

Not Easy Being Green: Process, Poetry and the Tyranny of Distance

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ABSTRACT *There are many places that we must save from destruction. Sadly, they are mostly distant from us. If we accept Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-World, this distance means that we cannot authentically speak of their Being. Even if we 'dwell' in our own lands, we are not 'at home' in these beautiful places. However, if we cannot speak of their Being, of what 'is', how can we ask logging and mining multinationals to stop destroying them? This speechlessness may be overcome with a Whiteheadian process metaphysics, and 'late' Heideggerian poetics. These may then be developed in a concrete community life.*

Here, then, was a sowing—and this, from the dragon-tooth seed, is the crop that we reap, the husks from the winnowing years—bulk-bushels of stone and samples of wind-patterned sand, fierce wounds in the valleys, desperate scars underfoot, and a gully trench for our tears (Thiele, 1968, p. 146).

Mountains and Being

By train, the Yarra Valley is about an hour east of Melbourne, Australia. Sculpted by 'English' hills and modern vineyards, the valley serves as an entry to the Yarra Ranges, a string of misty gumtree blue curves. In the small Yarra River town of Healesville, you can sit on a balcony, listen to the nearby cockatoos screeching, and watch the distant hilly blueness mingle with the smell of eucalyptus. The mountains are still.

These mountains, of course, are more than simply scenery. They shelter, provide water, food, shade, and tourist income. We can easily list the minerals that make them up, the geological processes that gave birth to them, and probably find census data on the small population that lives on them. All these, of course, are the province of

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experts—mineralogists, geologists, statisticians, and so forth. Without the help of the specialists, perhaps we can only begin with the one simple statement: the mountains are. This, of course, sounds like a simple statement to make. Indeed, we could make it about anything, or at least anything that is. They are. I am. It is.

For most people, these are the most everyday, common sense things to say. However, for philosophers like Martin Heidegger, noted for his links to ecological philosophy and the poetry of the land (Hay, 2002, pp. 159–161, pp. 168–169), the everyday is something to be overturned (Heidegger, 1987, pp. 10–13). Similarly, Heidegger (1987) proclaims that ‘[o]vercoming common sense is the first step of philosophy’ (p. 81). Consequently, ‘common sense’ statements like ‘it is’ are inherently problematic. What, Heidegger would ask, is ‘is’? If the mountains ‘be’, what is it to be?

For Heidegger, this question has been forgotten since Parmenides. Parmenides held that whatever is not Being must be non-Being, and Being later came to be associated with what is always ‘present’. As such, ‘things’ in the world are Being, and all else is non-Being. This influenced the Greek Atomists, such as Democritus and Epicurus, who therefore held that atoms were indivisible, eternally ‘present’ Being in a Void of non-Being. As Burnet (1948, p. 182) notes, ‘[w]hat appears as the ... atoms of Leukippus and Demokritus, is just the Parmenidean “being”’. Alternatively, Plato saw the ‘eternally present’ Forms as Being, while Aristotle saw *ousia*, or ‘substance’, as Being, and in both cases Being was taken as that which is ‘present’. For Heidegger, the intertwining of Platonic mathematicism, Aristotelian empiricism, and Epicurean atomism led to the metaphysics of Hobbes, Locke, Descartes, the modern scientific worldview, and the worst aspects of communism and capitalism. Here, rather than asking ourselves what ‘is’ is, we assume Being to be ‘[p]ermanent, always identical, already-there, given—all mean fundamentally the same: enduring presence, *on* as *ousia*’ (Heidegger, 1987, p. 202). Here, put simply, Being, including the Being of humans, is understood as ‘things’. As I have argued elsewhere, following Heidegger, this ‘thingly’ mentality is linked not only to ecocide, but to cultural commodification and the worst aspects of modern capitalism, including New Age ‘spirituality’ (Young, 1999, 2001a).

In response to this danger of ‘thingliness’, Heidegger argues that we should return to the ‘original’ pre-Socratic idea of Being. Here, Being is linked to *physis*. Heidegger (1935, p. 168) writes that the early ‘Greeks ... called [the] emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*’. For Heidegger, this idea of being moves away from a ‘thingly’ obsession with beings, and allows us to appreciate Being as a kind of creative becoming. We may say that something ‘is’, but this ‘is’ ‘must be understood creatively, not as an empty repetition’ (Heidegger, 1985a, p. 81). In this sense, a child ‘is’ an adult, a bud ‘is’ a flower, and God ‘is’ the world.

However, if Being is to be understood as the ‘rising in itself of all things’, how do we account for the Being of the mountains of Healesville? The important word here is ‘we’. If we are to come to terms with the Being of these mountains, we must first understand the Being of ourselves.

***Dasein* and World**

For Heidegger, we are ‘Being-there’, or *Dasein*. He writes, ‘it is constitutive of the Being of *Dasein* to have, in its very Being, a relation of Being to this Being’ (Heidegger, 1927, pp. 53–54). In this sense, there is no ‘essence’ of human nature or character. Rather, our essence is our existence. This existence, in turn, is the ‘taking up’ of an interpretation of what Being ‘is’ from the possibilities available to us. As Heidegger (1927) puts it,

'*Dasein* has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or already grown up in them. Existence is decided only by each *Dasein* itself in the manner of seizing upon or neglecting such possibilities' (p. 55). Here, then, we are not 'things', but interpretive possibilities to be.

What, however, gives us these 'possibilities to be'? For Heidegger, the answer is the *welt*, or World (Heidegger, 1985b, pp. 91ff.). Put simply, the World is our culture; the tradition we are 'thrown' into when we are born. Within the World, we 'grow into' an interpretative possibility of ourselves and the world. However, we do not simply 'choose' these interpretations of Being every day when we wake up in the morning. Rather, we are continually 'projecting' into the future a range of activities and purposes, what Heidegger calls Being-ahead-of-ourselves. Wedded to this are a host of tacit goals and purposes, each of which Heidegger calls a 'for-the-sake-of-which' (Heidegger, 1985b, pp. 185–188, pp. 237–238). Rather like rolling out a red carpet to walk upon as we are walking, Being-in-the-world means we 'throw' our selves ahead of ourselves.

