

Heidegger's Philosophy of the Event:  
*Ereignis* as Being's Ruptured Unfolding  
(from *Beiträge* to *die Kehre*)

*J. Avery Dawson*

**ABSTRACT:** Heidegger's *Ereignis* is hotly contested, yet foundational for contemporary philosophies of the event. I propose it is "the event of being's ruptured unfolding." I do so by analyzing three concepts through key passages between *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* and "The Turning": 1) the shift from essence (*Wesen*) to essences (*wes*) in the phrase "Be-ing essences as the event" in relation to time-space; 2) the retention of both historical and homonymous etymological meanings of *Ereignis* in the phrase "The event is appropriatingly brought into view (*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis*)" in relation to truth; and 3) the nuance of "rupture" in the phrase "fissure...is the splitting open of the essential unfolding of be-ing" in relation to decision. Analyzing these concepts and passages distills the historical and ontological senses of *Ereignis*: the founding of epochs, on the one hand, and original determinations out of the essencing of be-ing, on the other.

**KEYWORDS:** history of being; time-space; truth of being; rupture; event ontology

**CONTACT:** Avery Dawson, Western University; [jdawso10@gmail.com](mailto:jdawso10@gmail.com)

Future thinking is a *course* of thought, on which the hitherto altogether concealed realm of the essencing of be-ing is traversed and so is first cleared and attained in its most proper character as an *event*  
(GA 65: 3/5, tm)

Heidegger's *Ereignis* has been a topic of dissension among Heidegger scholars since *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*'s publication in 1989. Is it, perhaps, an "*a priori* opening" as Thomas Sheehan contends or, maybe, "an event of appropriation" as Joan Stambaugh and others have suggested?<sup>1</sup> In this article, I offer an alternative interpretation of Heidegger's *Ereignis* between *Contributions* and his 1949 lecture "The Turning." I propose it is the event of be-ing's ruptured unfolding. I do so by analyzing the semantic and etymological play of three concepts in key passages between *Contributions* and "The Turning." The "Event," I ultimately argue, characterizes an epochal unfolding of be-ing, a "history of be-ing" that decisively grounds beings anew.<sup>2</sup> I show this in three sections.

First, I analyze the phrase "Be-ing essences as the Event [*Ereignis*]" in *Contributions*. I that argue attending to the reformulation of "essence" (*Wesen*) as a verb, "essences" (*west*), illustrates how the event poses the question of being dynamically and epochally through Heidegger's concept of time-space.

Second, in "The Turning," I analyze *Ereignis*' etymological ancestor *Eräugnis* in the statement, "The Event is appropriatingly brought into view [*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis*]." I argue this reveals the dynamic meaning of the event as lighting up epochs anew through "the truth of be-ing," which Heidegger depicts through the imagery of a "lightning-flash" (*Einblitz*). Doing so, I firstly contend the appeal to *Eräugnis* illustrates how beings show up differently in epochs of be-ing's unfolding. I secondly frame the debate on interpretive disputes of *Ereignis* surrounding the privileging of either the historical etymology of appearing (*äugnen*) or the homonymous meaning of owning (*eignen*). As opposed to privileging one over the other, as other commentators do, I emphasize the importance of retaining both the etymological and homonymous meanings of *Ereignis* equally to better

capture the epochal transformation that “the turn into the truth of be-ing” entails, which the analyzed passage emphasizes.

Third, I return to *Contributions* to argue that Heidegger’s use of fissure (*Zerklüftung*) nuances the meaning of *Ereignis* as eventual rupture. Demonstrating that *Ereignis* is the event of be-ing’s ruptured unfolding, I finally contend that thinking through these ruptures as “de-cisions” permits us to see the historical and ontological senses of *Ereignis*: epochs of be-ing, on the one hand, and original determinations out of the essencing of be-ing, on the other. Distilled is a “history of be-ing” where different names (e.g., *phusis*, *ousia*, *substantia*, spirit, will to power) decisively describe the relationship between be-ing and beings. This, I conclude, further highlights Heidegger’s careful distinction between thinking be-ing as eventual (being-historical thinking) and thinking be-ing *from* the event in preparation for the other beginning (inventive or inceptive thinking). Both, I suggest, are necessary for future analyses of Heidegger’s philosophy of the event.

In my analysis, I mostly choose to leave the term *Ereignis* untranslated. Nevertheless, when I do translate it, I follow Daniela Vallega-Neu and Richard Rojcewicz by using the standard English translation “event.”

## I. *EREIGNIS*: TIME-SPACE

Heidegger writes in *Contributions* that “be-ing ‘is’ not a being,” “be-ing is not something...in itself [and] for itself,” and “be-ing is not, as in metaphysics, the ‘highest’” (GA 65: 13, 299/13, 236). Insofar as be-ing cannot be understood in these terms, we must no longer understand it as “essence” or any other variation given by the history of Western metaphysics, i.e., *ousia*, substance, idea, etc. (GA 69: 26-7/24-5). Heidegger instead writes, “Be-ing *essences* as the event [*Das Seyn west als das Ereignis*]” (GA 65: 30/25, em). It is Heidegger’s use of essence as a verb that illustrates a shift to understanding be-ing as eventual (GA 65: 287-8/225-6). It first implies a kind of emergence: a coming forth (GA 40: 122-3/126).<sup>5</sup> From essence to essencing, Heidegger poses the question of be-ing dynamically, a happening rather than a halting determination. That be-ing “essences” eliminates the idea that be-ing could be some essential entity,

and is rather an occurrence, something that happens, an *event*. Yet, as an “event” (*Ereignis*), it is not merely temporal; neither is it meant to be understood linearly nor dialectically. Instead, by shifting the usual noun to the unusual verb, he emphasizes a different kind of *movement*. As Vallega-Neu points out, the movement is unique in that it is neither active nor passive. In this way, the verb form closely resembles the Greek “middle voice,” where the subject of the sentence is fundamentally tied to – implies – its verb and predicate, and vice-versa.<sup>4</sup> As opposed to “Being” performing the action of “Event,” be-ing is underway as the event – much like, as Vallega-Neu indicates, in the sentence “It is raining,” where there is no subject.<sup>5</sup> There is, in fact, no “it” that “is raining”; *rain is what is raining*.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, there is no being that is event; rather, be-ing unfolds as the event. The grammatical reformulation is meant to illustrate be-ing as a happening, irreducible to any essential entity, quality, or action performed by some subject. Rather, posing the question of be-ing dynamically, Heidegger emphasizes be-ing’s emergence, its happening *there*. That be-ing happens as an event speaks to its unpredictability. It is not already present “there,” but happens in the moment of its occurrence. He further elaborates on the framework of this happening in *Contributions*:

