

## *The Denazification of MH: The Struggle with Being and the Philosophical Confrontation with the Ancient Greeks in Heidegger's *Originary* Politics*

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### I. Approaching Heidegger and the Film

James T. Hong's experimental documentary, *The Denazification of MH* (2006) is neither an apology for Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism nor a condemnation of that involvement. Rather, the film is a critical philosophical confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Heidegger's thought and the issue of his involvement with National Socialism. The film addresses the perennial concern as old as philosophy itself: the relationship between the philosopher's life and his philosophy. While the film does not adopt a definitive position regarding Heidegger, Nazism, and the issue of personal responsibility, it does suggest an affirmative response to the question posed by both Levinas and Blanchot regarding the possibility of philosophizing after Auschwitz. Considering Heidegger's influence on contemporary philosophy and literary studies, inspiring such films as *The Denazification of MH* and *The Ister* (David Barison and Daniel Ross, 2004), it appears as though it is not only possible, but necessary, to carefully and critically approach Heidegger in the effort to continue to philosophize in the wake of the most catastrophic event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Holocaust. In his thoroughly researched

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biography of Martin Heidegger, Rudiger Strafaski states the following regarding the potential of Heidegger himself to do philosophy in the wake of the German death camps, a matter about which Heidegger remained conspicuously silent:

Although Heidegger rejected the idea that he should defend himself as a potential accomplice to murder this did not mean that he shied away from the challenge to 'think Auschwitz' [...] When Heidegger refers to the perversion of the modern will to power, for which nature and man have become mere 'machinations,' he always, explicitly or not, also means Auschwitz (Safranski 1998, 421).

Scholars have employed a variety of methodologies for approaching this issue: (1) Reading Heidegger in a piecemeal fashion, selectively dismissing the texts of the 1930s (e.g., *Introduction to Metaphysics*), works deemed radically political in nature, motivated by the cause of National Socialism; (2) Reading Heidegger life and politics as inseparable from his philosophy, a philosophy which emerges directly from Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism; (3) Reading Heidegger as an apolitical philosopher, or perhaps more accurately, as a philosopher whose work has no definitive relationship to National Socialism. This understanding of Heidegger's philosophy is expressed by Julian Young, who liberates Heidegger's thought from the stigma of Nazism, arguing 'one may accept some, or all, of this philosophy without fear of being committed to, or moved into proximity with, Fascism.' (Young 1997, 5).

I approach Hong's film from the perspective that Heidegger's philosophy cannot be divorced from his politics, separated from the historical moment, the *attunement* of the times. However, we must be careful when bandying about the term, 'political,' for I contend that in order to understand the intimate connection between politics and Heidegger's philosophy, it is necessary to first be clear about exactly what Heidegger meant when writing and speaking about 'politics.' Heidegger was not concerned immediately with the science of governing a nation by means of state-founding or bureaucratic activities, rooted in the laws of a nation's constitution, which expressed the all-encompassing, unwavering 'core values' of its political activity. Rather, Heidegger's conception of the political was in many ways reminiscent of the early Greeks. It was primordial and ontological, and this notion is expressed in the so-called controversial writings of the 1930s, e.g., in the 1934-35 lectures, *Hölderlin's Hymns 'Germania' and 'The*

*Rhine*,<sup>7</sup> Heidegger writes of the *originary* community that precedes all reciprocal relationships, and in the 1935 lecture course, *Introduction to Metaphysics* Heidegger writes of the *polis* as the *originary* ontological site of Being as history, which first manifests the potential for all things political.

Heidegger sought to return to the understanding of Being as experienced by such early Pre-Platonic thinkers as Parmenides and Heraclitus, which was obscured and covered over, according to Heidegger, in great part because the original Greek experience of Being was literally lost in translation, i.e., the Roman Latin mistranslation of the original Greek authors. In *Being and Time*, Section 44 (1927), Heidegger is already writing on the marked difference between the notion of truth in the Western tradition of metaphysics and that of the early Greeks. The tradition understands the locus of truth to reside in the locution, the proposition, and the essence of truth to be the agreement between subject and object. Against this notion, Heidegger reveals through etymology a more primordial (Greek) notion of truth as *aletheia*, which translates as the event of 'un-covering,' or bringing out of 'concealment.'

