

Philosophy and Film : Interwining Heidegger and Wenders

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Abstract

*The thesis of this paper is that philosophy is at its end and movies are replacing it. It seemed helpful to start with a generalized overview of my project and spread out from there. I will use the philosopher Martin Heidegger's sketch of the end of philosophy, and the filmmaker Wim Wenders as an example of how movies are replacing philosophy. We spend much of our lives surrounded by moving photographic images. We are surrounded by an audio-visual form which first took shape in the cinema and became the common currency of modern television. Both materially and mentally they have a shaping impact on our lives. et few people make an effort to reflect back on film, thinking of movies solely as popular entertainment. My task is to take films seriously as thought and art. I want to think about how we think about films. I want to explore how films have the capacity to address some of the key issues which academic philosophy has been grappling with for centuries, and opens these questions up in new ways to the billions of people who are exposed to this technology. As an example of the capacity of film to do philosophy, I will look at Wim Wender's *Wings of Desire* (1987), the story of an angel hovering over Berlin who decides to become mortal. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) sets the stage of philosophy in this century, describing how he sees its completion in the traditional sense and what he sees as the task of thinking in philosophy's wake. In Heidegger's late writings I will use his call for philosophy to begin again, to experience the Being of beings which sparked the original Greek philosophers (his task of thinking) as a springboard to leap into *Wings of Desire* and its capacity to respond to this challenge. I will look at Wenders as overcoming Heidegger's response to his own challenge, his dwelling; which is possible because it is a film.*

Keywords: *philosophy, film, phenomenology, technology, Heidegger, enders*

I. Questioning Technology

Central in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger is the concept of technology. "We shall be questioning technology and in doing so we should like to prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free if it opens our human experience to the essence of technology."

I want to use Martin Heidegger's essay, "The Question Concerning Technology" as a way of framing my discussion about film. I see Heidegger's discussion of the dangers of technology and the corresponding saving grace as a microcosm of his philosophy as a whole, and the transformation of thought he wishes to carry out. This section can also be seen as a microcosm of my project as a whole. I will define how I am using technology, look at the dangers of technology, and finally I will explore the saving grace which can arise from technology. Later in the paper, I will play out a similar cycle of definition, dangers, and overcoming in the arena of metaphysics, using both Heidegger and *Wings of Desire* to articulate the process.

Defining technology

Heidegger uses the word technology in many ways. Historically, he is referring to the mass mechanization which began in the eighteenth century and cites concrete examples such as hydroelectric power plants, radar stations, and jet aircrafts. This is a matter of using external instruments as a means to an end. In addition, Heidegger uses technology to define a mode of thinking, and a way of revealing. This definition of technology is not limited to external machines we use, but has roots in a way of thinking which goes back to the ancient Greeks. For Heidegger, technology and Western metaphysics are intricately connected and inseparable. Technology arises out of the tradition of metaphysics and signals the closure of metaphysics. The essence of technology is essentially a way of revealing the totality of beings. As a way of revealing it is pervasive in Heidegger's life (and even more so, in ours), so much so that we can not choose to avoid technology. The advent of technology is something determined and destined long before the beginning of the technological revolution in the eighteenth century.

For Heidegger, technology is a method for calling forth and transforming the stock of reality according to our will. Technology facilitates a control over reality, rather than openness to experiencing it. For Heidegger, technology in its essence is an extension of metaphysics -- and is grounded in the history of metaphysics as a mode of revealing.

My use of film as technology

Film is one of the most powerful and prevalent technologies of our century -- and one of the most technological of popular art forms. In the medium of film the artistic and the technological meet, and this confrontation/cooperation springs forth a fascinating relation which I want to explore.

Heidegger's only specific reference to the medium of film in "The Question Concerning Technology" is relating to its danger and negative impact. It is a warning against the numbing impact the proliferation of images in which we live can have on us. Heidegger warns that "we do not yet hear, we whose hearing and seeing are perishing through radio and film under the rule of technology." This proliferation of images and sounds, which has multiplied numerous times in the forty-five years since Heidegger wrote the essay, makes it very easy for one to lose oneself in publicness and idle talk. Consequently, the individual fails to hear or see her own self amongst the chatter of the they-self. Amongst a barrage of CNN, Tom Cruise, and infomercials, it is easy to lose sight of oneself.

Danger in technology

For Heidegger, this danger is not limited to the proliferation of images, but in the use of all technology without adequate questioning its impact. "We are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology."

The danger follows from the fact that people are no longer merely preoccupied with the tool-world in order to provide the basic necessities of life, together with a modest supply of luxuries. We are tempted to become entirely absorbed and fascinated by the very demanding universe of objects studied and manipulated by technologies. In this age of what Heidegger calls, *Gestell* (enframing) -- everything, including man himself, becomes material for a process of production, an imposition of human will on things regardless of their own essential natures. *Gestell* sees things primarily in their relation to human will as a matter of a process of production or self-imposition -- a concept of the thing in its subservience to human preoccupation. The danger is realized when this one way of revealing beings (technology) overwhelms man and all other possible ways of revealing.

In Heidegger's life span he saw the dawning of the technological era which freed man from many of the limits of his natural environment. Transportation technologies and communication technologies largely overcame the barrier of physical distance. Humans became more independent of their natural world and less dependent on its limitations. The unreflexive incorporation of these delimitations into our everyday lives and thinking struck Heidegger as dangerous. Just as many liberations came with this increase in the power technology gave us over natural limits, man correspondingly lost part of the definition and ground of being human. With this separation from natural limits comes the danger of denying, and forgetting, what makes us human. The denial of finitude, individuality, and mortality is the true danger of technology. To the extent that technology fosters the illusion that we can live forever and control everything, we are in danger of losing our humanness.