Of course, this 'throw' is not to be understood individually. For Heidegger, our Being-in-the-world is also Being-with-others (Heidegger, 1985b, pp. 155–163). We are with these people, and not as 'things' merely next to each other. Rather, as Heidegger (1985b, p. 155) writes, 'the world is always one that I share with Others'. Rather than a society of contract, military sovereignty, or the market, the World is 'made' together and then gifted to us by others before us.

Moreover, we do not have simply 'things' with us in this shared World as if they were next to us in a box. Rather, we are 'Being-alongside' freeways, televisions, gum-trees, and mountains. They cannot be understood outside our World, naked or raw. As such, to put it in Heidegger's typically opaque prose, '[a]head-of-itself-Being-already-in-the-world ... includes one's falling into one's *Being alongside* those things ready-to-hand within-the-world' (Heidegger, 1985b, p. 237). This is not to say that there can be no nature without culture. As Casey (1993, p. 236) argues, there are so many features of the land that are simply there in our immediate experience. The bright sight of chalky cliffs, the sound of goats, the taste of the sea, and the smell of bay leaves growing on a mountain path—these rise up to us in some way and cannot be avoided. Nonetheless, as Casey (1993, p. 237) continues, '[c]ulture contextualises every corner of nature, including the wildest ones'. This contextualisation, of course, is strongest in the places where we live. We cannot be understood in isolation from our landscape and its features, tools, buildings, and so forth, and vice versa. Such things are 'in-the-world' with us, and the selves we 'project' are tied in with them.

For Heidegger, then, our existence in a World is 'spread' over the people who are in the place with us, and the 'things' that share these places. In Heidegger's later work, this notion of Being-in-the-World is extended to include the notion of 'dwelling' (Heidegger, 1971a, pp. 347–363). With dwelling, our self, 'stretched' in time and place, exists in a manner that cares for the people and 'things' that are incorporated into this 'stretching'. Instead of building a bridge that diverts the stream, creates barren banks, and kills the water life, we should try to build a bridge that 'lets the stream run its course and at the same time grants mortals their way' (Heidegger, 1971a, p. 354). Rather than manipulating the environment around us, we should let the myriad processes around us 'be'. Indeed, as Hay (2002, p. 161) writes, '[h]ere is Heidegger's most significant contribution to environmental thought: his insistence on the need to live authentically, to be at home, and to take responsibility for the defence of that home'. Put simply, we are always Being-in-a-World, and we should be 'at home' in that place.

World, Place and *Gestell*

By speaking of our 'home' in this way, Heidegger problematises the modern conquering of place by time, and the erosion of a people's authentic sense of Being-in-the-World (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 165; 1987, pp. 37–39, pp. 45–51). The result of this space–time compression, and the spread of technological rationality, is a blindness to the *physis* of the worlds wherein we should 'dwell'. Here, the 'logic' of *Gestell*, of technological 'enframing', has ceased to allow Being to be. It no longer rises up, of itself. Rather, Being is wrenched out of its hiddenness, manufacturing a state of 'total availability' (Heidegger, 1947, p. 242; 1971a, p. 363; 1987, pp. 37–39, pp. 45–51).

For many of those folk who live in Australia's rugged Northern Territory, for example, Being is lost. Most Territorians are in the 'thingly' World of capitalism and, indeed, many may work in the mining industry. In the Jabiluka uranium mine, they treat the Kakadu National Park like a 'standing reserve' of dead 'things' to be manipulated by sheer force of human will. Here, as with the gold of Rilke's poem, 'the will to will ... trades in the nature of Being and thus subjects all beings to the trades of calculation that dominates most tenaciously in those areas where there is no need for numbers' (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 115). As a result of this, we find the 'rising up' of *physis* forgotten, and 'everything reduced to open availability' (Kolb, 1986, p. 145). This is *Gestell*, and a similar 'logic' would apply to the old growth forests being clearfelled for woodchips in Tasmania. We are 'at home' insofar as we are surrounded by the familiar and commonplace (Heidegger, 1987, p. 168) However, these are characterised by alienation from *physis*, and from our own creative relation to Being. We are 'at home' in 'homelessness'.

However, even if we were not 'homeless', we would still have great difficulty speaking of the Being of Jabiluka. As we have seen, for Heidegger, our World is our creative 'clearing' of Being, and the Being of beings other than us is always with us and alongside us in our World. If we are authentically dwelling in a place, the *physis* that 'rises up' for us in this place is all we can authentically speak of. Put simply, *Dasein* implies *existentiell* and ontic horizons.

This ontological and epistemological position has been most recently and fully articulated by Malpas (1999). Drawing on Heidegger, Davidson and others, Malpas argues that 'place' is a structure wherein subjectivity and objectivity, self and others, and time and space, can emerge in their mutually implicating interdependence. As place grounds our existence, it is both humanised and humanising (Malpas, 1999, pp. 1–2). The places where we 'dwell' shape us as we shape them (Malpas, 1999, p. 187). Moreover, when we move from such places to the larger places within which these are 'nested', our grasp of place becomes more and more abstract (p. 171). Of course, places can reveal one another, implicating each other through 'internal' and 'external' topology (pp. 171–172). Nonetheless, Malpas (1999, pp. 183–184) shows how separation from place is also a separation from self.

