Simplex verbs and conceptualisation in German language: a case study based on Heidegger's history of Being

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Martin Heidegger makes use of the German language in the process of articulating his thought in his later work. It is the claim of this paper that Heidegger conceptualises the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*) by choosing certain simplex verbs as a springboard in the process of word formation, a process that is both enabled and conditioned by idiosyncrasies of the German language. This process of conceptualisation can be described and elucidated from a structuralist perspective concerned with linguistic morphology. Therefore this paper starts with a brief summary of the basic concepts of classic structural linguistics, with special emphasis on syntagmatic and paradigmatic sign relations. Secondly, based on the structuralist notion of language, the idiosyncratic character of German language will be elaborated. Last but not least, Heidegger's application of the simplex verbs *stellen*, *stehen* and *schicken* in numerous operations of word formation will serve for a case study of the process of philosophical conceptualisation rooted in idiosyncrasies characteristic of the German language.

KEYWORDS

Martin Heidegger; structuralism; morphology; *Ge-stell*; *Geschick*

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INTRODUCTION

The statement that Martin Heidegger was a philosopher who thought and wrote in German language is in nothing but the assertion of an obvious triviality. Nevertheless, the way Heidegger made use of German prompted numerous comments and debates (Schöfer, 1962; Kockelmans, 1972). Most famously, Theodor Adorno characterised Heidegger's linguistic style as a jargon, which he deemed — the manifestation of a prevalent German ideology echoing patterns of thought and speech from a fascist past only apparently overcome (Adorno, 1964). Furthermore, Heidegger himself was anything but indifferent to the issue of language in his own philosophical work. He wrote extensively about the general phenomenon of language (Heidegger, 1985) and occasionally commented on the particular character of the German language (Heidegger, 1982: 50–51). So, it should come as no surprise that Heidegger's take on language itself became the subject of numerous monographs and philosophical commentaries (Steinmann, 2008; Ziarek, 2013).

The following paper, however, does not aim to join the ranks of commentaries on Heidegger's thoughts and writings on language. Neither is it an attempt to investigate Heidegger's lexicon for its possible entanglements in fascist ideology, whether as an echo of that ideology or as its active mouthpiece. This paper rather attempts to show in what sense it is it can be claimed that the articulation of Heidegger's thought is among the possibilities provided by the idiosyncrasies of the German language. In other words, it aims to showcase — by no means exhaustively — how it can be asserted that Heidegger's philosophical work is indebted to the peculiarities of the structure of German language in its numerous attempts to conceptualise and articulate the question of Being. To do this, the idiosyncratic character of German language will be briefly mapped out from a structuralist perspective focusing mainly on morphology. That is why this paper begins with a brief description of the Saussurian notion of language with special emphasis on syntagmatic and paradigmatic sign relations.

SYNTAGMATIC AND PARADIGMATIC SIGN RELATIONS

The fifth chapter of *Synchronic linguistics*, part of the revolutionary *Course in general linguistics* by Ferdinand de Saussure, begins with the following sentence: "In a language-state everything is based on relations" (de Saussure, 1959: 122). This statement can serve as a precise synopsis of Saussure's thoughts about language that he has hitherto developed in the *Course*. The revolutionary novelty of de Saussure's approach — later to be called "structuralist" — begins with discerning language (*la langue*) as the object of linguistic science, by distinguishing it from speaking (*la parole*) within the general phenomenon of human speech

(*le langage*) (de Saussure, 1959: 77). On the basis of this classification, language is understood as a conventionally determined and collectively used system of arbitrary signs whose structure — both the structure of the whole language system as well as that of the linguistic sign itself — can be scientifically analysed and described (Elsen, 2014: 45). Thus, from a Saussurian perspective, linguistics is primarily concerned with signs and their interdependent relations.

