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Vattimo's Latinization of Hermeneutics Why did Gadamer resist Postmodernism?

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We have many reasons to be grateful to Gianni Vattimo for his ongoing contribution to philosophy and public life. Undoubtedly, his most decisive philosophical impulses have come from the German philosophical tradition, and mostly from the Holy Trinity of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer, who was his teacher. Yet, he was not German, but a proud Italian, and, for some reason, more able than others to carry this tradition further. The German philosophical tradition has, to a large extent, dominated philosophy since Leibniz and Kant, but its dominion has ebbed considerably after Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer. One could attribute this to the catastrophic impact of the Second World War. As if their philosophical tradition had anything to do with it, German-speaking philosophers have shied away from their traditions, readily espousing, for instance, the Analytic tradition, that is perfectly well-suited to the American *psychè* and its technical mind-set, but that somehow rings a little bizarre when translated into German.

This is also true in the field of the history of German philosophy, that the Germans traditionally dominated, obviously enough. If a student asks his North American teachers where to go if he or she wants to pursue graduate studies in Germany on Kant or Hegel (the “Plato and Aristotle” of the Germans), one would be hard-pressed to give any recommendations. Indeed, most major specialists of Kant or Hegel will take their cue, for better or for worse, from the work of their American counterparts. The same could be said about figures like Husserl, Nietzsche, Heidegger and Gadamer: they have often found more productive interpreters outside Germany than in their home country. A major case in point is Jürgen Habermas, Germany's most towering intellectual figure after Gadamer and Heidegger. Despite the decisive influences he received from Schelling, Heidegger and the Frankfurter School, he too turned away from the allegedly “bad” philosophical tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Gadamer was the last major intellectual figure to be relatively untouched by this feeling of guilt toward his own

philosophical tradition, but it could be argued that this was the case because he received his major philosophical up-bringing before the calamity of national-socialism. So it came to be that this philosophical tradition was carried further by foreigners, and more often than not, by the French, as confirmed by the work of world-renowned thinkers such as Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Lévinas, Foucault, Derrida, Ricoeur and so many others.

But these authors were rather foreign to the hermeneutical tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer. It is in this tradition that Gianni Vattimo stands: he had the good fortune of working on Schleiermacher under the supervision of Gadamer in the glorious 60s, while at the same time preparing the very first translation of Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (which appeared in 1970), thus contributing to the work's international fame. In no other country is Gadamer as celebrated as a major philosopher as he is in Italy today. For this also, we owe gratitude to Gianni Vattimo.

More importantly, it is a thinking that Gianni Vattimo transformed and urbanized, I would say "latinized", since he translated in a new and mediterranean language. He was the first to defend the idea that hermeneutics was the *koinè* of our age and coined such famous expressions as "weak thought" and "optimistic nihilism"¹. A German philosopher who would have spoken of an "optimistic nihilism" (an oxymoron by any other standards than those set by Gianni Vattimo) or who would have attempted to draw democratic consequences out of Nietzsche and Heidegger would have been grilled on the spot. In his most recent texts, Vattimo indeed unearthed unsuspected parallels between Popper's critique of platonism and Heidegger's destruction of metaphysics, claiming that Popper's notion of an "open society" had affinities with Heidegger's notion of *Ereignis*. The politician that Gianni Vattimo has since become thus praised Heidegger as a "philosopher of democracy"² This time, it is perhaps by Popper that he would have been grilled, if not by Heidegger...

It was by no means his only momentous contribution to the redrawing of the map of contemporary philosophy, of which he is now one of the most preeminent figures. Since his very personal *Credo di credere*³, he also established a convincing

¹ G. Vattimo, « Optimistic Nihilism », in *Common Knowledge* 1 :3 (1992), 37-44, and his interview with Santiago Zabala in « Weak Thought and The Reduction of Violence », in *Common Knowledge* 8 : 3 (2002), 452-463.