The basic framework of this happening is the time-space arising from it. The time-space is what juts out for measuring the fissure of be-ing. As the juncture of truth, time-space is originally the site of the moment of the event [*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*]. (GA 65: 30/26)

As the essencing or, as Gregory Fried and Richard Polt translate, the *essential unfolding* of be-ing,<sup>7</sup> *Ereignis* is further characterized as a happening through and by which “time-space” arises. This indicates that it is neither a representational event within time and space nor some *a priori* event preceding time and space. On the contrary, it is the eventuating of time-space itself.

This immediately diverges from a traditional Euclidean understanding of time and space. Time-space is not meant to suggest the events

where time and space intersect as if the two were entities in a vacuum playing on a dimensional plane. This “happening” is not positioned and measured via the points where time and space intersect. Rather, Heidegger emphasizes the dynamic simultaneity of time-space as *tim-ing* and *spacing*. Just as with the noun “essence,” Heidegger shifts these words into verbs to illustrate the relational movement inherent in them: time-space is always already involved with the emergence of things. It is a fluid web of relations coming together to build a site where some “thing” occurs. For example, in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking,” Heidegger describes this site-making through a bridge: “the banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses them. . . it brings stream and bank and land into each other’s neighborhood” such that the stream, bank, and land become what they are through being gathered together in the bridge (GA 7: 154 / PLT 150).<sup>8</sup> The emergence of things always occurs in the midst of other things, and it is through this site that they are opened to be what they are within that web of relationships. Similarly, time and space are not containers in which these sites are made but are instead building the site along with everything else. More accurately, they are like simultaneous interstices through which things emerge. It is thus the openings, not the Euclidean points, which define the emergence of things. These open sites are the basic framework of this happening, where time-space arises, giving a structure to the dynamic relationships of a situation ever anew. The eventuating of time-space itself suggests that *Ereignis* just is the unfolding of that happening where “truth,” which is the “disclosure of. . . what and how [something] is,” bursts forth or “juts out” (GA 5: 21 / PLT 35). Further clarifying how time-space functions may help unravel what this means.

Heidegger gives us a further clue when he describes time-space as “the site of the moment of the event [*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*],” which recalls the ecstatic temporality of “the moment” (*Augenblick*) in *Being and Time*. There “the moment” (*Augenblick*) signaled the critical juncture where *Dasein* steps out into the open and projects itself into the future amidst a world in which it already finds itself and against a backdrop that already claims it. Heidegger describes the temporality of

the moment as *ecstatic*, from *ek-stasis*: “outside-itself.” In the moment, then, *Dasein* is not pinned down to a particular instant in time, but stands outside of any localizable instant, constantly carried away into: 1) a world into which we have already been thrown—an embodied history; 2) the possibilities we project, i.e., where we are heading next: the next choice, place, or situation; and 3) the very midst of things in which we find ourselves (GA 2: 429-37/SZ 325-31). The ecstatic temporality of the moment signifies the fact that *Dasein* is always more than it is and “must be understood in terms of the world it inhabits and the possibilities it pursues.”<sup>9</sup> If the moment is the ecstatic site of being exposed to the open for *Dasein*, then time-space, as the site of the moment of *Ereignis*, is similarly the open site out of which be-ing essentially unfolds as the event. The “site of the moment of the event” thus illustrates that time-space breaks out into the “open,” where *be-ing* is always more than it is.<sup>10</sup> This notion, in fact, is emphasized by Heidegger’s choice to use “beyng/be-ing” over “being” (*Seyn* over *Sein*) to “indicate that being is here no longer thought metaphysically” and is instead, Heidegger continues, “the thinking of the historicity of be-ing” (GA 65: 436/344).

As such, time-space is both the site out of which be-ing as event can be thought in its historical unfolding and the happening of that unfolding. Heidegger explains that as the open site, time-space “juts out” in “junctures of truth,” which we understand as the “fissure of be-ing.” We understand and measure these fissures historically as epochs of be-ing’s essential unfolding or as Vallega-Neu succinctly explains, “as the event of appropriation [*Ereignis*] out of which epochs of being occur.”<sup>11</sup> The unfolding of these epochs is further discussed in Heidegger’s *The History of Beyng*.

In §75 of *The History of Beyng*, Heidegger indicates that be-ing’s essencing must not be viewed in terms of a pre-given process or progressive movement, “but rather [as] suddenness – sheer and precipitous – of grounding from out of *the event*” and again in §76 as “the sudden moments of foundering and precipitous collapse” (GA 69: 93/79). Thus, be-ing’s unfolding must be understood as a ruptured unfolding where

these epochs are neither fixed positions on the line of history nor necessary stops along “Being’s” progress (as if “Being” as “Event” is merely historicism or teleology). Rather, it is unpredictably transformative and always more than the precise moments (*Augenblicks-Stätte*) of its epochal configurations. It unfolds through precipitous gatherings – grounding arrangements of things – and sudden collapses – abrupt breaks in those arrangements. Rupture is used to describe this “unfolding” to account for these sudden gatherings and breaks appropriate to be-ing’s emergence. This means, as indicated above, that (1) be-ing *appears* differently in each epoch and (2) be-ing could have unfolded differently at each fissure “point” (de-cision). Both guide the next two sections in answering the questions: What does it mean for be-ing to emerge in junctures of truth? And how can the essential unfolding of be-ing rupture?

