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Depopulation: On the Logic of Heidegger's *Volk*

Name: Nicolai Krejberg Knudsen

Affiliation: Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University

Address: Building 1465, office 430, Jens Chr. Skous Vej 7, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

Contact: filnk@cas.au.dk, +45 28 15 06 70

Abstract: This article provides a detailed analysis of the function of the notion *Volk* in Martin Heidegger's philosophy. At first glance, this term is an appeal to the revolutionary masses of the National Socialist revolution in a way that demarcates a distinction between the rootedness of the German People (capital "P") and the rootlessness of the modern rabble (or people). But this distinction is not a sufficient explanation of Heidegger's position, because Heidegger simultaneously seems to hold that even the Germans are characterized by *a lack of identity*. What is required is a further appropriation of the proper. My suggestion is that this logic of the *Volk* is not only useful for understanding Heidegger's thought during the war, but also an indication of what happened after he lost faith in the National Socialist movement and thus had to make the *lack of the People* the basis of his thought.

Keywords: Heidegger, Nazism, Schwarze Hefte, Black notebooks, Volk, People,

Introduction

In § 74 of *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger introduces the notorious term "the People" [*das Volk*]. For Heidegger, this term functions as the intersection between philosophy and politics and, consequently, it preoccupies him throughout the turbulent years from the National Socialist revolution in 1933 to the end of WWII in 1945. The shift from individual *Dasein* to the *Dasein* of the German People has often been noted as the very point, where Heidegger's fundamentalontology intersects with his disastrous political views. At the same time, however, it is widely recognized that Heidegger rejects the crude biologism of "mainstream" National Socialism, which means that Heidegger's *Volk* cannot be equated to the Aryan race. In a similar vein, he rejects the idea of a *Volk* in the sense of the totality of German citizens, as this would be a mere thingly or *vorhanden* understanding of *Dasein*. "*Das Volk*" remains

veiled in mystery. What does the term signify? Who is designated by it, and who is not? What is Heidegger's *Volk* – or, perhaps rather, what is it doing in his thinking?

In 1934, just after his resignation as the rector of Freiburg University, Heidegger addressed this problem in a series of different lecture courses. In *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache* held in the summer semester, Heidegger rejected the traditional understandings of the People (as body, soul or spirit) and opted for a fourth understanding of the people that would bring it into line with his analysis of resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] in *Sein und Zeit*:¹

In the moment that we grasp the We as something relying on resoluteness [*entscheidungshaftes*], the decision [*Entscheidung*] concerning our being-ourselves also takes place. It is already a decision concerning who we are ourselves, that is, *das Volk*. (GA 38: 59)²

Here the moment [*Augenblick*] of decisiveness seems to be the defining feature of the People. The People must take upon itself its historicity and decide (for) its own Being, its being-itself. Thus, the People is not defined according to *facts*, but based on its *decisive facticity*, or, as James Phillips puts it, “[t]he people decides and thereby throws itself into determination, and yet it is only by deciding, by casting itself into the openness of decision that it can wrest itself from the determinate and confront itself as an exception to the ontology of the present-at-hand.”³ Whereas this appears to be a quasi-militaristic decisionism capable of asserting the national identity and uniqueness of the Germans, Heidegger is a bit more cautious in the winter semester in the course *Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein’*, where the decision to become a People is problematized by a form of existential uncertainty:

We do not know our proper historical time. The world hour of our people is concealed from us. We know not who we are when we ask concerning our being, our properly temporal being. (GA 39: 50/49)⁴

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Niemeyer Verlag, 2006). Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson as *Being and Time* (Harper Row, 1962), hereafter cited as *SZ*. Whenever I quote translations of Heidegger's work, the page number of the English version will follow the original German. When there is no such addition, the translation is my own.

² Martin Heidegger, *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*, ed. Günter Seubold, vol. 38 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1998), cited as GA 38.

³ James Phillips, *Heidegger's Volk: Between National Socialism and Poetry* (Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 24.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlins Hymnen ‘Germanien’ und ‘Der Rhein’*, ed. Susanne Ziegler, vol. 39 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1999), translated by William McNeill and Julia Ireland as *Hölderlin's Hymns ‘Germania’ and ‘The Rhine’* (Indiana University Press, 2014), hereafter cited as GA 39.

In order to decide ourselves as a People, we must know our historical time or moment, and in order to do so, we must “participate in poetry,” so that we can achieve “the necessary conditions” for experiencing “who we are” (GA 39: 58f). As expressed in the lectures on Hölderlin, the task of poetry is, exactly, to facilitate such an experience of the People that can ground its decisiveness. In this way, the poet is the “founder of Being [*Stifter des Seyns*]” who through his “Saying [*Sage*]” can bring the “Dasein of a People” to a stand (GA 39: 214).

Heidegger believed that Hölderlin was the poet capable of engendering this transformation. But this also means that Heidegger’s notion of *Volk* is elusive and veiled by ambiguity and uncertainty, since, on the one hand, he seems to *presuppose* the existence of a People just waiting to seize the right moment in order to fulfill its destiny, but on the other hand, this People *lacks identity* and has *yet* to be brought into existence by a poet. In this paper, I will try to outline what I take to be the logic of Heidegger’s *Volk* by asking, not what it is, as this question has already shown itself to be elusive, but by asking how it functions: How does it include, exclude and identify?

I argue that the elusiveness of Heidegger’s *Volk* is not due to communicative unclarity, but a result of the very function of the term. Thus, my thesis is that Heidegger’s notion of *Volk* can be understood as embodying a series of identificatory procedures that exhibit a paradoxical logic of gradual demarcation, in which identity is won at the cost of what is to be identified, and that Heidegger’s break with National Socialism constitutes a *depopulation* that remains, largely, in continuity with this *Logik des Volkes*, even though its connection to the possible self-realization of the body politic has been severed, thus rendering it inoperative.

Firstly, I argue that the contradiction between presupposing the existence of the People, on the one hand, and the Hölderlinian process of constituting it, on the other, is necessary in Heidegger’s thought, insofar as his understanding of the national operates on four different levels. Secondly, I review the procedures through which Heidegger sought to emphasize the communal *Dasein* of the People in what he, with Hölderlin, called the appropriation of the proper.⁵ Thirdly, I propose an interpretation of Heidegger’s thought *after* he got disillusioned with the National Socialist movement, arguing that this “break” is largely understandable from within the logic of *das Volk*.

⁵ I employ a series of terms in order to convey the complexity of Heidegger’s *das Eigene*: proper, appropriate, authentic and own. And correspondingly, whenever I use the terms improper, inappropriate or inauthentic, I refer to Heidegger’s notion of *das Uneigentliche*.

1. The Divisions of *Das Volk*

1.1 *The Geopolitics of the Volk: The people and the People*

In the 30's, Heidegger developed a philosophical vision of Germany as *Mitteleuropa*, i.e., a pan-Germanic empire capable of resisting the pressure from the superpowers threatening it from both sides. He (in)famously expressed this vision in his *Einführung in die Metaphysik* from 1935, where he wrote: "Russia and America, seen metaphysically, are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man [*der bodenlosen Organisation des Normalmenschen*]" (GA 40: 40f/40).⁶ He believed that a double metaphysical danger threatened Germany; a danger consisting of technology and "a rootless organization" of the human being. According to Heidegger, this resulted in "the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the reduction of human beings to a mass, the hatred and mistrust of everything creative and free" (GA 40: 41/40). It goes without saying, that only Germany – and German philosophy, in particular – could save the world from this thoughtless destruction of the earth.

As it has often been noted, Heidegger, when arguing for the actuality and relevance of his philosophy, invoked a *geopolitical* line of thought.⁷ As Theodore Kisiel describes it,

geopolitics is a study of the international politics and power relations that develop from the geographical juxtaposition of indigenous peoples, each with its unique character shaped by its domestic environment, beginning with the natural landscape (...) with its natural resources and viable occupations, and extending to the tradition that each locale cultivates.⁸

Likewise, Heidegger's geopolitics are centered around a specific German way of life that he designates with the often used phrases: *Zugehörigkeit* (belongingness), *Heimat* (homeland), *Bodenständigkeit* (rootedness) and *Ethos*. As is evident from the quotations above, however, Heidegger does not conceive the geopolitical struggle to be one between two different types of dwelling. Rather, it is a struggle between the German rootedness and the

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, ed. Petra Jaeger, vol. 40 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt as *Introduction to Metaphysics* (Yale University Press, 2000), cited as *GA 40*.

⁷ See for example Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 44-46; Theodore Kisiel, "Heidegger's philosophical geopolitics in the Third Reich" In *A Companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*, ed. Richard Polt, Gregory Fried (Yale University Press, 2001), 226-249; and Charles Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 112-167.

⁸ Kisiel, "Heidegger's philosophical geopolitics in the Third Reich," p. 320 n4.

technological, “*rootless* organization of the average man.” The metaphysical danger is one of *rootlessness* [*Bodenlosigkeit*] that threatens to destroy the earth – and the only bulwark against this is a thoughtful rehabilitation of the German *Volk*.

