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Heidegger and the Question of National Socialism

Disclosure and Gestalt

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Introduction

The Problem of Formlessness

The object of this book is to investigate the philosophical foundations and cultural context of Martin Heidegger's political and aesthetic thought in relation to the question of being, the question which determined the course of the philosopher's thought. In particular, I will focus on the question of 'form,' in the sense of *gestalt*, as the guiding thread which determined not only Heidegger's understanding of the being of beings in the 1930s, but also German conservative thought in the arts, technology, and political science. The question of *gestalt* signifies the necessity of giving form to an existence impacted by the threat of formlessness emerging from technology and social upheaval. According to Heidegger, however, the cultural critique of the conservatives failed to grasp the roots of formlessness in the very metaphysical destiny of the West. Consequently a concept of form, as *gestalt*, has to be won from the deconstruction of metaphysics as realized in technology.

Heidegger's understanding of *gestalt* offers entrance into the meaning of being as he unfolds it after 1933. It is my argument that Heidegger understands being as *differentiated presencing in beings*, and that being, consequently, is always to be conceived as in-corporated, finite, temporal, and historically sited in beings. The metaphysical concept of being as Idea, abiding presence, the transcendental, and the most general and abstract category of beings is shown to be derivative of the historicity of being.

Since the publication of Victor Farias's *Heidegger and Nazism*, the question of the relation 'Heidegger's politics' to his thought has been posed in numerous publications.¹ The most significant of these no longer dis-

pute that this relation is essential to the understanding of Heidegger's philosophy. The works of Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Thiele, Rickey, Ward, Schürmann, and Zimmerman may be mentioned as contributions to this discussion.² Other works, such as Hans Sluga's, offer a precise historical account of aspects of German politics in the 1930s; Herf's sociology of conservative German thought in the 1920s and 1930s renders much useful information, but, like Ott's biography of Heidegger, it is philosophically uninformed.³ Although there are, moreover, many substantial historical works dealing with the Weimar period and the 'conservative revolution' leading to 1933, Heidegger's thought is ignored or not given the significance it deserves.⁴ Conversely, a number of works on Heidegger's understanding of being show an appreciation of the historicity of being, but fail to relate the question of the differentiated presencing of being to Heidegger's political engagement in a convincing way, or neglect to do so at all.⁵ In these philosophical works, moreover, one misses a sense of the dense and often contradictory texture of the period to which Heidegger belonged. Consequently the need remains for a thorough treatment of the political philosophy of Heidegger in terms of his key question – the question of being – and of Heidegger's understanding of being as a response to the cultural crisis of interwar Germany. This crisis, I argue, was essentially a crisis of threatened formlessness. And precisely as such, it was also a crisis of the meaning of being as that which grants to each entity the singularity of its presence. The approach I undertake here, in terms of the differentiated presencing of being as *gestalt*, attempts to show that Heidegger's work, at least in one, essential respect, is a response to this dual crisis. My object is to establish the systematic and historical unity of the question of being and to show the impact of this question on the idea of the political in Heidegger's thought. Precisely because the question of being arises out of the history of being it is not, as often claimed, detached from concrete historical existence. While Heidegger was undoubtedly mistaken regarding the character of National Socialism, this movement, as well as the conservative revolution itself, was, at least initially, sufficiently complex and internally contradictory to allow Heidegger to read them as the beginning of a new founding, or *gestalt*-giving, of the *Volk* and its state. And only what has *gestalt*, in Heidegger's understanding of the tradition, has being, and has a future. The present work consequently offers itself not only as a contribution to Heidegger studies, but also, taking Heidegger's political philosophy seriously, as a reflection on the politics of *gestalt*.

In chapter 1, I argue that Heidegger's destruction of the history of

metaphysics offers a challenge to planetary, cosmopolitan thinking. The concept of the planetary, understood as the representational space of subjectivity, is opposed to that of the earth; the earth is conceived in its historicity as the homeland of its peoples. To think the earth, in turn, leads to the site opened up by the historicity of *Dasein*, and to the articulation of this site in works, rites, acts, and thought. As my commentary on three short texts from Heidegger's late work shows, a work of art, as image, for example, is one way in which this site is articulated and 'incorporated.' What is given in the image in this way is no longer conceived aesthetically, as grounded in the metaphysics of imitation.

Heidegger understands the site of the historicity of *Da-sein* as the site of the differentiation of being (*Seyn*). The second part of chapter 1 lays out the hermeneutic situation of Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy* (GA65) in the consummation of metaphysics as nihilism, and the sense of crisis and the need for decision this implies. The distinction between beingness (*Seiendheit*), as conceived by metaphysics, and being (*Seyn*), which the *Contributions* map out, is essential to our understanding of the differentiation of being in beings. This, in turn, allows us entrance into the question of the historicity of being as articulated in beings, and into the necessity of founding being in beings in response to nihilism. Nihilism is understood as the abandonment of beings to their mere calculability and functionality. The founding of the site of *Da-sein*, its articulation through works, labour, leadership, and thought is to be conceived as a direct response to the crisis of nihilism. Consequently it is my thesis that the history of being, and the historicity of *Da-sein*, are conjoined, and that this juncture leads directly to reflection on the founding of being in art and in the constitution of the political.

There is considerable discussion in the secondary criticism as to whether or not Heidegger offers, in *Being and Time* or elsewhere, grounds for a social philosophy and thus for political philosophy. In chapter 2, which is based primarily on *Being and Time*, I approach this problem through Heidegger's understanding of *Mitsein* in relation to the disclosive power and political function of authentic rhetoric as a mode of disclosure. Consequently I argue that Heidegger does allow for a positive concept of the political, or public, sphere, grounded in the historicity of *Dasein* as *Mitsein*. This creates the philosophical conditions for Heidegger's own 'political activism' in 1933–4 (particularly in the area of university reform), an engagement which is consequently not to be viewed as an aberration or an opportunistic concession to the new regime, but as following from the fundamental theses of *Being and Time* itself.

In chapter 3, I examine the meanings of the concept of ‘gestalt’ in the cultural critique of Weimar Germany and the early Nazi period, with particular reference to the writers of the Conservative Revolution. Given the special significance of the work of Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger I will examine their work separately, in chapters 6 and 7, respectively. I take my point of departure from the Rector’s Address of 1933, with the intention of elucidating its fundamental philosophical theses in the context of contemporary political ideologies and realities. As Heidegger’s brief engagement for National Socialism in the Rector’s address of 1933 makes evident, Heidegger’s sense of *Heimat*, *Volk*, and State entered into dangerous liaison, at least for a time, with the new regime.

Heidegger’s confrontation with the discourses of 1933 implicates above all his attempt to free the concept of *Volk* from racial interpretations, and at the same time to bring it into fruitful relation to the State and to the ‘earth’ as the historical native soil of a people. The concept of *gestalt*, in turn, has to be freed of formalist and Platonic implications. To establish the common ground of Heidegger’s thought and the ‘revolution’ of 1933, I examine the discourse of ‘style’ and *gestalt* to refine our sense of Heidegger’s appropriation and critique of contemporary ideologies. Consequently, it becomes necessary to examine the writings of Weimar cultural critics and National Socialist ideologues dealing with the formation of national character as determined by history, ‘race,’ *Volk*, and education. The question of ‘national aestheticism,’ understood as the concept of the re-formation of national character by reference to an ideal, finds its proper place here. The thesis of national aestheticism, which has gained wide currency in the secondary literature, itself requires revision. It will become evident that the ‘gestalt’ of the *Volk* is to be conceived less as the imitation of an ideal form than as the cultural and historical ‘rhythm’ of a people. The concept of ‘rhythm,’ understood as the defining, embodied historicity of the *Volk*, as articulated in the work of conservative revolutionaries and writers of the National Socialist period, cannot be reduced to a discourse of ‘race’ or a national aestheticism of race. We shall see that Heidegger’s deconstructed concept of ‘form’ implicates an understanding of *gestalt* as rhythm, and that this allows – at least to some degree – a common point of departure with conservative discourses.

One of the abiding themes of conservative cultural critics was the alienating power of contemporary science and technology, and Heidegger evidently had some sympathy for this view, although on his own philosophical grounds. Yet critics of technology also explicitly pose the

question of the possible integration of technology into the historical tradition of a people. In fact, for many of these critics, technology is to be given a new *gestalt* through its fusion with tradition. The position Jünger takes, that technology dissolves all existing, traditional forms of culture, is challenged by conservative writers such as Hardensett in favour of the view that a new synthesis of technology and tradition is possible.⁶ This raises the question of the leadership role of the State, and the possibility of overcoming the primacy of economic and technological imperatives by a politics of the Volk, and of science in service of the Volk. This position is echoed in the Rector's Address, and in Heidegger's political speeches of 1933–4, as well as in his *Logik* of 1934 (GA38).