Kakadu National Park, as we have seen, is a place that many of us wish to save from capitalist destruction grounded in *Gestell*. However, my home and Kakadu are as distant from one another as the Parisian Left Bank and the Orthodox churches of St Petersburg. Even though it is in Australia, Jabiluka has seasons that I do not understand and land that is utterly foreign to me and most other Australian suburbanites. Put simply, we in Melbourne are not Being-in-the-World of Jabiluka or its people. We are not authentically 'at home' there. It can be nothing but an abstraction, occasionally 'grounded' in brief visits or advertising pamphlets. Indeed, for many Australians of the urban east coast, the American suburbs are 'closer' than the country of Kakadu.

Consequently, the place-bound nature of Being-in-the-World does leave us somewhat 'stranded'. We are always Being-in-the-World, and those things Being-alongside and people Being-with cannot 'be' out of our World. Similarly, our Being-ahead-of-itself-already-being-in-the-world cannot 'be' apart from these things and people. It seems reasonable to assume that this is why Heidegger writes most confidently about places he is familiar with, or places revealed by 'authentic' German poets such as Rilke and Hölderlin (Heidegger, 1971a, b). He has what Malpas (1999, p. 137) refers to as 'the knowledge'. He 'dwells' in these places, walking, chopping wood or speaking German.¹ Similarly, we cannot speak of those places where we do not work, walk and speak. We are not authentically 'at home' in them. The ancient trees are not Being-alongside us, and our Being-ahead-of-ourselves 'projects' *existentiell* possibilities far removed from the Being of the Kakadu or their traditional owners.

This account of Being-in-the-World seems to have affinities with the 'bioregionalism' of Sale. Sale (1985, pp. 44–45), like Heidegger and Malpas, speaks of what could be called a circumspective 'knowing' of a given place. Similarly, Sale (1989, pp. 61–62) argues that only the people of a given region can articulate this kind of knowledge. However, technological rationality, capitalism, and the conquering of space by time have left many of us alienated from our places, and complicit in the destruction of the natural world (Sale, 1985, pp. 24–37, pp. 53–55).

Consequently, for Heidegger and Sale, physical distance is compounded by what Heidegger would call ontic and *existentiell* distance. First, we are ontically and *existentielly* blind to Being. Here, as Hay (2002, p. 160) writes, 'we are unable to find a reasoned justification for our pain or a reasoned argument against the right claimed by developers and governments to impose pain upon us'. Second, even if we overcome 'blindness', we are physically distant from all other places. We have *existentiell* and ontic horizons, the existence of which stem from the ontology of *Dasein*. Our authentic *Dasein* is not Being-with and Being-alongside distant people and places.

However, it is precisely these kinds of places that we want to save. We want to save the old growth forests, the National Parks, and the mountains as yet unscarred by agriculture, mining or cheap residential development. How can we overcome this? How do we 'open ourselves up' to things far away? As I see it, we have two options. These, in turn, will not necessarily translate into a blueprint for radical environmental activism. However, they will allow us to broaden our horizons. Firstly, we can come to terms with these places from afar. Secondly, we can bring them into our World. To do the first, we need the 'mindful' abstractions of process philosophy. To do the second, we need 'poetry'.

Process, Being and Beauty

As Cooper (1993) has shown, Alfred North Whitehead shares with Heidegger the idea that we are always situated in a given world. While their differences are many, both thinkers argue that we exist as a kind of 'stretched' self, located as a nexus that unites past, present, and future, the things with us in the world, and the people that share that world with us (Cooper, 1993, pp. 48–49, pp. 98–142). Moreover, Whitehead shares Heidegger's mistrust of 'things' (Cooper, 1993, p. 33).

However, Heidegger (1987) comes close to dismissing the entire tradition of Western philosophy as 'metaphysics'. Even Nietzsche succumbed to this, wilfully valuing the world as an 'ought' in response to the ontological primordialisation of beings (pp. 198–199). Consequently, philosophy *qua* metaphysics is at an end for Heidegger (1972). All that is left to do is open ourselves to the essence of *Gestell* and submit to the

destiny of Being (Heidegger, 1954, pp. 330–331), or wait for a ‘God’ to save us (Heidegger, cited in Günther and Kettering, 1990, p. 57). Consequently, with the work of ‘late’ Heidegger, we do not need to develop new abstractions, or properly replace the dominant metaphysics with one that allows us to do justice to the world at large (Gare, 1995, pp. 114–116; forthcoming). Rather, we must patiently wait for metaphysics to run its course.

Conversely, Whitehead makes an effort to build on the metaphysics of the Western intellectual tradition, and overcome its deficiencies. He develops abstractions which, as Malpas (1999, pp. 171–172) has argued, are what we require when we grasp distant places. In this sense, Whitehead is more able than Heidegger to help us overcome our *existentiell* and ontic horizons.

For Whitehead, much of modern philosophy makes the mistake he calls the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Put simply, this involves the development of abstractions that describe the world, and the reification of these abstractions. We begin to treat them as if they were real. For Whitehead, much of Western culture, academic or otherwise, partakes of this fallacy, and it had impeded our ability to make sense of the world. Not coincidentally, this fallacy resembles the ‘metaphysics of presence’, *on* as *ousia*, analysed by Heidegger. In each account, the present, permanent, static, timeless, and universal are made ‘real’. With the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, we are left with ‘things’.

In response, Whitehead tried to develop new abstractions that were mindful of this. In Aristotelian terms, he was working with *episteme*. With *episteme*, we work from abstract principles and demonstrate true ‘scientific’ statements about the world (Aristotle, 1995, 1139b:19–35, 1140b:31–1141a:8). These true statements come to constitute, as Hankinson (1995) puts it, ‘an organized body of systematically arranged information’ (p. 109), on topics such as biology, physics, and metaphysics. Whitehead realised the need for a new metaphysical schema to replace that of Western positivism, rationalism and foundationalism. Whitehead kept the Aristotelian emphasis on abstraction, induction, deduction and so forth, but rejected Aristotle’s wholesale commitment to ‘things which are eternal ... ungenerated and imperishable’ (Aristotle, 1995, 1139b:23–24). Rather, he committed himself to the notion of ‘process’.