According to Heidegger, modernity had fallen away from the potential for this authentic way of understanding politics, history (as 'historicality'), and destiny. Because of the influence of Platonic metaphysics, religion (Christianity), and scientific positivism, those of modernity failed to grasp the philosophical import of the legitimate ontological understanding of Being *qua* Being. Heidegger believed that asking and answering the question, 'How does it stand with Being?' determined the concealed essence of human history, inspiring the authentic unfolding of a people's (Germany's) destiny through ontologically inspired political comportment. For Heidegger, politics was first and foremost authentic philosophical activity, grounded in the search for ontological understanding and the (lost) experience of truth (*aletheia*) radically dissimilar to the notion of truth as defined in terms of the correspondence model. Such philosophical activity revealed 'the Greek conception of the essence of Being - a definiteness that has not come to us from just anywhere, but which has long ruled over our [German] historical Dasein' (Heidegger 2000, 96-97).

## II. *Polemos*: The King and Father of All Things “Political”

Although the film defies easy categorization, it is safe to say that it masterfully pushes the boundaries of documentary filmmaking. Hong shows that he is well aware of Mike Nichols' understanding of the creative use of documentary. Nichols believes that documentary, as a concept or practice, is not restricted to occupying a single, fixed territory: 'It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set number of issues and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes' (Nichols 1991, 17). The film erupts with the hauntingly cryptic words of the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, 'the obscure one,' bringing the spectator face to face with the archaic, strange, and beautiful language of the Greeks, a language still rich with untapped potential. The raw and violent treatment of the quotation through editing and effects suggests the primordial power that these ancient words have to keep interpreters at bay due to their overwhelming depth, a depth which Heidegger attempts to plumb with his radical brand of etymology in order to bring to presence the essence of this fragment, which emerges from the original moment of philosophy's long and much debated history.

Functioning as the arena for the confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) between the languages of Greek and German, the film traces the chronological development of Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus (and the Greeks) through the philosophy of the 1930s. The interplay of the Greek and German expresses the all-important link for Heidegger between these two languages of primordial power. He approaches the Greek in order to think and say anew the original Greek experience of Being. We approach Heidegger's *originary* notion of politics by first examining the quotation that opens the film, which translates as such:

*War (polemos) is both king and father of all things, and it has revealed some as gods and others as men; some it has made slaves, others free. (Freeman 1983, 29)*

Commonly, this passage is thought to connote life as a dynamic process of struggle and continual change, as birth, growth, and degeneration occur in the war (*polemos*) between opposing life forces. Heidegger's interpretation of "war," or *polemos*, reveals something far beyond the immediate connotation of this passage, that of representing the ongoing "earthly" struggle of humans, which directs the ebb and flow of history. Instead, Heidegger

interprets the passage (the film's second quotation) as sheltering the authentic concern for the question of Being *qua* Being and the concomitant concern for the authentic ontological and historical 'essence' of humanity. In this fragment, Heidegger locates the origin of all struggle and warfare, and in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, he interprets, and thereby translates the passage as follows:

Confrontation is indeed for all (that comes to presence) the same (who lets emerge), but (also) for all the preserver that holds sway. For it lets some appear as gods, others as human being, some it produces (sets forth) as slaves, but others as the free. (Heidegger 2000, 65/47)

Importantly, *polemos* expresses the aboriginal struggle of the so-called "forces of Being" in terms of the Greeks' understanding of *phusis*, *logos*, and *dike*. *Polemos* is the strife that holds sway before humans and even the gods. Put succinctly, *polemos* is the manner of Being's happening. All that comes-to-presence as a gathering, ordering, and separating out occurs in accordance with the primordial law of Being's unfolding. *Polemos* is not war in the human sense, thus the *originary* understanding of *polemos* has little to do with Göring's *Luftwaffe*, the *Panzer* divisions, or the German military's *Blitzkrieg* tactics that made short work of Poland's military forces.

