

Deakin Research Online

This is the published version:

Pont, Antonia 2007, Writing as capitulation: the shelter of being-responsible, *in AAWP 2007: the and is papers: proceedings of the 12th conference of the AAWP*, University of Canberra, Canberra, A.C.T., pp. 1-13.

Available from Deakin Research Online:

<http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30041010>

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner.

Copyright: 2007, University of Canberra.

Antonia Pont

Writing as Capitulation: the Shelter of Being-Responsible

Abstract:

This paper explores the notion of writing and its relationship to an always-existing responsibility. It asks the question of whether writing might necessarily be a kind of biographical undertaking, and then drawing on Heidegger, it inquires into how writing might provoke an ontological encounter for the writer. Via a close investigation of the definitions and etymologies of the word ‘capitulate’, the paper links the concepts of Derridean violence, Hellerian freedom and (post)modernity, non-infinite temporality and assumptions of a metaphysics of presence to a practice of reading/writing. By taking up the Heideggerian concept of Being’s as ex-istence and porosity, it attempts to argue that post-modernity, in coming to terms with the consequences of freedom, offers the subject the opportunity for an ontological encounter with responsibility, and subsequently how an acknowledgement of this thrownness might function in itself as a kind of shelter, albeit an open one.

Keywords:

Writing – Responsibility – Thrownness – Violence – Temporality

Biographical note:

Antonia Pont is a PhD candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. Her texts have taken many forms over the years – extended fiction, poetry, performance monologues and exhibited graphics. She performs work regularly around Melbourne, her most recent production being ‘Wanting – a show about desire and other privileges’ (also scheduled for the Midsumma Festival in January 2008) and she has recently completed a novel titled ‘The Best Thing About Snow’. Her doctoral research is examining ontologies of loss and contingency and their relation to deconstruction via the texts of Derrida, Heidegger and Heller. She also teaches in the School of Culture & Communication at the University of Melbourne.

Logos and Bios

In the paper that follows I will refer to the work of three writers. I am going to call them writers since, surely, this is a large part of what they do or did. Martin Heidegger would, however, normally be referred to as a philosopher, and more specifically perhaps, as an ontologist – a researcher in the area of Being. Jacques Derrida is generally considered a philosopher of language and the ‘father’ of deconstruction. Agnes Heller would perhaps be mostly classified as a philosopher, and one highly regarded in the field of social theory. But these three figures, mythological entities that they are, in the vocabulary of Barthes, must also – inevitably – be included in the set of humans known as ‘writers’. They all find/found it necessary to *translate* (and I use this word both lightly, earnestly, and also intransitively ...) onto ‘paper’ or into words. As Derrida has taught us, the old distinction between the paper-written and the breath-spoken is difficult to maintain along its traditional fault lines.¹

Recently I have found it necessary to ask myself whether theoretical writing could be considered a kind of biographical practice. If thinking is one of the activities of my life, then this thinking reflected in writing could be included in the *bios* of biography, or the *auto* of autobiography since it is a thinking associated with, or claimed by, a self or selves. Thanks to the practices of deconstruction, and to other contemporary research done on the actual mechanics of memory, we are now able to think this writing not as a pure documenting of the already-existing contents of the mind but as another kind of generative movement.

Whether one considers oneself a writer, as opposed to an actuary, an engineer or an athlete, might be an issue for ontic consideration. Heidegger explains this distinction clearly in the first Chapter of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1993: 53). Ontological inquiry looks at the meaning of (capital-B) Being, whereas the ontic sciences are those that take Being for granted and leave it unexamined so as to interrogate the features, qualities and differences between (small-b) beings. When the activity of writing becomes available as one in which a *Dasein* (a self-reflective entity) can examine the expression of, and discover something about, its Being, writing intimates a capacity for ontological inquiry.

If autobiography, then, is an inventive process that seems to draw impetus from whatever it is that we call the ‘memory’ of our lives, it is as if theoretical writing could be an analogous process propelled by the lives of my mind, or of my ‘intellectual’ selves.

The Supplement

We know, of course, that this translation of my ‘thinking life’ will not be complete. There is nothing in *autobiography* that implies fullness, as Rousseau himself lamented and which Derrida duly emphasised (Derrida 1997: 6ff). Our writings are always not enough, yet they are always, paradoxically, something in excess of what was there before. This is one way to begin thinking the ‘supplement’ – the supplement, which, of course, is not a *thing*. Rather, it is a way of thinking that permits one to integrate

the following: that change (what happens) is always more and less than what went before, and therefore paradoxical.

