Spring 2016

Beginning in Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé

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Beginning in Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé

Senior Project Submitted to

The Division of Social Studies

and

The Division of Languages and Literature

of Bard College

by

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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2016

Acknowledgements

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Ganz am Anfang sind wir, siehts du.
Wie vor Allem. Mit
Tausend und einem Traum hinter uns und
ohne Tat.

Nous sommes au tout début, vois-tu.
Comme avant toute chose. Avec
Mille et un rêves derrière nous et
sans act.

We are at the very beginning, you see.
As before everything. With
A thousand and one dreams behind us and
without action.

Rilke, Notizen zur Melodie der Dingen

Introduction

"...the beginning seems to be more than half of the whole, and many of the points being sought seem to become manifest on account of it." -Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics 1098b8

"Don't you know that the beginning is the most important part of every work and that this is especially so with anything young and tender? For at that stage it's most plastic, and each thing assimilates itself to the model whose stamp anyone wishes to give to it." -Socrates, Republic 377b

The beginning of a piece of writing, of course, is hardly ever the first thing written. We go back and add a beginning later, burying whatever first words we wrote under a procession we carry out to introduce our readers into our thought. Assuming, that is, that the first words we wrote haven't been edited out, or weren't written in some notebook or on some napkin left in a pocket and lost in the laundry. The words we put at the beginning become a way of reenacting the beginning stages of our own thought process, retrospectively setting up and staging what brought us to a path that we've already made.

In this project, I take beginning–both literally and figuratively–in the writing and thought of Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Mallarmé as a guiding paradigm. All three of these authors focus on beginning as a moment central to what follows. Some of the questions that this project began with are as follows: What constitutes a beginning for thought? Is there some sort of beginning before we begin thinking, and if so, how can it be accounted for or confronted? Must thought begin with an assumption, or is it possible to start thinking without taking anything for granted? Can thought begin as or through an act of free will, or has it always already begun for us? In asking these questions, a central concern for me is how beginnings in thought, questioned or unquestioned, have an impact on the way that we live our lives. Part of what arose for me was the suggestion that thought and writing must begin outside of thought and writing. Beginning as pure action, as a *coup* that gets thought going, that sets writing in motion: that possibility is what

really interests me, and one of my main questions has been how that moment of un-thinking and un-writing can be thought and written about.

In his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method,* Edward Said asks similar questions of how the beginning is a definitive moment for the thought and writing that follows. Said argues that rather than having the ability to begin on its own terms, the "beginnings" of thinking and writing are in some sense always a return to a previous thought or text. The book is situated within the context of mid-late 20th century critical theory and is concerned with a much broader array of texts and authors than this project. Said's book is novelistic in scope and ambition. Its structure, it seems to me, is largely open and exploratory, whereas I have aimed for a more pointed trajectory; if Said's book is a novel this is a novella. Said offers a broad panorama of what beginnings could be. It is appropriate that his title is plural. Beginning "resembles a magical point that links critic and work criticized" (71), it is a "necessary fiction" (77), it "is a consciously intentional, productive activity" and an "activity whose circumstances include a sense of loss" (372), it is "*the first step in the intentional production of meaning*" (5, emphasis is Said's), it is "the point at which, in a given work, the writer departs from all other works" (3), "a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness" (xv). One definition that I find particularly compelling and relevant to my own thought (especially my reading of Heidegger) is this: "A verbal beginning is consequently both a creative and a critical activity, just as at the moment one begins to use language in a disciplined way, the orthodox distinction between critical and creative thought begins to break down" (ibid). The idea of beginning as something both creative and critical is of great interest to me.

Said sums up one of the main goals of his book in the preface to the Morningside edition:

> But if there is some especially urgent claim to be made for criticism, which is one of the major claims advanced by this book, it is in that constant re-experiencing of beginning and beginning-again whose force is neither to give rise to authority nor to promote orthodoxy but to stimulate self-conscious and situated activity, activity with aims non-coercive and communal. This at least is what I had in mind when I took *beginnings* for my subject… (xiv)

For Said, the best prefix to go with beginning is "re-." Re-experiencing, revolution, renewal, revitalization, "reconstruction, repetition, restoration, redeployment" (370) all figure in to his idea of the concept. Beginning is an activity of repetition for Said, of returning to discourse and criticism in a way that understands itself as provisional, as preparing the way for another return and renewal. Surely this is part of why Said's definition of the word is so multifaceted. His method reflects his definition; he himself renews, reconstructs, repeats, redeploys, and reapproaches his own idea of what it means to begin.

Said's definition of beginning as a self aware critical-creative moment that prepares itself for repetition and renewal is partially what drove this project, in particular the first chapter. But I have also tried to establish a stricter, more negative definition of beginning. My definition is also more abstractly philosophical and may be more easily applicable to things outside of thought and writing. It became clearest later in the project, especially with Mallarmé, but it is and was present throughout the whole thing. The idea is that beginning is a moment of exclusion and limitation whereby something comes into being. Only by virtue of this moment of limitation can something exist as something and not as nothing. Part of my interest in this definition comes from its strange prioritization of the terror of beginning over the terror of ending. The end is not some awful imposition on something otherwise endless, but merely one of the limits that is always inscribed in and from the beginning. The fact that something will end is implied in its

having begun. The only way something can be "endless" is if it is "beginningless," meaning, if it

doesn't exist. Another reason why this definition is attractive to me is because it seems to

account for itself. Defining the term "beginning" was itself a way that my project was able to

begin, and this definition itself operated through a process of exclusion and delimitation. My

definition is bound to fail in some way or other, but that's part of the point, part of the

definition's limitation. I don't think it is possible to create a conclusive and comprehensive

definition of anything, because definition is by definition a process of delimitation and exclusion.

But that doesn't mean that we should not attempt to make definitions, just that we should be

aware of their limitations. Beginning is such an intimidating and threatening moment because it

is *the* moment that leads to the limitations that set us up for inevitable failure. And seeing this

moment as a thoughtless "*coup*" makes it even more threatening.

One of the driving questions of the project is how my definition of beginning as a

necessary moment of fatal exclusion relates to Said's more open definition of beginning*s* as

return, revolution, and reworking. The process of endless renewal is in some tension with the

harsh limitation of my definition, and both are very compelling to me. Said's definition seems to

work towards endless possibility whereas mine seems to emphasize the finitude of existence. I

have, without really realizing it, held them side by side throughout the project, and I think it is

one of its central tensions, whether or not it is always explicit.

There are many other questions and themes driving this project, some of which I confront

directly and some of which are more latent. One is that of the role of metaphor as a force that can

set thought in motion and thereby determine its course. This is part of my argument against

more traditional interpretations of Heidegger, and it is central to my reading of Nietzsche. It also

helps bring me to the question of the role of crisis in beginning. Crisis is seen through several

metaphors, mainly that of losing one's way and of being shipwrecked. All three of these authors,

I argue, see crisis (whether it is aporia, the loss of solid ground, or a shipwreck) as something of

a prerequisite for a new beginning. There is also an underlying question of community, of who is

in the crisis and who gets out of it, of who is responsible for making a new beginning.

Sometimes that community is a plurality within one person, other times it is a broader "we"

situated within a specific historical moment. Included in that question is that of the relationship

between writer and reader, of how beginning occurs through a response to and through writing.

There is also a question of how beginning can be seen as a kind of experiment. It is never an

experiment within the safety of a lab, but a real philosophical experiment with real ethical

implications. This kind of experiment means taking what has been begun seriously enough to

make it part of one's life. Carrying out such an experiment–whether it is through writing or other

actions–requires courage. The courage required to begin is another central theme of my project.

Crucial to all of this is the unresolvable tension between fate and free will. Is beginning a

moment in which we act, in which we really and truly make a decision? Or is every decision we

make so caught up within an inherited web of concepts and actions as to make it

predetermined?– is every beginning just a result of some previous beginning that is out of our

control?

　　　I see the general trajectory of this project through a metaphor, as a process of leaving the

land and setting out to sea. I start with Heidegger, the most philosophic and scientific of the

three, move to Nietzsche, the philosopher-poet (or poet-philosopher), and end with Mallarmé, the

poet of poets. Heidegger is largely concerned with "grounding" his thought in phenomena by

returning to "the things themselves" and thereby "furnishing the basis" for a new understanding of being. Nietzsche questions the stability of these scientific or philosophical grounds and focuses on a moment of departure, of voluntarily or involuntarily leaving the land and heading into the sea upon a man made vessel that replaces the "ground" that had been taken for granted. Mallarmé then focuses on the experience of being at sea on a similarly man-made poetic vessel, which becomes victim of a poetic "shipwreck." The pace of my thought increases as the project goes on, and by Mallarmé things become both broader and less stable. Part of the argument of this project (and part of where I began) is that these three authors can and do fit into a certain thematic trajectory, and I hope that I can help my reader hear the resonances that I have noticed between them.

The first chapter, on Heidegger, concerns itself with the question of how his most monumental work, *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), carries out, examines, and questions its own beginning. While a more traditional phenomenological argument would take the position that by making beginning an "issue" for thought, the problems implied in a beginning (above all the unquestioned assumptions we are forced to make) can be remedied, my argument is that rather than remedying these assumptions, Heidegger merely accounts and takes responsibility for them. By doing so he prepares his philosophy for critique and renewal.

The second chapter focuses entirely on three of Nietzsche's metaphors, which by the end become both discrete and intertwined: the metaphor of woman, the metaphor of gardening, and the metaphor of the ship. I argue that Nietzsche uses metaphors as a means of beginning in his thought and writing, and that ultimately, for Nietzsche, beginning takes place through poetic creation. Whereas Heidegger has a certain amount of scientific faith in the correspondence

between his thought and "the things themselves" (in other words, Heidegger believes in the accessibility of some kind of objective truth), Nietzsche argues that the truth can not be reached through a network of human concepts. Rather, man-made truth (or alternatively, "untruth")–the dress covering the woman's body, the seafaring vessel as opposed to the ground–is our primary means for understanding, creating, and living in the world. This makes the stake of beginning much higher: when we set out a new metaphor, we are not just creating a new approach to the world, but are engaging in a process of world building.

In the third chapter, I argue that Mallarmé's *Coup de dés* both describes the crisis of an understanding of the world (or, to follow Nietzsche, a world) falling apart and asks the reader to join in the gamble of constructing a new one in its place. This all happens through metaphors of ships, shipwreck, dice games, and constellations, as well as on the level of the poem's form. I also see Mallarmé as struggling with a problem similar to Heidegger, of wanting to create an understanding of the world and of literature that would contain everything, but realizing that by its very nature, such a project cannot begin. This leads him to the broken architecture of the *Coup de dés*, which like both *Being and Time* and Nietzsche's metaphors, embraces its finitude and prepares itself for renewal.

Chapter 1:
Beginning in Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*

"Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl
entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden."[1]
–Friedrich Schlegel, Athenäum Fragmente no. 53

"Frisch zum Kampfe!
Frisch zum Streite!"
-Pedrillo in Mozart's Entführung aus dem Serail

Introduction: entering the circle

In a chapter called "Where Does *Being and Time* Begin" of his book *Delimitations:*

Phenomenology and the End of Metaphysics, John Sallis asks how a philosophical investigation

like *Being and Time* can accomplish a true beginning. He writes:

> From its very beginning a project of philosophical thinking must be directed
> towards the matter that is at issue for that thinking… Yet, in order for
> philosophical thinking to be capable of taking up such direction, that matter must
> already somehow be disclosed in such a way that thought, having the matter
> before it, can then direct itself accordingly. (Sallis 98)

But before thought can direct itself towards something, "the matter must already have come into

view" and "in that case, the beginning already takes the matter as granted– that is, negatively, it

proves to be infested with presuppositions" (ibid). Sallis takes presupposition as a negative

aspect of the beginning of philosophical thought. But he suggests that the problem may be

avoidable: "This reflexivity… suffices to prevent the question of beginning from degenerating

into a mere ascertaining of a point from which thought would set out" (ibid). A "point" is always

ascertained ahead of time before thought begins–the point of beginning is necessarily presumed,

and therefore impure, "infested," "degenerated." To keep the question of beginning pure

"necessitates holding the question of beginning within the sphere of philosophical thought itself,

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[1] "It is equally deadly for the *Geist* [spirit, mind, soul] to *have* a system as it is *not* to have one. It will
likely have to decide, then, to bind both together" (my translation).

letting the beginning *of* philosophy be itself a problem *for* philosophy" (ibid). This self-reflexivity, according to Sallis, leads away from the image of a point and towards that of a circle. The circle allows for the point of beginning to remain an issue and a question for thought, rather than an unquestioned moment of departure.

Sallis' analysis of the difficulties of beginning philosophical thought is apt. In order for our thought to begin, we must make a wager on the presuppositions we use and the direction we go in. Yet Sallis overlooks the real beginning implicit in Heidegger's circle. He quotes Heidegger: "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way" (ibid), yet overlooks the fact that the entrance into the circle implies just as much of a "mere ascertaining of a point" and "setting out" as any other beginning. It may even be a more radical point of embarkation than the "negative" case, as the circle does not even admit of being "grounded" on anything–the assumption is that in its self-reflexivity, it somehow "floats" above and transcends the ground, but it may just be completely ungrounded, a total assumption. Further, it is left to be asked how one determines *what* circle one is entering and whether that "circle" really has the integrity that the image would assume. Just working with the image of a circle seems in itself a kind of "setting out," maybe even a "setting before," a *Vorstellung*, something imagined, even a *Voraussetzung*, an assumption. The circle is not just entered at a certain point, it is posited, created, and justified. In order for the beginning to remain a problem for philosophy, it would seem that not only the entrance into the circle, but the circle *itself*–that is, in Sallis' own words, the "matter before" thought to which it "direct[s] itself accordingly"–ought to become and remain a question. The circle itself is a presupposition. Once it has been imagined, it has already been entered, and this "point from which thought would set out" is just

as "infested with presuppositions"–e.g. the point of entry, the suggestion of an image, the

assumption that the circle is free of its own beginning–as any other.

But the recognition that the phenomenological circle is not separate from what Sallis

views as a "mere" and "negative" ascertaining of a point from which thought would set out does

not imply that we should not set out in the first place, nor that we should discard the image of the

circle and the method that it implies. It also does not mean that Heidegger himself did not

question his own presuppositions, and it is obvious that his thought "set out" on a great deal of

paths not just in *Being and Time*, but in many different directions later on. "Setting out" with

presuppositions should be seen–and as I will argue, is also seen by Heidegger–as a necessary and

unavoidable fact of any thought that no amount of self-reflexivity is "sufficient" to prevent.

Sallis overlooks Heidegger's statement at the end of *Being and Time* that his investigation, "Die

Herausstellung der Seinsverfassung des Daseins," "bleibt aber gleichwohl nur *ein Weg*" (SZ

436)[2]. If Heidegger's investigation is only *one* way (and Heidegger's emphasis is by no means

accidental), this implies that other possible ways can be taken. The circular path that Heidegger

takes is not "*the*" circle, but "*a*" circle–one among many possibilities. There are many other

circles that can be thought of and entered, and at different points at that. This statement of

Heidegger's implies that the phenomenological image of the circle does not suffice to avoid the

"infestation" of presuppositions or the "degeneration" of the beginning into a mere point of

departure (Sallis 98). The phenomenological circle of *Sein und Zeit* is just *one way* of setting out

on the investigation. Beginning, along with all of its "negative" aspects, is unavoidable.

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[2] "Nevertheless, our way of exhibiting the constitution of Dasein's Being remains only *one way* which we
may take" (Macquarrie and Robinson 487).

I will not, like Sallis does, ask how *Being and Time* seeks to escape or purify itself of the problem of beginning. Instead, I will look at how the book *claims*, *embraces*, and *takes over* presupposition as a problem that is not only a subject of the investigation, but a power over it as well. Heidegger creates a terminological mechanism that is designed to deconstruct the very dogmas that such a mechanism would imply. In doing so, he simultaneously embraces and problematizes presuppositions through a poetic process that is both creative (constructive) and critical (destructive). But rather than being self-defeating, his theory is self-renewing. It is a kind of preservation, yet it is also what Heidegger calls *entfachen*, enkindling. Thus when Heidegger writes that "the ultimate business of philosophy is to preserve the *force of the most elemental words* in which Dasein expresses itself" (M&R 262), we can see this preservation as necessarily embroiled in a process of assumption setting itself up for renewal. It does not just get us into a phenomenological circle of understanding, but poetically creates that circle. This departure is what I am interested in–it can be seen as the entrance into the circle, but on another level it is the presupposition of the idea of the circle itself, the creation of a philosophical method and vocabulary that allows the investigation to "set out" in the way it does, both in the sense of setting out down a path (in the sense of beginning, or *anfangen*) and in the sense of setting out ideas and terms to be thought about (in the sense of poeticizing or imagining, *vorstellen*). But because the path, as I will argue, understands that no matter where it goes, it is only one possible way among many; the destination is understood as tentative. Rather than seeking to become authoritative theory, Heidegger's philosophy provides its readers with the tools with which it can be disassembled and made into something new. It thus not only enacts and examines its own beginning, but anticipates and clears the way for new beginnings to come.

1. The First Page of *Sein und Zeit*: finding a way

The first page of *Being and Time* begins with a quotation in Greek from Plato's *Sophist,* followed by Heidegger's translation*:* "Denn offenbar seid ihr doch schon lange mit dem vertraut, was ihr eigentlich meint, wenn ihr den Ausdruck '*seiend'* gebraucht, wir jedoch glaubten es einst zwar zu verstehen, jetzt aber sind wir in Verlegenheit gekommen"[3] (SZ 1).   The quote is not a reference to authority in the tradition, but rather a call back to a state of unknowing. It is a moment of aporia in a Platonic dialogue, delivered by someone with no name other than the Stranger or the Visitor from Elea–not, it is important to mention, Plato himself (*Sophist* 244a). The aporia is not only not Heidegger's, it is not even Plato's. The doubt expressed by the Stranger by definition belongs to someone else. *Sein und Zeit* begins with the doubtful voice of another. Its dialogue is thus born out of something unknown and unknowable, something both foreign and strange, *fremd.* The "we" of this quote, then–whether it is the "we" within the dialogue, the "we" of Plato's or Heidegger's audience, or the "we" of the text and its reader (and presumably it is all of these and more)–is perhaps the most distinct threshold of the text. A reader is unsure whether they are included in it or not, yet Heidegger continues to employ it, drawing the reader into those who have come into doubt about the meaning of the word Being.

Heidegger follows his translation of the passage from the *Sophist* with the first pronouncement of his own in the text. He asks a question and gives an answer: "Haben wir heute eine Antwort auf die Frage nach dem, was wir mit dem Wort »seiend« eigentlich meinen?

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[3] "For manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression '*being*'. We however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed [literally, come into perplexion, a quandary, or even embarrassment]." (MR 1, bracketed section added).

Keineswegs. Und so gilt es denn, *die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein* erneut zu stellen"[4] (SZ 1).

