, *Four Seminars* 61).

Stepping back in order to glance ahead (*Augenblick*) at the event (*Ereignis*) of what comes is not simply a matter of re-acquainting ourselves with the pristine things of nature waiting there for us. Rather it means twisting free from technology to release a mode of seeing otherwise. Twisting free can take place, I suggest, through a counter-*techne* that materialises objects into things as part of the event of *poiesis*.

## The Open

Things thing when they are attuned with the “fourfoldedness of Being,” an “originary” way of being with nature as *poiesis*. How might this occur in technologically enframed worlds? In such worlds, things cannot thing in attunement with nature because their relation to nature has already been “denatured” or doubly reified into systems of value exchange (Nancy 87). The more we try to get “in tune” with nature, the more we find ourselves using technical means to do so. How, then, do we get around this double bind?

Heidegger provides a way out by suggesting that we affirm and resist technology at the same time: “we can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature” (“Memorial Address” 54). Instead of blindly employing technology to “warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature” we can engage in a decisive confrontation with/against technology that releases the “thingliness” concealed in technically produced objects and ordered environments into *poietic* becoming. According to Heidegger, this confrontation takes place in the realm of art:

Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it.

Such a realm is art. (“Question” 35)

By being part of, yet different from technology, art leads us into the Open: a place of “unshieldedness” to the forces of *poiesis* “flowing into one another” (“What Are Poets For?” 124). [20] The Open is not a place separate from technology, but a disjuncture in technology itself; it is the “essence” of technology insofar as it limits what technology can and cannot do without being reducible to any of these limits; it provides a space beyond technology for otherness. Without openness in this special sense of the Open, technology would be overwhelmingly monolithic, and in a sense, there would be no need for technological developments as all technology would have already reached its limit, its maximum form of development at the moment of its inception. The Open operates as *free possibility*, right at the limit of what technology controls and orders, and accessing it is the key to thinking otherwise. To enter the Open and hence partake of “the other beginning of immeasurable possibility for our future history” (*Contributions* 289), one must engage in “essential reflection upon technology” which, Heidegger argues, takes place in the realm of art and in particular through the singular artwork: “[the work of art] does not cause

material to disappear [into the nullity of negation], but rather causes it to come forth *for the very first time* and come into the Open of the work's world" ("Origin" 46, emphasis added). The singularity of the artwork is its coming forth "for the very first time," in open possibility.

### The singularity of the artwork

In what sense is an artwork singular? In "The Origin of the Work of Art," Heidegger makes the following comments about art: "Art is real in the artwork. Hence we first seek the reality of the work. In what does it consist? Art works universally display a thingly character, albeit in a wholly distinct way" (39-40). In the "reality of the work," a work of art affirms itself as thing by holding itself apart from being an object in "a wholly distinct way." An art work exhibits this "other-than-object" aspect in terms of its capacity to open up a world hitherto concealed. The artwork "opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force" (44). In being there in its singularity, it "holds open the Open of the world" (45). That is, it opens up a world in "openness" (the Open) – in enabled readiness for the other beginning. The artwork does this by resisting the tendency of the work-material from which it is made to disappear into usefulness; unlike the useful object such as an axe which "disappears into usefulness" (46), the artwork resists usefulness *by the very fact that it is*. In doing this, the artwork says "yes" – it locates and puts on display objects, shapes and forms of various kinds; at the same time, it says "no" by the existence of the display itself, which, for it to *be* art, must be experienced "otherwise" *as art* and not as something else. In opening up a world, the artwork "says" what it is otherwise (yes ≠ no), as a singular event of art.

In Heidegger's well known discussion of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of field worker's shoes, he says: "This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be" (Origin" 35). The artwork says something so that we are *taken* somewhere else. In contemplating the artwork we do not reflect back into our own subjective state; rather, the artwork does something to us, transports us away from where we are to another place. In our encounter with it, the artwork makes the shoes "thing", thus "saying" the possibility of "otherness." Heidegger is not suggesting here that we are taken back to the original moment when the worker toiled in the fields. This would be to say that the artwork gives us access to the thing-in-itself through noetic experience (direct and unmediated thought of the thing). Rather, he is saying that we are taken into the *openness* of possibility through the breaching of representational order; through the way in which the artwork returns the shoes to the materiality of the painterly gesture itself. This returning of the shoes to the "earth" is a revelation of "what the shoes are in truth" ("Origin" 35), which is not related to their historical reality but to their exposure to the fact that they simply *are* in the singular breaching of representational order enacted by the artwork in its "saying" of things. The truth that Heidegger invokes is not representational truth but ontological truth about the saying of Being and the possibility of openness which must be grasped experientially in specific encounters with artworks themselves.

