The Open Hand:

Making Room for the Depth of Things

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved October 2020 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2020

ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes the concept of "the open hand" as a philosophy of openness. The need for a philosophy of openness is derived from the contemporary turn towards things that is anchored in continental thought, but is at work in a variety of disciplines. This current interest in things has stirred the critique that the normalized human grasp on things is deficient because it cannot suitably handle the reality that intangible depth inheres in all things human and nonhuman. From the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19 to issues of social justice, the need to make room for the abyssal side of things is as compelling as ever. However, accommodating the deep reality of all things is complicated by the fact that it requires an orientation not guided by self-centered insularity, but by a serviceable theory of self-emptying openness. Sketching a philosophy of openness with the open hand, this dissertation reveals that while openness to things is critical for solving the complex issues of the twenty-first century, its opposition not only has existential primacy, but also can be and has been exacerbated by humanity's contemporary technological lifestyle.

To Angeline, everything is better with a friend.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is only fitting to begin by extending the open hand and thanking the depth in all things. It is the depth of things that never ceases to perplex, amuse, and stir.

I would like to extend an overwhelming thank you to my committee members: Krista Ratcliffe, Ronald Broglio, and Patricia Huntington. Their patience and guidance has carried me through this process. I am unfathomably grateful to have had such a kind and dedicated committee.

I am forever indebted to David Jasper at the University of Glasgow. His encouragement 13 years ago at the start of this doctoral odyssey was profound then and has been helpful in the many years since. I want to thank Kathleen Skillicorn at San Francisco State University for her unwavering friendship and mentorship. From Arizona State University, I want to thank Joe Lockard, Michelle Stuckey, and Zach Waggoner. None of this would have been possible without Professor Lockard's confidence and the tremendous support from Michelle Stuckey and Zach Waggoner at ASU's Writers' Studio.

I would like to thank my family for their wonderful presence and warmth. To Angeline, I extend the deepest thank you, for being a boundless source of wisdom, humor, and love.

Finally, I would like to thank the Graduate College, Department of English, and Graduate and Professional Student Association at ASU for helping me to realize this project with research and travel funding.

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Introduction

> The sea is emotion incarnate. It loves, hates, and weeps. It defies all attempts to capture it with words and rejects all shackles. No matter what you say about it, there is always that which you can't.
>
> —Christopher Paolini, *Eragon*

The Turn Towards Things

This dissertation addresses the contemporary turn towards things at work in a variety of disciplines. In a recent collection of essays titled *Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things*, Scot Barnett and Casey Boyle perfectly summarize this vast interest in things when they write, "In fields such as philosophy, archaeology, anthropology, science and technology studies, literary studies, and rhetoric and writing studies, things increasingly attract attention as scholars attempt to understand the roles things play in their disciplines…" (2017, 1). Barnett and Boyle go on to write, "While important differences remain, the interdisciplinary reassessment of things recognizes that we do not simply point *at* things but act *alongside* and *with* them" (1). This is all to say that the current interest in things nudges humanity towards an orientation guided not by insularity, but by an openness to things. The key to my argument is that a tenable philosophy of openness begins by inverting a set of contrasting metaphors attributed to the Stoic philosopher Zeno of Citium.

As the story goes, a commercial voyage travelling from Phoenicia met its demise just near the Piraeus (Inwood & Gerson 2008, 1). Amongst the sinking cargo and white-capped waves of the Saronic Gulf was the thirty-year-old Zeno from Citium. Zeno was not like his predecessors Plato and Aristotle, since he did not come from a powerful

family or have ties to figures like Alexander the Great (x). In that moment, Zeno was more like a piece of solid driftwood that was tossed upon the shore by a fortunate tide. It was however, out of that briny mishap that he made his way to Athens, where in the beginning of the 3rd century BCE he founded a school of philosophy on the *Stoa poikilē* or "Painted Porch" of the Athenian marketplace (xi). At first the followers of this school naturally called themselves "Zenonians" after their teacher, but they were soon identified by the peculiar locality of their meetings as the "Stoics." Stoicism became one of the most widespread philosophical movements in the Greco-Roman world for centuries, with the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius being the last major figure to embrace this school of thought (xii).

If stoicism sounds familiar that is because one of its key principles has been ingrained in our lexicon by the term "stoical." Just as the term implies, the Stoics maintained that one should be indifferent to misfortune and to simply accept it as part of fate. However the present project takes inspiration from a lesser known, but more important feature of stoicism. This feature is the interplay between the Stoic epistemology or theory of knowledge and their ethics. For the Stoics, the ethical or virtuous human life was only possible if one lived a life in harmony with nature, but such harmony was not achieved by humbly abiding with nature. For ancient Stoicism, human beings and nature were guided by the universal reason of the *Logos* (xiv), so the virtuous life meant avoiding deception by bringing the full apparatus of human reason to bear on nature in order to secure the deepest knowledge or wisdom about things (xv). Zeno reflects the view that real wisdom and the deepest knowledge are only achieved when we

exhaustively grasp hold of things with his use of two contrasting metaphors known as "the closed fist" and "the open hand."

The intent of these metaphors can be understood from a description provided by Cicero:

> When he held out his hand with open fingers, he would say, "This is what a presentation is like." Then when he had closed his fingers a bit, he said, "Assent is like this." And when he had compressed it completely and made a fist, he said that this was grasping (and on the basis of this comparison he even gave it the name '*katalepsis*' [grasp], which had not previously existed). But when he put his left hand over it and compressed it tightly and powerfully, he said that knowledge was this sort of thing and that no one except the wise man possessed it.
> (quoted in Inwood & Gerson 2008, 47)

While Zeno did not invent this worldview, what he encapsulates with these metaphors is the outlook that the open hand is a naïve orientation towards things. Moreover, the closed fist is the reality oriented practice par excellence, since the deepest knowledge about things is only achieved when the fist tightly closes around them. Now while stoicism has faded, this conclusion about the closed fist's ability to deliver real wisdom and the deepest knowledge about things is alive and well. At the same time, so is the view that there is neither wisdom nor virtue in the open hand, only emptiness and the eternal drift of deception.

It is within this context that I locate the intersection between Zeno's metaphors and the contemporary turn towards things. This turn has led to the realization that the closed fist is actually deceptive and destructive, since it's preoccupied with the surface presence of things and cannot make room for the reality that, "…things are more than what they mean or do for us. They are also vibrant actors, enacting effects that exceed (and are sometimes in direct conflict with) human agency and intentionality" (Barnett and

Boyle 2017, 1). In other words, bound and compressed by the knuckled grip of the closed fist is merely the surface of things, and excluded by this rigorous prioritization of the surface is the intangible depth that all things human and nonhuman have. This turn towards things highlights the deficiency of the closed fist and the need for a new type of "handedness" that this project contends is found with the open hand.

It's worth noting that this contemporary turn towards things has allowed many disciplines in the humanities to rejoin a dialogue that they have long been excluded from. It is no secret that the sciences have dominated center stage in the academy as the only ones capable of saying something of value about reality or the reality of things. However with this appreciatory turn towards the vitality and vibrancy of things, many disciplines within the humanities can now return to the table and say something of value about reality. Typically we find this work identified under such names as "Thing Theory," "New Materialism," "Speculative Realism," "non-philosophy," "object-oriented philosophy" and "object-oriented ontology," "Actor-network Theory," and "Assemblage Theory." For example, when it comes to those like Thomas Rickert and his notion of "Ambient Rhetoric" or Scot Barnett's "Rhetorical Realism," the often maligned and misunderstood discipline of rhetoric is not only perfectly situated to engage in a sincere discussion about the reality of things, but rhetoric can help other disciplines in the development of "…ways to accommodate nonhuman agents, such as animals, technologies, spaces, and everyday things," because "…attunements to nonhuman beings and extrahuman realities are nothing new for rhetoric" (Barnett 2017, 5). In this sense we might say that rhetoric as a discipline has much to teach us about how all things can be rhetorical.

It is no doubt interesting to think about how a discipline like rhetoric can examine the rhetoricity expressed by things, whether it is the way we act upon a rock that sits along a desert trail or the way the rock acts upon us. But we would be foolish to think that this turn towards things makes sense or appears tenable to everyone. In a world where the closed fist is the normalized practice of relating and thus largely has a chokehold on our relations with things, there is often clear resistance to opening up to the substantial depth of nonhuman things like "animals" let alone the toothbrush that sits on the bathroom counter (Broglio 2011, xvi-xvii). I have heard the word "ignoble" used by some in the academy to describe this turn towards things primarily because it necessitates that we rethink or challenge the human use and reliance on hierarchy. This challenge to hierarchy is complicated because as the noted literary theorist Kenneth Burke said about the human condition we are "…goaded by a spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)" (1966, 16). At the same time this reliance on hierarchy has resulted in horrific outcomes like the notion that some things or types of people intrinsically have or have more ontological worth over others. So there is a benefit to a more equitable ontology.

The term "ontology" and its derivatives will appear intermittently throughout this dissertation, so it is worth providing a quick definition in case it's meaning is unfamiliar. Most simply stated, ontology is typically concerned with the study of being and issues related to the structure of reality. Ontology finds itself under the philosophical branch of "metaphysics," because to study the structure of reality or what constitutes something like being is to ponder what lies beyond (*meta*) what we observe about the physical world. However, within contemporary philosophical circles metaphysics is usually thought of negatively, whereas ontology is a more respectable and rigorous area of study.

Part of this disdain for metaphysics is likely due to the fact that the term is attributed to Aristotle and his collection of fourteen books that constitute his *Metaphysics*, but Aristotle actually had no understanding of the term. Instead, Aristotle used several names for what we think of as "metaphysics," and most notable among them was the name "first philosophy." So while ontology is a relatively new term, having supposedly been coined in 1613 (Harman 2018, 13-14), ontology is often understood as "first philosophy."

In contemporary parlance, an equitable ontology is often understood in terms of a "flat ontology." While the term "flat ontology" is attributed to Roy Bhaskar (54), its appearance in this dissertation follows the positive meaning imparted on it by Manuel DeLanda (2006, 28). A flat ontology is often mistakenly taken to mean that all things are uniformly equal. Alternatively, what is actually meant is that we envision an equitable ontology that treats all things human and nonhuman in the same way, as having some shared feature. Within a flat ontology all things even things like "electrical grids"[1] or "soil"[2] are treated as having some shared feature. With regard to this dissertation, an equitable ontology is contingent on extending the open hand because it is with the open that we can make room for the reality that depth is an essential feature of all things whether we are speaking about things like humans or bat-borne coronaviruses. The fact that depth is an essential feature of all things is a key point in a variety of ways, but in particular because it directly pushes back against an idea like Giorgio Agamben's conception of "the open."

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[1] See Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things.* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 25.
[2] See Puig de la Bellacasa, María. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 169.

According to Agamben, any new political and philosophical paradigms must emerge from understanding that to be human is the result of an absolute gulf or caesura between humanity and things like animals. Agamben finds fault with what he calls the "anthropological machine" of Western thought for creating this detrimental separation between humanity and animality (2004, 37). These anthropological machinations have maintained the idea that humans have a privileged position in the world and over things. In Agamben's assessment, the only way to realize new political and philosophical paradigms that are capable of counteracting the destructive difference created by the anthropological machine, is to make room for this open state or "bare life" that resides between animality and humanity. Agamben concludes that we need to look to the "bare life" if we hope to resist what can be viewed as the closefistedness of the anthropological machine. To my mind this conclusion is incorrect on two accounts.

First, Agamben's thesis presupposes that the anthropological machine of Western thought has indeed achieved the separation of humanity and animality. However, this conclusion is not born out by the reality of things. Bruno Latour's (1993) *We Have never been Modern* perfectly appreciates this fact. Latour agrees that the "modern constitution," or what Agamben would view as the "anthropological machine," is driven by a desire to achieve an absolute difference between humanity on one side and nature on the other. This separation is described as placing humans and nature into two distinct "ontological zones" (Latour 1993, 10). Latour's point is that despite the effort by the modern constitution to create this divide, nature is constantly colliding, interacting, and informing our lives. Case in point, the current pandemic. As is shown later on in this dissertation, part of the reason that this pandemic has been so destructive is due to the erroneous belief

that humans and nature occupy two distinct ontological zones. This perspective sadly lacks openness to the reality that there are deep reservoirs of bat-borne coronaviruses that can spillover into humans with the possibility of causing severe disease and global disruption and destruction. So Agamben's estimation that humanity and animality, or humans and nature have been rendered separate by an absolute caesura between the two is inaccurate.

Second, since humans and nature are inextricably enmeshed, a new paradigm(s) that resists the closed fist or Agamben's "anthropological machine" is not found in the "bare life." As the ongoing pandemic attests to, there is no absolute gulf between the human ontological zone and that of nonhuman things. Rather there is only one shared ontological zone where all things human and nonhuman converge. Moreover, and as is the claim of this project, a new paradigm will result from embracing the reality that there is a shared feature amongst all things human and nonhuman. For Agamben ontology "is not an innocuous academic discipline" (2004, 79), but is perhaps the toxic black smoke belched out by the anthropological machine that is metaphysics. The whole point of metaphysics for Agamben is to move beyond (*meta*) the animal (*physis*) (79), and so metaphysics is part of the problem not the solution.

However, based on the definition and discussion of ontology and metaphysics offered earlier, the current project contra Agamben, is beneficially engaged in metaphysics and makes an ontological assertion that helps to move us towards a more intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves. Part of this positive engagement with ontology and metaphysics requires us to appreciate the reality that humanity and nature are not separate. Additionally, if we open up to this reality we will

further appreciate that not only do all things human and nonhuman dwell in a shared ontological zone or region, but as was already stated all things human and nonhuman have the shared essential feature of depth. Consequently, any new paradigm that seeks to overcome the deficiency of the closed fist has to emerge from making room for the depth that resides in all things, and that is exactly the focus of this project and embodied by the open hand.

Now some might argue that it is problematic to essentialize, and I would agree if it were not for one little caveat. Asserting that depth is an essential feature of all things would only be problematic if we said that there is a way to exhaust it or fathom it.[3] We avoid the evils of essentialism by the sheer reality that the depth that resides in all things is shown in this dissertation to be unfathomable or intangible. This point is further discussed in chapter five, but my thinking here is partly informed by object-oriented philosophy. That said, I don't go as far as to say that all real things are locked away in this deep intangibility or are only this depth such that we can never have relations with real things. Instead, my assertion is that our relations with things are real, but we cannot merely focus on what we distortedly grasp about them at the surface, and have to tend to the fact that part of our relationships with things and ourselves is a depth that cannot be grasped. Additionally, it is my perspective that since the intangible depth that inheres in all things directly informs the functioning of the open hand, the open hand is intrinsically ethical.

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[3] See Harman, Graham. *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 2002), 173.

In Silvia Benso's (2000) *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics* there is a full appreciation for the ethical dimension of the contemporary turn to things. Benso recognizes that the act of making room for what she calls the "alterity" of things implicitly requires us to envision a new form of ethical attitude or an ethics of things. For those like Benso, as well as María Puig de la Bellacasa, this ethical attitude is one of "tenderness" or "care." In particular, Benso draws on Plato and makes the assessment that tenderness is best achieved by living with things in "festivity" or "in a everyday time of festivity" (187). According to Benso, "festivity" does not mean that we "…live a life of festivals, but to live the relation with things, in tenderness, as if it were a festival, in festivity" (187). This project agrees with Benso insofar as a move away from closed fist is indeed an act of festivity; it is a tender and caring recognition of things. However, the open hand is intrinsically ethical not because it engages in tender festivity, but because the ethical cue is derived from the very reality that the world in which we live is one where all things human and nonhuman have intangible depth. With this point the open hand directly conflicts with the kind of formalism found in the ethics of Immanuel Kant.

Formalism in Kant's ethics can be briefly understood as there being no role for the outside world in the formation of our ethical attitudes, since an ethical attitude has to be a universalizable dictum exclusively derived from human reason. This formalism results from Kant's metaphysical outlook that saw things-in-themselves as off limits and only human experience as being directly accessible. This split between things and human experience, led Kant to closefistedly hold that ethics cannot arise out of the interactions between humans and things, but has to be located completely on the side of human reason. Clearly, the present project disagrees with Kant, and is then more aligned with

Max Scheler who was a prominent German philosopher during the early part of the 20th century and a main detractor of Kant's ethics. However, the extent to which my thinking allies with Scheler's ethics only goes as far as an agreement that our ethical comportment is informed by our interactions with things. Scheler would most likely not join me in saying that the open hand is intrinsically ethical because with the open hand humans take the ethical cue directly from the unfathomable depth that inheres in all things.

While the contemporary turn towards things is largely derived from current scholarship in continental philosophy like that of Silivia Benso, the need to make room for the depth of things is not a new idea. Almost all of the current scholarship can be traced back in one form or another to the mercurial and polarizing thought of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger. In fact, my own interest in the depth of things was not initially motivated by consultation with current literature, but with a fascination with phenomenology and an inevitable rendezvous with Heidegger's philosophical works many years ago. This a good point at which to address the choice to travel portions of my dissertation with Heidegger as a companion on this voyage. While Heidegger's contributions to philosophy are noteworthy, they run parallel to the fact that one cannot and should not shake such thinking free from his well-documented involvement in the Nazi Party.[4] By drawing attention to his philosophy, I do not mean to overlook or condone his moral failings, but instead hold both to be congruent realities and part of the challenge of working with Heidegger. Moreover, Heidegger serves as both an intriguing

[4] I do not agree with Richard Rorty's suggestion that when it comes to Heidegger we need to consider his contributions to philosophy apart from the misdeeds of the man. See Knowles, Adam. *Heidegger's Fascist Affinities: A Politics of Silence*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019) 9.

and horrific example of a person and philosopher who sought to move beyond the closed fist only to remain firmly dedicated to it.

There are many different ways to interpret and approach Heidegger's expansive philosophical corpus. For instance, some scholars draw a boundary around Heidegger's principal work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) published in 1927 as the only aspect of his philosophy worth serious consideration. Others grapple with his early writings including *Being and Time* and exclude the later works. While others exclude the early works, and focus solely on the later writings. Then there are those who try to draw a single thread through the whole meandering and confounding philosophical corpus including Heidegger's private journal writings known as the *Black Notebooks*, which were published in 2013 and are the most damning example of his antisemitism and thus his corporeal closefistedness.

