

ATTENTIVENESS AS AN ONTOLOGICAL PRACTICE IN MAMARDASHVILI AND HEIDEGGER

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Abstract: Attention plays central role in Heidegger's middle-late thought where it characterizes thinking of Being and is thus interpreted in a peculiar ontological way irreducible neither to the ontic models of cognitive sciences nor to its transcendental role in classic phenomenology. In *The Event* Heidegger associates attention with «inceptual thinking,» «essential thinking,» and «Beyng-historical thinking.» It is clear from this and later works that Heidegger means attention in a special ontological sense as an attention to Beyng. However, nowhere in Heidegger can we find a sufficient explanation of what such attention means and how is it different from the regular attention to beings. In the article I attempt to fill the phenomenological gap in Heidegger's thinking by using Mamardashvili's phenomenology in general, and his reading of Proust in particular. As I show, Mamardashvili succeeds in explicating a peculiar kind of ontological attentiveness constituting the core of human transformation but not leaning on human subjective will. In the context of the need for such a transformation, our usual attention is shown to be only pseudo-volitional and incapable of attending to the meaning of what *is*. I explicate how one's path towards trans-subjective historical freedom is rooted in a praxis of attentiveness. Finally, I integrate Mamardashvili's and Heidegger's accounts to show the possibility of a *phenomenologically instructive* reading of Heidegger's idea of an attention to Beyng.

Keywords: Attention to Beyng, attentiveness, Mamardashvili, Proust, Heidegger.

1. Introduction

Attention plays central role in Heidegger's middle-late thought where it characterizes thinking of Being and is thus interpreted in a peculiar ontological way irreducible neither to the ontic models of cognitive sciences nor to its transcendental role in classic phenomenology. Lawrence Berger remarkably presents the importance of attention in Heidegger and argues that staying with the movement of attention is the way to Being.¹ Heidegger does indeed write in *The Event* that the way in which Beyng-historical thinking hears the Word in the words of language is dependent on our *attention*

¹ Lawrence BERGER, *Attention as the Way to Being*, "Gatherings. The Heidegger Circle Annual", 10, 2020, pp. 111-15

(*Aufmerksamkeit*) or inattention (*Unachtsamkeit*) to Beyng.² Moreover, attention (*Aufmerksamkeit*) is nothing less than the inceptual thinking in the other beginning;³ it is a withstanding/in-dwelling in attentiveness and the name for the essential thinking.⁴ Though Heidegger is known for using notions traditionally belonging to the human psyche in order to speak about Beyng, he does not intend to anthropologize Beyng but, on the contrary, to de-anthropologize humanity.⁵ Importantly, the novel sense of a term should not be separated entirely from its original use but transformed in a way that illuminates the Beyng-historical origin of its meaning. In case of “attention” it is clear that Heidegger does speak about something that humans “do,” hence we have a unique hint of the role of humanity in the history of Beyng.

However, when we read Heidegger regarding attention, many questions come up. For example, if I am to be attentive not just to beings but to Beyng, it is not very clear what is it that I must be attentive to. In *Country Path Conversations* we hear about an attentiveness to that in which one belongs “without being absorbed in it.” This sounds like a contrast between one’s attentiveness to Beyng and one’s clinging to beings. Still, it is not clear what exactly happens when we are not absorbed in entities and how is it different from what happens when we do. Moreover, these ideas remain purely speculative without being anchored in concrete phenomenology. Yet, Heidegger does not strive to connect his grandiose ideas of human transformation as a participation in Beyng to everyday experience and concrete phenomenology. Indeed, it is quite unclear what happens to beings in such transformation: how do beings become enowned in the event and sacrificed to Beyng,⁶ i.e., become “eventful”? Furthermore, how can attention, in its clearly active and voluntarily essence, be integrated in Heidegger’s idea of Beyng as that which, after all, “makes all the calls.” If we do not want to remain within the sphere of speculation and want to relate Heidegger’s ideas to our own lives and experiences – and I can’t see any other good reason to do philosophy – we must fill the phenomenological gap in Heidegger’s thinking. That is to say, we need to explicate a concrete *praxis* of attentiveness in which anyone could in principle engage, and of which we have a *phenomenological* account consistent with Heidegger’s thinking.

² Martin HEIDEGGER, *Das Ereignis (GA71)*, Verlag Vittorio Klostermann, 2009, p. 173.

³ *Ivi*, p. 289.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ For example, in *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)* Heidegger stresses that ‘decision’ is a word that we first understand as something human but – since human existence itself has to be thought out of Beyng – decision is something that originally belongs to Beyng while human beings can be said at most to participate in it. See Martin HEIDEGGER, *Contributions to Philosophy (of the Event)*, translated by Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2012, p. 67.

⁶ HEIDEGGER, *Contributions*, p. 181.

In what follow I attempt to fill the phenomenological gap in Heidegger's thought by turning to Mamardashvili's lectures on Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. As I shall show, Mamardashvili's interpretation of Proust offers a concrete account of a *path of attentiveness* as a path of an *ontological effort* which clarifies how a human ability to be fully present might be achieved without fully leaning on one's personal will; that is, how a transformation of one's existence, in which one is gathered anew and first finds oneself, is offered by Being and occurs independently of one's conscious intention. I believe that Proust's insights into the structure of human experience and its embeddedness in the worldly phenomena transgress the subject-object distinction and thus offers a genuine insight into the way phenomena serve as a vehicle of the truth of Being in a way that addresses human beings and claims us, demanding that we risk ourselves and learn to renounce our psychological subjectivity in favor of an explicit engagement in the history of Being. We shall see that, without walking the path of an ontological effort (i.e., of the praxis of attentiveness), what we call "attention" is a largely illusory ability, far from being able to gather freely that which offers itself for our look in the surrounding world. Thus, I suggest that despite different terminology, Mamardashvili offers precisely what is missing in Heidegger – a concrete phenomenology of transformation from the state of being-away to being-there (or being-present).⁷ In this light, what I call here "the praxis of attentiveness" should be understood as a *microstructure* of human experience in its relation/belonginess to Being, showing how experience can be *ontological* and exemplifying how attentiveness affords the sheltering of truth in beings.

