Poetics of Alterity: Education, Art, Politics

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Statement of Originality

I, Soyoung Lee, hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Soyoung Lee
Abstract

This thesis examines a dominant way of thinking that presents itself as control. Such thinking prevails in education, especially where societies are driven by achievement and characterised by the discourse of efficiency. I suggest that this way of thinking inevitably blocks the other – that is, the radically other, which cannot be absorbed or assimilated into the same. The thesis explores ways in which what escapes our grip has an important bearing on education, including on such matters as the consideration of curriculum content. Art and the humanities will be seen as significant spaces where alterity presents and expresses itself, asking for our singular response. Works of art, for example, require us to be sensitive to what we cannot fully comprehend or contain; they unsettle and even disturb our accustomed ways of thinking. Poetic language is the exemplar: characteristically, it resists rigidity and consolidation, and cannot be reduced to merely instrumental purposes. It breaks the closed circle of economies of thought that would insulate themselves from an outside. The aim of this thesis is, by way of exploring such language, to search for and preserve places for alterity, as places that education and philosophy can find themselves again. I attempt to show that acknowledgement of the other should condition not only the practice of teaching and learning but also the practicalities of our social and political lives. Recovering the vitality of language will be seen as a resisting force against the impersonal, neutralised, and neutered language of control. In the end, it is through this that we can affirm the tensions and aporetic problems we encounter in our lives, particularly in teaching. Such affirmation enables the recovery of responsibility in what we say and do, where this is less to do with seeking security and much more a matter of faith.
Impact Statement

This thesis provides a radical critique of aspects of contemporary educational policy and practice, and it provides an account of ways for improvement. It answers to the call for a better understanding of otherness around the world, in particular where it experiences unforeseen problems caused by rapid transition towards a multicultural society. Mass immigration, for instance, is a concern for Europe, and many parts of the world. This thesis, while attending to the need to understand plurality and diversity, pushes further the limit of current political discourses such as the politics of recognition.

In doing so, the thesis, first, challenges and informs educational policy-makers and practitioners with an indication of an orientation they can depend and negotiate upon. It both challenges the way they directly deal with issues of plurality and exposes the barrier that is constituted by the dominance of an impersonal neutral language in education, as seen, for example, in the language of evaluation. Second, the thesis reveals the radical difference of the other and the need to consider this in curriculum design. The arts and humanities subjects will be seen as a place where we can encounter other cultures or languages, perhaps drastically different from our own. The thesis problematises current curriculum that merely adds up multicultural courses, and suggests alternative, more pertinent ways of understanding teaching and learning in order to address the issues in question. What is discussed has a bearing on curriculum matters such as religious or moral education and multi-cultural education. Furthermore, the importance of providing students with subject matter that is open to interpretation and requires judgement is discussed. Art appreciation, for example, will be seen as the context where alternative ways of thinking – thinking other than ratiocination – can be encouraged through the curriculum. This contributes to understanding the importance of such content in a way broader, less rigid or restricted way – where students are opened by a work of art as to a new experience and to new thought. Third, this helps teachers with a better understanding of what they do and teach. Nowadays, teachers themselves conceive their role in relatively disengaged ways, often understanding themselves to be playing a very specific, fully planned-out role, in which they can be
replaced as needed. The thesis challenges this partly through a reconceptualisation of what it is to know something (and hence with a bearing on curriculum content) and through a revision of the way that learning is understood. This not only will help teachers to understand their role differently but also will have a bearing on teacher education.

I have published parts my work on journals (e.g. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*) and also presented papers at conferences, locally and internationally (e.g. ECER (2018), PESGB Oxford annual conference (2018, 2019)), as a way of contributing to national and international discussion and to encourage different directions in thinking. The work of this thesis will be continued by, for example, adapting some chapters so as to reach wider audiences, including teachers and policy maker.
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Last but not least, I thank my family who have been always supported me in the decisions I have made. My parents, who are part of who I am today, taught me how to venture into life. Without the love and support of those dearest to me, I could not have come this far.

I want to close with words of Paul Celan: ‘Thinking and thanking in our language are words from one and the same source. Whoever follows out their meaning enters the semantic field of: “recollect,” “bear in mind,” “remembrance,” “devotion.” Permit me, from this standpoint, to thank you.’
Introduction

‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’
(Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 7)

‘What cannot be said above all must not be silenced but written’
(Derrida, The Post Card)

My research question began with an incident in South Korea, which has haunted me ever since. In April 2014, on the southwest coast of South Korea, the passenger ferry Sewol sank. It was carrying 476 people, 304 of whom died, including 250 high school students who were on a field trip. This single incident revealed, on the one hand, the corrupt state of the government and industry, laying the way for the impeachment of the President and the advent of a new government. On the other, it revealed a societal inability in terms of comprehending the suffering of the other. There is no doubt that the government tried to silence victims’ families to cover up its own faults; the mainstream media were antagonistic to the families, for example by describing them as seeking excessive amounts of compensation, as politically motivated by far-left agitators, as misguided and misinformed. It is also true that the media soon simply ignored the subject, even perhaps going so far as to engineer apathy towards it through the encouragement of ‘Sewol fatigue’. This happened at the very time when the families were still struggling to establish the truth: some were on hunger strike and were asking the government for a fairer judgement and response. And what they had to confront was not only the government itself but also the people who ignored them or even mocked them – in one extreme case, one group organised an ‘excessive eating protest’, gleefully eating takeaway pizzas right next to the hunger-striking families. It was the political conservatism of the government and the media that created the conditions for such hateful forms of behaviours to grow. The families and survivors
were very soon told they should ‘move on from the past’, even while the government blocked and delayed the raising of the ferry from the shallow waters where it had sunk: it took almost three years just for the ship to be raised, and that was possible only after the presidential impeachment and the advent of a newly elected government. Questions about the lack of sympathy or empathy were certainly raised. But are these enough?

I was working as a teacher in a primary school at the time. I was probably teaching in a class when the ferry started to sink. My recollection is vague, partly because I did not initially pay close attention to the news since I had heard that all the passengers were safely rescued – the government announcement that turned out terrifyingly to be false. Along with the rest of the nation, I had to watch the ship gradually sinking with almost three hundred people on board and then, for several days after it had sunk, to cling on to the real possibility that there might be survivors alive in air-pockets, even though no rescue attempt was taking place. This tragedy, brought about not so much by natural as by human causes, certainly created a disturbance in me. It was something I could not expect to be resolved but rather something I needed to live with. Speaking of the incident was difficult, but so too was being silent. But, then, how do we even begin to address this tragedy? The sinking was seemingly the result of various intertwined problems – the overloading of unsecured cargo, the illegal redesign of the ship, and the acquiescence of responsible bodies in the relaxing or ignoring of regulations, the explanation of which all comes down to economic and political interests. Yet, even more striking is a series of irresponsible judgements made at different levels that denied the possibility of rescue. The instruction to passengers to ‘Stay put’ inside their cabins issued while the captain and some crew were abandoning ship was not simply faulty, it was criminally negligent. The regularly repeated announcements of ‘Stay put, put on a life-vest, and don’t come out’ were followed by most students and teachers, resulting in a high number of casualties.

Although the disaster remains under investigation, all evidence points to the negligence of the government and the National Coast Guard. What we hear from the records is merely the language of bureaucracy, shored up against responsibility. What was absent in this was any real sense of those who had died or those who were in mourning as real flesh-and-blood people, each with their unique individual lives, the individual stories, cares, anxieties, hopes and fears. There was only impersonal neutralised language and sterile thought. In the autumn that year, I left Korea to study in London, for a year, on a Masters in Philosophy of Education. The incident was
something that kept pressing on me as if demanding my response, though I did not have the courage directly to face up to it. I wrote an essay on it, which I never used. Martin Heidegger, who I was focusing on then, provided me with some resources to think about it, but not sufficient.

In April 2017 I returned to London to do a PhD. This time I wanted to explore more directly the question I had: what is it that blocks us from a responsible response to the other? Soon after, on 14 June that year, Grenfell Tower, a 24-story residential block in West London, burned down as a result of inappropriate renovation, which used flammable exterior cladding that did not comply with building regulations. Seventy-two people died. A report in October 2019 said that more could have been saved if the instruction of evacuation had been provided earlier. The instruction given by the fire brigade was to ‘Stay put.’ The Leader of the House of Commons publicly stated to a radio phone-in host, ‘I think if either of us were in a fire, whatever the fire brigade said, we would leave the burning building. It just seems the common-sense thing to do.’ While this is a different context to the Sewol incident, what is the same is that such insensitive words are blind to those they are addressing. And I am compelled again to question myself: what would I do if I were there? Would I not trust the instruction? I think I would. Then is it ultimately good management or ‘good control’ – the phrase that was used repeatedly – that we need here? After the Sewol disaster, in South Korea, there have been discussions about good control or management; the need for safety education and about putting swimming on curriculum; as well as the cultivation of the capacity to doubt and to question authority developed through such activities as debating, all of which while important do not seem to be the fundamental issue. What we are facing is not something that can be solved by adding some extra component to the curriculum. We need rather to question the ways of thinking to which we become accustomed through education and through the culture we live in, and to think about what we have learned to deny. Moreover, I do not think that such measures as systems of good control can be established just one time and last forever; they will require constant review and revision; and ultimately the time for decision-making comes at any moment unexpectedly. Any rule or system soon begins

1 Jacob Rees-Mogg, the Leader of the House of Commons, was speaking on a radio phone-in on the findings of the Grenfell inquiry report. South Korean conservative party politicians comparing the Sewol disaster to a car accident, criticised the tax being spent on the investigation. (See for example https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-50302573?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c342p7y878wt/jacob-rees-mogg&link_location=live-reporting-story; Accessed on November 10, 2019).
to be irresponsible when it is fixed, closed and unchallengeable: it ceases to be answerable to human others. And, if we need to learn to question what is given, it will not suffice to learn a set of debating skills or arguments, with which, in our confidence, we may easily fall into the trap of abstract thinking. It is precisely such abstract thought, as shall be seen further, that gives rise to irresponsibility.

What is at stake is rather ‘control’ itself, which at best seems to give an illusion of order or to encourage an inappropriate craving for order. Societies which encourage the desire to be secure and settled (or, in its bourgeois equivalent in the life of the Last Man described by Nietzsche) should be called into question. This is not restricted to South Korea or the UK. The commitment to control is seemingly justified in an achievement-driven society particularly under the influence of bureaucracy inflamed by performativity and capitalism. What the culture of control reveals is the prevalent way that we think, where thinking itself is understood as control. Thinking serves to clarify and classify things in the name of efficiency – that is, as a means to master things. Yet, to think of what is radically other to myself, it is important that the other must remain as other, as non-reducible to classification. It requires an escape from what Emmanuel Levinas will call a totalising of thought. Such thinking, he claims, has arisen with a ‘philosophy of the neuter’, which he finds to be the characteristic of traditional Western philosophy with its primary concern with ontology – a philosophical orientation that reaches its most explicit expression in Heidegger’s thought (Levinas, 1969, p. 298).

This is related to his critical view of totalising ways of thinking, and hence of totalitarianism – surely not unrelated to Heidegger’s commitment to Nazism. For Levinas, thinking as totalising fails to recognise the irreducible alterity of the other [l’autrui]. It cannot acknowledge the other who cannot

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2 That would be, as Levinas puts it and as will become clearer in Chapter 4, only ‘ impersonal justice’ which can only be cruel if it does not attend to all human beings (Levinas, 1969, p. 300).

3 What Levinas points out is that Heidegger’s ontology – along with the concern of ontology in the Western philosophical tradition – does not open up space for the absolute other. And without this ethical dimension, ontology is ‘faceless’, unable to answer to the question of justice (Levinas, 1969, p. 46). Although, as he acknowledges, Levinas was deeply inspired by the philosophy of Heidegger, his own project is in large part a break with Heidegger. It is with and from Heidegger that Levinas makes a departure. On the one hand, he says that Heidegger’s Being and Time is one of the most important philosophical works, while on the other, he speaks of the importance of leaving ‘the climate of Heidegger’s philosophy, but not to go back to pre-Heideggerian philosophising, but go beyond’ (Levinas, 1978, p. 19). Levinas conceives of ethics as more fundamental than ontology. It is worth noting that what Levinas calls ontology is closer to what Heidegger and Derrida call metaphysics.

4 While the French term ‘autre’ means one other among many others (relatively to one another), ‘l’autrui’ refers to the absolute other, which is beyond any categorisation. Levinas uses l’autrui in reference to the human other with this in mind. This is often translated with the capitalisation of ‘the Other’, and this inevitably sacrifices Levinas’ use of ‘l’Autrui’ (see translator’s note in Totality and Infinity pp. 24-25). Levinas uses ‘l’Autrui’, for example, as what is opposed to le Même (the Same) and in the same realm with ‘l’infini’ (the infinity) or ‘la métaphysique’ (the metaphysics) (see for example Levinas, 1990, p. 180). It can be said that the relation to the
be contained in my idea of the other and always exceeds it, in a relation that to what Levinas terms ‘face’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 50). Thinking that only incorporates the other when it confronts this otherness is incapable of perceiving and receiving the wholly other. It fails to recognise and respond to the call of the face of the other [le visage d’autrui]. Lacking this ethical dimension, thinking then generates, encourages and legitimates neutralised, impersonalised vocabularies and impassive modes of thought. Hence ‘impersonal reason’ (Levinas 1969, p. 59). It does not do justice to things that do not fall within its terms of explanation or beyond accustomed ways of understanding, or outside its imposed categories; it is rationalism of a kind, and this excludes what cannot be explained in its own terms, shoring itself up in the face of what is other than itself. Such thinking renders the world and the other mere objects at its disposal: it becomes narrow, stubborn, and ossified, oblivious to the alterity on which it necessarily depends. It anaesthetises the disturbance that our sense of mortality provides, and the relation to the other becomes merely abstract and contingent, be it by contract, law or choice.

Educational policy-making and practice are not exceptions. Bureaucratic forms, in an unsteady liaison with the demands of the market, have led to educational discourse dominated by questionable notions of efficiency in attempts to override time. Educational policies and practices are imbued with impassive neutralised language and pseudo-scientific methods. Research in the field of education contributes to such tendencies in its partnership with funding bodies. Schools themselves are preoccupied with apparent evidence and results. We rush students towards this Platonist perfect form – a perfect outcome, perfect result, perfect achievement. What is learned must be measured so that it can be ticked as learned. Even the idea of authenticity is understood in teleological terms – as if finding oneself were comparable with discovering one’s blood type. What are valued are things such as efficiency, accountability, performativity, clarity, transparency and quantifiability; these are the terms against which education is evaluated. Technology serves this goal by providing the means for accumulating such data. Yet, language of this kind closes off the possibility of developing relationships to others in better, more constructive ways, in a manner that

other person [l’autrui] is the relation to the other [l’Autrui]. Dino Galetti writes that Derrida thinks of l’Autrui in terms of something like or as having a similar status to Ideas (Galetti, 2015, p. 200). For a further discussion in relation particularly to English translations of Levinas, see (Galetti, 2015, p. 200). I use the lower case ‘the other’ for l’autrui as I find that the context is normally clear enough to convey what is intended. This is partly to avoid unnecessary awkwardness and to accord better with ordinary English usage.
does justice to human singularity and plurality. The discourse of input and output, means and end, is blind to anything beyond that closed circle. Thinking becomes algorithmic, not allowing for uncertainty beyond what can be accommodated in binary terms, even though uncertainty is the very nature of otherness. What is continually demanded of us in our learning in fact blocks us from encountering otherness. Against this, we must, on the one hand, be vigilant about, and indeed wary of, impersonal language in philosophy and education, and, on the other, have the courage to abandon such comfortable grids, to disarm ourselves in acceptance of a degree of anxiety rather than seeking complete security, and to expose our vulnerability by letting the other interrupt.

My aim in this thesis is to explore a line of thought that may help us to move from self-oriented and self-referential thoughts towards the outside, towards the other. I point towards why this is important for education and how its neglect will stifle education. Language will be a focal point to which I will continuously return, to acknowledge the ethical dimensions in language and thought. The language in which we speak and live not only shows symptoms of the problem, but also is the key to understanding it. The intertwined relationship between language, thinking, and subjectivity as it emerges in education will be examined. This is to find the I by way of the other, and it is also therefore to find the other within myself – not as something that I can then recognise but precisely as an otherness, beyond recognition, that constitutes subjectivity. The development of an alternative, more robust understanding of teaching and learning can be built upon the acknowledgement of this exteriority, what is beyond my control as precisely what conditions whatever it is I do and think and feel. It will be in large by way of an alternative understanding of the nature of language that we will come to see our relation to otherness in a fundamental sense. We will come to understand better how language reminds us of our condition as human beings who speak; and of our relation to the other person, the fact that language already presupposes human beings who address one another and are addressed. It will be a journey towards thinking that is more hospitable to otherness; it will be a journey from the self to the other with no expectation of return to the same self. And, as will be seen, it is through acknowledgement of things that escape our grip and fall outside our control that I can affirm not only the words of the other but also my own. That is where saying is also acting – the producing of something new and the realising of the world in a certain way, as a way of being responsible.
What I will be looking at closely is also the nature of subject-matter or experience that cannot be contained in terms of conceptual categories or purely propositional knowledge, which raises questions of the untranslatable and the unspeakable. Such subject-matter requires one not to rush into putting thoughts into words. Rather one is called upon to hold back from hasty judgements, from the giving of opinions and recourse to analysis, diagnosis and even solutions. Works of art such as film or poetry can be seen as providing occasions for the disturbance and disruption of our habitual ways of thinking and for the acknowledgement of the alterity that resides in such works. This will help us to re-think curriculum matters and especially to reappraise the importance of art and the humanities as providing sites where we experience and respond to what is other to ourselves. What it means to know something will be discussed and reconceptualised in this light – that is, to know something while preserving its alterity. Ludwig Wittgenstein finishes the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with: ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’ He thought, according to the traditional reading of his work, that when things cannot be captured in pictures, one should remain silent. He is basically saying that we cannot speak meaningfully of what is outside of logic and the propositions of science, and thus excluding all expressions of value from the category of the meaningful, regarding them as non-sense (or nonsense!). They are beyond the limit of language. Without going into detail on Wittgenstein’s work, it is true that we often need to learn to be silent before putting ourselves and our words forward; for example, in facing the suffering of the other. Yet, I think it is equally important to give our words, and to make ourselves present in these words. It is to mark and re-mark history and to pass it on to the next generation, a practice inherent in the idea of education. Jacques Derrida, who, in his own ways, attempts to understand the limits of language, echoes Wittgenstein but radically alters the import of Wittgenstein’s aphorism: ‘What cannot be said above all must not be silenced but written’ (Derrida, 1987, p. 194). His allusion to Wittgenstein becomes clearer given what he says elsewhere: ‘I am profoundly convinced, against Wittgenstein, whose words you no doubt know, that “what we

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5 This is the translation by Ogden (1973). Pears and McGuinness’ translation (2001) reads ‘What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.’ According to a traditional reading of Wittgenstein, the early Wittgenstein deals with the relation between world and language as one of correspondence. This reflects the idea of the truth as correspondence and thinking as representation, which will be discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. The systematic structure of the *Tractatus* contrasts with that of his later anti-systematic writings and, in particular, with the style and approach of the *Philosophical Investigations*. Stanley Cavell (1999) and Gordon Bourn (1997), for example, provide readings of Wittgenstein that take his fundamental concern to be with the existential human condition.
cannot speak about we must (not) pass over in silence’’ (Peeters, 2014, p. 162). Derrida inserts ‘(not)’ in the phrase of Wittgenstein, a kind of affirmation of the impossible task. It is the place for this affirmation, despite the impossibility of, for example, fully understanding the suffering of the other, or recovering the past, that I am searching for in this thesis. I do this by exploring such matters as the question of translation, mourning and remembrance, and through a reading of poetry – approaches that may appear at variance yet that all come down to questions of alterity. In the end it will be seen more clearly that thinking differently is not only an ethical matter but also a political one. To set foot on the way, we will need to dispel many presuppositions underpinning our conceptions of human beings, language and thought.

The chapters proceed as follows.

**In Chapter 1**, I begin with Roland Barthes’s analysis of the *Encyclopédie* edited by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, which is representative of the spirit of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe in the 18th century and is an illustration of the impulse towards universal systematic knowledge and categorisation. My approach is to attend to the manner and purpose of what Barthes does with regard to this particular product, and to consider ways in which a parallel critique is pertinent today. Rather than providing a direct critique on the Enlightenment, I look at cultural products of today in the way Barthes looks at those of his time. This is to examine how a particular culture paves the way for a certain kind of cultural product and makes use of it. This lays the way for consideration of the culture of educational research in general and of how knowledge is produced and conceived. I problematise encyclopaedic conceptions of language and thinking, and the ways that they have given shape to contemporary conceptions of knowledge and research culture. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari provide some means of insight by releasing us from the stifling constraints of such ways of thinking. Reasons to be unsettled and to acknowledge something out of our control will be explicated. This chapter will provide the ground for us to step forward and the basis for a reconceptualisation of knowledge, in a manner that can do justice to what cannot simply be put into encyclopaedic categories.

**In Chapter 2**, I explore the philosophy of Heidegger, particularly the concept of *Gelassenheit* (‘letting-be’) as developed in his later thought. *Gelassenheit* illustrates a more responsive and receptive way of thinking, which for Heidegger stands in contrast to thinking under the sway of technology. This alternative understanding of
thinking helps to overcome the dominance of representational thought, a kind of thinking that imposes barriers on understanding and restricts how the world can be – exemplified, that is, by the encyclopaedic way of thinking discussed in the previous chapter. By exploring Gelassenheit fully we will understand thinking as more attentive and receptive to what comes from outside. While Heidegger’s critique of technology will be found to resonate with Barthes’s critique of encyclopaedism, he provides us with further resources for considering reason and thinking themselves in a more concrete sense, closer to our experience rather than as logic. Towards the end, with some examples, I seek to show the relevance of this to aspects of education, especially to the ways that teaching can be enhanced in order to do better justice both to the learners and to what is studied. I develop this in seven steps, yet the underlying movement is as a way of thinking, rather than as a formulation of direct or technical answers to educational problems. In the end, I revisit and re-examine aspects of Heidegger’s work about which I think there are reasons to be cautious. This is to encourage a degree of vigilance in relation to Heidegger’s thought, but in a way that does not deny its powerful insights.

This caveat is taken forward in Chapter 3. The chapter investigates more directly whether Heidegger’s philosophy is sufficient to guide us to the radical other. I attempt to demonstrate the limits of Heidegger in this respect by examining some of his remarks regarding being and language, particularly in relation to his attitude towards other languages. Through exploring this, I move from language to languages, and then to translation. In so doing I explore translation, beyond the technical understanding of it, as a site of diversity and plurality – that is, the place for us to respond responsibly to the other. Heidegger’s longing for the origin, for home, for Heimlichkeit, will be revealed as problematic and in tension with his own thought of the Unheimlich (the uncanny) as fundamental to the human condition. To this end, I acknowledge the always already plural nature of language, of language sustained in and by that plurality. To understand language in this way is also to acknowledge the very condition of human being in its plurality, always already in relation to the other. For the discussion, I draw on thinkers such as Paul Celan, Hannah Arendt, and Barbara Cassin. Celan’s resistance to Heidegger’s accounts of language will be seen as what exposes the limits of Heidegger, which must be overcome if the journey is to go beyond myself and further towards the wholly other.
In Chapter 4, I attempt to explore the thought of Levinas in order to further clarify the idea, already glimpsed in earlier chapters, of the ethical dimension of language itself. As an astute critic of Heidegger, Levinas provides us with insights into the relation between language, the other, and ethics. Heidegger’s overcoming of subject and object dichotomies is, here once more, challenged by Levinas by seeing the very subject as constituted by the other. Derrida, whose philosophy is highly influenced by Levinas, will also guide the lines of thought pursued here. Both Levinas and Derrida have taken up Heidegger’s thoughts in a way that both extends them and is highly critical, particularly in their exploration of the understanding of the other. The ethical approach towards the other will be seen as a form of thinking that is not totalised but always already open to what is outside and yet to come. I attempt to understand the practicality of ethics differently, beyond systematic approaches, and to illustrate an ethical dimension in teaching and learning beyond the narrow sense of moral reasoning or of the attaining a set of virtues or skills. The ethical demand will be seen as what comes through the words of the other, calling upon my responsibility, a responsibility that can never be fulfilled. And this sense of impossibility will be a sign-post for what I will discuss in the later chapters. In due course, this chapter will address some common misunderstandings regarding Levinas, in response to which ethics – specifically this fundamental relation to the other – will be seen as the very condition of education.

The substance of Chapter 5 intersects with previous chapters. Having established a Levinasian understanding of human subjectivity, the chapter takes another path in order to examine the conception of subjectivity, our fundamental condition, as never enclosed. It does this through the consideration of some works of art in relation to the concept of mourning – to the impossibility of mourning, as this is understood by Derrida. There is a sense of relentless struggle in mourning, which is suggested by the paradoxical idea that for mourning to be successful, it must not be successful. In discussing the experience of loss, in extreme and lesser tragedies, I attempt to find something affirmative in understanding this negativity in our lives. In so doing I explore the struggle to find words, specifically as illustrated in the poems of Celan and Hirokazu Kore-ed’a’s film Still Walking. I attempt to see how the acknowledgement these works enact can help us live with uncertainty, risking our own balance in a way that bears the weight of the other. This involves acknowledging the traces of negativity that constitute our presence, including that of death, the history of
suffering, and exclusions of the other, who must not consigned to oblivion. I explore how this thought becomes interwoven with our experiences of language, loss and remembrance. This will, I hope, illustrate the importance of staying in and with the negativity around us without attempting to arrive at any final resolution.

Chapter 6 revisits the problem with representation that was discussed previously in, especially, Chapters 1 and 2. The discussion of Levinas in Chapter 4 also revealed the problematics of representation in ways still more pertinent to the guiding theme of the thesis: as soon as we represent someone we fall into the trap of determination and fixation of the other. This chapter attends to such aporia by examining some problems in the teaching of poetry – here that of Paul Celan and Seamus Heaney. While attending to Celan’s double desire – he seeks to bring things into words, to be understood, but at the same time desires not to be understood exhaustively – I seek the possibility to acknowledge such a struggle as the resistance of alterity, or, say, of ‘the face’ that presents itself in the work of art. This leads back to problems of knowledge as brought up in Chapter 1: how can we teach something that goes beyond the acquisition of concepts or skills? How can we say we know something that resists our understanding? Yet, it is such subjects, as will become clear, that provide a focus for the development of ethical, political, sensibility. The space opened up by them will be hospitable to the unknown, will be a place of continual participation and engagement. In the light of this, the importance of language as poetics will be further examined. And the conditions upon which the consideration of the curriculum and its subject-matter depend will be thought anew, far removed from encyclopaedic depictions.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarises how I have moved away from encyclopaedic ways of thinking in an attempt to do justice to the alterity of the other. Thoughts explored in previous chapters will be re-visited and be revealed to be interwoven. Taking responsibility under the weight of the other involves also a transformation of the self; in this way I return to the self but only as making another turn from myself. The tension and contradiction we live with will not be resolved, and teachers will be seen as those who embody such tensions on a daily basis. But, as I shall argue, what we need is not the zeal to cling steadfastly to the self and to secure its controlling grids of thought, but the courage to reside within the unknown. I revisit Derrida and Deleuze as authors who offer ways of releasing the self, but I do this without attempting to synthesise their differences – that is, their own distinctive ways of attending to and
affirming the tensions. The difficulties in decision-making demand our responsibility more than ever, and they are such that given rules or protocols cannot free us from them. In consideration of the need faithfully to speak in one’s own voice, I continue along the path to discuss language, where opening up and preserving the space for alterity will be revealed as the responsibility in language for others and for myself. This will bring us to a point where the language of art and the humanities, of education, and of philosophy find themselves again; where one finds oneself again, and again. That is how we transform ourselves and the world, by responding to the alterity that expresses itself in the language of poetics, where I am singled out in my response with my words and action, where I must act in faith. It is not only poets who poetise alterity in their words; it is also, and more to the point, the fact that alterity poetises – transforms and sensitises – us in this way.

Without going into detail now, it would nevertheless be appropriate to begin with a glimpse of the way that the language of poetics can be opposed to the language of definitions and conceptualisation. Derrida, in ‘Che Cos’è la Poesia?’ (‘What is Poetry’) writes that poetry is what resists the form of ‘what is’: it is irreducible to such ways of thinking, and it resists definition and categorisation. As he ventures to suggest,

The poetic, let us say it, would be that which you desire to learn, but from and of the other, thanks to the other and under diction, by heart (Derrida, 1995a).

The poetic is the language from and of the other. To learn the language of the other – accentuated in the enigma and mystery of the writing of some poets – I need to attend with humility, acknowledging that I am encountering something I cannot know by definition or systematic analysis. Hence, I would do better to come to know it by heart. Yet, it is in the venturing of this language of the other, its invention, its advent(ure), that we enter into and constitute our relation to the other person: the ethicality of language is already there. Language presupposes an addressee (a ‘who’ that it is addressed to), and the poetic exemplifies this: its enigma addresses me as singular, places me under diction, calls for my response. And I do not know where else to turn, on what else to rely. To acknowledge such characteristics of language, as will come to be seen more clearly, awakens us to our fundamental relation to the other and to sensitivity to irreducible difference. Hence the art of poetics is the art of inhabiting such language.
This thesis does not attempt to develop any tidy formulation of a comprehensive remedy for educational problems, nor to provide a linear argument, but to see the nature of teaching and learning in a different light. It certainly traverses various territories. It is as though I try out different paths, from different directions, and with different undulations, different depths. The themes and topics of the chapters cross one another, revealing interrelations of mutual support, and tensions at times. I hope, in the end, they will serve in the end to provide a picture of the whole as something like a patchwork, as Deleuze might put it.

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6 Wittgenstein puts this, in his Preface of *Philosophical Investigations*, much better than I do here! His being unable to force his thoughts into a single direction was due to ‘the very nature of investigation’. The investigation ‘compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction.’ This makes the remarks in the book ‘a number of sketches of landscapes’ that together give the reader ‘a picture of the landscape’ (Wittgenstein, 1973. p. vii).
CHAPTER 1

Poetics of the Encyclopaedia: Knowledge, Pedagogy, and Research Today

This chapter explores ways in which Roland Barthes’s discussion of the encyclopaedia provides us with resources for thinking about education and research practice today. What Barthes addresses in his essay ‘The Plates of the Encyclopedia’ is a particular encyclopaedia, the Encyclopédie produced by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d’Alembert, which was published in France between 1751 and 1772. This is commonly referred as the first of a form that we recognise as the encyclopaedia today. I begin with Barthes’s analysis and critique of the Encyclopédie. Barthes, writing in 1964, engages with the Encyclopédie as an iconic product of its time, seeing it as conditioned by and, in effect, reinforcing a particular way of experiencing the world. Next, I consider ways in which a parallel critique is pertinent today. I explore some current examples of encyclopaedic form in relation to education and educational research. The purpose of this is to examine the interplay between particular cultural products and their society, in which not only certain types of knowledge but also a certain conception knowledge are produced and reinforced. So, it will not be the purpose of this chapter to provide direct analysis or critique of the Enlightenment, or to provide a historical account of knowledge. Rather, what I am interested in is problematising a particular understanding of language and knowledge that arises through these cultural products, particularly with regard to educational inquiry. This lays the way for thoughts expressed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in What is Philosophy?, which, as I shall try to show, are of help in furthering the analysis of the dominant
research culture’s use of such products and in imagining the task of education and research differently.

‘We Murder to Dissect’: The Encyclopaedia and the Progress of Reason

The Encyclopédie, as Barthes writes, is the book that for the first time in history deals only with objects. The very principle of the Encyclopédie is to encompass all knowledge in one book, to have a comprehensive knowledge of the world. It sets things in order so that the reader will be able to ‘perceive the elements without confusion’ (Barthes, 2010, p. 33). It categorises human knowledge so that it can serve the purpose of clear-thinking; it conforms to Descartes’s commitment to establishing ‘clear and distinct ideas’; and it is a highpoint in the expression of the spirit of the eighteenth century, the age of enlightenment. Barthes provides an analysis of how this particular book illustrates a particular way of thinking and reasoning at that time.

The plates of the Encyclopédie comprise two different kinds of images, each with its own role. At the top of each page, as a general rule, one can see quite a large image, usually spanning the width of the page, while, at the bottom, there are several smaller images. The image on the top shows a particular scene where people are doing or making something, and it gives the reader a context or a situation for the practice under consideration. The image at the bottom provides an inventory of the objects that are used in the scene above, the diagrams depicting individual objects being clearly separated from one another. In keeping with the purpose of the Encyclopédie, the plates display things in a systematic way, preventing any confusion and perhaps directing, if not harnessing, the imagination of the reader. Yet although this is a book of objects, Barthes writes that the plates of the Encyclopédie are ‘human’, and he gives two reasons for this. These reasons are not unrelated to one another.

First, and as is easily noticeable, human beings are represented on most pages, in the scenes at the top of each plate. If we randomly look at the upper part of any plate of the Encyclopédie, it will be apparent that most of the scenes are filled with people. Even the depiction of savage nature at the Giant’s Causeway in Ireland is not an exception. There are people in corners or in the middle of this vast natural scene, all playing their own roles. Several men seem to be examining the rocks – scientists or geologists. Others are pointing towards or looking at rocks, perhaps as a gesture of appreciation of the marvels of nature. The massive geometrical shapes of the basalt
rocks, revealing the wild but extraordinary aspects of nature, are here shown to be understood and appreciated by human beings. It is indeed by way of this process of reasoning – systematic classification – that this has become a part of the world of the *Encyclopédie*. The world is no longer mysterious.

Second, and perhaps more surprisingly, the encyclopaedic image is human because ‘it constitutes a structure of information’ (p. 29). Echoing Ferdinand de Saussure, Barthes tries to show that the image works in the way the language system works. He describes the lower part of each plate as paradigmatic in style in that it represents an array of items and meanings, differentiated from one another. The upper part of the plate, by contrast, is said to be syntagmatic: its meaning is contained in narrative continuities and neighbouring relations, the images of objects being assembled and completed, shown to be in use by human beings, their meaning fundamentally ascribed and determined by human beings. And this is precisely how information in the *Encyclopédie* is constructed for human use. Things get their meanings by the compiler of the encyclopaedia who ‘*mines* all nature with human signs’ (p. 24). So, with the birth of the *Encyclopédie*, in this sense, ‘a mine is born’ (*ibid.*). It surely is significant that one of the plates does indeed depict the workings of a mine. We mine the world, preserving what is excavated in the form of information, and through this, we make it our own. The world is reduced to a mere resource, being exhausted, investigated and utilised. Even when the process in question is not to do with making anything, it is still envisioned as something to be used by us, by the very fact that we have seen it: classifying helps us gain a better grasp of the world. Knowledge is understood in a particular way – that is, as information – and this serves our desire to be in control. We become masters standing in the midst of the world, yet standing over against it, opposed to it.⁷

Yet, further clarification is needed to discuss how the *Encyclopédie* directs us towards a certain way of thinking. If we begin with the context and purpose of looking something up using an encyclopaedia, this can be seen to be a more self-conscious than where, say, we come to know that thing by acquaintance. Our purpose will not be to experience it but rather seek the source of a particular kind of knowledge, of

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⁷ This echoes Heidegger’s critique of language and thinking as technology: in pursuit of utility, ‘speaking turns into information’, and natural aspects of language, such as uncertainty and insecurity, are conceived as a lack of formalisation (Heidegger, 2003b, p. 132). He also writes of the desire that lies behind this: ‘As an appraisal, information is also the arrangement that places all objects and stuffs in a form for humans that suffices to securely establish human domination over the whole earth and even over what lies beyond this planet’ (Heidegger, 1991, p. 124)
knowledge that can be classified. Encyclopaedic knowledge is made possible by converting the living experience of a thing into a source of information: this converts what we know into propositions, and thus changes and reforms in a certain way our relation to what we know. This is somewhat similar to the experience of the museum, when, for example, we examine the way that stuffed animals are displayed. There they are made still in order to show their essence more clearly – as if they are posed in their ideal position. Thus, the albatross is displayed with its long wings wide open, and falcons are shown fixed in a moment of flight, captured in the instant of attacking their prey. These birds are, as it were, revealing their pure forms, not out there alive in the wild but in a museum. Things are supposedly understood better – more clearly – because of this decontextualisation and abstraction.

But something is lost in that process. Barthes writes that the language of the *Encyclopédie*, realised in this particular way, ‘deliberately loses in intelligibility what it gains in experience’ (p. 31). And this resonates with what William Wordsworth writes in ‘The Tables Turned’:

> Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
> Our meddling intellect
> Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things: –
> We murder to dissect (Coleridge and Wordsworth, 2008, p. 136).

We examine things in order to understand them thoroughly; we fix and confine them to have them safely in our grip; we arrest them and take away their breath in order to stop the movement. And we kill them by taking away their dynamic life. ‘We murder to dissect’ is not a simple metaphor. Yet, we own our object of investigation only in a limited sense, only in that we have converted it into something we can understand, or rather into something utilisable.

It is worth noting that words always cut and divide. The *Encyclopédie* shows this *par excellence*. The referential function of words is accentuated in the forms of taxonomy, of nomenclature. The *Encyclopédie*, Barthes writes, is ‘a huge ledger of ownership’ that

depends on a certain dividing up of things: to appropriate is to fragment the world, to divide it into finite objects subject to man in proportion to their very
discontinuity: for we cannot separate without finally naming and classifying, and at that moment, property is born (Barthes, 2010, p. 27).

As we name them, things become familiar and become possessions. The radical development of the taxonomical sciences in the 18th century partly reflects this desire for ownership. Language serves as an inventory of the world, as a basis for the ‘learning of appropriation’ (ibid.).

What is problematic is the fact that language of this kind and the thinking it affords are then deemed the hallmark of human reasoning. The idea of human reasoning as power is even more accentuated in the ‘trajectory images’. We see people gathering wheat, milling it, and adding yeast and water in order to make bread. We see paper or glass being produced, seemingly out of nothing. The whole process shows that human beings can turn nature into resources, out of which human ‘goods’ can be produced. Nature’s raw materials can be turned into something good! And, importantly, the image illustrates ‘not only the object or its trajectory but also the very mind which conceives it’ (p. 33). In reading a plate from top to bottom,

it is the progress of the analytic mind that you are reproducing; the world gives you the usual, the evident (the scene); with the Encyclopedist, you descend gradually to causes, to substances, to primary elements, you proceed from the experiential to the causal, you intellectualize the object (ibid.).

This is nothing but the expression of the age of reason, which Barthes refers to as ‘the encyclopedism of the eighteenth century’ (p. 27). We gain a particular understanding of human reason through the *Encyclopédie*, belief in ‘the progress of reason’ (p. 32). There is pride in setting things in order, in appropriation of the world; this is what thinking in its higher capacity enables us to do. Hence, the *Encyclopédie* itself is ‘a Reasoned Dictionary’ (*dictionnaire raisonné*) (d’Alembert, 1995). And it is precisely this way of thinking that has enabled the advent of the *Encyclopédie* in the first place. This resonates with Heidegger’s analysis: the world’s becoming a picture is at the same time the event that brought about the emergence of modern subjectivity, so that the human being can ‘view’ the world rather than just be ‘in’ it (Heidegger, 1989).

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8 *The Preliminary Discourse to the Encyclopedia of Diderot* specifies two of its aims. The first is to set knowledge in order and have items connected to each other – hence, to be encyclopaedic. The second is systematically to provide solid grounding for each field of science and art: hence, it is ‘a Reasoned Dictionary’ (*dictionnaire raisonné*) (d’Alembert, 1995).
It is a crucial stage in the development of what Genevieve Lloyd will call the ‘Man of Reason’ (Lloyd, 1984). Only on the strength of this way of thinking was the project of the Encyclopédie made possible. Yet we cannot, even with more advanced scientific techniques, understand the world exhaustively, without any remainder. Understanding the world biologically, zoologically, physically, chemically, mathematically, and so on – even if any of these sciences were exhaustive – would not enable us to understand the world as a whole. A sum of fragments does not always make a whole. So there is a danger when this particular way of thinking is regarded as ‘the progress of reason’ or as the only form of reasoned thinking.

The Poetics of the Encyclopaedia

Let us revisit the image of the Encyclopédie, yet from quite a different angle. Towards the end of his essay, Barthes points out that ‘there is a depth in the Encyclopedic image, the very depth of time which transforms the object into myth’ (Barthes, 2010, p. 34). This is surprising given that the very purpose of the Encyclopédie is to have clear explanations of the world. Yet, far beyond its own intention, the image is actually open up to something mysterious.

As we saw previously, Barthes has first employed a Saussurean analysis of language in order to account for the structure of encyclopaedic information. Yet now it turns out that there is something in language that cannot be simply completed or confined within this structure. The image is ready to connect with others and fully open to new associations. And this openness makes the reader see something else, something in the image that was not intended: fleas, greatly enlarged, become monstrous figures, and snow-flakes become beautiful flowers. Perhaps this is more so for modern readers living today, after the passage of time. What is important is that these are not simply exceptions. Rather this should be read as part and parcel of the very nature of signs. The supposedly clear and fixed image produces meanings far beyond it. It is poetic – hence, Barthes speaks of the ‘Poetics of the Encyclopedic

* Heidegger writes this in 1938 in ‘The Age of the World Picture’. Heidegger criticises a particular worldview, which he later challenges with his account of technology as a way of thinking that conceives the world as mere resources. What is at issue with both Barthes and Heidegger is the way we experience the world. It is worth noting that the world for Heidegger is not simply the sum of physical entities: ‘If being-in-the-world is a kind of being which is essentially befitting to Dasein, then to understand being-in-the-world belongs to the essential content of its understanding of being’ (Heidegger, 1978, p. 118). Human beings are already beings-in-the-world. They are not subjects conferring values and meanings to the world in the way seen in the Encyclopédie.
image’ (*ibid.*). Signs’ very immobility, their being fixed in material forms, ironically becomes the impetus for this movement of flow. There is a seepage of meaning from one sign to another, and this creates a place for something new to come. The solid secure ground that the *Encyclopédie* seeks to establish becomes an abyss. The image seems to be suspended, resisting and breaking the information system in which it is supposed to fit. The system cannot but break open to the outside. And meaning can never be exhausted because of the ‘infinite vibrations of meaning’ at the very heart of each single image (*ibid.*). The *Encyclopédie*, which meant to dispel the secrecy of the world, now produces enigmas in abundance – endless layers of meanings, secrets, or even something more monstrous. In this way, the plates actually show something real, as Barthes recognises. Where the iconography of the womb looks mysterious, it at the same time depicts reality with great accuracy; it holds on to reality and does not simply lose its flow. The depth in the image reflects, on the one hand, a distancing from the real object, its being transformed through time into myth, and, on the other, the depth in the operation of signs themselves.

Now what we experience with the image brings us closer to Derridean accounts of language than to those of Saussure. Derrida takes the concept of the difference in Saussure (paradigmatic differential systems), and develops his concept of *différance*, which not only has the meaning of difference but also that of deferral. Language not only depends on differential systems: it not only differs but defers. Meaning never arrives at a fixed end-point, and words are never saturated with meaning: they are always open to new connections, new associations and interpretations. A sign is not fixed or confined in the form of a system at all. Reality is not an ‘Encyclopedic heaven’ – timeless, ordered, perfect (p. 38). Yet, paradoxically, through the *Encyclopédie* and its poetics, we now see reality better: ‘the real world is not reduced, it is suspended’ (p. 34). In the alternating movement of reading images, from top to bottom, bottom to top, in virtue of the non-linear characteristic of images, this suspension is enabled. Yet, the possibility of this suspension is, as we have seen, internal to language itself. ‘Even when we take language to be nothing but an instrument for information,’ as Heidegger puts this, ‘the speaking of language never becomes a mechanism that functions uniformly everywhere’ (Heidegger, 1991, p. 96).

Heidegger is a philosopher who enables understanding of language as something more than a tool or vehicle for the thought. It is not simply that the ‘I’, as active subject, using language, sees and names the world, as passive inert object. We
always think in and through language, involving a reciprocal, dynamic relationship between human beings, the world, and language. The ‘essential being of language’, Heidegger claims, ‘is Saying as Showing’ (Heidegger, 2003b, p. 123).\(^{10}\) In saying something, I allow things to come into view in a certain way, something that otherwise would have passed by unnoticed. By saying something to you, I allow you to see and experience the world in a certain way, by means of pointing to the world with words. In this sense, language is a *showing* that allows things to appear or disappear. It reveals the world in a particular way and, by giving a view of the world, draws us into a certain way of thinking. And this is already there even before I begin to speak of something: world first makes its appearance through language (its being said), and I respond to its saying. This is not to think of the human being as a being who controls or ‘possesses’ language, but rather as one already *in* language, as a language being. Furthermore, it is the case, as should become clear, that every time we say something, we bring something new into the world, and thus, however minimally, open up the world in some way, however differently, each time we speak; we let things come to the fore and, as a result, give the object new meanings. Language does not just describe things but rather realises and produces something new in the world. The Greek term *poiesis* refers to this productive characteristic of language, and it is in this sense that Heidegger can write that ‘language itself is poetry in the essential sense’ (Heidegger, 1975b, p. 72). This is nothing other than what we have seen with the poetics of the encyclopaedia.\(^{11}\)

Barthes reveals why the very project of the *Encyclopédie* cannot but fail. The world itself is an enigma. By attempting to accomplish the task of reason, what is revealed ironically is that the project is self-undermining: reason turns out to be other than it has been imagined. Reason – when understood narrowly, as systematicity or logic, within a particular form of rationalism – cannot be accomplished, because, in so doing, reason loses its relation to the world and language. Reason does not have its basis in logic or the algorithm: it emerges from language and out of our practices. By the same token, pushing scientific knowledge or method to the extreme can result in falling into the trap of pseudo-science, as with the claim that there are fundamentally

\(^{10}\) Albert Hofstadter, the translator of *Poetry Language Thought* notes that this ‘Saying’ derives not from *Saga* and but from *die Sage* in German; he accounts this for the reason why he capitalised it (Hofstadter, 1976, p. 371). Heidegger writes that he takes Saying [*Saga*] with its etymology of ‘pointing’ to relate to ‘showing, pointing out, signaling’ (Heidegger, 2003b, p. 123).

\(^{11}\) The English words ‘poetry’ and ‘poetics’ have their root in the Greek *poiesis*.  

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different human races, a claim we find in the *Encyclopédie*. The classificatory impulse in the 18th century sometimes asserted things that were totally unjustified, often in the name of enlightenment, as the *Encyclopédie* is not free from these. Hence, the emphasis on reason loses sight of a wider picture of the world and distances itself, again ironically, from the reality it hoped to understand and capture.

**The Synoptic and the Systematic in New Forms**

But, someone might object, we have moved beyond eighteenth-century encyclopaedism: our daily lives are more exposed, if I can put it this way, to thoughts of a poststructural kind. So, what does it mean to think of the encyclopaedia today, when our experience is closer to, say, Wikipedia? Hence, I turn my attention now to some cultural products of today that inherit aspects of the encyclopaedic form – in particular, the ubiquitous *Wikipedia* and that increasingly familiar feature of the research scene, the various ‘handbooks’\(^\text{12}\) of research in education. Consideration of these will help us to see where we stand now – to understand the context and society in which these products could be produced and are actively made use of. I attempt to explore how such products play a role in the ways that language and knowledge is conceived and realised in contemporary world, in particular in the field of educational research. And I do this, in a similar manner to that of Barthes, by looking at their forms with their characteristic susceptibility to a certain type of language – that is, the medium we are encouraged to think through. The contemporary publications I am referring to have been received in a mostly passive and unquestioning way amongst students and researchers in education, as useful resources and go-to, accessible accounts of key developments and ideas. The fact that these new forms are more or less placidly received may itself say something about the role they are playing.

**Wikipedia**

I begin with *Wikipedia*, undoubtedly a widely-consulted source of information today: it is not simply we find knowledge there, we find knowledge *produced* in a certain form. To the extent that such a source becomes a significant part of our lives, we cannot

\(^{12}\) I use the term ‘handbook’ as a shorthand way of embracing a variety of similar publications, with titles such as handbook, companion, or encyclopaedia in relation to education and educational research.
remain unaffected by the manner in which it presents the world to us. Wikipedia is partly inspired by and in some ways carries forward the spirit of the encyclopaedia. ‘Wikipedia’s goal,’ as it has recently stated it, ‘is to compile the sum of all human knowledge into a Web-based, free content Encyclopedia’ (‘Wikipedia talk’, 2018). While the aims of the encyclopaedia and Wikipedia overlap, the differences between them are significant. Perhaps it goes without saying that Wikipedia’s online form opens various possibilities, and these can partly overcome and extend aspects of the encyclopaedia in its standard printed form. Wikipedia is ‘continually created and updated, with articles on historic events appearing within minutes, rather than months or years’ (‘Wikipedia’, 2018). It is not only extendible, but also extendible up to the moment. Wikipedia acknowledges that knowledge is always changing, so it is ready to embrace whatever knowledge becomes in terms of substance and form. And importantly, it guarantees easy access not only to the body of knowledge, but also to the movement between the familiar categories of knowledge through ‘links’. Although the desire for relating and connecting things with cross-references was already there in the Encyclopédie, it has become much more powerful now by means of the development of new technology and the Internet. Wikipedia is open to the public, which means, in principle, that anybody can be an author and amend the information. This, on the one hand, has attracted many contributors which in turn accounts for its fast growth and, on the other, has to some extent discouraged experts. In this respect, perhaps, it is less reliably authoritative than the encyclopaedia, but it does have the potential for democratic empowerment.

The question of form and substance does, however, repay some further attention, and here it will be edifying to consider the style, structure, and layout of Wikipedia in the way that Barthes has given attention to those factors in respect of the Encyclopédie. Wikipedia has a standard pattern for each entry. If I search ‘caterpillar’, the first thing that shows up under the title is ‘disambiguation’. This means it relates to more than one article: did I mean the laval stage of butterflies? Or the Caterpillar, the fictional character in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland written by Lewis Carroll? I pick the character in the novel. An overview of the content follows, with the table of the contents on the left side of the screen, and an illustration of the Caterpillar on the right. At the bottom of the page, there are typically sections entitled ‘references’, ‘bibliography’, and ‘external links’. This synoptic systematic structure applies
generally, and the standard nature of this enables users to get used to the system. Notably many words appear in blue even in the short overview, which means that they are all linked to other pages. I can be instantly moved to the related pages, such as those on Lewis Carroll or on the novel itself.

What is the effect of this structure on the way that the page is used and the way that knowledge is conceived? It is helpful to pay attention to the nature of the Internet. Writing in 2001, Nicholas Burbules suggests that, the credibility of links in which information is provided is itself problematic, as this credibility is determined by the frequency with which a link is made, and this is often significantly related to commercial concerns. Hence, links are neither natural nor neutral. And, the Internet is to a large extent a self-sustaining reference system. Burbules draws an analogy with dictionaries as examples of ‘self-supporting structures’: ‘we look up the meaning of one word, it gives us another; we look up the meaning of that word, it gives us another; we look up the meaning of that word, and it gives us the first word we started with’ (Burbules, 2001, p. 442). In this closed reference system, ‘the very assistance we seek merely leads us in circles within the network’ (ibid.), and we will eventually need ‘some independent basis for assessing’ – for example, a connection with our previous knowledge or appeal to an authority (p. 444). So in this sense the problem of credibility is all down to one’s own judgement. If we only rely on links made by others, ‘we may be in the position of a blindfolded person being led by the hand by a group of others, all of whom are also blindfolded’ (ibid.). This characteristic of the Internet, I suggest, is accentuated in Wikipedia with its dictionary-like form. All the blue words, often taking more than half of the entry, tempt the user to click, and indeed each time this leads you to something new. But it leads you only so far within the Wiki world.

This relates to another danger of self-supporting closed structures. In such structures, it is difficult to question or imagine the outside. Burbules puts this humorously by reversing Meno’s paradox: ‘How do you know what’s not there when you do not know what it is? The global scope of the Web can create the illusion that whatever cannot be found must not be very important’ (p. 449). It is ironic that ‘without substantial independent knowledge of a subject area, it is impossible to find out, even with hindsight, what has been overlooked’ (p. 450). Provided that most users of Wikipedia are novices in the subject, the site can be a place for ‘self-confirming’ as Burbules puts it, rather than a place for testing and contesting one’s views against other conflicting views. It becomes a safe space rather than a place where I may be exposed
– and be exposed even to the extent of being disturbed. But why should I be disturbed, it might be objected, when Wikipedia is very useful for finding information quickly? What more do I want? This relates and extends to my next point.

