EPISTEMOLOGICAL DUALISMS: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF PRESENCE IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY HISTORY SINCE 1770

By

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To Mom and Dad

S D G
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What cannot be said above all must not be silenced but written.

– Jacques Derrida, *Points…*

If a gift is in danger of being annulled in the act of acknowledgment, that is, if it is essentially unspeakable, one might be tempted to pass it over in silence. However, if maintaining a gift as gift is at all possible, it is through writing. The following lines, therefore, constitute a certain form of naïve bravery, for in them, I wish to express my sincere gratitude without compromising my indebtedness – not in a single act of acknowledgment, but in singular moments of acknowledging. What holds them together is, essentially, hope.

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

EPISTEMOLOGICAL DUALISMS: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF PRESENCE IN GERMAN PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY HISTORY SINCE 1770

By

Florian Tatschner

May 2013

Chair: Franz Futterknecht
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In the 21st century, the humanities find themselves in an increasingly more difficult position concerning their academic legitimacy. In his work *Production of Presence*, the literary scholar Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht identifies the hegemony of the hermeneutic paradigm as the problem that keeps the human sciences from being able to address cultural phenomena, and particularly literary texts, in a significant way. Therefore, locating the origin of these limitations in the Cartesian subject/object split, he calls for the development of a post-metaphysical mode of relating the world, which he believes can function as the basis for a new epistemology. He overlooks, however, that right from the beginning thinkers criticized Enlightenment’s tendency to limit understanding to the confines of *Geist*

Thus, situating Gumbrecht within a critical philosophical tradition, which he himself ignores, this M.A. thesis argues that his ideas were, in fact, already beginning to form in the late 18th century in German thought and literature, and remained present, albeit in different forms, until today. Employing Gumbrecht’s thought as a blueprint, this M.A. thesis will analyze selected theoretical and literary works by Friedrich Schlegel and
Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Thomas Mann, as well as Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan, to trace out the affinities of Gumbrecht’s ideas with these thinkers and authors (but also the points of divergence), in order to outline an intellectual trajectory in German thought since 1770. Eventually, my work will reveal that Gumbrecht’s intellectual predecessors were to some extent more radical in their critique of Western metaphysics, that his thought reproduces a philosophy he wants to overcome, and that a new epistemology must, therefore, eventually depart from his concepts.
Faustian frustration has been the driving catalyst of Western thought since time immemorial. The pursuit of the quest for the discovery of what holds the world together at its core has brought forth ever more theories, paradigms, and bolder claims in every academic discipline. However, particularly in the humanities, the strive for absolute knowledge itself soon constituted the problem. Due to the nature of their subject matter, which, through its inherent contingency, notoriously withdraws from rational appropriation, the humanities became more skeptical than other sciences about the limits of knowledge, and declared the search for transcendental insight as vain. The thing itself remains inaccessible within the *conditio humana*, was the conclusion: the only possibility to approach the world is interpretation.

This epistemological framework shaped the further development of the human sciences. In the twentieth century – especially in the aftermath of 1968 – with the impact of structuralism and, almost simultaneously, post-structuralism, this resulted in a plethora of more or less distinct theories, producing a sheer endless amount of
interpretative discourse. This internal heterogeneity, once again, raised the question of the academic legitimacy of the humanities. At the onset of the twenty-first century, they are thus facing a state of crisis.

Within this difficult status quo, several scholars are attempting to bring about a rejuvenation of the endangered field, among them the German-born Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. In his work *Production of Presence*, the Stanford literary scholar identifies Western epistemology itself as the straightjacket imposing crippling restrictions on the potential of the human sciences. He particularly “seeks to make a pledge against the tendency in contemporary culture to abandon and even forget the possibility of a presence-based relationship to the world. More specifically: to make a pledge against the systematic bracketing of presence, and against the uncontested centrality of interpretation” (xivf.) within Western metaphysics’ exclusive favoring of signification. By the term presence, he means a spatio-sensual approach to phenomena (c.f. 17) beyond what meaning is able to convey, as he puts it in the subtitle of his book. Gumbrecht’s ultimate (and far-reaching) goal is the revision and eventual “reconfiguration of some of the conditions for knowledge production within the humanities” (2). Questioning the hegemony of what he calls the hermeneutic paradigm, he suggests that one should rather embrace “an oscillation . . . between ‘presence effects’ and ‘meaning effects’” (ibid), from which might ensue the re-invigoration of the field, the reconnection to (text-) phenomena that are, as of now, out of their reach (c.f. 1), and thus lead the way out of the crisis.

In order to illustrate that his notion of presence, in fact, neither “adhere[s] to the European tradition of ‘hermeneutics’ (on the contrary!),” nor constitutes “an exercise in
‘deconstruction,’” and is situated at “an even larger distance from ‘cultural studies’ or (God forbid!) ‘Marxism’” (xv), Gumbrecht provides a short history of Western metaphysics, which, according to him, culminates in the sole predominance of interpretation in the humanities. He maps a development of changing forms of self-reference, which eventually results in human beings seeing themselves as eccentric to the world. Interpretation increasingly “begins to be understood as an active production of knowledge” (26), and thus brings forth the – by now internalized – Western metaphysical worldview as differentiating between subject and object.

For Gumbrecht, this process sets in during the time of the Renaissance. He identifies the reformation, in particular, as an important milestone in Western thought. Protestants redefined the Catholic Eucharist, that is, “the presence of Christ’s body and blood,” as representation, and thus turned it “into an evocation of Christ’s body and blood as ‘meanings’” (29). This, and similar changes – for instance in European theater, where the more and more dominant French model also favors the semiotic figure over the phenomenological body – reduced substance, or the materiality of the signifier, to a role of secondary relevance (c.f. 31ff.). These shifts, according to the literary scholar, culminate in the philosophy of René Descartes and his conceptualization of human existence as split between res cogitans, the world of (and within) the mind, and res extensae, the body and all the things of the world (outside the mind): “the adjective ‘Cartesian’ refer[s] to the endpoint of a century-long development on the level of histoire des mentalités” (33). These epistemic modifications produced what is today the hegemonic Western mode of relating to the world, although subject to certain differences within this configuration.
Descartes’s subject/object paradigm calls for interpretation as the primary mode of analysis. Although its origin is not French but German, the founding of the humanities also falls into this context, for “the institutional independence of the Geisteswissenschaften . . . , following Dilthey’s programmatic proposal, was supposed to be centered around interpretation as its core practice and hermeneutics as its reflexive space” (43). As a product of the Enlightenment or more precisely, Cartesianism, Gumbrecht believes that the humanities have forfeited any non-Cartesian mode of approaching the (things of) the world (c.f. ibid). This has, until recently, remained unquestioned.

Gumbrecht wants to be situated among such thinkers as Jean-Luc Nancy, Friedrich Kittler, Robert Harrison, and especially Martin Heidegger, who all, in their respective manner, critiqued Western metaphysics. However, the literary scholar overlooks that resistance to the enlightened ratio emerged simultaneously with its gaining momentum as an epistemological force. His thought therefore can be said to actually belong to a larger intellectual trajectory. Particularly in Germany, a philosophical strand opposing the subject/object paradigm began to develop shortly after Immanuel Kant, following his inauguration as professor of philosophy in Königsberg in 1770, successfully introduced the Cartesian split in a modified form in the German context. Philosophers and poet-authors alike dealt with and negotiated what can be termed epistemological dualisms between meaning and presence from then onwards.

This thesis will argue that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work, in fact, implicitly draws on the critical philosophical impetus arising (predominantly) in Germany, and thus situates him in the vicinity of a form of thought that can be traced back to the late
eighteenth century. Therefore, by employing the ideas in *Production of Presence* as a frame of reference, three distinct chapters will examine archaeologically to what extent notions of presence existed *avant la lettre* in this philosophical tradition, and also the instances in which these differ from Gumbrecht’s conceptualization.

The analysis begins with a comparison of the literary scholar’s work to Friedrich Schlegel’s *Athenäums*-fragments and Friedrich Hölderlin’s novel *Hyperion*, which opens up the dualism between sensuality and rationality. It focuses on the issues of epistemological harmony, the status of women in Western thought, alternative modes of interpretation in relation to (poetic) language, as well as the role of ancient Greece in modern philosophy.

The next chapter will situate Gumbrecht’s work among Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and Thomas Mann’s novella *Der Tod in Venedig* or, in other words, within the dualism of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Comparing Nietzsche’s struggle between the two divine forces with Gumbrecht’s notion of oscillation will reveal to what extent the latter’s thought does not go far enough in its critique of the Western tradition. Furthermore, Mann’s narration alludes to the dangers of the Dionysian or presence respectively.

The last chapter then compares *Production of Presence* to Martin Heidegger’s *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*. Elaborating on Nietzsche’s criticism in the previous chapter, it will show that Gumbrecht’s work, in fact, through his very insistence on the separation of presence and meaning, remains stuck in a covert Cartesianism that undermines his entire project, while Heidegger reconciles the dualism in the struggle between *Welt* and *Erde*. Addressing questions of hermeneutics, human existence as being-in-world, and
released thinking, as well as unconcealment and hiding in connection to primordial language, the chapter provides a critique of Gumbrecht’s thought. Probing the ethical dimension of Heidegger’s work and Gumbrecht’s notion of presence, a comparison, or rather a dialogue, with Paul Celan’s poem “Todesfuge” will conclude the chapter, thus ending with the supplementing voice of the other in the Western tradition.

Ultimately the analyses will reveal that notions of presence have been a vital constituent of Western (critical) thought. The comparison with these shows that Gumbrecht’s critique of metaphysics, although a valuable point of departure and raising important questions, does not go far enough. Future thinking will have to venture beyond his ideas by taking into account existing notions of presence, particularly by reappraising the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in the face of alterity, and embracing the chiasm of self and other.
A moment arrives when one can no longer feel anything but anger, an absolute anger, against so many discourses, so many texts that have no other care than to make a little more sense, to redo or to perfect delicate works of signification.

– Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Birth to Presence*

A paradoxical *aporia* resides at the core of Enlightenment thought. The critical analysis of the project of rationalization soon shows that it does not function without its other. Thus a central dualism underlying the *conditio humana* becomes apparent. On the one hand, “Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie um,” but on the other “schon der Mythos ist [one would like to add *immer*] Aufklärung” (Horkheimer/Adorno 6). These two interconnected theses constitute what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno call *Die Dialektik der Aufklärung*; not in the Hegelian sense of a teleological process, but in a more ambivalent one. However, instead of referring to this epistemological constellation as a dialectics at all, it may actually be suitable to maintain the aporetic tension between the two forces as a necessary dualism, and thereby avoid any sort of value judgment altogether. Horkheimer and Adorno’s ideas are, of course, not the earliest criticism of Enlightenment in Germany.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century intellectuals already began to reply to the specifically German brand of rational thought, especially its modifications through the work of Immanuel Kant, and provided the foundation for the further unfolding of the dualism. Representative of these, this chapter will discuss the theoretical works of Friedrich Schlegel in the so-called *Athenäum* journal fragments.
(1796-1801) as well as Friedrich Hölderlin’s epistolary novel *Hyperion* (1797/99) as comments on Enlightenment concepts in relation to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s *Production of Presence*, and in particular the conflict between presence and interpretation. Schlegel and Hölderlin, both in their respective ways, suggest a critique that bears striking similarities to Gumbrecht’s questioning of Western metaphysics, and to some extent even goes a step further.

Heterogeneity defined both the political as well as the philosophical constellation in the German empire at the turn of the century. In *Production of Presence*, Gumbrecht argues that European thinking and the human mode of relating to the world changed drastically with the onset of (at first French) Enlightenment rationality in the seventeenth century. To him, the philosophy of René Descartes, “who for the first time made the ontology of human existence, as *res cogitans*, explicitly and exclusively depend on the ability to think and who, as a consequence, subordinated not only the human body but all the things of the world as *res extensae* to the mind” (33), constitutes an epistemic break. It signifies a radical shift of Western epistemology to the detriment of phenomena of presence. In Germany, the Cartesian split returned in a revised form by way of Kantian philosophy. In the first of his three critiques – *Die Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* – Kant had famously established the separation between the numinal and the phenomenal or, in other words, between the thing-in-itsel – according to the philosopher unavailable within human consciousness – and a mental conceptualization of things in the human mind, which resulted in a “thwart[ing] [of] the natural desire for a unity of knowledge “ (Seyhan *Romanticism* 9) that was already compromised by the
separation of the realm into hundreds of fiefdoms with various governmental systems (c.f. Peter 17f.). Thus, just as the empire itself was split, so was German thought.

Kant’s distinction between the numinal and the phenomenal, in fact, became the major problem shaping the philosophical climate of Germany in the late eighteenth century and the first decades of the following. The intellectual situation evolved in no way less chaotic than the political circumstances at the time. As a reaction to the philosopher from Königsberg, scholars developed a plethora of more or less interrelated, and also increasingly dialectic or dualistic, epistemological concepts that attempted to synthesize the Kantian dichotomy in order to “transcend [these] multiple forms of division” (Seyhan Romanticism 13). Despite this general state of disorder, Isaiah Berlin nonetheless emphasizes the importance of this configuration and writes “that [it led to] the largest recent movement to transform the lives and thought of the Western world” (1), namely Romanticism. Although ignored in Gumbrecht’s cursory history of metaphysics, there were in fact thinkers who voiced similar criticisms of rationalism – and especially the rising hermeneutic paradigm¹ – in connection to a more presence-based relationship to the world that highlighted sidelined epistemological problems (c.f. Beutin 204). The following analyses will place Gumbrecht’s work within this historical trajectory.

Two equally important, albeit rather dissimilar, figures in the Romantic undertaking were the writer-philosopher Friedrich Schlegel and the poet Friedrich Hölderlin. The latter grew up in the religious context of Swabian pietism (c.f. Martens Hölderlin 34f.),

¹ It has to be kept in mind that the hermeneutic paradigm was not fully established until the late 19th century. Similar tendencies, however, had been present in German thought ever since Luther’s translation of the Bible, and paved the way for the increasing hegemony of interpretation.
and, after the early death of his father, maintained an affectionate and respectful relationship to his mother. Quite contrary, born in the northern Hannover, Friedrich Schlegel was a difficult child. Often disobedient and also frequently sick, he became too big a burden for the large family and they eventually had to send him off to live with an uncle, who was a protestant preacher (c.f. Peter 20f.). Their respective childhoods shaped the two intellectuals tremendously, as is reflected in their writings. Despite different upbringings, their work draws on the same critical spirit and therefore their texts share striking similarities. Furthermore, they also prefigure thought patterns forming the basis of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s thinking. The paper will therefore proceed with an analysis of first Schlegel’s and then Hölderlin’s work according to its convergence with and deviation from Gumbrecht’s concept of presence.

Given the historical context, it might come as no surprise that Friedrich Schlegel’s thinking is founded upon the pursuit of epistemological harmony. Thus, although he acknowledges and avidly defends the achievements of Kant (c.f. Schlegel 83), in his own writings, Schlegel offers a supplementing critique of the great predecessor that ironically introduces a type of thinking that Kant had despised (c.f. Berlin 68). Instead of insisting on the absolute separation of the numinal and the phenomenal, subject and object, or the particular and the general, the Romantic thinker argues for a synthesis in what he calls a “schöne Mitte” (98). He points out, however, that in order to head towards this third space, an exclusive focus on reason is insufficient (c.f. 116). Schlegel emphasizes alternative modes of relating to the world, which must function as a supplement to the powers of the mind: “die eigentliche Lebenskraft der innern Schönheit
und Vollendung ist das Gemüt” (119). By employing the ambiguous German word *Gemüt*, meaning both soul as well as feeling, Schlegel re-introduces an apparatus into the epistemological horizon, which, as Gumbrechts writes, provides “the disposition with which we should open ourselves” in order to get a glimpse at the “existential space” (116) of the non-meaning related phenomena of the numinal that cannot be grasped within the ratio-hermeneutic paradigm. Schlegel and Gumbrecht hence share a conviction of the importance of retrieving sidelined means of approaching the world.

Their respective conceptualizations of how the epistemological strands are supposed to interact, however, are slightly different. While both thinkers imagine this relationship as a dynamic process, Schlegel does not describe it as an “oscillation” (2), as Gumbrecht would have it, but rather as a “free playing and 'disinterested' state of order” (Lange 291) of an unstable unity. Gumbrecht’s oscillating forces of presence and interpretation are in Schlegel always already reciprocally permeating, inseparable, and even indistinguishable. Hence – in a deconstructive move *avant la lettre* – Schlegel suggests that Western thinking must become more cyclical (c.f. 81) – entering into the “unendlichen Spiele der Welt” (198) – in order to (perpetually) draw closer (c.f. 167) to a harmonious unity of knowledge, or an instance of presence. Therefore, Schlegel maintains Gumbrecht’s notion of a dynamism of unconcealment and hiding, albeit in a more radical manner. To him, the original (pure presence) is withdrawing *ad infinitum* (c.f. 172) and always subject to “eternal striving” and “constant longing” (Beiser 128). However, it is through this very movement of concealment that a sense of presence is always absently present. Schlegel thus offers a more deconstructive notion of presence,

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2 The idea of beauty and perfection here always refers to the harmonic union of seeming opposites.
which foreshadows the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, to whose philosophy Gumbrecht refers explicitly, and which will be the focus of chapter four.

The changing role and status of women, an aspect merely implied in Gumbrecht’s work, plays a major role in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century philosophical discourse, and indeed, carries relevance for the whole endeavor of criticizing Western epistemology, in connection to the strive for harmony. Friedrich Schlegel writes that “[e]in blühendes Mädchen ist das reizendste Symbol von reinem guten Willen” (79). While the exact meaning of this sentence remains obscure within the context of the Athenäum-fragments, at first glance it seems plausible that it bears certain sexist undertones. This would put Schlegel in direct relation to Gumbrecht, who only mentions the other sex once, namely as one example of the perception of presence in what he – poorly disguising objectifying lust – euphemistically describes as “that moment of admiration . . . that gets a hold of [Gumbrecht] when [he sees] the beautiful body of a young woman” (97). In the latter’s work this constitutes the full extent of a treatment of gender in relation to presence. Gumbrecht does not consider the possibility that the Cartesian split between subject and object might entail the re-affirmation of the hierarchically structured male/female dichotomy, including its connotations of activity and passivity.