2. Phenomenon as an event

Somewhere in the middle of the lecture course on Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, we hear Mamardashvili says the following:

It seems to me that I chose an object by an act of attention - no, it was the world that turned several times and placed an object in front of me. Therefore, Proust is very suspicious of all volitional, controlled psychological operations, which are usually called memory, attention, choice, and so on.⁸

⁷ While Heidegger stresses that mindfulness (*Besinnung*) consists of both mindfulness of oneself (HEIDEGGER, *Contributions*, p. 36) and mindfulness of history (*Ibid.*), he mostly focuses on the latter, leaving the former kind of mindfulness unexplained. Mamardashvili, on the other hand, illuminates what mindfulness on oneself is while keeping its historical dimension in view.

⁸ Мераб МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, М.: Фонд Мераба МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, Moscow 2014, p. 350. Quotations from this work are translated from Russian by the Author.

And further:

[Because] it seems to us that we have performed a spiritual operation, but in reality the world has turned, and our attention was hooked on the delivered object.⁹

To understand Proust's suspicion of volitional acts in general and of attention in particular we must first turn to the way Mamardashvili interprets Proust's central notion of "impression" and models his phenomenology on it. «Proust has solved the phenomenological problem better and deeper than the system of phenomenology created by Husserl,» says Mamardashvili and explains that Husserl's main mistake was that he thought that one can voluntarily observe a phenomenon as if it is always lying there available for one's inspection. That is, classic phenomenology operates with a representational notion of a phenomenon and confuses phenomena with the contents of experience which can, for example, be attended to and brought to memory whenever we want.¹⁰ For Mamardashvili, the phenomenon is not given in the familiar every-moment experience but appears only rarely as an "external" stimulus to transform one's mode of Being. He interprets Proust's "impression" as a paradigmatic case of a phenomenon, defined as that which *cannot* be chosen and described but can *be* as a phenomenon only when our life and destiny are implicated in it.¹¹ The phenomenon appears always unexpected, and it claims me, demanding to decipher it at this moment; in the next moment it is already gone, and whether I succeeded to decipher it and let it affect me has important ontological consequences.

This model, in which the phenomenon "does not wait for me," is essentially different from Husserl's account in which we can intentionally bring the phenomenon forth through an act of attention,¹² but is also much more radical than Heidegger's idea in *Being and Time* that a phenomenon is «that which shows itself in itself.»¹³ That is, not only the phenomenon shows itself, but it also "chooses" when and how to show itself –

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ The distinction between objects and phenomena was also made by Heidegger as early as in the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* lectures when he argued that «the systematization of things also is inappropriate for phenomena.» (Martin HEIDEGGER, *Phenomenology of Religious Life*, translated by Matthias Fritsch and Jennifer Anna Gosetti-Ferencei, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 25). In later Heidegger we also hear that «nothing which would be permanent can be a being.», HEIDEGGER, *Das Ereignis*, p. 66.

¹¹ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 274.

¹² Edmund HUSSERL, *Analyses Concerning Passive and Active Synthesis: Lectures on Transcendental Logic*, translated by A. Steinbock, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht 2001, p. 49.

¹³ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford 1962, p. 51.

we cannot *make* it show itself, but, at most, create certain conditions favorable for its appearance (what I discuss further as “the praxis of attentiveness”).

A phenomenon comes to me, I do not choose when, and it disappears in the next moment. What is crucial is that it is external to the causal determinism of things in the world; it is precisely what differs from all contents of experience; it is an *event*. Crucially, an attempt to understand, i.e., to decipher this event – not intellectually but through self-risk – is also an event, and, as Mamardashvili stresses, whether an experience will be extracted and how one’s destiny will be formed depend on the happening of this event.¹⁴

To point out the phenomenon as an event we are required to do a more radical phenomenological reduction than the one performed by Husserl. According to Mamardashvili, Husserl’s reduction only seemingly suspends all natural presuppositions. In fact, it retains the main one – the content of experience is not reduced but rather plays a role of a *causal* ground underlying the way I experience something. For example, it is the closet in the hotel room that *makes* me feel uncanny. The content of experience here is the closet, but the impression, the truly experienced phenomenon, is the feeling of uncanniness which, in itself, has no relation to the closet.¹⁵ We are just so used to think psychologically (and psychophysically) about experience that we fail to bracket the relation between something (a phenomenon) and its content (e.g., a closet). It is this difference between a phenomenon and its content, that Mamardashvili calls a «phenomenological difference.»¹⁶ The strange experience which befalls me in the presence of a closet offers me a momentary opportunity to reveal something; it is a possibility to discover some underlying lawfulness which determines the topology of my destiny, i.e., of the hidden ways in which my self-identity and self-understanding are related to and separated from the abyssal trans-subjective origin of being human.¹⁷ The phenomenon “tries” to wake me up from a deep slumber consisting of familiar world-relations and sustained by confidence in my own self-identity. It is a momentary possibility for allowing the ontological transformation to occur. In Proust’s novel, Marcel is struck by an experience of trees waving hands to him as if asking him to save them, to free their souls. When the moment is gone and

¹⁴ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 225.

¹⁵ Husserl of course reduces the “real physical” closet and leaves only a closet as an intentional object of experience. Mamardashvili’s point, however, is that even such an ideal content is not the experienced phenomenon, not what Proust calls an «impression.» To think that a unique way in which uncanniness has momentarily broke into my life and caused a gap in its familiar flow is *caused* by something given in an experience (e.g., a closet) is already to assume too much.

¹⁶ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 274.

¹⁷ «Impression is the rustling of the fabric of the actual structure of life» (*ivi*, p. 171).

Marcel fails to decipher what just happened, he feels as if he died to himself or did not recognize a god.¹⁸ As Mamardashvili explains,

Proust's impression is always a special category; this is not as: here I see a table and I have some impression of it; no, this is a special category, let's say, of shocks to our sensitivity, which have the property of bringing our sensitivity into some unstable confrontation, which we must resolve at the cost (or risk) of our own life or fate. And an impression is always something aligned with that point or place into which nothing enters and from which nothing leaves. The impression seems to hang like a star. Double star: one star is a place, and its twin, or the second half, is an impression. In which direction you go in this place - in that direction one or another world will be formed, radically different from the others.