‘[A]n excess of online information’, Burbules writes, ‘tends to produce a “levelling” effect in which everything is viewed as equally plausible or implausible – i.e., for any point of view you can find a reasonably well-argued alternative view’ (ibid.). Then you can simply access those links that will confirm your own belief or meet with your wishes. But there is an ethical deficit here in that you are thereby insulated from the need for judgement: you can hide from judgement, avoid being challenged. The illusion of ‘fact’ that is encouraged remains oblivious to the value judgement that is already embedded there. How, more specifically in the case of Wikipedia, does this levelling effect work? If I search ‘fascism’, the result comes up with the same speed and in the same appearance as with the ‘caterpillar’ page. This certainly provides a good deal of concise information, often just from the overview. It even gives me the feeling that somehow or other I am learning a lot. This feeling is enhanced when I keep moving between links and adding new knowledge, including things I had not set out to find. Yet, some knowledge, and indeed my example of ‘fascism’ shows this well, cannot be learned and consumed in this way. The synoptic, extensively linked page encourages a kind of lateral structuring of thought. It enables something democratic, equal easy access, but at the same time levels or equalises all knowledge. Links contribute to another problem because they make it difficult to stay with and dwell upon the subject. We expect all the requisite information to come instantaneously, we expect pages to open immediately, and they do! Even the way content is displayed is limited by the medium and conditioned by its synoptic systematic structure. Through that structure an underlying message repeats itself and thereby gains legitimacy: that all knowledge can be understood within this synoptic systematic structure. This reinforces a certain idea about the acquisition of knowledge itself, which is understood as accessing information, and this does not acknowledge the depths and heights, the contours of each particular topic of knowledge. It smooths out and flattens the experience of learning. It can even be harmful if it gives an illusion of understanding ‘fascism’. One can easily be oblivious to the fact that knowing something comes about through processes of selection that are themselves exercises in value judgement. The experience with Wikipedia shapes our way of thinking. It
shapes not only our conception of what fascism is but also our understanding of what it is to learn what fascism is.\textsuperscript{13}

The democratic impulse behind Wikipedia can be self-defeating. Free-floating movement between all the seemingly meaningful things can make them equally trivial erasing their fundamental differences. To use it better we should be aware of its limits and potential harms, especially in our time where the demarcation between information and knowledge is blurred. This requires a questioning of what is absent in that synoptic systematic structure.

\textit{The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy of Education Online}

The encyclopaedia is not something new in the field of either education or philosophy of education, and the \textit{Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory} edited by Michael Peters (2017) is a recent manifestation of the form, though not typical of the kind. In fact, the project on which this is based was initiated in 1999, as Peters notes in the Preface to the book. Peters says that after finishing his PhD he was concerned that analytic method, though it ‘provided rigor, logic, and argumentation’, ‘did not recognize the cultural and social significance of language, as revealed by the early Wittgenstein’ (p. vii). So this book is partly a response to that concern. The \textit{Encyclopedia} is based on two principles: first, it ‘attempts to be socially inclusive and culturally responsive’; second, it ‘is forward looking as much as it is sensitive to the past’ (\textit{ibid.}). In general, the \textit{Encyclopedia}, rather than providing a unified view, attempts to recognise and update contemporary theoretical philosophical issues of significance. And this features as something distinctive in this encyclopaedia as it provides entries for various specific topics rather than focusing on introductory entries for supposedly necessary topics. The assembly of the volume has been undertaken collectively via a certain form of peer review, under section editors for each theme. Topics extend across a broad range, including entries on ‘Heidegger’ and ‘Deleuze’, relatively practical topics such as ‘Digital Learning’, more theoretical items such as ‘Truth and Meaning’, specialist matters such as ‘Philosophy of Sport’, as well as broader more timely issues, including ‘Indigenous Studies’, ‘Postcoloniality’, and ‘Gender Studies’.

\textsuperscript{13} Google might be another name for the encyclopaedia today. The information it provides is vast, and not dependent on a few experts or scholars. It certainly has a democratising potential but, like Wikipedia, also operates within algorithms that are not free from forms of self-reinforcement and economic interests.
This, I think, is undoubtedly a significant achievement in the field. Yet it is worth looking briefly at a review of the book by Martin Guha (2018). His criticism mainly targets the book’s frame and structure. First, the book should have a proper index and thematic outline. Second, the alphabetic headings need a thorough overhaul to make it a useful reference book. For example, to list ‘On Some of Nietzsche’s Ideas’ under O is, he says, ‘just silly’ (p. 13)! As a formal librarian he contends that ‘navigating this book is a matter of luck’ (ibid.). Third, there is the lack of comprehensiveness. Being interested in Aristotle, he went to A, and he ‘was surprised to find that a three-volume encyclopedia on philosophy does not have an entry on Aristotle’ (ibid.). He speaks here, fourth, of the lack of balance: ‘imagine, ten lengthy essays related to Freire and nothing on Aristotle’; and, similarly, ‘why there is an entry on Confucianism in Vietnam and not one on China is nowhere explained’ (ibid.). By contrast, he is impressed by the quality of the content itself, yet, ironically, this weighs against the book’s marketability. He is himself interested in philosophy, he explains, but thinking of his contemporaries, many of whom are now retired school teachers, he wonders who will be particularly interested in these detailed articles, and what libraries will be willing to spend over £400 for a copy (p. 14). The review intrigued me not because I think it is particularly astute or fair but because it illustrates the general expectation that comes with the encyclopaedic form, as his criticisms very clearly show. Guha is basically saying that this encyclopaedia is not encyclopaedic enough!

Yet there are features in Peters’ *Encyclopedia* that are continuous with the styles and principles of more standard encyclopaedias, and these repay attention. The alphabetical ordering of the book is the same as that of Diderot and d’Alembert, which, they state, aims to equalise – that is, to pay equal attention to all the objects. And a similar motivation may reasonably be ascribed to Peters. All the subjects seem important, and the lateral structure implies or even guarantees equal importance to each category. In addition to this, like *Wikipedia*, it has a cross-reference system; this is provided at the end of most entries, and it works at its best in the electronic form of the book, which is richly hyper-linked. And, as seen in the case of *Wikipedia*, this further contributes to an equalising and levelling effect. On the other hand, there are problems with *Wikipedia* that find their way also into Peters’ *Encyclopaedia* – particularly, in its self-supporting aspect. One might think they are less problematic here than in *Wikipedia* because all the categories are chosen carefully and written
thoroughly; yet, precisely because of this mark of quality control, readers are more likely to be reassured by the system.

Contra Guha’s review, it is to be acknowledged that Peters’ use of the term ‘encyclopaedia’ is surely not without irony: his own writings on technology and poststructuralism show that he is fully aware of the problems with the form, and the exploitation of online publishing demonstrates this in ways that are palpable. Yet I am left with some unease. As the previous paragraph indicates, there is a tendency towards a flattening of thought and understanding here in which this encyclopaedia reiterates the problems of its 18th century precursor, and it reinforces expectations of writing and dissemination that structure our ways of thinking and that may be in conflict with its intention. Let me connect this with aspects of the current research in education, where the grounds for anxiety are clearer – that is, in the growth of handbooks of research.

Handbooks of Educational Research

Handbooks of educational research are a relatively recent phenomenon (see, for example, Wyse, Selwyn, Smith, and Suter, 2016; Paulsen and Perna, 2019). The sudden abundance of these handbooks, with their characteristic style and structure, is quite noticeable. These comprise works by different authors, each of whom has been commissioned to write on a topic, usually with a focus on the provision of useful basic information about research processes or methods. This is not something completely new, as it partly follows in the trend of graduate research textbooks. Linda Stone (2006) analyses and criticises such textbooks in the US context: the presupposition that unites them is that a scientific understanding of research is needed by all; they pay primary attention to methodology and particularly to quantitative methods, and to the ‘serial steps to follow’ in terms of the general process and specific design of research, all of which purports to provide a sturdy sense of what good research must look like. This, she laments, is part of how ‘new generations of researchers early on learn what is “normal”’ (p. 127). And this, I suggest, is now extended through handbooks, whose authoritative styling gives their approach more apparent legitimacy.

What, then, do these handbooks look like? What characteristic forms and styles of language do they bring with them? And what is the effect of their styling and structure on the way that educational research and knowledge are conceived? First, the contents are presented synoptically systematically. They are structured around the
assumption that there is a linear process of research, an assumption partly reinforced by the desire to help research students quickly to grasp the substance of the field and to embark on their own research following these patterns. The BERA/SAGE Handbook of Educational Research (2016), for example, comprises six parts, each with a few chapters as sub-categories. They all together identify tasks to be undertaken at each stage. Part I, ‘Understanding Research’, includes ‘The Role of Theory in Research’ and ‘The Ethics of Research’ amongst its chapters. Topics such as ‘Writing about Research’ and ‘Social Media and Academic Publishing’ are addressed in the last part, entitled ‘Reporting, Disseminating & Evaluating Research’. The middle parts are mainly dedicated to methodology and data acquisition and analysis. So, the table of contents itself already conveys an idea of research, implying which things are of more importance, and indicating particular tasks to be undertaken at different stages, following steps.

Second, as you proceed, you encounter a series of decisions to be made in order that you can determine your own theoretical position. These are not simply such matters as choosing between quantitative and qualitative methods, the complexity of which the Handbook acknowledges. These decisions will be responses to the kinds of questions indicated in the Introduction: ‘Are you setting out to build theory or test theory? Are you looking to explore or explain? […] Are you looking to identify causal relationships between variables and generalize findings to larger groups and broader contexts?’ (p. 25) These are generally presented as involving a set of either/or choices. And, as it turns out, the questions are often couched in the terms of heavily philosophical ideas: ‘ontology’ or ‘epistemology’ appear as something to be, again, ‘chosen’ – that is, as ‘epistemological and ontological frameworks’. These are perspectives you choose and then hold fast to, and the quicker you decide the better as this can make your journey shorter. If you fail to choose the right one, the one fitting your research question, you will need to start all over again. Handbooks make things in the research process easy to pick up and use, and at the same time inevitably distort what those things are. And it is even more problematic when graduate students are expected to choose in this way, at this very early stage, between these apparently technical, curiously weighted, and dubiously defined terms. They are willing to do so

14 I once attended a graduate student conference where the theme was methodology. One of the talks was applauded for its clearness. The speaker suggested confidently: ‘it is important to choose between Positivism and Interpretivism as your worldview and for your research question. If you mix both in order to answer several questions, that’s Pragmatism, which I don’t really recommend as it can be very confusing.’
(however frustrated they may be by having to choose without knowing what all this really means) in order to get into the normal business of research, and this, from the very beginning, prevents an in-depth engagement with theoretical and historical ideas – which would surely only provide an extra burden.

Third, ethics is understood as something pertinent to one stage of the research. It is understood in terms of such procedures as ‘ethical declarations’ and ‘ethics approval’, or, as this Handbook emphasises, in relation to subject groups, that is, in terms of ‘consent/assent’, ‘anonymity’, and ‘confidentiality’ (p. 73). Although these procedures should not be undermined and are undoubtedly of importance, understanding ethics in this way makes the researcher insensitive to or oblivious of the ethical dimensions that pervade any educational research – that is, ethical and political responsibility taken in a wider sense. Ethics is indeed more than ‘ethical principles and codes’: one ‘principle’ explains that ‘justice’ means ‘treat people fairly’ (p. 76). More specifically, no research can be undertaken without some initial concern with questions of value. What is the point of enquiring into this topic? Why does it matter? These are already ethical questions. Similarly, the findings of educational research, the data produced, usually do not simply speak for themselves but depend upon thoughtful evaluation in which questions of ethics are again inevitably, and quite rightly, at work.

And as Paul Standish notes, ‘[c]arenest self-consciousness about research methodology, professionalisation and orthodoxy (‘research methods for all’) may ironically be complicit in this’ (Standish, 2001, p. 515) – ‘this’ being the preoccupation with the ‘ethics of educational research methods’ to the exclusion of wider and more fundamental ethical matters.

Fourth, despite the limitations that come with the structure of handbooks, and not least because of their limitations in terms of space and thus depth, they are often surprisingly confident in dealing with complex ideas. One of the chapters in the ‘Planning Research’ part of the BERA/SAGE Handbook is called ‘Unpacking Pragmatism for Mixed Methods Research: The Philosophies of Peirce, James, Dewey, and Rorty’; and its goal is ‘to explain the ontologies, epistemologies, axiologies, and methodologies advocated by four prominent pragmatists’ (p. 260). This will be done ‘in their own words’, it is claimed, ‘thereby leaving less room for interpretation found in secondary sources’ (p. 259). So, each philosopher is allotted to these four sub-categories, and this is explained in a supposedly objective manner. Perhaps one will learn something about pragmatism, but there is something self-defeating about what is
learned too. It is self-defeating because pragmatism is not like this – not amenable to these clear-cut distinctions or to presentation in a collection of fragments.

The systematic structure of handbooks shapes a sense of propriety in conducting educational research and, in some respects, paves the way for mechanistic thinking. What is suppressed is the play of ordinary language, especially where this is done in favour of reliance on jargon phrases. While thought jumps about between jargons, it can lose touch with reality in its flow, with contexts with their layers of meanings, and with its practical relatedness. In the system of technical terms and excessive theorisation, the door for new thought is hardly open. The handbooks are becoming more varied. The *SAGE Encyclopedia of Educational Research, Measurement, and Evaluation*, a kind of research handbook, even arranges the elements and concepts in relation to research in alphabetical order, complying with its title as encyclopaedia (Frey, 2018). The subjects are more specified and specialised so that we can find, for example, the handbooks of research on ‘special education’ (Sindelar, Mccray, Brownell, and Lignugaris/Kraft, 2014), ‘music education’ (Elliott, Silverman, and McPherson, 2019), or ‘dialogic education’ (Mercer, Wegerif, and Major, 2020). Such a trend may indicate something that research culture is reaching towards: ever-more-refined differentiation has its benefits, and it may reinforce the overarching hierarchy, the structures of systematic thought, to the neglect of the fabric of human experience. This would be to extend the univocity, replicated in various specialisation, and to close of possibilities of thinking in new ways.

**A Happy Fit: Handbooks – The Discourse of Research Methods – Funding Applications**

Initiation into the ‘normal process’ of research involves induction into its instrumental values. As Stone (2006) puts it, the message is to ‘get in and get out’. You must ‘locate your project methods in order to “get grants”’, you must ‘adopt and perfect standardized routines and formats’, and all this must culminate finally with publications and dissertations (p. 135). These values are shared and cultivated not only through research courses and handbooks but also through conversations with supervisors and other colleagues. And, understandably, neither academics nor graduate students are free from these ‘practical’ concerns. So it is not difficult to anticipate that research students are directed towards handbooks, and handbooks provide the knowledge that fits. There is a ‘fit’ between what is required in the current
research and what the handbooks provide. And I suggest that one of methodologies introduced in the *BERA/SAGE Handbook* is exemplary of this dovetailed fit.

The *Handbook* begins ‘Planning Research’ part with a chapter called ‘Approaches to Reviewing Research in Education’, and this is dedicated to systematic review, which is said to contrast with ‘traditional methods of research review’ (p. 160). The opening sentences state why this is called for: ‘[T]o move the field of education forward, reviews require a systematic analytic methodology that is transparent and trustworthy for pulling together existing research’ (p. 143). Systematic review is a methodology of growing importance in Evidence-Based Research approaches and was originally used in the field of health and social care before being imported into education. Its acclaimed advantages come from its way of using database and protocols. It is said to be ‘superior to an expert or individual literature review’ because it is ‘more comprehensive’, ‘less biased’, and ‘transparent and replicable’ (Andrews, 2005, p. 405). It covers more than any individual might achieve, irrespective of the researcher effect, with replicable protocol. This guarantees better quality evidence, and thus it positions itself as ‘epistemological and methodological progress’ (Gough and Thomas, 2016, p. 98).

Here, the zeal for the ‘systematic’ seems have come closer to the ‘mechanistic’. The claim of the ‘progress’ echoes the claim of ‘the progress of reason’ found in the *Encyclopédie*. The connection may appear clearer if we note that the *Encyclopédie* eulogises Francis Bacon, who wanted the mind to be ‘guided at every step, and the business be done as if by machinery’ (Bacon cited in Smith, 2006, p. 157). This partly appears as an egalitarian idea because, as Bacon provides an example that, almost everybody with a ruler or a compass will be able to draw a straight line and a circle (Smith, 2006, p. 158). But, as Richard Smith further illustrates, the emphasis on such methodology in effect leaves no room for human intellect and judgement. This is the problem found in contemporary educational research. What is aspired to are systematic research techniques and the hope that they can be adopted and operationalised straightforwardly. This can be seen as the working through of a ‘Baconian legacy of seeking to “level men’s wits”’ and as a consequent levelling of educational research.

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15 The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) in the UK is one of the leading institutions that has supported and promoted systematic reviews since 1993. Online publications such as the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education* (Noblit, 2016) can serve the purpose of systematic review well. This web-based encyclopaedia updates with the latest articles on a monthly basis and gives summaries of them. This relates to the way that social science researchers imagine themselves to be at the forefront of a rapidly developing science, and so the *latest research findings* are of paramount importance.
(p. 162). In a similar vein David Cooper argues that this is research only ‘in the sense of trying to secure a preset plan of inquiry through application of a rigorous methodology, of techniques of measurement and calculation’, and that such a way of thinking thereby restricts the nature of knowing to explanation, verification, and clarification (Cooper, 2002, p. 49). If research methodologies are understood as purely technical, this is tantamount to yielding to an impersonal mechanism. It generates thinking that is indifferent to differences. And this tendency is reinforced by research funding mechanisms that prioritise clearly deliverable outcomes. They determine the value of the question and appropriate methods for it, and in so doing they risk perpetuating prejudices and prejudgements that block enquiry. Much as systematic review promotes and conceives itself as having direct ‘impact’ on policy makers, it is difficult to deny its susceptibility to pressures from funding bodies and to market power.

This echoes the concern with education that Deleuze expresses through the several interviews collected in Negotiations. Deleuze says that we are now in ‘control societies’ that operate ‘through continuous control and instant communication’ (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 174). In such societies, the boundaries between institutions such as schools and workplaces is blurred, and they both give their way ‘to frightful continual training, to continual monitoring of worker-schoolkids or bureaucrat-students’ (p. 175). As Martin Joughin, his translator, notes, the French term ‘controle continu’, which literally means ‘continuous control’, is also the term for ‘continuous assessment’ in education, ‘continuing education’ or, as is translated in the above sentence, ‘continual training’ (Deleuze, 1995d, p. 202). While some of these developments may well carry less of a sense of institutional confinement, the undercurrent is towards this continuous control: universities are transformed into business schools, the place for perpetual training. And ‘information technology, communications, and advertising are taking over the words “concept” and “creative,” and these “conceptualists” constitute an arrogant breed that reveals the activity of selling to be capitalism’s supreme thought, the cogito of the marketplace’ (Deleuze, 1995c, p. 131). Of pivotal importance to this way of thinking is the ‘introduction of a cultural space of markets and conformity – that is, the space for “producing for the

16 Deleuze says that we are moving from the disciplinary societies analysed by Foucault to control societies, which was already anticipated by Foucault. In the disciplinary society, the boundaries between institutions are clear: you move from school to workplace, and perhaps to hospital, and so on (each institution being a more or less closed site). By contrast, the control society operates with continual training and monitoring.
market” – together’ (ibid.). So if we are to resist this force of the market, what we need is a mode of language and thought that can provide a countering movement. It is in the light of this thought that I now turn to what Deleuze means by ‘concept’ or ‘creative’ – terms that stand in need of further clarification.

**From the Encyclopaedia to Pedagogy**

In what was to be their last work together, *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the role and nature of philosophy in what is, to be sure, an unusual and provocative way: philosophy is the creation of concepts. But what do the authors mean by ‘concepts’ and what by ‘creation’? In fact, they are using the term in a highly specialised and stipulative way. It is clear that in order to work with these ideas, we must enter into a different kind of discourse, of which the following provides a sample pertinent to my purposes:

The post-Kantians concentrated on a universal encyclopedia of the concept that attributed concept creation to a pure subjectivity rather than taking on the more modest task of a pedagogy of the concept, which would have to analyze the conditions of creation as factors of always singular moments (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 12).

These remarks draw attention to the emphasis on a kind of interiorisation in the reception of Kant (in terms of transcendental categories): it would be to accentuate the more Cartesian aspect to Kant’s thought and to extend this into the classifications of the new taxonomical sciences (the pure subject categorising things); and this would be done at the cost of attention to the ‘more modest task’ of attending to the histories of interpretation and take-up of particular philosophical concepts – say, Descartes’ *cogito* or Rawls’ ‘veil of ignorance’.17 These are concepts, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense, because they constitute landmarks for thought. That this take-up requires ‘singular moments’ in philosophy always depends upon the thinking, saying, and writing of individuals – it is singularised in their experience. They continue in what itself is an illustration of the creation of concepts:

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17 The examples given in *What is Philosophy?* are: ‘Aristotle’s substance, Descartes’s cogito, Leibniz’s monad, Kant’s condition, Schelling’s power, Bergson’s duration’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 7).
If the three ages of the concept are the encyclopedia, pedagogy, and commercial professional training, only the second can safeguard us from falling from the heights of the first into the disaster of the third – an absolute disaster for thought whatever its benefits might be, of course, from the viewpoint of universal capitalism (*ibid.*).

Concepts develop out of the first stage of the encyclopaedia, where they are, as it were, fixed in their meaning, stabilised systematically, and set in order. This reflects the very fact that the need for concepts begins with the human desire to make sense of the world, to grasp things in understanding. And this is no doubt a necessary and important part not only of knowledge but also of our culture as a whole. Yet Deleuze and Guattari claim that there is a danger of falling from the stage of the encyclopaedia into the third, that of commercial professional training. Although the intention behind the encyclopaedia is certainly not inherently bad, it risks subsiding into commercial professional training – that is, when things are determined in terms of their ‘usefulness’, in the discourse of ‘universal capitalism’.

What is crucial, in resistance to this, is the second stage: pedagogy. By being released from the stage of encyclopaedia, the stage of pedagogy arises where thoughts are in movement, in flow. This is the place for the creation of concepts – not their installing and stabilisation at the encyclopaedic stage but the ongoing movement of thought that they enable, which is suggestive of the nature of language itself. Words go through forms of fixity, but to be renewed they must be released into the flow of thought. And this reflects the ordinary play of signs. For Deleuze, as Ronald Bogue notes, learning ‘is essentially concerned with signs’ (Deleuze, 2000, p. 4; Bogue, 2004, p. 332). The world, as it reveals itself through signs, unfolds dynamically in a way ‘that escapes common sense and defies its set categories’, where ‘things perpetually metamorphose into something else and thereby elude identification and specification’ (Bogue, 2004, p. 329). And this movement is essential for learning – pedagogy – in overcoming stiff and stifled thought.

This does not mean, as Deleuze makes clear, that concepts ‘can’t be taken up again and treated systematically’ (Deleuze, 1995e, p. 147). It is rather by being taken up repeatedly and linked up with one another that concepts become more powerful. This being in relation to others is itself something essential to them; it is in virtue of this that the concept is in ceaseless movement, in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari,
in ‘the world as a patchwork’ (ibid.). Elsewhere Deleuze writes: ‘A concept, as we see it, should express an event rather than an essence’ (Deleuze, 1995d, p. 25). This says something back to the desires of encyclopaedism, to the desire for essence in a fixed sense, not only in philosophy but also in education; rather than looking for something solid and secure, the shift in focus must be towards events – that is, to concern with particular things happening around us, and to the examination of what underlies such events. This is to attend to what the events say about the current climate of education, which is inseparable from one’s relation and experience of such events. The movement of flow is there in which concepts are created and can teach us to be critically responsive – where perhaps the concept itself is an event that changes our perception and brings about more thoughts and connections.

Pedagogy is a stage in the structure that is there for us now and perhaps is typically there in any discipline at any time: in any thought, theories, and research, all of which are comprised of language. In any dynamic activity in which we are engaged, there is always the danger that it will be fixed at some point, losing the connection to its outside, perhaps more so when it acquires and becomes authority. There are both temptations and pressures to move in this direction, in the running of schools, in the winning of an argument, in scholarship, and in the general competitiveness of academia. There is the temptation to take a short-cut from the encyclopaedia to ‘commercial professional training’. They fit! The force of ‘commercial’ in this phrase is to show the way that the ‘pedagogical’ is subdued or elided by the forces of universal capitalism. This is apt criticism given the ways that research itself has become subject to market forces and has been commodified. One sees the veneer of professionalisation, but this is anathema to the profession of faith in one’s subject that should characterise good teaching.

To restore movement, to come back again into the muddle, requires a kind of resolute resistance. The basis, the ground that is taken for granted, should be opened to questions and challenges. To embrace this, it is important to understand ‘rigour’ differently, not least in education but also more broadly in the humanities and social sciences. Given that the world can never be fixed without remainder, understanding humanity rigorously must be something different from understanding it through scientific methods, which can reveal only limited aspects. To accept this would be to do justice to what is studied, and to think beyond the system of cause-effect or input-output, and beyond the closed economy of commercialisation. (In fact, physical
science itself must also go beyond this.) This is to think of education not with exactitude but still rigorously, as Heidegger would say. Paradoxically, to be less grounded is to be more rigorous. Thus, Heidegger writes accurately of the teacher: ‘The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs’ (Heidegger, 1976, p. 15). His thinking is more demanding than theirs, reaching for a rigour of which they cannot (yet) conceive, a rigour that answers to what is studied. In realising that what we need is a faith to face the abyssal, the task of education and philosophy comes now to be seen quite differently.

The potential for this kind of thought is already there in the story of the human beings who struggle out of Plato’s Cave, a much-entertained metaphor of enlightenment, and the allegory now gains new significance and can be seen differently. Heidegger shows that the Cave is something to which one must return (see, for example, Heidegger, 1998b; Thomson, 2002). Barthes shows that the Encyclopédie repays attention, that there is something in it that educates, beyond the ambitions of its creators: even its etymology reveals its power as ‘paideia’; and as a product of the Enlightenment, it reminds us that light should not be read in a narrow way. There is something to which we always need to return: this is to do justice to the fact that there are always things to be done, to be re-found through new ways continually; my life is what I struggle with, over and over again, and the journey out of the Cave can never be one-way. And this is what pedagogy is about. Certainly, Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term implies something of the struggle inherent in pedagogy – teaching and learning. It is pedagogy in this sense that does justice to reason in its reciprocal relationship with language and the world. It is important to render thought responsive to what comes from outside, so that reason becomes responsible. And although the three stages that Deleuze and Guattari identify align in some degree with a recognisable history, at least in the West, what they are talking about is a structure more pervasive of the human condition, encompassing tendencies by which education is always threatened. And this gives us resources to embrace pedagogy as our condition, and to see it as the condition that disrupts educational research in its systematic excesses, but only the better to renew it.

Philosophers in education have provided some helpful advice. For Smith (2015) it is the arts and humanities that unsettle: ‘they call our powers of interpretation into

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18 Iain Thomson, for example, discusses how Heidegger seeks to recover the meaning of the allegory of the cave (Thomson, 2002).
play to remind us that there is seldom just one real world out there, but a variety of perspectives on whatever confronts us’ (p. 753). They displace the oppressive rhetoric of ‘impact’, which would plan and measure research even before it is begun. They resist its ‘colonising’ of the ‘academic imagination’ (p. 749). But supervisors also must wake up – so that they require their students to read whole books (instead of searching for keywords or something that will confirm their pre-existing views or support their ‘findings’). ‘Read classics,’ Hodgson and Standish (2007) insist. Read them and be ‘disturbed by them’ (p. 117): ‘Set the focus not on the problems you want to solve, for these so often will be problems whose terms you have taken for granted. Focus instead on the construction of the problems. Ask why the problem has been construed in this way, why just this has emerged as an “educational problem”. Create problems, do not just insipidly solve them’ (p. 118). To create problems, one will need to find oneself in the experience of and in relation to one’s surroundings, attending to the contours of that experience.

The value of such practices is in the fact that they cannot be taken up simply by following a rule, cannot depend on any fixed system. They depend on taking up the risk and uncertainty, and embracing the extent of anxiety. This is precisely what makes thought and discipline alive. This is not the constriction of rigor mortis but the rigorous construction of pedagogical transformation. Among courses in methodology, even among the growing number of emotional support courses (e.g, ‘overcoming writer’s block’), it is difficult to find engagement in challenging conversation. Space is needed for this, where we can write and then to come back to the muddle of conversation. It is in this muddle that one may eventually find what one wants to say and not just repeat what has been already said. We might even unlearn some of our habits, ways of thinking that have succumbed to convention. This is in defiance of what Deleuze has called the ‘professional eye’, the surveillance of ‘commercial professional training’, which ‘produces an immediate and complacent perfection that’s instantly controllable and controlled’ (Deleuze, 1995b, p. 79). Technical perfection stifles creation as it leaves no room for ‘perceptual exploration’ (ibid.). Like Barthes’ sense of the poetics of the encyclopaedic image, Deleuze opens the way to a different optics: ‘you can then see all the better the flattest of images is almost imperceptibly inflected, layered, with

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19 This is from ‘Letter to Serge Daney’ in Negotiations (1995b), where Deleuze uses a similar allegory in terms of the cinema. He recounts three periods of the cinema: encyclopedia of the world – pedagogy of perception – and professional training.
varying depths that force you to travel within it, but on a supplementary journey, out of control’ *(ibid.)*. To imagine the outside of ‘normal’ we might need something out of control, to acknowledge things not in our grip.

In this chapter, I have investigated the encyclopaedia and its relations not so much to criticise them but to take them as a means for questioning contemporary culture, particularly in education research. It is not possible simply to step outside all this, for I too am part of this culture. Yet, I am attempting here to gain some critical distance: to see how things have developed as a means of understanding where we now are. I have attempted to examine the ways in which knowledge can become fixed by forms of its discursive production – most obviously in the *Encyclopédie*, as well as in the modern encyclopaedic forms of the handbooks and *Wikipedia*. This is to examine them as expressions of the culture and society that made their birth possible in the first place and continues to use them. The familiar structures and strictures of today, which are materialised in these products, are of course contingent upon cultural and economic forces. They can become new means of thinning out whatever does not fit their own conventions of use, first weakening and then disabling the dynamism and movement of thinking. In the end I have drawn on the late work of Deleuze and Guattari, which makes these themes explicit in ways that are at once insightful about and powerfully critical of the distortions of pedagogy and education described above. The stemming of the natural flow of language itself is an important part of what is wrong. To attend to the openness of signs is nothing but to open the possibilities of ourselves, for we are not to be fixed.
Heidegger’s account of technology has been discussed widely in the philosophy of education. It has been found valuable, for example, in the analysis of policies and practices governed by the pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness (see, for example, Fitzsimons, 2002). Heidegger poses the question concerning technology as a question not about technology itself but about thinking: the question of what conditions the way we think. His critique will, on the one hand, provide a further criticism of the encyclopaedic way of thinking and, on the other, constitute a basis for an exploration of thinking that is more responsive and receptive in kind. This chapter focuses on the concept of Gelassenheit as developed in Heidegger’s later thought as a key to overcoming technological ways of thinking. It seeks to show the relevance of this to aspects of education, especially to the ways that teaching can be enhanced in order to do better justice both to learners and to what is studied. In the end, however, I encourage a degree of vigilance in relation to Heidegger’s thought, but in a way that does not deny its powerful insights.

Seven Steps on the Way

My argument moves through seven steps. These are steps towards thinking differently on a path of philosophy after Heidegger, and they are steps towards seeing teaching and learning in a new light. I present them as a series of propositions: (1) what is near
is not necessarily what is measured as near or is physically near; (2) being in nearness requires thinking differently; (3) representational thinking is only a particular way of thinking – it is ‘one track’ thinking; (4) thinking beyond representation begins with acknowledging human finitude and the limits of knowledge; (5) thinking in nearness depends on our effort to be receptive and responsive; (6) thinking, thus teaching and learning, requires dwelling within appropriate distance; and (7) teaching and learning should be given the time and space in which thinking can take place.

(1) What is near is not necessarily what is measured as near or is physically near.

‘All distances in time and space are shrinking,’ Heidegger writes in his lecture ‘The Thing’ (Heidegger, 1975d, p. 165). Why, in what sense, are they shrinking? We are certainly less restricted by the condition of time and space than ever before. I can speak to the person on the other side of the world and hear the news from abroad without delay. We access and experience the world literally in our hands, perhaps with a single movement of an index finger. The world is full of information that is available as preset data. We are close enough to the world to reach and grasp it, and this seems more apparent with the emergence of information technology. But this new technology differs from handicraft and from the earlier technology that enabled factory production. The way it works and controls is often hidden behind its attractive ergonomic convenience. It alters the world, turning it into readily available information. Even the word ‘information’ has changed meaning. Any data the computer produces is now regarded as information. Information has lost its relationship with truth: whereas ‘to inform’ was to apprise someone of the truth, this is now only a secondary consideration. So this world-view, which has become natural to many today, is only a particular view of the world, made possible, thinkable and perhaps even desirable in large part by technology.

Education has benefited from technology, particularly in terms of representing the world in a way that is approachable by students. Since Comenius’s *Orbis

20 Heidegger in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ distinguishes ancient technology and modern technology (Heidegger, 1977a). Although both serve as means to human ends, with modern technology, which challenges and exploits nature by storing and stockpiling it, the world only appears as resources at our disposal. Standish provides a further distinction: new technology differs from earlier forms and from modern industry. In the form of cybernetics, it controls and shapes production. And, perhaps in a more surreptitious form, it ‘hastens the tendency towards the restriction of thought within the parameters of calculative rationality’ (Standish, 1997, p. 444).
Sensualium Pictus (The Visible World in Pictures)\textsuperscript{21}, a seminal textbook for children, the question of representation has been closely related to the question of teaching. Orbis Pictus, as Klaus Mollenhauer explains, raises questions for education of what to represent, in what order, and what to leave out, which remain major questions today (Mollenhauer, 2013). Comenius attempted to relate abstract ideas to children’s concrete experience, and thus was regarded as progressive in his time. Although we have come far since then, what he was aiming at is still ‘live’ in contemporary thinking, perhaps even more so in a certain discourse of progressivism. With technology (and a further qualitative change with new technology) it has become easier to offer students vivid representations of the world. Virtual technologies even provide immersive experiences. Galleries and museums can ‘bring things to life’.\textsuperscript{22} Furthermore, e-learning programmes and apps have been developed, so it is argued, to promote students’ autonomy. They can choose what they learn and, thus, feel, so it is thought, a sense of ownership of their knowledge. Hence, technology is certainly playing an important role, and teachers are increasingly dependent upon it.

While I am neither denying the usefulness of technology nor advocating abandoning it, I suggest that, where technology is regarded as mere means detached from values, substantial questions remain hidden. Technology, as intimated above, displays the world in a particular way, the significance of which will be further explained in later steps. The question that now concerns us is this: given all these benefits in education, do students experience the world as something that is genuinely close to them – or, as Heidegger might say, in nearness?

According to Heidegger, all distances are only shrinking. Despite the fact that distances are shrinking in terms of physicality, we do not experience nearness. Rather, there is no longer any sense of distance as we have forgotten what it is to be near in a genuine sense. Heidegger writes: ‘Short distance is not in itself nearness. Nor is great distance remoteness’ (Heidegger, 1975d, p. 163). When I look at a picture through my glasses, is it the case that the glasses are nearer to me than the picture? Heidegger might say that the picture is nearer to me even though my glasses are obviously nearer

\textsuperscript{21} The picture book of John Amos Comenius was published in 1658 and translated into English a year later. It comprises 150 topics followed by pictures and explanations. Comenius writes in the introduction to the book that it is ‘a little book’ with ‘a brief of a whole world and whole language’, which indicates the purpose of the book and also kind of worldview that it expresses (Comenius, 1727, p. xiv cited in Mollenhauer, 2013, p. 34).

\textsuperscript{22} For example, the Modigliani exhibition in Tate Modern (London, 2017) provided a virtual reality experience of the final studio of Modigliani, and the Van Gogh Museum (Amsterdam, 2017) also exhibited virtual galleries for Sunflowers, bringing together all five versions, each located in different continents.
in the physical sense. It is the picture that is in my focus now, and I am not interested in my glasses. In the same sense, the person sitting next to me on the bus can be far away, whereas I can feel that my family – who actually live in another country, many miles away – are near. In this sense, what is near is not necessarily physically near. Nearness is not what technology simply can give us; the easy access of the world does not guarantee it. On the contrary, it is through thinking that we experience nearness.

(2) Being in nearness requires thinking differently.

Are we not thinking already, particularly in regard to education? Is it not the case when we learn, we think most actively – for example, when we learn in schools? Certainly, in schools we may find students and teachers who appear to be busy and active, moving from this to that class, achieving sequential objectives, and following sometimes minute-by-minute lesson plans. Some will say this proves that they are thinking effectively and even intensely, and this, in one sense, may be right. Yet, Heidegger says that we are ‘still not thinking’ (Heidegger, 1976, p. 4). Here, he is not referring to just any kind of thinking but instead highlighting what is the essence of thinking. In this sense, many may be considered not to be thinking at all, even in those moments in which they appear to be the most active.

Although what is at fault here is not technology itself, Heidegger’s concern is with the colonising power of technology, which blocks every other mode of thinking. The danger of technology is, in Heidegger’s terms, nothing but ‘enframing’, which frames our thoughts in a particular way. For example, devices such as the telescope and the microscope help us to see things better by amplifying one sense, even as they diminish other senses. Observing a flower through a microscope frame may alter the way we think of the flower: the flower may appear more, for example, as a reproductive organ. And this will be a very different way of thinking from that of someone who is walking along a country path, of a farmer waiting for the first fruit to come, or of myself as I look at Van Gogh’s Sunflowers. While spread-sheets help us to sort data, they at the same time encourage us to think in terms of whatever data will

23 It is worth noting Heidegger’s use of ‘essence’ (Wesen). He certainly does not see this to be a matter of fixed substance, in the way that it is traditionally understood. He uses the term in a verbal form, as ‘essencing’, in order to illustrate dynamic movement. In this sense, essence is the nearing movement of things – that is, the movement of bringing things into their essence. Yet, there is still an essentialistic aspect to his thought that needs to be problematised, and this in turn relates to the third point developed in the Caveat at the end of this chapter.
fit them. The classificatory nature of the database precedes the reality it works upon. And this applies also when there are no devices or instruments. We easily get used to thinking of a good lesson in terms of the sorts of criteria that we need to refer to when we fill in our lesson-plan. In this way, technological categories condition us to think of teaching and learning in these terms and desensitise us to the language we use. Technology is thus nothing but a way of thinking – that is, ‘calculative thinking’ in Heidegger’s terms: it compels us to think in a particular way by mediating our thoughts and experience. It is no more a mere tool than language is just a means of communication. Hence, as Anna Kouppanou and Paul Standish put this, ‘questioning technology must address ontological and epistemological concerns’ (Kouppanou and Standish, 2013, p. 107). In what follows I refer to neither ontology nor epistemology in name: such concerns are ever-present in Heidegger’s thought, but it may be better for them to emerge in a less explicit way. Technology is not neutral, and it cannot be free from values. Although it certainly opens up the world in a new way, it at the same time closes off other possibilities. As attention to technology helps to show, being in nearness requires us to think differently.

(3) Representational thinking is only a particular way of thinking – it is ‘one track’ thinking.

Heidegger writes that the nature of thinking ‘can be seen only by looking away from thinking’ (1970, p. 58). Here, he is suggesting, there are two different kinds of thinking: we need to distance ourselves from representational thinking in order to think differently. To clarify this point, I shall briefly explore logos – the origin of our contemporary word ‘logic’. This reference is necessary as, at least in the West according to Heidegger, ‘thought about thinking has flourished as “logic”’, which ‘understands thinking to be the representation of beings’ (see, for example, Heidegger, 1976, p. 21, 1998a, p. 265). It is necessary to think against logic, that is, beyond the logic of representation. This is an appeal not, of course, for illogicality but for the tracing of thought back to the original sense of logos. If we understand logos in a broad sense, in a way the Greeks understood it, it is related also to a ‘laying’, ‘stating’ and even a ‘gathering’ of thought. This involves the sense of letting things appear and manifest themselves by laying out and saying things and thus gathering and bringing new thought (see, for example, Heidegger 1976, pp. 198, 207). If we understand logos
in this way, we will find it to be in a reciprocal relationship with language and world.

By contrast, when *logos* is understood in its narrow sense, thinking tends to be restricted to the sense of ‘proposition’ or of ‘apprehension by reason’ (p. 4). This is evident in the fact that the approach to thinking as both proposition and reasoning has been the predominant, if not the only, explanation of thinking, at least in the Western philosophical tradition. Thinking in education is not an exception. As Emma Williams (2016) discusses the matter, there is a prevailing tendency to consider thinking as ‘critical thinking’, which presupposes a particular view of thinking that she terms ‘rationalistic’. When *logos* loses its sense of connection to language and world, thinking remains as mere representing. And, as Williams puts this, it is in this way that we view thinking ‘according to the features of *rationalism*’, which confines thinking education to the acquisition of a set of thinking skills (p. 32).

Representational thinking is well captured in the expression ‘one-track thinking’, in Heidegger’s *What is Called Thinking?*. The track referred to is the railway-track, which subtly underlines the fact that it has to do with technology. And it is one-track, which is to say that it ‘wills and therefore needs absolute univocity’ and thus attempts to dominate all things (Heidegger 1976, p. 26). This implies one identical way of seeing things (‘uniform views’ in Heidegger’s terms), which blocks other possibilities of thinking (p. 34). When one side is not recognised as just one side but is considered as exhausting all possibilities, we do not see things in their many-sidedness. Of course, we often think in the manner of representation, and it is quite right to think in this way. It helps us to deal with things and to solve daily problems – that is, with concepts, categories or criteria. Yet, in this way, we recognise and understand things as far as we have a conception of them in advance. We understand them only in terms of what we already have by imposing upon them this pre-formed idea. For this reason, thinking as representation is inclined to ‘fix’ the world and to freeze the flux of experience so that it can be more readily understood and controlled. Things are put into boxes like sets of data isolated from the background, which reminds us of the plates of the *Encyclopédie* illustrated in the previous Chapter.

It is worth noting that this is also related to the fact that thinking as representation has dominated philosophy as it connects most clearly with claims to truth – that is, to truth understood as correctness in representing the external world (truth as *adequatio*). Truth here presupposes subject-object separation and disembodiment; it encourages an abstract view of the world, or as it has been called ‘a
view from nowhere’; and it leads us to be confined in our thinking to calculation, which is inclined to dominate and master things, not just to allow them to be in their own right. As objects disconnected from human beings, things are more likely to be reduced to mere means, waiting to be used up for human purposes. In this way thinking as representation underpins calculative thinking and vice versa. Thinking becomes ‘a means of mastery’ (Lovitt and Lovitt, 1995, p. 586).

To think otherwise, Heidegger suggests, we need a leap in thinking. That is to go beyond ‘the horizon’, which constitutes only one side of the appearance of the represented object, and leap into the region of the ‘clearing’ (die Klärung). While Klärung connects interestingly with Aufklärung (the Enlightenment), it differs from the idea of enlightenment as intellectual epiphany. The clearing evokes something more physical, referring to those spaces in the forest that are created where the woodcutters fell and clear away trees, in which in this very process they are making their own path. It suggests also the everyday action of clearing something away and accordingly creating space. We can also recall Heidegger’s accounts of language as ‘Saying’ discussed in the previous chapter. As was seen with the clearing in the forest, language in its saying opens and discloses the world to us, a world that was concealed. Language as saying brings things into this openness where we can listen and respond to the saying of the truth of being. In this sense, the clearing itself is a place for truth – that is, for truth as revealing, truth as aletheia, in contrast to truth as correctness. Truth as aletheia is always to be understood in its constant movement of revealing and concealing, which can never be fixed or grasped. It is a self-revealing of being that simultaneously reveals and withdraws. When truth is thought in this way, world would be understood very differently from the world understood in terms of representation.

In this engagement with truth, we participate in a different way of thinking – that is, in ‘meditative thinking’ in Heidegger’s terms. This is thinking beyond the ‘one-track’, beyond any singular way of thinking that governs our lives and values; it is the thinking that makes representational thinking possible in the first place. This is not to

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24 Heidegger is alluding to the Enlightenment in such a way as to reappropriate the word.
25 It is worth noting that we cannot predict what will come after that disclosure of the clearing, just as the woodcutter cannot expect or foresee what is beyond the forest before it is cleared. Put otherwise, we open up the world through language, yet we do not control it fully. Rather, language is beyond the grasp of our understanding and thus we develop and form our thinking through language in a way we cannot predict.
26 Heidegger employs the Greek term aletheia in relation to revealing, and it is translated as truth. For Heidegger, truth exists as a form of negation. Aletheia is a negation of letheia, which means forgetting, and truth is a disclosure or unconcealing of what has been concealed. This connects to the sense of getting out of the state that is oblivious of being.
perceive the world as distanceless objects confronting a human subjectivity that is disengaged. It is rather to overcome the view that describes and legitimates human action in terms of observing, scrutinising, exploiting, and instrumentalising the world. Thinking then is to be experienced, neither as a grasping of what lies before us, nor as an attack upon it. Heidegger writes: ‘Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas’; it demands instead that we ‘engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all’ (Heidegger, 1970, p. 53). In approaching this thought, let us begin with what may at first sight seem rather strange – that is, with ‘letting-be’.

(4) Thinking beyond representation begins with acknowledging human finitude and the limits of knowledge.

One of the richest explanations of Heidegger’s thinking can be found in his concept Gelassenheit. The term Gelassenheit derives originally from the work of the philosopher and theologian Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and is often translated as ‘releasement’ or ‘letting-be’. The term first appears in Heidegger’s work in a dialogue written between 1944 and 1945, which was published later in English translation as ‘Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking’ (Conversation in what follows). It receives further expression in a 1955 speech entitled ‘Gelassenheit’. Notably, it is through a form of conversation – that is, in the earlier text, between a Scientist, a Scholar, and a Teacher – that Heidegger leads the reader toward the experience of Gelassenheit. And Gelassenheit is a key to meditative thinking – that is, to thinking in nearness.

According to Heidegger, the more we try to represent what Gelassenheit is, the more we fail to understand it; the only way into it is ‘to do nothing but wait’ (Heidegger, 1970, p. 62). As he avoids providing any specific indication of what this might involve, which is surely consistent with his position, the Conversation remains unclear and mystificatory. For example, we read that ‘releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together’; and this happens in the manner of ‘withdrawing rather than coming to meet us’ (p. 73). Does this refer, as it sounds, to some kind of mystical experience? To be clearer here, let us recall the concept of truth as aletheia. As was

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27This is the speech presented at the celebration of the 175th birthday the composer Konradin Kreutzer in the German town of Messkirch, the composer’s place of birth.
seen briefly above, truth as revealing refers to the revealing-concealing movement of being as it comes to light. In the event of this revealing, we are no longer to be thought of as subjects who can master or determine the world, in the realm of truth as correctness; rather we are in the region of a clearing in which the truth of being discloses itself. And the ‘mystery’ here is nothing but the nature of being, which in its revealing, at the same time, withdraws itself as we approach towards it. The awareness of this mystery is what is necessary for a true understanding of our reality, as the world is not something that we can fully grasp or predict. We must understand that there is always something that exceeds our understanding. This is so not just for scientific or epistemological reasons; rather, it is essential to what the world is. It is characterised by a kind of humility that does not dominate things but instead allows us something closer to wonder as they are revealed. It is important to know that something is hidden – that is, important to remain ‘open to the meaning hidden in technology’ (p. 55). And this is exactly why we need constantly to participate in the on-going movement of being, the ‘nearing’ of things (Heidegger, 1975d, p. 175). It is here that my responsibility is brought out, in my struggle at the boundaries of things, as I let myself into the mystery of things. This is a thinking that is not settled, and that will never be settled. The world opens up itself differently according to the manner of our participation.

At the present juncture, it might be helpful to revisit an image provided by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his work *Visible and Invisible*. His description of the beach line at the sea, the sea coming towards the strand and realising an intimacy between the two, resonates well, in my mind, with our being open to the mystery in participating in thinking. Merleau-Ponty writes:

…yet it is not possible that we blend into it, nor that it passes into us, for then the vision would vanish at the moment of formation, by disappearance of the seer or of the visible. What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them – but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing ‘all naked’ because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh. Whence does it happen that in so doing it leaves them in their place, that the vision we acquire of them
seems to us to come from them, and that to be seen is for them but a degradation of their eminent being? What is this talisman of color, this singular virtue of the visible that makes it, held at the end of the gaze, nonetheless much more than a correlative of my vision, such that it imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence? How does it happen that my look, enveloping them, does not hide them, and, finally, that, veiling them, it unveils them? (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, pp. 131–132)

In the light of this, as can now be seen more clearly, ‘openness to the mystery’ should be understood not as a matter of mystification but as acknowledging the limits to our understanding of things. Some aspects of the thing come to light, while others remain in darkness. We cannot determine, clarify, or conquer things in all of their nakedness. Rather thinking demands of us appropriate distance, not the attempt to hold things closely. In this way, as Michael Inwood writes, we ‘engage with beings as beings, as independent entities that are not simply appendages of ourselves’ (Inwood, 1999, p. 117). Things are not there to be scrutinised by human beings; rather they have their being in themselves. We can only wait for them to address us. It is to think towards being in its own right, opening up the space and letting things be as themselves.

The mysterious quality of Gelassenheit is found also in the Conversation itself, or better put, in any conversation. When we are in a conversation we usually do not know how or where it will end, especially if we are not setting out to achieve any specific result as we do in business meetings. Our conversation will be open to new associations, as thoughts constantly bring other thoughts. My saying something makes you to say something else. Almost without my wilful action, a conversation ends up where I did not expect. And this is precisely the manner in which Heidegger attempts to lead readers into the experience of Gelassenheit. It is worth noting, then, how interlocutors get onto the path of thinking. The Scientist, for example, confesses: ‘The occasion which led me to let myself into waiting in the way mentioned was more the course of the conversation than the re-presentation of the specific objects we spoke about’ (Heidegger, 1970, p. 69). The interlocutors come to Gelassenheit through an occasion of letting-themselves-in, which is not a matter of representation; it is by being immersed in the conversation without knowing what they are searching for. The experience of such a thinking is in waiting without waiting for a particular outcome; it
is not the result of a fully-formed intention to search for a concept but something that emerges from the flow of conversation, which moves the participants ‘as inconspicuous[ly] as the silent course of the conversation’ (p. 70). This is certainly not some kind of seeking after mystical experience; it is quite simply like joining a conversation, being opened to new thoughts in the way of letting-ourselves-in. In this way, we embark on the way of thinking, where ‘way’ is also Tao (which means at the same time way and truth, while sometimes, conversely, logos is translated as Tao).

(5) Thinking in nearness depends on our efforts to be receptive and responsive.

_Gelassenheit_ has initial connotations of passivity, and Heidegger, as seen above, indeed claims that all that can be done in order to understand it is to wait. Yet it should be noted that this is not an absolute passivity, such as, for example, the giving over of oneself to God in the religious sense, similar to that found in the writings of Eckhart. So more explanation of ‘waiting’ is required. Waiting does not mean that thinking just happens by itself. Heidegger writes: ‘At times, it requires a greater effort. It demands more practice. It is in need of even more delicate care than any other genuine craft. But it must also be able to bide its time, to await as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen’ (Heidegger, 1970, p. 47). Waiting here is not without effort, as when the farmer waits patiently, tending his crops. Yet the example is predictably evocative and painfully tainted with nostalgia, farming being attuned to the seasons and the rhythm of night and day. Does the example transfer to contemporary contexts? For example, to the shift-workers in a factory, to the staff in a call-centre, or, especially, to teachers in a school? Certainly, it needs to be asked: what does ‘waiting’ mean for the teacher?

A teacher may prepare with a well organised lesson-plan; she may provide students with knowledge in a careful and skilful manner, and good teaching generally does not happen without these attitudes. Yet, if we think not only of the teaching, but also of the learning of students, it can be seen that teachers need at some point to wait. Rather than being in a rush to see the results of the teaching she has just provided, or to judge her students, she needs to give time and space for the students to think and to realise what is inside themselves, or rather what is to-come to themselves – just as the farmer waits for the seed to germinate and the corn to ripen. This requires an attentive attitude, a readiness to respond to students in receptiveness. Given that we are always
already in relation to others, things to be attended to, such waiting is more or less there in every job, even in the daily business of an office or call-centre.

There is, of course, a difference between the farmer and the teacher: the farmer knows the sequence of the seasons, and he can act according to these. What does the teacher know of the different states that the child will be in? In answer to this question, it might be suggested that we, perhaps, need developmental psychology. This, however, might not be what Heidegger would prescribe. Instead, the teacher needs to become attuned to the children’s moods and changes in motivation, and to how they stand in relation to the thing they are asked to study, what they are noticing, whether it holds their attention, how to direct their attention, and so on. Surely, for the teacher, much greater effort and practice are required in waiting. This is, to stress the point, not a passive waiting, but an attentive and responsive waiting.

Heidegger’s remark on thinking as a handicraft helps us to understand this point more fully. In *What is Called Thinking?*, Heidegger provides the example of the cabinetmaker’s apprentice:

His learning is not mere practice, to gain facility in the use of tools. Nor does he merely gather knowledge about the customary forms of the things he is to build. If he is to become a true cabinetmaker, he makes himself answer and respond above all to the different kinds of wood and to the shapes slumbering within wood, to wood as it enters into man’s dwelling with all the hidden riches of its nature. In fact, this relatedness to wood is what maintains the whole craft. Without that relatedness, the craft will never be anything but empty busywork, any occupation with it will be determined exclusively by business concerns. Every handicraft, all human dealings are constantly in that danger. The writing of poetry is no more exempt from it than is thinking (Heidegger, 1976, p. 4).