Or to quote Derrida quoting Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*:

How goes the world?

It wears, sir, as it grows. (1994: 97)

The supplement means to capture our thinking at the point where it presumes either a kind of cumulative teleological tendency or a dystopic one. The world does not only grow, nor does it only decay. Decay, indeed, may be a kind – the only kind? – of growth. Of course, I play with words here. Decay/Grow. I find myself in the binaries of deconstruction. I can observe (again and again!) my almost innate urge to find the correct term to privilege and to leave things at that.

A memoirist who undertakes the task with any degree of rigour or curiosity, discovers that the endeavour of Remembering-Writing is neither a mirroring-documentation, nor a glorious improvement, nor a watering-down of original 'Life'. The encounter with the practice of writing forces an encounter with the workings of the supplement.

If writing can confront me with the workings of the supplement, what else might practising it unleash? How can writing operate as an ontological investigation? Or, to formulate the question with a contemporary spin:

Has the question of Being finished with us yet?

This brings us to the title of this paper.

Definitions & Chronologies

One day I was thinking and writing about writing, and I typed this sentence: *to write is to capitulate*. Then I read the sentence. And I may have re-read the sentence again later in the presence of my supervisor. What did I intend to mean by that statement? Most likely, my intention may not be traceable. But now that the claim exists, I can read it. I can read and try to work out what it is that I am responsible for. *Afterwards*. How curious.

If I simply ponder (without academic props) the usage of the word 'capitulate', I come up with a notion of it meaning something like 'surrender'. I think about war. I think about a certain line in Brecht's *Mutter Courage* (that I can recall easily since I played a soldier in that production, and watched the main characters rehearse their lines repeatedly) where Mother sings (I think?) something about capitulating. And it was about giving over.

Giving up.

Checking my Virtual Thesaurus,² I find that my casual, intuitive definition was close enough. Capitulation is defined as the action of *surrendering under agreed conditions*. Is writing, then, a practice of surrendering under agreed conditions? What might these conditions be? We will come to that.

For now, let us clarify the chronology of this anecdote (as much as one ever can). The statement ‘to write is to capitulate’ is produced in a moment when the only consciously acknowledged definition of the last word is the more commonly known one: ‘capitulate’ merely as another, fancier word for surrender. Even as I typed the statement that became the title for this paper, I didn’t know, firstly, if I even really agreed to it, and secondly, if I couldn’t have used the more common term.

Why would writing be an act of *capitulation*? Can capitulation, in this sense, be classified as an action at all? If capitulation is surrendering, isn’t it agreeing to cease with certain actions? To cease the active undertaking of resistance? To stop fighting? Capitulation could be seen to be an action that marks the edge of non-action. It is an action undertaken by a party that decides for itself – that is, an intentional action, because the words ‘surrender’ and ‘lose’ are not the same – to take another course, which is the course of not-acting in the prior way. Thinking about capitulation in this way renders the term a description for a threshold moment. *Before* there was action/resistance/war, and *after* giving up/going quietly/surrendering. The form is one of *action*, the content of which consists of non-action. Just like the supplement, we note paradoxical implications here, too.

Recalling that my strongest memory of the uttered usage of this word is in the context of Brecht, I check the *Collins German Dictionary* (for a translation). I find: *kapitulieren* and *aufgeben* + *gegenüber*. The Latin form is offered, alongside the Germanic: to give up, clearly stated with preposition: ‘opposite’. The German custom of listing verbs with the preposition required for their practical usage reveals another factor. Capitulation implies an other. A Someone-Opposite. To whom/what is one surrendering? Capitulation in the sense of surrender, ergo, is a dialogue of actions.

Let us now turn to the etymology of the word. Remember, I typed the sentence, not knowing about this second meaning. I wrote the sentence, and then I went looking to see what it might mean. In my *Shorter Oxford of Historical Principles*, in the paragraphs relating to the historical usages of the word ‘capitulation’ I encountered something fascinating:

to draw up in chapters, or under heads or articles, to specify.

This is from around 1678, an early reference, but perhaps getting to some kind of root. The word ‘root’ is commonly understood as indicating something earlier in chronology, but I want to note that this too can be a problematic assumption.