² G. Vattimo, « Heidegger filosofo della democrazia », in *Filosofia e politica* 55/135 (2003), p. 55-61.

³ *Credere di credere*, Milano, Garzanti, 1996. The original title means something like « I believe I believe », but was rendered in English simply by *Belief*, translated by L. D'Isanto and D. Webb, Cambridge : Polity Press. 1998. Following Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann reminds us of the Lutheran origins of this idea in the famous essay « *Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste*

(and for some quite surprising) link between the stream of “nihilistic hermeneutics” and the Christian tradition or, to be more specific (since one needs to), with the Christian tradition of charity, humility and *kenosis*. In this too, he could rely on his latin roots. Guided in this regard by the ground-breaking work of René Girard, he believed that hermeneutical perspectivism – and the strong acknowledgment of human finitude it entails – could be reconciled with the Christian imperative of “tending the other cheek”, forgiveness and generosity. Both traditions, the hermeneutical one and the Christian one he heralds, relinquish strong validity claims in the name of the strength of weakness, as it were. The major impact of this insight was not only that it shed new light on the Christian tradition itself, one, lest we forget, that had been a major target of attack and disdain in the footsteps of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger. More importantly, it underscored that hermeneutical nihilism (inspite of its name) was not without ethical and even political resources. Thus his notion of an optimistic nihilism: instead of fighting religious wars in the name of strong claims (“I am right, you are wrong, so you must perish”), he argued, it is perhaps wiser, especially in the age of assured nuclear annihilation, to learn to get along in the name of peaceful coexistence that is tolerant of everything except violence. Hermeneutics or nihilism thus became an ethical option instead of the enemy of morals. Quite an achievement and a turn-around!

For many, these ethical ideas are now commonplace, as one could say with Richard Rorty⁴, but no one would have thought about distilling them from the hermeneutical tradition of Nietzsche and Heidegger and from the Christian worldview (which most would more readily associate with a form of authoritarianism). But it is a feat Gianni Vattimo accomplished.

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The only issue I would like to discuss here is whether hermeneutics, and thus philosophy itself, must be seen as a form of nihilism. If nihilism only means a tolerance for the view of others to the extent that they do not violently limit the liberty of others, one can agree with Gianni Vattimo. But if one understands under

theologische Bewegung » (« Liberal Theology and The More Recent Theological Movement »), that opens his essay collection *Glauben und Verstehen (Faith and Understanding)*, vol. I. 1933, 9th ed. Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 1993, p. 24 (my translation from the German) : « The new man is always the other-wordly (*der jenseitige*), whose identity with the man of this world can only be believed. This is why Barth can even renew Luther’s paradoxical sentence according to which we only *believe* that we believe. »

⁴ R. Rorty, Foreword to G. Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation : Ethics, Politics and Law*, translated by William McCuaig, New York : Columbia University Press, 2004.

“nihilism” the notion that there are no truths in the sense of *adaequatio*, one can challenge this view. The question must be raised not only because of the apparent self-contradiction of a negation of truth that itself lays claim to truth (a point that has repeatedly been made). I raise it because Gianni Vattimo sees this forsaking of the notion of *adaequatio* as the only plausible consequence of Gadamer’s thesis according to which “Being that can be understood is language”, which is for him another way of saying that human understanding cannot relate to the things themselves, but only to the way we talk about them. And the way one talks about them is always framed by a historical perspective. Vattimo often faults Gadamer for not acknowledging fully the consequences of his own thought, i.e. the nihilistic consequences of his hermeneutic ontology.

Yet one must ask: Why is it that Gadamer failed to proclaim a nihilistic hermeneutics? In other words, why did Gadamer resist the postmodernism of some of his followers? To be sure, there are many relativism-friendly pronouncements in his work, e.g.: there is no understanding without prejudices, history does not belong to us, we belong to it, consciousness is carried by a *Wirkungsgeschichte*, understanding is linguistic in nature, etc. *Truth and method can* indeed be read as a manifest of nihilism. But the fact is that Gadamer recoiled from the nihilistic consequences of the postmodernists⁵. One has to ask why and whether he was right in doing so.