In Friedrich Schlegel’s thought, a more ambiguous rendering of the role of women unfolds. His highly eroticized novel Lucinde and its celebration of the wonders of the female body – most probably influenced by the then contemporary French materialism and its indulgence in orgiastic ecstasy – seem to confirm the thinker’s chauvinistic attitude. However, Schlegel does not stop there, for his strive for
epistemological unity “also inflects development towards social and cultural wholeness by insisting on gender, and the sexual component in the emergence of a complete humanity” (Phelan 42). The enthusiastic embrace of corporal love hence merely makes up one aspect of the quest for homogeneity. For the Romantic thinker, the presence of a woman’s body does not outline the entire scope of her role in the questioning of Enlightenment thought. Elsewhere, Schlegel ridicules Schiller’s cult of domesticity when it comes to the status of the female sex, as Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert remarks in a footnote (c.f. 181), and furthermore claims that women are the only interesting and inspiring human beings still fruitfully contributing to early 19th century discourse (c.f. Beutin 210). Even if, as Ricarda Schmidt writes, “many patriarchal structures . . . prevailed on a psychological and social level,” she also admits that there were “some remarkable changes to gender roles” (28) underway in early Romantic circles in Germany. Friedrich Schlegel obviously realized that the criticism of the European ratio must include a re-evaluation of gender politics and therefore – despite his own ideal of unity – initiated another strand of the unfolding epistemological dualism, which Gumbrecht ignores.

The absence of the discussion of gender in Gumbrecht’s concept of presence is problematic. Devoid of any specific gender dimensions, his thought is in danger of implicitly re-introducing hierarchical binary thinking, and thereby presents itself as grossly anachronistic, all the while insisting on the notion of providing the potential of a post-metaphysical mode of relating to the world. Due to this lack, Grumbrecht (maybe unconsciously) calls for uncritically reinstating traditional gender roles and phallogocentric thinking, which is, however, counterproductive to his epistemological
project. An interviewer for a film once asked Jacques Derrida which philosopher he would choose as a father were he free to decide. After a short pause, he declared that it would have to be a female thinker (c.f. Derrida), and hence alluded to the fact that twenty-first century philosophy has to take into account gender roles and its impact on Western thought. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s admiration of the female body – in his work uncritically placed within the problematic context of traditionally masculine domains such as football – seems to disregard this prerequisite. As a consequence, if Gumbrecht’s concept is supposed to aim for the sublation of the Carestian subject/object paradigm, instead of a return to patriarchal materialism, then it requires a supplement in the form of a gender sensitive reflection of presence.

As a result of the integration of sidelined epistemological strands, the Romantic notion of harmony also calls for a renewal of literary criticism that is equipped to address disregarded aspects of literary texts. Like Gumbrecht, Friedrich Schlegel positions himself critically towards interpretation when he writes: “Nicht selten ist das Auslegen ein Einlegen des Erwünschten oder des Zweckmäßigen, und viele Ableitungen sind eigentlich Ausleitungen” (79). Instead of remaining within a strictly ratio-hermeneutic horizon, he aims for a form of criticism that maintains the striving for unity, and thus includes Gemüt as a mode of approaching texts that is not only related to meaning, and thus capable of tracing out the magical and material qualities of literature (c.f. 106). However, once again differing from Gumbrecht, Schlegel does not differentiate between a specifically hermeneutic interpretation and a presence-based

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3 Gumbrecht writes about a “moment of admiration” that overcomes him, “when [he sees] the beautiful body of a young woman standing next to [him]” that he sees as similar to “the joy [he feels] when the quarterback of [his] favorite college team in American football . . . stretches out his perfectly sculpted arms to celebrate a touchdown pass” (97).
one, but attempts to fuse these contradictory ways of relating to literary texts. Insisting on the “non-closure in rational understanding” (McCarthy 107), he sees both aspects as part of a dynamic organic union. Consequently, Schlegel’s ideas to some extent seem to signify a return to Renaissance thought, which – according to Michel Foucault – consists “of an unstable mixture of rational knowledge, notions derived from magical practices, and a whole cultural heritage” (35). Therefore – although differing in relation to the actual realization of their integration – Schlegel shares with Gumbrecht a certain longing for a return to pre-Enlightenment forms of knowledge concerning literary texts.

The purpose of the new criticism, however, is the same for both thinkers. Friedrich Schlegel’s holistic “divinatoriumische Kritik” (91) is necessary in order to address his specific notion of the literary text as an interweaving of spirit and formed matter, as he describes in his essay “Gespräch über die Poesie” (c.f. 171). Gumbrecht also stresses the substantial aspects of language or, more specifically, the “Materialität des Signifikanten” (Mersch 25), which contains “eine nicht zu tilgende Präsenz” (27; original emphases) that shows itself. Both thinkers ascribe mystical or magical qualities to literature, inherent in its very materiality, that cannot be perceived within the limitations of Western metaphysics and thus require an alternative mode of analysis.

Gumbrecht still believes that this new sort of criticism cannot be brought to full fruition, “as we are not able yet (for sheer lack of appropriate concepts) to enter an intellectual world of postmetaphysical epistemology” (91). Unlike Friedrich Schlegel, he does not consider the possibility that the first step towards this new horizon might be a renewed usage of language. Gumbrecht contradicts himself: first he bases his concepts on the materialities of communication, but then declares that presence cannot be
grasped, least of all through language. This is certainly true for a certain type of discourse, as Isaiah Berlin points out: “Whatever description I give always opens the doors to something further, something even darker, perhaps, but certainly something which is in principle incapable of being reduced to precise, clear, verifiable, objective prose” (103). Seeing the ratio-hermeneutic terminology and manner of language lacking in this way, as expressed in “Gespräch über die Poesie” (c.f. 168), Schlegel calls for a “materiale, enthusiastische Rhetorik” (94) that does not try to uphold the binary split between interpretation and presence, but integrates the two dimensions in mutual dependency and hence willingly embraces the irrational darkness. He therefore certainly agrees that the critical discourse of interpretation cannot capture the “[i]ncomprehensibility” (Leventhal 300) of literary writing. In contrast to Gumbrecht, however, Schlegel thinks through the implications of the materiality of the signifier as a quasi-mystical force and concludes that “so läßt sich auch eigentlich nicht reden von der Poesie als nur in Poesie” (166). The language of the renewed hermeneutics is thus a specifically poetic one, which denies the very possibility of a fixed methodology or conceptualization in favor of a postmetaphysical open.

Schlegel takes this one step further when he claims that philosophy and poetry are in fact deeply related and intertwined (c.f. Millán-Zaibert 2). Scholars like Howard Hugo are mistaken in arguing that Schlegel insists on the “identity of Poesie with metaphysics” (222), for poetry, according to the Romantic philosopher, always has a distinctly physical materiality and as a consequence “belongs to the region of the numinal” (ibid), which cannot be accessed through ratio-metaphysical thought. This, furthermore, implies that Schlegel modifies Kant’s categories and interweaves them. He
does not hold that the numinal is “the locus of pure Idea” (ibid), as Hugo argues, but combines it with the phenomenal, thus producing the paradoxical notion of a phenomenally numinal (or vice versa), which one can only be perceived through a combination of ratio and Gemüt or, philosophy and poetry. Friedrich Schlegel’s ideas of this philosophico-poetic thinking thereby once again prefigure later philosophical developments, especially the work of Martin Heidegger. Nevertheless, failing to realize the radical implications of taking into account the substantial aspects of language, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht is unable to think the aporetic fusion of presence and interpretation and thus ironically remains stuck within a distinctly metaphysical binary opposition.

For both Gumbrecht and Schlegel, their own historico-cultural context does not offer a fertile ground for orientation concerning the envisioned “epistemological openness” (McCarthy 107). Gumbrecht writes that “the one strategy that can help us make progress here is the re-course to pre- or nonmetaphysical cultures and discourses of the past” (78). Schlegel seems to agree, as do most Romantic thinkers, and thus the two thinkers share a retrospective outlook. But they differ also in regard to their preferred model cultures. While Gumbrecht works with the Idealtypen-dichotomy between “presence cultures” and “meaning cultures” (79), and thereby once again confirms his indebtedness to binary Western thought, Friedrich Schlegel turns to ancient Greece, where he believes to find the world in celestial harmony (c.f. 173). Gumbrecht’s chosen examples are Native American tribes and pre-Reformation Catholicism, where he sees the presence-side of his distinction to be dominant. Schlegel’s philhellenism, on the other hand, pursues the quest for unity.4

4 The relationship with the other in German thought since the early nineteenth century becomes increasingly problematic, for, as Carl Niekerk confirms when he describes Romanticisms attitude
Although he is aware that modern culture cannot hope for a re-attainment of the ideal conditions of the golden age of the Greeks (c.f. Hugo 224), Schlegel still argues that a similar experience can be achieved, which evokes a sense of

\[ \text{ein erstes Ursprüngliches und Unnachahmliches, was schlechthin unauflöslich ist, was nach allen Umbildungen noch die Natur und Kraft durchschimmern läßt, wo der naive Tiefsinn den Schein des Verkehrten und Verrückten oder des Einfältigen und Dummen durschimmern läßt. (195)} \]

This, however, requires a certain mode or system (although open-ended) of perception. He finds this realized in mythology, which is still to some extent accessible, at least in its principles. As a consequence, Schlegel claims that “[i]f humanity were ever to reexperience the political and aesthetic harmony that the Greeks had enjoyed, a new center (\textit{Mittelpunkt}\textsuperscript{5}), that is, a new mythology, will have to be found” (Williamson 58; original emphasis). According to Schlegel, only through this can one hope to get a glimpse at the original powers of the earth (c.f. McCarthy 111) manifesting themselves in literature, albeit in a mysteriously uncanny and spectral manner (c.f. Schlegel 191 & 201), defying the clutches of rationality and impossible to grasp meaningfully (c.f. 195).

Mythology hence has the potential to constitute a new mindset or, more precisely, an epistemological order that does not rely on reason alone, but integrates the forces of \textit{Gemüt} in a dynamic union. Friedrich Schlegel confirms Berlin’s explication that “[m]yths were ways in which human beings expressed their sense of the ineffable, inexpressible mysteries of nature” (49), when he writes that what normally escapes consciousness towards otherness as paradoxically torn between xenophilia and xenophobia (c.f 156). By comparing Gumbrecht’s work to Heidegger’s thought and Celan’s poetry, chapter four will discuss this problem in more detail. However, also already in Thomas Mann’s \textit{Der Tod in Venedig}, a certain ambiguity underlies the relationship with the other.

\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Mittelpunkt} here needs to be taken in the sense of a middling space of negotiation.
altogether “ist hier dennoch *sinnlich geistig* zu schauen” (194; my emphasis). Through mythology, Schlegel hopes to draw near to what he calls a mystical science of wholeness (c.f. 199). This whole, is not to be mistaken for a fixed and homogeneous system, but a highly dynamic and paradoxical harmony “not constrained by the necessities of temporal order, consistency or causality” (Bullock 457), and therefore ultimately contrary to Western metaphysics in Gumbrecht’s sense. The literary scholar, however, seems to have fallen prey – as so many others before him – to exactly this misconception. As a result, he develops his concepts on an erroneous dichotomy. In this misunderstood form, Schlegel’s thought – and Romantic philosophy in general – has ironically brought forth the distinction between the now supposedly mutually exclusive realms of presence and interpretation, and thus (re-)initiated the dialectical dualism it sought to overcome.

Friedrich Hölderlin, one of the most significant poets of the German language, was another major figure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century German intellectual environment, whose work still figures prominently in contemporary literary criticism. Despite his classification as a so-called special case negotiating between different movements and discourses (c.f. Beutin 188) and especially his only novel *Hyperion* mirrors Friedrich Schlegel’s epistemological conceptualizations to a significant degree, as also other scholars confirm (c.f. Ryan 196), and thus serves as the next cornerstone in tracing Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s notion of presence through German thought.
The most significant overlap between Hölderlin and Schlegel is the principle of unity. Inspired by Heraclitus’s word of the ἑν διαφερον ἑαυτῳ, which denotes “die ursprüngliche Einheit von Gott und Mensch, von Mensch und Natur” that unfolds and becomes perceptible “erst durch ihre Entgegensetzung, in der aus sich herausstellenden Unterscheidung ihrer Elemente” (Martens Das Eine 188), the longing for homogeneity also guides the narrative of Hyperion. Already the preface to the novel testifies to this, where Hölderlin writes “[w]er blos an meiner Pflanze riecht, kennt sie nicht, und wer sie pflükt, um daran zu lernen, kennt sie auch nicht” (7). Through this metaphor, he describes his text as an organic structure, and due to his specific interpretation of aesthetics, the poet values literary language as a means of opening up a “‘transrationalen’ Raum” (Martens Hölderlin 100) of perception beyond the limits of meaning.

Anknüpfend an die ursprüngliche Bedeutung des griechischen Wortes Aisthesis als (sinnlicher) Anschauung verfügt das Kunstwerk – und so auch die Dichtung – über die Möglichkeit, das, was der bloßen Verstandesmäßigkeit, dem Bewußtsein, nicht mehr greifbar sein kann, zur Darstellung zu bringen. (69)

The analysis of Hyperion, therefore, requires both Schlegel’s sensuous Gemüt as well as rational interpretation. Hölderlin deems the individual approaches in isolation deficient. It is the task of the reader to negotiate the different epistemological strands. More so than Schlegel, Hölderlin emphasizes the struggle governing their relationship, which is never fully resolved (c.f. 76). He thus seems to problematize Schlegel’s ideal harmony, prefiguring Nietzsche’s thought, and apparently drawing closer to Gumbrecht’s notion of oscillation.

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6 This can roughly be translated as “the one which is differing within itself.”
On the structural level, Gumbrecht’s image of oscillation, in fact, illustrates the principle of the novel quite adequately. Hyperion himself also confirms this when he exclaims that “[b]estehet ja das Leben der Welt im Wechsel des Entfaltens und Verschließen, in Ausflug und in Rückkehr zu sich selbst” (50f.). As a consequence of this notion, the protagonist has to go through different existentially relevant episodes forming a journey that reflects the ongoing movement of separate epistemological categories. The persons he encounters in certain circumstances function as impersonations of these (at first glance seemingly) distinct modes of relating to the world: while Alabanda represents rationality and appropriating interpretation, Diotima stands for sensuality or presence (c.f. Ryan 181). These characters themselves, however, are not stable entities, but undergo specific changes as well. Thereby Hölderlin maintains the idea of a dynamic, albeit agonistic, union throughout the novel.

The setting of *Hyperion* reflects this struggle as well. The action takes place in eighteenth century Greece. Hölderlin thus juxtaposes Schlegel’s notion of a new mythology with the historical context of the 1700s, highlighting the tension between different ways of world appropriation or the “Zustand der Zerfallenheit des Menschen in der Welt” (Hölscher 14): the traces of ancient (mythological) society clash with the rise of modern (rational) culture. The insistence on this conflict leads M.B. Benn to reject earlier scholars, who viewed Hölderlin merely as an esoteric imitator of classical authors. He suggests that the poet does not aim for a return to antiquity (or any other sort of presence-oriented culture), but rather for a renaissance of their mythological worldview (c.f. 500). Gunter Martens summarizes the employment of Greece in *Hyperion* as follows.
Nicht das Wiedererwecken der Antike, nicht die Nachahmung ihrer geistigen Errungenschaften war das Ziel seiner [Hölderlin’s] Auseinandersetzung mit dem Altertum, sondern die Hoffnung und Erwartung, daß aus der spannungsreichen Beziehung von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart Impulse für die Veränderung einer als unbefriedigend erkannten Jetztzeit hervorgehen könnten. (Hölderlin 53)

As the narration unfolds, this ambivalence and the hope for an epistemic break become increasingly apparent.

Nevertheless, ancient Greece remains the ideal presence culture in Hyperion, to employ Gumbrecht’s terminology. It represents the quintessential space of ideal harmony between rationality and sensuality. In a first epistemological episode, Hyperion’s teacher introduces the protagonist to this balance

Bald führte mich Adamas in die Heroenwelt des Plutarch, bald in das Zauberland der griechischen Götter mich ein, bald ordnet und beruhigt er mit Zahl und Maas das jugendliche Treiben, bald stieg er auf die Berge mit mir; des Tags, um die Blumen der Heide und des Walds und die milden Moose des Felsen, des Nachts, um über uns die heiligen Sterne zu schauen, und nach menschlicher Weise zu verstehen. (20)

The old teacher interweaves different epistemological strands and thus the athletic materiality of the heroic body acts in unison with the spirit of the Gods and the human mind. A sense for corporality as well as rational consciousness both hold vital positions in this worldview of the ancients or, in the words of Martin Heidegger: “Ihr Blick ist wie jeder echte Blick geistig und leuchtet im Körperhaften” (Hölderlin 161). In Hyperion, this reciprocal relationship temporarily reveals true being, showing that, according to this reading, Hölderlin’s novel ultimately puts Gumbrecht’s notion of oscillation into question, for it is this very movement of different epistemological categories that brings forth a moment similar to presence, while Gumbrecht writes about an oscillation
between presence and meaning as if the two were clearly distinguishable. The reciprocality of *Hyperion* needs to be kept in mind throughout the rest of the analysis, because this ambiguous ratio-mythological way of interacting with the world functions as the protagonist's guiding principle to discover being.

