

BOOK REVIEW

Krzysztof Ziarek's

*Language After Heidegger*

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Krzysztof Ziarek. *Language after Heidegger*.  
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243 pages.

Krzysztof Ziarek's *Language after Heidegger* (hereafter *LH*) is an impressive and measured study that traces the transformations in Heidegger's thinking of language as he shifts from thinking *about* language to thinking *through* language in the 1930s. Through a deep attunement to Heidegger's creative employment of the German language in its "terms, concepts, scriptural marks, and even graphs" (68), Ziarek skillfully executes the difficult task of clearly translating and coherently explaining Heidegger's often fleeting and always fragile terminological constellations in his posthumously published *Ereignis* manuscripts, works written, in Ziarek's words, "for the drawer" (72). Ziarek deftly brings out the richness of Heidegger's thinking of language not by ascribing a philosophy of language to Heidegger, but instead by presenting Heidegger's thinking as a practice of reticence enacted through a "poietic experience with language" (25). The focus

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of Ziarek's study is therefore not primarily the texts in which Heidegger speaks most overtly about language. In taking this approach, Ziarek provides a balance to scholarship that analyzes Heidegger's philosophy of language through the texts where he speaks about language, for example, in the well-worn territory of *Being and Time*, the Hölderlin lectures, or *On the Way to Language*. While this hermeneutical decision brings a richness and originality to *LH* through detailed treatments of recent volumes of the *Gesamtausgabe* that have not yet received significant scholarly attention, volumes 71 and 74 most prominent among them, it is also the source of a minor shortcoming in an overall fine study, which dismisses *Being and Time* too abruptly. In what follows I will outline the major contributions of *LH* while raising a number of critical questions that emerge from the work.

*LH* pursues three main tasks: tracing the transforming role of language in Heidegger's thinking in the saying of the event (primarily in Chapters 1 and 2), applying this thinking to original analyses of contemporary poetry in Chapter 3, and taking Heidegger's "eventual" language as the starting point for an ethics of releasement in Chapter 4. Although it pursues these seemingly disparate tasks, *LH* must also be regarded as a unified whole that above all pursues one central goal: transforming our own relation to language by tracing the course of Heidegger's modified relation to language. Ziarek describes this process as follows: "In this study I elaborate the role that the poietic plays in Heidegger's *own* writing, in his style of thinking, especially how it motivates his use of German with regard to his declared attempt to transform our relation to language" (132). This transformation is not so much announced as it is performed in Ziarek's own practice of writing, thus echoing without merely mimicking one of the central strategies of Heidegger's scriptural practice. In writing of the event, Heidegger holds in reserve any discussion of his "method" of writing, and while it is indeed true that Heidegger does not employ anything like a method in his writing of the event, Ziarek convincingly demonstrates that there is nonetheless a deep continuity to Heidegger's approach to writing of the event.

With the keen eye of a literary scholar, Ziarek gathers together and lays out the consistent set of strategies that Heidegger employs to write his transformed relation to language as the singular saying of the event in what Ziarek repeatedly refers to as the “back draft” of the event. *LH* excels in attaining its own measure as it parses out, delineates and sketches some of the most important strategies that Heidegger employs in his writing, including “the beat outlined by prefixes, hyphens, etymons, and compounds” (25), but also the use of repetition, tautology, and the production of neologisms employed in ever-unfolding permutations that never merely replace, but always augment previous terminological constellations. Ziarek’s admirable achievement is the skill with which he renders the internal functioning of this language comprehensible without reducing Heidegger’s scriptural strategies to a systematic methodology and without sacrificing any of the rigor of Heidegger’s strategies for writing of the event. Hence, if Heidegger’s relation to language in the event manuscripts is remarkable for what it holds in reserve, then Ziarek’s language is likewise remarkable for what it does not say, and this reticence is both a strength and weakness of *LH*.