Being a cabinetmaker does not wholly depend on gaining facts or information. Rather, it is to learn to be related to wood and its nature – to respond, for example, to its different colours, textures, or shapes, which may at first sight be hidden. It is to learn that craft work brings things into presence, realising them in their own identity. To this end, it demands great endeavour on the part of the craftsperson, so that she is able to be responsive and receptive to things in their unique nature. Heidegger says that
thinking is like craft work or like composing of a poem (Dichtung) as these alike bring things into their own nature in responding to them. Things, through words, come to the poet in a kind of thinking that involves a sensibility, a humility, even, from time to time, a sense of hesitation or vacillation. Now this makes clearer that Gelassenheit, far from being something mystical, is a part of our everyday experience, in reading, writing, in conversation; and particularly in learning and knowing things; it is there in our responsiveveness and receptiveness towards things. This active on-going movement, in which ‘thinking would be coming-into-the-nearness of distance’, is not something that can be accomplished or finished at a certain point (Heidegger, 1970, p. 73). Yet it opens a different possibility of dwelling in the world.

(6) Thinking, thus teaching and learning, requires dwelling within appropriate distance.

The discourse of education today seems to be preoccupied particularly with clarity and transparency. It requires data to see things through and thus to monitor and control what has been and should be taught and learned. What is learned should be quantifiable as a proper indicator that learning has indeed taken place. If there is no evidence, it is almost implied, nothing has happened; conversely, nothing can be learned that cannot be turned into data. It is not only the outcome of students but also the performance of teachers, it is said, that should be evaluated, and this should be done through data-saturated, supposedly scientific methods, such as classroom observation check-lists or self-evaluation forms to measure ‘teacher effectiveness’. In fact, the process of teaching is almost being pulled apart by debased notions of criteria and reliance on such methods. There are questions of how (of method and procedure), but few of what and why: of the point and value of what is being taught and learned. Thus, what remains is the matter of efficiency, which in due course becomes its own end. And this amounts to a univocity in thinking about education. Moreover, to some extent this way of thinking becomes the internalised voice of the teacher, who, however hard she tries to resist, is compelled to teach in accordance with the policy. Within the discourse of efficiency, it is difficult for teachers not to be compliant and complacent. They become desensitised to the dominance of practices such as, for example, labelling students. This is the case all the more when there is no time for the teacher to think about her own circumstances. In the end, this univocal call certainly affects not only teaching
and learning but also the lives of both the teacher and the students. It surreptitiously governs the rhythms of everyday life.

Can teaching be understood or practised well through the application of scientific method? Can teaching be reduced to the creation of well-organised plans, to performance that matches those plans, and to the achieving of excellent results? And does a set of check-lists capture what is happening in the classroom? Although a check-list might be helpful in seeing some aspects of teaching, it surely, I suggest, breaks the flow of our thoughts and experience. When we understand reality in terms of lists of ‘criteria’ (reductively construed), it is difficult to engage with what is really happening in the class, what is happening here and now, in ways that go beyond the scope of those criteria. Such monitoring interrupts our ways of thinking in both time and space, isolating the process of teaching and learning, and thus reducing it to a mere sum of fragmented experiences. Experience is abstracted in the sense that ‘it has been pulled out of its constitutive relations and contexts, and so it is not encountered in its full reality’ (Kolb, 2000, p. 121). What is lacking here is a proper recognition of the limits of human knowing. Yet, in the very nature of teaching, certainly, there are things that escape you when you try to grasp it as a whole. If we understand the world in the manner of humility, in the light of what I have been discussing, we have the chance to acquire an indirect relationship towards what is hidden beyond our grasp. This is to build a relationship in a manner contrary to the asset-stripping of the world. We might recall the remark of Merleau-Ponty with his concerns for ‘veiling’ and ‘nakedness’. Merleau-Ponty points us towards the impossibility of defining the world in its nakedness. Scientific methods in education, especially when regarded as the only way to understand and discuss education, are attempts at confining and restricting things in their nakedness. Ralph Waldo Emerson writes: ‘I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition’ (Emerson, 1983, p. 473). While ‘unhandsome’ implies unbeautiful, it also, on the other hand, as Standish recognises, anticipates Heidegger’s accounts of thinking as handicraft – by way of its contrast with unhandsome thinking (Standish, 2014a, p. 256). 28 The cabinetmaker’s attention to the wood involves a kind of dwelling with things and a maintaining of appropriate distance.

This is to acknowledge that we may, with our hand, ‘allow things to slip away or crush them in its grasp’ (*ibid*.). Only by being aware of this, will we have a chance to dwell, to stay with things, allowing them to be in their own right.

It is worth emphasising that the hand also is embodied and thus a way of relating to the world. So, thinking as handicraft stands in contrast to abstract, detached reasoning. Let us think about the knowledge of paper experienced by the calligrapher, of light for the impressionist painter, or of animals for the animal handler. In these cases, respectively, the paper, the light, the animals are not experienced only as scientific knowledge – in terms of their factual properties and in need of correct representation. They are bound up rather with the way I (*qua* calligrapher, etc.) am in the world. Knowing things is inextricable from the way I experience them as an embodied human being. Even the information with which the computer deals comes somewhere from us as embodied beings. The hand, as Heidegger writes, ‘does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others. The hand holds. The hand carries’ (Heidegger, 1976, p. 16). For the painter, light is not something to fully control or grasp. Rather she will be sensitive to the changing light at each moment of the day – presumably in the way that Monet dwelt for years upon water-lilies in different lights. This is a matter of building a relationship by dwelling with things, inevitably sometimes in perplexity. It is the depth of experience of this kind we lose where everything is equally close. Where nothing is strange, our experience is flattened, and the contours of differences disappear. Nearness is, as Kouppanou writes, nothing but ‘the disposition to affect and to be affected by whatever comes near’ (Kouppanou, 2017, p. 12). It is precisely what demands of us more responsibility in our existing in the world. In respect of the hand, Heidegger further writes: ‘The hand designs and signs, presumably because man is a sign’ (Heidegger, 1976, p. 16). This kind of thinking and language is certainly different in its quality – that is, a different medium through which we view and relate to the world.29

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29 As Heidegger writes, ‘man is a sign.’ Human beings are always dependent upon signs in their very essence. Technology is one form of signs. And if we think about the scope of technology, it can be seen that there are no clear-cut boundaries – for example, in the writing technology that extends from pencils to computers. Rather there is a sense of continuity, albeit that there is certainly a qualitative shift in the way technology today mediates our thinking.
In completing this step, it is important to realise that, according to Heidegger, it is the teacher who opens this possibility of dwelling for students, just as it is the cabinetmaker who lets the apprentice learn how to respond to the nature of wood. The teacher does not simply impart knowledge as facts or information. Rather, the teacher allows students to have a more adequate relationship to things by letting them into responsive-receptive thinking and, accordingly, into enquiry about and a sense of the mystery of the world. Teaching is certainly more difficult than learning as it calls for the ability ‘to let learn (lernen-lassen)’ (p. 15). And to let learn is nothing but to let think.

(7) Teaching and learning should be given the time and space in which thinking can take place.

I turn my attention more specifically now to the classroom, to the experience of teachers and learners. Currently, while teachers go about the process of making many daily decisions, there is no proper time and space to think and reflect upon what they are doing. Teachers are busy maintaining speed of learning and progression, sometimes without paying proper attention even to the content of the curricula they teach. As briefly discussed above, teachers, on the one hand, are forced to be efficient while keeping up with what policy stipulates. On the other, they themselves are afraid of spending time doing ‘nothing’, which will surely be regarded as inefficient. They are rather in a constant move towards something, driven by achievements. But in such constant movement, their experience of time is interrupted for example by checklists of criteria, by the unit-by-unit planning of activities, and by school bells.

Yet, there is something almost sacred about teaching and learning. A teacher is related, on the one hand, to the world and, on the other, to students, in a way that allows them also to be related to the world. It is important to refrain from interfering in this process too much, especially because the exchange between teacher and learner is difficult to understand, and particularly difficult to measure through scientific methods. Thus, teaching needs to be respected and given time and space. Teachers and learners need sufficient time to dwell on and ponder things around them, to build meaningful relationships. Teachers in particular need less constrained work contexts and also proper time and space to allow them to exercise judgement in relation to what and how they teach. This is not to suggest that teachers should have complete freedom.
The point is rather that they are given the chance to keep questioning values, to reflect upon their judgement and their relation to the subjects they teach, which in turn will lead them to be more committed to what they teach. Dwelling requires time and space.

What kind of activities can, then, encourage in students thinking as Gelassenheit, allowing them to dwell upon what they learn? An understanding of classic texts or the appreciation of works of art may provide examples here, partly because if these are taught in the right way, with the kind of openness of enquiry that allows such texts to speak for themselves, they may provide some of the best routes to thinking that is Heidegger’s concern. To write or to understand poetry you need to listen to what a language and things say to you, rather than just submitting the poem to a systematic analysis. Experience of this kind can reveal the many-sided-ness of what is being studied, even as you dwell with it. To appreciate works of art, you need first to spend some time with them, for example, in looking at painting, listening to music, or watching a film. You cannot appreciate them by reading a summary or ready-made analysis – for example, in the way that students sometimes do, where the priority is to pass the examination with as little effort as possible. Art appreciation, by its very nature, requires us to be responsive and receptive to the works themselves, mostly without providing any clear response or representation; it demands that you to dwell in relation to them, perhaps leaving you in a kind of perplexity. Artworks cannot be understood at a single glance or simply explained away. It is more accurate to say that they create places for you to come back and stay. You get to know things better only by letting-yourself-into the mystery of things.

Yet, dwelling in this sense is not necessarily restricted to the experience of art. It is important in other contexts as well. In history, although direct acquaintance with the past is impossible, one starts to gain familiarity, say, through a sense of the ‘feel’ or a particular time or by detailed acquaintance with how people lived then. Through familiarity of this kind, such remote times and places can become parts of one’s life,

30 Art is certainly what is glimpsed as the saving power in technology, in Heidegger’s works. Both art and technology have their origin in the Greek term techne. Techne originally carried a sense of productive power, – that is, of the poiesis that brings things forth. Poiesis is also the origin of the word ‘poem’. Yet while art preserves poiesis, technology has lost it. Towards the end of ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, Heidegger cites one of the poems of Friedrich Hölderlin. The poem reads as below:

But where danger is, grows
The saving power also.
…poetically dwells man upon this earth (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 34).

This implies that we may find ways to overcome technology in art – that is, within technology but in a different form of techne.
providing places where one can dwell. A subject area such as chemistry might be thought less amenable to thinking of this kind. The chemistry teacher’s love of her subject, however, is also likely to be tied up with her familiarity with the chemistry lab, that distinctive place to which she returns every day. It is not only part of her familiar world, but part of what constitutes the field of her subject.

This can apply even to online learning. David Kolb’s ‘Learning places: Building Dwelling Thinking Online’ provides compelling examples for exploring potentially positive relationships with online technology (Kolb, 2000). Kolb discusses the possibility of dwelling in online learning platforms – that is, whether places can be created for students to spend some time and think. While it is partly technology that makes us to retreat from reality, this need not preclude the possibility that even an online platform can be a place for dwelling. Kolb ponders how far Heidegger’s concept of the fourfold, which understands experience in terms of the four dimensions of earth, sky, gods, and mortals (respectively, of what supports and sustains us; of the time passing and the changeability of things; of what we aspire to and revere, and the values by which we live; and of our relation to our finitude), can be applied to online places. ‘For an online site to be a place’, Kolb writes:

\[\text{it needs to be more than a static block of data. It needs ‘earth’, objects to interact with that have some independence and thickness of their own; it needs ‘sky’, times and changes, so that it is not always the same but varies according to its own rhythms; it needs ‘gods’, ideals and aspirations and calls to what we might become; it needs ‘mortals’, a sense that choices are meaningful in finite careers, that time makes demands and is not unlimited in amount. This sense of opening possibilities and an identity being offered and forwarded puts more ‘there’ there (Kolb, 2000, p. 124).}\]

I have provided several examples, designed to show something of what it is to dwell. It is about creating a place for thinking to take place. This is certainly a kind of knowing beyond the categories of ‘knowing-how’ or ‘knowing-that’, and it diverges substantially from any conception of thinking as thinking skills – where this suggests sets of rules, strategies, and techniques of thinking that children can be taught.\(^\text{31}\)

\(^{31}\)This has been briefly mentioned in Step 3 of the first section. Criticism of this particular view of thinking in relation to education has been provided in the light of Heidegger’s philosophy (see, for example, Standish, 1992; Bonnett, 1994; Williams, 2016).
Before concluding this section, it is worth acknowledging some possible objections or, rather, suggestions that point in different directions. For example, Charles Bailey takes up apparently related themes in his insightful *Beyond the Present and Particular: A Theory of Liberal Education* (2010). Although there is not enough space here to discuss Bailey’s ideas or liberal education fully, the title of the book is sufficient to suggest its line of thought. Education lifts people out of the immediate circumstances of their lives, beyond the place and time in which they are growing up: what it ‘liberates the person from [are] the limitations of the present and the particular’ (p. 15). If we look at this historically, we can see how apt this expression is. Certainly, previous generations had more restricted ways of thinking, partly because they did not have many opportunities to move outside of their place of origin. Some people today have few opportunities to leave the place where they are born, and thus to explore beyond what they currently know and are interested in. It should not be doubted there is virtue in learning to think in more abstract ways – that is, in terms of ‘the fundamental and the general’ in Bailey’s phrase (*ibid.*). Heidegger would not deny this. His concern is rather that such abstract thinking be in contact with a kind of nearness. It is relevant to say that he would also take the view that endless travel, the constant trying out of new things is not the best way to live, and not a way to dwell with things. What I want to emphasise is that there is a difference between moving outside oneself and thinking purely abstractly. For example, by encountering foreign cultures and languages, one may discover and come to be fascinated by their history or arts. Fascination on that kind may lead to the gaining of extensive knowledge about them. Yet, this kind of enquiry would not really be purely abstract thought. It would be focused instead initially on particular art objects and, accordingly, on one’s relation as embodied being to them. The human being is already immersed in the world, as indicated in Heidegger’s ‘being-in-the-world’. Hence, what is often thought of as abstract thinking already involves connections between things, and from these connections meaning is created – not as a mere object, but as a thing in its nearing.\(^{32}\) Even the most abstract concepts have their connections with, and arise from, the particular. World appears not in a detached form, but as that in which we are already

\(^{32}\) Heidegger distinguishes ‘things’ from ‘objects’. In ‘The Thing’ (1975d), for example, he describes a jug as a thing by way of explaining the concept of the fourfold, which has been discussed in this chapter. We experience things as things when we get away from the kind of scientific explanation that leaves us in a detached relationship to the object of concern and by relating to it through the fourfold.
involved. Knowledge cannot be simply abstracted from its background, nor separated from the world and from people, precisely whence it emerges.

In the above, I have described seven steps on the way to thinking in nearness. This kind of thinking which has been much neglected in the dominant discourse of education is now in need of proper recognition. Yet, these steps are certainly not the formulation of a direct or technical answer to educational problems. Instead, they are to be considered as opening a space within which education is thought in an indirect manner. We might need, as Heidegger writes, the will to begin to not-will, to seek out thinking beyond representation – that is, as non-willing. This is difficult as it is the way away from dominant forms of thinking – dominant especially in contemporary conceptualisations of education, manifested in current policy and practice. Steps are also on the way. They remain without the kind of completed moment of thinking that is stable and static, because we can only ever be on the way of thinking. It is a method only in the sense that the Greek term methodos reveals – met- (after) and hodos (way). This is to follow the way, to be on the way, and perhaps to follow after and with the teacher. Heidegger writes as follows:

Thinking itself is a way. We respond to the way only by remaining underway. […] In order to get underway, we do have to set out. This is meant in a double sense: for one thing, we have to open ourselves to the emerging prospect and direction of the way itself: and then, we must get on the way, that is, must take the steps by which alone the way becomes a way (Heidegger, 1976, p. 169).

As a thinking being, in a constant movement towards being, we remain on the path of thinking as nearness.

The Caveat

Heidegger’s account of Gelassenheit does indeed provide a way towards seeing the nature of thinking and thus teaching and learning differently. Yet, there are also aspects to the account that give reason for some caution. I shall briefly discuss three aspects that sometimes lead to a misreading of Heidegger or that show his thought’s limitations. And these are not unrelated to one another.
First, with the picture of *Gelassenheit* that Heidegger provides, if we follow what *Gelassenheit* seems to be suggesting on its surface, it may be that we get carried away with this idea and expect teaching and learning as a whole to be taken up within this flow of experience. This then comes close to the sentimentalisation of ‘mindfulness’ or overreliance on notions of ‘flow’ that are currently prevalent in education. Heidegger’s conception of thinking certainly has aspects that are vulnerable to romanticisation. His examples of handicraft or of the farmer evoke nostalgic feelings, and indeed he himself preferred the simple life of Black Forest. Michael Bonnett (see, for example, 1994, 1995, 2002), an insightful philosopher, who draws on Heidegger to discuss teaching and children’s thinking, seems at times to be taking Heidegger in this way. As Emma Williams points out, Bonnett’s discussion tends to fall into romanticism in its tone and style by making ‘poetic thinking’ too precious and celebratory (Williams, 2016, p. 53). In fact, teaching is a more diverse and complex practice. Teaching, for the teacher, is an on-going struggle, on the one hand, with content and, on the other, with students. This is true also for the students. The surroundings and problems students and teachers encounter are more diverse than ever before, not least due to the complexity of multicultural pluralistic societies. And this involves a kind of messiness. Although the idealised images that Heidegger exploited were designed to provoke the reader to think differently, in a refusal of calculative thinking, those images often evoke a kind of purity of experience, supposedly appropriate to the truth of being. It is important to be aware of this weakness, or we may fail to acknowledge the messiness not only of teaching and learning but also of our lives and the frenetic nature of so much of our experience: Heidegger can blind us to the comic and absurd aspects of our lives.

Second, it is worth emphasising the possibility of dwelling within technology that was glimpsed in the previous section. It is impossible to understand the world we live in now without understanding technology. It will be simply wrong, as Heidegger would agree, if we tried to go back to the past, abandoning technology or demonising its power. Yet, the modality of technology itself has changed, far beyond anything Heidegger might have anticipated. It permeates our lives and flows almost seamlessly through our daily routines. What needs to be thought further is the dynamic change and flux in power and economy under the influence of technology. Politics is not an

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33 Bonnett’s *Children’s Thinking* (1994), refers to thinking as ‘poetic’ which in Heidegger’s terms extend into ‘meditative thinking’ and ‘letting-be’.
exception. Cyber space has extraordinary potential for building new communities, places for solidarity, as has been shown by developments such as the #MeToo movement. Vigilance is needed in respect of the ongoing development of technology, in order to witness how it opens up the world in unforeseen ways. Better relations to it should continually be sought, not only by each individual but also by communities. To live well with technology would mean resisting acquiescence within dominant economic or political dispensations, something that Heidegger failed to do.

Third, there is, in Heidegger’s thought, a longing for essence and origin, and this may relate to the latent political leanings in his work. If we revisit Heidegger’s speech on Gelassenheit, he reflects on homeland (Heimat) as what it is that enables artists to become artists. How can we respond to this line of connection kind in Heidegger’s thought? Does the homeland mean a land not contaminated by technology? Does it imply a certain kind of language and people that belong to that particular land? Or is Heidegger’s vision too rural and picturesque, remote from any city centre or polis? Certainly, Heidegger’s later lectures celebrate a kind of folkish idyll, of the Black Forest and the German people. This is a barrier to the acknowledgement of plurality. Longing for rootedness exists in a kind of tension with Heidegger’s valuable accounts of uncanniness, homelessness, unheimlich. To do justice to these accounts, the desire for rootedness should itself be problematised, shaken and kept in question. Awareness of this danger in Heidegger may guide us towards a better understanding of community and human relationship – that is beyond Mitsein, beyond being-with. A fuller explanation of this point would lead to the profound criticism advanced by Levinas, who acidly remarks of Mitsein that it is like marching together. Crucial to Levinas’ account, and largely absent from Heidegger, is the sense of language as address, as fundamentally related to the other, where the other remains beyond me, is not simply to be known, and is not reducible to a member of the community. On this view, ‘letting them learn’ or ‘letting them think’ must always involve the teacher in the address of

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34 In this speech Heidegger talks about the age of homelessness (Unheimlichkeit), which has arisen under the sway of calculative thinking. People, different from those in the past who dwelt ‘calmly between heaven and earth’, have now lost the sense of rootedness (Heidegger, 1970, p. 48). The homeland nourished not only artists but also the ‘folk’, with their ‘roots in a native soil’ (p. 47). To be fair to Heidegger, the thrown situation of human being (Dasein) is itself unheimlich. It should be acknowledged that he is perhaps not saying that we can be settled if we think meditatively. And his suggestion for us to seek a different possibility of dwelling – ‘a new ground and foundation’ – may not simply mean going back to the past or to a particular land (p. 57). Yet, the picture Heidegger gives here is still worth pondering a bit more and being cautious about, as it evokes a sense of the recovery of originary ways of thinking that will enable us to be rooted again. This has the pattern of the journey of return.
someone, and reception of their words. Heidegger’s philosophy certainly has the possibility to think what is exterior. But the responsibility in thinking must be extended further towards the other, and showing how will be the very task of the chapters that follow.

It would be a mistake to allow these reasons for caution to blind us to the richness of Gelassenheit and to its significance for education. What is important is that Heidegger’s texts are open to deconstruction – that is, to unravelling and criticism, to construction and reconstruction.
CHAPTER 3

From Heidegger to Translation and the Address of the Other

In his philosophy of language, is Heidegger capable of receiving the other that is quite different? Of seeing or witnessing this? This chapter attempts to demonstrate the limits of Heidegger in terms of the capacity to recognise and acknowledge the absolute otherness of the other. In so doing, I examine some of Heidegger’s remarks regarding being and language, particularly in relation to his attitude towards other languages. Through exploring this, I move from language to languages, and then to translation. I explore translation, beyond the technical understanding of it, as a site of diversity and plurality – that is, the place where I am singularised to respond to the other. To this end, Barbara Cassin (2016) provides us with helpful resources by means of her book *Nostalgia: When Are We Ever at Home*.

After the so-called ‘turn (*Kehre*)’ in his philosophy, Heidegger’s attention moves from the focus on being to questions of language and poetry. However, although rather indirectly, his reflections on being had intertwined with questions of language; his account of language is inextricably related to that of being. For example, one of Heidegger’s most striking remarks says: ‘language is the house of being’ (see, for example, Heidegger, 1975, 1998). What he means is that language is not simply a communicative tool or a vehicle for pre-existing thought. It is rather what enables us to think and is a source of thought through which we experience and create the world. For example, we do not simply go through the woods in the way animals do. The very act of walking through the woods always already involves my going through the word
‘woods’ even when we are not aware of it and do not spell it out (Heidegger, 1975c, p. 129). We find ourselves already in language as a place to dwell, and this is what constitutes human experience. Heidegger’s philosophy of language helps us to think beyond traditional understandings of it, and accordingly that of thinking. And we have seen in the previous chapter how his thought can direct us towards paying attention to new possibilities for responsiveness and receptivity to the world, hence to think education anew. While there is no doubt of his contribution, there still remain things to be questioned, and to do this it is necessary to take further steps, sometimes beyond but sometimes with Heidegger. In this chapter, I suggest that a leap from language to languages is needed, and then from this towards a better understanding of translation.

Let us repeat the question: to what extent is Heidegger open to the otherness of the other, particularly when the other is completely different? This question may appear quite ironic especially following the chapter that discussed the richness of Heidegger’s thought in terms of responsiveness and receptivity to things, a responsiveness that might be taken to extend to other persons. Yet, it is reasonable to acknowledge the doubts that are to be found in, for example, Levinas’ criticisms of Heidegger. Levinas basically takes issue with Heidegger over the question central to his philosophy, the question of being, for its totalising power, which reduces the other to the same. He suggests that Heidegger’s vision of Mitsein (being-with) is something like ‘marching-together’ – that is, in resolution towards the same destiny and perhaps on the strength of a common identity (Levinas, 2002, p. 137). While bearing this in mind (I shall discuss Levinas more fully in the following chapter), this chapter takes a somewhat different route to investigate Heidegger’s philosophy, by exploring his thoughts and attitude regarding language. I attempt to show that Heidegger’s account of language has a limit when it comes to an understanding of the other, with the conjecture that this comes from the lack of proper attention towards different languages. In so doing I seek to understand language already in its plurality, as sustained in and by that plurality rather than as being rooted (to the land, people or origin). To understand language in this way is also to acknowledge the very condition of human being in its plurality, always already in relation to the other. In this sense, no matter how thought-provoking his account of language is, Heidegger’s philosophy of language may not be enough to address current problems in society (and thus education) – that is, societies now, more evidently than ever before, that are based on and struggling to embrace human plurality.
The Problem of Translation

Let us begin with one of Heidegger’s essays ‘A Dialogue on Language: between a Japanese and an Inquirer’ (Heidegger, 2003a). This Dialogue is based on an actual meeting of Heidegger and the Japanese scholar, Tezuka Tomio (1903-1983). And the Inquirer appears to be very much like Heidegger himself. Heidegger, in the course of the dialogue, not only illustrates but also allows readers to experience the way of thinking that is beyond representation. So, it is in a similar manner to the Conversation that we have discussed in the previous chapter, this Dialogue proceeds while taking up issues such as language and translation.

To proceed, it is worth attending a bit more to Heidegger’s accounts on language. Heidegger famously writes that ‘language speaks’ (see, for example, Heidegger, 1975a). What he is drawing attention to in his recourse to this strange phrasing is that human beings are not the agents of language, fully in control of it; they are more like products of language. We are brought into human practices where language is already in circulation; that is how we become human beings. Words are already there in my thoughts, and without them I could scarcely have fully human thoughts. So, ‘language speaks. At the same time and before all else: language speaks’ – and we only speak as a response to what it says to us (Heidegger, 1975a, p. 195). Language speaks the human being, and it is through human beings who speak that things reveal themselves as meaningful. In this way we understand language not as a mere communicative tool at our disposal, but rather as a source – a wellspring – of thought from which we can never withdraw. There always remains something in language that cannot be fully grasped. We are, in a real sense, sentenced or convicted by our words (our words express – betray – our convictions); sentenced to be in language from which we cannot extricate ourselves. A sense of responsibility is strongly tied into language – I am blamed for what I say; by being speakers we are condemned to sin.35 And, the words are not in my control, they always flee from me, beyond my expectations; what I mean is partly decided by others and I cannot take them back. Words can even seem to be stolen from me. Being aware of such nature of language and a danger in representation, in the Dialogue, Heidegger is wary of

35 This thought is in debt to Cavell’s reading of Henry David Thoreau in The Senses of Walden (see, for example, Cavell, 1992, p. 48). I come back to this in Chapter 6.
providing a fixed definition of language, and he rather attempts to capture the movement and flow of thought and language. Thus it is, Heidegger says, that the dialogue is of language, not about language. It is language itself that makes and creates its way within the dialogue.

In the Dialogue, the Inquirer draws upon his experience of the problem in translating Japanese words. By acknowledging the difficulties with Japanese words such as *Iki* and *Koto ba*, the Inquirer professes the mysteriousness of East Asian (Japanese) thought. He says:

Some time ago I called language, clumsily enough, *the house of Being*. If man by virtue of his language dwells within the claim and call of Being, then we Europeans presumably dwell in an entirely different house than Eastasian man (Heidegger 2003a, p. 5).

Here, the Inquirer acknowledges the difference between languages by identifying them as different houses of being in which they live respectively. The Inquirer then expresses the belief that it is impossible for an outsider to come to understand the Japanese thought and language from the inside. For example, he will never understand the *Noh* play. In this sense, both men in the dialogue, from two different cultures, dwelling in totally different houses, will never fully understand each other. So this seems to indicate where the problem of translation comes from. Yet, if we recall Heidegger’s accounts of language that we just discussed above, this is not, for Heidegger, a problem in a sense that it could, or should, be fixed. The supposed problem of translation (not only between languages, but also within a language) is precisely what illustrates the nature of language, and thus not something to be corrected. Heidegger’s rather exaggerated reaction, then, makes one wonder what lies behind.

Although I take Heidegger’s insights into language as a basis of my thought, the question I nevertheless want to raise at this point is not of language but, let us say, of *languages*, which, I suggest, start to reveal the limits of his account. While Heidegger does pay attention to foreign languages from time to time such as Japanese (and sometimes Chinese), it is ironically the case, I believe, that his attention is really

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36 These respectively can be translated, in English, into art and language. In the Dialogue, after a long hesitation, the Japanese explains *Iki* as ‘the breath of the stillness of luminous delight’, and *Koto ba* as ‘the petals that stem from *Koto’*, which is the event that gives delight (Heidegger, 2003a, pp. 44-47).
focused on language, in the singular, not on languages. And I shall suggest that this lies behind his incapacity to receive the other. Needless to say, it raises some questions (and maybe will also provide some answers) with regard to Heidegger’s dubious politics.\footnote{In 1933, the year Hitler came to power, all Jewish intellectuals were sacked from universities in Germany. Heidegger accepted an invitation to take up the rectorship of his university. Although he resigned a year after, he remained a Nazi party member until the end of Second World War. After the Allies’ investigations, he was banned from teaching. Partly through efforts of Hannah Arendt, he was allowed to teach again in 1950 and did so until his death in 1976.} Before proceeding to clarify this fully, let us attend more closely to the Dialogue.

If we consider the full title of the Dialogue, it is a dialogue between a Japanese and an Inquirer. Given that this is based on a real encounter, my first impression was to wonder why Heidegger is speaking of ‘a Japanese’, why the man’s name is not used instead and why the other participant is designated as ‘an Inquirer’ and not as Heidegger himself? While this already sounds strange as there is no identification of the person, the effect is, to some extent, one of generalising or even idealising Japanese (or perhaps in a broad sense East Asian) characteristics. By anonymising the participants in this self-conscious way, Heidegger is projecting the Japanese in an idealised and abstract way. Indeed, as Paul Standish writes, Heidegger seems to be eulogising the Japanese way of life and thought and thus the Japanese language, while ‘seeing it as offering a real alternative to the degradation of the West (of the English-speaking world in particular), whose thought had been progressively colonised by technology’ (Standish, 2014b, p. 23). For Heidegger, a language such as English is attuned to calculative thinking, while Greek is the language best placed to overcome this in its relation to the truth of being. And his interest in the Japanese language turns out to be related to his great interest in Greek. The Inquirer says: ‘Our thinking today is charged with the task to think what the Greeks have thought in an even more Greek manner’ (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 45). And both interlocutors seek a path towards this – that is, where things reveal themselves in a clearing, in the truth of being.

Despite the belief the Inquirer has earlier professed, as the dialogue proceeds, it seems that both very much understand each other, even seemingly united in their aversion to the colonising power of European or American thoughts, ‘the complete Europeanization’ (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 15). Also, both of them agree on the intimate relationship between Koto ba and ‘Saying’: Saying is the name for, the Inquirer says to the Japanese, ‘that essential being which your Japanese word Koto ba hints and
beckons’ (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 47). With a particular understanding of language – *Koto ba* – the Japanese goes on to profess, in a kind of mutuality of respect (or flattery), that ‘we Japanese have an innate understanding’ for Heidegger’s thought, regretting in the process the fact that there are not many who could hear ‘an echo of the nature of language which [the] word *Koto ba* names’ (Heidegger, 2003a, p. 50, 53). *Koto ba* now is understood as an idealised form of Saying. The way both understand the other culture is becoming quite suspicious. Both at first expressed the view that there was something unique in Japanese thought and language that an outsider could never understand, but then, with their common interest in overcoming Westernised thinking, they come to understand each other rather well. The Japanese also seems to be drawn into this exoticisation of the Japanese language and thought. Is this not a mystification and then idealisation?

The hyperbole of the assertion ‘I cannot understand you as you are so different’ is used duplicitously in a kind of performative contradiction, and, in spite of its avowed intentions, surreptitiously feeds the exoticisation of the other. It falls far short of a genuine understanding. The Inquirer, in a display of humility, declares the impossibility of understanding the other, in a way that covertly incorporates the other into the same. Any act of mystifying or idealising only effects the objectification of the other. The boundary between humility and hubris is blurred. This *Dialogue* not only shows Heidegger’s thoughts on language but also his attitude towards the other. As a *Dialogue* that is stylised, possibly ventriloquised, what it reveals in the end is Heidegger’s incapacity for receiving the other. And this may in some sense be inherent in Heidegger’s account of language as Saying, and its relation to the truth of being, which I shall come back to in the following section.

I think Heidegger was fully aware that there are dangers – of an inevitable loss – in translation, but the problem is that he does not seem entirely able to overcome the Western perspective. He did not step out of his own ‘house’ enough to be challenged by the other, partly because their encounter was towards something else, to experience the truth of being (or Greek thought). This in effect conflicted with his own insight on translation. What should be further considered is that translation involves understanding other languages and cultures, which can be wholly other to oneself. The problem of translation is not that there is a loss in the course of it (we have seen that this is the very nature of language), but that there are languages that we should acknowledge as equal, which seems obvious but is all too easily forgotten. A lack of
this understanding may reduce the other to a mere object, in a process of exoticisation or mystification. And this goes hand in hand with privileging one over the other, which is likely to result in imposing the loss on the less privileged side. What is at stake in translation is to allow oneself to lose some part of one’s language, to make ready for that loss. This, in a sense, ‘loss of innocence’ disturbs what I thought ‘the natural’ and denaturalises my being at home. This might be exemplified by the case of a monolingual person learning a foreign language, for whom different structures of different languages come as a surprise and an encumbrance – ‘I cannot believe that you reverse the order of words in a sentence. How come you need those different forms of article, ‘definite’ and ‘indefinite’? The gender for nouns? That’s just too much trouble!’ But the difference between languages is not something to be overcome, and understanding of this is integral to the path from language to languages.38

For a further clarification, now, I attend to Heidegger’s much celebrated conception of home, which has different facets and incorporates its own tensions, say, between belonging and being unheimlich. Heidegger’s sense of privileging a particular kind of language will be further discussed in relation to this.

Stories of Home: From Language to Languages

Let us make a short digression to glimpse somewhat different ideas of home and nostalgia, where nostalgia literally means the pain of home, homesickness. Barbara Cassin, in her book Nostalgia, provides three stories of home. In her discussion she first considers two stories drawn from classical mythology. One is that of Odysseus, an iconic story of returning home which has much influenced the development of European thought in many ways; and the other is that of Aeneas, who as an exile founded Lavinium, the Rome of today. What do these stories tell?

Homer’s The Odyssey recounts the story of Odysseus, who, after a long and exhausting journey, finally returns home to where Penelope, his wife, awaits. Home is epitomised by their marriage-bed, which is made from an olive tree still strongly rooted in the ground. Thus, home here is literally rooted in the way the bed is.39 By contrast,

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38 This also raises questions regarding monolingual culture and the growing hegemony of English. See, for example, Standish (2018a).

39 Levinas in this sense remarks of the journey of Ulysses (the Latin name for Odysseus) that ‘all his peregrinations are only on the way to his native island’ (Levinas, 1986, p. 346). He opposes, to this, the journey of ‘Abraham who leaves his fatherland forever for a yet unknown land and forbids his servant to even bring back his son to the point of departure’ (p. 348). A journey without return will be further discussed in the following chapter.
the story of Aeneas, which is recounted by Virgil in *The Aeneid*, has a very different trajectory. Aeneas also leaves his home city, Troy, when it is destroyed in war, but that destruction means he can never go back. Aeneas, unlike Odysseus, leaves for a new place while carrying his past and his homeland; quite literally since he lifts up and carries his father Anchises, whose hands are holding the sacred objects and their house gods, on his back. He then founds a new city where he adopts the new language – Latin – which is in contrast with the old language, Greek. In the world of Odysseus, Greek is *the* language, and this is understood by way of contrast with what is scarcely language, the speech of barbarians. Yet, Aeneas is now in the world of at least two languages, one after the other. The stories of home are in this sense those of language. And it is only in terms of languages, their difference, their plurality, that Aeneas can now think.

It will be helpful at this point to relate the contrast that has been established by Cassin, to a further distinction that emerges later in her book: between Heidegger and Hannah Arendt.

Let us begin with Heidegger. Heidegger sometimes expresses the view that there has been a kind of decline in being and in philosophy, which in a certain sense is a decline in thinking itself. And this has come about, according to him, partly through language; specifically through displacement of Greek by Latin in the classical world. Heidegger thinks that Latin as a language is inclined to arrange and set straight, to set things in order. For example, while the Greek word *hyle* means something like ‘substance’ or ‘material’ (both words of Latin origin), there is a sense of a dynamism within itself – that everything grows and is in movement. That character of energy or life is part of the motion of the world. However, with the Latin words, Heidegger contends, this sense of dynamism is neutralised and deadened. Similarly, *physis*, the word closest to our ‘nature’, implies something growing or changing, which in turn implies a dynamism or activity; whereas *natura*, the Latin substitute, indicates just what is there, implying something more static by comparison. Although it may be obvious in biology that things such as trees are growing, but in metaphysical terms they are to a certain extent fixed.

*Logos*, a term that is the origin of our contemporary usage of the word ‘logic’, is also of importance for Heidegger. (see also Chapter 2) In the current use of the term, logic is largely understood as reason or rationality, as something that enables us to think logically. Yet if we trace it back to its Greek origin, we find *logos* used in a richer
and broader sense. It is particularly with its verb form *legein* we can think of its meaning in terms of ‘saying’ or ‘to speak’, ‘to state’, ‘to report’, ‘to tell’ (Heidegger, 1976, p. 198). But, as Heidegger notes, this is not in the sense of mere activity, but in the sense that it is saying something ‘to lay before, lay out, lay to – all this laying’ (*ibid.*). This indicates how *logos* used to be understood in its relationship with language and its movement of bringing something forth. It is in Latin that these ideas start to be static, separate, fragmented and rather reduced. On the whole, for Heidegger, this sense of dynamic relations of the world with energy and growth, and with language interweaving, is now, by means of Latin, deadened. And by the same token, English encourages the idea of mastery and separation of human being and the world, partly with this inheritance from Latin and also with its clear subject-object structure. Accordingly, words are relegated to the function of mere tools, and thinking is reduced to representation, and the world to mere resources. And, for Heidegger, Greek appears to reveal possibilities of overcoming this in its particularity and more appropriate relationship with things, as we saw with *physis* and *hyle*.

While there is no doubt of the value of all these accounts, there are at least two points to be discussed in the present context. First, Heidegger’s affinity with a certain kind of language should be further related to his desire for origins. Greek, for him, has some authentic connection with being, which is then lost in the deterioration from ancient Greek into later forms of Greek, and then into Latin and into the modern languages we have now (perhaps most significantly, English). It is German, for Heidegger, that is the modern language that harbours the greatest possibilities of revealing and renewing our connection to the world. He once states explicitly that: ‘along with the German language, Greek (in regard to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and the most spiritual of languages’ (Heidegger, 2014, p. 60). This is how the Greek language and German (which, as Cassin aptly puts it, is even more Greek than Greek) relate to being, origin, and even essence – that is, to a kind of home, a place of return for Heidegger. Hence, his nostalgia for roots. In this respect, the idealisation of the Japanese language in the *Dialogue* can be seen more clearly to be coupled with Heidegger’s privileging of one (language and thought) over the other. Heidegger is holding on to certain languages at the expense of others. Even when he pays attention to other languages, he is to some extent utilising them as a way of extending Greek or German thought. And this sense of an original language, I suggest, gives rise to the further point – that is, the neutralising of language itself.
To explore this fully, let us for a moment entertain the thoughts of a different kind of thinker, Paul Celan, a German-Jewish poet and translator. Both his parents were executed under Nazi rule, and he himself was forced into a labour camp for about two and a half years. Despite this, and although he was equally fluent in other languages such as Romanian and French, he wrote his poems in German. It was at a time when, after the war, there was a general resistance to lyric poetry, especially if written in German, that Celan’s pursuit of writing in German appeared to be an effort to restore it, both despite and because of his personal tragedy. Given this, it is ironic and rather amazing that Celan found some affinity to the philosophy of Heidegger, whose involvement in National Socialism was never fully accounted for. Celan became deeply interested in Heidegger and actually found some resonance with his own work and thought. They entered into correspondence for some two decades; letters were exchanged, and they met on several occasions. In 1967 Celan had a poetry reading in Freiburg im Breisgau40; later he was invited to Heidegger’s Black Forest retreat, where they took a walk together. A poem was written afterwards entitled as Todtnauberg (The Mountain of Death).

Todtnauberg records in what appears at first sight to be simple notes of an afternoon, a walk near Heidegger’s mountain hut, some ninety minutes in the forest together. But it at the same time appears enigmatic as the poem seems to be fragmented and it is not easy to assume what Celan had in mind. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe for example writes that it ‘is really barely a poem; a single nominal phrase, choppy, distended and elliptical, unwilling to take shape, it is not the outline but the remainder – the residue – of an abortive narrative’ (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1999, p. 35). As such as Lacoue-Labarth and Pierre Joris (a translator of Celan) recognise, what emerges, on closer reading, is the desire on Celan’s part for a word of explanation from Heidegger about his connections with the horrors of Nazism. Indeed what appears in the very middle of the poem, at the epicentre of the shock-waves that reverberate through it, is ‘word’ – the hope for ‘a thinker’s word to come’.41

a hope, today,
for a thinker’s

40 This is where Heidegger gave the rectoral address in 1933.
41 For a further discussion on the elucidation of Todtnauberg and this aspect of the poem, see for example Lacoue-Labarthe (1999); Joris (1988); and also Standish (2018b). The translation provided is by Pierre Joris (2005, p. 122-123).
word
to come,
in the heart,

What is expressed is an unanswered plea and abandoned hope.

In *The Meridian*, which is the speech Celan gave in 1960 when receiving the Georg Büchner prize, he seems to be thinking of this encounter particularly when he speaks of language and poetry. It is as if he is in ‘a dialogue with Heidegger’s thought’ (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1999, p. 33). Celan says that when one speaks one should not forget that one only speaks from the particular ‘angle of inclination’, that is, within one’s existence, one’s being here and now (Celan, 2005, p. 181). He powerfully continues: ‘The poem wants to reach the Other, it needs this Other, it needs a vis-à-vis. It searches it out and addresses it’ (*ibid.*).

The poem becomes – and under what conditions! – a poem of one who – as before – perceives, who faces that which appears. Who questions this appearing and addresses it. It becomes dialogue – it is often despairing dialogue.

Only in the realm of this dialogue does that which is addressed take form and gather around the I who is addressing and naming it. But the one who has been addressed and who, by virtue of having been named, has, as it were, become a thou, also brings its otherness along into the present, into this present. In the here and now of the poem it is still possible – the poem itself, after all, has only this one, unique, limited present – only in this immediacy and proximity does it allow the most idiosyncratic quality of the Other, its time, to participate in the dialogue (p. 182).

It is in the light of this primary requirement or condition of human being that we must speak to one another. It is upon this condition that the poem becomes a poem and language can have meaning. In language, we address and we are addressed. We are invited into a dialogue. This is in a sense what we see in the life of the very young child. The child does not progressively accumulate knowledge of things, to which is then added the relation to human beings. On the contrary, the animal, inchoate, and
inarticulate life of the young child is broken open by the approach of the mother, who from the start looks to the child for response. It is by this address and response that the child can come not only into language but into the world. Thus, more strongly, we are already addressed. And this calls for the responsibility to respond in which the other becomes a thou. In this sense, ‘one’s inclination’ where the poet stands is also where he leans towards the other, rather than standing upright. It is the place, the exposure of position, from which he seeks to write in ways that ‘speak for the sake of an Other – who knows, perhaps for the sake of a wholly Other’ (Celan cited in Derrida, 2005, p. 9). For Celan, this is the condition and the orientation of the poem that is necessary in order for a poem to be a poem.

Yet, is there a thou in Heidegger’s dialogue with ‘a Japanese’? Is there any real inclination, or rather stabilising, a consolidation of positions? In Todtnauberg Heidegger is invited to speak, but does he respond? We are in some sense responsible in this way in all that we say. It is by responding to the other that we come into human being, that we come to be human beings. In The Meridian, Celan is dexterously levelling at Heidegger’s accounts of language, at the idea that ‘language speaks’. Such an account is oblivious to the very fact that language is here, between people in conversation, that it is fundamentally an address to the other. In ‘language speaks’, it is merely impersonalised, neutralised, neutered. Within the idea that language speaks, it is easy to overlook that there actually is a face that speaks – which Celan emphasises as a fundament of language with the fact that a human being is addressed by another human being. As Standish points out, the neutering tendency in Heidegger’s anxious emphasis on authenticity of language has the effect of denying ‘the partiality of the human and the essential place in language of the address’ (Standish, 2018b, p. 66). It is his longing for essence that in effect blocks the possibilities of welcoming the other, and of being aware that we are already addressing the other (and are simultaneously addressed).

Hannah Arendt, the third point of focus in Cassin’s stories of home, is herself an exile from Germany who, after escaping from Europe, eventually settled in New York. The contrast between Arendt and Heidegger parallels the other we have considered, that of Odysseus and Aeneas. Arendt’s experience of nostalgia was, as she

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42 The ‘mother’ here could of course be a man. The reference is to the adult caring for the child.
43 This (the singular ‘you’ of older forms of English) is also famously used by Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel to refer to human encounter as opposed to the encounter with objects.
puts it in an interview, for German, not Germany. She became fluent in French and English, the language in which she came to write, and thus the world she lived in was necessarily one with other languages. The whole connection with Germany, of which she was partly deprived, actually proved enabling for her: it enabled the experience of plurality. The condition of being exiled made all the more evident this richness in plurality, which she understood as nothing but the experience of human plurality. Arendt awakens us to the importance of experiencing the plurality of languages: ‘if there were only one language, we would perhaps be more assured about the essence of things’ (Arendt cited in Cassin, 2016, p. 57). And it is true that Heidegger was preoccupied with Wesen – essence. Following Arendt, Cassin writes, ‘let the essence vacillate! Not to be assured of the essence of things is the best thing that can happen to the world and to us’ (Cassin, 2016, p. 60). If Heidegger experiences any sense of exile, it is from the original language he imagines; for Arendt, by contrast, the condition of being exiled is one she embraces as the very condition of human being – that is, the condition enables one to understand the other.

We can now see more clearly how home, language, and the idea of origin are entangled. The story of Odysseus, like that of Heidegger, indicates an affinity with the origin. Heidegger, while being aware that language is not totalisable, responded by way of a dwelling within language, say, an in-dwelling. What Cassin illustrates through the examples of Aeneas and Arendt is something closer to the experience of being broken open and of living with that rupture. Notably, in the end, Odysseus leaves home for another departure, for a new place distant enough that he will need to renew his language to be understood and to understand. This is the departure from language (or ‘from logos’ as Cassin puts it) to languages (p. 32). There is a sense of unity in Heidegger’s thought, heading towards the same direction. For Arendt, what is more important is that languages are not resolved into one another but that, in relation to one another, they are all equal. And they stay alive in relation to each other as they are broken open towards the others. Arendt experienced language as itself a manifestation of human plurality. We are all in a sense related not just to one language, but to the very fact that there are languages. Even if we cannot speak any other languages, our existence is conditioned by our being in a world that is already and necessarily plural. To explain this more fully, I shall discuss language further, particularly its

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44 This was a German television interview with Günter Gaus in 1964.
characteristic of always already being plural. In this way, language may be seen not just as one sign of that plurality, but as plurality *par excellence*.

**Rooted in the air**

Is the contrast between being rooted and uprooted sufficient to describe the human condition? Does either term in this apparently obvious contrast apply? Heidegger rightly names the human condition as *unheimlich* – hence, as never having been at home, or paradoxically as at home and not at home. Would it be right to say that we are already exiled? Exiled and not exiled. Cassin says, one is neither rooted nor uprooted, but rooted in the air – that is, with ‘airborne roots’ (Cassin 2016, 62). What is it, then, to be rooted in the air? What does it mean to be exiled as the very condition of human being? In order to take further the discussion of language, let us begin with its relation to air.

How does air connect with language, or human beings? Of course, there is no doubt we cannot survive without air, yet much more can be said. Let us first think of what happens when we speak. My speaking depends upon fluctuations in the pressure of air. The voice would not be as it is if there were no air. That my vocal cords change partly depends upon air. Even the structures of sentences depend on human breathing too, so we can breathe properly at the end of phrases or sentences before starting again. Writing is no exception if we think of where we put commas and full-stops. It is obvious, is it not, how central our breath is to speaking, and thus to language? We simply cannot speak without air, and without it there would be no language at least in the form we recognise today.

It is out of that circulation of signs enabled by breathing that I come to hear words, and to speak, and that we conventionally acquire language, which is, in the end, inextricable from thinking. It is worth noting that to breathe is also to respire (respiration), to aspire (aspiration), and to inspire (inspiration), all of which share the root sense of spirit. In this way, breathing is involved in both the physical and spiritual – as conditions for language itself.

Spirit here is better understood not in a religious sense, as exemplified in Christianity, but rather as what we have in every conversation. Spirit is what is alive in the ordinary interchange of people, in the air they breathe, or in the words they

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45 In a similar sense, Derrida writes: `Without breath there would be neither speech nor speaking, but before speech and in speech at the beginning of speech, there is breath’ (Derrida, 2005b, p. 110).
express – that is, in addressing one another, as Celan reminds us. *Geist*, the German word for spirit, which relates also to the sense of the ghostly, is better suggestive of what Derrida has in mind when he speaks of words exceeding one’s death. How can this be so? For me to speak now, I must use words that existed before I was born. And what I speak will still be there after I die. The *words* will remain after I die. In this sense, Derrida even says that death is the very possibility of signs; the idea of death is implied already in the way any sign works (see, for example, Derrida, 1988). 46 Language, extending beyond my death and also beyond presence, is what shows and reminds me of my mortality. Furthermore, language is always open to new connections and changes. Derrida likens this with dehiscence, the bursting of the seed-pod: due to its unsaturated and disseminating character, language can never be contained in itself and may falter even in a single word. Whatever I say is going to endlessly connect with the things that are not here now. Thus language only defers and never arrives at a fixed meaning. So, this shows that my thoughts and words actually depend on what is not here now – a ghostly element in our language. And accordingly, language is something opened to the air. 47 This certainly connects with the very condition of human being, which, in Heidegger’s terms, is described as an ‘ek-sistence’: the existence of Dasein 48 is that of ek-sistence as always projecting oneself towards an outside, standing outside of oneself. Put otherwise, we are open to the outside. We depend upon something other than ourselves in order to become human beings. Our coming from past and heading towards future constitutes our presence. We are never closed up and always in the movement of becoming, open to what is not yet. Our being is in this sense a non-being, as we depend on non-presence. Unlike the lives of animals, human beings, as language exceeds itself, are always interrupted and opened up to new possibilities: thus, we are not at home; our condition is *unheimlich*, uncanny. Hence, language, more or less, is the human condition.

46 Derrida illustrates this by taking an example of signature in his paper ‘Signature Event Context’ (Derrida, 1988a, pp. 7-8). For signature to function, it must survive after one’s death. So the idea of death is presupposed and implied as the possibility of the structure of the signature. This is necessary for any sign in general: for sign to serve its purpose, it is necessary for it to be repeatable, in the absence (even after the death) of both the sender and the receiver. I come back to this in Chapter 6.

47 The affinity and difference between Heidegger and Derrida have been discussed from various points of view. For example, Timothy Clark discusses the lack of intersubjectivity in Heidegger’s concept of *Dichtung*. And in her discussion of Derrida’s text *Of Spirit* Emma Williams illustrates the residue of Western metaphysics in Heidegger’s thematic of spirit (Clark, 2008; Williams, 2016).

48 Heidegger coins this term to avoid the metaphysical burdens and presuppositions that come with the term ‘human being’.
Moreover, language cannot be possessed by anyone, and it cannot simply be attached to a people. Heidegger may well agree on the point that language does not belong to any individuals, yet, for him, it could be said to belong to or be a part of a *Volk*. And Cassin writes that Arendt decouples this when she expressed her nostalgia for German: neither for German land nor for German people, but for German language. In the same interview, she expresses how she ‘always’ missed her mother tongue: ‘I was telling myself: What is to be done? It is not really the German language, after all, that has gone mad. And in the second place, nothing can replace the mother tongue’ (Arendt cited in Derrida, 1998c, pp. 85-86). And Cassin repeats the point playing on the expression *déracine*, ‘de-races’, uproots – taking the root out, removing the idea of an origin that was never there (Cassin, 2016, p. 56). Language always exceeds any particular people – any *Volk*. German cannot be rooted or uprooted, as there is no such thing as an authentic people attached to German. Thus it ‘will still be a mother tongue for exiles, but it was no longer one for ordinary Nazis’ (p. 48).