[21]

In its singular occurrence – in its *positivity* – each time for "the very first time," the artwork exhibits a decisive resistivity to use, thereby affirming itself in the Open of absolute possibility. [22] In its resistance to objectification, the artwork opens up a *poietic* becoming otherwise: another beginning and a different mode of being-possible, unthinkable in current modes of utility and objectification where things are encountered as useful objects or stockpiles of standing reserve.

Gianni Vattimo has provided a way of reading Heidegger's approach to the work of the artwork as follows:

The work opens up a new "epoch" of being as an absolutely originary event, which cannot be reduced to what it already was, and it grounds a new order of relationships within beings, a truer and actually new world. . . . the artwork suspends in the reader all natural relationships, making strange everything that until that moment

had appeared obvious and familiar. (*Art's Claim to Truth* 152)

Unlike the jug (discussed previously) which opens into an already opened world, the work of the artwork inaugurates a radically new world-opening by “put[ting] in question our way of seeing and standing in the world” (69). The challenge for a nature philosophy is to think *with* the artwork in its capacity to breach the familiar, technologically ordered everyday world, opening us into the “nothing” or void of a not yet present world: a world “to come.” If we are to work with Heideggerian ontology in pursuit of a nature philosophy, we cannot get around this issue of the *fact* of art in its confrontation with technology by sliding into a poetic dwelling with nature in the way Foltz suggests. Rather we need to recover “the ontological bearing of art” (Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* 47) in its decisive confrontation with technology as offering an opening to nature in its call to us “otherwise.” [23]

### Seeing otherwise

In following Heidegger’s thinking here, it becomes apparent that any attempt to move out of technological enframing cannot take place by way of *techne* in its pre-Socratic artisanal sense, since *techne* cannot get beyond the “circumspective” looking that comes with using things that are ready to hand. [24] Artisanal *techne* can only “see” in terms of the familiarity of an already known world. However the artwork has the ability to open up otherworldliness from within the familiarity (*heimlichkeit*) of the everyday, through a seeing otherwise: “a look of an eye in the blink of an eye, a momentary look at what is momentarily concrete, which as such can always be otherwise” (Heidegger, *Plato's Sophist* 112-113). This “blink of an eye” (*Augenblick*) is the visionary “seeing” that allows the artwork to open up otherworldliness *from within* the circumspective seeing of *techne* and routine use. [25]

The *Augenblick* is not a projection of sight by a subject looking into the future (Heidegger calls this theoretical seeing – the seeing of science, which, he argues, is a derivative form of circumspective looking), but a seeing that comes from the future to the one who “tarries” in the disjunctive in-between of the artwork and the space of the Open, as openness to the event of *poietic* becoming. *Augenblick* is thus experienced not as an initial breakthrough vision of pure futuristic seeing that sees beyond the things in front of it, but as a “having seen”; a seeing that comes to the one who sees when she gives herself over to the thing as it is; when she lets the thing be in its being other than as an object of use. [26] Otherwise seeing is the look of *Gelassenheit*: the thinking-seeing that releases the thing to be other than what it has already become as the *nihil* of *Ge-stell*, the nothing of standing reserve. This otherwise seeing is not a random seeing in any other way, but a seeing that respects the being of the thing seen in its attunement with nature as *poietical* becoming.