Ideal Greece, however, is the space of Hyperion's childhood, and constitutes the phase of life where human beings still live in complete harmony. The protagonist once muses about the loss of his youth: "Da ich noch ein stilles Kind war und von dem allem, was uns umgibt, nichts wusste, war ich da nicht mehr, als jezt, nach all den Mühen des Herzens und all dem Sinnen und Ringen?" (15). Childlike innocence and purity represent the preferable constitution of human existence in the novel. This requires some clarification, which can be provided by another reference to Heidegger. In his interpretations of Hölderlin's poetry, he writes that


Although it is certainly true that the German poet was under the influence of the general anti-Enlightenment exhaltation of childhood of his historical context, this explanation does away with the criticism that the poet uncritically aims for a retreat into infantilism. It goes without saying that he is well aware that such a return is just as impossible as it is unnecessary. However, it appears justified to argue that Schlegel's epistemological apparatus of the *Gemüt* is to Hölderlin most active during the first years of human existence. Therefore, he lets his protagonist lecture that a child must not enter school

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7 This is connected to his concept of interpretation as being limited to effects of meaning, for the split between interpretation and presence requires a concept that can mask this binary opposition.
before having developed the capacity of Gemüt to the fullest “damit das Bild der Kindheit ihm die Rückkehr zeige aus der Schule zu vollendeter Natur” (105). In bemoaning the loss of his childhood, Hyperion acts upon this educational impulse. His regrets of having undergone a formal education do not signify an attitude of resignation in wishing to become a child again. Through praise of the image of youth, he attempts to evoke the sensory potential of Gemüt, this attunement to the world or “Herzinningkeit” (65), as Guarda puts it. Childhood in the narrative thus functions as a magical lantern (c.f. Guarda 66) enabling the protagonist to continue, paradoxically through attaining a retroactive outlook.

This attitude of youthful sensuality also guides the illustrations of nature in Hyperion. As implied above, Hölderlin’s representation of Greek nature – seen through Hyperion’s childlike eyes – emphasizes its ideal harmony that is still present (in the shadows of ancient ruins) if one is willing or capable of perceiving it. Passages, such as the following, appear frequently throughout the text:

Ich hatt’ am Fusse des Bergs übernachtet in einer freundlichen Hütte, unter Myrthen, unter Düften des Ladanstrauchs, wo in der goldenen Fluth des Pactolus die Schwäne mir zur Seite spielten, wo ein alter Tempel der Cybele aus den Ulmen hervor, wie ein schüchterner Geist, in’s helle Mondlicht blickte. (28)

Through its highly descriptive language, the novel paints the picture of the perfect pastoral with (ancient) Greece as its locus amoenus, depicting flora and fauna as living in a peaceful relationship with human beings and their creations. Hence, Ulrich Port writes that nature becomes the expression of “höchster metaphysischer Dignität” (89). However, while this is certainly true to some extent, nature’s value here does not limit itself to the world of consciousness. In fact, the passage is strikingly reminiscent of Heidegger’s idea of a mutual reinforcement of world and earth or, in other words, of
human (appropriating) strive and primordial (resistant) force. Furthermore, it allows drawing another connection to Gumbrecht. His own project of criticizing Western epistemology started with an experience of the beauty of nature, namely through witnessing a sunrise at the ocean (c.f. 3). Although Gumbrecht never uses the word nature in this context, by drawing on the very thought of Heidegger, he describes “the characterization of human existence as ‘being-in-the-world,’ that is, as an existence that is always already in a substantial and therefore spatial contact with the things of the world” (66), and thus mirrors the worldview of Hölderlin’s protagonist some extent. However, denying the Cartesian demarcation between subject and object, nature in Hyperion signifies a realm where the two powers of world and earth – again contrary to Gumbrecht’s binary logic – reciprocally enhance each other, in the process temporarily bringing forth being in its total unity.

The next episode in the course of the narrative is Hyperion’s encounter with Alabanda or, in other words, with Western reason. First intrigued by his friend’s rationalism, Hyperion soon realizes its defects. He changes his mind, when he is introduced to Alabanda’s companions. In the face of the invading Turks, they are planning to found the state on the basis of force and coercion instead of taking into account nature’s agency of self-regeneration (c.f. Ryan 181). They are the personified exclusivity of rationality after the extinguishing of any trace of sensuality, bringing forth an attitude where “der Verstand leuchtete über den Trümmern des Gemüths, wie das Auge eines Habichts, der auf zerstörten Pallästen sitzt” (44). This incident illustrates that Hyperion depicts Western metaphysics in isolation as developing a dangerous potential if not held in check by Gemüt. It also shows that Hölderlin’s novel does not
reject reason altogether, but merely its epistemological hegemony. Later, the protagonist explains that “[a]us blosem Verstand ist nie verständiges, aus bloser Vernunft ist nie etwas vernünftiges gekommen,” and in the same breath specifies that “Vernunft ist ohne Geistes- ohne Herzensschönheit, wie ein Treiber den der Herr des Hauses über die Knechte gesetzt hat” (111). Both, reason as well as emotion is necessary. Eric Santner’s reading is therefore misleading when it claims that “we find Hyperion living out the pain and frustration of trying to force his way back into harmonious oneness with nature” (52). It is certainly correct that the protagonist suffers, but not because he attempts to forcefully bring forth true being, but more so due to the very employment of force in this enterprise through Alabanda and his consorts. To Hyperion it is obvious that it requires a disposition of awaiting the regenerative powers of nature to take the first step, or letting things be, as Gumbrecht describes this through his notion of composure. That Hyperion has an impact on Alabanda (and vice versa) becomes apparent in the course of the narrative. The latter eventually dies a martyr at the hands of his former companions because he comes to realize the validity of Hyperion’s view of the world. Hence, while this episode makes clear that the rational interpretation of the world allegedly has its rightful place within the epistemological horizon of the novel, the passage nonetheless shows that Western thought needs a supplement in the form of a sensual spirit or *Gemüt*.

In the arms of a woman the protagonist finds this supplementary force. Hyperion’s distancing from Alabanda results in his relationship with Diotima, whose “Schönheit wird in platonischem Sinn geschildert als irdische Verkörperung des summum bonum, der Einheit alles Lebendigen” (Wackwitz 78), which constitutes the next epistemological
situation. In the novel, a woman represents true being. She is the embodiment of the unutterable (c.f. 70). Diotima’s influence heals Hyperion of the effects of having exposed himself to the absolution of human subjectivity in Alabanda (c.f. Ryan 188) and purges him of the dangers of crude rationality: “Schon lange war unter Diotima’s Einfluss mehr Gleichgewicht in meine Seele gekommen . . . und die zerstreuten schwärmerischen Kräfte waren all’ in Eine goldne Mitte versammelt” (104). The story could end here. However, the woman’s mythic force is ultimately ungraspable (even to herself) and Hyperion’s attempt to express what cannot be expressed foreshadows its withdrawal. By assigning to being the fixed name of beauty, the protagonist turns Diotima’s dynamic angelic wisdom into the static knowledge of books he wishes to criticize (c.f. 78). Through the act of naming, he ironically robs the woman of the dynamism of the ungraspable and as a consequence loses access to epistemological unity. In retrospect, Hyperion eventually realizes that the oneness of being, similar to Gumbrecht’s presence, albeit not yet as radically as the latter, is subject to a certain temporality. It unconceals or “öffnet” (70) itself in an “Augenblick” (76) before withdrawing once again (thus paradoxically maintaining the overall dynamism of the epistemological strive for harmony). Not retreating into mourning of this loss, which would signify a one-sided sensuality of an “irren Herzens” (52) just as defective as pure reason, Hyperion – reinvigorated by Diotima’s influence – dares to venture forth and oppose the hegemony of rational human subjectivity. Without this step, his development would have failed as he notes later: “Du hättest nie das Gleichgewicht der schönen Menschen so rein erkannt, hättest Du es nicht so sehr verloren gehabt” (118). Consequently, the
experience of the transitory opening of true being in Diotima’s beauty – even after its irrecoverable loss – motivates Hyperion to continue his quest for unity.

Through this episode, along the lines of Schlegel, Friedrich Hölderlin introduces the sphere of gender into the epistemological endeavor. It is a woman who functions as the representative of ideal being even though this is “counteracted by references to gender norms which, from a twenty-first-century perspective, threaten to turn pathos into bathos” (28), as Ricarda Schmidt writes. Nonetheless, Diotima’s position – as well as her own development towards unifying wholeness – attests an awareness of the importance of the reflection of femininity in Western thought. It is of course correct that Hyperion asks his lover to stay behind, while he himself is supposed to become the teacher of the nation. Despite of this, Diotima is still the only character in the novel who can lay claim to an own voice besides the protagonist and the “letters she writes to Hyperion before her death give evidence of the reflective depth a female protagonist is endowed with” (ibid). She is thus – unlike other female characters in Hölderlin’s times – not merely the passive other of rationality, but also an important agent in the logic of the narrative; according to Wackwitz even “die ästhetische Lösung einer philosophischen Aporie” (78). Hence, while completely omitted in Gumbrecht’s work, Hölderlin, like Schlegel, seems to lead the way to a renewed discussion of the relevance of female thought in the European tradition.

However, Hyperion’s motivation dies abruptly when he realizes his loss in the face of the brutalities of war, which temporarily threatens his epistemological journey. After the death of his friends Alabanda and Diotima, the protagonist falls into despair, wandering aimlessly until he decides to leave Greece behind and to travel to Germany.
(c.f. Ryan 192). While this description of the further plot development might suggest the failure of Hyperion’s mission, Ryan points out that it is actually vital to its completion: “Die Erfahrung des Fremdseins in Deutschland ist kein bloß zeitbezogenes Anhängsel, sondern erweist sich als Voraussetzung der weiteren Entwicklung” (193). The protagonist’s feeling of incompatibility with his new surroundings sets the stage for the revelation of his true calling.

To Hyperion, the rough northern country is everything he opposes and he describes its people as defective and inhuman:

Es ist ein hartes Wort und dennoch sag’ ichs, weil es Wahrheit ist: ich kann kein Volk mir denken, das zerrißner wäre, wie die Deutschen. Handwerker siehst du, aber keine Menschen, Denker, aber keine Menschen, Priester, aber keine Menschen, Herrn und Knechte, Jungen und gesezte Leute, aber keine Menschen – ist das nicht, wie ein Schlachtfeld, wo Hände und Arme und alle Glieder zerstükkelt untereinander liegen, indessen das vergoßne Lebensblut im Sande zerrinnt? (205)

Thus, to Hyperion the experience of otherness serves as a reminder of his original strive. In the presence of “einer entfremdeten bürgerlichen Aufklärungskultur” (Scharfschwerdt 101), he remembers the sensual forces of Gemüt, which he contrasts with the “qualitativ falsche Mündigkeitserklärung menschlichen Geistes” (103) that leads to an “atomische Vereinzelung” (102) instead of a harmonious union with nature. It is in this episode of alienation that Hyperion develops the feeling of being called to become a poet, for he believes that “wo ein Volk das Schöne liebt, wo es den Genius in seinen Künstlern ehrt, da weht der scheue Sinn, der Eigendünkel schmilzt, und from und groß sind alle Herzen und Helden gebiert die Begeisterung” (208). He is determined to transform his homeland into such a place and returns to Greece with this renewed, specifically poetic, mission.
Hyperion thereby fulfills what he had declared earlier in the course of the narrative. Everything, all forms of knowing, such as philosophy and sensual perception, “läuft am End’ auch wieder in ihr das Unvereinbare in der geheimnisvollen Quelle der Dichtung zusammen” (109). Reason and sensuality, meaning and presence, all run together in the ratio-aesthetic sphere of poetic philosophy or philosophic poetry. At the end of Hölderlin’s novel stands the close relationship between philosophy and poetry – as well as the importance of a renewed language – postulated by Schlegel and later further developed first by Friedrich Nietzsche, and then Martin Heidegger in his conversation with Paul Celan. Furthermore, the narrative traces a certain circularity. Hyperion returns to Greece where he first started. This does not, however, constitute the completion of the epistemological endeavor, but merely its new beginning (c.f. Ryan 195). Instead of a fixed circle, the last pages of the text allude to another turn in an epistemological wheel: “Wie der Zwist der Liebenden, sind die Dissonanzen der Welt. Versöhnung ist mitten im Streit und alles Getrennte findet sich wieder. Es scheiden und kehren im Herzen die Adern und einiges, ewiges, glühendes Leben ist Alles. So dacht’ ich. Nächstens mehr” (213). Hölderlin’s narrative thus concludes with Schlegel’s perpetual hope of something essentially ungraspable that will always remain of the order of avenir or the to-come.

The discussion of Friedrich Schlegel’s Athenäum fragments as well as Friedrich Hölderlin’s Hyperion has shown that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s concept of presence can be traced back to the critique of Enlightenment initiated by so-called German Romanticism. In fact, the analyses revealed that early nineteenth century ideas were more radical in their questioning of the predominance of the Cartesian paradigm.
Contrary to the contemporary literary scholar – writing after the impact of feminist and queer theory – who ignores this topic altogether, both Schlegel and Hölderlin include gender dimensions into their epistemological conceptualizations and ascribe an important role to femininity. Specifically addressing matters of aesthetics and literary writing in particular, the two Romantic thinkers also discuss the importance of the development of a new language through which communicating non-metaphysical truth becomes possible. To Schlegel and Hölderlin this is necessary because they strive for epistemological harmony or unity. In fact, contrary to Gumbrecht, they argue that poetry and philosophy are inherently connected. As a consequence, to them, a separation between “meaning effects” and “presence effects” falls prey to the same Cartesian split that Gumbrecht wishes to criticize. One is not complete without the other and both aspects work together to grant temporarily access to true being, which essentially remains ungraspable. Perfect stable unity – although unconcealed in moments of extreme temporarily – is ultimately deferred *ad infinitum*, leading to a state of perpetual longing. While this sounds very similar to Gumbrecht’s own description of presence, Schlegel and Hölderlin still achieve a greater clarity concerning post-metaphysical thinking as they identify two different modes of perception, namely the mind and what Schlegel calls the *Gemüt*. By concentrating on the effects of perception – presence or meaning – Gumbrecht does not take into account the necessity of a revised concept of interpretation that integrates rationality and sensuality. The comparsion with Schlegel and Hölderlin suggests that Western epistemology has to reside within this dualism.

Hence, the *aporia* mentioned at the beginning also characterizes the conclusion of this chapter. Schlegel and Hölderlin argue that the powers of the mind and the forces of
Gemüt must work together in order to open a space for the unconcealment of being; not in a dialectical thesis-antithesis-synthesis manner, but as a reciprocal dualism, marked by what Jacques Derrida has called singularity, where different epistemological strands blur into each other and become almost indistinguishable, and thus temporarily create a certain harmony or union. Partially undermining Schlegel’s and Hölderlin’s quest for unity, this dualism has become more pronounced in the works of later thinkers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, through the explicit focus on the two modes of perception and their effects, albeit coded in the terminology of Greek mythology. While aiming to bridge the subject/object divide, German Romanticis therefore ironically initiated a dualism they originally sought to overcome.
Romanticism is dead, Heinrich Heine declared boldly in the 1830s, yet this statement proved to be rather premature. While it is certainly true that the Romantic Movement, as it had developed in the late eighteenth century, had eventually lost its momentum in the first half of the nineteenth century, the influence of its ideas still persisted. The reception of romantic literature did not simply stop from one moment to the next. Authors such as Eichendorff and Hoffman were continuing to publish, and the other arts, such as music, had just started to appreciate the potential of Romanticism at the time (c.f. Safranski 233f.). In addition, major thinkers of the mid nineteenth century, for instance Friedrich Nietzsche, continued to follow romantic ideas, even if in a slightly modified form and sometimes subconsciously.

In fact, Nietzsche has often been compared to the writers and thinkers of early Romanticism, such as Novalis, Hölderlin, Schleiermacher, and Friedrich Schlegel (c.f. Norman 501), who are the focus of chapter two. Nietzsche’s earlier works, among them his first book *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), thus remained fuelled by romantic impulses. His interpretation of the Greeks in particular “. . . was influenced by (if not predicated on) the scholarly research and interpretative theories of figures associated with Jena romanticism” (503). Specifically their skeptical attitude toward traditional
Western epistemological conceptions of truth as well as their sophisticated theory of art, which emphasized play, fragmentation, irony, and the idea that philosophy should understand itself more as a form of art than anything else, connects Nietzsche to these early Romantics (c.f. 502). Filtered through Nietzsche, the Romantic legacy continued influencing modern writers such as Thomas Mann, who, in his novella Der Tod in Venedig (1912) enters into a dialogue with Nietzsche’s ideas, especially his distinction between the so-called Dionysian and Apollonian, which bears similarity to Gumbrecht’s concepts. This chapter will therefore – after a brief contextualization of Nietzsche’s attitude in his early period – focus on Die Geburt der Tragödie and Der Tod in Venedig as examples of presence-oriented world conceptualizations around the turn of the century, arguing that both texts function as supplements – in the Derridian sense – to Gumbrecht’s notions of presence and interpretation by pointing out dangers but also offering additional aspects for the characterization his two principles.

Despite all the shared beliefs concerning philosophy and art, due to which Nietzsche has sometimes been counted as being one of the last Romanticists, he strictly distanced himself from the movement and subjected his Die Geburt Tragödie to the most severe criticism for this very affinity in the 1886 preface to his debut publication. There he asks the rhetorical question “– Aber, mein Herr, was in aller Welt ist Romantik, wenn nicht Ihr Buch Romantik ist?” and goes on to condemn his work as “Artisten-Metaphysik,” “Ohren-Verführerei,” “praktischen Nihilismus,” and “verfänglich-rattenfängerisch” (15). He concludes this enumeration of romantic deficits with another question and writes: “ist das nicht das ächte und rechte Romantiker-Bekenntnis von 1830, unter der Maske des Pessimismus von 1850? hinter dem auch schon das übliche
Romantiker-Finale präludirt, – Bruch, Zusammenbruch, Rückkehr und Niedersturz vor einem alten Glauben, vor dem alten Gotte…“ (ibid)? However, this self-critique does not devalue his work completely, nor all forms of Romanticism. In the preface “Nietzsche criticizes the language and conceptual tools employed in the book, . . . not its core insights” (Cox 497). He is also not in favor of “the romantic progressive notion of history” and “the characteristic romantic notion of longing” (Norman 506), which is still present in his work. When he distances himself from Romanticism in the 1830s, he clearly does not have in mind the early propagators, such as Schlegel. The fact that his favorite poet was Hölderlin, who he defended vigorously to his high school teachers (c.f. Safranski 279) and whose Sophocleic language he praised (c.f. Zittel 387), also indicates that Nietzsche is not completely unsympathetic towards certain forms of romantic thinking.¹

The critique of the preface is therefore mainly directed towards later forms of Romanticism and needs to be placed in Nietsche’s specific biographical context at the time. His condemning comments in the preface were likely a direct reaction to his break with his long-time friend Richard Wagner, who’s Romanticism, like that of so many others among him, eventually resulted in his conversion to Christianity. This was unacceptable to Nietzsche, for Wagner thereby turned into a representative of the moralistic order that Die Geburt der Tragödie sought to denounce. However, disregarding his disappointment concerning his friend, “[t]he seeds of the Romantic discontent about philosophical certainty come to full fruition in Nietzsche” (Seyhan

¹ What he does not represent is the German-centric later Romanticism of the Brothers Grimm, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, as well as Joseph Görres. It is exactly their sort of pathos that Nietzsche later condemns in his own work.
Representation 17f.), and his affinity towards the uncanny positions him alongside the earlier Romanticists.

