

The Forgetting That Remembers

Abgrund, Membrure, and the Medium of Resistance

Author: Nourizadeh, Moreno
ORCID: 0009-0006-0174-2585
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.20663527
Version: v2_0

Preprint

*The light dove, cleaving the air in her free flight, and feeling its resistance,
might imagine that its flight would be still easier in empty space.*

Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, A5/B8 9

Abstract

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant sets a single image at the threshold of the whole critical enterprise. The light dove, cleaving the air in free flight and feeling its resistance, imagines that flight would be easier still in empty space (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A5/B8–9). The dove takes the air for an obstacle. Yet the air it pushes against is the very medium that holds it up; remove the resistance and the wing beats on nothing. The error reproduces itself wherever a condition of possibility is mistaken for a limit to be overcome.

This essay develops forgetfulness as such a condition, an ontological structure rather than a cognitive shortfall, through sustained engagement with Heidegger's *Identity and Difference* and Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*. Forgetfulness here names neither memory, the explicit retention of what was, nor forgetting, the erasure of what was, but the working and imperceptible medium that lets both occur. The analysis works out a ternary rather than a binary: memory and forgetting are two articulations within a third thing that is no midpoint between them; it is the ground from which each is cut. That ground is what Heidegger thinks as *Abgrund*, the ground that grounds by withdrawing, and what Merleau-Ponty thinks as *membrure*, the invisible armature of the visible. Through the cases where the medium fails, Borges's Funes and Luria's Shereshevsky, who remember everything and so can think nothing, the investigation shows thought to be metabolic rather than cumulative: it does not preserve its inputs in a synthesis; it consumes them in a transformation that yields what was not there before. The Greek word holds the stake in a single term. Forgetfulness is *λήθη*, the concealment out of which *ἀλήθεια*, truth as unconcealment, is wrested; what withdraws does not lapse into deficiency; it sinks into the bearing ground from which a present draws the room to begin. Only because the past has withdrawn can anything genuinely new arrive instead of the old returning under a borrowed name. Thought moves as the dove flies, carried by the resistance it takes for an obstacle.

Keywords: Forgetfulness, Ontology, Memory, Phenomenology, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Kant, *Abgrund*, Ereignis, *Membrure*, Écart, *λήθη*, Metabolism.

Contents

<i>Introduction: The Ternary Structure</i>	5
<i>Perception as Recognition, Not Registration</i>	5
<i>When the Medium Fails: Funes and Shereshevsky</i>	6
<i>The Ontological Structure of Priority</i>	7
<i>Part I: Heidegger and the Withdrawing Ground</i>	8
1.1 <i>Identity and Difference: The Belonging Before the Together</i>	8
1.2 <i>The Abgrund: Ground That Grounds Through Withdrawal</i>	9
1.3 <i>Ereignis as Metabolic Transformation</i>	10
1.4 <i>Das Nichts nichtet: The Nothing That Nothings</i>	11
1.5 <i>The Lichtung: Clearing Through Concealment</i>	11
1.6 <i>Dwelling and Gelassenheit: Inhabiting Through Withdrawal</i>	12
1.7 <i>Al theia and L th : Forgetfulness as the Concealment Truth Is Wrested From</i>	13
<i>Part II: Merleau-Ponty and the Invisible Framework</i>	14
2.1 <i>Perception and the Figure-Ground Structure</i>	14
2.2 <i>The Membrane: Invisible Framework as Positive Structure</i>	15
2.3 <i>The Écart: Productive Spacing and Differentiation</i>	15
2.4 <i>The Chiasm and the Flesh: Reversibility as Ontological Structure</i>	16
2.5 <i>The Night of Forgetting: Productive Undifferentiation</i>	17
2.6 <i>Speaking Speech and the Sedimented Word</i>	18
<i>Part III: The Metabolic Structure of Creation and the Crisis of Perfect Memory</i>	19
3.1 <i>The Metabolic Structure of Genuine Creation</i>	19
3.2 <i>Kant's Dove: Resistance as Medium</i>	20
3.3 <i>The Crisis of Digital Memory: Eliminating Forgetfulness</i>	20
3.4 <i>Epimetheus: Forgetting as the Fault of Origin</i>	21
<i>Part IV: Conclusion: The Architecture of Becoming</i>	22
4.1 <i>The Ontological Priority of Forgetfulness</i>	22
4.2 <i>Contemporary Implications</i>	23
4.3 <i>The Gift of Forgetfulness</i>	23

Introduction: The Ternary Structure

Perception as Recognition, Not Registration

Merleau-Ponty states the principle from which everything here follows: "To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground, one cannot go back any further" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 193). The formula is a limit-claim, and the limit it names is one of position. There is no standpoint above or outside the figure-ground relation, no surveying overflight from which the relation could be looked down upon and analysed from no place in particular, because any seeing whatever is already a seeing from somewhere within the relation. What Merleau-Ponty rejects in the phrase is the high-altitude posture, the *pensée de survol* that imagines it can hover clear of the world and take it in from nowhere; one cannot go back any further because there is no further back to go, no perch behind the relation that is not itself another figure on another ground. To find something standing out is to have it stand out against what does not stand out, and the unregarded term cannot itself be brought forward without dissolving the very relief it was supplying. This is the working paradox the essay tracks: the ground performs its office only on condition of not appearing, so that the moment it is made the theme of a direct look it stops being ground and becomes one more figure in need of a ground behind it. Merleau-Ponty fixes the point in a phrase that will organise the whole second part of this study, "the invisible of the visible" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 247), and sharpens it: the invisible "is not another visible," not a thing merely hidden that better lighting would expose, but the *Nichturpräsentierbar*, that which is presented precisely as the non-presentable within the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 254). The German loan in his French text is itself an argument: there is no native term for what is given only as the ungivable, and the missing word marks the place where the analysis has reached something that ordinary phenomenological vocabulary cannot name without betraying.

Perception, read this way, is recognition through sedimented horizons and not the registration of data. Husserl had already located the mechanism in what he called passive synthesis, the process in which a past horizon is awakened and, in being awakened, fused with the expectation the present arouses (Husserl, 1939/1973, p. 73). Awakening is the right word and retrieval is the wrong one. Nothing is fetched from a store; what occurs is the reactivation of acquisitions that have settled, as sediment settles, into the underground of consciousness, Husserl's *Untergrund*, the layer that bears the present without being present in it (Husserl, 1936/1954, pp. 361–362). When a door shows itself as a door, the showing rides on an apperceptive transfer, an *apperzeptive Übertragung* in which the sense built up in earlier encounters is carried over to the thing now in view (Husserl, 1931/1960, p. 111). The transfer works only because those earlier encounters have withdrawn. They no longer stand before me as remembered episodes; they have passed into what Merleau-Ponty names the *membrure* of the visible, the invisible framework, the in-visible that is the secret counterpart of the visible rather than its mere negation (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 215).

The selectivity is constitutive, not a contingent feature of attention. The perceptual field gives a narrow zone of clarity surrounded by a wide margin that operates without being attended to; the perceived "something" is always in the middle of a field, and the field functions only because most of it is not in focus (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 4). Aron Gurwitsch gave this its technical form: the thematic field requires the margin as its standing condition, so that the theme can be a theme only against what is held,

deliberately and by the very form of attention, below the threshold of notice (Gurwitsch, 1964, pp. 319–320). To perceive is already to forget, in the sense this essay will hold to throughout: to let the overwhelming part of what is given recede so that some small part can come forward and mean something.

