

## Gadamer's Late Thinking on *Verweilen*

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### Abstract

This essay presents Gadamer's interest in temporality as his strategy for advancing the importance of hermeneutics as philosophy of experience, a strategy that I show becomes significantly more salient with the appearance of his 1992 essay, *Wort und Bild*. I show how temporal categories function to demarcate the ontological imbalance that is of such central concern in Gadamer's philosophical project. The paper also considers some common misunderstandings of Gadamer that result from a failure to take full account of his experiential orientation, and thus prevent recognition of its radical potential. A full account must include a grasp of the exemplariness of art in his philosophy, and in this connection, the essay considers, not Gadamer's ideal of lyric poetry, but the quite distinct exemplariness of narrative art. Though its temporal structure would seem particularly pertinent, it is not this feature, it turns out, that makes it particularly worthy of hermeneutical reflection.

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### **I. Close to the Living World: Late Crystallizations**

This essay considers Gadamer's attribution of a special temporality to the experience of "tarrying" (*Verweilen*), a term that for Gadamer denotes the exemplary hermeneutical eventfulness of application. Gadamer has frequently mentioned that the quality of time during tarrying is its definitive feature, and therefore this particular thread about time in Gadamer would appear to be rather fundamental. However, it is difficult to find any substantial discussion of the overall significance of Gadamer's particular thinking about time. This content is typically passed over or at most regarded as puzzling or enigmatic, and this is perhaps surprising given that temporality is a such prominent Heideggerian theme, intractable or not.<sup>1</sup> Possibly, though, this thread in Gadamer is simply not very recognizable as an initiative at all, much less a Heideggerian one. One reason for this is the often tangential nature of this content, which, as I hope to show, is philosophically

necessary. But also, this content, or subtext, may be passed over by readers of Gadamer simply because time is still a deeply naturalized, self-evident concept and is thus resistant or invisible to reflection, despite Heidegger's efforts. If time in Gadamer were taken careful account of, however, the question of Gadamer's domestication of Heidegger would perhaps be put in a new light, since what becomes the issue is precisely the sonority of philosophy. What Gadamer says about tarrying time is a way of 'putting Heidegger' that has a sonority outside the discourse of academic philosophy.<sup>2</sup> This paper does not discuss the question of time in the context of Gadamer's relation to Heidegger, then, but is instead oriented only to Gadamer's preoccupation with the falling of philosophy on deaf ears, perhaps with its consequent fall altogether. I discuss the temporality of tarrying as part of his effort to not only make philosophy more hermeneutic but to make hermeneutic philosophy more concrete and oriented to experience, part of an effort to explain, finally, what is meant by such a task. For his reference to the distinctive "time-structure of tarrying" ("*die Zeitstruktur des Verweilens*,"), as he phrases it in his late essay on art, "Word and Picture: 'So True, so full of being!'" (47), helps establish an orientation to concrete experience that is radical and polemical, but at the same time accessible and graspable.<sup>3</sup> Gadamer's time-concept may therefore be critical to understanding the larger significance of the anomalous, autonomous character of the event of understanding so exemplary in his philosophy.

I will begin by indicating Gadamer's concern with, so to speak, rescuing philosophy, if

only hermeneutics, from the path of an abstract, “alienating verbosity,” as Paulo Freire once said of a certain kind of education. According to Jean Grondin (2003) in the epilogue to the English translation of his biography of Gadamer and at one of the last colloquiums Gadamer was able to attend (part of the *festschrift* at the University of Heidelberg to mark his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday), Gadamer listened to the various papers in his honor, papers by the likes of Gianni Vattimo and Richard Rorty, but felt “the presentations were perhaps not *lebensweltlich* (close to the living world) or not “phenomenological” enough, that is, not grounded in a genuine experience of the things themselves” (333). Grondin notes that Gadamer graciously blamed his own frailty for this assessment of the presentations, but whether Gadamer was astute, or whether he was not up to the task of understanding, the incident at least reveals an enduring preoccupation, perhaps even a last concern, with this question of grounding philosophy in the lived world.

A late preoccupation with philosophy’s phenomenological groundedness is more fully indicated in one of Gadamer’s last essays, a paper delivered in the Bamberger Hegelwochen in 1994, “From Word to Concept: The Task of Hermeneutics as Philosophy” (2002).<sup>4</sup> Because the particular thesis of this essay concerns this same question of the path of philosophy, its simplicity of style should similarly be considered carefully, perhaps as something crystallized rather than diminished. He begins by revising his description of the task of hermeneutics referred to in his title “to read ‘*not*

*only from word to concept but likewise from concept to word*” (1). His distinction between concept and word is that between the “strange and demanding” structures of conceptual language (1) that cannot speak to others, and language that does: “Without our bringing concepts to speak and without a common language, we will not be able to find those words that will reach other persons” (12). However, it soon becomes clear that his purpose is not to simply point out the problem of an impervious discourse that cannot speak to its public, or to suggest that the task for hermeneutics is to translate it into a language that can. Rather, this caution for philosophy from hermeneutics is connected to his account of a world out of balance, a phrase that Gadamer readers will recognize as his translation of what in his more academic register he calls an “ontological oneness”; he describes the malady of a world succumbing to Western scientific knowing which esteems mastery and control.<sup>5</sup> Briefly sketching a divergence of forms of knowing as an historical development that began with Greek conceptual thinking, his point is how scientific knowing burgeons at the expense of other, more experiential, but equally precise, forms of knowing. He says first of all that

There was a time when one was well aware that this kind of knowing was quite different from that of mathematics and logic. At that time, for example, one called the study of law “*jurisprudence*” – that is, a kind of intelligence or wisdom in judging. Law students were to develop in themselves a power of making distinctions, so that they could judge the right in a balanced, differentiated, and “objective” way. (3)

This distinct capacity of mind to “make distinctions” and “judge the right” is expanded to

include other forms of experiential “precision”:

