

Why Elite Education Has Failed in America – and Elsewhere: A Critique of the “Yale School”

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It is my hope that the title of my talk “Why Elite Education Has Failed in America – and Elsewhere: A Critique of the ‘Yale School’” raises questions. On the one hand, the words “Elite Education” may invite us to reconsider forms of higher learning. What is a college or university? In an important sense, I would like to argue, the university has always been grounded in a search for the *universal* language of humankind. One thinks of the sacred grove of olive trees: the *akádemos* where Plato and his students would gather, Aristotle’s *Lúkeion*, or, a little later, and against the background of a tragic love-story, the birth of the University of Paris. Since its beginning, western education has flourished because it has drawn its spiritual and physical nourishment from what we might call a *primal democratic impulse*, one that ignites and drives the search for a language meaningful to all persons.

But if education is tied to the spirit of democracy, how are we to understand the concept of *elite education*? This paradox, I would like to argue, is less difficult to resolve than we might expect. If the *university* is caught up in the search for a *universal* language, then an *elite university* is simply one that pursues this universal language with excellence. Such a school would be ruled by intellectuals who dissolve into the universal, non-elite community to which we all belong. Understood this way, *elite* refers to a few great persons who embrace their relationship to the still greater community of humankind.

Perhaps more interesting are the less abstract questions to which the title may gesture, questions concerned with a particular place of higher education: here Yale University, and, to be more specific, a particular style of thought associated with this institution: the “Yale School”. One might wonder about the relationship between education and place. In what way can a university’s spiritual search for a universal language be linked to a physical geography of sorts? How are we to understand the incarnation of excellence when elite intellectuals set sail to discover the universal spirit of humanity at a particular place?

Here I offer a glimpse into a movement of thought that presented itself – indeed ritualized itself – as a form of elite education: the “Yale School” for the sake of illustrating two points: Firstly, I would like to reveal the inner core that

made this intellectual constellation potentially excellent. Secondly, I show how and why the “Yale School” failed. This second point shall give me occasion to conclude by returning to the questions with which I begin.

1

The “Yale School” and Yale University

To be sure, the “Yale School” takes us beyond New Haven. Perhaps its most popular figure, Jacques Derrida, never held a professorship at Yale University. Instead Derrida was associated more with Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and the University of California at Irvine. Another one of its luminaires – and proselytizer of Derrida’s thought: Barbara Johnson was associated with Harvard University, where Johnson taught for 25 years before her untimely recent death in the summer of 2009.

But for reasons I hope shall become clear, I would like to focus on the how this nomadic intellectual movement is also tied to the physical institution to which its name gestures. Johnson completed her Ph.D. at Yale in 1977 with he who, alongside Derrida, is perhaps the most popular figure associated with this tradition of thinking: Paul de Man. By the time de Man accepted a professorship at Yale in 1970 he had come a long way from his Belgian origins. Like Derrida, who de Man met at Hopkins in 1966, de Man recognized American intellectual life as offering an *unlimited* style of inquiry. Of course the “Yale School” came into its own during the late 1970s. And one cannot forget the unlikely bedfellows Geoffrey Hartman, J. Hillis Miller and Harold Bloom. But as we shall see, there is something unusually unsettling about the spirit of de Man, and this means the spiritual nucleus he embodied at Yale University from 1970 until the unexpected death of the “[r]evered [p]rofessor”¹ in New Haven in late December 1983.

I draw attention to de Man because, as chairman of the Department of Comparative Literatures and Sterling Professor of the Humanities, he played no small roll in shaping the spirit of the “Yale School” at Yale University. Luminaires of this movement were present at Yale not only during the 1970s, but also in the 1980s, and beyond. As we shall see, its fading stars continue to limp about, some like ineffectual vampires or harmless zombies, still today. In the autumn of 1989, Karsten Harries, a professor of philosophy at Yale since the mid 1960s and colleague and friend to de Man – and incidentally my doctoral adviser until the spring of 2011, described Yale University as a “stronghold” for “a postmodern humanism that liked to invoke Heidegger, often a Heidegger seen through Derrida’s deconstructive lens”.² I shall return to how Heidegger fits

¹ *New York Times*, 31 December 1983.

² Harries, Karsten, “Introduction.” *Martin Heidegger: Politics – Art – Technology*, ed. Karsten Harries and Christoph Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. xiv.

into this intellectual force field below. I have also had the pleasure of working with Carol Jacobs, similar to Barbara Johnson another brilliant student of Paul de Man, and Henry Sussman, adept student of Jacques Derrida, both of whom, like Harries, continue to work within and thus shape the core of the humanities at Yale. All of this means to say: The “Yale School” and the physical university in New Haven have been associated with one another for almost a half-century in a way that cannot be overlooked.

This brings me to the question: How did this elite tradition that has been spiritually and physically tied to “Yale” set out in search of the universal language of humanity with an excellence worthy of its elite name? What was it that the “Yale School” did? Now I turn to what I take to be the inner core of this tradition of thought, something that made this movement exceptionally powerful and, to some extent, legitimates the real power and influence that it has had and continues to have on higher education.

2

Language as the Universal Language of Humankind

Similar to many movements in the humanities, the “Yale School” sees the social politics of our world as questionable. Recently in 2009, while returning to a Heideggerian loss of “being [Sein]” and the need to “recall our disintegrating Western culture to its origin so that from it might issue once again new growth”,³ Harries warns us about the dangers of our everyday life-world of machines: “where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine hearts.”⁴ Harries’ turn to Heisenberg’s citation of the ancient tale by Chaung Tzu is caught up in nothing less than a general need for us “save our own humanity”.⁵ These claims can be read alongside Carol Jacob’s recent search for a “language of ethics”, to which she gestures in her 2008 work Skirting the Ethical.⁶ Like Harries, Jacobs implies that we belong to a world whose social-politics, because of the lightning speed of technological advancement, has still to construct an ethical foundation.⁷

But if the discontents of the “Yale School” seem to echo those of other movements in the humanities, less expected is the *deconstructive* style of

³ Harries, Karsten, Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” (New York: Springer, 2009), p. 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁶ Jacobs, Carol, Skirting the Ethical (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. xxiii.

⁷ Here I am thinking of a conversation I had with Carol while a graduate student at Yale. In it she mentioned that she believed that technology advances faster than our attempts to create an ethical perspective that would correspond to its advancements.

thought through which this school confronted questionable social politics. Critical here is the belief that we live in a world increasingly saturated with forms of familiarity that keep us from actually thinking. While surveying the progress of our everyday life-world of machines, Harries reflects in 1998 that “[c]ompared with the situation of 1951 we are doing well, too well perhaps, terrifyingly, or should I say, suffocatingly well.”⁸ The hero of estrangement who revealed oppression lurking in inauthentic forms of experience was of course Derrida. By *deconstructing* familiar foundations of thought, as when Derrida criticizes the implicit raising the ear above the eye in philosophy’s ancient privileging of speech above writing in his essay “Plato’s Pharmacy” – significantly translated by Barbara Johnson into English in 1981,⁹ acts of *defamiliarization* opened up new styles of experience that were at once multivalent and breath-taking.

At the heart of the mystery that the “Yale School” opened up – and here I think we touch upon the seductive and still unexplored centre that makes this movement unique in the history of American intellectual life – is *language*. This may come as a surprise. On the one hand, language is linked to social-political oppression. Harries’ search “to save our own humanity” is thus connected to the “broader quest to free being [Dasein] from the rule of gibberish and idle chatter [*Geschwätz und Gerede*]”.¹⁰

But language also has the power to *defamiliarize* its oppressive impulses. Jacobs’ critique of that which Skirt[s] the Ethical declares that “straightforward assumptions about justice, divine and state power, the good and identity politics that every reader inevitably comes upon are disrupted when one takes into account the role of language: both the way in which language is talked about and the way in which it performs.”¹¹ And language not only has the power to disrupt its own inauthentic forms. During *acts of linguistic estrangement*, language calls forth reality, and this means transfigures itself into a source of social-politics that rules our most intimate relations – consider the language of lovers – as well as the social-politics that rule our families, communities and the global zones to which we now belong. As Harries reminds us in 2009, “language allows things to be [...]”¹²

⁸ Harries, Karsten, “In Search of Home”. Bauen und Wohnen/Building and Dwelling. Martin Heidegger’s Foundation of a Phenomenology of Architecture, ed. Eduard Führ (Münster: Waxmann, 2000), p. 102.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy,” *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 61-84.