Heidegger sees the danger associated with the modern outlook (*Gestell*) not in science, nor even in technology, nor in machines as such, but rather in man who has lost his insight into man and behaves toward himself and to others as though all were non-human-like objects.

This dehumanization can be seen in the over-abundance of images, information, and manipulation which the technology of film and television makes possible on a global scale. The technologization of communication, which yielded communication mediums for the masses, such as radio, television, and film made it possible for live sights and sounds to lose their context and connection with the beings from which they arose.

As a productive part of this production and distribution of images, the filmmaker, Wim Wenders sees this danger exemplified most clearly by in the "country of technology", the United States, and one of its most powerful technologies, television:

"Every fucking telly is the center of the world. The center has become a pathetic notion, and so has the image of the world become a pathetic idea, the more televisions there are in the world. Down with television." "[American television] was that incredibly noisy, tasteless, calculated, contemptuous behavior of this system of images which I watched at first with frightened fascination, and then I gradually became its prey. I was like an animal paralyzed by fear, on a road at night, staring into the car headlights. That's how I stared into that flickering light."

The mass of images which are produced serve what Wenders sees as "the American state philosophy: Entertainment."

The saving grace

But where there is danger, there grows what saves. Salvation must come from where the danger is -- or it is inauthentic. For Heidegger begins with this acknowledgment and the saving grace "includes holding always before our eyes the extreme danger." Everything depends upon this: that we ponder this arising and that we, recollecting, watch over it... So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain transfixed in the will to master it. We press on past the essence of technology.

In our century, poets and technicians confront each other as antithetical figures, and Heidegger's thinking revolves around their

confrontation. Certainly poets and technicians are not mutually exclusive beings, but they are generalized to represent a larger tension within society of the poetic and the technological in our thought and action. The poet walking in the woods loses himself in the rapture of its presence; the technician calculates bulldozers that will be needed to level it. We see in the poet the ideal of beholding the beauty; in the technician, the drive to power. Is the saving grace in the poetic technology? In the reconciliation of poetry and technology?

When Heidegger's ideas are applied to images and technology, the saving grace is in personalization and poeticizing of the generic mass of images with which we are barraged. In a selection and appropriation from the indistinct masses, the technology becomes humane and significant, not just a tool of manipulation. The saving grace in technological communication is to take the medium beyond the regulated-regulating instrument of information and commercialism it can so easily become.

What is needed in the face of the danger of technology is not new technologies to fix the old ones, or even a shelter to hide from existing technologies, but to humanize the ones which we live amongst; making the form meaningful, significant, humane and resonating. I am offering the filmmaker Wim Wenders and his film, *Wings of Desire* as an example of what is possible with the humanization of the technology of film. With a heightened attention, film can rescue images from the generic mass and proliferation of sights and sounds. By fostering a quietness which makes it possible to listen to the things themselves, the film can let the image speak, and let things appear.

II. Questioning Stories

As I am using Wenders as an example of this saving grace, it seems good to sketch the relation Wenders has to the rest of the film world. What is the connection between the two, and how representative is Wenders of other filmmakers?

Wim Wenders began making films in the early 1970s as part of a movement called the New German Cinema. As Wenders was beginning to make films, an overwhelming majority of films shown in Germany were made in Hollywood and exported to Germany. The images which filled the theaters and the sub-consciousness of the German people were largely from a mythical land of warmth and wealth which Wenders saw as very distant from the post-war Germany he grew up in. Wenders and the New German Cinema strived for a unique independence from Hollywood. The American film studio system appears, with some exceptions, as a prime example of the regulated, unreflexive, commoditization of technology which Heidegger warned of. Of popular American cinema Wenders explains the limitations it has brought upon itself,

They've given up experiencing things -life- outside the cinema and as a result they are unable to get anything of that into their films. I read a very frank interview with Steven Spielberg. He said he thought it was a great loss to himself that his entire experience, his world, consisted entirely of his childhood cinema experience. It is an astonishing admission, but I think he'll carry on regardless. I don't believe he will ever do anything differently. The attempt Wenders made was to begin filmmaking again, outside of the commercial machine. "The New German Film has been the strongest argument in the world for a cinema that is not just a business but also an expressive form; something not only with money; but also with art."

Ironically, Wenders began making movies in the early 1970s in Germany, but made nearly all of his films in the next fifteen years about or in the United States. The America which he scorned also had a great fascination for him. In 1987 he returned to Germany and the German language for the first time in a decade to make *Himmel Uber Berlin*, directly translated, *The Sky above Berlin*, or *The Heaven above Berlin* -- but distributed in English under the title, *Wings of Desire*.

Wings of Desire also marked a distinct change in tone for Wenders. All eleven of Wender's full length films up to this point had been

about the difficulty of telling stories, and very self-reflexive. But just before the making of *Wings of Desire*, Wenders decided to deliberately overcome this self-impediment,

Either I show that storytelling is once more possible, or I shut up. That's what I've set for myself in my next two films. Try a narrative that passionately and confidently assumes the relevance of film language to life and is no longer at pains to relate the story to the method of storytelling... Not to leave everything to the great box office spectacles, but to proceed with full confidence and tell stories.

III. Heidegger and Wenders

Both Heidegger and Wenders are fond of citing the poet, Rainer Rilke, and in this passage I think Rilke articulates a fundamental connection between the projects of both men. Both are looking for a fresh opening to the question and experience of Being (alive).