When the Medium Fails: Funes and Shereshevsky

The structure shows itself most clearly where it breaks. Borges constructs the experiment in "Funes the Memorious" by removing the one variable phenomenology treats as constant, the withdrawal. After his fall, Funes forgets nothing. "He remembered the shapes of the clouds in the south at dawn on the 30th of April of 1882, and he could compare them in his recollection with the marbled grain in the design of a leather-bound book which he had seen only once, and with the lines in the spray which an oar raised in the Rio Negro on the eve of the battle of the Quebracho" (Borges, 1942/1964, p. 63). This is not memory raised to a higher power. It is the cancellation of *l'th*, the concealing-withdrawal that Heidegger reads as belonging essentially to unconcealment itself, so that where nothing is hidden nothing can come to light either (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 50). The catastrophe is stated by Borges in a single clinical sentence: Funes was "almost incapable of ideas of a general, Platonic sort" (Borges, 1942/1964, p. 63). Without the gap that withdrawal opens, the gap Merleau-Ponty will name *écart*, divergence and non-coincidence and the very hollow in which a concept can form (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 206), generality has nowhere to arise. Borges presses the point until it hurts: it bothered Funes that the dog seen in profile at three fourteen should bear the same name as the dog seen from the front at three fifteen (Borges, 1942/1964, p. 64). A name is already an act of forgetting, a willingness to let differences fall away so that a kind can stand; Funes, who can let nothing fall away, is left with particulars that no concept can gather.

Luria's case of Solomon Shereshevsky supplies the clinical counterpart to Borges's fiction, and the convergence of an invented and an observed case on the same structure is itself evidence. Shereshevsky's synaesthetic hypermnnesia converted each word, on hearing or reading it, into a vivid image of the thing it named (Luria, 1968, p. 28). The result was obstruction, not enrichment: "Each word gave rise to an image, and this, in turn, would conflict with the image that had been evoked by the preceding word" (Luria, 1968, p. 112). Luria's conclusion reads as a phenomenological theorem in clinical dress: "The very abundance of his images militated against his ability to concentrate on what was essential" (Luria, 1968, p. 113). Essence requires inessence as its condition; the figure requires its margin; significance requires a fund of the insignificant into which most of what is given can be allowed to sink. Heidegger had named the pathology in advance under the heading of *Gleichgültigkeit*, the indifference in which everything counts equally and therefore nothing can count, since to count is to count for more than something else (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 42). His analysis of the referential whole, the *Verweisungsganzheit* of involvements, turns on the same withdrawal: what is ready-to-hand is not grasped theoretically at all, and its readiness-to-hand consists precisely in its having, as he puts it, to withdraw in order to be available for use (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 99).

That withdrawal, *Entzug*, is the hinge of the entire argument, and its grammar is worth marking at the outset. The word is built from *zug*, the draw or pull of *ziehen*, and the prefix *ent-*, which carries the sense of away-from; *Ent-zug* is a drawing-away, and Heidegger lets the morphology do the work the English

"withdrawal" leaves mute, since a withdrawal that draws is no mere absence; it is an active recession that shapes what remains. "Being itself withdraws," he writes, *das Sein selbst entzieht sich* (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 51); and the ground that does so is what he names *Abgrund*, the ground that grounds in the mode of absenting itself, a ground/reason that withdraws, *Das Sein: sich entziehender Grund* (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 72). The remainder of this essay is in large part a commentary on that hyphen and that prefix.

The Ontological Structure of Priority

Strip out the withdrawal and what remains is a flat plenum in which scale itself has been abolished, the opposite of the richer experience one might have expected. Heidegger has two names for this condition and they belong together. The first is *das Ungeheure*, the monstrous or uncanny, the state in which everywhere everything is ordered and so everything is equally without weight (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 135). The second is *das Riesige*, the gigantic, which he is careful to distinguish from mere largeness: the gigantic is not the big but the dissolution of meaningful magnitude through universal equivalence, the point at which quantity has so completely replaced significance that more and less no longer make a difference that matters (Heidegger, 1950/2002, p. 95). Funes lives in *das Riesige*. His day takes a day to reconstruct because nothing in it has been allowed to weigh less than anything else.

Merleau-Ponty supplies the positive correlate. Perception, he says, is a thought that perceives, yet a thought with no content of its own, because the content is always what the perceiving itself posits (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 44). What governs the positing is motivation, not efficient causation: one phenomenon releases another through the sense it holds out, and not by pushing it into being, the meaning that solicits a continuation (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 61). And meaning of this soliciting kind has the withdrawal built into it. For something to be held out as significant, the field around it must recede into a horizon; theme lives off margin (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 68). The structure runs through all experience and remains, by its nature, almost impossible to catch in the act, which is why Heidegger reaches for *das Unscheinbare*, the inconspicuous, and defines it by a negation that is not a privation: the inconspicuous is not merely what has gone unnoticed or has yet to be noticed, but that which does not press forward into appearance at all (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 51). We can remember experiences; we cannot, on the same terms, remember the remembering-structure itself, for any attempt to ground that ground demands a further ground behind it, and the regress halts only in the *Abgrund*, the ground that is groundless because it is the withdrawing on which all grounding rests (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 72).

Part I: Heidegger and the Withdrawing Ground

1.1 Identity and Difference: The Belonging Before the Together

Identity and Difference opens on Parmenides' third fragment, , "for the same are thinking as well as being" (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 23). The tradition, Heidegger argues, hears this as a thesis about correspondence, as though thinking and being were two established items that the sentence then declares to match (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 24). The reading begs the question it should be asking. It helps itself to the two terms as already separate and then has to manufacture a bridge between them, when the fragment is pointing at something prior to the separation, the togetherness out of which the two first come to stand apart at all (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 24).

The crucial move is a distinction English tends to flatten into synonymy. "The Same," *das Selbe*, is not "the merely identical," *das Gleiche*: in the merely identical the difference disappears, whereas in the Same the difference is held and so appears (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 25). Two things that are *gleich* are interchangeable, and their relation cancels their difference; two things that are *selbe* belong together in a way that carries their difference along rather than erasing it. Heidegger draws the consequence in the term that governs the book, *Zusammengehören*, belonging-together, and insists the weight fall on the first element: we are to think the belonging, *gehören*, and let it determine the together, *zusammen*, rather than the other way round (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 26). The ordinary reading hears a togetherness, two things side by side, and then asks how they are joined. Heidegger reverses the order of grounding: "We do not let the belonging be determined by the together, but rather the together by the belonging" (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 26). The relation precedes and produces its terms.

The event in which this belonging is accomplished is *Ereignis*. The word will not yield to a single English equivalent, and its resistance is instructive. It is ordinarily the German for "event," but Heidegger hears in it *eigen*, own, and the older *er-äugen*, to catch sight of, to bring before the eye, so that *Ereignis* names not an occurrence among others but the coming-into-its-own, the appropriation, in which thinking and being are handed over to each other and first become what they are (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 31; Stambaugh, 1969, p. 12). Neither term exists in advance and then enters the relation; each is delivered to itself only in and through the *Ereignis* that joins them. Carried over to the ontology of memory, this dismantles the storage picture at its root. The remembered content and the act of remembering are not two things that exist apart and are later associated. They accomplish one another in a single event, and what carries out their difference while holding their belonging is what Heidegger names *Austrag*, the perdurance or carrying-out: the difference of being and beings, thought as the difference of overwhelming and arrival, is the *Austrag* of the two in an unconcealing that keeps them in concealment (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 65). Memory and forgetting, on this account, are not opposites awaiting reconciliation. They are differentiations carried out by a prior structure, and forgetfulness is the *Austrag* that bears their difference while sustaining the belonging that makes them two sides of one thing.

1.2 The Abgrund: Ground That Grounds Through Withdrawal

The book's deepest term for that prior structure is *Abgrund*, and here the source language does not decorate the argument; it is the argument. *Grund* is ground or reason; the prefix *ab-* carries the sense of away, off, down-from. *Ab-grund* is therefore not the simple absence of ground, the way "abyss" suggests a sheer fall into nothing, but a ground that grounds in the manner of holding itself away, "a ground/reason that absents itself, that withdraws," *Das Sein: sich entziehender Grund* (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 72). Heidegger states the paradox without softening it elsewhere, in the formula that the essence of ground is the *Ab-grund*, *Das Wesen des Grundes ist der Ab-grund* (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 134), and the hyphen he sometimes writes into the word is a reading instruction: hear the *ab-* as doing something, hear the ground in the act of standing off. What grounds must withdraw in order to ground, because a ground that stayed fully present would become one more figure in the field it was supposed to support, and would then require a ground of its own.