In order to answer this question, it is important to bear in mind that an author such as Nietzsche played a far different role for Gadamer than he did for Vattimo. There is no chapter, indeed no real place for Nietzsche in the scope of *Truth and Method*. This is to a certain extent comprehensible for a hermeneutics that stands in the tradition of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and even Heidegger, for whom the primary task of hermeneutics is the uncovering of truth, whereas Nietzsche’s aim is arguably to undermine it (“truth as an illusion”). In his book, Gadamer jumped from Schleiermacher and Dilthey to Husserl and Heidegger, as if Nietzsche didn’t exist. This was an understandable omission insofar as the purpose of Gadamer’s hermeneutics was to justify (*rechtfertigen, auf ihre Legitimation hin befragen*, etc.) a truth claim in the realm of the humanities and in the experience of art and language.

⁵ In the first part of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer resisted the « hermeneutical relativism » of Paul Valéry according to which the meaning of his verses is the one they have for the reader (« mes vers ont le sens qu’ont leur prête »). This Gadamer pointedly dismissed as an « untenable nihilism » (*Das scheint mir ein unhaltbarer hermeneutischer Nihilismus, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. I, Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 1986, 100). On Gadamer’s distance toward Nietzsche, see my piece on « Hans-Georg Gadamer and the French-speaking world », in my collection *Von Heidegger zu Gadamer*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003, 136-143.

But this exclusion appeared less defensible for astute interpreters like Gianni Vattimo, for whom Nietzsche marked the decisive turning point of hermeneutics. For him, the universality of hermeneutics could only be understood in light of the Nietzsche who declared that there are no facts, only interpretations (*The Will to Power*, n° 481), or of the Heidegger who claimed that our understanding was framed by anticipations and the history of Being. In this regard, it can be argued that Vattimo was even more Heideggerian than Gadamer himself. The genius of Vattimo, who was followed by many others, was to associate this Nietzschean-Heideggerian outlook with Gadamer's seeming critique of scientific objectivity, his stress on the prejudices of interpretation, and his insistence on the linguistic nature of understanding. Stressing these elements, hermeneutics, they believed, jettisoned the idea of an objective truth. There is no such thing given the interpretative and linguistic nature of our experience. This drove Gianni Vattimo to "nihilistic" consequences and Richard Rorty to a renewed form of pragmatism: some interpretations are more useful or amenable than others, but none can *per se* be claimed to be "closer" to the Truth. In the name of tolerance and mutual understanding, one has to accept the plurality of interpretations. It is only the notion that there is only one valid one that is harmful.

There are at least two ways of explaining why Gadamer resisted nihilistic hermeneutics. I pointedly say « resisted » and not « rejected ». A conciliatory thinker to the core, Gadamer never really rejected any theory out of hand. On occasion, he even welcomed hermeneutic relativism as a welcome antidote against too positivistic conceptions of understanding. Yet, in the face of radical relativists, he stressed that it was a « *Sache* », a truth, that one seeks to comprehend. The first way is to explain why he took such a distance towards Nietzsche, and the second lies in the manner his most famous thesis according to which « Being that can be understood is language » must be heard, an issue on which Gianni Vattimo has written extensively.

1. *The distance toward Nietzsche and the meaning of interpretation for Gadamer : there are only facts « through » interpretation*