The present project's engagement with Heidegger can be described as adhering to the "single thread" approach. I read Heidegger as attempting to break with what he found to be Western metaphysic's careless and ruthless deployment of the closed fist, and he then spends his philosophical career trying to understand and fine-tune what it means to move beyond the closed fist to achieve a phenomenological openness that in many ways this dissertation is endeavoring towards with the open hand. Now it would be disastrous to think that Heidegger sought the open hand for the sheer reason that those like Siliva Benso have opined; there is no hint of ethics in Heidegger's thinking.[5] Nonetheless,

[5] Benso utilizes Heidegger's appreciation for things, but lack of ethics, and Levinas' ethics, but lack of appreciation for things to arrive at an ethics of things. See Benso, Silvia. *The Face of Things: A Different Side of Ethics*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000).

unlike Heidegger's mentor and the founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, Heidegger understood that the great value of phenomenology was not to grasp hold of the *eidos* or "essence" of things, but to stay open to them. Sadly though, Heidegger's great error both as a person and as a philosopher was that he maintained an unyielding attachment to the closed fist even as he sought to move beyond the closed fist and towards phenomenological openness. Thus part of the "the starry dynamo," to quote Allen Ginsberg, that energizes this effort to realize the open hand is both the challenge of avoiding a reestablishment of the closed fist and my apoplectic discontent with the way thinkers like Heidegger have endeavored to move beyond the closed fist only to stay grounded in closefistedness.

To my mind, it is entirely unacceptable to advocate for a move beyond the closed fist only to assert an answer that is itself closefisted. In addition to Heidegger, contemporary thinkers like Iain McGilchrist, François Laruelle, Ray Brassier, Quentin Meillassoux, and Graham Harman all serve as examples in this dissertation of attempts to move beyond the closed fist only to stay grounded in closefistedness. So part of the work that this dissertation undertakes in its effort to realize the open hand, is a consideration of why this error is committed and how we can avoid it. Briefly stated, the root of this error is related to the concern glimpsed during the earlier consideration of a flat ontology. Moving away from the closed fist requires moving away from ontological hierarchy and into the realm of open-ended plurality. The issue with plurality is that it appears to entail nothingness, and as Graham Harman is apt to say, "there is no room for 'nothingness' in ontology" (Harman 2002, 11). So in an attempt to avoid the specter of nothingness that

arises with the plurality of a flat ontology, the brash and closefisted decision is often made to assert some privileged mode of encounter, technology, domain, and so forth in order to restore order and to assuage the fear that without the closed fist we are thrust into irrationalism and nothingness.

This project shows that moving beyond the closed fist with the open hand does not lead to an irrational nothingness. More importantly, this project advances the claim that the action that fosters the open hand cannot be monopolized, but has to be open to all. Thus, the open hand avoids a reestablishment of the closed fist or a closefisted answer with an action of inclusion not exclusion. We can best acquire a facility for this action by first interacting with Heidegger's thought. It is through Heidegger that I show that the key obstacle to the open hand is "self-centeredness." The term "self-centeredness" is derived from the British Historian and philosopher Arnold Tonybee, but as I will discuss shortly, it is also used alongside "self-enclosure" (*jiko-nai-heisasei* 自己-内-閉鎖性) in the philosophical thought of Keiji Nishitani (Nishitani 1983, 242).

My engagement with Heidegger's thinking in this dissertation provides us with a way of understanding the full deficiency of the closed fist, as well as how the action that realizes the open hand has to be an action that mitigates what Heidegger frames as a kind of "originary" or existential self-centeredness. But as mentioned, Heidegger does not take on this self-centeredness directly and ultimately he never jettisons the closed fist. To repeat, this is the fatal hubris of some theorists who seek to move beyond the closed fist. The lack of willingness to make room for nothingness or the issue of self-centeredness, maintains a reliance on the closed fist. One of the keys to my effort to think through what it means to extend the open hand to make room for the depth of things is that given the

issue of self-centeredness, the open hand cannot be modeled by staying rooted in a Western philosophical orientation, and must seek the expertise and help of Eastern philosophical thought. My decision to seek help from those like Nāgārjuna who represents the Madhyamaka ("middle way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhism[6] or from Zen Buddhism, which is represented in this dissertation by the Kōyoto School's founder Kitarō Nishida and one of Kitarō's most noted pupils Keiji Nishitani, are not random moves, but have specific intentions.

First, with respect to Buddhism there is a certain gestural facility for the open hand. Now while we cannot and should not restrict the open hand or even the use of "gesture" (*mudr*ā) to Buddhism or a specific school or tradition of Buddhism, it is interesting to note how the open hand is used in Buddhist practice, as well as depicted in sculptures and representational images of the Buddha. We might for example envision what is called in Sanskrit the "Dhyana" *mudrā* or in Japanese *Jō-in* (*定印*), which is used during the practice of meditation. Here the back of the right hand rests on the open palm of the left hand with the thumbs lightly touching (Saunders 1985). We can think of the bowl shape created by the hands embodying the emptiness of meditation. We might also think of the "Abhaya" *mudrā* or in Japanese *Semui-in* (*施無畏印*), which symbolizes such meanings as "peace" and "protection." The performance of this particular gesture can vary, but often it is depicted with the right hand raised to about the shoulder level with the palm facing out and the fingers pointing upward,[7] while perhaps the left hand

[6] Nāgārjuna is one of the great Buddhist figures and central to the Madhyamaka ("middle way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. See McCagney, Nancy. *Nāgārjuna* And The Philosophy of Openness (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, In., 1997) 1.
[7] This is often the case in Theravāda Buddhist depictions of Abhaya mudra.

rests with the palm facing upward across the lap (1985). It should be noted in light of the idea of the closed fist that there is the "Vajra" *mudrā* or in Japanese *Chi Ken-in* (*智拳印*), which is referred to as "the fist of wisdom *mudrā*." This mudra depicts the right hand grasping hold of the left hand's index finger (1985).

Second, just as this dissertation has to turn to Heidegger, in a very congruent way this means we have to turn to the thought of Keiji Nishitani. Part of the reason for turning to Nishitani and working with his thinking in *Shūkyō to wa nanika* (*What is Religion?*), which was published in English (1982) as *Religion and Nothingness*, is that he was well versed in Western philosophy, specifically Heidegger's work. Nishitani frequently invoked Heidegger's thinking in his own publications (Dallmayr 1992, 37). Moreover, Heidegger is said to have been aware of the Kyōto School through visits by Count Shuzō Kuki who was a former pupil "or associate" of the founder of the Kōyoto School Kitarō Nishida (37). As Fred Dallmayr writes, "Reference to the same Count Kuki, one may note, are interspersed throughout the 'Dialogue on Language' (or dialogue with a Japanese) contained in *Unterwegs zur Sprache*" (37-38). So there is a certain latent or oblique connection that I am following between Heidegger and Nishitani. That said, and as Lin Ma has pointed out, we should not conclude that Heidegger was himself fully influenced by Eastern philosophy or actively trying to engage in and foster an East-West dialogue.[8]

Lastly, when it comes to the issue of "self-centeredness" it's simply necessary to seek help and support form Eastern philosophy. As just mentioned, my use of the term

[8] See Ma, Lin. *Heidegger on East-West Dialogue: Anticipating the Event*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

"self-centeredness" is informed by British Historian and philosopher Arnold Tonybee's use of the term, which Keiji Nishitani also uses along with the analogues term "self-enclosure" (*jiko-nai-heisasei* 自己-内-閉鎖性). My use of self-centeredness does differ in keys ways from Nishitani's use. My use of self-centeredness is informed by my consideration of Heidegger's early thoughts on *logos* as a capacity that is great at opening the world up for humans, but frequently fails to open humans up to the world. Also, self-centeredness is not intrinsically negative, but can be problematic and exacerbated by our contemporary *technicity* or technological lifestyle. Conversely, Nishitani finds self-centeredness/self-enclosure to be inherently negative and the result of a modern sense of nihilism.

Nevertheless, overcoming self-centeredness or a closefisted attachment to the self and reaching a kind of selflessness or self-opening, is a point of agreement for both my thinking and for Nishitani. According to Nishitani, the remedy to the *avidyā* "darkness of ignorance" or "fundamental darkness" (無明 *mumyō*) that arises out of a closefisted self-centeredness is a "self-emptying," which is actuated by a movement towards *śūnyatā*. *Śūnyatā* (pronounced SHo͞onyə˛tä) is commonly translated as, "void, vacuité, nothingness," but above all "emptiness" (McCagney 1997, 26). Now while self-emptying might invoke the Christian idea of *kenōsis*, I agree with Steven Odin's caution that while there is a motif in the Kyōto School of relating *kenōsis* and *ekkenōsis* to *śūnyatā*, we should not equate the two. [9]

[9] See Odin, Steve. 1989. "A Critique of the "*Kenōsis/ Śūnyatā*" Motif in Nishida and the Kyoto School." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9: 72.

Instead, Nishitani's use of "self-emptying" in relation to *śūnyatā* or in Japanese *kū*, brings us to a selflessness or "non-ego" (*muga,* 無私) that is more akin to the Buddhist conception of *anātman* or "no-self." Although as I argue, Nishitani seems to draw on the Hindu School of thought known as Advaita Vedānta, to provide an Advaitic[10] twist that allows for a real self or "all self" (*ātman*) arising out of our being "no-self" (*anātman*). It's this allowance for a real self out of being no-self that would appear to place Nishitani at odds with Mahāyāna Buddhism and Nāgārjuna in particular. While perhaps controversial, I maintain that Nishitani's discussion of *śūnyatā* is not necessarily irreconcilable with Nāgārjuna's philosophy. I follow the idea advanced in Nancy McCagney's study that takes Nāgārjuna to have understood *śūnyatā* not as "emptiness," but "openness." It is with this interpretation of *śūnyatā* in terms of "openness" that we discover a synergy between Nishitani's own nondual preservation of both *ātman* and *anātman*, and Nāgārjuna's enfolding of *śūnyatā* with a central ontological principal of Buddhist philosophy that can be understood as "dependent origination" (*pratītya samutpāda*). This is a synergistic conclusion about what it means to be most intimately aligned with the reality of all things including things like ourselves, and it is this conclusion that informs the open hand.

It is important to express that within the blanket term of "Eastern philosophy" we find extremely diverse, nuanced, convergent, and divergent schools of thought that typically originate from places like India, China, and Japan (Ma 2008, 6). So we should be mindful of this fact when using a general term like "Eastern philosophy." At the same time there are certain themes that emerge out of these various traditions that at the very

[10] The Advaitic ontological assertion is more fully discussed in chapter three.

least show levels of congruence. To use Nishitani's words, "…throughout the basic thought of Buddhology, especially in the Mahāyāna tradition, the concepts of emptiness, Compassion, and non-ego are seen to be inseparably connected" (1983, 288). Additionally, we need to avoid simply reducing a discussion of "emptiness" down to only Nishitani and Nāgārjuna, or believe that only Nishitani or Nāgārjuna have contributed invaluable thought to this or any other of the many rich Buddhist concepts and teachings. Lastly, while my engagement with Eastern thought is palpable and I believe just, this engagement is not comprehensive or exhaustive. The purpose of this dissertation is to think through what it means to extend the open hand to make room for the depth that intangibly inheres in all things, and such an undertaking requires that this document be the site for a dialogue between East and West, but also a site for an extremely interdisciplinary discourse. So in order to keep the scope of this dissertation manageable and coherent, I made the conscious decision to set certain parameters on this work and with the various areas that inform it. I have tried my best, but I am sure more could have been done, and so I apologize in advance for leaving anything out.

There are two final points that must be attended to before we move into an overview of the chapters that constitute this project. First, when it comes to a discussion about the intangible depth of things, we are quickly made aware of the limitations of language and the need for a style of communication or "rhetoric" if you will, which does not reduce but stays open. This is a concern that is both central to this dissertation and to those fellow travelers who have sought to move beyond the closed fist. Most intuitively, notions like silence, metaphor, and enthymeme are often quickly grasped as exemplars of this "open" use of language. Unfortunately, and this is the tenacity of the closed fist at

work, silence or metaphor are not simply appreciated as having the ability to redirect us towards a more open communicative experience, but are often closefistedly anointed such that one is privileged over another or over literal language as the only way to achieve this rhetorical openness.

This dissertation very much calls upon metaphor, and does so with an intention that was not clear to me until a sagacious mentor invoked Gloria Anzaldúa's tremendous insight that, "The resistance to change in a person is in direct proportion to the number of dead metaphors that person carries" (2009, 122). At the same time, "…we can also change ourselves through metaphor" (122). This project indeed seeks to foster change by playing with the metaphors of the closed fist and the open hand. However, the appeal of moving beyond the closed fist is the hope of arriving at a way of relating that is no longer grounded in exclusion, but guided by inclusion or an act of making room. So while I agree with Anzaldúa's counsel that the use of metaphor can be "La curación—the cure" to the closefisted reliance on dead metaphors (122), such flashes of indirectness and imagery in this project should not be read as an implicit or explicit confirmation that metaphor is the exemplar of this open language. Ultimately, what is shown in the course of this dissertation is that what really allows language to stay open is a type of self-emptying that affords a selfless or humble use of language that while possible with metaphor, this self-emptying can be just as easily actuated within the realm of literal discourse.

The final note concerns John Dewey's conception of "open-mindedness." For Dewey, open-mindedness was pivotally important for an active and engaged educational experience (Hare 2004, 111). Given the phraseological symmetry of the open hand to

Dewey's open-mindedness, it might be tempting to equate the two or subsume the open hand within Dewey's conception of the open-mind. This would be in error. I am not denying that the open hand can lead to an open-mind, but as we will see, the open hand leads just as easily to an open heart and open being. Therefore, we have to recognize that the philosophical underpinnings of the open hand are very different than Dewey's assessment of open-mindedness. For instance, Dewey's open-mindedness is contrasted with "empty-mindedness," or an "anything goes" type of attitude that lacks critical awareness about the world (116). Empty-mindedness has a negative connotation for Dewey, but with respect to a concept like *śūnyatā*, the term "empty-mindedness" can be viewed as deeply beneficial and indicative of the very catalyst that allows the hand to open. As the Zen master Dōgen offers, "To practice Zen is to drop off body-and-mind" (Nishitani 1983, 185). What is shown in this dissertation is that an empty mind or empty hand does not lead to an unaware stupor, but to a fundamental openness that I am sure Dewey would appreciate. Let us now move through a quick overview of the chapters.

Overview of Chapters

This project begins (chapter two) by problematizing the closed fist and challenging its grasp on things. I consider the closed fist alongside Heidegger's thinking and the relevant flourishes in Graham Harman's work that have built upon Heidegger's "tool-analysis" from *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*). Here the closed fist is shown to be a dominate practice of relating to things, and its affinity for reduction makes it incapable of a relational "openness" (*Offenheit*), or a "making room" (*einräumen*) for and "giving space" (*Raum-geben*) to the depth of things. The closed fist is understood as leading to deception, and so ingrainded as a practice of relating to things that it creeps into the most

promising attempts to move beyond the closed fist. I identify that part of the closed fist's allure is not just the primacy it has, but the potential for it to be exacerbated by our contemporary *technicity* or technological lifestyle. Ultimately, I determine that whaterver the action is that fosters the open hand it cannot itself be closefisted; in the sense that it deceptively achieves the open hand by priviliging a specific domain or mode of encountering things. The major constraint placed on how we achieve the open hand is that the open hand has to be accessible to everything. I conclude (chapter two) with the idea that the action that satisfies the above constraint is the "action of non-action" that Nishitani calls "self-emptying" or "non-ego" (*muga,* 無私), which is explored in chapter three as more of a self-opening.

In chapter three, I consider the self-emptying at work within the open hand relative to Keiji Nishitani's understanding of *śūnyatā* (emptiness), but this leads to the "openness" of Nāgārjuna. Ultimately, we will arrive at an appreciation for how self-emptying is better understood in terms of self-opening. The self-opening results in a fundamental openness where we are granted a most intimate encounter with things, even things like ourselves. I detail how the open hand is most practically expressed in a Buddhist inspired reorientation in language, whereby our communicative expressions avoid deception and align with the reality of things through a selfless or humble use of language. I show that this rhetorical openness accords with the classical view of what it means to practice "good rhetoric." However in a world routinely dominated by the closed fist, an openhanded principle like humility is often viewed as weak. In order to challenge this misconception of humility, I unpack (chapter three) how the wisdom of humility is endlessly beneficial and is viewed as the necessary new definition of "smart" in what

Edward D. Hess and Katherine Ludwig have deemed the "The Smart Machine Age" (SMA). Since there is no more timely an example than the current pandemic for why the open hand and making room for the depth of things matters, I give space to the pandemic in chapter four.

In chapter four, I provide a lesson in the open hand by making room for the current pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19. This lesson in the open hand applies the various philosophical points made in the earlier chapters to appreciate the unfathomably deep dimensions of this event and the things human and nonhuman associated with it. This lesson mixes scientific scholarship from domains like virology and epidemiology, with perspectives of the pandemic from the arts, as well as my own relevant embodied observations. At the start of the outbreak in the Chinese city of Wuhan in January of 2019, I was living in Rome, Italy. I was uniquely situated to appreciate and study the deep dimensions of this historic event as a result of the volatile outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 in Italy, which signaled the arrival of the pandemic that the globe has come to know.

The first part of the final chapter (chapter five) unpacks the view of reality entailed by the open hand that I call *deep realism*. I then conclude (chapter five) by returning to the idea at the start of the dissertation regarding the mistake that Zeno made that still endures to this day. As mentioned, this is the misguided belief that the alignment with the reality of things entails that we relate to them with the closed fist because it is with the closed fist that we achieve the deepest knowledge about them. Instead, the closed fist's inability to make room for the depth of things means that real wisdom and the deepest knowledge are achieved with the open hand. However just as Kitarō Nishida

appreciated, the deepest knowledge about things is not a knowing, but rather a profound loving. It is this profound love and openness for the reality of things that is possible when we extend the open hand to make room for the depth that inheres in all things human and nonhuman.

Chapter Two

Heidegger and The Closed Fist

> Just the same, thinking changes the world. It changes it in ever darker depths of a riddle, depths which as they grow darker offer promise of a greater brightness.
>
> —Martin Heidegger, *Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)*

The Reductive Grasp

The "tool-analysis" from Heidegger's principal work *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*) is considered by some to be his most significant philosophical insight (Harman 2009, 17). The analysis initiates with a hammer, which is observed in a state of functional "readiness-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*) and then broken "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*). This transition seems to single some great shift in our experience of the tool, and this is exactly the conclusion we are led to if we follow the conventional interpretation of the tool-analysis. By way of the conventional reading, the hammer's move from functional readiness-to-hand to broken presence-at-hand is taken to mean that theory is grounded in practice. Here an everyday hammer sits in a background of meaningless readiness-to-hand, and it is only through our use of the tool, denoted by the breakage of the hammer that it becomes presence-at-hand, which is to say that the tool gains meaning. Alternatively, if we follow Graham Harman's reading of the tool-analysis offered in his first main work *Tool-Being* (2002) we arrive at a radically different view.

