



Gewalt and Metalēpsis: On Heidegger and the Greeks

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Abstract This article seeks to interrogate Heidegger as translator. First we show that the refusal to translate *hypokeimenon* as *subiectum*, opens up the possibility of an onto-heno-chrono-phenomenology of the thingliness of the thing as constancy. Second we demonstrate that the attempt to think a transformation of *alētheia* cannot avoid translation and all its violences. Finally we return to the Greeks in order to think translation as *metalēpsis*, to reinterpret the Platonic translation of ideas as things, to rethink the Aristotelian *noūs* as self-translating, and to suggest that the origin of thinking may lie in translation as well.

In 1920, Benjamin writes to Scholem: Heidegger's work, in spite of 'all its philosophical packaging,' is basically 'only a piece of good translating work.'¹ Such an insult however, from the author of 'The Task of the Translator,' may actually be more of a compliment than Benjamin may have intended. For what if good translation is, in the end, good philosophy? What if good translation is the only way to approach the truth and origin of the work of art? Or what if, ironically or not, Heidegger turns out to be a bad translator? Would all his philosophy show itself to be bad philosophy badly packaged? Or is that not perhaps Heidegger's point, namely, that good philosophy is bad translation—a violence that betrays the original—that

¹ W. Benjamin, *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin*, University of Chicago, 1994, no. 92, 168. G. Eliot puts the problem of translation, of the uncertainty of language, another way in *Daniel Deronda*: 'the distance between her ideas and his acted like a difference of native language, making him uncertain what force his words would carry,' Knopf, 1964, 889.

shows how bad it is? Then would the task of the translator, that is, the philosopher, not be to demonstrate the necessity of bad translation?

An example is necessary of Heidegger as translator, of a text that (in revealing that which is essential) reveals translation itself as essentially violent. ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ is such a text—for here, everything turns on thinking the work of art as the happening of truth, thus on the translation of *alētheia*, and on the truth of translation. But if the question of truth (of art and translation, like that of being) is as old as Western philosophy, as old as the Greeks, we must then eventually return to them, and to Greek, to that which Heidegger calls the ‘Greek sense,’ in order to think the origin of the work of art in that which makes the translation, *metalēpsis*, of *alētheia* and its truth first possible.¹

Thingliness of Things

‘The Origin of the Work of Art’ then—but already we have translated—raises the question of the nature of art: whether and how, from and by which, art is. But Heidegger begins with art *qua* thing—for every work, although not reducible to a thing, has its thingly character. What then is a thing? It is neither a bearer of traits, nor the unity of a manifold of sensations, nor form and matter; rather each of these is an interpretation of the thing according to certain somehow motivated prejudices or preconceived frameworks, metaphysical concepts or thought structures. In fact, each of these interpretations, according to Heidegger, does violence, *Gewalt*, to things themselves—for they translate one way of thinking and experiencing into another. Indeed the problem with metaphysics is the problem with translation. Clearly it cannot be through removing the conceptual frame (like Kant’s *Zweckmäßigkeit ohne Zweck*) that has been used to interpret the thing—for this would simply leave us back where we started, just as not translating *hupokeimenon* as *Ding* leaves us with *hupokeimenon*; rather as Heidegger insists:

The process begins by taking Greek words over into Roman-Latin thought. *Hupokeimenon* becomes *subiectum*; *hupostasis* becomes *substantia*; *sumbebēkos* becomes *accidens*. This translation of Greek names into the Latin language is in no way the inconsequential process it is considered even today.

¹ *Poetry, Language, Thought*, HarperCollins, 2001, 81; *Holzwege*, Klostermann, 1950, 68; hereafter *PLT* and *HW*. See also, M. Heidegger, *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 32, *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, Indiana University, 1994, 211; hereafter *GA* plus volume number.