Central to this schema were the notions of process, prehension, potentiality and concrescence. Process, not unpredictably, is the fundamental category of existence. As Whitehead (1933, p. 354) writes, ‘the very essence of actuality—that is, of the completely real—is *process*’. Thus each actual thing is only to be understood in terms of its becoming and perishing. Prehension is the way in which these processes ‘reach out’ toward one another, making ‘objects’ of one another. With physical prehension, a process takes its physicality from an ‘actual occasion’ in the past. With conceptual prehension, a process moves away from the actual past towards future potentiality. Potentiality, in turn, ‘can be understood as the possibilities—the powers and liabilities for ordering and being ordered’ (Gare, 1996, p. 314). Lastly, concrescence is the coming together of processes in one another, and this can either be the result of physical or conceptual prehension. As such, bats, dogs, mountains, people and trees are not Lego creations, but ‘societies’ of concrescing processes, all creatively developing in their relations with one another (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 25–34). Moreover, the nature of the Being of such beings is a self-becoming. Here, ‘things’ are neither wholly dependent or independent, but unique in the innovations they make of their conceptual and physical inheritance (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 21–22). Nature, as *physis*, is creativity, and creativity is in fact Whitehead’s ‘category of the ultimate’, akin to ‘stuff’, ‘thing’ and so forth (Whitehead, 1978, pp. 21–22, p. 31).

Contra Whitehead, though, I do not believe in any 'eternal objects'. Far from affirming creativity and *physis*, these Platonic 'lures' for prehension make processes passive, waiting for God to pull them along. Rather, we should see conceptual prehension as only ever of 'objects' which are themselves ordered processes (Gare, 1996, pp. 315–316). In societies, for instance, an emergent order develops, where the potential 'luring' of the processes is created by the constituents themselves. This keeps the commonality of processes out of past actuality and in future potentiality, as Whitehead (1978, pp. 287–289) would have it, but makes this potential 'self-made'. This, in turn, moves us another step away from 'things', 'stuff', and from the tyranny of the Forms. The creative development of processes is truly self-creative, it is just that this 'self' is stretched.

Moreover, much like Heidegger's notion of a 'locale', this creative development is experienced by all 'stuff', including humans, in a 'worlded' fashion. The physical prehension we have of 'strains', or straight lines, happens alongside our experience of actual temporality, and these passed strains are then futurally 'projected' onto the field of potentiality. This mutual relationship between past and present, like the Heideggerian 'having-been' and 'ahead-of-itself', then allows us to feel a sense of directionality and spatiality in the present (Cooper, 1993, pp. 110–124). We take up our feeling of place in the past along with our feeling of actualisation, and these are 'projected' onto a potential future. This, in turn, allows us to feel time and space, or place, in the present. For Whitehead, we are, as Cooper (1993, p. 124) puts it, 'primordially as involved Being-in-the-world'. As such, we are Being-in-the-world as mutually related processes, spread over space-time, and creatively unfolding. In this sense, Heidegger and Whitehead both agree that we are place-bound and in a World.

However, by integrating his ontological account with new abstractions, Whitehead allows us to Be-in-the-World while still approaching distant places. We may let our 'ontic choice' enframe *physis* from afar, as this choice is prefaced on a self-conscious attempt to avoid the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, and to develop categories that do justice to 'process'. Consequently, there is no fear of joining the tradition of 'metaphysics' and assuming that '*on* is *ousia*'.

From this Whiteheadian account of *physis* follow some simple insights that do not rely on 'local knowledge'. The 'precise' quantifications of economics are abstractions from the 'societies' and their experience of one another. As Whitehead (1991a, p. 680) notes, 'the essential characterization of mathematics is the study of pattern in abstraction from the particulars which are patterned'. Similarly, Whitehead (1991b, p. 700) writes that 'Logic, conceived as an adequate analysis of the advance of thought, is a fake'. In this sense, the calculative rationality of the many mathematical sciences and pseudo-sciences is useful, but not ontologically basic; it is not true to nature or culture. It is, as Whitehead tells us, fake.

Why is this fakery important to environmentalism? As I have said, it is precisely this 'thingly' mentality that underpins some of the most destructive aspects of our commodified culture. With such abstractions, the world's tallest flowering plants, the huge mountain ashes of Tasmania, are not nurtured, but mostly woodchipped (Bonyhady, 2001, p. 8). Worse still, when these giants are clearfelled, the scene of desolation is covered with poisoned pellets to kill off native 'vermin', as this is the cheapest option (Ellis, 2001, p. 17). One Tasmanian woodworker reports 'timbers such as the rare myrtle, sassafras and king billy being bulldozed into a pile and burned in the name of efficiency when they could not be sold' (Tuleja, 1999, p. 4). Elsewhere, virgin Australian forests are sold to a woodchipping mill by the government for nine cents a tonne (Miller, 1999, p. 1). Indeed, despite research showing how logging leads to

drought, the decimation of many Victorian forests continues, with huge public reserves sold to private companies (Miller, 2002, p. 2).

Here, the abstractions of government, economists and industry enable them to destroy ecosystems, without having any idea of the nature, the *physis*, of the processes therein. Conversely, though we are not in the World of those people Being-alongside such forests, with a 'process' account we are able to approach these ecosystems while being mindful of the abstractions we use. Moreover, we may approach them with a new set of more appropriate abstractions, abstractions unavailable in the 'anti-metaphysical' work of Heidegger.