This means that Heidegger’s geopolitics hinges on a distinction between rootlessness and rootedness, between homelessness [*Heimatlosigkeit*] and a certain cultural sedentariness that Heidegger associates with the agrarian lifestyle of South-German peasantry.⁹ Hence in “Schöpferische Landschaft: Warum bleiben wir in der Provinz?” from 1933, he explains that his philosophy “belongs alongside the work of the peasants,” because it is “submerged in the happening of the landscape” (GA 13: 10).¹⁰ This, as Heidegger explains, is the reason that he declined a chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin; he simply could not be separated from this “creative landscape” as he would not be able to think within the metropolis. In fact, even Freiburg seems to be too far removed from the soil, which is why he had to “retreat out of the city into the hut” in Todtnauberg (GA 13: 12), in order to ponder whether or not he should go to Berlin.

In contrast to this sedentariness, Heidegger talks of a “freefloating consciousness” that he takes to be “derived from human beings in their historical rootedness [*Verwurzelung*] and in the national tradition [*volkhaften Überlieferung*] of their descent from soil and blood [*Boden und Blut*]” (GA 16: 132) (and in this particular instant – a letter from 1933 – Heidegger is not talking about America or Russia, but about Richard Högnigswald’s school of Neo-Kantianism).¹¹ Heidegger fears that the particularity and uniqueness of the *ethos* will disintegrate into an “indifferent, general world culture” (GA 16: 132).

As Charles Bambach has shown, this dichotomy between rootedness and rootlessness is the political undercurrent in Heidegger’s discourse on the earth and rootedness, at least between 1933 and 1945.¹² This leaves us with a preliminary definition of *das Volk* as being

⁹ The disdain of rootlessness is already evident in SZ, where Heidegger, in a particularly striking passage, connects the *fallen* form of dialogue, idle talk [*Gerede*] (which moreover marks the entrance to the public sphere, that we, in retrospect, easily recognize as essentially *urban*), with such a groundlessness: “The groundlessness [*Bodenlosigkeit*] of idle talk is no obstacle to its becoming public; instead it encourages this. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one’s own. If this were done, idle talk would founder; and it already guards against such a danger. Idle talk is something which anyone can rake up; it not only releases one from the task of genuinely understanding, but develops an undifferentiated kind of intelligibility, for which nothing is closed off any longer” (SZ: 169/213, my italics). Despite the underlying juxtaposition of urbanity with the authenticity of the province, I believe that the *geopolitical* significance of the distinction is a product of the political atmosphere of the 30’s and thus not present in SZ.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, vol. 13 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1983), cited as GA 13.

¹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebens*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, vol. 16 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), cited as GA 16.

¹² Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots*.

rooted in the earth, as opposed to its geopolitical enemies. Heidegger's critique of urbanism and Neo-Kantianism, however, shows that the distinction between the rootedness of the People and the uprootedness of those excluded from the People is neither a mere question of being a German citizen nor proficiency in the German language. Instead, the distinction is much more subtle as it cuts across our usual geopolitical distinctions between nations. Some Germans would be considered rootless and thus excluded from the People. This procedure of exclusion amounts to the semantic ambiguity that Giorgio Agamben locates in the way that modern European languages use the term 'the people' [*popolo*, *peuple*, *pueblo*, *Volk*, and, I might add, *folk*]:

[We have,] on the one hand, the *People* as a whole and as an integral body politic and, on the other hand, the *people* as a subset and as fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies; on the one hand, an inclusive concept that pretends to be without remainder while, on the other hand, an exclusive concept known to afford no hope; at one pole, the total state of the sovereign and integrated citizens and, at the other pole, the banishment – either court of miracles or camp – of the wretched, the oppressed, and the vanquished.¹³

Following Agamben, we can say that the distinction between rootlessness and rootedness is, in fact, a distinction between the *people* and the *People*, where the first signifies the excluded bodies of the uprooted – those who have forgotten the static ethos of the earth – while the latter signifies the included, unified body of those (at least capable of) valuing and protecting their traditional way of life against the dangers of modernity. Heidegger was actually aware of the semantic ambiguity of *das Volk*, as reported in the student protocol from his lecture course *Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat* from the winter semester of 1933/34:¹⁴

If, for example, we say 'folk song,' 'folk customs,' then we say the word *Volk* in a way that alludes to the life of sentiments and feelings; by this we mean a certain naive, unspoiled, fresh originality of mores. This is different from turns of phrase such as 'the crowd of people scattered': here we see an aggregation of subordinates, of the uneducated 'rabble,' which is supposed to be numerically superior

¹³ Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, translated by Cesare Casarino and Vincenzo Binetti (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 30.

¹⁴ This text was discovered by Marion Heinz in 1999 and published in German in 2009 and thus unavailable to Agamben when he wrote "What is a People?" in 1995. Of further interest is the fact that Heidegger in these lecture mentions the Greek distinction between *bios* and *zoe*. This, however, is not the place to speculate further about the obscure and vague transition offered by the student protocols from *bios/zoe* to the remarks on the state.

and shut off from so-called ‘higher’ goods; this way of speaking, then, emphasizes the social differentiation of the people.¹⁵

While thus noticing the various meanings of “the people,” Heidegger decides to cover over such a “social differentiation,” insofar as the way he uses the term “Volk” designates neither this ambiguity nor “race and a community of the same stock,” but rather “the nation, and that means a kind of Being that has grown under a common fate and taken distinctive shape within a *single* state.”¹⁶ I will treat the way that Heidegger covers over the fracture between People and people more thoroughly in the next section; for now, it suffices to note that this distinction is a direct continuation of the distinction between the rooted and the un-/uprooted and that this is what is sublated in the univocity and unitedness of what Heidegger reportedly calls “a *single* state.”

The rootedness in the *Heimat* is an essential relation to space, much along the lines of the analysis in “Schöpferische Landschaft,” whereby human beings develop “a special endurance in its propagation, in its growth, in its health”; in short, a way of life.¹⁷ This, however, is not the only relation that Dasein has to space. The second relation is embodied by the state: “We can speak of the state only when rootedness in the soil is combined with the will to expansion, or generally speaking, interaction.”¹⁸ The *Heimat* thus designates a relation of nearness to and habitation within a familiar environment and landscape that is, however, fragile and in need of protection from a larger entity. This entity is the state and its primary function is to protect the ethos of its inhabitants. Consequently, people without a state – as for example Germans living outside the borders of the Reich – “are in constant danger of losing their peoplehood and perishing.”¹⁹ This tension filled connection between an emphasis on the agrarian, provincial lifestyle and the unification in a single will to struggle against the forces embodying the modern forgetfulness of Being [*Seinsvergessenheit*] is what Bambach, following Ernst Bloch, calls “*pastorale militans*.”²⁰

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 43.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 43.

²⁰ Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots*, p. 4. I will return to this essentially Nietzschean logic between protection and expansion later. Those interested in the relation of this geopolitical will to power and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche should compare this with the remarks on the “guaranteeing of *Lebensraum*” in Martin Heidegger, “Nietzsches Wort ‘Gott ist tot’ in *Holzwege*,” ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, vol. 5 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2003), p. 229, translated by William Lovitt as “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God Is Dead’” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (Harper and Row, 1982), p. 73, hereafter cited as *GA* 5.

The People is the unity achieved through the connection between *Heimat* and state. Excluded by this definition are “the rabble,” who probably live in the urban slum, and the “Semitic nomads,” who like nomads in general “have not only been made nomadic by the desolation of wastelands and steppes, but they have also often left wastelands behind them where they found fruitful and cultivated land.”²¹ A similar line of thought is found in the lecture course *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit* (from the winter semester, 1933/34), where Heidegger in an analysis of Heraclitus’ phrase “polemos” (which Heidegger translates as “struggle” [*Kampf*]) yet again associates the People with rootedness, in contrast to the people, who as “internal enemies” must be pursued relentlessly to the point of “a complete annihilation” – because they have infiltrated in order to subvert “the inner root of the Dasein of the People” (GA 36/37: 91).²²

1.2 Hölderlin’s Law: *das Volk*[–] and *das Volk*⁺

So far Heidegger seems to be fully in accord with Agamben’s analysis of National Socialism according to which it attempts to “free the Western political stage from this intolerable shadow [i.e., the people and especially the Jew] so as to produce finally the German *Volk* as the people that has been able to heal the original biopolitical fracture.”²³ And Heidegger’s *Volk* and geopolitics does indeed presuppose a distinction between people and People determined via the dichotomy between modern homelessness and a rooted, cultural sedentarity. But Heidegger’s *Volk* is more complex than this, as his lectures on Hölderlin shows: Not only does it presuppose a distinction between a people and a People, but the term “People” is further divided into an unappropriated, unreflective or inauthentic sense of the *Volk*, on the one hand, and the appropriated or authentic sense of the *Volk*, on the other hand. For the sake of clarity, I will call the first for *Volk*[–] and the latter *Volk*⁺, while reserving *the People* for designating both of these senses, as opposed to *the people*. *Das Volk* as such, without – or +, is the unifying sense of the interplay or “logic” of these four different dimensions.

The tension between Heidegger’s disapproval of the mainstream understanding of what it means to be a People and his pride and belief in the grandeur of the *Vaterland* is evident in the

²¹ Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 55.

²² Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Wahrheit*, ed. Hartmut Tietjen, vol. 36/37 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2001).