In the natural sciences one speaks of the “precision” of mathematizing. But is the precision attained by the application of mathematics to living situations ever as great as precision attained by the ear of the musician who in tuning his or her instrument finally reaches a point of satisfaction? Are there not quite different forms of precision, forms that do not consist in the application of rules or in the use of an apparatus, but rather in a gasp of what is right that goes far beyond this? I could go into endless examples to make plausible what I mean when I say that hermeneutics is not a doctrine of methods for the humanities and social sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] but rather a basic insight into what thinking and knowing mean for human beings in their practical life, even if one makes use of scientific methods. (4)

Gadamer contrasts the following of rules with the kind of measurement having to do with a “rightness” in this other sense of experiential application of judgment: In the example of musical harmony which the ear ‘knows,’ for example, Gadamer is attempting to “register a clear contrast to the ideal of scientific governance and control” by showing that in such instances, “we are dealing with a knowing [*Wissen*] that does not simply rule over and control objects” (6).<sup>6</sup> The theme of “balance” dominates this late essay, culminating in a wish that, ultimately, “a balance between both forms of knowledge is attainable” (8). This statement crystallizes a critical thread in Gadamer’s philosophical project.

As we know, Gadamer’s hermeneutics is oriented to such concrete events of recognition wherein we feel ourselves addressed by something; he is oriented to the fact that

understanding is first of all an event. In the aforementioned essay his orientation to the auditory and oral dimensions of the word is an effort to designate language, too, as experience. Gadamer presents this hermeneutical correction of philosophy in the context of a real and urgent historical necessity to speak to one another (“We occupy a moment in history in which we must strenuously use the full powers of our *reason*, and not just keep doing science only”), a necessity which he suggests philosophy cannot address (12). So his point is that “speaking to one another” involves this kind of knowing or “power of reason,” that has become eclipsed by scientific forms of knowing. The language of philosophy, with its elaborate conceptual structures, is not critiqued here in terms of its imperviousness so much as how imperviousness denies the possibility of this experience. There is some suggestion that philosophy’s faith in logic, combined with a tendency to reify the concepts that logic extends, constitutes a way of knowing that rivals in naiveté a faith in the superiority of scientific knowing, which also takes no account of this experiential form of understanding. But Gadamer takes little interest here in elucidating the particular complicity of philosophy in Western civilization’s “neglect [of] the law of balance” between kinds of knowing (12). Instead, his overriding concern is simply with the possibility that we may be losing the capacity to have this experience of understanding and to know deeply what it is to understand something in this way when it is becoming more and more critical that we are able to do this. Hermeneutics, then, raises this possible loss as a problem for philosophy, and perhaps it is this problem that Gadamer did not see addressed in any of the papers written in his honour. In what

follows, I wish to show that Gadamer's designation and clarification of the temporality of tarrying may be regarded as a strategic response to this question of a gathering, collective hermeneutical weakening.

## **II A Matter of Time: Tarrying in Gadamer**

A typically brief but nevertheless illuminating discussion of the characteristics of tarrying occurs in Gadamer's conversation with Carsten Dutt in *Gadamer in Conversation* (2001). This is an apt place to begin because Dutt's last question to Gadamer in this interview happens to point to this possibility of a cultural loss of hermeneutic acuity. Observing "the terrorism of a cultural industry" that has spawned frenetic communications media where "tarrying has found no place," Dutt asks whether this confirms what Gadamer means by "an aesthetic culture that is withering away," and whether "tarrying is now disappearing" (77). Speaking here only with reference to art and aesthetics, Gadamer's response is somewhat more optimistic than in the global caution for philosophy discussed above. He states, "That is a possibility, but probably not. In any case one must not give up! I believe that the creative minds of our society are steering clear of this, or else will manage to free themselves of it in the future" (77). The difference in optimism indicates, I think, only a belief or hope that the realm of art has a special resistance to this ontological imbalance, due to the exemplary nature of art as a hermeneutical experience. Discussions of the temporality of tarrying always occur, of course, in the context of the work of art, in particular, poetry, because the experience of art is the exemplary

illustration of the event of understanding, an event that, as is clear from Gadamer's discussion about hermeneutics as philosophy, he believes needs to be more distinguishable.

In the conversation with Dutt, then, we find a fairly typical description of the encounter with the art work:

When a work of art truly takes hold of us, it is not an object that stands opposite us which we look at in hope of seeing through it to an intended conceptual meaning. Just the reverse. The work is an *Ereignis* – an *event* that “appropriates us” into itself. It jolts us, it knocks us over, and sets up a world of its own, into which we are drawn, as it were. (71)

The artwork's exemplariness lies in its affective power to be of concern to us, to “take hold” of us, he is saying here, as opposed to our power to possess precisely “what it stands for,” as though to decide on its representational success in conforming to something pre-existing. The distinction here, incidentally, concerns the question of *mimesis*, between art as recognition and art as representation. Gadamer later adds, however, that this “world” into which we are drawn has a further specifically *temporal* character:



The temporal dimension that is bound up with art is, in fact, fundamental. In this tarrying the contrast with the merely pragmatic realms of understanding becomes clear. The *Weile* [the “while” in *Verweilen*, tarrying] has this very special temporal structure — a structure of being moved, which one nevertheless cannot describe merely as duration, because duration means only further movement in a single direction. This is not what is determinative in the experience of art. In it we tarry, we remain with the art structure [*Kunstgebilde*], which as a whole then becomes ever richer and more diverse. The *volume* increases infinitely – and for this reason we learn from the work of art how to tarry. (76-77)<sup>7</sup>

Here, Gadamer specifies that, enfolded in a time which does not pass, the experience of being moved by the work of art reaches its greatest intensity or “volume.” This time-quality is a function of the intensity of the experience; it always attends the event. Recalling that art is exemplary, we must extend this: in our experience of art lies an amplification of certain qualities of understanding generally, clarifying the kind of event that understanding is. Gadamer is careful to distinguish this temporality from ordinary linear time in order to heighten the uniqueness of the event of understanding as a discrete kind of human experience, one that needs to be underwritten by (hermeneutic) philosophy and remain central to human being.