The linguistic sign itself is conceived as a dyadic unit comprised of two elements — the signifier and the signified — from two heterogeneous planes or orders. This notion of a sign, a structured and identifiable overlapping between the plane of the signifier and the plane of the signified, provides the only "positive fact" available in the study of language. Apart from that, "everything in language is negative [...] there are only differences without positive terms" (de Saussure, 1959: 120). Put differently, signs are not assigned to an ideal referent, something stipulating and safeguarding their meaning. In fact, de Saussure avoids speaking about the meaning of signs in a way that would involve him in a discussion about the ontological status or character of entities that render signs meaningful. That is not to say that de Saussure abandons meaning as a concept — meaning is integrated into the dyadic structure of the sign in form of the signified. However, it is never a function of the sign's extralinguistic reference but is rather the value of the signified, which is established by its difference to other elements of the same order (de Saussure, 1959: 117).[1] The term "value" is introduced by de Saussure to define the function of a sign — as well its constituents — in a linguistic structure. Hence, it can be said that for de Saussure signs primarily have value, which is determined by nothing other than the relation they have to other signs within the system of language.

The dyadic notion of sign also serves as an explanation for de Saussure's strict division between synchrony and diachrony in the methodology of linguistics. Synchronic linguistics approaches language as a "system for equating things of different orders" (de Saussure, 1959: 79). As such, it is concerned with the simultaneous multitude of relations between the signifier and the signified as well as the interdependent relations between the signs themselves. Due to the plethora of signs and the complexity of their relations, it is de Saussure's belief that the systemic study of language should limit its scope to a single point in time (de Saussure, 1959: 81). In other words, it should not have to additionally attempt to account for the evolutionary change of signs. The temporal transformations of signs constitute the object of diachronic linguistics. Synchronic linguistics on the other hand considers language essentially as a static phenomenon, which explains why de Saussure speaks of — as in the introductory quote — language-states.

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[1] This understanding of meaning has often been the grounds for debate and criticism. See for instance Barnouw, 1981.

The statement that everything in a language-state is based on relations allows to raise the question the further question about their precise character. Put differently: What kind of relations is it possible to discern in the structure of any given language-state? Here, de Saussure's thought presents us with two types of relations that seem to govern the totality of differences constituting language, namely syntagmatic and paradigmatic ones (de Saussure, 1959: 127).[2]

The possibility to discern syntagmatic relationships between the units of any linguistic structure is a direct consequence of the linearity or spatiality of linguistic phenomena. Every act of speaking is an enunciation of elements in sequence and therefore a line or chain of speech. The same can be said of writing — although de Saussure does not explicitly refer to writing in this instance — in the way that it aligns graphic elements. This kind of combination of linguistic elements "supported by linearity are [called by de Saussure] syntagms [and] the syntagm is always composed of two or more consecutive units" (de Saussure, 1959: 123). Almost every sentence or phrase is therefore a syntagm (e.g. "it rains", "the sky is cloudy" or "never say never"). Compound words (e.g. "sky-scraper" or "foot-path") can also be considered syntagms as they are configurations of two elements that can in other cases form different syntagmatic relations (e.g. "sky" is present both in "sky-scraper" and in "the sky is cloudy"). It is obvious that in a syntagm linguistic units are juxtaposed to each other, but it is precisely this juxtaposition that determines their specific value. Any given element of a syntagm has value only due to the elements that precede or follow it in a given syntagmatic configuration. Therefore, the analysis of a syntagmatic grouping is concerned with the positioning of its linguistic elements — the way one element relates to the others that co-occur in a line of text or speech.

The emphasis on co-occurrence allows one to contrast syntagmatic relations to paradigmatic ones. Whereas syntagmatic relations concern that which is present in a linguistic grouping of units — it is a relation of elements *in presentio* — paradigmatic relations concern possible associations to the elements of the grouping. That is to say, the paradigmatic relation concerns precisely those elements that do not co-occur in a syntagm, but are related to those that do. As such, the paradigmatic relation is a relation *in absentia* (de Saussure, 1959: 123). For instance, the word "happy" in the syntagm "I am happy" is related to the words "happier" and "happiest". It is therefore possible to establish a group of words that are related to "happy" without their being present in the given syntagm. Moreover, a grouping of linguistic elements established according to their paradigmatic relation can serve as a set

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[2] Although de Saussure himself speaks of syntagmatic and associative relations in the *Course*, it became common to designate the latter as "paradigmatic" in the tradition of linguistics (de Beaugrande, 1991: 24; van Marle, 2000: 225).

of possible substitutions for the element present in the syntagm (e.g. "I am [happy/happier/the happiest]").