²³ Agamben, *Means without End*, p. 33.

introduction to his reading of Hölderlin's poem "Germanien": Despite how the *Vaterland* is "forbidden, withdrawn into the busyness of everyday and the noise of bustle," it remains "the highest and therefore the most difficult." This *vaterländische* origin [*Ursprung*], he says, is designated by the name Hölderlin (GA 39: 4). Thus, when reading Hölderlin, the task is not to "make Hölderlin our contemporary, but on the contrary: we want to bring ourselves and those to come under the measure of the poet" (GA 39: 4). Here we clearly sense the tension between *Volk*⁻ and *Volk*⁺; he can talk about "*our* Vaterland Germanien" and yet it is, at the moment, not fit to the task that stands in front of it. The name Hölderlin designates a process in which those who participate in the idea of the *Vaterland* must be brought "under the measure" of "the poet of the Germans."

For Heidegger the idea of cultural sedentarity is not sufficient as the ground of *das Volk*. Even in the *Heimat*, the forgetfulness entailed by "busyness" and "noise" threatens the Germans. Thus, a meditation or reflection [*Besinnung*] on the proper – on what the Germans really are – is required and Hölderlin is the poet, capable of facilitating such a transformation. This process is, however, still grounded in the earth or the soil:

The coming to be of homeland does not happen through mere settlement, either, unless it is accompanied by a nurturing of the Earth for the gods, in which the Earth is held open for an encounter with the prevailing of the gods in the course of the changing seasons of the year and their festivals. (GA 39: 105/95)

The gods here designate the *ethos*, constituted through the meaning ascribed to places and times through, for instance, rituals and their continuation in the tradition of a generational community. Heidegger continues on the same page:

In the Earth's becoming homeland, it opens itself to the power of the gods. The two are the same and include within them a third element: that in the storm of the divine, the Earth itself comes to be torn open in its grounds and abysses. The latter can certainly become covered over, and do so together with the decline of the homeland. The Earth then becomes a mere site of use and exploitation. By contrast, when the Earth manifests herself in the disinterestedness of authentic Dasein, she is holy – holy Earth. (GA 39: 105/96)²⁴

Sedentarity, the stable relation to the earth that characterizes the *Heimat*, must be accentuated and appropriated. Even the People is threatened by a forgetfulness of Being and

²⁴ The same juxtaposition between the inauthentic, economic relation and the proper, poetic relation to the earth is invoked, whenever Heidegger quotes Hölderlin's famous passage: "Voll Verdienst, doch dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde."

must be saved by insight into their own Being in order to save the earth from destruction. *Sedentarity is, simultaneously, the presupposition and goal of this transformation.* This circularity expresses the very core of Heidegger's notion of *facticity* contra *Verfallenheit*. As Agamben expresses it, "[f]acticity does not mean simply being contingently in a certain way and a certain situation, but rather means decisively assuming this way and this situation by which what was given must be transformed into a task."²⁵ What we are, is given but must be constantly appropriated in a "hermeneutics of the proper."²⁶ As Heidegger says: "Remaining in the homeland is in no way brought about by itself. It does not consist in the fact that the poet is, so to speak, merely present in the compass of home. *The abiding is only what it must be in the return home*" (GA 4: 117/140, my italics).²⁷

Hölderlin conceived this perpetual homecoming, where what is given [*das Mitgegebene*] necessarily involves something yet to be achieved and appropriated [*das Aufgebene*], as a historical interaction between the Germans and the Greeks (GA 39: 292). Contrary to the, essentially, economic relation to the earth stands the poetic relation achieved through "a venture through the foreign" that can help us understand ourselves through a "joining difference [*fügende Unterscheidung*]" (GA 53: 68).²⁸ This foreign element, however, is not to be understood as the mere negation of the familiar, but rather the foreign that corresponds to our own failings. Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin leaves little doubt concerning what constitutes this foreignness. A letter from Hölderlin to his friend Böhlendorff, often quoted by Heidegger, expresses what has subsequently been called Hölderlin's law:

We learn nothing with greater difficulty than the free use of the national. And, as I believe, precisely the clarity of presentation is originally so natural to us as the fire from the heavens was to the Greeks.... Yet one's own must be learned just as well as the foreign. This is why the Greeks are indispensable to us. Only we shall not come close to them precisely in what is our own, our national, because, as

²⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereignty and Bare Life*, translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 150f. The fundamental difference between facts and facticity is also what enables Heidegger to polemically state that "the proper cannot be determined through measurements of the skull," *Hölderlin's Hymne 'Andenken'*, ed. Walter Biemel, vol. 52 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1982), p. 131, hereafter cited as GA 52.

²⁶ See Peter Trawny, *Heidegger und Hölderlin oder der europäische Morgen* (Königshausen & Neumann, 2004).

²⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlin's Dichtung*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, vol. 4 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1996), translated by Keith Hoeller as *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry* (Humanity Books, 2000), cited as GA 4.

²⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Hölderlin's Hymne "Der Ister"*, ed. Walter Biemel, vol. 53 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), translated by William McNeill and Julia Davis as *Hölderlin's 'The Ister'* (Indiana University Press, 1984), cited as GA 53.

mentioned, the *free* use of one's own [*der freie Gebrauch des Eigenen*] is what is most difficult. (GA 39: 291)

A venture through the Greek is “indispensable” if we are to learn “the free use of the national,” that is, if we are to evolve into *das Volk*⁺. Through the contrast with the Greek the Germans should reflect upon their own finitude and their own essence [*Wesen*]. Only this could, according to Heidegger, reestablish and secure the nearness to the things and the landscape that has been lost in modernity. This appropriation enables the Germans to be, what they really are. In this way, *Volk*⁺ deals with the uncertainty of not knowing who “we” are and what the “world hour of our people” is (GA 39: 50) and thus clears the way for the decisive, destinal self-assertion.

Here, we arrive at what James Phillips has called Heidegger's *ontological* opportunism, opposed to the naïve explanation that Heidegger joined the NSDAP to further his career:

In the name of the *Volk* of the question of Being, in the name of the German's long-standing metaphysical mission, Heidegger appealed to the masses of a nationalist uprising. If Heidegger's appeal was to have a chance of success, the masses had to be nationalistic. The masses had to be open to an appeal to their nationalism, and inasmuch as an appeal needed to be made, the masses had to differ as yet from the *Volk* of the question of Being. Heidegger did not confuse the masses of National Socialism with the *Volk* of the question of Being, but he failed to bring about a transformation of the masses.²⁹

The masses of the *Volk*⁻ are necessary but not sufficient. Phillips rightly emphasizes the “openness to appeal” to both nationalism and the question of Being that uncannily intersect in Heidegger's writings of the 30's.³⁰ This, I believe, is the very epicenter of the ongoing Heidegger controversy. The crucial point is that there is common ground between the appeal of nationalism and the appeal of the question of Being that does not concern facts, but facticity. In Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's insightful work on “The Nazi Myth,” we find another way of expressing this double appeal: “What Germany lacked, therefore, in practical terms, was its subject (...) [W]hat was at stake was their identity (or the vertigo of an absence of identity).”³¹ It seems that what Heidegger found promising in National Socialism was exactly such a lack of identity combined with an explicit hostility

²⁹ Phillips, *Heidegger's Volk*, p. 97.

³⁰ Heidegger mentions this double appeal in a letter to Elisabeth Blochmann from 1933, in which he talks about the current political situation: “Certainly, for many this can be and has been a path of first awakening – provided that we are resolved to prepare for a second and deeper one,” cited in Gregory Fried, *Heidegger's Polemos: From Being to Politics* (Yale University Press, 2008), p. 152.

³¹ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Nazi Myth” in *Critical Inquiry* 16, translated by Brian Holmes (1990), p. 299, cf. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger and the Politics of Poetry*, translated by Jeff Fort (University of Illinois Press, 2007), p. 90.

towards the forces that he too considered to be the part of the problem, namely, "global technology" (GA 40: 208/213) embodied in Russia and America. In this way, the hope was that this lack of identity and willingness for a geopolitical confrontation could also become a philosophical (perhaps, a 'geophilosophical') confrontation capable of preparing the nationalist masses for the question of Being, that is, of their own finitude and essence.³²

The task of Hölderlin's law is to counter this lack of identity and thus to *found* "the truth of the Dasein of a People" (GA 39: 144). The transformation from *Volk*⁻ to *Volk*⁺ consists in a reflection on one's own, and the task of the thinker is to guide this transformation. Based on this double appeal it seems that the "appropriation of the proper" requires a set of procedures that we could, with Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's analysis of German nationalism in mind, call "means of identification."³³

2. The Means of Identification

This appropriation is particularly evident in Heidegger's work on Hölderlin, "the poet of the Germans," and what has been called his "political texts" written around the time of the rectorship (from April 1933 to April 1934).³⁴ I believe that the means of identification through which Heidegger sought to facilitate the transformation from *Volk*⁻ to *Volk*⁺ can, largely, be described by three interrelated procedures: (a) originary *kairos*, (b) univocity [*Einstimmigkeit*] and (c) readiness for struggle [*Kampfbereitschaft*]. In this section, I will consider these procedures one by one.