« There are no facts, only interpretations » is a thesis with which Gadamer could have sympathized to a certain degree, but with a specific emphasis, that is often overlooked. The postmodernists often tend to use this sentence of Nietzsche to thwart or « weaken » the truth-claim of interpretation : every interpretation is only *one* way of seeing the world, there are and should be others. While recognizing the virtues of pluralism, this is perhaps not the point on which Gadamer would insist. I believe he would rather reformulate Nietzsche's famous

dictum by saying : « There are only facts *through* interpretation(s) ». For him, this means that there are no facts without a certain language that expresses them. But he is adamant about the fact that it is the *Sache*, the thing itself (or the « facts »), that comes to light through this linguistic unfolding. His model of interpretation is taken from the performative arts and the role *interpretation* plays in them. In a dance, a play, an opera, and all the performing arts (that we call in French les « arts d'interprétation »), to interpret does not mean to bestow a meaning to something from an outside perspective, it is to play out the work itself, since the work requires such a playing out : music that isn't played isn't music. The very important point here is that interpretation is not a meaning-giving activity that is applied to an otherwise meaningless reality, it is the enacting of a meaning that strives to be expressed. The rendering can be more or less adequate, but it is obviously binded by what has to be transmitted.

Gadamer's conviction is clearly that there is no art without interpretation, but this interpretation is less the meaning that is bestowed upon a work from the observer who sees things differently than another bystander, than the interpretation that pro-ductively brings forth the meaning of what is presented and that even brings forth, Gadamer will insist, its very essence. That is the case, for example, with a painting of a king or an event (say, a cruxifixion). It is always an interpretation by the artist, one could say. But for Gadamer, the artist and his intention are not really important in this process : the work of art is only successful and « true » if it brings forth the essence or true reality of what is presented. To be sure, this is impossible without the virtuosity of the painter, sculptor, writer or musician, but it is a secondary matter for the « truth event » that Gadamer heralds in the art experience. In his famous painting of « The 2nd of May » where Goya depicts helpless peasants raising their arms in the air while fired upon by the French soldiers, what is brought to the fore is the essence of the occupation of Spain by Napoleon's army, and of any human occupation for that manner. It is not an interpretation in a subjectivistic sense. The interpretation brings out the reality that was and a truth that teaches us something

And what strikes Gadamer here is that this truth transcends in a way its historical context. In his later works, he pointedly spoke here of the « transcendence of art »⁶. Surely, an artist is rooted in a context and a tradition, without which his creation would be impossible, but he is only a great artist to the extent that his work raises above this historicity and brings about a truth of lasting value. What is this truth, asks Gadamer? To the postmodernists who insist on the relativity of interpretations, Gadamer answers : but what about the superior truth of

⁶ It is the title of an entire section (*Zur Transzendenz der Kunst*), in his last book, *Hermeneutische Entwürfe*, Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2000, 145-191.

an art work that transcends its time? what about the strident eloquence of a poem or the binding rigor of a philosophical thought? This, he holds, is not a truth that can be ascertained by method, nor is it a truth that can be relativized by pointing out its contextual nature.

In other words, to insist on the « merely subjective » nature of interpretation or its « relativity » is, for Gadamer, to miss what interpretation is all about. It is always subsidiary to the work and the *Sache* that it interprets, even if it only comes out *through interpretation*. Gadamer likes to say that the best interpretation is the one that is not noticed as such, that disappears in the work itself, so that its *Sache* and truth matter comes to the fore. This is also true of a good translation : the better the translation (that is obviously an interpretation), the less one has the feeling of reading a translated text.

Thus, for Gadamer, Nietzsche's assertion according to which (in slight modification) « there are no truths, only interpretations » is itself somewhat one-sided. There are only truths *through* interpretation, to be sure, but there are no interpretations without truth to bring out. An interpretation that is not oriented toward truth is but a vain exercise, that cannot be distinguished from another.

According to Gadamer, the Nietzschean and postmodernist destruction of truth secretly rests on the *nominalism* of modernity, according to which there is no meaning in the « world itself », that is nothing but senseless matter. In this perspective, sense only comes out through the act of the understanding subject, who « injects » meaning in the world « out there ». The often overlooked subtlety of Gadamer's distinction of « truth *and* method » lies in the suggestion that the more or less pronounced relativism of postmodernism is the contemporary form of nominalism, which corresponds to the prevailing scientific view of the world : Being *per se* has nothing to say, meaning only comes about through our interpretations and language. In this predicament, the postmodernists conclude, it is pointless to ascertain if an interpretation is closer to the Truth or to Being given that there is no language-free access to reality. In this perspective (!), one can never overcome the realm of historical and linguistic interpretations. Whence the « nihilistic » consequences of modernity's insistence on subjectivity (or human language) as the only origin of meaning : what is of value is that which is posited for subjectivity, but there is no other value above and beyond subjectivity itself.

