

These words inefficient and metaphorical: An exploration of poetic language in the divide between world and earth

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I. Heidegger's misconception

In his attempt to derive how the work of art emerges, Heidegger proposed an open space of discovered knowing in the 'world' in essential contention with the concealed and enduring 'earth', and defined art broadly as the creative move bringing one into the other as a kind of truth-happening discovery.

While the reconsideration of truth as requiring a verbal action of constitution must be phenomenologically accurate, it seems that the static 'singleness' of such truth once established is in direct conflict with the proposal that the world is inherently 'open' in nature. When we say something is a certain way, we almost invariably create a universalization at the cost of the earth's grand plethora of variations and exceptions, for the human conception of how something 'is' is already essentially singular in its cognitive meaning; a shirt that is blue can never be red. The act of discovery may be a move of opening, but in our beholding of and acting upon that discovery the notion has become closed. This 'holding' of found truth to a singular point must be of the 'world' as Heidegger understands it as a space where things are disclosed.

Even as the apparent synonyms to 'know' and to 'understand' nonetheless have different 'feels', we have already seen how discovery is a pluralizing experience, and can happen at the touch of the senses as with the bodily and thus earthly connotations involved in these different words; 'understanding' implies a kind of overbearing mastery, a conducting and applicable total insight, whereas 'knowing' implies a comfort-with that is nonetheless unflinching in the face of surprise. To bring something into an equipmentally inclining world as a unit truth seems more accurately to be an act of closing it off from the earth's plurality. Art, then, does not bring the earth into an open space of the world, but drags the abstracted conceptualized world back down into the sensual and organically opening swarm-of-discovery of the earth.

'Are great shoals of sardines and flocks of geese in formation, empires of ants and aquatic sponges that behave together like a single organism, not familiar with each other, not comprehending to the fullest extent possible what their bodies do and what the body of the whole group does?'

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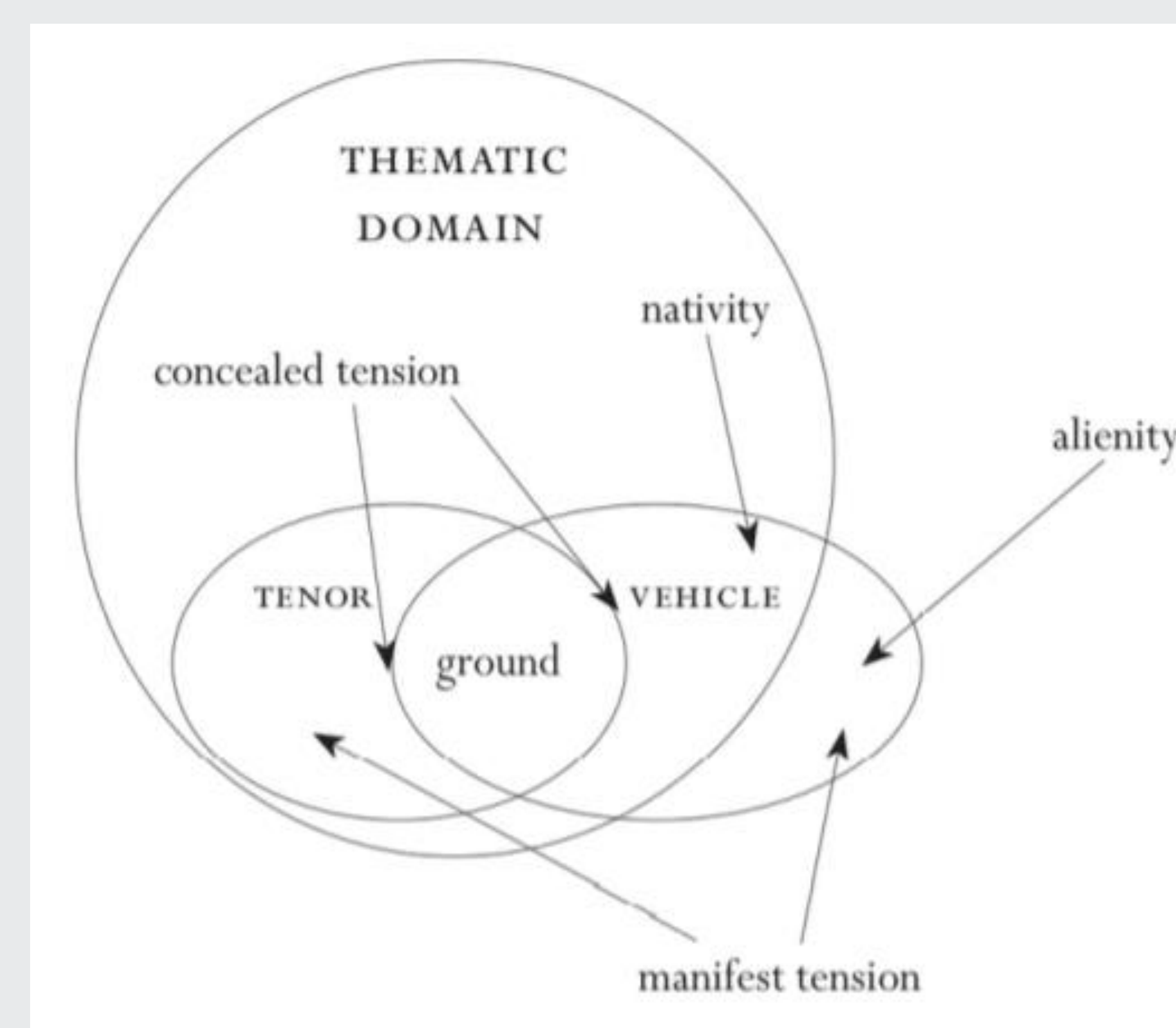
II. Naturalist knowing