As Sallis suggests, Heidegger makes the moment in the *Sophist* immediately relevant to his time

(Sallis 100). He begins by addressing the audience in the first person plural– *wir*, we– "do *we*

have an answer?" Immediately following this, Heidegger uses the word *heute*, today, which is

much more immediate, even more everyday than Macquarrie and Robinson's translation "in our

time." Unlike the quotation from the *Sophist*, which evokes an ancient voice in a way that makes

the problem seem timeless, or at least foundational, this question is one for Heidegger's time.

This may suggest that Heidegger's "we" and "today" are not necessarily *our* "we" and "today"–

that for *us today* to understand *Sein und Zeit* may be a different process than it was when

Heidegger wrote the book. Yet the question in the first person plural invites any reader further in

to the Stranger's doubt about Being. This collective doubt is where the book begins.

Heidegger's question is about the meaning of a word that is central to our understanding

of ourselves and the world in which we live. He asks us if we really know what we mean when

we say that word. The answer is *Keineswegs*, literally, no way. My translation is less formal

than Macquarrie and Robinson's, but it carries with it an important distinction that their "not at

all" loses. "Keineswegs" is a literal translation of the Greek ἀπορία (or aporia) literally meaning

without (ἀ-) a path (-πόρος). It both points back to the *Sophist* while also playing into

Heidegger's own use of the word "Weg" later in the text. It suggests that we do not know what

way we should direct our thought in order to answer the question. That is why "*die Frage nach*

dem Sinn von Sein," the question about the meaning of Being, must be raised *anew*, "erneut

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[4] "Do we in our time [today] have an answer to the question of what we really mean by the word 'being'?
Not at all [no way]. So it is fitting that we should raise anew *the question of the meaning of Being*" (MR
1, brackets added).

gestellt." In order for us to find a way to the answer, the question must be raised again for our time, for us. The problem of aporia is to find a new way, to begin, not just down a preexisting path, but down a newly set out path that follows a newly asked question. Heidegger's beginning is then not just a simple return to the Stranger's confusion, but a renewal of it. It is neither a break nor a revival of the tradition, but a new beginning that sets out and away from it within the immediate context of the words "wir" and "heute."

Yet in order for the question to be renewed, we must first have doubt about what we mean by the word "Being." Another way of saying this is that although we have no answer to the question, we are not even aware that we do not understand, or that there ought to be a question in the first place. After the first question, Heidegger asks a second question, although it seems more rhetorical than the first; it makes the answer obvious: "Sind wir denn heute auch nur in der Verlegenheit, den Ausdruck »Sein« nicht zu verstehen? Keineswegs. Und so gilt es denn vordem, allererst wieder ein Verständnis für den Sinn dieser Frage zu wecken"[5] (SZ 1). Again, the word *Keineswegs* emphasizes that we do not even have a way into aporia, a way to *not* understand the expression "being." The importance of this moment is hard to understate. We must first come into a quandary, *in die Verlegenheit kommen*, or reach aporia before we can even begin asking the question. To begin, Heidegger suggests, we must first lose our way. Only after such a crisis can we really set out on a new path.

The text's goal, then, becomes to find a way first of all to reach that aporia about the meaning of being, and then to attempt to make a new way out of it. Heidegger differentiates

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[5] But are we nowadays [today] even perplexed at our inability to understand the expression 'Being'? Not at all [no way]. So first of all we must reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question" (MR 1, my alternate translations added in brackets).

between the investigation's *Absicht*, or intent, and its *Ziel*, its aim, object, or goal: "Die konkrete Ausarbeitung der Frage nach dem Sinn von *»Sein«* ist die Absicht der folgenden Abhandlung. Die Interpretation der *Zeit* als des möglichen Horizontes eines jeden Seinsverständnisses überhaupt ist ihr vorläufiges Ziel"[6] (SZ 1). The translation of both *Absicht* and *Ziel* as "aim" loses the distinction that Heidegger draws between the two. The word *Absicht*, roughly translatable as intent, is composed of the preposition *ab,* which means "from," "off," or "away," and the noun *Sicht*, or sight. *Absicht* is what is seen from a certain perspective. Here, the perspective is the beginning of the philosophical project. The *Ziel* is quite different. It is the target, the goal to be reached at the end. It is the point towards which one aims. And it is *vorläufig*, a word that can be roughly translated, as Macquarrie and Robinson do, as "provisional," or tentative. The German word is composed of the prefix *vor-*, which can mean both before and ahead, and an adjectival form of the verb *laufen*, to run. The implication of something *vorläufig* is that it runs ahead of and before, it is tentative in that it has been cast out ahead like a scout. The *vorläufiges Ziel* is then a predetermined and tentative goal, a place where the investigation or treatise plans to wind up before the path has even begun. The *Absicht* is the sight out from the beginning, something that necessarily prefigures the *vorläufiges Ziel,* as it is impossible to see the goal (or to send out a scout) without looking out or having a perspective from where one stands.

There are two different paths, parallel with the two questions with which Heidegger begins the page. The first goes towards raising the question anew. This is *die Absicht*, the intent.

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[6] "Our aim [Absicht, intent] in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *Being* and to do so concretely. Our provisional aim [Ziel, goal, end] is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (MR 1).

In order to raise the question anew, we must first come into aporia concerning what the question is about: the meaning of Being. The second path goes towards an answer to that question. This is *das vorläufige Ziel*, the tentative aim. Because it presents a solution to the first path's problem, the second necessarily follows the first. Heidegger interestingly reverses the order of the paths on the first page in a backtracking movement. He first asks if we can answer the question and then if we can even pose that question. Heidegger's "Ausarbeitung von der Frage nach dem Sinn von *»Sein«*"[7] is importantly "konkret," concrete. The question is not just to be worked out vaguely, but through a concrete language, a concrete set of terms, and through concrete phenomenological investigation. Likewise, "*Zeit*" is to be determined as a *möglicher*, or possible, horizon for an understanding of Being. Whereas the working out of the question–the first path–is concrete, the second path towards the goal (*Zeit* as the possible horizon) is tentative, vorläufig, not set, but cast out from the beginning, from the aporia at the end of the first path, as a possibility.

  Ziel and *Absicht* are put into a slightly new relationship in the short paragraph that ends the first page: "Das Absehen auf ein solches Ziel, die in solchem Vorhaben beschlossenen und von ihm geforderten Untersuchungen und der Weg zu diesem Ziel bedürfen einer einleitenden Erläuterung"[8] (SZ 1). The *Ziel* here becomes the object of *Absicht*, which becomes active as

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[7] "working-out of the question about the meaning of Being"

[8] "But the purpose for making this our aim, the investigations which such a purpose requires, and the path to its achievement call for some introductory remarks" (MR1).
To help see the particularities of the German, here is the same translation with my added interjections: "But the reasons for making this [*Das Absehen auf*] our aim [*Ziel*], the investigations [*Untersuchungen*, undertakings, literally under-seekings] which such a purpose requires [*in solchem Vorhaben beschlossenen*, literally "decided (or enclosed) in such a fore-having"] , and the path [*Weg*] to its achievement [*zu diesem Ziel,* literally "to this goal"] call for some introductory [*einleitenden*, literally "leading-in"] remarks" (MR 1).

Absehen (so seeing instead of sight). This is just another way of seeing how the second path comes after the first, as at this point the *Absicht* quite clearly looks upon the *Ziel*. The *Ziel* is contained in a *Vorhaben*, a purpose or plan, a term which becomes important later in the book and will be the subject of the next section of this chapter. Words such as *Untersuchung*, *Weg*, and *einleitenden* all emphasize the path-like nature of the text, it is a seeking (*Suchen*) down a way (*Weg*) that requires *Einleitung*, which is translated as introduction but literally means leading-in. The perspective of the words, *ab* ("Absehen auf…) and *vor* (Vorhaben, vorläufig…), from, off, away, before, making their way down this path, suggest that the intent and goal of the investigation have already been set, that the path has been made and we are following our leader down it. The introduction only serves to explain them after we have been led in. What follows may be a turning back and an arguing for these points, but they have already been set up here at, or even *before* the beginning without any explicit argument or reasoning.

But it seems that presupposition, as looking down the path (*Absehen*) towards a goal (*Ziel*), is unavoidable. Implicit in Heidegger's argument even on the first page is the fact that when we speak, especially when we use any form of the word "being," we are always operating under unexamined assumptions. But in order to articulate a question about what we mean when we say something, we must first speak. Questioning requires saying, but saying requires presuppositions. To ask a question necessitates taking something as given and unquestioned. No question can successfully undermine itself because by virtue of being a question it must have some predetermined assumption in its saying–a definition, a direction, a perspective, and so on. On the first page, Heidegger speaks to and with his reader out of this state of unknowing, intending (in the sense of *Absicht*) of coming into *aporia* about what we thought we knew. The

point of the aporia is to pose the question outside of the inherited and understood notion of what

is being said when we say "Being," that is, to ask the question "purely," free of presupposition.

But even *out of* a sense of aporia, the process of setting a new path out in front of oneself

towards some goal and away from some perspective is unavoidable. When one path is lost, a new

one is made in its place. The new path, like the old, must presuppose a goal; a question always

opens up a field that includes a finite amount of answers and excludes all others. The point of

aporia then is not to improve our understanding nor to purify it of assumptions, but simply to

renew it or move it, and in so doing unavoidably open it up to a new set of presuppositions. We

always set down a particular path through a particular forest with a particular destination in

mind. What is important is not to be paralyzed by the "weakness" or "impurity" of a new

beginning, but to both claim responsibility for it and prepare oneself for its inevitable failings.

2. The *Vorstruktur*: accounting for the unavoidable presuppositions of a new beginning

In the last paragraph of the first page of *Sein und Zeit* quoted above, Heidegger refers to

what he has written as "*solchem Vorhaben*," which Maquarrie and Robinson translate as "such a

purpose." *Vorhabe* can be translated as purpose, project, plan, or even intention, but when it

comes back later in the book Macquarrie and Robinson choose instead to better capture

Heidegger's nuanced use of the term by translating it as "what we have in advance, or fore-

having" (MR 191). This translation, of course, unfolds the term a lot more than the original text:

a German reader would simply encounter the everyday word "*Vorhabe*" being used in a strange

and new way. What is necessarily lost in translation, one way or the other, is not only the

connection between the moment on the first page of the book and the moment deeper in the text,

but also the strangeness of the word's new usage. While its first occurrence may seem to

communicate its ordinary usage, when Heidegger's idea of the term is understood, we can see that already on the first page his new understanding is hidden and implied. This quite conveniently proves exactly what the word says, that the meaning of a word is "had in advance," even in the "planning" of the investigation. Thus the word's first inconspicuous appearance only proves Heidegger's point about the way in which interpretation (*Auslegung*) and assertion (*Aussage*) are predetermined by the three aspects of *Vorstruktur*: *Vorhabe, Vorsicht,* and *Vorgriff.*[9] These terms become a way of understanding the presuppositions that structure interpretation and expression before they begin, determining the course that they take.

A good place to start to understand Heidegger's *Vorstruktur* is a negative assertion he makes after the paragraph in which the terms are introduced. He writes: "Auslegung ist nie ein voraussetzungsloses Erfassen eines Vorgegebenen"[10] (SZ 150). If interpretation, or *Auslegung*, is never free of presuppositions, that means that it is *always* subject to them (or, to return to Sallis, "infested" with them). The word for presupposition, *Voraussetzung*, contains a useful poetic image. *Voraus* means something like "out and ahead." It is made up of the prefix "vor," before or in front of, and the prefix "aus," out. *Setzen* means to place something. So presupposition, or

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[9] *Vorhabe*, as said above, means something like "plan" or "purpose" in ordinary usage, but Macquarrie and Robinson translate it literally as *fore-having*.
Vorsicht ordinarily means caution, but Macquarrie and Robinson translate it literally as *fore-sight*.
Vorgriff ordinarily means something like anticipation, but Macquarrie and Robinson translate it as fore-conception in order to highlight its proximity to the word *Begriff*, which means term or concept. The *Griff* in both words refers to *greifen*, which means to literally grasp something in the hand. So *Vorgriff* is also what is grasped in advance.

[10] "An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us" (MR 191-192).
And with interjections:
"An interpretation [*Auslegung*, literally laying-out, at this point a term Heidegger has developed earlier in the book] is never a presuppositionless [*voraussetzungsloses*, literally "without having been set out ahead"] apprehending [Erfassen, which contains the verb *fassen*, meaning to grasp] of something presented to us [*Vorgegebenen*, literally meaning "fore-given," using the same prefix as the terms Heidegger has just established]."

a *Voraussetzung,* is something placed out ahead of us before we begin. While Heidegger never

explicitly states it, the *Vorstruktur* can be seen as an image of *Voraussetzung,* as that which

precedes and prefigures the work of thought. Yet instead of relying on the old word for the same

phenomenon, Heidegger refashions other terms to describe the phenomenon in a new way.

Immediately following the statement about *Voraussetzung*, Heidegger makes a claim

referencing the interpretation of texts that suggests a self-reflexive reading:

> Wenn sich die besondere Konkretion der Auslegung im Sinne der exakten
> Textinterpretation gern auf das beruft, was »dasteht«, so ist das, was zunächst
> »dasteht« nichts anderes als die selbstverständliche, undiskutierte Vormeinung
> des Auslegers, die notwendig in jedem Auslegungsansatz liegt als das, was mit
> Auslegung überhaupt schon »gesetzt«, das heißt in Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff
> vorgegeben ist.[11] (ibid.)

The use of the word "*gesetzt*" here calls back to the word "*vorausgesetzt*." That is to say that

"*was mit Auslegung überhaupt schon »gesetzt« ist*," (what is after all "set" in regard to

interpretation) is none other than the *Voraussetzung*, that which is set before, the presupposition.

Heidegger equates this to what is pre-given (v*orgegeben*) in the *Vorhabe, Vorsicht,* and *Vorgriff.*

These terms are a way in which we can and should examine how presuppositions work in regards

to textual interpretation. This applies to Heidegger's own text as much as it would to any other.

To understand exactly what Heidegger means by *Vorhabe* in the most nuanced way

requires an exhaustive reading of the entire book, so my readings here will have to rely on things

that won't be made explicit. I am forced to a certain extent to stick with a "selbstverständliche,

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[11] "If, when one is engaged in a particular concrete kind of interpretation [*Auslegung*], in the sense of exact textual Intepretation, one likes to appeal [beruft] to what 'stands there,' then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious [*selbstverständliche*] undiscussed assumption [*Vormeinung*] of the person who does the intepreting [*des Auslegers*]. In an interpretive approach [*Auslegungsansatz*] there lies such an assumption, as that which has been 'taken for granted' ["*gesetzt*"] with the interpretation as such–that is to say, as that which has been presented [*vorgegeben*] in our fore-having, our fore-sight, and our fore-conception [*Vorhabe, Vorsicht, Vorgriff*]" (MR 192, interjections in italics are mine).

undiskutierte Vormeinung des Auslegers."[12] Yet in his introduction of *Vorhabe*, Heidegger

accounts for the fact that what we use to understand something does not need to be stated

explicitly in order for it to work. This is how he introduces the term:

> Zuhandenes wird immer schon aus der Bewandtnisganzheit her verstanden.
> Diese braucht nicht durch eine thematische Auslegung explizit erfaßt zu sein.
> Selbst wenn sie durch eine solche Auslegung hindurchgegangen ist, tritt sie
> wieder in das unabgehobene Verständnis zurück. Und gerade in diesem Modus
> ist sie wesenhaftes Fundament der alltäglichen, umsichtigen Auslegung. Diese
> gründet jeweils in einer *Vorhabe*. [13] (SZ 150).

Even when a "totality of involvements" *is* understood explicitly and thematically it steps back

into the "unlifted" understanding ("tritt sie wieder in das unabgehobene Verständnis zurück").

Interpretation always relies on a hidden set of relations in order to operate. Although it has been

explicitly described earlier in the book, a word like *Bewandtnisganzheit* (totality of

involvements) is now understood in a way that is not "lifted" above the other words. The

translation "does not stand out from the background" is quite strong, all Heidegger says is that it

is "not lifted up." *Vorhabe* consists of this necessary and unseen referral to a totality of relations

that is "already understood," "not lifted up," inexplicit.

Heidegger's difficult phrase further explaining *Vorhabe* runs: "Sie [Vorhabe] bewegt sich

als Verständniszueignung im verstehenden Sein zu einer schon verstandenen

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[12] "...obvious [*selbstverständliche, literally standing on its own*] undiscussed assumption [Vormeinung, *pre-opinion*] of the person who does the interpreting [*des Auslegers, the person who does the laying-out*]." (MR 192, my interjections in italics).

[13] The ready-to-hand is always understood in terms of a totality of involvements. This totality need not be grasped explicitly by a thematic interpretation. Even if it has undergone such an interpretation, it recedes into an understanding which does not stand out from the background [*unabgehobene Verständnis*]. And this is the very mode in which it is the essential foundation for everyday circumspective interpretation. In every case this interpretation is grounded … in a *fore-having* [*Vorhaben*]" (MR 190).

Bewandtnisganzheit."[14] The word "*verstehen*" appears here in three forms, (1) the noun

Verständnis, [an] Understanding, which I will write with a capital U to differentiate from (2) the

present active participle *verstehenden*, understanding, and finally (3) the past participle

verstandenen, understood. Each use has a different meaning, but it is easy to get confused by the

repetition. The idea is that the interpretation "moves itself" (*bewegt sich*) by "appropriating" an

Understanding. Interpretation is a way of being that understands actively, but this process occurs

out of an Understanding that has already been understood. In other words, in any Understanding,

there is already something pre-understood or "had before" that allows the action "understanding"

to occur. We understand the sentence "the sun rises" because we have already understood what

the sun is, what rising means in relation to the sun, and the grammatical relationship of the two

words to one another. The Understanding gleamed from the sentence relies on a prior

Understanding of the language and its parts. This reliance upon an already and (importantly)

inexplicitly "understood" system is *Vorhabe*. This phenomenon is closely related to the core of

Heidegger's project. The problem that the first page of the book seeks to deal with is how we

already understand the word Being without being able to explain it. Coming into aporia about

the meaning of Being can thus be seen as a way of freeing ourselves from the (c) already

understood so that the (b) process of understanding can begin again, leading us to an (a) new

Understanding.

The term that follows *Vorhabe* is *Vorsicht*, which operates through an act of

"*Enthüllung*," what Macquarrie and Robinson translate as "unveiling." Heidegger writes:

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[14] "As the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood–a Being which understands" (MR 190). Another way of putting this could be: "It [interpretation] moves itself as an appropriation of Understanding in an understanding Being to an already understood totality of involvements."

> Die Zueignung des Verstandenen, aber noch Eingehüllten vollzieht die
> Enthüllung immer unter der Führung einer Hinsicht, die das fixiert, im Hinblick
> worauf das Verstandene ausgelegt werden soll. Die Auslegung gründet jeweils in
> einer *Vorsicht*, die das in Vorhabe Genommene auf eine bestimmte Auslegbarkeit
> hin »anschneidet«.[15] (*SZ* 150).