(a) In the first lecture course on Hölderlin, Heidegger repeats one of the essential insights from *SZ*: We are *thrown* into this world and must from out of this thrownness *project* our own being (GA 39: 175). This means that we, in a certain sense, *undergo* or *suffer* our own facticity and only based on this suffering can we authentically take upon ourselves our own existence. This process is, insofar as we are thrown into a historico-cultural world, a form of *destiny*. As Heidegger puts it:

Only in such a suffering can a destiny [*Schicksal*] take hold of us, a destiny that never simply lies present before us, but that is a sending [*Schickung*] – that is, is sent to us – and in such a way that it

³² I will return to the question, and Heidegger's explicit revision of the double appeal in section 3.

³³ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, "The Nazi Myth," p. 299.

³⁴ See Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (MIT Press, 1993).

sends us toward [*entgegenschickt*] our vocation, granted that we ourselves truly send ourselves into it, and know of what is fittingly [*das Schickliche*] sent, and, in knowing it, will it. (GA 39: 176/160)

Prima facie, this sounds like the embeddedness in tradition also underlying the sections on historicity in *SZ* in which “Dasein chooses its heros” (*SZ*: 385). After the turning, however, Heidegger superimposes his conception of the history of Being [*Seinsgeschichte*] on the concept of *Schicksal*, in such a way that the horizon of meaning into which Dasein is thrown is itself part of a historical development that Heidegger describes as a gradual decline from the pre-Socratic inauguration of thought.

The decline inherent to the history of Being further explains the geopolitical confrontation between Germany, on the one hand, and America and Russia, on the other. The Germans need the Greeks (who, as we remember, are ‘indispensable’ for the appropriation of the proper) in order to circumscribe the rootlessness and forgetfulness of Being that constitute the metaphysical sameness of their geopolitical enemies.³⁵ The uniqueness of the relation between the Germans and the Greeks is determined by the pre-metaphysical originarity of the Greeks with whom the Germans share a linguistic affinity. (The latter is a common assumption in German intellectual history inspired by the fact that German is not influenced by Latin to the same degree as English and French.³⁶)

The venture through the foreign(ness of Greek thought) is thus an encounter with the origin of the history of Being supposed to render the People capable of inaugurating a new beginning for thought beyond the forgetfulness of modernity. In this way, the transition to *Volk*⁺ requires what I call an originary *kairos*, that is, a rupture of chronological time in the decisive moment [*kairos*] capable of re-actualizing the origin of our tradition. The future of the German People relies on their ability to reinstate this originarity. Hölderlin’s greatness corresponds exactly to such arché-eschatology: “The poetic remains in power only if it itself always essentially prevails only in the origin and ‘never forgets’ the origin” (GA 39: 266/241).

A similar point is made in the Rectoral Address, where Heidegger introduces his vision for the German university by stating that science must be reoriented according to its Greek beginning:

³⁵ Heidegger does, famously, mention “the few other great beginnings [den wenigen anderen großen Anfängen]” that supposedly could engender another such circumscription but infamously fails to take them seriously (GA 4: 177/201).

³⁶ On this topic see for example Dennis Schmidt, *On Germans and Other Greeks: Tragedy and Ethical Life* (Indiana University Press, 2001) and Agnes Heller, “The Gods of Greece: Germans and the Greeks” in *Thesis Eleven* 93 (2008), 52-63.

For, assuming that the original Greek science [*Wissenschaft*] is something great, then the *beginning* [*Anfang*] of this great thing remains its *greatest* moment. (...) The beginning *exists* still [*ist noch*]. It does not lie behind us as something long past [*das längst Gewesene*], but it stands *before* us. (...) The beginning has invaded our future; it stands there as the distant decree that orders us to recapture [*wieder einzuholen*] its greatness. (GA 16: 110/32)³⁷

The originary *kairos* consists in repeating [*wiederholen*] the Greek beginning thus reactualizing its greatness and thereby opening up a future beyond the current crisis of forgetfulness and fallingness. Here we find the main historiographical theme of the late Heidegger: The originary sin, resulting from the metaphysical misinterpretation of the pre-Socratics, can only be redeemed by a retuning in accordance with (and not a simplistic return to) the origin [*arché*], which would end the miserable historical decline.³⁸ This is the meaning of the enigmatic phrase: the beginning “stands *before* us.” When keeping this in mind, it is clear why Heidegger did *not* use the phrase originary *kairos*, but abandoned the term *kairos* before *SZ*: In a certain sense, originary *kairos* is a pleonasm since Heidegger wants us to hear this *arché*-eschatological figure in the very term *Ur-sprung* (origin), which literally means an archaic leap or, rather, a leap from out of the archaic. The *Ur-sprung* is, according to Heidegger, always already *kairological*.

The strong reliance on *Ursprung* and its “distant decree” reveals the identificatory function of Heidegger’s history of Being. This establishes a unique relation between the People and the origin of thinking. This origin is thought as a form of autochthony in the etymological and mythological sense of this word: Something generated by itself from out of the earth [*autós + khthón*] and thus originarily without contamination and impurity.³⁹ Undoubtedly, this is a retroactive reconstruction of Greek identity that – especially in the

³⁷ Translation from Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*.

³⁸ This is also why it is no coincidence that the series of metaphors with which Heidegger described the culmination of metaphysics, collectively gathered in the name *Gestell*, is essentially *economic*. The designation of the epochal constellations of the history of Being as economies (see Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Indiana University Press, 1987)) reveals the historiographical affinity with the *ecclesiastical economy*, that is, the temporary (which in this case means historical) arrangements made by the church to deal with the fall of man while waiting or preparing for salvation. Agamben diagnoses this as the ultimate ground for Heidegger’s history of being *and* its essential aporia: “The attempt to think, at one and the same time, an infinite being and its finite history – and hence, the figure of being that survives its economy – forms precisely the theological inheritance of modern philosophy, which achieves its most extreme form in the last works of Heidegger” (Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government*, translated by Lorenzo Chiesa with Matteo Mandarini (Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 211, see also pp. 64-65, 252-253). While Heidegger’s thought certainly does contain such an eschatological strain, this is not the whole story as I will show in section III.

³⁹ See Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots*, pp. 96-98.

modern era – served a political aim. The questionability of this reconstruction is clearly put by Nietzsche:

Earliest inhabiting Greek soil: people of Mongolian origin, worshippers of trees and snakes. A fringe of Semites along the coast. Thracians here and there. The Greeks took all these elements into their own bloodstream, along with gods and myths (several of the Odysseus stories are Mongolian). (...) What are ‘racially pure’ Greeks? Can’t we simply suppose that Italic peoples, mixed with Thracian and Semitic elements, became *Greek*?⁴⁰

Heidegger glosses over any such questions of genesis and hypostatizes the Greeks as the sole and pure origin of thinking with which the Germans had a special connection. Such appropriation of a singular, pure origin is the mythic gesture *par excellence*. In the words of Nancy: “Myth is of and from the origin, it relates back to a mythic foundation, and through this relation it founds itself (a consciousness, a people, a narrative).”⁴¹ The problem with Heidegger’s arché-eschatology is, then, that “[t]he Greeks’ proper is inimitable because it never took place,” i.e., there simply is no pure and singular origin.⁴² Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe provides an excellent account of the identificatory procedures of originary kairos in their analyses of myth. The repetition of the origin (that never happened) establishes a communal narrative with the goal of achieving “a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence *as community*.”⁴³ In Lacoue-Labarthe’s terms this is the circular connection between onto-mythology and onto-typology:

It is the myth of ‘mythopoiesis’ itself, of which the type, by the very logic of aesthetico-political immanence, is both productive of and produced by fiction. Moreover this is why myth, signifying nothing other than itself, is a product of pure self-formation and finds its truth or its verification as the self-foundation of the people [or, rather, the People] (...) in conformity with its type.⁴⁴

Myth seeks to establish a narrative of its own becoming that creates a community *in its own image*, that is, in accord only with itself. Myth is autopoietic insofar as it generates its own subject, its own type or people. Heidegger’s arché-eschatological myth is the myth of the

⁴⁰ Nietzsche quoted in Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots*, p. 218.

⁴¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 45.

⁴² Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk (Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 246.

⁴³ Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics: The Fiction of the Political*, translated by Chris Turner (Blackwell Publishing, 1990), p. 49f, cf. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, pp. 53-55.

People capable of repeating the greatness of the origin, i.e., it is the myth of *das Volk*⁺ – which also means that the *Volk*⁺ only exists within the transformative process of a *mythopoiesis* that must find resonance in the *Volk*⁻.