A central, common theme of the discourses of 1933 is that the Volk is to be brought into a new, 'authentic' relation to its own 'native soil.' Karl Haushofer, the 'founder' of geopolitics, editor of the periodical *Zeitschrift für Geopolitik* (1924–44), and the director of an institute devoted to the study of geopolitical questions under the National Socialist regime, offers insight into the relation between Volk and earth in the ideological perspective of the extreme right. Haushofer's work has serious philosophical and political content, as recent research has shown.⁷ Much of Haushofer's work, for example, deals with the geopolitical concepts of limit and border (*Grenze*) as determinations of *Heimat*, *Reich*, and State. Reference to Haushofer's contribution and those of other conservative revolutionaries will allow for a more precise circumscription of Heidegger's reflection on the essence of the political as founded in the internal self-limitation of the polity. Other Nazi ideologues, such as Walther Darré and Walther Schoeneichen, propose analogous concepts of 'limit.'⁸ Darré was the pre-eminent representative of agrarian ideology in interwar Germany and sometime minister for agrarian affairs under Hitler. His works implicate concepts of *Heimat*, historical rootedness, and limit, which I propose to differentiate from those of Heidegger, thereby to clarify more precisely the character of Heidegger's early engagement for the new regime. Schoeneichen, as Luc Ferry has shown, wrote the most significant German works on ecology during the period of the Third Reich.⁹ Schoeneichen, and more generally, the ecological ideology and legislation of the National Socialists, articulate concepts of nature and of the ecologically founded determination of mankind which call for critical commentary. Again, my object is to determine to what extent Heidegger was liable, given his understanding of being, to recognize in these ideas reflections of his own expectations of a new beginning after 1933.

In the works of these authors, supplemented by readings of less-known writers publishing in significant journals of the period, we may expect to find an articulation of key political concepts, thus allowing one to distinguish, for example, between *Volk*, *Heimat*, *Staat*, *Reich*, *Nation*, *Rasse*, and *Bewegung* (people, homeland, state, *Reich*, nation, race, movement) as terms of political discourse. Despite the wealth of material devoted to Heidegger's politics, these distinctions have for the most part not been made in discussion of the philosopher's work. It is necessary to establish these distinctions, and others, and their concrete historical context, as the first step toward determining the universe of discourse out of which Heidegger's engagement for National Socialism emerged.

To think being as articulated, as *gestalt*, implies a philosophical and historical treatment of Heidegger's understanding of the differentiated incorporation of being in concrete historical existence. Heidegger's concept of being, in effect, constitutes not only the ground of his turn toward the new regime in 1933, but also determines his understanding of the relation of nation, labour, and historicity. In chapter 4, I focus in detail on Heidegger's *Logik* of 1934 to explicate his understanding of labour, or work, as grounded in the historicity of *Dasein*. Heidegger, in effect, did not commit himself to the new regime in 1933 out of opportunism, but evidently anticipated a genuine revolution, and thus the founding of a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Soviet communism. The *Logik* explicates 'work' as a structure of temporalization founded in the Care structure of the existential analytic and the historicity of *Volk*. Work as being-open, or exposed, positioned in the midst of beings and under the necessity of bringing them to an ordered stand is the truth within which *Dasein* stands and into which it is thrown.

Chapter 5 focuses on *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (GA40) (1935). Analysis of the explicitly political statements of the lectures (which have aroused considerable controversy) has to be integrated into an explication of the movement of the text as a whole and its fundamental philosophical theses. Chapter 3 already examines the critique of 'intellectualism' in Baeumler and Krieck, among others. In his own way, Heidegger shares this critique. The problem of intellectualism is especially significant to the question of university reform and the task of developing a new sense of *Bildung* to replace the humanistic ideal of education. Baeumler's appropriation of Nietzsche is of significance here, as it clearly also was for Heidegger. The critique of intellectualism implicates an attack on the perceived formlessness of liberal culture and more fundamentally, a deconstruction of the primacy of conceptual schemata over

lived and historically rooted existence. It is evident from key works of this period that the term *Geist* (spirit), for example, often signifies the operation of an intellect alienated from and hostile to the 'life' and 'soul' of a people (Klages, for example). In chapter 5, my first object will be to differentiate the critique of intellectualism carried out from the ideological position of the Conservative Revolution and National Socialist writers from Heidegger's often allied but fundamentally distinct deconstruction of objectifying thinking. Heidegger's understanding of the problem of 'intellectualism' in effect calls for a destruction of the metaphysical *chorismos* of being and beings opened up by Plato's thought. Being (*ousia*) is retrieved as the event of presencing in its coming to a stand in a being, thus to presence out of the limit proper to it. What presences in this way, out of the limit (*peras*), has gestalt, is *morphe*. What this implies for Heidegger's understanding of the political is that the differentiation of being, its dispersal in beings, must be given a site: this, in turn, raises the question of the relation of Volk and artwork and homeland to the differentiation of being in beings. I argue the thesis that the political, in Heidegger's sense, signifies the institution of the differentiation of being in the works and rites of an historical people.

To determine the extent of the affinity between the concept of Volk and state which Heidegger implicitly holds, and the concept held by the Conservative Revolution, I examine key works of Carl Schmitt, author of *The Concept of the Political*. This often discussed, and often misunderstood text defines the state as a self-delimited historically rooted form of existence. The charge of 'decisionism,' as directed against Heidegger, as well as Schmitt, has become common currency in the critical literature. I argue that this interpretation is fundamentally misconceived as directed against Heidegger, and can be brought against Schmitt himself only in a very qualified sense. Schmitt's political thought rather exhibits a kinship to Heidegger's insistence that being differentiates itself in the historically founded. Heidegger shares with Schmitt a critique of liberalism. The two thinkers are divided, however, by fundamental differences which I propose to work out in detail in chapter 6.

Chapter 7 offers five studies of the *Contributions*, focusing on the related questions of the artwork, the political, Volk, and technology in Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics. The possibility of founding the differentiation of being (*Sein*) in beings is the key issue in question. My central argument is that being differentiates itself and founds itself in beings through the site opened up by the historicity of Dasein as Volk.

The interpretation of Heidegger's concept of Volk has long been a

crucial point of contention in the secondary literature, and evidently is central to any interpretation of his ‘political philosophy.’ In ‘Volk, Differentiation, Founding,’ the first section of chapter 7, I show that Heidegger explicitly rejects the National Socialist misinterpretation of Volk because it merely reinstates a discourse of collective subjectivity and hence remains entangled in metaphysics. Heidegger holds that Volk is not a collective subject, but the site of the differentiation and gathering of being as founded in beings. The political implications of Heidegger’s critique of collective subjectivity, however, also encompass liberalism and the technological imperatives of capitalism. Thus Heidegger’s critique of the sciences – including the historical disciplines, in section 76 of the *Contributions* – denies them a founding power, such as could give gestalt to the historical existence of a people. Inasmuch as socio-historical discourses are rather governed by a logic of transparency and control, they follow the logic of technicity of modern society. Heidegger conceives of Volk as a counter-movement to socio-technical transparency and the dictates of production and consumption.

I argue that Heidegger understands Volk as the site of the founding of the differentiation of being in ritual, art, labour, leadership. Heidegger anticipates this site as the possibility of bringing beings into the shelter (*Bergung*) of their proper gestalt, that is, into the mode of being proper to each. Inasmuch as the Volk opens up this site, it institutes the historically specific differentiation of being in beings in response to the challenge of technicity and the reduction of the earth to the destructive uniformity of a storehouse of raw materials. The question of Volk, of being, and of human responsibility to other beings and the earth itself are intimately conjoined as responses to the challenge of the in-differentiation of all entities that the essence of technology inaugurates.

The *Contributions* allows us to determine the historical and systematic place of the ‘Origin of the Work of Art’ in Heidegger’s thinking. Truth – the disclosure of the event of being – must be founded, that is, brought to a stand in a being. What takes a stand to give a stand to the event of truth is *morphe*, which Heidegger explicitly glosses as Gestalt in the artwork essay. The work of art, therefore, is one way in which the truth of being is founded in a being. In the second section of chapter 7, ‘The Artwork and the Site of the Political in the *Beiträge*,’ I work from the context established by the *Contributions* – especially part V of that work, ‘The Founding’ – to interpret the artwork essay. This leads us directly to some of the central questions of Heidegger’s later thought: the relation of Dasein and *Seyn*, the dispersal and differentiation of *Seyn*, the founding of

the truth of being in beings, and the possibility of the Volk as the site of this founding. The work of art allows the event of disclosure to happen in the strife of earth and world, in such a way that truth is sheltered in the work. The movement of withdrawal (*lethe*) at the heart of truth (*aletheia*) is preserved. The artwork does not represent, it establishes truth by setting it into the work. This event allows the possibility of a community (*Da-sein* as *Mitsein*) no longer defined by socio-technical discourses of representation founded in modern subjectivity. The work of art, therefore, is one way in which the possibility of a postmetaphysical polity is opened up.

In the next section of chapter 7, 'Limit and Gestalt,' I undertake to show – by reference to Heidegger's retrieval of Aristotle's concept of being (*ousia, energeia*), particularly in 'On the Being and Conception of *Phusis* in Aristotle, *Physics* B, 1' – the basis of Heidegger's deconstruction of the aesthetics of 'form' and 'content' in his 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' Heidegger in fact re-interprets *ousia* as *gestalt*; a being has *gestalt* (hence being) in as much as it has the *arche* (or 'origin') and *telos* of its temporal unfolding in itself, thus to come to presence in its delimited specificity. *Gestalt* is understood as the singular rhythm of a being's unfolding and withdrawal according to the measure of its own inherent limit (*peras*). The *gestalt* of the artwork which emerges by way of the retrieval of Aristotle cannot be read as the imitation of a model in the tradition of aesthetics. The artwork is rather conceived as an event of disclosure which has the possibility of founding a community. The artwork founds the differentiation of being (*Seyn*) in a being. Therefore the artwork is implicated in the founding of political being in the postmetaphysical sense that the community, and the identity proper to it, no longer derive from collective subjectivity.