## II. ERÄUGNIS: JUNCTURES OF TRUTH

Truth was described above in terms of disclosure. Importantly, the excerpt from *Contributions*, in describing time-space as the site of the moment, also indicates that it occurs “as the juncture of truth.” As such, truth is not only disclosive, but also eruptive. Truth *breaks forth* out into the open. This additionally characterized time-space. Time-space, Heidegger states, is in fact the happening of truth (GA 65: 386/305). These terms used to describe this eruptive activity – breaking forth, jutting out in different junctures, happening, and disclosing – all depict truth as something that *alights* and *appears*. In this section, I first contend that “junctures of truth” can be understood through the imagery Heidegger uses in his lecture “The Turning.” Second, through an analysis of the etymology at play, I emphasize this imagery entails two otherwise contested meanings of *Ereignis*. Intimately tying truth to the notion of “lighting up” clarifies the essential unfolding of be-ing in terms of both “appearance” and “appropriation.”<sup>12</sup>

Just as the imagery of *Augen-blick*, translated literally as “blink of the eye,” helped the reader of *Being and Time* understand *Dasein*’s ecstatic activity, Heidegger similarly helps us understand “be-ing essentially

unfolds as the event” using *Ereignis*'s etymological ancestor *Eräugnis*. Using *er-äugnen*, the verb form meaning “bringing before the eye” or “to strike the eye” (GA 71: 184-5/156-7), Heidegger captures the “sudden and precipitous” character of be-ing's ruptured unfolding through the imagery of a lightning bolt's emergence and disappearance.<sup>15</sup> One of the clearest passages where he gives this imagery is in his 1949 lecture “The Turning.” He states:

This sudden self-lighting is the lightning-flash. It [be-ing] brings itself into its own brightness, which it itself brings along and brings in. When...the truth of being flashes, the [essencing] of being clears and lights itself up. Then the truth of the [essencing]...of being turns and enters...into that which now is the epoch of being. (GA 11: 120/QCT 44, tm)

And later:

In-flashing [this sudden self-lighting] is ‘the disclosing coming-to-pass’ [or simply] the event within being itself. The Event *is bringing to sight that brings into its own*. [*Einblitz ist Ereignis im Sein selbst. Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis.*] (GA 11: 121/QCT 45, tm, em)

The junctures of truth, in be-ing's essencing, flash. This means the “truth of be-ing” is what is brought to sight at each juncture. Heidegger describes this as flashing, where the “flashing” signals be-ing's emergence or “turn into an epoch.” In other words, truth, as a juncture in be-ing's essencing, lights up differently in different epochs. Importantly, when Heidegger writes “truth of be-ing” or “junctures of truth” he does not mean what counts as “right” or “correct” in some juncture, but rather simply what is being disclosed. Indeed, in keeping with the imagery Heidegger provides, “truth” is “unconcealment” or is “that which is brought before the eye” (*er-äugnen*).<sup>14</sup>



In the above passage, Heidegger paints the picture of a sudden flash, inviting us to imagine the lightening flash of a lightning bolt. A lightning bolt gathers positive and negative charges and breaks clear with a sudden flash, bringing the surrounding area to light. Using this imagery, be-ing gathers and enables a configuration of beings only to break clear disruptively, flashing and bringing them to light anew, such that, as Richard Polt writes, “one can survey one’s current world, acting in light of what has been and may be.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, as said above, this flashing (the truth of be-ing) and what is illuminated (beings) differs from epoch to epoch, which is to say that the relationship between be-ing and beings differs from epoch to epoch.<sup>16</sup> *Eräugnis* illustrates this in the sense of what is seen in the flashing light. For, how things light up “before the eye” indicates the epoch.<sup>17</sup> Just as a lightning bolt breaks forth when the difference in charges overflows, be-ing perhaps breaks forth when the difference between be-ing and beings overflows. To clarify, it is because the site of the moment (*Augenblicks-Stätte*) always indicates that be-ing is more than it is in a current configuration that it breaks forth out of this ineluctable difference anew. The motor of this site is always transformative then because be-ing is never wholly captured but properly *evental*, which is to say driven by a process of gathering and breaking forth that is never calculable or complete.<sup>18</sup>

This process, the differencing between be-ing and beings through each epoch (described through the imagery of *eräugnen* as “lighting up before the eye”), is the “turning” which titles the lecture. The turning then is another way of describing time-space as the site of the moment of *Ereignis*. Where does the turning occur in *Ereignis*? Heidegger answers in Section 255: “the turning in the event” of *Contributions*: “the *moment*, i.e., from the flashing up of be-ing out of the enduring of the simple and always incalculable event. . . these moments, and they alone, can become the preparations in which the turning of the event unfolds into truth. . .” (GA 65: 409/324). The site of the moment is instantaneous, “when the truth of being flashes,” as quoted above, and it is in this flash where be-ing “turns and enters” into a new epoch of its unfolding. We call these junctures of truth, which emerge from such moments, the event.