¹⁰ Harries, Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p. 54.

¹¹ Jacobs, Skirting the Ethical. This is significantly how Stanford University Press advertises Jacob’s book.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Having the power to create a world, language is linked to an experience of ecstasy that transcends any one particular language. As if noting the confluence of two rivers, de Man calls attention to how the German poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin is magically tied to poetry of ancient Greece, in particular when Hölderlin gestures to spiritual rebirth “in the style of Pindar [à la manière de Pindare]”.¹³ Deep within the heart of language resides the still more esoteric language of silence. “In one of the best know poems in the English language,” Barbara Johnson points out in 1998, “John Keats proclaims the superiority of silence over poetry by addressing a Grecian urn [...]”¹⁴ Here *the language of silence* invites a gathering that overcomes difference: through “the muteness of the thing [...] the human, the poem and indeed language itself all become metaphors for each other”.¹⁵

In a sense, this gives us something like an answer to one of the questions raised above. By gesturing to an esoteric, mystic *linguistic transition*, specifically the power of language to regenerate itself, the “Yale School” identifies a primal democratic impulse whose limitless potential would seem to complement the infinite spirit of the university. The universal language of humankind, in other words, is grounded in the universal mystery of language itself. Given that this *linguistic event* does not raise one individual, community or language above another, the primal equality concealed an authentic experience of language would have the power to question social-politics that tragically places individuals, communities and languages above others.

3

The “Yale School”: “gibberish and idle chatter”

That the “Yale School” draws its nourishment from what we might call *the secret democratic power of language*, I would like to argue, is what makes this constellation of thought one of the most intriguing, if still to be recognized, events in American intellectual history. Nevertheless, there is something about this self-obfuscating tradition that is still more intriguing. Here I turn to the second point I would like to make about the “Yale School”.

¹³ De Man, Paul, “Les exegeses de Hölderlin par Martin Heidegger.” *Critique*, Nr. 100-101, September-October, 1955, p. 815. Reprinted in: De Man, Paul, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, translation and introduction by Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971/1983), p. 261.

¹⁴ Johnson, Barbara, *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race and Gender* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 129.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30.

Despite its turn to the universal, life-giving impulse hidden in an authentic experience of language, the “Yale School” failed to bring about any social-political change in America, or elsewhere. In fact, as I shall demonstrate, the American cult of a social hierarchy founded on individuals who accumulate unlimited amounts of money has not only *not* been threatened by the “Yale School”, it has been reinforced by its distracting intellectualisms. I myself must confess that, because of my personal commitment to the mystical spirit of language to facilitate social-political change, I spent the first years of my graduate study at Yale taken by the stardust of the intellectual constellation to which I am presently gesturing. I quickly made the painful discovery that this style of thought has been and continues to be tragically powerless in the face of increasing social-political oppression. But this tragedy places a question not only before me, but before all of us: If language embodies a secret power to bring about change, how could an elite movement of thought centred on the mystery of language fail to make a difference in an evil world?

4

Skirting the Textual

The reason why initiates of the “Yale School” who sought to appropriate the power of language failed to make the world a better place is because *they never actually understood language*. As the classical scholar Barry Powell has been showing since the late 1970s, alphabetic writing invented by Homer in ancient Greece around 800 B.C. “created the illusion [...] that writing exists to record speech.”¹⁶ But because we as a species have succumbed to this *textual illusion* in ways that are unfathomable and still unexplored – alphabetic writing is in fact the precondition of history and globalization, among other things – “[i]t is hard for us to remember that it is only one kind of writing.”¹⁷

This is not to say that the stars of the “Yale School” do not reflect upon writing, which they do feverishly. I mentioned Derrida’s critique of Plato’s privileging of speech over writing. But this attempt to see writing and speech as equal only reinforces *the illusion of alphabetic writing* to which western civilization has succumbed for thousands of years. Derrida is no more aware that

¹⁶ Powell, Barry, “Homer and Writing.” *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), p. 11. Powell, Barry, “Homer and Writing.” *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry Powell (Leiden, New York, Köln: Brill, 1997), p. 11. Powell’s earlier work *Homer and the origin of the Greek alphabet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) must be read in regard to his still earlier exploration of *Composition by Theme in the Odyssey* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1977) that, as a *Beitrag zur klassischen Philologie*, takes us as far back as 1974.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

he is writing in the same “kind of writing” in which Plato wrote than de Man is when he speaks of what the Hellenic-inspired “writing[s]” of Heidegger and Hölderlin “say”.¹⁸

That the “Yale School” is plagued with a historical ignorance about the spirit of the kind of writing in which they *construct* their textual *deconstructions* is suggested also in Johnson’s turn to the language of silence. Although she indulges in gestures to Greece while reflecting upon Keat’s Grecian “urn”,¹⁹ it never occurs to her that the silence of the poem, as a product of Greek alphabetic writing, represents an *illusory silence* different from the *authentic silence* that coalesces about oral speech. I highlighted Carol Jacob’s search for a “language of ethics” which she proceeds to characterize as “bound up with the practice of literary theory”.²⁰ Like Derrida and her doctoral adviser de Man, Jacobs loses herself in textual fever. The literary theory to which ethics is connected is itself connected to what she names “the difficult practice of reading”.²¹ Invocations of a new “ethics of reading”²² nevertheless skirt the style of writing through which her faith in reading occurs. Jacob’s celebration of “reading” ironically represses the ethical implications of the ancient textual form: alphabetic writing through which she, like the rest of us, reads.

No less problematic is Harries’ philosophical turn to language. Although he has reflected on language as a professor at Yale for quite some time,²³ the birth of writing and its historical descent, along with all the philosophical implications that accompany these primal events, remains untouched. Because Harries cultivates an abstract relation to language and writing, as when he moves erratically from ancient Greek to Hebraic texts,²⁴ similar to his fellow initiates

¹⁸ de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, translation and introduction by Godzich, p. 254.

¹⁹ Johnson, *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race and Gender*, p. 129.

²⁰ Jacobs, *Skirting the Ethical*, p. xiii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

²² *Acts of Narrative*, ed. Carol Jacobs and Henry Sussman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 195, 199, 203, 230, 259, 263-65, 269, 272.

²³ Harries, Karsten, “Heidegger and Hölderlin: The Limits of Language”, *The Personalist*, vol. 44, no. 1 (1963), pp. 5-23; “Language and Silence: Heidegger’s Dialogue with Georg Trakl”, *Boundary 2*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1976), pp. 495-509; “Heidegger and the Problem of Style in Interpretation”, *Irish Philosophical Journal*, vol. 6. (1989), pp. 250-274; “Poetry as Response. Heidegger’s Step Beyond Aestheticism”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 16, *Philosophy and the Arts* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1991), pp. 73-88; “‘The Root of All Evil’”, *Lessons of an Epigram*, *The International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (March, 1993), pp. 1-20; *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”* (2009).