Harman contends that if you read Heidegger closely, the broken hammer's change to presence-at-hand does not reveal the object any more fully. Heidegger himself writes about the broken tool:

> But what does this reference to the modified way of encountering what is at hand, a way in which its objective presence is revealed, mean for the clarification of the

> *phenomenon of world*? In the analysis of this modification, too, we are still involved with the being of innerworldly beings. We have not yet come any closer to the phenomenon of world. (2010, 73)

What Harman identifies within Heidegger's distinction of tool/broken-tool is the important insight that all things are irreducible to their present-at-hand qualities. This irreducibility carries with it the implication that the practical use of a thing does not exhaustively grasp hold of a thing any more than scrutinizing its various qualities. The significance of this insight speaks directly to the problems of the closed fist.

The readiness-to-hand describes how in the frame-by-frame moments of our perceptual experience we do not actively tend to the things we interact with as Edmund Husserl argued (Harman 2009, 18), but instead we primarily take things for granted. The reason for this lack of attention to things is due to how the grasp of the closed fist engenders familiarity with a thing and once a thing is familiar and "at our disposal," there is nothing more to stay open to with respect to what is at-hand (Heidegger 2010, 69). It is this lack of further openness to what is at-hand that takes a thing for granted and causes it to recede into an unappreciated background.

For instance, as I type this section, I am uncomfortably seated at a kitchen table that has been appropriated for the writing of this project. As I work I do not actively tend to the table, its design, its past, future, or present. Nor do I think about things like my heart, which is circulating blood through my body, or the air that I am breathing, or the fact that the beams in the ceiling keep the floor above from crashing down upon me. With time, I will even background the discomfort I feel sitting at this table. The reason why I am not preoccupied with these things is because I believe I have a grasp on them and they are thus readily familiar to me. It follows that as long as the things around us are grasped

and familiar, then "the bloom is off the rose," and they are taken for granted and backgrounded.

It's this backgrounding of things that is problematic and precisely why Heidegger begins *Being and Time* with the question concerning the meaning of "Being" (*Sein*) and what he sees as Western thought's forgetfulness towards being (1-2). The attitude of forgetfulness towards the question concerning the meaning of being is not the result of the question's immensity, but the closed fist. When we relate to something like the notion of being with the close fist, being becomes reductively grasped in terms of a given meaning or "as something," so any further openness to the question would be unnecessary or irrational. This is Heidegger's "as-structure" (*Als-Struktur*) at work, in that the closed fist commits us to always grasping "something as something" in particular (144). When a thing has been sufficiently grasped as something in particular and made familiar, it then can be forgotten or backgrounded. The process of emplacing things in the background is part of the routine practice of relating to things with the closed fist and indicative of the closed fist's reductive tendency.

Heidegger most clearly discusses this affinity for reduction a number of years after *Being and Time* in his essay (1951), "The Thing." Heidegger suggests that when things around us are unfamiliar, they seem unsettlingly distant. We then seek to bring them near in order to resolve this discomfort and there is the belief that "nearness" is achieved by reductively grasping hold of them. Yet, Heidegger cautions us that nearness does not come about from "…the reduction of the longest distances…" (2001, 163). Rather nearness is something that we cannot encounter directly, but only "by attending to what is near" (164). In "The Thing," we are left with the impression that the closed fist,

the very action that Zeno believed led us out of deception towards the reality of things, is actually a deceptive practice of relating to things that generates distance and pushes them further away.

In a 2012 essay titled "The Third Table," Harman builds upon Heidegger's thinking, as he considers this reductive tendency in relation to Sir Arthur Stanely Eddington's discussion of two tables. At the beginning of his 1927 Gifford Lectures Eddington asserts, "I have settled down to the task of writing these lectures and have drawn up my chairs to my two tables. Two tables! Yes; there are duplicates of every object about me—two tables, two chairs, two pens" (quoted in Harman 2009, 5). The discernment that Eddington made is akin to what the American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars saw as the distinction between "the manifest image" and "the scientific image." These two "images" are really just two different ways we grasp hold of a thing like a table. By way of the manifest or quotidian grasp, the table is perhaps long and made of wood. By way of the scientific grasp offered by physics, the table is mostly empty space except for the busy work of various particles. In Eddington's estimation, the quotidian encounter is indeed meaningful, but if we want to reach what was understood as "nearness" to the table, then according to Eddington nearness is only achieved with the scientific grasp.

Harman contends that Eddington is misguided in his conclusion that the second table is the real table. Eddington's mistake is not that he is trying to seek a more "real" or intimate encounter with things, but rather that he sought to achieve such a relation with the reductive grasp, and specifically locating the real table in the grasp of science. Harman views this tendency to reduce as a historic prejudice that takes knowledge of a

thing to be derived from either a downward "undermining" form of reduction or an upward "overmining" reduction (Harman 2018, 43). The former is akin to Eddington's second table or the pre-Socratic diminution of things into fundamental elements like water and air, or into an undifferentiated lump like the *apeiron* (47). Alternatively, the upward reduction reduces things to causes and effects or even relations. The quintessential overminers for Harman are those like Alfred North Whitehead, Bruno Latour, and while Heidegger does not allow for a reduction to present-at-hand qualities, he does allow for a reduction upwards in terms of a referential totality or "equipmental totality" (Harman 2002, 32). At the same time noted figures like Derrida and Foucault do not escape this label either, since Jacques Derrida is viewed as advocating that "There's nothing outside of the text," and for Michel Foucault, everything is reduced to the structure of power that leaves no room for speaking about real independent things (Harman 2018, 49).

Now if we return to the kitchen table I am currently seated at, I can grasp after this table scientifically as the mostly empty dance of minute particles and electric charges or perhaps via a quotidian grasp as the well-warn gathering spot for the quiet cup of early-morning tea. I am not intrinsically wrong in finding what I grasp hold of to be meaningful. Where I error and deceive myself and possibly others, is when I apply the closed fist and take these tangible relations with the table to give me an intimate proximity to it, such that there is nothing more to the table outside of what has been grasped. One might wonder, what more is there to stay open to with this table beyond what is tangibly grasped? This is a question best answered in the next section.

"Making Room" as Phenomenological Openness

To answer the question raised at the end of the previous section, easily hidden from either of these ways of grasping the table is perhaps the intangible weakness in the table that at any moment could bring it crashing to the floor. The collapse of the table demonstrates, "…that just as the table could not be identified with the one we saw, it was also not the same as the one we used" (Harman 2009, 9). What Heidegger gestures towards in *Being and Time*, and Graham Harman builds upon in his own work, is the fact that all things, even things like tables and hammers have an ungraspable depth to them. More importantly, the closed fist's affinity for reduction means that it is incapable of opening up to the depth of things or what Heidegger understood in *Being and Time* as the "possibility" (*Möglichkeit*) of a thing, and in his later thought, "the mystery" (das *Geheimnis*) of a thing (2010, 36; 1966, 55-56). In a curious agreement with Heidegger, Theodor Adorno understood the depth of things in terms of "What is, is more than it is" (2007, 161; Macdonald 2011, 50). Adorno describes Heidegger's use of the word "Being" as a substitute for the deep reality that things are always more than they appear to be at the surface (2007, 102-106).

The lasting mark that can be gleaned from Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time* is not just a break with Husserlian phenomenology, but the need break with the commitment to the closed fist. The significant insight here is that in a world where all things have this unfathomable depth, the closed fist is a grossly deficient ontological practice of relating to things or what Heidegger would call "being-with" (*Mitsein*) (Huntington 2008, 317) because it inherently leads to deception and thus varying degrees

of "ontological deprivation."[11] This deception and ontological deprivation are the result of the closed fist's affinity for reduction, which does not allow for an opening up to the depth of things. As Heidegger expresses in *Being and Time*, this deception and deprivation means that, "Every priority is noiselessly squashed. Overnight, everything that is original is flattened down as something long since known. Everything won through struggle becomes something manageable. Every mystery loses its power" (2010, 123). So it would seem that in order to avoid the deception of the closed fist we need a way of relating to things that is a practice of openness, or a practice that can stay open to the intangible depth that all things have. For both my thinking and Heidegger's the notion of "openness" is crucial for a more intimate and real encounter with the world. Where Heidegger goes astray both personally and philosophically is in his unapologetic reliance on the closed fist in order to actuate what is best described as a phenomenological openness.

In one sense "openness" (*Offenheit*) for Heidegger is simply part of what it means to have one's being-in-the-world (2010, 129). This is an understanding of openness that is applied existentially to all things. For example, overtime the seaside cliff is warn away by the relentless waves because the cliff is existentially "open" (*offen*) to the forces of the sea. Equally, the cliff impedes the sea's forward movement because the sea is existentially open to the forces of the cliff. Likewise, if I were to spend all day in the

[11] Serena Parekh describes "ontological deprivation" in relation to Hannah Arendt's view that when individuals lose their political status in the world they can become "stateless" and experience a deprivation of place for their being in the world. I invoke this idea of "ontological deprivation" to mean the deprivation of a thing from its depth. See Parekh, Serena. 2014. "Beyond the ethics of admission: Stateless people, refugee camps and moral obligations." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40.7: 650.

inferno that is the current 116 degree Arizona summer day outside my window, I will undoubtedly acquire the color of a freshly boiled lobster and be worse for ware because I am open to the forces of the sun. At the same time, Heidegger in *Being and Time* closefistedly clings to the idea that humans are not just existentially open, but are uniquely capable of a phenomenological openness that aligns *Dasein* with reality or in Heidegger's terms with being. Given that the present project does not believe we can or should isolate Heidegger's philosophical closefistedness from his corporeal closefistedness, this phenomenological openness for Heidegger has to be understood anthropocentrically as an exclusive human capability and more horrifically as a kind of exclusive ethno-nationalist capability of the German people (Knowles 2019, 36-57).

Being and Time presents humans and more acutely the German people of Heidegger's era as occluded from this phenomenological openness to being and relatedly an "authentic" (*eigentlich*) way of being-in-the-world. I read Heidegger as defining this obstruction to phenomenological openness in terms of the normalization of the closefisted way of relating to being. Heidegger attributes this normalized practice of closefistedness to the public sphere or "publicness" (*Öffentlichkeit*). This vilification of the public sphere is most palpably felt in a quote from the *Black Notebooks* when he writes, "The more public the public sphere, the more closed the openness of being" (quoted in Knowles 2019, 16). As Heidegger sees it, the publicness of the public sphere is merely the place for the detrimental tendencies of "the they" (*das Man*)—"idle -chatter" (*Gerede*), "curiosity" (*Neugier*), and "ambiguity" (*Zweideutigkeit*) (2010, 111, 161-173), which produce a closed off or "inauthentic" (*uneigentlich*) experience of being that society then clings to. So Heidegger contends that there is a need for this

phenomenological openness that is comprised of a "making room" (*einräumen*) for and "giving space" (*Raum-geben*) to being as the totality of what-is (108). This openness jettisons the closed fist and achieves phenomenological openness and a more authentic experience because the "making room gives space" to being (Casey 1998, 252).

Again, Heidegger's error is not that he endeavors to move beyond the closed fist towards phenomenological openness, but in his rigid commitment to the closed fist. This closefistedness will be returned to later in this chapter and in chapter three, but it can first be understood here with regard to how he privileges "silence" (*Schweigen*) in *Being and Time*. Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*:

> Thus the mode of articulative discourse belonging to wanting to have a conscience is *reticence* [*Verschwiegenheit*]. We characterize silence [Schweigen] as an essential possibility of discourse. Whoever wants to give something to understand in silence must "have something to say." In the summons, Dasein gives itself to understand its ownmost potentiality-of-being. Thus this calling is a keeping silent. The discourse of conscience never comes to utterance. Conscience only calls silently; that is, the call comes from the soundlessness of uncanniness and calls Dasein thus summoned back to become still in the stillness of itself. Wanting to have a conscience thus understands this silent discourse appropriately only in reticence. It takes the words away from the commonsense idle chatter of the they. (2010, 283-284)

In this quote Heidegger unpacks a distinction that he makes earlier in his text between "discourse" (*Rede*) and "idle chatter" (*Gerede*). Building on what was said earlier in this chapter, the point for Heidegger is that when the closed fist is wielded we reductively grasp after things and while we have a very expedient way of hierarchically understanding the world, the consequence is a superficial or "idle" communicative interaction with things. This idle chatter propagates a closing off to the deep reality of things or for Heidegger a closing off to being because language is used reductively in

accordance with the as-structure and therefore can't make room for being. In order to avoid this idle closure so as to maintain phenomenological openness there needs to be a way to keep language open. What will become clearer by way of a later section in this chapter is that Heidegger does not just stumble upon the need to keep language open in *Being and Time*, since he arrives at this idea a few years earlier in a set of lectures he delivered at the University of Marburg. With that said, part of what Heidegger solidifies in *Being and Time* is the idea that this open form of language has to be a discourse grounded in silence.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1921) distinctively asserted in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus,* "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (1981, 189). Wittgenstein's point is typically taken to be an indictment of the unproductive nature of metaphysical pursuits. Conversely, I have often read this statement to mean that when it comes to the intangible depth that resides in all things and how we practically go about making room for such depth, what is needed is silence, but this is not an abandonment of language nor is it the silence of Wittgenstein and as we will see shortly, this is clearly not the silence of Heidegger. I raise here an idea that is further discussed in chapter three, but this "silence" amounts to what is really a humble or selfless appreciation of the limits of language and our ability to grasp hold of things. It is not silence, but a humble and nonattached usage of language that allows us to make room for the depth of all things and in turn maintains alignment with the deep reality of things even things like ourselves. Heidegger on the other hand seems to take a more literal directive from Wittgenstein's assertion.

For Heidegger as it is for my thinking, in order to have and maintain this phenomenological openness the goal is not to abandon language. It is in language that phenomenological openness can be practically fostered and maintained. Where Heidegger and I part ways concerns his closefisted vehemence for a "discourse" (*Rede*) that is only achieved through the act of reverent "reticence" (*Verschwiegenheit*) or simply the act of "silence" (*Schweigen*). In Heidegger's assessment this silent discourse affords us the most practical and authentic way of being-in-the-world, since it maintains openness to being.

Heidegger though does not just closefistedly privilege silence as part of his philosophic project, he essentializes silence as an intrinsic capacity that while perhaps not solely monopolized by the German people of his era, it is most exceptionally and authentically realizable in and by the German people. While this perhaps shows a slight difference between Heidegger and the *völkisch* thought of those like Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss, I agree with Adam Knowles that Heidegger has an affinity for *völkisch* thinking (2019, 38). Additionally, by essentializing silence in this fashion, phenomenological openness becomes anthropocentrically and ethno-nationally privileged. Since the ethno-national privilege is obviously baseless and closefisted, spending a moment on the wrongheadedness of the anthropocentric privilege is a better use of the final paragraphs of this section. Phenomenological openness as anthropocentrically privileged is best understood from a lecture course that Heidegger gave after *Being and Time* between 1929-1930 at the University of Freiburg.

In the course titled, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (*Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik. Welt—Endlichkeit—Einsamkeit*), Heidegger

advances his anthropocentric perspective when he discusses how things like animals display an "openness," but are not able to have this phenomenological openness. The differentiation here is between the existential openness or being open (*offen*) that all things including humans have, and this unique world-disclosing phenomenological openness, which allows humans to make things "openable" or "disconcealed" (*offenbar*) (1995, 248-253). This differentiation between types of openness leads to Heidegger's famous assessment that animals, while not "worldless" like the river rock, they are world poor in comparison to the richness of world that humans can have (Agamben 2004, 55). While I agree that when we make room for things we can have this more intimate encounter with things indicative of phenomenological openness, I wholeheartedly disagree that such phenomenological openness or "making room" is only possibly by a certain group of people, humans in general, nor is it achieved by privileging a specific capacity like silence. What will be shown later on in this chapter and most fully in chapter three, is that Heidegger's attempt at phenomenological openness was doomed from the start, since this phenomenological openness wherein room is made for the intangible depth of things is really a fundamental openness that is only achievable with the open hand, which is guided by an act of inclusion not exclusion.

In the present project, openness is indeed understood as an existential of all things as described in the first instance. However in the second instance contra Heidegger, this other kind of openness or phenomenological openness wherein the making room occurs is clearly not just the privilege of human beings, but is an action that anything can engage in. We need only to think of the way animals, especially those we have perhaps unfairly emplaced as pets, will frequently make room for and give space to humans, such that they

provide a profound example of what it means to embody this phenomenological openness and most intimate encounter with things. Even a thing like a house can teach us about this phenomenological openness, since a home frequently makes room for our laughter and tears, our celebrations and quite hours of slumber. Thus this second sense of phenomenological openness as an action of making room that gives space to things is not just a human action, but available to everything. Secondly, when humans do engage it, what is undone is the deceptive hold that the closed fist has on all things including ourselves. Now, for those who think that the depth of things and a need to be open to this depth is absurd, the fact is that because of our existential openness, we all routinely collide with with this deep aspect of things, albiet indirectly. What is truly absurd is that we often don't learn from these interactions, so as to opt for a practice of relating that makes room for the depth of things. A return to the tool-analysis provides us with some insight into why this is the case.

Deep Disruptions

As discussed already, in the tool-analysis Heidegger describes a moment when the hammer suddenly breaks and the tool becomes "presence-at-hand" (*Vorhandenheit*). In an affirmation of Graham Harman's reading, Heidegger's view of the broken tool as presence-at-hand is not an experience that delivers us into a new understanding of the tool or even an encounter with a new kind of entity. However there is addendum to the Harman reading that grants us greater insight into what exactly occurs when the hammer breaks. This addition concerns what Heidegger calls a "disruption of reference" (2010, 74).

When the hammer breaks the tangible reference or the closefisted practice of relating with the hammer as a "handy" tool is disrupted, and with the disruption the thing is momentarily no longer familiar to us; it is "unhandy" and strange (73). Once the hammer breaks and becomes unhandy, what is really broken is the familiarity that the reference provided when the tool was grasped as something in particular. So with the disruption of reference we find a breakdown in the "as-structure" and the loss of familiarity. Without the familiarity provided by the reference, any tangible insight is refused and the "as-structure" at least momentarily comes crumbling down. We often view this refusal as a kind of loss or an unproductive interruption, not as an important moment. In Heidegger's *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning) (Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, he describes the importance of the refusal, "Refusal (the essential swaying of be-ing) is the highest actuality of the highest possible as possible and thus is the first necessity…" (1999, 172). In other words, in the refusal of the actual reference we are indirectly aligned with a thing's "highest possible as possible" or simply its intangible depth.