Thus, for Gadamer, Nietzschean postmodernism would not be the consequence of hermeneutics, but only of an understanding of Being according to which everything depends on the view of subjectivity (or the outlook on things). According to Heidegger, this was the result of the metaphysical understanding of Being as *eidos* or *idea*, that silently subjected it to a human perspective (Gadamer disagreed here with Heidegger's reading of Plato, but mostly agreed with his interpretation of modernity). For Heidegger, and Gadamer, Nietzsche was the last

metaphysician in that he maintained this equation between Being and what a perspective makes of it. He was only more consequential than earlier metaphysics by proclaiming a universal perspectivism and by equating it with a cultural nihilism.

In other words, for Gadamer, hermeneutic relativism is a closet cartesianism (in spite of what it claims, of course!) : it is only because there is no cartesian truth to be had, i.e. a truth that rests on a *fundamentum inconcussum*, that one can claim that all is relative. Compared to such a « strong truth », our modest attempts at understanding can only appear as mere perspectives, that have no legitimacy outside themselves. For Gadamer, it is Nietzsche's tragic *non sequitur* to derive from this a nihilism, i.e. the idea that there is no truth in the sense of *adaequatio*. This only holds, Gadamer claims, if one presupposes the cartesian-methodical notion of truth.

Hence Gadamer's distance from Nietzsche's professed nihilism, according to which there are no binding truths or values anymore. This also only holds, he argues, if one expects an absolute truth or value in the quasi-mathematical sense of Descartes. Only the gods have such certainties, he reminds us, after Plato. But that does not mean that we are deprived of any foundation and any truth. In his eyes, it is intellectual arrogance⁷ to equate the absence of a truth that would satisfy the cartesian's thirst for ultimate foundations with the absence of truth and of an experience of Being. Truly, Being can only be understood through language, but it is then a Being that is understood, not a perspective. We can now turn to the meaning of Gadamer's well-known thesis, in some respects the epitome of his philosophy :

⁷ See Gadamer's letter of 1982 to Richard J. Bernstein, published in R. J. BERNSTEIN, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism : Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1988, 263 : « Don't we all succumb to a horrifying intellectual arrogance when we equate Nietzsche's anticipation and the ideological confusion of the present with the life that is really lived and with its solidarities. In this regard, my distance from Heidegger is fundamental » (*Verfallen wir nicht alle einem schrecklichen intellektuellen Hochmut, wenn wir die Antizipationen Nietzsches und die ideologische Verwirrung der Gegenwart mit dem wirklich gelebten Leben und seinen Solidaritäten gleichsetzen? Hier ist in der Tat meine Abweichung von Heidegger fundamental.*) See Gadamer's essay of 1983 under the eloquent title « Nietzsche – the Antipode : The Drama of Zarathustra », in his *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. IV, p. 448-462.

2. *Being that can be understood is language : Gadamer's emphasis on Being*

Gianni Vattimo brilliantly seized upon this declaration to defend his nihilistic or historicist appropriation of Gadamer⁸. For him, Gadamer thesis would amount to say that every understanding, every access to Being depends on our language, like it depends on its time and history. Gadamer is thus seen as the advocate of a radical historicism. To be sure, he had been criticized for that reason often before. Betti and Habermas, to name only two of his most important critics, had already voiced their fears toward what they perceived as Gadamer's « relativism ». For his part, Gianni Vattimo faults Gadamer for not being historicist enough, i.e. for not acknowledging the nihilistic consequences of his thought, expressed in the sentence « Being that can be understood is language ». But one must ask : is the meaning of this thesis really nihilistic?