(b) The second procedure, that of univocity or *Einstimmigkeit*, is supposed to unite the differing *Heimats* in a single will and State. This is where Heidegger's political Platonism makes itself known, since such unification requires a restructuring of the social order along the lines of Plato's *Republic*.⁴⁵ Hence, Heidegger proposes in the Rectoral Address that society is to be organized around a labor service, a military service and a knowledge service (GA 16: 113f/35f). The univocity of this configuration of the social order is made painfully clear in a paragraph from *Über Wesen und Begriff von Natur, Geschichte und Staat*:

Order is the human way of Being, and thus also the way of Being of the [P]eople. The order of the state expresses itself in the delimited field of tasks of human individuals and groups. (...) Only where the leader and the led bind themselves to *one* fate and fight to actualize *one* idea does true order arise.⁴⁶

Everyone within the *Volk*⁻ can thus be assigned a new role within a harmonious society that no longer contains a variety of different and opposing interests (as for example class interests) but is unified – through the leader – to *one* fate and *one* idea. This point, however, does not merely concern the establishment of a harmonious social body, but is given an explicit ontological interpretation in the first course on Hölderlin:

The truth of the People is the manifestness of being as a whole that prevails at a given time, in accordance with which the sustaining, configuring and guiding powers receive their respective rank [*Mächte ihre Ränge empfangen*] and bring about their univocity [*Einstimmigkeit*]. (GA 39: 144/126)

Here we are confronted with a materialistic stance rather strange within Heidegger's philosophy. The ontological emphasis on the "truth of the People" and the "openness of being in total" intersect with the political question concerning the social organization of society wherein the different "powers receive their rank." Or, as he puts it later in the same lecture course, "the new, fundamental experience of being" requires "firstly, a transformation of the essence of truth, and, secondly, a transformation of the essence of work" (GA 39: 196). Heidegger believes that we through an act of will can change not only the organization of our society but even the truth of being experienced by this society. This radical self-

⁴⁵ Even though Heidegger's conception of the state, contrary to Plato's, is ruled by a single Führer, this leader is still guided by "a band of guardians," Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 49.

transformative power of the community is the very intersection between ontology and politics for Heidegger in the early 30's. This means that what is produced through the appropriation of the proper is not merely a certain type of social agent or of a social order; the *Volk*⁺ is an ontological transformation that provides the People with a new disclosure of being.⁴⁷ (This amounts to the self-production of one's own *essence* [*Wesen*] in the verbal sense, related to *An-wesen*, that Heidegger so often emphasizes.) The will to autopoiesis, the will to radicalizing the uniqueness of a way of being, dissolves the social antagonism(s) of the current society through the unifying will of the leader.

A negative counterpart accompanies the work of restructuring society in a univocal way: the “figure” of the Jew. If the idea of a harmonious society is a means of identification, the “figure” of the Jew functions negatively in the sense that it acts as the explanation of the social antagonism that citizens still experience despite the promises of harmony. We find a convincing formulation of this point in Slavoj Žižek's analysis of fascism:

the reason for this imbalance is attributed to the figure of the Jew whose ‘excessive’ accumulation and greed are the cause of social antagonism. Thus the dream is that, since the excess was introduced from outside, i.e., is the work of an alien intruder, its elimination would enable us to obtain again a stable social organism whose parts form a harmonious corporate body, where, in contrast to capitalism's constant social *displacement*, everybody would again occupy his *own place*.⁴⁸

The ‘Semitic nomad’ – the rootless people *par excellence* – functions as an explanation of the imbalance experienced by the *Volk*⁻ and thus what hinders their transformation into a *Volk*⁺. This, however, is also the reason that the “figure” of the Jew is not really a “figure.” The Jew merely serves a negative function in the means of identification and thus cannot “enter into the process of self-fictioning and cannot constitute a subject, or, in other words, a being-proper.”⁴⁹ The Jew is not a figure, because that would require the power of self-formation; rather, the Jew represents the point of resistance or impossibility of our own proper being. The Jews are “not the direct opposite (a counter-type) of the Teuton, but his contradiction – the very absence of type. (...) They are destabilization itself.”⁵⁰ Or, in Žižek's terminology, “the fascinating image of the Other gives a body to our own innermost split, to

⁴⁷ Cf. Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 64: The state “is the most actual actuality that must give all Being new meaning, in a new and original sense. The highest actualization of human Being happens in the state.”

⁴⁸ Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 210.

⁴⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, p. 96.

⁵⁰ Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art and Politics*, p. 96.

what is ‘in us more than ourselves’ and thus prevents us from achieving full identity with ourselves.”⁵¹ The socio-ontological function of the Jew is the destabilization of our “full identity” with ourselves, that is, the harmonious univocity and appropriation of the proper. In the next section, I will further discuss the socio-ontological meaning of the Jew arguing that Žižek’s insight that the Jew gives body “to our own innermost split” and is “in us more than ourselves” is, in fact, crucial in order to understand Heidegger’s split with the National Socialist movement, but for now it suffices to note that the Jew explains the gap between *Volk*⁻ and *Volk*⁺ and thus marks the negative gesture accompanying the procedure of *Einstimmigkeit*.

(c) The third means of identification that we find in Heidegger’s texts from 1933-34 is the preparedness for struggle and sacrifice. This procedure is a recognizable answer to the questions: What is required in the decisive moment, the *kairos*? How do we ensure our univocity? And Heidegger does indeed answer:

The fundamental attunement [*Grundstimmung*] itself, however, must first of all be awakened. For this battle to transform the attunements [*Kampf der Umstimmung*] that still dominate and perpetuate themselves at any given time, the first-born must be sacrificed. (GA 39: 146/128)

The *Umstimmung* of the People requires sacrifice and struggle. Notwithstanding the triviality of this answer, it is problematized by the transposition to an ontological understanding of “the truth of the People.” What is the relation between the ‘we’ of the People and the ‘we’ of those prepared to sacrifice themselves in battle that Heidegger calls the “comradeship [*Kameradschaft*] of the frontier soldier” (GA 39: 72/66, translation modified)?

In order to illuminate this question, it is important to note that community for Heidegger is an ontological question and thus not something to be added to a preconceived individual. We are thrown into a historico-cultural world and therefore we belong to certain communities. “Being able to hear does not first bring about the relation of one to another – that is, community – but rather presupposes it” (GA 39: 72/66). Similarly, the “originary community” is not to be understood as a form of social contract or a reciprocal agreement of interaction; “[r]ather, community *is* through each individual’s being bound in advance to something that binds and determines every individual in exceeding them [*was jeden Einzelnen überhöhend bindet und bestimmt*]” (ibid.).

⁵¹ Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, p. 206.

Following this description of the originary community, Heidegger says that the *Kameradschaft* of the frontier soldiers

is neither based on the fact that people had to join together because of a longing for those who were distant; nor did it have its basis in people first agreeing to a shared enthusiasm. Rather, its most profound and sole basis lies in the fact that the nearness of death as a sacrifice placed everyone in advance into the same nothingness, so that the latter became the source of an unconditional belonging to one another. (GA 39: 72-3/66, translation modified)

Despite the individualizing and separating experience of facing one's death (that he famously insisted upon in SZ), Heidegger here connects the experience of *nothingness* with the establishment of a comradeship. And he goes on to say, that "Precisely death – which every individual human being must die for him- or herself, and which individuates every individual upon themselves to the most extreme degree – precisely death and the readiness for one's sacrifice first creates the space of the community out of which the comradeship arises" (GA 39: 73/66, translation modified). Heidegger suggests that the experience at the front [*Fronterlebnis*] establishes a community that exists authentically towards its own death, but the relationship between this 'we' of the comradeship and the 'we' of the People remains unarticulated for, surely, the 'we' of the comradeship relies on an ontic experience of combat, while the "originary community" of the People is something that is already in place because it is a historical and cultural community. This means that the comradeship is not identical to the originary community. Instead, the preparedness for struggle and sacrifice has a mediating role in the appropriation of the proper. Only by realizing that our way of being is hard-won, that it essentially requires *polemos*, can we finally become ourselves.

The specific function of the preparedness for struggle and sacrifice then seems to be that it establishes a "space of the community" and a "metaphysical proximity to what is unconditioned [i.e., death]" by offering a mediated reflection on our own essence as being essentially finite. As finite beings we are part of a unique, historical community that must be defended. Heidegger confirms this understanding of the identificatory function of struggle and sacrifice in a memorial speech held in 1933 for the proto-Nazi martyr Albert Leo Schlageter, who was shot for acts of sabotage against the French occupation in the Ruhr-area in 1923. As Schlageter, a former student at Freiburg University,

stood defenseless facing the rifles, the hero's inner gaze soared above the muzzles to the daylight and mountains of his home that he might die for the German [P]eople and its Reich with the Alemannic countryside before his eyes. (...)

Student of Freiburg, let the strength of this hero's native mountains flow into your *will*!

Student of Freiburg, let the strength of the autumn sun of this hero's native valley shine into your *heart*!

Preserve both within you and carry them, hardness of will and clarity of heart, to your *comrades* at the German universities.⁵²

Heidegger introduces his speech by asking his listeners to reflect on Schlageter's sacrifice – "the greatest thing of which man is capable" – in order "that this death may help us to understand our lives."⁵³ This is done through the double function of the "hardness of will" and the "clarity of heart." Firstly, the sacrifice must remind the students of Freiburg of the uniqueness of their mores, of their ethos and rootedness in the regions of their *Heimat* and thus guarantee their clarity of heart. Secondly, this clarity of heart must be accompanied by a hardness of will in which one is willing to sacrifice oneself in order to protect the German People, the *Reich* and the *Heimat*. In this way, the will to struggle, the *polemos*, intersects with the procedure of *Einstimmigkeit*:

And if the [P]eople feels this dedication [to *one* fate and to actualize *one* idea], it will let itself be led into struggle and will it. It will develop and persist in its forces, be faithful and sacrifice itself.⁵⁴

In this way, the struggle and sacrifice inspires the double relation between human and *Heimat*, on the one hand, and between human and *state*, on the other hand. By reminding us of our ethos, it inspires us to participate in the struggle against the geopolitical enemies. The struggle seeks to establish a geo-philosophical *Lebensraum* – a space of the community – by struggling with what threatens this form of cultural sedentarity.

