

Preface

To explain how the present work came into being and name those without whom it could not have existed one would have to also explain, in a sense, how an American from southern California came to write about a German poet, in particular a southwest German poet preoccupied with (his fantasy of) ancient Greece. This is not to say that I intend to give (even a brief) history of the crooked line that connects—somehow?—skateboarding and surfing under an eternal sun to a scientific exploration of a dark Greek demigod and his potential (courtesy of the modern German identity crisis) to help our species confront nuclear catastrophe and global warming. Instead, I shall simply sketch the time when a few unique persons and ideas who and which enabled the following study made their respective epiphanies.

This story begins after my youth dissolved not only into the low-lying, stratus clouds of San Francisco, on the east shore of whose bay I completed my undergraduate degree (at UC Berkeley), but also into that final, fateful breath of youthfulness: an affliction of *Reiselust* that allowed me to abandon my home state. And why not? California had, after all, killed the electric car (again) and done nothing (while corporations like Enron did everything).

But my European wild was a leap into an (exclusively) unconscious style of experimentation. The thoughts must have been, in some sense, brewing, if even today I can still scarcely discern an outline of their emergent shapes. Like the origin of a sound at night, these nascent creatures refuse to come forth. Perhaps there was a moment when a certain idea announced itself—for instance, when I was traveling back from Oxford to fetch the things that I left my uncle's flat in Eaton Square—or that one late Spring evening when I (drunkenly) could no longer find my way back to the flat in Le Marais. Was it the absence of family at this time from which these intellectual patterns arose? Or was the absence of family itself the cause of their stubborn refusal to appear?

If this remains unclear, one thing can be clarified—and with no little irony. The real magic of the idea (and person) that first came to me, like an enchanting apparition from a dream who had managed—somehow?—to escape into and remain within the waking-world—and this means the first clear boundary for thinking that I, for all my previous learning, actually learned—, was (communicated by) one who is rightly considered incapable of clear communication. While mistakenly work-

ing on a Masters degree at Williams College in the first years of our poor century, I succumbed to the seductive psychoanalytic powers of Jacques Lacan, in particular Lacan's gestures to the peculiarity of how we as a species see. This includes, among other things, the power of seeing to enhance (and destroy) love—and by love I mean community and nature.

Like an inexperienced, arrogant young general (of what army?) who is unaware that the gods had already fixed his tragic fate, I rushed home to southern California to revel in the glory of this revelation. Academically things were, in fact, not that bad—or, at least, they did not seem bad, at first. At UCLA John McCumber who for a second seemed like a kindred (fellow Scottish) thoughtful American, suggested (absolutely) that Lacan's concept of seeing could not be separated from what is, for John, the oceanic influence of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. For did not Heidegger already point out in the early 1940s—for instance, in his work on *Anaximander's Saying*—that seeing is always already concealed within the seen? Fine. *Avant-garde*—forward troops, from French psychoanalysis to German philosophy!¹ This was exciting, for the history of our insight into the magic of seeing exists.

But the intellectual (and spiritual) transition was not without its problems. Something was wrong—and rapidly getting worse. Not only was it unsettling that the father of the governor (of the home state to which I returned) had been a Nazi—to say nothing of the fact that the good people of California had elected a movie star-governor with a uniquely transcendental reputation (for smoking marijuana at Muscle Beach in Venice, Los Angeles), unprecedented historical cataclysms were devouring the horizon line of everyday (digital age) common sense. As basic human rights vanished after September 11th, 2001, my country (without my—or anyone else's—consent) and its long-standing junior partner (Britain) declared war and began its illegal (and immoral) invasion of Iraq.

So whatever happened to all the happiness that I had hoped to share with my family who, once again was so close and so distant? What was I to make of my grandmother's remote house in the mountains? And what would these places become now that I had set out on a journey that would lead not only from French psychoanalysis to German philosophy and poetry, but, finally, to early historic Greece and beyond? Unreachable seemed the names of my youth: Malaga Cove, Manhattan Beach and all the other places that my father and I had haunted along the Californian coastline: Rincon, Rocky Shores, Pleasure Point, Sunset Cliffs, San Elijo. It is hard not to enjoy the unwritten names that surfers assign to the shape of waves: Boneyard, The Hook.