²⁴ Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”*, p. 107. Harries, Karsten, “The Descent of the ‘Logos’”. In: *Transcendental Heidegger*, ed. Steven Crowell and Jeff Malpas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 88.

just mentioned (as well as to Erich Auerbach), he “fails [...] to account for the relation between the technology of writing and the style in written expression”.²⁵ This black hole about the history of writing exemplifies the ironic, and deeply unsettling, ignorance at the core of the “Yale School”: despite its limitless textual ecstasies, never once did those who made up this elite movement *deconstruct* the everyday textual tool – alphabetic writing – through which they fanatically *deconstructed*. Understood this way, the “Yale School” reminds us of Powell’s critical reflection in a forthcoming volume of essays *Public Greece/Secret Germany*: “The history of writing is little understood, and its relevance to modern philosophy and science, and classical scholarship, and the humanities in general is little understood.”²⁶

5

Skirting the Hitlerian

But if the “Yale School” failed to bring about any real social-political change in America because it pursued not a real experience of language, but a perversely abstract, illusory experience of language that represses the actual “history of writing”, then we should expect this intellectual movement to be plagued with historical aberrations. And in fact this is precisely what we see. Now I shall illustrate what I take to be the most sinister historical blind spot of the “Yale School”, one whose appearance in the late 1980s inflicted a psychological wound that continues to bleed, still today.

Less than five years after *The New York Times* ran an obituary quietly celebrating Paul de Man on December 1, 1983 following his death in New Haven ten days earlier,²⁷ and the complementary nostalgic piece from February 25, 1984: “Yale Still Feeling Loss of Revered Professor”,²⁸ the front page of *The New York Times* ran another article about de Man on December 1, 1987. This time, however, the title of the piece was anything but quiet: “Yale Scholar Wrote for a Pro-Nazi Newspaper”.²⁹

Here it is not my intention to recount the history of how the almost 200 articles, many of which are shockingly anti-Semitic, that de Man wrote in his early twenties for the Nazi controlled Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* from 1940 to

²⁵ Powell, “Homer and Writing.” In: *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Morris and Powell, p. 11.

²⁶ Powell, Barry, “Homeric Writing”. In: *Public Greece/Secret Germany*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013).

²⁷ *New York Times*, 31 December 1983.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 February 1984, p. 26.

²⁹ *New York Times*, 1 December 1987, p. 1.

1942,³⁰ accidentally came to light. Instead I am interested in how, far from searching for the universal language of humanity, the “Yale School” is marked by a desire to repress its relation to the history of *National Socialism*. Now I would like to briefly turn to Heidegger.

The “Yale School” stands under the sign of Heidegger more than we may tend to think. As I have recently emphasized, at the centre of Heidegger’s thinking is his relation to the poet Friedrich Hölderlin.³¹ And this is precisely the relation that we find de Man exploring in his well-known volume *Blindness and Insight* published first in 1971, and then again 1983. Here de Man declares that Heidegger’s elucidations of Hölderlin’s poems “surpass other studies” because they reveal “precisely the central ‘concern’ of Hölderlin’s work”, namely “the birth of Dionysus that Hölderlin, in the manner of Pindar, offers in illustration”.³² It is common knowledge that Derrida’s concept of *deconstruction* has its origin in Heidegger’s concept of *Destruktion*, which, as Christoph Jamme reminds us in 1998, takes us as far back as the summer semester of 1920.³³ When Johnson invokes the language of silence and wonders why Keats chose to write about a Grecian urn in 1998, she immediately then wonders why “Heidegger” in a post-war essay that appeared in English in 1971 “chose” to write about “a jug.”³⁴ Among the representatives of the “Yale School” I have episodically invoked, the most Heideggerian is of course Harries. Harries’ more than half-century interest in language from the early 1960s until today is inseparable from the spirit of Heidegger.³⁵

But the main reason why Heidegger is significant for the “Yale School” is because his connection to Hitler’s Germany was newly accented just months before the Nazi connection of de Man came to light with the publication of Victor Farías’ *Heidegger and Nazism* in the autumn of 1987.³⁶ In bitter contrast to the warm and glowing image of Heidegger’s unique “human fellowship

³⁰ de Man, Paul, *Wartime Journalism: 1939-1943*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz, and Thomas Keenan, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

³¹ Murrey, Lucas, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Akira Mizuta Lippit, Rolando Romero and Carl Good, No. 33, vol. 1 (*forthcoming*: Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2011), p. 93.

³² de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, translation and introduction by Godzich, pp. 255, 261 ; de Man, “Les exegeses de Hölderlin par Martin Heidegger.” In: *Critique*, Nr. 100-101, September-October, 1955, pp. 809, 815: “la naissance de Dionysos que Hölderlin, à la manière de Pindare, offer comme illustration”.

³³ Jamme, Christoph, “Heidegger’s Reinvention of Phenomenology”, trans. Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*, 2012).

³⁴ Johnson, *The Feminist Difference: Literature, Psychoanalysis, Race and Gender*, p. 129.

³⁵ See footnote 22.

³⁶ Farías, Victor, *Heidegger et le nazisme*, traduit de l’espangno et de l’allemand par Myriam Benarroch et Jean-Baptiste Grasset; preface de Christian Jambert (Paris: Verdier, 1987).

[Mitmenschlichkeit]” cultivated by the psychoanalyst Medard Boss early in 1987,³⁷ Farías cast new light on Heidegger’s inhuman intentions “to serve the work of Adolf Hitler”, as demonstrated by his willingness to cleanse the university of all “non-Aryans”.³⁸

The psychical explosion to which “the quiet chapel where Heidegger’s disciples were gathered”³⁹ in the late 1980s succumbed, and which was then deepened by the brutal revelation of de Man’s concealed support of Hitler’s Germany, made Heideggerians associated with the “Yale School” like Harries expectedly uneasy. This accounts for Harries’ statement in the autumn of 1989, to which I now return: While describing Yale University as a “stronghold” for “a postmodern humanism that liked to invoke Heidegger, often a Heidegger seen through Derrida’s deconstructive lens”, Harries confesses that there is in the present (1989) a need for “a thoughtful reconsideration of Heidegger’s National Socialist engagement”.⁴⁰ Because the “Yale School” was structured by intellectual heroes who inspired its style of thought, as with Heidegger, and who directly created it as a movement, as with de Man, and both of whom concealed their support of Hitler’s Germany after 1945, the “thoughtful reconsideration” Harries speaks of implies a need for deep self-reflection. This invites us to wonder: In what way has the “Yale School” thoughtfully reconsidered the Nazi-stained sources of its own identity since the late 1980s?

The answer, tragically, is not at all. This is shown in the way Harries, following de Man, draws attention to Heidegger’s interest in Hölderlin’s hymn “As when on a holiday...” As I have shown, Harries does not see that Heidegger’s main attraction to Hölderlin is the poet’s search for a leader in the present modelled upon Dionysus.⁴¹ Instead of noting what Bernhard Böschenstein trenchantly names in 1984 the “invocation of Dionysus”, *Dionysosvergegenwärtigung*,⁴² about which Hölderlin’s first later hymn coalesces, Harries represses the Greek demigod by turning to the familiar

³⁷ Heidegger, Martin, *Zollikoner Seminare*, hg. v. Medard Boss (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1987), p. xi.

³⁸ Farías, Victor, *Heidegger und der Nationalsozialismus*, Aus dem Spanischen und Französischen übersetzt von Klaus Laermann, mit einem Vorwort von Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1989), pp. 224, 228.

³⁹ Sheehan, Thomas “A Normal Nazi.” In: *The New York Review of Books*, vol. xii, No. 1-2, 14 January, 1993.

⁴⁰ Harries, “Introduction.” *Martin Heidegger: Politics – Art – Technology*, ed. Harries and Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. xiii.

⁴¹ Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, p. 87, ft. 85.

⁴² Bernhard Böschenstein, “Geschehen und Gedächtnis: Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Wie wenn am Feiertage . . .’ und ‘Andenken’—Ein einführender Vortrag,” in *Le pauvre Holterling: Blätter zur Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 1984), p. 9.

