

## The other house

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In the dialogue *Zwischen einem Japaner und einem Fragenden* (“Between a Japanese and a questioning man”), which was published in 1959 in *On the way to language* and echoed<sup>1</sup> to a dialogue with the Professor Tezuka from the Imperial University of Tokyo, which took place itself in Germany in 1953-1954, Heidegger moved forward on the way to the “unavoidable” encounter between the West and the East. The whole book of 1959 attempts to open a way. *Unterwegs*, to be on the way, is the main feature of thinking. When this way is turned towards language, *zur Sprache*, it means that language keeps closed to us in its essence, or at least that we did not reach this essence or this meaning of language yet, even if the way or the path, as a dialogue (*Gespräch*), opens always only through language (*Sprache*) itself. On this way, *Unterwegs*, the encounter, *Begegnung*, happened once at least as a dialogue, whose only a bit is restored in the book — and thus Heidegger chose the title: *Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache*. But the meaning itself of such a *Gespräch* will not stop to be questionable, all the way to the end<sup>2</sup>. What does “dialogue” finally mean, and is it really a “dialogue”? Thus first the *Gespräch* arises itself in the place after which it is inquiring: *Gespräch* belongs already to *Sprache*. *Sprache*, language, is not in any way its subject, rather its element. But such a dialogue belongs also to an encounter — between the West and the East —, whose necessity comes from elsewhere. The encounter has become *unavoidable*, *unausweichlich*. What is the meaning of this inevitability? It is an ambiguous one. For this necessity could on the contrary keep far from us the possibility of the dialogue itself. But the *Gespräch* could be all the more necessary to answer, that is to say, to correspond to what happens, or to what is coming to us. The dialogue belongs to a necessity which elsewhere Heidegger thinks as a destiny (or fate, *Geschick*) which is sent to us, the event or the era that he calls Framework (*Gestell* or *Ge-stell*), as the essence of modern technology. The thinking dialogue is thus an answer to the Framework. What Heidegger still calls the East and the West (but what is exactly now the meaning of such a partition, is it even necessary to keep a meaning for it?) is under the only worldwide

domination of the Framework. When in the dialogue the question is coming around the European “system of concepts”, the Japanese in the dialogue justifies the necessity for the Far East to inquire about it: “It seems that in front of the increasing technicality and industrialization of all the parts of the earth there is no escape any more (*kein Ausweichen*)”<sup>3</sup>. *Technisierung* and *Industrialisierung* are the faces of the ruling Framework. *Kein Ausweichen*, “no escape”: that is to say, it is not possible to shy away, but it does not mean at all that the encounter could now open as a dialogue, *Gespräch*. On the contrary: this Unavoidable, which comes from the undivided and absolute rule of the Framework over the earth, makes the possibility of a dialogue all the more distant and far. *Another* possibility is impending in a more striking way. The Japanese foresees it: “For the possibility still always remains that, seen from our East Asian *Dasein*, the technical world which tears us away (*uns mitreisende*) is limited to the foreground and...”. This other possibility remains undecided. But the questioning man gives immediately the consequence: “Thus a true encounter with the European *Dasein* in spite of all harmonization and mixing (*Angleichungen und Vermischungen*) however does not happen”<sup>4</sup>. It could be so that the encounter of the two *Dasein* — that is, of two meanings of man-being, or two faces, two possibilities of this unique meaning of Being which is called “man” — would never happen, would never become true, in spite of (or rather because of) the exclusive rule of the Framework all over the planet. The technical world, or rather its essence, the Framework which rules over it, is *uns mitreisend*, tearing us away or “sweeping us along”, and every being with us, every being *through* us. The principle of control is not itself under the control of any will. But there is maybe here an ambiguity. What does the Japanese mean exactly with this limitation of the technical world to the “foreground”? Is that to say that the deepening of the rule of the Framework would come up against a limit? Either such a rule meets with a resistance in the East Asian *Dasein*, or such a technical empire is ruling limitless, but its meaning is never and nowhere thought in its deepness. In a way, for Heidegger the two possibilities can be

accepted, provided that we understand them. Be that as it may, such a rule is coming according to Heidegger from the *Abendland*, that is, from the Occident as the land of evening where and whence the Greek beginning is coming to the end. In that sense the whole earth has become, under the rule of Framework, *Abendland*. But this *Abendland* has maybe not absolutely and definitively closed the possibility of the *Gespräch* between the two *Dasein*, even if each of them, the East Asian *Dasein* and the European one as well, is under the rule of the Framework dangerously closed to the meaning of his own being. And if they have no more access to their own being (their own thought, their own mortal being), the *Gespräch* between them has become itself impossible. Thus the “unavoidable” necessity of the encounter makes paradoxically the dialogue very fragile.