Consequently, we are in a position to reconceptualise ecological, botanical, and other accounts 'through the lens' of process. For example, the various processes and their prehensions in any region are a fragile network of interaction. As Gunter (2000a, pp. 217–218) puts it, 'societies, whether of a plant or animal community, for example, are what they are as a whole, because of the close and determining relation of each thing to each thing in the community'. Were we to learn this, things might be a little different. We would not, as the early Australians did, introduce the prickly pear into New South Wales and Queensland for hedges. We would realise that, relieved of its previous constraints, the cactus would infest over 60 million acres of land, making it impossible for anything else to grow there. We would not then need to introduce a caterpillar from South America to stop this infestation (Ponting, 1993, pp. 134–135). We might also think twice about the rabbits, foxes, blackberries, cats and colourful jumpers screaming 'USA'.

Similarly, if we were mindful of the various processes and their temporalities in a given region, we might refrain from woodchipping, mining or other forms of exploitation. Old growth forests, for instance, can only be understood and appreciated over many hundreds of years. For this reason, woodchipping old growth trees because they are near the end of their life makes little sense, as their 'post-mature years' may last another 500 years (Ellis, 2001, p. 18). Indeed, the forests within which these trees fall may take over 2000 years to regain their earlier health (Norton, 1996, p. 23). Similarly, we cannot, like the current Victorian environment minister, pulp a fallen tree as a 'byproduct that would be otherwise left in the forest to rot' (Miller and Timms, 2000, p. 9). Rather, these rotting hulks will shelter the many Australian species that require hollows to live (Miller, 2000, p. 8), hollows that do not form until the trees are at least 150 years old (Gibbons, 1994, p. 62). In each of these cases, the contribution of such trees to an ecosystem can only be taken into account if we situate them as processes in the midst of thousands of interlinking processes, all ordering one another over the lifetimes of the various species, during the spans of meteorological and geological shifts, within the life of the ecosystem itself, and through the myriad cycles that repeat within each of these.

Generally speaking, then, we must come to terms with the differing temporalities of the various processes and 'societies' in a region, and the way in which these intertwine. Australia needs an epiphany of the kind apparently experienced by early white settlers who watched their topsoil disappear with the winds. There was, as Griffiths (2002, p. 235) puts it, 'an immense sense of history dawning on settler Australians, and understanding not only of deep ecological time, but of their own historical role in violating it'. Like the tree-like Ents of Tolkien's *The Two Towers* (1973, pp. 88–115), we should advise people not to be so 'hasty' about everything. A 'process' account would provide the metaphysical underpinnings for such advice.

Moreover, as Gunter (2000a, pp. 211–223) has shown, a Whiteheadian account also allows us to affirm the precious beauty of these mountains, forests and so forth. Here,

the relations between processes are understood in terms of their aesthetic value in a way that does justice to wholeness and unity on the one hand, and individuality and uniqueness on the other (Gunter, 2000a, pp. 219–221; 2002). Rather than beauty being a matter of ‘picture perfect’ landscapes, it becomes the sense of harmony derived from a unique relation between humans and non-human relationships. These non-human relationships, such as the multiple temporalities explored above, are beautiful when they derive their uniqueness in stable and fruitful relations with different others. Rather than rigid homogeneity, we have stable heterogeneity. As a consequence of this, ‘[b]eauty in this immediate, almost instinctive, sense can be taken as a sign of ecosystem health’ (Gunter, 2000b, p. 25). In this sense, new Whiteheadian abstractions enable us to speak of the beauty of a forested mountain without lapsing into dry specialised Latinate jargon or vague New Age appropriations. We can say that a mountain is pretty and stand by it.

As such, the work of Whitehead allows us to make sense of the Being, *qua* becoming, of mountains or bushland, even from afar. While Heidegger maintains an ‘anti-metaphysical’ stance, with Whitehead we are able to develop a coherent metaphysical framework and, from this, process ethics. This, in turn, enables us to develop abstractions that do not treat processes as piles of ‘things’ to be controlled or consumed. Of course, these processes may not be Being-alongside us in our World, or perhaps only peripherally. Nonetheless, with process metaphysics they are approached in a manner mindful of this distance. Perhaps this could be understood as a mindful distantiarity, similar to the way in which we map an unfamiliar terrain, or use a phrasebook in a foreign country. Like the water, woodpieces, and packed earth of the Southern boys in Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* (1955, p. 7), Whitehead’s metaphysics may give us a ‘living map’ rather than a dead one.

Maps, however, still keep us at a distance. If we wish to come nearer to the World of the locals or, better still, to broaden our *existentiell* and ontic horizons, we will require more than new abstractions. Rather, we will need to ‘rebuild’ our World whilst dwelling within it. This will enable us to live, insofar as this is possible, in the nearness of places we may not have dwelt within. To do this requires poetry.

Poetry and Worlding

For the ‘later’ Heidegger, the truth in each World is a matter of poetic ‘unconcealing’. In his oft-quoted words, ‘language is the house of Being’ (Heidegger, 1971b, p. 132). Here, language is not simply an internal expression of an external reality. Nor is language the externalisation of our internal reality. Rather, Heidegger (1971b) speaks of language as a kind of *poiesis*, meaning ‘making’, or ‘building’ (p. 214).

Moreover, this ‘making’ works precisely because of *physis*, the ‘emerging and rising in itself of all things’. Not only do ‘all things’ develop from potentiality to actuality, but also from darkness to light, or hiddenness to unhiddenness. Many things do not ‘be’ for us, for they have not been taken into our World; they have not been ‘housed’ in language. Quite simply, ‘being loves to hide itself’ (Heraclitus, cited in Brogan, 1994, p. 227). With *poiesis*, we are ‘making’ a World by allowing it to rise up to us and be ‘unhidden’. *Poiesis* as language, in Heidegger’s (2000, p. 60) words, is ‘a naming of being ... not just any saying, but that whereby everything steps into the open, which we can then talk about in everyday conversation’. Of course, as ‘building’, such poetry can be architecture, sculpture, or painting; each may ‘make’ the World for us (Heidegger, 1935, pp. 143–206; 1971b, pp. 361–363). Put simply, ‘poetry occurs not simply in poems, but wherever *poiesis*, ‘bringing forth’ of a previously concealed part

of Being, occurs' (Young, 2001b, p. 281). True poetry, in this sense, is not the introspective indulgence of melodramatic teenagers, or some kind of boutique lifestyle choice. Rather, it is the way in which a people bring parts of the world 'to light' and, in doing so, 'make' their World.