The second passage above explicitly shows that the *Eräugnis* imagery reveals the meaning of *Ereignis*. Crucially, Heidegger notes that this *Einblitz*, the self-lighting of be-ing, is the event in be-ing itself. *Ereignis* just is the activity described or, as Albert Hofstadter writes, “the very process by which the emergence into light and clearing occurs.”<sup>19</sup> William Lovitt provides the English translation, “the event is the bringing to sight into its own,” of “*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis*” (GA 11: 121/QCT 45). This sentence indicates, perhaps, that *Eräugnis* just is what is proper to *Ereignis*, implying that *Eräugnis* provides the imagery to understand the meaning and “activity” of *Ereignis*: the event is properly what is brought into view. Indeed, William McNeill confirms this when he examines this exact sentence. He writes, “*Ereignis*. . . announces itself. . . as the ‘lightning flash’ of being itself that strikes our eye.”<sup>20</sup> As such, *Ereignis* does not just describe be-ing but is the ruptured unfolding of be-ing – what be-ing “is.”<sup>21</sup> But this is just to say what Heidegger himself already tells us, “Be-ing essentially unfolds as the event” (GA 65: 30/25).<sup>22</sup>

The sentence “*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis*,” in particular, is also crucial for demonstrating the key semantic and etymological connotations Heidegger wishes to highlight with the word *Ereignis* and its ancestor *Eräugnis*. In the sentence “*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis*” we see the crucial wordplay that characterizes the German term “event” on full display, which is regrettably lost in English. It is this etymological move which not only allows Heidegger to illustrate how be-ing essentially unfolds as the event by “the truth of be-ing lighting up anew,” but also to analyze the event as an appropriating activity which “takes up” and “grounds” beings anew through the turn into an epoch. Breaking down the German terms into their prefix–root–suffix form shows this more clearly. In the move from *Er-äug-nis* to *Er-eig-nis*, Heidegger wants us to see the semantic play between the two roots. Thus, we see a play between *appearing* or more literally *sight/eyes* (–*äug*–) and *appropriating*, or more literally *own* (–*eig*–), even if, as Heidegger accepts, the root *eigen* (own) and its infinitives, *eignen* and *aneignen* / *zueignen* (to appropriate), are not actually part of its historical etymology (GA 71: 184-5/156-7).<sup>23</sup> He keeps this false etymology at play with the historical to maintain the

complementary meanings through his deployment of the term. Both, I argue, are necessary for understanding how be-ing essentially unfolds as the event with the sentence above precisely preserving both meanings: “*Ereignis ist eignende Eräugnis.*”

This is importantly at the heart of disputes concerning the English translations of *Ereignis*, from Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly’s early English neologism “enowning” and Joan Stambaugh’s “event of appropriation”<sup>24</sup> to Thomas Sheehan’s “*a priori* opening event.” Emad and Maly defend their translation choice in their lengthy “Translator’s Foreword” to the first translation of *Contributions*. They explain that the *er-* prefix in *Er-ignis* indicates “achieving, enhancing, and carrying forth” – what we might refer to in English as “enabling.” Enabling has the function of “putting forth the movement” of *-ignis*, which they translate as “owning,” while insisting that this “owning” does not entail possession. Thus, *Er-ignis*, they contend, names an enabling “owning movement” that does not possess, but instead reveals, this ongoing movement’s relationship to things: a gathering and releasing without coming to rest in a particular “possession.”<sup>25</sup> The problem with “enowning,” as many authors have already pointed out, is that it further complicates the problems of translation rather than alleviates them.<sup>26</sup> No average English reader understands what “enowning” means any more than they do *Ereignis*. This leads others, following Stambaugh instead, to render it more clearly as the “event of appropriation,” which retains the connotations of “to own” (*eigen*) without having to create a new English word.

On the opposite side of this debate, Sheehan’s emphasis on the primary meaning of the reflexive verb *sich ereignen* as “to come into view, to appear, to be brought forth and revealed,” leads him to oppose the notion of the “event of appropriation” in favor of an “*a priori* event of the opening up of the open.”<sup>27</sup> Indeed, he even goes so far as to suggest that “appropriation,” while not eliminated from reference to the event, should be subordinated to the understanding of the event as an *a priori* opening. But this unfairly deprivileges the dynamic, appropriating character which is explicit in both the sentence I analyze above and the sentence Matthew King analyzes from *Identity and Difference*:

“*Er-eignen* originally means: to take in with the eyes, i.e., to catch sight of, in the glance toward what calls, to *ap-proprate*” (GA 11: 45/100-1).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, similar to Jean Cavallès’ critique of Edmund Husserl’s historical *a priori*, Sheehan’s “*a priori* opening” gives a primordial “before” which halts dynamic movement rather than generates it by reducing it to something that has always already occurred (rather than always already *occurring*), “the regular manifestation of a permanent essence.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, conceiving of *Ereignis* as an *a priori* event of opening, a primordial happening which allows the “open” to occur, similarly runs into the problem of halting its essential unfolding.<sup>30</sup> As shown in section one, it runs the risk of depicting *Ereignis* as some event preceding space and time rather than the eventuation of time-space and truth. Despite this, Sheehan’s careful etymological analysis and emphasis on “appearing in the open” remain crucial for the present argument; namely, that both meanings are primary to understanding the event’s unfolding.

Placing the arguments for these translations within the context of the above sentence “*Ereignis ist eignende Erägunis*,” allows us to understand *Ereignis* both as what is “brought into view” (i.e., the juncture of truth), which Sheehan privileges in his work, and the “enabling appropriation” (i.e., the turning) from epoch to epoch, which Emad, Maly, and Stambaugh privilege in theirs.<sup>31</sup> Both, I contend, are crucial for understanding the full (ontological and historical) sense(s) of what Heidegger means by the “event.” Their meanings are co-extensive, because as the passages from “The Turning” illustrate above, the “lighting up” of beings anew is a “turn” into a new epoch. In short, there is a deliberate play on both “lighting up” and “taking up/grounding” in the turning.<sup>32</sup> When the truth *flashes*, bringing the surrounding area to light, the difference in the way things appear both indicates what is appropriate to an epoch and appropriates what lights up to that epoch. We could therefore also render the above sentence as: “The event is appropriately [or appropriating-ly] brought into view.” At each juncture, what is proper to an epoch is what lights up as the truth of be-ing. We are thereby talking about the structures of be-ing in each epoch, how things appear and are grounded, which requires

both “appearing” (-*aug*-) and “appropriating” (-*eig*-). It is the former, which emphasizes the imagery of “lighting up” or “appearing,” and the latter, which emphasizes the differentiation between the imagery of each flashing (*Einblitz*), “belonging,” “fitting,” and “appropriating” (i.e., transformation from epoch to epoch).