All this requires further explanation in terms of Mamardashvili's view on human condition and its relation to the praxis of attentiveness. That is, to understand Proust's suspicion of volitional acts we need to explicate the relation between Mamardashvili's interpretation of phenomena (Proust's "impression") and human ontological condition. As we shall see, the needed transformation cannot be understood as volitionally achieved by the subject but happens in that «place» – mentioned in the cited passage – «into which nothing enters and from which nothing leaves.» That is, the "deciphering" of a phenomenon is not one of the subject's psychological activities but belongs to a sphere of existence beyond the subject-object polarity (and is thus "anti-psychological"). In the next section I show how this practice changes the ontological conditions of what we can attend to by allowing a *maturation* of a state of being-present.

3. Human condition and the praxis of attentiveness

Mamardashvili defines human condition as a «stubborn blindness.»¹⁹ This blindness has nothing to do with our intellectual, cognitive, or any other capacities. This is not a psychological or epistemological condition, but an ontological one. In this condition, one can be faced with truth "under one's own nose" and be unable to see it. To understand what Mamardashvili means, we may ask – what does a person see when she looks around? That is, what one really experiences beyond what can be technically described in terms of, say, one's physical encounter with an environment, spatial location, movement etc.? In other words, what one *understands* in a situation? Or, more importantly, what – amongst all the possibilities – originally constitutes one's situation and what stays outside of it? This last question can already be related to the subject of

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p.174.

¹⁹ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 27.

attentiveness. Namely, *what comes to one's attention?* And why *this* can come to one's attention while something else *cannot*?

I shall give an example from Proust's novel and integrate Mamardashvili's interpretation into it. Saint-Loup is unable to understand the origin of his love for Rachel, i.e., what he really feels and whether this feeling can be attributed to Rachel's qualities. So, he is enslaved by his feeling even though the facts regarding Rachel (who is a prostitute in the novel) are just in front of his eyes. In order to see, Saint-Loup would have to occupy a different position, one from which he could gather the situation for the first time in a way that each of the gathered elements first appears as what it is and in a way that is relevant for a realization of the true source of his love.²⁰ Mamardashvili argues that such a change of position is not a matter of more knowledge about Rachel – such “knowledge” would simply make no sense for Saint-Loup but perhaps only insult him and make him “see even clearer” the need to fight anyone who does not understand the spiritual qualities of his beloved. The entire psychological mechanism – which Mamardashvili exposes as the cause of Saint-Loup (and our own) blindness – is in perfect harmony with our abilities of reasoning and logic. It is not that our reasoning is incapable but that it always only functions upon a particular interpretive and selective constitution of the situation, one which is available from our *ontological* perspective. What comes to one's attention is qualitatively limited, and it determines the sphere of things, meanings, and relations to which one can “voluntarily” choose to attend. One can, so to say, do whatever one wants and pay attention to whatever one wishes, but the “list” of things and meanings available for such volitional operations is very limited and – more importantly - significantly distorted. One can thus “run free” within the limits of one's personal prison.

Mamardashvili explains that each “personal prison” is shaped and sustained in terms of one's psychological self-identity which forms during one's life *without us being-present in the process*, i.e., without our attention to the deep psychological reactions and adaptations which constantly re-shape our vision of reality yet always in a way that sustains the core of the already shaped identity. Our psychological identity thus governs which element may enter a situation and how to interpret it. In this light, what may *threaten* our self-identity is excluded and cannot come to our attention no matter how much we think about what happens to us. Mamardashvili argues that identity, when it is achieved, is unbreakable - we find in external objects the incorporation of what constitutes our

²⁰ Mamardashvili emphasizes Proust's point that there *in principle* can be no quality in the loved one which could explain my love. «Any beloved woman, as an object of love, is replaceable at least by a thousand of other women» (*ivi*, p. 38). That is, the fact that one loves this and not another woman (or man) says more about the lover than about the beloved.

identity. Crucially, facts *cannot* reach inside this sphere since it was not created by facts. Mamardashvili calls it the «point of singularity of individual experience,» within which, for example, Saint-Loup does not merely live but also has fulfilled himself in his human dignity, his high ideals, became “self-identified.” All this, says Mamardashvili, cannot be taken apart.²¹

Though it may seem like an unavoidable *psychological* condition, it has its roots in deeper *ontological-temporal* situation of human beings. Namely, what we are used to think as psychological automatisms on all levels of existence, e.g., emotional, motoric, and mental habits, are expressions of one’s temporal and spatial being-spread. This is a crucial point for understanding Proust’s vision on temporality and Mamardashvili’s phenomenology of attentiveness. In short, since there is no subject-object distinction on the level of lived experience, every being, when experienced, «becomes for us something immaterial, involved in the nature of our worries and feelings of that moment, and is inseparably mixed with it.»²² As we know already from early Heidegger, this is the way beings manifest prior to the introduction of a theoretical subject-object distinction. Yet, Proust and Mamardashvili notice that in this meeting, some part of the experiencer’s self remains within the experienced beings – the merger between the experiencer and the experienced *goes both ways*. Accordingly, we go through life in a way reminding of an overflowing bucket of water which moves rapidly, constantly spilling water around itself. In this light, one does not exist in the “now” but is spread between the manifold of spatial and temporal points in the past, which also determine what can be experienced in the future. Indeed, it is this dispersion within beings that thickens and enriches the experience; given an appropriate existential context, one can experience, say, a flower, as enriched by the temporally distant experience of a similar flower in the past. Things become the origin of our feelings, yet these are not *external* things – the subject-object dichotomy cannot be applied here, my selfhood is *embedded* in the world of things that have-been. One can then re-gather oneself and undergo a spontaneous re-merging of one’s temporally and spatially dispersed selfhood.²³

²¹ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 79.