Chapter 1, “Event/Language,” focuses on the dehumanization (*Entmenschung*) of language as the coming to be of the event while simultaneously tracing how, in the thinking of the event, Heidegger distances himself from the ontological difference and moves toward the differentiated relation to difference expressed through the hyphenated term *Unter-schied*. In his analysis of Heidegger’s tactics of writing, Ziarek focuses on Heidegger’s use of particular prefixes, the distancing separation of hyphenation, and the silent distinction between *Seyn* and *Sein*. In describing how the event transpires as language, Ziarek calls attention to two particular terms linked by a common prefix that emerge repeatedly in Heidegger’s saying of the event in both hyphenated and unhyphenated forms: *Einfalt* and *Einmaligkeit*, the in-fold or one-fold and each-time singularity. In his analysis of these terms, Ziarek is as much interested in what Heidegger seeks to say through these terms as in Heidegger’s operation of saying through the multivalent German

“*ein-*,” for “the conceptual work performed by these crucial terms becomes framed and inflected by the implicit nexus drawn among the textual occurrences of *ein*” (33). The *ein* or unity/inwardness of *Einfalt* and *Einmaligkeit* becomes central for *LH* because, according to Ziarek, the event is “not yet a matter of difference” (34). The event speaks itself in an unfolding “where the prefix ‘un’ does not signify the undoing of the fold but marks instead the event-like, spatiotemporal spread distinctive of the fold” (30). The clearing of the event in its unique unfolding is “both of and for language” (31), and the task of *LH* is situated in the space between these two prepositions. The unfolding or in-folding of the event occurs towards a language that seeks to capture the singularity of the event by measuring up to the sayability of the event. Only this language can be a language *for* the event as a human response to something prior to a human process of signification.

In responding to the event of the speaking of being, Ziarek traces how Heidegger seeks to develop an idiom that measures up to the unfolding of being. We must answer (*antworten*) through what Heidegger calls an *An-wort*, an occasionally hyphenated neologism that Ziarek brilliantly analyzes (58–60). As Ziarek demonstrates, it is here in the *An-wort*, the word spoken towards – or within – the space of event, that language as a human capacity meets language as a prior structuring or scansion of the world. It is with regard to the *An-wort* that it is worth raising the question of whether Heidegger’s conception of *Rede* in *Being and Time*, a work which Ziarek describes, employing his own careful scriptural marks, as characterized by “‘bluster’ and apparent self-assuredness,” is not already thoroughly dehumanized (164). Is it not the case that, when Heidegger speaks of *Rede* as the “the meaningful structuring of the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world” and speaks of how “[w]ords accrue to significations” (GA 2: 216, 214/SZ 162, 161), he is referring to a prior being-spoken of language that is already thoroughly *entmensch*? And is it not the case that the silent voice of the call of conscience, which is spoken by nobody as the saying of the nothing, already hints at and indicates aspects of his thinking of language and the event that are not so much left behind in his later work, as they

are brought to their own in an unfolding of what Heidegger cannot yet say in the language of *Being and Time*? These questions primarily point to matters of scope, for *LH* is not concerned with *Being and Time*, but instead with the specific operation of language in the saying of the event. Nonetheless, Ziarek's dismissal of *Being and Time* is symptomatic of a more fundamental tendency that will be discussed in further detail below.

Chapter 2, "Words and Signs," which convincingly demonstrates that Heidegger's later thinking of language is not based on a relation of signifier and signified, is in many ways the most compelling chapter of *LH*. Signs, according to Ziarek, "come into play only when language's event-like saying articulates itself into the spoken or written signs" (78), and Heidegger's account of language is neither "phono- nor grapho-centric but focuses instead on the nonhuman register of the pathways of language" (84). Much like the first chapter, the analysis in "Words and Signs" is also centered around a particular set of distinctions unfolded through Heidegger's choice of words: the distinction between *Worte* and *Wörter*; the two plural forms of *Wort*. The distinction between these two plural forms can once again be mapped onto the twofold nature of language as language of and for the event, for as Ziarek writes, "the word is to be understood as '*the tuning silence*'...and this reticent, self-silencing stillness becomes audible, as it were, only when words, this time understood as linguistic signs, reach their limit and break up, opening onto silence" (86). In the tuning silence *Worte* resonate, words that come to be as the clearing of the event of being, but those words are always already given over to signs, to a structure of difference which represents what is said in the event through *Wörter*; a term that Ziarek considers to be synonymous with the pleonastic compound *Wörterzeichen*.