Das Romantische bei den jungen Romantikern und bei Nietzsche ist die Erfahrung des Seins als etwas Ungeheures, das zur lustvollen Selbstauflösung verlockt, die Erfahrung eines Seins jedenfalls, worin es dem zum Bewußtsein erwachsenen Leben nicht geheuer sein kann. (Safranski 293)

This connection is specifically apparent in Die Geburt der Tragödie through his distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which, interestingly enough, also strongly corresponds with Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s presence/meaning opposition. This chapter will thus proceed by analyzing Nietzsche’s early text through the lens of Gumbrecht’s thinking and trace similarities, as well as differences, between the Dionysian as the approximate equivalent of presence and the Apollonian as related to interpretation. After that, it will examine Thomas Mann’s novella Der Tod in Venedig with the same premises as a literary example of the concepts’ impact in the early twentieth century.

Before the actual analysis, however, a short overview of the text is necessary. As the title suggests, in Die Geburt der Tragödie Nietzsche discusses the origins and development of ancient Greek tragedy and its relevance for his contemporary culture. He thinks tragedy is subject to an ongoing struggle between two distinct forces that primarily manifest themselves in the realm of art. Already on the first page of his text he claims “dass die Fortentwicklung der Kunst an die Duplicität des Apollinischen und des Dionysischen gebunden ist: in ähnlicher Weise, wie die Generation von der Zweiheit der Geschlechter, bei fortwährendem Kampfe und nur periodisch eintretender Versöhnung, abhängt” (19). Tragedy is the place for this temporal reconciliation. In order to gain a provisional understanding of the two aspects, Magnus and Higgins offer preliminary
definitions: “The Apollonian principle, in keeping with the characteristics of the sun god Apollo, is the principle of order, static beauty, and clear boundaries. The Dionysian principle, in contrast, is the principle of frenzy, excess, and the collapse of boundaries” (22), which Nietzsche primarily attributes, but does not restrict, to music, due to the sublime “erschütternde Macht des Tones” (Tragödie 27). Dionysian also means grotesque and orgiastic (c.f. 26) as well as ugly and disharmonic (c.f. 146), whereas the Apollonian signifies symmetrical beauty (c.f. 20), calmness as well as contemplation (c.f. 45) and informs “the limiting, delimiting ‘boundary drawing’ . . . ‘rational’ faculty of [the] mind which divides the world up into a plurality of discrete, spatio-temporal individuals” (Young Nietzsche 32). Therefore, “[i]t is the feelings of ‘profound delight’ on one hand and of ‘blissful ecstasy’ on the other that are held respectively to characterize the experience of the Apollonian and the Dionysian art forms” (Schacht 194). At this point, one has to keep in mind that these principles are not exclusively limited to the sphere of art or, more precisely, that Nietzsche believes in an artistic quality of human life, “for it is his contention that human artistic activities are to be regarded as of a piece with . . . more basic life processes” (ibid) from which also the Apollonian and the Dionysian stem. In fact, he describes them as primal drives underlying the human condition.

Having provided and explained these distinctions, Nietzsche then begins tracing the development of Greek tragedy from its emancipation from the mostly Apollonian epic of Homer to its Dionysian peak in the works of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and its eventual corruption through the Socratism of Euripides, who, in an effort to expel the Dionysian completely and found tragedy solely on the Apollonian, eventually falls prey
Die Geburt der Tragödie as a whole – similar to Gumbrecht’s *Production of Presence* – “represents a departure from narrow philological ways and an opening toward a speculative and threatening philosophy” (Porter 1). The oscillation between the two poles of interpretation and presence in Gumbrecht, representing either end of the spectrum respectively, mirrors the dualism of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

Influenced by the same philhellenism as Hölderlin and Schlegel (c.f. Baeumer 300), Nietzsche also draws on pre-Socratic ancient Greece as an example of a presence culture in Gumbrecht’s *Idealtypen* dichotomy. He claims to have found there a different manner of relating to the world, which “is not merely a correct assessment of the empirical world but an insight into the essential nature of a deeper, underlying reality” (Soll 109) that resists appropriation at the hands of human rationality. An important difference between the two thinkers is that Nietzsche, influenced by Buddhism and Schopenhauer’s pessimism, “holds the view that life is essentially characterized by suffering because this suffering is rooted in our true being” (110) and the Dionysian opens up this sublime abyss of being. In comparison, Gumbrecht’s idea of presence appears tamed and nostalgically unthreatening.

Nevertheless, Nietzsche does not take this Dionysian unconcealment, however terrifying and life-threatening, as something negative and to be avoided. On the contrary, he claims that it functions as an antidote to the Apollonian subjection to the individuation of the Schopenhauerian *Wille* or “principii individuationis” (*Tragödie* 22),
which veils the Dionysian “rauschvolle Wirklichkeit” of being into “die Bilderwelt des Traums” (24). This does not mean that the Dionysian is supposed to reign supreme and the Apollonian to be done away with altogether. Rather, these conflicting spheres ideally engage in an even existential struggle. “[B]ut that should not be taken to mean that they are enemies” (9), writes Tanner. More accurately, they enter into a brotherly relationship of mutual reinforcement (c.f. Schüle 188). As a consequence, “Apollonian art . . . acknowledges and does not eliminate from consciousness the terrible in life” (Young 43) but ensures that human beings are not devoured and dissolved in the Dionysian abyss, while the Dionysian prevents the danger of ossification at the hand of Apollonian “clarity” and its “hard edges” (Tanner 10). The dualism thus ideally constitutes a certain harmony.

In Nietzsche, “ideal being” negotiates between Dionysian intoxication and Apollonian dream. Rather than a static Hegelian dialectic of thesis and antithesis resulting in a permanent stable synthesis, the ongoing confrontation of the two forces is only momentarily reconciled in what Gumbrecht calls “conditions of ‘extreme temporality’” (58). This manifests itself “in immer neuen auf einander folgenden Geburten” (Tragödie 35) which reveal “in kurzen Augenblicken das Urwesen selbst” (103) or, in Gumbrecht’s words, bring forth “moments of intensity” (99). Jaggard confirms this when he speaks of a “temporary union of the Dionysian and the Apollonian” (280). Hence, human life, according to Nietzsche, should maintain a dynamic tension between ecstatic intoxication and symbolic artistic expression, similar to the oscillation between presence and interpretation that Gumbrecht calls for.
So far the discussion has remained on a primarily metaphysical level. However, Gumbrecht aims for a departure from Western metaphysics and therefore explicitly stresses the aspect of materiality or substance, which is suppressed in contemporary Western epistemology. To illustrate this, he chooses the Catholic dogma of transubstantiation: “The word ‘present’ does not only, and not even primarily, refer to a temporal order here. It means above all that Christ’s body and Christ’s blood would become tangible as substances in the ‘forms’ of bread and wine” (28). This sense of relating to the world has been increasingly gotten lost, starting with the Reformation and culminating in the Cartesian split between res cogitans and res extensae, which results in a disconnection of human life from presence. Nietzsche, despite the fact that Die Geburt der Tragödie still operates partially on a metaphysical level in order to prepare the departure from it, is also critical of the Western philosophical tradition – indeed, later “[h]e continues to use the term ‘Dionysian’ to name his naturalist and anti-metaphysical ontology and epistemology” (Cox 497). Already in his debut he critiques the Cartesian separation of mind from matter and, by once again referring to the pre-Socratics, argues that “der tragische Chor der Griechen in den Gestalten der Bühne leibhafte Existenzen zu erkennen genötigt ist. Der Okeanidenchor glaubt wirklich den Titan Prometheus vor sich zu sehen und hält sich selbst wie den Gott der Scene” (Tragödie 47). Nietzsche thus continues along the lines of his predecessors Schlegel and Hölderlin.

In this context, Nietzsche’s thinking is obviously similar to that of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. The body of Christ in the Catholic sacrament of the Eucharist in Nietzsche becomes the presentification of the Titans in Greek tragedy. Hereby, although this presence can still only be perceived as the ongoing movement of unconcealment and
withdrawal with no fixed solution, as Gumbrecht would describe it, the subject/object paradigm is eliminated by this very dynamism and oscillation between phenomenality and semiotics. Nietzsche goes further than Gumbrecht by arguing that the transitory experience of presence coincides with a simultaneous de-individualization and paradoxical initiation into the communion of all being as a whole, which reveals “die Wahrheit und die Natur in ihrer höchsten Kraft” (Tragödie 53), more real than reality and thus in a form of “nichttheologische Transzendenz” (Mersch 37): “Wir sind wirklich in kurzen Augenblicken das Urwesen selbst” (103). This results in the substitution of individual subjectivity by a communal unity. Magnus and Higgins sum up this existential movement as follows:

The Apollonian principle conceived of the individual as sufficiently separate from the rest of reality to be able to contemplate it dispassionately. The Dionysian principle, however, presents reality as a tumultuous flux in which individuality is overwhelmed by the dynamics of a living whole. (22)

Gumbrecht does not take into account this sense of wholeness and communion, although he alludes to similar scenarios. Implicit in his description of a football game, where he writes about moments of intensity triggered by the corporality of the players (c.f. 97), is the bodily co-presence of the fellow spectators in the stadium, to employ the terminology of theater studies. However, he pays no heed to the significance of this specific atmosphere. Although it is very much comparable to the orgiastic communality of the Dionysian choir, as Tanner confirms by stating that there is “no qualitative distinction between a football crowd and the audience at a tragedy” (14), Gumbrecht ignores this aspect completely.
It therefore comes as no surprise that the historical significance of the Reformation receives diametrically opposed interpretations in the works of the two thinkers and functions as a point of departure for very different genealogies. Whereas Gumbrecht sees Luther’s teachings and their consequences as the beginning of the extermination of a presence-based relationship with the world, Friedrich Nietzsche takes the Lutheran chorales, although still anchored in a Christian context, as the first reappearance of the Dionysian principle in Western culture, foreshadowing an awakening of non-metaphysical concepts of world-appropriation through German music of the nineteenth century. He describes the chorales as “der erste dionysische Lockruf, der aus dem dichtverwachsenem Gebüsch, im Nahen des Frühlings, hervordringt” (Tragödie 142). This divergence is possible because he once again stresses the community-building aspects of church songs and their potential to put the participants into dispositions of ecstasy, which is absent in Gumbrecht’s work. Nietzsche’s text thus supplements Gumbrecht’s thought in this respect, adds another layer of complexity to the idea of presence, and thus makes it viable for a combination with concepts developed in other disciplines concerned with communal experiences, such as sociology and theater studies.

With regard to the character of interpretation, Nietzsche’s Die Geburt der Tragödie also offers interesting insights relevant to Gumbrecht’s conceptualizations. So far this chapter has argued that, in a balanced unison, the Dionysian and the Apollonian bring forth an insight into deeper levels of being. However, this balanced relationship between the two forces one can only find, according to Nietzsche, in the tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus. As mentioned above, Greek tragedy suffered from the influence of the
rationalistic Socratism of Euripides, who attempted to solely found tragedy on the Apollonian. Through this initiative the character of this principle itself changed into an aesthetic Socratism, which was from now on the new real enemy of the Dionysian

Haben wir demnach so viel erkannt, dass es Euripides überhaupt nicht gelungen ist, das Drama allein auf das Apollinische zu gründen, dass sich vielmehr seine undionysische Tendenz in eine naturalistische und unkünstlerische verirrt hat, so werden wir jetzt dem Wesen des aestheticen Sokratismus schon näher treten dürfen; dessen oberstes Gesetz ungefähr so lautet: ‘alles muss verständig sein, um schön zu sein’; als Parallelsatz zu dem sokratisch ,nur der Wissende ist tugendhaft.’ (Tragödie 79)

Therefore, it is in fact not the Apollonian tendency as such, but its bastardized form, having succumbed to a rationalistic Socratism, that brings forth the exclusivity of the hermeneutic paradigm later on, beginning in 1893 with Wilhelm Dilthey’s purging of the field of and the introduction of “the universality claim of interpretation” (Gumbrecht 2). Avant la lettre Nietzsche calls this un-Dionysian practice a weakness: “Durch eine eigenthümliche Schwäche der modernen Begabung sind wir geneigt, uns das aesthetische Urphänomen zu complicirt und abstract vorzustellen” (Tragödie 54). He adds that this is due to a loss of Apollonian artistry: “Wir reden über Poesie so abstract, weil wir alle schlechte Dichter zu sein pflegen” (ibid). Thus Nietzsche implicitly argues for what Gumbrecht calls “‘getting his hands dirty’” (53) and scorns the “‘Sprachmikroskopiker’” (Wohlfahrt 155) of his age. Instead, he calls for a presentification of ancient texts. Exemplifying Nietzsche’s special relationship with Greek tragedy, Wohlfahrt quotes Joel and writes: “Die Antike war für [ihn] ‘kein Es, sondern ein Du, mit dem er spricht und streitet’” (ibid). Early on, therefore, Nietzsche had to face strong opposition from the side of the conservative academy. He explained “[d]aß man eine Sophokleische Tragödie besser verstehen und an vielen verdorbenen
Stellen vorübergehen, aber doch die Tragödie besser verstehen und erklären kann als der gründlichste Philologe, das wollen die Philologen nicht glauben“ (Werke 333). As it would seem, already at the time of the publication of Die Geburt der Tragödie, the emerging hermeneutic paradigm, although still clad in historicist vestments, held it as given that “to believe in the possibility of referring to the world other than by meaning [is] synonymous with the utmost degree of philosophical naïveté” (Gumbrecht 53), which is supposed to have died with the proclaimed demise of romanticism. Indeed, Nietzsche had to cope with the consequences of his iconoclastic attitude


He remained on this path into an intellectual exile, leaving what he described as the Socratically-tainted “Kriegslager des Apollinischen” (Tragödie 35) behind.

At this point, Nietzsche’s thought also departs from Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who is not willing to leave the shelter of the scholarly stronghold behind. As a result, the radicalism of the literary scholar’s thinking is undermined by an elitist and traditionalist belief in the relative objectivity provided by the academic sphere, which, according to him, enables the development of alternative models of epistemology in the first place. Gumbrecht writes that “if aesthetic experience and historicization impose the distance of the ivory tower upon us, they also oblige us to acknowledge that this very distance opens up the possibility of ‘riskful thinking’” (126). The example of Nietzsche, however, illustrates that the cost of resistance and academic iconoclasm are high, and that that consistent intellectual radicalism might ultimately lead to the expulsion from the
academy as well as the subjection to ridicule. This is something Gumbrecht, as of now, will not accept. By performing a somewhat obdurate and highly dubious intellectual feat, he aims to redeem academic remoteness as the foundation of his thought. He thus fails to see that the scholar’s tower might require tearing down and reconstruction in an altered form. Read with Nietzsche, Gumbrecht’s analogy of an oscillation between interpretation and presence is thus only tenable, if the core practice of interpretation itself, exposed to a Dionysian rejuvenation, is modified and reconstituted as a quasi-pre-Socratic Apollonian form of producing meaning. Otherwise, interpretation and its insights remain illusory (c.f. Nietzsche Tragödie 41). Gumbrecht’s attempt of a concession by insisting on the permeability of the humanities – he writes that the ivory tower “certainly has windows and doors” (127) – remains unconvincing and even hypocritical. Only if he can do away with his academic superiority complex, will his theory come to fruition. Then, however, he might find himself in Nietzsche’s company, thrown out of the tower through the very windows that are supposed to function as a channel of communication with the everyday world, but which must rather be seen as check-valves, preventing the hope of anything or anybody ever returning.

This reading of Nietzsche thus reveals that Gumbrecht’s criticism of the humanities does not go far enough, mainly due to lack of discussing the specific nature of contemporary interpretation, as already indicated in chapter two, and as will become clearer through discussing the thought of Martin Heidegger in chapter three. To conclude this section, one can summarize that Nietzsche’s hope concerning a rejuvenation of Western thought resided in the resurfacing of a tragic sense of life after having been exposed to real being. In his novella Der Tod in Venedig, originally
published in a periodical in 1912, Thomas Mann picks up on this notion and places his protagonist Aschenbach within the struggle of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as the following analysis will reveal.

Thomas Mann, like Friedrich Nietzsche (as well as the authors already discussed), had a special relationship to ancient Greece and even “wished . . . to emulate certain contemporary writers who advocated ‘neo-classicism’” (Robertson 95). However, “Mann was steeped in the thought of Nietzsche, [and his work] also registers the radical shift in the understanding of Greek culture instigated by Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*” (96), which promised to offer alternative modes of thinking for the German *Geist* and reintroduced the duality between the two divine principles. Quite contrary to the guiding assumption underlying the examination, according to Jerry Clegg, when it comes to the analysis of Mann’s text, “[t]he error is to cast its central character . . . as an arena wherein Apollo and Nietzsche’s other god, Dionysus, battle each other. That they do not is precisely Mann’s point” (157). However, while it might certainly be true that Aschenbach is not exactly the locale for the struggle between the two Greek gods in their ideal form, but rather between the re-emerging Dionysian and the bastardized Socratic Apollonian principle, it is misleading to argue that “[h]e has had, throughout his life, nothing to do with either Apollo or Dionysus up to the point Mann’s story begins” (161). In fact, the novella as a whole, with Aschenbach at the center, functions, both formally and in content, as an allegory of the history of tragedy as suggested by Nietzsche’s debut publication, albeit in the context of early twentieth century Germany and with an ambiguous, arguably less optimistic, interpretation of the further course of tragedy’s development. Although Socratic aestheticism has enthralled Apollo, he
remains present in his enforced absence, just as the Dionysian has remained absently present in a “mystischen Tiefe” (*Tragödie* 105), always ready to reclaim its rightful place in the struggle of the divine brothers, as Nietzsche argues. It would thus seem that in contrast to Clegg’s argument, Mann himself interprets the dominance of Socratism not as a fixed condition but as an unstable hegemonic construct in need of continual reproduction and maintenance.

