Logos and the Essence of Technology

Holger Schmid

Abstract The present study takes up Martin Heidegger's claim that today's technoscientific reality cannot be properly understood unless seen as the issue of a 2,300 year "incubation." Against long-lived clichés of romanticizing archaism—the "nostalgia for Greece" for example—this claim here appears in light of a consistently Pauline-Johannine futurism.

Accordingly, modern technology, that is "metaphysics" itself, is to be envisioned from a vantage point where, above all, world and language are known to arise from one and the same constitution, as implied in the key terms of *logos* and *poiesis*. Hence there must once again be talk of "the Greeks": respecting Heidegger's *Sache* as well as meditating upon his methods.

As technology today comes to be ever more identical with reality in general, we face a condition of "reality" which is patently indebted to the world-constitutive function of scientific knowledge (with its emphasis on the species of natural—or "physical"—science, to the extent that this mode of scientific thought has consequently all but absorbed its former antagonist, the "moral," i.e., the human sciences). The self-dissolution or melting into one, as it were, of these traditional antitheses seems inescapably to mark the ultimate peak of modernity. What used to appears to be nature turns out now to be a social construction of simulacra—or technologically generated "fictions." Nature, we are assured, does not exist. All of this, we believe, could not have been foreseen during the first half of the twentieth century, when, during and subsequent to World War I, Heidegger and many others encountered technology as a "planetary" problem. It is this coincidence of nature and technology that surely constitutes the most revolutionary aspect of the world-change we are currently undergoing. And yet, we are at the same time reminded of a passage in Plato,

H. Schmid (✉)
Université de Lille 3, 24, rue de Thionville, F-59000 Lille, France
e-mail: holger.schmid@univ-lille3.fr

one which is precisely adduced by Heidegger in the course of his own enquiring after technology: "Everything that is responsible [*aitia*] for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry." (Symp. 205b)[1] Faced with such a coincidence between *physis* and *poiesis*, (which Heidegger will praise as "Greek"), we might well surmise that our most recent technological revolutions are but the perfection of Platonist metaphysics: nature finally recognized as illusion, as simulacrum. To that extent, Heidegger's question as a task of thinking the nexus between science *qua* "modern natural science" (reason-giving: *logos*) and technology does not involve us in the old cliché of Romanticism: of immediacy lost and regained. Much rather could one claim, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration, that Heidegger remains ever indifferent to the past as such, a Pauline futurist or eschatologist throughout—a disposition that seems in paradoxical contrast to his insistent recourse to the Ancients, to "the Greeks." To explore this apparent paradox with respect to the "essence" of technology is the goal of what follows.

1   Modes of Incubation

It is surely not difficult to concede that in the last 250 years of Western history (i.e., since the First Industrial Revolution) there has been a crucial link between modern science and technology: since the beginning of the world of machines, that is, the beginning of "modern technology."[2] But Heidegger's more specific point is that the principle of sufficient reason, as embodied in Leibniz' thought, is to be recognized as that which transpires today (having only today become visible in its unfolding), constituting as it were the metaphysical ground of our still (and especially) "metaphysically" informed present. Heidegger's anti-historicist question thus intends to be an anamnesis of the present and its aetiology. It is precisely in the reason-giving principle that Leibniz refers us back to Plato's Socrates and to his paradigm of the only life worth living: one that is perpetually examined and controlled by *logon didonai* (*Apol*. 38A). Thus the relevant time lag would actually intensify—and it will increase further. And yet the whole idea of a chronological sequence might seem misconceived, for the very point of Heidegger's anamnesis is that technology is not at all an independent entity to be set over against metaphysics or theory. Technology, such is the thesis, is to be found *qua* "practice" precisely at the core, and as the core, of metaphysics itself. Hence, part of Heidegger's anamnesis will be to ascribe to the principle of sufficient reason-giving what he calls an "incubation period" of no less than 2,300 years.[3] What breaks out like a disease (or like the brooding of an egg) has thus been prepared over the course of a very long era. "Older" than technology, in any event, is the "essence" of technics, which holds sway not only in modern science, but in European science as such. Thus we may

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[1] See Heidegger (1977a), 10.

[2] See, e.g., Kockelmans (1985), 173.

[3] Heidegger (1996), first section.

say that this essence as it reigns today—to the extent precisely that it is itself nothing technological—is what began to rise 2,300 years ago: that is, in Heidegger's sense, *metaphysics*.

Is the principle of reason then to be qualified as a disease? Once again, we are reminded of Socrates who famously professes, a moment before his death, to owe a rooster to the healing god Asclepius. Is then Socrates' ever-examined life of *logon didonai* that very disease? What has this to do with Socrates' kind of open-ended questioning that might well be called the piety of his thought? Is *logon didonai* a condition, a factor, or the heart of the disease? Is the history of thinking or metaphysics the history of nihilism? In such anamnesis, would there not be, once again, a normative implication of nostalgia for a painless, pre-nihilistic state of "health"? But we should in any case be careful with our metaphors—and with the Pavlovian reflexes they are liable to provoke. A few things seem initially plausible—even before we begin to reflect on those 2,300 years:

1. What does it profit a physician nostalgically to wish away a "disease" that awaits diagnosis? 2. In Heidegger's incubation time the Pre-Socratics are conspicuously included: 2,300 years counted backwards from Leibniz' 1700 AD necessarily lead to 600 B.C.; hence not even the Seven Sages would be able to escape the verdict. 3. The notion of "disease" itself is historically conditioned, depending upon how an age or culture defines health. To Heidegger's mind, this is perfectly clear, bringing him closer to Ludwik Fleck than to Sigmund Freud: perhaps not a useless remark here, as mention will presently be made of King Oedipus. On the other hand, it is Husserl who envisages the genealogy of modernity as pathogenesis, culminating, as we know, in a "crisis" not of science alone but of modern life (or "European humanity") in general.[4] What distinguishes Heidegger, then, is his mode of recourse to antiquity. The Greek questioning experience and the essence of technology— how then are they to be conceived to hang together? And how are we to understand the "plague," the disease that haunts Thebes at the beginning of Sophocles' most famous tragedy?

Heidegger's questioning is guided by an observation which he shares, incidentally, with a number of other thinkers on metaphysics. The concept of philosophy— traditionally metaphysics—is itself preconditioned, at least since Plato and Aristotle, by an idea of "knowing" (or *scientia*) which is in turn shaped by a model of production, as typically embodied in Socrates' frequent references to artisans while inquiring after *techne*: thus production as "manufacture" (*Handwerk* is Heidegger's German term) and further, in Roman and Christian metamorphosis, as "creation" (with reference here to a creator).[5] The Greek term for this is *poiesis*. Its correlate is *techne* as the knowledge which is liable to become synonymous with all *episteme* in Plato: cognition or knowing in general, i.e., the noetic

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[4] On this, see Müller (1976), 22f.,with further references. The concept of "lifeworld," in its therapeutic intention emphasized there, is shown in its provenance from Heidegger's early lecture courses by Schmitz (1996), 19f.

[5] Cf., e.g., Heidegger (1977b), 48.

relationship to entities as such.[6] But as "knowing," it is the very sphere constituted by traditional rationality, "reason" stemming from the Latin *ratio* or, in Greek, *logos*. In its sphere, then, the traditional plurality of those knowing modes (the *technai*) comes to be subsumed under the one heading of *techne*. It further ensues, according to Heidegger, that above all it is in what seems to be its very opposite, namely contemplation or *theoria*, that the model of knowing as fabrication (*poiesis*) achieves its sovereignty.

What thus emerges is the question specific to the later Heidegger, intertwined with the problems of *die Kehre*, the "turning" in the 1930s, with reference to poetry, to the critical battle around and against Nietzsche[7] (very much including Jüngerian recrudescences, the Will to Power having transformed itself, through the Gestalt of the worker, into the Will to Will). And arising in the midst of all this is the idea of "planetary technology" where Heidegger reinforces and/or abandons the philosophical project of restituting or restoring the sciences—that is, the university—to a lost or obscured "essential ground," and thereby first completing metaphysics. As this is also the context of Heidegger's political disaster, it is clear that there is room for a number of serious questions, which would center on the issue of Heidegger's insight concerning National Socialism as opponent or embodiment of planetary technology, before and after 1938. This would be the insight, philosophically speaking, regarding "metaphysics" which represents itself as the problem, not the solution. And that is how technology comes to appear as the basic trait or structure of metaphysics itself. It is therefore a strikingly contemporary interest that inspires Heidegger to turn to a renewed anamnesis "of the Greeks" in order to lay bare the core of technology.

This of course involves the further issue of the form and fashion of our own Heidegger exegesis. It is clear that were we pledged, consciously or not, to a research model of the philosophy of technology (*qua* assembling expert knowledge and information data concerning technology), a Heidegger would have little to teach us: and least of all by distinguishing technology from its "essence." Not only has he no ethics, even worse, he has no logic—and no physics either. Thus, in particular, our perspective would not be disturbed by self-critical afflictions and suspicions, suggesting, e.g., that in so thinking we might simply re-iterate what Heidegger, it is to be hoped with an eye to his own *Machtrausch*, calls "busy-ness" [*Betrieb*]. In that case, we would not reflect upon but merely exemplify the expert's *hysteron proteron* of confusing the problem with the solution, just as it happened to the problem-solving hero Oedipus, who had to mistake the Theban plague as an outside "thing" or research object to be investigated. Yet what remains most interesting therein may be the fact that Heidegger, while still endeavoring to teach "metaphysics" in 1935, describes this very Oedipus, crushed between the assault of appearance and the advent of truth in his furious search for identity, as the exemplary "Greek" Dasein: "we must see him as the embodiment of Greek being-there, who most radically and wildly asserts its fundamental passion, the passion for disclosure of being, i.e.

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[6] See, for example, Heidegger (1984), 179.

[7] On this see Babich (1993), 239–260.

the struggle for Being itself."[8] Here indeed the connection between the "Greek" and the catastrophic procedure of Oedipus' expert questioning *techne* seems immediately to point to the non-apparent "challenge" which Heidegger will attempt to think as the essence of technology.