Rather, beneath the seemingly literal and thus truthful translation there is concealed, a *translation* of Greek experience into another way of thinking. *Roman thought takes over the Greek words without a corresponding, equally-original experience of what they say, without the Greek word.* The groundlessness of Western thought begins with this translation.¹

In other words, translation is interpretation, projection, transformation, reinterpretation. As Derrida writes:

Among the pairs of determinations that do injury in taking over [*Überfall*] the thing in the thing is the determination of the thing as underneath (*hypo-keimenon* or *hypostasis*) in opposition to the *symbebekota* which arise on top of it. This oppositional couple will be transformed, in Latin, into *subjectum* (*substantia*)/*accidens*. This is only one of the pairs of oppositions that *fall upon/attack* [*tombées sur*] the thing.²

So translation is not innocent—for ‘violence has long been done to the thingly element of things,’ and ‘thought was in play during this violation.’³ Thus conscious of the violence that runs through his work, Heidegger writes:

Readers have taken constant offense at the violence [*Gewaltsamkeit*] of my interpretations. Their allegation of violence can indeed be supported by this text. Philosophicohistorical research is always correctly subject to this charge whenever it is directed against attempts to set in motion a thoughtful dialogue between thinkers.⁴

As a kind of violence then, translation must attempt to approach the thought and truth grounded in original Greek experience. *Hypokeimenon* cannot be translated as a subject (with predicates)—for the propositional and grammatical reinterpretation of the thing itself, implies a restructuration of thought. Thing-structure and thought-structure are co-constituted by language, and we must therefore seek the *archē* that makes their translation possible.

How then, is it possible to gain access to the original experience of the thing, the common source prior to translation, interpretation, reinterpretation?

¹ *PLT*, 23; *HW*, 7.

² J. Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, University of Chicago, 1987, 284; *La vérité en peinture*, Flammarion, 1978, 325. Hereafter, *TP* and *VP*.

³ *PLT*, 24; *HW*, 9; translation modified.

⁴ ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Indiana University Press, 1990, xx; *GA 3, Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*, Klostermann, 1991, xvii.

On the one hand, a deconstruction of the reconstruction of translation is necessary; the interpretations of the thing as bearer of traits, unity of a sensible manifold, or form and matter, must be destroyed. 'Everything that might interpose itself between the thing and us in apprehending and talking about it must first be set aside. First then do we yield ourselves to the undisguised presence of the thing.'¹ On the other hand, 'the whole essay, "The Origin of the Work of Art," knowingly yet unspokenly moves on the path of the question of the essence of being. Reflection on what *art* may be is completely and decisively determined only out of the question of *being*.'² We must therefore, seek

to keep at a distance all the preconceptions and assaults of these ways of thinking, to leave the thing to rest in its own self, for instance, in its thing-being...to let the being be as it is...to turn toward the being, think about it in regard to its being, but by means of this thinking at the same time let it rest upon itself in its very own being.³

Thus the mediation of translation and reinterpretation, the violence of projection and transformation, can only be avoided by the double-movement that both refuses the traditional determinations of metaphysical concepts, and grants the thing a free field to show its thingliness immediately, allows us to encounter the thing without mediation.⁴

So what is the immediate and untranslated thought of the thing? What shows itself self-evidently insofar as we keep all preconceptions at a distance, simply describe without any philosophical theory?⁵ What lets the thing be as it is without doing violence to it?

For Heidegger, it is that which is continuous in the thing—not the form, but that which allows the interpretation or translation of the thing *qua* form and matter, or *ens creatum* and *in creatum*, to remain constantly together, to stand together; it is the constancy or continuity of the thing, the

¹ *PLT*, 25; *HW*, 9.

² 'Addendum,' *PLT*, 85; *HW*, 71; trans. modified.

³ *PLT*, 30-1; *HW*, 16. Art is to be understood therefore, neither in the vulgar sense of an area of culture, nor in the Hegelian sense of an appearance of spirit; rather, as a being, art must be thought in relation to its being, that is, with a view to the ontological difference between beings and being. See *Identity and Difference*, Harper & Row, 1969; hereafter, *ID*.

⁴ *PLT*, 25, *HW*, 9.

⁵ *PLT*, 32; *HW*, 17.

standing and remaining, *das Ständige, die Konsistenz*.¹ As Heidegger says in the lectures of the same year (1935): ‘But this standing-there, this taking and maintaining a *stand* that stands erected high in itself, is what the Greeks understood as being. Whatever takes such a stand becomes *constant* in itself and thereby freely and on its own runs up against the necessity of its limit, *peras*.’² Constancy allows things like equipment to be reliable and useful (belonging to earth, protected in the world), artworks to be self-sufficient (disclosing the truth, bringing beings to stand in the light of their being), or not (just as it allows thought to think it by resisting it, maintaining the thing’s difference from thought)—for constancy is the meaning of the being of the thing itself. To be means to be consistent, to remain constant; and the time of the thing is that which constantly is, constantly is present, presence.