²² *Ivi*, p. 382.

²³ Such a gathering happens only in certain existential context; one cannot, for example, simply revisit his hometown and collect all the selves which one spread there during one’s childhood. As Proust stresses, the temporality and the spatiality of the experience do not coincide with the objective time-space: one «does not walk the same street as everyone else» and has to be in an appropriate «state of mind» in order to walk, for example, «the sad streets of the past» (*ivi*, p. 384). Moreover, the “street” is irrelevant for the ontological meaning of sadness and may manifest later in an entirely different

Now we reach the point relating temporality and our psychological imprisonment. Mamardashvili speaks of two modes of being-spread, i.e., of two ways in which one's self remains partly within experienced beings. The *common* way, which results in the reducing of our ability to be agents and in the illusionary nature of our volitional acts, is to be *stuck* in past things. This happens when we are *not fully present* within the experience and are not *attentive* to the essence of that experience, thus leaving it unfulfilled and requiring future closure. In this case there is no healthy integration between one's self and the experienced things; the past experience endures within one's life in form of a habit, a stereotype, an automatic way of doing things.²⁴ «We die or kill ourselves every second because we allow our living sensation to be enclosed in a thing that is foreign or inadequate to it.»²⁵

In Proust's example, Guermantes is not present in a situation and is unable to genuinely relate to Marcel's grief but acts automatically, bowing and doing «what is accustomed to do in such situation.» As Proust and Mamardashvili explain, Guermantes' behavior is governed by «the unused supply of bows in his knees.» That is, Guermantes cannot *attend* to the situation; the true meaning and the appropriate thing to do or say *cannot come* to Guermantes' mind since he is temporally spread in the many past places in which he experienced the act of bowing without being fully there, i.e., without deciphering and understanding the full meaning of this gesture. Mamardashvili stresses that it is an ontological condition – Guermantes may think that he is doing some volitional act and controlling his attention, but he is not *there* to do so, is not experiencing what *is*, but is stuck in past beings where he «lost time.»²⁶

situation (e.g., in watching a departing train) which, suddenly, resonates the previous situation (Ivi, p. 452). In Heidegger's terms we can speak here about a repetition of something unique. In such a repetition the chronological order is irrelevant since the “past” and the “present” events are neither identical nor separable. As Mamardashvili stresses, Proust novel has the structure of such resonances (ivi, p. 454).

²⁴ There is also a worse case, in which one was, so to say, entirely absent from the experience. Then one's selfhood did not live at all and remained empty. There are people, Mamardashvili says, who never lived and thus do not really experience anything. In this light, to not be fully present and become stuck in the past is not so bad a thing, as it does allow a future possibility for reintegration by forming a sphere of its life. Those who did live and became entangled with things are «written in the book of living.» (ivi, p. 529).

²⁵ Ivi, p. 389.

²⁶ «I repeat: what does it mean to feel? To feel someone else's grief is, after all, a chance to depend not on the possibility of sensitivity as such, not on the irritability of the nerves, but on whether you are fully present in your possibilities before this event or not; and you are also not present according to certain laws - let's say, you are stuck in the past (this is one of the laws). Therefore, the way to feel is not (empirical) feeling or sensitivity, but some kind of a tool or a form that allows you to be present» (ivi, p. 327).

In this light we can see why the “personal prison” of self-identity cannot be voluntarily escaped. If one is “stuck” in some past thing, one cannot be liberated from the automatism which this dispersion sustains by thinking one’s way out or by receiving some new knowledge. The only way “out” is to *release* the past by extracting that which was not originally extracted within it. However, this is not something one can do intentionally through the usage of one’s representational memory and volitional re-thinking of the past. Even less via an external help of, say, a psychoanalytic. This would be an attempt to change through “facts” something that was not created by facts. What is philosophically important here is that *any* self-identity leads to “stubborn blindness,” and whatever we try to do to avoid this blindness will only modify it, perhaps in a direction that *seems* better to us within the scope of our re-configured blindness. Moreover, any volitional attempt to change ourselves is already determined in terms of our self-identity and can never bring about a state of liberation from psychological subjectivity. Yet, we need precisely such a liberation in order to be genuinely open and able to gather the situation, each time, in a way that our intentions would be transparent within it, and we could, for the first time, have the freedom to pay attention to the *meaning of the situation*. According to Mamardashvili, such a transformation is possible, but it must happen *independently of our intention*. It must occur in the «place wherein nothing enters,» i.e., in that point of our existence which is inaccessible by representational consciousness, and where the singularity of individual experience is being-fulfilled. This place, however, must be emptied out from whatever occupies it, i.e., from our self-identity. Then, something can mature within it and initiate a transformation *whether we intend it or not*.

Complete detachment is the liberation of space so that within the vacated space a presence can arise, that is, the personal presence of a certain state - I call it “the non-verbal.”²⁷

A transformation is required in order for us to be able to be *present* with what *is* and allow a different, healthy way of self’s embeddedness within beings. In this second way we are fully present within the experience and therefore exhaust it without becoming bound by some unfulfilled tendency outsourced into it. Mamardashvili calls this presence “the non-verbal” to emphasize that it indicates a shift in one’s state of Being irrespectively of one’s representational capacities. The phenomenon “hits” one’s very mode of existence and demands a full detachment as a renunciation of everything that one “knows” about the world *and* about oneself:

²⁷ *Ivi*, p. 231.

Everything that cannot be assumed, cannot be conceived, cannot be obtained by a conclusion from an existing law, all this is the field of impressions, or independent tests of the world; that is, what happened in us having the seal of joy and mystery, and happened in us independently of us, is something called impression. Its note is something that lasts, and we are inside it and hook our destinies with our stirring.²⁸

The phenomenon (or impression) is an independent test of the world, a particular access by way of our existential concern to the temporal dimension which determines our destiny. A detached, self-renouncing “stirring” within the temporality of a phenomenon is, as Mamardashvili stresses, an *ontological act*.²⁹ In this act we may determine “the same that already was” yet this very act will be a “different act without which there is no world.” The world of which Mamardashvili (and Proust) speaks “does not exist through rules and laws” even though, while it exists, rules and laws are fulfilled in it. Such a world must be *sustained* by ontological experience of the kind that has nothing to do with rules and laws as well, and this is what our being-claimed by a phenomenon affords. The liberation from psychological subjectivity is a return to the world to which one already belongs yet in a sense of belongingness that requires an ontological effort of «stirring within the impression.» The arising of presence in one’s existence thus allows, for example, to pay attention for the first time to the true meaning of one’s past and to come to a resolution of not repeating some behavior, a resolution of the “last hour,”³⁰ i.e., belonging to a temporality of what has matured and cannot remain what it was.