This is powerfully repeated in Derrida’s autobiographical work *Monolingualism of the Other*: ‘I only have one language; it is not mine’ (Derrida, 1998c, p. 1). Derrida says, in spite of the fact that he speaks several languages, he has only one language. Any one language is already in relation to others. This is so even for one’s first language which makes it uncountable. In this sense, there is a no such a thing as a first, let alone the first, language. A first language exists in circumstances that are always plural. Language is *already* out there, and already in the *plural*, which is to say also in a muddle, in relation to something other – that is, in relation to otherness that is endless thus it is not mine. So any language is always a language of the other. It cannot be a property, nor can it be propre (clean) because it is never secure, stable, or self-contained. Odysseus was not living in one language (and Heidegger surely was not thinking only in Greek and German); he only had the illusion of living in one language. The Greek he was brought up into was already itself plural. Any understanding of origin, let alone original language, is already translated and mediated through discourse – that is, through language itself. Thus ‘origin is a fiction’, Cassin writes, which ‘is a fabrication and not a given, a fiction that one chooses to fix’ (Cassin, 2016, p. 38). And often, if not always, it plays out as the means of justification for a certain form of hierarchy.
Before proceeding, it is worth noting what Derrida points out in relation to Arendt’s attachment to her mother tongue as he pushes and challenges this further. What Derrida conceives is that she misses German ‘as though the language were a remains of belonging’ (Derrida, 2000, p. 89). Derrida emphasises that language is also ‘the experience of expropriation, of an irreducible exappropriation. What is called the “mother” tongue is already “the other’s language”’ (ibid.). What made him cautious is also Arendt’s belief that language cannot go mad. Derrida states that she is rather ‘disclaiming’ and seeking to reassure herself in ‘wishing to believe this’ (Derrida, 1998c, p. 86). If we follow what has been discussed about language, as more than a simple external tool, it is ‘indeed necessary that the speaking citizen become mad in a mad language’ (p. 87). We would not be able to separate for example the language of Eichmann from himself and what he did. Indeed, the possibility of madness of the language is perhaps best exemplified by Arendt’s own thought, when she refers to the speech of Eichmann. Eichmann speaks the language of cliché (‘Officialese’ as he himself puts it) through which he avoids speaking to and for himself and for others; it reveals his inability to think and his seeking retreat in a bureaucratic ossified language in which he insulates himself from the outside. It is by losing ‘the possibility of invention’ – the natural productivity, idiom, and waywardness that Arendt identifies and celebrates in the mother tongue (Cassin, 2016, p. 46) – that language can go mad. So, the mother tongue too should not be complacent, be a consolidation or be in collusion with such a historical horror; it should be disturbed. It is by welcoming differences within and between languages, by encountering others, that we save what we love of our mother tongue. So what Derrida suggests, to complicate the picture, is that it is better to orient oneself towards the otherness than towards the mother tongue as a way of embracing ‘an essential alienation in language’ (Derrida, 1998c, p. 58). And this necessary ‘impurity’ is what we must learn to embrace as conditions for our language and ourselves. This leads us back to Heidegger’s remarks: ‘Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home’ (Heidegger, 1998a, p. 239). But home must be disturbed, and even dispersed to be saved!

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49 Derrida explores the topic of the mother tongue and madness in a long note in Monolingualism of the Other, and he refers to this also in Of Hospitality. For a detailed comparison between Derrida and Arendt, see, for example, Jennifer Gaffney (2015). She acknowledges Derrida’s point but also defends the position of Arendt by discussing the political importance of the mother tongue for Arendt. According to Gaffney, the responsibility to care for the mother tongue amounts, for Arendt, ‘to the preservation of a space of freedom or a political sphere’ (Gaffney, 2015, p. 536).
Cassin asks, ‘When are we ever at home?’ We return home to find it is not what we thought it would be. Maybe we are always on the way home. But this already sounds quite sentimental. It should be noted that this is not in the sense of endless adventure and floating states. It is neither staying in a sense of rootedness, nor a smooth nomadism. It is rather, to employ a crucial concept of Henry David Thoreau, a matter of ‘sojourning’ – of spending ‘the day’, or some time, and then moving on. Thoreau stayed by Walden Pond, outside Concord, Massachusetts for about two years; it was a woodland retreat, yet close enough to be seen and visited by his neighbours. He kept a journal and near the very end he records that he leaves the wood for the same reason that he went there. As much as living in Walden Woods was an experiment for him, his leaving there was another experiment. Stanley Cavell (2006) juxtaposes this with Heidegger in his essay, ‘Thoreau Thinks of Ponds, Heidegger of Rivers’ (referring to Walden Pond and the Ister respectively). Thoreau asks: ‘Why should we knock under and go with the stream?’ Then in opposition to the image of ‘a rushing stream’, he places ‘the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality that surrounds us’, which probably is the image of Walden, a pond where water is still and contained, the kind of water Heidegger never considers (Thoreau cited in Cavell, 2006, p. 224). Heidegger interprets rivers as marking the path of a people (Heidegger, 1996, p. 31; Cavell, 2006, p. 225). At a pond, there is no particular direction whereas a river has a destiny, a direction it reaches towards. The powerful flow of the river gets tied up with the notion of common destiny and German people.

Of course, the river for Heidegger is also what enables people to settle and make their living – that is, to dwell. This is a powerful thought that is shared by Thoreau who sits by the pond and waits for things to reveal themselves – perhaps also an instilling of thought. Both acknowledge thinking as ‘letting-be’ (Gelassenheit) rather than attempting to grasp the world. Yet, the rushing streams of Heidegger, ironically, only return to home. They all in the direction where tributaries join a larger river, where Dasein is ‘homebound’, in longing for unity (Cavell, 2006, p. 229). On the contrary, what characterises Thoreau’s Walden is sojourning: ‘living each day, everywhere and nowhere, as a task and an event’ that is ‘the essential immigrancy of the human’ (ibid.). Thoreau’s experiment is for the new departure, unattached. It is to be open to who will come after himself, the strangers, the term to which he refers to his readers; that is, learning to leave.
We constitute the image of home in various ways. We are confronted by continuous arrays of idealised pictures of life, particularly through TV commercials, magazines and advertisements prompting you to ‘find your real self’, where even the idea of authenticity is understood in teleological, and instrumental terms. Despite its importance, and because of its influence, the concept itself has been somehow exploited: it is rather diminished by being abstracted and adopted variously including in the economical commercial sense. What does it mean, then, to arrive home only to leave home? This might be a matter of literally moving from one place to another, yet, for most people, it will most likely be living in a particular place – in one’s marriage, one’s family, one’s community – and necessarily in relationship to the other. These are places that will not stay the same and will, in consequence, require us to sojourn if we are to live well. This also applies to one’s identity. We feel there is something about ourselves we must always hang on to. But that holding onto is often not some essential you, and instead an image of yourself. And those images can be changed by releasing ourselves from them. It is about letting go of what I thought was essentially myself and moving on to something new, to what happens beyond my expectations and my familiar terrain, through which I shall come to understand that the world exists in plurality. ‘Rootedness and uprootedness: that is nostalgia’ (Cassin, 2016, p. 7). If there are roots, they are only airborne roots.

To conclude, I return to translation, particularly with regard to the relationship with the other.

**Translation and the Address of the Other**

It was as if Heidegger was not affected in the course of translation, for all his protestations to the contrary (Japanese: ‘All his [Count Kuki’s] reflection was devoted to what the Japanese call Iki.’ Inquirer: ‘In my dialogues with Kuki, I never had more than a distant inkling of what that word says.’) (Heidegger, 2003, pp. 2-3). He understood the other by its closeness to his own thought. Yearning for origin or essence can blind us to the fact that we are already affected by the other, addressed by the other. The possibility of translation is already there in the language that we speak to one another.

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50 It is fairly transparent that Heidegger is the ‘Inquirer’. See also: ‘Inquirer: He [Count Kuki] could say in European languages whatever was under discussion. But we were discussing Iki; and here it was I to whom the spirit of the Japanese language remained closed – as it is to this day’ (Heidegger, 2003, p. 4).
another, and in our encounter with the otherness of different cultures and languages. At this point, it is worth pondering what Lovisa Bergdahl says regarding the ‘double desire’. Drawing on Derrida, Bergdahl writes of the desire to be understood on the one hand and on the other to be respected with one’s own difference as what escapes that very understanding. This is, in her words, the desire ‘between see me, hear me, understand me and do not reduce me by imposing your definition of who I am – [which] cuts to the very heart of who, as human beings, we are’ (Bergdahl, 2009, p. 37). It is in the context of considering religious differences that she speaks of this: she investigates what is at stake when people with religious commitments ‘are required to translate their religious ways of life into a generally intelligible language’, in the name of a liberal society. What is important is to do justice to what resists being translated without a remainder, she writes. It is to note that ‘difference cannot be reduced to common knowledge or intelligibility’, and that education needs to seek its way to respect this ‘unknowability’, and ‘untranslatability’ of the other (p. 39). We need to remind ourselves that we are encountering something untranslatable, something that exceeds ourselves, and this may involve abandoning our pre-existing views about others. We find this otherness – the double desire – in ourselves as well. Hence, in a sense, translation is our common condition. But this is not to level out any existing inequalities; it helps us rather to recognise power differences between languages and provides us with resources to push the limits of the liberal discourse of ‘recognition’.51 What is at issue is not necessarily to do with achieving mutual understanding and harmony, or with tolerance. What happens in the site of translation is closer to transformation: I must accept the risk of losing part of my own language, which in due course will allow me to learn and transform my own language and self.

What Dorota Glowacka writes in relation to the task of a translator helps us to see this better:

51 The ‘politics of recognition’ calls, for example, for the needs of better representation of underrepresented groups. This is certainly of importance to bring things to light, making invisible visible, and drawing people’s attention. Yet at the same time this can confine the other into the realm of knowable features of identity. So it is important to be aware of that recognition is, in Judith Butler’s words, not ‘for what one already is’ but also for one’s becoming (Butler, 2003, p. 31). Also we should be cautious of where the ‘horizon’ of recognition is located (Taylor, 1992). Although Taylor himself seems to be aware of this to some extent when he speaks of the horizon as in movement, the limits should be pushed further given that the horizon often depends on pre-existing norms, or even on privileged viewpoints. And as Derrida writes elsewhere, the horizon is inevitably the horizon of the self. For a further critical discussion of the politics of recognition, see, for example, an interview with Butler (Willig, 2012). She remarks that ‘the schemes of recognition that establish who will and will not be “recognizable” have to be considered critically’ (Willig, 2012, p. 141). Inclusion policy in education and the assumptions that come with it need to be critically considered in this light.
In translation, the sound of the native tongue, furrowed with the traces of the obliterated point of the text’s departure, returns as foreign – uprooted from its native soil [unheimlich]. Instead of striving to preserve the status quo of the target language, the translator must allow that language to be affected by the foreign tongue, to release the inscription of the trace of the other. Yet the translator is also a guardian of the frontier between languages, the one who regulates the migrations of meanings: he ensures safe passage but he is also responsible for halting their uncontrolled proliferations (Glowacka, 2007, p. 129-130).

One’s language returns transformed through the process of translation, and it changes the view of its own home land. The task of the translator is to be vigilant and aware of these losses and gains while acknowledging that they are not fully in our control. Of course, it is true that we stabilise things to some extent, but we will find this only as a future anterior – it will have been stabilised. And, then, we must be ready to leave, to be open to new connections. It is, to repeat, by being open to impurity and unpredictability that language is alive. Importantly, in translation, one needs ‘to be deeply self-reflective about what it has excluded, to confront its own investments and assumptions’, and, as Glowacka puts it, borrowing words from Derrida, to listen with ‘the ear of the other’ (Glowacka, 2007, p. 130; Derrida, 1988d). Such a process will cast doubt on what I have been thinking of as solid ground, as a foundation, and even as my mother tongue. The endeavour requires new words, concepts and ways of speaking, which will become a new source for my thoughts. Translation involves this invention, this creation of language. It is through being broken open by the other that I transform my language, transform myself – neither of which is actually mine in the sense of possession. The movement of return, the return of language, is found in The Meridian as well. In this speech, Celan speaks of the human condition as the meridian, as being under the tension between two poles and leaving us inescapably exposed to the sun. It is the meridian that ‘binds and which, like a poem, leads to an encounter’ (Celan cited in Derrida, 2005, p. 12): ‘I find something, like language, immaterial, yet earthly, terrestrial, something circular, which traverses both poles and returns to itself, thereby – I am happy to report – even crossing the tropics and tropes. I find . . . a meridian’ (ibid.). The encounter with the other under the midday sun is not likely to be of comfort and ease, but it is nevertheless something from which we cannot hide.
The possibility of understanding the other involves plunging into a different world that exists between different words. This is how we should venture in languages. The journey is not only to return but to set sail again, towards plurality.

Let us conclude by returning to Heidegger. His insight is valuable in guiding us to attend to the importance of receptivity: we can be open to the future as what comes from outside; we can respond to what appears to us; and we are the being that comes to light through language. Yet, on his account, it is hard to find a sense of the grappling or struggling that we face in the encounter with the other person – with a person who also actively creates her own meanings, who makes sense of the world in her own ways. Nor is there a struggle over negotiation or decision-making on the scale that I have depicted in respect of translation. The inevitable struggle that follows any human encounter is obliterated by and subjugated to the relation between language and the truth of being. Language, as Heidegger understands it, misses the fact that language is that of the other person. Hence, Levinas’ criticism of Heidegger’s Mitsein as ‘an association of side by side’ – that is, an association ‘around the truth’ (Levinas, 1987, p. 41). Heidegger was blind to the fact that it is a human face that speaks and that we are singularised in our responses to what others say – in effect, to the ethical dimension of language. A perfect translation is impossible but not any more impossible than it is to get into the mind of the other person. But we must continue to translate despite the impossibility, or rather precisely because of that impossibility. This calls for responsibility for invention, for a hospitable language that does not drag the unknown other into my familiar terrain. It is in this sense that Derrida writes: ‘language is for the other, coming from the other, the coming of the other’ (Derrida, 1998c, p. 68). And, language, at the same time, reveals that we are far from being the masters of it: we are only guests. As Anne Dufourmantelle writes, ‘It would be consenting to exile, in other words, to being in a relationship to place, to the dwelling, that is both native (I would say almost maternal), and yet in transit, if thinking occurred to the human’; thus Derrida invites us to recognise that we are ‘first of all a guest’ (Dufourmantelle in Derrida 2000, pp. 15-16).

The illusions of permanence or origin are dispelled. And this is nothing less than ethics. To further explore the ethical dimension in language itself, the next chapter turns fully towards the philosophy of Levinas.
CHAPTER 4

‘Ethics is an Optics’: Ethical Practicality and the Exposure of Teaching

The importance of Levinas’ philosophy for education has been widely discussed, with regard, for example, to social justice, to literature education, to religious education, and even to subject matter. In ‘Levinas: Ethics or Mystification?’ however, Alistair Miller questions whether Levinas’ work is of value at all. Miller raises doubts about whether his philosophy can, in any way, be helpful when it comes to practical ethical decision-making, especially within education. Levinas’ ethics, he argues, is ‘more likely to generate an esoteric discourse; instead of practical solutions, consoling utopian visions of the abolition of injustice and oppression; and instead of rational argument, poetic imagery and mystical incantation’ (Miller, 2017b, p. 526). Such a philosophy has no practical relevance either to education itself or to the broader realms of ethics and politics, and this is partly due to Levinas’ ‘profound pessimism regarding human nature and his mistrust of the traditional philosophical system’ (p. 535). The purpose of this Chapter is to read Levinas in relation to education against this indictment by Miller.

Miller’s criticism of Levinas is based on at least three assumptions. The first concerns Miller’s conception of ethics as an ethical system. He states, for example,
that there is a ‘need to demonstrate that Levinas’s ethics of the Other is plausible as an ethical system’ in order to show its practicality (p. 532). But, given that Levinas’ sustained project is nothing other than an attempt to reveal ethics as a ground that is beyond system, Miller’s claim seems clearly to be missing the point. A second problematic assumption has to do with Miller’s strategy of reading Levinas in the light of the binary classification of the empirical and the transcendental. According to Miller, Levinas’ ethics remains in an abstract or transcendental realm, which does not connect with personal relations in the empirical world. Thus, Levinas’ concept of the face, he concludes, is not a conception of a human face but only a kind of metaphysical speculation. I shall investigate this assumption by exploring the concept of the face in ways that do not succumb to this formulation. This in turn relates to the third problem. In emphasising personal relationships as essentially reciprocal, Miller seems to be misunderstanding, if not completely missing, the radicality of Levinas’ ethics. Non-reciprocity, on Levinas’ account, is an underlying condition of human relationships, and this conditions wider relationships with (things in) the world – notwithstanding the fact that this is something about which human beings are commonly or habitually in denial. Of course, there can be contractual relationships characterised by reciprocity, but these are subtended by this more fundamental relationship, a relationship of an asymmetrical kind. Blindness to this in Miller’s account may be due in part to limitations in his understanding of Levinas’ concept of subjectivity, which differs from the picture of ethical subjectivity that he himself endorses and perhaps takes for granted. Miller does not think that Levinas’ philosophy sufficiently ‘bears the weight of the expectations loaded onto it’ to enable it to disturb the dominance of such principles as rational autonomy and liberal individualism (p. 526). Contra Miller, I suggest that Levinas moves us beyond these default principles in a way that is more radical than anything Miller envisages.

The first three sections of this chapter proceed by taking each of these assumptions in turn and investigating them in the light of exegesis of relevant aspects of Levinas’ work. My discussion is developed within what is broadly understood as the tradition of phenomenology, and my purpose is not the positing of a new system or the formulation of systematic ideas of ethics: it is rather the achieving of an

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54 Robert Bernasconi, in ‘Rereading Totality and Infinity’, concludes that neither transcendental reading nor empirical reading is sufficient to understand Levinas (Bernasconi, 1989). Miller, while acknowledging Bernasconi’s point, writes that his reading strategy can be still justified in order to examine the correspondence of both dimensions of the practical and the empirical, which will test the practicality of Levinas’ ethics.
understanding of human experience – especially in contexts of teaching and learning – under a different, more accurate description. In doing so I attempt to show that Levinas’ philosophy indeed provides a ground for ethics – that is, a means of understanding the practicality of ethics differently, beyond systematic approaches. In the last section, I turn my attention to education more fully. In so doing, I investigate the current dominant discourse of moral education and Miller’s critique and proposal regarding this. I then attempt to show how Levinas disrupts it far more than does Miller: Levinas enables us to see teaching as an exposure. In the end, ethics will be seen as the very condition of education.

**Ethics as an Ethical System?**

Miller continually reverts to such phrases as ‘ethical system’ or ‘ethical foundation’. At one point he even refers to ‘Levinas’s quest for a humane belief system, an ethical system’ (Miller, 2017b, p. 535). It should be plain from my remarks above that this would lead, in my view, to a misunderstanding of Levinas’ philosophy. In order to demonstrate this, it will be worth tracing some features in the tradition of phenomenology, while at the same time providing some account of ‘the face of the other’.

Phenomenology, to be very brief, concerns the way things appear, the way they come to light, as the Greek root of the term (*phos*, light) itself indicates. Husserl, who is most closely associated with the inauguration of phenomenology, is interested in how things show up in meaningful relationships, in a way that is far from naturalistic scientific approaches. The contrast can be brought out perhaps by saying that emphasis on experience in phenomenology draws attention to the necessary role of the human subject in the way that things come to light. One consequence of this is a profound refiguring of conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity. Influenced by Husserl, Heidegger develops this approach further in his account of ‘Dasein’. Dasein, which literally means ‘being there’, indicates a fundamental structure of human being, a term that Heidegger wishes to avoid because it has become burdened by misconceptions of the human with ancient roots that have been consolidated during the modern period. Dasein points to our fundamental embodiment in the world as ‘being-in-the-world’, where our physiology is inseparable from the way things appear. Moreover, a fundamental characteristic of Dasein is finitude, and it is precisely finitude that gives
meaning; in this sense the way that things show up to us is not fixed at all. The project of phenomenology is to take this as the starting point on the grounds that being in the world, in this ordinary sense, is presupposed as the basis of all other more abstract or self-conscious thought.

Yet it is precisely from this point that Levinas goes a step further, in the direction of a more radical inversion. Levinas is basically saying that, even before the world appears to us, there is the relation to the other. If this is taken in purely chronological terms, it will surely be nonsense. The point is rather to think of this relation as a precondition: the appearing of which the phenomenologist speaks necessarily requires this relation to the other. In this respect, Levinas is on common ground with Heidegger and, for that matter, Wittgenstein. If we can imagine a human being isolated from others at birth and miraculously surviving on an uninhabited island, things would not appear for that human being as they do for us, and it is inevitably with a kind of anthropomorphism that we envisage such a being’s life and mind. The most pertinent distinguishing feature of Levinas’ thought in this respect, however, is his emphasis on the asymmetry of this relationship, of which I shall say more below. But, to compress a little, it is on the strength of this phenomenology that the world appears to me as it does, because the other has from the beginning already approached me. To illustrate this, Levinas first points out that there is already a rupture in Husserl’s principle of phenomenology. The rupture derives from the other person, who does not come to light in a pure intuition and who thus breaks Husserl’s all-encompassing phenomenological circle, of things perceived by human subjects and of subjects constituted by the perceiving of things. Human beings, because they are in a state of always becoming, cannot simply come to light in the way things do; and the approach of the other – that one is already approached by the human being – provides the structure that yields the borrowed light that makes the appearance of things possible. The world is not revealed, nor do we become human beings, through the direct light of the sun – a pure revealing – but by way of a detour: by way of the reflection and refraction in our relationship with others, in our life with language. I come to see the table, in the most ordinary sense, because the others with whom I am growing up see the table and use it and behave in relation to it in certain ways: this is what a table is. How then does the other person appear? The other certainly has an appearance, and most obviously a face. The face gives us information about the other, regarding such matters as their gender, race, age or possibly even social status. It represents. Yet,
according to Levinas, the face of the other is more than an object of knowledge or perception. So it is obvious that Levinas is not referring to the way that we can attend to what the other looks like or, say, look meaningfully into the depths of their eyes, however sincere this may on occasion be. Indeed, when the face becomes an image under my gaze, from which I can gather evidence and information, in the very act I turn the other into a mere thing. In this way, the other can be captured in representation and thus turned into something to be more easily understood: but this is a way of absorbing and comprehending the other, where there is a “prehending” in “comprehending”, in the realm of knowledge as light (Levinas, 1985, p. 60). In attempting to hold fast to my understanding of the other, I reify them in what amounts to a denial of their alterity. This reveals only the fact that I can never fully understand or grasp the other. As Levinas writes, ‘it is precisely in his image that he is no longer near’ (Levinas 1999, p. 89). So it is best ‘not even to notice the color of his eyes!’ (Levinas, 1985, p. 85). Put otherwise, to see the other is to see the face without image.

This is to see differently, by way of what Levinas will call, as was intimated, a detour. Levinas writes: ‘This detour at a face, and this detour from this detour in the enigma of a trace we have called illeity’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 12). In my attempt to understand the other, what actually remains to me are only traces of the other who recedes as I approach, traced for example in the words they leave me, in the hint of a smile or a furrowed brow. The phenomenon here is disturbed by the alterity of the other, the other’s illeity (which does not simply appear, does not show up in the light), which resists being grasped and confined in a concept or assembled in a representation. The face of the other is nothing but the rupture in phenomenon. In its constant movement, it slips away. Understanding the other in this sense involves a ‘standing under’ – that is, a standing under the demand of the other, in humility. In resonance with this, Derrida, so much influenced by Levinas’ ethics, writes as follows:

The other is infinitely other because we never have any access to the other as such. That is why he/she is the other. This separation, this dissociation is not only a limit, but it is also the condition of the relation to the other, a non-relation as relation. When Levinas speaks of separation, the separation is the

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55 The translation could perhaps be helped by the addition of commas or parentheses: ‘This detour at a face, and this detour from this detour in the enigma of a trace, we have called illeity’.
condition of the social bond. There is such a non-intuitive relation – I don’t know who the other is, I can’t be on the other side (Derrida, 1998a, p. 70).

The other person is the absolute other, who is totally separated from me and to whom I have no direct access. And the face of the other is the indication *par excellence* of this separation. If we were not separated, say, if we could understand the other perfectly, we would never have a human relationship with the other. On the contrary, we would control and objectify the other in the manner of taking the other into the same. Hence, separation does not mean that there is no relation. Rather, this separation is exactly the condition through which the relation to the other human being becomes possible at all! ‘It is the breaking-point, but also the binding place’ – that is, a binding built upon the acknowledgement that to know the other person is to know the interiority of the other (that is, to know that the other has an interiority that I cannot directly know) (Levinas, 1999, p. 12). There always is an infinite depth, an infinite space that will not be accessible. To respect and to relate to the other person is to remember this absolute otherness of the other. Levinas writes, ‘[t]o have the idea of Infinity it is necessary to exist as separated’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 79).

Levinas is neither positing a new ethical system nor proposing some new idea – for example, that we ought to have a special relation to the other (as if he were saying: ‘Wouldn’t this be a good idea?’). Within a tradition of phenomenology, he is saying rather that if you look at our relation to other people, you will find the relation to the face to be always already there. The face epitomises the infinity that breaks totality – that is, totality as enclosed circle, as fixed system or fixed history; it is the face that punctures my solipsism. And, at the same time, it is the condition for any system or, history, and for any constitution of myself.

Thus, as I have tried to show, Miller’s claim that Levinas’ ethics should be ‘plausible as an ethical system’ simply misses the whole point of Levinas’ philosophy, which attempts to think ethics otherwise (Miller, 2017b, p. 532). Levinas writes, in *Totality and Infinity*, that ‘ethics is an optics’. He goes further: ‘it is a “vision” without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision; a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type – which this work seeks to describe’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 23). To see the other as infinity, a different way of seeing is required: the other does not simply come to light as a phenomenon.
Beyond the Empirical and the Transcendental: the Face that Speaks, the Eyes that Listen

Within the terms of his dualistic approach, Miller claims that, while a transcendental reading of Levinas is ‘more sympathetic’, it fails to yield a philosophy that tallies with the realities of the empirical world (Miller, 2017b, p. 527). The face of the other at best illustrates ‘a metaphysical relation’: it ‘is not a human face expressing or evoking human thoughts and feelings’, and it suggests ‘no recognisably human relationship’ (pp. 530, 531). In response, in this section, I shall further explore ‘the face of the other’ in a way that moves beyond this binary classification of the empirical and the transcendental. In so doing, I explore, in particular, the ideas of ‘seeing’ and of language. The face works symbolically and metaphysically but also, as I shall try to show, as an evocation of the actualities of this world, as an accurate description of our experience of the other person. It is, as Levinas states, a ‘concrete abstraction’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 91).

Let us attend, first, to an example of seeing that Levinas provides in Totality and Infinity. This is the myth of Gyges, taken from Plato’s Republic (Plato, 2004, pp. 359-360). Gyges has a magic ring that enables him to become invisible – that is, ‘to see without being seen’ (Levinas 1969, p. 61). ‘The myth of Gyges’, Levinas writes, ‘is the very myth of the I and interiority, which exist non-recognized. They are, to be sure, the eventuality of all unpunished crimes, but such is the price of interiority, which is the price of separation’ (ibid.). If we were transparent to one another, if we could, say, see directly into one another’s minds, human lives would not be what they are, and the substance of our moral lives and education would vanish. But the wilful refusal to be known, and the shying away from it in secretiveness, are barriers to or deflections of the other’s approach and distortions of the address to the other. Gyges’ way of seeing indicates that he is not engaged with others, or participating in what happens around him; he refuses to be affected by the other; he is a voyeur. He exists independently – that is, free from the relation to the other. When one sees the world without being affected, in the position of the spectator, the world appears as abstract, separated from oneself, and without relation; and this means that there is no responsibility. Gyges, in Levinasian terms, is only a bystander and not a subject. It is for this reason that Levinas speaks of the ‘eventuality of all unpunished crimes’ as denials of the presence of the other. In this sense, Gyges’ way of seeing amounts to his denial of responsibility.
A similar kind of voyeurism can be seen in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Othello, being obsessed by the possible infidelity of his wife, even on their wedding-day, gives in to doubts about her. Goaded by Iago, he restlessly searches for evidence of her infidelity, asking for ‘ocular proof’ (Shakespeare, 2015, Act 3, Scene 3). While the insistence on ocular proof indicates Othello’s attempt to grasp the other, ironically this is exactly what feeds the doubt: the denial of the alterity of the other. It is worth noting that in wanting to see things clearly, he refuses to listen to her. What remains is only a gaze that turns the other into a mere object. While he turns his wife into the figure of a perfect bride, not just idealised but idolised, he is himself refusing to be exposed and affected. There is no relation found between them. And significantly, she has not been heard. But the state of denial, the repression that this constitutes is not one that can be sustained. Eventually it is a realisation of her otherness that overwhelms Othello. Unable to bear this reality, he smothers her with a pillow, stopping her very breath.\

In contrast to these examples, it is the case that when we are engaged with the other, we not only see each other, but also listen and speak to one another. The face of the other becomes the face that speaks. In listening, I look at the other, but I do not look at the other in the way of gathering evidence. I do not attend to blemishes on the face. Rather, I see the other through her voice – that is, as we saw, the detour I make in seeing the other. The greater part of the relationship to the face is hearing the word of the other, to which I am asked to respond. It is important also that it is in speaking, in expression that the other continually resists being confined in representation as a fixed form; indeed, speaking undoes forms, leaving only traces, the traces of words. Seeing the face of the other, the eyes now listen. Seeing without light, they become the ‘listening eye’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 37). The paradox is phenomenologically accurate. If there is a seeing that is purely visual, untouched by the understanding, then it is abstracted from our ordinary experience and not what seeing normally is. It is not just that the senses work together but that they must be understood as conditioned by this borrowed light, of the relation to the face, and of the relation to the face through language. It is not just that the optical must be understood in these ethical terms: in this intentionality of a wholly different type, ethics is an optics.

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56 Stanley Cavell also discusses Othello in similar terms – for example in the last chapter of *The Claim of Reason* where he illustrates how the denial of the other person can lead to tragedy. He remarks of Othello that: ‘He cannot forgive Desdemona for existing, for being separate from him, outside, beyond command, commanding, her captain’s captain’ (Cavell, 1999, p. 491). Also see *Disowning Knowledge* (Cavell, 2008), ‘Epistemology and a Tragedy: A Reading of Othello’ (Cavell, 1979).
The face is actualised in its saying. And the basic condition of listening is my exposure to the other. There is more passivity in hearing than seeing. I cannot simply shut my ears in the way I do with my eyes, and nor can I so easily control the range of (what takes) their attention. The words are something that fundamentally come to me, are sent to me. And this is also true developmentally. Human beings, as language beings, coming into the language world, start by hearing words, not by saying words, not even by understanding words. The traces of the other, the words that affect and remain inside me constitute me. In this way, I am already oriented towards the other, drawn by exteriority. And then I am further exposed by my saying, responding, joining a conversation. With my words, I cannot but expose myself. Thus, as Levinas has it, saying is ‘the most passive passivity’ (p. 111). This saying ‘is in the risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability’ (p. 48). This exposure and ex-position – my saying, my expression, in which I put myself outside myself, out of position – mean that I am open to change, to what will come from the outside, ready for the risk. Through passivity, I am open to infinity.

When eyes listen, seeing becomes witnessing. This is far from the way of seeing of Gyges or Othello – of Gyges who remains unseen and unimplicated, and of Othello who refuses to be changed, in what amounts to a fundamental denial of the relation to the other. It is witnessing in the sense that you let things affect you, change you and transform you. This is to say that one lives one’s life as a bearing witness to God. Then, to witness the miracle is more than just seeing: it involves how one is to live differently. Yet what is said here is not confined to a religious sense. It is to let my life become a site of participation with the events around me; this is the site where my life is caught up with and in things. This is how the subject as witness ‘breaks the secret of Gyges’ and how the idea of the ‘inward subject’ is dispersed (p. 145). Then my saying is already a testimony. Derrida writes: ‘You cannot address the “other”, speak to the “other”, without an act of faith, without testimony’ (Derrida, 1997b, p. 22). And this is ethical. Levinas writes:

Language, far from presupposing universality and generality, first makes them possible. Language presupposes interlocutors, a plurality. Their commerce is not a representation of the one by the other, nor a participation
in universality, on the common plane of language. Their commerce, as we shall show shortly, is ethical (Levinas, 1969, p. 73).

Language presupposes the other person – that is, the face that speaks.\textsuperscript{57} Language itself is nothing but a relation with the other, with exteriority. And the responsibility is in the capacity for response. It is in response that I free myself from the pull of ‘being fully myself’ and am ready to be broken open to the outside (Levinas, 1999, p. 91).

The face, rightly understood, displaces any stark contrast between the transcendental and empirical, the contrast upon which Miller relies. Phenomenologically I am broken out of my complacent totalising way of thinking. Even very abstract thought comes only on the strength of the relation to the other, through language. Hence, Levinas’ philosophy cannot be thought simply as a ‘transcendental ethics’, confined to the transcendental realm, as Miller puts it (Miller, 2017b, p. 532). Levinas’ account of the ‘transcendence of the face’ does not refer to some kind of special event (looking into the depths of the other’s eyes!), but rather to what is already there in an ordinary world: it is ‘not enacted outside of the world’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 172).\textsuperscript{58} Miller gives little attention to language in his discussion of Levinas, but it is precisely this that reveals the face as a human face that speaks to us.

**Ethics without Return: Non-reciprocity as the Condition for Reciprocity**

In order to address more directly the concepts of human subjectivity and responsibility, it is worth returning to the idea of separation. This, once again, will reveal limitations in Miller’s understanding of Levinas, especially with regard to the danger of thinking of human relationships only in terms of reciprocity, in the way Miller endorses. Levinas says that the other is ‘not on the same plane as myself’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 101). In this sense, separation is height – that is, not horizontal but vertical, even a matter of vertigo – and it implies the impossibility of reaching the other. This is where the other demands my infinite responsibility, a responsibility that only deepens the more I answer to it. While this is precisely what makes Levinas radical, it at the same time invites criticisms from those who find this too religious in tone or utopian. It is also

\textsuperscript{57} This is also where Levinas diverges from Heidegger’s account of language, which has problematic aspects in terms of its capacity to recognise and acknowledge the complete otherness of the other. The above quotation can be read as a criticism of Heidegger.

\textsuperscript{58} In the same place, Levinas also writes that ‘no face can be approached with empty hands and closed home’ which suggests that the ‘face’ is far from a mere abstraction (Levinas, 1969, p. 172)
easily misunderstood as we are so used to thinking of just human relationships in terms of reciprocity. To dispel suspicions of a certain mysticism here and for further clarification, it is worth referring again to Derrida, particularly to his thoughts on impossibility.

The gift, according to Derrida, is precisely what gives or generates the idea of the impossible. To be a pure gift, Derrida writes, a gift must defy the economy of exchange and must not be based on any expectation of a return; ‘[i]t must not circulate, it must not be exchanged, it must not in any case be exhausted, as a gift, by the process of exchange, by the movement of circulation of the circle in the form of return to the point of departure’ (Derrida, 1994, p. 7). What does this mean? Although the gift, at first sight, seems to move in one direction, there is in fact always a return. You receive something as a gift and then start to think what to give accordingly, in a kind of reciprocity. You give something to a small child, in circumstances where no comparable return can be expected, but then you see the happy face and sense the child’s delight in return. Even giving anonymously to the charity, you find, brings with it a degree of satisfaction, and the sense of virtuousness you feel however discreet, threatens to annul the purity of the gift itself. To be a pure gift, it should not even appear as a gift, as once it is recognised as a gift it becomes a debt, which in one form or another must be returned. And, as Derrida suggests, if no one recognises the gift as a gift, why would we call it a gift at all? This renders the pure gift impossible. Yet Derrida is not being cynical here but suggesting rather that we must give even if there is no pure gift as such. There is no possibility of doing this in its purest form, but we must do it nevertheless. Reaching for the impossibility, in defiance of the way things are, lifts us out of the simple economy of exchange: it is what makes us human. The culture of gift-giving, which seems to be central in our lives and in a sense unavoidable,

59 As can be found here, what interests Derrida is the very possibility and the necessity of the contamination, which he contends Levinas does not attend to fully. What he argues, for example, in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ (2001b) is that the face of the other cannot be something totally pure in the way it sometimes appears to be in Totality and Infinity. For Derrida, the other is found only and already in the movement within the same. The dramatic metaphors of Levinas can appear to be describing the other as ‘pure other’ opposed to the same. But, to be fair to Levinas, he acknowledges otherness not as something purely outward, but as something within our history and experience – the infinity is already within the totality as what conditions it. The concept of ‘trace’ – the other within the world that interrupts the same – partly answers Derrida’s criticism, which Derrida himself takes up and develops in his account of language. Derrida reformulates this into something that shows the general characteristics of language and attempts further to show the alterity and the necessity of contamination – the tied relation between alterity and alteration. This will be discussed further in the following chapters. For Derrida’s response to Levinas, see also Adieu: To Emmanuel Levinas (Derrida, 1999) and ‘At This Very Moment in This Work Here I Am’ (Derrida, 1991). Re-Reading Levinas includes a discussion of Derrida’s response to Levinas and vice versa (Bernasconi and Critchley, 1991). For further discussion of Levinas’ influence on Derrida, see Simon Critchley (2014) who reads Derrida’s deconstruction through Levinas’ concept of the other. For Derrida’s reading of Levinas’ language, see, for example, van Der Heiden (2015).
shows that our lives actually depend upon something that is not simply an economy of return, something that cannot be summed up. It disrupts what continues merely as life, as survival. ‘If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain aenomonic’ (ibid.). The gift is precisely what interrupts economy, which is only possible as the impossible.

This relates also to Derrida’s concepts of conditional and unconditional hospitality. In ‘Hospitality, Justice and Responsibility: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida’, he remarks that ‘unconditional hospitality implies that you don’t ask the other, the newcomer, the guest to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery or your home, you have to accept this’ (Derrida, 1998a, p. 70). While pure hospitality certainly sounds impossible, Derrida’s point is that any conditional hospitality is always to be understood in connection with this unconditional hospitality. As an example, Derrida speaks of Michel Rocard, the former French minister of immigration, who once, when he was under pressure to accept more immigrants into the country, responded that ‘France cannot take in all the wretched poverty of the world’ (Derrida, 2005c, p. 69). Derrida points out that ‘[i]n the same moment that he shuts it down, Rocard opens up a conceptual possibility. For a brief moment one sees a glimpse of an alternative absolute, an unconditional hospitality fended off by conditional hospitality’ (Deutscher, 2005, p. 69). And this is where one might ask what is better, what is the best – that is, precisely the question: why not take in more immigrants? These are questions that can actually inform political decisions and transform them. In the interview with Le Monde, Derrida says that ‘it is in the name of unconditional hospitality, the kind that makes meaningful any reception of foreigners, that we should try to determine the best conditions, namely particular legal limits, and especially any particular implementation of the laws’ (Derrida, 2005c, p. 67). Rocard’s setting of a quota is possible only by considering unconditional hospitality. This is not an unworldly idea but a matter of reality itself, where the idea of impossibility breaks the system open to new possibility.

60 To give someone unconditional hospitality means to give them absolute control over things. Yet, to let this happen, the host should at least have a power to control the rule. In this sense, there is a paradox here that renders unconditional hospitality impossible. Derrida further discusses this for example in Of Hospitality (Derrida, 2000). This paradox applies similarly to several of Derrida’s other key ideas, such as the pure gift and successful mourning which shall be discussed in Chapter 5.

61 Another example of political implication of this idea can be seen in the case of Cities of Asylum, which shows how Derrida’s thoughts were influential, for example as expressed in ‘On Cosmopolitanism’, and became adopted at a practical level (Derrida, 2001c). Derrida invokes how the law of unconditional hospitality should
And the relation to the other characterised by this impossibility is absolute, asymmetric, and unequal. This not only differs from a Hobbesian contractual relationship, which assumes the same rights between people, but also from the still reciprocal I-thou relationship that appears in Martin Buber. It is an aneconomy in the sense that there is no return. I answer to my responsibility, and what the other would do in like circumstances is not my concern. Return is not my interest. ‘Responsibility, the signification which is non-indifference, goes one way, from me to the other’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 138). And this extends to the point of substitution, to the point of being a hostage. ‘To be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the other’ (p. 117). Dostoevsky writes, in the phrase often quoted by Levinas: ‘Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others’ (p. 146). Dostoyevsky’s term, vinovatyi, which translates as ‘guilty’, also means responsible (Toumayan, 2004, p. 55).

The language of Levinas here is certainly provocative, with its use of terms such as ‘substitution’ and ‘hostage’, and it is criticised by Miller as being more ‘mystical incantation than rational argument’ (Miller, 2017b, p. 529). Yet, these terms are the very key to understanding Levinas’ concept of subjectivity. To clarify this, it is worth attending for a while to the word ‘hospitality’. In French, the term hôte has the meaning of both host and guest. If you imagine, when a host has a guest at home, the host becomes the one who serves and answers the guest. If we take this to the extreme, the host becomes a hostage, the etymology revealing lines of connection that otherwise escape us. An exemplary case of this can be found in maternity – that is, in the relation of a mother and her baby. The Italian philosopher Adriana Cavarero focuses on Levinas’ remark on maternity and writes:

‘Maternity’, for Lévinas, involves ‘a body suffering for another, the body as passivity and renouncement, a pure undergoing’. Maternity, in short, is here the exemplary case of an extreme passivity, in which the entirety of the Lévinasian ethical subject is perfectly reflected, because the face of the other

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62 Levinas is not suggesting a reciprocal relationship between human beings such that we would find that we are all dependent on each other, although of course he is not rejecting all reciprocal relationships. Rather the relation with the other is possible only on the strength of a more fundamental, unequal, non-reciprocal relationship. In this sense what Levinas suggests is even more radical than what Buber suggests.
calls it, without any action on its own part, to be ‘for the other, despite itself’ (Cavarero, 2016, p. 153).

Cavarero, while showing pregnancy as literally having the other in oneself, suggests that ‘maternity is, for Lévinas, a gestation of the other in the same that applies to everybody, or even to corporeal sensibility as such, and serves for him essentially as a way to dismantle the virile self’ (p. 154). We can see that what is challenged here is the concept of sovereign subjectivity. Levinas, in dismantling the concept of subjectivity that developed particularly in the western philosophical tradition, urges us towards something that seems to be impossible. Certainly, all relationships cannot be that of a mother (or father) and a child. Yet, I suggest, this relationship is still worth considering in understanding subjectivity differently. While the baby as the vulnerable other orients the mother, the baby is also from the very beginning in touch with the mother, as Levinas writes, ‘[t]he others concern me from the first’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 159). And it is through the relationship with the other, through language that I become a human being, that my awareness of things comes, emerging out of human practices and contexts.

The point is not exactly that I am responsible for what I did through the exercise of my own will and choice, nor that I am responsible before the law, however much we are understandably inclined to see good and bad within these terms. It is rather a matter of moving the barycentre from myself to the other – that is, to place the other over myself. Welcoming the other is a questioning of myself through the other, which amounts to questioning my freedom. Thus Levinas writes: ‘My freedom does not have the last word; I am not alone’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 101). For Levinas, the subject is the one who is subject to the other, which implies that we are never free from the relation to the other. Miller’s reading does not do justice to Levinas’ sustained project of understanding human subjectivity in this way. What Levinas attempts to do is not simply to reject human reciprocity in the way that Miller conceives it (Miller, 2017b, p. 530), but rather to acknowledge that any relationship is based upon infinite responsibility, and this implies a non-reciprocity – that is, to illustrate our existence in

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63 Cavarero also finds problematic aspects in Levinas. For example, there is no child figure in Otherwise than Being, and no mother in Totality and Infinity. Although as she suggests the figure of the new-born can be an ‘archetype of absolute exposure and a total nakedness’ (Cavarero, 2016, p. 158), she finds the anthropocentric conjecture of androcentric implications in his work. Cavarero, while being aware of the stereotypical mother figure, sees this as a way to enhance the understanding of asymmetrical relations to the other. This is within her project of moving forward from Levinas who, she claims, is still focused on an upright self, putting more weight on himself, and not risking the loss of balance.
its very structure as itself responsibility. This responsibility is one-way, with no return. It is, he will say, a sens unique (a one-way street), where the French happily can imply also that meaning is one-way, that there is no return from what we say. Hence, there is a return neither in the sense of Heidegger’s seeking after essence, nor as that figured in the journey of Odysseus. That journey absorbs and takes the other into the same, in a return to myself. In relation to this, Levinas provides a rather striking passage:

In human breathing, in its everyday equality, perhaps we have to already hear the breathlessness of an inspiration that paralyzes essence, that transpierces it with an inspiration by the other, an inspiration that is already expiration that ‘rend the soul’! It is the longest breath there is, spirit. Is man not the living being capable of the longest breath in inspiration, without a stopping point, and in expiration, without return? To transcend oneself, to leave one’s home to the point of leaving oneself, is to substitute oneself for another. It is, in my bearing of myself, not to conduct myself well, but by my unicity as a unique being to expiate for the other (Levinas, 1999, pp. 181-182).

To be a human is to have an infinite responsibility – that is, in the human spirit, the longest breath, the breath without return. It is to leave the home where I feel safe and to reach towards the other who breaks my solipsism. Yet, it should be noted, I cannot be a self-enclosed totality in the first place as the other is already in me. This is the condition of human beings who are always already open to the outside. That is not about my lack or needs that could be satisfied, but about the infinite human desire towards the outside. Infinity is not a negation of totality. It is rather what from the beginning makes totality possible.

If practicality is taken to require a comprehensive ethical system or specific sets of rules, then Levinas’ ethics does not provide them. Yet, his thinking can certainly inspire us to create a space for orientation; it conditions and negotiates ethical decisions; it makes us imagine the better, to open ourselves to what is to come. This resonates with Derrida’s appeal: ‘even if commitment is the destruction of the gift by the gift, give economy its chance’ (Derrida, 1994, p. 23). And it is through this that we

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64 This relates to what we have discussed in the previous chapter. Sometimes Levinas compares the journey of Odysseus to that of Abraham to the promised land. Levinas writes: ‘The one-way action is possible only in patience, which, pushed to the limit, means for the agent to renounce being the contemporary of its outcome, to act without entering the promised land’ (Levinas, 1986, p. 348).
become human beings, in the economy of our ordinary lives – but also, and more importantly, in the aneconomy of those lives. This is a kind of ethics that acknowledges the possibility of failure, and the inevitable disturbance in human beings. And, it is precisely this disturbance that allows us to keep trying for the better, and possibly to fail better, in Samuel Beckett’s phrase. ‘A face is a trace of itself’, Levinas writes, ‘given over to my responsibility, but to which I am wanting and faulty’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 91). I cannot but fail, but I still see the face. In other words, I acknowledge the possibility of failure, but the face will not allow me to give in to despair.

**Ethics and Education**

*Not to be Completed, but to be Open*

Within a dominant strain of the Kantian tradition and in the articulation of a particular version of a liberal education, ethics has been understood mostly in terms of the moral choices of a free agent. The focus here is on reasoning human beings who can autonomously legislate the moral law and have the capacity to follow it. This relates in turn to a certain conception of citizenship education, committed to nurturing citizens with rational choices who live the lives they choose. Although I acknowledge the importance of autonomy as thus understood, I recognise a two-fold possible danger here. First, in its focus on the development of the fully autonomous person, ethics tends to fall into an abstract conception of value. Yet, ethics is a matter not only of dilemmas that arise on particular occasions but of what is really happening now around me, between people, in the ordinary everyday world. Some supposedly rigorous and practical forms of ethics can themselves be caught up in abstract terms and ideas, far from lived experience. Second, this idea of an autonomous self feeds into an idea of education as a key investment in a flourishing life. It is not reducible to but overlaps with the image of the consumer in capitalistic society, especially in the way that it foregrounds the exercise of choice. Education works to produce a certain kind of subjectivity, which Foucault characterises as the ‘neoliberal subject’. This is the subjectivity of the person who constantly seeks to improve herself, who becomes, in his terms, an entrepreneur of the self. Education then becomes a calculation in relation to a return. Confined within an economy of this kind, education remains within a means-end schema. In spite of the best intentions of the proponents of this version of a liberal education, there is a collusion with familiar systems of input and output.
Miller shares this concern to some extent, and he writes: ‘it is all too easy for the individual exercise of rational autonomy in a liberal society to degenerate into utilitarian calculation’ (Miller, 2017b, p. 525). Yet, according to him, Levinas’ ethics is incapable of providing anything substantive in this respect. Let us recall Miller’s words:

Although I recognise that his [Levinas’] work is a profound and sustained meditation on the mysteries of life, I do not think the ‘ethics of the Other’ bears the weight of the expectations loaded on to it, or of the practical inferences – philosophical, ethical, educational and political – which are drawn from it, by philosophers of education (p. 526).

Miller finds an answer elsewhere. This is not explicit in the paper in question, but it does become clearer in his other works: he finds an answer in character education (Miller, 2017a, 2017c).

Character education on the basis of virtue ethics appears, as Miller suggests, to be partly in tension with the idea of autonomy. It focuses on the cultivation of the virtuous character, on qualities of the moral agent rather than on moral action. Randall Curren describes it as ‘a coherent and comprehensive approach’ that helps students to ‘acquire good judgment and govern themselves in accordance with it’ (Curren, 2017, p. 30). Committed to the ‘promotion of ethical understanding and reflection, instruction in critical thinking, and guided practice in analyzing case studies in judgment and choice,’ it encourages ‘thinking things through before acting’ (ibid.). The rationally autonomous being is clearly present here, with the emphasis on cognitive skills. With its attempts to inculcate students into practices and traditions, and with its professed contribution to academic achievement, character education feeds into traditional ways of teaching and the status quo – perhaps inevitably so, given that the very idea of character education draws on models of virtuous behaviour grounded in fairly traditional notions of discipline. What Miller advocates is a particular form of character education that involves ‘adventure education’ or ‘service learning’ (Miller, 2017c). He emphasises the potential benefits of the challenges encountered in these. In some respects, however, it seems to me, that such practices can smack of the ‘Grand tour’ of upper class young men in the 18th and 19th centuries or perhaps of the ‘mission trips’ that are promoted by some countries today. Can these
programmes genuinely be about the other when the focus is mainly on the individual’s flourishing? Do such practices genuinely call into question the values of the society in which the students are living? If not, character education, at least in these familiar forms, cannot fully escape the two-fold dangers described above.

Both approaches, the Kantian and character education, it should be emphasised, are tied to notions of self-formation, even of the completion of the self; and this appears to extend, seamlessly and naturally in Miller’s way of thinking, to the consideration of norms and systems. But there is something wrong with this. When ethics becomes something about myself – that is, when it focuses on developing my skill, on nurturing my character – it can incline me towards a kind of complacency and self-satisfaction, encouraging a surreptitious hubris about my good qualities. By contrast, Levinas will say, the desire for the other is to be understood as a necessary surplus, unanticipatable and not to be satisfied. To focus on myself will be ‘essentially a nostalgia, a longing for return’: at best Odysseus’ journey results in absorbing the other (Levinas, 1969, p. 33). It is the journey back to myself, progressively realising a better self, looking for a substance perhaps in the form of a system – that is, say, with closed thoughts. But ethics is also not about building a system. Ethics, by its very nature, is always in struggle, open to the outside. It is precisely where presence is interrupted. To follow a rule should in a sense be to create it anew, in response to those others around me and to the wider world. And infinity should be the backdrop against which rules and norms – say, a quota of immigrants – are set. This plainly extends to politics and to political deliberation and decision-making. As Derrida puts it, ‘one must either suspend the normative or else establish, take into account a radical heterogeneity between different kinds or structures or concepts of norm’ (Derrida, 2002, pp. 200-201). Otherwise, norms become ossified. Foundation is not to be fixed and but only to be re-found. Similarly, system is not to be understood as the model and standard upon which we can confidently rely. However sincere the motive to establish a system, in reality, no system can reflect each and every human need. This is not to succumb to ‘pessimism’ or ‘profound mistrust’, as Miller puts it, but to acknowledge failure and human finitude (Miller, 2017b, p. 535). It is to render rules and systems answerable to people and communities. Ethics, the relation to the other that Levinas reveals, is that upon which

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65 Judith Butler, for example, draws on Levinas in Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism, though she does this critically, in discussing political problems.
ethical knowledge, moral choices, and systems must be constructed – the ground of
ethics, and ethics as ground.

In this light, I want to discuss more specifically how Levinas provides a different
vision, a sense of ethics that is more fundamental. I turn my attention to the teacher’s
experience, examining the ethical dimension in teaching itself.

The Exposure of Teaching

Teachers, as is the very nature of teaching, are inevitably exposed to students all the
time. This is often so in spite of the teacher herself, who may well want to be secure
in her position and not to be hurt. Although vulnerable and perhaps inclined to retreat,
teachers may at the same time feel a strong sense of responsibility to be open to
students, who are after all themselves younger, more uncertain, and more obviously
vulnerable. Almost every moment for the teacher involves deciding whether or not to
listen and respond to students, whether and how to join the conversation with them.
And this creates a disturbance in the teacher, which sometimes involves the teacher
questioning herself and questioning what she is teaching. If we return to words of
Levinas quoted earlier about the very nature of speech, we can see how he touches on
something very close to this experience of the teacher: our saying ‘is in the risky
uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon
of all shelter, exposure to traumas, vulnerability’ (Levinas, 1999, p. 48). Readiness for
this risk, the risk of exposing oneself, is a welcoming of the other.