The withdrawal, once again *Entzug*, is no deficiency to be repaired; it is the positive way in which being holds sway: the self-withdrawing is the manner in which being essentially unfolds, *der Entzug ist gerade die Weise, wie Sein west* (Heidegger, 1937–38/1994, p. 337). The verb is *wesen*, the old verbal sense of *Wesen*, to hold sway, to endure as presence, the same root that still lives inside *ich bin*; being does not first exist and then happen to withdraw, it carries on its very holding-sway as withdrawal. What enables must stay inaccessible to keep enabling, and Heidegger names this self-keeping with a phrase whose two words pull against each other on purpose, *bergende Verbergung*, sheltering concealment: a concealing that does not deprive but harbours, that keeps safe by keeping back (Heidegger, 1954/1977, p. 35). The pairing is built on *bergen*, to harbour or shelter, the same stem from which *Ent-bergen*, revealing, is later made; concealment and unconcealment are cut from one verb, and the kinship is the thesis.

The phenomenological demonstration is the analysis of equipment. Heidegger separates two modes of a thing's being with two German nouns the English renders only by hyphenated coinages. *Zuhandenheit*, readiness-to-hand, is the mode in which a tool is absorbed into the task and withdraws from notice; *Vorhandenheit*, presence-at-hand, is the mode in which the same thing stands before us as a mere thing held up for inspection. The distinction is invisible in "available" against "occurrent" and visible in the German, because *zu-* names the toward-the-hand of use while *vor-* names the standing-before of contemplation. The peculiarity of what is ready-to-hand, Heidegger writes, is that in its very readiness it must withdraw, *zurückzuziehen*, in order to be authentically available (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 99). The hammer in use is not seen; it is wielded, and disappears into the hammering. Attend to it as a thing set over against us and the hammering stops; the tool that becomes present-at-hand has ceased, in that instant, to be a tool (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 98). Withdrawal is not what happens to the tool by accident. It is the condition under which the tool is a tool at all.

Expertise universalises the lesson. Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus describe skill acquisition as a passage through stages in which explicit rules, indispensable to the novice, progressively withdraw until the expert no longer consults them and instead responds to the situation directly (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, pp. 19–36). The chess master does not calculate her way to the move; she sees the board, and the calculation that once filled awareness has sunk into what Michael Polanyi calls the tacit dimension, the order of things in which "we know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966, p. 4). Tacit knowledge operates as *Abgrund*: it grounds the explicit performance by remaining unavailable to it, and the attempt

to make it fully explicit destroys the fluency it was sustaining (Polanyi, 1966, pp. 9–10). Thomas Kuhn finds the same structure at the scale of a science. A paradigm functions as tacit knowledge that cannot be fully articulated yet silently shapes every observation made under it (Kuhn, 1962/1970, p. 44); it must stay in the background, unexamined, for normal science to proceed (Kuhn, 1962/1970, p. 113), and the demand for its full articulation is the onset of crisis, not a refinement, the moment the framework one was working within is dragged into the foreground and ceases to operate (Kuhn, 1962/1970, pp. 67–68). Funes and Shereshevsky are the limiting case in which nothing is allowed to withdraw. Everything stays *vorhanden*, present-at-hand and equally available to inspection, and the *zuhanden* mode that makes skilled engagement possible never forms. Without the withdrawal that lets one be absorbed in a task, what Heidegger calls circumspective absorption, *umsichtiges Aufgehen* (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 107), there is no coping, only an endless inventory.

1.3 *Ereignis* as Metabolic Transformation

Return to *Ereignis* with the question of novelty in view. Heidegger blocks the reduction of the word to "happening" by insisting it is a *singulare tantum*: what it names occurs only in the singular, not once among a series of times but uniquely, outside number altogether (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 36). The appropriating event is the structure that lets temporality be, not an episode within time; it is the realm, vibrating within itself, through which the human and being reach each other and attain their active essence by losing the determinations metaphysics had fastened on them (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 37). That losing, *Verlust*, is the pivot. It is not deprivation but transformation, of a piece with what Heidegger elsewhere calls the change in the essence of the human, *Wandel des Menschenwesens* (Heidegger, 1936–38/1989, p. 95). Something is given up, and in being given up is converted into something that could not have existed while it was retained.

This is the difference between synthesis and metabolism, and it maps onto the difference between metaphysical causality and *Ereignis*. Metaphysical causality runs on the principle of sufficient reason, the *Satz vom Grund*, "nothing is without ground," *nihil est sine ratione* (Heidegger, 1957/1991, p. 3): the effect conserves its cause, the output holds its inputs in reserve, and the world is legible as a chain in which everything appears as the consequence of something prior, the very form of what Heidegger calls calculative thinking, *rechnendes Denken* (Heidegger, 1959/1966, p. 51). *Ereignis* works otherwise. The appropriating event does not keep its antecedents the way an effect keeps its cause; the human and being arrive at their active essence only by losing the qualities metaphysics gave them (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 37). Read at the level of lived time, this losing is a rupture, and Bachelard names it when he writes that the instant is essentially the consciousness of a rupture, a break in continuity and not a point on a continuous line (Bachelard, 1936/2016, pp. 128–129). The break opens a void, and Bachelard, following Dupréel, holds that a void must be posited between successive psychic states before any new consolidation of duration can occur (Bachelard, 1936/2016). Duration is made, not given, riddled with these productive gaps rather than flowing as a Bergsonian continuum; the new form arises through the rupture and not by recombining what preceded it, and for that reason it cannot be traced back to its origins, because the metabolic transformation has consumed them.

Language acquisition shows the structure in the open. The passage from non-speaker to speaker exhibits what applied linguistics calls emergence: properties arise that are not present in the components and

cannot be predicted from them (Ellis, 1994/2008, p. 233). Stephen Krashen's distinction between learning and acquisition records the same threshold from the inside, deliberate rule-following having to convert into unthematic competence through a process that cannot be deliberately steered (Krashen, 1982, p. 10). Merleau-Ponty states the phenomenology precisely: the one who speaks does not think the sense of what is being said, and words are not strongholds in which a meaning is kept (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 180); speech is rather the surplus of our existence over natural being (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 197), a surplus that arises when accumulated practice undergoes what he calls a sublimation of biological existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 189). The competence that results no longer contains the drills that built it; it has metabolised them. Roman Jakobson's work on aphasia confirms the architecture from the side of its breakdown. The two great types of aphasic disturbance, the similarity disorder that damages the paradigmatic axis and the contiguity disorder that damages the syntagmatic, are injuries to the underlying framework that structures the use of words, and not losses of vocabulary, the metalinguistic function (Jakobson, 1956, p. 76; Jakobson, 1960, p. 356). The framework can be damaged while the content survives, which is what one would expect if framework and content are distinct in the way *membrure* and the visible are distinct (Jakobson, 1956, p. 82).