This is the first characteristic of the ontological state of being-present: We become free from the automatism of psychological subjectivity (from being “stuck” in the past) and may let the situation unfold in its true meaning – what is essential in the situation can now *come to our attention*. Yet, as I said, this transformation cannot be intentionally fulfilled, but demands a maturation of something unavailable to our representational powers. This process entails something that is different from our regular attention to beings but can be called the praxis of *ontological attentiveness*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ivi*, p. 235.

³⁰ Mamardashvili explains Christ’s saying «Time has come and it is now» as an indication of the “last hour” not in a sense that there will be no more time after this, but in a sense of the “last” as “most mature.” Any moment in time can be the “last” in a sense of being the end of one’s history, a moment to complete one’s experience and act. *Ivi*, p. 323.

We have psychology then, when we did not do the metaphysical work; a metaphysical work in this case is the work of one's life, when you stand still and do not replace your states or impression with anything.³¹

As we have seen in the previous section, a phenomenon (impression) comes unexpected and shocks one's sensibility. The first step of attentiveness here would be to *notice* that something happens, that is, that my normal experience has been interrupted (e.g., that the "trees are calling me for help"). Paradoxically the ability to notice the phenomenon depends on previous cases of my success to be attentive to the difference between the content of experience (e.g., "trees") and the peculiar way in which the experience happens. The trees are the same trees yet in the event of a phenomenon, the trees manifest in a way that "calls me to help them" by somehow deciphering this very event. If I can notice this without immediately explaining it away as illusory or insignificant, *something happens* in a place, which Mamardashvili calls the point of darkness, i.e., the point where nothing can come in. The attentiveness here is something different from an ontic attention to beings as an act of concentrating and keeping one's "spiritual eye" on what one sees. Rather, it is attentiveness as a readiness to let go of what is "seen" and allow that which tries to reach me. Such an attentiveness is a letting-be, yet not in a sense of a passive staring at beings but in a sense of letting-the-phenomenon come over me and give me a possibility of releasing temporal/spatial entanglement of the self in all the beings which manifested without my attentiveness/presence. The shock of the phenomenon threatens my self-identity and triggers an automatic reaction of interpreting, reasoning etc. All this, however, is what we must abstain from – we must not replace the impression with anything.³² Then, and only then, we enter the temporality of the phenomenon which, as Mamardashvili explains, constitutes the minimal gap within identity, that is a minimal difference between myself and myself:

Let us put it this way - and thereby briefly introduce the concept of time: an impression is such a thing in which I, who experiences the impression, introduces a difference between

³¹ *Ivi*, p. 253.

³² Mamardashvili calls such an active abstaining "non-doing." Non-doing can be seen as a fundament of a non-volitional attitude towards human transformation. Importantly, one must abstain not just from one's everyday common interpretation of experience but also from leaning on some metaphysical standard, such as a religious idea or an ethical rule. This was already stressed by Meister Eckhart who required that one does not renounce one's will in favor of God's will, but renounce *any* will (including God's). In this context, Heidegger is wrong when we simplify Eckhart's idea of a renunciation of will to a standard Christian dogma of preferring God's will. See Ian Alexander MOOR, *Eckhart, Heidegger, and the Imperative of Releasement*, State University of New York Press, New York 2019, p. 22.

me, who is looking for the meaning of the impression and wants to understand it, and me, who experiences this impression. I repeat, there is a difference between the experiencing “I” and the “I” that understands or is trying to understand, that is, I do not coincide with my own state. It's clear right? If I think about a sensation, or am conscious of a sensation, then “I” is not this sensation: I have distinguished myself - from what? - from myself.³³

The impression “slides between” the two layers of my self, i.e., between the non-subjective experiencer and the subjective projection of one’s psychological self-identity. The kind of attentiveness required here is nothing like a regular concentration on something available for the subject but is instead a subtle noticing of the difference between myself and my subjectivity, i.e., between the “non-verbal” event of experience and the automatic force of explaining away its eventuality by bringing it under the forms of reason and one’s subjective perspective determined by the waves of past cases of absence (what we normally call “psychology”). As I said, this differentiation - if noticed and sustained without subjective interventions – allows one to loosen one’s subjectivity by reintegrating those “parts” of one’s self that are spread in lost time. This ontological liberation of the self, however, also affects the way beings manifest (otherwise it would not be “ontological”). Namely, the temporal dimension of the event of letting-the-phenomenon-work-on-me serves as the “between” of the past and the current experience – the trees could call Marcel only if he previously experienced other trees with some degree of existential intensiveness - and it reconfigures our experience of beings. For example, I experience a flower as occurring not (only) now within the contingent projection of my subjectivity, but as shifted away both from its current and its past representational contexts into the “between” where it can show itself in its uniqueness, not as a “flower” but simply as it *is*.³⁴ This is a temporal de-contextualization of a thing which Proust calls «dislocation.»³⁵ The uniqueness of a thus manifesting being belongs together with the uniqueness of the event of the phenomenon, both are separated from the lawfulness of reason and its subjective manipulations. «To truly know something – is to receive it fully, here and how, in a

³³ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 251.