In the former case, the etymological ancestor also gives us further insight into what is meant in *Contributions* when Heidegger states, “As the juncture of truth, time-space is originally the site of the moment of the event” (GA 65: 30/26). This site is the site of the lightning-flash; the truth of be-ing erupting out of its difference in perpetual revision (by gathering and breaking forth). Heidegger confirms in *Contributions*, “Time-space as the essential occurrence of truth...[and] the *site of the moment*...the where and the when of the history of be-ing as self-clearing and self-concealing” (GA 65: 375/296). The self-clearing and self-concealing, understood in terms of the passage from “The Turning,” are the self-lighting of be-ing (i.e., the truth of be-ing). The “where and the when” are then distinguished by the epoch, which the truth of be-ing provides.

This makes the “site of the moment of the event,” perhaps, as Eric Nelson describes, the point of “[seeing] differently out of the difference” of these epochal breaks.<sup>55</sup> But the lightning-flash is sudden. Given this, nothing guarantees the way one “sees” in an epoch; it is unpredictable. What is seen is not the result of a linear, logical (deductive), dialectical, or progressive unfolding. It is instead the result of fissure, a sudden rupture within be-ing, which mortals experience as the truth of be-ing (see GA 40: 174-83/183-94). This fissure is not merely a transition but a disruption and emergence. Whereas *Eräugnis* helped demonstrate how be-ing alights and appears as the event, fissure demonstrates how be-ing appropriates (beings) through original determinations from out of the event, the “rupture” of its ruptured unfolding.

### III. ZER-KLÜFTUNG AND ENT-SCHEIDUNG: RUPTURE AS FISSURE AND DECISION

Just as *Eräugnis* illustrated *Ereignis* as a flashing that allows things to appear, fissure, as the disruption from epoch to epoch, is the activity of *Ereignis* whereby they appear (“light up”) differently.<sup>34</sup> In this section, I contend that a close examination of the German terms fissure (*Zerklüftung*) and decision (*Entscheidung*) from *Contributions* demonstrates how rupture is the best way to conceive of be-ing’s unfolding as the event.

The truth of be-ing juts out from the fissure; this is the event of be-ing’s ruptured unfolding. The very word *Zer-klüftung* (fissure) attests to this as *-klüftung* (“cleaving between”) is further nuanced by *Zer-*, which implies the dissolution of prior continuity. *Zer-*, in fact, is often translated as *dis-* in English to capture this schematic meaning.<sup>35</sup> Fissure, then, should also be understood as dis-ruption.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, fissure is what is meant by “ruptured unfolding,” the dis-continuity or, literally, dis-rupture, that defines the event. Thus, the essencing of be-ing ruptures precisely because that is what it means for be-ing to essentially unfold as *Ereignis*. Heidegger states this in §157 of *Contributions*: “The fissure [*Zerflüftung*] is the inner, incalculable splitting open of the ap-proprietation [*Er-eignung*], i.e., the splitting open of the essential occurrence of be-ing” (GA 65: 279–80/220). If be-ing essentially occurs as *Ereignis*, fissure is the incalculable activity of its occurrence.

Incalculable, the breaks of be-ing’s ruptured unfolding do not pre-exist their occurrence and, as such, are not pre-determined. Since they are not pre-determined, Heidegger explains the breaks are instead the result of a *de-cision*. De-cision implies that these epochal arrangements could have been otherwise. But, if be-ing has no agency, how can be-ing “make a decision”?

Heidegger clarifies in §43 of *Contributions* that while we are inclined to think of de-cision in terms of human action or “something that occurs in an either/or,” this is not what the de-cision of be-ing implies. Instead, “de-cision is [simply] an original determination of beings as such out of the essence of be-ing” (GA 65: 89/71) and again

in §9 of *Mindfulness*, “This de-cision is not made as an ‘act’ of an individual person; it is the thrust of be-ing itself...wherein the *fundamental* transformation...historically unfolds as the event [*geschichtlich ereignen*]” (GA 66: 24/18, tm).<sup>37</sup> This rupture, described in terms of both *fissure* and *de-cision*, is thereby an ontological *and* historical occurrence; it indicates a turn into a new epoch *as* an original determination, a fundamental transformation, since “decision...is never [simply] an ‘historical’ critique which would always have to remain within its epoch” (GA 66: 24/18). In other words, de-cision must imply more than mere historical critique, dictated by everyday contingency. It concerns the *essencing* of be-ing. It is no surprise, then, that decision (*Ent-scheidung*) implies a cut or breaking off and into the *essencing* of be-ing, an *incision*. This incision, as Vallega-Neu explains, “articulates both...a closure and an opening.”<sup>38</sup> As an original determination, the de-cision is about the relationship between be-ing and beings (i.e., how they come to sight). Each cut originally determines and thereby fundamentally transforms beings anew, but on the condition that be-ing exceeds itself in the site of this incisional moment. To recall the imagery of section two, the eye closes on the previous way of seeing and opens to the possibilities of be-ing anew.<sup>39</sup> Yet, the original determination is not infinitely open ended, but decisively closed and opened in moments of different determinations. Hence the importance of retaining the sense of “appropriation” in translating *Ereignis* above. What is appropriate(d) to an epoch is the original determination, an essential de-cision about the relationship between be-ing and beings which defines an epoch.

