

UNTAMEABLE SINGULARITY (SOME REMARKS ON *BROKEN HEGEMONIES*)

The ease with which a whole age continues to graze, in spite of exterminations still alive in our memories and planetary asphyxiations already in our throats, gives ground for perplexity.¹

“It's finished. It must be nearly finished.”

These were, following an interminable silence, the first words spoken by the heads of Jean-Louis Barrault and Madeleine Renaud, as they barely emerged from their respective trash cans – words which Samuel Beckett addressed to Parisian audiences shortly after World War II².

I quote these words in lieu of an introduction to my reflections on the *opus magnum* Reiner Schürmann has left us – the term *opus magnum* is not too strong – not just because Beckett was an author whom Schürmann himself liked to quote (particularly the famous counsel “no ground, but say ground”). Above all, I quote these words because of the uneasiness they create, with their superimposition of the bygone and the interminable. For these words are in no way a contradiction, which as a platitude, stated without being noticed, is rendered comical. These words do not predict that one and the same reality is finished, and yet that it is not, since it is only about to be so. They aspire to say that, on the one hand, “it's over” – *everything* is finished, *the end* as such has been reached – and that, on the other hand, this very end never ceases (and never will cease) to come to an end. Nothing complicated, nothing warped; rather, this is the expression of a knowledge of the essential formality of our ownmost being, the being that is properly our own, since each of us is born for the task of dying, as well as the essential formality of the being we have in common, since the reign of modernity is that of a galloping uniformity, limitless in itself and devouring any external limit, and which thereby has something ultimate about it and yet knows that it is at the mercy of a catastrophe.

“It's finished. It must be nearly finished. . .”; these words were immediately understood by an audience which had just escaped from the horror of massacres and falsehoods, and was all the more convinced, therefore, that it was ‘still’ (always?) overshadowed by the riddle – the very fact that these massacres and falsehoods took place. ‘How could that have been possible?’ – the threat of this question not only cast its shadow over the joys and hopes of the present (even though this present was a ‘liberation’); it not only put its stamp, ahead of time,

¹ *Des Hégémonies brisées*, Mauvezin (France), Trans-Europ-Repress, 1996, hereafter abbreviated as *BH*; *Broken Hegemonies*, ed. Reginald Lilly, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, General Introduction. As the original was in the process of being printed at the time of writing, it will not be possible to provide page numbers in the references.

² Samuel Beckett, *Fin de partie*, translated as *Endgame*, New York, Grove Press, 1958, p. 1.

on the future of the victors and the defeated; in truth, the question imposed itself as a kind of deadly illness of temporality, in which only that which is without a future could have a future.

Could have. . . unless Oedipus finds the solution to the riddle. Well – it is too bad if I am accused of exaggerating – this very word, this mere word, i.e., the word of the solution, is what the hundreds of pages of *Broken Hegemonies* seek to express. We shall shortly see how. In other words, we shall approach the language hitherto unknown to philosophers, towards which thinking had to clear the way. For example, we will try to understand the meaning of an “analytic of ultimates”, to understand the fact that institutions are described as “phantasmatic”, to understand how they are thereby doomed at birth to be deposed and discharged – as occurred three times in history, with the Greek beginning, the Roman beginning, and the modern beginning, and lastly, to understand the hope that comes to light in the extremely recent possibility (barely dating back to Heidegger – it may only date back to Schürmann's reassessment of Heidegger) of practicing the art of “deremption”³. But before all of this, I must speak of the relation this immense movement of writing – a testament, literally – has to the initial work, or how the narrative of the Origin repeats that of the Origins⁴ at the same time as it escapes from it. For it is there, first of all, that the singularity of the writer, far from collapsing into some particularity, is conquered through the singularity of a country (Germany “afterwards”: after Nazism, after the crimes, after the surrender without conditions); in the singularity of a generation (which is all the more obsessed with the necessity of ‘bearing the memory’ of such an extreme horror, as strictly speaking it cannot recall it: “Born too late to see the war, too soon to forget it”⁵). Everything happens, indeed, as if the only way to be cured of a guilt which is all the more ruthless as it is imaginary, would be to decipher the universality of the Western ‘tragic’, starting from that which was a kind of grotesque and monstrous repetition of it. Or the reverse.