Upon reading about this more literal (and less vernacular) usage of ‘capitulation’, the word breaks apart suddenly, into sections, and we see the ‘capit’ – the part referring to a head, to a chapter. Thus, ‘capitulation’ serves to signify a breaking up into parts and a naming of those parts, as headings, as chapters and sections with titles.

The word *capitulate* can now cause us to think along different trajectories simultaneously: along the trajectory of surrender and non-action, and also, along the trajectory of separation, or categorisation, and resultantly, the theoretical implications of these together. The two definitions collide in the contemporaneous meaning of capitulation as surrendering under specific terms that are drawn up in a document with sections outlining those terms.

To surrender under agreed conditions.

And also to summarise by enumerating concisely the main parts of a topic.

Articulations

In his work from the early nineties, *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida speaks about a line from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* where it is claimed that 'the time is out of joint'.³ In his reading, Derrida illuminates something curious about the properties of separations and joinings.

To maintain together that which does not hold together, and the disparate itself, the same disparate, all of this can be thought ... only in a dis-located time of the present, at the joining of a radically dis-jointed time, without certain conjunction. Not a time whose joinings are negated, broken, mistreated, dysfunctional, disadjusted, according to a *dys-* of negative opposition and dialectical conjunction, but a time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction. (1994: 20)

Derrida here is speaking of an absence that always is, not about a lack in the wake of destruction. This 'without' is not *lost* but was *never-there*. He is also speaking about the nature of articulations. An articulating surface is one that serves, at once, as the agent of separation **and** as a circumstance or possibility of meeting. For something to articulate, there must be both segments and joinings. The umbrella word of 'articulation' covers the at-once-ness of this concept – together and apart, and each of these terms fertilising the other.

Derrida says that time doesn't necessarily have a 'certain conjunction'. Does 'certain' here mean 'sure', 'reliable', 'assumable' or does it, rather, mean 'substantial'? In fact, it may be that the articulating-that-is-the-'present' must not *be*. Not if one understands, perhaps in Heidegger's way, what the meaning of Being is.⁴

The present does not take up space and does not use up time. The present is not an entity and therefore it cannot *be*. It might be able to be understood as an absence, a kind of joint without substance but with effect. It is a theoretical site of articulation – or rather it is the relationship designated in the verb 'articulating' – between that which can be conceived as the past (earlier) and the future (to-come). The present – as a kind of absence, as a not-ness – in this way creates the three-fold model of time. It is a separating that connects, and as the action of separating it creates the things it separates-out and *articulates*.

But what might all this have to do with writing, especially if speech as one of its forms, is often referred to as 'articulation'?⁵

Writing

We can say that writing is an activity and a result. It is a trace (in the broader sense of this word) left by pens, pixels, voices and even patterns discernible in the world around us. Writing is a kind of relationship between elements that involves spacing, and it seems, on first view, to involve the interaction of a something with a nothing. It is also a system that constantly refers back to itself, that accumulates meaning. A

place where the empty shell of the letters m-e-a-n-i-n-g comes to refer to a complexity of relationships, to chains and chains of other conversations between elements. This meaning is a density of relationship. It is meaning as choreography not substance.

Just like dance, then, writing can be perceived as a dialogue between the something and the nothing. The body, for example, with the lack-of-body. And perhaps at the closest level, it is a dialogue between nothing and nothing that creates a pattern resembling what we know to be ‘something’. This is not to dilute what substance is, but rather to appreciate its actual workings.⁶

In Derrida, I think that the lay idea of the ‘written’ (words, paper, ink, lines and letters) transforms and unfolds itself outwards into a metaphor for a certain type of dance, that is lifelike, one that imitates (intimates) the way life itself might work. Or at least the choreography of this dance helps us to understand the way in which we get access to this life. This is another way to approach how writing might serve a purpose for ontological wonderings. (For example, the description above of how we encounter the supplement.)

So what are we doing when we write? And why might it be like a capitulation, in the senses offered above? And how is it related to the burden of freedom? How does it shelter? Let us move, gradually but with intent, towards the first of these questions.

The Writing ‘Subject’ & Capitulation

I am a person who finds herself frequently engaging with text. By text here, I mean written, typed, spoken, pen-on-paper text. Text as understood by the academic at the supermarket, as opposed to at their desk ... For me, the *bios* and the *logos* fraternize passionately.