1.4 *Das Nichts nichtet: The Nothing That Nothings*

In "What Is Metaphysics?" Heidegger makes the nothing verbal: *das Nichts nichtet*, the nothing nothings, or nihilates (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 90). The barbarism is deliberate and it is not wordplay. To say that the nothing nothings is to deny that the nothing is a thing, even a thing called "nothing," and to assert instead that it is an operation, the opening of the ontological spacing in which beings can stand out as beings at all. The phenomenology proceeds through anxiety. In anxiety, beings as a whole slip away, *das Seiende im Ganzen entgleitet*, and what the slipping reveals is the slipping itself, no thing at all, the nothing given as the receding of everything (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 88). The nothing is therefore not the logical negation of the totality of beings; it belongs, more originally, to their essential unfolding (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 90), so that the order of grounding between the nothing and negation must be reversed: the nothing is the origin of negation and not the reverse (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 90). Were the nothing not manifest, Heidegger argues, there would be no selfhood and no freedom (Heidegger, 1967/1998, p. 91), since both require the spacing in which a being can stand apart from what it is not. Read into the present argument, *das Nichts nichtet* is the most condensed statement of why forgetfulness is productive. The nothing the nothing makes is the same spacing the withdrawal opens; the *écart* Merleau-Ponty will describe is its phenomenological face.

1.5 *The Lichtung: Clearing Through Concealment*

The clearing, *Lichtung*, gives the operation a spatial figure, and the figure rewards the etymological care Heidegger lavishes on it. In the midst of beings as a whole an open place comes to pass; there is a clearing, a lighting (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 51). The temptation is to hear "lighting" as illumination, but Heidegger blocks it by recovering the buried sense of the German *licht*. The word in *Lichtung* does not primarily mean luminous; it means sparse, thinned, free, as a forester speaks of a stand of trees as light where the trees are few. The *Lichtung* is a forest clearing, experienced against the dense surrounding wood, the *Dickung* (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 66); it is a spacing, an openness won from density, and not an illumination, and Heidegger says as much, that the clearing is not simply the open but

the opening that grants the free region in which anything open can appear (Heidegger, 1949 50/2012, p. 442). The decisive sentence holds the two together: the clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 51). There is no clearing without the wood it is cleared from. Applied to memory, the significant recollection stands in a clearing opened by everything that has been let sink into the forgotten. Funes lives in the *Dickung*, an impenetrable density of contiguous detail in which, as Borges writes, there were nothing but details, almost contiguous details (Borges, 1942/1964, p. 66). No clearing forms, because nothing is allowed to thin.

1.6 Dwelling and *Gelassenheit*: Inhabiting Through Withdrawal

"Building Dwelling Thinking" recovers a forgotten kinship inside ordinary German and makes it carry an ontology. Heidegger's claim is that the way we are on the earth is *Buan*, dwelling: "the manner in which we humans are on the earth is *Buan*, dwelling" (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 145), and dwelling so understood is not the occupation of a space; it is the basic character of mortal existence, the manner in which mortals are on the earth (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 146). The argument is etymological and it is meant to be. Modern German *bauen* means to build, and has narrowed to construction; but the older *buan* meant to dwell, to remain in place, and the lost sense survives, Heidegger notes, as a covert trace in *Nachbar*, the neighbour, who is the *Nachgebauer*, the near-dweller, the one who dwells nearby. The recovery is not antiquarian. It shows that building and dwelling were once one mode of being-on-earth rather than a means and an end, and that the same kinship still sounds, for those who listen, in the grammar of being itself, since the old verb concealed inside *ich bin* and *du bist* says, before it says anything else, "I dwell," "you dwell." Dwelling in this sense lives off what has withdrawn into the unnoticed, the fourfold, *das Geviert*, earth and sky, divinities and mortals, in their simple oneness, an *Einfalt* that cannot be grasped head-on and operates only as withdrawn ground (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 147). The fourfold is not something standing behind the thing; it is the gathered ground the thing lets be, and it functions, like every ground in this essay, by not appearing (Heidegger, 1954/1971, p. 151).

The comportment answering to such a ground is *Gelassenheit*, releasement, the letting-be built on the verb *lassen*, to let (Heidegger, 1959/1966, p. 54). It is not passivity. It is the active relinquishing of the grasp that would force the ground into the open, releasement toward things and openness to the mystery, in which we let the thing be the thing it is rather than seizing it as a thing set before us (Heidegger, 1959/1966, p. 55). Gaston Bachelard names the same gesture in the register of science with his epistemological break, the *rupture épistémologique*: progress requires the abandonment of the established framework, so that the mind forms itself only by reforming itself, by releasing the preconceptions through which it had been seeing (Bachelard, 1938, p. 13). Understanding comes through a *Gelassenheit* toward what one already knows, a willingness to let the held framework go so that the phenomenon can show itself otherwise (Bachelard, 1938, p. 14). The releasement is itself a mode of productive forgetting: not the loss of a content but the loosening of a grip.

1.7 *Al theia* and *L th* : Forgetfulness as the Concealment Truth Is Wrested From

The Greek word for truth carries the whole thesis of this essay in its morphology, and Heidegger's lifelong insistence on reading it literally is the warrant for taking forgetfulness as an ontological structure and not a psychological lapse. *Al theia* is privative in form. It is built from *l th*, concealment or oblivion, and the alpha that negates it, so that the word says, before it says anything else, un-concealment, *Un-verborgenheit*, the state of having been wrested out of hiding (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 50). Heidegger presses the privative against the whole tradition that hears truth as correctness, the matching of a proposition to a thing: for the Greeks, he writes, truth means to take out of concealment, to uncover, and the prefix names not a logical negation but an act, a wresting, even an assault on a concealment that does not give way of itself (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 262). The point is not etymological piety. It is that the word preserves, in its own structure, a relation the later *veritas* and the modern "correctness" have buried: truth is not a property a statement has but an event in which something is torn from hiddenness, and the hiddenness is not abolished by the tearing but continues to surround and condition it.

This is why forgetting belongs to truth rather than opposing it. The *l th* inside *a-l theia* is not the enemy that unconcealment defeats once and for all; it is the reserve out of which unconcealment is each time drawn, and into which what is unconcealed each time returns. Heidegger makes the belonging explicit when he reads concealment as belonging to unconcealment itself, not as a mere lack but as its heart, the concealing without which nothing could come to be unconcealed (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 50). Read into the present argument, this is the deepest statement of the ternary structure. Memory is a mode of unconcealing, a drawing of something out of the reserve; forgetting in the ordinary sense is a sinking back into the reserve; and forgetfulness in the ontological sense is the reserve itself, the *l th*, the standing concealment that lets there be unconcealing and re-concealing at all. The figure of Funes can now be stated in one line. Funes is the abolition of *l th*, the cancellation of concealment, and the cancellation of concealment is not the triumph of truth but its impossibility, since where nothing can hide nothing can be brought to light. The lamp that never dims illuminates nothing, because illumination is the wresting of a figure from a dark that must stay dark around it. The privative in *a-l theia* is the same negation the *ab-* performs in *Ab-grund* and the *ent-* in *Ent-zug*: in each, the prefix names a withdrawal that is not a deprivation but the condition of presence, and the convergence of the three prefixes, one Greek and two German, on a single structure is the linguistic spine of the whole account.

Part II: Merleau-Ponty and the Invisible Framework

2.1 Perception and the Figure-Ground Structure

Merleau-Ponty's late ontology takes the figure-ground relation that the *Phenomenology of Perception* had described and presses it until it yields a thesis about being and not only about seeing. The principle is restated as the refusal of any overflight: "To be conscious = to have a figure on a ground, one cannot go back any further" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 193). Thought cannot withdraw to a height above the figure-ground relation and survey it from there, because the withdrawal would itself be one more figure cut from one more ground. The ground is not a faint figure waiting to be brought up; it continues under the figure and is, in his exact phrase, seen under the figure while not being seen (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 13). This sentence does the work of a definition. The ground is given in a mode that is neither presence nor absence, a seen-unseen, and the contradiction is only apparent because the two verbs name two registers. The ground works without being thematic; it bears the seeing without entering it.