The character of syntagmatic relations appears to be rather clear as it concerns that which is actually given in a linguistic structure. The mere presence of the linguistic units in a linear arrangement always already places them in relation to each other. Furthermore, the syntagm itself distinctly limits the amount of elements that can be put in relation to each other. In contrast, the conceptual status of paradigmatic relations appears to be much less obvious (van Marle, 2000: 225). The example above creates a set of the inflections of the adjective "happy", according to the way comparatives and superlatives are expressed in the English language. However, such a grouping in terms of paradigmatic relations is far from being the only one possible. One could easily suggest other sets of words — absent from the syntagm itself — and successfully claim their relation to the word "happy" (e.g. "happy/pappy/nappy/sappy/yappy" or "happy/merry/jolly/gay" or "happy/sad/gloomy/sombre"). The first example proposes a set of words that are related to "happy" simply based on form: they are associated with each other merely on grounds of the similarity of their signifier. By contrast, both of the other word groups present examples of paradigmatic relations that hold on the plane of the signified — the first in terms of synonymity and the second in terms of antonymity. Hence, it can be surmised that there is no definite answer as to what constitutes relatedness in a paradigmatic relationship. Although "paradigmatic relationships deal with the ways linguistic entities may be mutually connected, both formally and/or semantically" (van Marle, 2000: 225), they seem to require a *tertium comparationis* specifying which linguistic elements can form a part of them.

Last but not least: What constitutes a linguistic unit, element or entity? After all, both, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships hold between something considered a linguistic unit. It seems evident that "a unit is a segment of the spoken chain" (de Saussure, 1959: 121) — or of writing for that matter. However, such a description is far from a precise definition. If one were to analyse the structure of a sentence for instance, it would appear that the single word is the natural unit for such analysis. But then again, the word itself is also a linguistic structure that can be analysed into its constituent elements. This should not come as a surprise as de Saussure goes to great lengths to explain that there simply are no autonomous, standalone units of language. Language, as a complex structure comprised of interdependent relations, simply has no substance — as de Saussure emphatically emphasises (de Saussure, 1959: 146). A linguistic unit is therefore a highly flexible concept that only gains precise definition with regard to the aspect of linguistic structure, analysed in its differential and relational character. In other words, the definition of a linguistic unit will differ according to whether the field of linguistic studies is syntax, morphology, phonology or semantics (Wurzel, 2000: 5).

GERMAN: A HIGHLY MOTIVATED AND FLEXIBLE LANGUAGE

Every use of a natural language applies groupings of linguistic entities that are based simultaneously on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. A chain of speech or writing is a linear yet finite space that allows for a combination of linguistic elements within its limits. The rules for possible combinations are governed by the syntagmatic relations which are characteristic to a given natural language. In addition, every operation of combination simultaneously selects from a set of linguistic elements that are provided by the paradigmatic relations holding in the given natural language. Whereas the operation of combination (syntagmatic) takes place on a horizontal axis — what is actually present in a linguistic structure — the operation of selection and possible substitution (paradigmatic) can be imagined on a vertical axis.

From a morphological perspective — one concerned with the structure and formation of words — the German language can be characterised in terms of its high syntagmatic flexibility in comparison to other European languages. To some extent, German words could be metaphorically described as a "Lego set" that "functions both in everyday language" as well as "in philosophical language, where the omnipresence of combinations plays a crucial role in conceptualisation" (Dubost, 2014: 145–146).

The combinational flexibility of German words is probably best illustrated by the example of compound words, especially compound nouns — as they are basically a number of merged nouns (as "skyscraper" is a compound noun, the combination of "sky" and "scraper", both of which constitute unbound morphemes as they can stand alone in a syntactical structure). In contrast to English, in German the possibilities to merge nouns together is virtually unlimited. So long as the last noun in a morphological syntagm serves as a stem, there is theoretically no limit of noun adjuncts that could be placed in front of it. The most famous example from actual use in German (and not merely a jocular word or tongue twister) was ironically a term at the junction of legislature and bureaucracy: *Rinderkennzeichnung- und Rindfleischetikettierungsüberwachungsaufgabenübertragungsgesetz*. It could be rendered into English as: "Cattle marking and beef labelling supervision duties delegation law".