But Heidegger asks farer: what is the danger which is properly surrounding the dialogue? What is the *Gefahr* in which the *Gespräch* takes place? The danger is not only not to be able to go deeper up to the other *Dasein*. The danger is not only not to be able to do justice to the East Asian *Dasein* with the concepts of the *Abendland*. However there is here a true danger, and to begin we have to pay a more accurate attention to what the Japanese is telling, in Heidegger’s own language of 1927, about this first *Gefahr*. The danger is precisely this one: “That, through the richness of the Conceptual (*des Begrifflichen*), which the spirit of European language (*Sprachgeist*) puts at disposal, we would be misled to reduce what claims our *Dasein* (*was unser Dasein in der Anspruch nimmt*) to something indeterminate and fading (*zu etwas Unbestimmten und Verfließendem*)”<sup>5</sup>. This danger is already standing in the language itself, more exactly in what Heidegger does not hesitate to call the *Sprachgeist*. The question can not fail to arise: who is this *Geist*? Such a European *Geist* is distinguished by the rule of the concept or the Conceptual (*das Begriffliche*). How not to be struck by the Hegelian, as much as the Humboldtian way Heidegger characterizes the Occidental rule? Now this rule of the concept could be incommensurable with the East Asian *Dasein* and what “claims him”. Such an incommensurability would keep far such a meaning of being, rejecting it in an “indeterminate and fading” dimension. This danger is proper to a rule which would stay blind to what it would never truly meet. The deciding question is to know what the *Geist* means, and if the *Geist* is only the *Sprachgeist*, or not only each time the *Geist* of one language, but if it has another meaning than language itself.

“What claims our *Dasein*”: in the *Gespräch* the Japanese himself is still talking the language of *Sein und Zeit*. Is that to say that the existential analytic kept all its right in these years? The Japanese will soon ask questions about the hermeneutic philosophy, which he knew from Earl Kuki. But we have now to look for the meaning of the *Dasein* in language itself. However it maybe, the rule of the concept could make this claim inaudible for the East Asian man himself. “Indeterminate” and “fading” belong to the blind judgment of the concept. Such is the danger the Japanese foresees. However it is not the only one danger, and maybe not the major one either. The *Gefahr* in which the *Gespräch* takes place — and in that sense the two protagonists are equally exposed to it — is another one, which does not appear (*unauffälliger sie bleibt*). As it is staying in the background we have first to consider where it comes from. The question is about the country or the place (*Gegend*) from where the danger is threatening. In this country it is first necessary to experience (*erfahren*) the danger. The *Gespräch* itself is nothing else than such an experience. But what is this strange, dangerous country? The dangerous site where all *Gespräch* takes place and can ever begin, or rather: *the Gespräch as experience* is itself such a site. Thus it becomes necessary to go deeper in its essence. The only one danger is sheltered in language as language. *Die Gefahr unserer Gespräche verbarg sich in der Sprache selbst*<sup>6</sup>. “The danger of our dialogues was hidden in language itself”. How to think this danger staying back in language, and thus in the essence of the dialogue as such? Of what language is it a matter? Here, of the language in which the first dialogues (with Earl Kuki) formerly took place, and in which the *Gespräch* happens again, German language. Then the question was about *das Wesentliche der ostasiatischen Kunst und Dichtung* (“the Essential of East Asian art and poetry”). This Essential, they attempted to tell it in German, and thus they had to move it (*verlagern*) in the European (*in das Europäische*). The risk of this move is incalculable. At first sight the danger is one and the same: the danger that the Japanese saw before of a *Sprachgeist* which would keep closed, *verschlossen*, as now Heidegger writes it. But it is not only the blind rule of the concept, or rather: this last danger now refers to a deeper and hidden one. The danger is lying in the essence of language, so that language itself as language becomes a question. The Japanese makes the danger clear: “The language of the dialogue destroyed constantly the possibility of saying what was in question”.