The *Vorsicht* is the mechanism by which what is taken for granted in *Vorhabe* begins to be

unveiled. The particle *hin* plays an important role. It means out and away from something,

implying both the "there" and the "here." The "here" of the *hin*, so the perspective from which

the *Hinsicht*, *Hinblick*, and ultimately *Vorsicht* occur, is the *Vorhabe*, what is given or understood

in advance. The "there" would then be what is to be interpreted, which the *Vorsicht* takes the

first "slice of," allowing interpretation to begin. The "first slice" also breaks up the integrity of

the object of interpretation. Once the cut has been made, we are looking at something different.

The "angle" of the incision is determined by the perspective from which it is taken–while

Vorsicht unveils and "analyzes" (in the most literal sense of *lysis* and *schneiden*, cutting) it does

so out of a predetermined perspective, the *Vorhabe*. The "sight" of *Vorsicht* is itself

predetermined, but it also plays into how the object of interpretation is "seen" in a certain way

before thought is able to begin.

Following these terms is *Vorgriff*, through which something becomes conceptualizable.

Heidegger writes:

> Das in der Vorhabe gehaltene und »vorsichtig« anvisierte Verstandene wird durch
> die Auslegung begreiflich. Die Auslegung kann die dem auszulegenden
> Seienden zugehörige Begrifflichkeit aus diesem selbst schöpfen oder aber in
> Begriffe zwängen, denen sich das Seiende gemäß seiner Seinsart widersetzt. Wie

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[15] "When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, and
this is always done under the guidance of a point of view [*Hinsicht*], which fixes that with regard to which
[*im Hinblick worauf*] what is understood is to be interpreted. In every case interpretation is grounded ….
in a *fore-sight* [*Vorsicht*]. This *fore-sight* 'takes the first cut' out of what has been taken into our fore-
having [*Vorhabe*], and it does so with a view to a definite way in which this can be interpreted" (MR 191).

immer– die Auslegung hat sich je schon endgültig oder vorbehaltlich für eine
bestimmte Begrifflichkeit entschieden; sie gründet in einem *Vorgriff*. [16](SZ 150).

Interpretation (*Auslegung*) decides how things will be conceived of before it begins. The word

Begrifflich is related to the noun *Begriffe*, concept, which is in turn related to the verb *begreifen*,

which literally means to "grasp" or "take hold of" something mentally. The verb *greifen*, without

the prefix, simply means to grasp something in the hand. So the *Vorhabe* "holds," the *Vorsicht*

"sees," and the *Vorgriff* "grasps." The *halten* of the *Vorhabe* is not "holding" in the sense of

holding something in the hand, but of both "holding back" (in the sense of coming to a halt) and

of having "holdings." The active "grasping," on the other hand, occurs through the

conceptualizing force of *Vorgriff*.   Our Understanding is solidified in the way in which we grasp

an object with the terms that we use. *Vorgriff* brings the *Vorstruktur* to the level of language. The

concepts that we use to make phenomena definite are what determine our understanding of them.

Thus, reconceptualizing and creating a new vocabulary are ways to create a new approach to the

phenomena. However, this does not escape the problem of pre-conceptualization. A new

conception is only a new preconception, as any conception occurs as part of the *Vorstruktur*,

upon which any interpretation relies.

Whereas in the introduction of the *Vorstruktur*, Heidegger only applies it to interpretation,

or *Auslegung*, later in the same section he connects it to assertion, or *Aussage*. The relation

between these two terms is easier to see in German: interpretation is a laying-out (*Aus-legen*) and

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[16] Anything understood which is held in our fore-having [Vorhaben] and towards which we set our sights
'foresightedly' [»vorsichtig«], becomes conceptualizable [begreiflich] through the interpretation. In such
an interpretation, the way in which the entity we are interpreting is to be conceived [Begrifflichkeit] can
be drawn from the entity itself, or the interpretation can force the entity into concepts [Begriffe] to which
it is opposed in its manner of Being. In either case, the interpretation has already decided for a definite
way of conceiving it [Begrifflichkeit], either with finality or with reservations; it is grounded in a *fore-
conception*" (MR 191).

assertion is a saying-out (*Aus-sagen*). Heidegger writes that, "Die Aussage hat notwendig wie Ausslegung überhaupt die existenzialen Fundamente in Vorhabe, Vorsicht, und Vorgriff"[17] (SZ 157). This connection helps reveal the extent to which Heidegger uses the *Vorstruktur* as a self-reflexive reading of his own project. Clearly *Sein und Zeit* is both *Auslegung* and *Aussage* (interpretation and assertion), and has to answer to the problems of *Voraussetzung* (assumption) that this terminology analyzes. He writes, "Der im Aussagen immer auch mitliegende Vorgriff bleibt meist unauffällig, weil die Sprache je schon eine ausgebildete Begrifflichkeit in sich birgt"[18] (*SZ* 157). The way in which what we say or write has already been preconceived is for the most part hidden by the way in which our language has already been built up. A pre-given understanding lurks in any expression. Language always contains a beginning before the beginning. This problem is visible on the first page when Heidegger asks whether we can really say what we mean with the word Being. The existential analysis of Being is a way of reconceptualizing a thought that has already been had, seen, and grasped for us through our language and the tradition that it implies.

For Heidegger, *Sein* is the ultimate *Vorgriff*, the preconception that permeates all of our language and goes to the core of our existence. *Sein und Zeit* is a way of rethinking this *Begriff*, of giving the author and his audience a new way of having (*haben*), seeing (*sehen*), and grasping (*begreifen*) Being. There is, however, another implication of this reading of the *Vorstruktur*, and

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[17] "Like any interpretation [*Auslegung*] whatever, assertion [*die Aussage*] necessarily has a fore-having [*Vorhabe*], a fore-sight [*Vorsicht*], and a fore-conception [*Vorgriff*] as its existential foundations" (MR 199, interjections added).

[18] "When an assertion is made, some fore-conception [*Vorgriff*] is always implied; but it remains for the most part inconspicuous [*unauffällig*], because the language already hides in itself a developed way of conceiving [*Begrifflichkeit*]" (MR 199, interjections added). The phrase "way of conceiving" is a bit misleading. *Begrifflichkeit* really means something like "conceptuality" and even has a sense of something like "graspability."

that is that Heidegger's *own* conception of Being is also subject to it. This is visible in how

impenetrable any passage in *Sein und Zeit* can be if the reader has not carefully read everything

up to that point. The language in the book is constantly being built up. In each moment of

building we are explicitly aware of what Heidegger is doing, but the terms are soon adopted into

his language in a way that makes them inconspicuous, *unauffällig*. The pieces of the system sink

into the background. The process of *Sein und Zeit* is one of terminology taking form and then

coming into use. The reader does not only follow this process, but takes part in it by creating an

understanding of the terminology and then deploying that understanding in order to interpret

later sections of the book and learn new terms. *Sein und Zeit* is the process of building this

structure, and this happens as the text is read. The way in which the term *Vorstruktur*, which is

used to critique presupposition (*Voraussetzung*), takes place within the mechanism of this larger

structure allows us to see that even the weaponry of critique relies upon a prestructured

understanding.

 Much earlier, in the introduction to *Sein und Zeit,* when Heidegger is still setting up his

project and methodology, he writes:

> Die Möglichkeit der Verhärtung und Ungrifflichkeit des ursprünglich »Griffigen«
> liegt in der konkreten Arbeit der Phänomenologie selbst. Und die Schwierigkeit
> dieser Forschung besteht gerade darin, sie gegen sich selbst in einem positiven
> Sinne kritisch zu machen.[19] (SZ 36)

While it may not seem that way on the first read, keeping the *Vorstruktur* in mind helps show

that this statement has everything to do with Heidegger's own terminology. The words

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[19] "The possibility of the hardening and ungraspability [*Ungrifflichkeit*] of the primordially
"graspable" [»*Griffigen*«] lies in the concrete work of phenomenology itself. And where the difficulty of
this research lies is just in making it critical against itself in a positive sense" (my translation). Whereas
Macquarrie and Robinson say that the difficulty "lies in making it self-critical," I think Heidegger's use of
the preposition *gegen*, or against itself is crucial.

Ungrifflichkeit and *Griffigen* imply simply "ungraspability" and "graspable," but their proximity

to *Begrifflichkeit* and *Begriffen* is clear. The "hardening" that is tied up with something

becoming ungraspable would consist in the *Vorstruktur* being taken for granted. Heidegger

writes about interpretation, or "die Auslegung":

> ...daß ihre erste, ständige, und letzte Aufgabe bleibt, sich jeweils Vorhabe,
> Vorsicht, und Vorgriff nicht durch Einfälle und Volksbegriffe vorgeben zu lassen,
> sondern in deren Ausarbeitung aus den Sachen selbst her das wissenschaftliche
> Thema zu sichern.[20] (SZ 153)

The most important task of interpretation is to ensure that its *Vorstruktur* is worked out of the

objects of investigation themselves. Yet, as the statement in the introduction implies, it is also

crucial to ensure that the *Vorstruktur* does not harden to the point of its relationship to the things

themselves becoming no longer graspable. Heidegger's work in creating a terminological system

is thus a double movement of "ensuring the scientific theme" through an "ursprünglich" or

primordial relationship to the "things themselves" that can escape the already understood hidden

in language while *also* ensuring the liquidity of this system through self-criticism, which takes

place through mechanisms like the *Vorstruktur*. Another way of putting this is that in

Heidegger's sense, phenomenology can only work securely and properly when its systems are

not allowed to become hard and fast, but are constantly understood as requiring criticism from

within the system. This allows for constant renewal and return to the things themselves rather

than mere reliance on inherited terminology.

To turn Heidegger's writing into "Heideggerianism" or any other sort of

phenomenological toolbox forgets the importance of this double movement. Likewise, to take

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[20] "…[its] first last and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves" (Macquarrie and Robinson 195).

the self-critical turn as a call to completely dismiss Heidegger's system is to forget the value of

using the system positively. The point is to allow for the new beginning to make its

presuppositions while also accounting for them and undermining them. Rather than taking the

new ontology that Heidegger so meticulously constructs in *Sein und Zeit* as a new "given"–as

knowledge won that we can add to our own thought like money in the bank–he asks us to follow

Sein und Zeit's example and begin again, critically and creatively, on our own.

3. *Zurüstung und Entfachen:* the simultaneous use and critique of philosophy

While the *Vorstruktur* provides an analytical view of Heidegger's creative-critical project,

the image of *entfachen*, or enkindling, that only appears a few times at the beginning and end of

the text provides a metaphor for hot to approach it. In the second to last paragraph of *Sein und*

Zeit, Heidegger writes:

> Der *Streit* bezüglich der Interpretation des Seins kann nicht geschlichtet werden,
> *weil er noch nicht einmal entfacht ist*. Und am Ende läßt er sich nicht »vom
> Zaun brechen«, sondern das Entfachen des Streites bedarf schon einer
> Zurüstung. Hierzu allein ist die vorliegende Untersuchung *unterwegs*.[21] (SZ
> 437).

When talking about a *Streit*, a dispute or argument, it is hard not to see the word *Rüstung*, or

armor, inside the word *Zurüstung,* translated by Macquarrie and Robinson as "preparations."

Zurüstung is a preparation, but also an "arming." Armor is formed by a smith into hard metal

plates that enclose and protect the wearer. It is a preparation for the violence of battle, but its

role is passive and protective. In contrast with this image is that of *entfachen*, or enkindling.

Kindling is the opposite of armor: it is made of dry twigs and dead leaves. It burns easily and is

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[21] "The conflict as to the Interpretation of Being cannot be allayed, *because it has not yet been enkindled*. And in the end this is not the kind of conflict one can 'bluster into'; it is of the kind which cannot get enkindled unless preparations are made for it. Towards this alone the foregoing [*vorliegende*] investigation is *on the way* [*unterwegs*]" (MR 487-488).

used is to start a fire. The role of kindling is active and destructive. To use something as both

armor and enkindling is a contradiction. To burn *Sein und Zeit*, that is, to criticize it, to

understand it as kindling, means to reignite the question about the meaning of Being that has so

crucially been forgotten. Yet to use it as our armor is to possess ourselves of what it sees and

understands, to ally ourselves with and use its theory, to bring it to battle. Neither simple

criticism nor simple following are options: we must both arm ourselves and burn our armor: the

role of the book is both positive and negative. And the battle is just beginning again.

Heidegger begins the introduction, "The Exposition of the Question of the Meaning of

Being" on a similar note:

> Die gennante Frage ist heute in Vergessenheit gekommen, obzwar unsere Zeit
> sich als Fortschritt anrechnet, die »Metaphysik« wieder zu bejahen. Gleichwohl
> hält man sich der Anstrengungen einer neu zu entfachenden γιγαντομαχία περὶ
> τῆς οὐσίας für enthoben.[22] (SZ 2)

The emphasis on Plato's γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας, or the battle of the giants about Being,

rings again of the words *Zurüstung* and *Streit*. The fire of this battle must be enkindled, as it has

not only gone out today, but it is even seen as something we are exempt from. In this moment

before Heidegger's *Untersuchung*, or undertaking, has even really begun, we are still given the

hint that this battle needs to be newly enkindled, although it is not until the end of the text that

Heidegger tells us that his book is nothing *but* armament and kindling. Yet the text begins by

stressing the importance of Plato's battle of the giants. Battle both opens and closes the book, it

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[22] "This question has today been forgotten. Even though in our time we deem it progressive to give our approval to 'metaphysics' again, it is held that we have been exempted from the exertions of a newly [enkindled] [*neu zu entfachenden*] γιγαντομαχία περὶ τῆς οὐσίας" (MR 21, "rekindled" changed to "enkindled"). For some reason Macquarrie and Robinson choose to translate "neu zu entfachenden" as "newly rekindled" rather than "newly enkindled." I find the fact that Heidegger uses the same word here as he does at the end of the book an important signal that this translation ignores.

is where we begin and what we are left with–that is, what we begin with upon leaving the book. The word "we" is crucial. It is not just any battle, but our battle; it is not just any fire, but our fire. This is not just philosophy and metaphor, but an ethical command to embrace the contradiction between battling and burning.

Sein und Zeit is a beginning that provides for its own end, and thus new beginnings after it. In a positive sense, it purports to secure an *ursprünglich* or primordial scientific theme through a phenomenological relationship to the things themselves. Heidegger's *Vorstruktur* does not just consist of what he would call simple "fancy," "folk conceptions" (in other words cliché) or of terminology and methodology unquestioningly inherited from the philosophical tradition. It is an attempt to return to the subject matter in a new and sound way. Thus it is *Rüstung* or armor for the battle about the meaning of Being with which we can protect ourselves. On the other hand, it is in a negative sense prepared for its own criticism. The *Vorstruktur* discovers a serious problem in Heidegger's method. His terminology is just as much of a *Voraussetzung* and just as easily "hardens" to the point of its phenomenological relationship to the things themselves becoming ungraspable as any other–it could just as easily become cliché or inherited dogma as anything else (and surely has for many). In order to prevent this "hardening" (which it seems would make it even better armor), the investigation understands itself as kindling. But the use of Heidegger's system in the battle can't be seen separate from its criticism. The point is to use it and criticize it at once, to allow it to protect us *and* burn in the battle. And that isn't easy–it requires courage to go into battle armed with something that we know isn't completely sound.

Heidegger makes his system self-critical because according to him it is necessary to do so to keep it and future systems closer to the truth. If the system "hardens," we forget its relation to

the truth, and instead believe that it itself is the truth. There is a clear sense in which Heidegger believes his thought has a real correspondence to things themselves or to some primordial truth buried in language. But for Nietzsche, the truth is not accessible through human systems of language and metaphor that we use to understand the world. While metaphor for Heidegger is a way of approaching the truth, for Nietzsche, metaphor is a way of creating a world of things that we take to be truth, of setting out into uncharted and infinite seas. One can lose one's way completely; there is absolutely no bedrock of objective truth "in itself" upon which one can set one's feet, or even an anchor. This view requires much more courage than Heidegger's–not only does Nietzsche, like Heidegger, ask that we take the risk of making the assumption necessary to begin, but he asks that we do so within a world where those assumptions–and not phenomena which we can access through careful scientific or philosophical investigations–will take over as the ground beneath us.

Chapter 2:
Nietzsche's Metaphors of and as Beginning

"Wahrheitssinn. – Ich lobe mir eine jede Skepsis, auf welche mir erlaubt ist zu antworten: »Versuchen wir's!« Aber ich mag von allen Dingen und allen Fragen, welche das Experiment nicht zulassen, Nichts mehr hören. Diess ist die Grenze meines »Wahrheitssinnes«: denn dort hat die Tapferkeit ihr Recht verloren"[23] *-Nietzsche, Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft 77*

"Nur ein feiger Tropf verzagt!
Nur ein feiger Tropf verzagt!"
-Pedrillo

Introduction

To quote Alexander Nehamas, "Works on Nietzsche, the present one included,

conventionally begin with some commonplaces about his style" (Nehamas 13). Nietzsche's style

is so conspicuous that most beginning remarks about it have become commonplace. Of course,

as Nehamas points out, what is important is what we make of these commonplaces. The

commonplace I want to begin with is the centrality of metaphor to Nietzsche's thought and

writing. Sometimes Nietzsche's metaphors are clear, even explained immediately–he for

example explains his statement that god is dead as the fact "that the belief in the Christian god

has become unbelievable" (GS 279). Other metaphors, for example the kind that permeate *Thus*

Spoke Zarathustra like the eagle, the snake, the tarantulas, and so on, never receive any sort of

explanation and remain confounding. But in every case, his metaphors animate his thought. It is

more often than not difficult to determine whether his metaphors are there to explain

philosophical thoughts and ideas hiding beneath them or if it is the other way around, if the

philosophy follows from the poetry. But this separation between metaphors as poetry and ideas

as philosophy is for Nietzsche an artificial one. The metaphor is the idea, the poetry the

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[23] "*Truthfulness.*– I favor any *skepsis* to which I may reply: "Let us try it!" But I no longer wish to hear anything of all those things and questions that do not permit any experiment. This is the limit of my 'truthfulness'; for there courage has lost its right" (GS 115).

philosophy. Nietzsche's thought begins through and as metaphor. The best approach to our question of beginnings, then, is to look to the metaphors with which Nietzsche both begins and describes moments of beginning.

1. Woman as a metaphor for truth.

Nietzsche begins the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* with an assumption that leads to a question: "Vorausgesetzt, dass die Wahrheit ein Weib ist–, wie?" (JGB 3).[24] The word *Vorausgesetzt,* assumed, is a strange choice to introduce a metaphor. Metaphors aren't usually thought of as assumptions, but as poetic devices that we know possess an element of fiction. Assumptions usually exist within the context of a logical argument. The fact that Nietzsche turns the metaphor into a question makes it even stranger. Rather than elaborating on the comparison, Nietzsche presents it as the beginning of a thought experiment. Such a question at the beginning of a work like *Beyond Good and Evil* could define and orient the book as a whole. In other words, while the answer Nietzsche provides immediately after the question focuses more on the dogmatic philosophers clumsily chasing after the truth than on the truth itself (or herself), the entire book could be seen as an answer to the initial question "–wie?" or as a thought experiment following from this initial equation. The word *Vorausgesetzt* can thus be read more literally as setting out a metaphor in front of us to begin the process of thought (*voraus-setzen*). But what is this comparison?–if we follow Nietzsche's metaphor, if the truth *is* a woman, what then?