What is happening when an ‘I’ (that is, me) is a participant in this textual production?

At the very least, I make a mark on something (let us leave aside the question of agency, and even the question of priorness). There is a blank document window on the screen, and my fingers cause keys to produce letters, in order and with gaps.

There was nothing (or there was ‘white’) in the window to begin, and after? There are letters and words and the chimera of that kind of dance called meaning that is unavoidable in the presence of elements that are not insulated from themselves.

One could ponder who is the ‘subject’ of this making. Who is the entity who should take responsibility for this verb to write? And unavoidably it must be that accumulation of interactions called the ‘I’. Antonia. Antonia Ellen Pont. She did it. There is no one else to blame or laud.

And we know that this writing is at once something that intends to be a *reproduction* (supposedly of ideas already formed in the ‘mind’) but which, when observed more rigorously, is always already a production, a new invention, written for the first time, always a little more and a little less than the supposed-original that was ‘in’ or ‘of’ my mind. And therefore, writing is an act of reading. A place where we get to take responsibility, but for something for which we are a strange kind of agent. A delayed agent. An agent who always arrives later than the consequences of their agency.

This kind of subjectivity is baffling.

So I am the agent of something *familiar* yet never seen before. The exact shape of the text is not predictable. It arrives as a surprise. It is not a product of will, even if it might be one of intention.

And I can only know what it is for which I *must* claim responsibility only when it has already arrived in existence (the ‘ex-’ in the term existence here pointing towards that relational outside-itself-ness characteristic of the possibility of Being). My responsibility is already *out-there*, racing ahead of me. I cannot choose whether I am responsible. Simply, I always-already am. I acknowledge that I am the text’s maker and yet not its singular origin.

My making is an intervention into the world. It is a kind of action. It leaves behind traces and these traces have consequences, not the least of which is their inevitable engendering of still more traces and consequences. We are enmeshed now in the vocabulary of chains and trajectories. We are speaking, of course, about meaning.

But how does writing leave a trace through its marking?

Violence, according to Derrida

Writing marks out regions. The mark can be seen as a cut into nothingness. It is an intervening incision into space, an incision that itself is attributed a kind of substance. Is ink a *something* to the paper’s *nothing*? Or is ink the pigmented gash through to the infinite sky glimpsed through the firmament that is a white stretch of ‘substance’?

We find ourselves needing to revisit the metaphor of ‘time being out of joint’, the present as a certain kind of articulating – where the not-yet meets, and separates, from the no-longer. There is never a time *prior* to the gash of the present – if by ‘prior’ we mean independent of and having its origin clearly somewhere else. The creation of substance (past and future) seems to be made possible by the function of the articulating mark/space which *isn’t*.

We can play here with what is *a priori*. We can say that the separating/touching creates what it separates/touches. The verb can be postulated as prior to the noun, but only as play. To reverse this chronology would shift nothing. The word ‘articulate’ now unfolds itself out into the full breadth of its non-thinkable meanings.

But, by definition, capitulation is also a ‘chaptering’. How?

When we write (read: think, read, name, understand, observe, document, know) we act on our world. We remake our world in this act of engaging. We call it forth again and again. And it is not a one-way relationship. We know that language functions through both division and inter-relation. We are disrupted by it, and also called-forth. Derrida calls this a kind of violence. Derrida’s first violence is that which the quotidian notion of violence needs to obliterate. It is because we cannot bear this to-ing and fro-ing between the so-called single entity that is us and Other, that (normal) violence is enacted. As Adam Phillips remarks, violence isn’t conflict, it is the suppression of it (Phillips 2002).

Perhaps none of this is new, but Derrida is famous for his emphasis on an important detail in this constellation: there is nothing prior to this first violence. This means that to suppress conflict/breach/non-closure leads to regular violence, but that also to long for the priorness to (Derridean, first) violence equates to another, similar kind of violence. This is why we must mourn forever. It is also a point vulnerable to slippage. I watch my footing from here on in.

In the relevant section in *Of Grammatology*, where the discussion is of *proper names*, Derrida explains (underlining is mine):

We have already noted that violence here does not unexpectedly break in all at once, starting from an original innocence whose nakedness is *surprised* at the very moment that the secret of the *so-called* proper names is violated. The structure of violence is complex and its possibility – writing – no less so.