Is this disturbance, then, just an emotional difficulty that teachers, especially
young teachers, must go through? Is it that teachers need better social and emotional
skills? Do they need counselling or therapy? Such remedies enable teachers to cope
with negative feelings, whether by alleviating or denying them. Common strategies for
teachers are to shore themselves up in advance against being affected by students. Do
not laugh too much in the classroom. Do not be too friendly to students, especially
outside of the school day. And be sure not to reveal to students your own emotions.
Imposing strict rules and procedures in the classroom can also be a good way of
holding back exposure of this kind. Teachers’ uneasiness about lessons that allow for
open possibilities can be understood as harbouring this same mentality: in their anxiety
they lessen the chance of encounter and conversation with students. Such armoury prevents teachers from being affected too much, it encloses them safely in themselves, and so it in effect blocks the fundamental connection to the other. Yet the disturbance is not simply an emotional problem that should or could be solved. It shows rather the nature of teaching, where one is always already in relation to the other, a relation from which one cannot fully escape. And I suggest that to be a teacher and fully to acknowledge the ethical dimension of teaching involves living with this disturbance. It is only by acknowledging this disturbance as the basic condition of teaching that students can appear in their alterity, as vulnerable others who need to be heard. Students are not to be categorised in terms of learning types or to become subjects for the teacher-researcher. They must, in some way, be heard as they speak in their own voices, with their words and expressions. The ethical demand for teachers is here, at the everyday heart of teaching. This is something that cannot be captured by understanding ethics as the solving of moral dilemmas or, say, acting upon laws legislated for oneself. Nor can it be adequately contained in practices of adventure education or service learning, possibilities that Miller espouses. It is about the fact that, as a teacher, I am addressed, and I must respond.

This is where, I further suggest, the teacher’s lack of sureness of herself must be valued. Being unsure is not just some preliminary stage before getting to the right answer, to achieving the required standard for ‘excellent’ teaching. It is in living in that disturbance that the teacher’s responsibility lies. It is a thinking open to infinity, into which thoughts come from the outside. This is not about making assertions, being confident about what I do, or about the soundness of my judgement. We are indeed inclined to divide things up and to fix them conveniently in tidy representations, but there should be no retreat to understanding students in terms of categories and labels. Educational policies that promote transparency and accountability rely on formulations of evidence, the data so essential to promote student achievement. Such practices put the other under a voyeuristic gaze, blinding teachers to the fact that, without their participation, without their part in making themselves the site of the event, there is no relation to the other. To teach is to welcome the expression of the other – that is, ‘to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 51). As Levinas continues, this also means ‘to be taught’ (ibid.). This is how the world

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66 In this sense, Levinas’ ethics certainly extends to the dimensions not only of ways of teaching but also of thinking and curriculum content, as Paul Standish has discussed (Standish, 2011).
appears as meaningful. Thus, ‘[t]o have meaning is to teach or to be taught, to speak or to be able to be stated’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 97). Where there is no relation, there is neither meaning nor teaching.

The demands that teachers face are relentless; the response they can give must be renewed continually; the answers they give will be repeated, but differently, possibly in a better way, infinite times. This is not to be satisfied; it is even to be irritated. And it is this that makes teaching difficult. Teaching makes the teacher a site of witnessing – which is also a site for witnessing students’ growing up. It is where teachers also grow and grow up. Attending to students is not calling for clarification of their levels of development or achievement but a witnessing characterised by listening and receptivity. These are basic to our treatment of one another, our seeing of our lives in one another. And the space created here in this relationship can also be one where school rules and policies, and systems of procedure can be broken open for continual renewal and re-creation.

Ethics as a Condition of Education

This is not then a task of moral education alone. To consider ethics a part of education is already to presuppose a division of fact and value. Yet every content only comes to light with the person who brings it: even objective knowledge is ‘nevertheless marked by the way the knowing being has approached the Real’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 64). Thought and words are not something impersonal or impassive but are already in action – that is, with the face presupposed. Things appear and exist in their relation to human beings, in their being called for by someone. In this sense, ‘things figure not as what one builds but as what one gives’ (pp. 76-77). Nothing is without this ethical dimension, determined in the light of the relationship with the other. Thus, ethics – confinable neither to such a notion as the ethos of the school, nor to any particular subject (say, ‘moral education’) – pervades the whole practice of education, the whole practice of thought, and more specifically, the practice of conversation. In Ancient Greece, the ethical and the beautiful coincide. In Asian philosophy it is *Tao*, the way of life as truth. Neither can be separated from life itself. Hence, moral problems cannot simply be separated from other problems, from questions of aesthetics or epistemology. To see this is to acknowledge that human practice or even language itself are possible only upon the ground of ethics in this Levinasian sense.
Miller suggests that Levinas’ ethics can be fruitful only for intellectuals such as philosophers ‘who by profession and by nature is given to engage in critical thinking’ (Miller, 2017a, p. 190). Yet it should by now be clear that the appeal to infinity in Levinas is not to some abstract kind of thought or to something exceptional, any more than it is to be entertained only by those of a particular intellectual or philosophical bent. It is here already in relationship with the other, and in what, in consequence, other things can be. There is, in what Miller says, the danger of a retreat into a narrow and rigid notion of ethics that is blind to the nature of human beings and the world.

The question that Levinas is concerned with is in a sense inseparable from his own experience of the Holocaust. This also made many philosophers question the assumed equivalence between the rational subject and the moral subject. Did the Holocaust happen because we were not rational enough, or because there were not enough rational subjects? Or is it rather a deficit in acknowledging the always already there ethical relation? There is certainly a danger in thinking of ethics as identical with rationality – which would be to think of ethics as totalised or totalisable, within a universal system that, once completed, can be followed by all. If I keep others safely in the distance so that, in the light of reason, I can understand and control them, this will be a journey of return, absorbing them into the same. Levinas provides a way of moving from a voyeuristic seeing in the region of light towards being touched by the other in a place where I am a witness – that is, where I come to have a different vision. It is, in Levinas’ terms, to witness the glory of infinity (see, for example, Levinas, 1999). Ethics cannot be separated from our everyday difficulties, and it includes not only our conscious decision-making but also those casual, sometimes inadvertent harms that are part of what we ordinarily bring about in our lives together. It is here that there is the possibility of the good too. Thus, as Levinas writes, ‘[g]oodness is always older than choice’ (p. 57).

In the crucial sense of orientation towards something better, Derrida finds a structure that is messianic. This is to be understood not in terms of presence or representation but as the Messiah who is always still to come. This reminds me of

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67 This does not refer to the advent of a saviour who will transform the world, as literally understood. It is much more like what Derrida calls the ‘democracy to come’. If we think we have democracy, then we do not because, through a process of objectification, we have turned it into a sort of false thing or idol. This should be differentiated from various historical messianisms. The Derridean sense is of the Messiah who is always yet to come (see, for example, Derrida, 1997b, pp. 22-23). This, for Derrida, refers to the kind of faith that any society depends on, which ‘is not and should not be reduced or defined by religion as such’ (p. 23). I shall come back to this in the last chapter.
Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot* – where ‘God’ is hidden in the title. What Derrida attempts to show is that our way of existing – our life itself – is one of waiting. I face something strange, which makes me anxious and troubles me. I do not know what will come about or when; but, as in Beckett’s play, I must still wait. It is precisely in that restlessness, that itch, that the subject is. Be uncomfortable! Be irritated! Keep questioning yourself! This is what Levinas seems to say: ‘The identity of the subject is here brought out, not by a rest on itself, but by a restlessness that drives me outside of the nucleus of my substantiality’ (p. 142).

It is in seeing the other as inseparable from the origin, as prior to the origin, by offering an alternative conception of human subjectivity, that Levinas has indeed provided us with the means to move beyond sovereign subjectivity. It does this in a way far more radical than anything Miller provides. It must, however, be stressed that this is not an alternative among many other choices, as if we were to choose our ethics! It is the very condition of the human being and of the world. And it is by understanding subjectivity as witness that the ethical dimension of teaching and learning can themselves be thought within a different vision – that is, within an ethical practicality beyond ethical system.
Education today is prevalent with positivistic approaches with an increasing tendency of managing and controlling, which can be translated as fear of risk and unpredictability. It seeks the security of grids of measurement. Such policies extend their realm beyond managerial terms of ‘risk management’ towards ‘emotion regulation’. Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) for example is, ‘a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools’.\(^68\) It would be too quick to be happy about this recognition of the significance of emotional aspects of life because the rationale and motivation behind it may be rather more complex (in ways that will shortly be explained). It may just be another form of good management, particularly in the way that it is to be implemented and evaluated. Daniel Goleman is an influential figure in such accounts whose concept of Emotional Intelligence has been entertained and applied in various fields including education (see, for example, Goleman, 1996, 2013). It is not simply intelligence, it is said, but emotional intelligence that is a key to success. These discourses do not escape and are now securely incorporated into, the realm of closed economy.

\(^{68}\) For further information see (‘Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) Programme in Secondary Schools’, 2019) in GOV.UK.
Against such accounts and policies, there have been some good considerations of negativity in education. Matthew Clarke and Anne Phelan discuss the positive role and effect of negativity in and for teacher education. Negativity disrupts confined structures and determined standards and thus enables alternative thought and scenarios (Clarke and Phelan, 2015). Dietrich Benner and Andrea English discuss negativity (such as perplexity) as something built into the structure of learning. It is a necessary path to go through for both students and teachers as the place where old knowledge is negated so the new can be welcomed (Benner and English, 2004). Negativity plays an important role also in Gert Biesta’s accounts, although he does not use the word directly. He criticises the current climate where education is defined by measurement and argues that taking risks is precisely what makes education alive (see Biesta, 2010, 2013; see also Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish, 2000, p. 3-13). He adopts the phrase ‘a pedagogy of interruption’ specifically to address the individualisation of oneself through education: it is through interruptions that one shapes one’s identity and becomes a unique responsible being. These authors not only attempt to show the positive role of negativity but also to embrace it as something inevitable or even necessary in education. Negativity is not something to be simply defied or denied.

While acknowledging the importance of those discussions and also sharing a common ground to some extent in seeing negativity as something fundamental to the human condition, this chapter takes its cue from somewhere else to further the discussion on negativity – that is, from the experience of mourning. It might be helpful to move through several stages to clarify this a little. Negative experiences involve a moment of evasion or interruption that seemingly threatens our secure self. This can range from mild anxiety to a sense of life being threatened. These are reminders of our vulnerability and insecurity. Death is negativity in a prime sense, wholly in the realm of the unknown. We tend to first learn about death through that of others. We learn that animals and people die: for young children maybe through animals and pets, or people around them such as grandparents. Second, through this – falteringly, partially, gradually perhaps – I learn that I too will die. So the death of the other makes me

69 Biesta chooses to use the term ‘subjectification’ rather than ‘individualisation’ which is one of the three purposes of education he gives. He draws upon Levinas to illustrate how one becomes a unique individual in response to otherness. His three categories are: education as ‘qualification’, ‘socialization’, and ‘subjectification’. Although he acknowledges that the three areas can overlap, often it seems his picture is too clear-cut. For example, he writes that ‘[t]he subjectification function might perhaps best be understood as the opposite of the socialization’ (Biesta, 2010, p. 21), and ‘three functions of education can therefore best be represented in the form of a Venn-diagram’ with overlapping areas (p. 22). He does not go so far as to discuss the conflicts and relations between them. The result can be a too simplified version of how a person is singularised in a society.
realise my own mortality and finitude. There is a mutual influence between these two: I learn from the other’s death what it will mean for me to die; and I learn from the realisation of my own mortality something of what death is for the other person, the one dying now. It is an unpredictable certainty I cannot resist. If Heidegger is right, this awareness, through my facing up to it, can give my life meaning. Death gives us the possibility of authentic life. It reminds us of our finitude, which is what makes each moment significant. Through the death of others, we see our lives differently.

These are powerful thoughts, but can there be a further turn, from my death to that of others? Let me – I hope without spoiling the plot – anticipate a little. The last stage that I shall attend to in this chapter, however, takes this thought further towards learning that my finitude is transcended by the finitude of the other. For Heidegger, death is what enables Dasein – the ‘possibility of impossibility’. Yet for Levinas, death is the ‘impossibility of possibility’: it is not what gives self-understanding but what wholly escapes any understanding (Levinas, 2002, p. 122, 1969, p. 235). We encounter it as an absolute other, an encounter through which my responsibility towards the other is revealed. It orients me to the other where ‘to be or not to be’ is ‘not the ultimate nor the most urgent question’ (Levinas, 2002, p. 125). Given that this is where I want to end up or at least move towards in this chapter, I shall need to revisit education, asking what the discussion of mourning offers us: what does the discussion of death and bereavement show about negativity in general?

By way of exploring different experiences and possibilities of mourning without erasing such differences, I juxtapose two works of art: poetry by Paul Celan and Still Walking, a film directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. I examine the overlaps between them particularly in terms of their focus on the language of acknowledgement and affirmation of negativity. Both seek, I suggest, ways of finding and creating meanings even where this seems difficult, if not impossible. Both steps forward, to borrow an image from the film: they step forward even though there is no guarantee that there will be a sound footing. It is to seek possibilities to understand negativity as the basis for one to be affirmative and be responsible for what one says – that is, for oneself and others who are never complete in any positive sense. Throughout the discussion of loss, there is a sense in which questions press themselves on you, even though you do not know what would constitute an answer: what does it mean to question what is lost and what remains? What does it mean in education? In seeking answers I begin with some thoughts on mourning.
Normal Mourning and Melancholia

What it is to mourn properly? In some cultures, people have to cry, wail, or make noise, while in others, people should stay silent, or stay up nights. Different rituals and traditions involving mourning are found depending on cultural or religious background. By mourning properly, one shows one’s respect to the community to which one belongs. One may be even morally judged by way of mourning as Albert Camus depicts in *The Stranger*. This shows that mourning is a crucial and universal experience for human beings. Yet, it is still difficult to go through the experience of mourning. It is perhaps even more so if one is living in a secular society which might be less religious and ritualistic than ever. It is never clear what we should do to mourn, and no one knows exactly how to deal with that.

I vaguely remember when my grandfather died. I was almost ten years old. I was told he had died, yet I did not take part in what had been happening around his death. I stayed away from school for a few days – only a few perhaps because my parents were worried about my missing classes and having to catch up later. They might have thought it would be better for me to carry on as normal. The first thing I did when I was back in school was to take the mid-term exam that I had missed. For that, I was isolated from others in order to prevent anything that might affect the result of the exam. Nobody talked to me about that. Things around me, so it seemed, gradually went back to normal. Yet, I still remember I struggled for quite a while wondering what to feel and what to do lying on the bed and staring out of windows. I questioned whether I was sad enough. I wondered if I was right or even normal in what I was feeling and doing. There was no way to make sure about the way I should behave or respond. I was not sure what they were all meant to be. And now I think it must have been so for my parents as well.

We all live in the midst of extreme and little tragedies in our lives including deaths of loved ones. This is a part of our real world to which we are all vulnerable. And it is true that such experiences of loss cannot easily be put into words, let alone become a topic of daily conversations. Yet, should this be avoided, ignored or simply set aside as if it is outside life? Derrida writes in a rather affirmative manner that on

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70 Meursault, the protagonist in the novel, is accused and sentenced to death, not so much because he killed an Arab but because he did not show an appropriate attitude during and around his mother’s death.
such occasions, ‘speaking is impossible, but so too would be silence or absence or a refusal to share one’s sadness’ (Derrida, 2017, p. 72). The continual struggles of finding a better expression, as shall be clarified, themselves are precisely what characterise mourning. The reason to look closely at mourning is not simply because mourning is universal human practice, but because it will help to understand the fundamental human condition built into the structure of absence. And although the aim of the present chapter is not to solely and directly discuss bereaved children, a certain attitude towards such an occasion shall be seen as a symptom of how we understand the human relationship to negativity.

Freud (1917) in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ provides a distinction between what he terms ‘normal mourning’ and ‘melancholia’. By going through a process of normal healthy mourning, one can properly recover from the loss of loved one. Mourning is then completed. By contrast, melancholia is a form of ‘pathological mourning’ (Freud, 1917, p. 250). It mistakenly identifies the other as oneself – in Freud’s terms, it is ‘an identification of the ego with the abandoned object’ (p. 249). This is due to the inability to clarify and separate what is lost from oneself. By not being able to detach oneself from the object in loss, one fails to recover and re-complete oneself; and this is a sign of an immature self. In regard to Freud’s accounts, Derrida points out that there can be no normal mourning if the mourning is to be faithful to the other. Put another way, he thinks there is something unfaithful about the idea that mourning can be completed. This longing for the completion shows that normal mourning is at attempt to secure oneself. To do so, according to Derrida, one carries the other in a safe form – that is, a form of ‘introjection, interiorization of remembrance (Erinnerung), and idealization’ (Derrida, 2005e, p. 160). He continues:

But if I must (and this is ethics itself) carry the other in me in order to be faithful to him, in order to respect his singular alterity, a certain melancholy must still protest against normal mourning. This melancholy must never resign itself to idealizing introjection. It must rise up against what Freud says of it with such assurance, as if to confirm the norm of normality. The ‘norm’ is nothing other than the good conscience of amnesia. It allows us to forget that to keep the other within the self, as oneself, is already to forget the other. Forgetting begins there. Melancholy is therefore necessary (ibid.).
It is worth noting the term ‘to carry’ Derrida uses here. Not like any psychoanalytical terms, it is rather physical, bringing the sense of weight and of embodiment. We carry the babies, not only in our arms but also in gestation. We also carry the coffin following the death of our dearest. One might even recall the fleeing journey of Aeneas; he carried Anchises on his back without any hope for a return at the fall of Troy (Chapter 3). So the term itself somehow changes the realm of thoughts. Then, Derrida claims that to be faithful, one should carry the other not according to a ‘norm’ but with melancholy; and says this is ethics itself. What he points out is that, as intimated above, normal mourning, by going through the normalising process, renders the other as something containable. It does so in accordance with a ‘norm’ which can be social convention, rules or even simply my idea of what others would think ‘normal’ in contrast to pathological. Norms understood in this sense reassures us of our forgetfulness. It reassures us to forget the fact that to contain the other and to incorporate him in myself is the very beginning of forgetting. Hence the good conscience of amnesia. I might succeed in keeping the other in myself as a treasured memory which I can open only when I need it. I take control of the other as well as of myself. The uncanny experience of the loss will not disturb me anymore, so it does not harm or threaten my secure ground. Of course, we need to do so to some extent, but what is at stake here is the alterity of the other which always exceeds and escapes oneself. Blind to this, the normalising process amounts to the obliteration and oblivion of the other. To the contrary, melancholy resists such assurance; it welcomes the failure and pathology of mourning.71 And this is where the ethical question arises – the ethical in the sense that, in mourning truly for the other, I must risk my own wellbeing and good balance in a way that bears the weight of the other.

In a previous chapter, in considering the French word *propre*, which means both ‘clean’ (coinciding with purity) and ‘[my] own’ (as in ‘my own pen’), we have seen how the idea of the cleanliness and tidiness of things coalesces surreptitiously with the idea of possession. Put neatly into boxes and categories, things are fixed and made fully graspable. It is worth noting, for present purposes, that *propre* also resonates with ‘proper’, which in English means to be in accordance with rules and respectful behaviour and to be acting with appropriate decorum. Thus, some might think that to talk of death is improper, even taboo. This reflects a culture that is

71 Freud (1923), later, in ‘The Ego and the Id’ forgoes this clear distinction and accepts the necessity of melancholy as a part of mourning.
susceptible to the exclusion of what cannot be tidily incorporated into a ‘norm’. The charge of impropriety can reflect a pathology. Experiences and feelings that are not simply controlled are suppressed and excluded, often with good intentions, as when my parents supposed it was better to carry on as normal. Yet, if we follow what Derrida suggests, there is a necessary impropriety within mourning which resists the propriety of forgetting. If I say the mourning for my grandfather was successful and thus it is now completed, there is a sense of injustice to his death. To say I am perfectly over the loss of the beloved sounds like a betrayal of him. For mourning to be successful, there must be something remaining unresolved, and thus a sense of failure. True mourning remains without reaching the end, it continues until my own death. Paradoxically, successful mourning never succeeds, never arrives at the end-point, never overcomes melancholia. That is how it resists a closed economy. And melancholy is not simply a binary opposite to normal mourning: it is not wholly outside mourning. It is what enables mourning in the first place. The possibility of mourning is found in an acknowledgement of its very impossibility. It is this aporia in our experience of mourning that allows us to understand the fundamental condition about ourselves living with the other.

‘The world is gone, I must carry you’

To continue, it should be noted that different contexts of mourning and negative experiences – different sufferings and griefs – should be acknowledged. For example, a death of my grandfather which was relatively peaceful and the dying and the suffering of refugees from Syria cannot be equalised. We find in the world injustice – terrible violence, abuse of women, death of innocent children, and each suffering we encounter among and around them is always specific and singular. The Holocaust is a supreme example of this. And Paul Celan who I turn my attention to now shows how he continued writing poems within this supreme negativity. It is a line of his poem that I now want to closely look at without trying to read and interpret the whole poem.

Celan finishes his poem called ‘Grosse, glühende wölbung’ (‘Vast, glowing vault’) with a single sentence: ‘Die Welt ist fort, ich muß dich tragen’ (‘The world is gone, I must carry you’).72 This strange and enigmatic line looks as if it is isolated

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72 This is a translation by Hamburger included in Atemwende, and is a version used by Derrida in ‘Rams: Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem’ (2005e).
from the rest of the poem and rather completes itself. The poem says that the world is
gone. The world is far away, or the world is lost. This certainly comes with a weight,
with a sense of suffering and despair, particularly if we consider the traumas of Celan’s
life and experience (see also Chapter 3). It is inappropriate to read it with a sentimental
idea of perhaps a picture of a loving couple who separate themselves from the world
where the world falls out. Then, it would become an expression of outrage after the
death of the loved one – like a crying-out of ‘let everything stop!’ – notwithstanding
the fact that the world continues to be there when a lover has died, however much
hyperbole it is.\footnote{This is a line from W. H. Auden’s ‘Stop All the Clocks’.} But, what Celan describes is a situation where what has happened is
so awful that it is difficult to see any value in anything. The world is no longer
significant or reliable anymore and has been deprived of any ground for meaning or
morality. How can we go on after Auschwitz? There is a kind of totalising negativity
about the death camps which to some extent resides even in German language that
Celan writes in. The very possibility of meaning seems to have been dismantled. World
– a background of meaning-making and sign-usage that is embedded in various
practices – has stopped signifying and stopped being meaningful. This even contrasts
with cases of someone dying where the death still happens against a background of
significance. Celan is expressing the extremity of a world that has been drained of
meaning, where all values have broken down even to the extent that one might wonder
if it ever had meaning in the first place. But yet now I find myself with a baby crying,
an old man begging for food, a woman who has fallen to the ground. So I ask myself:
what am I to do? The world is gone, as you have gone; the significance of meaning
has perished where I am lost in the void; but I must carry you. I must carry the other,
both the living and the dead. I must carry on wording the world. Where does this
urgency and obligation come from?

The word ‘tragen’ which translates as ‘carry’, once again comes into the view
and opens the way (back) to Derrida and his reading of this poem in ‘Rams:
Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem’. Derrida writes:

I am left with the immediacy of the abyss that engages me on behalf of the
other wherever the ‘I must’ – ‘I must carry you’ – forever prevails over the ‘I
am,’ over the sum and over the cogito. Before I am, I carry. Before being me,
I carry the other. I carry you and must do so, I owe it to you. I before
[devant], owing, in debt and owing to you before you (Derrida, 2005e, p. 161-162).

How is the abyss to be understood, and in what sense is it immediate? The abyss needs to be understood in terms of the way that my relation to the other human being should not be understood in purely naturalistic terms. The relation to the other involves a responsibility that deepens the more that I answer to it, and in that sense opens to an abyss. And it relates to the other’s interiority, which as ultimately unreachable recedes the more I approach it, and so again opens an abyss. And in any practical engagement with the other – in a conversation or a contract, in agreement or disagreement – these abyssal dimensions are always already there. They are not mediated by an approach that progressively reaches this conclusion: they are revealed as the always present precondition of the relation to the other, however covered over this may have. This abyssal can neither reach a destination we finally come to nor be an origin in the sense of which we can define but it is something upon which we have always depended. This immediate presence, the direct engagement of it, leaves me in solitude, in my responsibility for the other. The weight of this is felt in ‘carrying’: the obligation of ‘I must carry you’ is prior to who I am, as it is precisely what constitutes myself. I exist only when I carry the other. So, I owe you who I am and how I am. There will be no world if I do not carry you. This echoes what was discussed earlier in relation to Levinas (Chapter 4), particularly with regard to his assertion of ‘ethics before ontology’, which Derrida is clearly drawing upon here.

This sense of obligation is the fundamentality of the responsibility to the other through which my world becomes the world. And in so doing, I carry the words of the other in me which not only will have become a part of myself but will continue to do so even after the other’s death. So the other is past but is also what is to come – that is, the past that will come. This carrying illustrates human subjectivity as the structure of responsibility as a result of which one can never be free from the other – the other is already in me. And, it should be noted, this is not simply about being together, co-existing harmoniously or, say, in solidarity; it is not about making a compromise. Rather, as Levinas writes, the other is an ‘itch under my skin’, and ‘insomnia’ that disturbs my rest – that is, something that forever remains unresolved and a debt that

74 This echoes what Levinas says: ‘The directness of death is the face of the other because the face is being looked on by death’ (Levinas, 2002, p. 135). It is the other who engages me in my encounter with the directness of death, on behalf of it.
never be paid off, an unresolvable mourning. This certainly challenges the concept of ‘self’ constructed in Western modernity under the influence of Descartes’ subject in ‘cogito ergo sum’ – that is, the self-sufficient subject who doubts all the way down to find the sound footing, a doubting self. The self, which is a foundation for Descartes, is itself what is questioned now. What I seek is not a solid footing for myself anymore: I am here without any ground, deprived of the world. But I see the other as my singularised responsibility, the responsibility that I cannot hide away from even when the signs seem to be stop working and the world seems to have stopped creating meanings. This responsibility prevails over the subject of ‘cogito ergo sum’.

The essay of Derrida that is in question here is partly – as is implied in its subtitle ‘Uninterrupted Dialogue – Between Two Infinities, the Poem’ – his own continuing dialogue with Hans-Georg Gadamer, after Gadamer’s death. Their first formal encounter was in 1981, a meeting that is often referred to as the ‘Gadamer-Derrida debate’, and it is remembered by Derrida as an occasion that was somehow interrupted and unheimlich, qualities that become more poignantly felt through his continuing of the dialogue after Gadamer’s death.75 The dialogue is further pursued where Derrida recognises Gadamer’s words in his own words, the other who now speaks through himself. In the debate in question, to be very brief, while Gadamer insisted on the agreement between his hermeneutics and Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’, Derrida disagreed. There was, as it was perceived then, something peculiar in the way Derrida disagreed: he was showing what he meant. His disagreement was partly a performative gesture towards the element of ‘agreement’ at the heart of hermeneutics.

75 This addresses their first formal engagement, at a conference organised by Philippe Forget at the Goethe Institute in Paris in April 1981. Their encounter was regarded as ‘improbable’ by critics, as they were left with an uncanny disagreement in the end. Gadamer gave a lecture against Derrida’s criticism of Heidegger regarding the residue of the metaphysics of presence in Heidegger’s discussion of being (Text and Interpretation). Derrida responded to this, but it seemed that his response marginalised Gadamer’s main discussion. (Three Questions to Hans-Georg Gadamer) Dialogue and Deconstruction records texts by both philosophers and its afterword includes commentaries (Michelfelder, 1989). John Caputo (1989), for example, takes up a Derridean perspective, arguing that deconstruction undermines concepts that Gadamer’s hermeneutics relies upon, such as authority and tradition. While tradition has been on the side of the privileged (as tradition is historically associated with a few), deconstruction attends more to the marginalised than tradition. See Philippe Forget (1989) for a further discussion of Gadamer’s reading of Celan contra Derrida. The discussion of Bernasconi (1995) is helpful in understanding the differences between Gadamer and Levinas’ conceptions of dialogue (which Derrida is drawing upon). He attempts to show the irresolvable relationship between the claim of alterity and ‘understanding’ in the Gadamerian sense. See, for example, King (2019) for a recent work on this topic. Following Heidegger, Gadamer is aware that the truth of meaning reveals, and at the same time withdraws itself, and it is on this basis that he insists upon the agreement between himself and Derrida. Yet, Gadamer, for example in the lecture Text and Interpretation, says that ‘whatever is alienating in text, whatever makes the text unintelligible, is to be overcome and thereby cancelled out by the interpreter’, and this is inevitably in conflict with the otherness that Derrida is concerned with (Gadamer in Michelfelder, 1989, p. 41). The task is to achieve an unequivocal understanding: ‘the task of the writer corresponds to that of the reader, addressee, interpreter’ to the extent that ‘reading and understanding mean that what is announced is led back to its original authenticity’ (p. 35).
While Gadamer had continued to write in reply to Derrida afterwards, Derrida never wrote anything. And this essay in question is his first reply, three years after Gadamer’s death. Here, on the one hand, Derrida takes up the (theme of) ‘dialogue’, which is important for both Gadamer and himself, and, on the other, he reads Celan’s poetry. He is in a sense attempting to carry Gadamer’s words but also to push them further, in a practice of reading that must be continued infinitely, and partly challenging Gadamer’s reading of Celan. What Derrida is questioning, both in the initial debate and this essay in question, is Gadamer’s attempt to find some sound footing in a presupposition of ‘good will’ or ‘agreement’, as a means to some final understanding. What concerns Derrida is that, insofar as ‘understanding’ is taken from the start to be the ultimate purpose of the dialogue, the otherness of the other appears inevitably as something threatening, something to be overcome.

Derrida writes, with Gadamer as his imagined interlocutor:

> Without this threat, this risk, without this improbability, without this impossibility of proving – which must remain infinitely, and which must not be saturated or closed by any certainty – there would be neither reading nor giving nor blessing (Derrida, 2005e, p. 145).

Doubting the ground of hermeneutics and the possibility of total agreement, Derrida brings back the abyss as the very condition of any ‘blessing’, as Gadamer puts, or, as Derrida puts it, of any understanding. Derrida draws attention to the resistance of the text itself – that is, what there is about the text that ‘must remain infinitely’. Success in any supposedly final understanding is bound to the idea of a closure to the text, and, as Derrida tries to show, this is in the process a closure to the other: this, Derrida claims is a ‘hermeneutic exhaustion’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 26). The threat that Gadamer resists is the very condition of the text and internal to its possibility and power as text. Gadamer says that he cannot believe that Derrida disagrees with him about this ‘good will’: ‘Whoever opens his mouth wants to be understood; otherwise, one would neither speak nor write’ (Gadamer, 1989, p. 55). And it is to this that Derrida answers with Celan: Celan’s poetry expresses the desire not to be exhausted, it voices this heightened alterity, resisting understanding or rather requiring it to be indecisive, incomplete. And that indecisiveness is what makes understanding possible in the first place. Something, alterity itself, must remain *uninterrupted*, as wholly other. The
meaning is never self-sufficient and always indecisive. And this indecision is what characterises the responsibility to what the poem speaks of. The poem brings us back to the abyssal where I am alone to answer. And that is precisely what enables the dialogue to remain ongoing, for it to be carried on even after the death of the other. And for the poem to survive beyond itself, gaining and creating new meanings.

In writing a poem, Celan himself wants to be carried somehow. He wants to reach the other, wants to be touched by the other. He wants to be understood but not as knowledge or information. His poem is not a set of representation or propositions, and he is speaking of something impossible to be exhaustively understood. His words require the anonymous readers to leap and plunge into the realm of ambiguity. The poem in that ambiguity, or rather in that excess of meaning which cannot be finalised, constitutes itself as a work of mourning both for the readers and the poet. It addresses the other in its infinite course where the readers are addressed to participate perhaps with their own losses. Words that remain unsaid, deliberate cracks and fragments, and faint traces call us to keep reading it, to translate it, and to speak also. One’s words will remain only as traces, for infinite times, yet without succumbing to futility. We are infinities, every one of us, which cannot be explained away. Is Derrida referring to Gadamer and Celan as ‘two infinities’ in this sense? Derrida’s attempt not to exhaust the words of other not only does justice to Celan (carrying what his poem sought for), but also does justice to Gadamer. He carries their words without closure, and without closure he is mourning for them.

I shall shortly further discuss the nature of language as such, but, for now, I want to make a little detour by discussing the film called Still Walking, directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda. By way of this film, I shall make my way back from the extremities of the Holocaust and Celan towards more domestic and ordinary circumstances of mourning in a broader sense, in a direction that will lead towards questions of schooling.

**Still Walking**

The film Still Walking was itself made as a work of mourning after the director’s mother’s death. In a sense it is a memorial for his mother; and it was made also, as he adds, for his father, with whom his problematic relationship remained unresolved. The film depicts a gathering at the family home over the course of the weekend, and it
begins with three scenes. First, we see the elderly mother and her middle-aged daughter preparing food; they are waiting in particular for the younger brother, Ryota, to arrives with his new wife. Second, there is the father, who leaves the house to take his walk; he does not even respond to his daughter who asks him to buy milk while he is out, though in conversation with his neighbour it is clear that he takes a certain pride in his position as a retired doctor. Lastly, there is a family of three on a train -- Ryota, Yukari and a little boy, Atsushi, on their way to spend the weekend with Ryota’s parents. Ryota is expressing some nervousness about seeing his father, and when he tries to Yukari, whom he has recently married, that they should not stay over-night, her response is to calm him down. Her previous husband, the father of Atsushi, has, we learn, died. This seemingly ordinary family gathering gradually turns out to be a memorial for a family member -- that is, for the elder son Junpei, who drowned while saving a child’s life. And Ryota’s nervousness is explained by the fact that he has lived the whole life as the second son, under the shadow of Junpei, and now the shadow of Junpei’s death. Junpei is everywhere present by his absence. His ghost rules the house, his sister complains. And the film itself in a sense depends upon death, which is heavily present throughout.

On their way to Ryota’s parents, Atsushi’s family stops at a restaurant. When Yukari goes to the counter to pay, Ryota asks Atsushi in a somewhat troubled tone of voice:

Ryota: Your mother told me yesterday, about the rabbit. Why did you laugh when it died?
Atsushi: It was funny.
Ryota: What was?
Atsushi: Rena started saying we should write letters to the rabbit.
Ryota: What’s wrong with writing letters?
Atsushi: Letters no one will read?

Apparently, a girl in the class had suggested that they write such a letter, though Atsushi’s parents knew nothing of this. For Atsushi, so it seems, what has died goes away and disappears. And Ryota does not, or could not, say anything in response. Does this say something about how Atsushi thinks of his father’s death?
Atsushi, later on, is asked by his new cousin about how he felt when his dad died. He answers: ‘I don’t know, I was too little’. When he is asked again if he cried, he says only ‘I don’t remember’ with an indifferent expression and tone. Later on, seeing a butterfly, Yukari asks him if he remembers the time with his dad catching butterflies. And he quickly says ‘no’. It seems that his father has gone and all the memories of him. Then, that evening, the butterfly comes back. Atsushi, with the others in the living room, finds his grandmother desperately following and talking to the butterfly. It finally settles on the picture of Junpei, and she sees it as an evidence that it is her son Junpei. This makes Atsushi very confused. Junpei is already dead and thus has disappeared. How could he be a butterfly? How can his grandmother think it is Junpei? So he asks his mother why his grandmother was acting in this weird way. And Yukari says:

Yukari: Even when they die, people don’t really go away. Your father is here right inside you. Half of you is made of your father, half of you from me.

Atsushi: What about Ryo then?

Yukari: Ryo will become a part of you, too. Slowly but surely. (Ryota comes in and wonders what they are talking about.) What do you say? Do you want to let Ryo in?

Atsushi: How will he get in?

Yukari: Through your mouth? (With an expression of surprise, Atsushi covers his mouth with his hands.) Or through your tummy button?

When Yukari says that ‘half of you is made of your father, half of you from me’, this is not simply a biological explanation. They both left their traces and heritage to Atsushi. And, Yukari says Ryota will be part of Atsushi too – through his mouth or tummy button. The tummy button is literally where one gets the nourishment during gestation. But one becomes oneself also through one’s mouth, not simply for nourishment but more importantly with one’s words. Indeed, Ryota’s being part of him will involve Atsushi’s acknowledgement, with his words for him. And Ryota will grow on him and will leave his words, his own traces. And this will happen ‘slowly but surely’ whose original Japanese is ‘Jiwa jiwa’. This phrase’s onomatopoeia
automatically relates to a physical movement such as the movement of water seeping into a cloth. And in repeating a word twice, it also brings with it a sense of affirmation. So, slowly, surely.

Figure 1

In the very next scene, after the conversation, Atsushi comes out to the front yard alone and talks up towards the sky:

I became one of the relay runners in the fall track meet. I saw a yellow butterfly today just like the one I caught with Dad in Karuizawa. When I grow up, I want to be a piano tuner, just like dad. If that’s impossible I’d like to be a doctor.

It now turns out, through these words of a prayer, that he has been remembering his dad and the time with him. He wants to be a piano tuner because it was what his father used to do. It seems that in attempting to normalise his own experience after his father’s death he has been trying to erase out his father. The repression amounted to the denial of both what he feels and what his father has left. Now his words acknowledge that his father still remains in him, as a part of him, that is, as what constitutes him. This is to remember that the other, the trace of the other is in me and will be there even after his death. It is not silly anymore to say words to and for someone who has died. These words have come from his mouth, but not without the struggle of finding his own words. Atsushi, by embracing the negativity and the other in his words, affirms himself and what he says.

At this point, it is worth coming back to the death of Junpei. His father is angry that his only heir, as he puts it, who could be a doctor like himself, died for someone
of less value (the rescued child only became a salesperson). But what is hidden in the despair at his son’s death? He clearly speaks in terms of a kind of economy: his son could have saved lots of people as a doctor instead of saving this one child. In this sense his son almost wasted his life. This reasoning belongs to an economy that is easy to understand but that is also rather distasteful. The fact that it is distasteful shows that human beings do not simply think in terms of closed economies. Yet, it does not mean that it is easy to escape this. Mother invites the saved child every year at memorial days wanting him to suffer from guilt. Ryota projects father’s words to himself: he is merely a ‘painting doctor’, he says, who restores paintings and is ‘hardly as important as a doctor’. He has been suffering all his life feeling inferior to his brother, yearning for recognition from his father. Yet, the very nature of Junpei’s death belongs to the non-economical which differs from all those reasons. Atsushi brings something to this too. His wish to be a piano tuner, not a high-profile job, was presumably a disappointment to his grandfather. The original word for the piano is pianoforte, which, in Italian, means soft-loud. So in a sense a piano tuner engages with a matter of gentle attunement which in turn comes back to Ryota’s job of picture restoring, and Yukari’s receptive and responsive attitude to her son.

The next day, Atsushi’s family of three leaves. On the bus, Ryota comes up with the name of the sumo player his mother kept asking him for. He blames himself: ‘I am always a little late’. The camera then shows both parents walking up the stairs, while its frame remains still. So we see they disappear as they go up. Ryota’s voice then narrates another death, the death of his parents – both died in three years, and we see them completely gone out of the frame. Often times, words come only belatedly. We live with the struggle in our words. One might not even know what one wants to say. Ryota is the second son in his family, and he also comes late to restore the family of Atsushi, where he himself is to be restored as well. All ‘doctors’ in a sense come after, to look after and attend to something, including the ‘painting doctor’ and even, say, the ‘piano doctor’. Some things come only afterwards, they come belatedly: mourning indeed, and also memory, even translation. The drama of the film itself is consistently low-key and understated, and, in a sense, nothing is explained – say, by the revelation of causal relationships. The words and feelings of its characters are restrained and suppressed. What they say to one another often seems dislocated, out of joint, out of step. Words fail and even hurt. Nothing seems to be resolved by the time the film ends. Can we glimpse any hope, despite our belatedness?
The last scene shows Ryota’s family visiting Junpei’s cemetery again, but as a family of four now with a daughter. Ryota tells his daughter the story of yellow butterflies: white butterflies that endured the cold winter comes back the next year as yellow. He says he does not remember where he got this story, but the audience know that it is what his mother said when they were walking down the same path. Maybe he remembers, maybe not. Now the same words are repeated but differently, the mother’s words emerging through him. They are changed, just like the butterfly is changed, after enduring the winter. The family walks the same path that they walked with Ryota’s mother, but with all new things to come – both their past and the future to come.

Scenes of walking constantly recurs in the film. Characters walk a lot alone, as well as together. In one of them, Ryota’s father, Ryota and Atsushi walks together to the sea. When the father gets late, Ryota paces his father in an unnoticeable way. Sometimes he walks ahead sometimes behind. This shows the way they keep moving forward, as a part of family and community, even though they might never reach the exact point. It is also an illustration of the nature of language and meaning where the endless struggle with words echoes their walking. The title Still Walking picks this up. The title is taken from a song heard in the film: ‘We walk forever and ever but I only sway like a little boat in your arms’. There is a sense of embracing instability and incompleteness, a constant work of mourning. The title Still Walking in its English translation can sound paradoxical – walking when you are still. This resonates with what Thoreau refers to the term ‘saunter’, which is to walk but not for the destination. Indeed walking can be an occasion for dwelling with thought, for instilling a mood or ideas. It might be described as walking in a stilled state, with still meant in the sense
of continuity, where I still walk and walk still. Perhaps as way of being oneself. The title therefore is playful – the paradox in being still whilst walking. Still walking picks up the sense of the continuation of the walk, hinting at something enduring over a long time, perhaps even hinting at surprise as in ‘Oh my goodness, they’re still doing that walk. . .’ And the paradoxical sense and the contrasting sense buckle and overlap to create an unresolvable tension that itself mirrors the structure of mourning, the idea of movement towards a finish that, if ever reached, would cancel the movement and deny itself.

While Celan’s poetry addresses an extreme traumatic experience, the film brings this into our ordinary lives. As noted, the different depth and suffering of these contrasting cases must not be simply regarded as identical. Yet both remind one of how the human condition is built into absence and how a sense of negativity runs through the whole of our living. Our existence is haunted in Derrida’s words. Mourning, as seen through the juxtaposed works of art, is crucially tied up with a language structure that is part of what we are. And all this suggests a possible way to attend to the words, to the world, and to one another.

The Open Wound

This section attempts to recognise negativity as that which is built into language and human structures. Words are marks of our woundedness. Our struggle with words is not merely one difficulty amongst others, but rather as something built into how we are as language beings, from which we can never be released.

As intimated in discussing a line of Celan’s poem, the world (at least in human sense) is inseparably related to the work of signs. And what I attempt to illustrate now is to say: for the world to be the world, there must be something already lost. The Christian biblical story illustrates this perplexing claim. Culture begins with exile from the Garden of Eden. This depicts the separation through having self-consciousness, of having language and knowledge. These prevent human beings from being immersed in nature as just animals. And this makes human culture different from that of animals. Humans accumulate the past and are aware of the future. When language enables us to reflect on what we do and think, it at the same time cuts us away from the world and leaves us in a state of *unheimlich*. In this sense, language marks the wound of that separation and our never being at home. That is our fundamentally wounded condition.
This is the very condition required for the human world. Words give us the world by cutting us from the world. That cutting is precisely what opens up human culture. It is through words – the source – that we create and recreate the world. Human beings are wounded in their becoming human beings. We are living with the lost.

This wound then is not something that can ever be healed or covered. The wound reminds us that humans are never closed or completed. We are never at home, I am never fully myself. It is an open wound which makes me live with the other in me. Language, a mark of the wound, reaches and connects to something else and creates new flesh, new meanings. This is how works of art build a memorial place for both Kore-eda and Celan. As memorial, on the one hand, they remember and remind us of the wounded condition of humans. On the other hand, they reach hands towards the other to address and to be addressed. They do not simply lament loss, but rather turn it into affirmation. Celan’s poems are written painfully, sometimes appearing as a fragmentation of words, as if the words were wounded themselves. His poems enact the sense of restriction and repression; they address what is unspeakable – that is, what is almost exterior to language. But, despite this overwhelming sense of negativity they do not simply rest and withdraw into negativity. They demonstrate a way of carrying on with the negativity around us, within us, and in us.

Celan, on the occasion of receiving the Bremen prize, says:

Reachable, near and not lost, there remained in the midst of the losses this one thing: language.

It, the language, remained, not lost, yes, in spite of everything. But it had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of deathbringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, ‘enriched’ by all this (Celan, 2002, p. 395).

At one level, Celan is talking about German, the language he chose to write with, the language of the people who brought his family to their death. It is the language he has sought to use, he says: ‘so as to speak, to orient myself, to find out where I was and where I was meant to go, to sketch out reality for myself’ (p. 396). Celan needed to pass through all the darkness with the very language which brought so many to death
in order to come to light again. He needed to orient himself within that language, not only for himself, but also for the language, to recover it in a sense. He did not turn away but rather faced the horror. He had to bring the unspeakable to words. He had to translate untranslatables. In this respect, Derrida says that each poem for Celan was ‘a resurrection’, ‘working with language that was in danger of becoming a dead language’, which he felt he was responsible for waking up (Derrida, 2005a, p. 106). But it is a resurrection not in the sense of Christian glory and immortality, but as re-engagement to a vulnerable body that is frail, and that remains indecipherable. His poems call for endless reinterpretation, a kind of resurrection, a resuscitation of language. It is in such struggles that his poems appear as translation.

If we read the passage at another level, any language passes through between death and life. It exceeds any death and comes back into circulations of words. It is in this circular movement, like that of meridian, as Celan speaks of it, where one encounters the other and wherein one finds oneself inescapably bound and led to the other (see also Chapter 3). Language returns to itself in a movement that traverses two poles. As if translated, language passes over and through the barrier as if through a ‘barbed-wire border’, or through ‘the grid of language’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 51). ‘To translate’ is also to transfer – that is, to carry the meaning over walls and boundaries. And there are inevitable wreckages, wounds, betrayals and treasons.76 Yet, in the loss, in going through these barriers, language renews itself, enriched by all this and thereby by its encounter with the other. Indeed when poems address the other in infinity, the poems do not remain the same. So long as the words are repeatable, they pass through the histories of the poet and the readers, passing not towards some other-worldly place but towards earthly beings who carry on with the loss: ‘Certainly it [a poem] lays claim to infinity, it seeks to reach through time – through it, not above and beyond it’ (Celan, 2002, p. 396). It is important to affirm our condition, suspended as we are in this infinite process, in the creation of inexhaustible meanings. The hiatus of a wound is exactly what welcomes the other. It is a door that opens ‘to the stranger, to the other, to the neighbour, to the guest, to whomever. To whomever no doubt in the figure of the absolute to-come’ beyond one’s anticipation or calculation (Derrida, 2005f, p. 56). And it is also a mouth, as Derrida again suggests, with lips that will never close – never to be sealed or healed. Mouths are the possibility of words even when closed. Opening

76 Hence, the old Italian saying: ‘Traduttore, traditore’ (‘To translate is to betray’). The Latin root of transfer – ferre – also has the meaning of ‘to bear’, or ‘to carry’.
the door is nothing but opening the words, words that open to the other, the words of hospitality. Wound marks call for the responsibility to respond. Words for the self and the other are words we need to endure: they bide their time even when they are going through a time of suffering and silence.

Language characterises our loss. It is also language that remains even in the midst of the losses and enables us to affirm not only what we have lost but also what remains and what will come to be. What is at stake is the preserving of alterity. The abyss of what remains other is fundamental to our condition of mourning. Our ordinary condition is one of presence and absence. We live with, and by starting off with, loss, and that is the condition for our words. What we need are words that attest to a faith, a kind of affirmation of life with loss. Celan once wrote to his relatives: ‘There’s nothing in the world, for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German’ (Felstiner, 2001, p. 56). And there is, again, a sense of obligation: Celan had to mourn in German which is a burdened language. Derrida writes: ‘I must translate, transfer, transport (übertragen) the untranslatable in another turn even where, translated, it remains untranslatable’ (Derrida, 2005e, p. 162).

**Addressing the Wound in Education**

What bearing can this discussion of mourning have on education? Let us first turn our attention back to ‘death’ while bearing in mind the way we have moved in three stages in the introduction: I learn about death by experiencing the death of others, which leads me to the realisation of my own finitude. And beyond this, I have been attempting to make another turn, to the death of the other which puts me in a position of response. My concern about death goes beyond myself to the other.

But where is death in current education located? Perhaps the most obvious place is with children who are bereaved, and this is what I shall look at first. How do schools respond, what intervention are there, to children’s experience of bereavement? Quite rightly, schools often act in cooperation with associations that give palliative help, and research in this field seems to be growing. They are mostly working from a psychotherapeutic perspective, though this may include cognitive behavioural therapy to the prescription of medication.\(^{77}\) Alongside this concern with bereavement, it is also

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\(^{77}\)See for example Andriessen et al for the reactions or emotions that adolescents go through as they reflect upon their cases in the interview. In the context of mental health, the research records various responses from adolescents. For the discussion about early intervention, see Dyregrov, Dyregrov, Pereira, Kristensen, and
the case that the general interest in ‘death education’ is growing. This is dedicated to challenging the cultural taboo that makes death a difficult topic, and it attempts to talk openly about this as part of human natural life. The approach claims that children should not be deprived of the chance to learn about it. In 2018, for example, doctors in Australia argued for the need for ‘death education’ in the school curriculum: children should be prepared not only for the death of others, they claim, but also for their own death.\textsuperscript{78} The debates around this are focused on demystifying death; it assumes one can overcome the fear of death by naturalising it using scientific words (for example, they suggest that metaphors about death be erased from educational discourse because they are thought to confuse children). In their attempts to improve the understanding of death in schools, both strands have important aspects. Yet both – the concern with bereavement and the project of death education – are insensitive to the valences of the language.

The language of therapy is primarily about ‘healing’. It is inevitably structured by the demarcation of the ‘normal’ and the ‘abnormal’. Though many professionals say that they are not suggesting a hasty pathologising of any child’s behaviour after a loss, they at that same time state that it is important that children understand what a ‘normal reaction’ to loss is, in contrast with ‘abnormal’ reactions. The issue then still remains: where to settle the boundary between the normal and the abnormal; and whether it can be settled once and for all. These are the questions that too often remain hidden and unvisited in the language of therapy. On the other hand, the language of science, with its naturalistic standpoint, smooths over the experience of death. Coming from a medical perspective, the focus is quite understandably on what they call ‘the normalisation of the death’, and the approach is highly cognitive in orientation. It attempts to understand death as part of a natural cycle; understanding it that way will,

\textsuperscript{78} For a further information on doctor’s call in Australia, see for example Barback (2018); Pickles (2018). Death education is not exclusive of children; however, interest in death education first grew in relation to adults. Death literacy, for example, is more focused on knowledge and skills of death systems; how one wants to die and how to prepare for it.
it is hoped, stem anxieties around death. Both ways of thinking easily slide into an idea of ‘normal mourning’ by making death something scientifically neutral, just a natural thing. It closes the wound to heal it.

If what has been argued in the previous sections is right, then an alternative vocabulary in relation to death is needed. It is worth noting research by Polyxeni Stylianou and Michalinos Zembylas that tries to find a way forward, outside both the therapeutic and the scientific discourses (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018a, 2018b). In contrast to the previous researches on a child’s cognitive capacity to understand sub-concepts of death (e.g. the cause of death), they designed an intervention to deepen their understanding of the bereaved in relation to concepts such as memory. This attempts to help young children (10-11 years old) to develop their own ways and words in consoling a bereaved friend, while ‘taking into consideration various factors such as the relationship with the bereaved and the role of memories’ (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018b, p. 453). The research showed that children attempted to find their own ways of talking about it rather than simply using stereotypical words as they had done at the beginning. They began to use words beyond those of the healing and rationalising discourse.79

A third growing strand concerning death takes more of an existential approach. One of the popular projects is called ‘Before I die I want to’. It is a contemporary equivalent to the ‘memento mori’ and attempts to be reflective on death and existential themes (Testoni et al., 2018; Testoni et al., 2019). This is inspired by the artistic project of K. S. Rives and Nicole Kenney who travelled to several countries and asked people: ‘what do you want to do before you die?’80 They took Polaroid photos of people when they were thinking about the question. Those questioned wrote their responses to the Polaroid portraits. Testoni et al. write that: ‘This fun interaction, shared all over the world, was to allow people to stop for a moment and refocus their thoughts on what matters most in life’ (Testoni et al., 2019, p. 388). As an experiment and as part of the research, this work was incorporated into a university course for graduate students. The purpose of the course was to make students aware of mortality and to help them

79 One of the observations in this research is that while ‘boys were initially mostly negative about the role of memories’, and ‘girls were more positive about the role of memories both before and after the intervention. Moreover, after the intervention, girls emphasized more the right of mourners to choose between remembering and forgetting, and they perceived memories as a way of continuing the relationship with the deceased’ (Stylianou and Zembylas, 2018b, p. 452). This, as the authors note, could be the result of implicit understanding of gender role or expected attitude for boys in dealing with emotions, and indicates the possibility of further repression based on gender difference.
manage their anxiety when facing it. The research shows, it is claimed, ‘that it is possible to deal with death anxiety and that coping with it can improve happiness, thanks to the meaning-making process’; ‘the elaboration of death-related issues can promote personal development and in particular the explanation of existential problems’, and hence it ‘will improve well-being’ (p. 396). So, what is highlighted is the positive effect on character: thinking about death is a chance to be a better person. It is possible that this project may help people to live better with their anxiety regarding death and to face up to aspects of their own lives. Yet, in the light of what we have been discussing in this chapter, we need to move beyond this. To do this, let us turn back to Heidegger.