2   Poiesis and the Un-poetic

The crucial aspect of the Heideggerian inquiry will turn out to be that the state of the *world* and the state of *language* are one and the same; and this is precisely what is expressed by the problem of *logos*. In principle, therefore, the question as to the essence of technology becomes ever more identical with the problem of an originary creation or production, as a constitutively "Greek" *poiesis* in contrast with, and obstructed by, the traditional metaphysical model of production (the same constellation likewise explains Heidegger's ongoing preoccupation with the poets, further extending well into the 1980s in the shape of Hans-Georg Gadamer's belated self-critical musings on poetry). The essence of technology according to Heidegger thus expresses a lack of, or a retreat from, or a refusal of a world. In that sense, if the task of thinking be to conceive this refusal "as such" (in terms of the knowing, *techne*, as essentially related to *poiesis*), the state of the world then appears by definition as "unpoetic." Now the term Heidegger introduces for this world-state is, of course, the notoriously provocative term: *Ge-stell*, usually rendered as "enframing" or else as "setting-upon" with connotations of trapping or entrapping. It may accordingly be assumed that as the name for technology's essence, *Ge-stell* must also be the formula for the question of how to distinguish technology from this essence, to the extent that, as a definition of this essence, it is contrasted with *poiesis* in the originary or Greek sense. In Heideggerian terms, then, there is implied a reciprocity or coincidence of an experience of language and of Being, proximally corresponding to the Greek versus the modern era (as *explanans* vs. *explanandum*). Less obvious and in the background, as it were, there is also in *Stellen* a crucial reference to the ancient Greek *thesis*, the counterpart of *physis*, and thus to the nature-culture dyad, famous since the Sophists and Aristotle, and recalling, via the "thetic" activity of *techne* in bringing things to stand (i.e., to be), the distinction between the "positive" and the "natural" in the Western tradition.[9] To capture this proximity, which will presently be recognized to imply the *Ge-stell* as the self-desisting Fourfold, it would seem tempting to render *Ge-stell* by the term "Sistence."[10] More remarkably, however, *Ge-stell* would seem to possess a polemic edge against Ernst Jünger's

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[8] Heidegger (1959), 107.

[9] See here Heidegger (1994), 62ff.

[10] *Stellen* corresponds to the verb "to sist," taken in its old, broad sense: "to cause to stand, to order one before a court, to place or posit, etc." OED. One may add that versions such as 'positionality' are utterly misleading, all the more so because the term pertains to Helmuth Plessner's anthropological definition of human specificity as eccentric positionality.

Gestalt of the worker,[11] signalizing the same epochal signature or state of affairs—namely, the "total mobilization" or Will to Will in a contrasting light.[12]

This should serve as a rough characterization of Heidegger's point of departure for his inquiry concerning technology. Here, one might still have the impression that much of this talk about "world" and world-refusal looks frighteningly familiar: the good, poetic, ancients versus the bad, world-deprived, technological moderns, exactly as romantic cliché would paint its nostalgia for Greece. It is all the more striking, however, if, as documented by one of Heidegger's seminars held at Le Thor as late as 1969, we should then find the thinker still emphasizing what he terms the "fundamentally *un-poetic* nature of the interpretation of language by the Greeks"— an assertion that appears to border on the paradoxical (the Greeks being, of course, the poetic nation *par excellence*) as long as we do not raise the question: what—or better: whom—does Heidegger mean by the Greeks? What does "poetic" mean here? (What does the Greek interpretation of language have to do with the Greek experience of Being?) What would a more "poetic" interpretation look like? All these aspects will turn out to have to do with Heidegger's treatment of *logos*.

3   Logos, the Constitution of World and Language

A first step towards characterizing the paradox would seem to reside in the assumption that what is meant is the Greeks' philosophy, *qua* philosophy, that carries and embodies this "un-poetic" interpretation (whereupon Aristotle, for example, could only be seen as the one who rehabilitated the poets banished by Plato): philosophy as such would be at stake—to the extent that it adopted in its entirety the epistemic model of production or manufacture as described earlier. Entities as *physis*, composed of form and matter, are thereby reduced to *thesis* (that is, to a product of work), negating the genuinely natural, physical character of standing and growing in itself. Aristotle, to be sure, does distinguish between the two kinds of "movement," the natural and the cultural. But as the ontological conception of the thing as ensemble of matter and form (or possibility and actuality) is retained, this continues to serve to reaffirm the demiurgic or poietic model of thinking and knowing

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[11] On the Heidegger-Jünger relationship in general, see Franco Volpi (1990), 9–45. Here, 32 for Jünger's reaction to *Gestell*.

[12] Such use of the term *Gestell* would then be datable as subsequent to "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1936), where it had simply designated the "thetic" stance of the artwork in the strife of world and earth. Thus 1938, as the the time of Heidegger's renewed (and by then decidedly critical) reflection upon Jünger's "worker" seems to suggest itself. Precision of insight into Heidegger's inner history during and after the Hitler empire seems occasionally hampered by negligence of Friedrich Georg Jünger's pivotal role therein, especially with regard to the book *Die Perfektion der Technik* (2010 [1939]) and its significance for Heidegger's changing view of technology: F. G. Jünger's name is absent from, e.g., Zimmerman (1990); Milchman and Rosenberg (1996); Rockmore (1992); Rockmore and Margolis (1992); Macann (1996); Pöggeler (1994); Jamme and Harries (1992); Seubold (2000), 119–132.

(and it is against Aristotle's dichotomy of entities that Heidegger had evoked the unitary Platonic thought of *physis* as itself the highest *poiesis*!).