The being and time of the thing however, are not sufficient for granting a free field to the immediate showing of its thingliness. For the thing’s being implies its unity; a thing always is and is one. As Aristotle reminds us: ‘being and unity are the same and are one thing in the sense that they are implied in one another as principle and cause.’³ And everything that holds for being holds for unity: the investigation of being, of being *qua* being, is just as much the investigation of unity, of unity *qua* unity; the aporia of one is that of the other. So if being is said in many ways, so too for unity, *pollachōs legetai*. As Aristotle writes:

¹ *PLT*, 26; *HW*, 11. In the ‘Addendum’ to ‘The Origin of the Work of Art,’ Heidegger takes pains to clarify the difference between, on the one hand, the positing, placing, putting of an object over and against a subject, or for consciousness, as in German idealism; and on the other hand, the *thesis* of the Greeks as letting-stand-up, letting-be-set-up, *Erstehenlassen*, let be brought forth into immediate unconcealment, let lie forth in its presence (*PLT*, 82; *HW*, 68). Two questions remain however, with respect to standing. First, where does being, or a being, stand, *hic et nunc*? Can it be said to be here or there, especially if it is in transition, motion, becoming, or on a threshold, transgressing a border, crossing a frontier, at the limit of a *Ge-stell*, or horizon of its unity? Do we then stand here or there—or perhaps rather both and neither? And second, can being or a being stand on or in an abyss, particularly if truth is abyssal? Can we stand in continuous discontinuity? Or must discontinuity rather be thought as discontinuous? And if the essence of the thing lies with constancy, what is the essence of constancy? Or if this search for essence—like that for meaning, ground, origin, truth—is infinite, is it not perhaps because truth, as Heidegger writes, is an abyss? On *Ge-stell*, see also, for example, ‘Der Satz der Identität,’ *Identität und Differenz*, Neske, 1957, 23ff; ‘Die Frage nach der Technik,’ *Die Technik und die Kehre*, Neske, 1962, 19ff.

² *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Yale, 2000, 63, 67; hereafter, *IM*.

³ *Metaphysics*, 1003b22-24.

for “one man” and “man” are the same thing, and so are “existent man” and “man” and the doubling of the words in “one man and one *existent* man” does not express anything different (it is clear that the two things are not separated either in coming to be or in ceasing to be); and similarly “*one* existent man” adds nothing to “existent man,” so that it is obvious that the addition in these cases means the same thing, and unity is nothing apart from being; and if, further, the substance of each thing is one in no merely accidental way, and similarly is from its very nature something that *is*:—all this being so, there must be exactly as many species of being as of unity.¹

Thus the constancy of the thing is not simply the meaning of its being, but just as much of its unity: to be one means to be constantly present.

But not just being and unity and time—for constancy is the meaning of the thing’s aspect.² If a thing is one, now or then, it is because it is also completely or incompletely so; and its constancy is not simply a temporal determination, but is always already also aspectual. In other words, the difference between complete and incomplete constancy, between the way in which a thing stands and is standing, cannot be understood simply as a difference of time: ‘the jug *stands*’ and ‘the jug *is standing*’ reveals an aspectual difference—one that is not simply linguistic, but phenomenological, a difference in the way in which the thing shows itself at any time whatsoever. Aspect then, is not just that which shows itself as itself, nor as another, immediately or not, like some kind of perspective or view, symptom or indication, nor an appearance of an appearance, nor that which disappears by appearing, because it is too dimly seen, nor because it is too much or many; rather aspect is implied by unity—and it is because of phenomenological aspect that a unified being can show its aspect as left or right, up and down, present or absent, expressed or not, relative or absolute, transcendental or empirical, concealed/revealed. So if something could be one or be itself or another, at one and the same time, although not in the same way, it is because of aspect. Then the unity of being (or of a being like a thing) would have to be aspectually complete or incomplete so that it could show itself in any way

¹ *Meta.* 1003b26-34.