This perhaps explains the minimalist approach that Hong adopts with respect to the inclusion of graphic World War II archival footage. Hong includes only sparse segments of film to introduce, in conjunction with the narration, the events immediately preceding the process of denazification (e.g., the entrance of the French troops into Freiburg during April of 1945 and Germany's surrender in May of 1945). The film is far better for this fact. In the hands of a lesser artist, a propagandist with an ideological agenda, a filmmaker who truly did not wish to legitimately grapple with the issue of Heidegger and Nazism, the project might have deteriorated into a sensationalist montage of death, destruction, and visuals of concentration camp atrocities, with the thoughtful words of Heidegger lost amid newsreels of devastating air raids inter-cut with footage depicting the frenzied atmosphere of the Nuremberg rallies (*Reichsparteitag*). It is not Hong's intension to merely push the spectator's emotional buttons, to exploit these appalling historical events that are cause for such great concern in order to preach on the subject in a hortatory fashion or engage in rote didacticism, rather he seeks to break open

and hold open the issue for debate, for unlike the filmmaker who has neatly worked things out before hand, Hong's film, much like Heidegger's philosophy, poses more questions than it ever attempts to answer.

Hong works along the lines of the intellectual cinema in the 1920s, a tradition that Siegfried Kracauer suggests culminated in the adaptation of Marx's *Capital*, where 'Eisenstein relied mainly on pictures to touch off thought processes and attitudes in the spirit of dialectical materialism' (Kracauer 1960, 208). The images that dominate Hong's film are images of Heidegger's Germany, and are captured in stark monochromatic 16mm by Hong and fellow cinematographer Yin-Ju Chen. The editing combines traditional "snap-cuts" with the efficacious use of soft, beautiful dissolves to transition between shots and locations. Although the pictures have a bucolic quality, there is undeniably something unsettling lurking behind the aesthetically inspired shots of the Black Forest region and *Todtnauberg*. Might these particular pastoral images have been selected for the purpose of eliciting thoughts of Heidegger's longing for a politics that signals the return to a pre-industrial society, which explains his disdain for the crowded, agitated, and inauthentic life of the city? Perhaps, but it seems as though Hong's imagery does not function in terms of the everyday understanding of metaphor or symbol. Instead, the images vividly 'poetize' Heidegger's home and its intimate surroundings.

Quite simply, the images speak the powerful and mysterious truth of Heidegger's authentic relation to the Earth, the self-secluding and sheltering Mother, the source of humanity's historical existence. For as Heidegger philosophizes in the Hölderlin lectures of 1934-35, when the Earth presences in the 'disinterestedness' of the resolute Dasein, the Earth is Holy. The shots of Heidegger's cabin are especially poignant, these magnificent shots are of Heidegger's workplace where he philosophized and toiled at physical labor for hours on end. Hong includes a variety of camera strategies when capturing the German landscape, including the clever use of POV, as if giving to the spectator the feeling of being on the approach to Heidegger's cabin, traveling the many and varied pathways, both familiar and unfamiliar, which lead to the *Hutte*. The soundtrack is dissonant and hypnotic, consisting of a key board simulating the deep, resonating tones of a dirge, the droning of a low end 'D' of the requiem mass. Merging perfectly the images and music with Heidegger's entrancing voice-over, these elements function to attune the spectator, her world is

colored, she is utterly enveloped by melancholic 'homesickness,' and with it, the longing to return home, to be at home. This for Heidegger is the *fundamental attunement of philosophy*, and all philosophical questioning originates in this moment when humans are grasped and seized by a mode of attunement in such a way that they are 'first able to conceptually comprehend, and are first able to grasp the matter of the inquiry' (Heidegger 1999, 9).