Hence the paradox persists: Greek philosophy would thus be unpoetic precisely owing to its manufacturing or *poietic* paradigm. At any rate, this "manufacturing of knowledge" is both technological and ancient, i.e., "Greek." The consequence becomes obvious in the problem of language and its Greek interpretation, which is the problem of *logos*. As Heidegger explains in 1969, it is the reduction of *aletheia* to the field of *legein* (in the sense of speech, as *verbum dicendi*) which characterizes the Greek inception from its beginning, "always already, in advance," i.e., ever since Homer's epic language: this is what constitutes the "unpoetic" interpretation of language, in view precisely of the fact that there is, according to Heidegger's conviction, no higher-ranking poetic practice than that of the Greeks.[13] Thus it is indeed in the *legein* itself that the unpoetic comes to be founded. At Le Thor, for once directly criticizing Aristotle's *Poetics*, Heidegger still adds (or perhaps has a participant add) a quotation of an apophthegm once uttered in conversation by Stéphane Mallarmé: "poetry has entirely lost its course since the great Homeric aberration." A gloss he leaves unexplained, advising the reader to meditate upon its implications. But it is clear that, at this point in Heidegger's reasoning, *logos* itself, in order to be freed from its metaphysical reduction to the apophantic and semantic, must be envisaged in terms of a more originary, "more Greek" and hence more "poetic" meaning of *legein*, and that the obvious locus of such an attempt must be the exemplary thinking of *logos*, in Heraclitus.

Thus in the Western tradition, "reason" and "language" are brought to hang together in *logos*, and that is why *logos* must be at the core of Heidegger's sustained reflection on the essence of technology: that is: *Ge-Stell* or "Sistence," as this essence, determined by its contrast with the "world" that it refuses or of which it constitutes the self-desisting event. Its counterpart will then be Heidegger's vision of that world in describing which he regresses, according to some commentators, into archaicizing mythology: the famous *Geviert*, the Fourfold, as the structure of the world formed by the interdependent, inseparable, resonating tetrad of "regions": divinities and mortals, sky and earth. The essence of the entity or the thing, as obliterated and left unthought by Plato as well as Aristotle (both spell-bound by the pattern of production) and thereby *a priori* annihilated by science, is now conceived as that which hosts or assembles the Fourfold, reminiscent of "thing" in Old High German, meaning "assembly" (around a 'cause' or 'matter' of dispute, in 'council').

In such apparent mythologizing, the suspicion of escapism and irrationalism is naturally bound to arise; and we seem to be back precisely to that romantic and nostalgic picture of a lost unity of the world. Are we then dealing with a new philosophy of *Ur-Gemütlichkeit*, as a sharp tongue commented regarding one of Heidegger's lectures? Yet it is also true that such a perfectly sober mind as that of the Prussian statesman, designer of the very notion of the liberal arts and theorist of language, Wilhelm von Humboldt, will find, a century earlier, surprisingly Heideggerian terms for describing the "assembling" bent of the Greek mind: "when

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[13] Heidegger (1977a), 73f.; see also Heidegger (1967), 271.

choosing an object," he writes, "they always take together [compare *legei*], as much as possible, the terminal points of all spiritual existence, heaven and earth, gods and humans, vaulting them in the idea of fate [*Schicksal*] as keystone." One could surely surmise a common, probably Platonic, source for this coincidence between von Humboldt and Heidegger, which may in fact come somewhat unexpectedly.[14] Hence in all of this there may be rather less irrational mysticism than much more structural thinking. But how are we to go about expounding and clarifying the problem of the refused "world" in what looks like a welter of paradox and contradictions, where Heidegger in addition attempts to think much more rigorously and radically than Humboldt, the enlightened humanist? Together, Enframing and the Fourfold signify the unity of language and world—the "assembling" which is the more originary meaning of *logos* (to be dis-covered). The relevant and problematic aspect thereof (which is precisely that of production or *poiesis* as the "un-poetic") would now seem to contain the problem of Enframing as the essence of technology, accessible by means of elucidating "the Greeks," that is, the Greek experience of language alone. More precisely still, the "unpoetic" (derivative, semantic *logos*) is the specific character which distinguishes the "world" (Fourfold) in its own, self-obstructing essence, as Enframing or Sistence. With this in mind, let us return to Heidegger's essays "The Question Concerning Technology" itself, the scene of which was a meeting of the Bavarian Academy of the Fine Arts in 1953, where Heidegger's lecture followed on the heels of an address by Werner Heisenberg.

4   Causality Displacing the Fourfold

Crucial to Heidegger's Munich lecture is its point of departure in the thesis described above, according to which the essence of technology is nothing technological, which he proceeds to explicate by examining the "instrumental," that is, analyzing the means/end relation defining the instrumental comportment—of *homo faber*, as Hannah Arendt would later call it—and by ranging it within causality. In modern science, as we know, what is constitutive is thought to be the very opposite: i.e., the presumptive elimination of all teleological elements. Heidegger, for his part, claims that the whole sphere of causality remains obscure precisely in that the instrumental (especially as regards technology's finality) is defined in modern terms by "efficient causality" alone as the sole admissible model of causality. Heidegger first refers to the traditional system of four causes (out of which structure modern thought subsequently isolates a single effective cause), raising questions such as: Whence the four causes? And how do they belong together? But then, taking a further step, he even