So the shift from readiness-to-hand to presence-at-hand is really a shift from the closed fist to the refusal, which marks an indirect alignment with the depth of things. In any given day there might be any number of disruptions of reference that unsettle the grip of the closed fist and they need not require the breaking of a tool or any other thing for that matter. A disruption of reference could be as simple as a butterfly grazing your shoulder or as complex as a pandemic fueled by a novel zoonotic introduction of a bat-borne coronavirus. The question that resounds is why if we undergo disruptions of reference all the time do we not learn from them, but instead, recommit to relating with

things with the closed fist? The simple answer is that, "Unhandy things are disturbing…" (Heidegger 2010, 73), so there is a strong, if not stronger allure to the closed fist because of the comfort and familiarity it provides.[12]

The more complicated answer has to do with how the refused experience of the depth of things is utterly estranging and self-challenging in its "uncanny" (*unheimlich*) lack of graspable surface presence. Since the depth of things is indirectly experienced as the "obtrusiveness" of the refusal (73), wherein there seems to be nothing to grasp, we fear this perceived nothingness and we fear the depth of things. This point will be further unpacked in a later section, but this fear is not just about a lack of a grasp on things, but a lack of a grasp on the self, since part of what is achieved by grasping hold of things is a sense of the self. Thus when we are acquainted with the depth of things by way of the refused grasp, there is a recommitment to the closed fist in order to not only regain a hold on things, but a hold on a sense of self. Now while this fear is understandable, what can't happen, but often does occur, is a further commitment to the closed fist in order to end the nagging obtrusiveness of this fear. To complicate matters, our contemporary *technicity* or technological lifestyle, while having many positive attributes, one of its major drawbacks is that it can exacerbate a commitment to the closed fist, which has the potential to foreclose on our ability to extend the open hand.

[12] This point places my thinking at odds with someone like Graham Harman and his Object-oriented philosophy or ontology because Harman holds that the "allure" is all on the side of the deeply hidden real objects. I don't deny that the depth of things is alluring, but clearly the closed fist has more of an apparent allure do to the familiarity that it provides. See Harman, Graham. 2007. "On Vicarious Causation." *Collapse*: 220-221.

The Closed Fist and Contemporary *Technicity*

Our contemporary *technicity* in many ways is simply amazing. For most of us, daily life is preoccupied by a firm grip around smartphones that have more computing power than the guidance computer (AGC) that sent Apollo 11 to the moon (Madrigal 2019). From within this lifestyle we can easily see what the weather is going to do days if not weeks into the future, complicated surgeries can be conducted remotely, and we search, send, and retrieve countless updates, messages, and videos from all over the world in a vast web of instantaneous information. What is not so wonderful about contemporary technicity is that we can easily lead ourselves to the faulty conclusion that there are no hidden depths or as Steven Shaviro writes:

> We live in a world where all manner of cultural expressions are digitally transcoded and electronically disseminated, where genetic material is freely recombined, and where matter is becoming open to direct manipulation on the atomic and subatomic scales. Nothing is hidden; there are no more concealed depths. The universe of things is not just available to us but increasingly unavoidable. (Shaviro 2014, 43)

It is precisely this kind of unabashed fixation with the tangible surface presence of things that fueled Heidegger's own worry about technology.

Admittedly, Heidegger had an ever-evolving stance on technology,[13] but the crux of his concern was that with the incredible reach of modern technologies we become convinced that we can shrink all distances and therefore plumb all depths. In contemporary technicity the reality is that great distances can indeed be traversed almost instantaneously. Whether it's the obscure song or a favorite gustatory wonder from across

[13] Hubert L. Dreyfus provides a thorough explanation of Heidegger's evolving perspective on technology. See Dreyfus, L. Hubert, and Spinosa, Charles. 2003. "Further Reflections on Heidegger, Technology, and the Everyday." *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 23.5: 339-349.

the country, with a few search results or the use of a service like "Goldbelly," what seemed incredibly far is now readily at-hand. As was noted in the discussion of Heidegger's "The Thing," the closed fist reinforces the deceptive perspective that "nearness" or a more intimate proximity to things results from the reduction of physical distance. Since contemporary technicity does indeed allow for a great reduction of distance, a commitment to the close fist can be easily exacerbated, such that our focus becomes solely on the accessible surface of things, "devoid of distance" and devoid of depth (Harman 2010, 22). Harman writes, "In this way, all objects are reduced to a single mournful feature: their superficiality in comparison with the withdrawn depth of being" (22). Furthermore, with this closefisted fixation on surface presence comes the added belief that we can have control over things.

W. Ross Ashby was one of the founding fathers of Cybernetics and systems theory. One of Ashby's great contributions is known as *Ashby's Law of Requisite Variety*. This law is so central to Cybernetics it is referred to as the "First Law of Cybernetics" and it simply states that; "Only variety can destroy variety" (Ashby 1956, 207). In other words, in any system the relationship between the ability to have control over a given system and the actual control one has of that system is dependent on securing the requisite variety or "information" about that system. If it is a simple system the amount of requisite variety needed is relatively simple, but if we have a complex system then the amount of requisite variety has to be equally complex. In either instance, control is directly dependent on a reduction in the number of uncertainties or intangible depths. By way of *Ashby's Law*, if contemporary technicity promotes the illusion that there are no

more hidden depths then it's easy for one to fall into the closefisted trap that the requisite variety for control has been achieved.

The more we fall for the beguiling, but deceitful promise that contemporary technicity can shed light on all hidden depths and provide control over things, the more we commit ourselves to the closed fist. In this manner we willfully begin to operate more like, "…a defensive closed system than a system open to discomforting information, differing opinions, and new information that may challenge our stories about who we are and how the world works or to experimenting and opening ourselves up to learning from mistakes and failures" (Hess and Ludwig 2017, 30). Compounding this issue is the fact that our contemporary techinicity can unintentionally hallow out our ability to counteract a commitment to the closed fist, so much so that our ability to open the hand can be foreclosed on. In Maryanne Wolf's *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain and the Digital World*, this scholar and global advocate for children and literacy, gives us some insight into the dynamics of this unintended outcome of our contemporary technicity.

The impetus for Wolf's investigation into how our digital lifestyle has impacted our reading brain is derived from her own experience trying to reread Hermann Hess's *Magister Ludi* (*The Glass Bead Game*). Despite her past fondness and familiarity with the book, the result was that she simply could not read it (2018, 99). Wolf's struggles with Hess's celebrated work are diagnostic of how our ability to conduct the kind of reading necessary for a book like *Magister Ludi* has been impacted by the mode of reading that has become the norm for so many of us in our contemporary technicity. This is a mode of reading derived from our daily experience of being inundated with huge amounts of information and having to rapidly process that information, which for Wolf noticeably

impeded her ability to open up to Hess's story (99). In Wolf's assessment, a work like *Magister Ludi* requires "deep reading" and our capacity to read deeply is being adversely impacted by our contemporary technicity.

Deep reading is not a hegemonic view of reading that maintains some paradigm about The Great Books or canonical texts being the only literature worth reading. Deep reading is merely the kind of reading where we engage the patience, reflection, empathy, critical thinking, and humility required when we really sit with a text. Unfortunately, deep reading is critically at odds with the kind of reading that we frequently perform in our digitally mediated lives, which is exemplified in an application like "Blinkist." Unlike the CliffsNotes of yore, which had to be read, we now have applications like the German nonfiction book summarizing service "Blinkist." The slogan on their website reads "Fit learning into your life" and offers to bring "you the knowledge from top nonfiction, so you can learn anytime, anywhere" ("Blinkist" n.d.) Not to be confused with an audio book service, Blinkist reduces major nonfiction works down to the key insights of the text so that you can listen[14] to all the important information of a selected work in a condensed 15-minute segment or "Blink."

Maryanne Wolf's concern is highlighted in an application like Blinkist because it prioritizes the simple grasp or acquisition of information, and ignores what is perhaps truly important; the abilities engaged and fostered when we take the time to read through the actual text, regardless of whether the reading takes place on a tablet or in a more traditional form. The reason that deep reading is challenging is because it requires us to surrender to the text. Deep reading's challenge is in opposition to an app like Blinkist,

[14] Blinkist does offer a condensed text option as well.

which contends that we fit learning into our lives, since in deep reading we make room for learning, and thus open our lives to the educational experience.

I am reminded here of a philosophy conference I attended a number of years ago in Kathmandu, Nepal. One of the papers presented by an American academic discussed the idea of studying the brains of "expert meditators" when they reach a state of deep meditation or *samādhi*. The thrust of the paper was that if we could see how the brain was being activated during *samādhi,* then perhaps we could recreate such circumstances through a technological device or a chip implanted in the brain that would bring even the most novice meditator instantly to a state of deep awareness. Just like with Blinkist and reading, the presenter of this idea missed the whole point of meditative practice. Whether we are talking about reading or meditation, the value is the day-in-day-out practice, since it is the actual practice that compels us towards such things as openness, empathy, patience, reflection, and so forth. If we short-circuit or bypass the difficult work of the practice, we risk undermining and under developing not just our ability to engage in deep reading or meditation, but our abilities to empathize and think critically, and this ultimately impacts our ability to break a commitment to the closed fist.

The loss of deep reading and these other unintended consequences are of a serious concern for us all if not the fate of a functional democracy, but there is hope. For those of us who have lived during a time when our lives were not constantly digitally mediated, Wolf suggests that with a little diligence we can restore our capacity for something like deep reading.[15] The real concern should be for young children who know nothing but life

[15] It took Wolf two weeks of diligently practicing deep reading before her "pace of reading now matched the pace of the action in the book." See Wolf, Maryanne. *Reader,*

in a digitally mediated world and whose attention is up for grabs (Wolf 2018, 108). Research shows that due to the slight amount of prefrontal brain development in younger children, they're easily distracted and are more susceptible to the stimulus that is shiny and new (109). Again, the loss here is not just about a sentimental attachment to reading, but that if things like deep reading are consistently undermined we will see a greater erosion of things like empathy.[16] With the diminishment of the ability to empathize comes at the very least a weakening of our ability to resist a commitment to the closed fist, and at worst an irreparable foreclosure on our ability to open the hand.

With all this said, we must avoid thinking that just because a commitment to the closed fist can be exacerbated by our contemporary technicity that we have to avoid technicity[17] or shun digital technologies altogether. As Heidegger noted in his *Memorial Address* (1955), "It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil. We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances" (1966, 53). Similarly, Wolf outlines a plan for how we should work with digital life when it comes to younger children in order to help them foster deep reading and the reading brain in general (2018, 105-149). So the

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Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018) 101.

[16] Wolfe notes that research conducted by Sara Konrath in affiliation with her Stanford University research group has shown a 40 percent decline in empathy among young people over the last two decades. The greatest decline falls within the last ten years. See Wolf, Maryanne. *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018) 50.

[17] Even if we wanted to avoid technicity it is impossible to do so. This is a point engaged by Heidegger, but most evident in the work of Bernard Stiegler whose concept of "individuation" asserts that human beings are "co-constituted with technology." For example, something like language can be considered a technology. See Kouppanou, Anna. 2015. "Bernard Stiegler's Philosophy of Technology: Invention, decision, and education in times of digitization." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47.10: 1110.

antidote is not a vilification of contemporary technicity or technology, but to foster a "free relation" with all things that allows us to stay open to them (Heidegger 1977, 3). It is here that the realization starts to set in that much to Zeno's dismay, it is not the closed fist, but the open hand that allows for this free and most intimate encounter with all things.

At this point I anticipate some early pushback. The closed fist may very well be incompatible with the depth of things, but surely the open hand, which appears at first glance to entail a lack of a hold on anything and everything, is itself incompatible with a lucid existence. There would seem to be a serious impasse here, but this impasse is the result of a misunderstanding about the problem. The issue at-hand is not one of grasp/no grasp, since with the open hand there's very much a type of grasping at work. Take the principles of democracy for example. Principles like inalienable rights or equality and freedom for all are intrinsically openhanded principles. The historic problem and one that still plagues a country like the United States, is that the practice of these openhanded principles has been besmirched by the grasp of the closed fist. So engaging in the practice of the open hand does not mean we lose hold of something like democracy, but that we more intimately and accurately align our handedness with the truth of these principles so that they can be extended to all, and not closefistedly grasped by only a few. The more pressing question is how do we achieve the open hand? The peculiar challenge of this question is that we have to first avoid the trap of moving beyond the closed fist by asserting a closefisted answer.

Closefisted Answers

Iain McGilchrist, a psychiatrist and former Oxford literary scholar, understands a commitment to the closed fist in terms of the left-hemisphere of the brain experiencing a cyclical moment of dominance over the right-hemisphere. According to McGilchrist, the right-hemisphere is what allows us to engage capacities like flexibility and openness, whereas the left-hemisphere is preoccupied with the surface presences; what is graspable and familiar (2009, 152). In a world where the left-hemisphere has won out, "Technology would flourish, as an expression of the left-hemisphere's desire to manipulate and control the world for its own pleasure, but it would be accompanied by a vast expansion of bureaucracy, systems of abstraction and control" (429). McGilchrist's argument is interesting, and it leads one to think that we can counteract the closed fist by privileging right-hemisphere activities, which for McGilchrist would perhaps require a prioritization of art and religion (445).

McGilchrist clearly offers us an answer for how to move beyond the closed fist, but his answer relies on the paradigm of the closed fist. The closefistedness of the answer is reflected in a privileging of a domain like art, and largely reducing openness and empathy to only one hemisphere of the brain over another. Additionally, truth for McGilchrist is viewed as a "process" (155), which denies the deeper substantial and agentic truth that unfathomably resides in all things human and nonhuman. McGilchrist is not alone or even the most egregious example of trying to jettison the closed fist with a closefisted answer. Rather this is a common problem at work in the most promising of perspectives, like that of François Laruelle's "non-philosophy," which seeks to undo the authoritarian hold that "standard-philosophy" has over thought (Maoilearca 2015, 8-9).

For Laruelle, we move beyond the closed fist with "non-philosophy." Non-philosophy is exemplified by the activity of "photography," since photography, "presents things without being about them—that is, without representing them or intending them as objects" (Shaviro 2014, 130). Unfortunately, the decision to anoint photography is a closefisted answer, which not only privileges one region of art over another, but reinforces the focus on the very human activity of taking photographs. While non-philosophy results in a reestablishment of the closed fist, its error is understandable, and like McGilchrist's it is not horribly appalling. Conversely, if we consider the "eliminativist" perspectives of Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux, their closefisted answers are nothing short of repugnant.

For both Brassier and Meillassoux the only way to turn towards things and make room for them is to completely eliminate subjective perceptual experience (73). The pair suggest that aligning ourselves with the reality of things means aligning ourselves with a view of reality that, "…takes seriously the possibility that there is nothing living or willing in the inorganic realm" (Meillassoux 2008, 38; Shaviro 2014, 73). In other words, for both Brassier and Meillassoux things are simply inert and inactive, and the use of thought and language actually get in the way of aligning ourselves with the reality of things. Where Brassier and Meillassoux diverge in their approaches to eliminativism concerns how we make room for the reality of things.

In what Shaviro deems to be a radicalization of "Badiou's dictum that mathematics is ontology" (2014, 74), Meillassoux's paradigm is actuated by "the mathematization of nature," wherein a pure or objective experience of the world is only made possible by privileging mathematical formalism (74). Conversely and more

radically eliminativistic, Ray Brassier argues that humans need to view themselves as just as inert and inactive as the things around them really are (75). Brassier brings forth a heavy dose of nihilism, wherein real wisdom and the deepest knowledge about things is achieved when we reach an "extinction of meaning" and I would add meaning making (2007, 238; Shaviro 2014, 75).

Whatever answer we arrive at for how we move beyond the closed fist, it has to be a move that avoids being closefisted in the manner shown for McGilchrist and Laruelle, but most importantly in the manner just shown for Meillassoux and Brassier. This may seem like an impossible task. It may also seem that if it is possible, whatever answer reached would surely be irrational and untenable in its impracticality. This challenge is only made worse by the fact that if we look for an answer in Heidegger's thinking we are easily led astray as result of his fierce personal and philosophical commitment to the closed fist.

As we have seen, part of this commitment is expressed in his focus on silence and a silent discourse in *Being and Time*. This is a point that will be returned to in chapter three, but in Heidegger's later thought the silent discourse from *Being and Time* is most fully realized in and with poetry. This though should not be understood as a mere interest in poetry, since Heidegger houdinies himself to the poetic with a padlock and chains, and chucks the key into Homer's "wine-dark" sea. In "The Thinker As Poet" (1947), which was originally titled "From the Experience of Thinking" (*Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*), Heidegger writes, "But poetry that thinks is in truth the topology of Being. This topology tells Being the whereabouts of its actual presence" (2001, 12). For Heidegger a thing's intangible "thingness" is not ultimately understood in terms of depth,

but as the topological ground of be-ing (*Topologie des Seyns*) or the place where the gathering of "the fourfold" (*das Geviert*) occurs (Heidegger [1969] 2003, 41; 2001, 148). This is to say, a thing is the gathering place of being as a *primal* oneness and, "By a primal oneness the four—earth and sky, divinities and mortals belong together in one" (2001, 147).

In the later thought of Heidegger we now achieve phenomenological openness and thus a most intimate encounter with things when we open up to a thing as the fourfold gathering place of being as these four world regions (*Gegend*). Thus, phenomenological openness requires opening up to a thing as the fourfold gathering place of these four world regions (*Gegend*), and the name for phenomenological openness is now "poetic dwelling" (2001, 209). When we dwell poetically with things, we avoid the deception of the closed fist because we make room for the fourfold in things. While closefisted, when faced with the intangible depth of things the desire to cling to aesthetics or poetry is understandable. For Heidegger though, there is an additional element at play in the closefistedness of his answer that makes it entirely unacceptable.

Heidegger understood in *Being and Time* that silent discourse was crucial for maintaining phenomenological openness, but it is safe to say that he did not know what it looked like. It wasn't until 1931 when he delivered a lecture series on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that Heidegger arrived at the model for this kind of discourse, which then amplified his move towards poetry (Knowles 2019, 79). It is in this lecture series that Heidegger reads Aristotle as modeling the poetic measure of language, which is to say that in "production" (*poiēsis*) one must understand the limits within which one is working (95,97). For Heidegger the limits or the measure of productive discourse are only

maintained with silence, and he sees Aristotle as demonstrating this fact. This rhetorical style that Heidegger finds in Aristotle is not the closefisted use of language where something like being is reductively sealed up in the as-structure and forgotten, but rather a rhetorical openness that is attuned to the fact that we can't exhaust a thing through words, things are always deeper than what we say about them. It's just as the quote from Christopher Paolini at the start of this dissertation gestures towards, regardless if we are talking about a thing like the sea or some other human or nonhuman thing, "No matter what you say about it, there is always that which you can't" (2003, 169).

Troublingly, Heidegger does not just recognize this facility for silent discourse as specific to Aristotle's philosophical prowess, but he identifies it as a uniquely Greek conception of silence, and way of thinking and speaking through silence (98). Thus Heidegger locates and attributes the mastery of this silent discourse that productively abides by the poetic measure of language in ancient Greece and to the Greeks. By locating the capacity for silence and the mastery of silent discourse in ancient Greece, Heidegger lionizes what Adam Knowles describes as a gendered notion of "male self-mastery" in relation to silence (2019, 102). In ancient Greece a significant feature of manliness was one's ability to "master silence," in the sense that a real man knows when to be silent and when not be (102-103, 124, 126).