To return to the notion of *phusis* as earlier introduced, Walter Brogan defines *phusis* in a three-fold manner: (1) *phusis* for the early Greeks is appearing, it allows beings to present themselves in their own self-showing, as this or that, as accessible or inaccessible; (2) *phusis* is a becoming that is not separated off from Being, as in Plato's philosophy, designated as 'inauthentic Being,' but the originary 'happening' by which things 'shine forth'; (3) most importantly, *phusis* happens as *polemos*, there is a 'primordial struggle that first draws beings out of concealment and lets them stand forth as such and such, i.e., as having determinate characteristics in relation to each other in a field of relations and differences,' and this concept for Heidegger of meaningful relations becomes Dasein's world (Brogan et al 2006, 39). As Heidegger reasons, the aboriginal struggle of Being and the subsequent emergence of beings, 'first projects and develops the un-heard, the hitherto un-said and un-thought,' allowing that which 'essentially unfolds to step apart in opposition, first allows [for the possibility of ] position, status, and rank to establish themselves in coming-to-presence' (Heidegger 2000, 65/47).

The unfolding of Being, however, is not independent of human activity altogether, but it is *phusis* and the manner in which the overwhelming unfolds (as *polemos*) that first allows those who struggle to emerge and carry on the struggle in works of art, philosophy, and state-building. It is only when Dasein enters, or is drawn into, the struggle with *phusis* by the necessity to understand and create its historical world and existence that its authentic destiny is possible. Through Dasein's works of art, 'the sway, *phusis*, first comes to stand in what comes-to-presence. Beings as such first come into being. This becoming-a-world is authentic history' (Heidegger 2000, 65/47). However, it is important to note that the activities of the poet, philosopher, and statesman, if they are authentic, depend on the relationship to Being, from which these activities acquire their power. It is from this concept that we discover what Heidegger means when speaking of *originary* "politics" as

manifesting through Being's *presencing* in the site of history itself, the *polis*. What is the authentic relationship to Being of which Heidegger philosophizes?

To begin, at the heart of Dasein's historical existence is the law of the tragic double-bind, i.e, in the struggle with *phusis* for unconcealment of beings, in the attempt to enact a collective destiny by bringing works of art to fruition that momentarily subdue the overwhelming sway of *phusis*, bringing it to stand and shine in works that embody the moment of Being's ontological historical disclosure, by necessity, Dasein's existence ends in disaster and ruin. It shatters against the overwhelming power of *phusis*; the necessity of authentic history demands this. According to John Caputo, it is only when human Dasein 'pushes itself to the most extreme condition of need and affliction that *phusis* as such comes to appear as this *and* that man himself is brought to the full power of his own [historical] essence' (Caputo et al 1999, 66). For Heidegger, historicity is defined in terms of Being's essence, so the potential for Dasein's becoming political is dependent on the unfolding of Being.

There is undoubtedly a "violence" inherent to the life of Dasein, inherent to the struggle to wrest beings from concealment and bring Being (*phusis*) to stand in works of art. Heidegger writes of the violence of human knowledge (*techne*) and creative activity (*poiesis*), which break into the overwhelming sway of *phusis* to give the process a temporary form. Dasein does violence, and has violence done to it in turn - Dasein is the "violent one" in its very nature. As Dennis Schmidt argues, Dasein's quest to reveal its world through *techne*, 'locates the human being at an unresolvable site of conflict' (Schmidt 2001, 251). Yet Dasein's confrontation with *phusis* is not understood primarily in terms of an adversarial or antagonistic relationship, more correctly it is one of reciprocity, as an interdependency exists between *techne* and *phusis*. For *techne* is not a form of knowledge that Dasein possesses or masters, and then in turn employs as a faculty of the intellect to master its existence. Dasein is not the possessor of *techne*, but rather Dasein's knowledge is derivative. It emerges only in the struggle, destined by Being, 'as a disciplining and disposing of the violent forces by virtue of which beings disclose themselves in such, in so far as the human being opens unto them' (Heidegger 2000, 120/167). The earthly struggle draws its strength and legitimacy only by way of its participation in the aboriginal struggle (*polemos*).