With the very recent essay “Word and Picture — ‘So true, so full of being!’” the extent to which temporality is a lasting preoccupation in Gadamer’s philosophy becomes quite evident. “Word and Picture” might be studied alongside Gadamer’s only other essays on

time, which were written several decades earlier. These are “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment (1972)”; “Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time” (1970); and, especially important, “The Western View of the Inner Experience of Time and the Limits of Thought” (1977).<sup>8</sup> These articles each maintain — with different emphases and for slightly different purposes — that asking the question, “what is time?” has revealed more about the hubris of philosophy and its naive trust in the self-evidentness of concepts than it might about the nature of temporality. Deeply engaged with the thinking of Heidegger, in all three essays Gadamer stresses the inadequacy of the concept of linear, dimensional time. For example, in “The Continuity of History,” it cannot account for human continuity: “It may well be that the experience of continuity is grounded in something quite other than the unending flow of time” (233). In “Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time,” he states its inadequacy to account for ancient Greek ontology: “The dimensionality of time does not seem to be master” of the Greek concept the present (341). And in “The Western Experience,” he speaks of a “one-sided way of experiencing time” (42). The particular meaning of these statements will be elucidated in the discussion that follows. The point for now, however, is that these three essays on time each demonstrate the critical feature of the temporality of tarrying, that during this tarrying experience an awareness of “time passing” is absent. Dimensional time cannot account for the tarrying experience.

In addition to the proximity of “Word and Picture” to these early essays on time, it should

also be mentioned that it is clearly an essential supplement to “The Relevance of the Beautiful” (1986), and perhaps even supplants the latter as Gadamer’s definitive statement about art. A careful study of the particular way in which the recent essay develops and corrects the earlier one will unavoidably focus on this question of time. In “The Relevance of the Beautiful, Art as Play, Symbol, and Festival” Gadamer presents the insights about time in the earlier essays in terms of the concrete example of “festival time” as part of his demonstration of the particular autonomy of art: “It is in the nature of the festival that it should proffer time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. That is what festive celebration means. The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill” (42). In this often cited statement, Gadamer describes normative time as something to be *used* -- for planning, calculating, for measuring. (We observe a similar contrast in the passage from the Dutt conversation above, “the contrast with the merely pragmatic realms of understanding” (71)). In festival time, this modality is suspended, so that normative time, paradoxically, “stands still.” Like the festival celebration, art has this temporal autonomy. In “Word and Picture,” the importance of temporality for the question of art is the central question, and is a more elaborate investigation. Whereas in the earlier essay Gadamer asks, “Why does the understanding of what art is today present a task for thinking?” (9), here the essay’s central question concerns art’s “contemporaneousness.” He asks, “What is the basis for this claim of art, with its superiority over time [*Zeitüberlegenheit*], to defy all enclosing limits” (26). And, “What is it that makes a picture or a poem a work of art, such that it

has such an absolute presentness?" (27). These questions about time concern an effort to articulate the universal significance of art, not simply what is distinctive about it. In other words, Gadamer's effort is to show us not merely art's autonomy, but its broader exemplariness for human being.

The most significant aspect of this essay is Gadamer's interest in recovering ancient Greek experience. In particular, he looks at the rich hermeneutic suggestiveness of Aristotle's concept of *energeia*, meaning "activity," or "actualization," which, Gadamer explains, Aristotle apparently coined in his exploration of the question of the being of becoming (39). Gadamer describes how with this term Aristotle captured a particular temporal quality that is useful to apply to an experience of art, the element of "simultaneity" (40). Aristotle's term, he explains, attempts to capture the idea that being is a function of becoming, activity that "has its fulfillment in itself":

Now in my view, the reason Aristotle described *energeia* with the word *hama* — meaning *Zugleich* — "at the same time" was in order to designate the immanent simultaneity — the *Gleichzeitigkeit* of duration: Not a one-after-another kind of duration but an at-the-same-timeness of that which possesses the time structure of tarrying — *die Zeitstruktur des Verweilens*. (40-41)

Here, the event has a unity that is clearly qualified temporally, with a quality of duration that is not dimensional or sequential but, rather, is "simultaneous." What Aristotle's concept of *energeia* also allows Gadamer to bring out much more emphatically is that

there is a special vitality associated with the temporality of this truth-event: “By means of this conceptual word, Aristotle was able to think of a form of “being-in-motion” that was without path or goal, that was something like aliveness itself...” (44). This goes further than “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” suggesting that the truth-character of art is not just a function of its unified and autonomous sense of completeness -- its “absoluteness,” as he says (29), but that its event-character is a function of the acuity with which this absoluteness is *present* to consciousness. It is a function of the intensity of engrossment in the matter at hand. And whereas in “The Relevance of the Beautiful,” tarrying time is described in paradoxical terms, as time disappearing or ceasing, here, having this attribute of “aliveness itself,” due to this “simultaneity,” tarrying time is defined positively rather than negatively. Not merely the absence of normative time, it is now a different time.

It is also provocative to consider the subversive effect of inverting the relative concreteness of “time” and “that-which-is-not-time” which is made possible with the expression of tarrying time in positive terms. Whereas worldly, dimensional time is thought to be concrete relative to the (quaint) concept of “eternity,” on Gadamer’s scale of concreteness, tarrying time appears at the pole of concreteness, not dimensional time. It is tarrying time that is more concrete, offering a new dichotomy with dimensional time. In effect, this appropriates or supplants a religious dichotomy, and might illuminate readers of Gadamer who mistake as orthodox religiosity such statements as, for example

in “The Relevance of the Beautiful, “learning how to tarry...is perhaps the only way that is granted to us finite being to relate to what we call eternity” (45). Or, in “Praise of Theory” (1998), “Disregarding oneself, regarding what is: that is the behaviour of a cultivated, I might almost say divine, consciousness.” The religious rhetoric certainly doesn’t mean that the way to God is through art. Such statements are important, however, because they clearly indicate the high value Gadamer invests in this experience. One might say that in “Word and Picture” Gadamer is preoccupied with articulating and emphasizing this value. He even speculates that experiencing the artwork is analogous to the Greek way of being with the gods: hermeneutical absorption is “a highest form of activity and a highest reality” (44). He points out that the God of Aristotelian metaphysics is one who “leads such a life of pure *energeia*, which means of uninterrupted pure looking” (44).<sup>9</sup> So the essay not only emphasizes how the time-structure of tarrying makes this kind of human experience unique, but suggests that this human experience constitutes the “highest” human reality. This is an emphatically anti-metaphysical, or, perhaps, ultra-concrete account of the sacred. And this sub-text about the sacred augments, or at least emphasizes, what is at stake in the socio-ethical imperative of speaking to one another, what is at risk in the possible disappearance of hermeneutical involvement as form of experience and a way of knowing.