From here I can see the wariness flickering alive in the pupils of those whose careers have been based on the celebration of the mystery of the ‘human person’, along with vigilance towards the ‘banalization of evil’. Let me reassure Messrs. the civil servants of humanity: there is not a line, not a word in *The Origins* or in *Broken Hegemonies* which tends towards a denial of evil. However, the kind of labor of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*) performed by Schürmann's writing brings to light, in contrast, what is slyly consoling about the conjuring exercises by means of which one lays out as non-banal – i.e., as incomparable and unique – the list of monstrosities of the first half of our century (totalitarianism, racism, Fascism, Nazism). For the counterpart of this setting-to-the-side would be that nothing so horrible, nothing so unbearable threatens *us*, the democratic societies, who are only liable to make mistakes or commit misdemeanors – and banal ones at that. Against this, the final count in *The Origins* (“How with all of my body I crush the past”) tells of Reiner's confrontation with American neo-Nazis celebrating Hitler's eighty-fifth birthday in the middle of Washington. It

³ [Reiner Schürmann's choice of a juridical term with which to render “dessaisie”: a withdrawal, a relinquishment, a removal from court, or, better, a dispossession, which doubtless renders the *Ent-eignung* of the *Beiträge* – Trans.]

⁴ *Les Origines*, indeed, is the title of the work, Paris, Fayard, 1976, in which Reiner Schürmann tells how the curse of being born a German in 1941 weighed on him for his entire life

⁵ Schürmann, *Les Origines*, p. 9.

is surely not mere chance that this chapter is the last of the book, for the lesson is twofold: on the one hand, the struggle around the lectern which the Führer is supposed to have spoken from at Nüremberg marks the young philosopher's deliverance from the symbolic weight of his origins, grasped at last, bodily seized and crushed in the shape of the "red varnished thing" guarded by brutes; on the other hand, the narrative relates the establishment, the efforts at recruitment, and the ceremony of the movement ('the' movement: there is only one, there is always only one) in the capital of the country which is the center of the free world. For indeed, these *Hitlerian* brutes are *Americans* – a devastating revelation, which only releases one from the past by suddenly imposing something obvious: the origins themselves have an origin, and the later is so deeply anchored in Western being that it is still active, thirty years after the end of the war, at the very heart of the nation which defeated Nazi Germany.

The autobiographical book says nothing about *what it is* that remained so dangerously virulent. It does not point, as Hannah Arendt did, to "loneliness."

Loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government, and for ideology or logicity, the preparation of its executioners and victims, is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have been the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution and have become acute with the rise of imperialism at the end of the last century and the breakdown of political and social traditions in our own time.⁶

But certainly, the end of the symbolic nightmare brings to light a new task for Reiner Schürmann – let us call it "historical-destinal", for lack of another vocabulary – one which is even deeper than the inquiry into "what prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world"⁷ (i.e., precisely, the "organized loneliness" spread further and further away, and more and more strongly, by our societies as productive bodies). Instead of 'deeper', perhaps I should say 'more archaic', in the sense of going back towards a more ancient and more obstinate condition of politico-social enslavement – closer to its far-off 'archè'. This condition is precisely the fact that before being "riveted to a monstrous site," we are, we have always been, we Westerners, riveted to the desire of the *archè itself and qua itself*, and thereby obliged at all times to will and maintain the totality of reality underneath the 'totality' of sense. This cannot be done (and hence was never done, in the Greek world, in the Roman world, or in the modern world) without one form or another of repression of the tragic singularity which defines being *tout court* (which indeed always unfolds itself as a 'world', a whole of phenomenalization and contextualization) as well as our 'individual' being (let us just say our life).

But the wariness will be reawakened here, precisely. This move back to the concept of *totality*, it will say, is evidently a way of escaping from the reality of the *totalitarian*. It can easily be read, precisely in *Les Origines*, as the transferring onto philosophy of a *desire for forgetting* which had been unable to fulfill itself, first in the expiation and (rather Boy Scout-like) devotion to the tasks and ideals of a kibbutz, then in a monastic attempt at absorption in the ineffability of the One.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York & London, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973, p. 475.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 478.