In the impressive interpretation he gave of Gadamer's thought at a conference honoring his 100th anniversary in February 2000, Gianni Vattimo indeed interpreted Gadamer's thesis as a form of linguistic relativism, and was followed in this regard by Richard Rorty, who spoke on the very same occasion⁹. He did so with convincing arguments, which correspond to the air of the time, as the striking agreement with Rorty's pragmatism only underscored. To say that there is no access to Being except through language *can* indeed be read as a linguistic relativism, a thesis Gadamer seems to defend when he claims that language determines not only the process (*Vollzug*), but also the object (*Gegenstand*) of understanding.

But it is not the only way one can understand Gadamer's famous dictum. In his reading, Vattimo puts the emphasis on language, which ends up absorbing Being in what can be called a linguistic ontology. Its major tenet is that one cannot talk about Being itself, but only of an « understood Being », that is, as it were, created, if not « invented » by language.

But what if, in Gadamer's sentence, one puts the emphasis on Being itself? Asked differently : what if it would be Being itself that would unravel *its* understandability in or through language? Needless to say, this sounds rather odd to our nominalistic ears. Nevertheless, it is a thought Gadamer defends in the last pages of *Truth and method*, when one reads him carefully. It is a difficult section, to be sure, that deals with the medieval doctrine of transcendentals, but that gives

⁸ See G. Vattimo, « Histoire d'une virgule. Gadamer et le sens de l'être », in *Revue internationale de philosophie* 54 (2000), 499-513.

⁹ See G. Vattimo, « *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache* ». *Hommage an Hans-Georg Gadamer*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2001, 50-60, and R. Rorty, « *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache* » in the same volume, 30-49.

another density to the thesis according to which « Being that can be understood is language ».

The point is that language, for Gadamer, is not only the language of our understanding or « our » language, but the language of the things. Gadamer not only argues in favor of a fusion of horizons between understanding and language, but also for a perhaps more discrete, but no less important fusion between language and Being itself. There is such a thing, as strange as it may sound, as a language of Being, or a « language of the things », what he often calls the « *Sprache der Dinge* »¹⁰. This could seem to be a simple metaphor or *façon de parler*.

Yes and no. Yes, because we are the ones who speak in such and such a way. But we speak in such a way because there is a bond between Being and language. And it is in order to understand this enigmatic tie that Gadamer alludes, surprisingly enough, to the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals in the ultimate section of *Truth and Method*, where one finds the discussion of the much quoted dictum, « *Sein, das verstanden werden kann, ist Sprache* ». And Gadamer does so because this doctrine succeeded in understanding a link between Being and language that is not one of opposition (on this side Being, on the other language), but one of kinship or direct filiation.

What fascinates Gadamer is the fact that the light (*lumen*) in which language stands, and that it spreads, is something like the light of Being itself. One can see what he means when one speaks of the « essence » of something. – By the way, Gadamer appeals very often in his work to this notion of essence, and it is never to destroy this notion, quite on the contrary. An art work, for instance, brings out the essence of someone or something, he always says, that which remains. – If I say, to take the most classical of examples, that the essence of man lies in the fact that he is a « rational animal », it is obvious enough, at first sight, that one is dealing with a view of understanding, of language or of our mind. Yet, what is envisioned by the notion of essence, is always more than that. It is Being itself. In the case in point, it is the human reality, as it is encountered, that I wish to understand in its essence. It is also this human reality that allows me to say, for instance, that the notion of a « rational animal » is perhaps not the best, the most felicitous, or adequate to the human essence. There are other components that make up its essence : it is also a being who can laugh, become crazy, write papers, etc. But, one has to ask, what is it that allows us to say that the essence of a thing is this or that? Gadamer answers : the things themselves and their language.