In Gadamer this tarrying temporality is a feature of phenomenological hold, then, which is in turn a function of hermeneutical involvement. This should dispel one common

misunderstanding of Gadamer's references to the temporality of tarrying straight away: it is not merely one's "taking time" to linger over something, as in a slackening or slowing down to contemplate, a distinction Dutt may have had in mind in seeming to pit tarrying against the pace of contemporary culture. The temporality of tarrying is not a function of lackadaisical, meandering contemplation, least of all passive in any way, but is a function of the fullness and *intensity* of attention and engrossment.

This "positive" as opposed to "negative" defining of the temporality of tarrying not only makes it easier to invest eventfulness with value, with possibilities for redefining the basis for human solidarity and human well-being, but also allows dimensional time-consciousness to stand out more fully as similarly at play in the antithetical way of being in the world that according to Gadamer is too prevalent. In other words, opposing temporalities define and make accessible, the "two sides" unevenly at play in what Gadamer refers to as an "ontological onesidedness." The temporality of tarrying serves as a backdrop against which normative, dimensional time becomes visible. Defamiliarized in this way, dimensional time can be seen to have a role in the malaise of planning reason, or calculative thinking, associated with the ontology of scientific objectivism. So taking account of Gadamer's emphasis on the temporality of tarrying facilitates a reflection on the possibility that our obsession with and deference to technology, arguably Gadamer's central philosophical question, has fundamentally to do with how we conceive of time.

To complete this account of a temporally defined dualism, then, I will briefly summarize what is perhaps Gadamer's most succinct treatment of the other side of the problematic, which occurs in one of the three essays on time mentioned earlier, "Concerning Empty and Ful-Filled Time." What he says here is that time-as-dimensionality is a conceptualization of time that has become so deeply sedimented as to seem self-evident and so has again and again has given rise to perplexity in the traditions of philosophy and theology (341-42). It has doomed us to conceive of the 'present' as a paradox because of the impossibility of reconciling the content of time with the concepts of past, present, and future:

The perplexity in which thought has become entangled is that time appears to have its sole Being in the 'now' of the present, and nevertheless, it is just as clear that time, precisely in the 'now' of the present, is as such not present. What now is, is always already past. It seems incomprehensible how one is supposed to comprehend what is past, as that which no longer is, and what is future, as that which is not yet, in terms of the being of the 'now,' which alone exists, in such a way that the whole "is" time. (341)

One might say that the 'present' is impossible to fix because 'past' and 'future' are so infinitely close as to continually impinge upon it. Yet, only with reference to the 'present' moment can past and future be distinguished at all. The concept of a tarrying temporality allows us to see how 'the present' posited as this (impossible) dimensional entity, has been abstracted from 'the present' as *that which is fully here for us*, as a matter about which we have, so to speak, presence of mind. This is the distinction between empty and



filled time that Gadamer's title alludes to.

Here, Gadamer does not approach the problem by summoning the Greek ontology of the beautiful. What he says instead is only that, in considering this legacy of perplexity concerning time as an entity, it seems evident that it is not time's dimensional definition that can provide us with a satisfactory understanding of it, particularly of the present. The designation "empty time" is how Gadamer terms time conceived of as the constant, flowing succession of 'nows' coming from a future and receding into the past. This is time subjugated to quantitative measurement. It is "empty" because measuring time requires a separation of the temporal units which measure from that which is measured; to separate time from its contents is to "empty" it (342-43). In "Empty and Full-Filled," what Gadamer suggests is that dimensional time is therefore "non-primordial" (343) in the sense that its contents (that which it measures) must precede it. It is in fact the *utility* function of measured time – time made available for use -- that Gadamer says is at the root of this emptying and which is sedimented within the concept of dimensional time. And this utility function belongs to the human attribute of "seeing anticipatorially," of having "foresight":

The view to purposeful action functions as a measure and everything that is not commensurate with it is overshadowed by the anticipated present of the decisive action. The penumbral character of everything else which imposes itself as alluring and attractive permits time itself to appear as something of which man can dispose — for the purpose of purposeful action. Time is made free for this purposiveness, and in this light it may be considered empty: when it is viewed in relation to what fills it. (343).

What interests Gadamer here is the possibility of a temporality that eludes utility and forward-looking-ness, which, of course, do not preside over the event of tarrying.

Gadamer wrote with prescience in 1972 (1998) that our “prepossession with the technological dream” is *the* prejudice of our time, calling it “the bottleneck in our civilization” (79). He wrote,

The ideal of managing the world through technology still forms man in its image and makes him into a technical administrator who adequately fulfills this prescribed function without worrying about other people. (83)

One might say that in Gadamer’s late thinking about *Verweilen*, the prejudice of our time is explicitly narrowed down to the concept of time itself. This is a strategic defamiliarizing or deconstructing of time that allows a particular perspective from which to view this pervasive deference to technology. The possibility presents itself that such deference prevents or obviates the occurrence of a kind of experience more or less universally ful-filling, the human hermeneutic experience Gadamer calls tarrying. The Gadamerian dystopia is not unlike others as far as technology is concerned. In his version, to be glib, little requires human application, so little cultivates it. Long alienated from abiding in inquiry as a form of life and way of being, a restless humanity defers to models, systems, operations, procedures, the ready-made strategic plan, and first and last

to reified concepts, long impervious to deconstruction. But in his version there is a critical foothold: At the roots of this malady is a singular, naturalized orientation to time as something to be managed and disposed of. Tarrying, involving the “temporal structure of being moved” and occasioning “durationless” time, as he says above, suggests a most practical and accessible solution, demonstrating how practice *is* a solution. In such an experience Gadamer sees something like a contemporary, strictly hermeneutical analogy to the Greek concept of the divine: the coming forth of fulfilled human being. It is this direction in Gadamer’s thought, a direction concerning “the highest reality,” that is now much more salient with the appearance of “Word and Picture.”