While these word-symbols function within the Saussurean structure of signifier and signified, Ziarek, with his sights clearly set on Derrida, claims that "Heidegger offers the possibility of evolving an account both distinct and more 'radical' than the one proposed by French post-structuralism and recent Continental thought" (117). Once again, Ziarek carefully marks his claim of radicality with quotation marks,

but he goes on to explain “radical” as meaning the conceptualization of language as beyond the structure of ontological difference and towards the differentiated difference indicated in the *Ereignis* texts and elsewhere by the term *Unter-schied*. In his assessment of Heidegger’s “radicality” vis-à-vis certain early texts by Derrida such as *Margins of Philosophy* and *Of Grammatology* Ziarek is entirely on the mark, but what is somewhat unfortunate is that he does not take into account Derrida’s own differentiated approach to Heidegger and difference in his final seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. II, published in French in 2010 and in English 2011.<sup>1</sup> In the seminar Derrida begins to explicitly rethink his own earlier deconstructive readings of Heidegger by returning to the relation of difference and language, and he does so by unfolding the terminological constellations that surround *Walten*, a word that Ziarek analyzes in detail in Chapter 4. Once again, this comment is primarily a question of scope and takes little away from Ziarek’s own masterful reading of Heidegger’s thinking of language prior to the structure of difference.

If Chapter 2 is the most compelling in *LH*, then Chapter 3, “Poetry and the Poietic,” is perhaps the most original chapter, for it is in the course of analyses of poems by contemporary US poets Susan Howe and Myung Mi Kim that the reader hears Ziarek’s own voice most strongly. Ziarek’s motivation in these readings is not only to move away from readings of the poets that Heidegger actually did read, a productive field of engagement that has yielded vast scholarly results, but instead to turn to contemporary literature in order to pursue the analysis of language *after* Heidegger. The chapter builds upon a refined study of Heidegger’s “sigetics” that draws heavily on the fragmentary discussions of silence and stillness in *Zum Wesen der Sprache* from volume 74 of the *Gesamtausgabe*, published in 2010. Ziarek rightly points out that “[s]ilence in Heidegger’s thinking about language is not silence in the sense of absence of sound or speech, just as little as it would be the presence or absence of writing,” but instead silence is a matter of “*Stimmen*, that is, as disposition or tuning” (149). A language capable of bringing silence to the word is a power-free (*macht-los*) language that

emerges as *Wörter* in the back draft of the event. Ziarek convincingly analyzes the work of Howe and Kim through this powerless conception of language, but I disagree with his attempt to characterize this power-free language as “feminine” (164).

The crux of my disagreement with this attempt can be situated in a passage which Ziarek himself translates and interprets. Heidegger writes – in Ziarek’s translation of GA 74: 152 – of “*wanting to say something ineffable but not being able to (keeping silent out of inability); leaving something unsayable in its unsayability (keeping silent out of ability)*” (148). While there is much to say about this quote, which is a reformulation and refinement of the Heideggerian refrain that whoever cannot keep speaking likewise cannot keep silent, it seems to simplify the complex relation between power, language and the voice.<sup>2</sup> What Heidegger’s distinction denies is a critical third form of silence, a silence that is not the silence of those who keep silent out of powerlessness in face of the ineffable, nor of those who choose to keep silent in the face of the ineffable, but of those for whom silence *is not at all a matter of choice*. Describing a power-less silence as “feminine” seems to overlook the extent to which one of the great goals of feminist philosophy has been to restructure the systems of power that have denied the power of speech to the feminine voice by effectively silencing the feminine voice. In other words, this twofold distinction seems to overlook the difference between who have the power to choose not to speak (the power, in a sense, to choose to be powerless) and those for whom being powerless is a matter of force. In short, one could raise the question whether Heidegger’s subtle analyses of silence make room for the power of *silencing*. Ziarek perhaps errs in trying to translate Heidegger into a feminist perspective, yet it also seems that he does not at all need to have Heidegger on board with him in his poetic endeavors. Indeed, it even seems that Ziarek’s analyses would be all the more powerful if they were clearly marked out *against* Heidegger by tracing the extent to which Heidegger – as Luce Irigaray has convincingly demonstrated – stands outside of a feminist perspective.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter 4, “Language after Metaphysics,” is, by Ziarek’s own admission, the most open-ended of the chapters in *LH*. The project of the chapter is to build upon the power-free relation to language explicated in the prior chapter in order to develop an ethics of releasement rooted in a restored capacity for listening. In the course of the chapter, Ziarek beautifully gathers together the manifold meanings of listening and belonging expressed through Heidegger’s overlapping polyvalent terminology of *gehören*, *hören*, *Ereignis*, *Enteignis*, *Eigentum*. Ziarek describes the importance of these terms as follows: “Without the human capacity to be responsive to the event – a capacity that the event grants or dedicates to humans in the sense that Heidegger calls *Zueignung* – that is, without the human capacity to listen to and bring the word of being into signs, there would be no possibility of ethics” (201). Ziarek develops this ethics of appropriation around the term *das gewaltlose Walten*, the violence-free sway (213) that is, in Heidegger’s words, *machtunbedürftig*, without any use for power (214).