### The saying of nature

In Heidegger’s general philosophical orientation, the fragmentary texts and sayings of the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers present a world view in direct contact with nature, unrestrained by modern considerations of subjectivity and self-reflective thinking. Speaking is not a matter of subjective speech, but a “saying” that includes both human beings and things insofar as they appear together in particular places and times and in certain orders. Speaking or “saying” *gathers* things to language: “what comes to language in the saying” (“Anaximander’s Saying” 250). Things are not static objects that gain their meaning from the position they hold in a universal order of reason, but things-in-motion as part of *poiesis* or originary becoming, whose meaning is always located in the possibilities given in the event of their finite arising (*Ereignis*). Saying is the partaking of the primordial becoming-revealing of things, insofar as we are able to “listen” for the way they call to us.

Listening is an attentiveness to things in their becoming that attunes us to “the fundamental trait of what is present [which is] injustice” (266). As things that arise, their presence testifies to an



*injustice* in that by being there as they are and persisting in the same way, they try to hold being to themselves, thereby denying the just sharing of being with others. Presence suggests a selfishness that values the persistence of the same and denies being-with others in future arrangements and possibilities: "The things that stay awhile are without consideration toward each other: each is dominated by the craving for persistence in the lingering presence itself, which gives rise to the craving" (271). The craving of things to endure in self-presence closes off saying otherwise and consolidates saying into discourse of the same that "reaches for 'unlimited domination over the earth'" (Schürmann 193). However, to hear the call of things "otherwise" is to be attentive to the injustice of being-as-presence and to think the possibility of the thing's being otherwise in terms of a *poietic* justice: a redistribution of being-as-difference; a setting right of the wrong that makes being come to a stand in selfish self-presence. [27] Heidegger calls this setting right *Gelassenheit* – the "letting be" of things into openness by releasing them from self-presence to partake of *poiesis* as originary becoming. [28] A nature philosophy would need to think the letting-be of the things of nature such that they were able to partake of the "event" of nature, not as a wilful self-appropriation, but in a non-wilful releasement where things were accorded their due respect and place with regard to their being-with other things, and in accordance with *poietic* becoming. [29]

By linking the saying of nature with justice, Heidegger suggests an ontological ethics based on *poiesis* as the sharing of the gift of nature's giving. The good of nature can only be itself, which is the fact that it gives what is. [30] The good of nature is the gift of itself shared out, for instance, in the turning of the earth around the sun that gives rise to the seasons, the weather, rivers, rainfall, tides and currents of the oceans, the blossoming of plants, and more generally, as a cosmic giving, shared through renewal and decay played out in the contractions and expansions of time and space that affect all things at all times and places. In giving what it is, in its "goodness," nature massively exceeds the "goods" of technological ordering and the authority of discourses that provide jurisdiction over nature (e.g. the good of technical efficiency, calculability, predictability and sustainability). Through its cosmic reach, nature breaches the ordering of *Ge-stell* with a shine in all things that is everywhere around. Nature gives even when challenged and ordered into standing reserve. Its giving is given in the chaos of eternal recurrence [31]: in their givenness, in the shining of nature through them, things are already otherwise.

An ontological ethics responds to the "just" giving of nature in the singularity of its "event" as openness to Being. [32] Justice in this absolute sense (ontological justice, concerned with being-as-giving) is "a doing that would . . . be rendered to the singularity of the other . . . as the very coming of the event" (Derrida, *Specters* 27-28). [33] An ontological ethics is not concerned with the restitution of justice according to rules and norms, but with the "doing" that makes justice (the giving-sharing of being as becoming) possible in an inaugurating sense. The task of ontological ethics is to guard over the openness of Being to enable another beginning, another way of being-with nature from within the technological enframing (*Ge-stell*) of the modern world.

### Art as *poietic* event

As suggested earlier, in modern technologically enframed worlds, things cannot thing because they are "denatured," or doubly reified into systems of value exchange. That is, things cannot thing because the *poiesis* that would make them thing has been concealed from them. Heidegger writes:

Above all Enframing conceals that revealing which, in the sense of *poiesis*, lets what presences come forth into appearance.

. . .