With the exception of Palmier's monograph, the literature gives little serious attention to Heidegger's relation to Jünger's thought.¹⁰ In the following section of chapter 7, 'Style and the Gestalt of Global Technology,' I interrogate Heidegger's understanding of *gestalt* in relation to Jünger, and in particular I focus on his *Der Arbeiter*, which had a considerable impact on Heidegger's concept of technology. The recently published (2004) volume on Jünger in the complete edition (GA90) provides an additional source for Heidegger's interrogation of the metaphysical concept of 'gestalt,' and raises the question of how the essential difference of this metaphysical concept and the non-metaphysical 'gestalt' of beings is to be determined. Jünger's concept of the 'total mobilization' of all resources, human and non-human, under the

regime of technology, gave a decisive impetus to Heidegger's own reflections on the essence of technology, the dis-integration of beings, and the possibility of the sheltering of beings in the site opened up by *Da-sein* as the site of *Seyn*. This discussion of the *Contributions* as a reflection on the incorporation of being in the gestalt of beings focuses on the question of 'style.' Heidegger understands 'style' as the law of the disclosure (truth) of the historicity of being as founded in beings. *Dasein* itself has a style of attunement, or openness, to being, which determines the How of the manifestation of beings.

What Jünger calls the gestalt of the Worker also implicates a style of making-manifest of the being of beings. In Jünger's terms, 'work' signifies the dissolution of the rank-differentiation of entities to facilitate their total mobilization in the service of technicity as represented by the gestalt of the Worker. For Heidegger the question arises whether this movement of in-differentiation still allows a people, insofar as it is rooted in the specificity of their historical tradition, the possibility of unfolding its own style of existence, or gestalt. *Volk* signifies a counter-movement to in-differentiation, and the reduction of all beings to the availability of stock-on-call. The related question, whether *technology* can be given a style commensurate with the historical specificity of a people, is raised by Heidegger without being answered. Although it would seem that Heidegger does not grant technology this measure of history-founding power, rather reserving it for the work of art, the *Contributions* is not conclusive on this subject. In the final section of chapter 7, I offer a brief reflection on the question of *freedom* as it relates to the project of the *Contributions*.

In my Conclusion, I raise the question of the relation between Heidegger's understanding of truth, modern subjectivity, and imperialism. This discussion, which focuses on the *Parmenides* (GA54), examines Heidegger's reflection on the fanaticism of the modern state and imperial politics, as founded in an 'imperial' (representational or objectifying) concept of truth. In these lectures, as well as in the lectures on Hölderlin, Heidegger intimates the postmetaphysical concepts of *Heimat*, the *Volk*, and the state. He argues that the modern state is founded in the representational 'staging' of reality by the collective subject of modernity, as codified in normative thought and socio-technical discourse. Whereas imperial or representational truth is the condition of the planetary space of globalization, Heidegger's thought of *Heimat* articulates the bounded horizon of the historicity of being as concretely incorporated and instituted in the existence of a people. This implies a direct challenge to the

politics of globalization and its philosophical premises. Heidegger's political thought is conceived in response to the *differentiation of being* (*Seyn*) as it is constituted in the concretely realized historicity of a people, and incorporated in the locality and gestalt of beings. Far from being a transcendental signified beyond and above human existence, darkly hovering over mankind to determine the course of human history, *Seyn* concretely articulates itself in the Dasein of a people as the site of the disclosure of what is. For this reason, Heidegger's political thought stands opposed to the universalist claims of the socio-technical organization of the planet, and, in an age of the limitless, his 'politics of being' articulates the necessity of an inherent limit that gives to each its own.

Heidegger's Transformation of *Gestalt* Discourse

Yet what thus comes up and becomes intrinsically stable, encounters, freely and spontaneously, the necessity of limit, *peras* ... That which places itself in its limit, completing it, and so stands, has form [Gestalt], *morphe*. (GA40, 64–5/60)

Limit and end are that wherewith the essent begins to *be*. It is on this basis that we must understand the supreme term that Aristotle used for being, *entelecheia* – the holding (preserving)-itself-in-the-ending (limit). (GA40, 64/60)

Form, *forma*, corresponds to the Greek *morphe*, the circumscribing limit [Grenze] and delimitation which forces and sets a being in that which it is, so that it stands in itself: the gestalt [Gestalt]. (GA43, 138)

The strife that is brought into the rift and thus set back into the earth and thus fixed in place is the *figure* [Gestalt]. Createdness of the work means truth's being fixed in place in the figure ... What is here called figure [Gestalt] is always to be thought in terms of the particular placing [Stellen] and enframing [Gestell] as which the work occurs when it sets itself up and sets itself forth. ('Origin of the Work of Art,' UK 50/189)

Because Goethe's understanding of gestalt pre-figures later developments of 'organicist' discourse, including the discourse of radical conservatism in the Weimar Republic, a brief consideration of his idea of 'morphology' is useful here. By the end of the nineteenth century,

Goethe's idea of the 'self-actualizing wholeness of organic forms'¹¹ would inspire many divergent reactions to positivism and to the disintegrating tendencies of scientific analysis, as well to modern industrial society in general.¹² The idea of gestalt would be taken up as a scientific thesis about perception by gestalt theory (Christian von Ehrenfels, Wertheimer) and as an historical and cultural-morphological thesis by racialist ideologues such as Chamberlain and Rosenberg. As Mitchell G. Ash has shown, pre-war Austro-German, and later, Weimar, culture, saw widespread appeal made to the idea of a unifying gestalt in various disciplines, from philosophy and experimental psychology (Dilthey, Husserl, Jaspers), to biology (Hans Driesch, von Uexküll) and political economy (Othmar Spann), and this across the entire political spectrum, from the radical Right to the liberalism of Wertheimer.¹³ Weimar especially, politically and economically fractured as it was, sought cultural renewal in new concepts of wholeness. After a brief consideration of Goethe's morphology, I will sketch some of the key theses of *Gestalt* theory. My intention in both cases is the very limited one of mapping out the terms of discourse, if only in a preliminary way, to which the conservative discourse of gestalt responds and reacts. This will prepare us, in turn, for a confrontation with the question of gestalt in Heidegger's thinking.

In reaction against the analytic tendency of empiricism, and against Hegel, who insisted on the primacy of the concept (*Begriff*) in the constitution of knowledge, Goethe attempted to found knowing in the concretely embodied universal. This implicates the correlation of *Gestalt* and *Bildung*: in the first instance, Goethe defines the gestalt of an entity as that which gives it a specific identity, or character. *Bildung* refers to the process of formation which generates a determinate entity.¹⁴ Consequently, gestalt, in its complete sense, signifies the being of an entity conceived in terms of its entelechetic unfolding toward its immanent limit and completeness. The gestalt is the *Urphänomen* – the intrinsic form. The identity of the thing is not given by an atemporal Platonic universal, but by 'the unique, distinguishing patterns of individual organisms.'¹⁵ The concepts of gestalt and *Bildung*, in their description of an entity, signify the union of the ontological (being) and of the genetic (becoming).

The object of Goethe's morphological studies in botany 'is not to unveil [to go behind the phenomenon, thus to analytically decompose it], but to hold in contemplation [schauen] the self-regulation at work in nature, by means of experimental re-enactment and symbolic representation.' Thus the comparison of morphological features allows us to distinguish a type (*Typus*), understood as a constant, or shared, element.

The type is the common element of a synchronic comparison.¹⁶ It signifies the unity of *Bild* and *Begriff*, which does not exist as such in any given entity, but nonetheless – as the *Naturgesetz* or *Bauplan* of a particular species – gives the particulars their order and gives order to our perceptions. The diachronic comparison of stages of growth, in turn, renders ‘a kind of ideal whole’ called the *Idee*.¹⁷ The combination of these two ways of seeing (diachronic and synchronic) renders the *Urform*, which in its singular instantiation makes manifest the *Urphänomen* (*Gestalt*) as a concretely embodied universal.¹⁸ *Gestalt* signifies the self-manifestation of the phenomenon. The object of Goethe’s ‘scientific method’ is to bring the *gestalt* to light, thus to allow phenomena to show themselves in the relation of figure and ground, of *gestalt* and world, or horizon of perception. This notion would be taken up by *gestalt* theory at the close of the nineteenth century.

The *gestalt* psychologists (especially von Ehrenfels, Koffka, Köhler, and Wertheimer) show that what we encounter in primordial experience is neither (i) atoms of sensation, as postulated by empirical psychology, nor (ii) unequivocal objects presumed by common sense; but rather (iii) each moment or thing presenting itself as part of a meaningful totality or perceptual field, part of a dynamic whole given by an intentional totality.¹⁹ Since perception presents us with ‘actual things and events,’ rather than ‘sensory elements,’ as Kurt Lewin writes, ‘the stimulus to perception ... must be assessed not according to its physical intensity but according to its psychological reality.’²⁰ In his ‘On “Gestalt Qualities”’ (1890), Christian von Ehrenfels, student of Franz Brentano, raises the question whether a melody, for example, is the mere sum of its parts, or something – a whole – distinguishable from the sum.²¹ He argues that the ‘Gestalt quality’ is more than the sum of its parts, although a complex of elements given to sensation is the foundation (*Grundlage*) ‘necessary for the existence of a given Gestalt quality.’²² The quality is a presentational content which is nonetheless distinguishable from the *Grundlage*. ‘Certain groups of objects,’ Gurwitsch comments, ‘especially homogeneous ones, are given to perception with an immediate character of grouping and unity. This character appears as an autonomous sensory fact.’²³ The equivocal character of a visual figure (Do we see opposed profiles or the outline of a vase?) ‘must be due to production’ by the mind, for there is no change in the stimuli. ‘Gestalt theory gives an absolute primacy to immediate observation, as opposed to every theoretical consideration.’²⁴ It should be noted that whereas Ehrenfels conceives the ‘gestalt quality’ as an *attribute* of phenomenal wholes, the Berlin school of Carl Stumpf,

to which Köhler belonged, takes a gestalt *to be* a ‘special kind of whole’ in the sense that the quality is intrinsic to the gestalt, not separable from the supposed fundamenta.²⁵