### **III. Mis)Reading Gadamer**

Yet, it is possible to embrace aspects of Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy, such as his theory of the historically-affected consciousness, his dialogical model of understanding, and his account of the metaphoricity of language, without really taking notice of what exactly is exemplary about art for Gadamer and, therefore, in no way take up the question of concreteness. For example, readers betray a drift away from Gadamer’s tenacious orientation to the concrete event of understanding when they see a disconnect between Gadamer’s dialogical model of understanding and his characterization of understanding as a singularity, as an autonomous tarrying, complete with qualities of rightness, oneness, and scandalously, even divinity. And his characterization of engrossment is sometimes even mistaken for a transcendent account of the givenness of meaning. Perhaps most

problematic are readings that, in prioritizing the self-other dynamic in Gadamer's conversational model, exploring, say, the ramifications of the open versus appropriative hermeneutical stances, inadvertently abstract this dynamic from the primary condition of engrossment in a subject matter. It would seem crucial to recognize that in the concrete experience of understanding, one cannot be simultaneously engrossed in a subject matter and be thinking about oneself and one's relation to the other, just as one cannot, say, read and watch how fast one is reading at the same time. The point that self and other affect and are affected by the experience is quite another level of description, one that is tellingly abstracted from the event itself.

In fact, this particular oversight ironically, and unfortunately, obscures a critical line of thought about subjectivity or selfhood in Gadamer, one that has many implications for self-growth, human continuity, and human well-being. What is obscured is precisely that the totality we objectify as our 'self' is *forgotten* in the experience of tarrying. Indeed, the transformative nature of the experience is predicated upon this forgetting of our selves. An illustration of Gadamer's exasperation with those who focus on intersubjectivity to the exclusion of *what it is they are in dialogue about* occurs in one of the Dutt interviews in *Gadamer in Conversation*. Gadamer is asked "...wouldn't you say that hermeneutical philosophy thematizes conversation as our capacity for rational intersubjectivity?" ("Hermeneutics," 59). Gadamer's reply is, "Oh, please spare me that completely misleading concept of intersubjectivity, of a subjectivism doubled!" He explains, "a

conversation is something one gets caught up in, in which one gets involved” (59). Gadamer insists that this is in fact the “measure of a real conversation” (59). This confirms what we have seen so far, that it is the degree to which one is caught up in the subject matter that measures the value of dialogue. And the potential intensity of this experience is what the example of art is intended to isolate for our consideration, the artwork being a “thou” as well. It is very much at the expense of this totality we call ‘self’ that we experience a fullness of engagement or engrossment, and are thus “fulfilled” by it.

One cannot understate the richness of this dynamic in hermeneutic application wherein the entity of the self becomes so immaterial, wherein, as Gadamer says, “the actual self of whoever is thinking, that individual’s personal and historical determinedness, is extinguished” (1994, 65). The event of understanding with its intensity of engrossment in the matter at hand in fact involves a productive tension between forgetting and remembering that it is important to recognize as definitive of the historically-affected consciousness.<sup>10</sup> When Gadamer states at the end of “Word and Picture” that “the present of the past belongs to the very nature of spirit” (59), he refers to a positive tension inherent in tarrying wherein the past comes forth in our effort to understand something. But it is a forgetting kind of remembering, or a remembering kind of forgetting, and a tension that reveals that the historically-affected consciousness belongs to the condition of being human, to the condition of finitude. It is important to observe the consistency

between temporality of tarrying and this other more familiar Gadamerian concept. For there is no reason to think of the historically-affected consciousness exclusively on the scale of the unfolding of human history. Rather, one might first think of it in terms of a single event of human understanding: When the past comes forth in our effort to understand something, it occurs in such a way that we cannot raise ourselves above the course of the thinking event in order to objectify it (or our selves) in any way.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the repeated, unpredictable, unobjectifiable coming forth of the past during events of human understanding is Gadamer's account of how human historical continuity is accomplished. One virtue of his particular account of the temporality of tarrying is that it may clarify, not for philosophy, but for anyone, what is important about an event-concept of historical continuity. It facilitates a conception of our relationship to the continuity of "history" as inherently and profoundly participatory, as well as facilitates a conception of alienation as the absence of such participation. This participatory account of human continuity is distinctly different from human continuity as something given, say, in the form of received history, a view that must bracket the hermeneutical event. In only locating human historical continuity "elsewhere," so to speak, we become alienated from it because, as opposed to taking part in the process through the human activity of tarrying; we conceive of the activity of composing history as exclusive, lying elsewhere than in our own being and in our own fulfillment.

Gadamer's orientation to the specific, optimal character of the human experience of being

in thought allows the possibility for an entire nexus of hermeneutical terms to similarly undergo a shift in significance. Discourses about human social solidarity, about human spirit, and about human self-growth, for instance, might address the condition of alienation differently when attuned to the richness associated with participating in the event of understanding. For instance, such a correction of thought amounts to a revision of our terms of engagement with the question of, say, our post-modern “condition,” or our “condition” of human finitude, which would allow for a prognosis that this condition is not necessarily a tragic one.