Christian prophets like John.⁴³ That Harries does not explore that which makes Heidegger’s interest in Hölderlin unique, namely the poet’s experimental gesture to the still unexplored depths of Greek religion, belongs to a general ignorance of how German philosophy and poetry is often grounded in a perversion of Greece. This is further shown by Harries’ misidentification of the source of Heidegger’s concept of “the holy”. Jamme trenchantly noted, already in 1988, that Heidegger’s *Heilige* can be traced back to the classical scholar Walter F. Otto, in particular Otto’s 1929 book *The Gods of Greece*.⁴⁴ This wonderful insight opens up a fruitful *Umfeld* of thought. In his first public lecture course on Hölderlin in the winter semester of 1934-35, Heidegger celebrates Walter F. Otto’s subsequent “beautiful and valuable book” *Dionysus: Myth and Cult* that appeared in 1933.⁴⁵ Here Walter F. Otto explicitly criticizes the protestant Kantian-inspired theologian Rudolf Otto, in particular Rudolf Otto’s concept of “the holy”.⁴⁶ Harries’ continued attempts to associate Heidegger’s concept of *das Heilige* with Rudolf Otto’s concept of “the holy” while skirting Walter F. Otto, as illustrated by his most recent gesture to the Kantian-friendly “*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*” in 2009, thus leave the difficult inner core of the Heidegger-Hitler question untouched.⁴⁷

All of this is important because it hints at how the “Yale School” never responsibly explored Heidegger’s relation to Hitler’s Germany. The turn to Hölderlin’s search for a “Chorführer”⁴⁸ (V 1196) in present-day Germany, which occurs precisely while Heidegger is turning to Walter F. Otto’s Hellenic concept of “the holy” in the late 1920s and early 1930s,⁴⁹ belongs finally to a German romance of Greece where the experimental psychic space of a new Dionysus/Christ is filled by the figure of Hitler. Given Heidegger’s explicit

⁴³ Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, p. 87, ft. 85.

⁴⁴ Jamme, Christoph, “Hölderlin und das Problem der Metaphysik: Zur Diskussion um ‘Andenken.’” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, Baumgartner und Höffe, 42, no. 4 (1988), p. 649.

⁴⁵ Heidegger, Martin, *Hölderlins Hymnen “Germanien“ und „Der Rhein“*, Bd. 39 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1980), p. 189

⁴⁶ Otto, Walter F., *Dionysos, Mythos und Kultus* (Tübingen: H. Laupphrin, 1933), p. 33.

⁴⁷ Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”*, p. 188. This historical incorrectness became clear to me through email communications with Harries while I finished my dissertation.

⁴⁸ Hölderlin, Friedrich, *Hyperion, Empedokles, Aufsätze, Übersetzungen*, Bd. 2, Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), p. 905.

⁴⁹ Murrey, Lucas, “Tragic Light and Language: An Exploration of the mystical depths – and limits – of Hölderlin’s “second Bacchus”. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (2011), pp. 317-28.

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From an invited public lecture delivered at Leuphana Universität, Lüneburg, 3 November 2011

rhetoric about the death of the Judeo-Christian God since the late 1920s,⁵⁰ Hellenic Dionysus is a dangerous competitor for his German *Führer*. Thus the Greek “preeminent demigod”⁵¹ disappears as quickly as he appears in Heidegger’s Nazi lecture courses on Hölderlin in the 1930s. This creation of this void is to make room for a new triumvirate of “violent men” who “use power, to become pre-eminent in historical being as creators, as men of action [...] without statute and limit”.⁵² The “Chorführer” of ancient Greece, in other words, gives way to the “demigods”, *Halbgötter*, of modern Germany: the poet, *Dichter*, the thinker, *Denker*, and finally, the politician, *Staatschöpfer*, a clear reference to Hitler.⁵³

Also significant is how the Heidegger-inspired acolytes of the “Yale School” repress the relation between Heidegger’s attraction to Hitler and the late Stefan George, in particular George’s mythologizing of Norbert von Hellingrath.⁵⁴ I have noted that de Man draws attention to Heidegger’s interest in Hölderlin, in particular Hölderlin’s retelling of Dionysus’ mystic birth in thunder and lightning. Given that de Man wrote his dissertation on George,⁵⁵ we would expect him to know that the George circle, *George-Kreis*, which after the discovery of Hölderlin’s translation of *Bacchae* and “As when on a holiday...” in 1910 is also named “secret Germany”, *geheimes Deutschland*,⁵⁶ cultivated a Hölderlinian “lightning-flash”, *blitz* (V 10),⁵⁷ through which “the new god”⁵⁸ of Germany was to be born after 1918.

⁵⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *Reden und Andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, Bd. 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2000), p. 111; Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, pp. 77-78.

⁵¹ Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen „Germanien“ und „Der Rhein“*, Bd. 39, p. 189.

⁵² Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, vol. 40, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983), p. 162.

⁵³ Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, p. 83.

⁵⁴ This is something I am presently exploring. See Murrey, Lucas, “Das Mysterienspiel.” In: *Public Greece/Secret Germany*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013).

⁵⁵ This was recently related to me by Bernhard Böschenstein.

⁵⁶ Murrey, Lucas, “Tragic Light and Language: An Exploration of the mystical depths – and limits – of Hölderlin’s “second Bacchus”. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (2011), p. 321, ft. 1158.

⁵⁷ George, Stefan, “Neue Gedichte”: “Chor”. In: *Blätter für die Kunst*, begründet von Stefan George, hg. v. Carl Klein, *Neunte Folge* (Berlin: Otto v. Holten, 1910), p. 34. This poem is significantly reprinted in George’s 1914 *Der Stern des Bundes*. George, Stefan, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 8, *Der Stern des Bundes* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), p. 114. I also gesture to the meaning of this poetic complex in my recent dissertation.

⁵⁸ George, Stefan, “Hölderlin.” *Blätter für die Kunst*, begründet von Stefan George, hg. v. Carl Klein, *Elfte und zwölfte Folge* (Berlin: Otto v. Holten, 1919), p. 13.

But something that de Man and the “Yale School” left untouched – and indeed never wanted to touch – is the perverse psychical zone wherein the figures of Hellingrath and Hitler are inextricably tied to one another. Hellingrath, who discovered Hölderlin’s lost manuscripts and passionately embraced George’s spirit, died while fighting for the German cause at Douaumont near Verdun on 14 December 1916. The youthful Hölderlinian philologist and Georgian succumbed, in other words, to what Friedrich Gundolf, who also fought at Verdun, names in a letter to George the “lightning-twitching horizon”, *blitze-durchzuckte[r] Horizont*, whose “dream”-like reality the “imagination” had still to comprehend.⁵⁹ George memorialized Hellingrath in the shadow of Nietzsche’s description of Dionysus’ “dismemberment”, *Zerstückelung*, and “transfiguration [...] into air, water, earth and fire”, *Luft, Wasser, Erde und Feuer*,⁶⁰ in his description of “Norbert” who is tragically “dispersed into fire earth and air”, *in feuer erd und luft zerspellt* (V 8).⁶¹

Why is this important? Hellingrath’s aunt, princess Elsa Bruckmann, saw in Hitler, who like Heidegger was born one year after her nephew in 1889 and who also suffered the trauma of Verdun, a replacement for Hellingrath after his tragic death.⁶² As is well known, Elsa Bruckmann’s salon welcomed her nephew’s Hölderlinian “secret Germany”. This is shown by the two lectures Hellingrath delivered on Hölderlin while on leave and dressed in soldier’s uniform before friends Karl Wolfskehl, Alfred Schuler, Ludwig Klages and Rainer Maria Rilke in early 1915,⁶³ precisely when the mass death of The First World War was announcing itself. This is the same trauma, as is well known, through which Hitler’s perversion of art, religion and politics crystalizes into an illusion of immortality. Less known is how Elsa Bruckmann’s salon also welcomed the meeting between the Nazi philosopher Alfred Bäumler and Hitler, who met for an hour through her graces in March of 1931.⁶⁴ Here Hellingrath’s double who

⁵⁹ George, Stefan, *Briefwechsel, Stefan George, Friedrich Gundolf*, hg. v. Robert Böhringer mit Georg Peter Landmann (München: H. Küpper, 1962), p. 295.

⁶⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Section X. Nietzsche, Friedrich, *Kritische Studienausgabe, Die Geburt der Tragödie, Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen I-IV, Nachgelassene Schriften 1870-1873*, hg. v. Giorgio Colli und Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988).