To answer this question with an idea of Nietzsche's conception of woman in general would be dangerous. Sven Brömsel puts it well in the *Nietzsche-Handbuch*: "Das Frauenbild N.s ist umstritten… Die Frau erscheint in seinen Schriften als Mutter, Konkubine, Wahrsagerin,

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[24] "Supposing truth is a woman–what then?" (BGE 2).

Wüstentochter, Wagnerianerin, Prophetin, Schauspielerin, Gattin, Gouvernante, Mädchen,

Mänade, Priesterin, Tänzerin, Hure, Herrin, Hexe, Heilige, Hetäre, höhere Tochter und

Gebärerin" (Brömsel 232)[25]. Nietzsche's conception of women is elusive, polymorphous, and

can be as reverential as it is acidic. Our approach then, shouldn't be burdened by the "gruesome

seriousness" or "clumsy obtrusiveness" of which Nietzsche accuses the dogmatists (BGE 2).

Rather than trying to offer a final reading of Nietzsche's *Frauenbild*, we should approach it

respectfully and lightheartedly as something that neither can nor should be "pinned down"

through scientific analysis but rather brought into conversation with our own investigation.

Nietzsche provides an echo of the preface later in section 127 of *BGE*: "Allen rechten

Frauen geht Wissenschaft wider die Scham. Es ist ihnen dabei zu Muthe, als ob man damit ihnen

unter die Haut, –schlimmer noch! unter Kleid und Putzt gucken wolle" (JGB 127)[26]. Science, or

Wissenschaft–which in the context of 19th century German does not just indicate the "hard

sciences" but the rational, scholarly attitude in general–offends the "real" woman by wanting to

look under her dress. The scientist wants to reveal what shouldn't be revealed; he is invasive and

voyeuristic. Much like the dogmatists in the preface, the scientist takes an untoward approach.

Strangely, the physical/sexual transgression implied by getting "*unter die Haut*," under the skin,

is portrayed as less terrible than getting under the dress and finery. Woman, for Nietzsche, cares

more about concealing the beauty on the surface than she does about that surface undergoing

violence or penetration. If truth were such a woman, she would be bashful, cautious, and the

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[25] "Nietzsche's image of woman is the object of controversy… Woman appears in his writing as mother, concubine, soothsayer, desert-dweller, wagnerian, prophetess, actress, wife, governess, girl, maenad, priestess, dancer, whore, mistress, witch, saint, courtesan, young lady, and childbearer" (my translation).

[26] "Science offends the modesty of all real women. It makes them feel as if one wanted to peep under their skin–yet worse, under their dress and finery" (BGE 87).

object of the dogmatists' transgression. Rather than approaching the truth with respect, these

philosophers do it violence in the name of knowledge. And such violence changes the truth; if

the woman has to be killed and dissected in order to be known, the knowledge is ultimately of

something other than the woman herself.

Near the beginning of his infamous sexist tirade in book seven of *BGE* Nietzsche reverses

the formulation of woman as truth: "Aber es *will* nicht Wahrheit: was liegt dem Weibe an

Wahrheit![27] (JGB 150).[28] The contrast between this section and the preface is paralyzing.

"Assuming truth is a woman," it is hard to understand how there could be nothing more "alien,

repugnant, and hostile" to her than truth (BGE 163). But the image here is not that far from what

we saw in section 127 above. If woman is repulsed by truth and concerned with appearance and

beauty above all else, she would surely be offended by the advances of the probing scientific

man. This moment also presents the scientific man's desire in a different light. Rather than a

pure desire for truth, "wir Männer" (we men) desire the seductive play that makes "unser Ernst,

unser Schwere und Tiefe" (our seriousness, our weight and depth) appear "beinahe wie eine

Thorheit" (almost like a folly) (JGB 150-151). The verb *erscheint* is perfect–these heavy

qualities in the man are not *revealed* as *Thorheit* (foolishness or folly), but only appear as such.

Woman, here, is a creature of mirage and finery, a changeling easily earning the long list of

names Brömsel attributes to her in the *Handbuch*. Man, on the other hand, is a heavy, serious

creature who takes delight in the "lightness" of woman. Rather than being opposed to the

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[27] "But she does not *want* truth: what is truth to woman?" (BGE 163).

[28] "But she does not *want* truth: what is truth to woman? From the beginning, nothing has been more alien, repugnant, and hostile to woman than truth–her great art is the lie, her highest concern is mere appearance and beauty. Let us men confess it: we honor and love precisely *this* art and *this* instinct in woman–we who have a hard time and for our relief like to associate with beings under whose hands, eyes, and tender follies our seriousness, our gravity and profundity almost appear to us like folly" (BGE 163).

preface, this section asks us to compare truth to such a changeling. Truth is a modest and

shameful thing, avoiding the persistent and heavy-handed advances of scientists, detesting

revelation and loving veils, disguises, and shadows. Likewise, the scientists pursue it not only

out of a genuine desire for knowledge, but also out of a perverse desire to see their hopes

squandered and to *look* like (and not actually be) fools themselves.

A section titled "Vita femina" in *The Gay Science* can help unite these later moments of

BGE with its preface:

> Ich will sagen, dass die Welt übervoll von schönen Dingen ist, aber trotzdem arm,
> sehr arm an schönen Augenblicken und Enthüllungen dieser Dinge. Aber
> vielleicht ist diess der stärkste Zauber des Lebens: es liegt ein golddurchwirkter
> Schleier von schönen Möglichkeiten über ihm, verheissend, widerstrebend,
> schamhaft, spöttisch, mitleidig, verführerisch. Ja, das Leben ist ein Weib![29] (FW
> 229)

Life, here, as a woman, is similar to the image of woman as truth in *BGE:* it is bashful, seductive

and engages in a play of revelation and unveiling. Life hides herself beneath "ein

golddurchwirkter Schleier von schönen Möglichkeiten"–a golden veil of beautiful possibilities–

that she rarely removes. The *Schleier* tones down the sexual energy that we saw in the scientist

peeking under *Haut* and *Kleid* in *BGE.* A veil covers one's face. The "possibilities" lying

beneath the veil are not explicitly sexual, but rather the hidden possibility of the face's purely

individual and indescribable beauty. The veil itself is also beautiful, leading the beholder to

desire not just the revelation, but the hiding–or the lie–as well. Here, revelation is not a product

of scientific invasion. Rather, life reveals herself: "was sich aber uns enthüllt, *enthüllt sich uns*

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[29] "I mean to say that the world is overfull of beautiful things but nevertheless poor, very poor when it comes to beautiful moments and unveilings of these things. But perhaps this is the most powerful magic of life: it is covered by a veil interwoven with gold, a veil of beautiful possibilities, sparkling with promise, resistance, bashfulness, mockery, pity, and seduction. Yes, life is a woman" (GS 271-272).

Ein Mal!"[30] (ibid)–the verb, *sich enthüllen*, is reflexive. There is a potential for knowledge of life

that is not won through the "clumsy awkwardness" of the scientist or dogmatist, but through

allowing life to unveil herself. The fact that life and truth are equated to woman in both of

Nietzsche's works shows their similarities: both life and truth engage in a play of revelation and

receding that the advances of a scientific attitude only injure. The comparison shows that for

Nietzsche, truth and life are inextricably linked. Truth is alive, and life reveals itself as truth.

Likewise, the violence of the scientific attitude "kills" a living component to the truth, be it

through simplification, generalization, or the kind of "cutting at the joints" of analysis that

Socrates mentions in the *Phaedrus*.

Within these metaphors of women there are three distinguishable levels. The first level is

the dress, finery, or the veil. It is beautiful in its own right, but it conceals the more beautiful

second level, the naked skin. The skin is what the woman is the most shameful about, whether it

is the sexually charged skin under the dress or the unique face under the veil. Underneath the

skin is the depth to which the scientist or biologist seeks to probe. Penetrating the skin does a

violence both sexual and analytic. The utmost beauty lies in the rarely revealed second layer,

which the scientific attitude has little respect for, regarding it more as a boundary to the real truth

than anything else, and of which the woman (or life or truth) is ashamed. The first layer, like a

piece of clothing, both conceals and conforms to the shape of the second layer–the "lie" is

beautiful in its own right, but the beauty is contingent upon the concealed form underneath–in

other words, the veil both conceals and reveals the "possibilities" beneath. If life and truth are

both women, they have bodies–bodies with integrity, bodies that feel shame and hide themselves,

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[30] "But what does unveil itself for us, *unveils itself once only!*" (GS 271).

bodies that are unique, living, and changing. The scientific attitude that seeks to "understand," "grasp," or "comprehend," these bodies ultimately does it a fatal violence. Nietzsche suggests a different approach to knowledge of life or truth in the above section of *GS*: allowing life to reveal "herself" to us rather than encroaching upon "her" with science's violence.

If the truth is located on the second layer, the skin, it puts the validity, importance, and existence of the third layer, the depth, into question. Nietzsche presents this doubt as a real struggle, writing that nothing has caused him more trouble than "einzusehen, dass unsäglich mehr daran liegt, *wie die Dinge heissen*, als was sie sind"[31] (FW 83). The "actual" being or essence (*Wesen*) of a thing is what the scientist seeks to discover and the name is what covers it. Nietzsche compares the range of human associations for a thing to a dress:

> Der Ruf, Name und Anschein, die Geltung, das übliche Maass und Gewicht eines Dinges– im Ursprunge zuallermeist ein Irrthum und eine Willkürlichkeit, den Dingen übergeworfen wie ein Kleid und seinem Wesen und selbst seiner Haut ganz fremd– ist durch den Glauben daran und sein Fortwachsen von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht dem Dinge allmählich gleichsam an- und eingewachsen und zu seinem Leibe selber geworden: der Schein von Anbeginn wird zuletzt fast immer zum Wesen und *wirkt* als Wesen![32] (ibid)

The top layer, the name, is foreign to both the skin, the second layer, and the *Wesen*, the third layer, and thrown over them arbitrarily. But the top layer grows onto the body underneath and is soon indistinguishable from it: it becomes the body, and eventually the *Wesen* itself. Here the second and third layer are themselves brought so close together as to be nearly indistinguishable from one another–there is a sense in which the "skin"–what the *Kleid* is thrown over–is deep

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[31] "…to realize that what things *are called* is incomparably more important than what they are" (GS 121).

[32] "The reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for– originally almost always wrong and arbitrary, thrown over things like a dress and altogether foreign to their nature and even to their skin–all this grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body. What at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is effective as such" (GS 121-122).

enough to be the essential being of a thing. But the point is that the thought that one could

destroy (vernichten) the top layer (the clothes) in order to access what lies underneath is

misguided. Rather, the only destruction comes through the creation of a new top layer, a poesie

that fastens a new dress for the woman that is the truth. The section continues: "Nur als

Schaffende können wir vernichten!– Aber vergessen wir auch diess nicht: es genügt, neue

Namen und Schätzungen und Wahrscheinlichkeiten zu schaffen, um auf die Länge hin neue

»Dinge« zu schaffen"[33] (ibid). As an alternative to the destructive penetration of the scientist,

Nietzsche suggests the creation of new names and *Wahrscheinlichkeiten*–"probabilities," quite

close to the "schönen Möglichkeiten" covering *Vita femina*, but taken literally, things that *seem*

like the truth (die wahr scheinen). The "seeming" (*Schein*) works in the place of the

"skin" (*Haut*) and essence (*Wesen*), it grows into it. It is not the truth itself, but it functions as

such.

  That the female existence is attributed a radically elusive independence and integrity

upon which the "male" attitude attempts a possessive and scientific violence betrays an attitude

surprisingly feminist for Nietzsche. The female body for Nietzsche becomes an image of the

elusive, unknowable, and impossible to possess–truth and life are women because they hide

themselves from us and ultimately one cannot become their master. The more one tries to

become master of life and truth, the further one is from having their beauty revealed and being

able to appreciate it. The female body ultimately becomes a metaphor for an aspect of existence

independent of actual sex or gender–and the fact that "woman" for Nietzsche is ultimately a

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[33] "We can destroy only as creators. –But let us not forget this either: it is enough to create new names and estimations and probabilities in order to create in the long run new 'things.'" (GS 122).

metaphor, a transport, a generalization and a means to an end, surely throws a wrench in the idea

that he is a feminist. Introducing the most anti-feminine section of *BGE*, Nietzsche writes:

> Das Lernen verwandelt uns, es thut Das, was alle Ernährung thut, die auch nicht
> bloss »erhält«–: wie der Physiologe weiss. Aber im Grunde von uns, ganz »da
> unten«, giebt es freilich etwas Unbelehrbares, einen Granit von geistigem Fatum,
> von vorherbestimmter Entscheidung und Antwort auf vorherbestimmte
> ausgelesene Fragen. Bei Jedem kardinalen Probleme redet ein unwandelbares
> »das bin ich«; über Mann und Weib zum Beispiel kann ein Denker nicht
> umlernen, sondern nur auslernen, –nur zu Ende entdecken, was darüber bei ihm
> »feststeht«. (JGB 148)[34]

There is in us, Nietzsche writes, "*da unten*"–down there, or deep down, a fated bedrock that we

"are" and cannot teach or learn around–it is "*Unbelehrbar,*" unteachable. We can at best

discover what this "granite" in us *is*, but we cannot change it–we "*are*" the problem, not the

solution. The unteachable bedrock, like a woman, cannot be "had" or "possessed" finally–we

cannot gain control over it, we can only hope that it will reveal itself to us. It is appropriate that

Nietzsche would use this to preface "einige Wahrheiten" "über das »Weib an sich«." The desire,

Nietzsche admits, to find truths about woman in and of themselves only leads him to reveal how

much they are his *own* truths, "wie sehr es eben nur *meine* Wahrheiten sind" (ibid). This is the

"granite" or "fatum" residing within him expressing itself as truth and conviction. Nietzsche may

as well be saying that these are truths about "das Weib an *mich*."

Woman as life or truth is ungraspable, unchangeable. The "unteachable" in us is a female

body that is ashamed to be seen unveiled or naked. If there is a fated piece of granite truth at the

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[34] "Learning changes us; it does what all nourishment does which also does not merely "preserve"–as
physiologists know. But at the bottom of us, really "deep down," there is, of course, something
unteachable, some granite of spiritual *fatum*, of predetermined decision and answer to predetermined
selected questions. Whenever a cardinal problem is at stake, there speaks an unchangeable "this is I";
about man and woman, for example, a thinker cannot relearn but only finish learning–only discover
ultimately how this is 'settled in him.'" (BGE 162).

core of our lives that does not just predetermine our answers, but even the questions we ask, it would problematize any idea of freedom, whether intellectual or practical. And the question with which Nietzsche begins *BGE*: "Voraussgesetzt, dass die Wahrheit ein Weib ist–wie?" becomes itself predetermined, itself a product of the unteachable. The question remains of how a spirit can become "free" if it is chained to the "body" at its core. In this metaphorics, woman becomes a beginning before the beginning–she is the evasive uncontrollable element in us–something at our core that is ultimately "other" that prevents the beginnings we make for ourselves from being our own autonomous acts.

A true beginning, however, is an act of free will. Zarathustra says: "Alles am Weibe ist ein Räthsel, und Alles am Weibe hat Eine Lösung: sie heisst Schwangerschaft"[35] (Zarathustra 66). Of course this statement could easily be read as sexist and reductive, and that is surely an element of it. But when read figuratively, "woman" (*Weibe*) and "pregnancy" (*Schwangerschaft*) help resolve the question of free will raised in the view of woman as a metaphor. Woman as *ein Räthsel*, a riddle, reflects the "problem that we ourselves are"– the irreducible "body" within us that determines the question and answer beforehand. The solution to this problem, says Zarathustra, is *Schwangerschaft*. Presumably, this means impregnating that body with a new one. Pregnancy is not exactly a solution, as it gives birth to a new body, which is itself a new *Räthsel* or problem. The "solution" here is thus not the kind of solution the rational scientific man would propose–an analytical and teleological solution that ends in the unraveling of the body or the acquisition of a final knowledge of "woman." It is a procreative and erotic solution, a solution wherein the "problem" is not resolved, but transformed into a new one. This transformation

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[35] "Everything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: it is called pregnancy" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 48).

opens up an opportunity for a beginning that is neither the product of fate nor freedom alone, but exists as and is born out of a combination of the two.

In the section *Von Kind und Ehe* shortly after the mention of *Schwangerschaft* quoted above, Zarathustra says, "Nicht nur fort sollst du dich pflanzen, sondern hinauf! Dazu helfe dir der Garten der Ehe!"[36] (Z 70). The passage contains an untranslatable pun on the verb "fortpflanzen," which is built out of the preposition "fort" (away) and the verb "pflanzen" (to plant), but literally means reproduce or procreate. Nietzsche, through Zarathustra, substitutes the preposition "hinauf" for "fort," creating a new idea of procreation which is not horizontal–planting out and away from oneself–but vertical–planting out, off of, and above oneself. Zarathustra continues: "Einen höheren Leib sollst du schaffen, eine erste Bewegung, ein aus sich rollendes Rad,–einen Schaffenden sollst du schaffen"[37] (ibid). The child planted out of the "garden of marriage" is created higher than the creators themselves, and although it has been brought into being by its creators, it propels itself. It is its own first movement, a wheel rolling out of itself.

The passage above is similar to others in *Zarathustra* that concern themselves with "das Kind" for example from the first *Rede Zarathustras*, "Von den drei Verwandlungen": "Unschuld ist das Kind und Vergessen, ein Neubeginnen, ein Spiel, ein aus sich rollendes Rad, eine erste Bewegung, ein heiliges Ja-sagen" (Z 26). The child, not as passive "Neubeginn" but active "Neubeginn*en*" is able to forget and become innocent of its origins–that irreducible "granite"

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[36] "You should not just reproduce, but surproduce! May the garden of marriage help you to that!" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 52). A literal translation could read: "You should not just plant yourself away, but upwards!"

[37] "You should create a higher body, a first movement, a wheel rolling out of itself– a creator you should create" (52).

fate–and say "yes" to movement and creation free of the weight of the soul's "bedrock." It may

be "a higher body," but there is also a possibility for *das Kind* to be the creators themselves:

"Dass der Schaffende selber das Kind sei, das neu geboren werde, dazu muss er auch die

Gebärerin sein wollen und der Schmerz der Gebärerin"[38] (Z 87).   The child, the mother/woman,

the father/man, and the "garden of marriage" here become metaphors for a drama of new

creation and beginning taking place within one person.