In connection with the idea of the self, moreover, there is a further potential in, if not a rather colossal consequence of, Gadamer’s initiative to rejuvenate a category of knowing he calls tarrying with the help of another concept of temporality. The irrelevance of what we call “self” in the experience of tarrying challenges the value of strictly narrative accounts of human identity, solidarity, and historical continuity, including theological ones. Perhaps one of the most significant ramifications of *Verweilen* in Gadamer is what it means for the value of narrative, the question being whether or not a “narrative” ontology, a term becoming favored in social science disciplines, is really a synonym for the oneness Gadamer refers to.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the cultural dominance of narrative as an art form generally (cinematic, written, etc.) seems to come into question in light of Gadamer’s critique of the dominance of dimensionalized time over human consciousness. His distinction between temporalities allows for the heretical possibility that the

proliferation and cultural dominance of narrative art, not to mention narrative ways of thinking generally, has a dark side, symptomatic of our alienation from the concrete life-world to which Gadamer is attempting to return us with his advocacy of the cultivation of hermeneutic acuity. Yet, because of his fundamental orientation to event hermeneutics, the last thing one should expect from Gadamer is to himself go down the path of considering narrative art as a dimensional structure.

It is important to see, for example, that the work of Paul Ricoeur on narrative is quite antithetical to Gadamer's basic orientation because Ricoeur is a thinker who couldn't be further from Gadamer in regard to the question of time. Arguably, Ricoeur's well-known work on time and narrative (1984) theorizes and fortifies precisely the normative view of time that Gadamer seeks to deconstruct: the normative view that narrative makes time meaningful. Ricoeur's work has the virtue, indeed, of reminding us that time is a critical ontological issue.<sup>13</sup> It is, I believe, essential to thoroughly elucidate differences between Ricoeur and Gadamer on the question of time, especially for the question of the task and the scope of hermeneutics as philosophy, but, additionally, in order to simply clarify the relationship of these two thinkers so often thought to be compatible. For, if tarrying time is as fundamental to Gadamer's hermeneutics as narrative time is to Ricoeur's, then the difference between these thinkers would seem to be considerable, perhaps irreconcilable. It is not surprising that Ricoeur's and not Gadamer's treatment of time is widely known, and their incompatibility on this specific question gone largely unnoticed. Because



Gadamer's efforts are to deconstruct a normative view of time, he faces a natural resistance of thought, whereas Ricoeur's efforts to clarify this already normative view of time do not. And then there is the perhaps more germane question of how well the theorizing of time lends itself to their respective philosophical approaches, analytic versus speculative, rigid statements versus a path of thought. For all its risks, there is something philosophically consistent about Gadamer keeping this content about time tangential, an aside in a philosophy that moves toward actual praxis and eschews the aloofness of elaborate systematizing and analytical abstraction. Perhaps it is a content that is intentionally hermetic, to be won only with hermeneutical labour.

#### **IV. Reading Narrative: On the Way to a Hermeneutics of Experience**

In this concluding section, I would like to suggest, however, that there is an unrecognized potential concerning the example of narrative art in Gadamer's hermeneutics. While the last thing one should expect from Gadamer is to himself go down the path of considering narrative art as a dimensional structure, one looks for a conception of this art form consistent with his hermeneutics, an ontologically corrected conception of this art form. We find, of course, that poetry, in particular, lyric poetry, is for Gadamer the exemplary art, while mentions of the narrative typically appear only as a means of heightening through contrast what is essential about the experience of poetry. Such tactical contrasts appear, for example, in "Philosophy and Literature" (1985) where he notes, "for methodical reasons," the difference between "something we call poetry" and "oral and

written narrative” (249). Lyric poetry is contrasted with “the other extreme of the novel” in “Composition and Interpretation” (1986, 67). And in “Philosophy and Poetry” (1986), Gadamer speaks of the “complete scale of translatability” from poetry “leading up to the novel” (135). In each case, narrative art is mentioned in order to emphasize respects in which lyric poetry should be singled out among the arts as most exemplary. The tactical nature of this distinction between “narrative” and “poetry” is an important reminder of Gadamer’s orientation, though; what interests him is not the abstract demarcation between literary genres but a range in the particular demands of hermeneutic application in the case of the literary arts.

The exemplariness of poetry, then, is a well-developed, prominent, and intricate content in Gadamer’s philosophy. Briefly, because of the interpretive demands typically belonging to poetry, the tarrying experience is one having the greatest potential to disrupt the natural forgetfulness we have of language, to dispel its invisibility and therefore that of concept formation. The experience of reading poetry exemplifies the most full and discriminating instance of remembering-forgetting, the unpredictable coming forth of memory during tarrying. Seeking a “corrective” for the “hubris that resides in concepts,” Gadamer therefore sees lyric poetry as an example for the proper function of philosophy (1997, 38). Poetry exposes, through its semantic and syntactic play, the givenness of concepts, making it potentially radically unsettling, undogmatic. This theorization of a potential in language does not depend upon genre distinctions. One might say that he is

simply naming this potential in language with the term “poetry.” This means that, conversely, ‘narrative’ may be said to represent a contrasting potential: “narrative” is that which makes an art of precisely language’s hiddenness, employing “everyday” language, “intentional,” or readily “translatable,” language, as Gadamer variously refers to it in the essays mentioned above. But is this all we can say about the experience of narrative art?

Gadamer, in fact, did write in 1992 a very substantial essay wherein a discussion of narrative appears not just as a contrast to poetry, but as a central question. “Zur Phänomenologie von Ritual und Sprache” (1993) is a lengthy essay contemporaneous with “Word and Picture,” and like it, first appears in Volume 8 of the Complete Works, the two essays comprising the final section. Although an English translation of this essay is unfortunately not yet available, Richard Palmer has written two summaries which together make clear that the essay is a significant development of Gadamer’s thinking, not about the “corporeality” of poetry, as Gerald Bruns puts it, but about the everyday hiddenness or disappearance of language into its use, and about the importance of this feature of language to its conservative function.<sup>14</sup> Palmer’s summaries reveal that Gadamer develops this within the context of what Palmer calls an “anthropological” account of the development of language as fundamentally oral, Gadamer’s challenge to the presumption within Western philosophy of its fundamental writtenness (“Ritual, Rightness and Truth,” 531). In this account of human development, as Palmer explains, Gadamer posits a divergence between the two different forms of linguisticity, termed

“ritual” and “conversational” (534). Narrative, or *Mythos*, as Gadamer prefers because of its kinship with Greek experience, has its roots in the former, and is a linguistic development, both anthropologically speaking and in terms of the single human life, that precedes the emergence of the poetic or conversational word (535). This will be another important late essay to appear in English, especially in juxtaposition with “Word and Picture.” Given the prominence of the theme of temporality in the latter, this juxtaposition perhaps tacitly poses the question of what is it to tarry in narrative art, an art where, in the grip of hermeneutic application, dimensional time is displaced by tarrying time, yet where, meanwhile, one encounters not merely language functioning in a ritual way, turned toward confirming and consolidating a human life world, but language that is temporally marked out.