Therefore, part of what is closefistedly preserved by Heidegger is an elitist notion of silence that is attributed to only an "elite class of men" who had the special capacity to master silence (148). Such elitism means that one is afforded the privilege to speak, and more importantly the privilege to be silent, and such privilege in ancient Greece was, "…associated solely with virtuous Greek men, as opposed to women, slaves, and non-

Greeks" (125). Nevertheless, with the lectures on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Heidegger found what he read to be the progenitors of the phenomenological openness to being, wherein such openness is only achieved through silent discourse or dwelling with the poetic measure of language, which according to Heidegger the Greeks had mastered. In true *völkisch* fashion, the Heidegger of the 1930s took the German people to be most uniquely capable of opening up to being because they were the direct successors of a Greek-German lineage that bestowed upon them this essential capacity for silence and thus the ability to dwell by the poetic measure of language (153).

Besides the corporeal closefistedness just described in Heidegger's move towards the poetic, this move is philosophically closefisted because of how it reinforces an unhelpful distinction between domains of life like aesthetics and the sciences. Heidegger is often viewed as having embraced a kind of scientism or anti-scientific position, which is exemplified in an assertion about how scientific knowledge, "…annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded" (2001, 168). Turning to an aesthetic form of communication like poetry as the proper guiding star when in search of the truth of things is not necessarily a new idea. R.G. Collingwood wrote of the philosophical method, "The principles on which the philosopher uses language are those of poetry; but what he writes is not poetry but prose" (1977, 214). While Heidegger is guilty of closefistedly clinging to poetry, a more aggressive and pretentious commitment to a closefisted privileging of aesthetics is found in the contemporary continental school of thought known variously as "object-oriented philosophy" (OOP) or "object-oriented ontology (OOO). While I am sympathetic to the idea of turning to aesthetics, it simply has to be avoided for reasons that are detailed in the remaining paragraphs of this section.

Let's imagine that we are standing within The Octagonal Courtyard of the Museo Pio Clementino in the Vatican Museum. Before us is "Laocoön and His Sons;" a nearly seven-foot tall marble sculpture created somewhere between 40-30 BCE and uncovered in Rome in the 16th Century ("Laocoön" n.d.). The life-size sculpture shows the Trojan priest Laocoön and his sons Antiphantes and Thymbraeus, battling a set of sea-serpents sent to attack the trio by the gods. The attack is the result of Laocoön's warning the Trojans not to accept the horse conveniently left behind by the Greek army. In the throws of the aesthetic encounter we are witness to the winding assault of the serpents and the unrelenting contortions of agony exhibited by Laocoön and his sons. The encounter between the sculpture and ourselves may result in a photograph or in ruminating on the meaning of the work; it exudes human suffering or more abstractly the suffering of Troy who brought the horse within its mighty walls. However unlike the city of Troy, our siege to grasp hold and reduce the artwork fails, just as my description of the sculpture does not do justice to the work. The reality is that no matter how we encounter the work, it always exceeds our grasp because like all things, the work has a depth that can't be grasped or summarized.

The phenomenon described in the aesthetic encounter of "Laocoön and His Sons" is analogous to what R.G. Collingwood called in his 1924 work *Speculum Mentis* "the failure of art." Collingwood writes, "In art the very secret of the universe is laid bare, and we know those hidden things for which the scientist and the philosopher are painfully searching" (2011, 108). Although, Collingwood deems that what is "laid bare" is intangible. Collingwood describes this lack of tangibility as "the failure of art," but this is not an absolute failure. As Collingwood says "substantial truth" is revealed in art, but this

is not truth in a formal sense. Alternatively, truth is revealed in the "guise of beauty," but beauty for Collingwood is not a formal or tangible assertion (110). Therefore according to Collingwood, "Art asserts nothing…Art fails us because it does not assert. It is pregnant with a message it cannot deliver" (110). But again, this is a "failure" only insofar as the work's substantial truth inheres in its depth, which always exceeds our attempts to access it. The impression left by Collingwood's description of the failure of art and my description of "Laocoön and His Sons," is that an aesthetic encounter with a thing most consistently and overtly familiarizes us with its depth. It's precisely this kind of sentiment that object-oriented philosophy tries to capitalize on.

When it comes to aesthetics, it seems that we take one of two directions. We often demean aesthetics and elevate domains like the sciences, or inversely we indulgently anoint aesthetics with safeguarding the secrets of the universe. Object-oriented philosophy takes the latter path to suggest that the expertise of aesthetics is precisely the unfathomable depth of things. This is not say that the aesthetic encounter teaches one how to fathom the unfathomable or to grasp the ungraspable, but rather it cultivates an appreciatory "taste" for the estranging depth that all things have (Harman 2018, 83). The conclusion drawn by OOP is that aesthetics, above all other domains, is intrinsically orientated towards the depth of things. In Graham Harman's words, "The Philosophy of the Third Table is aesthetics" (2012, 14-15). Therefore, according to OOP to learn what it means to extend the open hand we should only look to the arts and artists from all genres (Harman 2012, 14).

The attraction to aesthetics is understandable, but privileging the aesthetics or the aesthetic encounter commits us again to a closefisted answer and thus leaves us grounded

in the closed fist. Harman's compassionate plea is that, "the real is something that cannot be known, only loved" (2012, 12), but loving reality cannot be the result of making one domain superior to others and excluding other domains or modes of encounter like the everyday, as well as the scientific, economic, political, religious, mathematic, and so forth from extending the open hand because they are "literal" domains. Object-oriented philosophy possesses the point of view that "…literalism is inherently flawed…" and so it privileges "nonliteral" or metaphoric domains like the arts and design or even rhetoric because of its use of enthymeme (Harman 2018, 7, 93). As Ray Brassier points out, this monopolistic emphasis on the aesthetic encounter creates a paradigm where "metaphorical allusion trumps scientific investigation" (2014, 418). Highlighted in these examples of trying to move beyond the closed fist only to stay grounded in the closed fist is the tenacity that this practice of relating to things has, which can lead even the most well intentioned attempt to move beyond the closed fist further into it.

To my mind, moving beyond the closed fist means striving for the open hand, and the open hand cannot be the result of a reductive prioritization of a group of people, a capacity like silence, an organ like the brain, or a domain like aesthetics over and above others. The whole point of the open hand is to avoid the deception and reduction of the closed fist, so no mode of encounter, group of people, technology, domain, and so forth can be superior in its ability to foster openhandedness. Therefore, and against Harman's conclusion, a philosophy of "The Third Table" cannot be aesthetics, but has to be a philosophy of openness; a philosophy found with the open hand. Now while the open hand can't be monopolized, this does not mean that the arts or the sciences can't foster this mode of relating to things. In order to avoid a closefisted answer, the main constraint

on how we achieve the open hand is that the open hand has to be accessible to all, and therefore has to be realized with an action of inclusion not exclusion. What kind of action might this be then? Conveniently and bizarrely, Heidegger's early thinking is where we need to look first.

Self-centered *Logos*

As it was for the Stoics, relating to things with the closed fist maintains a certain amount of attachment to the idea that human beings are privileged "disclosers" of the world because we are equipped with a special capacity. This capacity is classically reflected in Aristotle's *zoon logon echon* or "The human being is the animal who has speech" (Crosswhite 2013, 121), and is typically identified as *logos* (*λόγος*); a widely definable concept that encapsulates things like speech and reason, but could be also thought of as the general surface level system of communication wherein we encounter things and grab hold of them in our attempt to make sense of the encounter (Ratcliffe 2005, 23). Thus *logos* is held as an essential capacity, which is supported by Plato's *psychagōgia* or the notion that *logos* has the power to lead the soul (Crosswhite 2013, 28). This "power" is ostensibly the result of how *logos* is vitally rooted in everything we do; it allows us to find our bearings in the world and it opens up avenues for our lives to take. It's then accurate to say that *logos* is at work in the closed fist, and Heidegger's early thought points towards a peculiar issue with *logos* and in turn the closed fist.

Part of Heidegger's consideration of *logos* is featured in his "Grundbegriffe der Aristotelishcen Philosophie" ("Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy") lectures delivered in the summer and winter semesters of 1924 at the University of Marburg. Heidegger's reading of Aristotle leads him to the suspicion that the issue with *logos*

stems from the fact that it is not "a *logos* of judgment," but is instead, "a *logos* of understanding" (2009, 75; Bambach 2013, 120). The difference between a *logos* of understanding and a *logos* of judgment, is that the latter would entail that we could some how bracket-off the self from impinging on our process of making sense of things. Such a bracketing-off would mean that our judgments about things would be undistorted and objective discernments. Conversely, Heidegger reads Aristotle as not locating *logos* in the sterile ground of objective judgment, but in the complex and "vernacular"[18] ground of understanding, where our being-in-the-world and "being-between-worlds"[19] always distort our encounters with things. This feature of *logos* is what Heidegger calls in *Being and Time* the, "hermeneutics of the λόγος," which suggests that a key feature of our experience of reality is a kind of self-centered interpretability (2010, 24). A clearer view of the self-centeredness of *logos* can be gained if we turn to the *Sophist* lectures delivered after the *Grundbegriffe* course.

In the *Sophist* lectures, Heidegger engaged in a detailed attack of Plato's dialectic, but again he adjusts his focus to *logos*. For Heidegger, "According to its original sense and according to its original facticity as well, λόγος is not disclosive at all but, to speak in an extreme way, is precisely concealing" (2003, 136). Heidegger continues, "λόγος is at first mere prattle. The domination of idle talk precisely closes off being for the Dasein and brings about a blindness with regard to what is disclosed and what might be disclosive" (136). To be clear, *logos* is "disclosing" (*aufdekend*), in that it

[18] See Hauser, A. Gerard. Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Public and Public Spheres. (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 1999).
[19] See Ortega, Mariana. *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2016) 49-59.

allows for a tangible encounter with things. It's then understanable why *logos* is often viewed as an intrinsically "transcendent capacity" (Crosswhite 2013, 188), since the manifestation of *logos* is the closed fist, which opens the world up for us through its grasp. Herein lies the problem.

This opening is only a self-centered grasping that opens things up for us, and not a phenomenological openness where we open ourselves up to things. It's the one-sidedness of this opening up of the world for ourselves that makes it a "concealing" (*verdeckend*), and can promote the ignorant "prattle" that stems from a self-centerd relation with things. Heidegger states in *Being and Time*, "Conversely, the opacity [Undurchsichtigkeit] of Dasein is not solely and primarily rooted in 'egocentric' self-deceptions, but just as much in ignorance [Unkenntnis] about the world (2010, 142). Although, this igornace is most acutely an ignornace about the depth of things, which is the result of our self-centered or "egocentric" self-deceptions that fixate on surface presence. So in order to unwind this ignorance of the closed fist and achieve the room making phenomenological openness of the open hand, we need an action that deals directly with the self-centeredness of *logos*, since it drives the closed fist and can inhibit the open hand.

As we move into the next section and further unpack this necessary action, a word of caution needs to be issued. To say that the open hand can overcome the ignorance of the closed fist does mean that we do away with the "opacity" (*Undurchsichtigkeit*) of things. The open hand does not lead to a Huxlyean cleansing of the doors of perception where we achieve a disclosive "pure perception" or "pure seeing" (*voεῖv*) (Heidegger 2003, 136). Instead, we overcome this ignorance and deception by appreciating the fact

that the deep opacity of things is an important ethical and realist component of relating to all things including ourselves.

The Open Hand: An "Action of Non-action"

As stated at the beginning of this dissertation, Heidegger's thinking is largely multiphasic and circuitous, but his main goal is phenomenological openness and this openness is directly tied to *logos*. So it is not surprising that his consideration of *logos* from the lecutres during his Marburg years finds a symetrical concresence in another set of lectures. At present, these lectures are found in *What Is Called Thinking?*, but were originally delivered during the winter and summer semesters of 1951 and 1952 at the University of Freiburg just before his official retirement (Gray 2004, vi). Similarly to what was offered in the Marburg lectures, the self-centredness of *logos* is present, but for Heidegger it is exhibited in a proccupation with "saying" or "stating" over and above what Heidegger calls the "laying." Gemma Fiumara and Krista Ratcliffe have each vividly traversed this subject and have described this issue as a problem of a "halved"[20] or "divided"[21] *logos*. This divided *logos* refelcts the intrinsic self-centeredness of *logos* because a preoccuppation with saying is merely an amplification of the self and the self's saying about what has been grasped by the closed fist.

Going back to the *Grundbegriffe* course, this focus on the self-centered saying is due to how we always encounter our own voice "before" (*primär*) any deeper realization that we are first and foremost respondents to and with others (Heidegger 2009, 21). The

[20] See Fiumara, Corradi Gemma. *The Other Side of Language: A philosophy of istening*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).
[21] Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005).

divided *logos* myopically disregards the fact that our communicative or rhetorical relations with things have exteriority or as Heidegger describes in *Being and Time*, our experience of the world is existentially a "being-with" (*Mitsein*) others (2010, 116). The use of "others" here does not draw a distinction between everyone else but me, "but, rather, those from whom one mostly does not distinguish oneself, those among whom one also is" (115). It is important to note that Heidegger's view of "being-with" is stunted in a variety of ways.

Thinkers like Mariana Ortega have asserted that Heidegger maintains a dominant interpretation of being-with that completely ignores the lived experience of being "between" worlds or the experience of a "multiplicitous" self (2016, 59, 130). Thus we need to expand the notion of being-with beyond Heidegger's thinking. This expansion is achieved by embracing the kind of perspective found in the Latina feminist phenomenology of Ortega whereby we make room for the fact that a sense of who we are, especially for those from historically marginalized communities (63), is not simply a singular being-in-the-world, but also multiplicitous and in-between. It follows that a sense of self is not something individualistic or vacuous, but a complex and multiplicitous being-in and being-between where all things human and nonhuman have a hand in forming this sense of self. This exteriority invokes the kind of materialism proposed by Hobbes, which questions the vision of ourselves as fully self-sovereign or autonomy's agents (Frost 2010, 163).

In the words of Thomas Rickert, there is a certain "ambience"[22] to our interactions with things human and nonhuman. This means that things are acting upon us as much as we are acting upon things, and that we are not the only ones with a voice or not the only ones to have *logos*. To borrow from Thomas Nagel, not just humans have a communicative "what-is-it-likeness,"[23] but all things human and nonhuman have this experience. For example, University of Cambridge researchers have recently discovered that sand dunes, which typically form in large dune fields, engage in their own communicative interactions. This study of aqueous dunes goes against the theoretical modeling of dunes as, "self-propelled autonomous agents, exchanging mass, either remotely or as a consequence of collisions" (Bacik et al. 2020, 1). Instead, this research conjectures that sand dunes engage in a communicative interaction that informs the distancing of one dune from another.

In *Philosophical Investigation* (1953), Wittgenstein memorably made the point that, "If a lion could talk, we could not understand him" (1958, 223). The idea being that things: seas, tables, lions, bats, sand dunes, and so forth do indeed communicate, but their rhetorics are informed by their lived positionalities, which are very different from our own form of life. I agree that we are barred from fully understanding the lion because we are in a sense ontologically estranged from its way of being just as I, a white male, am in a matter of speaking barred from fully understanding what it means to be a women or a

[22] See Rickert, Thomas. *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*. (Pittsburgh, PA, 2013).
[23] See Nagel, Thomas. 1974. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83.4: 435-450.

women of color. However this does not mean we can't adjust our grasp or way of relating so that we make room for the reality that the lion has its own experience.

To be clear, this adjustment does not mean that we indulgently place, or feel like we have the right to place ourselves in the lion's experience. Such actions are just as harmful as not appreciating the lion's agentic depth in the first place. Instead, the adjustment stems from what Ortega deems a "critical world traveling," which Ortega modifies from María Lugones' original conception of "world traveling" (2016, 135-142). Here though, the criticality with which we travel is informed by a very specific action, which most of the time means we refrain from any actual travel. Following Keiji Nishitani, we can call this action an "action of non-action" (1983, 153).

In *What Is Called Thinking?* Heidegger suggests that we have to balance out the saying with a "laying." According to Heidegger to engage *logos*, so as to engage in its verb form *legein*, means that we don't simply commit to saying or stating, but in the original Greek[24] sense we also must embody a "laying" (2004, 198-199). This laying makes room for things to let-lie-before-us (207), and according to Ratcliffe (2005) the laying is effectively "a site for listening" (23-24). Hans-Georg Gadamer suggestes that, "Anyone who listens is fundementally open" (quoted in Fiumara 1990, 28), since the act of listening allows for "a more inclusive logos" that makes room for others, and thus avoids the commitment to the self-centered saying (2005, 25). As Fiumara describes it, if

[24] It is important to note that it's hard to differentiate what was actually the original Greek intent and what Heidegger has projected onto ancient Greek thinkers.

logos is to serve as the "house of being,"[25] "we should ask how we can possibly 'host being' in such a lessened house, that is, in a language that can speak but can not listen" (1990,13).

So it would seem that the open hand is actuated by the act of laying as listening, which harkens back to Heidegger's view of "silence" from *Being and Time*. However, the "laying" is itself deeper than just listening or silence, and to privilege listening or silence is to posit a closefisted answer for how the open hand is achieved. The issue with the halved *logos* is the self-centeredness, so while the laying can be achieved with listening or silence, what occurs in the laying is more acutely interpreted as the action of non-action that is identified by Nishitani in *Religion and Nothingness* as "self-emptying" (1983, 96). I will expound upon this in more detail in the next chapter, but the use of "self-emptying" is a motif from the Kyōto School that serves as a comparative gesture towards the Christian idea of *kenōsis*. Yet, I agree with Steven Odin, we should not equate the Christian idea of *kenōsis* or *ekkenōsis* with Buddhist concepts like "emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) or "no-self" (*anātman*), or even Nishitani's "non-ego" (*muga,* 無私), [26] since these latter concepts entail something very different.

To be clear, the self-centeredness of *logos* does not produce an experince of things that is *solus ipse*. Self-centeredness simply means that the self acts as a hub of reality wherein our experinces of things are experiences for the self or selves, and shaped by our various embodied positionalities. In other words, when the grasp of the closed fist

[25] Heidegger (1947) refers to language as "the house of being" in the Letter on "Humanism." See Heidegger, Martin. *Pathmarks*, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 239.
[26] See Odin, Steve. 1989. "A Critique of the "*Kenōsis/ Śūnyatā*" Motif in Nishida and the Kyoto School." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9: 72.

grabs hold of a thing, the grasp does not just secure an understanding of the thing for the self, but it secures a sense of the self for the self. This grasping of the self in things is often banal and expressed in tangible truths of everyday existence like facts about your family or your favorite flavor of ice cream. That said, because the relation is dominated by the self-centered grasp of the closed fist, it is the self or selves, over and above the things we are relating with that often dominate relations and can lead to the self-centered deception indicative of the closed fist.