2. Gardening as a metaphor for the possibility of free will

The metaphor of gardening hinted at above helps resolve the problem that the metaphor

of woman as an elusive and uncontrollable "truth" within us has created for the possibility of free

will. This metaphor not only provides new depth to the drama of creation and beginning, but also

relates it specifically to the task and tradition of philosophy. In Beyond Good and Evil Nietzsche

writes:

> Allmählich hat sich mir herausgestellt, was jede grosse Philosophie bisher war:
> nämlich das Selbstbekenntnis ihres Urhebers und eine Art ungewollter und
> unvermerkter mémoires; insgleichen, dass die moralischen (oder unmoralischen)
> Absichten in jeder Philosophie den eigentlichen Lebenskeim ausmachten, aus
> dem jedesmal die ganze Pflanze gewachsen ist.[39] (JGB 11)

The *Lebenskeim* (germ of life) made up of the *Absichten* (intentions, a word whose literal

meaning became important in our reading of Heidegger) is what determines the entire *Pflanze*, or

plant of the philosophy. Like the problem deep within us predetermining both question and

answer that was represented in part by the female body, the "seed of life" is what really

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[38] "In order for the creator himself to be the child who is newly born, he must also want to be the birth-giver and the pain of giving birth" (66).

[39] "Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown" (BGE 13).

determines the plant that will grow out of it. There is something irreducible to this *Lebenskeim*—

like the *vita femina*, it is hidden out of sight, subterranean, irreducible. The philosophers have not

been in control of their philosophy, Nietzsche asserts, they have merely been writing

predetermined answers to predetermined questions that were planted within them—part of them—

all along—up until *now* that is. There is a subtle suggestion here, shown not just through the fact

that Nietzsche is pointing this problem out as such, but also through his assertion that it is not

philosophy's nature to always grow from such a seed. This process has only existed in "jede

grosse Philsophie bisher" (every great Philosophy until now). The suggestion is that there is a

possibility for another way of approaching philosophy that would not blindly follow from such a

germ.

A similar metaphor is carried over into *Morgenröte*, where Nietzsche describes

conclusions (*Schlüsse*) growing like mushrooms (*Pilze*):

> *Gärtner und Garten.* – Aus feuchten trüben Tagen, Einsamkeit, lieblosen Worten
> an uns wachsen *Schlüsse* auf wie Pilze: sie sind eines Morgens da, wir wissen
> nicht woher, und sehen sich grau und griesgrämig nach uns um. Wehe dem
> Denker der nicht der Gärtner, sondern nur der Boden seiner Gewächse ist![40] (M
> 224)

The image here is nearly identical to *die Pflanze* in *BGE*. But the substitution of mushrooms for

the generic "plant" and of conclusions for the generic "philosophy" gives the metaphor a sharper,

more sinister focus. Mushrooms grow in the dark. They don't grow from seeds but from spores

that spread quietly and out of the control of a gardener. One morning they appear, and we don't

know where they came from. The gray and grumpy mushroom is the plant of the isolated thinker

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[40] "Out of damp and gloomy days, out of solitude, out of loveless words directed at us, *conclusions* grow
on us like mushrooms: one morning they are there, we know not where from, and they look back at us,
gray and grumpy. Woe to the thinker who is not the gardener but just the soil of his crops!" (my
translation, after Daybreak 171).

who is the ground rather than the gardener. They are pale, often poisonous, and grow where they want rather than where we want them to. A similar image can be found in Zarathustra, where he compares *Pilze* to "petty thoughts," "Aber dem Pilze gleich ist der kleine Gedanke: er kriecht und duckt sich und will nirgendswo sein– bis der ganze Leib morsch und welk ist vor kleinem Pilzen"[41] (Z 90). The mushroom here is a definite sign of death and decay. It takes over the body rather than empowering it, draws it down into the earth rather than allowing the body to plant itself "hinauf."

Earlier in *Morgenröte* Nietzsche reflects on a similar thought in less metaphorical language: "*Zur Beruhigung der Skeptikers.*– »Ich weiß durchaus nicht, was ich *tue*! Ich weiß durchaus nicht, was ich *tun soll*!«– du hast recht, aber zweifle nicht daran: *du wirst getan!* in jedem Augenblicke!"[42] (M 105). The thinker whose conclusions grow around him like mushrooms is an example of "being done" rather than "doing." The philosopher whose thought is a plant grown entirely out of a *Lebenskeim* likewise takes a passive role. The mistake, however, may be less one of action and more one of grammar. Nietzsche continues the passage, "Die Menschheit hat zu allen Zeiten das Aktivum und das Passivum verwechselt, es ist ihr ewiger grammatikalischer Schnitzer"[43] (ibid). The "growth" one experiences when one supposes oneself to be in an active role may really be the experience of the petty thinker covered in fungus or the philosopher unaware that he is really writing a mémoire.

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[41] "But a petty thought is like a fungus; it creeps and crouches and does not want to be anywhere– until the whole body is rotten and wilted with little fungi" (68).

[42] "*To reassure the sceptic.* – 'I have no idea what I am *doing*! I have no idea what I *should do*!' – you are right, but do not doubt this: *you will be done*! at every moment!" (my translation, after Daybreak 76-77).

[43] "Mankind has in all ages confused the active and the passive, it is their eternal grammatical blunder" (my translation, after Daybreak 76-77).

Reversing the "eternal grammatical blunder" may mean taking a role that seems more passive or roundabout. However, utter passivity is surely not an option. The answer isn't one of revolutionizing the grammar, or of taking a revolutionary approach to a misguided grammar, but of taking a third path between active and passive. A later section of *Morgenröte* suggests a "solution" to the problem along this third path, similar to what Zarathustra suggests with *Schwangerschaft*: "*Was uns freisteht.*– Man kann wie ein Gärtner mit seinem Trieben schalten und, was wenige wissen, die Keime des Zorns, des Mitleidens, des Nachgrübelns, der Eitelkeit so fruchtbar und nutzbringend ziehn wie ein schönes Obst an Spalieren"[44] (M. 291). Working with our "*Trieben,*" or drives, is a way of working through the "*Unbelehrbar*" within us, the elusive and unchangeable female body. The *Keime*, the germ, sprout, or bud of the plant is described as a series of emotions or mental states–rage, empathy, curiosity, and vanity are the examples Nietzsche gives–that have the possibility to grow like a beautiful fruit on trellises. The image is not one of overcoming these emotions, but of working with them like a gardener. The attitude is neither completely active or passive, but middle-voiced–a gardener nourishes, guides, trims, and harvests without being the thing that grows or is grown out of himself.

Nietzsche finishes the section: "Dies alles steht uns frei: aber wie viele wissen denn davon, daß uns dies frei steht? *Glauben* nicht die meisten an *sich* wie an vollendete *ausgewachsene Tatsachen*? Haben nicht große Philosophen noch ihr Siegel auf dies Vorurteil gedrückt, mit der Lehre von der Unveränderlichkeit des Charakters?"[45] (ibid). The suggestion

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[44] "*What we are at liberty to do.*– One can control one's drives like a gardener and, though few know it, grow the sprouts (or germs) of anger, pity, curiosity, vanity as fruitfully and productively as a beautiful fruit on a trellis" (my translation, after Daybreak 225).

[45] "All this we are at liberty to do: but how many know we are at liberty to do it? Do the majority not *believe* in *themselves* as in complete *fully-developed facts*? Have the great philosophers not put their seal on this prejudice with the doctrine of the unchangeability of character?" (Daybreak 225).

made through the verbs "*freistehen*" and "*kann*" are of open but unachieved possibility. Actualizing this possibility means overcoming the belief that our characters are already fully grown and unchangeable. The belief (*Glaube*) or prejudice (*Vorurteil*) preventing us from reaching this kind of possibility is itself a kind of weed that has overgrown the garden. Further, the verb "*freistehen*" suggests the kind of openness that avoids complete action (similar to the "male" attitude of violence and transgression) and complete passivity (similar to the "female" attitude of veiledness and impenetrability). The gardener transcends the "given" active and passive categories and uses elements of both to grow their garden.

The section in which Nietzsche highlights the possibility of becoming one's own gardener is in the first person plural–*was uns freisteht*. The "solution" to the "riddle" of woman is *Schwangerschaft*, the product of intercourse between a male and a female, to which "*der Garten der Ehe*" can be of aid. These examples imply a kind of plurality or communality to the middle-voiced production of pregnancy and gardening. On the other hand, the wild mushrooms grow out of "damp, dark days, loneliness," and "loveless words." The loveless attitude– of isolation, avoidance, violence, and violation, produces uncontrollable *Gewächse,* but the *loving* attitude embraces a trellis, a fruit, or a child– and of course this does not only mean love for someone else, but also for oneself, or more precisely, for the "other" within ourselves, the *Unbelehrbares*, the body within us that says nothing but "I am me" and cannot be changed.

> Wir werden schließlich immer für unseren guten Willen, unsere Geduld, Billigkeit, Sanftmüthigkeit gegen das Fremde belohnt, indem das Fremde langsam seinen Schleier abwirft und sich als neue unsägliche Schönheit darstellt: – es ist sein Dank für unsere Gastfreundschaft. Auch wer sich selber liebt, wird es auf diesem Wege gelernt haben: es giebt keinen anderen Weg. Auch die Liebe muss man lernen. (FW 220)

There is something veiled and foreign (*fremd*) even within ourselves with which we must be patient, fairminded, and gentle in order to learn to love and cultivate– like a plant in a garden, we must be hospitable towards ourselves if we want to control our own growth. This view also returns to the "unveiling" of the *Vita femina*, showing again how the "woman" is really a metaphor for something within ourselves, regardless of sex or gender. The first person plural reveals that the "we" can refer to what would seem to be one person– the art of the gardener is to work collaboratively with the "we" that all of us contain within ourselves.

But the loving cultivation of the gardener may not be enough. In *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes that "Die guten Menschen jeder Zeit sind die, welche die alten Gedanken in die Tiefe graben und mit ihnen Frucht tragen, die Ackerbauer des Geistes"[46] (FW 38). These "good men" manage to create a certain kind of "newness" by growing fruit out of an old thought, but it is the evil men who are able to bring about a more radical newness: "Aber jedes Land wird endlich ausgenützt, und immer wieder muss die Pflugschar des Bösen kommen"[47] (ibid). The "ploughshare of evil" does not cultivate, but overturns and refreshes the earth that is used for cultivation. The ploughshare's evilness comes from its newness: "Das Neue ist aber unter allen Umständen das *Böse*, als Das, was erobern, die alten Grenzsteine und die alten Pietäten umwerfen will"[48] (ibid). The "evil" attitude of overturning and renewing opposes the "good" attitude of patient love and cultivation, but the two attitudes work in cyclical harmony. The good depends on the evil to renew the land and the evil depends on the good to grow the fruit.

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[46] "The good men are in all ages those who dig the old thoughts, digging deep and getting them to bear fruit–the farmers of the spirit" (GS 79).

[47] "But eventually all land is exploited, and the ploughshare of evil must come again and again" (GS 79).

[48] "What is new, however, is always *evil*, being that which wants to conquer and overthrow the old boundary markers and the old pieties; and only what is old is good" (GS 79).

3. The ship as a metaphor for metaphor

The metaphor of land itself becomes a victim of the "ploughshare of evil" in another metaphor of Nietzsches, that of the ship and seafaring, which reworks the understanding of land from a renewable place of growth and sustenance to a hidden presumption that deceives one into a false sense of stability. The ship is its own kind of fabricated "land" on the unstable and boundless sea that understands itself as a human construction rather than a god-given ground. And even the ships themselves become used up and undergo a similar process of destruction and creation as occurs between the farmer and the ploughshare. Ultimately, the ship setting out on a journey across the sea becomes a self-reflixive metaphor for how thought begins as an experiment taking place through metaphor.

In *Shipwreck with Spectator*, Hans Blumenberg offers a helpful reading of this metaphor in Nietzsche with a focus on the idea of an inevitable shipwreck. He begins by showing Pascal's influence on Nietzsche: "The twist Nietzsche gave to nautical metaphorics, and which people might at times have liked to call 'existential,' was discovered by Pascal in the formula 'you are embarked'" (Blumenberg 19). Pascal's statement asserts that by virtue of existing as human beings, we are already involved in the game or wager about the existence of god. According to Blumenberg, Nietzsche appropriates Pascal's dilemma after the "death of God" and turns it into a simple metaphor of existence. Whether we want to or not, we exist, and we have to reckon with our existence by understanding it in some way or another, "The skeptic's abstention, which Montaigne had expressed through the image of remaining in the harbor, is in Pascal's view not an option. The metaphorics of embarkation includes the suggestion that living means already being on the high seas, where there is no outcome other than being saved or going down, and no

possibility of abstention" (Blumenberg 19). For Neitzsche, the nautical journey as a metaphor is no longer just a voluntary transgression of natural boundaries, as Blumenberg argues has also been the case: "…there is a frivolous, if not blasphemous, moment inherent in all human seafaring, on a par with an offense against the invulnerability of the earth" (Blumenberg 11). In Blumenberg's view, the "first step" from the land onto sea is, in Nietzsche's view, an involuntary one.

The ship we find ourselves on thus becomes something like what Nietzsche describes in section 121 of the Gay Science:

> *Das Leben kein Argument.*– Wir haben uns eine Welt zurecht gemacht, in der wir leben können– mit der Annahme von Körpern, Linien, Flächen, Ursachen und Wirkungen, Bewegung und Ruhe, Gestalt und Inhalt: ohne diese Glaubensartikel hielte es jetzt Keiner aus zu leben! Aber damit sind sie noch nichts Bewiesenes. Das Leben ist kein Argument; unter den Bedingungen des Lebens könnte der Irrthum sein.[49] (FW 138)

That Nietzsche refers to these "Bedingungen des Lebens" (conditions of life) as "Glaubensartikel" (articles of faith) would suggest that they not only *could* be errors (könnte der Irrthum sein) but almost certainly are. At the very least, their truth is not necessary or guaranteed–just because something is necessary for life does not mean that it is true. Whereas the embarkation for Pascal is presented as a wager of "the whole finite stake in the hope of an infinite reward," Nietzsche, in Blumenberg's view, sees the embarkation as a metaphor for the basic conditions of life, or "simple self-preservation."

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[49] "*Life no argument.*– We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we can live–by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith nobody now could endure life. But that does not prove them. Life is no argument. The conditions of life might include error" (GS 177).

The first involuntary step of the seafaring metaphor, embarkation, is followed by a second: "The next metaphorical step is that not only are we always already embarked and on the high seas but also, as if this were inevitable, we are shipwrecked" (Blumenberg 20). Blumenberg continues to offer an image within Nietzsche of the shipwreck as another form of self-preservation:

> In the case of Nietzsche's beam, the shipwreck is in the background, no longer has to be made explicit, and turns everything into an instrument of naked self-preservation. It is what remains after a sinking in which the artificial vehicle of self-deception and self-assurance was long since smashed to pieces: "For the liberated intellect, that enormous timber and framework of concepts, clinging to which needy humankind saves itself for life, is only a scaffolding and a toy for his boldest works of art: and if he smashes it, mixes it up, and ironically puts it back together, pairing what is most alien and separating what is most closely related, he shows that he does not need these forms of emergency assistance." (Blumenberg 20)

In Blumenberg's reading, shipwreck is the moment in which the "articles of belief" that form the "conditions of life" can no longer keep us afloat. Either we desperately cling to the pieces or take the playful approach of the "liberated intellect." Blumenberg writes that "Shipwreck, as seen by a survivor, is the figure of an initial philosophical experience" (Blumenberg 12). The destruction of the vessel that carries us over the sea of existence necessitates a process of rethinking and re-creation that is essentially philosophical.

Blumenberg reads another aspect of Nietzsche's use of this metaphor as a third and final step along a progression: "Nietzsche himself carried the imagination of seafaring and shipwreck even a few steps further. Those rescued from shipwreck are astonished by their new experience of dry land" (Blumenberg 21). The victim of the wrecked vessel that had previously given us our understanding of existence washes up on the dry land of science: "This is the fundamental

experience of science, that it is able to establish things that stand firm and provide solid ground

for further discoveries" (Blumenberg 21). Science is described not as a man-made vessel

floating on the water, but as an island, an oasis of solid ground in an ocean of uncertainty. This

metaphor does not describe a timeless human experience, but an experience that takes place in a

specific historical moment: "It could have been otherwise, as is shown by other ages' belief in

fantastic metamorphoses and marvels. The reliability of firm ground is something wholly new

for humans who are surfacing out of history" (Blumenberg 21). It makes sense that Blumenberg

sees this as a step further in the nautical metaphorics. The historical situation of modern science

leads to an additional aspect of the metaphor wherein the shipwrecked philosopher takes refuge

from the groundless sea in favor of the solid land of science.

Much of Blumenberg's reading of the "third step" comes from section 46 of the Gay

Science "*Unsere Erstaunen,*" or "Our Amazement." Interestingly, what Blumenberg sees as

"steps further" comes earlier in the book than moments that he reads as earlier in the progression.

The section begins: "Es liegt ein tiefes und gründliches Glück darin, dass die Wissenschaft Dinge

ermittelt, die Stand halten und die immer wieder den Grund zu neuen Ermittelungen abgeben: –

es könnte ja anders sein!"[50] (FW 73). The "Glück" (luck or happiness) of science is described as

"gründlich." Even before Nietzsche arrives at the metaphor of a shipwrecked sailor washed up

on land, or even names the subject of this profound and fundamental *Glück*, he compares it to the

ground. Things communicated by science "halten Stand" – they do not just "stand up under

criticism," they literally hold their stance– they stand on solid ground rather than floating or

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[50] "It is a profound and fundamental good fortune that scientific discoveries stand up under examination and furnish the basis, again and again, for further discoveries. After all, this could be otherwise" (GS 111).

swimming. Perhaps most interesting is the moment Kaufmann renders as "furnish the basis," "…den Grund …abgeben." *Abgeben* means something like "provide" but can also imply something like "surrender" or "give up." The combination of the word with *Grund* on the surface communicates that science provides the basis for new discoveries, but hides within it a more sinister possibility of the ground giving out, opening up into what is a favorite word of Nietzsche's, an *Abgrund*, or an abyss. "–es könnte ja anders sein!" ends the sentence, naming the possibility of an instability in science–"yes, it could be otherwise!"

Of course, if it *could* be otherwise, if the *Grund* could become *Abgrund*, it is not nearly as stable as the shipwrecked sailor would think. The possibility of the ground giving out is enough to eliminate an assurance of stability. It is stable for now, but in the same section Nietzsche embraces the possibility of the ground giving out with longing: "Einmal den Boden verlieren! Schweben! Irren! Toll sein! – das gehörte zum Paradies und zur Schwelgerei früher Zeiten; während unsere Glückseligkeit der des Schiffbrüchigen gleicht, der an's Land gestiegen ist und mit beiden Füssen sich auf die alte feste Erde stellt– staunend, dass sie nicht schwankt"[51] (FW 73). The happiness of a shipwrecked sailor is far from the paradise of earlier times. Blumenberg writes that "Terra firma is not the position of the spectator but rather that of the man rescued from shipwreck; its firmness is experienced wholly out of the sense of the unlikelihood that such a thing should be attainable at all" (Blumenberg 21-22). In Blumenberg's reading, the shipwrecked philosopher is astounded that he has attained what seems unattainable. But

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[51] "To lose firm ground for once! To float! To err! To be mad! That was part of the paradise and debauchery of bygone ages, while our bliss is like that of a man who has suffered shipwreck, climbed ashore, and now stands with both feet on the firm old earth–amazed that it does not waver" (GS 111).