¹ Although I continue to believe in the potential of psychoanalysis (and psychology and psychiatry) to improve our earthly place in the cosmos, because it tends to repress history and (with tragic irony) knows nothing of the history of money and its lethal visual cultural, this discipline and practice has been, more or less, exploited by money-tyrants and the "legal-systems" over which they rule. For this reason, which has nothing to do with Heidegger, I quickly moved beyond Lacan into a more historical, if still at times still psychoanalytic in spirit, perspective of socio-politics.

But where were these places now? Yes, I could recall the seascape of *Short Sands* in Oregon from somewhere deep within my childhood—and even fragments of the magical forest through which one must pass to reach its icy, northern wave—, but this name was not only distant, it was as if it never existed. What was this strange absence of the name alongside the growing power of its meaning?

To understand the visual essence that underlies even the letters on this page—and perhaps to initiate already my escape from the peculiarity of Heidegger's Hellenic spirit—I found myself in dialogue with Barry Powell, the classicist who has gestured to Homer's invention of an unparalleled, cataclysmic visual media around 800 B.C.E. But how was alphabetic writing related to the names of lost places? And what does it mean to make visible a spirit of a lost essence and behold this image of estrangement? And what about the places that we haunted that had no names, despite (or perhaps because of) the unique shape of their waves?

Tragic loves and friendships—and the spleen of a doomed search to rescue family—an enchanting, heart-breaking time whose meaning is still revealing itself: I remember attending (although at the time not understanding the depth of) Edward Said's lecture at UCLA in 2002, that is, just before Said's untimely death in the autumn of 2003. Was this the one that he dedicated to she who standing defenceless before a Palestinian home, was "bulldozed into death" by Israeli bulldozers?

It is quite possible that this book could never have been written. It could have been an endless cycle of tragic love and tragic friendship—exchanging, for instance, Los Angeles for New Haven (and surfing for squash). But the nameless keystone of my arch refused to collapse. The storm initiated in Freiburg after I discovered the swastika emblazoned on Max Kommerell's *Dichter als Führer* from 1928 and which, if only slightly, subsided during my desperate return to Montpellier in the Spring of 2008—this was the time just after I (definitively) gave up on Heidegger: a change that, because of an obdurate Heideggerian advisor in the Philosophy department at Yale, I had to keep quiet—gave way to a new cycle of experience—one in which I still find myself today: the time when this book came into existence.

Not only to complete my abandonment of the Nazi philosopher, but to descend, humanely and scientifically, into the mystical depths of Greece, I found myself in 2009 communicating with Richard Seaford, to whom (alongside another) this book is dedicated. Exacerbation of the *Holocaust (Benjaminian) Industry* at Yale since the the financial crisis of 2008, specifically the (perverse) ritualisation of an aggressively pro-Israeli *Weimar Culture* in the German department, made Connecticut easier to leave than my home state. I arrived in Germany just in time—of course—for another enchanting, heart-breaking Ereignis. In this phase of time the text continued...

But to bring this oblique and rambling (and alas sentimental) prefatory remark to a conclusion I should say, finally, that which should be said: to distance myself from the Nazi Heidegger whose "philosophy" I was still ostensibly analysing while a Ph.D. student at Yale until the late Spring of 2011, I had began to (carefully) shift the focus of my thesis to what this modern philosophical tyrant calls the poet of poets: Friedrich Hölderlin, in particular Hölderlin's retrieval of Dionysian Greece.

(Heideggerians, among others Germanophiles, may not like this work, because it is not simply about a German poet). By the autumn of 2010 the Hölderlinian scholar Bernhard Böschenstein, to whom (alongside Seaford) the present work is dedicated, gave a lecture, Hölderlins Dionysus—Versuch eines Gesamtbildes, in my honour.² And soon thereafter, by mid-2011—why did this take so long?—I found myself beginning a dialogue with Noam Chomsky, to whom (among a few others) my second, forthcoming monograph, Nietzsche: The Meaning of Earth, is dedicated.

All of this is simply to say that the ideas preserved in the alphabetic letters that follow, by virtue of those mentioned above, are the survivors of a stormy voyage to a place beyond our monetised (and visualised) society of species destruction. Without my family, these colleagues and friends, this dangerous crossing could not have been. Thank you.

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Lüneburg, Germany

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² Not my words. This is something Böschenstein himself acknowledged.

Hölderlin's Dionysiac Poetry

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