Now, if my analysis is correct and the logic of Heidegger's *Volk* requires not only a distinction between people and People, but furthermore hinges on an implicit distinction between those who strive to appropriate their own essence through the procedures of originary *kairos*, univocity and preparedness for struggle and sacrifice (that is, the *Volk*⁺) and those who fail to do so (the *Volk*⁻), the question remains, whether this sheds new light on Heidegger's disillusionment and break with National Socialism.

⁵² Heidegger in Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 41, my italics.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵⁴ Heidegger, *Nature, History, State: 1933-34*, p. 49.

3. Depopulation Times Three

By now it is evident that a certain circularity is at play in Heidegger's *Volk*. The means of identification aims to appropriate a presupposed sedentariness. Thus, in a certain sense, what haunts Heidegger's *Volk* is the old hermeneutical question regarding the right way to enter the circle (cf. SZ: 153/195). Or, perhaps more urgently formulated due to the social nature of the current question: If anyone has *actually succeeded* in entering this circle?

So far we have seen two different demarcations of the social body that both exhibit a double logic; they identify and depopulate. In the quest for identity they make the national community more and more exclusive. The exclusionary logic of this demarcation I call *depopulation*. In section I we encountered two such depopulations that can be summarized in the following way:

- Depopulation^I: Social totality – people = People (via sedentariness)
- Depopulation^{II}: People = *Volk*⁻ → *Volk*⁺ (via the procedures (a), (b), (c))

The first depopulation subtracted the *people* from the social totality by way of the distinction between rootedness and rootlessness. This resulted in the *People* that Hölderlin's law, however, revealed to be insufficient in itself. The distinction merely granted the unappropriated form of *das Volk* (*Volk*⁻). Hence, it was followed by a second depopulation in which the *Volk*⁻ was to appropriate its own national essence and communal identity through the procedures of (a) originary *kairos*, (b) univocity and (c) preparedness for struggle – thus arriving at the *Volk*⁺. These two processes of depopulation explain the difficulties that faces one, when trying to answer the (rather banal) question: Who did Heidegger actually have in mind when he spoke of *das Volk*? – Surely, Heidegger was thinking of the Germans, the national community [*Volksgemeinschaft*]. Or perhaps the linguistic community [*Sprachgemeinschaft*]. But then again, citizenship and mother tongue are merely superficial attributes and says nothing about one's proper belonging to the 'we' of the *Volk*. Perhaps, he was then thinking of the Alemannic and Schwabian peasants who remained true to their mores in originary, generational communities. But were these peasants receptive for thought – and for sacrifice in the name of the destiny of Being? The slippery slope of this gradual demarcation is clear: We know that some *were definitely not* included, but when trying to figure who was actually included in the *Volk* we find that the term is extremely elusive. In the end, the *Volk*⁺ probably designated no one – except, perhaps, Heidegger himself.

The problem is not this slippery slope itself, and Heidegger seems to be fully aware of it already in 1931, when he in a notebook entry writes: “Can an individual still achieve [*erzwingen*] something essential? / Is the community of the few [*die Gemeinschaft der Wenigen*], which delivers this, not missing?”⁵⁵ And in accord with what has been suggested above, Heidegger’s solution to the problem of the missing *Volk*⁺ is that we must take responsibility for what is essential by “taking a stand and sacrificing ourselves” (GA 94: 16). This slippery slope merely suggests that the hermeneutics of one’s own is an infinite process, and, surely, it is impossible to imagine an individual or a community for whom its own being is no longer an issue, no longer something to be appropriated. The real problem arises from the fact that Heidegger lost his faith in the National Socialist movement in the late 30’s or early 40’s (the exact time does not matter much for the present argument).⁵⁶ The problem is as follows:

If Heidegger’s idea of a *Volk*⁺ is a transformation of *Volk*⁻, and *Volk*⁻ presupposes sedentarity, then *Volk*⁺ is rendered impossible by the recognition that the Nazi movement is as rootless and influenced by the essence of technology as, say, the Russians and the Americans. The sedentarity that was the basis of the first demarcation is now conceived to be practically non-existent, which means that *Volk*⁻ is no longer possible. Hence, Heidegger is left with an idea of the authentic people (*Volk*⁺) without anyone willing to realize it. He has the means of identification but no a body politic or collective will: The *auto* is separated from the *poiesis*. *Das Volk*⁺ is not just uninhabited due to the infinitude of the hermeneutical process of facticity; there is simply no one with the potential or capability of becoming a member of Heidegger’s *Germania* and thus of realizing the destiny of the Germans.

⁵⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen II-VI (Schwarze Hefte 1931-1938)*, ed. Peter Trawny, vol. 94 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), p. 16, cited as GA 94.

⁵⁶ This belief goes across the spectrum in the debate concerning Heidegger’s politics, while the actual disagreement concerns whether Heidegger changed his political views or merely reevaluated his understanding of the movement while remaining a secret Nazi. Concerning this reevaluation, see for instance Bambach, who believes that Heidegger’s politics merely went “underground,” *Heidegger’s Roots*, pp. 184 ff; Krell, who sees a “growing opposition to the Third Reich” that stems from a realization that Nazism was, like Bolshevism and Americanism, “all about technology” in David Farrell Krell, “Heidegger’s Black Notebooks, 1931–1941” in *Research in Phenomenology* 45 (2015), p. 140; and Phillips, who, in *Heidegger’s Volk*, pp. 133-168, recognizes the engagement with Hölderlin as a counter-pole of the German people opposed to the nihilism of the official ideology in *Heidegger’s Volk*. Even apologists like Young and skeptics like Wolin see a change of attitude around this time despite the fact that they could not disagree more about how to interpret it, see respectively Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 163ff; “Poets and Rivers: Heidegger on Hölderlin’s ‘Der Ister’” in *Dialogue* 38 (1999), p. 402 and Richard Wolin, “Introduction” in *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 6. Personally, I consider the debate concerning whether or not Heidegger’s criticism of the Party line was genuine to be a dead end. Rather, my hypothesis is that the things that Heidegger changed – and changes did occur – are largely understandable within the peculiar logic of *das Volk* that I have argued underlies his writings of the 30’s. Whether or not this makes things “better or worse,” I leave for the reader to decide.

- Depopulation^{III}: $Volk^+$ without $Volk^- = \cancel{Volk}$ (since sedentariness cannot be presupposed)

Obviously, the abandonment of ontological opportunism is simultaneously a departure from the philosophical geopolitics – at least in the quasi-militaristic, decisionist form we saw above. In this way, Heidegger's *Volk* seems to designate a *Volk* that is absolutely lacking, since it designates no one in particular and thus erases itself. The *Volk* turns out to be entirely depopulated: a $\cancel{Volk}$.

The question that remains is where the complete depopulation of the *Volk* leaves Heidegger's thinking. In order to answer this question, we must consider how Heidegger describes his "break" with Nazism. In a note from the *Schwarze Hefte*, written in 1938-39, Heidegger writes:

Thinking purely "metaphysically" (that is, being-historically), I took, in the years 1930 to 1934, National Socialism to be the possibility of a transition into the other beginning and gave it this interpretation. Thereby, this "movement" and its proper forces and inner necessities as well as its greatness was misjudged and underestimated. (GA 96: 408)⁵⁷

Here we are told that Heidegger misjudged the essence of National Socialism, and in the lines that follow he illuminates this error by explaining that Nazism is the "completion of modernity" and "the complete 'mobilization' of all the powers of the humanity that is now standing on its own [*auf sich gestellten Menschentums*]" (GA 96: 408). Needless to say, in Heideggerian lingo the completion of modernity and a total mobilization is *not* a compliment. Instead of providing the kairological break with the history of Being, Nazism is its culmination. In this way, Heidegger misjudged the movement, but, he also claims to have "underestimated" it. In the next paragraph he elaborates on this apparently contradictory statement by saying that the insight into his earlier deception concerning the essence of National Socialism has resulted in "the necessity of its affirmation" (GA 96: 408). This affirmation is a second affirmation that counters the misjudgment with "*thoughtful* reasons" and which establishes a "movement" (originally in quotation marks) that "remains independent of any contemporary configuration [*Gestalt*]," that is, independent from the actual, existing form of National Socialism (GA 96: 408). This means that the Nazis

⁵⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Überlegungen VII-XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938/1939)*, ed. Peter Trawny, vol. 95 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), cited as GA 95. For a further discussion of this passage, see Krell, "Heidegger's Black Notebooks, 1931–1941," pp. 139ff.

themselves are entangled in metaphysics, modernity and rootlessness, but there is still a small chance of a second affirmation of what Heidegger believed to be their greatness. The “break” with National Socialism is thus a reevaluation of what I earlier called the “double appeal” to nationalism and the question of Being. As we have seen, he took the nationalist appeal to concern a confrontation with technology and the modern way of life, but as it turned out the Nazis were themselves infiltrated in this. The question is in which way (if any) Heidegger can continue his project of affirming the greatness of *das Volk*, even when he misjudged the essence of the first, nationalist appeal and affirmation.