In The Therapy of Education (Smeyers, Smith and Standish, 2007) the authors consider Heidegger’s account of death. They first acknowledge that Heidegger helps us to think of time beyond the familiar chronological understanding of it, as linear clock time: we are, by contrast, always on the way from a past and projected in an open way towards the future. There is, as the authors note, an ethics to this: it is in the acknowledgement of our existence as being-towards-death, in facing up our own possibility of death, that ‘singular authentic engagement’ is exacted (p. 99). Questioning death, in this sense, is not something additional to life but inseparable from and pervasive of our lives as a whole – and this has ethical import. Yet, the authors attempt to challenge this further by taking issue with a ‘heroic’ element in Heidegger’s conception of death, a conception exemplified by the death of Socrates, which illustrates how death has been typically understood in Western philosophy (p. 102). Socrates bravely confronts and accepts his death as if running towards his final moment. But this kind of relation to death does not displace the self. Rather, there is a sense of ‘egocentricity’ (p. 105). In response, the authors turn elsewhere: ‘But there is a time that exceeds anything that could be mine – the time before my birth and after my death, and the time beyond what can be recuperated and recovered. Hence memory is bounded by an immemorial time’ (p. 105). Heidegger’s time returns to oneself to nourish the self. But this time should be interrupted by others, and by the time that is beyond my understanding and existence, beyond my concern for authenticity. It is about moving the weight from the self to the other, which earlier in the chapter I

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81 This research concerns using photo-voice methods for such projects (Testoni et al., 2019, p. 388). For the relation between death and environmental education, see Affifi and Christie (2018) which similarly draws upon Heidegger’s conception of death to discuss the relation between death education and ecological education: the concern about death can make one think of the death of others – animal, plants and environments as a whole.
characterised as ‘carrying’. ‘Perhaps we need the *memento mori*. But can the *memento mori* remember the immemorial?’ (p. 108) The ethical demand is pervasive in the sense that we live under the weight of the other. The possibility for Heidegger’s ‘being-towards-death’ goes beyond oneself, and towards what I owe to the other’s death. What is more fundamental is the relation of what I am to the other, and this turns away from the obsession with my own death.

Second, let us look at mourning at a societal level. Judith Butler, for example, in her accounts of the politics of mourning, shows how it can be politically consumed when it is closed off. Writing after September 11, her discussion of the grievable and ungrievable life illustrates how the society disavows selective groups by repressing mourning for a certain group (Butler, 2003). Michalinos Zembylas, drawing upon Butler, engages with concrete examples of conflict-ridden areas such as Cyprus (The conflict between Greek and Turkish Cyprus) (Zembylas, 2008, 2009). He closely looks at how mourning is politically controlled and thus works to produce stigmatised images of the other side and in large part perpetuates the conflict in a divided country and the prevalent, entrenched antagonistic attitudes. Zembylas criticises the dominant view that controls ways of remembering and forgetting, then draws on Derrida’s conception of mourning to attempt to seek the possibility of schooling that preserves differences and specificities of the loss from both communities by learning to mourn in schools. Echoing Butler’s claim, he argues that ‘the recognition of our vulnerability to loss, as the groundwork to the formulation of school and public pedagogies of aporetic mourning, can induce a powerful point of departure for political alignment with others; this alignment has the potential to move us beyond trauma’s seduction’ (Zembylas, 2008, p. 15). This is to recognise common vulnerability as a place to enhance our capacities to form critical and better responses to others’ traumas, and to interrogate our stigmatised framing of trauma. Changing one’s relation to historical events and other people alters one’s way of understanding the other. This is an attempt to find new ways to understand and make meaning out of traumatic experiences of the past and to create pedagogical spaces for this to transform one’s perception and action. Zembylas’ discussion importantly addresses the trauma and memory, historically shared (consciously and unconsciously), that is passed through generations and calls for a place for continued mourning where we can not only acknowledge our common fragility and suffering but also critically engage with received accounts of the past.
Third, what needs further investigation is the kind of society that cannot bear and does not allow aporetic mourning in a more general and symbolical sense. This in turn relates to how an individual wound – such as the physical or emotional suffering a child goes through – is regulated or even denied. How do negative feelings and experience in general get treated in schools and societies? Excellent Sheep by William Deresiewicz illustrates this problem by looking closely at elite students in the US context (Deresiewicz, 2015). Many elite students, while seemingly confident and competent on the surface, turn out to be having significant problems dealing with negative feelings such as anxiety and depression. They suffer from the fear of failure and feelings of emptiness. Questioning the value and meaning of life has been missing in their lives, and now they do not know how to ask such questions. What seemed like ways of controlling negativity turned out to be ways of suppression and repression. Another example, coming from a UK context, is so-called ‘boarding school syndrome’, a term coined by Nick Duffell, a former boarding-school teacher, now a psychotherapist (Duffell, 2000, 2014).

Duffell discusses this through the lens of his experience of helping ‘boarding school survivors’, as he puts it. Basically, he found that people who were sent to boarding schools at an early age went through mental difficulties afterwards, throughout their later lives. He argues that this is related to what he terms the ‘rational man project’, the project of the Victorian boarding schools and their commitment to producing future leaders, with an excessive attention on rationality; this in turn excluded other elements of development and personal growth, let alone the acknowledgement of negative feelings. Yet, as we see in both cases, when negative experience is regulated, normalised and repressed, children do not get the chance to think and talk about their struggles, or even to react: these measures do not make such experience disappear and will only delay its return.

Negative experience manifests itself in various forms in schools, such as badly disruptive behaviour, forms of withdrawal or drop-out, and learning difficulties. Adolescence is also commonly considered as something troubling, and existing guidance and solutions rarely acknowledge its impact on the children themselves who are going through it. Rather they focus on effective management of the troubling

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82 The questions put forward by Colin Luke’s 1994 BBC documentary The Making of Them seem to be still relevant today. This 40-minute production records young boys starting boarding prep schools and exposes the problems of such experience.
The dangers of hasty management in some therapeutic approaches are always there. This is a matter of danger because these attempts can be tools for control, for normalising ‘abnormal things’, often in spite of the best intentions. For example, labelling a child as ADHD makes it difficult to question the context that makes the child to appear as ADHD. What is more urgent and incumbent on parents and on those professionally involved with such children is not a diagnosis but a will to engage at a deeper level. A similar tendency is present in dealing with school violence. Approached in terms of, for example, effective emotional coaching and skill, and of efficient regulation and procedures, it often seems as if the response merely wants to bury things as quickly as possible, to clean the surface and hide everything from sight! Such procedures, if they cannot provide a child with a place to talk about her woundedness, can be cruel. What is needed is time and space for conversation, without any agenda. Time for such endurance, to dwell and stay with things, is a chance to affirm negativities in one’s life and to produce and realise one’s own words. It is a process of mourning in one’s own way that is required.

If society and education do not allow children to struggle and be lost before they can move forward meaningfully, then children cannot learn how to live with negativity; if they can, then perhaps, living between the known and the unknown, they will find their own voice in relation to realities of their lives. The solution is not as simple as policies like SEAL suggest, policies that address themselves reductively to seeking the means for ‘effective’ learning. It not only does not do justice to the specificity of the experience children go through but is also blind to its own conceptualisation of human beings. Being unable to question its own ground, the concern for ‘emotion’ can easily slide back into the discourse of rationality. Although more attention has been given to the need for emotional support for students reflected, for example, in changes to the Ofsted inspection framework in the UK, my suspicion is we are facing something that cannot be resolved by adding another category to school evaluation. Nor by simply putting ‘death’ as subject on the timetable! The rigidness of plans inevitably excludes things that do not fit them. School experience is excessively determined by planning, in a way that closes off the challenge of thinking

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83 Among the many books with ‘emotion regulation’ in the title, Practitioner’s Guide to Emotion Regulation in School-Aged Children is one example which promotes this line of thought to be applied in school practices (Macklem, 2008).

84 The framework puts more emphasis on ‘personal development’. See ‘Education Inspection Framework 2019’ (Kant, 2006, p. 82). Associations such as YoungMinds, for example, have been campaigning to have student well-being and mental health prioritised in Ofsted inspections (‘Our Response to the Ofsted consultation’, 2019).
for oneself or of encountering situations that are unpredictable; it does so by putting the emphasis on competition along clearly defined paths. And, more importantly, what is lying behind such a way of thinking is the desire for normalisation – for control and regulation. If education refuses to engage with what cannot be controlled and regulated, it in effect denies its responsibility to an otherness that cannot be incorporated, to keeping otherness alive! Children are not sick bodies waiting to be healed and guided by some figure of authority. It is important to stand beside them in acknowledging that they are also actively going through suffering and that they must find their own voice in response to it. The wound should be respected and taken seriously within time, rather than erased or banished. Thoreau writes, ‘our moulting season, like that of the fowls, must be crisis in our lives’ (Thoreau, 2004, p. 24). Human life is bounded by negativity. Yet, we need to affirm even our own most painful and agonising state as a process of metamorphosis. This is not at all something abstract but about our way of being in the world as the visceral image of moulting gives.

Fourth, the obsession with ‘rationality’ should be further investigated. While autonomous rational being has been an ideal of education at least since the 18th century, this has also been challenged recently, partly with regard to the demands of living with others who are different from oneself. Concerns about cultural differences and multicultural societies in conditions of globalisation have led to an interest in cosmopolitanism in education. Yet there is a tension between the ideal of autonomous being, which, with its claims of universality (of all human beings as rational beings), is itself a Western construct, and cosmopolitanism, which in principle welcomes all equally as ‘citizens of the earth’, as Immanuel Kant puts it. To clarify this tension, it is helpful to visit some criticisms on the dominant features of current cosmopolitanism provided by philosophers in education such as Sharon Todd and Marianna Papastephanou. As Todd suggests, the dominant discourse on cosmopolitanism presupposes a particular conceptualisation of human beings and humanity. She thus challenges what underlies these thoughts and practices by discussing such matters as human rights, democracy, and citizenship, particularly in relation to ‘the question of imperfection’ (Todd, 2010, p. 48). By revealing the tension between

85 Kant writes, for example: ‘originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else’ (Kant, 2006, p. 82). And Derrida exposes and explores the tension in Kant’s own account in ‘On Cosmopolitanism’ (Derrida, 2001c).
86 It might be worth nothing that Heidegger criticises the view of humanism as an endorsement of human rights because it presupposes human freedom as what belongs to human beings. He attempts to recover the meaning of humanism by revealing freedom as Dasein’s ek-sistence in response to the truth of being (see, for example,
cosmopolitanism’s ideal of plurality and its endorsement of universalism and human
rights, she suggests that, if the value of plurality is to be respected, such endorsed ideas
should be interrupted – that is, by radical otherness which should be encountered in a
way that seeks neither to incorporate it nor to undermine it. Rather than being in pursuit
of, if not being complacent in, a state of harmonious consensus, which
cosmopolitanism often imagines as its final destination, we need to see conflicts
around us not as something to fear or overcome but as part of our ontological condition.
For example, it is often considered that ‘through forms of dialogue and deliberation,
we can better understand others and reach reasonable agreement over conflicting
perspectives’ (p. 99). Yet, this can undermine what conflict itself means, which is
nothing less than the expression of otherness that I need to attend to even where mutual
understanding or agreement may be impossible. If we have ‘consensus’ as a purposive
goal, and if this consensus is based upon rational forms of argument, we may fail ‘to
sustain the diversity and necessary incommensurability upon which democracy itself
rests’ (p. 102). Learning to be a citizen in a democratic world, as she continues, does
not end in learning one’s rights and obligations, nor in learning rational argumentation
(through such practices as deliberative procedures). It is important to look at conflict
as part of how we are and as that upon which any democratic society is founded.
Conflicts in our world is the condition of the site that we participate in and find
ourselves in, that we exercise our judgements about, and this should be seen as part of
what education is for. Children walking out of school to engage in the climate change
protest are responding to their own responsibility for the dying of the earth and its
animals, and they are thus taking upon themselves the burdens of human failings. This
is an education asking humanity to make changes. There might be no simple ways to
resolve the problem, but despite that, and perhaps precisely because of that, their
voices should be heard and attended to. As Todd suggests, universality itself should
be seen as ‘an open-ended struggle’ (p. 88).

Both reliance upon our commonality as ‘rational beings’ and espousal of
positive values towards which we should perfect ourselves miss something important.
What such approaches leave unquestioned is the historicity and contingency lying
behind the very idea of universality. Often the desire to define human essence

Heidegger, 1998a). Levinas’ criticism is focused more on how autonomy is understood as one’s freedom where one is free from others, which, in his terms, will be ‘an absence of relation, an outcome of history in which nothing remains other, and consequently a sovereignty in the void’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 169). See, also Humanism of the Other (Levinas, 2003).
universally works as a means to exclude other qualities or other races and cultures. The European conception of humanity itself is something contingent, and it is not free from the charge that it neglects and evades other forms of human life. A teleological movement of perfecting the self can be blind to both otherness and one’s own imperfection. In a similar vein, Papastephanou suggests that ‘cosmopolitanism should be shown to be independent of the outcome of debates on human nature’ (Papastephanou, 2002, p. 74), because it can generate a criterion of humanity that works most favourably for those who are most ‘like ourselves’. ‘We may then proceed equally dogmatically to discriminate behaviours and practices accordingly’ (ibid.). What Papastephanou further draws our attention to is the importance of looking at the past – in particular, at the history of conflict and suffering within cultural encounters. Such conflicts cannot be treated solely in cognitive terms for they point to ‘a debt and a mutual responsibility, of one culture towards the other’ (p. 79). From this perspective it is wrong to retreat to the idea of the universal as a reaction to the demand for understanding plurality and to the uncertainty and unpredictability plurality has brought. The question should remain open and live: who and what have historically been excluded by the ideal of universality? How have the ‘common values’ we now have been changed through conflict and struggle? Such questions linger in the traces of memory, revealing the contingency of present norms. They highlight the importance of acknowledging the role of conflict and history in their formation. In the light of this awareness, a different approach would be to orient ourselves not towards the imposition of practices governed by universal ideals but towards the predicaments of others. Rather than championing principles of human rights, and somewhat naively expecting them to be applied later on, we should shift attention to the tensions and suffering actually happening around us.

I discussed above the effects of covering up too quickly or failing to notice the wound. I have moved from specific to more general things. Addressing and acknowledging our imperfection grounds our responsibility without the expectation of completeness. Human beings cannot be self-enclosed, completed, or expressed in universal terms. This chapter has then been another way of acknowledging the other, in the manner that was explored previously with Levinas, and it has done this particularly by way of examining the otherness in myself – that is, by denying the possibility and desirability of closure, of reaching some final, totalising agreement or understanding. It is a matter of letting negativity interrupt us so that we are reminded
that our very condition is opened, exposed, and then of affirming this. Literally and symbolically, ‘we owe ourselves to death’ (‘nous nous devons à la mort’) (Derrida, 2010, p. 57).
CHAPTER 6

Problems of Knowledge: Reading a Poem, Reading the Immemorial

With my own reading of Celan’s poem in the previous chapter, I am left with some anxiety. Did it do justice to what Celan was addressing, what I was addressed to? And can I be confident that I explained and did not ‘explain away’ his evocation and resistance? Indeed, I myself am inescapably implicated in the exploitation of his work. Given this, can any reading ever do full justice to such texts? What can it mean to know something that resists and exceeds one’s understanding? Where is the place for such knowledge, if there is any, in education? And why does it matter? Now, I revisit Celan, bearing such questions in mind. This will lead us to the consideration of reconceptualising our understanding of knowledge. I do this by way of considering problems that arise in teaching poetry. In so doing, I continue to explore questions of loss and remembrance, in connection with which I discuss two poems. I begin with one of Celan’s earlier poems and probably the most famous – ‘Todesfuge’.

Reading a Poem (1): ‘Todesfuge’

Paul Celan’s first major collection Poppy and Memory was published in Germany in 1952. Following this, Celan’s work became well known in German literary circles, and, against his nature, he became something of a celebrity figure, famous for what were later on labelled ‘Holocaust poems’. And ‘Todesfuge’, a central piece of this collection, was at the heart of his fame. ‘Todesfuge’ might be translated literally as
‘fugue of death’ or ‘death-fugue’. Its title draws readers’ attention to its form, a powerful consistent rhythm, intensified through repetition. (Celan’s own reading of this poem shows that his voice goes faster and gets heightened as the poem progresses.\(^87\)) It stays in the reader’s mind. And the image of death and the concentration camp is powerfully suggested, for example, in the image of the black milk with which the poem begins. It is good in many senses that the poem received the attention it did: Celan, himself a camp survivor, was heard, and through him the voice of victims was heard. One can perhaps glimpse a sense of obligation in the frequent travels he made to Germany to read this poem, from France, where he lived for most of his life. That is a kind of bearing witness, or bearing witness for the witness, since true witnesses, those who reached the bottom, as Primo Levi puts it, ‘have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute’ (Levi, 1988, p. 64).

Yet the reception of Celan’s work, particularly in German society, was complex. The complexity includes Celans’ own uneasy relationship to ‘Todesfuge’. Pierre Joris, an eminent translator of Celan, recounts that throughout the 1960s Celan refused not only public reading of the poem but also its further anthologising. The most obvious reason for this, Joris writes, is ‘that the poem, through its very “success,” had become endangered – in Germany it had become a pawn in the so-called “Vergangenheits-bewältigung-Prozess” and its misuses’ (Joris, 2009, p. 81). The term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can be translated as ‘coping with the past’, ‘working through the past’, or even ‘overcoming the past’. This is a key term in understanding post-war German culture as it indicates the way Germany confronted its past. Germany was at pains in its struggle, on the one hand, with denazification and, on the other, with the remembrance of victims. It was against this background – the desire of recovery for the new Germany, that Celan was most welcome, and ‘Todesfuge’ was read rather obsessively, including in universities and schools.

John Felstiner, also a celebrated translator of Celan, recounts his experience of translating the poem in his essay ‘Paul Celan’s *Todesfuge*’, in which he also records how the poem was received in schools. He describes the way a teacher’s guide recommended the following approach:

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\(^87\) See, for example, ‘Todesfuge – Paul Celan’ [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVwLqEHDCQE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVwLqEHDCQE) (Accessed on 2 Oct 2019).
Students would spend a few preliminary minutes on ‘content preparation’, then go on assiduously to analyse the poem’s prosody and structure. (In a German high-school reader from the 1960s that a friend has shown me, there is firmly pencilled in above Todesfuge the word ‘Daktylus’.) Having beforehand studied fugues in music class, a pedagogical journal suggests, students might each adopt a motif or voice to perform Celan’s poem, ‘to make the polyphony audible’ – with what effect, it’s hard to know. This journal does advise giving students something historical first (but not about the mass murder – better Anne Frank’s diary). And ‘the point is for this to happen before interpreting Todesfuge’ – which seems reasonable enough, unless the point really is to get all that history behind you, because ‘a consideration of Todesfuge could easily lapse into discussion of the persecution of the Jews’ (Felstiner, 1986, p. 254).

I am not arguing that all students should be bombarded by ‘mass murder’ rather than reading Anne Frank’s diary. It is more the attitude towards the content that I am concerned with. There surely is something that this seemingly reasonable guidance – well, the tone is one of reasonableness! – misses out or even distorts. Assiduous attention is paid to the form and rhythm (dactylic), and the structure and sound, perhaps with an emphasis on the use of metaphor and repetition. By contrast, the substance of the poem is treated only in passing. It is not difficult to imagine that the guidance helped teachers by releasing them from a burden: what the poem addresses is unbearably horrifying, impossible to confront, especially during those decades in Germany. So, after a few minutes of history wrap-up, as if ‘to get all that history behind you’, the students are free to go to the poem itself – that is, to those more comfortable, teachable and even measurable matters, such as rhyme and metaphor, and form and imagery. Accordingly, the weight of the poem is eased, if indeed the reading does not turn into a denial of the very point the poem is addressing. What is left is a perverse sense of relief, even hubris that this difficult matter has been dealt with – we have rightly confronted and acknowledged our guilt! This acknowledgement of guilt works as a kind of inoculation. Humility in relation to language, and in relation to the poet perhaps too, is irretrievably lost.

There are parallels to this teaching in the critical reception of the work. One of the early reviews of Celan’s collection was quick to praise: ‘His lyrics are poesie pure,
magical montage’. Another article, on ‘Todesfuge’, spoke of its ‘removal of everything concrete’, ‘its romanticizing metaphor’, its ‘enchantment’ and ‘lyrical alchemy’, ‘Zen Buddhist satori-experience’, and ‘clever technique and beautiful imagery’; it was said to be ‘wholly without intention’, as if wanting ‘to be nothing but breath, sound, image, effortless and almost singable’. Hence, Celan was described as ‘a tender sculptor’ (p. 253).88 Hans Egon Holthusen, a poet and critic, applauded the way the poem “escapes the bloody horror chamber of history” to “rise to the ethereal domain of pure poetry,” via a “dreamy,” “surreal” and “transcendent” language’ (Joris, 2005, p. 21).89 There is an irony because Holthusen himself had been a member of the SS and the Nazi Party until the fall of the Reich. Joris recounts that Celan was both praised and blamed for turning historical horror into the beautiful. Celan wrote in his letter to his friend Erich Einhorn that he thought he was ‘not forgiven’ because he reminded people of their guilt. He continues: ‘The literature prizes I was given shouldn’t fool you: they are, finally, only the alibi of those who, in the shadow of such alibis, continue with other, more contemporary means, what they had started, and continued, under Hitler’ (p. 181). His realisation was that his poem had been used as an ‘alibi’ covering up the society’s continuing indifference.

Though briefly and partially, it is worth having a close look at the poem. ‘Todesfuge’ was written in 1944, the year Celan had returned to his hometown, freed by the Soviet army, after being in a labour camp for a year and a half. The poem begins:

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night

Celan speaks as ‘we’, as one of the victims himself. It is no less than his own testimony – a way of bearing witness, his own struggle of remembrance, all the more so because

89 Hans Egon Holthusen’s essay ‘Five Young German Poets’ is published in the highly regarded magazine Merkur. Felstiner reproaches Holthusen’s insensitive language in his review of Celan. Holthusen for example says that Celan has “mastered” a technique of repetition’ despite Celan’s use of ‘master of Germany’, and Celan has “overcome” a staggering theme’ which reminds one of German efforts of overcoming the past, ‘as if Celan were part of Germany’s Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ (Felstiner, 2001, p. 78-79).
Celan did not give any other form of testimony than his poems. ‘Black milk’, the poem’s first two words, is indeed a striking metaphor, particularly in European culture. Milk is what feeds you and nourishes you, it is mother’s milk, but this symbol of nourishment is now black and dirty with dust. But this is no mere metaphor as we can imagine that the milk was literally dark with the dust and ash of the crematorium. The poem carries this ‘black milk’ through the repetitions and at the last (the fourth), it reads:

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland

We drink the black milk again, but this time it is referred as ‘you’, personified as ‘Death’ and as ‘a master aus Deutschland’. Milk feeds them enough to keep them alive, but only so that they can die; they are drinking to die. And if the milk is ashen, they are, rather literally, served with death. The milk has turned black, and it both brings and is death. And the symbolism plainly points to something central in European culture, upon which that culture relies and by which it is now contaminated.

What is noticeable in this translation by Felstiner is that he reverses the translation towards the end, as if the German language devours the words from the back, with the coming of the master and death. In explaining the reason for this, Felstiner writes of what he realised in the process of translation: ‘as I worked my way through Deathfugue, that the poem was becoming easier and easier to translate: I have done this phrase before, and this one too, and here they come back again, no need to think anymore’ (Felstiner, 1986, p. 260). The power of the repetition meant that the poem was in danger of trivialisation and prompted an easy possessive reading. What is to come next becomes anticipatable, and then my eyes move ahead of myself, ahead of my thought. The phrase that initially made you stop in shock is now domesticated in the course of repetition and no longer affects you to the same extent – that is, once again, an inoculation. Later, perhaps partly in resistance to this, Celan wrote: ‘I don’t musicalize anymore, as at the time of the much-touted “Todesfuge,” which by now has
been threshed over in many a textbook’ (Celan cited in Joris, 2005, p. 34). One gets the grain – what is useful – by imposing a certain violence on it. And the remains are not taken care of. The attention given to ‘Todesfuge’ becomes that of the voyeur.

Regarding ‘Todesfuge’, Joris rightly notes: ‘It is a poem that still, somehow, maybe desperately, believes, or wants to believe, or acts as if did believe in the fullness of utterance, in the possibility of being, a being who speaks and in whom both language and what language talks about are grounded’ (Joris, 2009, p. 82). There is a sense of urgency and the struggle in these words of Joris as well, as if they reflected Celan’s frustration. Was Celan simply naïve in believing the fullness of the utterance? Did he not understand the unsaturated nature of language? Or was he so innocent or so desperate to believe that people would listen to him, and understand him? As though we can ever say something fully or understand the other fully? Yet, in any case, he was surely making the claim on his audience: ‘You must listen to me, you must believe me!’ Hence, he speaks of ‘a message in a bottle, sent out in the – not always greatly hopeful – belief that somewhere and sometimes it could wash up on land, on heartland perhaps’ (Celan, 2002, p. 396). A desperate hope in ‘perhaps’. In later poems, Celan’s message becomes more enigmatic. We do not know who is speaking any more. Words barely remain. They resist being made explicit, so that they cannot be simply consumed.

The tension in Celan’s poem is between the desire to give form to the unspeakable and resistance to that form being colonised by purposes of a quite different kind. The risk is inevitable when anything attains a material form, including signs. As we are familiar with by now, there is a violence internal to naming, to representation, which fixes and contains. Levinas, in ‘Ethics and Spirit’, one of the essays collected in Difficult Freedom, aptly expresses this tension: ‘Perhaps art seeks to give a face to things, and in this its greatness and its deceit simultaneously reside’ (Levinas, 2016, p. 8). In Levinasian terms, the face appears as language, and so the poem holds or carries the face of the other; it attempts to preserve this otherness. It draws you into itself as if someone is speaking to you. It holds your attention, so you cannot simply turn away. Yet, the risk is always there as once you spell out what it means, it falls into the trap of representation, and possibly further to reification. But works of art perhaps can draw you into them, into their meaning, without its being

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spelled out, but instead enacting and reminding you of what it means to see the face of the other. Perhaps this is where the hope in Celan resides. Celan wrote once in a letter (which was unsent) to René Char: ‘one can never pretend to comprehend completely – that would be disrespect in the face of the Unknown that inhabits – or comes to inhabit – the poet; that would be to forget that poetry is something one breathes; that poetry breathes you in’ (Celan cited in Joris, 2005, p. 35). To respect a poem is to respect the face that inhabits it. If poetry is something one breathes, if it is something enabling one to live, to make the poetry alive is to let it continue to breathe in the one who reads it. And that is to preserve its unknown territory, to acknowledge its openness, without moving to complete closure, a suffocation.

Celan’s poem demands to be treated as we would treat a person. With the distraction of attention to the measurable properties of the poem, the poet’s voice is trivialised, neutralised, or even erased. And this amounts to the denial of both the poet and what the poem is speaking for. Yet, is this the case only for ‘Todesfuge’? Are Celan’s later works, with their ambiguity of form, safe then from this exploitation? How about poetry in general, those poems taught in schools? To be in a better position to discuss these matters, I now want to make a detour to explore the nature of remembering and the questions of history with which the problems that arose in reading ‘Todesfuge’ are inextricably intertwined. In due course, what is at stake in reading itself will be further clarified. In so doing, I draw on Jean-François Lyotard and his conception of the immemorial.

The Immemorial

Bernhard Schlink, the author of the novel *The Reader* (2003) and *Guilt about the Past* (2010) was born in 1944 and grew up in the post-war years. He is now a judge and a professor of law. In his books he recounts the complex feelings of his generation as they explored subjects such as collective guilt, the possibility of reconciliation, and the banality of evil. In his book-length essay, *Guilt about the Past*, he recalls how the past influenced the identity of post-war generation; the past was even there at the centre of their rebellions against their parents. He writes that ‘During the sixties, when those actually involved were reluctant to speak of the past, we developed a strong need to

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91 Celan, in *The Meridian*, speaks of poetry as breath: ‘Poetry: that might mean a turn of the breath’ (Celan cited in Derrida, 2005b, p. 109). And as discussed in Chapter 3, breath is what makes the speaking possible in the first place, without which, as Derrida puts it, there will be ‘neither speech nor speaking’ (p. 110).
confront them, provoke them, ask them what they had done’ – where ‘them’ includes their own parents (Schlink, 2010, p. 25). His generation ‘regarded it as self-evident that the past had to be talked about, researched, taught, learned’ (ibid.). This was their approach in coming to terms with their past – that is, at least, not to suffer of the shame and as though to prove their innocence. And this is thoroughly illustrated in his novel *The Reader*. The narrator of the novel, Michael, is a university law student, born around the same time as the author was, suggesting the novel is autobiographical to some degree. Michael recalls when he participated in the seminar about the Holocaust:

> Exploration! Exploring the past! We students in the seminar considered ourselves radical explorers. We tore open the windows and let in the air, the wind that finally whirled away the dust that society had permitted to settle over the horrors of the past. We made sure people could breathe and see (Schlink, 2003, p. 89).

Bringing everything into the light with some new air, out perhaps from the shadow of guilt that had been suffocating the society and the students themselves. The exploration of the past is in this sense a matter of life, of being alive. They ‘explored it, subjected it to trial by daylight, and condemned it to shame’ (p. 90). This includes not only court cases in the 1960s but also the talks, conferences, and classes on the Holocaust which went on and on, so that they would not forget, and the horror would not be repeated. Students in medicine had classes on how doctors cooperated with the Nazis, and those in chemistry on how chemists did the same. There was this tremendous enthusiasm for denouncing anything related to Nazism, as if they were purging themselves. Yet, there was at the same time this perverse triumphalism, glee about having got things right, which slid into ugly hubris, whatever the good intentions it started with. Schlink writes: ‘The result has been a sort of banality. The Holocaust has become small change that is easily handed out. Yet another memorial event, conference, article or book against forgetting the past, another comparison between Auschwitz and some awful contemporary event’ (Schlink, 2010, p. 27). Repeated representation made itself too clear and thus familiar. Once it was brought into the light, the horror could be named and condemned; and this could easily be turned into a convenient process – that is, into thoughtless repetitions. The unspeakable was normalised and neutralised; the images of horrors and even the testimonies of survivors soon ‘froze into clichés’
(Schlink, 2003, p. 147). And although I am not saying that Holocaust is incomparable, it is also not simply comparable as if it could be a yardstick for all the horrors.

This is indicative of the problematics of memorialisation that Lyotard explores, particularly in *Heidegger and “the jews”*. He discusses the nature of remembrance alongside his critique of Heidegger, who stayed silent about his political commitment under Nazism. Memorials, such as war memorials, are an attempt to bring the past into the present; they preserve the memory by giving it a material character so that they can be seen and talked about; they recall shared memories of the community. Yet, while a memorial embodies a certain narrative, it can be blind to others. For example, in remembering the death of our soldiers, we can be blind to that of others, or the injustice of war itself. The war can be glorified, while the enemy is likely to be demonised. Any memorialisation can be turned into a secured object, in service of certain narratives. This is to remember only to the extent that the secure identity of society is not to be threatened, and even in order for its faults to be hidden and in a sense redeemed. And this is, as Lyotard speaks of it, a ‘politics of forgetting’ (Lyotard, 1990, p. 4).

A parallel can be drawn. ‘*Todesfluge*’ was read and remembered in order to forget something more substantial and more disturbing. What is important, according to Lyotard, is to understand the immemorial. There is something already forgotten, which cannot be recovered in memory – it is the immemorial, the limit in recalling the past. This can be explained by considering cases of extreme experience – say, of an unspeakable horror. Such experience can be too excessive to be brought into the level of consciousness, and thus resides only at the level of the unconscious without being registered in a form of representation. Then one will neither forget it, nor remember it, simply because one does not know what to forget or remember. To forget it, it should be first brought into consciousness (as Freudian psychoanalysis works, which Lyotard is drawing upon here). But even if one manages, in due course, to bring it to a level where it is represented consciously, something is already lost. The excess had to be rendered in some way to be retrievable. Once we spell it out, it becomes something else. This is so to some extent in remembering any past event: we cannot simply get back to where these things happened, and the immemorial is there from the very beginning of remembering. What Lyotard writes of childhood further clarifies this. When we try to remember our

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92 This reminds us what has been briefly discussed in the previous chapter, as for example explored by Judith Butler, about how mourning can be politically used.
childhood there is something that by nature cannot be brought to our consciousness without distortion: something happened before our self-consciousness or self-awareness, so we cannot fully grasp and bring it into our memory. Once a memory becomes too clear then there is the suspicion that it is probably not any more the one from our childhood. A childhood, understood in this way, ‘would not be a period of the life cycle, but an incapacity to represent and bind a certain something’ (p. 17). The only way we can do justice to this imperfection is to remember that we cannot but forget: we cannot remember, even when we think we do, since there is always something irretrievable; something is already forgotten. Hence, as the immemorial resists, there will be no totalising understanding of the past, or of the suffering of the other.

Lyotard writes: ‘one remembers (and this must suffice) that one never stops forgetting what must not be forgotten, and that one is not quit [one has not given up] either just because one does not forget the debt’ (p. 84). What the immemorial tells us is not that we are now free to forget, say, the history of suffering; rather, one must still remember because one cannot simply forget one’s fundamental relation to the other, forgetting of which would amount to the denial of one’s responsibility for the other. Such responsibility is the debt that Nazism has tried to be free from, and to definitively forget; ‘this unchaining is evil itself’ (ibid.). Inheriting Levinasian insight, Lyotard’s claim is made partly against the pride of autonomy and self-assertion in Western thought. (see also Chapter 4 and 5) On the contrary, Lyotard’s emphasis is put on the subject of responsibility (a subject not self-sufficient or independent but rather always in debt to the other), which reshapes political responsibility. An avoidance of witnessing the immemorial amounts to political irresponsibility, that of Heidegger. Heidegger failed to recognise the relationship of this debt, a necessary lack in oneself, otherness – that is, ‘the jews’ in Lyotard’s terms, the symbol of what is wholly other to Western thought, which accordingly was marginalised and excluded. This Heideggerian denial is tantamount to the denial of the fact that we cannot stay self-enclosed – that is, the illusion of solipsism and the denial of the existence of the other who breaks it.

For Michael, in The Reader, realisation of this kind comes with Hannah, whom he has been intensely involved with and through his recollection that he loved her: at the time, he was fifteen and she thirty-two. She disappeared one day without a single word, and when he saw her again, it was at her trial, which he attended as part of his
Holocaust seminars. Hannah was accused for what she did as a Nazi guard, and particularly for the fact that she had stayed outside the burning church with Jewish prisoners locked in. In the course of the trial, Michael realised that Hannah was illiterate, which explained not only her sudden disappearance and her peculiar behaviour sometimes when they were together, but also her delayed answer to the court and low understanding of what was happening in the case and the position she was in. With such disadvantages, Hannah was pointed to, by the other guards, as someone who was in charge of what happened and as who wrote a report that day. She could have defended herself by saying she could not read or write. But she chose to be sentenced, even for things that she did not do, rather than having her illiteracy exposed. She was sentenced to life. If we trace back a little more, she lived her whole life trying to hide her illiteracy. She fled from her previous jobs when she got promotions because she was afraid of situations when reading would be unavoidable. That is how she ended up as a Nazi guard, where no reading, and perhaps no thinking, was required. Would it all have been different if she could have read? If she could spend her energy not in hiding her secret but on something else? Michael was left in frustration. Not that he wanted to give her an excuse, but that there was something that would never come to an understanding, or be resolved; her motives could not be simply pinned down as he thought he could with the evil war criminals. He even wondered if he was guilty as well because he loved her, and that this was the connection to her that he himself chose to be in. Bringing the past to light was not so clear and straightforward after all. Neither the history nor the motivation of evil acts can be understood simply through a process of pure revelation. Nor can the suffering of the victims. This restless task of reading the past was what the author himself (and his generation) had to go through, since they were bound to discovering, to coming to knowledge of the fact that their loved teachers, and professors, parents had been involved in such acts. And Michael comes to the conclusion:

We should not believe we can comprehend the incomprehensible, we may not compare the incomparable, we may not inquire because to inquire is to make the horrors an object of discussion, even if the horrors themselves are not questioned, instead of accepting them as something in the face of which we can only fall silent in revulsion, shame, and guilt. Should we only fall silent in revulsion, shame, and guilt? (Schlink, 2003, p. 102)
The enthusiastic exploration of the past objectified it by closing off a further reading of the past, denying the very thing that it purported to remember. Nothing could be purely revealed in the daylight. Understanding the past is more than examining a fixed object and requires that one must acknowledge the impossibility of total understanding. But does it mean that we should all remain only in silence?

We might find an answer in the way the novel presents the past. The novel itself is an attempt to retrieve the past: Michael strives to reconcile with the past and Hannah, and the readers follow him by tracing back the clues given in the novel. The readers are required to puzzle the clues and construct and interpret the past but only to fail in fully grasping it in the end. With regards to this, the authors of *The Therapy Education* suggest that it is this novel itself that presents a way to read the past; the novel ‘conveys the otherness of words to the author or reader; the impossibility that any text should fully recuperate or contain human lives and human action, meaning, history; the impossibility of the recovery of childhood’ (Smeyers, Smith, and Standish, 2007, p. 70). There is a sense of humility in acknowledging the impossibility of full meaning: we are to become engaged and re-engaged with the text, without closure. So it is we, as readers, who are implicated in reading the past, in reading the text, perhaps not without sharing the feelings of shame and frustration that Michael had (ibid.).

Hannah learns to read in the prison; her shelf was full of books about the Holocaust. It was found a day before her release, after she had hanged herself. It is symbolic that it is through reading that she seemed to have realised what she did; she felt guilty which she had not during the court case. Would it have been different, let us ask again, if she could have read, if she could have read the immemorial and incommensurables – the responsibility that comes before any rules?

Lyotard writes: ‘One must, certainly, inscribe in words, in images. One cannot escape the necessity of representing. It would be sin itself to believe oneself safe and sound. But it is one thing to do it in view of saving the memory, and quite another to try to preserve the remainder, the unforgettable forgotten, in writing’ (Lyotard, 1990, p. 26). The task of writing – understood as a mode of inscribing and mark-making, as ways of giving form – is what we cannot wholly escape from. Yet, we should be aware that such an act as marking is always exposed to the danger of exploitation: films about the Holocaust can become a part of Saturday night entertainment, of the Hollywood film business, a topic at the dinner table. There is no straightforward way of dealing with this – *including what I am doing here*. But this *must not* be the reason for avoiding
further engagement and imposing silence. Art bears witness to this painful aporia: ‘It
does not say the unsayable, but it says that it cannot say it’ (p. 47). This might require
that the representation is to be interrupted, resisting too great a clarity or the
representation’s becoming exhausted in any supposedly complete interpretation: this
is the struggle not to be simply utilised, consumed. Rather, it should become an
invitation for others, for the next generation – for them to read and re-read, to mark
and re-mark as a form of remembering, and of mourning.

The Price of Readability

I want to explore further what is at stake in reading a poem. I do this by investigating
the interwoven relationships between language, memory, and dates. And the poem will
be seen as a site where such relations unravel. I revisit Celan, this time with Derrida
and his essay called ‘Shibboleth: For Paul Celan’. In this essay, Derrida speaks of how
Celan’s poem dates and remembers: what the poem carries is ‘the memory of
forgetting itself, the truth of forgetting’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 35). While this resonates
with what Lyotard previously made apparent (that art can bear witness to the
immemorial), Derrida directs us further towards thinking of what is at play in that
moment of both forgetting and remembering: our inevitable forgetfulness is not simply
what threatens us, but the condition of remembrance. Accepting the risk of forgetting
(a risk that is always inevitably there but that we quietly ignore) according to Derrida,
is something necessary for the poem to be read and thus remembered – that is, it is the
price of readability; and this is due to the nature of signs and our existence as language
beings, which is inseparable from our capacity to date and remember.

Let us begin with dates. Any date (of an event) in order to be a date must be
‘exposed’ or available to people, for how else is it to be remembered? And this
necessarily comes with the risk of distortion: that not everything cannot be
remembered, and that memory is not always reliable; and that beyond what is
remembered there is always the immemorial. But it is the date itself, despite this risk,
that offers itself up, the date whose ordering enables it to connect with, to be reached
by, others:

Commemorating what can always be forgotten in the absence of any witness,
the date is exposed in its destination or in its very essence. It is offered up to
annihilation, but in truth it offers itself up. The threat is not external; it does
not stem from an accident that would suddenly come along and destroy the
archive’s material support. The date lets itself be threatened in its coming
due, in its conservation and its readability, by them, insofar as it remains, and
gives itself to be read. Risking the annulment of what it saves from forgetting,
it may always become no one’s and nothing’s date, essence without the
essence of ash, about which one no longer even knows what was one day,
only once, under some proper name, consumed there (p. 36).

A date naturally fades away as time goes by; it is exposed to annulment from the very
beginning. The same date returns annually (e.g. in the form of anniversary), yet it will
not be exactly the same date: the date annuls itself in its return. This will be another
illustration of the immemorial showing the impossibility of recovering the past. But
Derrida takes us further: it is the date itself that offers and sacrifices itself up, so that
it ‘gives itself to be read’ and thus to be remembered.93 And it does so, importantly,
for the sake of the other: it relates itself to the dates of others, the dates that will come
in the future (something else will happen on the same date, people will be reminded of
different things about the same date, etc.), which at the same time will obscure its own
singularity. The date can be remembered only by going through this forgetting – that
is, the price it pays to be read, to be related to the other. So, in a sense, to be
remembered is to be forgotten. By effacing itself in its singularity, effacing itself of its
singularity, it opens up the extent of generalisation that enables it to reach anonymous
future readers. It is in this sense that Derrida says the date may become that of no one
and nothing. The date, suspended between singularity and generalisation, is always on
the way of becoming no one’s and nothing’s date in a further generalisation. It
anticipates death: if Celan dies, if all the witnesses to the Holocaust and the next
generations die, if there is no more witness for the witnesses, will the date still be
remembered in its singularity, or will it be then no one’s and nothing’s date?

This structure is based upon Derrida’s accounts of the nature of language. In
‘Signature Event Context’, Derrida illustrates the ‘essential iterability’ that enables a
sign to be what it is (Derrida, 1988, p. 9).94 For any sign to work as a sign, it must be

93 The poem is literally an ‘offering’ of words – it is, in Levinasian sense, an offering of language which gives
meaning to the things and the world; it is the offering that comes with and through the other. Levinas writes: “The
“vision” of the face is inseparable from this offering language is. To see the face is to speak of the world”
(Levinas, 1969, p. 174). This offering of words not only what produces new meanings in the world, but also what
gives the world meaning in the first place.
94 Derrida begins with the description of the characteristic of ‘writing’ and further illustrates that it is something
internal not only to language in general but also to our existence (see, for example, Derrida, 1988). This is part of
repeatable and be recognisable even after the death of the sender and receiver. He takes the example of the signature: to be recognised and authorised, a signature must be repeatable. But for a signature to be authentic it cannot, like a photo-copy, be exactly the same. That repeatability accompanies the possibility of alteration – the extent of generality. This means that as soon as the signature is given in the way that it should be, it is also inevitably exposed to the counterfeit, to forgery. The possibility of authentic signature depends on this very impossibility of remaining in its singularity. This risking of itself is what makes the signature logically possible. The extent of generality is already implied in the structure of the sign: the sign must be recognisable outside the singular so that it can be used in varied contexts. This is what Derrida means by ‘essential iterability’ – the possibility of repetition and alteration. Similarly, a date’s iterability is tied to its essential annulment, the effacement of date itself. This is how the date becomes ‘readable and commemorative’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 36).

Forgetting is the condition of remembering. And a date exists only by encountering the other where its effacement is essential.

The date is the inalienable property of the poem: it gives a chance to the poem; out of ‘the silence singularity’, it gives ‘the chance to speak to the other!’ (p. 8). Derrida writes: ‘The date provokes the poem, but the poem speaks! And it speaks of what provokes it, to the date that provokes it, thus convoked from the to-come of the same date, in other words, from its return at another date’ (ibid.). When we speak, we are already speaking on and of a date. So any utterance, hence any poem, is always already dated. Also the issue with this convocation is that any single date presupposes a whole system of dating and thus it exists within the dates that are not at present. This is the condition upon which the date draws the past and the future together to the present. There is a sense of futurity when the poem speaks and convokes its own date and the date of the future together. The poem in this sense projects itself towards the ‘to-come’. In speaking of and to the date, the poem brings together past and future, poet and reader. This, again, works similarly to the way the sign works: any word comes already with its past usages; it bears traces of what it is not. The poem comes with this passage of time and traces, and it will be read and repeated in other contexts. That is, despite and thanks to the fundamental iterability of the sign. Exceeding its own context, it gains further layers of meanings. Our capacity to remember depends, as a

Derrida’s broader project of deconstructing the ‘metaphysics of presence’. This involves subverting and displacing binary and hierarchical relations such as mind/body, speaking/writing, and presence/absence.
whole, on this structure of language. Memory is bound to the way we use words, to our existence as language beings. Our present is experienced only by what is absent. Never self-sufficient a priori, our present always depends on what is not-present. Thus, Derrida writes: ‘there is no experience consisting of pure presence but only of chains of differential marks’ (Derrida, 1988, p. 10). Interwoven relations between dates, memory, and language are central to my existence as they develop in my presence. This is precisely the site in which, when we read a poem, we participate.

What is also illustrated is the performative dimension in the language of poetry. In the present context, it is worth recalling the idea of language as poiesis, through which Heidegger had guided us to understand the productive power of language (Chapter 1). Moving from this same ground with Heidegger, we broached the thought that language somehow presupposes the face. And then I find that Celan’s words address me and make their claim upon me; they singularise me in my response to them. The language of the poem exemplifies not only poetic productivity but also ‘poetic performativity’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 47). Derrida is alluding to J. L. Austin’s concept of performative as opposed to constative utterance. Words do not simply describe or represent, they do things: it is by saying something that we give a marriage vow (‘I do’), name a ship (‘I name this ship…’), or promise (‘I promise’). The words of the poem do not simply describe or report something in a neutral sense. They do something: the poem works on or somehow moves the reader and the situation; it addresses and singles out the reader, calling for response. The poem does this for its date, for what it speaks for – that is, as seen in Celan’s The Meridian, in search of intimate dialogue with the reader. (Chapter 3) Timothy Clark puts this aptly: ‘The poetic is the chance of an event of interruption whose arrival constitutes its receiver, even as it simultaneously institutes itself and is contaminated, risking effacement, by the force of this reception’ (Clark, 1993, pp. 69-70).

If the poet poetises alterity by writing a poem, by writing the ‘face’ that resides in the poem (for, as Levinas tells us, the face comes to us as language), the alterity

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95 J. L. Austin discusses this in How To Do Things with Words, which was first presented as the William James Lectures in 1955 (Austin, 2005). Derrida acknowledges the great importance of the idea of performative but also criticises the limits of Austin (Derrida, 1988). The examples given above are clear cases of performatives. But it turns out that constative utterances also work performatively: we not only describe things, even when we think we are purely describing something; we at the same time do things in what we say. Austin, in the end, also acknowledges that there is no clear-cut distinction between performative and constative utterances. Yet, Derrida attempts to push this further as he recognises that what Austin has excluded as infelicities (‘non-serious’ or ‘parasitic’ uses) are precisely what shows the nature of language. For Derrida, such a condition is necessary and essential for the sign.
expresses itself and is experienced as already at work in the poem: the poem, or perhaps the alterity itself, poetises us – sensitises us to see the face of the other. It works itself into us by realising the relationship with otherness – which, in our own words, is always. The double genitive of ‘poetics of alterity’ suggests this double gesture. Alterity prominently resides in and presents itself in poetry. What is to be remembered is that alterity, like the poem, can be preserved only by being responded to – by risking contamination, in its inevitable repetition, in the way the poem offers itself up.96 I will come back to this.

Reading a Poem (2): ‘Mid-Term Break’

Now I move from the first poem to the second – from extreme circumstances to those that might arise in any family and are, hence, closer to ordinary experience. This will clarify the way the problem with ‘Todesflüge’ can guide us to a more general critique of the nature of, and of our relation to, knowledge. Could our habitual understanding of knowledge actually have blocked our relation to the alterity within the subject we learn and teach?

‘Mid-Term Break’ by Seamus Heaney97 is a much-anthologised poem, often studied in GCSE and A-level courses in the UK. Much commentary and analysis of the poem can be found online, often under the title ‘Poetry for GCSE English’. To be very brief, the poem records a tragedy that the poet’s family went through – the death of Heaney’s younger brother. The title, which primarily amongst schoolchildren has the connotation of ‘half-term holiday’, also indicates a forced and unexpected interruption by the death – which is the reason why Heaney has to return home. Yet readers will find this out only towards the end of the poem, where they will also find out about how old the boy was and how he died. Heaney’s brother was only four when he was killed in the car accident.

96 For Derrida, it is important to note that alterity is not free from this alteration. Derrida places alterity in the same structure of poem’s readability. In the way the poem risks the chance of contamination to be read, alterity cannot but risk itself. Not taking this risk will be another way of killing it by ossifying and stopping its own movement. Derrida, in Altérités, says that “The point is that if one insists on holding a pure respect for this alterity without alteration (cette altérité sans alteration), one always risks lending a hand to a lack of mobility, conservatism, etc, that is, an effacement of alterity itself” (Derrida and Labarrière, 1986, p. 31 cited in Clark, 1993, p. 71).

97 Seamus Heaney is a Nobel Prize-winning poet (in 1995), who died in 2013. He spoke of himself as a farmer and a poet. He wrote poems in the time of political upheaval in Northern Ireland. The BBC documentary ‘Seamus Heaney and the Music of What Happens’ records his life with reading of his poems by his family members. His wife for example recounts how one of his love poems – which is written about their own marriage – is frequently read in weddings. The title of the documentary is from his poem called ‘Song’ where he describes poetry as ‘music of what happens’ (On BBC Two, Nov 2019).
I looked at some online guides to interpreting the poem. ‘Poetry Essay’ is one of the big YouTube channels for such things. The channel presents video material on the principles of poetry analysis (‘How to analyse a poem in six steps’\footnote{How To Analyse A Poem’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNmJApvpJA (Accessed on 2 Oct 2019)} and analyses popular poems accordingly. ‘Mid-Term Break’ is one of those chosen. The analysis of this poem comprises two slides.\footnote{Seamus Heaney – “Mid-Term Break” Annotation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TEdi6cYWpQ (Accessed on 2 Oct 2019)} Explanations contained in boxes appear sequentially in video form. Various colours are used to emphasise different aspects of the poem (rhyme, imagery). Arrow-marks against the relevant lines of the poem direct the viewer to explanations (in boxes), which supply such phrases as ‘an elegiac tone established’, ‘enjambment that increases pace and reflects confusion and grief’, and ‘poetical devices: metaphor, personification’. This is done concisely and very clearly. Some viewers have left their comments there. Most seem to be students as they say such things as that ‘this is going to be very helpful for the test’. One of the comments says that the poem is revealed in the best way. But, is it? The poem seems rather to have been anatomised or dissected as William Wordsworth would put it.\footnote{William Wordsworth writes this in ‘The Tables Turned’ (Coleridge and Wordsworth, 2008, p. 136; see also Chapter 1).}

![Figure 3](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDGm1fLWKqQ&t=1693s)

I found another video on the poem, a lecture by Andrew Barker, who himself is a poet.\footnote{Seamus Heaney – Mid-Term Break – Poetry Lecture and analysis by Dr. Andrew Barker’ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DGm1fLWKqQ&t=1693s (Accessed on 2 Oct 2019)} He paraphrases every sentence, explains them very thoroughly, in order
to, as he says, make sure everyone in the audience can understand them. He also provides some background information about the poet, on what made the poet write this poem. He explains technically how the poem makes you wonder about what has happened, maintaining suspense until the final revelation of the brother’s death; the poem sets the mood and the scene so that the weight of the tragedy is gradually revealed. Let me make some specific examples. The presenter enthusiastically explains a verse of the poem: the mother ‘coughed out angry tearless sighs’. He imitates this coughing of the mother several times, acknowledging that it would be impossible to do this perfectly. He does this in admiration of Heaney’s poetic technique (‘we get this wonderful acoustic demonstration of distress’) . . . But this leaves me quite embarrassed. . . He moves on to the scene where the young Heaney goes into the room where his brother’s body has been laid out. He explains how certain sounds create specific feelings (e.g. the sibilance of ‘sh’ creates a calm): ‘great examples of the form imitating the content’. . . His explanations are pertinent. I even had the feeling that I had learned everything about the poem. But, do I really know the poem? I am perhaps able to break down the poem into given categories: ‘Tone: sombre. Imagery: death and grief. Poetic techniques: onomatopoeia, assonance. . .’ This surely would help me to get a good grade. It would help me – let’s not lose sight of this – as a teacher preparing a class in accordance with the assessment requirements. This seems then to be the good teaching that will be expected by schools, students, and parents. . . But do I really know the poem?