Nietzsche maintains the doubt: we can never be sure that the ground is completely stable. The

belief that it *is* stable forgets both the threat and the paradise of its instability.

In Morgenröte Nietzsche paints another image of an island: "Inmitten des Ozeans des

Werdens wachen wir auf einem Inselchen, das nicht größer als ein Nachen ist, auf, wir Abenteuer

und Wandervögel, und sehen uns hier eine kleine Weile um: so eilig und so neugierig wie

möglich, denn wie schnell kann uns ein Wind verwehen oder eine Welle über das Inselchen

hinwegspülen, so daß nichts mehr von uns da ist!"[52] (M 206). The fear of the island being

overtaken by the ocean's winds and waves is as sharp as if the island were a boat bound for

shipwreck. Even though it should be stable ground, the island is viewed as a temporary resting

point, not a permanent and stable home. The section, titled, "*Aus der Gesellschaft der Denker,*"

or "*From the company of thinkers,*" goes on to emphasize the community of "*Wandervögel*" on

the island, "und so leben wir eine köstliche Minute der Erkenntnis und des Erratens, unter

fröhlichem Flügelschlagen und Gezwitscher miteinander, und abenteuern im Geiste hinaus auf

den Ozean, nicht weniger stolz als er selber"[53] (ibid). Rather than dwelling on the joy of finding

stable ground to rest on, the thinker, like a bird, celebrates the chance to adventure onwards. For

Nietzsche, the shipwrecked man kissing the land he has washed up onto is more like the man

who desperately clings to the beam of the broken ship than the free spirit or liberated intellect of

the *Wandervögel* who embraces the opportunity to move on.

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[52] "In the midst of the ocean of becoming we awake on a little island no bigger than a boat, we adventurers and birds of passage, and look around us for a few moments: as sharply and as inquisitively as possible, for how soon may a wind not blow us away or a wave not sweep us across the little island, so that nothing more is left of us!" (The Dawn 157-158).

[53] "…and thus we live a precarious minute of knowing and divining, amid joyful beating of wings and chirping with one another, and in spirit we adventure out over the ocean, no less proud than the ocean itself" (The Dawn 158).

The ultimate wreckage of a system for understanding the world, the death of god, does

not beget a moment in which the sailors wash up on the shore, but rather opens up the horizon:

"In der That, wir Philosophen und »freien Geister« fühlen uns bei der Nachricht, dass der »alte

Gott todt« ist, wie von einer neuen Morgenröte angestrahlt… endlich erscheint uns der Horizont

wieder frei… endlich dürfen unsre Schiffe wieder auslaufen… jedes Wagniss des Erkennenden

ist wieder erlaubt, das Meer, *unser* Meer liegt wieder offen da, vielleicht gab es noch niemals ein

so »offnes Meer«."[54] (FW 234). What could be described as a loss of direction, a violent storm,

or a shipwreck, instead becomes a new dawn, open horizons, and good weather for sailing.

The next section "*Inwiefern auch wir noch fromm sind,*" or *"How we, too, are still pious"*

offers a theoretical background to the image of science's "ground" as unstable. It begins: "In der

Wissenschaft, haben die Überzeugungen kein Bürgerrecht, so sagt man mit gutem Grunde"[55]

(ibid). Science is the systematic, empirical search for knowledge, and has no room for the kind

of convictions one encounters in religion:

> …erst wenn sie sich entschliessen, zur Bescheidenheit einer Hypothese, eines
> vorläufigen Versuchs-Standpunktes, einer regulativen Fiktion herabzusteigen, darf
> ihnen der Zutritt und sogar ein gewisser Werth innerhalb des Reichs der
> Erkenntniss zugestanden werden, – immerhin mit der Beschränkung, unter
> polizeiliche Aufsicht gestellt zu bleiben, unter die Polizei des Misstrauens[56] (FW
> 234-235)

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[54] "Indeed, we philosophers and 'free spirits' feel, when we hear the news that 'the old god is dead,' as if a new dawn has shone on us… At long last the horizon appears free to us again… at long last our ships may venture out again… all the daring of the lover of knowledge is permitted again; the sea *our* sea, lies open again; perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea'" (GS 280).

[55] "In science convictions have no rights of citizenship, as one says with good reason [or grounds]" (GS 280).

[56] "Only when they decide to descend to the modesty of hypotheses, of a provisional experimental point of view, of a regulative fiction, they may be granted admission and even a certain value in the realm of knowledge–though always with the restriction that they remain under police supervision, under the police of mistrust" (GS 280).

A hypothesis is only allowed under the "police surveillance of mistrust"– a scientific mindset

will only make an assumption if it is understood as a tentative, "fictional" position that will later

be proven or disproven. For Nietzsche, science begins with this central distrust of conviction in

favor of truthful discovery, "Fienge nicht die Zucht des wissenschaftlichen Geistes damit an, sich

keine Überzeugungen mehr zu gestatten?"[57] (FW 235). But Nietzsche goes further, claiming that

this mistrust of conviction is *itself* a conviction: "nur bleibt übrig zu fragen, ob nicht, *damit diese*

Zucht anfangen könne, schon eine Überzeugung da sein müsse, und zwar eine so gebieterische

und bedinungslose, dass sie alle andren Überzeugungen sich zum Opfer bringt"[58] (ibid). Science

begins with the conviction that convictions are not to be trusted, and the entire discipline follows

from this groundwork. "Man sieht, auch die Wissenschaft ruht auf einem Glauben, es giebt gar

keine »voraussetzungslose« Wissenschaft"[59] (FW 235). Science, which would seem to escape the

trap of relying on belief for its groundwork, itself has an unproven and unstable assumption as its

bedrock and foundation.

     Nietzsche's claim that there is no "»voraussetzungslose« Wissenschaft" shows that there

is a central "hypothesis" to science that is not seen as hypothetical, but is taken for granted and

drives the entire discipline. In other words, science rests on a "necessary fiction" that is treated

like a proven fact. Nietzsche calls this central conviction "die unbedingte Wille zur Wahrheit,"[60]

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[57] "Would it not be the first step in the discipline of the scientific spirit that one would not permit oneself any more convictions?" (GS 280).

[58] "…only we still have to ask: *To make it possible for this discipline to begin*, must there not be some prior conviction–even one that is so commanding and unconditional that it sacrifices all other convictions to itself?" (GS 280-281).

[59] "We see that science also rests on a faith; there simply is no science 'without presuppositions'" (GS 281).

[60] "The unconditional will to truth" (GS 281).

and explains it: "es thut nichts mehr noth als Wahrheit, und im Verhältniss zu ihr hat alles Uebrige nur einen Werth zweiten Rangs"[61] (FW 235). This unconditional will to and exaltation of truth which, according to Nietzsche, forgets and suppresses the value and usefulness of untruth, is a moral judgement: "Folglich bedeutet »Wille zur Wahrheit« nicht »ich will mich nicht täuschen lassen«, sondern–es bleibt keine Wahl–»ich will nicht täuschen, auch mich selbst nicht«:– *und hiermit sind wir auf dem Boden der Moral*"[62] (FW 236). As we saw in our reading of the scientific attitude as potentially violent towards the "feminine," Nietzsche goes on to claim that this moral drive may be "ein lebensfeindliches zerstörerisches Princip," even "ein versteckter Wille zum Tode"[63] (FW 236). Ultimately, the moral will to truth is seen as "ein *metaphysischer Glaube*"[64] that takes its fire from the same flame first lit by "ein Jahrtausende alter Glaube… jener Christen-Glaube, der auch der Glaube Plato's war, dass Gott die Wahrheit ist, dass die Wahrheit göttlich ist…"[65] (FW 237). Rather than being a stable ground that the shipwrecked man finds himself on, astounded at its stability, Nietzsche views the "ground" of science as a new manifestation of the ground of Platonism and Christianity. While this ground may seem like it is still believable, its roots are the same as those of the old beliefs that are no longer believable.

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[61] "*Nothing* is needed *more* than truth, and in relation to it everything else has only second-rate value" (GS 281).

[62] "Consequently, 'will to truth' does *not* mean 'I will not allow myself to be deceived' but–there is no alternative–'I will not deceive, not even myself'; *and with that we stand on moral ground*" (GS 282).

[63] "…a principle that is hostile to life and destructive"; "a concealed will to death" (GS 282).

[64] "a metaphysical faith" (GS 283).

[65] "…a faith that is thousands of years old, that Christian faith which was also the faith of Plato, that God is the truth, that truth is divine" (FW 283).

Blumenberg's reading of the "island" fashioned by science as a final step in the metaphor that offers a chance of real stability ignores Nietzsche's equation of scientific ground with the "Boden der Moral" and its metaphysical belief in the divinity of truth. Perhaps the shipwrecked man looks at the ground and is amazed at its stability, but what he fails to realize is that this stability is an illusion, and the new island is just the same as the old. In his speech "On Priests" Zarathustra says:

> Auf einem Eilande glaubten sie einst zu landen, als das Meer sie herumriss; aber siehe, es war ein schlafendes Ungeheuer!
> Falsche Werthe und Wahn-Worte: das sind die schlimmsten Ungeheuer für Sterbliche,–lange schläft und wartet in ihnen das Verhängnis.
> Aber endlich kommt es und wacht und frisst und schlingt, was auf ihm sich Hütten baute.[66] (Z 92)

This is the real conclusion to the metaphor of the shipwrecked sailor who washes up on the "stable ground" of science. We can imagine the sailor embracing the solid ground, building a home, and even starting a village with the other sailors, and maybe entire generations later, the island reveals itself to be a sleeping monster that wakes up and swallows the village whole. The attitude of these sailors is not philosophical–they have gone through the experience of shipwreck, but they don't question the stability of the new ground that they stand on. Their attitude is scientific, which is for Nietzsche ultimately a moral, pious, and dangerously unaware attitude. Rather than taking the risk of embarkation and adventure, this attitude takes the risk of the

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[66] "Once they believed they landed on an island as the sea tossed them around; but see, it was a sleeping monster!
False values and words of delusion: these are the worst monsters for mortals– long does doom sleep and wait in them.
But at last it comes and wakes and devours and gulps whatever built itself huts upon it" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 70).

sedentary and the gullible–of finally being deceived when it believed itself to have known the truth all along.

The real philosophic attitude is expressed in the section preceding the one concerning the "death of god" in *The Gay Science, "Im Horizont des Unendlichen."* Blumenberg writes that this section "follows Pascal almost verbatim" (Blumenberg 19), yet ignores the role that it plays in conversation with other moments in Nietzsche's writing. The parallel to Pascal's "vous êtes embarqué" is clear in the first lines: "Wir haben das Land verlassen und sind zu Schiff gegangen! Wir haben die Brücke hinter uns, – mehr noch, wir haben das Land hinter uns abgebrochen!"[67] (FW 140). Nietzsche's use of the perfect tense depicts a similar situation to Pascal's wager of already being in the game, or already having begun to play. The metaphor may not be one for existence in general as Blumenberg proposes, though. The use of the perfect tense in GS 124 reflects the crucial moment in the following section when the madman says, "Gott ist todt! Gott bleibt todt! Und wir haben ihn getödtet!"[68] (FW 141). The moment of the ship leaving and abolishing the land behind is a metaphor for a historical moment rather than human existence in general. This could, as it does in the way the sections of the book are ordered, follow rather than precede the shipwrecked sailor washing up on the island of science.

If the land that has been destroyed behind the ship is a metaphor for stable scientific ground, metaphysical faith, or the belief in objective truth, the sea that the ship floats on becomes a metaphor for a different kind of truth. The section continues "Nun Schifflein! sieh' dich vor! Neben dir liegt der Ocean, es ist wahr, er brüllt nicht immer, und mitunter liegt er da, wie Seide

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[67] "We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us– indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us" (GS 180).

[68] "God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him!" (GS 181, the exclamation points, which Kaufmann for some reason omits, are my addition).

und Gold und Träumerei der Güte. Aber es kommen Stunden, wo du erkennen wirst, dass er unendlich ist und dass es nichts Furchtbareres giebt, als Unendlichkeit"[69] (140). Although the clause "es ist wahr" doesn't match the masculine gender of "der Ocean," it is hard not to see the "golddurchwirkter Schleier von schönen Möglichkeiten" of the *Vita femina* and the dress thrown over the body of truth-as-woman in the "Seide und Gold und Träumerei der Güte" of the ocean. The sea's surface is dazzling and multifarious, the possibilities it contains are endless. Like the elusive woman, it cannot be captured or held, but is liquid and boundless. But the ocean is not the same as the woman as truth or life; it is an endless horizon and a groundless field whose possibilities are not erotic or reproductive, but adventurous and perilous.

At the end of the section, the focus turns from the *Schifflein* to a bird. Here the focus is on the question of whether or not the infinite horizon provides freedom or results in total aimlessness: "Oh des armen Vogels, der sich frei gefühlt hat und nun an die Wände dieses Käfigs stösst! Wehe, wenn das Land-Heimweh dich befällt, als ob dort mehr *Freiheit* gewesen wäre,– und es giebt kein »Land« mehr!"[70] (FW 140-141). The "Land-Heimweh" that befalls the bird is a kind of nostalgia for the limits presented by the stable ground. These limits, like the walls of a labyrinth, provide a kind of guidance; in a moral system, even one as buried as science's moral belief in the divinity of truth, we know what we ought to do even though we don't have the freedom to make our own rules. But this "land," like the idea of god, is no longer believable. The bird has taken flight and the ship has set out to sea. The freedom that the bird discovers after

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[69] Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure [it is true], it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity" (GS 180, brackets added).

[70] "Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*–and there is no longer any 'land'" (GS 180-181).

abolishing the land behind it is itself a kind of cage, an aimlessness that requires the courage to make one's own rules and laws–to imagine a horizon towards which sails can be set. The greatness to suppose one own's horizon is similar to the greatness that must be embodied to be "worthy" of the task of having killed god: "Müssen wir nicht selber zu Göttern werden, um nur ihrer würdig zu erscheinen?"[71] (FW 142). After having abolished the land behind us, we must be great enough to create land in front of us if we don't want to be trapped by the endlessness of our new horizons. And perhaps the most intimidating part of this task is that once we make a horizon, the ocean is no longer endless, but suddenly limited.

A certain amount of courage is presupposed in the act of setting out itself, though, and the fact that the adventurers find themselves on a ship rather than clinging to a beam goes to show that work has already been done. The ship is heading somewhere whether or not the goal has been determined–perhaps new land does not need to be made or found and the ship itself is enough. The ship carries us over the unintelligible (yet beautiful, yet dangerous) seas of existence, it is a transport, a vessel, a thing necessary for life–the ship is its own kind of truth: human truth. In *On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense,* Nietzsche calls truth a "movable host of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms," a "construction… upon an unstable foundation, and, as it were, on running water" (Nietzsche Reader 117-118). But the ship is not exactly the same as truth: "Only by forgetting this primitive world of metaphor can one live with any repose, security, and consistency: only by means of the petrifaction and coagulation of a mass of images which originally streamed from the primal faculty of human imagination, like a

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[71] "Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" (GS 181).

fiery liquid" (Nietzsche Reader 119)–the forgotten metaphor is an island, coagulated and petrified lava, whereas the new metaphor is a construction, a vessel.

Thus the ship's embarkation is a metaphor for metaphors–for "setting out" an idea, whether one knows exactly what it is or not. Earlier in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche writes: "Der Denker sieht in seinen eigenen Handlungen Versuche und Fragen, irgend worüber Aufschluss zu erhalten: Erfolg und Misserfolg sind ihm zu allererst *Antworten*"[72] (FW 70). Such *Handlungen* or actions can also be actions of writing, of suggesting something, putting forward a hypothesis. The beginning of *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*–"Vorausgesetzt, dass die Wahrheit ein Weib ist– wie?" is such an experiment. It takes place through the setting-out-ahead of a metaphor which, like the three central metaphors we have occupied ourselves with here, woman, gardening, and ships, determine the course of thought to follow. But unlike the deep, buried, and unseen metaphors of tradition–of the divinity of truth, for example–these metaphors are clearly constructs that carry us over the sea of existence. Metaphors are vantage points from which we can look out at the beautiful and unintelligible waters of our lives. They provide a perspective on the truth. Because of this, they are not just personal events, but historical events–the great metaphors provide platforms for the observations, decisions, and actions that make up human history. And the greatest metaphors harden into land. Like Nietzsche's "worn out coins," we forget that they are only suggestions of and perspectives, and not the things themselves.

For Nietzsche, metaphors are the only possible beginning. They even affect practical beginnings, as they create the concept-worlds within which we live, make decisions, and act. If we have the courage, which may involve being "evil" like the ploughshare overturning the old

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[72] "A thinker sees his own actions as experiments and questions–as attempts to find out something. Success and failure are for him *answers* above all" (GS 108).

land, we can make these beginnings for ourselves, whether they are personal or historical. But the question of whether or not the metaphors we make for ourselves are true acts of freedom remains open. For the ship, the bird, and the madman in *The Gay Science*, the land and god have already been abolished. The old metaphor is destroyed and a new one made in the past tense, and we find ourselves dealing with the consequences, nostalgic for a time when we were walled in and knew how to act. *Der Garten der Ehe*, with its loving, patient cooperation may provide freedom–Nietzsche, most clearly through Zarathustra, insists that there is a possibility to make oneself into *das Kind*– a wheel rolling out of itself, its own beginning. But perhaps the best thing we can learn from Nietzsche is that even this orientation–the dichotomy of fate and freedom–is a metaphor, and an old and worn out one at that. The greatest freedom–or the greatest prison– would be in imagining ourselves a new compass and map to navigate even that dilemma.

Chapter 3:
Mallarmé: Thought begins as gamble

"Nein–!
    ach nein es sei gewagt–!
        Ach nein nein nein es sei gewagt,
                    Neeeeeeiiiiin!
                        es sei gewagt es sei gewagt es sei gewagt es sei gewaaaaagt!"
                                        -Pedrillo

"I feel so broke up
I wanna go home"
-The Beach Boys

                                        "La mer…"
                                        -Charles Trenet

            un livre ne commence ni ne finit : tout au
        plus fait-il semblant
                    —
                -Feuillet 181 du "Livre" de Mallarmé

Mallarmé's *Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard* makes navigation a central issue, both in theme and form. The poem forces its reader not only to navigate a symbolic language paradoxically dense and sparse, but also to literally navigate a text untraditionally spaced out across the page. The poem's strangeness makes it hard to find an entry point for analysis. An obvious way in is the poet's preface. But turn to it, and the first line tells you: "J'aimerais qu'on ne lût pas cette Note ou que parcourue, même on l'oubliât"[73] (Mallarmé 442). The "Lecteur habile*,*" the skillful reader, he continues, won't gather much from it, but "l'ingénu," the naive, could be troubled by it– the poem presents nothing new, after all, than "un espacement de la lecture," a spacing of the text, or rather, reading itself. Even if Mallarmé goes on to offer a brief exegesis of the poem, we are pushed back the moment we enter the preface. This reveals the extent of the poem's esotericism. Although it does not refuse entry, the poem speaks a mystical

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[73] "I'd like it if this note wasn't read or even that, once skimmed, it was forgotten" (all translations in this chapter are mine unless indicated otherwise).

language for which there is no dictionary. But like the "cloître quoique brisé, [qui] exhalerait au promeneur, sa doctrine"[74] to which Mallarmé compares *Divagations* (Mallarmé 79), *Coup de Dés* speaks to the reader not through the clear and totalizing language of a bible or temple, but through the nebulous exhalation of a ruin. Were it a complete structure, it would be hermetic, inaccessible. But the poem's fragmentation both allows the reader a way in and the poem's "fumes" a way out. A reading of the poem relies on impressions of this smoke and a reconstruction of the broken vessel–a task that is always bound to fall short. The goal of reading the poem then isn't to create a perfect reconstruction, but to experiment with possible readings.