It is crucial to note that Heidegger’s “break” with National Socialism occurs more or less simultaneously with a change in his interpretation of Nietzsche. In 1934, Nietzsche was believed to be saying the same things as Hölderlin (cf. GA 39: 293f), but in 1941/42 Heidegger notes that the difference between them and the different ways they “determine” the “future of the Germans and of the West” is abysmal (GA 52: 78, cf. GA 53: 67). The ground for both of these turns is to be found in Heidegger’s interpretation of the will.⁵⁸ Nietzsche’s doctrine of the will to power is thus not deemed to be inaccurate, but rather the perfect description of the disclosure of Being in modernity. Like National Socialism, as we saw above, Nietzsche designates the culmination of modernity through his metaphysics of the will. Heidegger captures this in a paragraph from the essay “The Word of Nietzsche: ‘God is Dead’” from 1943, where he explicitly links the will to the various forms of *stellen* that will later reemerge as *Ge-stell*:

To preserve the levels of power which the will has attained at particular times requires that the will surround itself with that [*mit einem Umkreis von solchem umgibt*] which it can reliably and at any time fall back on and from which its security is to be guaranteed. These surroundings enclose the enduring existence, at the immediate disposal of the will, of that which presences [*unmittelbar verfügbaren Bestand an Anwesendem*] This enduringness [*Beständige*] is however turned into a permanence [*Ständigen*], i.e., into that which is [*steht*] constantly at one’s disposal [*Verfügung*], only by its being brought to stand by having set it in place [*Stellen zum Stand*]. This placing [*Stellen*] has the nature of a production [*Herstellens*] that re-presents [*vor-stellenden*]. (GA 5: 239/179)

The metaphysics of will reduces being to a reserve [*Bestand*] “constantly at one’s disposal,” and in this way it mirrors the “hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man” (GA 40: 40f/40) that Heidegger saw in the US and

⁵⁸ Bret Davis offers an excellent study and overview of this theme through Heidegger’s oeuvre in *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit* (Northwestern University Press, 2007).

the USSR. An overreliance on the will thus conflicts with his idea of rootedness. The task of the second affirmation (the affirmation of the *Volk*), then, is to think the means of identification without presupposing a collective will capable of enacting this transformation of its own accord. In other words, the means of identification must be thought without a presupposed sedentariness and without a will capable of making a large scale revolution. Obviously, this implies a reinterpretation of the procedures described in section II in view of the critique of the metaphysics of the will.⁵⁹

Originary *kairos* is retained but in a changed form in which the creative power can no longer be ascribed to a willful community. By reconsidering his interpretation of the current situation, the affinity between the Greeks and the Germans that constituted the myth of autochthony is severely problematized. Due to his reevaluation of the movement, the *Volk*⁻ in which the myth should find resonance is no longer available. In this way, the mythic figure of the *Volksgemeinschaft* capable of instituting a new epoch of Being is substituted by a myth of decline, in which the self-transformation of the community remains *immanent* to metaphysics, rather than providing a rupture with it. *Volk* is in a certain sense a myth lacking its hero, that is, a *Volk*.

This means that the third degree of depopulation requires a shift in social-ontological grammar, since the identification can no longer be a *self*-identification, insofar as the community that should act as subject of this process is deemed absent. Instead, Heidegger comes to believe that the will cannot enact the transformation into *Volk*⁺ alone, but must be reconceived as merely one part of the process. The idea of a radical self-transformation is rootless, since it resonates with the metaphysics of the willful subject. As Heidegger famously puts it in the Spiegel-interview: “Only a God can save us now.” He explains this by saying that “philosophy will not be able to effect an immediate transformation of the present condition of the world. This is not only true of philosophy, but of all merely human thought and endeavor.”⁶⁰ In a similar tone, the dialogue on *Gelassenheit* says that “we are to do nothing but wait.”⁶¹ This, however, does not mean that we can rely entirely on a divine intervention. Instead, the task of philosophy and of thinking in general is to prepare us for this

⁵⁹ That Heidegger changes his interpretation of the will is very clear when we compare, for instance, his two readings of Antigone (in GA 40 and GA 53). In the first, Antigone is described as being capable of performing a radical, creative transformation of the city, while the will is given a more modest place in the second, where she merely responds critically to a tension inherent in Being itself. In this way, authenticity still requires decisiveness after this reevaluation of Nietzsche, but not in the form of a radical ontological creativity.

⁶⁰ Heidegger in Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, p. 107.

⁶¹ Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Verlag Günther Neske, 1959), p. 35.

arrival of the god. In this way, Heidegger comes to believe that an overreliance on the will is bound to keep us trapped within metaphysics, and that we must combine our powers for decision with a meditation on our own shortcomings (cf. GA 95: 24f). Heidegger thus positions the need for decision within a quasi-messianic framework.

For instance, he writes in 1938-39, that poetry and thought must move us into a certain place:

This „place,“ however, is no extant site, but a cleft of being with the possibilities of the simplest decisions. The first decision, however, is: whether the human wants to belong to Being [*Seyn*], to the dire need [*Notschaft*] of god, or whether it wants henceforth to calculate beings and secure itself as what is most a being [*Seiendste*] – whether as a people or as a fragment of a vague ancestry [*ungenauen Geschlechtes*]. (GA 95: 63)

Heidegger displaces the idea of the decision in such a way that we must now choose between Being and the, as of yet, absent god, on the one hand, or whether we want to remain within modernity with its manipulation of things and even ourselves, on the other. It is interesting to note that where *Volk* was previously positioned at the 'right' side of this dilemma, it is now considered to be part of the metaphysical danger. The people is merely one form of this manipulation of beings (which is why he often talks about "*Volk*" in quotation marks in, for example, GA 96; he wants to distance himself from the the actual movement).

Similarly, *Einstimmigkeit* can no longer be established through the will of a strong *Führer*. But on the other hand, a transformation of truth and a transformation of the social order (that is now believed to be centered around the disclosure of Being as *Bestand* in its total mobilization) is still required for the establishment of a new experience of Being. This, however, can no longer happen according to a radical self-transformation of the community. This rests partly on the fact that will itself is in opposition to sedentarity and partly on the interesting consequence that the purity of the community is no longer contrasted to a foreign element: Rather, the *People* itself is already contaminated by the *people*. This is evident in the required reinterpretation of *polemos*.

Beyond the hope for a communal, kairological will and a supposed purity of the *People*, we must ask what happens to the idea of the geopolitical struggle. First of all, the connection between the *People* and the *comradeship* is severed, because the struggle is no longer a struggle with an external enemy, which means that we can no longer look to the frontier soldiers for inspiration. The frontier soldiers are merely victims, or perhaps better yet: puppets, of the metaphysical logic that determines *all* the powers of the war. In

“Abendgespräch in einem Kriegsgefangenenlager” written in the last days of the war, this move that dissolves the geopolitical forces into a single metaphysical logic of nihilism is evident: “The Being of a time of devastation [*Das Sein eines Zeitalters der Verwüstung*] consists exactly in the abandonment of” (GA 77: 213).⁶² Furthermore, he explains that “this kind of historical calculation can even be a consequence of the essence of the human that devastates [*verwüstet*], which now means, that it is abandoned by Being” (GA 77: 214). In other words, the *polemos* that Heidegger earlier considered to be a struggle between the Germans and their enemies is now a process that is explained by an abandonment of Being seen as a “devastation” in the essence [*Wesen*] of the human. This means that the *polemos* is *internalized*, i.e., considered to be a struggle between differing disclosures of Being (a conflict revolving around *An-wesen*) because the Germans simultaneously display rootedness and rootlessness.

This leads me back to the question of the Jew. Above I followed Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Žižek’s analyses of the Jew in which it is understood as the fantasmatic explanation of the disturbances and antagonisms in one’s appropriation of the proper. According to this line of thought, the Jew is in no way a designator of actual Jews, but – at least in my Heideggerian interpretation of this insight – an ontological question insofar as it relates to the People’s reflection on its own truth. The essence [*Wesen*] of the Jew, then, is what disturbs our *Einstimmigkeit* and what lures us into a forgetfulness of Being. But insofar as this disturbance – and this is, in a certain sense, what Heidegger realized despite the fact that his own Anti-semitic prejudice prohibited a coherent formulation of it – has contaminated the German essence, in the form of an essence [*Wesen*] that “devastates,” the Jew is merely *an ontological trait internal to the modern mode of disclosure*. The coherent Heideggerian interpretation of the international conspiracy of *Weltjudentum* is thus not an ontical explanation of social infiltration, but an ontological description of how *the modern human being* (which now includes the Germans as well) *is essentially (part) Jewish*.⁶³

⁶² Martin Heidegger, *Feldweg-Gespräche 1944/45*, ed. Ingrid Schüßler, vol. 77 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 1984), cited as GA 77.