Thus the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing,

bringing-forth, but conceals revealing itself and with it, That wherein unconcealment,  
i.e. truth, comes to pass. ("Question" 27)

Enframing not only conceals *techne* (the "former way of revealing" or technical working with nature in a sympathetic way), but conceals *poiesis* itself. But Enframing is itself part of *poiesis* as the event of the Being of all things in their coming-to-be (Ziarek, "Powers to Be" 176). Even though it conceals *poiesis*, technological enframing must itself *be* an event of *poiesis* by the very fact that it *is*. In revealing this fact *poiesis* turns technology against itself. Heidegger calls this capacity of technology to turn against itself the "saving power": "the essence of technology must harbour in itself the growth of the saving power" ("Question" 28). The saving power of technology is the unconcealment of *poiesis* in the concealment of *poiesis* itself; the "undoubling" or "un-denaturing" of the thing in exposure ("unshieldedness") to the Open.

Thus we need to reconsider what it means to speak of *poiesis* in modern technologically enframed worlds. *Poietic* revealing is the revealing of a concealing that is not hidden in its own innerness, but the revealing of a concealing that is already revealed, already *there*: a figuration of materiality already turned otherwise within the technological ordering itself. [34] This figuration that turns with and against technology is art, and in more specific terms, the artwork as the act of *poiesis* that "says" being-as-becoming otherwise to the calculative rationality of modern technology. The artwork works both with and against technology at the same time in affirming itself as other in the act of being the artwork that it is. The *techne* of art is not the same as technological enframing, but stands otherwise in it, as technology's other possibility, opening up a releasement toward things.

## Conclusion

As *poietic* event, artwork keeps the Open open, thereby ensuring that meaning is not blocked in the nihilistic sameness of technological enframing but available for *poietical* becoming in re-attunement with nature. I have suggested elsewhere that the task of maintaining the openness of the Open is essential for democracy (Mules "Democracy and Critique"). At this point I want to suggest that we can think of *poietic* "non-willing" as serving a democratic purpose in keeping openness open, thereby ensuring the necessary freedom and justice to take place in the open-gathering of human beings that makes democracy happen in particular places and times. We need to think of this open gathering as something that the artwork prefigures in its very materiality; in its resistance to everyday use, and in its singular thereness, as *this* thing in its "thinging" into openness.

As *poietic* event, the artwork leads into a space in which the *demos* (the people in open freedom with one another and within the world in which this freedom is enacted) is *renatured*, to bring this world into a just (i.e. non-exploitative) relation with the things of nature. By *renaturing* I do not mean returning to primary nature, but undoing the denaturing of nature that produces nature as something already available for use as standing reserve and technical fact. To do this is not to leap out of technology and into some non-technological ground more attuned to nature, but to re-attune ourselves for the nature "to come." This can be achieved in two ways: first, by recovering "the ontological bearing of art" (Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* 47) – art's singular capacity to open up the otherness of Being by both affirming and resisting technological ordering at the same time; and second, by reawakening trust in Being (Rojcewicz 206), so that nature is no longer thought of as an "empty signifier" circulating within the discourses of power, but as an *ontological fact* in the shining of the things of nature already given and all around.

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## Endnotes

1. Heidegger understands possibility in a special sense as the “enabling” of Being, as distinct from an actuality derived from a number of calculated possibilities (“Letter on ‘Humanism’” 242). Possibility needs to be thought strictly in terms of the facticity of something – the fact that it is, as something already given by Being. Something is possible when it is promised or announced. Being itself is promise: “Being is the promise of itself” (*Nietzsche* vol. 2, 226). Throughout this essay I refer to possibility as an enabling possibility as distinct from a calculated possibility. For Being see footnote 4.
2. There are two ways Heidegger’s writings could be read with regard to nature: a modernist-romantic reading that leads back to an originary pre-technological contact with nature as a more authentic way of being, and a postmodernist-postromantic reading that leads into radical openness *through* technology as a positive affirmation of human being in relation to nature as a possibility not yet realised. I reject the former approach as utopian and tending towards dogmatic religious and political consequences, while adopting the latter as progressive and compatible with a pluralised critical democracy. See also Michael Zimmerman’s refutation of the former approach in his own early work in favour of the latter approach in his later work (Zimmerman, *Contesting Earth’s Future* 105).
3. The issue here can be understood in terms of the distinction between *naturans* (nature in itself) and *naturata* (nature as we perceive it): for Kant “any knowledge of natural productivity, the *naturans*, is ruled out, and we can know only nature for us, the *naturata*” (Vallier, p. xvii-xviii).
4. Following Heidegger, the term “Being” names the absoluteness of what is, while the terms “being” and “beings” name specific entities that, in being what they are, manifest Being. All beings manifest Being, which gives them their capacity to be. But Being and being are not to be confused (*Being and Time* ¶1). Heidegger argues that the basic error of Western metaphysics and science is to confuse Being with being, for instance by naming Being as a specific condition for beings to be (e.g. the unity of nature, the equilibrium of the system). To do this, Heidegger argues, is to reduce Being to being, thereby obscuring Being’s capacity to give beings their being.
5. For things as announcements, see *Being and Time* ¶30.
6. For Being as event (*Ereignis*) see *Contributions to Philosophy*. Being is “the happening of the truth of be-ing” as an open transposition of beginnings (7).
7. Heidegger’s “turn” in philosophy can be understood as a shift from an ahistorical account of human being in the early phase of his writings, characterised by the formal analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*, to a concern for the historical (un)grounding of human being in technological enframing in the later phase. For Heidegger, philosophising had become, in these later writings, a “reflection on the situation and place of contemporary man, whose destiny is still but little experienced with respect to its truth” (“The Word of Nietzsche” 54).
8. To make this distinction, Heidegger uses a number of examples including a distinction between pre-industrial and industrial modes of the growing of crops: “The work of the

peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature" ("Question" 15).

9. Singular things are exceptional; that is, they exist in a state of exception. The exemplary exceptional thing is the work of art – the thing that exists in indeterminacy – as Kant proposes in the *Critique of Judgment* (§4, 208).
10. Jacques Rancière argues that the aesthetic regime of modern art (and by this he means Western art since the Romanticism of the late eighteenth century) asserts "the absolute singularity of art, and, at the same time, destroys any pragmatic criterion for isolating this singularity" (*The Politics of Aesthetics* 23). See also Vattimo (*Art's Claim to Truth*), who argues that Heidegger's ontology of art proposes that the artwork must be understood in terms of its "absolute novelty" and in terms of the shock [*Stoss*] produced by the work . . . [which is] the fact that there is a work of art at all" (68). Here shock is not to be reduced to a subjective state of inner emotions, nor to the marvellous wonder of art, but describes the mood (or attunement) of openness that happens in encounters with art as an event of opening a world. In its capacity to open up a world, the artwork "is full of instituting force" (69).
11. Foltz mentions turning only once, as a "turning away from the danger intrinsic to modern technology" (105), but not as an operation within technology itself.
12. For twisting free see Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 1, p. 201. Twisting free is not an overcoming that leaves nothing of what is overcome behind (it is not a Hegelian *Aufhebung*), but a turning out of and away that carries something of what it leaves behind with it. Twisting free is the Heideggerian source of Derrida's strategy of deconstruction. See Vattimo ("*Verwindung*": Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy") for a discussion of Heidegger's concept of *Verwindung* as twisting free from metaphysics, where "One lives metaphysics as the possibility for a change, the chance that it might twist in a direction that is not foreseen in its own nature" (12-13).
13. This is how I understand Heidegger's phrase "openness to the mystery" ("Memorial Address" 55). Mystery does not belong to another world, but to the otherworldliness (*unheimlichkeit*) of this world in its everydayness.
14. Schelling asks a similar question of natural things: the question is not what brings them together into a unity but what keeps them apart, what makes them singular in their relatedness to one another? (*First Outline* 19). The term for this keeping-apart is *partage*.
15. See Dreyfus and Kelly (116) for a discussion of divine innerness in the Christian understanding of truth.
16. The use of the verb "to thing" relates to original attunement (*Stimmung*): a primary orientation to Being that opens things to possibilities of meaning, over and above their signifying function. As Vattimo suggests: "things, in addition to having a function, possess an attuned valence (*Art's Claim to Truth* 62). Original or "affective" attunement is "the opening moment of the world" (66).
17. The void is not an empty abstraction of absolute nothingness; it does not negate being. Rather it is the in-between of being and not-being; we can "tarry" in the void. Heidegger also uses the term the Open, borrowed from Rilke, to describe this openness of being.
18. Heidegger's ontology is *cosmic* in scope. For cosmic in art see Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* 52. The cosmic reach of art relates to art's capacity to open worlds as part of *poietic*-cosmic

becoming of everything, in the same way that pre-Socratic philosophy and art engaged directly with cosmic becoming.