To be sure, it is always possible to find in what one reads the confirmation of a suspicion one had prior to reading, and which presides over one's reading. But this is only so on condition that one does *not read* certain passages, which are however quite clear. Thus one will interpret as the confession of a flight into the speculative a sentence such as the following: "I was absorbed. by my origins for so long that I did not feel the origin, the only one"⁸. This interpretation will only succeed if one omits the clarification which immediately follows, and precisely, quite consciously goes against the idea of flight: "To quit the past does not mean to forget the unforgettable. Nor does it mean to step over blood"⁹. What does it mean, then? To the contrary of what one imagines, the way in which questioning the Origin enables one to "quit" the past is the opposite of forgetting: "I refuse to forget my terrorized childhood and pass on to the day's matters." Contrary to the bulk of his compatriots, who hastened to confine the bloody past of their country to the category of a monstrous exception, and similarly ascribed to "the war" their interminable submission to a criminal régime, the better to join the rest of humanity in its busy production of ever more wealth under the glass roofs of democratic institutions, as if *nothing had happened*, Reiner Schürmann is a German who refuses to embrace our world, precisely *in order to remember*. We should understand this to mean, not so much the recalling of events or the fact of their horror, but remembering *something incomprehensible* (something, in any case, understood by no one, including the philosophical world) in the ontological arrayment of modernity, a 'something' which threatens to return (in a shape which, to be sure, cannot be anticipated, but which we know will be a sister to all those other shapes which have already come to pass in history) unless we set out to perform the *anamnesis*, the task of un-forgetting of its origin. The consciousness of such a task was already present when Reiner wrote *Les Origines*. Witness the following passage, in which the author comments on the horror of bombings at night:

Myself, I refuse to adapt. [. . .] I refuse to forget my terrorized childhood, to pass on to the day's matters [. . .] I also refuse to hold the war responsible for everything. But without it, would I have risen so early? Would I have learned to curse consolations? Would I have remained on the path, the heels of the Origin, the only one, like an ecstatic person and an unbeliever?¹⁰

One could not find a better way to announce the labor which is underway in *Broken Hegemonies*, a labor possessed of an inspired vigor, a dogged determination, an almost inexhaustible strength, of which I know no other example.

* *
*

Now that I have established, or at least sketched, this link between a life's work (which *Broken Hegemonies* obviously is) and the singular form given to this life by history (that of a long, ever-budding and always painful scar), am I simply going to put forth the usual

⁸. Schürmann, *Les Origines*, p. 191-2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

professorial discourse, i.e., present the content of the work, bring its method to light, and formulate its lesson? In one way, yes – this triptych is unavoidable. In another way, no, for two quite different reasons, both of which, however, oblige me to replace the discursive scope of the traditional presentation and discussion with the intrusive brevity of some ‘remarks’. First, because one of the particularities (excuse me, one of the ways in which the singularity manifests itself) of the writing at work here is precisely that it never ceases to return to the reasons or grounds of its form and its themes; in other words, it not only expounds that which it discusses, but also the guiding threads it allows. I use ‘threads’ in the plural, because there are several of them. The General Introduction to the work mentions these possible readings four times: a) “the pages that follow are meant to be read as a contribution to the age-old ‘doctrine of principles’” (these are the first words of the Introduction, and the theme is taken up again five pages later); b) elsewhere, one reads: “nor would a summary of these pages be erroneous that saw in them the testing of a suspicion, namely that the other of life is ill suited to it”; c) in yet another place, a third possible and legitimate entry into the work is suggested:

The following pages may be read as documenting the pain [...] forever more distorting the pleasure of calling things by their (common) name. The documentation at hand shows not only that the pain is ancient and that the differing of which it is a symptom has instituted philosophy as well as, perhaps, what is called Western civilization; in addition, it calculates into that pain a sickness that is present until death;

d) lastly, one can read that “furthermore, it would not be a mistake to read the following pages as a verification, based on textual evidence, of an incongruity between the conceptual function of idiomatic speech and the deictic function of everydayness”. Hence it would be useless to repeat this, and presumptuous to think one knows what this writing is made of better than it does itself.