For Heidegger, to be faithful to his chosen path, the question of Being, he had to learn a new way of speaking (and thinking) -- from "inside," from "out of experience of Being itself," rather than from above Being. (what Heidegger calls metaphysics) The majority of Heidegger's late writings, beginning at a some debatable point after his early philosophic "masterpiece" *Being and Time*, focus on different aspects of this speaking from inside Being, or what Heidegger calls dwelling.

In comparison, Wenders metaphorically embodies this transformation in *Wings of Desire*. He shows the frustration of an angel always confined to looking on from above, always outside the experience of "Being" itself, as a starting point for a transformation to inside "Being." The immaterial angel falls in love with a human woman, who performs as an angel in the circus, and chooses to become mortal and enter into the experience of mortality. First, the movie shows us the floating, detached, omniscient perspective of angels and then we enter into life from the eye level, into mortality.

I will be relating and contrasting Heidegger's transformation from metaphysics to dwelling and the transformation in the film, *Wings of*

Desire from angel to mortal. I will look at how Wenders overcomes Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics, and at the movie as a possible saving grace which arises out of the area of danger, technology, and takes Heidegger's challenge of dwelling a step further than Heidegger takes it himself.

Likewise, choosing to do philosophy within the medium of film, and using the medium to its fullest potential, brings the metaphysical into the real, and forces philosophy into an expression from inside Being, rather than outside and above Being.

World-Wide Homesickness

The reason that both Heidegger and Wenders feel the need for this transformation into Being is to address an uprooted consciousness which they see and feel in the contemporary world around them. This lack of rootedness is the motivation which prompts the transformations each wishes to make. I am looking at their creations and expressions offered to the world, both in writing and film, as an attempt at dealing with a profound lack of connection with world and Being prevalent in our technological time.

We can see this homelessness most concretely in the situation both men arise from in post-World War II Germany, they were severed from their past and present. They were forced to forget their collective past and where they came from because of the horror of it, leaving them without a tradition to arise from, or build on. At the time Heidegger wrote "Building Dwelling Thinking," one of his most poignant attempts at searching for dwelling, Germany was overwhelmed with a national crisis of literal homelessness, with millions of people lacking basic shelter, on the first steps towards recovering from the destruction of the war. Beyond the current tragedy he saw, Heidegger had to deal with his own involvement in Nazism, and his lack of resistance to the movement. Wenders was born in this same time period, and grew up in Dusseldorf in the aftermath of the terror. The extent that each man's longings are subjectively true, and the extent that they are true for all people alive in the second half of this century strongly merge together in my mind.

All I know for certain is that the longings and lack of connections which they describe are very resonant with what I see and feel, and don't feel as distant situations peculiar to post-war Germany.

To deal with this problem, the first step in the project of both men is an acknowledgment of the current tendencies of homelessness. "Not angels, not men, and the shrewd animals notice that we're not very much at home in the world we've expounded." Rainer Rilke (1st Elegy) Both see an alienation and despair in their respective, overlapping contemporary times which is a result of a definitive underlying metaphysics and world-view. Both also see a need to overcome this limitation. This is the prompt which longs for and calls about dwelling.

Wenders

In Wender's 1982 film, *The State of Things*, about the making of an independent film, the "fictional" director of the film within the film, Friedrich, articulates the feeling of all of Wenders' earlier films and confesses, "I'm not at home anywhere." For Wenders, somewhere, the joy has gone astray, but it is not out of sight, or memory. "When the child was a child, it didn't know it was a child, everything was full of life and all life was one" Wenders sees things as fragments now, or as some would say, he is cursed with a "post-modern sensibility," yet he has a longing to piece these fragments together in a whole, to collect them in a story, and to experience resonances.

All of Wender's films prior to *Wings of Desire* were road-movies. The characters go on and on, without any particular destination in mind. It is not important for them to arrive anywhere in particular. The stories are dominated by dislocated males searching for the saving grace, yet never satiated. In Wender's first dozen films he acknowledges and describes his view of the fragmented nature of the contemporary soul and culture. Not until *Wings of Desire* did he respond to that homesickness, or did he offer a transformation beyond that fragmentation.

As *Wings of Desire* was filmed in 1986, just a couple of years prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall and a divided Berlin, angels and the camera keep returning to the wall, giving us one of the strongest modern images we have to describe the divided (German) soul. This gives a universal symbol for the dualities within ourselves which Wenders wants to overcome.

For Wenders, being a creator and shaper of images, this fragmentation is also clearly expressed in the over-abundance of images and information in the world, especially in the United States.

"No other country in the world has sold itself so much and sent its images, its SELF images with such power into every corner of the world." "America, land of images Land made of images Land for images. Even writing has become pictorial here like nowhere else." This is Wender's specific prompt for his project: the recovery of vision. Paul Cezanne phrases Wender's desire. "Things are looking bad. ou have to hurry if you want to see anything. Everything is disappearing." In Wender's travel-diary, *Tokyo-Ga*, his fellow German film-maker, Werner Herzog, addresses the problem,

The simple truth is that there aren't many images around now. When I look out the window here, everything is blocked up, images are impossible. ou practically have to start digging for them like an archeologist to try and find something in this damaged landscape. We urgently need images to accord with the state of our civilization, and with our innermost souls.

Wenders has set out digging to find these images which connect the external state with the internal state of things. "It is better to have a few images that are full of life than masses of meaningless ones." Cinema can rescue the existence of things with attention and care to the selection and creation of images. For Wenders, we need these images to become thoughtful of our place in the world.

Heidegger

Contemporary, technologically fragmented times don't fit into what Heidegger sees as the ordered monolith of the metaphysical

tradition. The metaphysics which tradition has handed Heidegger do not satisfactorily accommodate or incorporate the world he sees.