The move separates Merleau-Ponty from the Husserl of constitution. Where Husserl treats perception as a bringing-to-giveness, a *Zur-Gegebenheit-Bringen* of what had been absent (Husserl, 1913/1931, p. 92), Merleau-Ponty inverts the vector: perception works by sustaining a systematic non-giveness, holding part of the world back so that the rest can show. The visible, he writes, is pregnant with the invisible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 216), and the invisible meant here is not a second visible behind the first; it is the invisible of this world, what inhabits it, sustains it, and renders it visible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 151). The grammar of the genitive is the whole point. It is the invisible *of* the visible, belonging to it as its own withdrawn lining, not an invisible elsewhere.

The impersonality of perception betrays the same structure. Perception, Merleau-Ponty says, occurs in the mode of the anonymous *On*, the French impersonal "one": it is not I who see and not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility, a vision in general, inhabits us both (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 142). This anonymous adherence to the world is what he names *foi perceptive*, perceptual faith, and the choice of *foi* over *croyance* is deliberate and load-bearing. *Croyance* would name a belief, a propositional assent one could examine and justify; *foi* names a trust that precedes any proposition, an adherence that, in his words, knows itself to be beyond proofs (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 28). Perceptual faith is not a conviction we hold; it is the holding by which there is a world for us at all, and it operates, like every ground here, by not being looked at. Empirical confirmation arrives from the Gestalt tradition Merleau-Ponty read closely. Köhler's organised vision rests on field forces that are not themselves perceived, since the field organisation is not given as such (Köhler, 1947, p. 104); Koffka's ground "serves as framework" while the framework itself does not appear (Koffka, 1935, p. 183); Wertheimer's wholes precede their elements rather than being built from them (Wertheimer, 1923, p. 2). Each result says, in the idiom of experimental psychology, what *membrure* says in the idiom of ontology.

2.2 The *Membrure*: Invisible Framework as Positive Structure

Membrure is Merleau-Ponty's word for structural invisibility, and it is chosen, not found. He needs a term that will say "framework" without saying "scaffold," something articulated and load-bearing yet internal to what it bears, and ordinary French offers no single word for it. So he reaches for *membrure*, which gathers *membre*, the limb or member of a body, *membrane*, the living tissue, and *armature*, the framework of a structure, into one term that means an articulated inner framework belonging to the thing it structures (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 215; Dillon, 1988/1997, p. 156). The invisible is not the non-visible in the sense of the merely absent; it is the invisible of this world, its *membrure*, its inner framework (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 215). The selection of the word is itself the argument, in the manner Merleau-Ponty practises throughout the late work: where the available vocabulary would flatten a distinction, he coins or recovers a term whose own resonances carry the distinction the common word loses.

The *membrure* is a negativity that is not nothing. The invisible is there without being a thing set over against us; it is, Merleau-Ponty writes, pure transcendence without an ontic mask (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 229). He gives it a homely figure that holds the paradox without resolving it, the hinge, *la charnière*: the hinge is that on which the door turns in opening and closing, itself immobile (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 264). The hinge enables the movement of the door precisely by not moving; the *membrure* enables perception precisely by not being perceived. Linguistic competence runs on the same hinge. Chomsky's competence is a tacit knowledge that underlies performance and cannot be directly inspected (Chomsky, 1965, p. 4), and when we listen we hear meaning, not the grammar that delivers it, the grammar operating as *membrure*. Merleau-Ponty had already given the linguistic version of the thesis: language operates through the differences between signs and between significations, so that each element has value only through the others (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 39). The aphasiac confirms it by deprivation: he has lost the power of projecting before himself a linguistic field (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 176), and what is damaged is the invisible framework that lets a word be situated and used, and not the stock of words, which is Jakobson's metalinguistic operation seen from the clinic (Jakobson, 1956, p. 83).

2.3 The *Écart*: Productive Spacing and Differentiation

If *membrure* names the withdrawn framework, *écart* names the spacing within which anything can be differentiated at all, and it is the most carefully chosen term in the late lexicon. The translators of *The Visible and the Invisible* note that the one French word must be rendered, depending on the sentence, as divergence, spread, deviation, or separation, and the spread of renderings is a sign that English has no settled equivalent for what Merleau-Ponty wants. *Écart* belongs to the register of surveying and ballistics, where it names a measured deviation from a line, a controlled offset rather than a mere gap, and it is this productive, measured sense he exploits. The *écart*, the divergence, is not a distance in the Cartesian sense (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 197); it is no ontological void; it is the hollow in which time is formed (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 199). A void would be sheer privation. The *écart* is privation made productive, the offset that lets the two sides of a relation be two without ceasing to belong together.

The touching-touched relation is its clearest exhibit. My two hands touch the same things, Merleau-Ponty observes, but they are never together in the same touching (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 147): when my right hand touches my left, the touching hand cannot at the same instant be the hand that is touched, so that the reversibility is always imminent and never realised in fact (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 147). This failure to coincide is not a shortfall to be lamented. It is what makes touch touch and not fusion; the gap, and not the coincidence, is what makes perception possible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 148). Carried into time, the same spacing is required between retention and protention. The living present holds together a primal impression continuously shading off into retention and an expectation reaching toward what is coming as protention (Husserl, 1928/1991, p. 31), and the *écart* between these dimensions is what gives the present its depth, what Merleau-Ponty calls its temporal thickness, *épaisseur temporelle* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 423). A present without thickness would be a knife-edge instant with no past trailing into it and no future leaning on it. Funes lives on that knife-edge. Perfect memory eliminates the *écart* by holding past and present at equal presence, and the reconstruction of a single day costs a single day because nothing in it has receded far enough to make room for the next thing (Borges, 1942/1964, p. 65). Without the offset that opens temporal depth, there is succession without thickness, one full moment after another, and no time in which to think.

2.4 The Chiasm and the Flesh: Reversibility as Ontological Structure

The chiasm, *chiasme*, names the crossing in which the seer and the visible turn into one another, and the word is borrowed with precision. Its surface sense is rhetorical, the ABBA reversal, but the sense Merleau-Ponty leans on is anatomical, the optic chiasm where the fibres from the two eyes cross and are redistributed without merging. That is the structure he needs, a crossing that exchanges without fusing. The chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 264), the seer seen in the act of seeing, the toucher touched in the act of touching, and the doubling never closes into identity because the *écart* keeps the two sides apart even as it binds them. This is reversibility, *réversibilité*, and the French suffix marks it as a standing feature of being rather than a process that can be run backwards: the touching and the touched are reversible in principle and the reversal is always abortive in fact, which is to say that reversibility is the imminence of a coincidence that is structurally deferred.

The element in which reversibility takes place needed a name philosophy did not have, and Merleau-Ponty supplies one by reaching past the modern vocabulary altogether. "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 139). The whole move is here. He announces a vacancy in the inherited lexicon, says outright that there is no name in traditional philosophy for what he means, and then fills it not with a coinage but with a deliberately archaic word, *élément*, scare-quoted so that the reader hears the pre-Socratic *stoicheion* and not the chemist's element. *La chair*, the flesh, is then the element in which seer and seen, toucher and touched, are made of one tissue, the formative medium of the seer and the seen (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 147), their common stuff rather than their synthesis. The choice of *chair* over *corps* is itself the distinction. *Corps* is the body taken as a thing among things, the body anatomy lays open; *chair* keeps the low, sentient, carnal register, the meat that feels, and it is the feeling-felt mass and not the body-thing that can be the medium of

reversibility.

Memory has the chiasmic structure too. Time and chiasm, Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note: the *Stiftung*, the institution or founding, of a point of time can be transmitted to the others without continuity, without conservation, without a fictitious support in the psyche, the moment one understands time as chiasm (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 267). The German *Stiftung*, taken from Husserl, names the act of instituting a sense that then goes on meaning without being stored, an inexhaustible founding that keeps founding because it has passed, and it is the word the argument needs at the point where it must say how a past can remain in force without being retained. Past and present, on this account, are *Ineinander*, in-one-another, each enveloping and enveloped (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 267); memory works by the chiasmic enfolding in which the past remains the lining of the present, and not by storage. This is what Merleau-Ponty calls the Memory of the World, *la Mémoire du Monde*: the things have us, and it is not we who have the things; language has us, and it is not we who have language; it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 194). Memory belongs to the structure of being and is not a private faculty, a vertical past that holds, in principle, all the past and all the present (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 244).