⁶¹ George, Stefan, “Norbert.” *Blätter für die Kunst*, begründet von Stefan George, hg. v. Carl Klein, *Elfte und zwölfte Folge* (Berlin: Otto v. Holten, 1919), p. 16.

⁶² This was brought to my attention by Bernhard Böschenstein. See Bohnenkamp, Klaus E., “Hofmannsthal’s Egeria. Elsa Prinzessin Cantacuzène, spatter verheiratete Bruckmann, im Briefwechsel mit dem Dichter vom 24. November 1893 bis zum 10. Januar in Wien”, *Hofmannsthal Jahrbuch zur Europäischen Moderne*, Band 18 (Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, 2010).

⁶³ Oelmann, Ute, “Norbert von Hellingrath,” *Hölderlin-Handbuch, Leben-Werk-Wirkung*, hg. v. Johann Kreuzer, (Stuttgart und Weimar: Metzler Verlag, 2002), p. 424.

⁶⁴ Bäumler, Alfred, *Männerbund und Wissenschaft* (Berlin: Junker und Dunnhaupt, 1934), p. 194.

had been haunting Elsa Bruckmann’s villa since 1924: Hitler⁶⁵ was connected to the philosopher who had prepared the way for a Hölderlin “secret Germany” and nationalist philosophy in 1926:⁶⁶ Alfred Bäumler.

Heidegger’s relationship to Bäumler gives us a critical sense of Heidegger’s relation to Hitler’s Germany. Here I am thinking not only of Heidegger’s inspired letter to Bäumler in early 1928,⁶⁷ the hikes the two “philosophers” took together through the Böhmerwald in the summer of 1932 just after Bäumler had met Hitler through Elsa Bruckmann,⁶⁸ and their bucolic retreat at Heidegger’s hut in Todtnauberg during the summer of 1933 following the Nazi book burnings.⁶⁹ I am thinking also of Heidegger’s persistent attraction to Bäumler after 1945, as illustrated by his attempt to contact his old friend and colleague through the classicist Wolfgang Schadewaldt in 1951.⁷⁰

Heidegger’s turn to art, *Kunst*, and Hölderlin in the late 1920s and early 1930s is symptomatic of what I would like to call a *psychical protective shield*, *Schutzraum*, in which Heidegger’s (per)versions of “secret Germany” and Hitler’s Germany complement one another.⁷¹ The “nice conversation” Heidegger has with Gundolf late in 1929,⁷² precisely when Heidegger is dressing himself like George,⁷³ looks forward to the celebration not of a Dionysian “Chorführer” in 1933, but of a new German “*Führer* [...] and he alone”.⁷⁴ The sustained attraction that we see in Heidegger to what he names “*geheim*es

⁶⁵ Böhringer, Robert, *Mein Bild von Stefan George*, 2nd ed. (Düsseldorf: Helmut Küpper, 1967), pp. 249-50.

⁶⁶ Bachofen, J.J., *Der Mythos von Orient und Occident, eine Metaphysik der alten Welt*, mit einer Einleitung von Alfred Bäumler, hg. v. Manfred Schroeter (München: C. H. Beck, 1926), p. i.

⁶⁷ *Thomas Mann und Alfred Bäumler: Eine Dokumentation*, hg. v. Marianne Bäumler, Hubert Brunträger, und Hermann Kurzke (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1989), p. 242.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Heidegger, Martin, *Wegmarken*, Bd. 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1976), p. 483.

⁶⁹ Bräuninger, Werner, “*Ich wollte nicht daneben stehen...*”: *Lebensentwürfe von Alfred Bäumler bis Ernst Jünger* (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2006), p. 27.

⁷⁰ Bäumler, Alfred, “Kulturmorphologie und Philosophie.” In *Spengler-Studien. Festgabe für Manfred Schröter zum 85. Geburtstag* (München: C.H. Beck, 1965), pp. 115-116.

⁷¹ This may also be true for Carl Schmitt. For a new, insightful account of Schmitt, see Jean-François Kervégan’s forthcoming *Que faire de Carl Schmitt?* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

⁷² Petzet, Heinrich Wiegand, *Auf einen Stern zugehen: Begegnungen und Gespräche mit Martin Heidegger 1929-1976* (Frankfurt am Main: Societäts-Verlag, 1983), p. 18.

⁷³ Heidegger, Martin, *Martin Heidegger, Elisabeth Blochmann: Briefwechsel 1918 – 1969*, hg. v. Joachim Storck (Marbach am Neckar: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft, 1989), p. 34. One thinks also of Beuron and “the monks’ costume” the philosopher wore not only while participating in monastic ritual. See Otto Pöggeler’s insightful essay, “Heideggers Weg von Luther zu Hölderlin,” *Heidegger und die christliche Tradition*, hg. v. Norbert Fischer und Friedrich-Wilhelm von Hermann (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2007), p. 180.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Reden und Andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges*, Bd. 16, p. 184.

Deutschland” in 1934,⁷⁵ and which lives on in his sacralisation of Hellingrath⁷⁶ (see in particular Heidegger’s 1936 dedication),⁷⁷ must also be tied to the pictures we have of the Nazi philosopher in 1936 – which, similar to de Man, Heidegger tried to conceal. Here we come across Heidegger wearing emblems like the swastika pin and ritually intoning Hitler’s name before lectures with the Nazi salute.⁷⁸ Finally, Heidegger’s upper level seminar on George in the summer semester of 1939⁷⁹ and his celebration of George’s poem “Norbert” during the winter semester of 1941-42⁸⁰ frame his praise not of a Dionysian “blitz”, but a Hitlerian *Blitzkrieg* that tears through the Ardennes forest in the summer of 1940.⁸¹

The *Schutzraum* to which Heidegger’s thinking belongs shields his need to raise the German people, language and earth above all other peoples, languages and places of earth through erratic shifts to figures like Hitler and Hellingrath. When it is no longer legal to celebrate Hitler in public after 1945, his *Schutzraum* regresses into a more isolated and episodic experience of George and Hellingrath, and this means to the original Hölderlinian “blitz” of 1910-1914 from which a new German god shall arise. The only problem after 1945 for Heidegger is noted in his confession in a letter to Hellingrath’s widow just months before his death in February 1976: “It is not yet time”, *Nicht ist es Zeit*,⁸² for this new German god. Harries, who fails to note that Heidegger’s edition “As when on a holiday...” from the late 1930s and early 1940s has its origin in George’s first printing of Hölderlin’s hymn in 1910,⁸³ exemplifies how Heidegger-initiates of the “Yale School” skirt Heidegger’s relation to the Hitlerian.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 290.

⁷⁶ This begins in his lecture course in 1934-35. See Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen* “Germanien“ und „Der Rhein“, Bd. 39.

⁷⁷ Heidegger, Martin, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, Bd. 4 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1996), p. 33.

⁷⁸ Sheehan, Thomas, “Heidegger and the Nazis”, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. XXXV, No. 10 (June 16, 1988), p. 43.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, Martin, *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, Bd. 85 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1999), pp. 69-72.

⁸⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *Hölderlins Hymne “Andenken”*, Bd. 52 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1992), pp. 44-45.

⁸¹ Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche*, Bd. 6.2 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997), p. 165.

⁸² Letter from Heidegger to Imma von Bodenmershof, 10 February 1976. *Martin Heidegger und Imma von Bodmershof: Briefwechsel, 1959-1976*, hg. v. Bruno Pieger, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2000), p. 143.

⁸³ Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, p. 85, ft. 87.

The Linguistic Protective Shield (Der sprachliche Schutzraum)

One of the symptoms of the “Yale School”’s repression of its Nazi-stained sources is its tendency to lose itself in abstract language. I return for the last time to Harries’ description of Yale in 1989 as a “stronghold” for “a postmodern humanism that liked to invoke Heidegger, often a Heidegger seen through Derrida’s deconstructive lens”, in particular Harries’ claim that this elite institution in New Haven is unusually fruitful for “a thoughtful reconsideration of Heidegger’s National Socialist engagement”. Harries turns to Derrida’s characterization of Hitler’s Germany as a “dark continent”. He proceeds to speak of a collective reluctance to embark on a journey to explore Nazism given that “our spiritual home lies in ruin”.⁸⁴ But the spiritual home to which Harries gestures remains unclear. Is Harries longing for a Christian paradise that is no longer possible after the death of God? I have noted his repression of Dionysus in favour of familiar Christian prophets such as John. And I have just shown, this means an inability “to confront Heidegger”⁸⁵ even after the late 1980s.