As such, be-ing’s de-cision “is not made but *occurs* in such a way that it can be intimated” through thinking.<sup>40</sup> In the history of Western metaphysics, be-ing has had several names (e.g., *physis*, *ousia*, *energia*, will to power), each of which has unfolded from an essential de-cision, what Heidegger calls “the first beginning” (GA 69: 26-7/24-5). It is this rupture, explored in terms of both fissure and de-cision, that allows us to think differently out of these different epochal arrangements. That is, thinking the de-cision of the first beginning allows us to think otherwise

than what occurred. In this way, *Ereignis* is simultaneously 1) the event of be-ing's ruptured unfolding and 2) the thinking of this ruptured unfolding historically. Both contribute to overcoming Western metaphysics in preparation for what Heidegger calls the other beginning.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

What are we then supposed to expect from our first gropings...?  
(GA 65: 278–9/219)

Heidegger's *Ereignis*, I have argued, is the event of be-ing's ruptured unfolding. I showed this above by attending to three specific concepts through key passages between Heidegger's *Contributions* and "The Turning": 1) essences (*wes*) and time-space, 2) appearing/unconcealing (*Eräugnis*) and truth, and 3) fissure (*Zerklüftung*) and decision. By considering the shift from using essence as a noun (*Wesen*) to a verb (*wes*), I argued that the phrase "Be-ing essentially unfolds as the event" (*Das Seyn wes als das Ereignis*) illustrates the move to understanding be-ing dynamically and epochally, framing my overall argument. Analyzing time-space showed this unfolding as epochal and historical. Yet, time-space, as the "site of the moment of the event" (*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*), also revealed that be-ing can never thereby be tied completely to any particular historical configuration. Much like the moment (*Augenblick*) for *Dasein*, the site of the moment of the event (*Augenblicks-Stätte des Ereignisses*) reveals that be-ing is always ecstatic, always more than the particular historical epochs in which it unfolds. This led to an analysis of *Eräugnis* – the etymological ancestor of *Ereignis* – in its relation to truth to highlight a) the way be-ing is said to "light up as the truth of be-ing" differently from epoch to epoch, b) Heidegger's purposeful semantic play between the historic etymon *-äug-* (sight) and the homonymous etymon *-eig-* (own), which illustrates both the *appearing* and *appropriating* character of *Ereignis*, and c) to differentiate my argument from other scholars by showing that both are required to fully capture what Heidegger means by the turning in *Ereignis*. Finally, to close my argument I analyzed the term "fissure" in relation to de-cision,



illustrating how this epochal unfolding must be nuanced by the term *rupture*. Fissure, my analysis showed, is *disruption*, the incalculable and unprecedented breaks that characterize epochs of be-ing's unfolding. Decision clarified these breaks as original determinations and fundamental transformations, revealing that *Ereignis* is not merely historical, but ontological insofar as each determination grounds beings anew.

Yet, this has only been a preliminary and preparatory analysis – and by no means an exhaustive one. The scope of this article was to propose an interpretation and clarify the semantic novelty of Heidegger's *Ereignis* in key passages between *Contributions* and "The Turning." Specifically, it was to understand it as the event of be-ing's ruptured unfolding or simply to "think being as and in its historical happening."<sup>41</sup> As such, I do not presume to offer a complete and definitive depiction of *Ereignis*, only one that synthesizes existing scholarship and stresses key, relevant passages that are central to Heidegger's use of the term between the texts I analyze. What is especially important, I contend, is his emphasis on understanding the notion of "event" as dynamic and ecstatic, appearing and appropriating, and, ultimately, an historical rupture and decisive ontological determination.

In doing so, the most important issue my analysis contributes to is undoubtedly the disputed import and meaning of "the Event" (*Ereignis*) in Heidegger's work. While not offering an essentially new understanding of the event, my analysis contributes to scholarly debate in two main ways. First, it emphasizes the event as the founding of new epochs through a ruptured unfolding, specifying the three senses that define its "evental structure" (dynamic/ecstatic, appearing/appropriating, and historical/ontological). Second, it offers a way to think *Ereignis* from its dual historical and homonymous etymological meanings of appearing *and* appropriating without prioritizing one over the other (as the "event of appropriation" in the first case and Sheehan's "*a priori* event" in the second). Given my analysis, I especially oppose Sheehan's proposal for the role and meaning of *Ereignis* in Heidegger's work. Where Sheehan privileges "appearing" to show

that the event is both the *a priori* source of “meaning giving” for humans and the way the appropriation of the human being occurs to sustain this *a priori* “meaning giving” activity,<sup>42</sup> I synthesize the two meanings of the etymological roots to suggest that appearing and appropriation are immanent to be-ing’s autonomous unfolding, both historically (through the appearance of the epochs of its unfolding) and ontologically (through the original determination of beings via their appropriation within such epochs). Thus, my argument rests on a fundamentally different supposition. Namely, *Ereignis* does not depend on the essential relationship between human beings and meaning, but, as the event of be-ing’s ruptured unfolding, on history and ontology.<sup>43</sup> As such, I agree more with James Bahoh and Daniela Vallega-Neu, insofar as Heidegger’s *Ereignis* concerns both a differential relationship between its historical and ontological senses and an (auto)poietic thinking from out of its occurrence, i.e., being-historical thinking.<sup>44</sup>

Future work, therefore, may pose the question of why we must think from *Ereignis* to overcome what Heidegger calls the “first beginning” of Western metaphysics, the first original determination from out of the essential unfolding of being (cf. GA 65: 172–7/135–9). *Ereignis* is neither merely a historical, nor solely an ontological concept. It is perhaps by thinking through this history in terms of its ruptures and original determinations that we can creatively think anew. For as Heidegger writes, “The other beginning, on the basis of a genuine originality...becomes fruitful only in the historical dialogue of thinkers” (GA 65: 187/147). As historical and ontological, we must perhaps engage in what Heidegger in *Being and Time* termed destructuring (*Destruktion*) and, perhaps at the same time, what in *Contributions* he termed inventive/inceptual thinking (*erdenken/anfängliches Denken*).<sup>45</sup> In elucidating these ideas, future works may find that overcoming the first beginning requires both these genealogical and creative methods. Perhaps what is key about the *event* is precisely the historical necessity and inceptive novelty in experimentally thinking be-ing’s ruptured unfolding.