³⁴ Then, just like in Blake’s poem, the whole world can be seen in a flower (*ivi*, p. 401). Another example is the moment Marcel experiences the beauty of a girl apart from any prejudices of what makes up beauty; the girl’s beauty here is unique and unmeasurable, it has nothing to do with what one *thinks* beauty is (*ivi*, p. 404). Such perception, Mamardashvili stresses in another example, is a perception of an event – one can see a banal thing like woman entering a car on a street yet experience it not as another case of “woman entering a car” but as an eternally enduring event of entering a car by a woman; such an event excites me without any reason (though we always attach some reason to it), simply because its eventfulness is the source of the experience of the beautiful (*ivi*, p. 205).

³⁵ *ivi*, p. 251.

form of a full act, that is in a form of my full presence, and to receive it uniquely.»³⁶ This is how, for example, children experience things and such experience is determined by a *faith* in the absolute incomparability of beings.³⁷

The “faith” of which Proust speaks is a result of a long ontological maturation (after it has been inevitably lost in our childhood) and is opposite to the belief in the “facts” which divert our attention from the underlying law³⁸ (which is not a law in a regular sense but a temporal configuration of our being-stuck in self-identity); it is opposite to our belief in the objectivity of beings,³⁹ which is in reality a mere projection of our representational faculties. This faith in the uniqueness of things corresponds to the mystic’s belief that no a priori mechanism can sustain the *real* world⁴⁰ but that the real world requires my participation, my full presence.⁴¹ Such faith – as any real faith – is a faith in the absurd,⁴² in what rejects that which is given immediately and without my effort. Yet such faith is far from being blind. On the contrary, it is grounded in one’s praxis of attentiveness, that is in the ontological effort of noticing one’s psychological slavery and the possibility for liberation brought by the phenomenon.

4. Revisiting Heidegger through Mamardashvili’s phenomenology

Now I would like to revisit the questions I had regarding the idea that, in Heidegger, attention is a way to Being. I want to see if Mamardashvili’s phenomenological reading of Proust helps answering these questions and whether these answers fit Heidegger’s ideas and thus fill the phenomenological gap in his thinking.

My first question was – what am I supposed to pay attention to in order to experience not just beings but the event of their presencing, i.e., Being? Berger justly notices that we have to move “the site of willing” from the inner sphere to our relation to Being, i.e., our attention should not be determined by the familiar subjective will. Such a

³⁶ *Ivi*, p. 308.

³⁷ *Ivi*, p. 413.

³⁸ *Ivi*, p. 270.

³⁹ *Ivi*, p. 271.

⁴⁰ «The whole Proustian world holds and floats on top of the wave of effort, and the difference between people, that is, whether they are equal or not equal, will be largely determined by who made the effort and who did not make it. As the Gospel says: ‘Formerly there were John the Baptist and prophets, but now the kingdom of God is being taken by force.’» (*ivi*, p. 377). The effort here is an effort of ontological attentiveness, i.e., of holding myself open not for already objectified beings but for the event of self-renunciation initiated by the phenomenon. Death, Mamardashvili says, is a radical case of such self-renunciation and hence is the gatekeeper of one’s transformation (*ivi*, p. 392). Ontological attentiveness then can be said to be an attentiveness to death.

⁴¹ *Ivi*, p. 321.

⁴² *Ivi*, p. 132.

“movement,” however, is something we cannot initiate directly, hence the paradox. Mamardashvili exacerbates the paradox by stressing that there is no real duality between one’s “inner sphere” and one’s “relation to Beyng.” What we take for our everyday attention is not really a volitional, self-grounded decision – the subject’s pretensions for autonomy are illusionary and are sustained by a state of ontological blindness. This state is characterized by a distorted and limited vision of a situation within which one is “moved” to act by the waves of past entanglements in beings. That is, Heidegger’s idea that we cannot experience Being because we cling to beings receives a concrete phenomenological explication. To cling to beings does not mean that we are too focused on beings but that we are *not present* in our experience of beings, thus not allowing beings to manifest in their uniqueness; in this way we become “stuck” in beings, dispersed in time-space and creating the “waves” which govern our conscious life in the present. This situation is self-aggravating - the more we are governed by (past) beings, the more we are unable to be present within current experiences and thus creating more entanglement. Though each experience betrays that a thus experienced world is a falsification brought by the projection of our representational capacities, the hints are too subtle and are immediately explained away by the force of our psychological self-identity. The praxis of attentiveness, as an ontological effort, thus begins in being able to *wait* for the phenomenon to appear and to shock my sensibility for a moment, creating thus a gap within which I may discern the difference between myself as the one who is being-claimed by the phenomenon and myself that hurries to explain, rationalize and get rid of such a “glitch in the matrix.” This is not a waiting for something particular, but as Heidegger stresses in *Country Path Conversations*, is a waiting neither upon something nor upon nothing, but upon that which corresponds to «pure waiting.»⁴³ Such a waiting is a mode of existence which Mamardashvili identifies with the Christian “being awake and sober;” it is a praxis of attentiveness, in which one does not pay attention to some particular object or to one’s inner subjective sphere but to the flow of experience prior to the subject-object distinction. One can thus notice that a phenomenon shocks this very flow. This shock allows one to “calibrate” the ability of differentiation between the event of experience and its immediate representation. Importantly, the “calibration” is not something one “does,” but is a result of maturation which happens without our knowledge each time we are able to *let the phenomenon be* without interrupting it. Such attentive self-restriction does not result in anything practical that could be pointed out immediately, it has no effect; yet, it contributes little

⁴³ Martin HEIDEGGER, *Country Path Conversations*, translated by Bret W. Davis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 140.