2.5 The Night of Forgetting: Productive Undifferentiation

Merleau-Ponty gives the withdrawal a further figure, the night, *la nuit*, and it is the figure that brings the argument closest to the experience of forgetting. Night is not a thing set before me; it enwraps me and infiltrates through all my senses, stifling my recollections and almost effacing my personal identity (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 283). Night names not darkness as a thing but the withdrawal of differentiation itself, the lapse of figure and ground into an undivided depth from which new configurations can come. It has no outlines; it touches me directly, and its unity is the mystical unity of the *mana* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 283). The night is productive because it undoes the articulations of the day, and the undoing is the condition of any new articulation.

This connects to what Merleau-Ponty calls hyper-reflection, *sur-réflexion*, a reflection that takes itself, and the changes it introduces into the spectacle, into account (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 38). Hyper-reflection seeks the originary through a super-vision that would see itself seeing, and discovers in the attempt the impossibility of a complete reduction, the fact that reflection can never get behind itself to the unreflected ground it rises from (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 38). The ground keeps withdrawing as one reaches for it, which is only to say again that the *membrure* cannot be made visible without ceasing to be *membrure*. Bachelard finds the productive night in the poetics of dream: night dreams cannot be recounted, for to tell them is already to awaken, and the productive confusion in which subject and object are indistinct is the very soil of the birth of images (Bachelard, 1960/1971, pp. 148, 151). Scientific discovery passes through the same undifferentiation; Poincaré describes the ideas rising in crowds during a phase of unconscious work, after the conscious effort had been set aside (Poincaré, 1908, p. 387). Perfect memory abolishes the night. Shereshevsky cannot sleep because images keep appearing before his eyes (Luria, 1968, p. 70); without the night's lapse of differentiation there is no rest, no incubation, no soil in which images can form, only an unbroken illumination in which everything stays equally lit. Levinas gives this insomniac plenum its name, the horror of the *il y a*, the there is: a presence of absence, an atmospheric density, the plenitude of the void that returns when every

determinate being has been withdrawn and yet existence will not fall silent (Levinas, 1947/1978, p. 58). The *il y a* is what forgetfulness saves us from, the bare fact of existing with no clearing in it.

2.6 Speaking Speech and the Sedimented Word

Language gives the memory-forgetting structure its sharpest exhibit, and Merleau-Ponty marks it with a distinction French can carry in a single inflection where English needs a paraphrase. He separates *la parole parlante* from *la parole parlée*, the speaking speech from the spoken speech, and the contrast lives entirely in the difference between the present participle and the past. *Parole parlante* is language in the act of instituting a sense, the creative word that sweeps the listener from the signs toward a meaning not yet available before it was said; *parole parlée* is language after the fact, the sedimented stock of accepted relations between sign and signification that the speaker inherits and the reader brings with him (Merleau-Ponty, 1969/1973, p. 11). The participles do the philosophical work. *Parlante*, still speaking, names an event that exceeds the system it departs from; *parlée*, already spoken, names the settled deposit that event leaves behind. The distinction is not temporal in the trivial sense of earlier and later but ontological, the difference between an instituting and an instituted, and English collapses it whenever it renders both by "speech" or "language" and has to add an adjective to recover what the French grammar already held.

The relation between the two is the relation between forgetting and the bearing ground. Sedimented speech, *parole parlée*, is the language the reader brings, the fund of habitual significations without which no sentence could be begun (Merleau-Ponty, 1969/1973, p. 13); but it functions, like every ground in this essay, by withdrawing. We do not attend to the grammar and the dictionary while we read; they have sunk into the working invisibility from which the living sense can rise, and the moment we attend to them the sense stops and the words become objects of inspection, *vorhanden* rather than in use. The speaking word lives off the forgetting of the spoken word, off the sedimentation that lets the inherited system recede into a *membrure* the new meaning can be cut against. And the instituting itself is what Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty after him, call *Stiftung*, the founding act whose fecundity is that it can be transmitted to every later present without being conserved as a content, an institution that keeps instituting precisely because it has passed (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 267). Creative speech is therefore a forgetting that remembers in the most literal sense the title intends: it lets the said sink into the sustaining ground so that something can be said that was not there to be retrieved, and the writer who could forget nothing of the language he inherited, who held every prior usage at equal presence, would be the Funes of style, able to repeat the whole sedimented stock and unable to say a single thing that had not already been said.

Part III: The Metabolic Structure of Creation and the Crisis of Perfect Memory

3.1 The Metabolic Structure of Genuine Creation

Creation discloses the same structure the analysis has tracked from perception through dwelling. It does not work by recombination, by reshuffling preserved elements, but by a transformation that consumes what it works on. Bernard Stiegler gives the process its technical apparatus. The contents of consciousness are externalised into what he calls tertiary retentions, the supports outside the living memory in which experience is deposited, the tool, the script, the recording, and these undergo grammatisation, the process by which the flux of consciousness and of the body is made discrete, broken into reproducible units (Stiegler, 2004/2010, p. 31). Discretisation looks like a loss, the living flow cut into dead segments, but Stiegler's point is that the cut is productive, because the segmented and exteriorised past is what a future can take up and rework rather than merely repeat. Technics, he writes, is what opens the possibility of a future, an *avenir*, that is not simply the consequence of the past (Stiegler, 1994/1998, p. 134). The French *avenir*, the to-come, carries the sense the argument needs, a future that arrives rather than a future that is deduced, and it arrives only because the past has been exteriorised and so released from the grip of pure interior continuity.

Science exhibits the metabolic cut at the scale of a discipline. Normal science proceeds by puzzle-solving within a paradigm (Kuhn, 1962/1970, p. 36), but anomalies accumulate until they precipitate what Kuhn calls crisis, the proliferation of competing articulations, the willingness to try anything (Kuhn, 1962/1970, p. 91). The resolution is a rupture, not an extension of the old framework, and Kuhn is emphatic that the passage cannot be made gradually: the transition between competing paradigms cannot be taken a step at a time but, like the gestalt switch, must occur all at once (Kuhn, 1962/1970, p. 150). The new paradigm does not contain the old as a special case it could be derived from; it reorganises the field so completely that the very data are seen differently, which is why the convert cannot reconstruct the steps of the conversion. The old framework has been metabolised, not preserved, and this is the same losing that *Ereignis* names at the level of being and that Bachelard's epistemological break names at the level of method.

Artistic creation runs on the identical rhythm. Valéry describes the poet as awakened in the man by an event, yet the awakening is what makes him a poet, so that the occasion is not a cause the work conserves but a threshold the work crosses and leaves behind (Valéry, 1939 45/1958, p. 63). His most quoted remark belongs to the same logic: a poem is never finished, only abandoned (Valéry, 1939 45/1958, p. 77). Completion would require returning to the origins and certifying that the work follows from them, and that return is just what is foreclosed, because the making has consumed its origins. The poem cannot be traced back because the tracing-back would have to recover a state the transformation destroyed. Genuine making and genuine remembering share this feature: both keep their past only by metabolising it into a present that no longer displays it.