19. Recapitulation is the event of “enowning” (*Ereignis*): the turning-passing through of Being into openness: “a turning, or rather *the* turning, which points out precisely the essential sway of being itself as a counter-resonating enowning” (*Contributions to Philosophy* 184). Recapitulated meaning is always already ahead of *Dasein*; ahead of any attempt to claim it as one’s own. For a discussion of recapitulation in Schelling’s nature philosophy, see Iain Hamilton Grant (13). Grant notes that a concept of recapitulation offers a non-linear model of biological evolution suited to contemporary evolutionary science.
20. Heidegger borrows the concept of the Open from the poet Rilke. The Open operates as an absolute concept, in the same way that the Absolute operates for German idealist philosophy.
21. Derrida’s comments on Heidegger’s reading of Van Gogh’s painting draw out a certain privileging of “reliability” (“Origin” 34) or “preoriginary” contact with the earth – “belonging to the silent discourse of the earth” (Derrida, *The Truth in Painting* 354) of which, predictably, Derrida is critical. However, there is an ambiguity throughout Heidegger’s work about originary grounding especially in relation to technology. Derrida’s comments here, which interpret Heidegger’s reading of the shoes as belonging to the silent *discourse* of the earth, are putting words in Heidegger’s mouth, as the earth is, in Heidegger’s terms, not a discourse, but something that “speaks” in a prediscursive sense of saying-gathering. It only becomes a discourse when the gathering of speech settles into logos, which is, of course Derrida’s main point. Nevertheless, Heidegger’s discussion of the disjunction between earth and sky here, and the question of speech as disjunctive “gathering” in other essays belonging to the group of essays on art and language (in the publication *Poetry, Language, Thought*), anticipates and overcomes Derrida’s objections and leads toward possibilities of (un)groundedness as being-as-becoming, suggesting a post-Derridean position which begins from the very grounding of being itself in its release into otherness. In this case, deconstructive analysis becomes a matter of listening and responding to what the artwork “says” in its restless grounding-releasing movement within and out of *techné*.
22. It may be objected that Heidegger uses as an example of art an ancient Greek temple which “things” not in order to open up another world for the ancient Greeks, but to maintain the openness of their already existing world. But this is to miss Heidegger’s crucial point about the historicity of art, and the fact that Western art develops through various epochs with different ways of revealing different types of worlds. Modern works of art, in their initial presentation to a public, may open up their world otherwise, but eventually this otherwiseness consolidates into familiar worldliness. At the time of their initial showing, Cezanne’s still life paintings of apples precariously placed on proto-Cubist tabletops defying Newtonian physics may open up an entirely new world of postmodern visual and embodied experience in the late nineteenth century, but at some point, this world has been realised in routine ways, so that Cezanne’s paintings cease to have any revolutionary effect and become absorbed into the fabric of the very world they helped open up, where they become, like the ancient Greek temple, sites that keep the world “abidingly in force.”
23. The ontological bearing of art relates to its capacity to manifest truth. John Sallis points out that Heidegger is responding to Hegel’s announcement that art could no longer manifest truth in a direct sensible way (as Greek art was able to), and so he announced the end of art (see Heidegger “Origin” 80). Once truth surpasses sensible manifestation and takes on intelligibility, then art ceases to be able to have an ontological bearing. However, Heidegger argues, as Sallis points out, that Hegel’s pronouncement of the end of art relies on a certain metaphysical idea of truth in which the sensible and intelligible are united in the art form

itself. Instead, Heidegger argues for a different kind of truth, one based on “a new interpretation of the sensible” (157), where truth is understood as “unconcealment” (157) or openness, in its singular occurrence in the artwork: “Setting truth into the artwork, setting it to work in the work so that it happens there – and only in such a setting – as truth, will not be a matter of setting something intelligible into a work that, simply by virtue of its sensible character, cannot measure up to that truth. The truth that, in Hegel’s phrase, obtains existence for itself in the artwork, will be a truth that – to reverse what Hegel says of postclassical art – is so akin and friendly to sense as to be capable of being sensibly presented” (157). That is, Heidegger counters Hegel’s declaration that art can no longer carry truth, with a more “originary” claim that is always already bearing truth in its singular work of sense opening to being.