This example is evidently an extreme one, but it exposes the "Lego set" character of German words when constructing new words. Moreover, it is important to mention that this operation of synthesis is not only a marginal peculiarity in German, but very much an observable phenomenon in everyday use. If, for instance, one were to forget the word *Klempner* (plumber), it would be viable to circumvent the forgotten word by talking about the *Sanitäranlagenwiederinstandsetzer* (sanitary facility repairer).

Another important aspect of compound words is their motivated character. De Saussure introduces the concept of motivation to distinguish between the

absolute and relative arbitrariness of the sign (de Saussure, 1959: 131). A sign is less arbitrary — that is to say motivated — if it suggests or recalls the linguistic entities it is composed of. Concerning word construction in German it appears that "at the end of the process of combination, each original element retains more or less completely its literal meaning", thus giving the impression that "the sign is less arbitrary [...] because the relation between signifier and signified is more constantly discernible" (Dubost, 2014: 146). Although there is no absolutely unmotivated language, for de Saussure the degree of motivation provides grounds for a possible classification of languages. In that regard the criterion of motivation allows to graduate between languages as unmotivated ones appear to be organised to a greater extent around a vast lexicon, whereas motivated languages tend to be more grammatically complex (de Saussure, 1959: 133).

Compound nouns are not at all the only segment of the German language which testifies to its motivation and flexibility in the process of word formation. A similar, and perhaps better, case can be made for verbs. Take for example the German verb *berichten* (to report). In terms of a syntagmatic analysis, it can be treated as a compound and hence divided into *be-richten*. Both parts of this syntagmatic relation are morphemes, the first being a bound, grammatical, derivational affix — a prefix to be precise — the second being the morphological word stem.[3] Thus, it be can said that the syntagm *be-richten* is the result of the operation of affixation — a process in which the simplex verb *richten* was merged with a prefix. At the same time, the bound morpheme *be-* is associated with a paradigmatic grouping of morphemes that can each be substituted in its function as a prefix to the verb *richten*. In consequence, a set of compound verbs can be established that all share their commonness in the appearance of the same sign, e.g. *ver-richten* (to carry out, to accomplish), *hin-richten* (to execute, to put to death), *unter-richten* (to teach), *ab-richten* (to drill, to train, to plane), *zu-richten* (to injure, to square, to prepare), *aus-richten* (to align, to adjust, also: to tell, to organise), *an-richten* (to cause damage), *auf-richten* (to rear, to raise, to erect), *ein-richten* (to establish, to arrange, to furnish). Moreover, the examples of words organised around *richten* is not limited to verbs. Numerous nouns and adjectives can be considered derivatives, e.g. *Richter* (judge), *Gericht* (court, tribunal, but also: dish), *Richtung* (direction), *Nachricht* (information), *richtig* (correct, proper, accurate), *richterlich* (judicial).

From the abundance of such examples — the above list being far from exhaustive — it can be surmised that simplex verbs in the German language play

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[3] The issue whether the stem of a verb in the German language is a bound or unbound morpheme — at least from the perspective of lexicology — has been the object of a heated linguistic debate. One could assume that the infinitive verb form constitutes an unbound lexical morpheme. However, due to the shortening of form in the imperative mood they are usually classified as bound lexical morphemes (Elsen, 2011: 3).

a central role in the process of word formation through affixation. However, it is striking that the everyday character of the words does not appear to be grounded in their semantics. In terms of the dyadic nature of the linguistic sign, it could be inferred that the fact that all the words organised around the verb *richten* belong together is solely grounded on the plane of the signifier. On the other hand, the motivational character of compound words suggests that their constituents retain to some extent their original significance. So, it is fair to inquire into the meaning of the simplex verb *richten* itself — regarding its presence in all the compound words in which it serves as a stem. What is the signified of the signifier *richten*? The answer, however, might disappoint: There simply is no distinct and unambiguous meaning attributable to the arrangement of graphic elements in *richten*. The word appears to be highly polysemic as it can be translated in numerous ways — to focus, to judge, to do, to set, to point — among others. Each compound or derivative that makes use of the verb *richten* seems to tap into a different signified that can be attributed to the verb's signifier.