This 'making', in turn, is something each of us can do to 'reworld' ourselves and others. Outside my study, for instance, is a huge elm tree. After reading the simple lines 'You linger your little hour and are gone,/And still the woods sweep leafily on', in Robert Frost's 'On going unnoticed' (1928, p. 146), I could see the tree anew. I began to see, for the first time, the 'leafiness' of it: the mix of pale yellow and green, the way in which the leaves cluster on the upper boughs, and the contrast between the slow growth of the trunk and limbs, the wax and wane of the leaves in each season, and quick flutter of the yellow and green in the breeze. This, in turn, allowed me to see the friendly bond between the searing summer sun of Melbourne, the shading 'leafy sweep' of the elm, and the cool eastern windows of my study and balcony. Consequently, 'truly poetic words go "into the depths" of us, reminding us of those "hidden" elements of our Being that are removed from the "ready to hand" nature of our everyday lives' (Young, 2001b, p. 280). With poetry, then, we are able to 'open ourselves up' to previously 'hidden' places, near or far.

Similarly, after spending time relishing the later works of Monet, and working with pastels in the same vein, I began to see the liquid amber tree next to the elm afresh. Rather than a simple tree with autumn leaves, I saw the entire garden as a play of rich reds, oranges, greens and golds. This 'play' was itself suffused with the mingling of the organic 'societies', as the fallen leaves rotted brownly into the rich green earth, and the trees began to again prepare for the long, cold winter. All this contrasted in tone with the evergreen dark of the eucalypts over the road, with their sparse, proud foliage and shedding bark—the fruit of a hot, dry and ancient land.

Of course, this is not to say that reading a few modern poets or drawing with pastels will miraculously 'bring forth' a new World for Western civilisation. There is no sense in which the 'metaphysics of presence' associated with the orthodox philosophical tradition will be suddenly overcome. Similarly, the *Gestell* associated with global technological rationality will not be revealed and poetically dissipated. Rather, this is simply to show how we 'greenies' can begin to 'be' in a way that authentically embodies the 'logic' of the places we want to save. Quite simply, it is a start, and an attempt to wrest language away from the doublespeak and doublethink of the New Age (Young, 1999) or global capital. A similar argument could be made for music, painting, sculpture, architecture, and so forth.

Put simply, by allowing Being, what 'is' is, to be seen in a new light, we are able to 'see' things afresh. Far and unfamiliar places grow near and familiar. Moreover, we can make what is near and familiar less 'thingly' and more '*physis*-like'. As Heidegger (1971b, p. 218) writes, '[p]oetry is what first brings man onto earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling'. As such, 'late' Heidegger is far less anthropocentric than his younger self. When we are dwelling in a place, our World is attuned to the *physis*, the 'rising in itself of all things'. In this sense, with truly *poietic* art:

... we open ourselves to another person's project, to an alternative way of being in the world. [...] This idea may then be given an ecological inflection: works of art can themselves be imaginary states of nature ... and by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth (Bate, 2000, pp. 250–251).

This is why Bate (2000, p. 149) refers to the poet as a vagrant, for he ‘finds his home in the *logos* and not the *oikos*’. As such, *poiesis* helps us to become ‘at home’ in the world. Just as physicist Fritjof Capra (1991, p. 11) can ‘see’ the ‘cosmic dance of energy’ on a beach, so too may we begin to ‘see’ the ‘process’ reality of mountains, forests and so forth.

In doing so, we may also lead more meaningful lives. Mathews (1991) essentially articulates this position by drawing on Spinoza. Certainly, Spinoza’s work was ultimately grounded in egoism and self-interest (Midgley, 1978, p. 352; Gare, 1996, p. 61). Indeed, Spinoza saw many affinities between Hobbes’s work and his own (Spinoza, 1674, p. 369). However, Spinoza was also an influence on Schelling and Heidegger (Gare, 1996, pp. 218–219; Snow, 1996, pp. 454–455), as well as Whitehead (Hubbeling, 1984, p. 9). Mathews’s account of the ‘ecological self’ is therefore sensitive to the requirement that we situate ourselves relative to the web of self-sustaining and interpenetrating processes that we crudely call the ‘environment’. Like that of Spinoza (West, 1993, pp. 292–296), Mathews’s argument hinges on *conatus*, the will to endure in individual processes. As enduring processes, we must value ourselves. However, our ability to endure relies on our ‘dwelling’ within a given region, and our complex relations with an open system of self-organising processes. These, in turn, endure only insofar as they can be understood in relation to the ‘web’ of enduring processes that is the cosmos itself. Each of these processes ‘values’ those it endures with. Consequently, Mathews argues that our own individuality is only valuable and meaningful insofar as we situate ourselves in the places where we ‘dwell’.

Similarly, Sale (1985) argues that we must be persuaded that the local biosphere is in some way intimately related to us (p. 53). Our value and significance can only be found where we ‘dwell’. Malpas (1999, p. 192) comes to a similar conclusion. Consequently, we must be persuaded that the land matters so that we may, in Heidegger’s words, circumspectively Be-in-the-World and then ‘dwell’.

These kinds of ‘ecological self’, in turn, would be nurtured by an approach that allows us to ‘see’ the *physis* of the world, without reducing this enduring to atoms, individuals, or machines. One such approach, of course, is process philosophy. Gare (1996, pp. 59–62, pp. 310–427) has shown how process philosophy can take up the insights of the ‘deep ecology’ of Mathews and others, without vague intuitionism, vulgar biocentrism or the self-interest egoism of Spinoza.