There was in fact a first violence to be named. To name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference, in classifying, in suspending the vocative absolute. To think the unique within the system, to inscribe it there, such is the gesture of the arché-writing: arché-violence, loss of the proper, of absolute proximity, of a self-presence which has never been given but only dreamed of and always already split, repeated, incapable of appearing to itself except in its own disappearance. (Derrida 1997: 111-12)

Splitting (verb not noun) is prior. Absolute proximity – to oneself, to truth, in other words wholeness – is a ‘dream’. It is only once meaning (: the movement of analogy, or relationship, or isomorphism⁷) has emerged that our imaginations can conjure (that is, think) its opposite – non-meaning, or undifferentiated wholeness. The dreaming up of uninterrupted, originary non-violence is a secondary phenomenon.

Heidegger might say that the finite creates the possibility of thinking the infinite, and not the other way around. (Dastur 1998: 59)

Thrownness

Heidegger not only names this strange circumstance, he calls us, as *Dasein*, this very situation. *Being-Thrown*. We are that.

The possibility of our Being is a function of this thrownness. By thrownness, I understand Heidegger to mean that we have always already arrived, we are never masters of our own arising, our origins always precede us and we cannot catch them in the act. We are the *results* of something and not our own cause. This is to be ‘thrown’ – into life, into responsibility, and according to Heidegger, into guilt (but a non-religious or moral one) (Dastur 1998: 31-32).

We wake up to find that we are already here and are already acting and engendering consequences for which we, and we alone, are responsible. (One could say that the historically recent invention of ‘childhood’ is a way to shelter a small *Dasein* from, and to delay the impact of, the full brunt of this existential reality.) In other words, we are always answering (*respons-ability*), the question is not launched by us.

The practice of writing – and here lies its ontological potential – seems to me, to magnify and throw into relief, the machinations of this situation. To write is to experience oneself as *Dasein*, and as Derrida explains in ‘Signature Event Context’ (1988: 9), experience itself has the same kind of structure as writing. I return now to an earlier description in this discussion today, so as to argue that writing is just like being *thrown*, in two ways.

Firstly, the ‘I’ writes, and what arises has never been seen or thought before (the writer is the first and most surprised reader), there is no ultimate control over the written, yet once written the writing has always-already arrived – that is to say, there is no gerund-state, no *arriving*. As a writer I am not able exhaustively to predict and prevent the content or actions of the writing, and yet am still always responsible for it. (Perhaps this hints at why many writers have claimed to have been inspired by God, or have wanted to attribute to God the responsibility for their productions. In some ways, they may be shingly accurate – that there is something relevant to the movement sometimes called ‘God’ in how writing arrives, but it is a misunderstanding of this movement, to want to displace the responsibility of it elsewhere – God is not a site where unwanted or refused responsibility can be stockpiled. Heidegger implies that God *is* not. God cannot be classified among entities.)

Secondly, the writing (verb not noun) is prior. The writing calls forth the writer, makes the writer’s identity possible. So while, the writer has always-already arrived when the writer notices themselves, the occupation/verb generates the writer, and not the other way around. The notion of being ‘born into language’ might be the other way of viewing this. The trajectories of meaning’s movement pre-dates the singular *Dasein*.

So one might be called forth by writing (verb), and our writing (verb) might call forth a world. That is, the nominal seems to arise out of the verbal. It may not be the subject who creates action on an ontological level. The term ‘subject’ becomes misleading here. It is generally defined grammatically through its carrying out of the verb. Instead, we see that it is in fact carried into Being *by* the verb.

Consequently, responsibility does not follow on from (original) agency, rather something like agency might be made possible by the entering-into of responsibility: *the capacity to respond, to answer questions already posed*. It is to acknowledge *at once* one’s generated quality (thrownness), **and** that one’s existence (outwardly turned Being) is marked by the double quality of originary violence (always being affected by world). Through being a being that engenders consequences (affects world), agency might be something that looks like knowing one’s *place and genealogy* within chains of meaning, and still being able to answer/participate. How does this relate to the way we understand freedom?