Problems of Knowledge: What does it Mean to Know a Poem?

Knowing by Acquaintance

To proceed, it is worth noting how a dominant theorisation of knowledge – involving the relation between ‘knowing-that’ and ‘knowing-how’ – is at play in the scene of teaching. The reading of the poem is focused largely on measurable or clearly identifiable features as if knowing the properties of a poem suffices for or equates with knowing the poem. And the assessment indeed specifies criteria that direct examiner, teacher, and learner to such an assumption. ‘Knowing-that’ refers to what can be expressed in propositions. This may include information about the author, about imagery, about rhythm, and so on. ‘Knowing-how’ is also there in that, as is plainly suggested, the poems are to be analysed in several definite steps (e.g. ‘How to analyse
a poem in six steps’ enumerates techniques relating to subject, theme, tone, imagery, form, and feeling). Once you acquire a set of skills or a frame-work, you can apply it to any poem: it puts you on the look-out for such features in any poem you encounter (you can spot the ‘dactyl’ with ease).

Now it is not so much a matter of whether such things are not important or irrelevant. Knowing those surely can enhance my understanding of the poem. Yet, neither knowing-that or knowing-how seems sufficient, and perhaps, in knowing the poem, this typology of knowing is not even necessary. Rather, applying general concepts to poetry can block what emerges between yourself and the poem, which lays the way for something unpredictable. The technical terms get in the way of experiencing the poem in its singularity. Ready-made thoughts are provided promptly before I can gain any intimacy with the poem. The more manicured the explanation is, the more it may preclude my own response. My response is directed to what is anticipated, which, with its prepacked terms, fixes in advance even my emotional engagement. Yet what happens in my relationship to the poem is something that cannot be neatly contained in the language of the general, in the readily digested categories and in the mere application of technical terms. ‘You don’t know the poem!’ – someone might say, even though I have just gained a perfect score in the exam. Such an approach, in studying a poem, easily slides into a bad reading. Having definitive answers had instilled in me certain habits in reading literature. In school exams, I read the questions first and then the text; I quickly read through the text from top to bottom looking for key words and answers. Once I had acquired this habit, it worked at its worst when I read poetry. I was too impatient to dwell on each word and phrase; I ran ahead of myself, looking for supposedly important points. But good marks could never really tell me that I knew the poem.

I have objected to over-emphasis on ‘knowledge-that’ and ‘knowledge-how’ and their focus on competence and propositional knowledge, so where else am I to turn? It is to ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ that now I turn, the least considered aspect of knowledge in philosophy and education. Let us recall what was said earlier about Gelassenheit, in Chapter 2: the cabinetmaker’s apprentice builds her relationship to her work by attending to the various kinds and qualities of wood with which the

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102 Cavell says a similar thing and gives examples: “‘You don’t really know what it’s like to be a Negro’; “You don’t really know how your remark made her feel’; “You don’t really know what I mean when I say that Schnael’s slow movements give the impression not of slowness but of infinite length.” You merely say the words’ (Cavell, 2015, p. 178).
craftsman is working. What is necessary is to spend a certain amount of time dwelling with what she is working on. An accretion of experience gathers around this, in the duration of time, the instilling of the work, that builds the affective engagement. Knowing, in this sense, is relational and comes rather slowly. As already intimated in Chapter 2, this is necessary in reading a poem – a work of art that demands us to dwell with it. We give it its due, so it can speak to us in its own right. Knowing by acquaintance, understood in this way, is not something separate from knowledge-that and knowledge-how. It is rather the basis of any sense of knowing. Even the technical understanding of a poem must come not merely in abstract form, should come out of this condition. How we know things is inextricable from how we are – that is, from our existence as being-in-the-world, the very condition that fabricates and nourishes our thoughts. Knowledge about the poem is inextricable from my prior engagement with the world, just as that knowledge subsequently becomes the condition of further experience. I am waiting for the bus; the words come back to me. At another time a friend tells me of a child who has died; the words come back to me. . . Pausimg after reading a poem will do it some justice so that time and space are given for thoughtful response. Thoughts can grow and germinate to be brought into words – brought unto words against a background of word. My understanding begins with muddled words, not with clear abstractions. Feelings, sensations, bodily reactions, the rush of emotion – these are not to be separated out, chaff to the wheat’s cognitive grain. Celan defies any desire on the part of the reader to get quickly and easily to ‘the meaning’ of the poem.

It is pertinent here to consider what is commonly referred to as ‘learning by heart’. What is at stake in learning a poem by heart? This practice – ‘learning by heart’ – used to be much appreciated, and it was seen as of importance in education, but today it is usually associated with ‘thoughtless learning’ as opposed to ‘meaningful learning’. Yet we find Derrida, if we recall from the introduction of this thesis, invoking this expression, ‘learning by heart’. What the expression suggests is that there is something you need, to some extent, to be taken by. You just need to ‘go with it’ without knowing everything, because you are encountering something you cannot know exhaustively. Mechanical repetition itself implies a kind of passivity. It is like the prayer I learned in my childhood, which I learned without understanding what it meant; I still do not know what it means. But it dwells with me and often comes back to me involuntarily. There is here a sense of humility in relation to words, which sometimes is captured in
religious thought and practice: words from the Bible or the Buddhist chanting continually repeated in rituals, phrases with resonance that linger in one’s mouth and mind, lingering without their meaning being clear. What is acknowledged is something that stops you short of understanding, a resistance in language. This is something that is schooled out in us today.

A poem certainly is more than meaning and goes ‘beyond any semantic comprehension’ (Derrida, 1995c, p. 97). It comprises of such as sound and rhythm: ‘The irreducibility of song or of consonance in the poem (Gesang) is the non-semantic, non-substitutable character of the letter, in a word, of that which has to be learned by heart’ (Derrida, 1995b, p. 314). And as Derrida acknowledges, this is very close to Heidegger in suggesting a way of relating to something that escapes the structure of ‘what is’: this thinking is a way of responding to the saying of language – something you listen to thankfully, with receptivity and responsiveness. The words of the poem will then return to me and speak to me. And they become a place that I return to. They become memory, ritual, and a prayer in repetition. Knowing a poem is not something purely cognitive – it involves respecting its excessive aspect, inexhaustible nature. What is opened up by doing so is a path to encounter a singular poem – by denouncing our desire to define and determine its meaning, without expecting to extract from it something applicable to all poetry. Building a relation with a poem is each time singular, and one needs to begin anew as if one were meeting a new person (or meeting the same person newly, again). Having a set of skills or pertinent background information is no guarantee to this kind of knowing. You notice some features based on your knowledge, but this will not suffice in knowing a poem, any more than it does in knowing a person. What is demanded, in knowing a poem, is ‘to know how to renounce knowledge’ – our cultural background of concept acquisition, which blocks us from experiencing it (Derrida, 1995a, p. 289).

Celan says that he ‘cannot see any

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103 Derrida takes an example of the phrase ‘tout autre est tout autre’ as ‘repeated and repeatable formula’ – something you learn without understanding (Derrida, 1995, p. 97). This phrase can seem as simple tautology. But it reveals something often overlooked and brings our awareness to it. It can mean: ‘Every other (one) is every (bit) other [tout autre est tout autre], everyone else is completely or wholly other.’ See, for example, Derrida (1995d, p. 68, 2005g, p. 232).

104 The term ‘cognition’ comes from Latin and is more of a technical term. The way this term is used is often suspicious. It presupposes the separation of intellectual and emotional side, stops holistic perception which led to the neglect of the aspects other than ‘cognitive’. Feeling is better not to be understood in contrast to or exclusive of thinking or knowing. Rather, feeling is internal to knowing. And feeling does involve thinking as even the sensation comes with some background understanding (if it not in an extreme case).

105 Of course having this growing relationship to the poem, I am likely to want to know the background of the poem, and how the poet is trying to convey what he means. Such knowledge of concepts and artistry might even generate stronger feelings and make my understanding more complex or perhaps even confused. Even so, such knowledge and concepts are not where we settle but where we make a departure for the unknown. And often the
basic difference between a handshake and a poem’ (Celan cited in Levinas, 1997, p. 40). A handshake acknowledges and affirms the other’s presence by giving my presence to the other person. It is the ‘handing over (here) a self to another’, Claudia Rankine says: ‘Hence the poem is that – Here’ (Rankine, 2004, p. 130). It is a gesture of proximity and intimacy in which a poem reaches for the reader in wanting to be received, not merely as an object to analyse, but, ‘like a sealed message that can be passed from hand to hand or whispered from mouth to ear’, something that must in some sense remain within the unknown (Derrida, 1995c, p. 97).

Knowing in Feeling

Stanley Cavell helps us to see a further dimension to the kind of knowing considered here. Cavell (2015b), in his essay ‘Music Discomposed’ addresses a particular period when avant-garde music of a particular kind was gaining influence and creating a certain climate. Cavell has in mind the revolution in music that was inspired by Arnold Schoenberg and his pupil Anton Webern. With this new music, communication seemed difficult if not lost between audience and musicians; often one of them was blamed for misunderstanding. Cavell identifies two extreme reactions to the new music: one is that of those people who could not bear the new, perhaps best characterised by the reaction of Saint-Saëns, who stormed out during the first performance of Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring. The other is that of those who were rather obsessed with newness itself, the critics and composers who were totally committed to this, often with recourse to abstract theories of mathematics or metaphysics (e.g. Ernst Krenek, a disciple of Schoenberg). Both strands became, in Cavell’s view, ideological as they did not leave the room for other possibilities of thinking it: they either defended or rejected outright this new music. Accordingly, the place for each individual’s judgement was rather suffocated, and this left little room for the creative judgement

knowledge we already have prevents us from experiencing the poem anew. This is knowledge we should not be bound by but able to renounce.

106 Cavell’s relation to philosophers such as Derrida and Levinas is not straightforward. He often had requests to clarify his seemingly intimate contiguities with these philosophers though he mostly avoided direct answers. In spite of what Cavell himself regards as distance and disparity over the intimacy, points of similarity have been discussed cogently by; for example, Gordon Bearn (1998), with regard to Derrida, and Paul Standish (2008), with regard to Levinas. I see the theme of alterity—the problem of the self and the other—as a common interest among these philosophers. Cavell takes up the theme in response to the ancient problem of scepticism—the question of the existence of the external world and other minds, and by thematising acknowledgement. Cavell discusses his relation to Levinas in ‘What Is the Scandal of Skepticism?’ where he writes: ‘Something this means to me is that skepticism with respect to the other is not a generalized intellectual lack, but a stance I take in the face of the other’s opacity and the demand the other’s expression places upon me; I call skepticism my denial or annihilation of the other’ (Cavell, 2006, p. 150).
on the part of both artists and critics. It is in response to this that Cavell speaks of ‘knowing in (by) feeling’, which he takes to be key to experience music. He writes:

‘Knowing by feeling’ is not like ‘knowing by touching’; that is, it is not a case of providing the basis for a claim to know. But one could say that feeling functions as a touchstone: […] the object has been tested, the result is one of conviction. This seems to me to suggest why one is anxious to communicate the experience of such objects. I want to tell you something I’ve seen, or heard, or realized, or come to understand, for the reasons for which such things are communicated (because it is news, about a world we share, or could). Only I find that I can’t tell you; and that makes it all the more urgent to tell you. […] It matters, there is, a burden, because unless I can tell what I know, there is a suggestion (and to myself as well) that I do not know. But I do – what I see is that (pointing to the object). But for that to communicate, you have to see it too (p. 178).

This is not about collecting sense data, as a basis for knowledge in the more familiar sense; it is not like the game ‘What’s in the box?’, where one finds out by touching without seeing. It is rather that knowing comes with feeling. It is more like touching when you know what the thing is, knowing but still touching it, and being touched. A poem affects me, orients me, leads me, and even forces me to think otherwise. Something other than skills or information is developed in due course – something happens to me and changes me. Learning here is not simply an acquisitive process and involves this encounter with what cannot be possessed. This excess does not give itself into any simple explanation, and it is precisely this that leads me to my conviction. It becomes a touchstone.

A conviction in this kind is not something accords to the universal criteria. It neither derives from nor in pursuit of abstract generalisation. Cavell puts it: ‘You have reached conviction, but not about a proposition; and consistency, but not in a theory. You are different, what you recognize as problems are different, your world is different’ (Cavell, 2015a, p. 80). What we recognise is a sense of transmormation – something happened to me and now I am changed to see things differently. How does my response to a work of art like a poem then bring about such changes? Cavell writes in his reading of Thoreau’s Walden: ‘My subject is nothing apart from sensing the specific weight of
these words as they sink; and that means knowing the specific identities of the writer through his metamorphoses, and defining the audiences in me which those identities address, and so create; and hence understanding who I am that I should be called upon in these ways, and who this writer is that he takes his presumption of intimacy and station upon himself” (Cavell, 1992, pp. 11-12). Responding to the words of a poem is also recognising part of myself answering to those words. That I feel I am called upon and taken in certain ways and not otherwise, and that I want to respond and answer in certain ways, not otherwise, leads to my conviction – a conviction where I first am convinced. The word ‘conviction’, as seen in Chapter 3, alludes to my responsibility in what I say – where I can be wrong and thus can be convicted (p. 48). The exposure of myself is inevitable, in my words, some of which may be confirmed by other people, while others may be rejected. I might be pressed on clarifications or refinement of my thought, in explaining or defending myself, and this will lead to knowing myself better. I find my response by way of forming it, and this is nothing but a transforming of myself – that is, by being responsible and answerable to the words of the poem, what I am addressed by.

This cannot be achieved from simply repeating what the teacher says. It comes from my effort to contribute my own words, instead of relying on stock phrases and cliché. My experience of knowing a work of art cannot fit into any pre-packed concepts or categories; they will take me only so far. It is the unknown that I am drawn to with my feelings, and it is in the face of it that I am forced to invent new words. ‘Because it is news’, ‘because the knowledge, unshared, is a burden’, as Cavell puts it, I must tell you (Cavell, 2015b, p. 178). I now see things differently, and I wonder if you can see things differently too, which gives an urgency to conversation. The conversation is not meant to be easy: what we see is never exactly the same. And the fact that I cannot easily put what I feel into tidy words and concepts is what opens a space for conversation and judgement. I put the effort to find a right word for what I see, what I feel, so I can direct the other to feel it as well.107 It can be difficult and rather frustrating.

107 Cavell’s account in many parts resonates with that of Derrida. But for Cavell, the inclination towards achieving authentic meaning is stronger than it is for Derrida. He draws on Wittgensteinian reference to the finding of peace, which implies the possibility of a stability of meaning being achieved, however momentarily. While Cavell’s account of ‘conviction’ echoes Derrida’s discussion of ‘faith’, Derrida is more negative about such a moment. Although I do not attempt to measure the distance between them in this thesis, I come back to discuss Derrida’ account of faith in the following chapter. Gordon Bearn provides a good analysis of the comparison between Cavell and Derrida in, for example, ‘Staging Authenticity: A Critique of Cavell’s Modernism’ (2000), and ‘Sounding Serious: Cavell and Derrida’ (1998). Bearn discusses the points of dispute that Cavell raises against Derrida as well as Cavell’s general understanding of poststructuralism. Cavell’s criticism of Derrida as a sceptic and his reservations about poststructuralism derive partly from the way that
But this struggle itself is at the heart of aesthetic experience, realising and transforming where I stand. Without this there will be only a uniformity of thinking. The urge for conversation, and the frustration in finding my own words, disturbs conformism and escapes ideological ways of thinking. And this answers to the ethical political engagement to which I turn now.

_Aesthetic Judgement_

The fact that it does not look for a definitive answer, as seen, makes knowing by feeing all the more important in making room for new thoughts and individual voices. Cavell leads us further with regard to the nature of aesthetic judgement. ‘[A]esthetic (and moral and political) judgment lacks something’, Cavell writes: ‘the arguments that support them are not conclusive the way arguments in logic are, nor rational the way arguments in science are. […] It does not follow, however, that such judgements are not conclusive and rational’ (Cavell, 2015a, p. 82). That aesthetic judgements are not supported by definitive or incontrovertible argument is necessary for those judgements to have the quality or character that they do and for art (or art appreciation) to be what it is. This is ‘the kind of rationality it has, and needs’ (p. 80). There are no pre-set rules to blindly follow. Nor does it reach for a final agreement in the way a formula in maths does. What is important is being sensitive to differences and guiding one another to see different aspects and possibilities. And, Cavell suggests, this characteristic of aesthetic judgement informs us as a model of ethical and political judgement. To appreciate works of art ultimately depends upon how I feel, and this response cannot be forced on me by someone else. Art appreciation can be and perhaps should be guided to some extent, but in the end I need to make my own judgement. I am, in reading a poem, singularised in response to it. I pay attention to what matters, test my sensibilities, and think about ‘what my response is’, and this is precisely what is important in a democracy. It urges me to view the world and what is happening around me more attentively. In this sense art provides a focus for the development of political sensibility, and similarly, of ethical responsibility. What is opened up is a place for imagination that escapes pre-established positions, where people try to express and respond with their own words. And this prepares us for a political decision. My

‘deconstruction’ was adopted and celebrated in America, where it was often taken as a method, particularly in literary criticism.
response must matter, or aesthetic appreciation is void; my response must matter, or democracy is empty.

The exercise of judgement does not happen in isolation. It cannot be something purely subjective (simply a matter of different personal taste), no more than it is a definitive answer. The judgement presupposes a shared experience, values and purposes – that is, against the background of something we already have. And the absence of completion of knowledge and agreement makes the conversation continue, makes the work of art alive. Paul Standish writes in response to Cavell’s essay on music, ‘there is nothing beyond each case of judging (improvisation, performance), other than other cases of judging and the way these inform one another, the precedents, and the comparisons they afford’ (Standish, 2015, p. 304). Meaning is not simply there to be discovered but to be created in these dynamics, where it can be also shared and sustained. Similarly, a teacher’s bringing something to the class does not completely depend on her personal taste. She should be able to bring something of value of her community and for the sake of the future community. Her judgement should be discussed and tested, contested, attested against that of other teachers and communities. And chances for this should not be blocked.

To further discuss what is at issue at this community level, I now return to Derrida.

Il faut partager

How do we share meanings and how can they be passed on between generations without succumbing to conservatism? Let us return to Derrida’s discussion on Celan’s poem.

…the poem speaks beyond knowledge. It writes, and what it writes is, above all, precisely this: that it is addressed and destined beyond knowledge, inscribing dates and signatures that one may encounter, in order to bless them, without knowing everything of what they date or sign. Blessing beyond knowledge, commemorating through forgetting or the unimparted secret, partaking, still, in the unpartakeable (Derrida, 2005f, p. 34).

The poem, bearing the dates and memories, is addressed and destined beyond knowledge. It is so without knowing everything about those whom it will reach,
without knowing what more it can speak of. It remembers the secrecy of singularity, which cannot be shared without loss: it partakes in the unpartakeable.

But what is it ‘to partake’? Derrida notes us that he employs the French term partager (to share, to partake, to partition) in the way it is used by Jean-Luc Nancy.108 Derrida explains that partager, on the one hand, has a sense of demarcation and caesura, and on the other, participation – ‘that which is divided because it is shared or held in common, imparted and partaken of’ (p. 31). A borderline for example divides territories but at the same time is shared by both parties. Such things as dates, memories or poems can separate us in this way too. They bring people together for a shared experience, but what is shared will not be the same. I will never fully understand what Celan experienced and the meaning of his words. I cannot fully grasp what each poem bears and bears witness to. Its singularity in this sense is a passcode, it imposes a barrier for my understanding – that is, a shibboleth.109 But that is exactly where I am called to partake in what the poem says, to share the incommensurable meaning by way of acknowledging the impossibility of dissolving that barrier. It is necessary for me to partake (Il faut partager). It might be important even just to be a part of something, which we all already are in relation to language. Language par excellence is what we come under together, it is the trade-wind, Celan says, that affects us all, but it is also what separates us; we cannot fully grasp what the others mean, but it is language that makes us closer to one another. It parts and divides, but also brings together. Meaning is created there with this rift: the source for misunderstanding is the condition for sharing. Nancy writes: ‘There is no meaning if meaning is not shared’ (Nancy, 2000, p. 2). Sharing is internal to the idea of meaning and thus internal to knowledge. There is no knowledge if knowledge is not shared. Knowing something presupposes being part of a community, in which participation is continually renewed, without expecting to see the end. Education can do justice to this by taking part in the

108 Jean-Luc Nancy uses this term in Le partage des voix (1982) to mean both ‘sharing’ and ‘dividing’. Nancy, in Being Singular Plural writes that ‘There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, […] because meaning is itself the sharing of Being (Nancy, 2000, p. 2). Meaning is possible only by being shared by people, which is the sharing of Being by people in Heideggerian terms. In this sense, human being is always singular and plural – always being with others. For Derrida, having a sign itself means that it is shared and is available to share as it is implied in the very structure of iterability.

109 Shibboleth means a password which recognises who can be included and also excludes the enemy. This was used to distinguish Ephraimites by Gileadites. Ephraimites could not pronounce ‘shi’ and said ‘si instead. Who could not pronounce properly not only was not allowed to cross the River Jordan to back to their home territory but was killed. This implies something that one knows but cannot pronounce. The borderline is there. In this sense, as Derrida writes, ‘[t]he date (signature, moment, place, gathering of singular marks) always operates as a shibboleth’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 33). Sharing the sense of a particular date’s significance is ‘a partaking of shibboleth’ (ibid.).
creation of meanings and responses, by providing and preserving space for them. By leaving room for inexhaustible meaning, we share them without exhausting the language of the other. This is how the poem speaks to us and directs us beyond the rigid understanding of knowledge, and how it reshapes our understanding of ethical political responsibility.

To conclude this section, let us revisit the phrase ‘learning by heart’. Derrida points out a second aspect of it which is equally important for himself but perhaps less so for Heidegger. Having started with Heidegger, we found ourselves enjoined to respect the secrecy of poetry. But we have moved on to see that what is at issue is also the necessity of conversation and the sharing of meanings. Derrida’s emphasis is on the fact that the poem cannot be kept in pure secrecy, in a pure interiority. A poem must be exposed in order to reach its readers – that is, we might say, a necessary ‘exteriority’ of the poem.¹¹⁰ The poem wishes to be learnt by heart to save its singularity. But, for it to be saved, it must be open to further readings and interpretations. It must be kept in the space of conversation. And learning by heart itself cannot be some pure interior experience: for a poem to be learned by heart, it must go through the same structures of repetition, remembrance – the inevitable loss and contamination. So we face ‘a double bind’ of imperatives here: ‘I must and I must not take the other into myself’ (Derrida, 1995a, p. 321). We are reminded of mourning: we carry the other in our hearts but must not take this as a kind of incorporation or interiorisation. Something we cannot keep and save without loss calls for this necessary incompleteness and continual engagement. We cannot but fail, and, what is more, we should fail in fully grasping this alterity. We learn to embrace the fact that something always remains other via this failure, via renewing our responses to such failures. Taking part in this impossibility keeps the poem alive. And this is a struggle that cannot be found in Heidegger, found, for example, in the way he attends to foreign

¹¹⁰ In ‘Che cos’è la poesia?’, the solitude and vulnerability of a poem is juxtaposed with that of animal – hérrison, hedgehog. It, in crossing the road, rolls itself up into a ball at attempt to save itself from the threatening forces, but in so doing, it exposes itself to the danger. The poem wished to be learned by heart to save its singularity, but it should be exposed to other readers to be kept saved and alive. The danger impending to hedgehog (or a poem) reminds us the inevitability of loss in translation (Chapter 3) – the exposure to the accidents in crossing between languages. With this figure of hedgehog, Derrida illustrates the earthly characteristic of the poetic which he terms ‘poematic’: ‘the humility of the poematic hedgehog: low, very low, close to the earth, humble (humilis)’ (Derrida, 1995b, p. 309). The term ‘poematic’ attempts to differentiate himself from Heidegger’s Dichtung and poiesis as ‘setting-forth-of-truth-in-the-work’ (Derrida, 1995a, p. 297). Poematic is the down-to-earthness of hérrisson by which Derrida moves the focus from the secrecy in Heidegger’s account to the necessity of the exposure of the poem. There is, as Yue Zhuo puts it, a ‘shift to the exterior’ (Zhuo, 2018, p. 139). If we follow Derrida, Heidegger’s poetics can be another force that puts the poem into a danger by keeping it in a pure interiority (Derrida, 1995b, p. 303). In ‘Istrice 2: Ick bünn all hier’, Derrida more explicitly confronts Heidegger’s accounts of Dichtung (Derrida, 1995b).
cultures and languages, as we have already seen in Chapter 3. In the conversation with the ‘Japanese’, the ‘Inquirer’ attends reverentially as the ‘Japanese’ explains the difficulty for Westerners to understand Japanese thought, as represented by such ideas as *Koto ba* and *Iki*. But the voice is curiously ventriloquised: in presenting the dialogue, Heidegger is surreptitiously indicating that there is at least one Westerner who has understood. What is absent is the struggle that is inevitably there if one genuinely confronts the language of the other, the expression of alterity.

**A Response to Singularity: The Arts and the Humanities**

The poem of Celan calls for sensitivity to the poetic aspects of language – that is, to the productive and performative – and to language’s interwoven relation to history and memory. This suggests that the problems that arose in reading this extraordinary poem, ‘*Todesfuge*’, in fact extend farther into curriculum matters, into history and the humanities in general – the humanities, that is, broadly understood, as including such subjects as literature, history, philosophy, and art. What is at stake is knowledge of the singular, which gives rise to, is realised in, singular experience.

We do not experience the general phenomenon but the particular and the singular. I experience a poem in the singular, not poetry in general. What is at issue is my own response to the poem, to the specificity that I encounter here and now. The language of the general and the universal strips off this specificity, that of relations and backgrounds. Yet, the poet can seem to be generalising. Many poems indeed speak of love, friendship, death – wanting to touch general features of human experience and human feeling. To take a specific example, Philip Larkin, in his poem called ‘Water’,¹¹¹ seems to be talking about religions in general, as opposed to the specific and singular. He is suggesting ways in which his imagined religion might generally be practised. Yet, what is of more importance is that his poem is realised in specific words, in its particular configuration of sounds and meanings. One cannot paraphrase or explain his poem as some general theory (‘Larkin has proposed a religion that comprises. . .’). It will be a misunderstanding of what he is doing, which is leading the reader through a surprising train of thought, a surprising sequence of words, which are

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¹¹¹ The poem reads: If I were called in/ To construct a religion/ I should make use of water.// Going to church/ Would entail a fording/ To dry, different clothes.;// My liturgy would employ/ Images of sousing,/ A furious devout drench.;// And I should raise in the east/ A glass of water/ Where any-angled light/ Would congregate endlessly.
there now as we read or hear them. What his words deliver is a kind of sentient which
does not have its place in a theory or in systematic knowledge. And it is, in the end, to
this singular poem, that the reader should be brought and should attend to and make
her own judgement.

The historian does generalise: a historian might begin by saying ‘The 17th
century in Europe was a century of religious wars’. This general statement comprises
the study of complex and multifarious events. But, this statement, eventually, would
be a lead into the examination of particular events, across which further generalisation
might be made, but it would depend upon attention to those events in their singularity.
A historian might want to reach this generality, but it cannot be something like the
discovery of a law of natural phenomena or of a compound of water. Whatever
principles or patterns may be observed, these are but means better to understand
particular events; they are always non-reducible. The historian, in speaking broadly
and generally, may be understood as gathering a diversity. The chemist, by contrast,
in describing the properties of water, will be identifying the essential qualities of water.
Moreover, what history deals with is human meaning-making practices; it studies
things that human beings do, their actions as manifested in particular events. Those
events cannot be made sense of without reference to human intention and self-
understanding. Human beings, as the object of studies, different from stones or
chemicals, speak to you, speak back to you; they have their own language through
which they themselves make sense of what they do. The meanings that arise there
cannot be exhausted by the specialised vocabularies that scientists or even historians
bring to them. There comes a point, again, when it calls for one’s judgement.

In both poetry and history there is a role for judgement; such subjects address
themselves to you. And in both cases, this is judgement without a definitive rule or
answer – obviously so in poetry and to a considerable extent in history. One might
begin with a frame-work to analyse, say, the cause and effect of a war, yet, this will
not be sufficient to understand a particular war. Moreover, although I do not deny the
need for such analysis in some contexts, understanding the war only by the language
of the general and universal will strip it of its context and background so as to become

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112 The vocabularies of geologists or chemists, for instance, look at what are relatively fixed entities: the objects
of their study do not produce their own meanings; rocks can be classified without their own perspective being
accounted for. By contrast, the interpretation of human practices involves not just the application of a vocabulary
of the discipline in question but the encounter with the language of fellow human beings, beings who speak for
themselves. This owes to the insight of Peter Winch (1970).
no longer a matter in the face of which we are singularised to respond. Such a subject not only cannot be fully generalised but also must be open to continued engagement and judgement. What is at stake is a particular attitude, willing engagement with things, a way of giving an attention. The absence of judgement, as if history were a matter of the description of physical processes, will amount to irresponsibility, just as closing off the poem will be.

Yet, it is worth attending to their differences. In studying history, it is perhaps not in the same way that I am called for to respond in reading a poem. In the reading of a poem, there is something about the reader’s primary affective response; of course this can be refined or become better informed, but, there is still something about the response that is primary. In history there is so much to be learned, and I may need to follow my teacher quite a long way as she tells me things and explains things to me. For example, my teacher tells me that there was a war in Korea from 1950-53, and then she explains what the war was about and who was involved in it. Then maybe in a later lesson she talks about the way that really it was not just war between the north and the south but was a war by proxy, where the north was funded by communist countries and where Americans directly intervened by fighting for the south. In explaining this she has made lots of generalisations (How else could I learn about it?), and each of these probably needs questioning in some degree. It requires the exercise of judgement, especially as further evidence and further accounts are uncovered. So my judgement emerges much more slowly, riding on the back of other judgements, and, if all goes well, progressively coming to see limitations in the accounts or complications that I was not aware of before. So I am becoming a bit of a historian.

Yet, importantly in these explanations, as was the case in the reading a poem, my own response needs to be part of what the teacher is dealing with. A good history teacher will be concerned about what the class reacts to, and this will be so also in philosophy or religious education classes, although this might be less central in the process as it is in the case of aesthetic judgement.

It is appropriate to pay attention to curriculum matters that cannot be fixed or so readily generalised, to matters that cannot or should not be appropriated or exploited. Teachers’ responsibility lies in a continual engagement with their subject-matter, in a manner that leaves them never free of responsibility. As teachers and educators, they are consequently condemned to exploit to some extent those things they study. Sometimes a subject can be chosen to direct students’ attention and kindle their interest:
controversial and sensational images (e.g. atrocities) often serve that purpose. Whatever the teacher’s approach, there is an inevitable framing, where what is being studied goes through a kind of loss and an arresting of its movement. Things can be used and consumed by teachers, sometimes in the enthusiasm of their very endeavour. What is at issue in particular is the kind of responsibility and difficulty that teachers in the humanities undergo, which is very different from that experienced by, for example, teachers of physics or of more or less technical subjects.113 But it is precisely in such struggles that the teacher exposes herself to and learns to respond to what is uncontrollable. I am inclined to go so far as to suggest that some knowledge can be addressed and approached only in this poetic manner, with the acknowledgement of what cannot be held in one’s grip. And if this is right, it means that our understanding of the knowledge we are dealing with needs to be reconceptualised.

I have attempted to make some gestures towards describing the kind of bearing that the teaching of two poems might have on the importance of the humanities. This is indicative of the pervasiveness of responsibility in an ordinary classroom. Where knowing itself is reified, the space for the acknowledgement of alterity (for teaching and learning content that is inherently characterised by an alterity) is curtailed, for such content cannot realistically be quantified, measured, and tested in a formalised way. (This is not to say that assessment is impossible, for there are other less formalised ways in which this can be done. And assessment of a kind is in any case internal to the response and exchange of conversation so central to the arts and humanities.) Things that do not come with a clear result are regarded as inappropriate for the curriculum and are set aside, which relates to the general devaluation of the humanities.114 The illusion is to think there must be some fool-proof test when there is not. That is not how our world is given substance. Neither is it how our relation to our world is, nor how art is. For some things that are studied, knowing explanatory terms or being able

113 What sciences and technical subjects teach is mostly at a level of abstraction from experience in some way or other. Yet, all knowledge and even natural sciences come along with human language, so they too to some extent has this dimension. A good science teacher knows that science is not the whole story. But their experience and main difficulties would be different from teachers in humanities as their purpose is not in studying the connection between dates, memory and singularity. They for example do not deal with proper nouns.

114 Devaluation of humanities is not unrelated to a political conservatism which avoids and fears to talk about the foreign, the outside, the strangers. Contents are often depoliticised only for highly political reasons. Andy Pearce (2019), for example, in ‘An Emerging “Holocaust Memorial Problem?” The Condition of Holocaust Culture in Britain’, discusses the concern on an emerging political agenda to tie the Holocaust history and memory to ‘British values’. Arthur Chapman (2019) discusses the change of grammar and contents in history textbooks in ways that leave less space for interpretation.
to name facts and categories may mean very little, even nothing. And this is partly why those objects of study are worthy of attention and are of value.115

**Getting the Grain: The Teaching of Two Poems Reconsidered**

The problems that arise in teaching the two poems we considered are not, of course, identical. Celan surely addresses extremity of experience, entwined more directly with massive historical upheaval; Heaney addresses a more or less ordinary domestic situation, where ordinariness itself requires further discussion. But what I have attempted to show is not that we need extra vigilance when teaching something like ‘Todesfuge’, but that if we are to do justice to ‘Todesfuge’, this will sensitise us also to a wider problematics of knowledge in the practice of education. Ethical and political responsibility extend into the ordinary classroom where the poem is read. And this lays way for further questioning of the conditions of learning and teaching as a whole. Rather than reading as if there were an essential meaning, as if we were concerned with the purely cognitive process of a disembodied mind acquiring knowledge, we need to attend to what comes before and goes beyond knowledge narrowly understood. Study-guides to literature and some anthologies themselves are like processed food, where the raw material of the food (the poem itself) has been changed almost into a different form, as if for the refinement of the knowledge therein, but with much of the nourishment taken away. The space for what cannot be easily grasped is schooled out partly through the requirements of competence and the pursuit of a certain form of knowledge. Without acknowledging what cannot be fully known, we accede to an idea of knowledge that ‘would be the suppression of the other by the grasp’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 302). This is the grasp Celan wanted to escape from, and the grasp education itself should be released from.

To teach poetry in this light also means to listen to what the poems teach us, what they say. We are addressed, and the response must be sensitive to the language in its singularity, a singularity that refuses to be translated and understood without remainder. What an experience of the poem points towards is the experience of alterity

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115 Michalinos Zembylas, for example, in ‘Pedagogies of Hauntology in History Education’, discusses how ‘the dominance of a fact-laden mode of attentiveness reduces the past to its temporal dimensions and thus makes the ghost out of our time’ (Zembylas, 2013, p. 77). With reference to Derrida’s term ‘hauntology’, he discusses the way the deads are reduced to spectacles in visual culture, and argues that this serves ‘to fuel the legitimation of ideological projects – for example, ideological projects that promote certain practices of remembering or forgetting, justice and (re)conciliation’ (Zembylas, 2013, p. 78).
itself. Teachers must give students some time and space for thinking so that they can be exposed to how the work of art affects them. Teachers and students come in touch with the same art-works, which may touch them similarly or differently, but where they may share some understanding. The teacher can suggest things to attend to, and these may sometimes be even disruptive, provocative, confusing. She will sometimes hold her students back from a quick judgement and lead them away from overly tidy arguments and detached forms of analysis. Students may be forced outside of themselves, out of their normal expectations and comfortable dispositions – that is, they may be displaced, which is partly what art is for. Sometimes a teacher and students will need to learn together to be silenced by what is before them, particularly when quick responses cannot do justice to what they are studying. Sometimes they must stop analysing or interpreting at all. But often they will continue to respond responsibly. This is an education for the teacher who will learn to risk her own thoughts, to be critical of the ground she stands on, who will sometimes stay quiet and leave some space for judgement to those she is teaching. This is suggestive of practicalities of teaching and possibilities of learning and understanding that are not restricted to systematic technical reason.

The problems presented by way of teaching poetry can be illustrative of wider curricular and pedagogical challenges, especially where there are dangers of exploiting or sensationalising the material. There is a kind of repression in dominant conceptions of knowing and thinking, and in the insulation from experience that this effects, that needs to be exposed. Ways of learning to which we are accustomed can work as an inoculation against anything that we might be disturbed by. What is at stake in reading the poems is not so much the seeking of essential meanings as a turning of attention to what cannot be fully grasped or contained, for at some point this is what education must be based upon and oriented towards. I imagine that many teachers, despite the strictures of their circumstances, do struggle to open spaces for the experience of alterity. Such teachers attend to the possibilities of seeing something in works of art, feeling something in them, and listening to what they say. Similar possibilities are there in the humanities, as they are also, differently again, in science. The teachers find space for conversation where students challenge what is received and are challenged by what is to come. Such teachers bring a representation and turn it into an invitation, opening it to ambiguity and uncertainty in ways that enrich all the more the conversation. The conversation builds upon the past but welcomes the future, just as
poetry does in its most fundamental aspect. Celan’s poems are desperate, bleak in the extreme, but to write at all is already affirmation of a kind. I, as a teacher, am also called upon to act. And sometimes this leaves me with a sense of frustration or even shame. Such feelings teach me to take my own part responsively, and to unlearn the denial that has been continually instilled, in society and in school.

116 I am thinking of two occasions here: one is a verse from a poem by a Korean poet Dongju Yun, and the other is what Primo Levi writes in *The Drowned and the Saved*. Yun writes: ‘when people say life is hard to live/ that a poem is written so easily/ is a shameful thing’ (*A Poem Written Easily*, my translation). He himself was a university student in Kyoto, Japan, during the time of Japanese colonisation, certainly a privileged position. He died young in the prison in Japan, a few months before liberation. Perhaps that verse is partly about his frustration about that and his not being actively engaged with the independence movement as some of his friends were. When there are people who struggle and suffer, the poet feels ashamed of writing a poem. Levi writes about the shame as a survivor, ‘the privilege of surviving’: ‘The wort survived that is, the fittest, the best all died’ (p. 63). The shame is about having failed to resist, having been stealing bread from others, taking advantage of the weaker – precisely the condition for surviving, ‘although one knows, rationally, there is not much to be ashamed of’ (p. 58). Coming to share the history and the time of the other is accompanied by a sharing of this shame and not simply escaping it by not seeing, not knowing, not being touched. This is something for which we feel responsibility beyond the imposed legal terms, where the understanding of our relation to the other is confined in effect to the terms of a social contract.
CHAPTER 7

Wandering Words, Words in Faith: Speak You Too

Speak you too,
Speak as the last,
Say out your say.

Speak —
But don’t split off No from Yes.
Give your say this meaning too:
give it the shadow.

Give it shadow enough,
give it as much
as you see spread round you from
midnight to midday and midnight.

— Celan, Speak You Too.

The Tension: Where Are We Now?

In this thesis, I have moved far along a path, from the encyclopaedic way of thinking that presents itself as control to an attempt to do justice to what cannot be simply fixed, defined, secured in concepts – moved, that is, towards a consideration of the alterity of the other, of a difference that cannot be absorbed. In so doing, I have explored the interrelations among language, world, and human subjectivity, which accordingly have helped in the reconceptualisation of knowledge.

But what is a path? The path I have followed is not a straight path, and Heidegger himself would not have been looking for that, but his thought is on the way, on path through the Black Forest, and sometimes with a sense of destining. But the path I have taken is not even a meandering path. Rather there have been different starting-points, a number of different paths. It has been necessary almost to start again, or at least to release myself from the hold of some of those stronger, well-marked paths that have been trodden and worn by scholars and aficionados. As I said in the introduction, I have in fact tried out a number of different paths, opening different kinds of depth and connection. I have been compelled – can I say this? – to ‘travel over
a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction”. In a way the chapters might be seen as pictures of landscapes, from different angles, highlighting different aspects.

Now, in this conclusion, I trace back, first, and pick up some threads of thoughts in order to see how each chapter has contributed along its path, the paths crossing one another from various directions, and to see how such philosophical concerns are pervasive in teaching. Second, I seek to imagine a certain orientation in which we can be directed towards the outside, welcoming what comes from and with the other, where the other is seen as the condition upon which not only teaching and learning but also any ethical political response must be dependent. The profession of teaching will be seen as inseparable from what one projects and produces – with, that is, one’s words, action, or work (oeuvre), as a way of realising something in the world and of critical affirmation of what one inherits and comes into. Third, I explore ways of affirmation particularly by comparing Derrida and Deleuze. They are to be seen as at the intersection of two different strands of thought in poststructuralist philosophy. I explore their difference and closeness without attempting to synthesise. My final thoughts on language conclude with Celan, who guides us to see responsibility as inherent in what we say – the words in relation to which, in faith, we can place ourselves.

Being released from the encyclopaedic impulse, we have been exploring the nature of language, as productive and as unsaturated. Chapter 1 illustrated the need and the possibilities for resistance to the rigid and consolidated, bureaucratic capitalistic discourse that is the field of education and the conception of knowledge produced in its service. We saw, in Chapter 2, how Heidegger provided the groundwork for an alternative understanding of language and thinking. His challenge to subject/object, passive/active dichotomies illustrates the dynamic relationship between language and thinking, where reason itself is understood within that dynamism rather than as a separate capacity. The idea of Gelassenheit highlighted ways of thinking that are responsive and receptive to what comes from outside – that is, by way of listening to what language says. This revealed possibilities for more responsible ways of thinking, in ways that manifest care for others and the world. Yet, for the purpose of the journey, the journeyings, set out in this thesis, another leap was needed with and from Heidegger. Although Heidegger’s thought can be a guide

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117 See Introduction, p. 19, n. 6, for the reference to Wittgenstein.
towards recognising and acknowledging things that cannot be fully grasped, his account of language is blind to the fact that any language comes with the face of the other: what we fundamentally do with and in language is to address and – prior to that, developmentally, logically! – to be addressed by the other. The limitation in his thought was exposed by his juxtaposition against other thinkers, exposed particularly by Celan in Chapter 3, and examined further by Levinas in Chapter 4. Levinas challenges our understanding of human subjectivity and effects another inversive turn from the ground Heidegger purports to provide: the self is constituted by being singled out by the call of the other, called to response, the very structure of responsibility. This provided an entrée into a continuity of discussion, in the following chapters, with Celan, Derrida, and Lyotard. Our heterogeneity – our not being self-contained autonomous beings but being always already in relation to the other – was explored by looking at concepts such as translation, mourning, and the immemorial. In the course of doing so, the binding of language to negativity was seen as the condition of such fundamental human experiences. From this, we were led to realise the urgency of reconceptualising knowledge in a way that adheres to alterity (far from tree-like encyclopaedic knowledge), and this was discussed in Chapter 6.

The journey I made cannot be conceived as one of dialectical progress. Neither have I arrived at a definitive answer. Rather, there remain unresolvable tensions. As soon as I started a journey towards the outside, I was continually brought back to myself – that is, to understand the self differently, to be touched and transformed. It was to know myself better by way of the other. Yet, this is not in order to better myself, by taking and absorbing the other. That would be solipsistic, a kind of consumption. Neither is it to find my ‘real’ self: that would amount to narcissism. Both, as Derrida often puts it, are the phantasms of a sovereign self. Rather, my being constantly brought back leads to a questioning of myself – questioning my freedom and my comfort – such that I am put at risk by the other and open to the (in-)coming of the other (l’invention de l’autre). We cannot remain unaffected and untransformed when we encounter the other, which gives the self a different understanding of itself, and the world.

Similarly, as I have attempted to move from the origin, from representation, from security, I have realised that the tension was not to be resolved once and for all. Our hankering for the secure foundation was understood in a broader sense, within the necessity of representation we cannot be free from. This was exemplified and
accentuated by the double desire of Celan: he wants to resist the grasping force of representation, yet, at the same time, he attempts to give words to the unspeakable. This was discussed with Lyotard and Derrida in Chapter 6, where works of art were seen as a possibility of bearing witness to such unspeakability. This was further explored by Derrida’s exploration of a poem: in longing for or reaching towards the other, the poem exposes itself to the danger of effacement. But in acceptance of the very risk, the poem is saved in its mobility, in relation with the other by being read. What I have been attempting is in a sense to seek language that does justice to what Celan was reaching for – that is, language hospitable to alterity, language that respects the resistance to totalising understanding. Art and humanities were seen as possibilities where we can reconceptualise what it means to know something that holds alterity. Our response to such subjects – for example, works of art – is to be characterised by poetic language where we are required not to exhaust the meaning but to leave it open. Such language conditions the practicality of social political lives. Hence aesthetic judgment comes to be seen as a good model of ethical political judgement. The experience of what is inexhaustible and ungraspable is already there in our everyday language, though it is accentuated in poetic language. Such unsaturated language – which resists the very idea of full meaning – is not a failure but an essential condition for any meaning, and thus it is a call for affirmation. The tension we find here has been familiarised in varied forms. If we recall but a few: a perfect translation is impossible but we must continue to translate, the pure gift is impossible but we still must give; unconditional hospitality is impossible but it should be there as an idea to orient and direct any conditional hospitality (the political decision – say, accepting the refugees – should consult the ethical orientation in this sense); for mourning to be successful it must not succeed; there will be no final agreement or consensus but that is the condition of our continuing to talk to one another without absorbing or consuming the other; and immemorial time requires us to remember that we cannot but forget. Paradoxically, when a decision seems to be impossible, with these seemingly contradictory imperatives, we are impelled even more to decide. And the impossibility is there to orient impishly\(^\text{118}\) those decisions, for us to be compromised by it.

\(^{118}\) Cavell plays on this word in his writings on Edgar Allan Poe in *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Cavell, 1988). This describes the way our own words escape our control and mischievously become something other than we intended them to be. There is something that frustrates the desire for security and safety: something goes wrong, even despite our best intentions. But it is precisely this impishness that becomes the condition of welcoming something new.
These aporetic problems are not just abstract philosophical thoughts disengaged from life. They weigh heavily in our lives and decisions, particularly in the quotidian lives of teachers. Let us list a few of them by drawing upon what has been discussed throughout the thesis. As teachers:

- We need to pass on the past, but at the same time we need to open it to the future. We bring the young into tradition – into existing values and cultures – in a way that will lead them to respect it, but we should let them be critical about what is given and even encourage them to challenge and change it.

- We frame everything: bringing something into the class is already a way of framing, the class is a frame. By choosing certain resources and by presenting them in a particular way, we reveal some aspects while hiding something else. We should enable students to question what is outside the frame, and to become aware of the frame itself.

- If we think of ethical relationship guided by the understanding of absolute otherness of the other, we should not define students by labels and categories. But we need such labels to recognise their difficulties and help them. We should then be wary of that recognising identities too easily, of equating identity with social or psychological categories because these can be also ways of limiting not only my understanding of her but her own understanding of herself.

- We are part of the institution or government, but we should be able to be critical of its policies and practices. It is partly because although schools are not (should not be) means for political manipulation, schools are already part of politics. The current protests of young people about climate change challenge us to think upon such boundaries.

- We are obliged to evaluate students in accordance with the policy and the system, but we also know that what is learned cannot be evaluated solely in such ways and is often not even that evident in the short term. The most important things, matters of value and judgement, cannot be completely quantified and put into data.

- Our responsibility to students deepens the more we answer to it. We are called to infinite responsibility and unconditional hospitality. But there comes a
moment where we also need some control in the classroom, a precondition for providing students with such hospitality. The classroom, which is not designed for one-to-one relationships, demands that, in each moment, the teacher negotiate the limits of hospitality. We need to respond to each student and at the same time consider the general condition for the whole.

The list could be developed on and on. Some of these have been touched in several places. For example, reading and appreciating works of art was suggested as a possible place where we engage with our irrecuperable past and contribute our own words and judgements. This opens ways for responsibility and the faith of teachers, but without any words proving definitive. None of the tensions listed above can be solved by systematic procedures. The rules and principles break down in many actual contexts, and problems arise in teaching are not simply generalisable. Such aporetic problems show the extent to which teachers’ problems are fundamentally philosophical, or rather how teaching itself is philosophical. One’s philosophical thinking is already called upon, already engaged, at such undecidable moments. Philosophy for teachers is not something to be contrasted with their acquisition of practical skills or, as it is often regarded, a luxury, while practicality itself cannot be equated with something mechanical or with algorithmic procedures. Questions regarding moral, epistemological and existential matters are at the heart of teaching: a teacher’s ‘philosophising’ and ‘teaching’ are not separable. Denying such questions is part of the symptom of disengagement, burying away the complexity, and this entails a detachment from the ethical and the political. The teacher embodies these tensions, aporias and conflicting imperatives, which present themselves with intensity in teaching. They belong to an economy, but they need to exceed it if they are to be what they are.

Against the anxiety of uncertainty, what education turns to are ways to control: rigid language, tick boxes, quantifying measurement, and evidence for quality control. Fully armed teachers with a set of competence and skills are needed for ‘professionalisation’.119 But what they learn at the same time is to deny what they already know. The anxiety over control simply fails to acknowledge what the teacher

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ordinarily knows and does; it discourages them in what they do. Teachers very often know whether a child understands something without having students formally tested, and they often know better than what the test results tell. What teachers know is built into the ordinary conversation taking place in the school. Managerial language does not acknowledge this as knowledge, and it actually goes against what teachers ordinarily do: it freezes their very conversation. This echoes what Lyotard called ‘performativity’, the whole focus of which is efficiency and effectiveness (Lyotard, 1984). Everything should be measurable, converted into numbers and data; and teachers’ performance is not an exception. Such a tendency removes immeasurable difference; difference is understood only in terms of the uniform line according to which everything is comparable. Education is reduced to ‘perpetual training’, as Deleuze and Guattari put it (Chapter 1), evaluated by use value and market value. And so is it for the profession of teaching. Yet, what teachers need is the space for the incalculable: to voice themselves and exercise their own judgements, to give reasons for what they say and do, to contest them against those of others, their colleagues included. It is by embracing the anxiety that is internal to teaching, and by acknowledging the complication as something that should not be simply muffled, that we see the importance of teachers’ thinking and judgement. This is what the teacher-proof curriculum denies. Teaching, by nature, cannot be programmed in advance, set out in a way that is fully under control. This is precisely why teachers cannot be replaced by AI. Imagine where people are so sure about what they do, or the institutions so confident with what they have, where judgements are made algorithmically, relying on systematic protocols and the procedures – without ever wanting more than the status quo. Then there will be neither decisions nor changes. Teachers who live with the tensions, by contrast, will always create rules that go beyond the existing rules. Bombarding them with rigid languages of performativity and accountability suffocates the space for such creation and judgement. Would it not, rather, be helpful to acknowledge the aporetic aspect in teaching, helpful in realising and articulating the practical work of the teacher? The profession of teaching should then be understood in different terms. This is what I turn to now.

Saying No to say Yes: Words in Faith
In ‘The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the “Humanities,” what could take place tomorrow),’ Derrida suggests a different way of understanding the profession of teaching, particularly by considering that of professors in universities (Derrida, 2008). Derrida finds a way to understand it in the term ‘to profess’: ‘to profess’, going beyond its religious connotation of professing faith, is to make a commitment, to declare something out loud, to put my words forward publicly. And it is on the strength of this that what he calls ‘the university without condition’ becomes possible. This is to name the university as a place where one can speak without any limits – that is, with the right of the university to unconditional freedom. Furthermore, Derrida places the humanities at the centre of this university because such ‘professing’ presents itself more pervasively there. In what follows, I attempt to explore the performative dimension of professing, which will turn out to be not only a right but also a responsibility, and its relation to the humanities.

The act of professing is not limited to verbal actions: it is ‘the right to do it performatively, that is, by producing events, for example, by writing, and by giving rise to singular oeuvres’ (p. 26). I mark ‘singular ouveres’ so that I can come back to it shortly. Let us for now attend to the word ‘performatively’. This ‘performative’ should be differentiated from what Lyotard called ‘performativity’, which we have just seen above. What Derrida is referring to is Austin’s performative speech acts, which we saw in the previous chapter in terms of ‘poetic performativity’: a poem is not simply propositional, it does something, it acts upon us with its words. According to Austin, performative speech concerns what we do with words, and this contrasts with constative speech whose function is to be found in such speech acts as describing, reporting, stating the fact. When Derrida says that one should be able to profess performatively, this is also to claim that one should be able to act publicly and according to what one believes. This action here is not something that contrasts with saying. By saying something, as we have already seen, we always project and produce something new in the world. Saying something is already doing something: you change the scene and the context; you direct people’s attention to the hidden aspect and realises the world in a different way. What Derrida points out is that to profess is

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120 This was originally written for the Presidential Lecture Series at Stanford University in 1999. Collections for example in Derrida and Education (Biesta and Egéa-Kuehne, 2001), Deconstructing Derrida (Peters and Trifonas, 2005) and Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader (Cohen, 2008) are partly in response to this paper in question. Also see ‘Disciplining the Profession: subjects subject to procedure’ (Standish, 2002).
already an action, an act of profession, an act of faith. And this performative dimension is pervasive in teaching, inherent in the very practice: even when we think we are dealing with only constative matters, these are never merely constative. We are actually doing something.