The poem itself begins, however, quite clearly: the title is an assertion– "Un coup de Dés jamais n'abolira le Hasard"– A throw of the Dice will never abolish Chance; the title page proudly dubs the work, which could just as easily be unclassifiable, a poem; the first page contains nothing but four words, bold and capitalized: "**UN COUP DE DÉS**." The line is what it describes- "un coup"- not just a throw, but a hit, a blow, a shock which initiates the poem. The rest of the poem is fragmented and descending until the last line- "Toute Pensée émet un Coup de Dés"[75] (441). Next to the rest of the poem, this is a maxim carved in stone. A section of the preface helps complete our constellation:

> La fiction affleurera et se dissipera, vite d'après la mobilité de l'écrit, autour des arrêts fragmentaires d'une phrase capitale dès le titre introduite et continuée. Tout se passe, par raccourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit. Ajouter que de cet emploi à

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[74] "an abbey that, even though ruined, would breathe out its doctrine to the passer-by" (Divagations 8).

[75] "All Thought emits a Throw of the Dice."

nu de la pensée avec retraits, prolongements, fuites, ou son dessin même, résulte,
pour qui veut lire à haute voix, une partition.[76] (443)

Story is avoided, the "fiction" or "imagination" appears and disappears, everything happens through hypothesis. The poem is a musical score performing naked thought, it "is" a throw of the dice because it is thought. The text's path, the course of the music, demonstrates thought like dice rolling in slow motion. The final line is where the dice fall, the thought out of and after motion, its finished form. And the first line is its beginning, the thoughtless moment of risk or experiment from which the rest follows.

Un Coup de dés works within Mallarmé's pre-established poetical language. Our reading of the poem will benefit from an understanding of some of Mallarmé's earlier work that engages in a similar thematic language. While *Coup de dés* describes and enacts beginning, there is a sense in which it does so retrospectively: the metaphoric framework and the metaphysical stakes have been established, the main gamble or *nouveauté* is, as Mallarmé points out, a formal one, *un espacement de la lecture*. Mallarmé's epigraph to his volume of *Poésies,* the poem *Salut*, which is itself a kind of retroactively imposed beginning (it was written in 1893, decades after the poem that follows it, written in 1862) introduces many of the images found in other poems of Mallarmé's, above all *Coup de dés* (Poésies 179-180). The poem opens the book by inviting the reader to a toast to:

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[76] "Imagination flowers and vanishes, swiftly, following the flow of the writing, round the fragmentary stations of a capitalised phrase introduced by and extended from the title. Everything takes place, in sections, by supposition; narrative is avoided. In addition this use of the bare thought with its retreats, prolongations, and flights, by reason of its very design, for anyone wishing to read it aloud, results in a score." (EPC Digital Library)

Rien, cette écume, vierge vers *Une ivresse belle m'engage*
A ne désigner que la coupe; *Sans craindre même son tangage*
Telle loin se noie une troupe *De porter debout ce salut*
De sirènes mainte a l'envers

Nous naviguons, ô mes divers *Solitude, récif, étoile*
Amis, moi déjà sur la poupe *A n'importe ce qui valut*
Vous l'avant fastueux qui coupe *Le blanc souci de notre toile.*
Le flot de foudres et d'hivers; (Poésies 3)[77]

Just as the toast is to nothing, the "virgin verse" designating nothing other than the champagne glass is symbolized through the foam describing the contours of its container. The glass contains nothing but foam–the poem is not just *vierge vers* but *vierge verre*, a container that, rather than carrying an intoxicating liquid to the lips in a traditional poetic paradigm, holds a foam that simply gives the translucent glass an opaque form. Rather than narrating, teaching, or describing*,* which Mallarmé equates to "prendre ou de mettre dans la main d'autrui en silence une pièce de monnaie"[78] in *Crise de Vers*, *Salut* only "communicates" foam, fluff, images that don't refer to anything outside of the poem, their container.

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[77] "Nothing[,] this foam and virgin verse
To designate nought but the cup;
Such, far off, there plunges a troop
Of many Sirens upside down.

We are navigating, my diverse
Friends[,] I already on the poop
You the splendid prow which cuts
The main of thunders and of winters;

A fine ebriety calls me
Without fear of its rolling
To carry, upright, this toast

Solitude, reef, star
To whatever it was that was worth
Our sail's white solicitude" (Fry 47, with minor alterations).

[78] "taking or placing a coin in someone else's hand"

As Charles Mauron comments in the index to our English translation, "at once the word 'foam' evokes resonances of the sea" (Poems 181). Yes, but the transition from the image of the champagne glass to the image of the sea is more than superficially associative–the image of the ship as transport relates directly to the poetic paradigm which, like the upside down Sirens, Mallarmé seeks to invert.[79] The ship is being steered, but the sail is set to nowhere in particular. Mallarmé eschews the simple trade ship of a traditional poetic transport for a vessel as pointless as the champagne glass full of foam. The point is neither to bring exotic goods to or from somewhere nor to bring the poet and his *divers amis* to some destination, but simply to be borne over the waters in an empty vessel. The white solicitude of *la toile*–the ship's sail but also a canvas–completely literalizes the play of the page of poetry as an empty container. The poem ends with a gesture towards the white page, meaninglessly and aimlessly directing the poetic craft, which exists only for the sake of floating on the sea, which surrounds and describes its empty hull, onwards.

Similar imagery is carried over in several poems later in the volume. *Brise Marine* engages heavily with the Baudelarian trope of setting out on a poetic journey due to unbearable boredom but ends with the request "*Mais, ô mon cœur, entends le chant des matelots!*"[80] The sailors exist only as victims of hypothetical shipwrecks of which the sea leaves no evidence–the song containing their story can only exist as an absence, yet the poetic voice ends the poem longing to hear it. Like the champagne foam, the absent sailors' absent song exists only to mirror

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[79] …and which Baudelaire ironized in both verse and prose before him. See, for example, Barbara Johnson's reading of the "second Baudelarian revolution" in *Défigurations du langage poétique,* where she argues that the prose poem *Un Hémisphère dans une Chevelure* ironizes and problematizes the supposed poetic voyage of the verse version, *La Chevelure* (Johnson 31-55).

[80] "But, oh my heart, hear the sailors' song!"

the poem's own emptiness back onto itself. *Ses purs ongles…* (an earlier version of which

Mallarmé named "*Sonnet allégorique de lui-même[81]*") contains a similar play on impossibility

with the "*nul ptyx,*" qualified by the line immediately following it, *"Aboli bibelot d'inanité*

sonore."[82] The *ptyx,* a seemingly meaningless word which Mallarmé hoped to have created

through the magic of the rhyme (Poésies 240) is gone from the *salon vide* "Car le Maître est allé

puiser des pleurs au Styx / Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s'honore."[83] The object described by

the meaningless word, present only through its absence in the main scene of the poem, becomes

a container for the Styx's water of forgetting. Again, the poem does nothing but reflect on its

own status as a container containing nothing.

The poem perhaps the most relevant to *Coup de dés* is the sonnet "A la nue accablante tu"

which "evokes the drama of *Coup de dés* in miniature" (Poésies 256). The poem's blindingly

obscure language reflects the scene it depicts: foam floating on the sea where there could have

been one of two things, either a shipwreck or a siren:

A la nue accablante tu
Basse de basalte et de laves
A même les échos esclaves
Par une trompe sans vertu

Quel sépulcral naufrage (tu
Le sais, écume, mais y baves)
Suprême une entre les épaves
Abolit le mât dévêtu

Ou cela que furibond faute
De quelque perdition haute
Tout l'abîme vain éployé

Dans le si blanc cheveu qui
[traîne]
Avarement aura noyé
Le flanc enfant d'une sirène

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[81] "Sonnet allegoric of itself"

[82] "no ptyx / Abolished bibelot of sonorous inanity"

[83] "empty salon," "For the Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx / With this sole object which
Nothingness honors"

(Poésies 71)[84]

Neither the shipwreck nor the siren are depicted; they are only imagined hypothetically,

suspended together through the third stanza's "Ou." The poem thus navigates the Scylla and

Charybdis of the two images, settling on neither but leaving them doubly hypothetical. What the

poem says is: if something did happen there, it could have been this, or it could have been that.

Thus the poem's images are so far removed from the concrete or even the imaginary realm that

all that remains is the location of their potential occurrence; this is summed up in the words of

Coup de dés, "Rien n'aura eu lieu que le lieu.[85]" The first and third stanzas which introduce the

two potential scenes of the poem are overwhelmingly vague and abstract, and only become

comprehensible upon having read the stanzas that follow them, which introduce the concrete

terms *naufrage* and *sirène* (which only arrives at the end of the poem). And the place–the water,

the sea surface, etc., is never even named, but only inferred obliquely. The result is a poem

requiring a certain kind of navigation–like the image in *Salut*, Mallarmé places his reader on the

prow, cutting the water ahead of the ship. In other words, the reader is put out ahead of the

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[84] "To the clouds overwhelming husht
Base of lava and basalt
To even the echoes enslaved
By a trump without virtue

What sepulcral shipwreck (you
Know it foam, but only slaver)
Supreme one among the flotsam
Abolished the undressed mast

Or that which furious fault
Of some high perdition
All the vain abyss let loose

In the so white hair that trains
Avariciously will have drowned
The childish flank of a siren" (my translation after Fry 124).

[85] "Nothing will have taken place but the place."

images before they occur and must distinguish them through the disorienting mist of the abstract language; likewise, Mallarmé navigates us "between" the two non-events of the poem although they both existed in a hypothetical past on the same spot.

The navigation required by "A la nue accablante tu," like many other Mallarmé poems, is one of sense-making. On the level of the text itself, the poem has a linear form. The poem consists of four stanzas and even has the rhythm and rhyme of a traditional sonnet. The content– above all the difficult grammar and vocabulary–is all that suggests or would lead to a non-linear approach to reading. There is no question as to how the poem should be recited or as to what order the words actually go in. The form is locked in place. But the grammatical suspensions (the parenthetical phrase in the second stanza for example) and reversals (the last two lines for example) require jumps to be made and connections to be drawn that the text itself does not make for the reader.

Coup de dés, on the other hand, requires actual navigation and decision making in order to be read– even the line "RIEN / N'AURA EU LIEU / QUE LE LIEU" is put together out of three separate lines across two pages with many other lines dispersed in between. Espen Aarseth deploys a useful pair of terms–cybertext and ergodic literature–to describe literature that, due to its formal organization, refuses linearity and leaves the task of path making up to the reader. In a normal piece of text like a sonnet or the one you are now reading, the mechanical organization of the text is necessarily part of the background, but:

> The concept of cybertext focuses on the mechanical organization of the text, by positing the intricacies of the medium as an integral part of the literary exchange. However, it also centers attention on the consumer, or user, of the text, as a more integrated figure than even reader-response theorists would claim. The performance of their reader takes place all in his head, while the user of cybertext

> also performs in an extranoematic sense. During the cybertextual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of "reading" do not account for. This phenomenon I call *ergodic*, using a term appropriated from physics that derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning "work" and "path." In ergodic literature, nontrivial effort is required to allow the reader to traverse the text. (Aarseth 1)

As *Coup de dés* is read, or even before it can be read, it requires that a path be made through the text. While Mallarmé's sonnets require mental or grammatical navigation in order to be "read," in other words, "made sense of," *Coup de dés* in its most difficult moments requires mechanical navigation across the page in order to be read–not just on the level of making sense, but before that on the level of putting words in a specific order in which they can begin to make sense. The image of the constellation that Mallarmé evokes at the end of the poem is entirely appropriate. The author provides the points, and leaves it up to his readers to draw the lines between them.

When Mauron argues that in *Coup de dés* "Mallarmé wished to give visual expression to a complicated train of thought by showing us, one after another, the images of a kind of intellectual film" (Fry 283-284) he overlooks what makes the text ergodic. Aarseth contrasts the position of the reader of a traditional linear text as "a spectator" or "voyeur" who is "Safe but impotent" to that of the "cybertext reader" who "is not safe" (Aarseth 4). "The cybertext reader," he continues, "*is* a player, a gambler; the cybertext *is* a game-world or a world-game; it *is* possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery" (ibid). Where Mauron compares the poem to a train and a film–both entirely linear technologies where the "operator" controls little more than the speed–a reading of the poem as cybertext suggests two specific metaphors that are

much more in harmony with the poem's own world of images: a ship on the open sea and a game of dice.

A "train" of thought follows coherent and linear tracks; while the *Coup de dés* does have a fairly linear progression and falling motion, the branching grammatical possibilities that open up throughout the poem depict a much less bound and linear way of thinking. Like in *Salut*, the navigation is done by the reader and the writer together, but there are surely no "tracks" along which the reader is lead. In the preface Mallarmé writes that "traits sonores réguliers ou vers – plutôt, de subdivisions prismatiques de l'Idée" appear "dans quelque mise en scène spirituelle exacte, c'est à des places variables, près ou loin du fil conducteur latent, en raison de la vraisemblance, que s'impose le texte"[86] (Mallarmé 442). This "fil conducteur latent" is the closest thing the poem has to "tracks," but rather than following it, the text appears in variable places around it. The poem does have a certain amount of linearity, but the path is dispersed around the "guiding thread." The advantage of the distancing, Mallarmé writes, is to accelerate or slow the speed of "le mouvement, le scandant, l'intimant même selon une vision simultanée de la page"[87]–the result is a kind of unity which comes "d'après la mobilité de l'écrit, autour des arrêts fragmentairs d'une phrase capitale dès le titre introduite et continuée."[88] There is a "thread" that is followed and surrounded, but the reader is not bound to one line of text. If writing shows a "train of thought" it surely goes along the normal tracks of standard prose. The

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[86] "regular sonorous lines or verse – rather prismatic subdivisions of the Idea [appear] in some precise intellectual performance, that is in variable positions, nearer to or further from the [latent] guiding thread, because of the verisimilitude the text imposes" (EPC Digital Library, interjections added).

[87] "the movement, the scansion, the sequence even, according to a simultaneous vision of the page."

[88] "after the mobility of the writing, around the fragmentary stations of a capitalised phrase introduced by and extended from the title" (my translation after EPC Digital Library).

key is that "[t]out se passe, par racourci, en hypothèse; on évite le récit"[89] (442-443). The reader

is required to make hypothesis and experiments in order to follow the invisible trace of fishing

line pulling the poem down. The "fil conducteur latent," like many of the images from

Mallarmé's sonnets, is only present by implication and can only be approached through

hypothesis. If the form of *Coup de dés* suggests an image of a transport, it is a ship wandering

across an ocean–but also the pieces of the broken ship floating on an ocean and the stars of a

constellation reflected in the water– the point is that there is no clear "track" for the train of

thought to be bound to, that the poem is deliberately localized in the ocean because the ocean is

exactly what doesn't lead and bind in the way language normally would, but opens, obscures,

even drowns. If the poem "pulls" us anywhere it is down rather than across or towards, *là-bas* in

the literal sense ("down there") rather than the colloquial ("over there").

Mauron is drawn to the image of film because the pages of *Un coup de dés* can be read as

tableaux with visual compositions that are brought into motion through language. Mallarmé's

mention of the "vision simultané de la page" in the preface confirms this, but unlike the images

seen in film, language requires that a certain path be made–the words don't just move by

themselves, but need to be put into an order by a reader to move, and Mallarmé with obvious

purpose neglects to provide an authoritative method for finding a path through the poem. To

"read" the poem, the reader must take the risk of drawing their own line through the words on

the page. The two page spread with "LE MAÎTRE" in the top left shows this well (426-427).

The grammar sometimes seems to draw the path across the fold between the pages, like with

"que se / prépare" and sometimes seems to bar the grammar onto one page, as with the few lines

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[89] "Everything takes place, by shortcut, through hypothesis; story is avoided."

at the bottom of the page, either "un / envahit le chef" or "un / naufrage cela." There is no rule or regularity as to how the poem should be read across the fold (or even on the individual page), and the reader is asked to experiment with different methods of reading without being given an authoritative path to follow. Hence the image of the dice game in which both the writer and the reader are players. The reader engages simultaneously on the one hand in the gamble of constructing a path through the text and on the other in the gamble of constructing a thought out of the text–the two gambles inform each other as they go on. "Veillant / doutant / roulant / brillant et méditant   /   avant de s'arrêter / à quelque point dernier qui le sacre" (441)– these lines describe the falling and rolling movement of dice as much as they describe the experience of reading and writing the poem, as well as the experience of a thought coming into being. Aarseth writes that the "effort and energy demanded by the cybertext of its reader raise the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention" (Aarseth 4). The position of writer as master and reader as student become intertwined in a cybertext. Of course, the original writer inscribes and arranges the words, which in a sense contributes to the way in which meaning is made, but the reader is forced to take a hand in this process, which leads to a sense of agency and influence, but also puts the reader of the cybertext, to use Aarseth's phrase which is totally appropriate to Mallarmé, "at risk" (ibid)– the reader is no longer in the passive, safe position of the viewer, but is himself in the game.

But Mauron's reliance on inappropriate images that aren't included in the language of the poem (or Mallarmé's poetry in general) reveals the key problem with his reading: it works within the exact paradigm of poetry-as-representation that Mallarmé's entire poetic project struggled against. The *Coup de dés* is not an image of the poet's thought, but an "emploi à nu de la

pensée"–the bare *employment* or use of thought. A filmic image of thought would be far from

Mallarmé's ideal "œuvre pure [qui] implique la disparition élocutoire du poëte, qui cède

l'initiative aux mots" (Mallarmé 256)[90]. One of the main ways that Mallarmé's earlier, more

traditional poetry strives towards this disappearance is through its complete emphasis on self-

reflexive form, hence the "nul ptyx," the toast to the champagne glass full of foam, or the

description of the possibility or fiction of two past events or objects of description in "A la nu."

The emphasis is not on the object of description–so, the depiction of a "train of thought" through

some sort of filmic poetry–but through the enactment and instantiation of a thought or idea that,

because it is a thought that is in strict opposition to poetic depiction, can *only* be enacted, and not

described. Rather than a film, the poem is a musical score requiring interpretation and

performance to be set in motion.

Rancière writes of Mallarmé: "If philosophy is present, it must therefore be in the

specific way in which thought 'takes place', in which the Idea is inscribed in the *form* of the

poem, on this side of the ordinary forms of discursive thought" (Rancière 44, emphasis added).