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[14] Humboldt (1961), 30. The import of Heidegger's references to Humboldt, particularly in light of the closing pages of his *On the Way to Language*, has frequently been underestimated. Cf. the author's study, Schmid (1999), 92–98.

declares that ancient thought is ignorant of efficient causality, given that there is not even a Greek word for it (either in Aristotle or elsewhere).[15]

Greek production does not effect an object through subjectivity; as an example, Heidegger demonstrates this Greek character by analyzing the making of a silver chalice, a sacrificial vessel, as it turns out, by a silversmith. (This silversmith may also be read as a critical—if not self-critical—echo to the famous hammer-using artisan of *Being and Time*'s analytic of Dasein.) With regard to Heidegger's example, we may recall that naturally the silver (as *hyle*) and the "aspect" (*eidos*) of "chaliceness" represent material and formal causes. There remains a third that above all is "responsible" (*aition*) for the sacrificial vessel by circumscribing the chalice as belonging within the realm of consecration: the end, *telos*, or final cause, which completes the entity by assigning it the bounds of its sphere—not its purpose. The silversmith, the fourth participant in the responsibility for the finished vessel, is what he is not as efficient cause: "the Aristotelian doctrine," says Heidegger, "neither knows the cause that is named by this term nor uses a Greek word that would correspond to it." What the silversmith does is to deliberate [*überlegen*] and to gather [*versammeln*] the three causes previously mentioned. Deliberation, *Überlegen*, says Heidegger, is in Greek *legein*, *logos*: It is due to this *logos* of the silversmith *that* and *how* those first three modes of *aition* come into appearance and into play.

Three points may strike us in this account of the making of the chalice. First, the denial of an efficient cause (even of a Greek equivalent term), which would, if unconditionally accepted, facilitate a sharp distinction between Greek—namely, in this case, Aristotelian—and modern. However, the texts yield a different impression: for not only does Aristotle know of such a cause, the name that he has for it is exactly "the efficient," understood as the poietic: *to poietikon*.[16] Second, the artisan's doing—*poiein*—is, so to speak, absorbed in the assembling, *legein*; thus it seems that, for Heidegger, sheer "deliberation" brings about the accomplished vessel. In other words, *logos* (the deliberation exhibiting the artisan's *techne*) and *poiesis* become here identical in that *logos* is stripped of its usual meaning "to say" or "to tell," in favor of assembling or "laying," which will turn out to be the more originary sense of *logos*—and *poiesis* as well—that Heidegger had sought. (It could also be observed that *logos* and *poiesis* further coincide with *physis*, nature, with the help of the quotation from Plato directed by Heidegger against the conventional distinction, going back to the Sophists and Aristotle, between natural and cultural or "positive" beings).

Third, the correlate of this latter fusion of *logos/poiesis* is our main interest for the present consideration of "world" (language and Being) in the later Heidegger:

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[15] This and what follows: Heidegger (1977a), 6ff.

[16] Compare, e.g., *Met*. I, 2, 1013a 31 with *De gen. et corr*. I, 7, 324 b 13 and *De anima* III, 5, 430a 12. Occasionally, as at *Met*. VIII, 6, 1045a 30f., Aristotle unhesitatingly drops all talk of finality to name the efficient cause as solely responsible for any transition from the possible to the actual in the shaping of matter (thereby approaching, once again, the Platonic identification of *physis* with *poiesis* from *Symp*. 205b).

the example of the silversmith's production shows on closer inspection that the play of the four causes is in fact derived as stemming from, and as being a concretization of, the Fourfold. Conversely, the Fourfold constitutes an elaboration of the doctrine of the four causes in the way Heidegger is known to rethink (in terms of the "unthought") loci of ancient tradition in a "more Greek" way. To put this in other terms: Heidegger's idea of the Fourfold is not derived from Hölderlin, as, for example, Reiner Schürmann and others have assumed,[17] but rather from Aristotle. As sky and earth stand for and deepen matter and form, silver and chaliceness, as the *telos* of sacrificial libation leads to the divinities, the region of the mortals then must be the specific site of the *poietikon*, the poetic: in their very act of "assembling," by deliberation: *logos*.[18] So conceived, the fourfold structure becomes concinnous with the equally Aristotelian key thought of the essay, namely the truth-character of technology as *aletheuein*, in using which Heidegger reaches back to his reception of the *Nicomachean Ethics* 30 years earlier.

As the Fourfold constitutes the structure or harmony of the world precisely as refused and silenced by Enframing or Sistence, i.e., by the essence of technology, it is what Heidegger's anamnesis of the Greek inception aims at. In such a retrieval of "the Greeks"—that is: of Aristotle—the un-poetic nature of the essence of technology now accurately echoes the poietic structure of the Aristotelian Fourfold. The poietic doing of the mortals in assembling "things," their *legein*, clearly shows the parallel: just as Enframing is nothing else than self-desisting Fourfold, so *techne*, by now amounting to "Greek" knowing in its entirety (in light of Plato), is essentially obliterated and likewise manifested by the poietic-unpoetic mode of disclosing that is technology's truth.