² Clearly, the linguistic concept of aspect is insufficient for an account of phenomenological aspect, or for thinking the way in which beings are and are unified at one and the same time. For the linguistic concept of aspect see R. Binnick, *Time and the Verb*, Oxford University, 1991, or B. Comrie, *Aspect*, Cambridge University, 1976. On phenomenological aspect, see my, *The Irony of Heidegger*, Continuum, 2007, 27-29; and ‘Being and Implication: On Hegel and the Greeks,’ *Cosmos and History*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

whatsoever, could present this face or that, this perspective or that side, so that it could be before or after in this way or another, or even so that it could be something rather than nothing. As Aristotle writes:

Since of the actions which have a limit none is an end but all are relative to the end, e.g. the removing of fat, or fat-removal, and the bodily parts themselves when one is making them thin are in movement in this way (i.e. without being already that at which the movement aims), this is not an action or at least not a complete one (for it is not an end); but that movement in which the end is present is an action. E.g. at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding and have understood, are thinking and have thought (while it is not true that at the same time we are learning and have learnt, or are being cured and have been cured). At the same time we are living well and have lived well, and are happy and have been happy. If not, the process would have had to cease, as the process of making think ceases: but, as things are, it does not cease; we are living and have lived. Of these processes, then, we must call the one set movements, and the other actualities. For every movement is incomplete—making thin, learning, walking, building; these are movements, and incomplete at that. For it is not true that at the same time a thing is walking and has walked, or is building and has built, or is coming to be and has come to be, or is being moved and has been moved, but what is being moved is different from what has been moved, and what is moving from what has moved. But it is the same thing that at the same time has seen and is seeing, or is thinking and has thought. The latter sort of process, then, I call an actuality, and the former a movement.¹

The constancy of the thing therefore, can be reduced to neither a merely linguistic or semantic characteristic, nor a metaphysical, ontological, heno-logical or temporal determination—for it is just as much aspectual, and the science of aspect is phenomenology. Thus the immediately untranslated onto-heno-chrono-phenomenology of the thing (or just phenomenology for short) shows itself to be completely one now—and this is why it can be equipment or artwork.

Truth of Truth

The thingly character of the work of art lies in its constancy—but what about its non-thingly character? For art is not just a thing; rather, according to Heidegger: insofar as it brings the being of a being to a stand, *zum Stehen*, to

¹ *Meta.*, 1048b18-34.

presence as standing-in-itself, *Insichstehen*, to light in the constancy of its shining, *in das Ständige seines Scheinens*; the work of art is a deconcealing, *Entbergen*, or opening-up, *Eröffnung*, of that which cannot be reduced to thingliness, namely, the being of beings (such as artworks).¹ But the work is only accessible, if it is removed from all relations to something other than itself and its own world. And Heidegger insists that this attempt to encounter the original world (from whence the work comes) is impossible; it has perished, withdrawn, decayed—and can never be recaptured. The world (and earth, i.e., the ground, the heaviness or constant opposing pressure of material from whence the world arises) to which the work belongs however, is opened up by the work itself. For as Heidegger writes: ‘World is always *spiritual* world. The animal has no world, nor any environment. The darkening of the world contains within itself a disempowering of the spirit, its dissolution, diminution, suppression, and misinterpretation.’² World then, is neither a quantifying collection nor an imaginary frame imposed upon things, nor an object of a subject; it is that which frees or opens up the place through which the work can work to set up a world, *Aufstellen einer Welt*; just as the world is that in which the work takes place.³ Paestum’s Greece may be encountered no more; its aura is dimming, just as the West declines—but its world is set up and remains constant with the temple. As Heidegger argues: the history of being (and of human beings in relation to their being), takes place insofar as the world worlds, *Welt weltet*, is present as a world. And we have a world insofar as we are in the world, constantly remaining in the openness of beings, *im Offenen des Seienden*, although stones are worldless, and plants and animals have no world.⁴ So together, world and earth unfold as the whole of a continuously individuating work, and constitute each other in their oppositional striving: grounded on earth, world strives to open up and surmount it; earth juts through world, attempts to close it down. Thus the whole is self-differentiating insofar as it is essentially self-secluded, *wesenhaft Sichverschließende*. The work of art however, always opens up the unity of world and earth for a specifically historical people, *Volk*—not only those who speak the language, but those

¹ *PLT*, 35, 38; *HW*, 21, 24.

² *IM*, 47.

³ *PLT*, 39-40; *HW*, 25-6.