Then how does this relate to the humanities and to ‘singular oeuvres’? In the university the humanities above all are the context for this act of profession. As we have discussed in the previous chapter, the humanities concern human meaning-making processes, the content of which is always open and incomplete: the humanities require describing and interpreting human actions, where those actions and the meaning attached to them defy exhaustive or incontrovertible description. Their purpose is not in arriving at scientific certainty, which makes them the place where performative speech matters the most. Nothing can remain beyond question, including the concept of the humanities itself. Its own ground and histories should be all the more questioned – such as the problematics of the concept of ‘man’ or ‘truth’ it holds to. It is commitment to the re-elaboration of the concept of the humanities itself that will transform to the humanities of tomorrow. This task of questioning one’s heritage is nothing but ‘deconstruction’ in Derrida’s terms. The term ‘deconstruction’ is often misunderstood and equated with destroying everything that is given. But deconstruction begins with acknowledging the fact that one inevitably comes to a work or to an object of study against a background of traditions of experience and understanding; one’s understanding is interlaced with what one inherits, including one’s language. With this awareness, deconstruction encourages us to take up things of importance that one is introduced to and to question them: not to demolish but to improve them. It begins with a cautious and careful attention to what is given and, by displacing what is stabilised, it opens up room for re-creation and re-engagement.¹²¹ For example, to question the histories and conceptions of ‘man’ or ‘truth’ is to acknowledge how the conception has been changed and to better them by revealing the contingency of those conceptions and imagining them for tomorrow. This task of deconstruction presents itself in the humanities as a legitimate space. Such tasks must be taken up by first ‘beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and their own axioms’ (p. 26). We do not receive our heritage as given merely to repeat. It opens

¹²¹ It is in this vein that Derrida reads the canon: engaging with concepts such as reason, hospitality, forgiveness, friendship, all of which are important facets of the human cultures and traditions, particularly in Western philosophical traditions.
to my decision to select and re-affirm. Surely, I come out of certain traditions – of language, culture, and social values – but it is my responsibility to take them up as my own and to make them anew. This critical reception presupposes my responsibility in taking up what I am given: it is to “reject” it in order to find it again’ (Derrida, 2005f, p. 29). It is to say No in order to say Yes. What we do and experience in our conversations is not far from this: ‘do you mean this or that?’ ‘I didn’t mean it, what I mean is…’; or when you try to understand something together ‘do you think it means…? I think it means…’ There are all kinds of rejections to find meanings in talking to one another. It requires finding new words, and creating different meanings, which is part of the vitality of language. And this is the language that should be manifest in the humanities, and in universities as a whole.

By the term ‘Humanities’ (putting it in the upper-case), Derrida means various departments such as ‘literature, languages, non-discursive arts, law, philosophy, critique, and so forth’, implying that this can be even broader (Derrida, 2008, p. 29). So the reason that Derrida places the humanities at the centre of the university is not for them to be an enclosed sector or more highly placed than others. It is rather for them to take a leading part in extending practices of critical questioning to other departments, such as the sciences, vocational learning and, further, to the public. And the humanities do this by speaking out loud, by producing writing, and by producing ‘singular oeuvres’: the potential for a leading role is there. Oeuvres is associated with oeuvres d’art, but here this includes not only the fine arts but also all the symbolic cultural productions that define the disciplines belonging to the humanities (p. 38). If we recall the sentence I marked before, one professes ‘by producing events, for example by writing, and by giving rise to singular oeuvres’ (p. 26). So the work (oeuvre) itself, such as writing, is an event: it brings something new into the field. It changes how people think and perceive things, makes something happen to the thought and the ways we think – that is, ‘the event of thought’ (ibid.). It is an event in the sense that it transforms, affects and changes the current state. Derek Attridge suggests that:

The work as event, as, for instance, the writing of an essay or a book that calls for re-reading, that effects a change in its readers, and that opens new ground for other writers, is a singular work, a work that is unlike any other – not because it has a unique and unchanging substance but because it deploys the shared resources of thought and language to introduce the hitherto
unknown and unimaginable into the field of the known and imaginable (Attridge, 2014, p. 58).

This event, as Attridge writes, is inseparable from affirmation and performativity: ‘an event in thought happens because the new has been affirmed, and the process of affirming the new in an event is a performative one’ (p. 57). Such oeuvres call for re-reading, and re-visiting by making themselves as an event. And in that course, they not only transform the reader but also renew their own meanings. That is how affirmation becomes re-affirmation in creating something new. It is in connection with others, by being located in different relations, that they are to be repeated, re-found, and rediscovered. The relation itself produces something new. What I suggest further with this oeuvre, which is ‘singular’, is that it implies a sense of responsibility. It is singular also in the sense of it being singularised by what calls it forth. Such an oeuvre becomes what it is in its response to something, some situations or existing discourses, inside and outside the university; it does not arise as pure abstraction but in a relation to the particular. And this is precisely what makes it meaningful as an oeuvre, singularised by its responsibility, offering itself as a place for gathering – people and thought. This is how universities can be places to resist the power of the state, of economic dogma, culture or religion, and ‘all the powers that limit democracy to come’ (Derrida, 2008, p. 26).

The unconditional right now turns out as a responsibility – that is, the responsibility to bring something new, to give rise to an event that breaks the closed circle of economy and recover the flow of thoughts. Directing us further to this responsibility, Derrida writes:

To profess is to make a pledge while committing one’s responsibility. ‘To make profession of’ is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one’s word and believe this declaration. I insist on this performative value of the declaration that professes while promising (pp. 35-36).

To profess is to responsibly promise. One professes in wanting for the other to take one’s words seriously and to believe what one says. And this is already a promise declaring that I am saying something truly to you. I project myself into my words: ‘To profess is to pledge oneself while declaring oneself, while giving oneself out to be,
while promising this or that’ (p. 36). What I say is not simply an explanation, but to promise that something will happen. It is worth recalling Celan’s poetry. His poem touches us and calls us to act upon it but not by providing us with scientific evidence but rather by saying: ‘you must believe me’. This is the very characteristic of testimony, which Derrida discusses elsewhere (see, for example, Derrida, 2005d). Testimony is not about convincing you with the guarantee of evidence, or to provide certainty; if there is evidence that makes the case clear, you will not need testimony any more. In this sense, the possibility of perjury is what makes testimony possible. Teaching is certainly not reducible to the scientific conception of knowledge, or something that can be evaluated by evidence, data, numbers and spread-sheets. We do not always teach something testable in the way a science lab does, where it is in control of all the variables. Even when we deal with theoretical abstract matters, the act of teaching is always contextual. And this impossibility of complete control is what makes teaching as it should be. Denying this will block teachers from proferring in an act of faith, from producing their own words and works, and from projecting themselves towards the promise of the future. The point is not to gain more skills and competences, it is to have faith in one’s words and to be responsible for this. It is to encourage teachers to affirm the value in what they teach, to make a claim with their own voices. Rather than trying to squeeze all the uncontrollable into grids of expectation and measurable performance, why not embrace the necessary fluidity in teaching and acknowledge what we can do there? To believe the value of what we teach, to believe that we can teach? Then what matters is good faith, judgement and the space for open conversation. This is a risky job for teachers themselves as it demands them, in what they say and do, to be exposed and contested. It takes courage for them to doubt what seems to secure their position, not to follow what others do, to be even aversive to existing practices, to be critical of what the resources they are making use of, to refuse to speak in stock phrases, and to be challenged on their own assumptions and biases. It is to experiment, and to explore an untrodden path.122

Of course, philosophy has its place in, if not at the centre of, the humanities. To profess philosophy is, Derrida writes, ‘not simply to be a philosopher, to practice or teach philosophy in some pertinent fashion, but to pledge oneself, with a public

122 This echoes Emersonian thinking, which is discussed by Cavell as ‘aversive thinking’ (Cavell, 1991). To be aversive to existing norms creates the possibility for change. As illustrated by Cavell, to continually turn from one’s culture becomes a return to it, and this is not without change and transformation.
promise, to devote oneself publicly, to give oneself over to philosophy, to bear witness, or even to fight for it’ (Derrida, 2008, p. 36). In so doing, it addresses other disciplines, and it enjoins the public to take its questions seriously and to question themselves – their own grounds and histories too. This is how philosophy remains foreign to itself, how it becomes heterogenous, by placing itself in relation to others, by welcoming interruptions. Unconditional freedom does not come from achieving a ‘neutral utopia’: it is perhaps less a matter of achievement than of responsibility – responsibility, that is, for what will come and for the restless struggle underway. The structure of promising already presupposes the future. One promises how one will be and how things will be in the future, and this is to promise what one will do for that future to come. This is why we can speak of an unconditional university only in terms of ‘as if’ or ‘perhaps’, according to Derrida. It is by promising to realise something to happen by acting ‘as if’ we can achieve it, or ‘as if’ we already have achieved it, as a way of reaching the university of tomorrow. We are singularised to answer what calls for us ‘as if we have it’ – as if there are, or as if there ever will be, such places for unconditional freedom. We answer by orienting ourselves to such places.

There is a tendency to see the humanities as a useful addition to curriculum, even as a kind of decoration or embellishment: the humanities help people to be more sensitive in what they are doing, and the love of art is good for well-being – hence, they humanise the curriculum and our lives. Yet, the value of the humanities, following our discussion, is that it is knowledge domain in which we find ourselves in discomfort, where we are exposed to the burdens of thought, the weight of responsibility, the traces of our own past and guilt, and where we face up to the urgency of judgement and action. They provide the place where we can reject what is received or take it up as our own, perhaps refashion it as our own. Such spaces of reflection are easily removed in the neutral language of science (which can be found not only in science but also in the humanities). What we need is language that is sensitive to what escapes closed systems and rigidities of authority, and turns instead towards people and reality. Derrida is clearly placing the responsibility for the recovery of such language on the humanities. And to seek for such language is a kind of resistance: ‘One resists not only by critique but also by opening up new possibilities for thought, accepting that this is always a risky business since one cannot be sure of the value or virtue of what will emerge’
Making cracks in consolidated positions and unlocking language from its more impersonal forms can be as risky as it is powerful.

**Yes before Yes: the Orientation**

One might argue that such critical thinking (if I can use this term), this doubting and rejection of what is given, is not something very new, and can in any case be found in Heidegger’s thought. Surely in his investigation of Dasein, he explains that the achievement of authenticity is possible by way of resisting the anonymity and conformism of ‘Das Man’ (‘the they’), where one hides oneself in average everyday publicness. The authentic self can be achieved by continual renewal of the thought and speech that has become impoverished in the language of Das Man. Although there seems a resonance with what Derrida is saying, Derrida’s account is subtler in the way it illustrates how we acquire language as we come into our community with others in which, in turn, I find my own voice. And what is more important is that, for Derrida, the act of professing and promising is oriented towards something very much other than myself – other than Dasein. This section attempts to clarify this. To know where the orientation heads towards, ironically, we must return to what comes prior to the ‘rejection’. This is a Yes that comes prior to any Yes or No, or any performative act, a condition upon which all of them depend.

Derrida, in his interview with Nikhil Padgaonkar says that saying no is already saying yes: “the “yes” is not a word like others, that even if you do not pronounce the word, there is a “yes” implicit in every utterance; even if you multiply the “no”, there is a “yes”” (Derrida, 1997). So even when you say No, you are already saying Yes as the very condition for saying anything at all. And this primary sense of yes is the

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123 This is just like the stage of ‘pedagogy’, where, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the force of resistance resides (Chapter 1).
124 Hubert Dreyfus (1995) for example interprets Das Man as a structure of Dasein upon which authentic Dasein is grounded – that is how Dasein comes into the existing norms in the course of socialisation. I agree that Das Man is the structure of Dasein – the desire and possibility for the fall into anonymous conformism is always there, so authentic resoluteness is to be made up continually. But if we think of Heidegger’s accounts of language, which he focuses on more directly in his later works, the language of Das Man might be a more impoverished version of the language we acquire as we come into our community with others, closer to the language of technology. The productive nature of language is, however, there from the very beginning, and thus the potential to recover sterile thought exists even in the language of Das Man. Heidegger does not explore much about how we come into language and community, in ways that Derrida and Cavell do, partly because he speaks of children very little. In The Claim of Reason, for example, Cavell describes how his two-year-old daughter experiments and plays with words. This suggests that innovation and creativity are there from the start, not exactly as something inherent in the child but as a capacity to respond to the affordances of words (see, for example, Cavell, 1999, p. 172-173). We might think of this as their iterability and non-saturated quality.
welcoming of the other, to promise that that the other is already welcomed, is seen as
the other. Derrida:

When you address the Other, even if it is to oppose the Other, you make a
sort of promise – that is, to address the Other as Other, not to reduce the
otherness of the Other, and to take into account the singularity of the Other.
That’s an irreducible affirmation, it’s the original ethics if you want (ibid.).

To say a word, to say anything, to put anything into language already is based upon
something affirmative. Even when we say No to the other person, we are still
acknowledging the other as a person. The acknowledgement is already there that I am
speaking to you, I am addressing you, I affirm you as a person. In the same sense, even
to criticise, to negate or to deny something, one first needs to say Yes.125 This is the
Yes that matters more than any questions, ‘the one that resounds in the question so as
to always come before it’ (Derrida, 1988a, p. 123). This is a Yes that does not belong
to totality and comes before and accompanies any relations (p. 126).

This Yes, the condition for any words and action, is at the same time what
orients them. This Yes is nothing but the absolute other, the outside, the future that
orients oneself:

As soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as
soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting
for someone to come: that is the opening of experience. Someone is to come,
is now to come. Justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the
other, with the promise. Each time I open my mouth, I am promising
something. When I speak to you, I am telling you that I promise to tell you
something, to tell you the truth. Even if I lie, the condition of my lie is that I
promise to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among
others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise. This universal structure
of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact
that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – that is what I call
the messianic structure (Derrida, 1996, pp. 22-23).

125 So, for Derrida, this affirmative Yes is the very basis of deconstruction. One needs to affirm the value of
something to engage with it deconstructively.
While this passage enables us to see things that have been discussed so far in interrelated connection, it also brings us back to the sense of infinity, the structure of waiting we have seen with Levinas (Chapter 4). The structure of the promise itself is waiting – the waiting for the Messiah who is always yet to come. Each time I open my mouth, I promise something, I commit myself to something, and to someone. The fact that I address you is what conditions and orients the structure Derrida describes, a messianism without the Messiah. For Heidegger, to exist is to be open to the future as well. He is one of the first philosophers who attempts to explore human subjectivity not as self-enclosed interiority but as being always outside of oneself. As we have already seen, Dasein is always standing outside itself as ‘ek-sistence’ – that is, always in its becoming, projecting itself towards the future. Derrida in a sense re-formulates this: our existence is an opening to the other through which we are open to the future. But in our waiting for this other, the future is not something to be achieved. The arrival of the Messiah will be endlessly deferred. And this is how justice should be understood – that is, as always yet to come. Hence ‘democracy to come’. Derrida’s affirmation is affirmation of this limit as to what conditions and orients us.

This thought is consistent with his accounts of language. Iterability – repetition and alteration – breaches meaning and also broaches it (see also Chapter 6). There is always a possibility that what I say will be repeated, understood, and interpreted in a manner far from what I meant to say. I can never control this. Meaning is never secure. But it is saved by what threatens it. So, like the work of mourning (Chapter 5), one should never succeed in getting rid of such threats if one wants to succeed in saying anything. What matters is faith, a good faith. To have faith is to affirm this limit, to affirm this negativity we are bound to. It is by continual renewal of our words, by trying to say things again and differently that we affirm even the inevitability of contamination in saying something. Derrida says: ‘To create a work is to give a new body to language, to give language a body so that this truth of language may appear as such, may appear and disappear, may appear as an elliptic withdrawal’ (Derrida, 2005a, p. 106). By giving a work – an oeuvre – we are giving a chance for new language. But even when it happens, even when it appears, it may be only ‘as an elliptic withdrawal’, never fully present, never secure. And this limit of language is what saves the irreducible difference, the other as what is to-come.

Ways to Yes: At the Crossroads
Throughout the thesis, I have been drawing on philosophers who could be roughly placed under the title of poststructuralism. Paul Standish provides a helpful distinction. He suggests that it may be helpful to think in terms of poststructural philosophy as comprising two major strands of thought or lines of influence: one concerned with ‘alterity and negativity’ following Levinasian thought (Derrida and much of Lyotard, for example), and the other characterised by Nietzschean ‘affirmation’ (Deleuze and some of Foucault) (Standish, 2004). But, the question arises, are these strands in conflict? If so, Deleuze seems to be out of place in this thesis. And we just have discussed Derridean affirmation. How is this different from Nietzschean affirmation, when Derrida himself acknowledges a Nietzschean inheritance in his thought? In this section, I explore how these strands cross one another’s paths, particularly by attending to Derrida and Deleuze. I do not attempt to synthesise or reconcile them by putting them into one system. Without attempting to fully resolve the tension between them, it is worth exploring their differences while letting them resonate with each other. In so doing I draw on Gordon Bearn, with particular reference to his paper ‘Differentiating Derrida and Deleuze’, which will help us address the present task (Bearn, 2000a).

Let us first recall Derridean affirmation. If we follow Derrida, what conditions meaning is also what makes secure meaning impossible. Iterability conditions what we say but annuls it at the same time. There is no way to free us from this restlessness. Derrida’s affirmation, with his messianic structure, encourages us to continue to try to say what we want to say. The inevitability of failure does not mean that we must succumb to nihilism. We must live in a tacit promise towards the future. Bearn points out that it is precisely in this sense that Derrida cannot say true Yes: the very ground of Derrida is ‘an absence, a lack’ (p. 448). So what moves Derridean affirmation is ‘desire as a lack, a painful lack’, in the way that desire is commonly understood in European philosophy since Plato (p. 454). There is, then, a subtly encroaching sense of despair about the impossibility of authentic meaning. What is desired is the satisfaction of this lack, no matter how impossible it is – the desire is to say something

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126 Derrida and Deleuze both recognise and acknowledge the intimacy and closeness between them and often expressed gratitude for each other’s insights. For a further discussion on their relationship, see, for example, Bearn (2000a), Protevi (2003), and Cisney (2020).

127 Bearn here is referring to the Platonic conception of desire as lack. For example, in the Symposium, Socrates speaks of lack as a necessary condition for desire. The story that Aristophanes tells seems more fitting to Bearn’s description above. Aristophanes illustrates desire as a seeking for wholeness – the other half of oneself – where desire for the other can be satisfied once the lack is filled.
authentically. So Bearn says that there still is an object of desire, there still is ‘a point’, a sense of purposiveness. Desire, understood in this way, can be satisfied by filling the lack, achieving the purpose. But this achievement is not an answer for Derrida either, on account of the fact that ‘its end (goal) would be its end (death)’ (Derrida, 1988b, p. 129; Bearn, 2000a, p. 450). The satisfaction should be deferred endlessly, otherwise it will kill the desire itself, and any possibility of meaning. The lack not only breaches but also broaches meaning. Bearn says: ‘So desire too broaches and breaches linguistic action’ (Bearn, 2000a, p. 454). And having this lack at its heart, as something to overcome, Derrida’s Yes is, Bearn puts it, only a ‘double negation’ (ibid.). It is negating the negation: there is a limit you cannot ever achieve (No), and we still do something affirmative towards that limit while acknowledging that it will be never successful (No).\(^\text{128}\) It is by saying No and No that Derrida turns them into Yes. So according to Bearn, Derrida says No No, not being able to say true Yes.

Bearn then contrasts this Derridean affirmation to that of Deleuze. According to Bearn, Deleuze will agree with Derrida that there is an inevitable failure within representation, but Deleuze also suggests an alternative way, ‘which breaks on through (to the other side)’ (p. 441). Derrida is still within the frame of representation, and Deleuze, by contrast, gets away from the binary frame of representation and non-representation. Deleuzean desire does not aim for any object: it is ‘released from the ruination of having something I desire, something I want to say’ which was present in Derrida (p. 456). It is ‘pointless’ as Bearn puts it in a positive sense, free from any limits or confinement, not holding fast to any goals and purposes. It desires only for more desire. Thus, on the difference between Derrida and Deleuze, Bean concludes: ‘It is the difference between a philosophy trapped in the frame of representation and one which breaks on through (to the other side)’ (p. 441). And he provides some helpful images to illustrate Deleuzean desire. If we keep on looking at the patterns of wall-paper and move your eyes along with the patterns, there comes a moment when all the patterns, which seem the same, appear to be different, all in movements. The movement is created in the very repetition of wall-paper. Repetition, far from presenting a further danger of inauthenticity, in fact increases intensity and releases difference. It is rather an aesthetic experience, which, as Bearn puts it, is ‘like enjoying

\(^{128}\) This structure also applies to Lyotard. Bearn writes of this in ‘Pointlessness and the University of Beauty’ (Bearn, 2001, p. 240). We can recall Lyotard’s account of the immemorial and childhood discussed in Chapter 6. There is, as we saw, an acknowledgement of the impossibility of, and also the attempt to bear witness to, such limits. And both Derrida and Lyotard have been influenced by Nietzschean affirmation.
caress’: ‘It is almost as if we were allowing our minds to caress the indeterminate multiplicity of forms in the wallpaper’ (Bearn 2001, p. 244). It is through repetition we are drawn to the released differences between things that first appeared identical. This is not something far from our daily experiences, as Bearn suggests: it is in ‘taking the same drive, again and again, or reading the same poem, again and again, or caressing the patterns on the wall, the crease down your lover’s back, again and again’ (p. 245). The world appears never the same when we attend to it pointlessly – that is, with ‘a swarm of differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences’ (Deleuze, 2001, p. 50; Bearn, 2001, p. 242).

This ‘caress’, which is a sensible or even a sensual term, comes in more fully in his paper called ‘Staging Authenticity: A Critique of Cavell’s Modernism’. And I quote the passage in question at length:

The arts are crafts, and the craft of intensifying may be modeled on the caress. The caress aims at nothing, or everything. The hand is famous for its opposable thumb. It is a fine instrument, able to type, to drive, to perform the minute maneuverings required for cutting edge, key hole surgery. But if it is to caress, all of this must be left behind. The hand must be deprived of its glorious instrumentality. To caress is not to beat, nor to rub, nor to clutch, nor to hold, nor even to pet, as we pet a dog. The caressing fingers of the hand are made to dangle, like things, and these dangling things are turned around, for fingers caress not with the fingertips, their business side, but with their backs, their useless side. And these dangling things, turned backwards against their design, are dragged by their arm against the chest of your lover. The caress has no point, not because it has no purpose, not because it has many different purposes: neither one nor many, the caress swarms with innumerate intensities. The caress is pointless, in a positive sense. The caress is Yes. Every sensation counts. On the side of the fingertips while we are typing, only some of the world gets in. QWERTY. Typing, like all instrumental action, says No. No to what is not intended. But the caress says Yes to every sensation. In life, in art and in philosophy, beyond authenticity and inauthenticity, is intensity (Bearn, 2000b, p. 308-309).
Without aiming to arrive at any fixed point, caressing fingers are free from any sense of destination. It is always in the middle where ends and means are not separated. There is no need for disappointment, but only the need to sense everything while moving forward and forward. This is not about efficiency, nor about exactness. This is about finding a rhythm, of affirmation without negation. Bearn suggests it is rhythm in the dance of Nietzsche, or rhythm in the rhythm of Messiaen (Bearn, 2001, p. 251). Olivier Messiaen’s organ music deploys the vast resources of a large church organ, often with overwhelming sound – full to excess. His rhythm is not smooth or comfortable at all but off-balances the audience with its ‘irregularly changing rhythmic characters’ (p. 252). This is rhythmic in the way that is neither like military marches, which ‘divide time into equal units’, nor like even ‘syncopated rhythms’, which ‘feel off-beat only because of the regular repeated beat that we feel underneath the syncopation’ (p. 251). It is this Messiaenic rhythm that is able to keep the inhabitants of the Deleuzean university ‘off-balance, folding the multiplicities of their cares and interests together. At the limit, nothing would be kept separate from anything else’ (p. 253). That is the rhythm of, as Bearn titles it, the ‘University of Beauty’: ‘Messiaenic’ rather than ‘Messianic’. This is also the rhythm of the caress, its pointlessness which gets away from tensions, and worries of authenticity and inauthenticity, or the concern for utility and instrumentality. It is ‘pointless not because it has no point, but because it is involved in myriad points’ (p. 245). It is about enjoyment. This is the true Yes, Bearn says, that breaks through to the other side of representation, the Yes that Derrida can never say.129

It is worth visiting Deleuze’s own words:

However one sees it, we’re on the plane of immanence; should we go around erecting vertical axes and trying to stand up straight or, rather, stretch out, run out along the horizon, keep pushing the plane further out? And what sort of verticality do we want, one that gives us something to contemplate or one that makes us reflect or communicate? Or should we just get rid of all verticality as transcendent and lie down hugging the earth, without looking, without reflecting, cut off from communication? (Deleuze, 1995c, p. 148)

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129 This powerful image (breaking through to the other side of representation) evokes the idea of representation as a mirror, with two particular connotations. One would be Richard Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty, 1981), and the other, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* (Carroll, 1871).
We see this movement towards the earth – that is, towards lying down, and towards hugging the earth without the need for something other-worldly, something vertical, up there. This is the movement of a rhizome as opposed to the hankering after structures of arborescence, and it resembles the movement of a caress. Rhizomes do not grow by a central root, but by cloning, and spreading. They extend themselves to embrace the earth, the whole. This is the image that Deleuze and Guattari provide to oppose our accustomed way of tree-like thinking – found, for example, in family trees, in management trees, in the main and subsidiary branches of philosophy, and the tree of knowledge in the encyclopaedia, all of which presuppose and impose certain hierarchical relations. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write: ‘The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and, and, and,”’ This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be.” Where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you heading for? These are totally useless questions’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 25). So for Deleuze, as Bearn puts it, ‘To seek intensity is to seek infinity horizontally’ (Bearn, 2000b, p. 308). It is not about contemplation, reflection or communication as if we were thinking or speaking of something at a distance and disengagement, in a purely abstract rationalistic manner, disconnected from what conditions the thing in the first place. Such ways of thinking surreptitiously feed into a metaphysical hardening and freezing of movement.130 The Deleuzean moment is indeed there in teaching and learning, and it plays an important part: in studying a subject, learning a foreign language, reading a detective novel. Often we are grasped by what we learn and taken further, in unexpected directions. In learning, we experience something that does not simply end but rather intensifies the more we pursue it. The desire stretches itself, without aiming at a specific goal or evaluation, which is precisely what enables it to grow and intensify. It goes on and on, for it to be related and connected, through ‘and’ and ‘and’, to something other than itself. Nothing is opposed. This affirmation without negation is like a Möbius strip as Standish (2004) puts it, or a Klein bottle, with only one side and without ‘beyond’.

I am drawn so much by Bearn’s analysis, and yet I still want to try to get a little more clear about why Derrida chooses to work within representation, to be, in Bearn’s

130 This can be understood as opposed to the rational picture of communication, which cannot be ready for what is beyond one’s expectations. Gatekeeping of media can also be an example of communication as control. The discourse of ‘efficient or useful’ communication reduces it to the exchange of information. Deleuze says: ‘Creating has always been something different from communicating. The key thing may be to create vacuoles of non communication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175).
terms, ‘trapped in the frame of representation’ (Bearn 2000a, p. 441). And, if I can do this, it may well turn out that the distance between them is closer than it appears to be. Bearn is right about that Deleuzian affirmation cannot be found in Derrida. His philosophy is based on understanding language as bound to negativity. And this negativity that escapes full presence is nothing but alterity. Iterability – the alteration, or, say, contamination, that is inevitable in repetition – preserves the place for alterity. It is the ‘logic which ties repetition to alterity’ (Derrida, 1988c, p. 7). This indicates what Derrida inherits from Levinas, aligning him with the negative strand of poststructuralism. So the difference between Deleuze and Levinas seems clear enough, and yet, quite ironically, it is by turning to Levinas that I hope to bring Derridean desire closer to that of Deleuze. Bearing in mind that Deleuzean desire is characterised, by Bearn, as caress, I am drawn to another facet of the caress that is illustrated by Levinas.

The caress consists in seizing upon nothing, in soliciting what ceaselessly escapes its form toward a future never future enough, in soliciting what slips away as though it were not yet. It searches, it forages. It is not an intentionality of disclosure but of search: a movement unto the invisible. In a certain sense it expresses love, but suffers from an inability to tell it. It is hungry for this very expression, in an unremitting increase of hunger. It thus goes further than to its term, it aims beyond an existent however future, which, precisely as an existent, knocks already at the gates of being. The desire that animates it is reborn in its satisfaction, fed somehow by what is not yet, bringing us back to the virginity, forever inviolate, of the feminine (Levinas, 1969, p. 257-258).

The caress here is an illustration of desire for the other. I am always in the longing relationship for the other, as the other can never be appropriated. The other draws me towards it but at the same time recedes from my reach. The imagery of height and depth is present, certainly in contrast to Deleuze. It is the vertical and vertiginous nature of our unconditional obligation to the other that Levinas attempts to show to be the very basis for horizontal, contractual relationships. The other is not on the same plane. Hence, the longing is for something which is always beyond.

With the caress, I realise that there is interiority that I cannot see through or simply penetrate: our very separation. So there is certainly a sense of limit, or a lack
in Bearn’s terms. But I suggest that this is not a lack in the sense of longing for the satisfaction, as the case of hunger and thirst. That is how Levinas differentiates desire from ‘need’. Contrary to the requirement to satisfy bodily needs, such as to drink or eat, desire ‘does not proceed from a lack’ (p. 299). Desire is not of an order that could ever be satiated or completed. To the extent that there is a completion, desire is immediately and constantly reborn. But this should be understood rather paradoxically. It is not that one bit of desire is completed and then the next bit arises: rather the desire is reborn in an intensified way. His point is to illustrate the way that in a non-closed economy, nothing can be finally completed. Thus Levinas’ reference to ‘hunger’ in the above should be understood as on a par with biblical expressions referring to ‘spiritual hunger’. While ‘need’ is associated with ‘egoism’, which returns to itself, desire is of and for the other. ‘It is like goodness – the Desired does not fulfil it, but deepens it’ (p. 34). This desire is not about completing myself; it reminds me of the fact that I am broken open to the other. The caress comes with such acknowledgement, like an expression that does not impose itself on the other. The caress, in Levinas, is also characterised as ‘feminine’. Although Levinas scarcely can escape the charge that he is drawing upon an archetypical femininity, what he has in mind should not be understood as something solely physical or biological. It rather implies fertility: fecundity of thoughts, feelings and ideas. What is illustrated is the receptivity and hospitality that gives new growth, produces something new. Thinking itself, here, is found as welcoming and hospitable. So ‘the virginity, forever inviolate, of the feminine’ reads as paradoxical. The point is that what the caress caresses is always something new, like virgin territory; what the caress finds or touches is always found or touched as new.

Levinas’ account of desire (hence Derrida’s) proves itself as goodness that only deepens towards greater goodness, distancing itself from a conception of desire as lack, and closer to what Bearn endorses. The searching of the hands and fingers in a caress is pointless for Levinas as well, because it does not aim to complete something or to achieve something. I do not aim to grasp the other: it is not about seizing or possessing,

131 Luce Irigaray criticises Levinas with the charge of being unethical in the way he speaks of sexual difference. She argues that Levinas views fecundity as something paternal because Levinas connects this later to the relationship between father and son. Irigaray says that this then amounts only to the journey of the male figure who returns to himself, and as a result reduces woman to a mere medium for man to re-create himself. Yet she shares with Levinas thoughts on the potentiality of the caress, and therefore turns attention to the fecundity of the caress itself, rather than that of the son. This is something I cannot cover in this thesis, but, while taking the point of Irigaray, I think, for the present context, it is worth exploring Levinas’ account of the caress beyond the terms of sexual binaries. For her discussion of Levinas, see for example, Irigaray (1991, 1993).
let alone the fact that it does not harm or violate the other. Such a caress provokes us to think of what it means to touch another person’s skin, which is different from touching a table or a dog (not just different in sensation but different in sense, the sense of what it means to have this contact with another person), and what is touched in the caress will be touched anew each time. It involves responding, being receptive and responsive, and being attentive in a manner that is in some sense assiduous, where in the very touching we are also touched, which in itself is a wholly different sensation. Perhaps to caress is to see the face of the other, where goodness is produced in the very relationship with the other. Caressing for Levinas is a kind of physical incorporation or bodily realisation of a spiritual or intellectual process. This is not about intellectualising the body, but about sensualising and embodying the mind and spirit. The physicality of senses is, paradoxically, always more than the physicality.

Surely the difference between the two strands must not be obliterated. One desires an absolute other vertically, the other desires to intensify itself horizontally. The verticality in Levinas is still associated with something higher or something deep (that is, in an affirmation of the limit), while Deleuze’s thought is absorbed in this ongoing rhizomatic movement, not thinking (that is, affirmatively not even entertaining the negative thought) that we cannot cover the land (break free of the limit). For Deleuze, that is where it is at, and there will be no thinking that it should be somewhere else – for such would be fantasy, narcissistic nostalgia. But I think we now find them at a crossroads: neither of them is attempting to grasp and confine things and other people; both acknowledge what exceeds oneself. Neither holds fast to the self, nor to fixed identity. No longer am I the cause of everything, through my ascription of meaning to the world. They turn away from teleological concerns and from obsessions with origin and purity, all of which constrain our thinking and control it. To think is rather a matter of attending to what is around me, stopping myself of all these narcissistic worries I have, and instead getting absorbed in the world, finding myself in the middle of an experience, in relation to what is other than myself – which is precisely a source of self-creation and transformation. Being pulled by what is outside, I know myself better. Thinking happens in welcoming what exceeds myself – the irreducible difference, be it intensity or alterity. To stifle these dynamics with force exerted by univocal thinking, by rules, binaries and classifications, turns our thought

132 Deleuze’s rhizomic roots or aerial roots echo Cassin’s accounts of ‘air borne roots’ (Chapter 3) in the sense that they have neither origin nor destination.
sterile. And it is a kind of humility that stops us from being over-confident of such categories. To save the thinking and language in order that they should remain alive, to bring language back to its own flow, is a shared project of the universities of Derrida and of Deleuze – the universities of tomorrow.

Bearn speaks of the need for a ‘negative account’ of representation (such as Derrida and Lyotard supple), for it ‘to be supplemented by a positive, affirmative, account of what is beyond representation’ (Bearn, 2001, p. 243). This is neither about making an either/or choice nor a matter of placing one above the other. It is about realising what is already there when I free myself from the grid and free the others from my grip. The journey of this thesis has, it should be acknowledged, been more of a Derridean one because the purpose of it was to engage with the limits (and possibilities) of language and the necessity of representation. I think that for Derrida to work within representation is a responsibility – that is, to grapple with this task we cannot fully avoid or escape. So rather than ‘a philosophy trapped in the frame of representation’, I would say, a philosophy that begins with acknowledging the necessity of representation. For Derrida (and Levinas too), the relation to the other is realised in language, so that the desire to mean what I say cannot but matter – even if, at times, when the other resists what I say, this will lead me into frustration and despair. Such desire makes our conversation with one another continue, and therein lies a responsibility. And this surely offers something that supplements Deleuzean affirmation. On the whole, Deleuzean affirmation of irreducible difference is already a way of respecting alterity; and the endless re-reading that Derrida’s oeuvre demands itself effects an openness to endless connections, which opening is itself a kind of intensity. One opens a path for the other. This is a way of saying Yes. Resisting the synthesis of two strands keeps a loose end for ‘and’. Perhaps they are inseparable as long as life is inseparable from death. Finding beauty might not be far from facing up misery. Remembering the immemorial is not a separate thing from the love of life.

**Speak You Too**

Turn back to language, not to the language of the technical manuals with their codes of efficient functioning, but turn especially to poetry, to poetry in its pointlessness. Poetry does not function in the way the manuals do. But this, which is not necessary and perhaps rather useless, is an important part of human culture; it holds to the truth
of what escapes logic, somehow bringing reality to words. It pushes the limits of language and, at the same time, holds to the limit-amplifying unsaturated nature of language. The poetic, as we saw in the previous chapter, emerged as an event that brings otherness, the advent of the other, which in due course transforms both itself and the reader. The poetic shows how language limits ourselves but at the same time constitutes our understanding of the world.

Turn again to Celan. The epigraph to this chapter is the beginning part of Celan’s ‘Speak You Too’ (Celan, 2002, p. 77). The poem encourages the reader to speak, to say what one wants to say, or rather what one must say. And in so doing, it demands, or rather commands: ‘don’t split off No from Yes’, ‘Give your say this meaning too: give it the shadow’. The words of Celan themselves are unclear and resistant to clarity, they dispel logic, they defy analysis. So how can we understand the poem’s calling for a shadow?

The shadow is the condition of words, it is language’s retaining of negativity (Derrida). Presence depends upon what is absent, and the shadow acknowledges this background. To say one thing is to hide others: bringing something forth, you hide something else in the dark (Heidegger). This selection, this seeing, depends upon, the shades of light and darkness. Let me push some more. The shadow is what safeguards words and protects meaning. The shadow is between total light and absolute darkness. Words must be given their shadow, such that they can never be exhaustively understood, nor absolutely misunderstood: they come in shades between the absolutely knowable and the completely unknown. But I have just said that the shadow is the condition of language. So why would we need to give it? What could this mean? The problem is that we deny this shadow quality of words and pin our hopes on getting the essence of meaning, stripped of ambiguity. As if we could! Celan thus implores:

Give it shadow enough,
give it as much
as you see spread round you from
midnight to midday and midnight

133 This is ‘Sprich auch du’ from his 1955 Von Schwelle zu Schwelle. I used the translation by John Felstiner (Celan, 2002, p. 77).
That is, attend to words in the knowledge of the shadow that extends from them. Meanings will only be between ‘midnight and midday and midnight’ – that is, between the midday sun, which allows no shadows, and the complete darkness of midnight.

If we understand words and meanings in this way, even yes and no is not something straightforward. Sustain the logic of your argument strictly, and you will avoid contradiction. Logic brings the comfort that your reasoning is safe and secure. But actually, it is never so, never solely this, because language is always prone to this uncertainty, ambiguity given in the shadows it casts. And this is the very condition from which logic and clarity emerge. As Johann Georg Hamann writes: ‘Clarity is a suitable distribution between light and shade’ (Hamann cited in Goethe, 2005, p. 28). In total light, we see only whiteness and distinguish nothing. To see clearly requires there to be variations of light and dark. If objects absorbed no light, there would be no colours at all, reminding us of the fact that light itself comes in different shades of colours. The world is inconceivable without this fluctuating light, out of which we understand the world in its revealing. Openness of meaning is the way new ideas come to mind and thoughts extend beyond my anticipation. Language, Derrida shows, is fragile, it covers an abyss that, at any moment in conversation, we could fall into, even as it remains the very thing upon which we depend. Precariousness and loss are internal to language and there at the very genesis of our speaking and thinking. And reason is not something like a calculation disengaged from what it thinks through (language, the medium) and thinks of (the world).

The shadow is also what comes from myself as well. I am not self-contained but rather spread out: ‘as you see spread round you from (als du um dich verteilt weißt zwischen)/ midnight to midday and midnight’.¹³⁴ The German term ‘verteilt’ means to distribute, hence the sense of sharing as well. The self is not fixed, but something shared and dispersed. This is a suggestion not to hold onto the idea of the self, but rather to accept in yourself the creation of shadows and the flows through which you become open to what constitutes the very self, which is always a matter of shared relations. Giving the shadow to what I say then also means being responsible for this self, as also for the other whose identity is never fixed and cannot simply be revealed in total light. I try to give meaning in words that cannot be simply exhausted, and at the same time I do not exhaust what others say. And this is precisely what good poems

¹³⁴ The translation for this verse is varied: for example, ‘as you know to be parcelled out between’ by Pierre Joris (2005, p. 54), and ‘as you know to be partitioned out around you between’ by Véronique M. Fóti (2006, p. 79).
and works of art do – casting shadows for themselves and for what they speak for. The meridian – drawn by ‘midnight and midday and midnight’ – is there again where we encounter the other. Derrida remarks in his interview with Alan Montefiore that ‘when you show some respect for the other, you have to respect his or her own language and to affirm yours. That is the experience, the deep experience of translation which is not only political, but poetical – a poetic problem’ (Derrida, 2001a, p. 184). This affirmation is of the effort to remain heterogenous, to embrace impurity, not only between languages, but also within a language – that is, in reading, writing, thinking and translating. Conversely, what is at stake in poetics is politics itself, through poetics’ displacing of binary hierarchies, its unsettling of thought, and its challenge to consolidated positions and institutions. Poetic language explores such boundaries, without exploiting the other. In The Meridian Celan writes: ‘That is, I believe, if not the inherent obscurity of poetry, the obscurity attributed to it for the sake of an encounter – from a great distance or sense of strangeness possibly of its own making’ (Celan, 2005, p. 179). And Lacoue-Labarthe writes that for Celan the ‘obscurity is a mark of attentiveness in relation to the encounter, if not of respect’ (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1993, p. 23). The obscurity of poetry – where we find ourselves in a darkness full of shadows, where things are strange or out of place – preserves the place for the other.\footnote{‘Obscurity’ originally refers to darkness. The Spanish for dark, for example, is oscuro. The modern meaning of ‘obscure’ is closer to ‘strange’ or ‘out of place’.}

In this sense, affirming the heterogeneity of language is nothing but the affirmation of the other. We say something for ourselves and for the other by casting enough shadow.

Véronique Fóti adds another dimension to the understanding of this shadow: ‘Ghosts cast no shadow; their lack of this dark companion betrays their immateriality. Donating sufficient shadow to one’s saying seems then to involve giving it earthly density, undoing its ghostly detachment’ (Fóti, 2006, p. 82). It is as embodied finite beings that we cast shadows – that is, as earthly embodied beings as opposed to immortals such as ghosts or divinities. This leads to what comes next in the poem.

Look around:
See how things all come alive –
By death! Alive!
Speaks true who speaks shadow.
Meaning is inseparable from shadow, and life is inseparable from death. Through its spectral character, language is alive. And it is by death – not only by facing up to our own death, but also in our mourning for the other – that we are alive. Poetics can welcome this paradox and contradiction. It can ‘welcome mortality, the dead, the spectres’ – the negativities we must live by (Derrida, 2005b, p. 103).

The last stanza reads:

But now the place shrinks, where you stand:
Where now, shadow-stripped, where?
Climb. Grope upwards.
Thinner you grow, less knowable, finer!
Finer: a thread
the star wants to descend on:
so as to swim down below, down here
where it sees itself shimmer: in the swell
of wandering words.

The ground shrinks, there is nowhere to stand, you see only the abyss. There is no meaning – the shadow is stripped away. This is the world without significance, drained of meanings, which might remind us of the line: ‘The world is gone’ (Chapter 5). Where to head then? Will he reach the star by climbing upwards? Yet, where he is led to with a finer line – a thread – is down below, to swim down below. A thread (Faden) can be a thread of light (Lichtfaden) but also a thread of the fabric, the textile and texture, that is suggestive of the textuality of human life on earth, and even the text that leads and directs us to the ‘wandering words’ in the last verse. He finds himself in the swell of these wandering words. The star up in the sky can be the symbol of divinity implying the Platonic conception of perfect form. It resembles our desire for the secure idea, refinement of thoughts to abstracts – the vertical movement of climbing up, out of the cave. Yet, the need is to go down. The star wants to descend to wandering words where meanings are regained. The shimmering of the water gives the star its shadow, the shadow that is sustained in the reflection of the star; the water shimmers endlessly. It is also in water that the poet gets the shadow back by finding himself amongst the streams of wandering words, the possibilities of meaning. Our words cry, swirling in the abyssal sea, and they might go silent and might not reach the other. But give your
words, and give words meaning. To have words and to mean them is also to be truthful and responsible to yourself and to the other. This, I think, is partly what compelled Celan to write, and perhaps what makes many others write and say things, when words are called for, when they are called to speak most meaningfully. It is so even in the midst of losses, often by going through a painful process of babbling and burbling, of stammering and stumbling, sometimes not being heard, sometimes in the form of silence, that is, in waiting for words that will come.

Poetic language characterised by inexhaustible shadows presents itself pervasively in the language of art, and, less explicitly, in that of the humanities. And this is the language in which not only education but also philosophy must find itself again. Derrida is pondering philosophy’s necessary weakening of distinctions it has itself installed:

\[\text{With this distinction between the empirical and the essential, a limit is blurred, that of the philosophical as such, philosophical distinction itself. Philosophy finds itself, \textit{finds itself again} in the vicinity of poetics, indeed, of literature. It finds itself again there, for the indecision of this limit is perhaps what is most thought provoking. It finds itself again there, it does not necessarily lose itself there, as some believe, those who, in their tranquil credulity, believe they know where this limit runs and timorously keep within it, ingenuously, albeit without innocence, stripped of what one must call the \textit{philosophical experience}: a certain questioning traversal of limits, uncertainty as to the border of the philosophical field – and above all the \textit{experience of language}, always just as poetic, or literary, as it is philosophical (Derrida, 2005, p. 44).}\]

In philosophical experience, one traverses limits and borders, and explores new landscapes. Philosophical inquiry and critique cannot be reduced to analysis, explanation, or logical argumentation.\(^{136}\) It destabilises calcified thought to make it move again. It calls always for further engagement, in which we experience and

\(^{136}\) Wittgenstein famously remarks that ‘philosophy ought really to be written only as a \textit{poetic composition}’, or, as the translator Peter Winch renders it later, ‘really one should write philosophy only as one \textit{writes a poem}’ (Wittgenstein, 1980, 24e; 1998, p. 28). Cavell in a sense inherits this insight and hence shares this concern with Derrida. Similar to Derrida, Cavell’s distinctive writing style disturbs and disrupts the distinction between literature and philosophy. He often criticises the way philosophy as a discipline (or as he puts it, ‘formal philosophy’) represses certain styles of writing (see, for example, Cavell, 1991, p. 34-35).
experiment rather than possess or master. And this is nothing but the experience of language, where the new and unexpected can come and can be welcomed. It imagines what is not yet and does not fix itself. This is as poetic as it is philosophical. Philosophy, when it is poetic, is sensitive to difference, to the expression of others, to the things that cannot be contained neatly in concepts and arguments. It embraces self-interruption as what conditions itself, which, as other, gives philosophy a better self-understanding. By embracing heterogeneity, philosophy finds itself again in the earthly textuality of human life – which is also the task of education. This lays the way for knowledge other than the scientific and conceptual, other than what is provided in forms that are readily digested, translated, and classified (Chapter 6). The virtue of getting lost is there in welcoming what cannot be calculated or defined by pre-set criteria. Knowing such things requires us rather to wonder and wander with words. A poem is never timeless, Celan says: it is not like an encyclopaedic timeless order. ‘But the poem does speak!’ he writes in The Meridian. ‘It remains mindful of its dates’ (Celan, 2005, p. 180). It speaks of a date, a place, a name, in reaching the readers of the future. It addresses the particulars and remains mindful of them. In the experience of poetic language, we can remain mindful of the alterity, without which not only education but also philosophy becomes irresponsible.

How does this help teachers with the aporias they face, the question that we have started with? In The Other Heading Derrida writes:

> When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said that there is none to make: irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program. Perhaps, and this would be the objection, one never escapes the program. In that case, one must acknowledge this and stop talking with authority about moral or political responsibility. The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible: the testing of the aporia from which one may invent the only possible invention, the impossible invention (Derrida, 1992, p. 41).

Responsible decisions cannot be programmed: ‘ethics, politics, and responsibility, if there are any, will only ever have begun with the experience and experiment of the
aporia’ (*ibid.*). This echoes what Deleuze says in ‘Control and Becoming’: ‘our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move’ (Deleuze, 1995a, p. 176). It is the experience of the decision in indecision, that is, in indecision what ‘keeps attention forever in suspense, breathless, that is to say, keeps it alive, alert, vigilant, ready to embark on a wholly other path, to open itself up to whatever may come, listening faithfully, giving ear, to that other speech’ (Derrida, 2005b, p. 146). Such restlessness, ‘far from paralyzing, sets in motion’ (*ibid.*) – that is, it is the movement that leads to change and difference. The etymology of ‘decisive’ suggests being cut off – interpreted here not, or not only, on the grand scale but in terms of the little new steps, the cutting and dividing and opening to something new, that are made in what we say and do, in each word we use, even in each word we think. It is out of this that we are as human beings. The teacher’s decision made in the face of an aporia is a moral political decision. And it will be the basis for new idioms in which we talk about education, in resistance to the culture of control with its blindness to otherness.

To conclude this thesis as a whole, I would like to add a few more words. As soon as we think, we are already in language. As soon as we think in language, we are already presupposing the relation to the other. Language comes from the other and is of the other. This is what Levinas and Celan calls us to attend to. And Derrida further directs us to see what is at stake at the very moment of that speaking of and to the other. In addressing the other, we already risk the effacement of the other. We risk being faulty. But if I do not speak of the other, that leaves me inclined towards a petrifying the alterity. This is bound to the very structure of language which we are already in when we speak of the other. We speak of the other only by risking contamination, in language. As seen previously, even learning a poem by heart depends upon the repetition (my attempt to memorise it), which is inevitably tied to alteration. But keeping the poem to myself will result in losing its breath, blocking it from the air outside. That would be worse: alterity will be silenced – by a bigger violence. Hence, Derrida says, we must speak of it even if it is only ‘violence against violence’ (Derrida, 2001, p. 145). This is how Derrida affirms the contamination as our chance to preserve alterity. There comes a necessary moment of negotiation and decision, which is nothing but a political and historical concern (Derrida and Labarrière, 1986, p. 31).\(^1\)

\(^1\) Derrida: ‘There is a moment where I feel that *it is necessary* to reengage with the negotiation – it is a political, say, historical concern’ (Derrida and Labarrière, 1986, p. 31, my translation).
In Levinasian terms, the third party is already there from the very beginning. And we must orient ourselves to the call by the other at such moments. Poetics – where the nature of language is amplified – can open up the way for alterity to speak of itself. It can be the site where what cannot be known without remainder can be acknowledged. It is an important part of education to preserve and reserve the space for such language, where I rediscover myself as singularised in my own response. To preserve alterity is to preserve its mobility, the mobility of language. It is to ‘let the poem speak’, to ‘let the other speak’. This challenges the way human reason is predominantly understood. Human reason is better understood, as Derrida would say, by welcoming alterity into the heart of the *logos*. Then we will find ourselves in the movement where alterity is already at work, speaking of ourselves.

This thesis began partly as a response to the *Sewol* tragedy, and those who live with such tragedies. Derrida, in his interview with Michal Ben-Naftali criticises people who ‘philosophize as if nothing has happened’, alluding to the Holocaust (Derrida, 1998b). After some events, we cannot go on as if nothing happened. My experience of writing is in a sense an expression of my anxiety of forgetting, my own work of mourning which must only continue. In this thesis I have sought a language that can be mindful of such dates, language that attends to the other, with a faith that ‘the essence of language is goodness, or again, that the essence of language is friendship and hospitality’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 305). There lies justice, that is where it comes from. Perhaps what this thesis has provided was not a path of reassurance. But I choose to oscillate not to give into ossify. I must take the anxiety of uncertainty upon myself, no one else. Hence, in the solitude of decision, I speak and you too.

Celan says ‘Speak you too’. But a question hangs over the lack of punctuation, which can place ‘you’ in the object position as well: I see you and I speak you. Could this not be read as saying that in speaking, we address the other – that is, call the other into being. We become human in part through being addressed. And to speak to

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138 Derrida argues that Levinas does not fully attend to the very possibility and the necessity of contamination. See also p. 101, n. 58, in Chapter 4. But to be fair to Levinas, his discussion of the third party shows the tension between ethics and politics in his terms. It is true that the arrival of the third party is often described as secondary to the relation to the other. But, as Robert Bernasconi (1999) shows, the third party, is described, even if only occasionally in Levinas, as already within the face of the other. If we follow this reading, it will mean that Levinas acknowledges that the problem of the third party – the problem of politics – is something already there within ethics.

139 A similar phrase is used in ‘Violence and Metaphysics’ when Derrida speaks of how the Greeks welcomed alterity in general but without confronting absolute alterity: ‘in welcoming alterity in general into the heart of the logos, the Greek thought of Being forever has protected itself against every surprising convocation’ (Derrida, 2001b, p. 191). Alterity should be welcomed as a radical other so that, in the course of reception, it will challenge and transform fixed discourse and identity.
someone is to address them. The absence of the pronoun ‘I’ in Celan’s phrase gives its beginning to ‘Speak’ as if ‘Speak’ were the first word that is spoken. As if this kind of primal or originary speaking were the most fundamental expression – speech struggling to speak, the human struggling to speak. I speak you and you too.
List of Publications

Material in various chapters has been published elsewhere, and a list of these publications is as follows:


References