by little to our «being released into the abiding-while.»⁴⁴ As Heidegger stresses, we do not awaken the releasement in ourselves *from out of ourselves*, but rather releasement is *allowed* from somewhere else.⁴⁵ As I tried to show, in Mamardashvili's reading of Proust we find the concrete phenomenological account of the way we *do* participate in preparing the event of releasement and we do it by practicing a peculiar kind of attentiveness. Such attentiveness fits Heidegger's definition of releasement as being beyond the distinction between activity and passivity.⁴⁶ That is, to "let yourself be involved in releasement" and to "to remain purely released over to the open-region" entails a peculiar kind of attentiveness to the distinction between the open-region and whatever appears in it. Yet, paradoxically, one must *let* the distinction be – whether the distinction takes place is dependent on one's non-voluntary "ability" to *give* it a place; that is, one does not receive passively something certain but, in a way that corresponds to Mamardashvili's idea of having faith in the uniqueness of beings, is required to remain open to the each time unique event of the open, which is «gathering all» and «letting each thing arise in its resting.»⁴⁷ The self-gathering of the experiencer beyond her psychological subjectivity belongs to the gathering character of the open (i.e., of *Beyng*). From Mamardashvili we learn that such a letting-oneself-be-gathered can belong to experience only if we are attentive to our own state and "see" both the self-defending movement of the psychological subject and the gap which the phenomenon introduces into this movement. Moreover, we must be attentive to the fact that in the flash of impression there is a subtle openness through which we sense ourselves belonging to the event that "causes" the momentary stillness of our representational faculties. The openness of *Beyng* requires to be distinguished experientially from beings (i.e., from the content of experiences) so that its healing power could cultivate further liberation of one's selfhood from psychological self-identity rooted in a temporal-spatial dispersion. Indeed, as we read in Proust, the very event of being attentive to the distinctiveness of such an experience *is* healing.

Moreover, the way a phenomenon comes over one's experience and offers a possibility of being led by it solves the problem which puzzles Heidegger scholars regarding what Ian Alexander Moor calls a «trace of will» required in order to «want to be released.»⁴⁸ Moor wonders – what if meditative thinking is something out of our control? Proust solution lies in subtle phenomenological observation regarding the way

⁴⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Country Path Conversations*, p. 61.

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, p. 70.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ivi*, p. 74.

⁴⁸ MOOR, *Eckhart, Heidegger and the Imperative of Releasement*, p. 130.

the phenomenon breaks through all our normal means of control and is eliminated by our automatic tendency to control. The sort of control that is required in order to let the phenomenon “do its work” is not a control in a normal psychological sense since rather than trying to apply some existing measure and make sense of the phenomenon, one is required to be led by a phenomenon and withstand the abyssal nature of its own sense. In this event, there is no one who could be in control, since to let the phenomenon be is to engage in a dissolution of the controller (i.e., the subject). There is no determinable “goal” in this event, not even a negative one – one does not really *abstain* from *anything* but walks a thin path “between” willing and abstaining, a path to which one is drawn by the phenomenon. This “between” is the “between” of a decontextualized phenomenon, neither belonging to the passive side of temporality as a past experience within such and such context, nor to its active side of positing the sense of the experience in the “now” and according to what one projects into the future.⁴⁹ Namely, to renounce the will is not to stop being an agent – agency and subjective will are conflated in metaphysics but do not originally belong together. Heidegger, Mamardashvili, Proust and others (starting at least from Meister Eckhart) reject subjective will not because it is somehow a priori wrong, but because they have discovered that what we call “will,” that is an autonomous intention of the subject, is neither autonomous nor an intention. It is rather, as Proust says, an «unused supply of bows in the knees,» i.e., a subject’s *necessary* activity rooted in her inauthentic past and determining her world of possible meanings and actions, leaving her no space for a genuine agency. As Bret W. Davis stresses, willing is not a solipsistic self-striving of the ego but a going beyond oneself in order to incorporate the “external” excess back into subjectivity.⁵⁰ We learn from Proust that such an incorporation is only possible since the ego projects *itself* in terms of one’s existing self-identity. Its autonomy after all is

⁴⁹ Jürgen Wagner stresses that only Eckhart but not Heidegger are radical enough in overcoming the separation between the active and the passive sides in the event of letting-be. Namely, a genuine overcoming of this opposition entails leaving behind all distinction between the one who is let-be (humans) and the one that lets-be (the open/God). For Heidegger, this is still, according to Wagner, and important distinction. (see Jürgen WAGNER, *Meditationen über Gelassenheit . Der Zugang des Menschen zu seinem Wesen im Anschluß an Martin Heidegger und Meister Eckhart*, Verlag Dr. Kovac, Hamburg 1995, p. 90. However, Heidegger does problematize even the ontological difference – as a source of all differentiations – in the Beyng-historical writing of the late 1930s. In the later works, he proceeds with the deconstruction of identity-difference dichotomy and, I think, in this way, allows a *better* understanding of *union mystica* than it is afforded in the language of Meister Eckhart. As Bret W. Davis points out, Heidegger allows seeing such union not as an indistinct identity but as “nearness” that preserves essential distance. (Bret W. DAVIS, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2007, p. 143.

⁵⁰ DAVIS, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, p. 149.

quasi-solipsistic – one as if breathes the same air during one’s entire life in a sealed room without an access to the freshness of the winds outside. While the first appearances of the “intention” to be released (from will) may be purely intellectual and based of ego’s will to incorporate something into itself, the strike of the phenomenon brings a motivation of a radically different nature; one then experiences a dreadful gravity of something *real*, i.e., of the dimension of one’s Being wherein one participates in an experience (*Erfahrung*) of the trans-subjective sway of what is each time distorted and reduced in one’s subjective experience (*Erlebnis*). The practice of attentiveness means then to let oneself attend to this other sort of motivation.⁵¹ Such a motivation is not will-based since it is not *personal* in an ego-centered sense of will to power. This brings us to the second question.

The second main question is this – how the praxis of attentiveness allows beings to become eventful, i.e., to sacrifice themselves to the truth of Beyng? Here an objection can be made to my attempt of bringing Proust and Heidegger together: it seems that Proust aims at *personal* life-fulfillment, in which one becomes liberated from one’s psychological self-identity and experiences fully the true nature of one’s motivations. That is, Proust’s transformation aims at recollecting the “lost time” so that one could become a gathered individual, fully present in every situation; one’s life then becomes a phenomenon – it shows itself out of itself without hiding anything or symbolizing anything beyond its own manifestation. Heidegger, on the other hand, aims at the possibility of being-enowned by Beyng – one’s liberation from subjectivity happens not as a re-integration with one’s deep, temporally spread desires, but as a re-integration within the history of Beyng. Rather than becoming fully human one overcomes being-human and fulfills itself as Dasein.