An awareness of Gadamer on temporality will perhaps make it inevitable that this apparent irony concerning narrative is reflected upon, the irony of being absorbed by the artistic rendering of dimensional time while at the same time being experientially absent from it. Does this refuge from dimensional time ultimately result in making us more credulous of it? The appropriate preliminary to such a reflection is to dwell on narrative while firmly oriented to the concrete event of understanding and to the richness of what takes place there. In this paper, I have argued that Gadamer’s late thinking about tarrying emphasizes a concept of temporality in order to facilitate the recognition and rejuvenation of a kind of knowing that he sees at risk, as a means of fleshing out this kind of

experiential knowing and giving it an autonomous, elevated value. Yet, to me Gadamer's Ritual essay suggests the possibility that in the experience of reading narrative the special autonomy of tarrying is immediately observable by virtue of its representational language, and for this reason shows the way to an experiential hermeneutics by another route. In other words, there is a distinct exemplariness in the invisibility as opposed to in the corporeality of its language. In a banal but telling tension in its formal study, one can readily see how in narrative art the autonomy of tarrying is especially salient. The prevailing approach to the study of narrative is generally to defamiliarize the literary text. That is, one seeks, with distancing descriptive categories of varying complexity, to overcome the natural invisibility of the text in the reading experience. Yet every reader, from the most naïve to the most experienced, knows *from her reading experience* that this very invisibility is where the affective power of narrative, as narrative, lies. This commonplace conflict between experience and analysis would seem to signal a tension between the two ways of knowing Gadamer polarizes, the deliberate application of method, and the unpredictable exercising of judgment that occurs with phenomenological hold.

But what is important, however, is that the conflict is evident precisely because of the invisibility of the word in the case of narrative art, as opposed to its corporeality: As suggested, narrative art often, though not always, entails a kind of languaging whose sole aim is to seamlessly disappear, a feature that may be said to determine its ritualistic or

conservative nature. The words disappear into an unfolding story and a sonorous voice. They disappear into their referential function as words, and into the grasp with which the art holds us as we behold it. Narrative in this respect may be thought of as the artistic perfection or idealization of this language principle, one with or in which the traditional anti-narrative plays. But we are not fools for having fallen into the spell of narrative. We are merely readers. So it is not surprising that, due to this conflict between a reader's lived experience of the literature and the descriptive categories that, by making the text strange, tend to render the experience irrelevant or illegitimate, one often finds a resistance to literature.

Is it not, in fact, precisely the "invisible" nature of narrative art that makes it especially capable of illustrating what is critical about the historically effected consciousness? There may be a critical hermeneutic lesson here, overlooked by conventional analytical approaches to studying narrative: the hermeneutical principle that it is impossible to defamiliarize the text *while reading the text*; we cannot emancipate ourselves from the linguistic and ideological artifice at the same time as we are engrossed by it. So in the case of the study of narrative, it is particularly easy to detect the prejudice against a kind of knowing that Gadamer identifies, to perhaps see how "reading" itself may easily fall into the category of knowing that he claims is under threat. The ease with which we may detect this in the case of narrative art makes it exemplary in a very different way than poetry is exemplary, where in the hold of reading poetry, questions about making

meaning arise, as it were, all by themselves. Deepening our grasp of the reading experience points the way past the alienation inherent in a strictly defamiliarizing or so-called emancipatory way of studying narrative: Rather than *overruling* the experience of reading the narrative text, a more hermeneutical approach *fully develops an understanding of the dynamics of its psychic hold over us*. This is not merely a hold from which we might be emancipated. It is rather the hold upon which any effort to think emancipatorily depends.

It would appear, then, that due to the special ease with which we abide in narrative art, its study has a particular potential to sensitize us to an awareness of art as experience, and so to more fully appreciate the question of balance that Gadamer's philosophy attempts to raise. As we recall, an awareness of art as experience enables one to discern and appreciate the literary event as discrete fulfillment – as a moment of actual cultural participation. On the other hand, in desensitizing the student to the language experience itself, this awareness is precisely the casualty. The aim is to make it possible to observe that it is during the anomalous event of tarrying that literature as art becomes a culture-forming force, for better or for worse. This is not at all to say that analytical constructs are themselves not culture-forming subject matters. The analytical or structuralist discourse, say that of Paul Ricoeur or Gerard Genette, may be equally engaging, and critical, but while instrumental in striving to supplement and sophisticate the concrete experience of reading (literature), they do take its place.

The ultimate point, perhaps, is that this view of cultural participation allows one to get beyond the pragmatic value of studying literature, for example, as that which “enhances critical thinking,” as we like to say. It provides a response to the general assault on the relevance of the arts and humanities disciplines by pragmatic administrators attempting to manage educational “outcomes.” Often, what a defense of the humanities amounts to these days is to insist that they are instrumental in developing the critical faculties, presumably so that we can go on to solve more important, pragmatic problems. To say the study of art is important for its own sake has no self-evident meaning in an ontology oriented to planning, managing, controlling, utility. Possibly, only when the nature of the experience of literature is reflected on do we allow the cultural value and real relevance of literature to stand out fully for us. Taking affirmative notice of the peculiar invisibility or transparency of the narrative word, and of how we abide so effortlessly in the narrative element, is not only a hermeneutical correction of the study of narrative. The point is rather that, dwelled on in this way, something proto-typical can be seen in the experience of narrative art. Confronted with the existence of that which is “invisible,” we glimpse a possibility regarding human experience generally: that hiddenness, or “finitude” if you prefer, is a general feature of our human being.