Within the context of the authentic relationship to Being as described, the notion of the 'political,' in the *originary* sense of the *polis*, as site of history, arises. The original sense of *polis* had for the Greeks a more primordial meaning than the mere designation of the 'city-state.' What the Greeks called *polis*, as Heidegger tells us, represented the preeminent place where Being opened and manifested its historical potential. The *polis* is not first political, initially it is 'the site of history, the Here, in which, out of which and for which history happens' (Heidegger 2000, 162/117). And while the *polis* certainly includes the competitions, games, political assembly, and the military, it is first and foremost the open region that manifests the possibility of all these activities. As Heidegger claims, it is in this open region of historical Being that the authentic works of history (historicality) transpire. For example, as the Greeks gathered for worship in the temple, a monumental work of art, the great intermediary between their world and the overwhelming sway of *phusis*, they were attuned communally in the resolute moment of Being's *presencing* and transformed: priests became *as* priests, thinkers *as* thinkers, statesmen *as* statesmen, and gods *as* gods.

### III. The Critical Confrontation (*Auseinandersetzung*) with Greek Antiquity and the Worldly "Politics" of the Third Reich

The film is not only concerned with the confrontation between the languages of Greek and German, it also presents the confrontation between two distinct political philosophies: the worldly politics of the Third Reich (and Western Europe) and Heidegger's *originary* politics as described. In fact, the film engages in hermeneutics. It seeks to understand the issue of Heidegger and Nazism through the categories of language and ontology, and ultimately, to interpret, or translate, Heidegger's philosophy. For Heidegger, we must note that interpretation and translation are interrelated, e.g., with respect to the translation of a language (and the same idea applies to the 'translation' of a philosophy), one word cannot simply stand in for another, functioning as a substitute for that word. Rather, translation-interpretation is the movement 'from the spirit of one language onto that of another' (Heidegger 1996, 62). It brings to light the hidden connections that are present in the translated language, but are not explicitly set forth in it. 'From this,' writes Heidegger, 'we can recognize that all translating must be interpreting,' and the reverse is

also true, 'every interpretation and everything that stands in its service, is a translating' (*Ibid.*, 62).

Heidegger interprets the Greeks with the purpose of "coming to be at home," i.e., finding Germany's proper heritage by way of a "passage through the foreign." As Heidegger reasons,

[I]f the becoming homely of a particular humankind sustains the historicity of its history, then the law of encounter [*Auseinandersetzung*] between the foreign and one's own is the fundamental truth of history, a truth from out of which the essence of history must unveil itself (49).

For Heidegger, the clarification of one's language happens historically through the encounter with a foreign language and culture. Heidegger's philosophy can be explained in terms of the attempt to understand the authenticity of 'homeliness' as it relates to the fundamental truth of history, in terms of the historical destining of Being, and so his philosophy assumes the form of an extended and sustained critical encounter with thinkers and poets of other cultures. According to William McNeill, *Auseinandersetzung* translates as 'a setting apart from [and of] one another,' and this setting apart, this confrontation, can be a 'dialogue exchange or encounter between two parties' as in a critical encounter such as a debate (McNeill 1996, 174). It is important to note that Heidegger's critical encounter with those of philosophy's tradition, e.g., Aristotle, Kant, Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and the Greeks, is undertaken in the spirit of illuminating the strengths of their positions. This is to say, his critique does not merely destruct, dismantle, or censure, but rather allows the inherent strength of the positions to emerge in the new light that the critique breaks open.