5   Back to the Pre-Socratics?

There yet remains the riddle of the unpoetic interpretation of language which we seem now in a position to pose more adequately. The further turn to *logos* in Heidegger's reflection *not* as signifying "speech" but something more primordial, leads us one step further back (or ahead) to the pre-Platonic Greeks. It is especially in his essay "Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)" that Heidegger expounds the allegedly original meaning of *legein* and *logos* as presupposed in the silversmith parable: "laying," or laying-before as letting-lie: this very turn from *speech* to *laying* constitutes the locus where, according to Heidegger, there flashes up the "unthought" essence of language (and "world" alike; that is, the "middle" of the Fourfold as *Sage*). Correspondingly, he comments on what is for us to envision as the unthought in the Greek inception:

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[17] See, e.g., Schürmann (1987), 224: "Unfortunately for conceptual clarity, this is where Heidegger's language follows Hölderlin's most closely."

[18] It may be observed that the silver chalice is Aristotle's own example when characterizing the material cause: see *Met*. V, 2, 1013a 25 f. The fact that deliberation, which would expected to be *phronesis*, is shifted to *logos* seems due to the meaning assigned to Parmenides' fr. 7,5 DK.

had this beginning not safeguarded what has been, i.e., the gathering of what still endures, the Being of beings would not now govern from out of the essence of modern technology. Through technology the entire globe is now embraced and held fast in a kind of Being experienced in Western fashion and represented on the epistemological models of European metaphysics and science.[19]

Metaphysics and science are declared to be based upon the resulting conception of language as tool or organ (*glossa*, "tongue") and as "signifying voice," *phone semantike* (from *semainein*, to mean). By contrast, this flashing up of the primordial unthought essence of language took place in Heraclitus's use of the word *logos*. But this flash was extinguished abruptly so as to obliterate *logos* in the sense of primordial "laying." And hence Heidegger's point is that this "laying" is to be recognized as the originary experience of language: "saying,"*Sage*, which must therefore be thought as the middle of the Fourfold (where it also appears as Fate or Destining, *Geschick*, with an echo of *moira* in Parmenides).

Of the vast field of questions here, we shall only be concerned to address that aspect of *logos* as it relates to Aristotle in transcending him. With the extinction of the flash, *logos* is set on its way to become *ratio*; it will proceed to become, in an ever-renewed application of the form-matter scheme, the human faculty of autonomous reasoning or "logic" as opposed to ("positive") revelation. Meanwhile, it becomes proposition, then concept, ultimately it becomes the word, *verbum*. Thus Heidegger would seem to maintain that *logos*, to the very extent that it took on the meaning of "speech", obscures the more original meaning of laying-out (*lesende Lege*: something like "col-lective layout"). This would be precisely the genesis of the now familiar "unpoetic" interpretation of language, while—with the advent of the "semantic voice"—the unity of World and language in originary *poiesis* falls into oblivion and refusal. Henceforth, in Enframing or Sistence the world speaks only in its concealment. It is important to note that it is this meaning of laying that Heidegger has in mind when he renders logos by *Sage*, saying, as the contrary of speech further to be elaborated as the "ringing of silence." (Another aspect of the saying-laying relation will be mentioned in a moment.) Conversely, *Sage* is not by any means "myth" as some commentators have believed.[20]

In order to measure the enduring presence of Aristotle in all this, while trying at the same time to elucidate the advent of the "semantic voice" as the incisive moment in the history of logos, it may be useful briefly to recall Heraclitus's famous fragment 93 (DK[21]) regarding the diction of Apolline prophesying. It is familiar to all of us, e.g., in Marcovich's translation: "The Lord whose is the oracle in Delphi neither speaks (*legei*) nor conceals, but gives a sign (*semainei*)." Heidegger quotes it repeatedly, since the wording beautifully confirms his main point since *Being and Time*: apophantic "disclosing" (or, "de-claring," with an allusion to Charles Kahn's rendering) as here the sense of *legein* is made evident in opposition to cryptic

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[19] Heidegger (1975), 76.

[20] See, e.g., Lacoue-Labarthe (1987), 87; Großmann (1996), 198.

[21] Diels and Kranz (1951).

"concealment."[22] But what about the opposition itself, and what about the *semainein*? Even without intending an overall analysis in our present context, two problems may yet be observed to cohere in this received interpretation (which dates as far back as Plutarch[23]; and, as we recall, Plutarch was himself a Delphic priest): the meaning of *semainein*, on the one hand, together with the meaning of the "neither—nor" opposition on the other, both seeming to center upon the problem of "signifying" (hinting) as the presumptive activity of the oracle. It is to be understood that for commentators from Antiquity, Heraclitus is usually taken to be referring to his own philosophic discourse (*logos*), either metaphorically or by comparing it more or less favorably with the oracle. Thus in the usual understanding of the Delphic way of giving a sign (itself famously ambiguous) is implied something like a scale of transparency between the extremes of total lucidity and total opacity, where *logos*, taken as revealing opposed to concealment, would find its place on the side of lucidity, so that the sign itself comes to stand in the middle: that is, in a chiaroscuro midpoint as a fragile measure between those two extremes.[24] In other words, what we find is Aristotle's conception of the mean (*meson*).

