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MARKING SILENCE: HEIDEGGER AND HERDER ON WORD AND ORIGIN

Abstract. It is clear that the question of language is of utmost importance to Heidegger's work from the late 1930's, the period of the so-called *seynsgeschichtlich* treatises. This preoccupation has become increasingly evident thematically, but is equally apparent in the interruptive and fragmentary presentation of the writing itself, a writing which seems to seek to bring into question the very possibility of philosophical discourse. This paper will argue that decisive, in these texts, both to the development of Heidegger's conception of language and to its mode of enactment, is an engagement with Herder's work on the origin of language. This engagement is evidenced by the intensive address to that text that we find in the seminar notes from 1939: *Vom Wesen der Sprache: Die Metaphysik der Sprache und die Wesung des Wortes. Zu Herder's Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (GA 85). Herder's text allows Heidegger to develop a relation to the fragmentary that is decisive for the unfolding and development of his thinking.

Keywords: Heidegger, Herder, language, listening, mark, silence

“The word fails”, writes Heidegger in the *Beiträge*, “not as an occasional occurrence (...) but originarily”¹. But this originary failing of language points in that text not to an expressive incapacity, but rather to a positive intimation of a renewal of thinking. The philosophical discourse that marks the *Beiträge*, and the surrounding texts of the so-called

¹ M. Heidegger, *Beiträge Zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1989 (English: *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, transl. R. Rojcewicz, D. Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2012). Translation modified.

seynsgeschichtlich period might be understood as responding to this sense of a ‘failing language’, by initiating a kind of writing that opens in particular ways onto silence, onto spaces and interruptions in which this originary failing can appear: a fragmentary writing.

This paper will argue that decisive to the unfolding of the question of language and the performative mode of its exploration is the confrontation with Herder, which becomes explicit in the 1939 seminar on the latter’s *Treatise on the Origin of Language*. Little attention seems to have been paid to this text: By contrast, a far greater emphasis has tended to be placed on the influence of Humboldt in the development of Heidegger’s thinking of language². Whilst in no way disputing the significance of Humboldt’s presence, I would like to suggest that the particular mode of engagement with language that occurs in the texts of the late 1930’s is forged more directly out of the confrontation with Herder than in relation to Humboldt’s thinking³.

It is the notion of originary ‘mark’ that Herder develops that enables Heidegger to conceive of the word as dislocation, as disruptive in its very essence. In this conception, a fragmentary and interruptive discourse must become the paradigm for an address to the question of language itself. Additionally, Herder’s multi-layered centralization of listening allows for a re-configuration of the discourse of subjectivity in terms of a ‘gathering’ towards a listening which is always grounded in, and directed toward, this interruption.

² See, for example, the invaluable account of the significance of Humboldt for Heidegger’s thinking of language in G. Figal, *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and the Philosophical*, transl. Th. George, SUNY Press, Albany 2010, especially 191–197.

³ There are important accounts of Herder’s work on language to be found in K. Terezakis, *The Immanent Word: The Turn to Language in German Philosophy, 1759—1801*, Routledge, New York 2007; in Ch. Taylor, *The Importance of Herder*, in: E. Margalit, A. Margalit, *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, Chicago UP, Chicago 1991; and in M. Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2012. The second of these, in particular, discusses the question of the relation between Herder and Humboldt’s conceptions of language. For a valuable account of this and other controversies surrounding the reception of Herder’s work on language, see J.H. Zammito, *Herder, Sturm und Drang, and “Expressionism”*, Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal 27(2006)2, 51–74.

I. Herder writes as follows: “Now, it is in the face of this sort of deep abyss of obscure sensations, forces, and irritations that our bright and clear philosophy is horrified most of all”⁴. The enthusiasm of this claim, but also its anxieties, might serve well to describe the ambience of Herder’s thinking in general, a thinking that plays always in the space between clarity and obscurity, caught in the pull of both. Nowhere is this truer than in the *Treatise on the Origin of Language*, whose central insights seem generated in an intertwining of obscurity and illumination. On the one hand, a ‘listening’ that occupies the central ground of the possibility language, but which cannot be clarified in terms of a subjective capacity; on the other, a conception of the word as ‘mark’, a ‘marking’, that is neither the externality of sound nor the index of a silent internal registration.