However, another such approach is the *poiesis* of Heidegger, which avoids destructive anthropocentrism by placing our creativity in the context of the Being of beings. Of course, Mathews’s Spinoza would have balked at such a suggestion, dismissing art and beauty as ‘secondary qualities’, or relegating them to the status of medicinal aids (Morrison, 1989, pp. 359–365). Nonetheless, Mathews’s account seems more favourable to the approach of *poiesis*, as it affirms human creativity by seeing it as a contribution to the creative unfolding of the whole. Just as Mathews (1991) warns against anthropocentrism but calls for us to ‘add our affirmation to the universal *conatus* in [our] unique modes of consciousness’, (p. 161) so too does Heidegger (1962) ask us to fulfil our role as the ‘shepherds of Being’ (p. 245). *Poiesis* enables this shepherding by allowing the heterogeneous self-rising processes of enduring *physis* to creatively ‘be’ (Young, 2001a). By letting *physis* ‘be’ in places near and far, we ground ourselves as *Dasein*, while at the same time broadening our *existentiell* and ontic horizons to include distant places.

Consequently, *poiesis* is also the kind of persuasion that Sale requires. ‘Poetry’, as Bate (2000, p. 251) puts it, ‘is the song of the earth’. By listening to this song, we become more intimate with our place on earth. Indeed, such poetry may draw its power

from a 'dwelling' that relates only to a particular bioregion (Bate, 2000, pp. 205–242). In this sense, *poiesis* broadens our *existentiell* and ontic horizons, but does justice to the bioregions where we are 'placed'.

Nothing, of course, can really replace the creative 'nearness' of Being-in-the-World (Heidegger, 1985b, pp. 138–139). For those who dwell near a river, for instance, we must acknowledge "the *living* of the rise and fall" that distinguishes local knowledge from the transient observations of tourists or scientific observers' (Goodall, 2002, p. 41). If we live our lives in the suburbs of Kew or Double Bay we cannot dwell in Kakadu, on the Derwent River, or near the Murray–Darling Basin. No poetry can overcome this. Moreover, these poetic accounts are often subjective, and thus still only concern a part of place (Malpas, 1999, pp. 173–174). Nonetheless, if poetic words do indeed bring parts of our world 'to light', and if the poets are doing their job, then there is hope that the vague and weak pictures we have of distant places can be painted with the right colours.

Practical Wisdom and Community

How practical, though, is this *poiesis*? To answer this question, we should briefly turn to Richard J. Bernstein, an insightful scholar of Heidegger. Drawing on Aristotle (1995, 1140a:1–23), Bernstein (1995, pp. 120–126) argues that *poiesis* is similar to *techne*, or craft. Of course, this is not to say that Heideggerian *poiesis* is like computer programming or automotive mechanics (Heidegger, 1971b, pp. 213–229). Unlike these, true poetry is not tainted by the 'logic' of technological rationality. Rather, it nurtures the 'emerging and rising in itself of all things'. Nonetheless, *poiesis* is limited. Even if the people and places of our World 'well up' in *poiesis* (Heidegger, 1935, p. 200), poetry is a solitary art, far removed from the hustle-bustle of the *polis*. Poets, as Heidegger (1971b, p. 214) writes somewhat melodramatically, 'shut their eyes to reality. Instead of acting, they dream'. As a kind of 'knowledge', *poiesis* mostly has little to do with the often vague and clumsy reality of other people.

While this is often its strength, this solitude also reveals an important difference between *poiesis* and other forms of 'knowledge'. We require a knack, a know-how, to get things done right in this vague and clumsy 'real world'. This knack, however, is not something we 'know'. As Aristotle (1995, 1141b:16–17) writes, 'some who do not know, especially those who have experience, are more practical than others'. Such people have *phronesis*, or 'practical wisdom', an embodied 'capacity to act with regard to human goods' (Aristotle, 1995, 1140b:20–21). *Phronesis* cannot be written down, or distilled into axiomatic rules or computer programs. Nor can it be undertaken alone, as *poiesis* can. Rather, it must be acquired in diverse ethico-political situations through practice (Bernstein, 1995, pp. 124–126). It is the 'self-knowledge' that ethical practice brings, rather than the kind of 'knowledge' a workman has of his tools and materials (Gadamer, 1997, pp. 313–316). If *poiesis* is needed, then, it must be combined with *phronesis*; with the know-how that comes from collaborative debate, dialogue, labour and so forth.

This respect for everyday reality is essential to any kind of poetic liberation, however utopian. As Harvey (2000, pp. 182–196) makes clear, a future *utopos*, such as that concerned with a proper concern for the Being of mountains, can only come from a *topos* here and now, including its people. If, then, *poiesis* is to help us to dwell, we will need to work with the people around us. We must not be so concerned with the 'bursting blossom of Being' that, like Heidegger, we forget about the lives, superficial, authentic, or otherwise, of real people.² We cannot simply 'step back before one who is not yet here, and bow, a millennium before him, to his spirit' (Heidegger, cited in Günther and

Kettering, 1990, p. 87). Rather, we must affirm that the ‘hidden unity of Being ... has been and is to be *practically worked out*. ... [Furthermore,] man’s conscious shaping of things sensitizes him to nature as shaping itself’ (Bakan, 1983, pp. 84–85, p. 90). Perhaps, then, the mountains of Healesville and Hobart allow us an opportunity to overcome the defeated tones of ‘late’ Heideggerian thought. Rather than leading us only to Todtnauberg and *poiesis*, Nature wells up in us and inspires us to *praxis*.