The unclear language of the “Yale School” that conceals its problematic ties to National Socialism is related to its general tendency to dissolve into a language of obscurity. Harries’ vague gestures to “a postmodern humanism”, the “deconstructive lens” and a “spiritual home [that] lies in ruin” are thus linked to Derrida’s no less vague gestures to Hitler’s Germany as a “dark continent”. This impulse of linguistic abstraction resides within the heart of this intellectual movement. In 1987 Derrida represses the history of Heidegger’s relation to Hitler through general references to a plurality of “Nazisms”.⁸⁶ One year later in 1988 Derrida similarly represses de Man’s Nazi journalism by turning our attention to a mystifying “war” that – somehow? – cannot be identified.⁸⁷ But what is still more alarming is how such flaccid statements issue forth directly from the centre of Derrida’s “deconstructive lens”. Here I am thinking of a story related to me recently by my colleague Bernhard Böschenstein. While giving a seminar in Geneva, Derrida proceeded to elucidate an esoteric relation between the German word *Überfall* and women’s underwear, *les dessous féminins*.

⁸⁴ Harries, Karsten, “Philosophy, Politics, Technology,” *Martin Heidegger: Politics – Art – Technology*, ed. Harries and Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. 226.

⁸⁵ Harries, “Introduction.” *Martin Heidegger: Politics – Art – Technology*, ed. Harries and Jamme (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1994), p. xxi.

⁸⁶ Derrida, Jacques, “Heidegger, l’enfer des philosophes,” *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 6-12, November (1987), pp. 170-174.

⁸⁷ Derrida, Jacques, “Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man’s War”, trans. Peggy Kamuf, *Inquiry*, 14, Spring (1988), p. 590. Reprinted in: *Responses: on Paul de Man’s Wartime journalism*, ed. Werner Hamacher, Neil Hertz (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1988) p. 127.

Recognizing that Derrida was ignorant of the everyday German word for an “attack” or “ambush”, Böschenstein interrupted the seminar and explained its straightforward meaning. Later, when the literary scientist and philosopher met again by chance in Seattle, Böschenstein asked Derrida what it was about Heidegger that he found so attractive. Derrida answered: “the play of words”, *die Wortspiele*.⁸⁸

This anecdote has an important irony. Irritated by Böschenstein’s will to linguistic clarity, Derrida was far more interested in Heidegger than the sober literary scientist. But it is precisely Böschenstein’s philological sobriety that made him, and not Derrida, the person to whom Heidegger turned in the late 1950s while the Nazi-philosopher was nursing the traumatized Hölderlinian core of his post-1945 philosophy.⁸⁹ Böschenstein’s linguistic balance further shielded him from Heidegger’s perverted *Schutzraum*. Böschenstein is right to finally reject Heidegger, despite Heidegger’s acceptance of him. And this is not to say that Böschenstein’s balanced experience of language stalls poetic and philosophical *Wortspiele*. Consider the lecture he delivered at Leuphana University in November 2010: “Hölderlins Dionysos – Versuch eines Gesamtbildes”.⁹⁰

Of course it is natural for a person to create what I would like to call a *linguistic protective shield* (*sprachlicher Schutzraum*) to guard oneself from the unease that can accompany a sudden confrontation with past events. While taking a graduate seminar at Yale with Jacobs I asked her about de Man, in particular about what happened when she first heard about his wartime journalism. After recalling Derrida’s snap decision to publish all of de Man’s articles, Jacobs explained that her first reaction was disbelief. Because the articles were signed “P. M.”, de Man’s Jewish-American student imagined that the author had – somehow? – not been “P.[aul de] M.[an]”, but instead a “P.[eter] M.”, or someone else with the first and last initials “P. M.”.⁹¹

But the insulation of an imaginary linguistic realm can be suffocating and fatal. Although Jacobs’ doctoral adviser transcends Harries in his ability to identify “the birth of Dionysus that Hölderlin, in the manner of Pindar, offers in illustration”, de Man nevertheless gravitates to an abyss of infinite intellectual regression: While “*it is a fact that Hölderlin says exactly the opposite of what*

⁸⁸ Email from Bernhard Böschenstein to Lucas Murrey, 13 Oktober 2011.

⁸⁹ Böschenstein, Bernhard, “Im Gespräch mit Heideggers Erläuterung von Hölderlins später Hymne *Griechenland*.” “Es bleibt aber eine Spur, Doch eines Wortes”: zur späten Hymnik und Tragödientheorie Friedrich Hölderlins, hg. v. Christoph Jamme und Anja Lemke (München: Fink, 2004), p. 271.

⁹⁰ This lecture was held on 30 November 2010, and shall also appear in: *Public Greece/Secret Germany*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013).

⁹¹ Carol Jacobs recently confirmed my story in an email I received from her on 26 September 2011.

“Why Elite Education Has Failed in America – and Elsewhere: A Critique of the ‘Yale School’”

Dr. Lucas Murrey

From an invited public lecture delivered at Leuphana Universität, Lüneburg, 3 November 2011

Heidegger makes him say”, we are told, “[i]t can indeed be said that Heidegger and Hölderlin speak the same thing”.⁹² Our journey to explore Nazism, in other words, is interrupted by a limitless “level of thought” in which “it is” – conveniently – “difficult to distinguish between a proposition and that which constitutes its opposite.”⁹³

7

Skirting the Monetary

To begin to gesture to a conclusion of sorts, I would like to return to my earlier point that the “Yale School” is linked to Yale University in New Haven. Such a gesture may seem surprising. Nowhere did I imply that the “Yale School” is interested in the spirit of place. This raises the question: How can an intellectual movement be tied to a place while remaining uninterested in the spirit of place itself?

As the sociologist G. William Domhoff has recently shown, the image of the relation of Yale University to New Haven since the 1960s has been false.⁹⁴ To counter this perverted picture, Domhoff turns to real images. In contrast to “the great future made possible through urban renewal”, we consider the 17 murders in New Haven committed between October 2009 and mid-April 2010.⁹⁵

Domhoff is right to accent this brutal truth. By October of this year 2011 New Haven witnessed no less than 29 murders close to Yale’s campus.⁹⁶ Exiting the dreamy picture of “spires and quadrangles of [...] one of America’s richest Ivy League colleges”, we confront childbearing locals “worrying about the winter” ritually excluded by “Yale’s stone walls, elegant colonial churches and smart people walking past boutiques and coffee shops, carrying their course books.”⁹⁷

But here I am not interested in illuminating how Yale University “contribute[d] significantly to the basic problems”⁹⁸ that haunt the small city where it thrives. The details of its abuse of locals, in particular its limitless acquisition of local property to skirt the payment of taxes, has been

⁹² de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, translation and introduction by Godzich, pp. 254-55.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁹⁴ Domhoff, G. William, “Who Really Ruled in Dahl’s New Haven?”, September (2005): http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/new_haven.htm.

⁹⁵ Cited in: Domhoff, “Who Really Ruled in Dahl’s New Haven?”, September (2005): http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/new_haven.htm.