Heidegger’s reflections on Herder revolve in and around the orbit of this tension, leaning on the difficulties of the text, forcing open its radical possibilities, and watching, too – sometimes with palpable frustration – its withdrawal, its retreats. The reflections take the form of a series of notes or short fragments composed for a seminar that Heidegger gave in the Summer of 1939. They are elliptical and condensed, seeming – structurally and stylistically – to have much in common with the series of so-called *seynsegeschichtlich* treatises with which Heidegger was privately engaged at the time. Indeed, to the extent that those texts oblige us to re-frame our understanding of the relation between public and private discourse, between ‘note’ and ‘essay’, perhaps more broadly between the fragmentary and the systematic, the notes on Herder, too, suggest a kind of between-space, neither exactly “lecture notes” nor still expository discourse, but a different kind of utterance, one whose lacunae, whose uncertainties are as much a function of the writing itself as the index of an incompleteness. For this reason, too, it is possible to wonder whether the dynamics of Heidegger’s reading of Herder do not pertain most directly to the writings of this period, and

⁴ J.G. von Herder, *On the Cognition and Sensation of the Human Soul*, transl. M. Forster, in: J.G. von Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2002, 196.

whether the reflections on origin that Herder imposes on Heidegger might indeed not be decisive for an understanding of these texts. Such, at any rate, is the contention of this essay, which will try to follow some of the central moments of the notes on Herder in order to bring into view a process of thinking that might determine, indeed demand the kind of practice of writing that unfolds in the works of this period.

II. Herder's text asks after the 'origin' of language. The title of Heidegger's seminar asks after its 'essence'.⁵ A shift is marked, then, a difference, one that allows us to register the particular distance that Heidegger is taking from Herder's text. What does this shift imply? The movement from a question of origin to a question of essence aims at resisting their conflation, at any gesture that would make of essence an origin, an *essentia*. Herder's express aim is to disallow a 'divine origin' to language, and to establish in its stead a conception of origin oriented entirely to the context of human life, to its needs, its drives. The question of 'origin', then, will be directed toward a description of a structure of causal determination (*kausal denkende Erklärungsfrage*⁶). It will be a question of genesis, of an establishing, an *Entstehungsfrage*. In framing his approach as a question of essence, Heidegger does not seek to withdraw from the question of origin, but on the contrary, to explore the full consequences of thinking language in terms of origin: To speak, in other words, not about the origin *of* language, but of language *as* origin. This will require that the two notions, essence and origin are detached from one another – hence the shift in the title: indeed, such a detachment might be construed as one of the central tasks of what Heidegger calls a history of being. But they must be detached in such a way as to allow them to address one another reciprocally. The approach will be one that Heidegger describes as an

⁵ M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache, Gesamtausgabe* 85, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1999, 3 (English: *On the Essence of Language*, transl. W. Torres Gregory, Y. Unna, SUNY Press, Albany 2004, 3). Hereafter cited as *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, followed by German, and then English pagination in brackets. Translations have been modified.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81 (70).

Er-findung – a processual uncovering/discovery, that will address the question of language not merely as an object of inquiry, but rather as a question that can never abandon an interrogation of its own origin, its own source. A question arises from a need (*Notwendigkeit*), its arising has a purpose (*Zweck*), and the displacement of Herder’s question of origin into a question of essence is aimed at forcing open the *Not* from which arises the very possibility of questioning. It is in this sense that Heidegger says that what the question will open is the experience of lack, of absence (*den Mangel erfahren*⁷), a lack which will which turn out to be determinative of language itself, in Herder’s account as much as in Heidegger’s reading. On the one hand, then, Herder’s question of origin will be opened up by being exposed to its limitations, namely, the incapacity of an account of the historical genesis of language to address the question of its essence. Conversely, though, ‘origin’ will be made to play in close proximity to the consideration of ‘essence’ in order to expose the latter to the question of its historicity: “Essence is itself not bereft of origin (*ursprunglos*) – in its essentiality”⁸, as Heidegger remarks. This mode of keeping-apart whilst holding-in-play *is* precisely what Heidegger means by ‘question’. The ‘question’, here, in this sense, will be the question of language.