Hong incorporates the following quotation in the film regarding the 'philosophical confrontation' with the great tradition:

These questions are all unusually difficult, and basically inaccessible to common understanding. A long headache and a rather critical confrontation with the great tradition are needed. One of the great dangers of our thinking today is precisely that thinking, particularly philosophical thinking, no longer has a real, primordial relation to the tradition.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Filmmaker James Hong informed me that the audio tracks of Heidegger were taken from the following sources: "*Martin Heidegger im Gespräch mit Richard Wisser*" (the 1969 TV interview);

Hong's filmic *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger grows directly from Heidegger's confrontation with the Pre-Socratic Greeks in which he was attempting to bring Germany to the realization of its historical potential, its authentic destiny. As stated, though the Greeks were an ancient and foreign culture, Heidegger believed that the Germans shared a common heritage with them, a heritage rooted in deep philosophical thought and language. 'For along with the German language,' writes Heidegger, 'Greek (with regards to the possibilities of thinking) is at once the most powerful and spiritual of languages' (Heidegger 2000, 60/43). Heidegger approaches the Greeks in order to think and say anew the original Greek experience of Being. However, it is not simply Heidegger's intention to relive the Greek experience, but rather to eventually move beyond it, to radicalize it by thinking and speaking the 'un-thought' and 'un-said' in their philosophy, approaching ontology again, for the first time, in the modern age. For example, in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1936), Heidegger formalizes what the Greeks were only able to intimate, namely, thinking Being in its intimate relation to Time in the *Ereignis*, the moment of the revelation and appropriation of Being as historical.

Grounding the confrontation in the film between the languages of Greek and German is the encounter between the interrogator and the interrogated, between a member of the denazification committee and Heidegger, between worldly politics and *originary* politics. This mock interchange is brilliantly conceived and enacted by Hong to reveal the abysmal disconnection between the worldly politics of Western Europe and Heidegger's ontology. For this purpose, Hong incorporates audio tracks of Heidegger from various recorded interviews to serve as philosophical responses to the rote questions of the interrogator probing Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism. However, it is not Hong's intention with the verbal exchange to in any way trivialize the importance of the interrogator's questions, delivered as they are with robotic precision, devoid of emotion, for certainly the denazification committee dealt with the most pressing issues of the modern world. Rather, the sublime absurdity of the confrontation suggests the difficulty that traditional politics (as the spawn of metaphysics) faced when attempting to

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Heidegger's reading of *Gelassenheit* (1955) translated into English as 'Discourse on Thinking'; and two of his readings of *Die Sprache*. One is from 1959, and the other version from sometime in the 50's. This is in English in *Poetry, Language, and Thought*.'

deal with Heidegger, to interpret-translate his thought. For example, the National Socialists were neither spiritually nor intellectually equipped to ascend to the heights of his philosophy.

As stated, Heidegger envisaged the National Socialist movement as a new German beginning that would inspire the revolutionary historicizing of Germany, which would occur through a critical encounter with the Greeks, their language, thought, and heritage as revealed for appropriation and repetition, grounded in the return to the primordial relationship to Being. As John Caputo writes, 'In the primordial Greek beginning he would make plain to all the spiritual authority of National Socialism as the true future and destiny of Germany, Europe, of the West' (Caputo et al 1999, 53). The beginning Heidegger envisaged (the 'other beginning') was not in any way a faux encounter with classicism, a revival of the art, architecture, and politics of either Greece or imperial Rome. For according to Heidegger, the Nazis carelessly confused Germany's authentic historical destiny with 'the superficiality of subjective values' (*Ibid*, 54). The 'inner truth' and 'greatness of the movement,' if such truth and greatness did exist for Heidegger, was to be found in the conception of politics that was both spiritual and metaphysical, for it is only when the philosopher, poet, and statesman are responsible to the call of Being that a political order, which stands above and beyond all human laws, has the potential to emerge (*Ibid*, 53).

Heidegger's philosophy does not argue for the existence of universal principles of reason or morality, which inform human 'essence' or dictate the legitimacy of the human morals (the *is* and the *ought*). However, Heidegger is in no way a nihilist, rather, in turning his attention to the question of Being, he allows Being (as *phusis*) to intimate measure and the positions of status and rank through its own higher law, i.e., the 'higher law of Being as history' (Sluga et al 2001, 200).<sup>2</sup> The notion of values emerging in the struggle with the primordial forces of *phusis* is expressed in his brief analysis of tragedy in, 'The Origin of the Work of Art.' In bringing beings from concealment, in a mode of truth-happening, which reveals Dasein in its primordial community with others, the power of tragedy manifests