The second reason is a more hidden one. It stems from the furtive character of the remarks (often notes) which, here and there in the text, prevent one from considering *Broken Hegemonies* as the most recent of the great perspectival arrangements of Western history which German philosophy is accustomed to, wherein these perspectives, each time, are the fruit of an attempt to give an ultimate determination of the meaning of being and truth. This notwithstanding, there are many, massive appearances which could lead us to consider Reiner Schürmann as a kind of post-Heideggerian Hegel (the scarcity of references to the thinker of Jena is, naturally, no argument against this reading)¹¹. The only difference would be that he replaces the logic of negation with that of denial (*dénégation*), and replaces dialectical unfolding with the repetition of the tragic. The philosophical reading of history would then trace a kind of reverse Hegelianism, but a Hegelianism nevertheless, which would run as follows:

1. Hegel's philosophy consists in a series of variations on one and the same theme, according to which there is only one ‘idea’ at work in all of our ideas, regardless of which stratum of experience or period of history these ideas express. This idea of the ideal itself

¹¹ Hegelian discourse, indeed, belongs to those discourses about which Schürmann abruptly declares, towards the end of the general introduction of his book, that they will not be read, the motive being the therapeutical character of the “dialectic which reconciles the oppositions”.

consists in every concept's embracing the difference (which, however, it posits) between itself and the sensible manifold it subsumes. In other words, the *logos* is capable of thinking its own epiphany in the phenomenon, or rather *as* the phenomenon. There is no *other* of spirit.

2. Despite this, this life of spirit is not unaware of death. It is even a perpetual crossing of death, an incessant resurrection of the infinite ceaselessly shedding its finite garbs like husks in order to envelop itself in new finite garbs. It is not, then, the life of an immortal spirit, like that which Platonic anamnesis purports to reveal, or like that of Jesus Christ, the 'victor' of death, whose body (which is thereby termed 'glorious') is thereafter only the appearance of a body. The relation of death to life is quite different; Hegel defines it in a well-known formulation (but one which thereby is not well known: as he said, "*Was ist bekannt, gerade weil es bekannt ist, ist nicht erkannt*"). Who among us could recite it? "But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it" .

In symmetrical similarity and opposition to the first point, one would then notice that all the themes in *Broken Hegemonies*, are equally *variations* (in the musical sense) on one and the same motif – the constitutive tendency of our being, in every field of experience, to elevate and autonomize the common traits of a given manifold of singular entities precisely so as to turn their singularity, each time, into a mere particular case of the normative signifier (there lies the similarity, not just to Hegel, but to all the major discourses of the tradition since the birth of philosophy with the Greeks); *but* this attraction of the universal is always compounded by a kind of reverse pull, due to the fact that we can never entirely blind ourselves to the desperate resistance the singular puts up to its death sentence in the concept. This withdrawal – in his magnificent writing style, Schürmann often calls it the "undertow" – is just as originary as the universalizing trait. The aim is to show that the singularity's refusal to let itself be absorbed into the concept "belabors," "works at" the latter at the very heart of its operation, destabilizes it, and ends up wrecking it. We can see, then, how it is diametrically opposed to the "labor of the negative", which in Hegel, on the contrary, is the very instrument of Spirit, literally the instrument of sacrifice of sense-certainty, as necessary as that of Iphigenia at Aulis (for it is indeed at the very moment of this sacrificial operation that the wind of knowing begins to blow – "absolute" knowing, whose crime itself is its absolution).

Up to this point, the comparison/opposition between Hegel and Schürmann would not be entirely false. It would at least have the merit acknowledging that the *Hegemonies* belong to the genus 'philosophy', even while the 'end' it strives to think is *also* that of philosophy. One could term it 'philosophy of the tragic' – one must term it so, in fact, precisely because it is "its own age grasped by thinking" (Hegel again). For here is how it defines its own task:

To think is to linger on the conditions of what one is living: to linger on the site we inhabit. Hence the privilege of our time, provided that the essential fragility of the ultimate referents is manifested in it. It assigns to philosophy, or to whatever takes its place, the task of showing the tragic condition of all principial construction.¹²

¹² *BH*, General introduction.

Philosophy, *or that which takes its place*: we should dwell on this formulation, for it obliges us to *take back*, in some sense, all that we have just *put forth*. Why? It means that Schürmann's writing occupies the very site which, in the West, has always been that of philosophy, yet it also means that despite this, this writing does not produce one more philosophy, especially not some 'final' philosophy (whether it understands itself as fulfilling the rest of the task incumbent since Plato on European humanity, as was, e.g., Husserl's ambition, or, conversely, as a kind of 'final solution', a neurotic annihilation of the very race of philosophical questions, as, e.g., in an unchecked positivism). Nevertheless, the above formulation does imply – and this is not the least of its merits – that this writing must not be mistaken for that which, in France, thought it could, by virtue of a mere decision, settle onto a terrain entirely different from the philosophical terrain (this bore the name of 'deconstruction', and Schürmann pinpoints, pins down what he calls its "candor", taking up the critique that Derrida had given of it in *Margins* as early as 1972, almost word for word¹³).