As such, the full expanse of this project would require exploring the relationship between “thinking *Ereignis*” as being-historical thinking (*seynsgeschichtliches Denken*) and thinking *from Ereignis* as inventive or inceptual thinking (*erdenken/anfängliches Denken*). Nonetheless, this preliminary interpretation of *Ereignis* may permit us to begin thinking be-ing anew or, at the very least, to better understand Heidegger’s philosophy of the event.

## NOTES

- 1 Thomas Sheehan, "A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research," *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 1253-9. Joan Stambaugh, "Introduction," *Identity and Difference* by Martin Heidegger, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), 14. The debate is neither limited to these two interpretations nor are they the two definitive positions of the interpretive dispute, but I do believe they are the most fruitful to discuss for my argument.
- 2 Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, "Translators' Introduction" to Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), x. The word "be-ing" is an English translation of Heidegger's use of the old German spelling of being, *das Seyn*. The hyphenated English translation is meant to emphasize the verbal resonances of the term "*das Seyn*." I use it over the now standard English translation of "beyng" because, in agreement with Fried and Polt, I believe it emphasizes the "verbal, temporal meaning of Being" better than the archaic English equivalent "beyng."
- 3 On how the *Er-* in *Ereignis* indicates emergence (thus appropriating emerging), see Robert B. Dewell, *The Semantics of German Verb Prefixes* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2015), 127.
- 4 Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Poietic Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 4.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 4-5.
- 6 Cf. Beth Levin and Bonnie Krejci, "Talking about the Weather: Two Construals of Precipitation Events in English," *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 4: 1 (2019): 14-16. This is a contentious topic in linguistics. Some linguists argue that there is no entity that serves as a referent for "it" in this sentence, whereas Levin and Krejci recently argue that this sentence is a subset of "substance emission events," which imply an emission that is particular to some entity (e.g., blood or oil). This, of course, still cannot apply to "be-ing" since there is no determinate "substance-as-subject"

(like blood or oil), which performs “the event.” Nevertheless, the above sentence is useful to illustrate the point of Heidegger’s grammatical reformulation.

- 7 Outside of emphasizing the unusual shift from *Wesen* to *west* as “essencing,” I follow Fried and Polt in translating *west* as “essentially unfolds.” Compare especially their translation of “Sein west *als* Erscheinen” as “Being essentially unfolds *as* appearing” (GA 40: 108/111).
- 8 Cf. Gail Stenstad, *Transformations: Thinking After Heidegger* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 92.
- 9 Richard Polt, *Time and Trauma: Thinking Through Heidegger in the Thirties* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019), 14.
- 10 Cf. James Bahoh, *Heidegger’s Ontology of Events* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 63. Bahoh goes further and emphasizes that the heart of the ontological sense of the event is characterized by a structural instability that generates time. His and my interpretation of *Ereignis* agree, I think, though our arguments take different routes to get there.
- 11 Daniela Vallega-Neu, “Ereignis,” in *The Bloomsbury to Heidegger*, ed. François Raffoul and Eric Nelson (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 288.
- 12 Graeme Nicholson, *Heidegger on Truth: Its Essence and Its Fate* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 154–59. For an excellent treatment of “truth” in Heidegger, I refer readers to Nicholson’s book.
- 13 Albert Hofstadter, “Introduction,” in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, and Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2013), xix. See also Thomas Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 34 (2001): 196–98 and Richard Polt, *The Emergency of Being: On Heidegger’s Contributions to Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5 and 87. Polt briefly takes this imagery up in direct relation to the formula: “*Das Seyn west als das Ereignis.*”

- 14 Daniela Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger's Poietic Writings: From Contributions to Philosophy to The Event* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 5–6.
- 15 Polt, *Time and Trauma*, 17.
- 16 To ask about this relationship is to thus ask how it stands with be-ing, what Heidegger calls “The Grounding Question” (GA 40: 4–5/3). It is important to note that be-ing and beings are not separate entities which relate to each other, but, in the very sense of the imagery provided in this section, are simultaneous. He writes in *Contributions*, “Yet, be-ing is not something ‘earlier’ – existing in itself, for itself. Instead, the event [*Ereignis*] is the temporal-spatial simultaneity for be-ing and beings” (GA 65: 13/13).
- 17 For more on this imagery in terms of the question of truth and grounding in *Contributions*, see GA 65: 239/188, 307–8/243–4, 331–3/263–4, 338–41/268–70, and especially 343–4/272 and 356–7/281–2.
- 18 To be “evental” in this case means to constantly reveal and conceal. No moment fully “reveals” or “unconceals,” otherwise being would once again be thought of as an essence [*Wesen*], and the event, “[in] the manner of an idea, [would] be established and represented” rather than essentially unfolding [*west*] (GA 71: 184/156).
- 19 Hofstadter, “Introduction,” xx.
- 20 William McNeill, “On the Essence and Concept of *Ereignis*: From *Technē* to Technicity,” in *After Heidegger?*, ed. Richard Polt and Gregory Fried, 251–62 (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), 259.
- 21 Richard Capobianco, *Engaging Heidegger* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 34–5.
- 22 Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” 196–98.
- 23 Ibid., 197. See also Matthew King, “Heidegger’s Etymological Method,” *Philosophy Today* 51: 3 (2007): 286.
- 24 Stambaugh, “Introduction,” 14.