The very opening of Herder’s text can be seen to mark out the terrain upon which Heidegger will want to engage this question; and to mark out, too, the lines of fracture that he will try to force apart, acknowledging an inextricable proximity to the tradition that will be dislocated in its very moment of restoral: *Schon als Tier hat der Mensch Sprache*⁹. It is an opening that appears on one level entirely congruous with a tradition that has always sought for language within the orbit of animality,

⁷ Ibid., 23 (19).

⁸ Ibid., 85 (73).

⁹ J.G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, in: *Herders Werke*, ed. W. Dobbek, vol. 5, Aufbau-Verlag Berlin, Berlin 1964, 79–190 (English transl. in Herder, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. M.N. Forster, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 2002, 65–164). Hereafter cited as *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, with the German pagination followed by that of the English edition. Some translations have been modified.

within its difference and its accordances. But Herder's opening falls short of a definition: "schon als Tier", he writes. The *als* here must be understood as an "in so far as" – '*in so far as the human is animal*', we read, 's/he *already* has language.' Thus a space already opens up that will prevent 'language' from simply determining the lines of difference that distinguish the human. If λόγος, in other words, can still for Herder determine the ζωή of the human, it can only be in ways that complicate and substantially distort any simple interpretation of the ἔχον in terms of the 'possession' of a 'faculty.' *Sprachfähigkeit* will need to be re-configured, beyond the scope of a merely definitional property. Herder, of course, is reading Condillac and Rousseau, venturing with them into the domain of 'natural language'. Thus, for Herder, the animal, too, 'has language' – a language whose spontaneity and immediacy re-emerge in human speaking, in human gesture but, critically, without being allowed to define them. If the suffering body 'breathe[s] more freely by giving vent to its burning, frightened breath',¹⁰ this need will indeed mark the discourse of Philoctetes just as it does the whimper of the dying animal. But the non-reflective spontaneity of the cry, bonded though it is to an equally spontaneous sympathetic response, offers for Herder no continuum, no lines of expansion out of which a human speaking might emerge. If the irruptive immediacy of the animal cry is to be allowed a presence within human discourse, it will only be as trace, as remnant, filtered always through complex mechanisms of difference. For Herder, then, language retains the merest trace of the animal cry, the indices of joy and suffering. But these "remains" are, "not the roots, but the juices that enliven (*beleben*) the roots of language"¹¹. If the residue of the affective will haunt the word, there is yet, for Herder, an irreducible gap between the spontaneity of an affective cry and the emergence of language. The elaboration of this gap, and of this trace, will involve a complex unfolding of determinations and differences that mark out the human involvement with animality in ways entirely other than as an iteration of capacities.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79 (65).

¹¹ Ibid., 83 (68).

The opening of Heidegger's text, too, settles upon the 'having', upon the range of assumptions that open up already within the thought of the 'having' of language, and indicates that the movement of his reading will, in questioning, disorient the conception of the human that underpins Herder's opening:

"The 'human being' 'has' 'language' (*ratio et oratio*), ('animal rationale' 'is able' 'to speak' and 'speaks' necessarily by virtue of his essence).

The 'word' 'has' the 'human being' (being-there 'grounds' – guardianship of being)".