In the second chapter, the novella introduces Aschenbach as a man torn between Nietzsche’s two spheres, who, however, eventually abandons both and becomes a Socratic intellectual. On his father’s side, “[s]eine Vorfahren waren Offiziere, Richter, Verwaltungs-funktionäre gewesen, Männer, die im Dienste des Königs, des Staates ihr straffes, anständig karges Leben geführt hatten” (Mann 19). But on the other side, “rascheres, sinnlicheres Blut war der Familie in der vorigen Generation durch die Mutter des Dichters, Tochter eines böhmischen Kapellmeisters, zugekommen. Von ihr stammten die Merkmale fremder Rasse in seinem Äußeren“ (ibid). Through the father Aschenbach has gained access to the Apollonian principle. Through the mother the protagonist came under the influence of the Eastern otherness of the Dionysian. And at first, just as in Greek tragedy, the two forces seem to be in equilibrium. Only when Aschenbach is slowly being initiated into a Socratic society, do both, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, succumb to an aesthetic Socratism as the following passage suggests

By gaining Socratic honor, Aschenbach loses his artistic balance between the
Apollonian and the Dionysian which results – after years of daily self-discipline with
cold-water showers while others at his age were living passionate lives (c.f. 22) – in his
slow decay and the complete ossification of his oeuvre: “sein Stil entriet in späteren
Jahren der unmittelbaren Kühnheiten, der subtilen und neuen Abschattungen, er
wandelte sich ins Mustergültig-Feststehende, Geschliffen-Herkömmliche, Erhaltende,
Formelle, selbst Formelhafte” (28f.). In other words and in striking reminiscence to
Gumbrecht’s critique of the loss of presence, Aschenbach, “[b]ecause he has directed
his energy solely toward the rational, active side of his creative process, . . . has lost
contact with his emotions, his instincts, his unconscious, with that part of man’s nature
that often lends life meaning” (Vogt 28). The protagonist thus represents the then
current state of Western culture.

It is at this point that the actual storyline of Der Tod in Venedig sets in. In the face
of the dominance of Socratic aestheticism, “die hohe Fluth des Dionysischen”
(Nietzsche Tragödie 64) suddenly breaks in again, seizes Aschenbach, and reawakens
long-lost qualities

eine seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern ward ihm ganz überraschend
bewußt, eine Art schweifender Unruhe, ein jugendlich durstiges Verlangen
in die Fernem ein Gefühl, so lebhaft, so neu oder doch so längst entwöhnt
und verlernt, daß er, die Hände auf dem Rücken und den Blick am Boden,
gefesselt stehen blieb, um die Empfindung auf Wesen und Ziel zu prüfen.
(13)

The Socratic resistance within the protagonist is already alluded to in the last lines
of the above quotation. Immediately afterwards, in an act of crude rationalism,
Aschenbach tries to dismiss these feelings as insignificant: “Es war Reiselust, nichts
weiter” (ibid). However, the Dionysian force is too strong to be suppressed and soon he
is again overcome by “Entsetzen und rätselhaftem Verlangen” (14), which kindles a longing for liberation from the pseudo-Apollonian discipline: “Fluchtdrang war sie, daß er es sich eingestand, diese Sehnsucht ins Ferne und Neue, diese Begierde nach Befreiung, Entbürdung und Vergessen, – der Drang hinweg vom Werke, von der Alltagsstätte eines starren, kalten und leidenschaftlichen Dienstes” (16).

A central weakness of *Die Geburt der Tragödie* is a certain lack of the forms of manifestation of the Dionysian and Apollonian. While Nietzsche describes the “how” – i.e. the modes of their functionality – as intoxication and dream respectively, he fails to properly illustrate the “as what.” Mann’s novella functions as a supplement to these shortcomings of the book in this respect by rendering especially the abstract principle of the Dionysian in concrete forms. Aschenbach’s initial encounter with the chaotic force is triggered by a red-haired stranger’s face, reminiscent of Nietzsche’s description of the Dionysian as “fratzenhaft” (*Tragödie* 26): “seine Lippen schienen zu kurz, sie waren völlig von den Zähnen zurückgezogen, dergestalt, daß diese, bis zum Zahnfleisch bloßgelegt, weiß und lang dazwischen hervorbleckten” (Mann 12). In this Levinasian situation *avant la lettre*, the grimacing face of the other foreshadows Aschenbach’s journey into the Dionysian abyss. According to Picart, “[t]his figure conveys the aging writer away from his native surroundings after the suggestive vision of a decaying swampland, which hints at stirrings of the primitive Dionysian stage” (15) and also at the city of Venice as the protagonist’s final destination.

This is not the only encounter with the personified divine principle in the novella. In the course of the narrative, Dionysus appears embodied in other characters, which guide the main character’s journey: “one may interpret the second ministering figure
(the grimy, goat-bearded ticket-seller), whom Aschenbach encounters during his ride aboard the funeral boat across the Adriatic, hinting at an increasing immersion into the a-moral and a-/irrational Dionysian depths of nature” (ibid), as another manifestation of the Greek god. Picart also identifies the mysterious gondolier, who Aschenbach himself describes as a “sonderbar unbotmäßigen, unheimlich entschlossenen Menschen” (Mann 44), as a third Dionysian figure, which “seems to evoke images of Charon, the surly conveyor of the dead to the underworld” (Picart 16f.) and thus makes the protagonist’s journey to Venice appear as the crossing of the river Styx, prefiguring Aschenbach’s fate. Once again, the description of the gondolier’s out-of-place otherness is striking: “Es war ein Mann von ungefälliger, ja brutaler Physiognomie . . . Seine Gesichtsbildung, sein blonder, lockiger Schnurrbart unter der kurz aufgeworfenen Nase ließen ihn durchaus nicht italienischen Schlages erscheinen” (Mann 43). Furthermore, all these encounters are similar to what Gumbrecht has termed moments of extreme temporality. The figures reveal themselves to Aschenbach before suddenly withdrawing again. At this stage, the uncanny Dionysian has not yet gained dominance over the protagonist but rather, in guerilla fashion, advances in short recurring thrusts as part of an imbalanced game of hide-and-seek that lures the protagonist into the abyss.

The most important character in Aschenbach’s journey deeper into the Dionysian is the young Polish boy Tadzio, who plays an ambiguous role in the narrative. At first, Aschenbach is enchanted by the boy’s beauty which reminds him of “griechische Bildwerke aus edelster Zeit” (50). These statuesque qualities clearly mark Tadzio as belonging to the Apollonian “Kunst des Bildners” (Nietzsche Tragödie 19). At this point already under the influence of Dionysian intoxication, Aschenbach, beginning
to fall in love with the adolescent, also becomes opened anew for the balancing force of Apollonian dreams again or, as Nietzsche expresses it: “das Bild [here of Tadzio], das ihm jetzt seine Einheit mit dem Herzen der Welt zeigt, ist eine Traumscene, die jenen Urwiderspruch und Urschmerz, samt der Urlust des Scheines, versinnlicht” (38). However, Socratic rationalism is not defeated altogether and Jerry Clegg's claim pertaining the “spontaneous, effortless shedding of [Aschenbach’s] Socratic identity” (162) is misleading, for this very Socratism resurfaces repeatedly and fights the onslaught of the Dionysian, which threatens to overthrow Socrates's dominance over Apollo. Thus, after his first encounter Aschenbach believes “daß seine Gedanken und Funde gewissen scheinbar glücklichen Einflüssen des Traumes glichen, die sich bei ernüchtertem Sinn als vollständig schal und untauglich erwiesen” (Mann 54). This shows that whenever the intoxicated protagonist begins to dream, Socratic rationalism attempts to render his insights insignificant.

Tadzio not only brings forth a newly-gained awareness of the lost Apollonian principle in Aschenbach, but also functions as another alter ego of the Dionysian. Picart writes that “the long-suppressed Dionysian element resurges in [Aschenbach], principally through his passionate entrancement with the beauty of Tadzio,” who she describes as “a figure in whom the figures of Eros, Dionysus, Apollo, Hermes, and Hades (Death) blur into each other” (20). In the constellation of Tadzio's character, Dionysus is clearly the dominant force, for although it is mainly his perfect beauty that leads Aschenbach into homosexual desire (as he believes), he also notices “daß Tadzios Zähne nicht erfreulich waren” (Mann 66). Together with the dark musicality of the sound of his name which "mit seinen weichen Mitlauten, seinem gezogenen u-Ruf
am Ende, etwas zugleich süßes und wildes hatte” (64), this alludes to the Dionysian depths within the youth. Tadzio, as the primary source of both Aschenbach’s intoxication and dreams, leads the protagonist to stay in Venice, even as the situation around him escalates. The boy’s Dionysian quality is revealed when Tadzio, in the fifth and final act of the novella, sheds his Apollonian mask and shows himself as the god he had embodied all along, namely the grimacing Dionysus, leading Aschenbach into the existential abyss: “Ihm [Aschenbach] war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche Psychagog dort draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke; als ob er die Hand aus der Hüfte lösend, hinausdeute, voranschwebe ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure” (139). Thus Mann stays true to Nietzsche’s premises and “[i]n der Gesamtwirkung der Tragödie erlangt das Dionysische wieder das Uebergewicht” (Tragödie 134).

Before this catastrophe at the end of the narrative, however, Aschenbach undergoes a thorough Dionysian rejuvenation. Through Tadzio’s influence, confirmed by the coincidental loss of his luggage (c.f. Mann 73), Achenbach forfeits the chance to turn away as he decides to stay in Venice, even when cholera haunts the port-city and claims numerous lives, just to remain in the presence of his object of desire. According to Nietzsche, as the Dionysian increasingly takes control, everyday life is slowly being forgotten and, if perceived at all, is deficient:

So scheidet sich durch diese Kluft der Vergessenheit die Welt der alltäglichen und der dionysischen Wirklichkeit von einander ab. Sobald aber jene alltägliche Wirklichkeit wieder ins Bewusstsein tritt, wird sie mit Ekel als solche empfunden; eine asketische willensverneinende Stimmung ist die Frucht jener Zustände. (Tragödie 50)
This is also true for Mann’s intoxicated protagonist, for “der Gedanke an Heimkehr, an Besonnenheit, Nüchternheit, Mühsal und Meisterschaft, widerte ihn in solchem Maße, daß sein Gesicht zum Ausdruck physischer Übelkeit verzerrte” (124). Aschenbach has missed the decision, which would have led him back towards “heilsamer Ernüchterung” (89) and his Socratic aestheticism seems to be already defeated at this point in the narrative. In fact, rooted in the Dionysian sphere and overcome by a “dunkle Zufriedenheit,” he even embraces his dangerous surroundings: “zugleich füllte sein Herz sich mit Genugtuung über das Abenteuer, in welches die Außenwelt geraten wollte” (100). Not even the spreading disease can unsettle Aschenbach. In fact, the “indische Cholera,” originating in the jungles “in deren Bambusdickichten der Tiger kauert” (119) is the last messenger and executing force of the Dionysian in the narrative, which completes his estrangement from Socratic aestheticism but also from the healthy influence of the Apollonian.

In Nietzsche’s book as well the tiger and India are symbols of the untamed Dionysian (c.f. 26). After the graveyard scene at the beginning of the novella (c.f. 10), the sudden appearance of the uncanny stranger, and the journey in the gondola with the sinister gondolier, which reminds Aschenbach of a coffin (c.f. 41) across the river Styx, the disease eventually unites all the previous manifestations of the Dionysian under the central and ambivalent motif of death. In this context, Caroline Picart writes

It is significant that Mann reinterprets Nietzsche’s Dionysus in *The Birth of Tragedy*, less as a god of fertility and life, and more as a figure of death, and ironic and sterile exhaustion. This effectively wipes out Nietzsche’s careful distinctions between the ‘sick/Asiatic’ Dionysus . . . and the ‘healthy/Greek’ Dionysus . . . . In Mann’s re-telling there is no healthy Dionysus to worship for he has already been murdered. Mann places Nietzsche, despite the latter’s vehement denials, in the same camp with Wagner, Romanticism, and decadence. (100f.)
This reading, however, seems to be guided by the same Socratism that caused “the
death of tragedy, the replacement of the tragic vision by a theoretical conception”
(Deleuze 18), in the first place. At the very least, her reading of the Dionysian is one-
sided and does not take into account the principle’s inherent ambiguity. According to
Nietzsche, Dionysus sometimes appears in the form of a “grausamen verwilderten
Dämons” and at other times in the guise of a “milden sanfmüthigen Herrschers”
(Tragödie 66), which is also true for Tadzio as described above. Focusing exclusively
on a later interpretation of Nietzsche’s concept, Picart ignores the ghastly, horrific, and
terrible aspects of the Dionysian abyss and intoxication (c.f. Tragödie 24) that threaten
to devour human beings in the absence of the Apollonian counter-force. It is certainly
true that Thomas Mann, informed by later writings of Nietzsche, paints a more skeptical
picture than the Die Geburt der Tragödie, but he still also maintains the ambiguity of the
Dionysian in his novella. Rather than arguing that there is no Greek Dionysus in Der
Tod in Venedig, one can instead read Aschenbach’s eventual demise at the hands of
the cholera as the last leap into the lap of Dionysus, for, as Nietzsche writes, “[d]as
Allerbeste ist für dich gänzlich unerreichbar: nicht geboren zu sein, nicht zu sein, nichts
zu sein,” however, “[d]as Zweitbeste . . . ist für dich – bald zu sterben” (Tragödie 29).
Aschenbach willingly embraces the disease, just as Nietzsche had voluntarily infected
himself with syphilis, as the last antidote against the resistance of the Socratic.

However, like Derrida’s pharmakon, the Dionysian antidote wagers between two
poles. According to the French philosopher, it can either signify “remedy,” as which it
“repairs and produces, accumulates and remedies, increases knowledge and reduces
forgetfulness,” or mean “poison,” with the reversed effect: “it can worsen the ill instead
of remedy it” (97). In contrast to both Picart and Nietzsche himself, Mann thus paints a less optimistic, but at the same time more ambivalent picture of the influence of the Dionysian. On the one hand, with Aschenbach’s death, in the greater context of German thought at the beginning of the twentieth century, Mann seems to argue that in order to once again lead the principles of the Dionysian and the Apollonian into equilibrium, Socratic aestheticism must be eliminated altogether from the German Geist. On the other hand, the death of the protagonist might also allude to the dangers involved in embracing the irrational forces of the Dionysian or Gumbrecht’s “presence” for that matter.

The meaning of the prose tragedy thus remains ambivalent, but Thomas Mann intentionally maintains this undecidability of his text. In fact, according to T.J. Reed, “ambiguity is the central technique of Mann’s art, suggesting, but not affirming, layers of meaning which lie beneath the surface of immediate experience” (178). Additionally, in Der Tod in Venedig, the author negotiates between several levels of complexity. On the extradiegetic level, the Apollonian structural principle of classical Greek tragedy with its five distinct acts clashes with the disorganized and orgiastic Dionysian tendency of the protagonist on the intradiegetic level, which is once again repeated solely on the content-level in the struggle at work within Aschenbach himself. This complex discursive web brings forth “ambiguity in the word’s more dubious sense: not [only] richness of meaning, but uncertainty of meaning, disunity” (173). Ultimately, this undecidability remains.

To come to a conclusion, one can summarize that both Nietzsche’s Die Geburt der Tragödie, as a theoretical foundation, as well as Mann’s novella, as a literary
interpretation thereof, function as supplements of Gumbrecht’s thinking and further
enrich the complexity of the concept of presence. Next to several similarities between
the two thinkers, such as the temporal aspect as well as the dynamic oscillation
between different principles, Nietzsche stresses the communal aspect of the Dionysian,
which hints at a lack in Gumbrecht’s idea of presence. With his notion of Socratic
aestheticism, he furthermore offers a constructive critique of the literary scholar’s
concept of interpretation and unmasks Gumbrecht’s own elitist traditionalism, which
undermines the radicalism of his epistemological project. Thomas Mann then in his
narrative provides concrete examples for the abstract concepts of both Die Geburt der
Tragödie and Production of Presence. As an analogy of Nietzsche’s genealogy of
ancient Greek tragedy, it illustrates the struggle between the Dionysian, Apollonian, and
Socratic aestheticism through the lens of the protagonist Aschenbach. Although “Mann
shared with Nietzsche his longing for life, that self-denial of the spirit in favor of life,”
rather than continuing in vein of Nietzsche’s romantic optimism, “this longing assumed a
totally different emotional tone” (Gronicka 21f.), and he skeptically stresses the
ambivalence of a Dionysian rejuvenation as both remedy and poison, which also adds
an interesting twist to Gumbrecht’s oscillation between presence and interpretation.
Mann hence implies that in order for the balance to be restored, Socrates must be
purged from the German intellectual tradition.

In general, therefore, his view on the revival of Greek tragedy in Germany and the
renewal of modes of thinking differs significantly from his avowed mentor Nietzsche.
Especially in his later years, “the experience of the Nazi nightmare and the horrors of
World War II made Mann aware that Nietzsche’s glorification of the irrational, of man’s
Will-to-Power, and the instinct-driven, “rapacious blond beast, the blonde Bestie
dangered man’s sanity and his very existence” (23).