If we recall from earlier, it was stated that the open hand cannot be monopolized or be the privilege of any one mode of encounter, group of people, technology, domain, and so forth. Part of the reason for this constraint is that allowing for such monopolization results in a closefisted answer, which defeats the whole point of a move beyond the closed fist. The other key reason has to do with how *logos* is at work in all of these areas of experience. Since *logos* is at work in all these areas, they are all intrinsically self-centered and thus susceptible to becoming closed off and deceitful. Put simply, if human beings are exceptional at all, it is the degree to which we can become closefisted and self-centeredly closed off in anything and therefore everything from listening to aesthetics, sports to religion, politics to science, reading to running, can become self-centeredly deceptive. Case in point, phenomenological openness and silence are both closefistedly corrupted by Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time* when he anthropocentrically and ethno-nationally privileges them both. So while the open hand is accessible to all, so too is the closed fist. For this reason the core action of non-action that initiates the open hand has to directly counter the self-centered grasping of the world for ourselves, and self-emptyingly open ourselves up to things.

Heidegger himself never frames this issue in terms of self-centeredness and primarily articulates this problem in terms of two different ways of thinking. The first way is a calculative orientation (*rechnendes Denken*) and the other is a meditative thinking *(besinnliches Denken)*. The former is driven by a, "compulsion to master everything in the logical terms of its procedure" (1949, 357), whereas the latter "…demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas" (1966, 53). Heidegger astutely understands that what is needed is a "releasement towards things and an openness to the mystery" (*Gelassenheit and Offenheit für das Geheimnis)* (54-55), but once again he misses the fact that this releasement and openness cannot be achieved closefistedly. This releasement and openness emerges with the open hand, in that the open hand releases the grasp of the closed fist, and in doing so we make room for and open up to the depth of things. But it is important to note that the open hand is not a matter of listening or silence over saying, one group of people over another, or humans over nonhumans, aesthetics over science, nor one way of thinking over another. The open hand requires self-emptying and such selflessness is accessible to all.

The challenge of the open hand is then very clear and not a matter of accessibility, but as mentioned earlier in the chapter one of fear. The fear of the open had is a fear that we have no hold on anything; principally ourselves, and thus we are plunged into the irrational chaos of nothingness. Again, this fear is understandable, but it cannot be a reason to commit to the closed fist. To overcome this fear we have to take the difficult step for Western thought and make room for Eastern philosophy, specifically the concept of *śūnyatā* and how those like Keiji Nishitani and Nāgārjuna have understood it. Seeking

help in this way not only results in a far more beneficial global philosophical perspective, but it allows us to set aside this fear and appreciate how the self-empting indicative of the open hand leads not to nothingness, but to emptiness, and thus a fundamental openness. It is this fundamental openness that is the phenomenological openness that Heidegger was ultimately striving for, but could not "realize" because of his own fierce philosophical corporeal commitment to the closed fist. It is ultimately this fundamental openness that allows us to overcome the deception of the closed fist and enter into a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves.

Chapter Three

FROM ZENO TO ZEN

> On the field of emptiness that absolute breach points directly to a most intimate encounter with everything that exists.
>
> —Keiji Nishitani, *Religion & Nothingness*

Getting Settled

In the previous chapter Zeno's metaphors of the open hand and the closed fist were understood through the philosophical prism of Heidegger's attempt to move beyond the closed fist to achieve phenomenological openness. By doing so it allowed us to directly see how the closed fist is a flawed practice of relating with one another because of its self-centered inability to make room for the depth of things. Alternatively, the open hand was presented as being able to make the requisite room for the depth of things, but only if the open hand is actuated by a practice of self-emptying, which is accessibel to all. The present chapter seeks to expound on the idea of self-emptying by seeking help and guidance from Eastern philosophy. The intent of this part of the dissertation is to assuage any fear about the open hand by clarifying how self-emptying leads not to nothingness, but to emptiness (*śūnyatā*), and thus a fundemental openness that affords us a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves. Before we delve into the relationship between self-emptying and *śūnyatā* (pronounced SHo͞onyə˛tä), it is both helpful and necessary to establish a few basic perspectives.

First, as was discussed in the introduction, working through the idea of the closed fist and the open hand necessarily leads to Heiddegger, and working with Heidegger necessarily leads to the work of Keiji Nishitani and his main text (1983), *Religon and*

Nothingness, originally published in Japenese as *Shūkyō to wa nanika* (*What is Religion?*). However, to arrive at Nishitani means that we must expand beyond the bounds of *Religion and Nothingness*, the Kyōto School, or even Zen Buddhism. The reason for this expansion has to do with the fact that neither Zen Buddhism nor the Kyōto School appeared *ex nihilio*, but like most Buddhist schools of thought, it is part of a deep and complex lineage. What it is commonly referred to in the West as "Zen Buddhism" is actually a form of Buddhism known as "Chan Buddhism," which found its way to Japan from China during the Tang Dynasty. The word "Zen" is equivalent to the Japenese pronounciation of the Chinese word "Chan." Chan or Zen are both schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism (Loy 1997, 42). Nāgārjuna, who lived around 150 BCE, is considered one of the great thinkers of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and it was Nāgārjuna who interpreted Buddha's Madhyamaka ("middle way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhism in terms of *śūnyatā* or "as the emptiness of all things" (Honderich 1995, 601). As for the Kyōto School, we should avoid strictly equating the school with Chan or Zen Buddhism. The Kyōto School (*Kyōto-gakuha*), which was founded by Kitarō Nishida, is its own original system of thought that is indeed informed by Zen Buddhism, but also engages Western philosophical and theological concepts. Keiji Nishitani was Nishida's pupil and one of the Kōyto School's most well-known thinkers.

Secondly, it is problematic to say that the "the aim of Buddhism is...," but in the interest of an intelligble discussion let's just say one of the main problems that Buddhism grapples with is the issue of how to attain *nirvāna* (Loy 1997, 192). However to speak of *nirvāna* or "liberation" in a Buddhist context is really to engage in a discussion of how one frees oneself from *samsāra* or "suffering" (6). In many Buddhist teachings part of the

way to end suffering requires overcoming a deluded or unreal orientation in the world that is the result of attachment, and principally an attachment to the self or the substance of things. In Nishitani's words, "The ancients took this elemental self-enclosure, this self-centeredness that is the wellspring of endless karmic activity, as the darkness of ignornace (*avidyā*) or "fundemental darkness" (1983, 242). Hence what is needed is a decentering or "emptying" of the self's attachment to a closefisted idea of a self, whether it be one's self or the self-like essences of things. Just briefly, I would like to return to the Christian idea of *kenōsis* that was touched on at the end of the last chapter.

The term "self-emptying" appears in *Religion and Nothingness*, but I agree with Steve Odin that the "self-emptying" that Nishitani is speaking to, while perhaps evocative of the Christian notion of *kenōsis*, it should not be conflated with the sense of self-emptying that Nishitani invokes. The Christian idea of *kenōsis* is found in the second chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians wherein it is said that it was Christ that "emptied himself" to humbly serve others, and thus followers of Christ must do the same so as to have "the mind of Christ" (Odin 1989, 71). As Odin notes, the Christian idea of *kenōsis* or "self-emptying" is a frequent motif in the Kōyto School because it would appear that *kenōsis* is a correlate to the notion of *śūnyatā* and relatedly, the ideas of "no-self," which in Sanskrit would be *anātman* or Pali *anattā*, or as Nishitani uses "non-ego" (*muga*, 無私). But as we will see over the course of this chapter, the concept of *śūnyatā* and the self-emptying, which I argue is more of a "self-opening," are very different from the Christian idea of *kenōsis* or *ekkenōsis*. The latter notions require a strong attachment or reification of things like the Church, Christian doctrine, and the Eucharist (84), and such an attachment is at odds with a the concept of *śūnyatā* in a Mahāyāna Buddhist

context or even in the context that Nishitani is developing out of the Kōyto School in *Religion and Nothingness*.

Lastly, the final point that needs to be established before we move forward concerns a central ontological principal of Buddhist philosophy that can be understood as "dependent origination" (*pratītya samutpāda*). The idea of *pratītya samutpāda* or in Pāli *paticca samuppāda*, is said to have occurred to Gautama before he was released from *samsāra* (McCagney 1997, 57). The central thrust of Gautama's realization is that interdependence (*pratītya samutpāda*) describes the human condition as being an interdependent condition of ignorance and craving that ultimately leads to a kind of recurring wheel of suffering. However if a link (*nidāna*) in the great chain of *pratītya samutpāda* is broken, then ultimately the whole chain will break and suffering will end because of the way that everything is linked together (58). In canonical Pāli texts to create "emptiness" (*suññatā*) between linkages in the chain that is *paticca samuppāda* is to arrive at emptiness, and an arrival at emptiness is to achieve *nibbāna* or "liberation." Following McCagney's study of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, where things start to get a little complicated has to do with Nāgārjuna's interpretation of the relationship between emptiness and interdependence.

As we will see, Nāgārjuna's understanding of *śūnyatā* was very much derived from Mahāyāna sutras, especially the Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpārmitā Sūtra. Where Nāgārjuna makes his original turn that leads to the formulation of the Madhyamaka ("middle way") school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, concerns the view he asserts in Mūlamadhyamikakārikā, which states that, "Codependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*) is called *śūnyatā* by us. It (*śūnyatā*) makes use of convention and is the

practice of the middle way" (quoted in McCagney 1997, 54). In other words, Nāgārjuna equates *pratītya samutpāda* with *śūnyatā*, which defies the clear distinction made between the two in canonical Pāli texts. Moreover, he adopts a view that there is a certain "conventional truth" (*samvrtisatya*) that dependent origination or interdependency has (*pratītya samutpāda*), while *śūnyatā* has a "higher truth" (*paramārthsatya*) (54). These truths are not intrinsically at odds with one another, but can come into alignment with one another.

Despite the nuance in how Nāgārjuna views *pratītya samutpāda* and *śūnyatā*, he is often viewed as maintaining the larger Buddhist perspective that there is no autonomous "self-being" (*svabhāva*) or what in a Western context we would think of as a thing's substance or "essence" (*eidos*) because all things are in reality *śūnya* or "empty." As a result of the pivotal role *śūnyatā* plays in Buddhism, to "realize" emptiness and end suffering requires a practice of self-denial or self-emptying to achieve "non-self-being" (*nihsvabhāva*) or "no-self" (*anātman*). Due to *anātman*, or this complete self-denial we might be persuaded to think that following a Buddhist outlook is not ideal for how we go about actuating the open hand to make room for the depth of things. Alternatively, we might think that we would be better served by seeking the help of the Hindu school of thought known as Advaita Vedānta. Advaita Vedānta is known for its "nondual" perspective that views reality culminating in the one ultimate reality of "Brahman," but the Advaitic ontology also leaves room for a "true self" or an "all self" (*ātman*) (Loy 1997, 180). With the Advaitic assertion we don't empty the self to realize Brahman, since the practice is to "realize" our real self (*ātman*), and thus appreciate that being one's real self (*ātman*) is to be at one with everything else in and with Brahman.

This is highly contentious, but I disagree with the sentiment that the Buddhist *anātman* and Advaitic *ātman* divide is really a divide at all nor that we need to strictly choose one over the other. I am convinced that we can read Nishitani's *Religion and Nothingness* as a kind of openhanded apprecation for both the Buddist assertion and the Advaitic one. This is to say that Nishitani provides a way to bridge this divide by encouraging us towards *anātman* by way of a self-emptying transition into *śūnyatā*. However within emptiness and the realization of *anātman*/"non-ego" (*muga,* 無私), he then argues that what emerges out of *anātman* is *ātman*. Moreover, when we couple Nishitani's discussion of *śūnyatā* with Nancy McCagney's view that Nāgārjuna understood *śūnyatā* in terms of "emptiness," but "openness," Nishitani's own nondual preservation of both *ātman* and *anātman* becomes even more palatable, and Nāgārjuna's enfolding of *pratītya samutpāda* with *śūnyatā* is shown to be synergistic with Nishitani's conclusion. It is from this point that we can now make a move towards *śūnyatā*.

Towards *Śūnyatā*

In Zen Buddhism there is a practice referred to as the "self-presentation of the Great Doubt" or simply the "Great Doubt" (Nishitani 1983, 16). The Great Doubt should not be likened to the methodical doubt of René Descartes (19), as it's a diligent practice of constantly emptying oneself. In other words, in the practice of the Great Doubt, one avoids the grasp of the closed fist, and simply passes through any reduction that might arise. It is precisely a lack of the closed fist that occurs when we layout for things, but as mentioned earlier, this is an unsettling experience, since it signals a lack of self and thus a fall into the unproductive groundlessness of nothingness. The usual course of action when confronted with nothingness is to either dismiss it as frivolous or in what amounts

to a recommitment to the closed fist; nihility is grasped.[27] We need only look at the ontological flatting of art and the subsequent arrival of plurality in art to understand how the specter of nothingness can provoke a return commitment to the closed fist and a grasp on nihility.

In 1969, famed art critique and philosopher Arthur C. Danto encountered Andy Warhol's "Brillo Box" at the Stable Gallery on East-Seventy-fourth Street in New York (Danto 1992, 5). At first Danto could not quite place what was different, but he eventually settled on the idea that the end of art had arrived. This is not the "end of art" thesis of Hegel or Giorgio Vasari, but the notion that art had been liberated into a plurality of styles, none being more art-worthy than another. For Danto there was no longer a dominant style that could be definitively pointed to as indicative of "art." It was this plurality in art that brought Danto to participate twelve years later on a panel at New York's School of Visual Arts to discuss the "disturbing idea" of plurality (221), since plurality appears to entail nothingness.

The logic that views plurality as entailing nothingness feeds off of the perception that plurality is induced by liberating something like "art" from the hierarchical regime of the closed fist, which had the function of dictating what art is, could be, or was. However if art is liberated and no such regime is left, then there is no mode for telling us what art is or is not, and thus art is situated in limbo, as everything and nothing at the same time. A plurality does not mean that there is no-thing. Even Danto understood we still have art. Since the nothing here is still seen a something, it would be more appropriately described

[27] What I am describing in terms of a grasp, Nishitani describes as taking a "stance on nihility." See Nishitani, Keiji. *Religion and Nothingness*, trans. Jan Van Bragt (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 1983), 95.

as “nihility” (*kyomu*) or “relative nothingness” (*sōtaiteki mu*) (Nishitani 1983, 96). Inevitably though, the fear of nihility leads to a return commitment to the closed fist. In the case of art this took the form of the “Art-World.”

According to Nishitani, part of the issue with Western thought when it dances with nihility in the pale moon light, is that it “realizes” nihility (96), but only in the sense that it still regards nihility as some objectified thing (33). For instance, Nishitani sees Heidegger as conceiving of nihility as some “thing” called nothingness (96). This objectification of nihility is really an attempt to grasp hold of it, so that we can maintain an *ek-static* or “creative stance” (33), and this means that we are still very much maintaining the closed fist. For Nishitani what is needed is to abstain from grasping after nihility and, “…to pass through nihility and shift to an entirely new field, different from what it has known hitherto” (112). Where might we pass through if we don’t apply the grasp of the closed fist? In one sense we transition into *śūnyatā* or in Japanese *kū*, but as we will see, this emptiness is really a fundamental openness.

In *Religion and Nothingness*, Nishitani describes a “ ‘Zen monk named Ting Shan-tso (pronounced Jojoza in Japanese) inquiring of the Zen master Lin-chi (in Japanese, Rinzai) ‘What is the heart of Buddhism?’ ” (20). Upon hearing this question, Lin-chi slapped the monk and pushed him away, and as Nishitani describes, “Ting Shang-tso, brought abruptly to a state of concentration, stood motionless and in such a total self-oblivion that a monk nearby had to remind him to bow to his master. At the moment of bowing he is to have attained the Great Enlightenment” (20). In this example the combination of the “slap” and the act of being “pushed away” stimulates a disruption. The disruption unsettled the monk’s familiar hold on things, which is represented by the

Ting Shang-tso's focus on the answer to his question, and instead placed him into the nihility of the question itself. It is said that on the field of nihility all things appear as a great question mark (124).

However Ting Shang-tso did not just drop into a nihilistic void, he attained the Great Enlightenment. The reason Ting Shang-tso bowed and achieved enlightenment was not because he reached nihility, but because he had years of diligent practice, which primed him to resist a return commitment to the closed fist when faced with nihility. When the disruption occurred by way of his Master's actions, familiarity was not simply unsettled, but the attachment to the self-centered relation to things shattered or fully emptied out, and Ting Shang-tso passed from the field of nihility to the Great Affirmation of the field of emptiness. Understandably, avoiding any kind of hold on things is to travel by extreme *via negativa* in a direction that appears untenable and leaves us with absolutely nothing, but in a sense this is exactly the point. It is only when nothingness is made "absolute" (*zettaiteki mu*) that nihility is passed through and the "field of emptiness" arises (63-127). This field or ground of emptiness is not a new ground *per se*. Following Mahāyāna and Nāgārjuna in particular, *śūnyatā* is the ground that all things are already most fundamentally at home on. It's only when we relate to the world with the closed fist that it seem like emptiness is a fall into a chasm where there is nothing to grasp hold of. In reality, it is on the field of emptiness that we stop our fall, which is a fall into the self-centered deception of the closed fist.

As has been delineated thus far, Nishitani's thinking is distinct from say that of Pure Land Buddhism or the teachings of Nāgārjuna (Takeda 1999, 160-161), and this distinction concerns what occurs on the field of emptiness. For Nishitani, "The field of

śūnyatā is nothing other than the field of the great Affirmation" (1983, 131), and this is because, "On the field of emptiness all things appear as they are again as substances, each possessed of its own individual self-nature, though of course not in the same sense that each possessed on the field of reason" (124). Typically, the arrival at emptiness requires that there is no longer any kind of self or "substance" left over. Real emptiness requires an emptiness of self or *anātman*.

Alternatively, Nishitani maintains that there is an emptiness of self; *anātman* or "non-ego" (*muga,* 無私), but that this emptiness of self allows everything in an Advaitic manner to appear in its own substantive self-nature as a kind of *ātman*. As Nishitani offers, " 'Emptiness is self' means that, at bottom an in its own home-ground, the self has its being as such a field," to which he adds, "The field of *śūnyatā* within which the world and things become possible opens up at the home-ground of the self as a self that is truly on the home-ground of the self itself, that is, the *original self in itself*" (151). The idea here is very much the one attributed to the Zen practice of "just sitting" (*zazen*) and expressed in Zen master Dōgen's view of Zen practice the he learned from the Chinese master Ju-ching (184). This is the view that, "To practice Zen is to drop off body-and-mind" (185). The point being that whether we drop off body-and-mind with Zen meditation, or in the parlance of this project, we release the grip of the closed fist to open the hand, what awaits us when body-and-mind drop off or when the hand opens is not an irrational nothingness, but emptiness, and therefore a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourserlves. How can this be? To answer this question let us first contemplate the mistake that is made when relating to things with the closed fist.