The idea underpinning the poem is enacted through its form rather than contained in it. The

focus is on the glass itself, not what it carries; unlike Baudelaire who dwells extensively on the

exotic perfumes carried in a poetic transport, Mallarmé focuses entirely on the ship. It is not

through an interplay of images and metaphors signified through the poetic language that the

philosophy is revealed, but through the way in which the form "takes place." The form

(container) does not exist for the sake of communicating and reinforcing the content (contained)

like it would in lyrical poetry. The "content" of the words exists for the purpose of filling out

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[90] "The pure work [that] implies the disappearance of the poet speaking, who yields the initiate to
words" (Divagations 208).

and making the poetic form visible. Yet the motion of *Coup de dés* is to take what had been the

dense and perfected form of the earlier poetry and to disperse it–if the (artificial) beginning of

Mallarmé's poetic mission is the raising of the glass of champagne foam in *Salut,* the end (which

is itself another more radical beginning) is *Coup de dés*, where Mallarmé smashes the glass on

the ground and makes his reader interpret the glittering shards like a constellation. The

homophony between "vers" and "verre" (verse and glass) is one of Mallarmé's favorites– it's not

inappropriate to say that the "crise de vers" quickly becomes a "bris de verre."[91]

That is not to say that *Coup de dés* is formless, but that it is an anti-form. It resists

formation at the same time that it requires it–the *ergon* of the text is Sisyphean, the shipwrecked

vessel can't be reassembled. We still manage to make a raft that gets us to the end of the poem,

whose undertow constantly draws us down. But this downward movement also implies a

possible upwards trajectory. *Coup de dés,* with its dispersion of verse and meditation on the

impossibility of abolishing chance, dives directly into *le hasard.* But Mallarmé says in *Le*

Mystère dans les Lettres, reading should conquer "le hasard" "mot par mot"[92] (288). In this

view, *Coup de dés* is hardly reading or writing– it is playing, betting, or adventuring. There must

be, as a mirror image in the sky reflected in the water, some ideal text opposed to the *Coup de*

dés that *could* abolish chance, that could really be "read." This is Mallarmé's *Livre*, the imagined

but never actualized text of pure and perfect architecture that would sum up all of literature and

swallow all of existence. If *Coup de dés* is a failure, it is only so in reference to *le Livre,* not on

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[91] The credit for this pun that of course only a native francophone could come up with goes to Éric Trudel.

[92] "chance"… "word by word."

its way to becoming the ideal text, but as hazardous, fragmented reality in contrast with the

perfectly structured Book which can only exist in the imagination.

Vincent Kaufmann describes Mallarmé's *Livre* as "le livre total, qui devait représenter à

lui seul le tout de la littérature"[93] (Kaufmann 21). It is a totalizing project, the book in which

everything would be absorbed–as Mallarmé writes, summarizing "une proposition qui émane de

[lui]" in *Le Livre, Instrument Spirituel*: "tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre"[94]

(Mallarmé 274). But, in accord with Mallarmé's project, the way in which the book totalizes is

neither representative nor pedagogical, "La totalisation ne passe plus dans son cas ni par une

rhétorique pédagogique, ni par une entreprise encyclopédique, mais uniquement par une activité

de manipulation d'autrui devenu le support d'un calcul de la totalité des effets de la parole

poétique"[95] (Kaufmann 95). In other words, the Book does not strive for representative totality

(everything in the world is depicted in the book) nor educational totality (everything you could

ever learn is taught through the book) but through formal, even grammatical totality: the Book

contains every possible permutation and manipulation of poetic form, purified of content or

representation. "La lecture du Livre, c'est une récitation, une opération de totalisation qui réduit

tous les discours au même, les faisant disparaître en tant qu'événements de parole"[96] (ibid). *Le

Livre* is completely formal and mechanic, it exists as spea*king* rather than spok*en* content. Yet, at

the same time, as Kaufmann writes, "Le Livre, semble-t-il, reste nécessairement et

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[93] "the total book, which must by itself represent all of literature."

[94] "a proposition which comes from [him]," "everything in the world exists to end up in a book.".

[95] "In this case the totalization no longer takes place through a pedagogical rhetoric nor through an encyclopedic enterprise, but solely through an activity of manipulation of others that has become the support of a calculation of the totality of effects of poetic speech."

[96] "Reading the book is a recitation, an operation of totalization that reduces all discourse to the same thing, making them disappear as events of speech."

irréductiblement virtuel; il ne peut avoir lieu que sous forme de fragments, qui en font miroiter

l'existence et la place"[97] (Kaufmann 23). It is nothing but active, but only virtually; it is nothing

but its own taking place, but only hypothetically.

Jacques Scherer sums up the existential status of *le Livre* quite well: "Comme Dieu,

comme la vie, le Livre est absurde, impensable. Il existe sans exister vraiment, comme les êtres

de littérature. De fait, c'est ce qu'il est"[98] (Scherer IX). *Le Livre* is *un être de littérature* in

several senses. First, it is the ultimate existence of literature: it is the entirety of literature united

in one being. Secondly, it exists only through suspension, through being written and talked about

but never actually created–even the *feuillets du Livre* collected in Scherer's book, *Le "Livre" de*

Mallarmé, are only plans, sketches, and descriptions of the book. What we have of the book

itself are descriptions encircling a nonexistent nucleus. The first two senses are combined in the

third sense: *le Livre* is necessarily a fiction, not just in the sense of it being imaginary, but in the

doubly fictive sense of its being impossibly so: *le Livre* is the imagination of something that

cannot be imagined, the fiction of an impossible fiction, the literary existence of impossible

literature.

Blanchot equates the *Coup de dés* with *le Livre*, which he explores through his idea of "*le*

livre à venir," that is, the book "to come" that never actually arrives and can only exist in the

future, *l'avenir.* Blanchot's assertion, "*Un Coup de dés* is the book to come" (Blanchot 239) can

only be understood in reference to a sentence preceding it: "The work is the expectation of the

work" (ibid). For Blanchot, the poetic work is only present through its absence, which is felt

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[97] "The Book, it seems, stays necessarily and irreducibly virtual; it can only take place in the form of fragments, which mirror existence and place."

[98] "Like God, like life, the Book is absurd, unthinkable. It exists without actually existing, like the beings of literature. In fact, that's what it is."

insofar as the work is expected or waited for. That is not to say that poetry does not exist, nor that its absence is that of a complete void. It is not that poetry does not exist, but that it exists as something in the future. It "is" in the same way that the future "is" something that will come. The expectation of the work looking towards the future exists, but the work itself never actually arrives. "The presence of poetry is still to come: it comes from beyond the future and does not stop coming when it is here…. Nothing certain seems to appear" (239). The sentence should not be read as though the presence of poetry has not yet come, but that the presence of poetry "is" in the form of being on-the-way. If the *Coup de dés* "is" *le Livre* it is only by virtue of it *not* being *le Livre*, but being the constantly unfulfilled expectation of its arrival, the fiction of the possibility of the Book's fiction. In Blanchot's sense, *Coup de dés* is, much like Heidegger's project in *Sein und Zeit* or Nietzsche's tightrope walker in *Zarathustra*, always *unterwegs*, on the way to *le Livre* but–and this is its defining characteristic–never arriving.

But being "on the way" to *le Livre* implies a certain accomplishment. A work that is the expectation of *the* Work is aimed in its direction. Blanchot writes that in *Coup de dés,* "[f]or the first time, the inner space of thought and language is represented in a perceptible way" (240). This representation is not symbolic, but physical– it is "visible typographically" in a way tending towards visual art. Yet, as Blanchot points out, this is a contradiction with Mallarmé's own view of language as the absence of the signified: "Now he gives language–whose unreal force of absence he had pondered–all the existence and all the material reality that this very language had been commanded to dispel. The 'tacit flight of abstraction' is transformed into a visible landscape of words. I no longer say 'a flower'; I draw it with syllables" (ibid). Blanchot argues that the contradiction in Mallarmé is transcended by Mallarmé insofar as, in the pure work at

which *Coup de dés* aims, the language's power of representation is given over purely to the

poetic form. It is pure architecture. Through its existence as poetic architecture that, of course,

has to fall short of the ideal *Livre* which Blanchot makes sure to qualify as something essentially

futural–*à venir*–*Coup de dés* "is" *le Livre,* in other words the expectation of *le Livre: le livre à*

venir.

      Blanchot's view of *Coup de dés* is compelling. But rather than being defined by its

success as regards l*e Livre* by virtue of its being "on the way" to something that will never come

(Blanchot writes: "*If it were* is enough for [Mallarmé]"), *Coup de dés* should above all be read as

a *failure* to achieve this ideal. As we have seen, there is something essentially metaphoric going

on in *Coup de dés*. It can only be understood by engaging in a representational and symbolizing

kind of reading that is predicated on an understanding of Mallarmé's poetics. Mallarmé's

mention of the two kinds of readers in the poem's preface helps show this. *Coup de dés* also

meditates on and formally demands a "gamble" and "navigation." In other words it takes as its

subject and performs the moment in which writer and reader *take aim* and *delimit the possible*

range of possibilities. *Coup de dés* is pure *commencement*– and as Mallarmé writes in the actual

fragments of *le Livre* "un livre ne commence ni finit: tout au plus fait-il semblant" (Scherer

feuillet 181). A book neither begins nor finishes: at most it pretends to. Because beginning is a

choice, it implies an infinite array of choices that weren't made: beginning is as much a moment

of inclusion as it is of exclusion, and is this way it is terminal, determinate, fatal.

      Le Livre, the book which would encapsulate everything and all of literature is not

impossible because such a work *could* never be finished, because the author would die before

being able to perfect it. It is not a task outside of human possibility just because life isn't long

enough to complete it. *Le Livre* is not impossible because of death, but because by its very nature it can never begin. If, to exist, something must begin, that means that in existing it excludes all other possible existences. What follows is that what does *not* exist is exactly what exists as the possibility of everything: *le Livre* totalizes only hypothetically, in other words, totalization is only possible hypothetically, as something that does not and can not exist outside of the realm of fiction.

But the poem can and does exist. It begins: "UN COUP DE DÉS / JAMAIS / QUAND BIEN MÊME LANCÉ DANS DES CIRCONSTANCES / ÉTERNELLES / DU FOND D'UN NAUFRAGE … N'ABOLIRA … LE HASARD"[99] (421-423). The "eternal circumstances" could be some sort of existence transcending death. They have no end, there is nothing to stop their motion. Yet even in such circumstances a throw of the dice can not abolish chance. By virtue of being thrown, the dice role into and out of chance. No matter how many times they are thrown, the result can never be predicted. Perhaps "du fond d'un naufrage" qualifies "des circonstances / éternelles" – the eternal circumstances are the circumstances of death. The dice are thrown out of a nothingness, yet this act seems to defy the nothingness out of which it emerges. Even a pen that doesn't exist put down to a paper that doesn't exist in a scenario entirely imagined could never write a book that would abolish chance and contingency.

The pen appears throughout the poem: "*plume solitaire éperdue / sauf / que la rencontre ou l'effleure une toque de minuit*"[100] (432-433) and "*Choit / la plume / rhythmique suspens du*

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[99] "A throw of the dice / never / even when thrown in circumstances / eternal / from the bottom of a shipwreck … will abolish … chance"

[100] "*solitary plume overwhelmed / save / the encounter or the graze of a cap of midnight*"

sinistre"[101] (437). The pen falls, it is alone, but it is also suspended, also encountering the strange celestial "cap of midnight." The page, too, like in *Salut,* appears: "*cette blancheur rigide / dérisoire / en opposition au ciel*"[102] (433). It is rigid, opposed to the sky, but laughable, a failure. The "Master" appears, but as only through his loss in the shipwreck. He is "sans nef / n'importe / où vaine"[103] (427), "hors d'anciencs calculs / où la manœuvre avec l'âge oubliée"[104] (ibid), "surgi / inférant de cette conflagration / à ses pieds / de l'horizon unanime"[105] (426 - 427). To a certain extent this is all nonsense, but that is part of the point. The shipwreck confuses the language, swallows the master, forgets the directions, both isolates the master's pen and mixes it with the sky. The tiny square of the page, laughable next to the immense dome of the sky, also manages to reflect it in its whiteness. The master–the poet? the reader?–tries to find his feet, but the horizon has become "unanimous," homogenous. The sky and the sea mix together. The poem can hardly be read, we instead try to grab on. The "béante profondeur" of "cette voile alternative" is compared to "la coque / d'un bâtiment / penché de l'un ou l'autre bord"[106] (425). The sail and the page, brought together, like in *Salut,* by "voile," become the ship's hull rocking from side to side. The drunkenness is hardly poetic intoxication, but the disorientation of seasickness. Assuming the master is a figure of the poet, even he is overwhelmed in the shipwreck. The vessel – the language – is completely destabilized. Finding one's footing is

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[101] "*Falls / the plume / rhythmic suspense of the disaster*"

[102] "*this rigid whiteness / derisory / in opposition to the sky*"

[103] "without vessel / no matter / where vain"

[104] "outside of old calculations / where the maneuver with the age forgotten"

[105] "sprung / inferring / of this conflagration / at his feet / of the unanimous horizon"

[106] "gaping profundity" of "this alternative sail" .. "the hull / of a vessel / pitching from one board to the other"

difficult enough, mastering and commanding the vessel, already overcome by the waves, is impossible.

The poem ends with the image of a constellation. "EXCEPTÉ … PEUT-ÊTRE … UNE CONSTELLATION"[107] (440-441). The constellation is the exception, the product of the throw of the dice. The constellation is somewhere between chance and its abolition. It is "froide d'oubli et de désuétude" but "pas tant / qu'elle n'énumère / sur quelque surface vacante et supérieure / le heurt successif / sidéralement / d'un compte total en formation"[108] (441). The moment resonates with Blanchot's reading. The "compte total en formation" can be seen as *le Livre*, always coming into formation but never resting. It is not a story or a lesson, but an account, even a reckoning. The constellation's totality, like *le Livre*'s, is mathematical, architectural. But the poem, by nature of having begun, has to stop; the dice, by nature of having been thrown, have to fall. The constellation can't take up the entire sky. But it is an account of the heavens, a way of dividing up the world so that it can be understood, so that we have some objective measure above our heads by which we can navigate the seas. The problem is that the constellation is never perfect nor complete, it is by definition part of the heavens, not a total account of the entire sky.

The poem's penultimate lines, "avant de s'arrêter / à quelque point dernier qui le sacre"[109] describe the inevitable limitation inscribed in and from the beginning. The *point de sacrer* is the moment when the constellation is really drawn, where the poem goes from the forming reflection of the sky in its entirety to an image confined to the bounds of a piece of

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[107] "EXCEPT … PERHAPS … A CONSTELLATION"

[108] "cold with forgetfulness and obsolescence" but "not enough / that it doesn't enumerate / on some surface vacant and superior / the sequential clash / sidereally / of a total account in formation"

[109] "before stopping / at some final point which sanctifies it"

paper. In being sanctified–in stopping their course–the dice, the constellation, and the poem are born. They are all born into motion, but the motion is restricted to the boundaries between beginning and end, which contain each other.

The poem ends on the same words it began, also its title. Although it is the end of the poem, the line "Toute Pensé émet un Coup de Dés" can easily be seen as the seed, sitting at the very bottom, out of which the whole thing grows. The poem isn't a loop, it doesn't start again once we reach the bottom like some sort of endless rollercoaster. Rather, the end and the beginning describe and contain each other in the same way that a dice throw "contains" the result. Because the poem is an actual thing, it must begin and end, both in time and space. If it is "on the way" towards totalization, the exercise is futile. But the poem is a meditation on this futility, on the terrible confusing shipwreck that inevitably occurs when trying to describe a path that could somehow swallow the entire globe. It sets out in anticipation of its downfall, willingly and directly into it, because the break, the disintegration, and failure are all inscribed within the act of setting out in the first place.

Afterthought

"Aber es gehört mehr Muth dazu, ein Ende zu machen als einen neuen Vers: das wissen alle Ärzte und Dichter"[110] -Zarathustra 216

"If my mind could gain a firm footing, I would not make essays, I would make decisions; but it is always in apprenticeship and on trial" -Montaigne, Of Repentance[111]

The fear of Mallarmé's dice player isn't in the possibility of winning or losing, but in the fact that the dice can only land on one side. It may take more courage to end than it does to begin, but the dice player realizes that the beginning "makes" the ending, that the fear of the ending is contained in the fear of the beginning. The dice, by virtue of being thrown, have to land. One can imagine a poet who easily begins new verses but can't finish anything. Yet the "unfinished" verse still has a beginning and an end. Whether or not we take control and "finish" something, it still always ends by virtue of having begun. The difficulty in writing an ending is not so much the anxiety of giving the work an end– it has one whether we decide what it is or not. Rather, the anxiety comes from beginning the last sentence on the one hand (it is our last chance to throw the dice), and from the requirement of leaving the reader with something on the other. The work *really* begins once we write the last line: that is when we lose control over it, when we let it fall into the hands of whomever may take it.

Heidegger himself sketched an entire second book of *Sein und Zeit* that was never finished. An attempt at an explanation of this fact would just fall into speculation, but it is worth noting that the book is "unfinished," whatever that may mean. Despite this, the end and the beginning of what we have still mirror one another, and the book still has an effective ending.

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[110] "But it takes more courage to make an end than to make a new verse: that all physicians and poets know" (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 166).

[111] Thanks to Thomas Bartscherer for bringing me to this passage in Montaigne at the perfect moment.

But the end is a question mark rather than a period. The book ends by opening rather than closing the discussion. Nietzsche implicitly places a question mark at the end of his thought, too. It is the skepticism of experiment: "*Versuchen wir's*!" – "Let's try it!" Nietzsche makes claims not by promising (*versprechen*), but by attempting (*versuchen*). The goal of a hypothesis (as opposed to a thesis) or of an essay (as opposed to a treatise) is to open up a discussion, to see how it goes, not to decide, but to search (*suchen*). Mallarmé's claim, "toute pensée émet un coup de dés," is one that both takes over and undermines itself. It is self reflexive, it does exactly what it describes, or rather, is the result of what it describes. It *is* itself a "coup de dés," a wager. The claim accounts for its own groundlessness, which does not redeem it or purify it, but makes it responsible for the cost of its wager.

The other side of a text that reflects on itself or takes responsibility for itself is that it incites reflection and response in its readers. Such a text can't convince its readers because it is suspicious of itself, it understands and displays its limits. A text or thought that is not suspicious of or responsible for itself confines itself within its own limits. It ends by closing off the discussion. It demands that it have the last word. But a text that reflects on its limits manages somehow to spill beyond them. Such a book ends by opening up. The text is still necessarily confined between a front and back cover, but this containment gives it a power that transcends these necessary limits. It remains alive, it is not just an argument, but a conversation partner. It ends, but only in one sense. Rather than demanding the last word, it understands its ending as a new beginning for someone or something else. The exclusion inherent in the moment in which it came into being–its beginning–opens out into a new and unfilled space, which it then offers us.

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