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<sup>2</sup> Sluga, Hans, "Conflict is the Father of All Things," from *The Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed., Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, Yale University Press: New Haven, 2002), pp. 220-221. 'Heidegger's view is rather, and increasingly so in the course of his lectures, that Being is dynamic in nature and that the distinction in position, status, and rank [and the valuation thereof] will open themselves up only in the originary struggle [*polemos*] that characterizes Being.'

the higher law of Being in the moment of the clashing of world and Earth, the 'work-being' of the art work. As 'world reveals itself, it submits to the decisions of an historical humanity the question of victory, defeat, blessing and curse, mastery and slavery' (Heidegger 1971, 63).

It is this notion of tragedy as work of art manifesting values for the *polis* that inspires the film's hermeneutic to fold, or "spiral," back to readdress and reinterpret the words of Heraclitus. The third and final quotation that Hong incorporates is presented in Heidegger's German language. At this point, the film's climax, if such a term is appropriate, it is as if the Greek has been assimilated by the German and the German is transformed and empowered by its original Greek heritage in the encounter with the foreign, the Other. The quote Hong incorporates is from Heidegger's 1936 version of 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and bespeaks the power of ancient tragedy to inspire the eruption of a new world and historical "beginning," revealing to the Greeks what is still 'yet undecided' and that which is without measure, disclosing their historical existence along with the 'hidden' necessity for measure and decision (*Ibid*, 77). Tragedy is not merely a mimetic spectacle, which portrays the human battle for freedom against the recalcitrant gods, but rather a work of art that legitimately holds the power to transport a people into their appointed historical destiny. Tragedy, as Heidegger writes,

transforms the people's saying so that now every word fights the battle and puts up for decision what is holy and what is unholy, what is great and small, what is brave and cowardly, what is lofty and flighty, what is master and slave. (43)

The "other beginning" of which Heidegger wrote was an event that required an ongoing battle, history must continually be fought for and won, over and again. The thinker, poet, and statesman were not merely to initiate Germany's authentic beginning in the confrontation with the Greeks, they were also, and perhaps more important, required to continually put that beginning into question to assure the dynamic progress of Germany and the West. In the new beginning of history, as Heidegger contends, the path that is eventually marked out experiences a breakdown and progress inevitably grinds to a halt. According to Caputo, 'Once things stabilize, they fall in decline and require still another revolutionary struggle and retrieval' (Caputo et al 1999, 68). Heidegger's beginning implies a permanent struggle based on the radical re-questioning of the historical grounds

emerging from the struggle for a world.<sup>3</sup> Since all that emerges from the questioning of Being must be subjected to a radical enquiry, a radical reinterpretation, in effect, 'nothing would be left standing, not if you let the question loose, not if you let it provoke the trembling and insecurity of which it was capable' (Caputo et al 1999, 68).

Perhaps this represents a legitimate way to initiate a political revolution, but it is no way to guarantee its continued stability and lasting influence. Heidegger's 'beginning' was more than National Socialism could tolerate, Heidegger's ontological notion of politics was not the type of politics that would ever inform the Third Reich. While they relied on Heidegger's political loyalty, they were not interested in adopting his philosophy as the grounding and guiding intellectual force of the movement. The Nazis were not interested in reading Heraclitus. As Caputo correctly concludes,

it seems to me that they were quite right to be troubled about all this talk about the questionability of Being, the groundless abyss beneath whatever we call a ground, the nothing which "nothings," which withdraws and leaves us empty. They were right about his thought, more so than he himself was, although they barely understood a word he said. (65)