In the face of the essential homelessness of man, there is a struggle for a home, for a grounding. Heidegger sees this homelessness as, most fundamentally, the symptom of man's oblivion to the question of Being. The truth of Being remains unthought and we have closed ourselves off to the meaningfulness of the question. "This homelessness is specifically evoked from the destiny of Being in the form of metaphysics and through metaphysics is simultaneously entrenched and covered up as such."

Divided souls and culture. "The time remains destitute not only because God is dead, but because mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality." Starting from the fragments, the reconstruction into a whole begins. The first step in this transformation is acknowledging and describing the painful disconnection which exists now, and exploring how it came to be; how the unconcealment of metaphysics led to the technology. Homelessness must first be experienced, rather than pretending everything is "OK."

Before a transformation is possible, one must first connect the internal and external and recollect what brought us to this point.

IV. Defining Metaphysics

"Still you argue for an option, still you anger for your case, like you wouldn't know a burning bush if it blew up in your face." (John Hiatt, "Through your Hands")

Heidegger

Heidegger defines philosophy as striving for the Being of beings. It is man's attempt to think beings in their common properties, to isolate the "Beingness"(Seindheit) of beings. The most universal features, such as idea (Plato) and *energia* (Aristotle) are isolated and distinguished. The history of metaphysics is the history of a discourse which opened itself by asking the question, "What is Being?", only to begin at the very same time, the spelling out of an answer that

forecloses any possibility of an experience with the dimensionality of Being as such. The discourse begins with an opening question, the question of Being, but its history is marked by a way of thinking -- speculative, explanatory, representational -- which spells its increasing CLOSURE to (the meaningfulness of) Being. The explanation of Being which reveals also conceals. The reason which clarifies also obscures. Nothing may be illuminated without shadows being cast. The values which Western civilization had drawn in order to define man and to give meaning and direction to human life have been nullified. "This is the darkening of the world." We see the lights in the cinema have fallen. We still await the flickering light coming from the projector to engage us. The world awaits a source of energy to illuminate the screen.

"The tradition of the truth about beings which goes under the title of 'meta' develops into a pile of distortions, no longer recognizing itself, covering up the primordial essence of Being. Herein lies the necessity of the 'destruction' of this distortion, when a thinking of the truth of Being becomes necessary. But this destruction, like 'phenomenology' and all hermeneutical transcendental questions has not yet thought in terms of the history of Beings."

By "philosophy" in these essays, Heidegger means philosophy as a "matter of reason." When we look into the history of metaphysics, we find philosophy's faith in reason and its faith in the ultimate rationality of the world. We find a world which is intelligible within existing categories, conforms to the laws of logic, and is ultimately explainable.

According to Heidegger, no metaphysics, whether idealistic, materialistic, or Christian, can "get a hold" on Being on its own terms or in accord with its essence. On the contrary, metaphysics is the underlying structure of presuppositions which shelters us from Being. "Every determination of the essence of man which already presupposes an interpretation with being without asking about the truth of Being, whether knowing or not, is metaphysical."

Though Heidegger draws inspiration from Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Anaximander, who preceded Socrates, Heidegger is referring to the tradition which begins most distinctly with Socrates, and is passed to Plato and Aristotle, and from them, to the subsequent western tradition. In this use, philosophy is interchangeable with Western "rationality" or what Heidegger calls "metaphysics." It is a matter of supplying reasons and argumentation, of entering the forum of rational debate. Socrates is the paradigm for a philosopher in this sense. Socrates searched for clear and well formulated definitions, and for the arguments which sustained them. He wanted to give a "rational account" of the virtues, not one which rested solely on the authority of the poets. As I will explore later, Heidegger consciously tries to deviate from this idea. For Heidegger, "thinking" is not primarily concerned with definitions and arguments; it dwells -- despite Socrates's warning -- in an intimate relation with the poets and poetry. This thinking is only possible if one makes the leap beyond the necessity to provide reasons for every proposition, if one overcomes metaphysics.

The beginning of philosophy is the beginning of the rule of reason. Today in the age of reason and the age of technology, the innermost teachings of philosophical reason are being worked out. In this century, philosophy has unfolded into the form of the "particular sciences." The appearance of psychology, sociology, anthropology -- of all the natural and humanistic sciences -- does not represent the dissolution of philosophy, but its completion, its final development. Philosophy in the form of metaphysics gives birth to philosophy in the form of the particular sciences. The demanding of science to "give reasons" has as its issue the rational and the technical sciences of the modern age. For Heidegger, the completion of philosophy means the beginning of the world civilization based upon Western rational thinking. Now, the rational systems worked out in the mind of Aristotle and other philosophers are acted out in the computerized landscape across all of the continents, effecting the lives of all humans, not just select intellectuals who can read and think along with Aristotle.

We are so filled with 'logic' that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction. We pitch everything that does not stay close to the familiar and beloved position into the previously excavated pit of pure negation which negates everything, ends in nothing, and so consummates nihilism. Following this logical converse we let everything expire in a nihilism we invented for ourselves with the aid of logic." "By continually appealing to the logical, one conjures up the illusion that he is entering straight forward into thinking, when in fact he has disavowed it."

Wenders (angels in the metaphysical section)

"I feel so detached today, I don't know, no" Poi Dog Pondering, "It's not that Simple". The movie, Himmel Uber Berlin is told through the eyes and ears of angels in Berlin. The angels can not only see everything physical, but can also over-hear people's secret thoughts and glide in and out of any private conversation or monologue. Even lies can be detected by noticing the disparity between thought and expression. They see beyond the present day also, into the past which lingers unconsciously behind the present. The ruins and rubble of World War II Berlin intertwine with today's images of modern buildup and decay. The angels are condemned to be witnesses, for ever nothing but onlookers. They are only marginally guardian-angels, laying an understanding hand on people passing by, but not always successful in their influence. They are unable to do so much as move a grain of sand. They are invisible to man, but themselves all-seeing.