This is precisely the question of the *Geist* and its limitation to *Sprachgeist*. How could the *Gespräch* take place elsewhere than in one language, and to what extent one language will be able to welcome another, or rather the *Dasein* and the claim sent to him in another language? To do justice, to welcome or to meet — how could it be possible from one language to another one? The danger is not only the peril of the blind and blinding rule of the concept. *The radical, essential peril is language itself. Sprechen, to speak, is to live in.* Such is at last the meaning Heidegger now gives to *Dasein*: to stand in the claim of Being is now to stand in language. And the *Dasein* answers to such a claim every time he is speaking. This is the decisive remark of the questioning man: “Some time ago I called language (rather awkwardly) the house of Being. If man, through his language, is living in the claim that Being sends to him, then we Europeans are likely to live in a totally other house than East Asian man”<sup>7</sup>. The claim is reaching us only as language (and not exactly *through* it), and the *Dasein* is nobody else but this one, who is standing in such a call as he is living in language. But how is possible a *Gespräch* between two houses? Heidegger answers: it is *almost impossible, beinahe unmöglich*. The two *Dasein* do not meet anywhere else but in the house of language. *Haus des Seins* is indeed very difficult to understand, so is the *Dasein* as “living in” this house<sup>8</sup>. It remains that the dialogue, almost impossible, happened. The question is then this one: what is exactly the *Sprache* supposed to be if, as the house of Being, it can let the dialogue take place in itself, that is, the dialogue with another *Dasein*, another possibility for existence or man-being, living in another house, in another language? Farer Heidegger will mention the “still hazy (*noch verhüllt*) horizon” for the attempt to think the *Wesen der Sprache*, that is, the attempt of the book itself. This hazy horizon means that the question is kept as a question: will thinking make the experience of the *Gespräch* between the two *Sagen*, European Occidental saying and East Asian one? *For it is not exactly a matter of languages:* but of the Greek *logos* on one side and, on the other side, of “another house” — other than the Greek one: with regard to this other house Heidegger told once he had the feeling to stay “outside on the doorstep”<sup>9</sup>. Heidegger can then attempt to make the meaning of such a *Gespräch* clear, if only it were possible: *dass europäisch-abendländisches und öst-asiatisches Sagen auf eine Weise ins Gespräch kämen, in der Solches singt, das einer einzigen Quelle entströmt*<sup>10</sup> (“... so

that European Occidental saying and East Asian one would come into dialogue, in such a way that what is flowing from the one spring would sing”). The two *Sagen* would let arise *singing* in the *Gespräch*, and singing would have one source. What would be the one spring of singing, and what name could we give to it? No more *Geist*. The spring does not appear: *Die aber dann beiden Sprachwelten noch verborgen bliebe*, the Japanese answers (“But this spring would still remain hidden from both worlds of language”). Is the one spring still *Sprache*, a language which would not appear in any language, in any world of language? The 1934 lectures on *Logic* had already thought the concept of world from language: *Kraft der Sprache und nur kraft ihrer waltet die Welt — ist Seiendes*<sup>11</sup> (“Thanks to language and only thanks to it the world is prevailing — the being *is*”). And the original language is then *poetry*, in poetry only the essence of language appears: but for all that does the one spring appear in it? The one spring maybe will appear only in the work of translation, between the two languages, in *wandering* between the two houses, the two languages, the two faces of *Dasein*, as the Japanese, who translated Heinrich von Kleist, will put it farer: “And as I was translating it was for me as if I were wandering between two different essences of language, but so that sometimes a glimmer was shining for me, which made me feel that the essential spring (*Wesensquelle*) of the two radically different languages was the same”<sup>12</sup>. According to the translator the spring of the essence, from which each language spreads out its own being, was not the concept, and cannot be either approached by it: *Singen* or *Dichten* could let the essence appear better than *Begreifen*.

This second danger, however, if only we stand clearly in it, could be an answer to the first danger: the attempt of the “almost impossible” *Gespräch*, that is, the experience of the essential danger, could give in the Greek *logos* (precisely, in this instance, in German) hospitality to a claim sent to man in “the other house”, the other “language” (which again is not properly one language). This other claim could point out, from the one spring which never appears, another possibility. This other possibility if it were welcome could contribute to turn the language of the *Abendland* towards itself and, to some extent, against itself. *Towards itself*, to think itself, as the language of metaphysics; and necessarily, as such, *against itself*, for it could not think itself if it were not free from itself. But such an hospitality given to the other house presupposes

that it is still possible to make a way through the first danger, *die vollständige Europäisierung der Erde und des Menschen*<sup>13</sup> (“the full Europeanization of the earth and man”). The Europeanization is what the *Letter on humanism* already (in 1946) called *devastation*: “The widely and rapidly spreading devastation of language (*Verödung der Sprache*) not only undermines aesthetic and moral responsibility in every use of language; it arises from a threat (*Gefährdung*) to the essence of humanity”<sup>14</sup>.