From a linguistic perspective which is strictly synchronic and structuralist, an unambiguous determination of the signified that can be attributed to the signifier *richten* is a highly unlikely thing. The verb should simply be analysed in a broader context or a larger linguistic syntagm, allowing us to pinpoint its meaning by opposing and relating it to other elements in that particular syntagmatic structure. However, from another perspective — one that to some extent leaves the rigour of linguistic science behind — the sheer amount of repetition of the same signifier in such a vast array of distinctly human activities and institutions might open up space for philosophical speculation concerning their commonness — a commonness that somehow transcends the plane of the signifier or is not merely reduced to it. As such, the verb *richten* might serve as a useful tool in conceptualising collective human existence in its reliance on a process of subjugating the world to a form of judicial or geometrical essence — a process that is not bereft of violence. The numerous compound verbs mentioned above signify human activities that seem to participate in such a procedure.

THE ROLE OF SIMPLEX VERBS IN HEIDEGGER'S THOUGHT — A CASE STUDY IN CONCEPTUALISATION

This section the article aims to show how Heidegger makes use of (to some extent even abuses) the flexible and motivated character of the German language in the process of articulating his philosophical thought. In a sentence: this article attempts to briefly demonstrate the important role of verbs in Heidegger's later work. To add a little more precision, it is the claim of this paper that

Heidegger organises his thoughts around certain simplex verbs whose semantic ambiguity and malleability in regard to possible word formations serve him as a springboard for the articulation of his philosophical project, the project more commonly known as the history of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*). In other words, the frequently asserted deep rootedness of Heidegger's philosophical work in the German language does not only provide essential grounds for a commentary about his nationalist — if not fascist — inclinations. Additionally — and more importantly for an interpretation that is not merely interested in dismissing the philosopher — it can simply be shown how Heidegger's philosophy is indebted, even from a purely practical point of view, to the idiosyncrasies of the German language. It can therefore be argued that it is in fact the structural, syntagmatic flexibility inherent to German, one allowing for numerous operations of a paradigmatic character, that to some extent makes possible Heidegger's philosophical work.

To portray Heidegger's rootedness in the idiosyncratic structure of German, three simplex verbs have been chosen: *stellen*, *stehen* and *schicken*. This selection is by no means exhaustive. (A similar case could be made for verbs such as *fügen*, *wesen* or *denken*). The sole common denominator of the three verbs lies in the plane of the signifier, as they evidently all start with the same letter.

STELLEN AND STEHEN

The first two verbs *stellen* (to put, to place, to position) and *stehen* (to stand) will be considered as a related pair: *stehen* can be understood as a consequence of *stellen*. In this sense, something stands where or on what it was placed, put or positioned. For the occurrence of *stellen* and *stehen* in Heidegger's writings, consider the following two quotes. Firstly:

> Das Nachstellende Vorstellen, das alles Wirkliche in seiner verfolgbaren Gegenständigkeit sicherstellt, ist der Grundzug des Vorstellens, wodurch die neuzeitliche Wissenschaft dem Wirklichen entspricht (Heidegger, 2000: 50; emphasis added),

and secondly:

> Das Wesen des Ge-stells ist das in sich gesammelte Stellen, das seiner eigenen Wesenswahrheit mit der Vergessenheit nachstellt, welches Nachstellen sich dadurch verstellt, daß es sich in das Bestellen alles Anwesenden als den Bestand entfaltet und darin einrichtet und als dieser herrscht (Heidegger, 2004: 68; emphasis added).

A brief look at both examples suffices to notice the barrage of words making use of the stem *stellen*. Furthermore, it is possible to register this operation of word formation purely on the plane of the signifier. It is not necessary to know what both these sentences signify to form the assumption that the word *stellen*, including its meaning, is of crucial importance. In addition, two nouns that make use of *stehen* can be identified. The first one being *Gegenständigkeit* (objectness) and the latter *Bestand* (stock, inventory or standing in reserve).

The second quotation is of special interest here, as it uses the verb *stellen* in its infinitive form. A translation of the first part of this sentence could take the following form: "The essence of *Ge-stell* is the collected placing/positioning".[4] In other words, the numerous actions that can be designated by the verb *stellen*, all gathered together, somehow make up the essence of that which Heidegger names *Ge-stell*. The neologism *Ge-stell* became famous in Heidegger's writings as the essence of modern technology (Heidegger, 2000: 21).[5] However, "technology" in Heidegger's thought is not merely a general title for technical processes or objects, but can be understood as something constituting an epoch, something marking out the dominating character of a specific and historically conditioned relation to beings. From this perspective it becomes evident that *stellen* plays a central role in Heidegger's philosophical project aiming to articulate the history of Being.