Now, if it were to be accepted that this idea of a moderated mean or middle, between the extremes of concealing and revealing, constitutes but a retrojection of an Aristotelian schema onto the fragment (hereby implying a kind of semantically ambiguous twilight as essential to Pythian sayings), the question would still remain with regard to an earlier meaning of *semainei*. This is not the place to attempt an alternate reading of the fragment according to which the "neither—nor" would refer not to a scale of degrees or *valeurs* of light and darkness but to a qualitative antithesis, in keeping with other occurrences of the neither/nor in Heraclitus. It may be thought, however, that, if anywhere, it is in this Heraclitean saying that something like the "Greek interpretation of language" is to be found and examined as to its poetic or non-poetic character. The crucial point of such a reading would be to emphasize that the lord of Delphi does not declare or "lay open" in the mode of *legein* at all (not even halfway)—not implying as necessary that twilight ambiguity which is a trait of only some of his sayings (for a counter-example here we may recall, in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, the exactly unambiguous Delphic command that Orestes kill his own mother).[25] With regard to the meaning of *semainein*, "to indicate," it could be argued that its meaning is closer to "instruction" by imperative, giving orders, for instance, indicating where to go for a departing colony.[26] In addition, as

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[22] See, for example, Heidegger (1959), 170. Held (1970), 162–206, while emphasizing Heidegger's philological merit in elucidating "the original meaning of the word 'logos'" (204), does not mention fr. 93. Similarly, Bröcker (1965). See Kahn (1979), 43.

[23] See *De Pythiae oraculis*, 21, Mor. 404 HD.

[24] Cf. Marcovich's discussion: "The saying seems to be an image (metaphor); its implication might be the following: 'As Apollo neither speaks out all (100 %) nor conceals all (0 %), but shows forth a part of the truth (50 %), so also Logos inside things is neither inaccessible to human knowledge (0 %) nor self-evident (100 %), but requires an intellectual effort from men,'" etc. Marcovich (1967), 5l.

[25] See also Delcourt (1955), 97.

[26] Cf. Detienne (1994), 165ff.; see further Nagy (1996).

semainein is a technical term of mantic and prophetic terminology, to say that the lord of the oracle indicates, *semainei*, would hardly seem for Heraclitus to be a surprising claim but to amount much rather to a tautology. The otherwise inevitable lack of equilibrium (*semainei* must balance *anax*) would point to the previous part of the sentence, i.e., once more to the problematic neither/nor and to the "does not lay open" (*oute legei*). Thus we might be led to improvise a rendering such as, "The ruler who possesses the oracle-chasm at Delphi neither lays open nor conceals but gives orders." If, on principle, the oracle does not "tell" in the way of *logos*, then surely this would encourage enquiring into the Greek interpretation of language beyond *logos* (or, more precisely, beyond the Aristotelian fixations of both *logos* and *semainein*)—all the more so if we recall that the oracles were delivered in verse: in hexameters, like Homer's (unless, with Mallarmé in mind, this were to be put inversely), that is, poetically. It is from this pivotal point of the Greek interpretation of language (i.e., the experience of language and of Being) that the question of *logos* in Greek philosophy in Parmenides and Heraclitus could be reopened. We might expect that it is precisely to the "question concerning technology," with its identity of Fourfold and Enframing, that such renewed analysis of the limits of *logos* would return: and this would then seem to form a new chapter in the history of the oddly timeless influence of Heraclitus on Hölderlin and Hegel, on Nietzsche and Heidegger. Heraclitus, in his vehement opposition to Homer: after having spoken of the "great Homeric aberration," in a sequel not mentioned by Heidegger, Mallarmé replies to the interlocutor's question, "Before Homer, what?": "Orpheus."

6   Ephesus and the Essence of Technology

In that sense, there is shed more light on the decisive instant when, according to Heidegger, the flashlike appearance of *logos* as saying—i.e., as laying—in Heraclitus was immediately obliterated and obscured so as to set metaphysics on its way: the instant when, through the shift from laying to speech in *logos*, precisely the unpoetic interpretation of language arises, while primordial *techne* and *poiesis* are seen retreating into the unthought, in favor of the incubation of modern technology. That is, exactly when logos came to designate the experience of language to the very extent that it became the occidental *ratio* or calculative reason. This instant is in Aristotle, or as we can further narrow it: in the very opening phrases of *De interpretatione*.[27] What makes the interpretation of language ultimately unpoetic would be the idea of symbols of mental experience as sensual articulation of sentence meaning, in the "semantic voice" (*phone semantike*), where *semainein* first appears as we know it, as signifying. By the same token, *logos* becomes well-ordered, calculative "telling"—it becomes concept, proposition, and at the same time "reason," the thinking faculty of the rational animal, a shift that allegedly dates back to Parmenides (fr. 7,5 DK). At last, on the other hand, *logos* then appears as the Word, once again,

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[27] See Heidegger (1971), 97.

after 600 years, in Heraclitus's town of Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor, in the writings of the fourth Evangelist. All the while, the self-obstruction of the"world" prepares itself, toward its manifestation as *Ge-stell* after 2,300 years.