⁴ *PLT*, 43; *HW*, 30. Elsewhere, Heidegger suggests that animals are not *weltlos*, but poor in world, *weltarm*. See ‘Letter on Humanism,’ in *Basic Writings*, Harper & Row, 1977, 203ff; *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik, GA 29-30*, Klostermann, 1983, 271ff; as well as Derrida, *De l’esprit*, Galilée, 1987, 75ff.

who live in the language insofar as they are (and are constituted as that which they are) through the language.¹ Thus work sets up world and sets forth earth, world opens up work and frees up earth, earth grounds world and shelters work; and the work of art lets the unity of the striving, *Streit*, fight, *polemos*, of world and earth stand, brings it to completion as aspectually incomplete, constant violence, continual war—struggle *qua* struggle—and this is the truth that comes to presence or happens in the work of art.²

What then, is the truth of the truth of the work of art? As Heidegger insists: truth must be thought by recalling the Greek word *alētheia*—not simply by a renewal of Greek philosophy (itself impossible), nor through a mere name-change in word usage, but by thinking *alētheia* as unconcealedness, *Unverborgenheit*. In fact, the possibility of thinking the truth of being and beings—the world of the word—this is what the Greeks missed,

for the concealed history of Greek philosophy consists from its very beginning in this, that it does not remain in accordance with the illuminating essence of truth in the word *alētheia*, and has to misdirect its knowing and its speaking about the nature of truth more and more into the discussion of a derivative nature of truth. The essence of truth as *alētheia* remains unthought in the Greeks, and most of all in the philosophy that follows after.³

In this way, Heidegger thinks that which is present in Greek, but unrealized by Greeks—for failing to hear their own language, they did not know or experience that which they already had, namely, truth as the unconcealedness of beings (the happening of illumination, clearing, lighting, *Lichtung*), prior to the true, and to all other forms of truth. Unconcealedness however, is always also concealedness—for at the moment that a being reveals itself, it simultaneously, *zugleich*, conceals itself, refuses to reveal itself and dissembles: as shoes reveals their equipmental reliability, they conceal their fragility. Concealment belongs to unconcealment; truth, in its nature, essentially, is un-truth, *die Wahrheit ist in ihrem Wesen Un-wahrheit*. Thus the constancy of truth, its continual origin, is its double, ambiguous or abyssal essence, that which Heidegger names truth's original struggle, *ur-war*, primal conflict, *ursprüngliche Streit*.⁴

¹ *PLT*, 45-47; *HW*, 32-34. For Heidegger's characterization of the struggle in terms of Heraclitean *polemos*, see for example, *IM*, 64-65.

² *PLT*, 35; *HW*, 20.

³ *PLT*, 49; *HW*, 36-7; translation modified.

⁴ *PLT*, 53; *HW*, 40.

Truth then, is literally *a-lētheia*—not *Wahrheit*, but the *Unverborgenheit* that is just as much a *Verborgenheit*, a revealing-concealing that allows Heidegger to avoid taking truth for correspondence, *orthos*, *homoiōsis*, *adaequatio*, correctness, or even truth. Not a renewal of Greek thought and language, nor speaking (the being of beings, beings as a whole, the work of art, the struggle of earth and world) in Greek; rather a taking over of the Greek word *alētheia*—thereby avoiding the Roman error—that corresponds to a taking over of the equally-original experience of what they say, however concealed from them. Everything that might interpose itself between *alētheia* and us must be set aside—for only then can undisguised original *alētheia* come to presence. We must let *alētheia* be as it is, in its *alētheia*-being, grant it a free field to show its truthfulness without mediation.

Heidegger's demand however, for an immediate encounter with *alētheia*, is doubly questionable. First, immediacy is always mediated in at least one way, namely, by immediacy; and without mediation, the self-showing of *alētheia* shows itself as mediated.¹ Second, if the Greeks understand truth as *homoiōsis*, then *Unverborgenheit* is not *Wahrheit*, but it is still a translation of *alētheia*, however literal or transformative. Simply importing *alētheia* into German, letting it be as mere *alētheia*, would get us nowhere—for it remains Greek; so even if the impossible revival of Greek philosophy were possible, it would be of no help to us, *hülfe uns nichts*.² Thus speaking and thinking and experiencing *alētheia* as *Unverborgenheit*, unconcealedness, is no immediate encounter, but just its opposite: a mediated translation.

But doesn't Heidegger know this? As he says in the posthumously published *Spiegel* interview: 'One can translate poetry, as little as one can translate thought. At best one can circumscribe it. As soon as one makes a literal translation everything is transformed.'³ As he says again in the *Spiegel*:

¹ For the deconstruction (however Hegelian in structure) of the 'without' in Kant's 'purposiveness without a purpose,' see Derrida, *TP*, 83ff; *VP*, 44ff.