They simply wander around Berlin. Each angel has his own area which he walks, and his people, which he grows fond of watching, and whose progress he follows with special attention. Mortals are unaware of their presence. Only the most naive children can catch glimpses of them, but they soon forget their visions, dismissed in the "realistic" world of grown-ups. Most mortals are sheltered from the experience of angels by their own the closing of their mind and heart. In an overconcern with the technological management which comes with "adulthood" and "seriousness" one loses the ability to see angels. In Wender's Berlin, many of the citizens have even lost the ability to

truly see other human beings. A lonely taxi driver in the movie thinks to himself that each citizen is a "separate nation state" which can only be entered with the correct password, often unknown to anyone. We each build our own walls and barriers, much higher than the Berlin Wall to protect ourselves from angels and other suspicious, magical creatures.

Although the angels can witness everything from above, there are many things they don't understand. They lack emotions, taste, touch, and all the peculiarities which come with living in the sensuous, passing world. From the angel's eyes, the film(world) is in a tinted black and white, suggesting a metal with a little lustre of old coins or tarnished silverware remaining as a reminder of the possibilities of color. As Wenders describes his own angels in preparatory notes for the film, "They are pure CONSCIOUSNESS, fuller and more comprehending than mankind, but also poorer. The physical and sensual world is reserved for human beings. It is the privilege of mortality, and death is its price."

The detached life of Wender's angels, who appropriately live and congregate in a large Berlin library, resembles the analytic life of the academic intellectual; hovering forever above. They are a cliché kind of intellectuals in their apartness and distress over the spiritual emptiness of people. The angels task, as is the academics, is to "assemble, testify, and preserve." Their spirit nature is both a delight and a burden to them; they live in an ambivalent loftiness. The angels can easily be seen as aspects of ourselves, not just abstract theological tapestries. Within each one of us a detached, onlooking angel is longing to leave the loftiness and enter into the stream of life.

"I am walking with my arms swinging. I want the stream to be a river, the river to be a torrent, and this puddle to be the sea."

V. Overcoming Metaphysics

"Everybody's trying to figure it out Everybody's trying to work it on out But it's not that simple it's not that simple." (Poi Dog Pondering, "It's not that simple") "Past the scientific darkness... to an angel

bending down to wrap you in her warmest coat." (John Hiatt, "Through your Hands")

Heidegger

The dominant question Heidegger must face is, now what? Can the closure of metaphysics be overcome? Can the discourse somehow be re-opened? Can we 'end' metaphysics by thinking the question of Being in a way that reopens it -- and reopens us to its reach and range? Heidegger wants to end metaphysics, not to end the question of Being, but precisely in order to let ourselves be opened up by it.

"But with the end of philosophy, thinking is not at its end, but in transition to another beginning." At the same time that Heidegger argues for the destruction of that which presently rules in our Western tradition, he also insists on a return to the tradition, and a retrieval of its concealed wisdom. We must recollect, remember, and recreate the beginning of the beginning of the question of Being; for in the beginning of the questioning the task is strongest and brightest. In the beginner's mind the mystery is clearest.

Thinking (Denken) is differentiated from "philosophy." Thought can be restored, at philosophy's end. The end is no mere stopping, but the completion of philosophy, which makes room for a new beginning. "Thinking begins only when we have come to know that reason, glorified for centuries is the most stiff-necked adversary of thought." Philosophy must cease to be a matter of "deciding issues" and "settling disputes" at all. If the answer can be given, it will consist in a transformative thinking, not in a propositional statement about a matter at stake.

"It is time to wean ourselves of the habit of overestimating philosophy and therefore demanding too much of it. What is necessary in the present time of world need is less philosophy but more of the attentiveness of thought... The thinking of the future is no longer philosophy, because it thinks more originally than metaphysics, which is a name for the same thing." In Heidegger's later writings, he

surrenders the labels of philosophy and metaphysics altogether. From within metaphysics he was unable to find any way out.

" et a regard for metaphysics still prevails even in the intention to overcome metaphysics. Therefore, our task is to cease all overcoming and leave metaphysics to itself." The question proposed in the previous section of this paper, defining metaphysics is presumably not asked at all in the later stages of Heidegger's overcoming, for to have that concern is to have a regard for metaphysics, which distracts from the new task of thinking.

Wenders

In *Wings of Desire*, one day the angel Damiel has the extraordinary notion of giving up his angelic, metaphysical existence for human life. I'm going to take the plunge, an old human expression, often heard, that I only understand today. Now or never; the moment of the ford. There is no other bank. There is only the river. Into the ford of time, the ford of death. Down from our look-out of the unborn. Observing from above is not like seeing at eye-level. First I'll have a bath.

The metaphysics which Wenders overcomes, as the angel enters mortality is the metaphysics of angels and divinities which is fully separate and distinct from this mortal existence. Divinity is no longer a reward to be hoped for after life passes in a distant heaven, but divinity is an active energy which interplays with this very moment, and need not be waited upon. The angels and the divine enter into this life, if we open up to the possibility and leave our metaphysical shelters -- as the innocent children in *Wings of Desire* do. The idea of grace and divinity as necessarily other is overturned. Angels are everywhere. Even Columbo is an angel. Heaven is overturned and the angels want to enter into the messiness of life.