The Japanese and the questioning man will look for the other house and its world in what is maybe an inaccessible place for the European, in the Noh theatre. But the other house (each one is the other for the other) cannot be considered as a simple help, without any question, in the attempt which gives its meaning to our “today’s task”, an attempt which remains here a riddle: *das griechisch Gedachte noch griechischer zu denken* (“what was thought in a Greek way, to think it in an even more Greek way”)<sup>15</sup>. But what does it mean, “to think in an even more Greek way”? To see it in its essential origin, *Wesensherkunft*. Such an *erblicken*, such an eye is still Greek in a way, but, “as for what it sees, it is not Greek any more, never more Greek”<sup>16</sup>. To attempt in the Greek language, that is, the language of the *Abendland*, to see with an eye, which remains Greek, what is not Greek any more: could the other house help us in such an attempt? Help cannot come but from the distress itself. But to meet the other possibility, the other *Dasein* and the other claim from Being, could be, how almost “impossible” it remains, in such a distress, however, invaluable to us.

The way of thinking is always a way in language: in language Being is claiming (*zuspricht*) man. In the *Gespräch* the Japanese, thinking of Heidegger himself, suddenly senses *eine tiefverborgene Verwandtschaft mit unserem Denken, gerade weil Ihr Denkweg und seine Sprache so ganz anders sind* (“a deeply hidden relationship with our thought, precisely because your way of thinking and the language of your thinking are so completely different”<sup>17</sup>). Such an “other thinking” through the Framework, that is, through metaphysics, seems to open at least the possibility to meet the “other house”, even in this “Greek” house that the German language still remains in its essence. But such a *Denkweg* is opening in the *Abendland* itself: the *Abendland* drawing to a close is trying to become other to itself. Thus, from the site, *Ort*, which is proper to the *Abendland*, but ruling over earth without any possible escape, that

is to say, from metaphysics, Heidegger attempts to move to another site or place, the site *ohne Namen*, “without any name”, as he puts it, thinking maybe of the Tao<sup>18</sup>. The *Wanderung* (“wandering”) will not leave a house for the other. But it will leave, *verlassen*, a site, metaphysics itself, through what Heidegger calls the necessity of its “situation”, *Erörterung*.

How could we go further in the *Begegnung*? How could we enter into the *Gespräch*? Here we want just to remember and to describe what our site is according to Heidegger’s attempt of an *Erörterung*. We could start from the danger, *die Gefahr*. We met two dangers. The first one was the danger of the concept, that is to say, the danger of metaphysics. The second one was the danger in language itself, every language destroying the possibility to say in itself what appears only in another language, what is claiming another *Dasein*. This second danger puts us on the way to meditate the one spring: to that extent it is a “salutary danger”, as Heidegger writes it in 1947 in *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, about the *Dichter* and his closeness with thought<sup>19</sup>. But as for the first danger, it has its own site, which demands itself a “situation”. This site is metaphysics, which rules over language as strongly as over the planet. The attempt of an *Erörterung* of metaphysics, which is also the situation of our *Dasein*, led Heidegger to the Framework, the *Ge-stell*. Heidegger thinks the danger from the essence of modern technology: so does he in the *Bremer Vorträge* in 1949<sup>20</sup>. The *Abendland* has become now, as the Framework, a planetary rule. The rule of the Framework is coming to us from the Greeks, the rule of the *Stellen* as *Nachstellen* (“to set”, “to put”, as “to adjust” and “to hunt”): *Das in sich gesammelte Stellen als Nachstellen ist die Gefahr. Der Grundzug des Wesens der Gefahr ist das Nachstellen* (“the gathered setting as adjusting is the danger. The fundamental feature of the essence of the danger is adjusting”). The *Ge-stell* (the Framework, understood as *das gesammelte Stellen*) does not spare language at all, since it is itself *Seinsgeschick*, a destiny sent by Being, and Being is claiming man in language, in the *Anspruch*<sup>21</sup>. This call gives the thinker his vocation, “to be an echo”, *ein Echo zu sein*<sup>22</sup>, which itself “requires to take care of language”, *verlangt eine Sorgfalt der Sprache*. Language under the rule of the Framework is itself rooted out from all *Bodenständigkeit*. Such a ground has nothing to see with *das bloss Nationale*, as Heidegger writes it clearly: *Das Heimische einer hohen Sprache gedeiht nur im Bereich des unheimlichen Anspruchs der*