² *PLT*, 49; *HW*, 36. As Derrida notes: Heidegger's texts too, like those of the Greeks, maintain a certain somehow motivated 'resistance to translation' (*De l'esprit*, 17).

³ *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 23/1976, 217, my translation. If the Greek spirit is only at home in German *Blut und Boden*, then 'a certain violence is done to the Greeks as such,' (B. Babich, 'The Ethical Alpha and the Linguistic Omega: Heidegger's Anti-Semitism and the Inner Affinity between Germany and Greece,' *Joyful Wisdom*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994, 10). In the background, of course, is Heidegger's support for the old Romantic notion of a 'special inner relationship [*innere Verwandtschaft*] between the German language and the Greeks' (*Spiegel*, 217). This seems to support the argument for

As little as one can translate poetry, can one translate thought. At best one can circumscribe it. As soon as one makes a literal translation everything is transformed [So wenig wie man Gedichte übersetzen kann, kann man ein Denken übersetzen. Man kann es allenfalls umschreiben. Sobald man sich ans wörtliche Übersetzen macht, wird alles verwandelt].¹

Is the mediated translation of *alētheia* therefore, perhaps not designed to ironically point us elsewhere? Not to the possibility or necessity of an immediate encounter with truth, nor to the possibility of an untranslated thought or experience—but rather to the impossibility of immediacy, the impossibility of setting everything aside in order to let truth come to undisguised original presence; and the impossibility of speaking without translation, of thinking, experiencing without transformation? Then the investigation into ‘The Origin of the Work of Art,’ would far more be a demonstration of the impossibility of thinking the original truth of art, of the impossibility of avoiding projection and prejudice, interpretation and re-interpretation, the transformative violence that phenomenology does to both thoughts and things; it would show that the original is always a translation—for translation is the truth of truth, and thus the origin of the work of art.

Origin of Origin

If art is the happening of truth then—or the happening of the violence of the translation of truth—it is because it lets translation happen at the origin. But in pointing out the *Ur-sprung* of the work of art, Heidegger succumbs to the very process of translation against which he warns: rather than leaving *archē*, rather than thinking in Greek, he takes it over into German; and this is not an inconsequential process, but a transformation into another way of thinking,

Heidegger’s belief in the ‘racial superiority, of the Germans, as well as the intrinsic philosophical superiority of the German language,’ (T. Rockmore, ‘On Heidegger and National Socialism: A Triple Turn?,’ *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, XIV:2-XV:1, 1991). On Heidegger’s silence after the war, see J.-F. Lyotard, *Heidegger et “les juifs,”* Galilée, 1988; *Heidegger and “the jews,”* University of Minnesota, 1990; and B. Lang, *Heidegger’s Silence*, Cornell, 1996. For an exceptional analysis of the ‘aestheticization of politics’ (Benjamin, Brecht, Syberberg) and the ‘metaphysics of the subject’ in relation to Heidegger’s fascism, see P. Lacoue-Labarthe, *La fiction du politique*, Bourgois, 1987; *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, Blackwell, 1990.

¹ *Der Spiegel*, Nr. 23/1976, 217, my translation.

experiencing, perceiving, that which Kafka names a metamorphosis, *Verwandlung*. Here the failure of Heidegger's thinking would not be (and could not be translated or transformed into) a success, at least anymore or less than a failure—for with respect to the essential ambiguity of questions and answers, failure and success, artists and artworks, being and human beings, the text is unambiguous on at least one point: it remains undecided although *decidable*, indeterminate but *determinable*, *unbestimmt aber bestimmbar*. Thus decidability shows itself as the possibility of ambiguity; the capacity or force, power or potency, to be decided is the constancy that allows us to decide or not—for (to deploy that which Kant names the 'usual subterfuge') a transcendental determinability is prior to determination and indetermination alike, just as it is prior to questioning and answering, success and failure.¹

And not only the origin—for now truth is *Unverborgenheit*, no longer *alētheia*; the Germanification of thought and experience has begun. As Nietzsche reminds us: translation is absorption, appropriation, take-over, *Überfall*—for

one conquered then, when one translated,—not only insofar as one leaves out the historical: no, one adds to this the allusion to the present, one strikes out, above all, the name of the poet and puts one's own in its place—not in the sense of theft, but with the very best conscience of the Roman Imperium.²

But maybe we can proceed otherwise—for it is perhaps now possible to attempt to think the transformative violence of translation in Greek, so as to experience (if all art is *Dichtung*, or rather *poiēsis*) the happening of *alētheia*.