Groundless Grounds

In her book, *A Theory of Modernity* (1999), Agnes Heller names the dynamic that, in her view, founds modernity. Now, a foundation of anything (a political period, an

argument, a society) needs to be ‘a resting point’, ‘something that does not need to be demonstrated’ (Heller 1999: 41). An arché is a founding notion or truth that stops the process of negation whereby things are constantly questioned, not taken for granted. What Heller identifies as the paradox at the heart of modernity, and one that it is crucial to hold in sight, is that the founding dynamic of modernity is the dynamic of freedom. It is the final word on things that says: nothing should be seen as the final word. That is, everything is questionable. As a modern being, I want to question everything. Who then, the question begs, is required to answer to my endless questioning?

Astutely, Heller deduces that, since modernity’s arché is freedom, modernity is founded on a ground that cannot ground. Its very internal principle is to let nothing be a ground, to let nothing remain undemonstrated (Heller 1999: 12).

This may explain a sense of vertigo in modernity (and what I consider sometimes to be fraught attempts to come to terms with this in the contemporaneous epoch of postmodernity). It may also glance in the direction of why, perhaps, numerous moral atrocities have been able to unfold on the world stage with apparently little able to stop or hinder them.

If this paradoxical and founding principle of modernity is not acknowledged, then one lives (and writes) as if there is a ground – a place where the buck stops. What Heller reminds us, is that there is no place where the buck stops, there is no place for this stockpiling of ‘debt’ except ourselves. To be self-reflective in modernity is to admit this paradox and to take steps to prevent its shadows from colonising one’s behaviour.

If there is no theoretical site that can remain undemonstrated as an arché (to remain undemonstrated might amount to being a place where no further inquiry is required/allowed, an Elsewhere for the buck of responsibility – parents, God-with-a-beard, the Nation, the Universe, the ten commandments, medicine, science, one’s upbringing, etc) the only place where freedom can be gathered and held without it spinning backwards towards a never accountable, non-existent origin turns out to be the human ‘subject’. That means, us. Or *Dasein*, to return to a Heideggerian vocabulary.

To write self-reflectively is to practice at the heart of this paradox. The content of the writing, in this case, is less crucial perhaps than the close observation of the movement/action/tendency of this writing. Perhaps this is deconstruction. And to write is to face the strange injustice, and I use this word intentionally. The injustice of always-already *Being-Thrown* and *Being-Responsible*.

It is simultaneously the following-through to its end of the consequences of conceptualising the subject in a certain way. Once we, as subjects, assumed the right to interrogate traditional grounds, we took on the burden of having nowhere else to ground ourselves. One’s thoughts flick to *Genesis* – the h(e)aven of elsewhere evaporating.

This, however, does not make *Dasein* the *raison-d’être*. This slide would be to misunderstand Heller’s point. Modernity’s ground of freedom requires each ‘subject’ to choose grounds for themselves, knowing that these grounds are *ultimately*

ungrounded, in the way that signified/signifier relationship is ‘arbitrary’, but still effects *traction*. Once chosen, the consequences of these grounds belong to the ‘subject’ (which may be an entity of more than one *Dasein*). This leads Heller to caution that existing in modernity with an ambivalent attitude to declaring grounds leads to cynicism, and to refuse their contingency, to fundamentalism (Heller 1999: 1ff).

Shelter

When I write, there is no one ultimately to tell me if I am right.

To be an artist can be to know this weight and this vertigo. To be an artist (with words, or charcoal marks, or limbs in a space) might be to take up the responsibility for this choice each moment. And in the instant of recognising this bottomless homelessness, the mirage of shelter appears. *Is felt*.

Does this word fall outside the realm of academic rigour?

I feel as if I come home when I cease to flee this constellation – of thrownness, and of freedom as the responsibility for setting limits.

Agnes Heller has asked the question ‘where are we at home?’ (1995: 1-18) I would like to ask the question: ‘what kind of shelter is possible in postmodernity?’

One way to clarify the term shelter is to notice that its meaning often arises in its being contrasted to the concept ‘home’. *Home* might infer enduring solidity, permanency, substantiality, predictability, property, familiarity, consistency.⁸

If I personally reflect on this understanding of home, I cannot claim to know or to have had a certain experience of a structure/situation imbued with the adjectival qualities listed above. On the other hand, I believe that I can speak of shelter.

I can speak of:

Being-Thrown.

Being-Responsible.

Towards death and accelerating.

My Own Ground (when the ‘my’ is an acknowledged ever-receding origin).