With the closed fist we routinely take what has been grasped to be disclosive about some aspect of the logic of reality (117), such that we erroneously take the self-identity or the substance of a thing to be reductively disclosed. For instance, when we perceive something like a fire and its qualities to burn or to produce heat, often we ontologically reduce the self-nature or self-identity of fire down to these tangible surface presences and ignore the fact that there is more to the reality or self-nature of the thing (117-118). In Nishitani's view of emptiness, a thing's substantial self-nature always exceeds our grasp because an entity's self-nature is never self-identical, so it is more than it is. This means that a things *ātman* or most real self is not found in closefisted self-identity, but in its full self-emptiness or *anātman*. In other words, our arrival at *śūnyatā* by way of self-emptying does not lead to a complete self denial where there is nothing left, but rather an arrival at *anātman*, but it is in this emptiness that all things are most really and intimately *ātman* including ourselves.

We can conclude that the point at which self-nature is really void of any and all attempts to equate a thing with its self-identification, is on the field of emptiness. In emptiness, there is no closefisted grasp or no reductive self-identification, and therefore there can be no-self-identity or *anātman*, which precisely means that the substantial self-nature of "non-self-being" (*nihsvabh*ā*va*) is utterly free to be what it is. This substantiality on the field of emptiness is really a "non-substantial substantiality" where "The 'what' of a thing is a real 'what' only when it is absolutely no 'what' at all" (125). Put differently, when we embrace the open hand and self-empty in a releasement of the closed fist, we are not led to nothingness or a world devoid of things and selves, since there is no-what or no-self. To quote the line from Stefan George's poem that Heidegger

himself invokes in *On The Way to Language*, "Where word breaks off no thing may be" (quoted in Heidegger 1971, 108). In agreement with Heidegger, this breaking off of the word just like the breaking open of the closed fist's grasp on things, allows an "is" to arise (108), or allows no-thing to be really what it is. So with the open hand there is the "absolute no-thingness" of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and thus no-thing or no-self (*anātman*) is what it means to be freely and really what a thing is (*ātman*).

Śūnyatā and Openness

As was already mentioned, the kind of Advaitic room that Nishitani makes for both *anātman* and *ātman* with an arrival at *śūnyatā* is at odds with Mahāyāna Buddhism and in particular the thinking of Nāgārjuna. Although, this only seems to be the case insofar as we understand Nāgārjuna to interpret *śūnyatā* as "emptiness." If we apply Nancy McCagney's position that Nāgārjuna used the word *śūnyatā* not to mean "emptiness," but "openness," I contend we arrive at a wonderful synergy between Nishitani and Nāgārjuna. Nancy McCagney in *Nāgārjuna and the Philosophy of Openness* writes that the root metaphor for *śūnyatā* is space, "And since the term 'space' (ākāśa) in the Asta means sky (div, ākāśa), the term 'śūnyatā' is founded upon a sky metaphor and is, at least in the Asta, better translated by the positive term 'openness' than by the negative term 'emptiness'" (1997, 35). McCagney's reference to "the Asta" is the Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpārmitā Sūtra, which is directly informing Nāgārjuna's interpretation of *śūnyatā* with the idea of "openness." It's an understanding of *śūnyatā* in terms of "openness" that has a significant implication for the notion of "dependent origination" (*pratītya samutpāda*), and if we apply openness to Nishitani's view of

śūnyatā, it further legitimates his conclusion about how all things have a non-substantial substantiality or *ātman* with *anātman*.

Again, in canonical Pāli texts to create "emptiness" (*suñ̄ñ̄atā*) between linkages in the chain that is *paticca samuppāda* is to arrive at emptiness, and an arrival at emptiness is to achieve *nibbāna* or "liberation." So in canonical Pāli texts *paticca samuppāda* or in Sanskrit *pratītya samutpāda* is to be lost in delusion and thus "suffering" (*samsāra*). The only way out of suffering is to arrive at reality with *suñ̄ñ̄atā*. In this sense emptiness and dependent origination are opposed to one another. Nāgārjuna contradicts this idea by equating *śūnyatā* with *pratītya samutpāda*, which admittedly, if we work with an understanding of *śūnyatā* in terms of "emptiness" appears to be problematic. This concern drifts away though, when we have an appreciation of *śūnyatā* in terms of "openness" because as Nāgārjuna understood placing *śūnyatā* against *pratītya samutpāda* creates two extremes. Either we are lost in the closefisted cycle of grasping after things with *pratītya samutpāda* or we are freed into the openhanded emptiness of *śūnyatā*.

Ultimately, Nāgārjuna follows Gautama's recommendation that we need to follow the "middle path" or "middle way" (Madhyamaka), and understanding *śūnyatā* in terms of openness allows for such a path because it means that even in the throws of the "conventional truth" (*samvrtisatya*) of *pratītya samutpāda* we can align ourselves with the "higher truth" (*paramārthsatya*) of *śūnyatā* or the "openness" of all things. The action that is required to maintain alignment between the everyday conventional experience of the world and the higher truth about reality of things in terms of openness, is an action of self-emptying-opening whereby we abstain from closefistedly clinging to or grasping

after things, so that we stay open to all things including ourselves. And with this we might say that to be *ātman* with *anātman* is to maintain an openness to all things because all things are most really an intimately themselves (*ātman*) when they are self-opened (*anātman*), or simply open to themselves and to others.

So if we return to the notion of "self-emptying," what is really being actuated is a self-opening to things. A fun example of this self-opening can be found in the domain of sports broadcasting. To "lay out" is an actual broadcasting term, and is typically the mark of a seasoned commentator, since it takes a bit of skill to know when one needs to avoid speaking over the moment. Often the best instances of this "laying out" coincide with an exciting play. Perhaps you are listening to a baseball or football game on the radio or watching it on TV. When there's a walk-off homerun or a hard fought touchdown is scored, rather than closefistedly clinging to one's self by talking over the moment, many sports commentators will layout in what can be thought of as move of self-opening, which makes room for the excitement and natural "tumult and shouting," as Grantland Rice would say, of the sporting event. The action of selflessly laying out and not stepping allover the broadcast with additional commentary makes room for the moment, and this openness makes room for the fans to have a most intimate encounter with it.

Now Nishitani himself never mentions *śūnyatā* in terms of openness, and he definitely does not say anything about sports broadcasting, but if we read Nishitani closely we can see how the self-opening engendered by Nāgārjuna's interpretation of *śūnyatā* in terms of "openness" is synergistic with Nishitani's perspective in *Religion and Nothingness*. As Nishitani describes, the "standpoint of *śūnyatā* is not simply a negative negativity," for if it was it would be indistinguishable from nihility (1983, 138). Instead,

emptiness points to the Great Affirmation or what Nietzsche called "be-ification" (*Ichtung*) (124), because emptiness is really a great openness where all things are free in their non-substantial self-natures and with this openness, "All things are linked together one way or another" (149). Here the relations between entities are indeed real, but at the exact same time all things are absolutely unique in their self-natures (147). In this openness, all things have a unique non-substantial self-nature and simultaneously, everything relationally interpenetrates and holds everything else up. Nishitani is well aware that suggesting that entities are both unique and stand on the "home-ground" of everything else may come across as absurd and seem to entail chaos (150). But if we take the time to appreciate what is happening in the openness of self-emptiness, Nishitani's conclusion is quite eupeptic.

It is the very openness of things, wherein entities in their self-natures are never self-identical and thus deeper than any self-identification that allows for relations and the possibility of real touch and connection. Nishitani expresses this idea with phrases like the "fire does not burn itself," "water does not wash itself, the eye does not see itself" (116). These phrases gesture towards how if fire in its self-nature were self-identical to the action of burning it would not be open to or capable of burning other things nor would it need to because fire would be consumed with itself; fire would simply be closed off in itself and would simply burn itself. The same holds for water or the eyes, if water were self-identical to washing or if the eyes were self-identical to seeing, which is to say if things were closed and not open, then neither water nor the eyes would be able to wash or see others.

Only from the closefisted grasp on nihility would things appear as self-centered "vacuous actualities"[28]or as Nishitani would describe, "…as a one-and-only, a solitariness absolutely shut up within itself" (1983, 145). Such a grasp would maintain that causal relations are closed off and "vicarious"[29] and lead, as it has done for Timothy Morton and Graham Harman, to the conclusion that causality is properly thought of as "aesthetic" (Harman 2018, 138). Conversely, and in a way congruent with how Nāgārjuna enfolds *śūnyatā* with *pratītya samutpāda*, Nishitani invokes a "circuminsessional system," whereby, "the interpenetration of all things that comes about here is the most essential of all relationships, one that is closer to the ground of things that any relationship ever conceived on the fields of sensation and reason by science, myth, or philosophy" (1983, 150). Nishitani speaks of an intimate reciprocity that is described in *Religion and Nothingness* as, "circuminsessional interpenetration," but is perhaps most fully and originally understood by Nishitani's use of the Japanese word "egoteki sōnyū" (回互的相入) (148, 294-295).

I posit that for Nishitani and Nāgārjuna, *śūnyatā* acts as a "field of force" that makes it possible for each thing human and nonhuman "…to be itself with every other, and so too, for each not to be itself with every other" (150). Here we find the synergy between Nishitani's own thought that allots for the Advaitic assertion, and Nāgārjuna's "middle way" (Madhyamaka), in that real emptiness is real openness, and to be open is

[28] Harman uses Alfred N. Whitehead's term "vacuous actualities," to describe what real objects are in his ontology. See Harman, Graham. *Tool Being* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 2002) 230- 247.
[29] See Harman, Graham. 2007. "On Vicarious Causation." *Collapse*: 221.

both to be aligned with the reality of all things, while being truly one's self. Nishitani states:

> This state of affairs, in which each thing becomes really manifest just as it is in its own respective mode of being within a world seen as a circuminsessional system where All are One, is, in its original Form, what Buddhism calls "thusness" or "true suchness." But the field where this true suchness comes into its own forever opens up only in conjunction with the "as onself." This is the original form whereby all things become manifest just as they are. (279)

By seeking self-emptiness we arrive at *śūnyatā*/openness and achieve *ātman* with *anātman*, and this means that in a way we have achieved a new kind of self-centeredness, but not in the form that was rigidly grasped and expressed by the closed fist (128). This centeredness of the self aligns with Nāgārjuna's "middle-way" in that Nishitani deems it to be a " 'nonobjective' middle mode of being" or "samādhi-being" (165). It is from this middle way of abiding openly with things that we intrinsically have "compassion" (*karunā*) for all things including ourselves (281).

Nishitani invokes the great poet Masuo Bashō and instructs:

> From the pine tree
> Learn of the pine tree,
> And from the bamboo
> Of the bamboo. (quoted in Nishitani 1983, 128)

For Nishitani like it is for Bashō, to "learn of the pine tree" does not mean that we grasp it phenomenally, scientifically, or aesthetically, but demands that that we self-open by aligning ourselves with *śūnyatā* or the "openness" of things and thus, "…enter into the mode of being where the pine tree is the pine tree itself…" (128). For Nishitani, "Even a single stone or blade of grass demands…" that we pull, "…away from our ordinary self-centered mode of being," and this means we have to, "…straighten ourselves out by turning to what does not respond to our turning, orientating ourselves to what negates our

orientation" (140). The takeaway from this discussion of *śūnyatā* is that if we want to open the closed fist and have a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves, we have to self-open, which allows for a fundamental openness where room is made for the unfathomably deep reality of things. As McCagney concludes from Nāgārjuna's philosophy, *Tattva* or "reality" is "the openness, *śūnyatā*, of *pratītya samutpāda*," which I take to mean that it is only with an openness to things, including things like ourselves that we can be most intimately aligned with each other and reality (1997, 113). We might now wonder what kind of practical outcome could the open hand have? What we will discover is that just as it was for Heidegger in *Being and Time*, the open hand fosters an "awakening to rather from language, " but unlike Heidegger this reorientation does not closefistedly rely on privileging silence or poetry (Wright 1992,133). Instead, the self-emptying of the open hand fosters a widely accessible selfless or humble use of language (in the widest sense of the term) that allows us to navigate the world, while staying open to the reality of things.

The Rhetoric of The Open Hand

In this project Zeno's original metaphors have undergone a transformation, but this is not the first time this has happened. Originally, the open hand symbolized a naïve understanding of the world, which was juxtaposed with the wisdom that comes with a scrutinized existence afforded by the closed fist. In the Renaissance, the closed fist came to symbolize the rigorous and logical discourse of the philosopher, in opposition to the openhanded rhetoric of the wordy orator (Corbett 1969, 288). After the Renaissance, the open hand came to describe, in a more general manner, the popular communication of everyday life, whereas the closed fist was characteristic of informed or erudite discourse

(288). Further still in the late 1960s, Edward Corbett recast the classic metaphor, such that "the rhetoric of the closed fist" was seen as indicative of a more non-verbal, group-oriented discourse grounded in coercion rather than rational persuasion (293). As for "the rhetoric of the open hand," Corbett saw it in terms of a communicative style punctuated by a reasoned and "conciliatory discussion of the issues" (288). Within the confines of this project, the rhetoric of the open hand is now informed by the open hand's concinnity with the self-emptying/opening aspects of Buddhist thought, which are further explored in this section.

It is important that the openhanded practice of relating to things not make the opposite mistake of the closed fist, which would be to focus solely on the open-ended depth of things. Here we can think of Heidegger's differentiation between the word as "term" (*Wörter*) and word as "word" (*Wort*) (2004, 128). The word as term is the word that has been isolated from its open-ended complexity and made sensible by the definition. Our use of terms is indeed reductive. However, this is not an endorsement of the idea that relating with things with the open hand means transcending or moving behind our use of terms to arrive at a non-discursive paradigm or privileging one kind of communicative modality of expression like poetry over others.

A misconception[30] of Eastern philosophy, especially that of Zen Buddhism, is that a deeper experience of reality is achieved only when we rid ourselves of the use of discourse or language in a wide sense (Wright 1992, 114). As Dale Wright expresses, "Not only are we mistaken when we understand the Zen master to have achieved this

[30] This misconception could be understood as part of "The Pre/Trans Fallacy." See Wilber, Ken. *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2001) 180.

state, we also render him incapable of the worldly 'function' for which he is famous" (122-123). Wright's argument is that discourse is not just the coin of the worldly realm in which we live and where our employment of terms keeps us all from sliding into a nonsensical relativism, but discourse is an integral part of Zen practice. Without discourse neither the monks nor the daily monastic operations would be able to function (126). So rather than transcending language, there is a complex "Zen rhetoric" at work, which not only informs the daily life of Zen practice, but is also at work in meditation or even enlightenment (126).

As was witnessed with Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time,* the rhetorical approach invoked by Wright and embodied by the open hand requires, "…a fundamental reorientation within language," whereby we make room for the reality of the depth of things by embracing that, "Language is always in some way inadequate to experience" (133-135). Again, Heidegger himself recognized a similar position in *Being and Time* with his view that to have and maintain phenomenological openness requires that "discourse" (*Rede*) make room for being through an act of reverent "reticence" (*Verschwiegenheit*) or simply "silence" (*Schweigen*). This silent reverent reticence from *Being and Time* morphs into the notion of the "sigetic" at work in Heidegger's *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)* or the *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* written between 1936-1938. For Heidegger the sigetic recognizes the limitations of language to say something about being, and thus utilizes silence as a way to acknowledge being without making any kind of assertion about being (1999, 55). It is not until Heidegger's later thought that the idea of the sigetic becomes concretized in his emphasis on poetry. Since the corporeal closefistedness of Heidegger's use of the sigetic and poetry

has already been broached and detailed, at this juncture we will only concern ourselves with the philosophical closefistedness of this move.

For Heidegger when we are most aligned with the reality of things and engaged in phenomenological openness, our use of existential tools like thought and language, are not closefistedly used to amplify our self-centeredness, but are utilized to redirect ourselves back to the mysterious "opacity" (*Undurchsichtigkeit*) and "density" (*Dichten*) of the world. As Heidegger writes in his essay on *Logos*, "The word of thinking rests in the sobering quality of what it says. Just the same, thinking changes the world. It changes it in ever darker depths of a riddle, depths which as they grow darker offer promise of a greater brightness" (1984, 78). But as we have seen, according to Heidegger the way in which we make room for what Nishitani would call "the far side at the near side of things" is through poetry (1983, 138).

For Heidegger, especially the later Heidegger, poetry embodies the sigetic and the silent reverent reticnence of *Being and Time* because poetry is a "letting go of the ground; it means letting go of language, which is the same as letting things thing: *Das Wort be-dingt das Ding zum Ding*" (Bruns 1989, 178). Heidegger identifies in the poet an appreciation for a "different rule of the word," wherein, "the poet must relinguish the claim to the assurance that he will on demand be supplied with the name for that which he has posited as what truly is" (1971, 146). In other words, the poet makes room for being by recognizing the ambiguity and limitations of language, and thus uses "the word of thinking" (i.e. poetry) to emphasize not the surface of things, but the "reticence" or reserve that is the depth or mystery of things. In Heidegger's later thought, he fully embraces not just Collingwood's idea that the philosophical method is at home or

grounded in poetry, but the only way for us to experience phenomenological openness, is when we our dwelling in the world is this poetic/silent reverent reticence where our words of thinking speak not to the surface, but respond to the reality of the "dark cosmic world" in which we live (Bruns 1989, 174).

Once again, Heidegger's error, as it is for others, is a commitment to the closed fist, which relies on the misguided view that this reorientation within language can be exclusively priviliged. The truth is that the poetic word can be just as corrupted by the closed fist's self-centeredness as the words of the politician, so there is nothing inate to poetry that makes it the ideal discourse for opening us up or aligning us with the reality of things. In Heidegger's words, even poetry can be idle chatter. What can and sometimes occurs with forms of human expression like poetry, a political speech, or in the pracitce of Zen, is a use of language whereby the very words used are "turning words."[31] Here we have a use of language that turns us away from our attachment to the words, and thus an attachment to the self in things or the self in what is being said, and self-emptyingly/openly reorients us towards the unfathomable depth of things. It's this selfless or humble use of language that is the key, and while the poet can be humble, a humble or selfless practice of language is not exclusive to the poet and it can just as easily be engaged in by the shop keeper who helps a customer find something in their store or as will see in chapter four, by the virologist who maintains a proper appreciation for the deep reservoirs of bat-borne coronaviruses.

[31] Dale S. Wright describes an attention to "turning words" in Zen practice. Here language is used to "…'turn' the mind of a properly trained practitioners away from an attachment to and absorption in language. See Wright, Dale S. 1992. "Rethinking Transcendence: The Role of Language in Zen Experience." *Philosophy East and West* 42.1: 127-133.