3.2 Kant's Dove: Resistance as Medium

The image with which the essay opened can now be read out fully. Kant's light dove, cleaving the air and feeling its resistance, imagines that flight would be easier in empty space (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A5/B8 9). The dove mistakes the medium of its flight for an obstacle to it. The air resists, and the resistance is real, but the same resistance is what the wing presses against to gain lift; in the vacuum the dove craves, there would be nothing to push against and no flight at all. Kant deploys the image against rationalist metaphysics, the thinking that would free itself from the constraints of sense in order to reach pure intellectual intuition: Plato, he says, abandoned the world of the senses because it set such narrow limits to the understanding, and ventured beyond it on the wings of the ideas, into the empty space of pure understanding (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A5/B9). The result, Kant shows, is an illusion and not a higher knowledge, because thoughts without content are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A51/B75); reason cut loose from the resistance of intuition does not soar, it produces dialectical illusion, *dialektischer Schein*, the wing-beat that generates no lift (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A293/B349).

The image transfers to memory without strain, because forgetting is to thought what the air is to the dove. Perfect memory seems to promise perfect thought: abolish the resistance of forgetting, and the mind would rise unhindered through the totality of its experience. The promise repeats the dove's error precisely where it feels most compelling. Forgetting is not the obstacle memory must overcome; it is memory's medium, the element memory presses against to gain the lift of significance. Kant himself supplies the mechanism in the doctrine of synthesis. The "I think" must be able to accompany all my representations, but this accompaniment requires that the manifold of intuition be gone through, taken up, and combined (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, B131 132), and a going-through is a selection, an order in which some are taken up as others are let go. There is no synthesis without subordination, and no subordination without the recession of what is subordinated. Funes is the dove that got its vacuum. Without the withdrawal that opens what Kant calls the transcendental distinction between phenomenon and noumenon (Kant, 1781/1787/1998, A235/B294), the manifold collapses into an undifferentiated presence in which nothing can be taken up because nothing has been let go, and the wings beat on nothing.

3.3 The Crisis of Digital Memory: Eliminating Forgetfulness

The dove's error is now built into a technological project. Digital systems pursue perfect memory as an explicit goal, and Stiegler reads the pursuit as the latest stage of what he calls the industrialisation of memory, the regime in which tertiary retention becomes hegemonic and the externalised record begins to displace rather than support the living capacity it was meant to serve (Stiegler, 2004/2010, p. 67). The promise is enhanced cognition; the delivered result, Stiegler argues, is a systemic stupidity, *bêtise systémique*, the destruction of the very capacity to think that the retention was supposed to extend (Stiegler, 2012/2015, p. 52). The stupidity is not a contingent failure of the technology; it is the consequence of eliminating the metabolic cut, of retaining everything so completely that nothing can be released into the bearing ground from which thought draws its room.

The fantasy underneath the project is the separability of pattern from its material support. N. Katherine Hayles names it the founding move of the posthuman imagination, the belief that information can be

detached from the material substrate that instantiates it (Hayles, 1999, p. 2). But information without instantiation is the dove's vacuum in informational dress, since embodiment is not incidental to human cognition but its very basis (Hayles, 1999, p. 203). The point can be put in the terms of information theory itself. Shannon's measure makes information a function of contrast, of the reduction of uncertainty against a field of alternatives; information requires difference, and a memory that retained everything with equal fidelity would retain no information at all, because nothing in it would stand out against anything else. Perfect retention is, in the strict sense, the abolition of information. Machine learning exhibits the limit technically. Algorithms compute probabilities and cannot, as Luciana Parisi notes, experience the incalculable (Parisi, 2013, p. 92); they perform what Matteo Pasquinelli calls statistical realism, the automation of the empirical without genuine abstraction (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 8). Perfect retention of the training set does not produce understanding; it produces the most faithful possible map of what has already been seen, and the map is not the territory and never crosses into it (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 9). What the system lacks is the metabolic transformation, the capacity to consume its data into a form that exceeds them, which is to say it lacks forgetfulness in the working sense. The dream of uploading the mind commits the same error at the limit. Kurzweil's singularity assumes a pattern can be uploaded with identity intact (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 198), but a mind stripped of embodied forgetfulness would be Funes universalised, a pure pattern without the gaps in which meaning forms, an unbroken illumination with no clearing in it.

3.4 Epimetheus: Forgetting as the Fault of Origin

Stiegler gives the whole argument a mythic ground that is also a conceptual claim, and it turns on a forgetting written into the origin of the human as such. In the myth Plato has Protagoras tell, the task of equipping the living creatures is given to the brothers Prometheus and Epimetheus, and Epimetheus, whose name means afterthought, the one who grasps too late, asks to do the distributing himself. He spends all the available powers on the animals, claws and hides and speed and fur, and arrives at the human having forgotten to keep anything back, so that the human is left naked, unequipped, without a quality of its own. Prometheus then steals fire and the technical arts to compensate the brother's forgetting (Stiegler, 1994/1998, pp. 187–188). Stiegler's reading takes the name with full seriousness. The human is constituted by the *epimetheia*, the forgetting and the lateness of Epimetheus; it has no origin to remember, no proper quality given at the start, and exists only as the compensation for an originary default, a *défaut d'origine* that is also a fault and a lack (Stiegler, 1994/1998, p. 188). The human is the being that is, by definition, missing its origin, and technics, the prosthetic that supplies what nature withheld, is the form that missing origin takes.

This is forgetfulness raised to the constitution of the species, and it completes the account the phenomenology gave for perception and the ontology gave for being. The human does not first exist and then forget; it exists as a forgetting, a being thrown into the world without an essence to retain, and its memory is from the start exterior, deposited in the tools and signs that Stiegler calls tertiary retention because the human has no interior origin to fall back on. Prometheus and Epimetheus belong together in the way *Zusammengehören* describes, foresight and afterthought, the anticipation that steals fire and the forgetting that made the theft necessary, and neither is intelligible without the other. The default is not a misfortune that befell an already-constituted humanity; it is the condition of there being a humanity at all,

a being whose openness to a future, an *avenir* that is not the mere prolongation of the past, rests on its having no fixed origin clamped onto it. Funes, once more, is the counter-figure. To remember everything would be to recover the origin the human is constitutively without, to abolish the *défaut* that opens the human to its history, and the result would not be a more complete humanity; it would be the cancellation of the openness that makes a human history possible. The fault of Epimetheus is the gift of forgetfulness told as a story about beginnings.

Part IV: Conclusion: The Architecture of Becoming

The investigation converges on a single thesis. Forgetfulness is not a deficiency of memory but the ontological structure that lets memory be, the withdrawing ground on which the whole economy of retention and loss is raised. Heidegger's *Abgrund* shows how a ground grounds by absenting itself, how being as a ground that withdraws, *sich entziehender Grund*, enables in the mode of holding itself back (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 72). Merleau-Ponty's *membrure* shows how an invisible framework structures the visible while remaining, by necessity, imperceptible (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 215). The *écart* shows how a productive divergence, the spacing that is not a void, opens the room in which anything can be differentiated from anything else (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 206). Across the German and the French the same structure is named twice, and the convergence of two such different idioms on one form of thought is part of the evidence for it.

The failed cases confirm by deprivation what the analysis claims by construction. Funes and Shereshevsky do not display memory perfected; they display thought made impossible by the withdrawal of forgetting. Their condition is the lived form of what Heidegger calls the loss of the ontological difference, *die ontologische Differenz*, the difference between being and beings that the *Austrag* carries out (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 62); where everything is equally present, the difference that lets anything be encountered as something collapses, and experience sinks into *das Ungeheure*, the monstrous equivalence in which no figure can rise from any ground. They live the truth the dove's image holds, that the resistance taken for an obstacle was the medium all along.

4.1 The Ontological Priority of Forgetfulness

The first result is that forgetfulness has priority over the memory-and-forgetting distinction rather than standing as one term within it. *Ereignis* gives the form of the priority. Thinking and being belong together in the Same not by a synthesis that joins two prior things but by an event of appropriation in which each comes into its own only by losing the determinations metaphysics had given it (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 37). Forgetfulness names this appropriating event at the level of lived time, the metabolic transformation in which the past withdraws into the sustaining ground and so makes a present and a future possible. Memory and forgetting are the two faces this single withdrawal turns toward us, retention and release of one and the same operation, and the operation itself, the withdrawing that grounds, is forgetfulness in the ontological sense the essay has tried to fix.