The question arises whether gestalt qualities, or, a gestalt, is inherent in the object or dependant on an act of consciousness. Ehrenfels had initially left this open, although he intimates that our concepts are founded in the self-presentation of the gestalt.²⁶ Evidence for this, Ehrenfels holds, is given by the ‘intimate unity in which we combine presentational contents of physical and psychical occurrences – contents of the most conceivably different kinds – into integral concepts.’ Consequently, ‘gestalt qualities comprise the greater part of the concepts with which we operate.’²⁷ Koffka also held that ‘to apply the gestalt category means to find out which parts of nature belong as parts to functional wholes.’²⁸

In the first instance, gestalt qualities are referred to sensation and perception; as such they can be temporal (a melody) or nontemporal (visual, tactile). This does not exhaust the extension of the idea of gestalt, however, for ‘changes such as the waxing or waning of a desire, a pain, an expectation, if they become the objects of an inner presentation are peculiar temporal gestalt qualities.’ Ehrenfels adds that it is ‘clearly Gestalt qualities of this kind that serve to a large extent as the basis of aesthetic effects and poetic creations.’ The stylistic affinity of artworks also rests on gestalt qualities.²⁹ Gestalt qualities are produced by the imagination in art, architecture, music.³⁰ Moreover, he argues that the common comportment, or *habitus*, exemplified by relatives of a family shows ‘a resemblance manifested in their whole physical nature and bearing, a resemblance which often resists analysis into relations of identity between individual constituent parts.’³¹ Koffka likewise recognized that ‘there are Gestalt processes also in the realm of human action, above all in motor actions, speaking, writing, singing, sketching.’³² Wertheimer applied the notion of gestalt to the unity of body and mind as expressed in the physiognomy, action, movement, and thought of a person.³³ Köhler, similarly, maintained that ‘the processes of learning, of reproduction, of striving, of emotional attitude, of thinking, acting, and so forth, may be included as subject-matter of gestalt-theory insofar as they do not consist of independent elements, but are determined in a situation as a whole.’³⁴ The unity of action and behaviour generates a certain style of comportment and is in this sense a unified whole. Higher-level gestalten, Barry Smith argues, constitute an historical paradigm: ‘wholes may come to manifest a high degree of inter-partial unity because their parts have grown together, for example as a

result of sharing historically a common fate.³⁵ A tradition constitutes a temporal gestalt of this kind.

A gestalt, moreover, is defined by degrees, or 'levels,' of perfection, and by its relative 'purity.' In 'Gestalt Level and Gestalt Purity,' Ehrenfels argues that levels of gestalt are determined by the relative unity of part and whole.³⁶ Higher levels reflect an ascent in the degree of formedness, and this is a value for human feeling, and a value in itself. Gestalt purity, in turn, is manifested by ideal forms such as the sphere. The degree of purity of the sphere cannot be logically surpassed, although the level is not a high one. Thus a rose, for example, has a higher level of gestalt than a sphere, but a lower degree of purity.³⁷ In aesthetic terms, the 'lawfulness' of a given phenomenon signifies the consummate realization of a given type.³⁸ Wertheimer's notion of '*Prägnanz*' signifies 'the tendencies toward certain kinds of order' in 'perceptual and memory phenomena.'³⁹ As Smith notes, Edwin Rausch explicates *Prägnanz* as the lawfulness, originality, integrity, simplicity, meaningfulness, and expressivity of a phenomenon. The inclusion of meaningfulness and expressivity signifies that the object appears within an historical, cultural horizon. Therefore, *Prägnanz* is not merely a formal determination of objects.⁴⁰ According to Gurwitsch, the purity of an optimum gestalt means, 'phenomenally, a maximum of stability, clarity, and good arrangement, and physiologically, a minimum of expense of energy in the corresponding processes of mental excitation.'⁴¹ Kurt Goldstein, the teacher of Gurwitsch,⁴² had come to similar conclusions: 'it follows that preferred behavior, good Gestalt, or whatever one chooses to call it, represents a very definite *form of coming to terms of the organism with the world, that form in which the organism actualizes itself, according to its nature, in the best way ...* Tendency toward preferred behavior means self-organization of the system.'⁴³ The 'field theory' of Kurt Lewin (of the Berlin school) also insists that '*only by the concrete whole which comprises the object and the situation are the vectors which determine the dynamics of the event defined.*' Consequently, in a way which has evident similarities to Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world, the 'dynamics of sensory psychology,' for example, depend on 'the structure of the whole surrounding field.'⁴⁴

The philosophically most fruitful development of gestalt theory emerged from the phenomenology of Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty, which Husserl himself anticipates. In 'The Limit of the Concept of Gestalt,' Gurwitsch holds that Husserl postulated two kinds of unity of a multiplicity: (i) conceptual or categorical unity; and (ii) a unity 'immediately experienced and given alongside and at once with the sensory

data.⁴⁵ The latter is not constituted but given. In his ‘Phenomenology of Thematics and of the Pure Ego: Studies of the Relation between Gestalt Theory and Phenomenology’ (1929), Gurwitsch notes that Husserl’s ‘figural factors,’ as postulated in chapter 11 of *The Philosophy of Arithmetic*, mean ‘hardly anything different from Ehrenfels’ ‘Gestalt-qualities.’⁴⁶ This is supported by Husserl’s comment to this effect in the *Logical Investigations* of 1900–1.⁴⁷ According to Husserl, a collection, such as a swarm of birds, is grasped in a ‘unitary total intuition.’ ‘When we set into relief a specific collection in intuitive unity, that figural moment steps forth which exerts the strongest stimulus on our grasping.’⁴⁸

Against the Berlin school of gestalt psychology, however, Husserl maintains that a gestalt quality – e.g., a tone – is not synthesized from sound waves on the neurological level, but constituted by the intentionality of consciousness.⁴⁹ Both Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty would also critique the naturalistic basis of the gestalt theory of Köhler and Koffka, for ‘they postulated the material world as the only real world’ and held that gestalt perception is neurologically founded.⁵⁰ Toward the end of the 1920s Husserl again castigated gestalt theory for its naturalism, the causal explanation of the gestalt experience, and the failure to consider the genetic constitution of the gestalt.⁵¹ Husserl, nonetheless, like Ehrenfels, still posited a dualism of substratum (sensuous elements) and the gestalt or figuration. In the *Ideen I* (sec. 85) this dualism is articulated as the dualism of sensuous *hyle* and intentional *morphe*.⁵² Gurwitsch rejects this dualistic thesis to develop what is in his view a more consistent theory of gestalt, founded in Husserl’s phenomenology, while supplementing it. In *Studies in Phenomenology and Psychology*, Gurwitsch focuses on the epistemological problems of gestalt theory: following Husserl’s *Ideen*, Gurwitsch’s essay ‘begins with pure consciousness in the form of the *cogito*: something is given to me – something objective.’ Consequently he accepts the *epoché*, and focuses on the object only as given to consciousness (i.e., as ‘theme’, sense). Consciousness is characterized by the intentionality of being-perception, wishing, and so on, and the ego lives in such acts of intentionality.⁵³ The world of stimuli – and the world of ‘real things’ – falls away in favour of what is present to consciousness. The fundamental problem posed is that of the relation of part to whole: ‘The curved line is not a content with properties of its own. Instead it is defined and determined by the configuration to which it belongs and the role it plays in the configuration.’ ‘What a “part” – better stated, constituent – of a certain Gestalt is, how it stands in it, is determined by the structure of the Gestalt.’⁵⁴

Therefore Gurwitsch rejects the empirical thesis that atomic stimuli (sense data) constitute an objective world which is then composed into wholes by mind or brain. Gestalt theory of knowledge ‘takes its departure from the original orderedness, structuredness, and organization of the immediately given, the primal phenomenological material.’⁵⁵ Gestalt features of experience, including qualities such as ‘close by,’ ‘next to,’ and so on, are immediately, phenomenologically given. What is given is always a theme (‘object’) standing in a field – it never stands alone; relations of temporal or local proximity, of qualitative similarity, establish a ‘Gestalt connection.’ The ground (thematic field) is organized around the figure (‘theme’).⁵⁶ Gurwitsch in effect postulates two types of ‘gestalt connection’: (i) that of the theme as the total system of its constituents (as opposed to a mere sum); and (ii) the union of theme and the thematic field; the theme is an independent whole, but the field is mere background.⁵⁷ The figure has thing-character; the ground has stuff-character. ‘The primary distinction of the theme consists in its peculiar independence with regard to whatever else belongs to the thematic field. Self-sufficient, unitary, and delimited, resting entirely on itself, it stands in the thematic field which fades into the indefinite in several directions.’⁵⁸ Despite Gurwitsch’s attempt to establish the ‘self-sufficiency’ of the theme, however, the criticism can be brought that his theory of gestalt still entails transcendental idealism, for it ‘locates phenomena within the sphere of immanence’ to establish themes as atemporal, self-same units of meaning. This contradicts his intention to grant the stream of experience its own autochthonous structure.⁵⁹