As the transition to the next chapter, in the following paragraphs the text will give
way to the voice Friedrich Nietzsche and his visions for a German future. He believes in
a glorious resurrection of Dionysus in Germany and declares that the closure of the
Socratic paradigm is outlined in Faustian frustration

Wie unverständlich müsste einem ächten Griechen der an sich
verständliche modern Culturmensch Faust erscheinen, der durch alle
Facultäten unbefreidigt stürmende, aus Wissenstrieb der Magie und dem
Teufel ergebene Faust, den wir nur zur Vergleichung neben Sokrates zu
stellen haben, um zu erkennen, dass der moderne Mensch die Grenzen
jener sokratischen Erkenntnisslust zu ahnen beginnt und aus dem weiten
wüsten Wissensmeere nach einer Küste verlangt. (Tragödie 111)

Celebrating Kant, Schopenhauer, the music of Beethoven, and, at the time of the
publication of Die Geburt der Tragödie, also still Wagner, Nietzsche prophecies a
restoration and reanimation of German thought

Denken wir uns eine heranwachsende Generation mit dieser
Unerschrockenheit des Blicks, mit diesem heroischen Zug ins Ungeheure,
denken wir uns den kühnen Schritt dieser Drachentödter, die stolze
Verwegenheit, mit der sie allen den Schwächlichkeitsdoctrinen jenes
[sokratischen] Optimismus den Rücken kehren, um im Ganzen und Vollen
‘resolut zu leben.’ (Tragödie 113)

In retrospect, after two World Wars which led to the almost complete destruction of
Germany, these sentences sound tragically ironic. Nietzsche was not aware that his
ideas would later be abused for the most horrific purposes Western history has ever
witnessed².

Und wenn der Deutsche zagend sich nach einem Führer umblicken sollte,
der ihn wieder in die längst verlorene Heimat zurückbringe, deren Wege

² Although having distanced himself from these pathetic passages, Nietzsche was later still appropriated
as just another nationalistic thinker by the Third Reich.
Nietzsche’s calls were answered, although not in the way he himself had imagined. Adolf Hitler and his regime led the way into the literally dreadful and terrible, which, instead of bringing the cure for German culture, resulted in the fall into the abyss of inhumanity. It would seem as if historical reality revealed that the longing for the Dionysian and presence, the complete embracing of mood and instinct, or the search for a deeper being, can very easily culminate in the utter destruction of humanistic values and the total devaluation of human life. The next chapter will retrace these developments in the thinking and literature of the twentieth century, represented through the work of Martin Heidegger and the poetry of Paul Celan.
CHAPTER 4
RECONCILING THE DUALISM – BETWEEN EARTH AND WORLD: TRACING PRESENCE IN MARTIN HEIDEGGER’S DER URSPRUNG DES KUNSTWERKS AND PAUL CELAN’S “TODESFUGE”

The age of the sign is essentially theological. Perhaps it will never end. Its historical closure is, however, outlined.
– Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology

From a twenty-first century perspective, Friedrich Nietzsche’s ominous call for a *Führer* in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* casts a dark shadow on German Romantic thought and its legacy. Indeed, in the eyes of numerous critics the type of thinking it represents ultimately culminated in the Holocaust. Isaiah Berlin, for instance, believes that already Romanticism’s foundations were corrupt, writing that “the whole thing [Romanticism] is a product of wounded national sensibility, of dreadful national humiliation,” with the conclusion that “this [hurt pride] is the root of the romantic movement on the part of the Germans” (38). The accusation needs to be taken seriously, for if true, tracing Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work back to the Romantics brings forth highly problematic implications. In particular his indebtedness to the ideas of another post-Romantic thinker, Martin Heidegger (c.f. Lacoue-Labarthe *Heidegger* 86), adds several layers of complication. Scholars still tend to interpret the latter’s temporary affiliation with National Socialism as a confirmation of the nationalist underpinnings of thought forms that evolved from Romanticism. This resulted in the evocation of devastating criticism, most prominently by Adorno and, more recently, by Jean-François Lyotard, who goes so far as to write that “[t]he stakes of [Heidegger’s] ‘politics’ [inherent in his philosophy] exceed those of the NSDAP and those of the SA” (65). Carl Niekerk confirms that “there is . . . a virulent anti-Semitic trend within the Romantic movement” (158). However, he
immediately points out another aspect: “It is correct to say that the Romantics possess a concept of alterity that goes beyond that of the Enlightenment and is more open towards the otherness of other cultures” (ibid). This is also to some extent true for Heidegger’s work.

What is one thus supposed to make of this contradiction? Both premature dismissal and uncritical embrace of the heritage of Romanticism seem inadequate. The paradoxical fact that “the movement is perceived simultaneously as committed to [cultural] pluralism and yet also as the birthplace of modern German nationalism” (156) rather calls for a careful weighing of its positive and negative potential. A suitable starting point for this re-evaluation is the encounter of the philosophy of Martin Heidegger with the voice of the other (to Western metaphysics) in the form of the poetry of Paul Celan. This chapter will therefore situate Production of Presence in the context of this intellectual dialogue, which will reveal the epistemological shortcomings of Gumbrecht’s work, and thus point toward potential future thought.

Heidegger is the only thinker analyzed in this thesis on whom Gumbrecht drew directly in order to develop his ideas.¹ In the preface of his book the literary scholar states “that it has become difficult for him to imagine his own work without the philosophy of Martin Heidegger” (xvi). However, he also distances himself from the thinker and writes “the last thing that he would be willing to accept is the label ‘Heideggerian’” (ibid). Gumbrecht implicitly alludes to the so-called Heidegger-affair of the second half of the 20th century when he qualifies: “His reasons for this refusal are

¹ Therefore the analysis in this chapter will proceed somewhat differently from the two previous chapters. Instead of tracing out the moments of divergence and convergence, this part will contain a more pronounced critique of Gumbrecht’s work.
not philosophical reasons” (ibid). The denunciation of Heidegger by Victor Farias in his infamous publication *Heidegger and Nazism* served, for his enemies, as the ultimate confirmation of the German philosopher’s irredeemable connection to the ideology of the Third Reich. By adding the disclaimer above, Gumbrecht seems to attempt to circumvent being drawn into this discussion.

Heidegger’s silence concerning the topics of his political past and the atrocities of the Shoah led to further lasting criticism, also by Celan, considered this refusal to speak up unacceptable. However, the seeming lack of ethical dimension in Heidegger’s work does not necessarily mean that he simply wanted to evade and forget these issues, as David Carroll claims (c.f. xxv), but might actually signify a far deeper realization on his part than his enemies would deem him capable of. This chapter will therefore attempt to show that implicit in Heidegger’s philosophy after 1934 is what Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe has called “the unthought of National Socialism” (*Heidegger* 83) by analyzing *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* (1935) as a foundational text for Gumbrecht’s notion of presence. This examination will reveal that the latter’s thought is actually implicitly reproducing the Cartesian split it seeks to overcome. Therefore departing from Gumbrecht’s work, the discussion will proceed by situating Heidegger’s text in a relationship with the *Ursprung* of Paul Celan’s oeuvre, namely the poem “Todesfuge” (1945). The discussion will reveal that Celan’s poetry functions as an ethical supplement concerning a certain lack in Heidegger’s work. As Gumbrecht completely omits ethical dimensions in his work, it is going to be of minor importance to the analysis of Celan’s text.
While Gumbrecht borrows extensively from Heidegger, he also frequently simplifies, or even ignores several aspects completely, which leads to serious misunderstandings, especially concerning the concept of interpretation and hermeneutics that forms the main target of Gumbrecht’s epistemological critique. That the questioning of the hegemony of the hermeneutic occupies such a central position in Gumbrecht’s thinking renders these shortcomings even more problematic. The comparisons of *Production of Presence* with Schlegel and Nietzsche have already implied that Gumbrecht entertains a limited notion of interpretation – that is, merely as “the identification and/or attribution of meaning” (1) –, which then functions as a “scapegoat” (xiv), in the literary scholar’s own words, for everything that is wrong in the humanities today. Heidegger’s work in particular unmasks Gumbrecht’s problematic concept of interpretation.

Gumbrecht overlooks, or willingly ignores, that interpretation is (initially) an integral aspect of Heidegger’s philosophy. In *Sein und Zeit* he explains that *Dasein* or “[h]uman being is essentially self-interpreting” (Dreyfus 23). Taking this condition as his point of departure, Heidegger then extrapolates the idea of a radical form of interpretation (c.f. Dreyfus 59) situated within his understanding of phenomenology as concerned with something concealed that does not show itself directly. Jean Grondin provides a short summary thereof: “Sie [hermeneutics] soll – sehr wohl im Sinne der klassischen Kunst der Auslegung – dem ans Licht verhelfen, was sich nicht phänomenal zeigt, dabei aber auch die Verbergung und Verdeckung als solche kenntlich machen und erklären” (49; original italics). This indicates that Heidegger’s interpretation, albeit deriving from Dilthey’s hermeneutics (another arch-enemy of Gumbrecht’s), goes beyond the
traditional concept, which, according to Gumbrecht, is only concerned with signification. Heidegger himself offers an insightful explanation in §32 of *Sein und Zeit* that confirms his distance from more ordinary or bastardized forms of interpretation

Sie wirft nicht gleichsam über das nackte Vorhandene eine ‘Bedeutung’ und beklebt es nicht mit einem Wert, sondern mit dem innerweltlichen Begegnenden als solchem hat es je schon eine im Weltverstehen erschlossene Bewandtnis, die durch die Auslegung herausgelegt wird. (150)

It is evident that Heidegger’s notion of hermeneutics as always already connected to the things of the world aims at the circumvention of the Cartesian subject/object paradigm, which Gumbrecht, despite the fact that he shares this goal with the German philosopher, ironically reproduces through his differentiation between presence and meaning.

Although Heidegger himself refrains from using the term explicitly in his later works, hermeneutics still remains in its original sense as deliverer of news and message or, in other words, as conversation in which the concealedness of Being may unfold itself (c.f. Grondin 50). In this form it also figures in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks*. The hermeneutic circle, in the Heideggerian sense, opens the way into the inquiry of the essential character of art.² Heidegger writes: “So müssen wir den Kreisgang vollziehen. Diesen Weg zu betreten, ist die Stärke, und auf diesem Weg zu bleiben, ist das Fest des Denkens“ (*Ursprung* 8f.). This, however, does not result in the ascription of fixed meanings, but in a renewed and revised understanding of the question posed (c.f. 70f.). Heidegger’s concept of interpretation thus includes the un-interpretable and therefore exposes presence and meaning as intricately interwoven, denying any sort of static

² Heidegger thereby fulfills Friedrich Schlegel’s call for a more cyclical philosophy.
solution or, as Hans-Georg Gadamer puts it: “Der Zirkel von Ganzem und Teil wird im vollendeten Verstehen nicht zur Auflösung gebracht, sondern im Gegenteil am eigentlichsten vollzogen” (277). This requires a degree of patience that Gumbrecht is not willing to accept (c.f. 51). Instead of building on Heidegger’s “new interpretative breath” (Derrida *Sovereignties* 107), which understands hermeneutic practice as taking into account the “heterogeneous to all interpretative totalization” and hence the possibility if the very “[e]radication of the hermeneutic principle” (26), Gumbrecht’s refusal maintains the split between meaning and presence that threatens to undermine Gumbrecht’s own agenda.

Gumbrecht’s misreading of the quality of interpretation begins with a misunderstanding of Heidegger’s “characterization of human existence as ‘being-in-the-world,’ that is, as an existence that is always already in a substantial and therefore in a spatial contact with the things of the world” (66). It is certainly true that Heidegger affirms spatio-substantiality as an integral part of human life. This, however, is not his main concern when introducing the concept of being-in. *In-der-Welt-sein* functions as the refutation of the traditional assumption that theory precedes practice (c.f. Dreyfus 47), although not in the form of a simple inversion, as Gumbrecht seems to believe when he writes that “‘being-in-the-world’ was a reformulation, rather than a radical replacement of the subject/object paradigm” (46). He fails to acknowledge the groundbreaking character of Heidegger’s conceptualization, which runs contrary not only to the intentionality of Husserl, but also to Kant’s theory of perception, and constitutes an original “attempt to get beyond the subject/object paradigm” (Dreyfus 49). An openness towards one’s surroundings characterizes “being-in-the-world,” which
simply lets itself be drawn in by the world (c.f. ibid). In *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* Heidegger thus introduces the term mood – similar to Schlegel’s notion of *Gemüt*\(^3\) – as the form of perception within the state of being-in: “Vielleicht ist jedoch das, was wir hier und in ähnlichen Fällen Gefühl oder Stimmung nennen, vernünftiger, nämlich vernehmender, weil dem Sein offener als alle Vernunft, die, inzwischen zur ratio geworden, rational mißgedeutet wurde” (16f). Gumbrecht does not take this idea of mood into consideration.

In fact, through his distinction “between a world-appropriation by concepts which [he calls ‘experience’) and a world-observation through the senses (which [he calls ‘perception’)” (39), Gumbrecht himself falls prey to his own critique of Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world.” By describing sensual perception as observational, he reinstates the subject/object split on another level. The aim of Heidegger’s concept is to avoid this sort of thinking altogether. Mood reads *Stimmung* in German, which also translates as “attunement” (to the things of the world). It “reveals that the whole of being is *given before* any judgment that affirms or negates it” (Haar 152; original italics) and “does not *think* the totality, but rather makes it *come about*, emerge moreoriginarily than representation, which proceeding by construction or assemblage, can only think after the fact” (153; original italics). Gumbrecht’s failure to incorporate this into his thought leaves him indebted to the very philosophical tradition he seeks to overcome, undermining his own project yet again.

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\(^3\) Heidegger’s thought, however, is more radical because it describes “mood” as more primordial than any form of intentional state or pre-reflective and tacit mental states belonging to the old tradition (c.f. Dreyfus 54).
This in turn leads back to Gumbrecht’s over-emphasis of materiality, both in his own thought and his reading of Heidegger, which is grounded in this covert Cartesianism. Attuned to the world Dasein is more open to Sein, according to Heidegger. Gumbrecht takes this to mean that being “has substance and that, therefore (and unlike anything purely spiritual), it occupies space” (68). In order to strengthen his point, he refers to a passage from Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks, where Heidegger writes about the thing-li-ness of artworks. Upon closer inspection, the section Gumbrecht alludes to – it merely appears as a footnote – does not suggest that: “Die Kunstwerke zeigen durchgängig, wenn auch in ganz verschiedener Weise, das Dinghafte” (35). A work of art reveals thing-li-ness, that is, what makes a thing a thing and characterizes its being. However, this does not indicate that materiality and substance constitute the essence of a thing in its entirety. This argument reproduces earlier definitions, which Heidegger demonstrated to be insufficient (c.f. 23). Thing-li-ness withdraws itself – in fact, this form of concealment possibly belongs to the character of being – from simple appropriation, and thus Heidegger writes: “Muß dann jenes Befremdende und Verschlossene im Wesen des Dinges nicht für ein Denken, das versucht, das Ding zu denken, das Vertraute werden? Steht es so, dann dürfen wir den Weg zum Dinghaften des Dinges nicht erzwingen” (25). Contrary to his own dismissal of forced rational fixation of meaning, Gumbrecht’s impatience implies the desire to get a hold of presence, which essentially cannot be grasped.

This comes as a surprise, for the literary scholar explicitly stresses the importance of another Heideggerian concept hinted at in the above quotation: Gelassenheit. Gumbrecht translates this as composure and particularly highlights its incompatibility
with his concept of interpretation as attribution of meaning. Heidegger’s own definition of

*Gelassenheit*, which some scholars also transcribe as “releasement,” points in a

somewhat different direction. As the concept is of primary importance to the overall

argument of this chapter, a longer passage from Ute Guzzoni, in order to shed light on

this, shall be quoted in full

Releasement characterizes a thinking that involves itself with what it has to

think and does so by letting itself be determined by it. It waits for it, brings

itself into the nearness of its farness. This releasement stands in radical

opposition to the calculating relation of humans to the whole of the world

and to the objects that humans attempt to violently seize in a technical or

scientific manner. Released thinking is neither active nor passive; it is

neither the grasping of the modern subject, which attempts to get things into

its grip; nor does it exercise a more disinterested spectatorship. Instead, it

originates out of an attitude of questioning and listening and sensitive

reflection. (136)

Heidegger primarily criticizes what he calls *rechnendes Denken*, which is predominant

in post-Enlightenment Western cultures, and that, according to Horkheimer’s and

Adorno’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, represents a mathematical mode of thought that

ultimately leads back into barbarism (c.f. 13). Nevertheless, *Gelassenheit* does not

exclude interpretation in the Heideggerian sense, but rather provides its epistemological

basis as a non-reductive awareness of the concealment of being (c.f. Frede 131).

Gumbrecht’s somewhat different understanding of this concept, and especially of the

character of being, significantly influences his further reading of *Der Ursprung des

Kunstwerks*.

The dynamic relationship between *Welt* and *Erde*, as well as its connection to the

character of truth, forms the core of Heidegger’s essay. To him, truth is not simply a

fixed proposition, but an event in which the “Seiende tritt in die Unverborgenheit seines
Seins heraus” (30). The philosopher uses the Greek word “ἀλήθεια” (4) to refer to this process. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht acknowledges this (c.f. 67) and draws on these concepts in order to clarify his notion of presence, because they “offer a degree of resistance to a smooth integration into any metaphysical worldview” (78). While this is indubitably correct, the literary scholar’s application of world and earth – based on his prior misreadings – ironically robs Heidegger’s terms of their critical power and re-initiates them into a binary Western framework, as the two interpretations he provides of the terms reveal. According to the first, earth refers to “Being as a substance” and world to “the changing configurations and structures of which Being as substance can become a part” (76). The second one suggests that earth means “things seen independently of their specific cultural situations” and world “configurations of things in the context of specific cultural situations” (ibid). The latter two definitions Gumbrecht poses as questions. However, the first two also present themselves as questionable. Ultimately, both explanations are inaccurate and misleading mainly for two connected reasons.