4.2 Contemporary Implications

The second result bears on the digital project that would abolish forgetting. Stiegler's diagnosis is that the industrialisation of retention yields a proletarianisation of sensibility rather than enhanced memory, the loss of the knowledge of how to live, the *savoir-vivre* that can only form in a being that forgets (Stiegler, 2004/2010, p. 39). Machine learning gives the diagnosis a technical face: systems that retain their data with perfect fidelity achieve extraordinary pattern-matching and yet, as Pasquinelli argues, lack genuine abstraction, because they cannot undergo the metabolic transformation that turns a retained past into a resource for an unprecedented present (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 8). They demonstrate computationally what the phenomenology argues conceptually, that without the productive withdrawal of forgetfulness there is recombination but never creation, a map and never a new territory.

The implications reach past technology to the constitution of human existence. If consciousness is temporal at its root, as Husserl holds in describing the absolute flow of time-consciousness (Husserl, 1928/1991, p. 77), then forgetfulness is the structure of temporality itself and not an accident that befalls a memory, the withdrawal of the just-past into retention that lets a now be a now. If existence is finite at its root, as Heidegger holds in the analysis of being-toward-death (Heidegger, 1927/1962, pp. 279–311), then forgetfulness enables the authentic temporality in which past, present, and future reach their unity, the ecstatic unity in which existence stands out toward its own ends only because it does not hold all its moments at once (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 365). Finitude and forgetfulness are the same condition described twice. A being that retained everything would be a being for which nothing could matter, since mattering requires the finitude that lets some things weigh more than others.

4.3 The Gift of Forgetfulness

Nietzsche stated the thesis a century before phenomenology gave it its apparatus: forgetting is essential to action of any kind (Nietzsche, 1874/1983, p. 62). The essay has tried to show how deep that essentiality runs, down past psychology and into the structure of being. Forgetfulness is not a defect awaiting technological repair but the gift, the *Gabe*, that, as Heidegger says of being itself, gives precisely by withdrawing, the *es gibt* in which the giving holds itself back in the gift (Heidegger, 1957/1969, p. 19). The German keeps the kinship the English loses: *es gibt*, "there is," says literally "it gives," and what it gives, it gives by withdrawing as the giving, so that the gift of forgetfulness is of a piece with the gift of being.

The ground grows by deepening its withdrawal, not by accumulating. The framework enables by becoming invisible, not by being displayed. The past empowers by metabolising into the imperceptible, not by being preserved entire. Merleau-Ponty's last word on the matter is the one this essay would borrow: the invisible is the invisible of the visible, its natal soil (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 247). Forgetfulness is memory's natal soil, the withdrawing ground that lets thought stand, move, and begin. We are not information-processing systems hampered by limited storage but metabolic beings whose capacity for thought depends on a productive forgetting. The limitation is the condition; the obstacle is the path; the withdrawal is the gift. The dove's air, felt as resistance, was the medium of flight; forgetting, felt as loss, is the medium in which memory thinks.

References

1. Bachelard, G. (1938). *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique*. Paris: Vrin.
2. Bachelard, G. (1960/1971). *The Poetics of Reverie*. Translated by D. Russell. Boston: Beacon Press.
3. Bachelard, G. (1936/2016). *The Dialectic of Duration*. Translated by M. McAllester Jones. London: Rowman & Littlefield International.
4. Borges, J.L. (1942/1964). 'Funes the Memorious', in Yates, D.A. and Irby, J.E. (eds.) *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings*. Translated by J.E. Irby. New York: New Directions, pp. 59–66.
5. Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
6. Dillon, M.C. (1988/1997). *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*. 2nd ed. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
7. Dreyfus, H.L. and Dreyfus, S.E. (1986). *Mind over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer*. New York: Free Press.
8. Ellis, R. (1994/2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
9. Gurwitsch, A. (1964). *The Field of Consciousness*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
10. Hayles, N.K. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
11. Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
12. Heidegger, M. (1959/1966). *Discourse on Thinking*. Translated by J.M. Anderson and E.H. Freund. New York: Harper & Row.
13. Heidegger, M. (1957/1969). *Identity and Difference*. Translated by J. Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row.
14. Heidegger, M. (1954/1971). *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Translated by A. Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row.
15. Heidegger, M. (1954/1977). *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by W. Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row.
16. Heidegger, M. (1936–38/1989). *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. Translated by P. Emad and K. Maly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
17. Heidegger, M. (1957/1991). *The Principle of Reason*. Translated by R. Lilly. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
18. Heidegger, M. (1937–38/1994). *Basic Questions of Philosophy*. Translated by R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
19. Heidegger, M. (1967/1998). *Pathmarks*. Edited by W. McNeill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
20. Heidegger, M. (1950/2002). *Off the Beaten Track*. Translated by J. Young and K. Haynes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
21. Heidegger, M. (1949–50/2012). *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures*. Translated by A. Mitchell. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
22. Husserl, E. (1913/1931). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translated by W.R. Boyce Gibson. New York: Macmillan.
23. Husserl, E. (1936/1954). *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
24. Husserl, E. (1931/1960). *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Translated by D. Cairns. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
25. Husserl, E. (1939/1973). *Experience and Judgment*. Translated by J.S. Churchill and K. Ameriks. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
26. Husserl, E. (1928/1991). *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*. Translated by J.B. Brough. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
27. Jakobson, R. (1956). 'Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances', in Jakobson, R. and Halle, M., *Fundamentals of Language*. The Hague: Mouton, pp. 55–82.

28. Jakobson, R. (1960). 'Linguistics and Poetics', in Sebeok, T. (ed.) *Style in Language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, pp. 350–377.
29. Kant, I. (1781/1787/1998). *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
30. Koffka, K. (1935). *Principles of Gestalt Psychology*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
31. Köhler, W. (1947). *Gestalt Psychology*. New York: Liveright.
32. Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
33. Kuhn, T.S. (1962/1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
34. Kurzweil, R. (2005). *The Singularity Is Near*. New York: Viking.
35. Levinas, E. (1947/1978). *Existence and Existents*. Translated by A. Lingis. The Hague: Nijhoff.
36. Luria, A. (1968). *The Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book about a Vast Memory*. Translated by L. Solotaroff. New York: Basic Books.
37. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945/1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by C. Smith. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
38. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1969/1973). *The Prose of the World*. Translated by J. O'Neill. Edited by C. Lefort. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
39. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964/1968). *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by A. Lingis. Edited by C. Lefort. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
40. Nietzsche, F. (1874/1983). 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Untimely Meditations*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
41. Parisi, L. (2013). *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, and Space*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
42. Pasquinelli, M. (2019). 'Three Thousand Years of Algorithmic Rituals: The Emergence of AI from the Computation of Space', *e-flux*, 101, pp. 1–12.
43. Poincaré, H. (1908). *Science et méthode*. Paris: Flammarion.
44. Polanyi, M. (1966). *The Tacit Dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
45. Shannon, C. and Weaver, W. (1949). *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
46. Stambaugh, J. (1969). 'Translator's Preface', in Heidegger, M. *Identity and Difference*. Translated by J. Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, pp. 11–14.
47. Stiegler, B. (1994/1998). *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*. Translated by R. Beardsworth and G. Collins. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
48. Stiegler, B. (2004/2010). *For a New Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by D. Ross. Cambridge: Polity Press.
49. Stiegler, B. (2012/2015). *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*. Translated by D. Ross. Cambridge: Polity Press.
50. Valéry, P. (1939–45/1958). *The Art of Poetry*. Translated by D. Folliot. New York: Pantheon.
51. Wertheimer, M. (1923). 'Untersuchungen zur Lehre von der Gestalt II', *Psychologische Forschung*, 4, pp. 301–350.