How then, did the Greeks think translation? Not simply as *hermēneia*, but as *metalēpsis*. The Platonic doctrine of the forms, for example, is not simply participation; rather things are the translations of ideas, and art partakes of the *eidos* insofar as it transforms the language of originals to that of the copy, or the copy of the copy. So Parmenides asks in Plato's

¹ *PLT*, 70-1, 75-6; *HW*, 58-9, 64. On Heidegger's failure to raise the question of the question, see Derrida, *De l'esprit*, 1987, 24.

² F. Nietzsche, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft, Kritische Studienausgabe*, Bd. 3, Book 2, § 83, De Gruyter, 1988. Thanks to Helen Lambert for reminding me of this. I have already attempted to think the ambiguity in Heidegger's concept of take-over in "Verteidigung der Ironie: Heidegger und die Rektoratsrede," *Dialektik*, Vol. 2. For an important reading of Nietzsche on translation and rhetoric, see Lacoue-Labarthe, *Le sujet de la philosophie*, Flammarion, 1979; *The Subject of Philosophy*, University of Minnesota, 1993, especially Chapter 2.

onymous dialogue: ‘Then each translation translates either the whole or a part of the form? Or can there be any other way of translating besides this?’¹ And in the *Republic*, Socrates asks Glaucon: ‘What then? Have we, in your opinion, gone through particular qualities that are in any way unnecessary and inconsequent to one another in a soul that is going to translate being, adequately and perfectly?’² Then it is no surprise that Aristotle formulates the divine’s relation to itself *qua* translation: ‘thought thinks on itself because it translates the nature of the object of thought [*hauton de noeī ho noūs kata metalēpsin toū noētoū*].’³ Thus if participation, for the Greeks, is essentially translation, it is not because *alētheia* is truth, *Wahrheit* or *Unverborgenheit*; but because *metalēpsis* is the truth of translation and transformation, and of the (univocal, equivocal, analogical) relation of ideas and things—for it is the origin *mimēsis*, and that which makes the ontological difference (of being and beings) first possible.

So participation is translation, *metalēpsis*—but what is *metalēpsis*? It is the movement (*trans-*) of *lēpsis*, taking, accepting, seizing: on the one hand, actively, violently, carrying-off as booty, grasping with the hand or mind, perceiving, apprehending, comprehending; on the other hand, passively receiving, being griped, possessed, violated, had, *echō*, *Schein*. So *metalēpsis* is (always inadequate, impossible—or rather uncertain) substitution, movement over to another insofar as it is moved—for in seeking to seize, we are seized, taken over in the take-over, translated by translation, transformed in the transformation, violated in the violation. Thus *metalēpsis* is a *metalēpsis*; and the truth is a translation, the violence of taking one for the other, not one for one.

As a happening of *alētheia* then, *poiēsis* shows itself as the illumination of *metalēpsis*—for concealment-unconcealment is original translation. Representative art (and its negation, non-representative art) is a translation of truth—but translation itself is poetic. So the question of the origin of the work of art, of the onto-heno-chrono-phenomenology of artworks, becomes far more the question of the violence of translation as translation. Thus perhaps just a suggestion or indication from Benjamin (quoting Pannwitz), a direction for thought:

¹ *Collected Dialogues*, *Parmenides* 131a. Plato also uses the verb *metalambanō* instead of the abstract noun *metalēpsis* (see for example, *Phaedo*, 102b).

² *Republic*, VI 486e; cf., IV 421c, VII 530b, X 619d. Unfortunately or not, an interpretation of Heidegger’s being-with, *Mitsein*, in *Being and Time* as *metalēpsis*, translation, is beyond the scope of this paper.

³ *Meta.*, 1072b19-20.

Our translators, even the very best ones, proceed from a wrong premise. They want to turn Hindi, Greek, English into German instead of turning German into Hindi, Greek, English. Our translators have a far greater reverence for the usage of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign works...The basic error of the translator is that he preserves the state in which his own language happens to be instead of allowing his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue.¹

¹ Benjamin, 'Task of the Translator,' *Selected Writings*, Vol. I, Harvard University, 1996, 261-2.