*wesenhaften Stille im Wesen des Seyns*<sup>23</sup> (“The home of a high language is thriving only in the field of the unfamiliar claim of the essential silence in the essence of Being”). How to be an echo when the Framework is ruling over the slightest word, the slightest thought, the slightest act? How could the claim be heard and answered? Our times belong to a distress which wears a veil, Heidegger says in “*Die Gefahr*”<sup>24</sup>. The highest distress is the lack of distress, *Notlosigkeit*. While going deeper into our distress and into this lack whence the distress is coming, the lecture *Gelassenheit*, in 1955, sees in it a lack of thought, *Gedankenlosigkeit*. “We” are *gedanken-los*, we lack thought: the rule of the Framework is the rule of the *Gedankenlosigkeit*<sup>25</sup>. It means that we are becoming poorer and poorer in thought, *gedanken-arm*, even when such a poorness still remains inaccessible to us. Here begins the attempt to *leave, verlassen*, the site to which we belong. To meet and to think such a poorness, such a distress, requires that we are able to free ourselves in a way from the rule of this site, to enter into the *Wanderung* of *Unterwegs zur Sprache*. “Wandering” in that way will take place in *Denken*, in thought itself, as a turn or return to it, while the man is today “in a flight away from thought”, *auf der Flucht vor dem Denken*<sup>26</sup>.

Here, while wandering, and looking for what Heidegger, after Master Eckhart, thinks as *Gelassenheit*, “releasement”, welcoming the *Dasein* from “the other house”, or maybe being welcome in it, could be decisive, and the dialogue, “almost impossible”, could be one of our most urgent tasks.

#### Notes

1. Just echoed, but it does not claim to transcribe it faithfully at all.
2. *Unterwegs zur Sprache, Gesamtausgabe* Bd. 12, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1985, p. 141.
3. *GA 12*, p. 83. Cf. also the English translation by Peter D. Hertz, *On the way to Language*, New York, Harper, 1982, here p. 3.
4. *GA 12*, p. 83.
5. *GA 12*, p. 84.
6. *GA 12*, p. 85.
7. *GA 12*, p. 85.
8. Cf. *Letter on humanism* (1946, first published in 1949): “In thinking Being comes to language. Language is the house of Being. In its home man dwells. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home. This guardianship accomplishes the manifestation of Being insofar as they bring the manifestation to language and maintain it in language through their speech” (*Wegmarken*, Frankfurt, Klostermann, 1996, p. 313 ; tr. David Farrell Krell, *Basic writings*, New York, Harper and Row, 1977).
9. Cf. *Japan und Heidegger*, hrsgg. von Hartmut Buchner, Sigmaringen, Thorbecke, 1989, Hartmut Buchner, « Zur Einführung », p. 15 (from a letter of 27th December 1961, about a translation of Bashō and the Noh theatre: *Aber überall habe ich das Gefühl, als stünde man « draussen vor der Tür »*).
10. *GA 12*, p. 89.
11. *GA 38, Logik als die Frage nach Wesen der Sprache*, § 29, p. 168. Cf. also § 31, p. 170: *Das Wesen der Sprache west dort, wo sie als weltbildende Macht geschickt, d. h., wo sie das Sein des Seienden im voraus erst vorbildet und ins Gefüge bringt. Die ursprüngliche Sprache ist die Sprache der Dichtung.* (“The essence of language opens its being where it is sent as the might which is forming a world, that is, where at first it forms in advance the Being of the being and brings it to the structure. The first language is the language of poetry”).
12. *GA 12*, p. 109.
13. *GA 12*, p. 98.
14. *Wegmarken*, p. 318 (tr. David Farrell Krell).
15. *GA 12*, p. 127.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *GA 12*, p. 129.
18. Cf. Otto Pöggeler, « West-östliches Gespräch: Heidegger und Lao Tse », in: *Neue Wege mit Heidegger*, Verlag Karl Alber, Freiburg-München, 1992, p. 387sq.
19. *GA 13*.
20. Cf. « Die Gefahr », *Einblick in das, was ist*, *GA 79*.
21. *Dieser Anspruch kommt seit der Frühzeit des Griechentums nicht mehr zum Schweigen* (« This demand does not stop to sound any more since early times of Greekness »), *GA 79*, p. 65.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 56: *Wo freilich die Gefahr sich verbirgt, da verhüllt sich auch die Not. Darum wird die Not nicht als die Not erfahren.* « Where certainly the danger is hiding, the distress is also wearing a veil. That is why the distress is not experienced as distress ».
25. *GA 16*, p. 518.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 519.