When Heidegger speaks of Being (*Sein*) or the Being of beings (*das Sein des Seienden*) he is referring to its character as presence or presencing (*Anwesenheit/ Anwesen*). According to Heidegger, the history of Being is determined by the originary experience of beings as something that is present (Heidegger, 2000: 142). This orginary event that appropriated the thinking of Being as presence — an appropriation that holds until today — is attributed by Heidegger to Ancient Greece (Heidegger, 2007: 6, 10). However, it can also be said that the experience of the presence of beings in Ancient Greece is of a special and unique character. Broadly speaking, the distinct and originary character of this experience can be described in terms of its radicality — there was no commonly accepted and collectively internalised answer to the question: Why is there something rather than nothing? Now, on the one hand, the plethora of metaphysical propositions in Ancient Greece attempting to explain, justify and substantiate the presence of beings is a testament to the concern reflecting the radicality of its experience. On the other hand, it can be said that each metaphysical answer or reasoning is at the same time an attempt to mediate

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[4] All translations of Heidegger's writings are by the author unless marked otherwise.

[5] Although the word *Gestell* is in very much present in the German language (e.g. *Brillengestell* [spectacle frame]), Heidegger makes it clear that he hijacks the word for a different purpose. Recent translations and interpretations of Heidegger's writings in English have taken that into account by abandoning the classical translation of *Ge-stell* as "enframing" and instead use "positionality" (Mitchel, 2012).

and mitigate the experience of the presence of beings in its radical character. In other words, each attempt at metaphysics, each quest for a reason, principle or ultimate cause, aims to provide the thinking of beings with a ground or foundation for their presence/Being. So, the process of metaphysics can be described in terms of attempting to place, put or position (*stellen*) the presence of beings on an unquestionable and irrefutable foundation so that it can stand (*stehen*) on the firm ground of reason.

It is striking how Heidegger attempts to develop a notion of Being that allows him to refer to the originary and radical Greek experience of Being without making use of words that would suggest that the presence of beings is in some sense placed or positioned, thus conditioning the beings themselves in their standing. Heidegger emphasises that for "the Greeks what is present disclosed itself in the character of an in-front-of (*Gegenüber*), but never in the character of an object (*Gegenstand*)" (Heidegger, 1997: 121). Although Heidegger considers the philosophical works of Aristotle and Plato to be the historical beginning of the burial of the disclosure of Being as radically experienced presence (Heidegger, 1984: 121–122), he usually does not refer to the epoch of Ancient Greece in terms of a characteristic and commonly accepted foundation on which the thinking and understanding of Being is collectively grounded.

This is not the case for the following epochs that can be discerned in Heidegger's articulation of the history of Being: medieval Christianity, the Early Modern Age and the planetary age of modern technology (Heidegger, 1977: 332). The constitutive moment of each of these epochs seems to be the way the thinking of beings adheres to a ground that safeguards (*sicherstellen*) their standing and accounts for their presence. However, the character of this ground fluctuates — there is "a shift in the master signifier", so to speak — and with this changes the way the presence of beings is accounted for in thinking — thereby marking the end or the beginning of an epoch. Now, it can be claimed that Heidegger himself uses numerous available word formations organised around the simplex verb *stellen* in order to allude to the epochal changes in the history of Being. In the epoch of medieval Christianity for instance, the world and all its beings was thought of in terms of divine creation. As such, the presence of beings is understood as something created *ex nihilo* and in this sense is considered an *ens creatum* (*etwas hergestelltes*)[6] (Heidegger, 1977: 90). Put differently, the presence of beings is safeguarded (*sichergestellt*) and accounted for by the presence of a supreme deity. Thus, the presence of beings is not radically

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[6] Here, however, Heidegger cannot make use of the term *Herstand* to characterise the standing of beings in the epoch of Christianity. *Herstand* is used by Heidegger to describe the presence of a being that comes forth of its own accord (*das von sich aus Hervorkommende*) and therefore would rather characterise the presence of beings in the epoch of Ancient Greece (Heidegger, 2004: 39).

inexplicable but always already thought of as the effect of a divine process of production. It is the result of a process that can be described with the German verb *herstellen* (to produce, to create) which in turn refers to an entity on which ultimately the understanding of all beings as created is positioned or placed.