Here we need to look closer at Mamardashvili’s unique interpretation of Proust. According to Mamardashvili, both the phenomenon and my act of letting it engage me belong to a temporality different from the passive flow of a clock-time within which separate acts can be performed within the scope of general laws. This passive flow is not the temporality of the real world but of representation. The real world does not endure passively but is *held in its endurance*; it requires human acts behind which something ontological is sustained. In order for any rule to continue into the next

⁵¹ As Heidegger insists, an event of an insight that allows one to go beyond willing is not accidental but requires preparatory work. Accordingly, Bret W. Davis stresses that *Gelassenheit* is not mere existence beyond will but is also a *renouncing* of will. (DAVIS, *Heidegger and the Will: On the Way to Gelassenheit*, p.183). The tension between the sudden nature of an insight into what is and the need to actively prepare oneself for it corresponds to the tension of the suddenness of a phenomenon and the “life work” of being attentive and ready for its appearance in Mamardashvili’s interpretation of Proust.

moment it must be “recreated” again.⁵² This temporality is a tune of an impression, and when we restrict ourselves attentively to this tune, we move within this very temporality.⁵³ Fulfilling one’s life then is not an individual story but a re-integration, or enownment within the temporality of the phenomenon “consisting” of an ontological effort. Such temporal re-integration, Mamardashvili explains, is a contribution to a trans-personal endurance of such a meaning (of Beyng) in terms of which alone something like human existence makes sense. Such meaning is essentially temporal, yet it cannot be said to belong to the past. Mamardashvili would agree with Heidegger that «what is recollected is nothing past.»⁵⁴ Mamardashvili’s example (taken from Pascal) is «the agony of Christ never ends and we must not sleep.» Therefore, when one walks the path of ontological attentiveness one does not merely excavates the psychological roots of one’s inclinations, but also – even if indirectly - the ontological roots of human existence. Such an attentiveness, indicated by Heidegger as an attentiveness to the transition, is an enduring (*Austrag*) of the (ontological) difference⁵⁵ and it belongs to the history of the truth of Beyng. Thus, to succeed to engage with the historical dimension of sense in which «the agony of Christ never ends and we must not sleep» is not to fulfill something personal but to undergo a transformation of the sense of “personal” and to experience one’s belongingness to an ontological effort to which humanity as a whole is assigned.⁵⁶ Indeed, Proust’s phenomenon does not force me into the realm of experiences rooted in some representable concerns, but into the *origin* of experience which he illuminates as a sphere of a non-representable *existential* concern⁵⁷ requiring an ontological effort as an attentive *remembrance* both in a sense of collecting my own “lost time” and in a sense of sustaining the history of the meaning underlying such effort.

Accordingly, what Heidegger calls «sheltering of the truth of Beyng in beings» is achieved in a form of those human acts which, by engaging in the temporality of the event in a way that illuminates the origin of all existential concerns, each time in a particular way constituted by the temporal layers of one’s being-embedded within beings, let a being appear in its de-contextualized uniqueness. That is to say, the

⁵² МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 230.

⁵³ *Ivi*, p. 231.

⁵⁴ HEIDEGGER, *Das Ereignis*, p. 57.

⁵⁵ *Ivi*, p.50.

⁵⁶ «Just as a remembered bell tower is not a bell tower, but a sign of the path in the sense that it contains dozens, and hundreds, and thousands of acts of human bewilderment, of searching, of attempts to understand oneself, of choosing this or that, changing this choice, and so on, i.e., of human work.» МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 438.

⁵⁷ МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 445.

sheltering of truth is not a designation of some eternal structure to a being, but as Heidegger insists, a creative preservation of self-concealing,⁵⁸ and what Mamardashvili display as the direct experience of the “non-verbal” source of sensibility which requires our ontological effort in order for the “hidden” temporality of the meaning of Being to be *sustained* as an enactment of this very experience. Accordingly, it is precisely the inceptuality experienced «from the perspective of beings» as a withholding⁵⁹ and a protection of what is unique and worthy of thinking. A successful attentiveness to Proust’s impression is then what Heidegger calls the experience «*of the fact that Beyng is.*»⁶⁰ It is the recognition of the «imperceptible gleam of the enigma» in beings.⁶¹

Leaning on Proust’s phenomenological observations, Mamardashvili presents a path of being-present, i.e., of the praxis of attentiveness, which indicates a direction of a peculiar correlation between my efforts and my quality of Being. The degree of Being of our thinking, he says, is different from what we “do.”⁶² The ontological effort itself must become the “object” of my attentiveness. As Heidegger stresses, we must be able to *distinguish* one (mode of) thinking from another.⁶³ Then, somewhere on the path, I become attentive to Beyng without knowing how I got there. That to which no path (from beings) can lead is only achieved by remaining within the impassible, the *απορία* of “can’t go further”. It is only in this place that an additional act is required yet it cannot be initiated in the regular volitional sense. Heedfulness, Heidegger says, is obedience (*Gehorsam*).⁶⁴ In light of Mamardashvili’s interpretation of the phenomenon, such an obedience is an act of risking one’s self-identity by letting it dissolve in the temporality of the phenomenon, a radical leap beyond the illusion of one’s subjective freedom into the “between” of the Event. Far from rejecting the reality of a human self, a phenomenon affords experiencing the illusionary nature of subjectivity. An *attention to Beyng* then is not a cognitive emphasis of something given *in* experience, not even of the *givenness* of what is experienced. Instead, it is an effort of *being an experiencer* who, in the very effort of remaining present, allows beings to sway uniquely and contributes to the historical task of safeguarding Beyng.

⁵⁸ HEIDEGGER, *Contributions*, p.307.

⁵⁹ HEIDEGGER, *Das Ereignis*, p.58.

⁶⁰ *Ivi*, p.68.

⁶¹ *Ivi*, p. 78.

⁶² МАМАРДАШВИЛИ, *Психологическая топология пути*, p. 291.

⁶³ HEIDEGGER, *Das Ereignis*, p. 46.

⁶⁴ *Ivi*, p. 48.

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