While I agree wholeheartedly with Ziarek’s analysis of *Walten* as the expression of a transformed understanding of power in Heidegger’s work after the focus on struggle in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, it is nonetheless necessary to draw attention to two issues. Firstly, it is worth taking note of the fact that the language of *Walten* begins to arise in full force prior to the *Ereignis* manuscripts in the 1929 lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* as a translation of *phusis*. This is closely related to the second issue: the tendency of Ziarek’s work posits a trajectory that aims towards Heidegger’s later works such that those later works are presented as *replacing* the earlier works, instead of viewing the later works as refracted by or reflected through the earlier works. Although Ziarek does not explicitly endorse such a strategy, he does tend to privilege the later “gentle” Heidegger of *Gelassenheit*, instead of letting the gentle Heidegger be read through and alongside the Heidegger of *polemos* without the earlier texts being regarded as surpassed or replaced.

Working against this logic of replacement and surpassing, in Chapter 4 Ziarek offers a fascinating hint at an ethics of reading Heidegger



that he does not so much explicitly develop as silently perform. As Ziarek writes in the opening pages of the chapter: “Put plainly, it is important to avoid the mistake of overemphasizing the ‘content’ of Heidegger’s texts, of what is explicitly said and ‘meant’ in them, to the detriment of the insights opened up – and held out to future thinking as possibilities – specifically through the idiomatic working of his language” (176). What this quote hints at, and what I believe Ziarek could have elaborated more fully, are the hermeneutic commitments embedded in this approach and the ways in which those commitments explicitly call into question various strands of Heidegger scholarship. *LH* all too often directs its critique towards vague interlocutors such as “commentators” (213) while referring to unnamed authors who “tend to focus” (49) on something in particular and to aspects of Heidegger that are “still too often overlooked in critical responses to Heidegger” (115). By taking recourse to these anonymous gestures without – to put it somewhat crudely – naming names, *LH* deprives itself of the opportunity to make a more forceful intervention into existing fields of Heidegger scholarship by adopting its own overly gentle stance. Once again, this takes away nothing from the force of Ziarek’s analysis, and I am aware of the extent to which Ziarek may have adopted this stance as his own performance of the very ethics of listening that he lays out, yet *LH* seems to sell short its own possibility for a more “radical” intervention.

As a whole, *LH* is a laudable achievement that opens up many exciting questions for future research. By way of conclusion, I will briefly raise a few of these questions that do not point to lacks in *LH*, but instead seek to highlight the work’s productive openness. What, I ask, is the place of the Greeks in Heidegger’s transformed understanding of language? Does Heidegger not read the Greeks as dwelling within the kind of ethics of silence and releasement that *LH* seeks to recover? And in a related question of *paideia*, what are the pedagogical tactics for teaching and learning an ethics of releasement? Or, to rephrase the question more concretely, what is the relation between the manuscripts written “for the drawer” and Heidegger’s simultaneous activities as a

productive lecturer? Is it not the case that a transformed relation to language also emerges in the Nietzsche lectures of the 1940s? As these questions show, Ziarek's valuable study is just as important for its rich analyses of language as for the open questions and paths for future research it points toward. *LH* is a significant guidepost that sets a course for future research as we seek to come to terms with the being of language and the language of being after Heidegger.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. II, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).
- 2 As Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*: "A mute person has not only not proved that he can keep silent, he even lacks the possibility of proving this" (GA 2: 219/SZ 164-65).
- 3 Luce Irigaray, *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, trans. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).