In response to difficulties associated with the residual Cartesianism of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty drew extensively on gestalt theory to formulate his own philosophical position. He could overcome the form, matter dualism of Husserl, because, having abandoned Husserl’s theory of the atemporality of meaning, Merleau-Ponty holds that meaning and signs, the ‘form and the matter of perception ... are related from the beginning.’⁶⁰ His revision of gestalt theory is interesting to us insofar as he pays particular attention to the ‘embodiment’ of the gestalt as a condition of experience, for this concept has evident similarities to discourses on gestalt in Germany, which we shall examine to establish the cultural context of Heidegger’s thinking. Merleau-Ponty develops the gestalt theorists’ notion that ‘the synthesizing forms of our experience are not ideas but corporeal a priors. These givens of the body, physiological forms which establish the general horizons of the world of our experience, prepare the possibility of intellectual knowledge but are effective prior to it

and as its ground; they are themselves moments of Being.⁶¹ The ‘sensory units’ – or gestalten – which are the ‘basis for our perception of the world’ are the ‘result of a natural or spontaneous organization on the part of the organism.’⁶² The gestalt does not go beyond experience, nor is it a condition of experience. ‘Gestalt forms are, so to speak, constantly at work, organizing and delineating our immediate bodily experience.’⁶³ ‘Matter,’ Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘is “pregnant” with its form, which is to say that in the final analysis every perception takes place within a certain horizon and ultimately in the “world.”’⁶⁴ This implies, in M.C. Dillon’s words, that Merleau-Ponty ‘recognizes the Gestalt as a dynamic and emergent (rather than static) unity: the meaning of the theme is taken to be diachronic, unfolding through time.’⁶⁵

As we have already noted, moreover, forms of behaviour, or of comportment, also take typical gestalten. The world takes shape in typical forms of embodiment: ‘I experience the unity of the world,’ Merleau-Ponty writes, in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, ‘as I recognize a style,’ that is, as a certain way or manner of being.⁶⁶ ‘As Gestalt psychology has shown,’ Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘structure, Gestalt, meaning, are no less visible in objectively observable behaviour than in ourselves.’⁶⁷ This would implicate, he continues, the possibility of a science ‘based on the description of typical behaviours.’ The question of style arises in response to the problem of identity within temporal flux; it is necessary to postulate an identity without recurring to the identity given by atemporal meaning as constituted by consciousness. ‘Style’ signifies a manner or way of being, not an invariant quality. The theme (object, event, person) has a stylistic identity within the horizon established by a world as a context of meaning.⁶⁸ ‘Stylistic identity’ signifies the identity of a certain rhythm, a certain regularity of the unfolding of time within the temporalization of a world; it is a concept we will encounter again – in conservative and nationalist discourse, no less than in Jünger and Heidegger.

Two questions arise at this point: (i) To what extent is the conception of gestalt in conservative and nationalist discourse of the 1920s and 1930s comparable to the idea of gestalt in the tradition of gestalt theory, and gestalt phenomenology? The answer to this question would allow us to anticipate more clearly the field of discourse out of which Heidegger’s work emerges. (ii) To what extent would Heidegger implicitly or explicitly draw on a concept of gestalt, retrieved from the metaphysical tradition, to unfold his own understanding of being in the course of the 1920s and 1930s? This question will only be answered in a preliminary, schematic way, in preparation of the body of this text.

In chapter 3, I will examine the literature of the Conservative Revolution in detail to determine its understanding of gestalt. At this point, the theses of gestalt theory and gestalt phenomenology, which conservative discourse also held, may be summarized as follows. This is not to say that these theses derive from the same premises, or lead to the same conclusions. My object is simply to establish a formal and historical framework for our subsequent discussion: (i) Formal gestalt theory and conservative discourse both insist on the unity of part and whole, the whole being more than the sum of its parts; the whole which thus emerges manifests its own being and character, such as cannot be grasped by an analytical decomposition of phenomena. (ii) Conservative revolutionaries also affirmed the concept of optimum form, exemplified in the 'good' gestalt of maximum purity. Gestalt in this sense, as resting independently in itself and distinct from its horizon, serves conservative discourse as an ideal of order, whereas (iii) the naturalism of the Berlin school, inasmuch as it sought a physiological basis for experience, was rejected by conservatives; the unity of body and mind (or soul) is affirmed. This unity supposedly articulates itself as the stylistic unity of body and mind.

Furthermore, (iv) although the gestalten are affirmed by conservatives as belonging to nature itself, there is a tendency to affirm equally the constitution and transformation of these forms by the collective subjectivity of a particular culture. This leads to a notion of cultural morphology, of typical national characteristics. Moreover, (v) conservative discourse accords with gestalt theory to affirm the concept of higher-order gestalten. These regulate (a) the style of *artistic production* in a particular period and culture; (b) the typical *comportment and character* of individuals of a particular culture (or 'race'); (c) the style of a culture's *institutions*; and (d) the way of unfolding of a people's *tradition* itself. These four aspects are in each case grounded in an historically specific rhythm, that is, a specific way of temporalization, understood as the unfolding of a potential into its proper limit. The specificity of a way of temporalization grants a style of work, of the artwork, of production, comportment, and of the institutions of a tradition, an ownness which is not inevitably identical with a concept of atemporal essence. Jünger, as we shall see, appeals to a discourse of type and gestalt in related senses. The extent to which these theses nonetheless depend on metaphysical concepts of the distinction of form and matter, on the primacy of the atemporal Idea (Plato), on the actualization of a perspective (Nietzsche), or on a naturalistic concept of racial substance can only be clarified as we proceed. We may anticipate that the primary distinction to be found between conservative

discourse and National Socialist ideology will be that the latter valorizes a concept of racial gestalt more consistently and radically.

The significance of the idea of gestalt for Heidegger's thinking in the 1930s has to be won from his confrontation with the philosophical tradition, and particularly from his reading of Aristotle. This involves the deconstruction of fundamental metaphysical concepts – such as *morphe*, *arche*, *telos*, *peras*, and *entelecheia* – to win a non-metaphysical concept of wholeness and differentiated unity as gestalt. Heidegger's retrieval of these metaphysical concepts distinguishes his understanding of gestalt not only from the Platonic, or conversely, Nietzschean tendency of many conservatives, but also from the gestalt theorists, as well as from earlier phenomenological developments.

Let us briefly consider what Heidegger knew of gestalt theory in the narrower sense. His letters offer us some clues. The following testimonies are valuable not only as an insight into Heidegger's intellectual biography, but also prepare our subsequent elucidation of substantive issues. In this context, I will also refer briefly to Heidegger's lectures on biology, for they offer a philosophical commentary on 'organic unity,' which illuminates the issue of 'wholeness' in gestalt theory, the new biology, and Heidegger's own thinking.

Through the early writings of Husserl in particular, Heidegger will have been led to an acquaintance with the works of gestalt theorists. The Third Investigation of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* explicitly deals with the relation of part and whole, and the particular character of ontic and ontological wholes. Einar Øverenget has argued that in *Being and Time* 'Heidegger not only uses the terminology of parts and wholes, but he uses it in accordance with the conventions Husserl establishes in the Third Investigation' in his discussion of 'the structural make-up of Dasein,' as well as of the being of equipment.⁶⁹ The question of the distinction between a sum and a whole is, of course, central to gestalt theory. It is therefore likely that Husserl's discussion of this problem would have alerted Heidegger to contemporary work in gestalt theory. In fact, Heidegger would have learned of von Ehrenfels' work through a reading of Husserl's Sixth Investigation of the *Logical Investigations*, where von Ehrenfels' essay on gestalt qualities is explicitly referred to. Going by the evidence of a late letter (1960) to Imma von Bodmershof, Christian von Ehrenfels' daughter, we find that Heidegger praises von Ehrenfels as one who 'first brought to life again the idea of "gestalt" for modern thinking.'⁷⁰

Evidently Heidegger was acquainted with the work of other gestalt the-

orists. In a letter of the 10th November 1926, to Elizabeth Blochmann, Heidegger somewhat cryptically remarks, that Wertheimer, in his “psychology” course, ‘certainly offers the most modern of what can be heard in this field today.’⁷¹ Wertheimer, Köhler, Koffka, and Kurt Lewin were all students of Carl Stumpf, himself the student of Franz Brentano. Equally significant is Heidegger’s praise of Adhémar Gelb, an associate of Wertheimer and the neurologist Kurt Goldstein. In 1914, together with Goldstein, Gelb undertook research on brain-injured soldiers in an institute near Frankfurt. He would later, in 1929, join Wertheimer, Koffka, Goldstein, and Köhler on the editorial board of *Psychologische Forschung*, the chief organ of gestalt theory.⁷² In February 1930, Heidegger recommended Gelb, or alternatively Kurt Lewin, for the chair in philosophy at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Breslau in Schlesia, showering both with praise. Gelb’s research anticipates a new concept of psychology with fundamental implications for philosophy.⁷³ In May of 1932 Heidegger apparently encountered Gelb (now teaching in Halle) in Cologne, and again came away with a high opinion of him: ‘I value him greatly and believe he will one day write the new psychology, which is growing out of the totally changed problematic of the new biology.’⁷⁴ Heidegger had in fact worked with Gelb since the winter of 1928–9 in the preparation of a posthumous edition of Max Scheler’s philosophy.⁷⁵ In ‘Analysis of a Case of Figural Blindness’ (1918), Gelb and Goldstein show how the loss of the ability to see figures, or gestalten, due to traumatic brain injury is compensated for by neural plasticity.⁷⁶ Goldstein’s and Gelb’s research on brain injuries supported the conclusion that the organism compensates for the loss of particular capabilities by ‘reorganizing sensory functioning at a lower level,’ thus indicating that ‘cortical “whole processing”’ underlies sensory perception.⁷⁷ According to Goldstein, ‘observation of patients with brain injury also teaches us that there is a tendency for the injured organism to maintain a performance capacity on the highest possible level, compared to its former capacity. When one performance field is disturbed, the most important performances of the field survive the longest, and tend to be most readily restored.’⁷⁸ The organism attempts to re-establish an ordered relation to its world; the unity of this relation constitutes a gestalt.