A place of *least* effort (but always some), where the ‘walls’ of the structure tend towards balancing the ‘pressures’ from the external context momentarily but in flux.

Letting the soft violence – of naming, of categories, of writing – rock and remake my body over and over.

Safety as accurate taking-stock.

Watching the way things move.

Knowing ‘self’ as movement only.

If home is a place where the doors and windows are closed, then sheltering might be where things still move in and out – a place to ex-ist. Shelter is not an illusion of being unaffected, but within shelter the buffeting is somehow softer ... Soft enough.

In-conclusion

So let us return now to our beginnings, without attempting to tie a tight knot. The definition in the Virtual Thesaurus for capitulation also says:

To give up or agree to forego to the power or possession of another.

Who/How might this other be, when the capitulation is of the textual kind? I do not think it is capitulation to another singular *Dasein*, because that would be a kind of abandoning of responsibility.

Let us examine the above statement closely. There is a power or possession that is not exercised by the writing 'subject'. Does this mean that to resist would be to cancel out this power or possession, or does it imply that the subject is already possessed by and in the power of this other? If the latter is true, then this giving up or agreeing appears more like an acknowledgment. One ceases denying that one is in the power or possession of Others (not sequentially, but simultaneously, this is why Time and Being are not opposites). One ceases to struggle with the ex- of existence. One learns to live in the breach, in the soft violence. One acknowledges that one is not an insular entity, and that this will always ache a little.

Dastur explains:

It is indeed essential that one not confuse *Dasein* – whose essence lies in its 'to be', that is, in its existence – with an intra-worldly thing which is already given (*vorhanden*). This explains why the world is not external to *Dasein*, but instead represents one of its constituting items. (Dastur 1998: 20-1)

Writing, if it is anything like Being for *Dasein*, is marked by a porosity. It is an experience of being constituted already – by language, by memories, by gaps and forgettings – and in this way unable to be sealed off. Derrida calls it *violence* (which must be tolerated). Buddhists might call it suffering. It is the impossibility of policing the boundaries of oneself absolutely, since what one *is*, ontologically, is this breachability. *Dasein*'s appearance of substance is its quality of being open. It is the strange way that Nothingness left to its own devices is Something.

In this way, to enter the dance of responsibility, to mourn our longings for home and to appreciate the shelter that is our interdependence is a kind of capitulation, in all the senses explored above. If Heidegger recognises Being 'as the purely Other than everything that is' (Dastur 1998: 10), perhaps it is Being to whom we surrender. To answer, then, whether the question of Being is finished with us yet, I would say 'no'. And that I would like to learn how to invite Being to have its way with me. I see it as the stuff of practice. In other words, a kind of elegance.

Endnotes

1. See Derrida 1997: Part I.
2. See <http://www.visualthesaurus.com/>
3. Also the name of a book by Agnes Heller, the examination of which is beyond the scope of this paper.
4. ‘But the difference between Being and beings already constitutes the implicit horizon of *Being and Time*, in which it is stated several times in the introduction that “Being cannot be conceived as an entity”’ (Dastur 1998: 10).
5. This is too short a paper to examine in detail the breadth of what writing is, and its relationship to speech. We know that much preliminary and rigorous work on this area has already been done by Derrida and others. However it is specifically Derrida’s affinity and my still undeveloped understanding of it that I seek to clarify.
6. See in general, and for other broader and tangential thoughts, Hofstadter 2007.
7. To borrow the term used by Hofstadter in Chapter 11.
8. Cf. Jackson 1995; especially p123.

List of works cited

- Dastur, Françoise 1998 *Heidegger and the question of time*, Humanities Press International: New Jersey
- Derrida, Jacques 1988 *Limited Inc*, Northwestern University Press: Evanston, IL
- 1997 *Of grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore
- 1994 *Spectres of Marx*, Routledge: New York
- Heidegger, Martin 1993 *Basic writings*, Routledge: London
- Heller, Agnes 1999 *A theory of modernity*, Blackwell Publishers: Oxford
- Heller, Agnes ‘Where are we at home’, *Thesis Eleven*, 41:1, 1-18
- Hofstadter, Douglas 2007 *I am a strange loop*, Basic Books: New York
- Jackson, Michael 1995 *At home in the world*, Duke University Press: Durham
- Phillips, Adam 2002 *Equals*, Basic Books: New York