The first problem arises from Gumbrecht’s failure to grasp the entire scope of the dynamics between Welt and Erde. As a means of an initial approach, it is of course helpful to describe world as striving for unconcealment, with the goal of “Offenheit” (45), and earth as functioning as hiding resistance, or “[d]as Sichverschließen” (44) in Heidegger’s own terminology. This can, however, only function as a preliminary solution. Attempting to grasp the two terms separately, as Gumbrecht does, is doomed to fail because “Welt und Erde arbeiten als aufeinander angewiesene gegeneinander” (Kern 169), meaning that “was die Erde ist, ist sie wesentlich nur in einem

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4 This means “truth” in ancient Greek and as “a-lethe-ia” contains the notions of a happening.
Zusammenhang mit einer Welt, deren sich verschließender Grund sie ist” (168), and vice versa. Hence, Heidegger never mentions the one without the other, defines them always in relation to one another, and thus stresses their Gegenwendigkeit that unfolds itself in an “ontological battle” (Kockelmans 155): “Das Gegeneinander von Welt und Erde ist ein Streit” (Heidegger Ursprung 46). Unlike that of Gumbrecht’s oscillation, their relationship is one of mutual interdependence. As a struggle between understanding and non-understanding (c.f. Kern 170) the process involves both presence and meaning in an unresolvable connection of unconcealment and hiding in the form of a dynamic agonistic chiasm.

Therefore, defining earth as expressing the substantiality of being independent of world is impossible without retreating and getting caught up in the Cartesian web of the subject/object paradigm. For works of art (including literary texts), this means that they are “marked by an indissoluble identity of medium and content that cannot be divorced into anything like material base and signifying superstructure” (Walker 101). Erde inarguably includes the materiality of nature (c.f. Harries 115), but it is also more than that, namely the ground on which Dasein bases its existence (c.f. Inwood 119), which is inextricably bound to Welt as the totality of understanding within the conditio humana (c.f. Young Heidegger 39). In his unwillingness to re-think his concept of interpretation and his insistence on the substantial character of being as something disconnected from a cultural context, Gumbrecht evokes the idea of an oscillation between presence and meaning, instead of maintaining the intertwined tension of the struggle between world and earth. Consequentially, he re-inscribes Descartes’s split into his project of a supposedly post-metaphysical epistemology.
As a result of Gumbrecht’s erroneous interpretation of Heidegger’s concepts, the special character of truth as ἀλήθεια as well as the central notion of what the philosopher calls Lichtung, is missing in the literary scholar’s discussion, although it yields a promising potential concerning the conceptualization of presence. The unconcealment of being as concealment in the event of truth only functions through the chiasmic interplay of world and earth. By separating the two existential categories, Gumbrecht denies the possibility for this to unfold, and, therefore, comes to a mistaken conclusion: “Being is tangible things, seen independently of their culturally specific situations – which is neither an easy feat to achieve nor a probable thing to happen” (76). Only perceptible through released thinking (and hence technically not something that can be achieved at all), truth as ἀλήθεια – that is, the revelation of being’s hiding – is not something material but a “Geschehnis” (Heidegger Ursprung 52), which brings forth a clearing. Heidegger himself describes this as follows:

Dank dieser Lichtung ist das Seiende in gewissen und wechselnden Maßen unverborgen. Doch selbst verborgen kann das Seiende nur im Spielraum des Gelichteten sein. Jegliches Seiende, das begegnet und mitgegnet, hält diese seltsame Gegnerschaft des Anwesens inne, indem es sich zugleich immer in eine Verborgenheit zurückhält. Die Lichtung, in die das Seiende hereinstehlt, ist in sich zugleich Verbergung. (51; original italics)

This dynamic is an integral aspect of an artwork, according to Heidegger, and is thus, contrary to Gumbrecht’s assumption, very likely to happen, albeit not always recognized as such. By ignoring the idea of a Lichtung, which Wrathall thinks “should be understood as something like a space of possibilities” (33), Gumbrecht forfeits a great potential: “[t]he clearing makes it possible for a certain understanding of being – a particular presence – to come to prevail among entities” (Wrathall 34). If it is true that the work of art opens the way for “the ‘clearing’ in which specific forms of human
existence . . . emerge-into-presence in their reciprocal interdependence” (Guignon Intro 12), then the literary scholar omits a dimension that is always already implicitly present in Heidegger’s Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks (and later thought): “die Möglicherkeitsbedingungen der Ethik” (Greisch 120), not in the sense of the usual morality, but in the original sense of the Greek ἔθος as a primordial attitude. Although Heidegger never elaborates on this potential explicitly, Gumbrecht fails to address the issue altogether.

Another vital topic of Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks – albeit surprisingly disregarded altogether in Gumbrecht’s work, keeping in mind that he is a literary scholar – is the relevance of language to the concept of presence. A fundamental question remains unaddressed: “How could any language say the most originary which calls for thinking?” (Mugerauer 241). According to Heidegger, in order to formulate an answer to this, one must turn to art, which he identifies as the privileged domain for the double movement of unconcealment and hiding. Kunst, to him, is “ein Werden und Geschehen der Wahrheit” (Ursprung 73; original italics). This again is connected to the philosopher’s understanding of art as essentially poetic in nature: “Wahrheit als die Lichtung und Verbergung des Seienden geschieht, indem sie gedichtet wird. Alle Kunst ist als Geschehenlassen der Ankunft der Wahrheit des Seienden als eines solchen im Wesen Dichtung” (73f.; original italics). Poetry as the essence of art thus inhabits a central position in Heidegger’s thought which Gumbrecht fails to take into account.

The centrality of Dichtung for the German philosopher is a result of his specific notion of language as “the 'house of being’” (Wrathall 122). This requires some clarification. When Heidegger writes about language, he does not conceive of it in a
“voluntaristic, metaphysical” (Mugerauer 199) way. As early as in *Sein und Zeit*, he started developing a radically new concept of *Sprache*. Beneath the generic *Gerede* of everyday situations, he claims to find a more primordial form of discourse, which is not primarily concerned with signification, but constitutes an existentially relevant aspect of *Dasein*. This notion of language runs contrary to modern linguistics, as Heidegger himself writes in his magnum opus

> Der in die nachkommende Sprachwissenschaft übergegangene und grundsätzlich heute noch maßgebende Grundbestand der ‘Bedeutungskategorien’ ist an der Rede als Aussage orientiert. Nimmt man dagegen dieses Phänomen in der grundsätzlichen Ursprünglichkeit und Weise eines Existenzials, dann ergibt sich die Notwendigkeit einer Umlegung der Sprachwissenschaft auf ontologisch ursprünglichere Fundamente. (Sein und Zeit 165)\(^5\)

The search for these originary foundations brings Heidegger to ancient Greek. Similar to Schlegel and Nietzsche, he does not merely seek to return to the golden age of a past long gone, but takes antiquity as the point of departure for a renewed journey towards primordial language. Indeed, he writes that through the process of translation from Greek into Latin, and later into other languages, the original experiences connected to words were lost, which leads Heidegger to claim that “[d]ie Bodenlosigkeit des abendländischen Denkens beginnt mit diesem Übersetzen” (*Ursprung* 15). In addition, however, he goes a step further to argue that not even the Greeks thought through the essence of language sufficiently – as he explicates concerning the idea of ἀλήθεια – making such the task of the post-metaphysical philosopher (c.f. 49)\(^6\). Heidegger

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\(^5\) Obviously sympathetic to this description of language, Paul Celan underlined this passage in his own copy of Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* and added comments and own thoughts that he would later incorporate into his poetry (c.f. Lyon 15).

\(^6\) Thus Heidegger does not operate within Gumbrecht’s presence culture/meaning culture dichotomy. Instead of simply using ancient Greece as a reference point, he believes that a more originary form of thought must actually correct the Greeks’ failure to think far enough.
therefore attempts to recover awareness for the fact that “language, taken in its origin, is really Being itself formed into words” (Kockelmans 194). It is this incentive that ultimately directs the thinker towards *Dichtung*.

Particularly after 1933, Heidegger increasingly began to reflect upon the “close analogy between poetic and philosophic thinking” (196). This affinity is due to the specific employment of language in the two domains. According to the thinker, a poet’s use of language differs from any other person’s, which puts him in a privileged position to utter the unspeakable or, in other words, the truth as unconcealment and simultaneous concealment: “Zwar gebraucht auch der Dichter das Wort, aber nicht so wie die gewöhnlich Redenden und Schreibenden die Worte verbrauchen müssen, sondern so, daß das Wort erst wahrhaftig ein Wort wird und bleibt“ (*Ursprung* 44). It is thus that *Sprache* unfolds its potential in its entirety and creates an opening for the revelation of what is (c.f. Bernasconi 39). Art as *Dichtung*, disconnected from the traditional realm of aesthetics and value judgments7, thereby becomes what Heidegger calls “die Stiftung der Warheit” (*Ursprung* 77) in the form of a gifting, founding, and beginning. As Charles Guignon writes, “[g]reat literary works have the ability to rejuvenate [the] background of primordial saying, transforming it into a new ‘truth’ for a community” (*Truth* 57), and, more importantly, they at the same time provide the basis for and undertake the establishment of the house of being as language. Considering Gumbrecht’s omission of the relevance of *Sprache*, and the differences mentioned

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7 As Iain Thomson writes referring to *Sein und Zeit*: “because aesthetics tries to describe art from the perspective of a subject confronting an external art object, the aesthetic approach begins always-already ‘too late’ (BT 249/SZ 207). Aesthetics looks for art in the wrong place (at the derivative rather than the primordial level of human interaction with the world), and what it finds there is not the true work of art. Misled by the presuppositions of modern philosophy, aesthetics overlooks that more originary level of human existence where, Heidegger will argue, great art inconspicuously accomplishes its ontologically revolutionary work” (57).
before, it becomes evident that, ultimately, Gumbrecht’s concept of presence, although extensively borrowing his terminology, has, contrary to his claim, nothing in common with Heidegger’s philosophy. At this point it is time to return to the issues that functioned as the introduction to this chapter.

In the context of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, Gumbrecht’s covert Cartesianism and its one-sided emphasis on substance and materiality finds itself in a very problematic light. In his Idealtypen-dichotomy between meaning and presence cultures, he assigns space as the primordial sphere of human interaction with things of the world to the latter and elaborates if space is the dominant dimension through which, in a presence culture, the relationship between humans, that is, human bodies, is constituted, then this relationship . . . can constantly turn (and indeed tends to turn) into violence – that is, into occupying and blocking spaces with bodies – against other bodies. (83)

What if the violence does not stop there, but actually culminates in the (attempt of) the total annihilation of the other body? Is the Third Reich with its politics of extermination (directed towards bodies) thus an extreme presence culture, and, if so, is then the longing for a return to presence in the Gumbrechtian sense not a dangerous step back into a mindset that brought forth the most tragic human catastrophe of the twentieth century? These questions point towards the necessity of taking into account the ethical implications of presence, and it is in the work of Martin Heidegger – genuinely different from Gumbrecht’s thought – that one finds the tools to uncover these. This claim concerning Heidegger’s work might seem just as problematic as the literary scholar’s careless sidestepping of ethics, for how is a philosophy that has, according to Lyotard, “nothing to say about this question [, that is], the question (that Adorno) called ‘Auschwitz’” (76) supposed to be of any help concerning this matter? The comparison
between Gumbrecht’s and Heidegger’s work has shown that the latter’s, contrary to Lyotard’s polemic accusation, in fact has something to say, even though it only does so implicitly.

What is indeed missing in Heidegger is the voice of what the Third Reich defined as “other.” Here Paul Celan’s poetry comes in as a supplement in the Derridian sense – “to fill a lack and to add” (Spivak 460) – inscribing this voice into the very texture of German language, and, thereby, rendering explicit what remained unclear in Heidegger’s Der Ursprung des Kunsterwerks and unaddressed altogether in Gumbrecht’s work. However, this inscription of a (Jewish) other on a (German) self is not supposed to perpetuate another binary split, and rather functions after the logic of a chiasm, meaning a deep entanglement of two (distinct) traditions that through their encounter change without, however, blurring the boundaries altogether, but respectively acknowledging the otherness in them. This chapter will thus proceed with analysis of Paul Celan’s poem “Todesfuge” in the context of the comparison between Gumbrecht and Heidegger.

“Todesfuge” is without a doubt the most well-known and widely discussed of Celan’s poems. Particularly in postwar Germany, the work became the iconic representation of the Shoah – and the poet’s own tragic experience thereof – in an increasingly developing memory-culture surrounding the Nazi past (c.f. Seng 62). Treating it as an aesthetic object, numerous critics and commentators have offered their interpretations of the poem and its (supposed) metaphoricity.8 Already the first lines have triggered extensive commentary

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8 This chapter will not provide another representational analysis but merely point out exemplary interpretations in order to lead the way into a post-aesthetic reading of the poem (c.f. Thomson 112).
Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken (Celan 40)

Karl Weimar, for instance, writes that “[t]he ‘milk of morning’ that the captive Jews must
drink is a bold metaphor for the lethal gas of the concentration camp chambers” and
goes on to point out the corruption of life at the hands of the Third Reich when he states
that the formerly innocent nourishing white “milk turned black by the murderer’s
monstrous design” (81), bringing forth a “new order of perverted inversion” (91). This
plays into Weimar’s further reading of the poem and, as a consequence, he interprets
the figures Margarete and Sulamith in a similar manner:

    dein goldenes Haar Margarete
    dein aschenes Haar Sulamith (Celan 41)

While the former’s golden braids functions to him as “a topos, a stale and flat
designation for the Aryan beauty to whom the blue-eyed guard-murderer writes,” the
latter’s Jewish “hair, once ‘like purple,’ is ashen, symbolic of the blight of the
crematorium” (93). This juxtaposition then creates an irreconcilable divide between the
two peoples. The analogy of “Juden” and “Rüden” in comparison to the superior
Germans (c.f. Felstiner 37) underlines this impression. The poem has thus often been
read as powerfully representative of the horrors of the Holocaust.

However, from within this sort of criticism one cannot fathom the full scope of
“Todesfuge.” It is correct that it “has startled listeners, shocking some and convincing
others by its metaphors” (Felstiner 27), but even Celan himself later “regretted the
metaphorical ingenuity in ‘Todesfuge’ since ingenuity could distract from the poem’s
burden” (34). In fact, reducing the text to its representational and biographical
dimensions runs risk of succumbing to a cult of memory that translates the poem into an
aesthetic object to be experienced and quickly discarded. Celan certainly considered
"Todesfuge" the tomb of his mother (c.f. Seng 62), it is also a lot more than that. The
poet did not simply try to work through his own trauma, but also “struggled to recover
from silence the unspeakableness of the Holocaust” (Lyon 14) as a whole. In the poem,
he grants a (polyphonic) voice to the other of German thought and culture, in this case
in the form of “the absent presence of the dead” (19). It therefore becomes a very
specific memorial, not only for Celan’s mother, but also for all the victims of the Shoah
and (evokes) their place in the history of Germany.

With this ambition, “Todesfuge” indeed forms the Ursprung of Celan’s further
project: bringing forth a space for the voice of the other in a language “that he believed
had fallen victim to what might be called the ‘verbicide’ caused by the Nazis’ abuse and
perversion of German” (Lyon 11). The poet’s approach is similar to a surgical operation,
however, one that does not simply try to sow the open wounds in the language, but, in
fact, highlights them, in an undertaking, which introduces elements of otherness into the
German tradition, and can thus be aptly described as Veränderung. In the poem, Celan
shows “dass auch die Sprache und Tradition in der seine Dichtung wurzelt, Anteil an
dem todbringenden Genozid hatte“ (Seng 60). This already becomes apparent in the
title “Todesfuge.” The German master of the fugue was Johann Sebastian Bach.
Whereas he musically depicted the message of the gospel, Celan establishes a “bond
of music with death” (Felstiner 33), spreading the perverse message of the Holocaust

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
Er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
(Celan 40)

“Todesfuge” accusingly exposes the problematic of a tradition that did not think the
other in its otherness, resulting in its complete appropriation through extermination: “Sie
unterstellt den Deutschen eine doppelte Meisterschaft, die in der Kunst und die im Töten" (Emmerich 54). With this background in mind, the victims' lamentations in the poem drown the genius of Bach, Wagner, and Schubert, in a polyphonic and contrapuntal cacophony, which "render[s] music and the idea of music grotesque" (Felstiner 33). The voices of the dead appropriate the art of the fugue for themselves, infusing it with elements from the psalms9 and thereby turning it into something that undermines the Western musical principle.

Furthermore, the already mentioned juxtaposition of Margarete and Sulamith continues the othering of the German tradition. The contrast does not only highlight the incompatibilities of Germans and Jews, but problematizes the beauty of the Faustian Margarete, and simultaneously introduces another heroine: Sulamith, princess from the Song of Songs, whose name "[a]kin to shalom ('peace') or Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) . . . guards its identity" (38), resisting appropriation and thus functioning as a symbol of hope. Margarete's golden hair, on the other hand, is deceptive and turns into the snakes with which the man in the house plays: He is dealing with archetypal evil veiled as (Aryan) beauty. “Todesfuge” seems to suggest that through the Germans' failure to properly think the other and grant it its rightful place, they have succumbed to the lures of primordial evil. Introducing another element into the contrapuntal web of Celan’s poem, Felstiner thus reads the blond hair as an allusion to Heinrich Heine, “like Celan a German-speaking Jewish poet exiled in Paris with ambivalent feelings to the fatherland” (36), and his poem “Lorelei” in particular. “Todesfuge” unearths the remains of the “unnamable other” at the heart of the German tradition, “with which language makes

9 The music of the quoted lines alludes to the laments of the Israelites in psalm 137:3 (c.f. Wiedemann 609).
contact in poetry” (D. Schmidt 112). The encounter with this other foreshadows the “unheimlich dimensions of a cryptic predestination” (Derrida Sovereignties 24), which will leave neither the tradition nor the German language itself unaffected.

In fact, “Todesfuge” leads the way into what Paul Celan called the “‘actualized language’” (Lyon 130) of his later oeuvre. This special kind of Sprache then is not of the order of signification or representation (although essentially still tied to it). Celan increasingly inscribes otherness into the German language itself in an effort to speak the unspeakable. In “Todesfuge” this is visible in the eventual collapse of the pure fugal structure into an ever more spastic and syncopic rhythm (c.f. Lacoue-Labarthe Experience 49), which at the same time breaks down the sentence structure into a bricolage of all the haunting images of the victims’ sufferings, ending once again with the phrase

   der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland (Celan 41).