Crossing from the metaphysics 'of' language into the thinking (*Erdenkenden*) leap into the essential occurring (*Wesung*) of the being-historical word.¹²

The disorientation engendered here by the extraordinary labyrinth of parentheses, the almost absurd proliferation of inverted commas, will mirror, in effect, the passage that "language", that the "word" (impossible, here, not to be drawn into the same proliferation, the same disorientation) will undergo in Heidegger's retrieval of their essence. What occurs in the reading, in the writing of this passage is of the order of the interruptive – a fragmentation, an incessant halting, that effectively prevents reading even as it incites it: the passage becomes, in a sense, unreadable. But, as we shall see, it will be precisely in taking up the interruptive, in encountering the breaking of the word, that Heidegger will most forcefully pursue the path that Herder opens, a path that leads toward the diremption of the tradition in which he remains embedded, even in his resistance.

III. Herder's contestation of the tradition which unfolds around the specificity of the human relation to language begins, indeed, with the marking out of difference quite other than the familiar articulation points of the human/animal divide. Herder insists upon a radical gap between human and animal, upon an unbridgeable gulf, which emerges precisely at the instant of their self-articulation. The cry, the sob, the interjection carries the trace of the animal, but human discourse will

¹² M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, op. cit., 3 (3).

be grounded quite otherwise than in an elaboration of animal capacities. The old determinations of language, of the human as *animal rationale*, will seem to be jettisoned in a radical departure. Nonetheless, as Heidegger will quickly observe, that very difference can only be thought via an analogical structure that takes the animal as its model: “human in the analogy with ‘animal economy’. But thereby ‘animal’ at the same time in the (descending) catalog with the human being”¹³. Locked into such a differential structure, it will remain for Heidegger an open question whether, and on what basis, Herder’s conception of human difference can free itself from the analogical determination of “degree”. He asks: “The difference, though, not in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’ (at what magnitude would the human circle begin?). But what does that mean?”¹⁴

What it means, for Herder, is that the human, here, is to be determined – and decisively so – as fundamentally lacking, as deficient in relation to the animal. The latter is understood in terms of its “sphere” of operation, its “circle” (*Kreis*) – one might almost say its “world” – a domain that both responds to and determines its needs and drive-capacities (*Kunsttriebe*). It is precisely the lack, the absence of just such a specificity, such a “circle”, that opens onto the possibility of an experience that will come to be determined as human. Instead of the particularity of an adaptive cooperation, this human experience is one of dispersion (*Zerstreuung*): “his forces of soul (*Seelenkräfte*) are distributed over the world. There is no direction of his representations toward one thing”¹⁵. It is within this lack (*Mangel*), though, that the ground is laid for something like a *differentia specifica* of the human, the “germ of a substitute”, an “attunement” (*Einstimmung*) – but one which will remove the human entirely from the domain of the animal. To this peculiar kind of attunement, generated from a dispersion, grounded in a deficiency, Herder will give the name *Besonnenheit* – an

¹³ Ibid., 29 (24).

¹⁴ Ibid., 16 (14).

¹⁵ J.G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, op. cit., 79 (94).

“awareness” configured in a field of diffusion, which for that very reason cannot be easily correlated with “consciousness”.

If the human possesses “forces of representation” (*Vorstellungskräfte*) that are “inferior” to the capacities (*Kunsthigkeiten*) of the animal, it is this lack, this gap – one might call it a certain kind of dislocation – which opens up a space in which a specifically human way of being can unfold. Herder writes: “Since he does not fall blindly on one point and remain lying there blindly, he becomes free standing (*freistehend*), can seek for himself a sphere for self-mirroring, can mirror himself within himself”¹⁶.