However, we cannot have words and deeds with all people, as we cannot be everywhere at once. Moreover, we cannot be all things to all people. There are many who will simply oppose us. As Bakan (1983, p. 93) writes, ‘[t]hose who share our telos are those with whom we can speak and act collectively. Those who oppose our telos are those against which we should engage in struggle’. Sadly, there will be more people to struggle against than with and, as with all *phronesis*, we will make many mistakes. Nonetheless, if schoolgirls can scare businessmen with their community art, there is still hope that we may as a group ‘make’ a new sense of nature (Sexton, 19/7/01, p. 6).³ We must therefore seek to find groups of people with whom we share the possibility of ‘building’ and ‘dwelling’. These groups, as Arendt (1958, p. 218) reminds us, must not necessarily love one another, but should at least try to nurture respect.

Indeed, it is possible that poetry can nurture this kind of community building, thus combining *poiesis* and *phronesis*. This is because poetry can ‘reveal’ our own mortality (Young, 2001b). This, in turn, enables us to come to terms with our lives as beginnings, middles and ends. In short, we live ‘storied lives’. By conceptualising ourselves as autobiographies we are able to articulate our ecological projects in terms of our life stories, and those of others. Moreover, we can place these stories in the context of shared or opposing cultural and social narratives. This narrative approach also accords with the insights of process philosophy (Gare, 2000) and the topological account of Malpas (1999, pp. 80–84, pp. 186–188). In this sense, the speculative abstractions of ‘process’ *episteme* and the ‘revealing’ of *poiesis* come together in a community and *praxis* of open-ended dialogue. Indeed, Malpas argues that politics is grounded in a grasp of place (p. 198).

This, in turn, seems to accord with Sale’s (1985) notions of ‘ecoregion’ and ‘morphoregion’. For example, to come to terms with an ecoregion, often some thousands of kilometres in size (Sale, 1985, pp. 56–57), we must use either transport and satellite technology or ‘rooted’ community cooperation. With a process metaphysics integrated with our narrative approach, people could place themselves in a narrative tradition that included a folkloric knowledge of place (Sale, 1985, pp. 45–46), and also collaborate in the task of ‘mapping’ an ecoregion by telling stories of their *poietic* and *epistemic* circumspection of the region. Indeed, this kind of storytelling could build a cultural community (Carr, 1986, pp. 135–150).

This community, in turn, could undertake *poiesis* in its architecture. Consequently, what Sale calls a ‘morphoregion’ (1985, pp. 58–59) of human settlement could ‘reveal’ the *physis* of the land on which it ‘dwelt’, while also doing justice to the creative, communal, and ‘placed’ nature of the inhabitants (Sale, 1980, pp. 165–178). In this sense, architectural *poiesis* would be much like the farmhouse or Greek temple of Heidegger (Heidegger, 1935, pp. 167–172; 1971a, p. 362). These kinds of *poiesis* would allow those ‘homeless’ in a place to once again be ‘at home’, while also allowing them to appreciate the ‘revealed’ Being of distant places and people. In this way, locals and non-locals could ‘dwell’. This, in turn, broadens the horizons of Being-in-the-World, while doing justice to the regionalism implicit in Heidegger and explicit in Sale.

Lastly, *episteme*, *poiesis*, and *phronesis* all seem to combine in recent ‘process’ articulations of Leopold’s ‘land ethic’. Gunter (2000b) has applied Leopold’s ideas to the

'Big Thicket' bioregion in Texas. The result is an *ethos* that combines the metaphysical precision of 'process' (Gunter, 2000a, pp. 216–217), a poetic concern for beauty (Gunter, 2000b, p. 25), and a practical everyday wisdom that valorises local cooperation between different groups (Gunter, 2000a, pp. 218–219; 2000b, pp. 29–30). Certainly, Leopold seemed to integrate these approaches in life, if not in print (Opheim, 1992). Moreover, this *ethos*, like that of Heidegger, is prefaced on a deeper concern for the dangers of space–time compression, technological rationality and ecocide (Gunter, 2000b, p. 23). Thus, in Gunter's rearticulation of Leopold's *oeuvre* we see an *ethos* that attempts to overcome orthodox metaphysics, poetically 'reveal' *physis*, and develop a practical sense of 'getting things done'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we must ask what 'is' is. This, in turn, shows us that we are Being-in-the-World, and that authentic 'dwelling' in a World entails ontic and *existentiell* horizons. Having done this, there are three tasks that we must undertake if we are to broaden these horizons, and build communities that may 'dwell'. First, we must develop an alternative metaphysical schema based on the many insights of process philosophy. Second, we must develop *poiesis* that allows people to see the Being of our world in a different way. Last, we must realise these in collaboration with those around us. Of course, there is much for us to do. Nonetheless, we must do it. Otherwise, the mountains and forests of Healesville and Kakadu will cease to be poetry, and end up as mere fictions.

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Notes

1. In Nazi Germany, the authentic Being of the German 'home' was associated with a collectivist place-bound anti-modernity (Wolin, 1990, pp. 53–66). This anti-modernity, in turn, was associated with parochialism (Harvey, 1997, pp. 208–209). Of course, not all 'placed politics' is a kind of Nazi parochialism (Malpas, 1999, pp. 97–198). Moreover, this parochialism does not invalidate Heidegger's work. Rather, we must take his work seriously, but also acknowledge that its link to Nazi parochialism is not coincidental. The very possibility for personal and cultural life, and hence politics, is grounded in those places where persons, peoples, and nations dwell (Malpas, 1999, pp. 176–187).
2. While Heidegger sees this criticism as a 'misunderstanding', even his attempt to redress this misunderstanding smacks of 'otherworldliness' (Heidegger, cited in Günther and Kettering, 1990, p. 82).
3. A young schoolgirl painted a picture of her town's deputy mayor, a developer, destroying a local park. The deputy mayor had the work banned from exhibition, and called any critics 'absolute losers'.

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