The question naturally arises as to what was significant to Heidegger in the research of Gelb and Goldstein. What does Heidegger mean, moreover, by his reference to ‘the new biology’? These questions can be posed with greater precision by considering key theses of his lectures on biology in *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik* of 1929–30 (GA29/30). Reference

to Goldstein's *Der Aufbau des Organismus* (1934), which offers a systematic treatment of the underlying premises of the research Gelb and Goldstein had been conducting, can also illuminate both questions.

Heidegger's lectures on biology in the *Grundbegriffe* require a detailed treatment on their own terms, within the context of a paradigm shift initiated by Jakob von Uexküll and Hans Spemann, with which Heidegger was intimately acquainted. It is worth noting that von Uexküll has been reappropriated by the emerging field of 'biosemiosis,' and that Spemann's studies in embryology anticipated contemporary research in 'cloning'; Spemann, moreover, was a long-time colleague of Heidegger's at the University of Freiburg. As far as I know, such a study of 'Heidegger's biology' has not been undertaken. David Farell Krell's *Daimon Life* does not attempt to follow the movement of Heidegger's phenomenological method, and completely ignores the historical and theoretical context of the lectures.⁷⁹ What follows as a brief note is intended solely to advance the question of how Heidegger might have understood the concept of *Gestalt* as a particular kind of whole.

Admittedly Heidegger does not explicitly develop a non-metaphysical concept of *gestalt* until the 1930s, with the retrieval of *morphe* and *entelecheia* in a non-metaphysical sense. The *Grundprobleme* (GA24) of 1927 still uses the word *Gestalt* to translate the metaphysical concepts of *forma* and *essentia*, and makes no attempt to distinguish them from *morphe*, which is evidentially also thought according to its traditional, metaphysical determinations (GA24, 116–21). Yet the quality Heidegger ascribes to the wholeness of the organism – the movement of life back into its own *arche* – already anticipates the kind of wholeness which will later determine his understanding of *gestalt*. Not only is the organism a whole, rather than an aggregate of instrumental functions or parts – eyes for seeing, claws for grasping – but this whole has a kind of being-in-itself (*Eigentum*). 'Gestalt' will come to signify a way of being-in-itself, which is not merely the wholeness of a presentation composed of non-independent parts (*Momente* in Husserl's sense). What is crucial to Heidegger's sense of the *gestalt* of an entity is its movement of unfolding into its own inherent limit (*peras*) and its simultaneous movement of withdrawal back into its *arche* of movement. In a way commensurate with *a-letheia* (un-concealment) itself, limit and withdrawal shelter the entity in its own being.

Heidegger holds that contemporary biology had taken 'two decisive steps' away from the still-reigning 'mechanistic' view of life, which begins by dis-integrating the organic whole to begin with the cell as the putative fundamental element from which the organism is to be re-constructed.

Moreover, in a further act of analytic disintegration, the cell is defined bio-chemically by mechanistic biology. The first decisive step toward a new biology is made by Hans Driesch's 'holistic' interpretation of life: the 'organism is not a sum, constructed out of elements and parts, but rather the development and unfolding of the organism in each of its stages is guided by its own character of wholeness [Ganzheit]' (GA29/30, 379, 380). Driesch's experiments had shown that the determination of cells to their subsequent function 'takes place in relation to the whole and in consideration of this whole'; the cell is set on its own path of unfolding, but as a part of the whole. The decisive factor is the 'clear breakthrough of the idea of wholeness,' which excludes the interpretation of the unity of the organism as the consequent result of the relation of its parts. The idea of wholeness, Heidegger warns, should not mislead us, as it did Driesch, in the direction of neo-vitalism, consequently to posit a certain power, or entelechy, to explain the apparently inherent purposiveness of the organism (GA29/30, 381). Heidegger continues that Driesch's work is advanced and re-directed by Spemann to confirm a non-mechanistic account of organic wholeness. As Hamburger notes, Hans Spemann's own theoretical interpretation of his experiments rejects the neo-vitalistic approach to cell differentiation.⁸⁰

The second decisive and equally important step is carried out by von Uexküll, especially in his *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1909), and in the *Theoretische Biologie* of 1928. As we shall see, von Uexküll shares with Goldstein the fundamental premise that an organism forms a unity with its environment. Heidegger no more accepts von Uexküll's theoretical interpretation of his observations than he does Driesch's neo-vitalism (GA29/30, 382–3). Again, what is decisive in von Uexküll's work, for Heidegger, is a fuller understanding of wholeness. Jakob Johann von Uexküll (1864–1944) argued that the structure of an organism, its development and relation to the environment, is informed by teleological principles. As opposed to mechanistic views of the organism as a primarily passive receptor of external stimuli, to which it merely reacts in reflex, von Uexküll holds that 'animals possessed extra-mechanistic properties of potentiality and self-directed activity.'⁸¹ The organism forms a whole with its environment, a whole which is regulated by the interaction of the 'inner world' of the animal with its environing world. Goldstein also came to this conclusion: 'For each organism, not everything that occurs in the outer world belongs to its milieu. The only events which normally prove themselves as stimuli are those with which the organism can come to terms in a manner that its existence (i.e., the actualization of the perfor-

mances which constitute its nature) is not essentially disturbed.⁸² In Heidegger's words, von Uexküll's investigations make possible a 'still more radical interpretation of the organism, inasmuch as its wholeness is not exhausted by the corporal wholeness of the animal, but rather, corporal wholeness is itself first understood on the basis of *that* primordial wholeness which has its limit in what we called the *ring of dis-inhibitions*' (GA29/30, 383). A brief explication of this 'ring' is in order, and this calls for a better understanding of the animal's wholeness.

Wholeness determines the kind of motion proper to the organism. This motion gathers the individual parts (the 'organs') into the whole, into the potential for being of the whole. Particular organs – e.g., the eye – are capabilities (*Fähigkeiten*) granted by a possibility inherent in the way of being of the organism. The mode of being of 'organization' signifies the ability to self-articulate itself in capabilities (GA29/30, 342). It is not that an organ has a capability, but that a particular capability articulates itself as this organ (GA29/30, 319–24). As capability-for, a capability is a kind of opening-up of a dimension, a movement-toward, but in this the capability presents itself, does not leave itself. It does not lose itself in the realization of a drive (*im Triebe*), but rather actualizes itself by holding itself in being in the drive. This leads Heidegger to claim that capability, as that which holds to itself, reveals the particular mode of the being-itself of the animal. The animal, as self-articulated capability, is self-generating, self-regulating, self-renewing: it has its own kind of property-in-itself (*Sich-zu-eigen-sein*), an ownness-in-itself (*Eigentum*) which determines its way of being, a way of being which is distinct from the selfhood of reflection, consciousness, personality (GA29/30, 339–40).

As one way of being-itself, the organism cannot be reduced to a mechanism or interlocking complex of mechanisms. The 'organ' is not a mechanism, but the articulation of a capability, and capability shows the mode of being-its-own-self proper to the animal. This Itself, phenomenologically disclosed by the holding to itself of capability, reveals that the wholeness of the organism maintains itself in and as a whole *by its movement of withdrawal* from being present-at-hand, from objectivity, from mere interaction-with and dissolution-in-the-world. This leads me to emphasize two essential points of Heidegger's discussion: (i) the animal has a kind of 'self' (*Eigentum*); and (ii) the self-ownness of the animal is granted by its movement of holding-to-itself in every motion-toward or capability-for. Capability implies the self-reserve of withdrawal from the mere being-present of instrumentality. In this sense the organism withdraws into its own *arche* of movement in the course of its unfolding or dis-inhibition.

As Roger Smith has shown, ‘inhibition’ became one of the fundamental concepts of modern biology, especially physiology, and of psychology, from the time of their inception in the nineteenth century.⁸³ Heidegger situates his analysis in this discourse without accepting its premises. The holding-to-itself of the animal does not encapsulate it in itself: equally primordial is its movement into a certain ‘ring’ of openness, the circle of its environment, which Heidegger refers to as the animal’s ‘ring of dis-inhibitions’ (*Enthemmungsring*). Hence the other to which the animal relates is ‘taken into the openness of the animal in a way we characterize as dis-inhibition (*Enthemmung*)’ (GA29/30, 369). This corresponds to the thesis of von Uexküll that the organism forms a whole with its ‘world.’ The primordial unity (*Ganzheit*), and limit (*Grenze*), of the animal is granted not by its bodily form, but by its unity with the ring of dis-inhibitions which corresponds to its capability-for (GA29/30, 383). To interpret Heidegger’s concept of organic unity in the related terms of Goldstein, this means that the reality of the organism and that of its environment mutually constitute each other: ‘Reality means that something features in the adequate stimulus reaction of the whole organism, that such a reaction prevails which makes ordered behavior possible, and with it, the realization of the essential nature of the organism. In other words, a *thing is not real because of its stability; rather is stable because of its “reality.”*’⁸⁴ According to Heidegger, the openness of the animal is given direction by its behaviour (*Benennen*), which is sharply to be distinguished from the action (*Handeln*) of Dasein – it is a relatedness-to, but not a transcendence of what is related to its being (GA29/30, 369). The animal does not relate to an object (*Gegenstand*), but to such things as release its capabilities from being inhibited to being dis-inhibited; what dis-inhibits withdraws from the animal (things are never fixed in the stability of an object), and draws the animal into the ‘ring’ which limits and releases it (GA29/30, 372). Inhibition (*Hemmung*) holds the animal in itself; dis-inhibition (*Ent-hemmung*) signifies its actualization as a unity with its ‘environment.’ The unity of the organism with its environment constitutes its gestalt. According to Goldstein, ‘what will turn out to be a gestalt for an organism depends predominantly on the organism’s structure.’⁸⁵