These indications have their price. Despite this, it is quite clear that not only shall we not answer the question of the place from which *Broken Hegemonies* speaks, but we shall not even be able to *pose* it (in the strong sense of the term, as a *Frage-stellung*) as long as we try to understand it in a way which is both too simple and too complicated, as the place of philosophy, which would yet be occupied by that which is no longer a philosophy, nor a determinate opposite of philosophy. This formulation is certainly correct, but it is still empty, or if one prefers (to be less hard on oneself), purely enigmatic.

What then, positively speaking? How can one determine – other than as what *it is not* – the thinking at work in the pages Reiner Schürmann has left us? It is as difficult to reply to this question as to that which Valéry asked one day,

Où sont des morts les âmes singulières?
(Of the dead, where are the singular souls?)

It will be as difficult, unless one should notice that the singularity of the work lies precisely in its clinging, always and again, regardless of the theme of the moment, or of the epoch it is deciphering, to a thinking of singularity. Yet we must be properly aware of our near incapacity, after two thousand years of philosophy, to think something correctly under the aegis of this term, that is, to distinguish the singular from the dust of the 'pure manifold', as well as from the 'particularity' subsumed under a concept. To be sure, Schürmann constantly attempts to set us on the path, by retracing the path of Parmenides, in his first chapter. The manner in which this is done is so learned, however, that the simplicity of the stakes may escape us, if we are lazily content to summarize the thesis and the arguments of the thesis. Even in order to read others – especially in order to read others – we must bear the burden of thinking that which guides their thinking, for ourselves, at least initially. Forgive me, then, for outlining a thinking of singularity with an example which is not developed in *Broken Hegemonies*, but which is at least of the 'Parmenidean' type, namely, the unity of contraries which we call right and left. (Only one other thinker attended to this opposition, as

¹³ *BH*, General introduction, especially note 24. See *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris, Seuil, 1972, p. 161-163.

we know: Immanuel Kant, expounding the “paradox of symmetrical objects” as a constraint imposed by sensibility, which marks its difference, irretrievable in relation to the concept. But this is precisely why the *Critique* leaves this singularity where it is, as a *marker* which always remains foreign to the way in which sensibility and the understanding reveal themselves to be the *limit* of one another. This abandonment, in turn, is the limit of Kant's thinking.)

These contraries indeed have no genus, even if they are maintained and held in a unity, their unity. They are without internal differentiation, and should not be understood as distinct from their unity, which language insidiously forces us to do when we say, “*in* their unity.” Parmenides’ manner of superimposing this difference on that between the sexes emphasizes that it is a difference without appearing to do so: “Boys on the right, girls on the left.” But if we stand in front of a mirror, we will be in a better position to learn how the terms of this difference, even if they are bound to one another, are held together (*sunéchousin*), are those of a *différend*¹⁴ that nothing can appease, subjugate, or subsume. Imagine that you are combing your hair, dividing it into two uneven masses on either side of a part, and that the larger mass is on the *left side* of your head; the mirror will show you the exact image of your gestures and this mass, except that on your double, it will show you this mass *on the right*. Hence, even though you see all of yourself in the mirror, it will forever be impossible for you to see yourself ‘as you are’ (and as you will indeed be seen by others): with hair parted to the left. What declares itself here is the *différend* between the image and that of which it is the image, even if it is nothing other than their unity. On the contrary, it is the rule of this unity itself. For it would certainly be senseless to conceive of some higher authority which would unify the real and its reflection beyond (above) the difference between right and left. The visible is governed by space and nothing higher. From whence it follows that right and left are indeed contraries, but are not the species of any genus. In other words, they are ultimate singularities, to use an expression whose pleonastic character I wished to emphasize.