The constitutive moment of the next epoch, the Early Modern Age, and the shift in the history of Being is signified by Heidegger by the verb *vorstellen* (to represent). Here, the presence of being is placed on the ground of human subjectivity and its faculty of representation (*Vorstellungskraft*). However, in the epoch of Christianity the presence of beings was safeguarded and grounded by the faith in divine transcendence. So, the abandonment of this transcendence means that the presence of beings is guaranteed (*sichergestellt*) only if the representing subject (*Das vorstellende Subject*) provides (*zustellen*) sufficient reason for it (Heidegger, 1997: 42). It is precisely in this sense that the human subject becomes the ground for the presence of beings. Its faculty of representation becomes the authority and tribunal by which judgement is made whether a being brought before it stands up to sufficient reason. Consequently, the presence of beings is guaranteed only in so far it can be brought in front of the human subject as the object (*Gegenstand*) of its representation (Heidegger, 1977: 91). In Heidegger's words: "Only what is brought to a standstill (*stehen*) in a grounding representation can count as a being" (Heidegger, 1997: 42). Moreover, the constant necessity to provide sufficient reason as to whether an object of representation is safeguarded in its presence gives rise to a dynamic with a highly inquisitive and intrusive nature — a dynamic that can be recognised as the prevalent leitmotif of modern thinking. Human subjectivity in its representational capacity, can maintain its character as the ground of objectified beings only if it constantly proves itself as the authority able to justify its own representations. As such, the dynamic of modern thinking consists in an incessant hunt (*nachstellen*) to find a mode of representation that ensures the totality of objectified beings in its "objectness" (Heidegger, 2000: 50) allowing at the same time for a reproduction of human subjectivity as the ground of this process.

The epoch of planetary modern technology can be described in terms of an intensification of the dynamic prevalent in Early Modern Age, as well as its emancipation from the human subject. Put simply, the necessity to ascertain (*feststellen und sicherstellen*) the presence of beings as objects of a representation by providing sufficient reason evolves from the realm of scientific knowledge and encompasses the totality of human activities. As such, the presence of beings is not fully accounted for any more by Being an object for the process of representation. Beings have to constantly stand in reserve (*Bestand*) for a process that reduces their presence to potential usefulness and availability to said process. In other words, beings are ordered (*bestellt*) to stand in reserve for a process that is not of purely representational character. Here modern

technology is conceived by Heidegger as a process that gathers and combines all that he has hitherto signified with the verb *stellen* and reduces beings to their Being-a-resource — beings whose presence is justified only in so far it ensures continuation. Hence, the word *Ge-stell* as the essence of modern technology. It simply is that which combines and collects all the metaphysical procedures of placing and positioning, thereby challenging (*stellen*) the human being "to reveal the real as standing in reserve through the process of order-ing" (Heidegger, 2000: 24–25). Consequently, the technological process itself becomes the ground determining — by way of *bestellen* (to order, to cultivate, to appoint, to request) — the presence of beings as disposable resources.

SCHICKEN

The German simplex verb *schicken* is usually translated simply as to send. However, Heidegger reminds us of the polysemic character of the signifier *schicken*, thus broadening the extent of the signified that can be attributed to it. According to Heidegger, *schicken* can also take on the meaning of actions such as "to organize", "to arrange", "to bring something where it belongs", "to commit", "to make room" (Heidegger, 1997: 90). In addition, *schicken* can be used as a reflexive verb, indicated by writing it as *sich schicken*. Here it suddenly gains a meaning which is highly idiomatic. For instance, the saying: *Es schickt sich* could be translated as: "as befits", "that is the way to behave" or "it is proper". With regard to an analysis of the example given above, the subject — which supposedly is identical to the object in a syntactical structure involving a reflexive verb (e.g. *Er wäscht sich* as "He washes himself") — remains rather mysterious. It is simply designated as an *Es* (it). Moreover, the very action signified by the syntagma *sich schicken* is also rather mysterious. The sentence *Es schickt sich* — if it were to make use of the meaning expressed in the verb "to send" — could be literally translated as "it sends itself".