To show the overcoming of abstraction from life, the original detachment must first be shown and lived through. *Wings of Desire* opens (and closes) as a poem written into a personal journal. From these detached words, living is born. Just as almost all movies begin as words on a script and only later come to life in sights and sounds on

the screen. The path one follows in leaving the flat world of paper for the full experience of life is traveled through. "The paradoxical thing is that films begin with words, and that words determine whether the images are allowed to be born. The words are like the headland that a film has to steer round to reach the image."

In many ways, *Wings of Desire* is one of the most intellectual and abstract movies ever made. It is full of telling and philosophical side-winders which abstract the concrete and take our focus away from the physical world. The movie is full of things Heidegger wants to get past (representative, calculative, linear thinking). *Wings of Desire* is not all a blissed-out, Heideggerian meandering. The full cycle is shown, going from abstract intellectual detachment to the simple pleasure of cupping ones hands around a warm cup of coffee on a winter day. The full cycle is needed to show the transformation and overcoming. Beyond that, after we have gone through Heidegger's transformation and begin living (thinking)(feeling) anew, what is returned to after the overcoming might be the same philosophic development and abstraction which was being overcome. We might have a cycle of the linear, and a return to the origins of Greek philosophy (wonder) such as Heraclitus which Heidegger was so influenced by. What Heidegger is trying to overcome is not the philosophy itself, but to overcome a stale taking for granted, a sleepiness of the tradition which has covered the original spark of wonder and experience of Being.

By giving up layers of presuppositions and explanations which covered the brightness of Being, we enter a nearness with Being which Dwells.

VI. The Task of Dwelling

"Logic and sermons never convince, The damp of the night drives deeper in my soul." (*Leaves of Grass*, 49)

"So whatever your hands find you must do with all your heart. There are thoughts enough to blow men's minds and tear great worlds apart. There's a healing touch that finds you on the broad highway

somewhere. To lift you high as music flies into the angel's hands."
(John Hiatt, "Through your Hands.")

Heidegger articulates the problem which he has created in discounting metaphysics and philosophy in his book, *The End of Philosophy*:
The mere thought of such a task of thinking must sound strange to us. A thinking which can be neither metaphysics, nor science? A task which has concealed itself from philosophy since its very beginning, even in virtue of that beginning, and thus has withdrawn itself continually and increasingly in the time to come? A task of thinking which -so it seems- includes the assertion that philosophy has not been up to the matter of thinking and has thus become a "history of a mere decline?"

That outlines Heidegger's challenge of construction. It is much easier to cynically and recklessly tear down a false construct than to build a fresh place of dwelling. Heidegger makes this task of building even more difficult by taking away the main tools which the old worker (philosophy) used to assemble its monolith. Where is one's path of thinking to start without the tools of reason and metaphysics?

Heidegger answers this in primarily metaphoric language rather than in the technical language of philosophy, in his essays contained in *Poetry Language Thought*.

Fourfold of earth, sky, mortal, divinity

Essential to Heidegger's dwelling is the idea of the fourfold. In this notion, Heidegger also comes closest to directly paralleling the play between angels and mortals in *Wings of Desire*. Throughout *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger speaks of the rift between apparent opposites we experience in our thought and lives. In a time which has lost contact with Being and is obsessed with technological management, mortals and divinities, earth and sky, are thought and felt as separate, distinct beings.

The saving grace is in the gathering of the fourfold. What unites opposites is the rift, the pain of the threshold which joins the opposites. How the world fits together, the appropriating of mortals to

divinities, earth to sky, things to place and function -- how all this fits together -- can be determined only by the upward glance that spans the opposites, earth and sky. In this glance there is a mirror-play of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. Each reflects itself, in its own way, into the oneness in a round dance and their belonging to each other. In *Wings of Desire*, Daniel and Marion, the angel and the mortal, become lovers in the sense that they become clarified, exposed, and reflected in each others presence; yielding a replenishing affirmation of each other.

In this light, *Wings of Desire* can be seen as the gathering of Heidegger's fourfold. As Wenders suggested to in the original title, the "Sky above Berlin" enters into the play of sleepy mortals on the ground. As the angel enters into mortality, the sky enters the earth; heaven and earth do not seem so far away. The mirroring of the angel and mortal is realized and they "are together." They come out into the open, together, belonging to each other.

"I'll be your mirror, reflect what you are
In case you don't know I'll be
the wind, the rain, and the sunset
The light on your door
To show that
you are home." (Velvet Underground, "I'll be your Mirror")

Mortals are in the fourfold by dwelling. "In the gift of the outpouring, mortals and divinities each dwell in their different ways." The opposites are united not when all lose identity and become one generic mass, but when each realizes his own true nature and releases into that nature. The nature of being a human is mortality, finitude, and in this acknowledgement and acceptance, comes a harmony with the fourfold.

Mortals dwell in that they initiate their own essential nature - their being capable of death as death - into the use and practice of this capacity, so that there may be a good death. To initiate mortals into the essence of death in no way means to make death, as the empty nothing, the goal. Nor does it mean to darken dwelling by blindly staring toward the end. In saving the earth, in receiving the sky, in awaiting the divinities, in initiating mortals, dwelling comes to pass as the fourfold preservation of the fourfold."

Heidegger is thinking always of opening up to the possibility of authentic human existence, of a life in which man does not go on blindly, as in the technological world view of Gestell, but a life in which man dwells, and is more open to an experience with Being; of finding one's way into the nearness of Being.

Letting the sky be the sky, the mortal be the mortal

The key to dwelling for Heidegger is to hear and see the world with the child's sense of belonging and joy. "We have heard when we belong to the matter addressed."

Wenders in his 1985 movie, *Tokyo-ga*, a personal travel diary and homage to the Japanese film-maker, Ozu, reflects on this during his flight to Tokyo. For five minutes Wenders points the camera out the window and does not speak. Then he says, "Just looking out of the window did me good. If only it were possible to film like that, I thought, the way you sometimes open your eyes. Just looking, not trying to prove anything."