⁹⁶ Defiesta, Nick, “Man murdered in East Rock”, *Yale Daily News*, Friday, October 28 (2011): <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2011/oct/28/man-murdered-east-rock/>.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

demonstrated.⁹⁹ Instead I am concerned with *the linguistic ritual* that accompanies this exploitation of place. Domhoff notes that New Haven “is now one of the poorest cities in the United States. Yale and its faculty members are islands of increasing privilege and isolation in a sea of misery.”¹⁰⁰ As is also well known, many of Yale’s professors earned over 100,000 dollars every year since the 1990s. This means that it has been in their interest to support a social-politics where individuals can acquire unlimited amounts of money. At the top of this perversion is the longest serving president in the Ivy League, Rick Levin, whose salary reaches up to a million dollars, and whose earnings during the past decade exceed over 10 million dollars.¹⁰¹

But this is something Levin refuses to talk about. When recently asked about his compensation before departing to another continent, Yale’s president refused to comment.¹⁰² This *illusory silence* complements the picture of New Haven as a “renaissance” of “urban renewal”.¹⁰³ It complements also the president’s *linguistic illusions*. Consider Levin’s celebration of “[u]niversities” as “places well situated for critical analysis of the problems our society faces and reasoned discussion of the most effective strategies to build a better world”.¹⁰⁴ This is at least what I gleaned from the email I received a few weeks ago as an alumnus of Yale. Was I surprised when Levin noted that our present discussion about money is “over-simplified”?¹⁰⁵ The Frederick William Beinecke professor of economics is ironically ignorant about money, which, as the classical scholar Richard Seaford has brilliantly shown, arose already in ancient Greece, and has harmed human life in ways that have still to be studied.¹⁰⁶

Levin’s *linguistic insulation*, which keeps him from criticizing how money tends to be concentrated in the hands of a few reckless individuals, is closer to the *sprachlicher Schutzraum* of the “Yale School” than we may think. For all its claims to philosophical thoughtfulness, this intellectual movement with its

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Kaplan, Thomas, “Levin pay highest in Ivy League: After \$90,000 raise, longest-serving Ivy president earned \$869,026 salary in 2006”, *Yale Daily News*, Tuesday, November 13 (2007): <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2007/nov/13/levin-pay-highest-in-ivy-league/>.

¹⁰² Needham, Paul, “Levin’ salary third-highest in Ivy League”, *Yale Daily News*, Tuesday, November 18 (2008): <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2008/nov/18/levins-salary-third-highest-in-ivy-league/>.

¹⁰³ Domhoff, “Who Really Ruled in Dahl’s New Haven?”, September (2005): http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/local/new_haven.htm.

¹⁰⁴ Email to the Alumni, Parents and Friends of Yale from 13 October 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Here the classic text is Seaford, Richard, *Money and the early Greek mind: Homer, philosophy, tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Many of Seaford’s insights here are deepened in his recent monograph. See Seaford, Richard, *Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

limitless sea of linguistic illusion has failed to note the deceptively simple fact that philosophy arose in the west *as a consequence of money*, something that Seaford has also brilliantly shown.¹⁰⁷ Thus the unlimited monetary essence underlying the unlimited philosophical spirit of Heraclitus,¹⁰⁸ which “philosophers” such as Harries have skirted,¹⁰⁹ helps us to resolve the paradox noted above: The “Yale School” is harmonious with Yale University because *both ritualize an abstract experience of language that conceals the exploitation of place for unlimited individual monetary gain*. Never once did this American tradition of thought think about the historical problem of money and places denigrated into perverted forms of placelessness.

But this is not all. The *illusory linguistic zone* in which the “Yale School” dwells is tied to a still greater problem of irreality, one that, similar to the sea-ice presently melting in the Arctic, is at once incomprehensible and still unthought. I have implied that philosophers working in the humanities everywhere, not just at Yale, tend to remain ignorant about the origin of their discipline in the birth of money in ancient Greece.¹¹⁰ This impulse to shut oneself off from a realistic picture of the past is reflected in everyday Americans who tend to be radically misinformed about how concentrated wealth actually is in their country.¹¹¹ Instead of looking at the facts, the American people, and this includes American academics, live in a dream world where it is imagined, for example, that poverty is less brutal than it is, and that wealth comes from working for wages.¹¹² This tragic impulse to replace a sober view of life with a virtual picture of reality cannot be linked to the Native American Indians whose earthly spirits disappeared as soon as Europeans seeking a *New England* translated their sacred names into free-floating – that is *placeless* – images of alphabetic letters that seem to complement an unethical world of money. One thinks of the eastern Algonquian word for “great little mountain”: *Massachusetts*, and the saying “at the long tidal river”, otherwise known as *Connecticut*. But how are we to understand the ancient European source of the American tendency to illusion that the “Yale School” illustrates?

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*, pp. 273-331.

¹⁰⁹ Nowhere does Harries or anyone else associated with the “Yale School” address this critical issue.

¹¹⁰ Seaford, *Money and the early Greek mind: Homer, philosophy, tragedy; Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*.

¹¹¹ Domhoff, G. William, “Wealth, Income, and Power”, September (2005):

<http://sociology.ucsc.edu/whorulesamerica/power/wealth.html>.

¹¹² Ibid.

Skirting the Earth

The accumulation of unlimited individual wealth, I would like to note, is connected to a concept of earth as a dead machine whose resources can be infinitely exploited by science. This brings me to a final point I would like to make about the “Yale School”, one that is similarly symptomatic of a greater problem in the humanities, namely the failure to formulate a clear relation to the earth and the history of this relation in the west.

To be sure, “Yale School”-initiates like Harries flirt with this relation. But as we should expect, here we also stumble across problems. Harries’ concept of earth is derived from Heidegger whose own concept is inadequate in a way that Harries has not understood. This is shown most clearly in Harries’ skirting of the Dionysian context that haunts Heidegger’s turn to “the event”, *Ereignis*. Although he notes that Heidegger’s criticism of science through the word *Ereignis* in 1919 is rooted in his attraction to the choral song of Sophocles’ *Antigone* translated by Hölderlin,¹¹³ Harries fails to see that this “event” of sunlight is rooted in cult ritual re-enacting the mythic appearance of a divine being mystically illuminated “*from within*.”¹¹⁴ Seaford has drawn attention to theatrical re-enactments of the epiphany of the earth goddess in the *Demeter Hymn*, as “when the house is filled with light ‘as with lightning’” (V 278 – 80).¹¹⁵ Given that Greek tragedy is inseparable from a religious holiday celebrating the epiphany of Dionysus, the luminous *Ereignis* Heidegger seeks cannot be disassociated from a visual revelation of the Greek demigod who in *Bacchae* is named “greatest light” (V 608) and in *Antigone* “chorus-leader [Chorführer] of fire-breathing stars” (V 1146-7).¹¹⁶

But like most philosophers, Harries is unaware of the history of how light in Greece is rooted in the dark powers of earth. This means that Harries cannot evaluate Heidegger’s perversion of this *geocentric limit of light*, in particular how this “event” of light is related to Heidegger’s search for communal rebirth after the First World War in 1919 and then in the late 1920s until 1945. This search is connected to the deeper precondition of Heidegger’s relation to Hitler. Harries notes Heidegger’s turn to tragedy in 1919 is mediated by Hölderlin. Nevertheless, Harries fails to point out that this would never have happened, if

¹¹³ Harries, *Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”*, p. 111.