This analysis may appear to be merely particular, yet its relevance or breadth is considerable, as it explains why the labor of thinking in Reiner Schürmann is called the “analytic of ultimates”. The expression seems easily understood (or so one believes, carelessly perhaps) when applied to birth and death, but it does not immediately yield its meaning when applied to the difference and the unity of the concept and the given (“that old tandem,” to quote Beckett again). That the terms between which space is distributed qua system of orientation (not only the *synechia* of right and left, but all the others: up-down, in front-behind, far-close, vertical-horizontal, etc.) are connected each time in a singular, and thus ultimate, *différend* (which is not the particularity of anything) is an example which, in turn, allows one to orient oneself in thinking. Not because the thinking of space is in any way generalizable to all ‘objects’ of thought (to make use of an atrocious, but handy vocabulary), but because this thinking provides a relatively easy basis on which to understand the meaning of “ultimate”, “singular”, “difference as differend”, “contraries without genus”, etc. (one recognizes the key terms of *Broken Hegemonies*). That said, it is self-evident that this ‘form’ (let us say, in Parmenide-Heideggerian fashion, the *synechia* of entity and being), even if it

¹⁴ [A term frequently used by Schürmann, among others, and customarily left in the original. It normally refers to a dispute between parties, who *differ* from one another on some ground – Trans.]

must as a hypothesis (indeed, I believe that the thinking at work in *Hegemonies* undeniably works on this hypothesis) finds itself at the ground of any dominant principal construction in the history of the West (besides, only two come after the Greek One: Roman *natura* and modern *self-consciousness*), it is self-evident, as I was saying, that this form cannot be found, strictly speaking, outside of the ‘historical monuments’ of the tradition. The *monere* alone is ‘always the same’, not the *monumenta*, to be sure. Singularities, always... Their community of fate is not a concept. The description given of this in *Broken Hegemonies*, consequently, is not governed by the science (*Wissenschaft*) of some theoretical machine which can *deduce* the epochal principles according to which Western history distributes itself, but by a singular knowledge (*Wissen*) which can induce in them just so many essentially heterogeneous figures of what Heidegger will call “the sending of being”.

By ‘knowledge’, I mean the kind of discernment or insight, often bitter and in any case always painful – even when it engenders serenity – which silently forms along the path of a life, and is only gathered up on the eve of this life. When I say that Reiner Schürmann's *Hegemonies*, written indeed along the last *stretch* of his path, are guided by a *singular* knowledge, I do mean the singularity of *his* experience, *his* path in the midst of our world. From this point of view, the fact that the book opens with an exegesis of Parmenides’ poem appears to me to be anything but a coincidence. The *kouros*, the young man borne away by the mares, whom the Goddess firmly enjoins to hold the present and the absent together, is Schürmann himself. To be sure, the tragic which, from the height of such a knowledge, he will learn not to deny, is no longer that which resonates in the verses of Aeschylus (a contemporary of Parmenides, as Schürmann notes¹⁵). It is no longer the *différend* between the law of lineage and the law of the city, which Attic classicism sought to occlude in the following century. It is, of course, the tragic of our own epoch. And he who revealed the knowledge of his own experience to Schürmann on this matter, he who taught him “everything” on the way travelled was, failing a Goddess, the philosopher of Freiburg. It is no coincidence, either, that the book closes with a reading of the *Contributions to Philosophy* – about which Schürmann writes,

I know of no other text that offers so painfully to our thinking the great repressed in our tradition, tragic being. Heidegger lends his voice to the forces of repression as much as to those of the return. The pain remains unrelieved, for the same adversity passes through and within the site of the text as well as the thought which echoes it. The distress of the site and the pathos of the thinking indicate one and the same epochal monstrosity. In the latter is declared in turn the agonistic dissent or dissension by which Heidegger understands being from then on.¹⁶

Consequently, one does not have to look far to find the reason why the reading of Heidegger given in the *Hegemonies* fulfills itself in the guise of a reading of the *Beiträge*. It is not at all because these texts from 1936-1938 constitute, as Otto Poggeler believes, the masterpiece of Heidegger’s thought. It is because of the dates, and the form they cannot help but bestow on the question of being. These two years, indeed, are those of the fulfillment – with Nietzsche’s tutelary assistance, and further, Holderlin’s – not only of the “taking of

¹⁵ *BH*, “The One that Holds”.