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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For a survey of how Gadamer scholars in English have treated this content about time and tarrying, see Ross 2003, Introduction, *Event Hermeneutics and Narrative: Tarrying in the Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*.

<sup>2</sup> Dwelling on tarrying is, in fact, a readily identifiable Heideggerian initiative. See, for instance, "The Truth of the Work of Art," (Gadamer 1994), originally his introduction to the 1960 Reclam edition of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." Glossing Heidegger's effort to conceptualize the ontological autonomy of the art work, Gadamer writes, "A work of art does not 'mean' something or function as a sign that refers to a meaning; rather, it presents itself in its own Being, so that the beholder must tarry by it" (103-4). The importance of elucidating this point in Heidegger concerning the ontology of the artwork is often confirmed. For instance, "My philosophical hermeneutics seeks precisely to adhere to the line of questioning of [the "Origin"] essay and the later Heidegger and to make it accessible in a new way" (1997, 47). Robert J. Dostal (2002) has noted that an unpublished, early essay of Heidegger's on Aristotle from 1922, shown to Gadamer then and inspiring him to study under Heidegger, contained a discussion of tarrying. This essay by Heidegger, "*Anzeige der hermeneutischen Situation*," was not published until 1989 (*Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften*), after Gadamer rediscovered it in his papers (Dostal, 264, n.10). The Heidegger essay was published with an introduction by Gadamer, "*Heidegger's 'theologische' Jugendschrift*" (1989). See also *Gadamer in Conversation* (2001b): "The most important Heideggerian text to have appeared posthumously is this earliest work of his (104)."

<sup>3</sup> "*Wort und Bild -- 'so Wahr, so seiend!'*" appears for the first time in Gadamer's *Gesammelte Werke* 8 (1993). It is included in Grondin's *Gadamer Lesebuch*, (1997). Richard E. Palmer has translated the Grondin reader (forthcoming, Northwestern University Press, 2005). He has kindly provided and granted me permission to cite from his manuscript translation of *Wort und Bild*.

<sup>4</sup> It is relevant to mention that the Bamberger Hegelwochen is an annual proceeding inaugurated with the aim of having academic philosophers address a general, educated public.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, the Foreword to *Truth and Method* (1993), where Gadamer concludes by similarly stating his wish that the cultivation of hermeneutic consciousness might mitigate the expansion of science “into a total technocracy,” stating, “the one-sidedness of hermeneutic universalism has the truth of a corrective” (xxxvii).

<sup>6</sup> Gadamer states here that this second kind of knowing as “right measure” or balance, is elucidated in *The Enigma of Health* (1996), which, he says, reflects on “the harmonious feeling of well-being that we call ‘health.’” (8).

<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Dutt specifically asks about the temporality of tarrying here, an acknowledgment of this content about time that rarely occurs. The context of his question suggests he is familiar with the late essay “Word and Picture,” mentioned above, which treats this subject at length, and to which Gadamer had just made reference.

<sup>8</sup> There is no editor or translator identified. None of these three essays on time have ever been reprinted, except in the *Gesammelte Werke*.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotelian theology and the Greek concept of the divine is also the context of the statement in “Praise of Theory”: “For [the Greeks], the divine consisted precisely in the lasting present of this [hermeneutic] intensification” (35).

<sup>10</sup> See “Analysis of Historically effected Consciousness” in *Truth and Method*, especially Gadamer’s explanation of the fulfillment of the dialectic of experience in becoming “radically undogmatic” (355).

<sup>11</sup> For effect, I have deliberately tampered with Gadamer’s definition of the historically effected consciousness in “The Continuity of History and the Existential Moment”; he states, “What I wish to express through this somewhat ambiguous expression is primarily that we cannot raise ourselves above the course of events and as it were confront it in such a way that the past turns into an object. To think this way would be to miss catching even a glimpse of the authentic experience of history” (237-38).

<sup>12</sup> Gerald Bruns (1999) discusses this “narrative turn” in *Tragic Thoughts at the End of Philosophy*, p. 94.

<sup>13</sup> The question of Ricoeur’s understanding of Gadamer on time is a fascinating one. One of Ricoeur’s earliest essays on narrative time is his “Introduction” to the UNESCO volume, *Time and the Philosophies*, in which Gadamer’s “On the Western View of Time” appears. His introduction does not overtly engage Gadamer’s essay on time but presents an early version of the time-as-narrative thesis. He continues his attempt to analytically clarify the question of time subsequent to the 3-volume *Time and Narrative* in “Initiative” (1991). This essay attempts to distinguish the structure of the present in an especially fine-grained way, and in its frank prioritizing of planning, in particular, of “promising,” constitutes a remarkably diametrical contrast

to Gadamer's experiential account of the present in which exactly and explicitly this does not reign over consciousness (217). For an examination of the relation of Ricoeur and Gadamer in this particular encounter and on the subject of temporality generally, see Ross (2003), Chapter Three, "The Spirit of Narrative: Onesidedness in the Temporality of Paul Ricoeur," 121-171.

<sup>14</sup> Palmer has written two summaries. The first, "Ritual Rightness and Truth in Two Late Works" (1997) treats the "Ritual" essay and "Word and Picture" together. Palmer's second summary (2002) is devoted solely to the ritual essay, is more substantive, and follows the structure of Gadamer's essay more exactly. While Palmer apologizes in the head note that this second summary is only an "interpretive reading" (38), the summary seems clear about what is new in the Gadamer essay, namely, thinking that deepens the subject of concern to us here: the two poles of familiarity and discovery. The "corporeality" of poetry is a term used by Bruns in "The Remembrance of Language: An Introduction to Gadamer's Poetics" (1997, 2 & ff).

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