Heidegger was undoubtedly dissatisfied with the official position of the party. Conflicts with staff and party members led to his resignation as rector of Freiburg University in April of 1934. As Michael Inwood writes, 'Although he did not leave the party, he took no further significant part in political affairs [...] he claimed that he became disillusioned with Nazism after the *Röhm putsch*' (Inwood 1996, 4). Heidegger was writing in a critical manner about the politics of National Socialism as early as the Hölderlin lectures in 1934, and to return to the much analyzed and debated quotation from *Introduction to Metaphysics*, regarding the 'inner truth and greatness' of the movement, whatever its deep and hidden meaning might be, it certainly expresses Heidegger discontent with the direction of the party's movement, and this has been related to the question of technology by scholars. Dennis Schmidt argues that for Heidegger, the inauthentic notion of *techne* would be the conception of *techne* as a form of knowledge that is 'transmissible in an unproblematicized

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<sup>3</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans., Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2000). 'Beginning,' as Heidegger states, 'can never directly provide its full momentum; the only possible way to preserve its form is to repeat, to draw once again more deeply than ever from its source.'

manner and which regards itself as somehow immutable to and above the claims of history' (Schmidt 2001, 236).

The critique of technology, at least in the 1935 lecture course in which Heidegger made the infamous remark, refers to the inauthentic view of the power, purpose, and origin of human knowledge (*techne*). National Socialism failed to grasp the reciprocity of between *techne* and *phusis*, and as such experienced an impoverished relationship to humans and their world. As outlined, it was for Heidegger the ontological determination of the *polis* that inspired Dasein's historicity. As Schmidt points out, the education of those who compose the *polis*, the philosophers, poets, and statesmen, must be 'framed by a spiritual understanding of the over whelming power of *techne*' (*Ibid*, 235). When delivering his inaugural rector's address ('The Self-Assertion of the German University') at Freiburg, Heidegger was already well aware of the devastating potential that technology harbored for destroying the planet by obscuring Dasein from its historical relation to the authentic questioning of Being. According to Heidegger, Prometheus, the first philosopher, bringing fire and *techne* to humankind, understood what the Germans failed to see, namely, that knowledge is always weaker than the destining of Being's call, *techne* is always inferior to the necessity of history's law.

#### IV. Concluding remarks:

Heidegger faced the denazification committee in 1945. It is not an exaggeration to state that many of the French were more interested in arranging meetings for Heidegger with leading foreign intellectuals than they were in learning the degree of his involvement with the politics of the Nazi party and their crimes against humanity. With the exception of Adolf Lampe, the one proverbial thorn in Heidegger's side, who opposed his rehabilitation and called for Heidegger to admit of personal responsibility, the committee was overall congenial to Heidegger. It was his fellow philosophers and former students that were the hardest on Heidegger, demanding his admission of guilt and expecting from him that which he never adequately provided, an explanation that served to fully justify his involvement with National Socialism, and beyond this, an apology for Auschwitz. They wanted 'a word that would finally clear Heidegger of being identified with Nazism,' and

this 'word' never came, not even in the posthumously published interview in *Der Spiegel* (Safranski 1999, 421).

It is right to take Heidegger to task on the issue of Nazism and the Holocaust. I argue against the apologetics that Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism stemmed in great part from political naivete and the overestimation of philosophy's power to influence the development of Germany's history. Heidegger's students would perhaps agree with the following point, namely, that a naive complicity is complicity nonetheless. So we return to the question that opened the essay: Is it fair to demand a consistency between the life lived and the life philosophized by the philosopher? I am torn between two positions. Heidegger undoubtedly made some horrendously bad moral decisions, which culminated in the Holocaust and Europe's destruction. One can argue, in a manner reminiscent of Sartre, that in affirming the politics of Nazism, Heidegger was at once affirming every single atrocity committed in the name of Germany during World War II. However, as Richard Polt and others have rightly argued, if we dismiss his work on the grounds of Heidegger's politics and moral past, we must as well dismiss the work of all the other philosophers, and more, artists, poets, etc., who have also behaved immorally. I find it unrealistic to demand that the philosopher's life represent the embodiment of the work in its totality. However there must be some relation between thought and action, e.g., Heidegger's 'political' life, which is the involvement with Nazism, and the great philosopher of Being.

And it is between these two positions, between 'good and evil,' that Hong's film works so powerfully and effectively to remind us of the need to continue the careful and critical approach to Heidegger: The man, his life, and thought.

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