¹⁶ *BH*, “On the Double Bind Without Common Name”, section entitled “A ‘Terrible Warning’”.

distances”, as one says, with the National Socialist movement, but also of the fundamental critique of the ‘thetic’ character of the understanding of the modern world, the truly decisive factor in Heidegger's acceptance of the rectorate in 1933. So long as technology (whose essence, one remembers, is identical to that of modern metaphysics) appears as a mere reality, straight out of human hands, the domination it exercises over man in return, and above all the political forms it imprints on his existence, can equally be understood as just so many realities, against which it is possible to ‘act’ effectively, collectively, with a view towards “new departure” of knowledge and being-in-common. “I saw that possibility” (at the time of the rectorate), Heidegger says clearly in the interview with the *Spiegel*¹⁷, and explains no less clearly that this possibility was not “incarnated,” in the eyes of the Heidegger of 1933, by the NSDAP, but seemed to be achievable at the cost of a (frequently conflictual) “compromise” with it¹⁸. The advent of all this, which led Heidegger to resign, also forced him to meditate on the origin of his failure. How should being be “arranged” (“*agencé*”, the formulation is a naïve one, but there is no better one) so that the metaphysical form in which it imposes itself on human knowing and acting simply cannot be “suspended” – by means of a phenomenological bracketing, or by an insurrection of individual and collective volition? The *Contributions*, as Schiirmann reads them, are entirely devoted to this question. His manner is sometimes critical, and sometimes even harsh, as for instance when discussing the question of “Who?”, or the question of the “god” and the “people”; he notes that a “thetic” regime of thinking lingers on in Heidegger. What also lingers is the confusion, resulting from this thinking, between the historical-destinal and the historical, even if the advent of *Dasein* in its truth is now referred back to an indeterminate and indeterminable morrow. But his manner is generous at the same time, for he recognizes – both in the sense that one reconnoiters an unknown land, and in the sense of ‘acknowledging the rightfulness of’ – not only all the traits of dissension, of the *agôn* which characterizes the arrangement of being for Heidegger thereafter, but also the predominance of being-concealed in unconcealment itself, and, lastly but most importantly, the thinker's consent to ‘deremption’ as the only suitable attitude towards modern humanity’s plunge into dereliction.

This term, ‘deremption’, will cause wariness to rear its head once again. “Here we have,” it will say, “the proof of the fundamentally nihilistic character of Heideggerian thought. This fatalism is the death of all moral acting”. As for dereliction, the triumphant ‘upright’ thinkers of today will say it is pure invention. Is it not contradicted by the gradual extension to the whole of the planet of the production of wealth, which itself brings about democratic freedom and the progress of knowledge – its condition and its consequence at once?

The refrain is familiar, it has been taken up endlessly since the eighteenth century. But one must remain blind to a great number of events which, so to speak, all took place at once in our twentieth century, in order to believe that this song will continue to be sung *as such* for

¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, Réponses et questions sur l’histoire et la politique, trans. J. Launay, Paris, Mercure de France, 1977, p. 22. Cf. “Only a God Can Save Us Now”, *GFPJ* 6, 1, Winter 1977.

¹⁸ Forgive me for referring, regarding this exegesis of the *Rectorial Address*, to my own text, “Pourquoi avous-nous publié cela?”, in *De l’université*, Mauvezin (France), T.E.R., 1982, which to my mind is essentially convergent with R. Schiirmann’s analyses.

centuries more. The short-sighted, self-satisfied vision of British analytic philosophy and American pragmatism is required, if one is to continue to crown or cap our modernity with a consoling and consolidating ‘thinking’. I shall not develop the concrete analyses here which, in my view, are opposed to this perpetuation of the philosophical phantasm in the most drab and prosaic form imaginable: ‘Business as usual’. I shall not do so because Reiner Schürmann does not, and he alone is at issue. Let one read, then, regarding the insufficiency of a “moral” perspective and the reasons why he prefers the Heideggerian inquiry into “that which is”, note 27 of the final chapter, and on what is known as the “question of evil”, in the first two pages of the general conclusion of the book, One will then see that even if it remains on the path of the most principal questions, Schürmann's judgment on the essential fragility of the “ultimate referents” of our world is just as severe – or, better, is more *disquieting* still – as that to which I have been led, by what I have called “concrete analyses.” To spread this uneasiness, after having put it in the most rigorous possible form, was obviously the intention which gave rise to this admirable book. As for myself, I have only written the meager pages above in order to give the student (that incarnation of the *kouros*!) the desire and the courage to climb into this chariot. May I have succeeded, if only slightly.

Translated by Charles T. Wolfe