"Men alone, as mortals, by dwelling attain to the world as world."

Dwelling is the process of finding your own nature, which for humans is deeply rooted in mortality. With this comes an eternity by being what you are now, and not being elsewhere. The experience of bliss comes in the acceptance and willingness of our own mortality and acceptance of change, glad to be here, not there.

Becoming Mortal

"Rational living beings must first become mortals." Heidegger says, when discussing the need for poetry, that he lives in a time when "mortals are hardly aware and capable even of their own mortality. Mortals have not yet come into the ownership of their own nature. Death withdraws into the enigmatic. The mystery of pain remains veiled. Love has not been learned."

Likewise in *Wings of Desire*, the angel, Damiel, in entering mortality, did not automatically become human, just as many of us are not fully human beings. Only through the learning of love did Damiel become

mortal. "Only the amazement about the two of us, the amazement about man and woman -- only that made a human being of me."

For Heidegger, intertwining mortals and divinities is at the very heart of dwelling. "Man dwells, insofar as he is man, in the nearness of god."

Are we yet mortals? Becoming mortals is a deliberate decision to dare, just as Marion articulates in her monologue to Damiel when they first meet. After Damiel has entered into mortality, they find each other at a bar in an underground music club. Before Damiel can speak, Marion begins a monologue which challenges both to become truly alive in each other's presence, or in Heidegger's terms, to listen to the voice of Being. "I don't know if destiny exists, but decision exists. Decide! ou're holding the game in your hands... Now or never."

Do we hear the chirping of crickets and the mating calls of the frogs with the ears of a child? Do we hear the music of Being at all? How capable are we, each one, of becoming beings without shells, open to pain, shaken by every sight and sound? Mortals hear the thunder of the heavens, the rustling of woods, the gurgling of fountains, the ringing of plucked strings, the rumbling of motors, the noise of the city -- only and only so far as they always already in some way belong to them and yet do not belong to them.

By belonging and dwelling, our bodily senses open to enchantment; to belong to Being, so that we may listen to it. Heidegger is preparing for an attunement and releasment into Being where one patiently waits for the voice of Being. "Thinking of Being is as much a thinking done by Being through one individual as individual thinking of Being." This is close to the poetic self-surrender, and for the philosopher, a surrender of philosophy. We do not come to thinking, thinking comes to us.

One can not explain the fourfold -- to explain just doesn't reach the fourfold. To remain in explanation leaves us looking on from outside of Being. The meaning is found in the actual living out of existence -- in a radical openness to the question of Being. In order to dwell, we must give ourselves confidently to earth's sacred revelation.

One does not follow along Heidegger's path by learning a doctrine or by doing research on a body of writings. Instead, one must have an experience of the matter of thought, of Being. The aim of his essays is to prepare us to undergo an experience with thought. One's individual being can receive Being if only one chooses to turn toward the light, as the rose turns to the sun instinctively to grow. This experience is not in our control, rather it befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms us, and transforms us. The task of thinking is not an "object" of scholarship and calculative thought, but the source of an experience. It is not we who play with thought, but thought which plays with us.

From a metaphysician's perspective, one would want to know what "proofs" we have for Heidegger's "thesis" concerning the task of thinking. Philosophers distrust such instinctive, intuitive responses, as we are trained to distrust them, and sometimes so much so that we lose the capacity for them. (I think that last sentence was too intuitively based for a philosophy thesis) But none of what Heidegger says of dwelling takes place in the realm of "assertions" "about" thought. Heidegger's task of thought occurs outside the realm of justification. It can only be understood by those who have had the experience, who can shut off concepts and representations and listen to what thought itself is saying. Heidegger came to hold that every "concept" and every "assertion" spoke from outside, spoke "about" Being. To be faithful to his path he learned a new way of speaking -- from inside, from out of the experience of Being itself; no longer a hovering, detached angel, but an intricate part of the flow of Being.

Beyond Heidegger's words. The world is in color. It smells.

Within the story there is an affirmation of mortality and finitude in the narrative of *Wings of Desire*; a joy of being alive. Upon leaving his angelic safety and sterility, the angel Daniel approaches Peter Falk, realizing he was also once an angel and made the same descent from angel to mortal, and that he is not alone.

This is the essence of dwelling which is difficult to derive from the serious world of Heidegger: play. The joyful celebration of being alive

which yields discovery opens us up to the experience of Being which a metaphysical explanation can cover up.

Poetically dwelling

Although there are many similarities, I see the playful, active dwelling which Wenders gives to us as quite distinct from the dwelling which Heidegger calls us to. Wenders shows us a dwelling through exploration of the physical and emotional world in action, instead of the meditative thinking Heidegger speaks of. Heidegger remains a spectator. Heidegger lives in ideas of Beings and can not tear his gaze away from them, or not for too long. There is an intellectual passion in his writings, but not much sensitivity to the actual occasions of our human history and their implications. "To think is to confine oneself to a single thought that one day stands still like a star in the world's sky." Heidegger has nobly devoted his life to one thought, and the rest of the world has fallen away. Heidegger's overcoming of metaphysics is an attempt at pure thinking, of blissing out, is a process of reflection not in the service of doing or making. Heidegger's call to thinking remains in the blissed-out meditation which is embodied in the first hour of *Wings of Desire*. As the angels float in and out of the city, they are fully aware, yet detached. The angels are listening to what Heidegger is looking for, i.e., an attentiveness to the murmur of thoughts rising from Being. The angels are listening carefully and compassionately to the deep thoughts arising from the Being into Berlin, into the silent passengers on the subway, beneath expression and even the consciousness of the individuals.