Naturalists perhaps were already aware of the fault in Heidegger's argument; in his privileging of the world as entitled to truth, he had lost sight of the earth's plurality as the open home of actual being which is not without knowing. The open nature of the earth is a delicate but timeless intuition that cannot be other-thrown by mere rhetoric.

Poet Don Paterson's book on poetic language and function helped me reconsider what a knowing in plurality and familiarity might look like, where it is opposed to a knowledge in singularity and abstraction. For example, he believes the phonetic content of words 'self-corrects' them in the poetic context as of the earth before they are of language as an abstract and unfamiliar space we must enter unwittingly into as a child (as Lacan understood). Language and category are, to Paterson, unfamiliar spaces subject to a force of habit as John Dewey understood it; where they are first effective and useable tools for the individual life, they conceal the unindividualized space of the earth to which they once belonged.

Abstract singular concepts, to Paterson, operate symbolically, meaning concrete 'totems' are used not just to represent abstract 'animi', but to define them in the first place, as definition must first come from the earth where everything exists; the claim to substance even in abstract things is already from the earth. Metaphors, then, are codifications of resemblance which in nature are often derived from shared quality of experience. Thus metaphors are communications of knowing in familiarity, as they signal similarity while maintaining and celebrating the infinity of distinction which in the metaphor and nature appears as the tension which animates them with a joy-in-plurality of life.

Visualization from Don Paterson's *The Poem: Lyric, Sign, Metre of the metaphoric mode*



III. Herder's abyss and *Différance*

Herder, as a formal naturalist philosopher, was for me a validation that even thinking for the sake of thinking can come to the same conclusions that Paterson does about the fall into category and unconsidered language independent of a strictly poetic context. In other words the agreement between Herder and Paterson indicates for me a more fundamental quality to the poetic spirit that its involvement in lyric composition; poetry, as Paterson explicitly states, is a quality of the human experience at its most authentically grounded.

'The sensing human being feels his way into everything, feels everything from out of himself, and imprints it with his image.' - Herder

Herder also asserts that animals, plants and maybe even rocks can have a kind of knowing of each other and the earth, and quantifies this knowing by the commonality of responses to stimuli between all bodies, a notion which fits perfectly if fantastically with knowing as we might come to feel it in opposition to understanding.

This anti-subjective intuition combined with a Herder's celebration of the infinite unfathomable depths of biological diversity brought us to a confrontation with Jacques Derrida's proposal of *Différance* and its ultimate refusal of all category. Navigating a train of thought while trying to evade any use of category or generalization proves difficult, but the notion of things becoming as they are in direct and continuous relation to that which they are exactly not aligned well with the idea of opening-onto a world which only closes in the refusal of this delicate self-contradiction of the essence. This dismantling of true and un-true, or is and is not, as a definable paradigm comes full circle to the instability of Heidegger's conception of open truth in its being disclosed, and bought me to the conclusion that under the same force of cognitive habit in which we subsume things under concepts and thus lose sight of them, our insistent on reasoning in binary oppositions is another way in which the earth's content is disfigured beyond our familiarity with it. Among other things, I believe it is poetry that serves to contest and erode these binaries where they become too entrenched in unconsidered thinking.

IV. Shelley's vast frame

The entire paper is acutely aware of the flaws of language and rhetoric. As such, poetic device and form has been injected into as many elements of it as possible as a compensating factor for possible unfamiliarity with the language I used. The paper is divided into sections which follow the structure of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Alastor*, and many of the conclusion I come to our, I hope, subsequently 'grounded' by this poem, which is uniquely concerned with anthropomorphic abstract detachment from the earth, and the inevitable collapse of this separation at death.