Reflexivity, then, becomes a function of a dis-orientation, an inadequacy, not the index of a plenitude. The reflexive movement, the difference that emerges from the openness of *Besonnenheit* – “a difference not in levels or additions of forces, but in a *quite different sort of orientation*”, as Herder says – is equally the possibility from which language can emerge. Heidegger, though, will attempt to force open the conception of *Besonnenheit*, and will do so by tracing the ways in which Herder remains locked within a tradition, but equally – within that very rootedness, pulls free. On the one hand, then, the question will arise regarding the ‘directedness’, the “possibility of direction” (*Richtungsmöglichkeit*) that pertains to *Besonnenheit*: if the domain, the circle of the human is the totality of the dispersive field – if, indeed, the human is determined as such a dispersion – then toward what is the reflexive turn directed? What occasions its directionality? Heidegger will see that what is at play, both in the movement of *Besonnenheit/Besinnung* and in the notion of ‘marking’ which emerges from that movement, is a recursion to a version of *cognitio distincta* that is taken up from Leibniz, and that can be entirely subsumed within traditional models of the clarity/obscurity of representational consciousness. And yet, on the other hand, this very difficulty – the question of orientation within a grounding disorientation – opens the way for an entirely other thinking of the mark, of attentiveness, of the ‘ac-knowledgment’ (*An-erkenntnis*) that belongs to the reflexive mirroring of *Besonnen-*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 82 (98).

heit. If Herder's reflexive mirroring indicates a return to 'self' from out of the totality of the dispersive field which is the locus of human difference from the animal, then how is reflexion to be understood here, if not by simply falling back on traditional assumptions? Not, evidently, as an *Ichheit*, as a grounding of the 'I think'. Rather, indefinitely prior to such a ground, the self-sameness *Selbigkeit* of this reflexive motion will indicate that which first "makes possible the 'oneself', 'yourself' and 'myself' and 'ourselves' and 'yourselves' (*Sich* und *dich* und *mich* und *uns* und *euch*) of 'reflexive' grasping"¹⁷.

However, this grounding is to be understood, for Herder, the 'free-standing' dispersion of capacities and engagements, the dis-orientation of the human, is the space in which a kind of mirroring, a reflexivity, can occur. And it is at the same time, within this field of dispersion, this zone of deficiency – and in the same movement – that Herder will uncover the central axes of his account of language, its possibility and its origin. "The human being", writes Herder, in an extraordinary passage, "demonstrates reflection when the power of his soul operates so freely, that in the whole ocean of sensation, flooding through his senses, it can separate off, can stop, so to speak, a single wave (...)"¹⁸. A marking, a halting occurs: From out of the "hovering dream" (*schwebender Traum*) of sensation, a mark (*Merkmal*) is articulated, differentiated, split off. And with this splitting, with this incision, language will emerge. The word, for Herder, will be torn out of the dispersive field: a mark, scouring the indifferent surface of sensation. It is this breaking off, this stoppage that marks the movement from the indistinct zone of *Besonnenheit*, to the more properly human specificity of *Besinnung*. It is this movement that grounds the origin of the word.

IV. What is initially most striking about Herder's notion of the 'mark', the incision with which language is initiated, is that it is fundamentally aural, acoustical: A silence rent by sound provides the paradigmatic image of the 'mark-word'. Equally striking, though, given the distance

¹⁷ M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, op. cit., 16 (19).

¹⁸ J.G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, op. cit., 103 (87).

that Herder is drawing from the inchoation of the animal cry, is that the example that founds the elaboration of the origin of language is precisely such a cry – specifically that of a sheep whose bleating will provide the strange paradigm out of which the conception of the mark will unfold. To express the origin of the word from out of a sounding, to constitute that origin as the welcoming of an irruptive cry from out of a fabric of indeterminacy, is to insist upon a centralization of listening. And so indeed, listening will become, for Herder, not merely a perceptual starting-point, but more completely the nexus around which the entire possibility of the human will gather and coalesce. *Besinnung*, in this sense, *is* precisely a listening.

It is precisely at this juncture, though, at the point of the emergence of the mark-word and its concomitant listening, that Herder must develop his text in ways that will draw Heidegger's attention powerfully. In making of the 'mark' not merely the sign of an external phenomenon but the index of a coming-to-awareness, Herder's 'mark' must necessarily push beyond the limits of the sounded: it must be more than the rending of silence. Neither the pure irruption of sound, nor yet mimetic inscription, the notion of the 'mark' will hover in a space sufficiently indeterminate to release the question of origin from the constraints of merely genetic considerations, and open it, as Heidegger will suggest, onto the question of essence.