The verb *schicken* is crucial to Heidegger's articulation of the history of Being (Heidegger, 1997: 90–91). For instance, he asserts that "what is historical in the history of Being is determined by the aptness of a sending (*dem Geschickhaften eines Schickens*), not by an indeterminately thought up happening (*Geschehen*)" (Heidegger, 2007: 12–13). The very way Being happens or occurs is obviously determined by what he calls *schicken*. The explanation of this verb's importance for Heidegger can draw upon that which has thus far been stated about the history of Being. It has been said that the constitutive moment of each of the epochs in the history of Being is the way the understanding of beings adheres to a ground that ensures their standing, thereby providing an explanation or reason for their presence. The "ground" here is that upon which the think-ing of beings takes place. In this sense, it is something that enables, but at the

same times conditions a certain way of understanding the world and therefore determines the relation humans can have to beings (as such it is a condition of possibility and thus has a transcendental character). To put it briefly, the ground to which the thinking of beings holds onto determines the way the presence of beings is accounted for in a given epoch. Now on the one hand, this very ground can be considered as a sending or shipment — something that has been sent forth (*geschickt*), considered as given. On the other hand, it is precisely in this sense that the ground, as something that has been sent forth, comes close to various other meanings Heidegger has attributed to the verb *schicken*. It organises, arranges and makes room for a certain way of thinking. Moreover, the ground constitutes the destiny (*Schickung, Schicksal*) of the way in which beings are understood.

However, the character of this sent ground fluctuates, thereby precipitating an epochal change, which in turn allows one to speak of a history of Being. So, the question may be posed: Who or what is sending forth the ground as a destiny for a given epoch? This question appears to be valid; it is, however, impossible to answer without rejecting the most important presupposition of Heidegger's philosophy — the ontological difference. As Jacques Derrida has shown in his essay *la différance* — at a moment that is of striking similarity to the issue at hand — the acceptance of the validity of such a question would imply that Being (*das Sein*) is derived from and ultimately refers to "a w h a t or a present being [*ein Seiendes*] as a subject, a w h o" (Derrida, 1982: 15). In other words, there is no ultimate dispatcher or sender of grounds — a "ground of grounds" so to speak — that can be designated as the true and only substance or subject of the history of Being.

Nevertheless, the verb *schicken* in its reflexive use allows us to subvert or at least alleviate the logic of syntax that seems to relentlessly demand the possibility of identifying a subject behind each activity. If the ground as something that is sent forth determines the Being of beings, it can be identified as the object of the process of sending. However, in a sentence that makes use of a reflexive verb, the object is in some sense identical to its subject. In consequence, it can be said that it is Being itself (*Das Sein selber*) that sends itself as the historically changing Being of beings (Heidegger, 2004: 69). So, it can be surmised that Being is primarily neither object nor subject, but rather only the process of sending, thought this is a process that changes with regard to how it sends forth the ground on which the presence of beings is accounted for.

To address this shift in the ways Being sends itself, Heidegger introduces yet another word formed from the verb *schicken*: the noun *Geschick* or *Seinsgeschick*. From the perspective of German morphology, the prefix *Ge-* expresses the collection of that which it is affixed to. For example, *Ge-stell* constitutes the gathering of *stellen*. It therefore seems plausible that the term *Geschick* signifies the collection of ways in which Being itself can send itself as the Being of beings.

However, in opposition to *Ge-stell*, *Geschick* is not introduced as a neologism by Heidegger. As an everyday German word it means "skill", "skilfulness", "aptness" or "predisposition". If *Geschick* constitutes the collection of ways in which Being sends itself, the term *Seinsgeschick* suggests that there is a common character, a certain aptness to these collected ways of sending. Now it is striking that all epochs of the history of Being are bound to reveal the Being of beings as presence (*Anwesenheit*). Admittedly, the character of how the presence of beings is accounted for changes — they may be present as an *ens creatum*, object or a resource — but they always remain determined in their Being as presence. As such, it seems that the destiny (*Schicksal*) of human beings — even or especially in the age of planetary technology — is bound to the character of Being as presence.

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