From the perspective of Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle, which will concern us in detail in “Limit and Gestalt,” the third section of chapter 7, this brief note on the biology lectures leads to the following conclusion: The unity of the ‘self’ of the animal, and its ‘environment,’ in one gestalt, is defined by its release into its own limit, *and* its withdrawal back into the *arche* of its unfolding. The following senses of withdrawal are implicated in the biology lectures: (i) the withdrawal of beings as beings,

from the animal (this signifies, in a positive sense, the integration of an environment into the specific potentiality of an animal); (ii) the withdrawal of inhibition (*Ent-hemmung*) in the dis-inhibition of the animal; and (iii) the withdrawal of the animal back into itself (*Hemmung*): withdrawal as holding-to-itself holds it in its gestalt. Withdrawal (*steresis*) holds the animal in the gestalt of its being, in the unity of its potential (*dunamis*) and actualization (*entelecheia*). Only because it withdraws from total release into its *Umwelt*, in effect, from its own dis-integration (death), can it release itself into the environment and still remain itself. A potentiality of the animal actualizes itself only by continuing to be potentiality – it does not ‘disappear’ into the act. It is not an instrumental means to an end, but a way of being-itself. For this reason, Heidegger can speak of a kind of ‘selfhood’ (*Eigentum*) of the animal, as having a property in itself, whereas it would be senseless to speak of the ‘self’ of an instrument. The animal, therefore, is not a composition of a set of ‘organs,’ conceived instrumentally. The specific mode of temporalization of the living being grants a ‘gestalt.’ The implication, more generally, for Heidegger’s understanding of gestalt is that a movement of self-reserving withdrawal from being-present – such as holds each in its own potentiality – defines beings in their being as gestalt.

A brief review of the senses of gestalt implicit in *Being and Time* is in order, to prepare for my discussion of Heidegger’s work of the 1930s. Heidegger does not use the term *Gestalt* in *Sein und Zeit*. The reason for this, as I noted above, is evidently the metaphysical associations of the word, which he clearly indicates by using it to translate *forma*, *morphe*, and *eidōs* in their metaphysical senses in the *Grundprobleme* of 1927 (GA24, 121). However, as the citations from the *Introduction to Metaphysics* and the Nietzsche lectures which head this section of my text indicate, Heidegger no longer ascribed a metaphysical sense to *morphe* by the mid-1930s. It is therefore necessary to ask if this retrieval of the Greek *morphe*, *eidōs*, and *entelecheia*, in order to win a non-metaphysical sense of form as gestalt, is prefigured in *Being and Time*, and if so, in what way.

As a project of fundamental ontology taking its point of departure from the analytic of *Dasein*, *Sein und Zeit* finds ‘sense perception’ in the openness of *Dasein* to the being of beings. The truth of sensory perception is the truth – the disclosedness – of phenomena: seeing always discovers colours and contours; hearing, things-heard. We have ears because we hear – that is, because *Dasein*’s transcendental constitution already is being-with the things themselves. Our being-in-the-world prefigures the possibilities of what is heard, what is seen. Consequently the thesis of

gestalt theory, that we do not perceive sense data, but particular, meaningful forms,⁸⁶ also follows for Heidegger, although on different premises (SZ 163–4/153). The epistemological thesis of gestalt theory, which holds that we perceive forms, and that we tend to discover Closure, Similarity, and so on, in the phenomena, demands an ontological foundation. Da-sein, as being-in-the-world, signifies that things are disclosed in their specific being, as those entities which they are (which does not exclude the possibility of misinterpretation). The tendency to see things as unities, in terms of gestalt criteria, grounds itself in the being of the things themselves. Husserl's theory of wholes in the *Logical Investigations*, Third Investigation, would have directed Heidegger to the ways in which the intentionality of consciousness grasps phenomenal wholes as wholes. Heidegger's transformation of the question of intentionality, which grounds it in being-in-the-world, in effect integrates the problem of wholes into his analytic of Dasein's temporality and historicity. The call of a bird, the approaching motorcycle, the glimpse of someone passing, is already given as such by the hermeneutic As of understanding, by *Befindlichkeit*, and by Discourse (*Rede*), which together constitute Dasein in the temporality of its being-in-the-world. What is 'perceived' in this way already has gestalt in the sense that a determinate whole is grasped as such in its local and temporal specificity, as having particular qualities, and as standing-forth out of a context of significance (horizon, or 'background') in which it is embedded. In its being, Da-sein is always already directed towards – it intends – the being of the thing (GA20, 40/31). Moreover, since Heidegger explicitly defines historicity as a more concrete working-out of Dasein's temporality, the wholeness of entities within the world is ultimately constituted by the interpretive horizon of Dasein's historicity. The 'gestalt' of innerworldly beings is given by this horizon, and this is one way the gestalt as whole is distinct from the formal concept of the whole explained in the *Logical Investigations*.

The act of working with a tool, which, as we recall, has the being of the ready-to-hand, or handiness, grasps the tool in a pre-conceptual sense as a 'figure' defined by its relation to its 'ground.' Even without being grasped thematically, the hammer, for example, constitutes a figure, thus to exemplify a certain wholeness in its mode of givenness, by the way in which it 'fits the hand' and allows itself to be worked with. The interpretation which is already inherent in the use of a hammer (SZ 149, 157/140, 147) pre-reflectively constitutes it as hammer, as being this kind of entity. In this sense the hammer is 'figured,' takes gestalt as 'handy' to the grip of one's hand. The How of our use of tools, furthermore, is

always given to us in concrete specificity by the historicity of Dasein, which makes possible the equipmental totality (*Zeugganzheit*) that defines the very being of tools (SZ 68/97).

Figure and ground together compose the unified gestalt of the equipmental context, from which work takes its sense and direction. To say that the equipmental context constitutes a gestalt inherent in the phenomena themselves means that it has a certain order, regularity, simplicity, as defined by the system of references of the work-place (SZ 102, 149/95, 139). Place has gestalt: place is not an abstracted space-point, but, in Calvin Schrag's words, it is 'the abode in which the world-experiencer lives and moves and searches for meaning.'⁸⁷ Defined by de-severance and directionality (SZ, sec. 23), the spatiality of being-in-the-world takes gestalt. The closeness, directionality, and so forth of equipment are inherent in our grasping of the 'perceptual field' (SZ 102, 110–11/95, 102–3). It is only with dissolution of the worldhood of the world, that circumspective 'space,' or place, is neutralized and reduced to pure dimension (SZ 112/103–4). And it is only by way of abstraction from the embodied historicity of Dasein that the gestalt of ways of being-with and working together is refigured into purely formal relations of dependency.

In summary, the senses of 'gestalt' implicit in *Being and Time* may be indicated as follows. All of the following senses are significant for Heidegger's understanding of the concept. However, because the gestalt of the work of art, and that of the cultural form and historicity of a people, including its political composition, will prove especially significant in determining Heidegger's relation to the radical conservatives, as well as for our understanding of the articulation of being (*Seyn*) in beings, these senses of gestalt will be the primary focus of this book. In the first instance, as we have seen, we can speak of the gestalt of *entities*, that is, of the *temporalization of the being of beings*. This sense pertains to nature, as the biology lectures attest, as well as to things produced, such as equipment or works of art. Evidently, the gestalt of these three kinds of entities would have to be determined differently in each case. In his essay on Aristotle's *Physics B*, 1 (1938), Heidegger's deconstruction and retrieval of the metaphysical concepts of *energeia* and *entelecheia* lead him to understand the being (*ousia*) of beings as gestalt (*morphe*). In the third section of chapter 7, 'Limit and Gestalt,' I will examine this essay in relation to 'The Origin of the Work of Art' in detail to unfold the gestalt of one, exemplary kind of entity – that of the artwork. Second, the gestalt of *the historicity of beings (world)*. Entities within the world are historical in a secondary sense in their belonging to the historicity of Dasein as being-in-the-world (SZ,

sec. 76). The gestalt is a whole grounded in historicity, in a way in which the concept of ‘whole’ of Husserl’s Third Investigation is not. Moreover, we recall that Husserl still distinguishes between ‘sensuous hule and intentional morphe’: ‘sense data give themselves as material for intentional formation or meaning [Sinngestaltungen].’⁸⁸ Heidegger does not make this distinction, for ‘intentionality’ is always already an attuned understanding, and as such being-with beings. Tools take gestalt out of the context of significance of the workshop, the workshop out of the world of Dasein. Tools, equipment, works of art, articulate the historicity of Dasein in different degrees and in different ways. We know that the artwork will be given exemplary status in terms of its power to ‘in-corporate’ and manifest the historicity of Dasein in a being. The ontological (existential) wholeness of the temporality of Dasein, its *Ganzsein*, is *the site of the disclosure of the gestalt of entities*.