All of this may then be duly regarded as an exposition of Heidegger's claim in the Heraclitus essay as already cited: "Had this beginning not safeguarded what has been [*das Gewesene*] i.e., the gathering of what still endures, the Being of beings would not now govern from out of the essence of modern technology." Here, the essence of modern technology, the enframing mode of "sisting" and entrapping entities, precisely in its unpoetic character (reduced to *causa efficiens*), is nothing other than the world, the Fourfold, showing itself only in its concealment or refusal, *sub specie contraria*, as Enframing. Or, citing Heidegger once again, it is this essence of modern technology, through which "the entire globe is today transformed and destined into a being which is occidentally conceived and is entrapped within the truth-form of European metaphysics and science." The insight resulting from this anamnesis is not only, first, that the essence of technology is indeed nothing technological but also, second, that it is visible only as seemingly remote in time. It therefore defies any historicist perspective but is emphatically historic, *geschichtlich*, as Heidegger correctly claims. It remains outside the jurisdiction of expert historiography, on pain of confusing the problem with the solution. There is no other way of grasping that direct connection between the height of the techno-logical age and the beginning of metaphysics, i.e., the "Greeks," than what Heidegger calls "thinking." And this will all the more be true to the extent that in light of Heraclitus, as opposed to Aristotle, the Greek experience of language would seem less manifest in Oedipus' struggle for self-determination than in the wisdom of his adversary, Tiresias.

Meanwhile, there is still a corollary to be appended. As we have seen, it is in the totality of aspects concerning the Fourfold no less than the related problem of *logos'* primordial creativity (transcending the "unpoetic" Platonic model of craftsmanship or manufacture)—i.e., in the name of what Heidegger envisioned as originary *techne-poiesis*—that Heidegger turns away from Leibniz and towards Aristotle. He turns to Aristotle in order to depart from him towards the thought of a more primordial, "more Greek" conception of the unity of the four causes in the Fourfold conceived as the "Saying," *die Sage*. Heidegger re-encounters that same Platonism as the innermost character of modernity, if not the essence of technology itself: as anyone can see in today's mediatic reality. It is this constitutive Platonism that Heidegger found embodied, at quite another level, in Heisenberg: symbolically speaking, at the point where Heisenberg himself took up the thought of the four causes, along with other Aristotelian concepts, to articulate the *Zusammenhänge* which he had elaborated 30 years earlier.[28]

On the other hand, an attempt at an even more pointed reflection on language and the "unpoetic," at a greater distance from Aristotle rather than extrapolating what is

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[28] See Liesenfeld (1992), 199, n.l10, et passim. Subsequent divergences, precisely with regard to Platonism, are mentioned in Pöggeler (1994), 400f.

"more Greek" in rewriting him, would continue the meditation on Greek "basic words," *Grundworte*, by acknowledging above all that they appear, "more primordially," in contexts of poetic composition: which is the case precisely of *logos*, *aletheia*, *semainein*.[29] This would include, and be nourished by, a critical debate, e.g., with the recent book on Pindar by Michael Theunissen, who, coming from a rather un-Heideggerian orientation but nevertheless sharing the historic but non-historicist motivation of presenting a cost-benefit analysis or critical theory to Western rationality, turns to archaic Greek lyric poetry precisely to step out of the tradition pre-given as the discipline of "philosophy" (susceptible of anachronism), in order to grasp, philosophically, the problematic of the experience of time, which would seem to have much in common with the essence of technology.[30]

7   Being and Writing

This would elucidate (such is my concluding observation) further surprising aspects of this Heideggerian Aristotelianism: one of them to be found exactly in the place of the unpoetic interpretation of language, i.e., of Being, where things begin to look somewhat like an everyday evolutionist perspective. In the case of language, *logos*, and of art, *poiesis*, alike, the "Greeks," says Heidegger, dwell in their world without attaining to sufficient concomitant thinking on either.[31] This looks just a bit like conventional thinking about unreflective "primitives" in their *histoire froide*—regarded from modern European perspectives. What is perhaps more crucial is the fact that it also looks like the Husserlian "naive" givenness or "natural" attitude; and we may surmise that this is still an unexpected reflex of the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. This concerns once again *logos* in what Heidegger claims to be its primordial meaning as "collective laying-out," *lesende Lege*, just as such "laying" as letting-lie represents a remarkable avatar of the Greek *hypokeimenon*, as that which is let, or allowed to, present itself "before": the "underlying" Substance, that is, no less than the metaphysical category *par excellence* since Aristotle. Could that be a coincidence? Concerning the second term, *Lese* (collection, of what lies before), it is hard to escape seeing that it simultaneously refers to the ordinary sense of *lesen*, or *legere*, i.e., reading, in that Heidegger names correlatively, in 1935, the written letters, *grammata*, as the paradigm for the Greek "experience"—not here of *language*, but of *Being*.[32] What could this supposed paradigm have to do with the "unpoetic"? We find therein a final hint at the unity of world and language as revealed by the recourse to the Greeks in the thought of the Fourfold or saying as speaking in its very concealment as Enframing. That is, the essence of technology takes on a

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[29] Cf. Boeder (1959); Böhme (1986).

[30] Theunissen (2000).

[31] See, e.g., Heidegger (1975), 77.

[32] See Heidegger (1959), 64.

surprising proximity to the problem of the connection between writing and
metaphysics. This would lead to further questions addressed to Heidegger and to
the Greeks as well.[33]

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[33] This essay was originally presented at the 2001 meeting of the Heidegger Circle convened by Babette Babich, Fordham University in New York City, on the 25th anniversary of the question Heidegger offered on April 11th 1976 to the meeting of the Heidegger Circle in Chicago.

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