In contrast, Dammiel in *Wings of Desire* blisses out in the utter everydayness of physical existence. *Wings of Desire* points to a dwelling beyond words, in the nameless which Heidegger only thought about, and expressed in words. *Wings of Desire* answers Heidegger's challenge of dwelling and is uniquely suited to do so by its medium. It is impossible for a lecture to literally dwell in the nameless. Heidegger, or another writer, may prepare us for this experience, but the means of communication is limited to words. Wender's camera gracefully allows us to enter into sights, sounds, and things which Heidegger spoke about, and allows them to speak for

themselves without the intermediary of words. It is quite true that this language of film which Wenders shares with us has its limits and boundaries just as the written word does, and there is much about a first hand experience of the world which a movie can never capture; the joy is in the overflowing of previous confinements and the fresh world which our attention correspondingly opens up.

Wenders has overcome Heidegger's overcoming. He has shared what it means to dwell in this uncanny world in a way which Heidegger didn't, and added an extra dimension to the question and challenge. He has discovered eternity in the moment, in giving oneself over to the mystery. This is the age-old story of the birth of the eternal into the temporal, pure consciousness becomes flesh. But now heaven is overturned. The angels are discontent with the life above and beyond the birth and death merry-go-round. What is sacred to Wenders is the story itself, and through it we may enter into the divine. The story has healing powers.

Telling stories on film aims at recognition from the spectator while the form tries to produce order out of a chaos of impressions. Ever since Homer, mankind has needed stories to learn that coherence is possible. There is a need for connections, because human beings don't experience much coherence. That's what stories do. They confirm your ability to determine the meaning of life."

That is what entering the detached world of philosophy and then leaving it can do -- awaken us to the uncanny joy of being alive which cannot be found in any system of metaphysics. Just as Damiel discovered the magic of colors, smells, and touches he could not feel as he was detached from life; so the world surely holds an expanse of colors beyond the ones I can see now. An infinite number of layers of color and discovery lie waiting for our attention and wonder to awaken them.

Perhaps, if our bearing can become more thoughtful, our walking more open to feeling the support of the earth and taking its measure in our stride, we may be blessed with answers that only our phenomenal

body moved by its ancient and irrepressible dream to make every single moment a celebration of Being, could ever understand. Though you argue for an option, though you struggle in your logic, though I might lose myself in the abstraction of a senior philosophy thesis, it will come through your hands. "I only need to raise my eyes, and once again I become the world." (Marion in *Wings of Desire*)

VII. Dwelling in the Senses

"And you ask, what am I not doing? our voice can not command. Inside you will move mountains, and it will come through your hands." (John Hiatt, "Through your Hands")

Wings of Desire is uniquely suited to overcome Heidegger's dwelling because it is a film and not only words. In film it is possible to enter into the nameless and communicate that experience. Wenders uses a medium which can bypass language to communicate directly with the senses through moving photographic images of reality accompanied with the aural.

Heidegger unknowingly hints at the advantages this might provide. "As soon as we have the thing before our eyes, and in our hearts an ear for the word, thinking prospers." An endorsement for using the medium of film for philosophy? I am fairly certain that Heidegger never suggested using the medium of film to address this task of thinking, but I think he has set up the stage nicely for the possibility. "Films are the art of seeing, my father used to say." (*Kings of the Road*).

Film as addressing popular philosophy

We are all philosophers in so much as we have a general view of the world. Film goes regularly accomplish what many philosophical theories wrestle with and are defeated by and this rehearsal of their powers is a source of great pleasure; the human capacity to model the world and to play at modelling possible worlds. Professional philosophers can not help being fascinated by the spectacle of ordinary people playfully accomplishing what the philosophers theorize about. The play is voluntary and fun.

A new kind of reality is created, and brings our mind into a previous, complex state, where the outer world is woven into our minds and shaped not by its own laws, but by the acts of our attention -- an ease of movement back and forth (past/present, distant/close) fused world, as in our consciousness. Overcoming space, time, and causality and adjusting the events to the forms of the inner world of attention, memory, imagination, and emotion.

Movies fulfill our ancient yearning toward the world of dreams in a technologically obsessed age. For more than trivial entertainment, the cinema can spur our transformation and archetypical insights. In the theater's darkness the discriminating rational ego is lulled, so that we allow ourselves to be taken over by a spell, as real and potent as the trance of the primitive. Cinema is our shrine, our house of worship, our prayer room, a tribal rallying hall. Watching cinema is a communal, shared experience.

It's only a movie

Man is both actor and spectator. Have a good time, it's only a movie. Having assumed less pre-conceived metaphysical limits of experience, the child experiences a joy that most adults have lost forever. Dwelling is the process of retrieving, or indeed, discovering for the first time, this sense of joy. Can we find within ourselves a child of joy? Can we begin to see and listen to the world with a sense in touch with that joy? Can we see again with the child's sense of belonging? Let the mystery be, even within this technological world, we can release our illusion of control over the world and belong to the world. Love the questions and perhaps you will live your way into the answers.

"But do we know what beings mean? We would only come closer to the matter if we were to conceive ourselves with the nose, the eyes, and with hearing."

The Berlin wall which was the backdrop for much of the division in Wings of Desire of soul and body, East and West, is no longer there.

Look and realize with the effortlessness of seeing. Make no efforts from withdrawal from the world. Live. All is the ultimate reality, and it can be understood from the motion of a finger as well as from the experience of any everyday ritual. Daniel is not born into a new kind of mortality. It is the same one we belong to. It has been there all along. All that is needed is the discovery and awakening.

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