The opening up of such a question will unfold, for Herder as much as for Heidegger, around the question of listening. If the occasion of the mark is the irruptive intrusion of the sounded, it is nonetheless true that the marking (*merken*) itself takes the form of the reflexive registration proper to *Besinnung*, a registration very properly delimited by Herder as *Aufmerksamkeit*. Listening – and Herder is explicit about this – is the domain within which the entire development and unfolding of language will be possible. But if the mark is not purely or exclusively sounded, how are we to develop and extend an understanding of listening that embraces the mark beyond its acoustical instantiation? Furthermore, if the mark hovers in a zone of indeterminacy between external manifestation and internal correlate, inseparable from both

and yet belonging to neither, it is no longer possible to maintain the opposition between mark as sounded event and listening as its perceptual registration. Instead, mark and listening will appear in Herder's text to coalesce, almost to merge, as if – and this will be the direction in which Heidegger will want to push Herder – the two belong equally, co-originarily to the event of language. Indeed, one might say that the movement of Heidegger's reflections on Herder are oriented toward this intersection of origin and listening – toward the place where listening becomes an origin, and origin a listening.

“We creatures that hear, stand in the middle,” says Herder.¹⁹ It is the manifold complexity of this ‘middle’ that will enable Heidegger to appropriate Herder's project to a new sense of ‘origin’. In an effort to elaborate the notion of ‘mark’ as the primary event of language, but beyond the constraints of an acoustical model, Herder develops a conception of the human as *sensorium commune*. The sensorium is the arena, the space in or toward which the multiplicity of sense gathers. What will be decisive for Herder is precisely this gathering: It will be his insistence on the ‘middle’ – the point of coalescence, the drawing-in of the multiplicity – that allows Herder to elaborate a concept of hearing that, for Heidegger, opens his text onto an experience of language that breaks free of the representational.

Heidegger describes the domain of the sensible in Herder's treatise as the domain of “the interwoven, dark, blurring, manifold, capturing, pressing afflicting (*drängende Bedrängnis*)”²⁰. And indeed, for Herder, for whom “originally (*ursprünglich*) the senses are only feeling (*Gefühl*)” the centrality of hearing – its status as the ‘middle’ sense – as nothing to do with any newly-discovered clarity or transparency that would usurp the traditional dominance of the visual. On the contrary, for Herder, hearing gathers the sensorium by virtue of its indistinction, hovering between dazzlement and obscurity, immediacy and indifference. Herder in fact describes six modes of gathering, six ways in which the sensorium collects in and around a listening. Between the

¹⁹ Ibid., 104 (109).

²⁰ M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, op. cit., 131 (113).

dark inchoate movement of ‘feeling’, and the blinding light of pure vision, the human is threatened on all sides by an overwhelming of the *Aufmerksamkeit* that is his proper domain: if the domain of feeling ‘stuns’ (*übertäubt*), the sheer brightness of vision would blind beyond all seeing (*überglänzt*). Resistant to the pull of these extremes, hearing – in its very opacity – would cast a middle path, drawing the sensorium into a gathering in which the *Besinnung* of the human can occur. Hearing, then, gathers from out of an inadequacy, a lack that at one and the same time determines, in relation to the other senses, both its specificity, and also its dependence.

Heidegger, however, understands that the middle ground in which Herder’s sense of hearing hovers is precisely what will tend to draw his sensorium away from a model that might be fully assimilated to a traditional framework of perception. What, for Heidegger, will mark out the limits (*Grenzen*) of Herder’s account is his express intention “to explain in which way that which is *non-sonorous* comes to language. How that which is non-sonorous can gather itself in a middle region, how this middle is of such a kind as to mediate everything that is felt into a sounding”²¹. If, then, hearing is to be of the *non-sonorous* as much as of the *sonorous*, one must wonder again about the middle ground, the zone of indistinction that is to determine hearing as such. Heidegger observes that, given Herder’s insistence that the sensible is interwoven with an obscurity that sets its origin within the domain of “feeling”, such a ‘middle’ – such a zone of indistinction, of lack – might be seen to be determinative of all forms of sensible experience, not merely hearing. Furthermore, if hearing, for Herder, is to gather both the sounded and the non-sounded, then “hearing” is clearly being thought, here, beyond the limits that would determine it as a “perceptual function”. Here is what Heidegger says: “With this consideration of limit, it is overlooked that if the senses are taken in their full essence (vibrating in awareness (*schwingend in der Besonnenheit*)), the corresponding possibilities (e.g., stunning and diffusion) still subsist overall. The fact that here the sense of hearing as perceiving with the ear has