⁶³ This is why Heidegger in his *Schwarze Hefte* goes so easily from the apparently ontic “Jewry” [*Judentum*] to “the metaphysics of the West.” See for example: “But the temporary increase in the power of Jewry has its basis in the fact that the metaphysics of the West, especially its modern development, served as the hub for the spread of an otherwise empty rationality and calculative skill, which in this way lodged itself in the ‘spirit’ without ever being able to grasp the concealed domains of decision on its own,” *Überlegungen XII-XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939-1941)*, ed. Peter Trawny, vol. 96 of Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2014), p. 46, hereafter cited as GA 96. This paragraph further testifies to the pains that Heidegger went through in order to avoid his own conclusion: “Jewry” *almost merges completely with metaphysics*.

‘Jewish’ is here merely a name for what, according to Heidegger’s diagnosis of nihilism, could as well be called Catholic, Bolshevik or American. To formulate this point rather crudely, the “Jewish plot” have achieved a form of world domination but only through its integration into the very essence of Dasein itself. All the negative stereotyping associated with the Jew describes what Heidegger (too late) recognized as a characteristic of his fellow Germans and thus ruined his grand vision of purity.⁶⁴ Hence, Žižek is absolutely right within the Heideggerian logic of the *Volk* when he says that the Jew is “our own innermost split” and “in us more than ourselves.” What ruins our full identity and appropriation of our own are *the Jews that we are*, since the struggle is internalized as the epochal constellation of Being. And since *polemos* etymologically designates the struggle with an external enemy, my reinterpretation of it pushes it to the exact point where it becomes indistinguishable from *stasis*, the Greek word for internal conflict or civil war. The geopolitics deconstructs and becomes an *oikeios polemos*, a domestic war.

In this way, the dictum that it is “in us more than ourselves” corresponds exactly to the turn in Heidegger’s thought from a form of subjectivism to a thinking of Being. What is in us more than ourselves is *Being*, which “needs and uses [*Brauchen*]” the human in order to disclose itself and which gives us our horizon of meaning.⁶⁵ *Polemos* without will is, then, equivalent to the key word for the late Heidegger: *Gelassenheit*.⁶⁶ The point is that the Jews that we are cannot be defeated merely through an act of willing. Instead, we must prepare ourselves, decisively, for a return of Being that we cannot bring about ourselves.⁶⁷

This does not mean that he has abandoned his political project. In a certain sense, the logic of *das Volk* is continued but now with the marked difference that the establishment of

⁶⁴ This logic is clear in another striking passage from the *Schwarze Hefte*, where Heidegger scorns that race functions as a principle of history. This is a “consequence of the power machination [*Machenschaft*]” which brings everything into the domain of “calculation.” But immediately after, this obvious critique of National Socialism is turned against the Jews “with their emphatic talent for calculation,” who, as he says probably referencing Jewish marriage customs, “have already been living for the longest time according to the principle of race [*Rasseprinzip*].” Given the logic of the *Volk*, however, it hardly comes as a surprise that the consequence of this paradoxical, (anti-)semitic logic of *Machenschaft* is the “self-alienation of peoples—the loss of history—that is, of the domains of decision for *Beyng*” and that this hinders the only possibility for Peoples to “bring themselves to unity” (GA 96: 56).

⁶⁵ Cf. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, vol. 9 og Gesamtausgabe (Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), p. 407; Martin Heidegger, *Identität und Differenz* (Klett-Cotta, 2014), 19.

⁶⁶ That an internalized *polemos* is not in contradiction with the idea of *Gelassenheit* has been argued by Gregory Fried in *Heidegger’s Polemos*, p. 84.

⁶⁷ When keeping in mind that the antagonism and the Jew is “in us more than ourselves” in an ontological sense and thus what motivates Heidegger’s notion of *Gelassenheit*, Žižek’s critique of Heidegger and call for “more will and struggle and less *Gelassenheit*” really seems to miss its mark, Slavoj Žižek, *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (Verso Books, 2012), p. 902. For a further discussion of *Gelassenheit*, see Nicolai Krejberg Knudsen, “Nostalgic *Freilassen*: Emancipation Beyond Empowerment” in *Tropos* 8 (2015).

Volk⁺ is severed from the actual masses. It can only be prepared for and not produced. In a striking passage, Heidegger describes this quasi-messianic logic of ~~das Volk~~:

Dostoyevsky says towards the end of the first chapter of “The Possessed or, The Demons”: “He who has no people has no god.” – But *who* has a people and his people and *how*? Only he who has a God and then in the same way? But who has a god and how? Do we now fall into a back and forth of an oppositionality that as such achieves nothing in its one- and doublesidedness? Is it not itself worn and stretched out through that, though neither people nor god, needs both but in essentially different ways in order to find its essence and in order to found and be a being? And what is this? Being [*Seyn*] in its truth. (GA 96: 123)

We lack both people and god, and we need both of them in order to find our essence and thus counter our lack of identity. In order to escape the meaningless “back and forth” between having no people and having no god, we must meditate and come to terms with that which carries both of these sense of lack, which is obviously ourselves. But we must not only come to terms with our own abilities, but also, and crucially, our inabilities. In order to find our essence, we cannot rely on will alone but must open ourselves to that which exceeds us and determines us: Being itself.

In sum, Heidegger’s disillusionment with the National Socialist movement implies that there is no community whose purity can make up the kairological basis of an encounter with the foreign geopolitical forces of modernity. Rather, the “geopolitical” struggle is elevated to the level of Being. The *polemos* between rootedness and rootlessness takes place in the epochal constellation of Being and is not tied to a clear cut social differentiation. In this sense, I have argued that the logic of the ~~Volk~~ – a *Volk* completely depopulated, whose identity is so strictly defined that it designates *no one in particular*, and which, consequently, erases itself and cuts across our usual geopolitical limits – is one in which the “figure” of the Jew is an ontological of our essence [*Wesen*]. In the ~~Volk~~, the means of identification are procedures that can no longer be limited to a specific community whose purity and identity it seeks to enhance. Rather, the means of identification function immanently to an *epochal* logic whose boundaries are no longer geopolitical but eschatological.

Conclusion

Heidegger saw a potential in National Socialism and hoped that the revolutionary spirit of the Germans could introduce them to his philosophy of Being. On the one hand, then, he appealed to a presupposed mass of People and urged them to take upon themselves their

uniqueness and the weight of their historicity. But on the other hand, this was for Heidegger no easy task and even the Germans, the metaphysical People *par excellence*, was characterized by a lack of identity. I have argued that his quasi-militaristic appeal to a geopolitical struggle against the rootless people of modernity is not in contradiction with the more cautious reflection on the People, still in need of appropriating its own essence, that we find Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin. Rather, these two elements are folded into each other in such a way that it constitutes a complex logic of *das Volk*. On the one hand, then, Heidegger presupposes a distinction between the *people* and the *People*, between the *rootless* and the *rooted*. And on the other hand, the *People* is not sufficient for developing the *Dasein* of the German *Volk*. In Hölderlin's words, the free use of the proper is the most difficult. To appropriate one's own is thus not something given through a factual knowledge but through a decisive facticity in which one's own being – in an infinite hermeneutical process – is constantly an issue, and hence not something that can merely be presupposed. This task of appropriating the proper inscribes a distinction within the social body of the *People* between the inauthentic *People* (that I have called *Volk*⁻) and the authentic *People* (that I have called *Volk*⁺).

The appropriation of the proper is undertaken through a series of procedures or means of identification. Based primarily on the first Hölderlin-lecture, I have described three interrelated procedures: originary *kairos*, univocity and preparedness for struggle. These embody a logic of demarcation in which the identity of the appropriated is strengthened through a gradual narrowing down of the social body on which this logic is supposed to function. Hence, the logic of Heidegger's *Volk* is one of depopulation: The *Volk* is gradually contracted to the point where the social group that Heidegger seems to have in mind is entirely absent.

This, however, merely shows that Heidegger's concept of authenticity involves an infinite hermeneutical task, which is why the depopulating logic is in no way unintended. The real problem arises in the light of Heidegger's reevaluation of the National Socialist movement, in which he comes to believe that sedentarity can no longer be presupposed. The Germans too are rootless and infiltrated in the essence of technology. This means that the presupposition on which the logic of *das Volk* rests is false. Heidegger attributes his misconception of the movement to a misunderstanding of the metaphysical nature of the will. The idea of a radical self-transformation enacted through sheer willing is believed to be just another form of rootlessness.

This does not mean that Heidegger abandons the logic of *das Volk* and the means of identification that enables the transformation of the masses of nationalism into the *Volk* of Being. Instead, Heidegger reconstructs these procedures in a way that does not rely on the metaphysics of a willful self-transformation and does not presuppose an existing movement capable of enacting this transformation. Instead, the *polemos* between rootlessness and rootedness becomes a struggle internal to the epochal constellation of Being, rather than a geopolitical struggle manifested by opposing military forces. The battlefield is thus moved away from the frontier and into a difficult preparation for a turning in the epochal constellation of Being that is itself out of our hands. This maneuver that brings the means of identification beyond their geopolitical inception and into an epochal no man's land is the logic of the *Volk*.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ I would like to thank the participants of the Research Seminar in Philosophical Hermeneutics at Aarhus University, Thomas Schwarz Wentzer, Lars Albinus, Morten S. Thaning and the anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.