¹⁰ See, for example, his work of 1960, contemporary of *Truth and Method*, « The Nature of Things and the Language of Things », in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated by David E. Linge, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London : University of California Press, 1976, 69-81 (« Die Natur der Sache und die Sprache der Dinge », *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 2, 66-75).

Allow me to invoke one last example of this language of things, based on more recent insights. It is well-known that research in genetics has drawn out what is called the « humane genome » of humankind, that draws out its genetic code. It is obvious that we are dealing here with a scientific explanation, that is thus a falsifiable view of human intelligence about our genes. Nevertheless, we are not only dealing with an invention of our intelligence or our language. It is the code of the genes themselves, of the things themselves, that the scientist aims to sort out, not the code of our language. I am not interested here in the genetic theory for its own sake. My only point is that science, as does every human understanding, aims to discover a language that is already the language of the things themselves, the one that enables us to revise our constructions and linguistic framings of this language. There is thus a language of the things themselves, of Being, that we hope to bring out when we try to understand and open our ears.

This echoes what was said earlier about interpretation in the world of art. An interpretation of a play, an opera, a piece of music or a dance is not merely a subjective enactment, with no bearing on Being, it is an enactment that is called for by the work of art itself. The presentation (*Darstellung*) is not foreign to the work, or to Being, but its true unfoldment.

It is in the very same spirit that Gadamer, in his famous discussion of the hermeneutical circle, in the second section of *Truth and Method*, insisted far less on the insuperable determination of our understanding by prejudices than on the constant process of revision of our prejudgements when confronted with the thing itself (*Sache*) and what it has to say¹¹. In more ways than one, Gadamer keeps insisting that our prejudices have to avail themselves, to be confirmed and verified by the things themselves. These passages were never to the liking of the more postmodern readers of Gadamer, who thought that their mentor contradicted himself : how on Earth could one speak of the « things themselves » in a panhermeneutical philosophy that otherwise appears to defend a universal perspectivism according to which it is non-sensical to speak of the things themselves?

They thus felt obliged to radicalize Gadamer's hermeneutics, to rid it of its platonic or essentialist elements, thus claiming to be more coherent than Gadamer in espousing a nihilistic ontology. Yet, Gadamer resisted this consequence, because

¹¹ See the decisive passage in *Truth and Method*, WM, GW I, 271 : « Wer zu verstehen sucht, ist der Beirung durch Vor-Meinungen ausgesetzt, die sich *nicht an den Sachen selbst bewähren*. Die Ausarbeitung *der rechten, sachangemesseneren* Entwürfe, die als Entwürfe Vorwegnahmen sind, die sich '*an den Sachen*' erst bestätigen sollen, ist die ständige Aufgabe des Verstehens. » It is not only obvious to me that Gadamer maintains here the notion of truth as *adaequatio*, but that his notion of a fusion of horizons can be read as a form of *adequatio rei et intellectus*, as I hope to show in another context.

the things themselves resisted this appropriation. It is not true that Being, and its language, can be reduced to our language. If this were the case, one could not explain why one is able to rectify a too one-sided view of Being. It is Being itself that is understood in language.

Now, I don't expect Gianni Vattimo to agree with me. But if he disagrees, it is only because he doesn't believe that my interpretation corresponds to what Gadamer *has to say*. There is thus, for him, a « language of Gadamer » that is not reducible to my interpretation, or that I misconstrue, and to which his reading corresponds better. The same holds for our interpretation of the world : he would certainly claim that his reading of reality (of language, of Being, etc.) is more accurate than mine. He thereby only confirms that there is a « language of things » that our interpretations can touch, or miss, to varying degrees.

The Gadamer who insisted on the language of Being was not very well received by his postmodern inheritors. Yet it is also part of his legacy. To be sure, Gianni Vattimo stressed the perspectival and nihilist elements of Gadamer's hermeneutics. But he was right in acknowledging that it was a hermeneutic *ontology* that Gadamer was after. For this also, one has to be grateful, beyond the differences, for his latinization of hermeneutics.