²¹ Ibid., 117 (101).

in no way priority, but only insofar as it is grasped as perceiving *in the sense of being attentive (Aufmerken), of listening, of being-silent*²².

In other words, despite Herder's attempt to delimit and separate out the domain of hearing from the extremes that it mediates, and his own insistence both that sense experience is originally tied to the domain of feeling, and equally that hearing is to be determined purely in relation to the extremes that enfold it, entail that those limits cannot be maintained. 'Hearing' must always be involved beyond itself, occupying a place within domains from which a determination as mere sense experience would have excluded it. Indeed, given the intertwining that is the gathering of the sensorium, one would have to understand this gathering not merely as the assertion of a median, but precisely as a gathering *of* extremes, a gathering that at all moments involves and includes those extremes. Thus, the distinction of 'hearing' as pure perceptual domain is elided, and must be replaced by an altogether other sense of *Aufmerksamkeit* – one of 'listening, of being-silent'.

Aufmerken, then, is engaged here in a very particular way, one that will enable Heidegger to draw Herder's thinking towards an acknowledgement of the belonging-together, the *Zugehörigkeit*, of the "mark" (*Merkmal*) and the listening that attends to it. What Heidegger does is to take up the "middle" (*Mitte*) with which Herder reaches for an understanding of the sensible as gathered into and around hearing, and to re-cast it, not as the "middle", but rather as the *in-between* (*das Inzwischen*): "What Herder intimates with the »middle« character of »hearing« is the in-between and in-the-midst-of the *clearing*"²³. *Aufmerksamkeit* will indicate a double movement, one that gathers, draws in, but also simultaneously "spreads out" and "displaces" (*entrückt*). The "middle", then, toward which sensibility is gathered, is not the ordinary *punctum* of consciousness that Herder's account might be taken to imply. Rather, as Heidegger says, that which hearing gathers toward is "insistence" in the 'there'. What is heard, what marks and is marked, what is attended-to, *is* this insistence: An elliptical moment in Hei-

²² Ibid., 123 (105).

²³ Ibid., 113 (96).

degger's text reads just "attunement (*Gestimmtheit*) as insistence in the in-between"²⁴, and elsewhere, "hear-ing of an insistence" (*Er-hörung einer Inständigkeit*)²⁵.

V. If hearing, if listening (and it is Heidegger's text allows us to slip between the two) no longer recoils upon the intensities of the subject, but rather indicates a gathering from and toward a 'there', such a 'there' cannot, however, constitute a ground of experience. Rather, the 'there' – fragile, tenuous – comes to pass in and as *mark*. How, though, is such a mark to be understood, if not as the registration of a givenness, as the index of an exchange between sensibility and understanding? Heidegger returns insistently to Herder's first insight: The mark, writes Herder, is "the tone that *breaks free*"²⁶. But we have seen already how Herder pushes the "mark", and its hearing, beyond the limit of the sounded; and for Heidegger, too, "sound can never for itself and firstly become that which sets the measure; if this happens, then everything would lapse into error". If the mark, in other words, were to be understood exclusively from out of the sounded, this would entail falling back upon a classical symmetry of opposition, in which the sounded word takes place as the registration, or expression, of the silent plenitude of the given. It is not thus that silence is to be understood. The notion of 'mark' will avoid re-staging this metaphysical opposition of sound and silence by virtue of its functioning *between*, as a crossing, moving seamlessly along the borders that would seek to demarcate these poles. If listening, for Heidegger, gathers in and around what he calls a 'clearing', it will do so as 'mark', but a mark that *carries silence in and as its breaking*. The 'there', for Heidegger, is thus – properly thought – not silent, but is precisely the index of this movement, the crossing that the mark effects. Thought in this way, the mark-word would serve to delineate a path that thinking might travel as it traverses the borders of metaphysics: "Sounding and intention and

²⁴ Ibid., 93 (80).