¹¹⁴ Seaford, *Cosmology and the Polis: The Social Construction of Space and Time in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*, p. 28.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ For an episodic sketch of what I here name *the geocentric limit of light*, see Part II “Hölderlin’s search for the right number of eyes” in: Murrey, “Tragic Light and Language: An Exploration of the mystical depths – and limits – of Hölderlin’s “second Bacchus”. Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University (2011), pp. 51-122.

not for the image of Hölderlin that Stefan George had created in 1910 and thereafter, and this includes George’s “[h]ints”, *WINKE*, of a Hölderlin-inspired German “demigod”, *Halbgott*, in 1919 who mystically ascends “from out of the deepest earth”, *AUS DER WEITGEBORSTNEN ERDE* (V 3).¹¹⁷

Here I should note: It has been easy enough for intellectual constellations like the “Yale School” to conceal its ignorance about Dionysian Greece. Still today, the humanities are recovering from the fatal misidentifications about the earliest forms of pre-Judeo-Christian western identity. One of the greatest of these delusions is that which arose from classicists like Erwin Rohde and Wilamowitz-Moellendorf who falsely believed that Dionysus was not a Greek god. This historical inaccuracy continued well into the 1970s, when the “Yale School” first began to flourish. This invites us to wonder: To what extent have our familiar forms of higher education normalized an inauthentic experience of language and history whose repression of the earth complements a global culture founded upon money and traditional mechanistic science? It is hardly surprising that the “Yale School”, despite its deep interest in Hölderlin, skirted the poet’s insight that the earthly winegod is also a “Name-creator”, *Nahmenschöpfer*.¹¹⁸

This brings me to the final point with which I would like to conclude. The *unfruitful fantasies of language* that the “Yale School” betrays should be read as a cipher of the extent to which the humanities continue to unconsciously use a Judeo-Christian model of language whose ancient impulse of uprootedness and abstraction successfully reinvented itself during the past two centuries to complement the limitless forms of science and money.¹¹⁹ For are not the uprooted texts that we read and write on our mobile visual machines like laptops and cell phones simply the disconnected stone tablets of Shavuot and the otherworldly breath of the Pentecost dressed up in new transcendental, mechanical clothes?¹²⁰ Dionysus, who reminds us that authentic language belongs to the living diversity of earth’s biospheres, therefore remains a dangerous and attractive figure. Because he represents a part of ourselves we have still to confront – one that we fear because it calls out to us to acknowledge our tragic place in the cosmos, Dionysus is not only skirted, but also ritually abused. Witness Harries’ all-too-Christian dissimulation of Germany’s machine

¹¹⁷ George, Stefan, “Winke”, *Blätter für die Kunst*, begründet von Stefan George, hg. v. Carl Klein, Elfte und zwölfte Folge (Berlin: Otto v. Holtten, 1919), p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Murrey, “Heidegger at Sea: The Tragic Voyage to a Post-modern, Geocentric Name”, *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, ed. Lippit, Romero and Good, No. 33, vol. 1, p. 89.

¹¹⁹ The fact that Americans tend to be unrealistic about money is clearly connected to the fact that most Americans are Judeo-Christian and or from another religious sect that condemns the earth for the sake of a God who raises one language and people above all others (well over 3 in 4 persons, if not more). In support of the connection I see between American and Europe, Europe reveals still more concentrated religious patterns.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

genocide in 2009 as “bestial violence that so readily springs” – somehow? – “from the Dionysian earth.”¹²¹

9

Skirting the Universal Spirit of the University

Through its Judeo-Christian *sprachlicher Schutzraum* that actively buries its Nazi-stained sources, the “Yale School” is caught up in a global problem of money and science that tends to repress the earth. As we live more and more in virtual realities that makes us less aware of history, less aware of a real outside and *less happy*, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to dream of what Christoph Jamme recently named in 2010 the “realization of humanity”, *Verwirklichung der Humanität*.¹²² Most unsettling, our limitless everyday descent into virtual realities has made us unaware of the loss of the biodiversity critical for our species to sustain itself. The ancient Greek myth of Erysichthon who, suffering from an all-consuming hunger, devoured the organs of his own body, as Seaford rightly implies, is not simply a metaphor for the disappearance of rainforests.¹²³

The *inauthentic turn to language* that we witness in the “Yale School” thus offers us also a unique glimpse into the cause of what may become the greatest tragedy our species has faced. The mystery of language, and here I mean *an authentic experience of language that embraces the earth*, is no doubt a powerful tool for elite forms of education to question the evil social-politics of the unlimited money culture that rules our planet. And this is why the “Yale School” is unusually tragic. Instead of questioning *the illusion of recorded speech* that alphabetic writing produces, the “Yale School” with its emphasis on language

¹²¹ Harries, Art Matters: A Critical Commentary on Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art”, p. 188.

¹²² Jamme, Christoph, “The Inheritance of Idealism”, trans. Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*: München: Wilhelm Fink, 2012).

¹²³ Seaford, Richard, “Money makes the (Greek) world go round: What the ancient Greek anxiety about money has to tell us about our own economic predicaments”, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 June, (2009). Here I would also like to note that the earlier reference to Dionysus’ “transfiguration [...] into air, water, earth and fire”, *Luft, Wasser, Erde und Feuer* (p. 10), is perhaps more directly linked to a universal experience of earth than we may think. See, for example, Böhme, Gernot; Böhme, Hartmut, Feuer, Wasser, Erde, Luft: eine Kulturgeschichte der Elemente (München: C. H. Beck, 1996), pp. 310-11. Here we find reference to how James Lovelock’s theory of the earth (Gaia), as a living, pulsating and self-regulating organism has recently provided science with a more clear view of the human’s (earthly) place in the cosmos. See Lovelock, James, The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning (New York: Basic Books, 2009). See also Stephan Harding’s Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia, foreword by Lynn Margulis (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Pub. Co., 2006).

ironically produced *just another linguistic illusion*. While speaking about writing, Barry Powell insightfully criticizes the academic egoism that has marked scholarship on writing: “Answers have been obtuse or fanciful, especially in the German tradition of scholarship, which imagines that conditions in culture were the same in 800 B.C. as they were in the twentieth century.”¹²⁴ Powell’s important critique of how unreflective we have been in regard to the “combining of letters” *grammáton te sunthéseis* (V 460),¹²⁵ and this means the “abc”s into which all western persons are inducted as children in school still today, is no less true of the “Yale School”, which skirted the history and origin of text.

As I hope to have shown, *the ignorance of language* that we confront here is less than innocent. The idea that writing is disconnected from history and earth, an idea that complements the unlimited spirits of science and money, continues the ancient Christian belief that language has its origin in a God who demands that we turn away from the dark powers of the earth to the illusions of another world. By “dark powers” I mean literally dark, not evil, but simply that which the eye cannot see, because they are buried in the darkness of the earth below. That the production of a God careless about earth is a perversion of humankind is shown vividly in the way that the “Yale School”, being associated with Yale University, remained cruelly distant from the geographical place (New Haven) that supported its sea of textual illusions. Such an intellectual shortcoming could never have occurred if we were not still suffering from what Seaford names “the large gap in western religious experience” that “Christianity [has] left”.¹²⁶ But as the chorus of Greek tragedy reminds us: “Time reveals all things.” Like the classicists of the 18th and 19th centuries who first studied writing, acolytes of the “Yale School” “produced interesting theories and complex proofs, but because their premises were wrong their work was to a large degree a waste of time.”¹²⁷

What at first appeared like an exceptionally fruitful journey into the universal spirit of human nature is, in the end, a warning that as we reinvent the concept of the sacred in a way that makes it more accessible to all of us, we must question devious images of scholarship that ironically keep us from progressing to a more ethical picture of our humble place in the cosmos. Before losing ourselves in textual fever, we must say farewell to intellectual romances that stand in the way of our need to learn how to breathe with the earth. Here I am thinking of those torch-lit processions and homecomings that precede Plato’s

¹²⁴ Powell, “Homeric Writing”. In: *Public Greece/Secret Germany*, ed. Christoph Jamme and Lucas Murrey (*forthcoming*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013).

¹²⁵ Aeschylus, *Prometheus*. In: *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoedias*, ed. Denys Page (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

¹²⁶ Email from Richard Seaford to Lucas Murrey, 19 April 2010.

¹²⁷ Powell, Barry, “The Philologist’s Homer.” *Homer* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 21-22.

“Why Elite Education Has Failed in America – and Elsewhere: A Critique of the ‘Yale School’”

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akádemos, in particular the chorus of satyrs who discover “the secret of how to restore the wind”.¹²⁸ Abandoning our inauthentic *sprachlicher Schutzraum*, we should embark on a *primal linguistic turn*: a new historical experience of language and writing that leads us out of our virtual realities and back to the earthly places where a more universal spirit can flourish and sustain human life. This at least should be the task of intellectuals at elite universities today. For if we as a species cannot reformulate our relation to the sacred and language in way that honours the earth, then *this mysterious, beautiful goddess* may leave us behind.

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¹²⁸ Cited in: Euripides, *Cyclops*, With an Introduction and Commentary by Richard Seaford (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 2.