Later the poet perfects this treatment of the German language and his works are more and more marked by breaks, gaps, lacunae, neologisms, and unusual punctuation, as well as seemingly unmotivated juxtapositions of images, and stream-of-consciousness technique (c.f. Glenn 27), whereby “every poem becomes the simple advance of the what is otherwise unspeakable” (D. Schmidt 113). Celan’s modifications thus often appear as mutilations, as inflictions of damage on the language. However, it is this maneuver that brings forth the space for the voice of the other: “It is a language that speaks as an open wound” (114) in the side of the Western tradition. The horrors of the Shoah here speak themselves back into existence. Through his re-working of the German tradition, the poet supplements the Romantic New Mythology with the unutterable elements secretly at its core, thus evoking the (absolutely) other, not as
representation but as the paradoxical un-concealment of its “self-encrypting withdrawal” (114). Celan seems to realize poetically what Lyotard writes in *Heidegger and “the jews”*

It seems to me . . . that ‘the jews’ are within the ‘spirit’ of the Occident that is so preoccupied with foundational thinking, what resists this spirit; within its will, the will to want, what gets in the way of this will; within its accomplishments, projects, and progress, what never ceases to reopen the wound of the unaccomplished. (22)

It is from within this wound that Paul Celan’s poems, as the voices of the other, look for their addresses in the hope of being heard. This poetic encounter between a self and an other – questioning both in the process – yields a promising potential for the Western self, as Hadrien France-Lanord writes: “Im Gedicht *Einmal* erscheint diese Aufhebung des traditionellen *Ich* im Werden (*ichten*), einem geöffneten *Ich*, das sich gleichursprünglich entfaltet in der Begegnung mit einem Du” (80). Through his poetry, Celan creates the site for this encounter. “Todesfuge,” as the *Ursprung* of his career, functions as the doorway into an existential space: into the crypt of being that completes the chiasm of self and other.

This existential space functions as an *unheimlich* supplement to Heidegger’s language as house of being and his notion of *Gelassenheit*. An affinity of Celan’s poetry to the thinking of the infamous philosopher existed even before the poet’s extensive readings of Heidegger’s works, wherefore Lyon calls Celan a “nascent Heideggerian” (3). However, he also goes beyond Heidegger and focuses explicitly on elements that Heidegger, although not completely avoiding, only hints at. Celan’s poetry puts into practice an aspect of the happening of truth as ἀλήθεια, which Heidegger describes as follows: “Das Ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit stößt das Ungeheure auf und stößt zugleich das Geheure und das, was man dafür hält, um” (*Ursprung* 77). In “Todesfuge,” Celan supplements the un-concealment of the world of the German tradition with the
concealment (as concealment) of the earthy otherness of the Jewish tradition. Although this ethical dimension is implied in Heidegger, it is Celan, as the advocate of the other, who formulates it clearly. He exposes that the earth upon which Heidegger’s Volk is based on (c.f. Ursprung 78), is essentially unheimlich, (literally) undermined by radical alterity:

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr anderen singt und spielt er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr anderen spielt weiter zum Tanz auf (Celan 40)

The guard makes the inmates of the concentration camps work the concealing earth, which in the logic of the National Socialist Ge-stell has no legitimacy. They let them dig into the Heimaterde. In the project of the unconcealment of the Third Reich world, the regime thus attributes Erde, this sheltering withdrawal incompatible with their plans, to the Jewish people, thereby ironically granting them the power of undermining their entire endeavor. Celan’s poem unmasks the appropriation through extermination of the other as a Cartesian attempt of the concealment of concealment, which eventually has to fail. However, turning the German soil into the mass grave of the victims of the Holocaust subverts it into an Un-Heimaterde. “Todesfuge” exposes this and reveals that Hitler’s world is built on earthy otherness that remains uncannily present underneath.

The poem, in a similar fashion to the inmates’ shoveling, becomes “jener Stoß ins Un-geheure im Geläufigen” (Heidegger Ursprung 69), laying the very foundation of the crypt beneath the temple of being, where an encounter with the other becomes possible.

Paul Celan’s “Todesfuge” – as well as his later work – thus turns into the crypt of being: an uncanny space for the continually recurring (re-)presencing of being in singular moments, subject to extreme temporality in the dynamic of unconcealment and
hiding, in the sense of what Michel Foucault has called a heterotopia. This notion requires clarification. What the French intellectual means by heterotopia, in a strictly spatial sense, is a site that is “outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality” (Räume 935). In the context of Celan’s poetry, this applies to his (as well as Heidegger’s) notion of primordial language as an ethico-existential space, as also France-Lanord confirms when he writes that “die Sprache als solche und sie allein – und nicht vermittelt durch das ontisch-moralische Prisma von Gut und Böse [established by Cartesian meaning and signification] – kann einer Ethik ihren Ort geben” (82). However, Foucault’s heterotopias are also subject to a certain temporality and thus “most often linked to slices in time – which is to say they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies” (Räume 939). In “Shibboleth,” his essay on Celan’s poetry, Jacques Derrida puts this in slightly different words, which are nonetheless related to the Foucauldian concept, and writes that “the poem recalls a date,” which is “rooted in the singularity of an event” (Sovereignties 7) that iterates, “each-time-only-one time” (11; original italics), and, therefore, has the potential to bring forth “the encounter of the other in a single place, at a single point, that of the poem” (13). As the crypt of being, the heterotopia establishes a genuine spatio-temporal dimension for the perception of the other as concealment through released thinking. As a consequence, Emmanuel Lévinas is mistaken when he writes that “[i]t [the poem] speaks rather of the failure of all dimensionality and moves toward utopia”

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10 This thesis uses the German edition of Foucault’s collected works Dits et Ecrits in order to facilitate reference. The English translation by Jay Miskowiec employed here and can be found online: <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> (20 July 2011).

11 Thus it always already anticipates another turn in the wheel of the hermeneutic circle (c.f. Derrida Rogues 18).
Written in the first-person plural, “Todesfuge” in fact becomes the space for the return of the dead of the Shoah, evoking “the spectral revenance” (Derrida Sovereignties 18) of the victims’ voices as the uncanny musicality of a Dionysian choral, singing the unspeakable: a conversation with the dead beyond the limitations of linguistic categories (c.f. Franke 625) through the releasement of the other within the heterotopic crypt of being.

With this crypt underneath the temple of Sprache, Paul Celan supplements Heidegger’s philosophy of being with an ethical element that “challeng[es] modernity’s symbolic and real obliteration of the Other” (Suied 218) in the German tradition. In fact, he reveals that any edifice is not only built on Erde but always already built into it and thus residing in an embrace with the other: the temple as the worldly unconcealment of the concealment of earth above the ground is only complete with its subterranean counterpart. This further complication of the struggle between Welt and Erde is what is missing in Heidegger’s thought (or remains merely implied), but fully elaborated in Celan’s poetry. His “Todesfuge” functions as the doorway into the heterotopic space of the crypt of being that is his oeuvre, which, through its continued dialogue with the thought of Heidegger, reveals the chiasmic relationship of self-and-other/other-and-self in its primordiality. Another quotation from Derrida’s essay provides a fitting summary

The crypt remains . . . , the passage uncertain, and the poem unveils a secret only to confirm that there is something secret there, withdrawn, forever beyond the reach of hermeneutic exhaustion. A non-hermetic secret, it remains, and the date with it, heterogeneous to all interpretative totalization. Eradication of the hermeneutic principle. (26)

12 The figure of the chiasmus, in this context, is supposed to function as a concretized form of the Derridean notion of the supplement in the form of a reciprocal doubling, which “wrenches apart the neatness of the metaphysical binary oppositions. Instead of ‘A’ is opposed to ‘B’ we have ‘B is both added and replaces A.’ A and B are no longer opposed, nor are they equivalent. Indeed, they are no longer even equivalent to themselves. They are their own differance from themselves” (Johnson xiii).
At the intersection of that time and space where the Cartesian appropriation of the other into the same ceases, the surrender to the other of the self begins, as representation, through an attitude of *Gelassenheit*, gives way to (re-)presencing. When memory in the sense of *Er-innerung* as an *action* of abstraction into meaningful concepts fades, the subjection to the process of *Innerung* as a *passion* of handing oneself over into the crypt of being of another’s memory commences.¹³ Where interpretation ends, the poem begins to speak the unspeakable.

The analysis has shown that Paul Celan appropriates Martin Heidegger’s thinking on art – particularly on language – and supplements it with the voice of the other in a chiasmic embrace. However, the question, of why Heidegger himself chose to stay silent about his involvement with National Socialism and the horrors of Jewish genocide remains. If it is true that

one of the primary phenomenological lessons that Heidegger drew from art . . . is that when things are approached with openness and respect, they push back against us, making subtle but undeniable claims on us, and we need to learn to acknowledge and respond creatively to these claims if we do not want to deny the source of genuine meaning in the world (Thomson 22),

as Iain Thomson writes, then why did the German philosopher not elaborate on this active resistance of appropriation? It would seem that the ethical implications of this insight would urge Heidegger to do exactly that, as Celan hopes, too, when, in “Todtnauberg,” the poem about his encounter with the thinker in his mountain hut, he writes the following:

*geschriebene Zeile von*
The poet was obviously aware of the ethical dimensions in Heidegger’s work and awaited an explicit elaboration of them in such a future publication that would function as a significant contribution to the fight against anti-Semitism in post-War Germany (c.f. Lyon 165). It is now clear that such a response never came, leading to the condemnation of Heidegger’s thought as infested with Nazi ideology to the core.

But is this silence really a non-verbal confirmation of his “having forgotten” about “the terrible responsibility” (xxv) of his thought, as David Carroll writes? Heidegger’s efforts concerning Celan’s poetic career – his efforts to get him a teaching position at a university, the use of influence to persuade booksellers to put Celan’s poetry on display, and so forth (c.f. Lyon 168) – seem to render these accusations as rather premature. It is legitimate to assume, keeping his private correspondences with former Jewish friends – such as Hannah Arendt – in mind, that Heidegger was painfully aware of his mistakes. He also seems to have realized that his position concerning the Holocaust was compromised by his political past and that nothing that he could have said would have met with the acceptance of his critics. More importantly, however, is the possibility that he, in fact, realized that the full scope of the Shoah is essentially unspeakable, or that, at least from the mountain of philosophic thinking, the full extent of the Holocaust cannot be uttered. What is true for the Ephraimite is thus also true for the thinker: “The Ephraimite knows how one ought to but cannot pronounce it” (Derrida Sovereignties 50; original italics). The Holocaust is Heidegger’s shibboleth. Celan might have known this, himself almost never having spoken about the genocide outside his poetry either (c.f.
Felstiner 22). He could have realized that what cannot be spoken from the mountain of *Denken* might be possible from the mountain of *Dichtung*, and that, therefore, the word of the thinker must remain in the mode of “to come.” As a consequence, instead of condemning Heidegger’s work as fascist, the task of contemporary scholarship is to trace out carefully and critically the implicit ethical dimensions in his thought. As this chapter has revealed, his ideas on language and art in particular can function as the stepping stone for this future project.

As the comparison with Heidegger’s *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks* has shown, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s notion of presence, even though aiming for similar goals, reproduces an epistemological position he wishes to criticize, thereby subverting his own purpose. Beginning with his failure to re-evaluate the role of interpretation in the humanities, in connection to his misreading of being as essentially substantial in nature, Gumbrecht forfeits the potential of released thinking as basis for a post-metaphysical epistemology. Furthermore, his omission concerning the central role of language renders his ideas problematic, particularly pertaining to their classification as literary theory. Eventually, Gumbrecht’s neo-Cartesian split of presence and meaning turns his thought into an objectivizing aestheticism and lukewarm subjectivism, which unmask his supposedly progressive epistemology as what appears as a hypocritical compromise that, in fact, compromises his entire intellectual endeavor. In front of the problematic backdrop of this covert Cartesianism, his notion of violence in the context of what he calls presence cultures seems, indeed, suspicious, even dangerous, and threatening to return to a form of thinking Heidegger himself abandoned after 1933.
While Martin Heidegger’s short involvement with the Third Reich remains problematic and necessary to take into account, this chapter has shown that his later thought also contains “a (lamentably [only]) subtle resistance to the National Socialist worldview” (Thomson 57), and even the potential of an ethics as ἔθος. What remains subtle in Heidegger, Celan expresses powerfully in his poem “Todesfuge,” supplementing the philosopher’s temple of being with the voice of the other sounding from the depths of the crypt of being below. Lyotard is thus certainly has a point when he concludes his Heidegger and “the jews” with the observation that Celan’s poetry “is his [Heidegger’s] lack: what is missing in him, what he misses, and whose lack he is lacking” (94). A thinking of presence, therefore, must ultimately depart from Gumbrecht’s anachronisms and willingly embrace the inextricable tension of Heidegger and Celan, of self and other, of philosophy and poetry.
By comparing the philosophy and literature of several German thinkers and authors with Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work *Production of Presence*, this M.A. thesis attempts to outline an intellectual trajectory in German thought that stretches (at least) from 1770 until the present. Albeit in different manifestations, notions of presence that sought to undermine the Cartesian and Kantian splits between subject and object or phenomenal and numinal, have had a tremendous influence on German intellectual history and thus initiated, embraced, and tried to reconcile, specific epistemological dualisms.

Although pursuing a notion of ideal harmony and countering the increasingly dominant Kantian rationalism of the late-eighteenth century, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Hölderlin ironically opened up the dualism between sensuality and rationality. Stressing the intoxicating quality of presence, Friedrich Nietzsche and Thomas Mann reformulated the dualism as the brotherly conflict between the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Eventually, Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan attempted to resolve the dualism as the chiasmic struggle between *Welt* and *Erde*.

This last comparison, in particular, brought forth the ethical implications of presence absent in *Production of Presence*. It is also this ethical dimension, which may unite and resolve the other problematic aspects of Gumbrecht’s thought – namely the...
disregard for questions of gender (as well as race and class for that matter), the one-sided concept of interpretation, and the omission of a discussion of language – in a revised conception of presence, which uses the encounter between the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the cryptographic poetry of Paul Celan, that is, the chiasmic relationship of self and other, as a point of departure, in order to delve into the existential potential of (post-)aesthetics.

Taking Heidegger and Celan seriously requires one to not dwell on the notion of their thought and writing as static oeuvres, but to acknowledge the fact of their working as dynamic events. This means that drawing on their work constitutes an entrance into a conversation with poetico-philosophical ideas, contained in their texts that, although written by these specific historical authors, are no longer completely their own. Formulated in _Sprache_ and thus functioning as _techno-poietic_ agents, albeit subject to the principle of singularity, they build up their own (poetic) momentum by addressing an other or _Gesprächspartner_. The result is a dialogue that opens the check valves of self and other, putting both under erasure in a chiasmic embrace, and therefore revealing truth as _Lichtung_ of concealment in the next rotation of the ever spinning hermeneutic wheel that always already foreshadowes another turn, which remains a matter of _a vénir_.

This idea is not entirely new. In the 1960s, the Western humanities heard that the world is essentially a text in the broadest sense of the term: there is nothing outside of text and nothing beyond discourse. They heard, but they did not take in the full scope of the message. In the attempt to understand deconstruction from without its own confines, namely of _différance_, and thereby misreading Jacques Derrida, the human sciences
brought forth a metaphysically conservative form of thought, although disguised as radical, that reduces the world-text to the status of an object to be read, interpreted, understood, and, therefore, annihilated. The text became a mere paradigm, while the mode of analysis itself remained largely unaffected and unquestioned. The failure to realize that the reader is always already part of the world-text, not in some superior subject position, but on level ground, and, that the world-text is not simply an object, but a peculiar interlocutor looking for an addressee – in short, the refusal to acknowledge the reciprocal agency of the reader and the text, which undermines both, uncovers the insistence on an artificial objectivity: a destructive, even nihilistic, attitude that seeks to tame the text and squeeze it into the framework of what the Western tradition has termed “object.”

The repression of the full scope of Derrida’s thought in its radical character, that is, the appropriation of deconstruction as a mere method, applicable just as any other mode of criticism, overlooks the (de-)central Truth of différance – as denying such Aneignung – resulting in the endless production of evermore homogenized interpretations: “Die Gelehrtenrepublik ist und bleibt endlose Zirkulation, ein Aufschreibesystem ohne Produzenten und Konsumenten, das Wörter einfach umwälzt” (Kittler 11f.). Ironically, this misunderstanding of the il n’y a pas de hors-texte, through the creation of an illusory outside-of-text capable of tracing out strands of meaning, therefore soon (an-)nihilates all meaning and thus results in the il n’y a pas de dedans-texte. The unwillingness to accept deconstruction’s call – as a disempowering dynamic of Ereignis – for epistemological humility, as well as subjection of the reader to being-in-
the-text as an “unwarrantable involvement” (Culler 88) prolonged the crisis of the humanities into the 21st century.

This M.A. thesis has shown that Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s work, in line with the discussed authors, belongs to a tradition of thought, which – willing to tackle the critical condition of Western thought – points out this problematic epistemological configuration in the human sciences and provides preliminary ideas to overcome it. Employing his work as a blueprint, via the point of departure provided by the encounter of the thought and poetry of Heidegger, Celan and Derrida, one can begin to uncover, polish, and build on similar older tendencies buried beneath the predominant strands of Cartesian metaphysics, in order to work towards an epistemological rejuvenation that chiasmically embraces the voice of the other in situations of (post-) aesthetics.¹ This, however, has to remain, as of yet, of the order of the “to-come.”

¹ This must entail a renewed conceptualization of the agency of art. Krzysztof Ziarek points into the right direction: “The force of art lies therefore in its ability to call into question and rework the very paradigm of making and producing (machen), disclosing its inscription in the operations of power (Macht) and their ways of manipulating (Machenschaft) and foreclosing the event of being into resources and products, in which beings and their relations become conduits of intensifying power” (115).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Florian Tatschner obtained a bachelor’s degree in English and American Studies as well as Theater and Media Studies at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in 2010. He is currently studying North American Studies at the same institution. After finishing this program in late 2013, he plans to enroll in a doctoral program in order to further his research. His scholarly interests include poststructuralist theory, twentieth century German philosophy, and nineteenth and twentieth century American and German literature. Outside academia, Florian enjoys playing the guitar and experimenting with photography.