- 25 Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, “Translator’s Foreword,” in Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), xix-xxii.
- 26 Cf. Eric Nelson, “History as Decision and Event in Heidegger,” *Arche* IV: 8 (2007): 97–115 and Bahoh, *Heidegger’s Ontology of Events*, 11.
- 27 Sheehan, “A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research,” 198.
- 28 King, “Heidegger’s Etymological Method,” 286. This is King’s own translation of “*Er-eignen heißt ursprünglich: er-äugen, d.h., er-blicken, im Blicken zu sich rufen, an-eignen.*” Emphasis added.
- 29 Jean Cavaillès, *On Logic and the Theory of Science*, trans. Knox Peden and Robin Mackay (New York: Sequence Press, 2021), 123. Cavaillès is referring to Husserl’s desire to ground a theory of science in the intentional structure of consciousness (i.e., sedimentation and the historical *a priori*) particularly in his *Formal and Transcendental Logic*. Cavaillès also critiques Immanuel Kant’s *a priori* concepts of space and time for similarly primordially presupposing a definition of infinity that later is problematized by mathematical experience (Ibid., 42). In reference to Sheehan, if the temptation to use *a priori* is in the hopes of avoiding historicism, then Cavaillès has much to offer Heidegger scholarship on this account. There is a demand in Heidegger, I think, to avoid the *a priori* as much as mere historicism. The happening of the event, even in moving from the first beginning to the other beginning, is always already underway, not always already done.
- 30 This is not remedied in Sheehan’s later *Making Sense of Heidegger*. In fact, even when he incorporates appropriation into the meaning of *Ereignis*, he still only does so on the supposition that it, in accordance with the event as an *a priori* opening of the open, “is a *fact*, that which is always already *done* (*factum*) and thus always already operative.” See Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 234.

- 31 It should be emphasized again that Sheehan does not exclude the latter meaning from *Ereignis* but reserves it for an activity that takes place within *Ereignis* as the turn. Controversially, he argues that the turn essentially describes the relationship between being and *Dasein* in his overall argument that Heidegger's work is not about being, but human meaning making, which my argument opposes. Cf. Thomas Sheehan, "The Turn," in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010), 82-5 and 93-5. For an excellent critique of Sheehan's position here, see Bahoh, *Heidegger's Ontology of Events*, 147-52.
- 32 See GA 65: 352/278. Heidegger notes that this "taking up" should *not* be understood as Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*) but as grounding from out of the event. See also Bahoh, *Heidegger's Ontology of Events*, 85: As Bahoh suggests, this entails that "being as event is essentially self-problematizing and structurally incomplete – it is not objectively present, fully determined [at a higher level in the case of sublation], or exhaustively representable."
- 33 Eric Nelson, "History as Decision and Event in Heidegger," 108.
- 34 Polt, *The Emergency of Being*, 151. Calling to mind the imagery of §2, Polt describes fissure as "flashpoints, rifts that emerge as the volcanic event of be-ing deploys itself." Compare also with "Being essentially unfolds as appearing" in *Introduction to Metaphysics* (GA 40: 108/111).
- 35 Dewell, *The Semantics of German Verb Prefixes*, 169. Emad and Maly, "Translators' Preface" in Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xxxvi. Because *-kluft* is how the English "cleft" or the verb "to cleave" is derived, Emad and Maly translate *Zerklüftung*, *Erklüftung*, etc., as cleavage.
- 36 Polt, *The Emergency of Being*, 151. Polt's account of fissure as a "volcanic eruption" and the way the truth of be-ing "juts out" from fissure entices me to amend dis-ruption to dis-(e)ruption to account for the full activity. This is in line with what Heidegger writes in *Contributions*: "decision is the erupting fissure of be-ing itself" (GA 65: 103/81).



- 37 Heidegger also discusses the notion of “undecidability” (*Unentscheidbarkeit*) in GA 66. Undecidability refers to the space of preparation for the moment of decision. It is how Heidegger characterizes his thought, according to Vallega-Neu, as a “historical meditation [*Besinnung*] on the truth of being.” It concerns the preparation of the de-cision which has yet to occur. Heidegger thus often refers to it in terms of “leaping ahead.” In relation to how I use de-cision in this essay, it can be thought of as the thinking of the event in preparation for its occurrence as the other beginning, which I briefly discuss as inceptual thinking. Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Poietic Writings*, 65–7.
- 38 Vallega-Neu, “Thinking in Decision,” 248. The etymology of the verb form *scheiden*, in fact, means to separate or divide. See Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1854–1960), Bd. 14, Sp. 2403.
- 39 Ibid. Vallega-Neu explains being in de-cision as be-ing’s shift underneath one. One must respond to this decision even if one did not make it. She provides ample examples including the birth of a child, the diagnosis of a terminal illness, and falling in love.
- 40 Nelson, “History as Decision and Event in Heidegger,” 101.
- 41 Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Poietic Writings*, 1.
- 42 Sheehan, “The Turn,” 85.
- 43 This is not to say that the human being plays no role, only not an essential one. *Ereignis* is not, I contend, an activity that describes the relationship between being and the human being, but the unfolding of be-ing. Humans may be taken up by or belong to this essential unfolding, but we do not thereby play a central role in *making it happen*. Even less so, then, should *Ereignis* be thought of as an *a priori* of or for *Dasein*. My suggestion that be-ing is an “autonomous unfolding” similarly does not eliminate the role played by beings, it only emphasizes that they immanently belong to this unfolding.
- 44 Bahoh, *Heidegger’s Ontology of Events*, 13–4, 68–70, and esp. 161–82. Vallega-Neu, *Heidegger’s Poietic Writings*, 2. I am committed

to Vallega-Neu's idea that being-historical thinking is itself a poietic process, a way of "getting in the flow" of be-ing's own autopoietic unfolding.

- 45 GA 2: 29-35/SZ 21-26 and 517/SZ 391-2; GA 65: 56/45-6, 205-6/160-1, 228-30/180-2, 409-17/324-30, and especially 456-65/359-66.