24. For circumspective looking see *Being and Time* ¶69 (p. 98). If we follow Heidegger here, it is a mistake to reduce art to a matter of circumspective looking, as if what counted was the capacity of the artist to see within different ways in which the work of art might be completed using specific techniques, or even to see sympathetically with the things of nature. Rather this circumspective looking must itself be inhabited by a counterwise seeing: a seeing that comes in the “waiting” of the open encounter with things in letting them be (Heidegger, *Country Path Conversations* 72-73), and leading to *poietic* figuration. Letting be is not a matter of quietly contemplating the things of nature, but comes about when objects represented in paintings are “challenged” (Origin” 71) by the work itself (the artwork), thereby releasing the thignness harbouring in the object into open possibility.
25. See Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, Vol. 2, p. 41 for the concept of *Augenblick* as visionary seeing. See also McNeill (220 ff.) for a discussion of Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche and the concept of *Augenblick*.
26. See Rojcewicz for this kind of seeing (8). Heidegger describes this kind of seeing as “the beholding that watches over truth” (“Science and Reflection” 165).
27. My reading of Heidegger’s text differs somewhat from Derrida’s in *Specters of Marx* (23-29). Derrida criticises Heidegger for giving priority to “gathering and to the same . . . over the disjunction implied in my address to the other’ (28). In other words, Derrida criticises Heidegger for valorising the unity of self-presence at the expense of the disjunctive forces within it that lead to openness and the possibilities of the otherwise. However, my reading indicates that Heidegger’s concern is not to valorise self-presence, but to think from within it, in terms of the disjunctive forces (the force of *poiesis*) that Derrida says he disclaims. As Heidegger himself says, the “fundamental trait of what is present . . . is injustice”, where injustice is thought of in terms of a primary disjuncture. Elsewhere Heidegger argues that presence is always inhabited by *poiesis* as “irruption” (McNeill 196). Heidegger’s philosophy is one of disjuncture not synthesis. There is no risk that in following Heidegger here we end up reducing justice to a set of rules and norms based on the unity of self-presence, as Derrida implies.
28. For Heidegger’s discussions of *Gelassenheit* as releasement and letting be, see “On the Essence of Truth” (144-45) and *Country Path Conversations* (70-80). *Gelassenheit* involves a fundamental freedom to be in the otherwise of open possibility, and as such retains elements of Kantian critique. *Gelassenheit* is a critical task of non-willing such that openness is “let in” by “waiting” for the event as it comes to us (“Country Path Conversations” 75-76). One does not will releasement, but waits for it: you wait “to let yourself be involved in releasement” (76). This kind of non-willing, waiting, letting be, is precisely what artists do when they create works of art.
29. For a discussion of *Gelassenheit* and non-willing in Heidegger see Davis (15-17 et. passim.)

30. John Sallis writes: “the venerable principle that whatever *is* is good precisely insofar as it *is*” (29). The good gives: “It is in relation to this generosity – and not by bringing into play such modern concepts as value – that the goodness or excellence of things is to be understood. . . . [For something] to be what it is – rather than being also other than what it is – is to be one and the same as itself. It is precisely this oneness that is bestowed by the good in its generosity” (52, fn. 11). The good of what is good is the fact that it gives what it is, not its selfish “craving” for self-presence. Goodness and hence justice is in giving, not having or possessing.
31. Eternal recurrence as “existence as it is, without meaning or aim, yet recurring inevitability without any finale of nothingness” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 35).
32. The expression “just so” retains something of the sense of singular justice here. Something is “just so” in the sense of being right or fit for being what it is.
33. Derrida notes that justice concerns the turning (the “eternal recurrence”) of being in which the other returns to inhabit the same: “in the logic of the turn or round, thus of the other, of the alter in general” (*Rogues* 30-31).
34. This figuration can be understood as technical slippage or *informe*. See Mules “Contact Aesthetics”.

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