²⁵ Ibid., 71 (61).

²⁶ J.G. Herder, *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, op. cit., 115 (98).

meaning are co-originary (*gleichursprünglich*) and grounded in the essence of being itself,” says Heidegger²⁷. To dissolve these structural hierarchies in the notion of the ‘mark’ is to set out on a path that must entail re-configuring utterly the understanding of sound, of sounding: “‘Sounding’ – as the happening of the strife of world and earth – presupposes the strife and the clearing”²⁸. The sounding of the mark is neither an origin nor a consequence: rather it is the index of a crossing, of an irreducible and un-resting movement, an intertwining of sound and silence such that the ‘interruption’ that conjoins them becomes more than interference, more than hesitation: Interruption becomes the very ground and possibility of the ‘there’, of the *da* of *Da-sein*, as Heidegger will have elaborated it. Herder’s conception of mark, thus, becomes the knot that binds the thinking of language to the thinking of event. Heidegger’s work from the *seynsgeschichtlich* period must be seen as working through and within this knot.

What, though, of the centralization of listening, as much a dominant feature of Heidegger’s discourse as it is of Herder’s? A question obtrudes – not so much a challenge as an incitement to a thinking suggested by the constellation of terms around which Heidegger’s discourse revolves. It is this: can one *listen* to a *clearing*? The question is far more than a matter of mixed metaphors. It is, in fact, a fundamental question, as it is precisely here, within this question that the intertwining of sounded and non-sounded, silent and resounding is to be experienced. Listening, which gathers itself as an insistence is, as Heidegger puts it, “the dominance of expectation” (*Die Herrschaft der Er-wartung*)²⁹, the place which both marks and is marked by silence and its sounding. If we are speaking here of the essence, or of the origin of language, it is because it is the word which carries most completely this intertwining. The word is the marking of silence, not just as sounded utterance, registering silence in its interruption, but also equally as inscription, as writing: “Decisive: The essence of sound

²⁷ M. Heidegger, *Vom Wesen der Sprache*, op. cit., 55 (45).

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55 (45).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61 (51).

and of the sounding as *Sage*. Script, the written, the legible”³⁰. And it is this, too, perhaps, that leads Heidegger to note, without elaboration, without explanation, almost in passing: “The silence of being itself, *is* ‘word’”³¹.

And finally, then, what is one to say of a philosophical discourse that would attempt to engage this intertwinement? Heidegger writes: “‘Listening’ – diffusion that takes hold (νοῦς), displaced gathering (λόγος)”³². A philosophical λόγος will be one that takes up this listening in the form of the inscriptive silence of the word, a *ratio* that no longer displaces the sensible, but rather thinks itself as the intertwinement of silence and sound, the marking that traverses their in-between: “The sensible not lesser, essentially, than ‘reason’; indeed *both, here, the same*” [my emphasis]³³. The *seynsgeschichtlich* treatises will work through this sameness, crossing always toward an origin in which such a sameness might be grasped. If these works speak in a language which is fragmentary, elliptical, opening onto interruption, onto silence, such a language in no way represents the abandonment of philosophical discourse. Rather, it is its fulfillment: a language that pursues the paradoxical project of remaining, of insisting in a “crossing” which can itself not be understood or grasped other than as “*the transitory*, the incidental – what, barely thought, shall be abandoned”³⁴.

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³⁰ Ibid., 133 (114).

³¹ Ibid., 76 (66).

³² Ibid., 137 (119).

³³ Ibid., 131 (113).

³⁴ Ibid., 61 (51).

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