As this site of disclosure, Dasein is always attuned to beings, and this attunement takes the existentiell or ontic form of moods (*Stimmungen*, *Gestimmtsein*) (SZ 134/172). According to *Sein und Zeit*, the Care-structure of Dasein grants it its wholeness, and articulates its temporalization. Thus the attunement, or *Befindlichkeit*, of Dasein, which always implicates a way of understanding (SZ, secs. 29, 31), determines the How of the manifestation of beings, together with discourse (*die Rede*), in Heidegger’s analytic of the wholeness of Dasein. This existential, or ontological, structure is ontically articulated in moods and their attendant way of interpreting and articulating the world. As early as in the *Grundprobleme* of 1919 (GA58), Heidegger had argued that the How of experience is articulated by fundamental rhythms which order the significance of the What-is of entities and our own lives. This ‘functional rhythm’ gives the stream of living experience its form (GA58, 85). Dasein has the possibility, within certain limits, of freely shaping this rhythm to give order and stability to its own existence. In *Sein und Zeit*, this comes to word in the choices which Dasein makes, for example, in choosing the heros significant for its own concrete historical situation and its being-with others (SZ 385/437). In effect, the form of existence, in the *ontic sense of a structure of moodful understanding which orders the flow of experience, is the gestalt which Dasein gives to itself*. In Husserl’s terms, mankind has the possibility of self-formation (*Selbstgestaltung*), which allows the formation of ‘specific forms of life, or, types of humanity.’ A human being can grasp his or her entire life with different degrees of clarity and evaluate its possibilities.⁸⁹

According to Calvin Schrag, the dynamics and structure of experience are determined by the ‘gestaltism of time and space’: ‘World ex-

perience, presented in the living present, is ever in the process of arriving from a past and moving into the future. Thus we come upon the retentional-presentational-protentional structure as the basic structure of temporalized world experience. This constitutes the gestaltism of time as horizon-form.⁹⁰ While Heidegger, unlike Schrag, does not use the term *Gestalt* to characterize the existential structure of Dasein, the wholeness (*Ganzsein*) of Dasein evidently does articulate itself ontically in regulated rhythms of experience which prefigure the How of presentations, and which give Dasein a stability through the flux of experience. In the Aristotle lectures of 1931 (GA33), Heidegger interprets the Greek *bios* as ‘the possibility of a freely chosen existence, which can be given gestalt [die Möglichkeit eines freigewählten und gestaltbaren Daseins], and which holds itself in what we call a way of comportment [Haltung]’ (123). The gestalt which Dasein chooses for itself gives it its ontic stability, a stability which is ultimately grounded in the existential structure articulated by the analytic of Dasein. In this structure, being-toward-death, which throws Dasein back on its ownmost possibilities, is the very root of the stability of any comportment Dasein may concretely choose for itself.

The ontic forms of the historicity of Dasein take gestalt in ways of embodiment and enactment. Gesture, for example, is an embodiment of the historicity of gestalt. According to Schrag, ‘gestures are movements of intentional experience in its expressive and communicative projection. It is not that gestures simply indicate or point to the intended contents of feeling, willing, and thinking; they are the concrete embodiment of these intentionalities ... My gestural embodiment reveals the structure and dynamics of my lived space as infused with meaning and value.’⁹¹ This thesis, as we shall see, is anticipated by the conservative discourse of Weimar insofar as it attempts to describe the cultural specificity of ways of embodiment. Heidegger addresses the question of embodied gestalt in the attunement (*Befindlichkeit*) of Dasein: attunement signifies the invisible body of Dasein. It articulates itself ontically in gesture and comportment, as well as in forms of dance, sport, play, styles of music. This sense of gestalt will allow Heidegger, as we shall see, a significant point of contact with conservative discourse, which sought to propagate a national ‘style’ of embodiment in all its forms. Finally, the historicity of Dasein in this sense already implicates *the historicity of Volk*. The historicity of Dasein arises out of the ways it takes over its heritage, in the happening or ‘historizing of a community, of a people (Volk)’ (SZ 384/SZ-MR 436). This happening of a Volk, which Heidegger calls its ‘destiny’ (*Geschick*), is articulated ontically and concretely in the specific political institutions,

forms of labour, art, and technology, as well in styles of leadership and thought of a people. Heidegger's reflections on labour, for example, in the *Logik* of 1934, is an explicit attempt to give labour in its relation to the state and the Volk a new ontic gestalt, or concrete articulation, in accordance with the historicity of Dasein.

In certain respects, Husserl's understanding of the forms of the life-world anticipates Heidegger. According to Husserl, cultural types of the formation of social-ethical life include, for example, the religious life: in such a culture, 'a consciously constituted idea of purposiveness [Zweck-idee] lives in a [form of] cultural humanity and, in [its] most conscious gestalt, in one of its social organs (in the priesthood).' This *Idee* is actualized in a will, 'which in an unmediated way belongs to the whole community and which is supported by the collective will of the community.' 'The idea of purposiveness is one of a universal and absolute regulation of the whole culture under the system of absolute norms derived from divine revelation.' Husserl continues, 'But in respect to the life of the community and the entirety of cultural development which takes place within it, we may say, that it has the peculiar form [Gestalt] of a [form of] life, of a development, which has in itself a unitary idea of purposiveness [Zweck-idee], which is constituted in the collective consciousness of the community, an idea of purposiveness which intentionally guides development.'⁹² Later, in *The Crisis*, Husserl will recognize the objective a priori of the life-world.⁹³ Gestalt, however, is not only given in the a priori of a life-world – a new gestalt also can be produced, inducing a paradigm shift.⁹⁴

The construction of a new gestalt of the community, based on its own anthropological premises (which are of course not to be confused with Husserl's thought) is a fundamental concern of the radical conservatives. And despite the clear distinctions between Heidegger's philosophy and the theses of the Conservative Revolution, we shall see that the reconstitution of a gestalt of the *Volk* is central to Heidegger's reflections of the early 1930s, just as it was to conservative discourse.

Finally, I will quote a passage from an interview with Max Müller (1985), a former student of Heidegger's. Müller offers this interpretation of Heidegger's thought:

I believe that ... [Heidegger] saw the necessity of institutions ... very clearly. For everything turned for him on the [question of] *Gestalt*. Therefore the gestalt of leadership, or gestalt in Stefan George, or the gestalt of the worker, and also the form and gestalt of the community. Ernst Jünger had great influence on him. For ... [Heidegger], not abstract norms and values

were binding, but rather concrete gestalten, which one could follow and imitate. The gestalt, which a Volk has to win for itself, is the work. And this gestalt, on the one hand, has to be proper to it, and on the other, the opposition of objectivity and subjectivity disappears in it. It is our gestalt and yet an objective gestalt.⁹⁵

Müller identifies the centrality of overcoming representational thinking in Heidegger's thought, and the necessity of ways and forms of being which can bind and obligate. The gestalt, understood as structure of temporalization, as 'embodied' historicity, discloses modes of being (whether the being of a thing or of an institution) that issue a call, and that call for a binding response. Undoubtedly the word *Gestalt* easily evokes misleading interpretations. Gottfried Schramm (who conducted this interview, along with Bernd Martin) glosses Müller's remark to mean that, for Heidegger, the problem of modern politics and its institutional structure is reduced to a fixation on charismatic leaders, and a mythical interpretation of institutions. I will show that this is a total misconception of the problem. To speak of *being and gestalt* in reference to Heidegger's thought, thus to think the differentiation of being in beings, is only possible in terms of the destruction of metaphysics.

As opposed to a tradition of interpretation which reads Heidegger's critique of modernity as evidence of his 'cultural pessimism' and disassociation from concrete historical realities (Habermas), postmodern thinkers such as Foucault, Baudrillard, and Paul Virilio have taken up Heidegger's phenomenology of the disintegration of the modern subject and the Enlightenment project in specific and fruitful interrogations of their own. What is most obviously at stake here, in these opposing responses to modernity, are two, very different senses of our hermeneutic situation.

The hermeneutic situation to which Heidegger responds, as he makes evident with considerable explicitness in both *An Introduction to Metaphysics* and the *Contributions to Philosophy*, is the dis-integration and functional integration of beings into the availability of stock-on-call. Heidegger's thesis is that this event consummates the history of metaphysics. This experience of the abandonment of beings (*Seinsverlassenheit*) to the objectivity of representation and the functionalization which follows from it creates the need to ask about being, to retrieve being from forgetfulness (*Seinsvergessenheit*). The question of being, however, does not lead away from beings, or from humanity, but seeks to overcome the *chorimos* between beings and being which constitutes the legacy of metaphysics.

To interrogate Dasein as the site of the disclosure of being, and to found being in beings, inaugurates the project of another beginning. Being 'is' nothing mystical, behind or above the phenomena, not the deterministic other of mankind. Nor is mankind, in its response to being conceived as wilful subject entangled in its own 'decisionism.' To say that Dasein is the 'site' of being signifies that Dasein is the project of the disclosure of being in beings. This implies a responsibility to beings as beings, to what is most proper to them. The functional determination of entities signifies a loss of being. In taking this experience as his point of departure in key works of the 1930s, Heidegger does not abandon the phenomenological method, but rather seeks to bring the structures of our contemporary experience to light by revealing their provenance in the history of the meaning of being. The project of Da-sein implicates the retrieval of another way of being, and another way of experiencing entities. To speak of the 'gestalt' of being as incorporated in beings, and as instituted in the communal institutions of Da-sein itself in its specificity and historicity, signifies an openness to possible modes of the temporalization of being that is more 'proper' to Dasein and to beings, if only in the sense of being less reductive than objectification and functional disintegration. The differentiation of being grants beings their singularity, their difference. The project of Da-sein in this sense, moreover, can only become binding insofar as it speaks to a possibility of our experience, as one retrieved from tradition, just as the thesis of the disintegration of beings has to be experienced as disclosive of the phenomena and our own contemporary world. The founding of Da-sein opens up a path to the historicity of *Seyn*, and the disclosure of *Seyn* through the site of Da-sein is given gestalt through the historicity of a people and in the emergence of entities into the light of historicity.