At this point in the project I would be remiss if I did not invoke Jacques Derrida and his "exorbitant method" of "deconstruction." Admittedly, deconstruction would seem like the right model for this Buddhist inspired rhetoric of the open hand.[32] However, I am not convinced deconstruction is the correct analogue. The temptation to embrace deconstruction is understandable because at the surface it conjures a sense of hermeneutical if not phenomenological openness. Deconstruction seeks to go beyond a mere reproductive reading or the initial intent of a thing, and tries to open the thing up, so as to extract new insights. Thus the endpoint of the exorbitant method of deconstruction is to grasp after a more "productive reading" or interpretation, which is not achieved through our opening up to things, but in the spirit of the self-centered *logos* discussed in chapter two, opening things up for our more productive insight (Caputo 2018, 122). The rhetoric of the open hand is very much suggesting that to maintain the idea that there is a more productive reading is part of the deception of the closed fist. Instead, the key to aligning communicative expressions with the reality of things is to stay open to the fact that there is no reading or interpretation that is more productive.

More importantly, Derrida is very much absorbed in and attached to words. As was stated, the Derridean model concludes that there is nothing more than a vast discursive web that we all are caught in and inescapably committed to. Now I agree with the idea that there is no getting behind or transcending this web. However this agreement is short lived, since Derrida's conclusion is that we must deconstruct words and thus be

[32] Derrida's "deconstruction" comes to mind when Eric Nelson discusses the self-challenging and self-destructing teachings in Chan Buddhism. See Nelson, Eric S. *Chinese and Buddhist Philosophy in Early Twentieth-Century German Thought* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 2017) 238.

fully absorbed in them. For Derrida, it's only by way of a deconstructive absorption in words that we realize *khôra* as being the very interplay of *différance*, and achieve the further realization that our sense of self is informed and created by those we share our being with (Caputo 1997, 75). This is the exact opposite of the kind of unattached usage of language that I am gesturing towards with the rhetoric of the open hand. The point of the rhetoric of the open hand is to use words in a selfless or humble manner such that we let go of them and don't fixate on them. It is in this staying open that we "awaken" to language and align our communicative expressions with the reality of things.

Just as Wright cautions that there is no transcendence of language, McCagney cautions that this selfless recognition of the limits of language does not lead to a "catatonic stupor" or having to retreat from the world into silent meditation (1997, 80). Instead, we are simply led to "…a nonattached usage of ordinary language" (80). The great value of being able to use terms neutrally without settling down and becoming attached to them is that we intrinsically avoid a self-centered attachment (30). Therefore the rhetoric of the open hand fosters a selfless or inherent self-emptying/opening use of language wherein we stay open to other perspectives, and in doing so we are aligned with the deep reality of things. Furthermore, if we place this rhetorical approach of the open hand alongside Shai Frogel's consideration of the "Gorgias" and the "Phaedrus" dialogues from Plato, it appears that the rhetoric of the open hand finds its model in the classical understanding of what it means to practice "good rhetoric."

In the "Gorgias," the dialogue begins with a conversation between Socrates and the physically imposing and rhythmically speaking Gorgias from eastern Sicily (Graziosi 2014, 65). The "Gorgias" is routinely held up as an example of the intrinsically negative

nature of rhetoric, since Socrates engages in a robust attack of the practice. However in the "Phaedrus," Socrates defends rhetoric from Phaedrus' claim that rhetoric is out of place when seeking truth (Frogel 2005, 17). The positive view of rhetoric in the "Phaedrus" is frequently taken to be an abrupt shift by Plato, but as Shai Frogel maintains the "Phaedrus" is only continuing the point made by Socrates in the "Gorgias" (18). Frogel's position is that both dialogues are seeking to understand "the relation of rhetoric to truth and justice" (23). The takeaway from these dialogues is that rhetoric ought not to be viewed as inherently antithetical to moving closer to reality or the truth of things.

At this point, Frogel heads in the same direction as Chaim Perelman, since Frogel preserves Perelman's hunch that rhetoric is intrinsic to philosophy or the pursuit of the reality of things. In the joint critical work (1973) *The New Rhetoric* by Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, Perelman is not out to invent a new theory of rhetoric, but is instead trying to return rhetoric to its dialectical ground that was once commonplace in more ancient conceptions of rhetoric (31). Perelman's project strives to bridge the expanse between rhetoric and dialectic by placing the two methods on the same plane and therefore grounding all forms of deliberation in a rhetorical-dialectical nexus (31). Central to this reconfiguration is a "pluralistic model of truth" (34).

According to this model, it is ridiculous to speak of truth as "The Truth," and to view philosophical thought as harnessing the rational argumentative power of dialectic to move towards "The Truth," while rhetoric is merely concerned with a persuasive victory. Instead the fact that there's a multiplicity of philosophical approaches to understanding the world, lends credence to the idea that "truth has many faces" (34), and that within any philosophical line of argumentation one will discover the rhetorical-dialectical nexus at

work. For Perelman the philosopher does not lay down a set of objective proofs, rather she or he is engaged in a series of rational argumentative moves to understand what is true for her or him, while attempting "…to persuade an ideal philosophical addressee to accept" a position (34). Simply stated, for Perleman the glue that binds the rhetorical-dialectical nexus is "persuasion."

Like Perelman, Frogel agrees that there is a rhetorical-dialectical nexus or a "rhetoric of philosophy," but it is not because philosophical discourse utilizes persuasion in arguing for a version of the truth among a plurality of truths. Instead, Frogel maintains the idea of "the Truth" and following the "Gorgias" and the "Phaedrus" dialogues, Frogel asserts that the discursive search for "the Truth" is not contingent on one engaging the dialectic of philosophy over the suasive methods of rhetoric. Frogel highlights a distinction that Plato makes via Socrates in the "Gorgias," not between rhetoric and dialectic or between what is a true art of the good and a false art of what is pleasing, but between two types of rhetoric (16).

According to Socrates, "good rhetoric" seeks to improve the citizens' soul, while "bad rhetoric" merely has the aim to provide citizens with enjoyment (16). Thus the attack on rhetoric in the "Gorgias," is not an attack on rhetoric *in toto*, but rather what constitutes "bad rhetoric." Likewise, the "Phaedrus" seeks to fully understand the constitution of "good rhetoric." The insight that Socrates has is that "bad rhetoric" is myopically focused on a persuasive victory and thus mired in duplicity, whereas "good rhetoric" makes it a priority to avoid the duplicitous path of "bad rhetoric." In this way, Socrates appears to view "good rhetoric" as inherently part of a move towards the truth of things because any such move has to avoid deception or "bad rhetoric."

Likewise, in Frogel's estimation the pursuit of "the Truth" has to be driven by "good rhetoric," otherwise such a pursuit always runs the risk of deception brought about by "bad rhetoric." But for Frogel "good rhetoric" is analogous to what Nietzsche calls in *The Gay Science* "The Will to Truth," which is "the will not to deceive, not even myself" (quoted in Frogel 2005, 109). The meaningful conclusion for Frogel is a privileged view of philosophy as the domain of inquiry that has "the Truth" as its goal and therefore must intrinsically be engaged in "good rhetoric," as a practice of avoiding the "bad rhetoric" of deception. Alternatively, I find Frogel's rendezvous with Nietzsche to be indicative of a different discernment.

Following what was said about "good rhetoric" and its analogue in Nietzsche's "The Will to Truth," what is of sincere consequence is that an orientation towards the truth of things requires avoiding deception of self and others at all costs, and to avoid deception of self and others at all costs is to be fundamentally open to things in the manner achieved with the self-emptying and thus self-opening of the open hand. In keeping, "bad rhetoric" is indicative of the closed fist, since the rhetoric of the closed fist is consumed with the self-centered grasp. With the closed fist we deceive others and ourselves because we ignore the truth that things human and nonhuman have a depth that we cannot grasp hold of. Thus good rhetoric aligns with the rhetoric of the open hand, wherein a self-opened or humble use of language offers a reorientation within language that aligns us with the deep reality of things. For those who think there is not much wisdom to be found in humility or in a world where communicative expressions are guided by this selflessness, the next section explores how the wisdom of humility is truly endless and not something we should easily dismiss.

Humility is Endless

> The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
> Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.
>
> —T.S. Eliot, "East Coker," *Four Quartets*

Socrates memorably tells us in the "Apology of Socrates" when he is on trial in Athens for not recognizing the gods and corrupting the youth, that if he is wise, as the oracle at Delphi famously reported, then it is because he is "…not wise in anything, great or small…" (1964, 427). There is no denying the substantial influence Socrates had on ancient philosophy and the Stoic school in particular (Inwood & Gerson 2008, x). It is then odd that Zeno elevated the closed fist over the open hand, but perhaps Zeno was afflicted by the same feeling that often afflicts people today when in comes to humility. In a world where the closed fist is so easy and familiar, it's at times difficult to see how there is any real wisdom in humility. Consequently, when the subject of humility is broached, the usual reaction is to dismiss it as impractical or to simply characterize it pejoratively as a synonym for *weakness* and *submissiveness* (Hess and Ludwig 2017, 59).

Discussed in the second chapter was the idea that a commitment to the closed fist can be exacerbated by our contemporary technicity. The worsened commitment is the result of how contemporary technicity can lead to a belief that all hidden depths have been excavated, which in turn promotes the illusion of control. Such a worsened commitment would be disastrous for humility, and as the famed MIT professor in mathematics and pivotal figure in computer science Norbert Wiener once wrote, "We can be humble and live a good life with the aid of the machines or we can be arrogant and die" (quoted in Hess and Ludwig 2017, 15). Death and destruction can and as we will see

in the next chapter, do result when we apply the closed fist instead of the open hand, but Wiener's warning is motivated by a different worry.

For Norbert Wiener the arrogant death that he saw as a possibility would be the result of unregulated developments in things like artificial intelligence and automation (15). In our present moment we are not yet under threat of a rise of machines that will wage war against us in some Terminator scenario. However, there is a very real concern for what will happen to society when many of the jobs once performed by people are to a greater and greater degree automated in what Edward D. Hess and Katherine Ludwig have deemed, "The Smart Machine Age" (SMA). It has been estimated that over the next twenty years, "…technological advances could displace as many as eighty million US Workers" (19), since the smart machine age will no longer require human workers for value creation in a wide variety economic sectors (19).

For Hess and Ludwig, our ability to adjust to the deluge of automation in the smart machine age will require us, "…to fundamentally change our views of what it means for humans to be 'smart' and what it takes for humans to succeed and reach their fullest potential" (17). The assertion made by the authors is that in the smart machine age, we must acquire a view of humility as "the new smart." This is to say that in the SMA our current understanding of "smart" will be outdated, and to hubristically hold onto an antiquated definition of smart will indeed put us on the arrogant path Wiener warned us about.

What does it mean to say that our definition of "smart" is outdated? In today's world we frequently work under the assumption that intelligence is quantity based (31). For most of us, our lives are centered around the closefisted acquisition of some amount

of knowledge and then the performance of that knowledge. Hess and Ludwig recognize that this "quantity-based definition of smart" plays right into the delights of our self-centeredness and the ego (32). The authors note that this "kind of self-focus leads to ego defensiveness and fear that inhibits learning and impedes critical thinking, creativity, innovation, and emotional engagement with others" (32). Thus it would seem that laboring under the quantity-based notion of smart in addition to being problematic in the SMA, it's also an impediment to the open hand.

According to Hess and Ludwig, our definition of "smart" must change from the old smart notion rooted in quantity of knowledge grasped, to the new smart grounded in humility. In the SMA the kinds of skills that will be highly desired in human workers will be SMA skills like "critical thinking, innovative thinking, creativity, and high emotional engagement with others" (22). The rationale behind the need for these SMA skills is due to how they will compliment technological innovations or due to the fact that they cannot be easily reproduced by technology (21-22). However, I contend that to speak of "humility" as being the new definition of smart, is to really say that the measure of intelligence is one's openness to things human and nonhuman. In other words, at its most fundamental level humility brings forth openness and openness is crucial for these SMA skills. We can further understand how openness functions within these SMA skills by considering an example like critical thinking.

We typically define critical thinking as a way of objectively considering an issue (24). It is the "objectivity" of critical thinking that's difficult, given that we are always in some sense self-centered in our understandings about things. As I have detailed in this project and Hess and Ludwig describe, this self-centered "Inner talk is part of our story-

how we perceive the world, but the tendency to self-focus and distort reality negatively affects our behaviors, thinking, and ability to relate and engage with others" (79). Thus critical thinking really demands the self-emptying-opening of the open hand, so that we can see all the various sides of an issue and stay open to the depth of the issue beyond what we might grab hold of at the surface of things.

To be clear, humility with regard to the open hand or the new smart of the SMA, is not simply self-denial or a kind of negative self-criticism where we must wallow in a stew of worthlessness. Humility and openness does not require one to give up all knowledge or even a sense of self, but just like with our understanding of rhetoric earlier, the call here is for an epistemic reorientation. As McCagney writes of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, "The ordinary use of language (*samvrtisatya*) describes events truthfully provided the descriptions are not reified" (1997, 115), which is to say that our surface level understandings about things are truthful as long as we don't take them to be exhaustive of things. For if we reify our superficial understandings, we hubristically lose our openness to the depth of things and there is no longer an alignment between the openness at work at the level of "conventional truth" (*samvrtisatya*) and on a deeper level, the "higher truth" (*paramārthsatya*) that being selflessly "open" (*śūnya*) allows us to be most intimately near to each other and ourselves (87-113).

The humility and therefore openness fostered by the open hand is not an outright rejection of all and every understanding we might have about things, but rather a respect for the limits of our understandings. Respecting these limits does not send us spiraling into nonsensical oblivion, since there is a beneficial wisdom that comes with humbly appreciating the incompleteness of our grasp that allows us to engage with the world

more openly and therefore more realistically. Moreover, the openness engendered with humility has been shown to increase one's ability to learn and allots for greater flexibility and adaptability, which is crucial for better performance and leadership (Hess and Ludwig 2017, 64-69). It's this openness that results from humility that have made humility a key component within the business practices of some major American corporations (69-71) and most intriguingly, a part of the leadership and performance tactics of special operations forces like the US Navy SEALs (72).

The wisdom of humility truly does seem to be endless and far from weak or worthless. If relating to things with the open hand can lead to such wisdom, then it is in our self-interest to let go of the closed fist and open the hand to make room for the depth of things. It was stated at the beginning of this dissertation that we cannot afford to ignore or exclude the depth of things because our lives are deeply impacted by and intertwined with all sorts of things. While evidence of this fact is on full display in issues like the Smart Machine Age or Climate Change, there is though no more timely or palpable an example of this critical insight than the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19. In the next chapter we explore the nuances of this pandemic, since it is a salient example of what happens when we ignore the depth of things and opt for the closed fist over the open hand.

Chapter Four

Making Room for a Pandemic

The Virus

In 1974, Thomas Nagel famously wrote an article titled "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" The novelty of Nagel's article was that he was unknowingly following the very instructions touched on in the last chapter that were echoed by Nishitani and originally posed by Masuo Bashō. To learn from the pine tree requires that we learn of the pine tree (Nishitani 1983, 128). This kind of learning entails that we cannot merely stay closed off in our self-centered experience and think that a thing like a bat has no experience. Instead, we have to open ourselves up to the bat, so as to learn of the bat. Now while we will never fully understand a bat's experience, the key to this "animal phenomenology"[33] that Nagel gestured towards is the openness of the open hand. Sadly, not everyone took Nagel's query about bats seriously. This chapter attests to the fact that if a larger swath of humanity had learned of the bat, this pandemic, which arose from a bat-borne coronavirus, would have likely had a very different outcome.

The pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its related disease COVID-19 is a salient example of the kind of destruction and deception that can be propagated with the closed fist, and is a reminder about the urgent need to open the hand to make room for the intangible depth of things. In this chapter we will discover that while relating to things with the open hand would not have kept this virus from emerging or even an outbreak from happening, such openness would have allowed for better global preparedness,

[33] See Broglio, Ron. *Surface Encounters: Thinking with Animals and Art*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011) xv.

which would have limited the destruction caused by this historic event. To properly open up to this pandemic collision with the deep reality of things, we have to first make room for bat-borne coronaviruses and the original SARS (SARS-CoV-1) outbreak.

Coronaviruses fall within the subfamily *Coronavirinae,* which consists of four different genera—Alphacoronavirus, Betacoronavirus, Gammacaronavirus and Deltacoronavirus (Jie Cui, Fang Li, and Zheng-Li Shi 2019, 181). Infections of alphacoronaviruses and betacoronaviruses only occur in mammals, whereas gamma and deltacoronaviruses largely infect birds (181).[34] These viruses have long been known to be responsible for human illnesses like the common cold, and while they were also known to cause respiratory and intestinal illness in animals and humans, they were not thought to be highly pathogenic for humans (181). This was, until 2002 when SARS emerged. The original SARS epidemic was the first major epidemic of the 21st century and it gave rise to 8,100 cases and almost 800 fatalities (Qiu 2020, para. 1).

At the start of the outbreak it was unknown to virologists that SARS was related to bats let alone that it was a bat-borne group 2 betacoronavirus. Initial reports only pointed to wildlife traders in China's Guangdong province that had been infected with SARS from a mongoose-like mammal known as a "palm civet" (para. 7). Civets were being maintained in the open market, as they "are"[35] a food source, and in some areas of China considered a delicacy. So civets were thought to be the source of the zoonotic

[34] Some gamma and deltacoronaviruses infect mammals. See Cui, Jie, Li, Fang, and Shi, Zheng-Li. 2019. "Origin and evolution of pathogenic coronaviruses," *Nature Reviews Microbiology*, 17: 181.

[35] China has recently issued a ban on the sale of civets and other wild animals, but this does not mean that civets and other wild animals won't still be consumed as a food source and sold on the black market.

spillover that introduced the virus into humans ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 21:57-22:10). However research results contradicted this theory and the question was then how did the virus get into civets? Fortunately, previous virus outbreaks in the 1990s of Hendra and Nipah directed researchers towards bats as the possible origin of the virus (Qiu 2020, para. 9).

With Hendra virus there was a zoonotic spillover event from horses to humans and with Nipah, the spillover went from pigs to humans (para. 9). In each of these outbreaks, while the intermediary animal was different, both pathogens were ultimately traced back to a species of fruit bat (para. 9). In 2004, Zheng-Li Shi, who is currently the director of the Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases at the Wuhan Institute of Virology and referred to respectively as the "Bat Woman" for her extensive work on bat-borne coronaviruses, was part of an international research expedition into caves in China to find out if bats were indeed responsible for SARS (para. 5). The findings at first were discouraging, but eventually with the aid of an antibody test, three species of horseshoe bat were shown to have the antibodies for SARS (para. 12). A number of years later, Shi's team discovered a strain of coronavirus in horseshoe bats that had "…a genomic sequence about 97 percent identical to the one found in civets in Guangdong" (para. 15).

Over the last 16 years, Shi's work along with the work of those like the U.S. based nonprofit EcoHealth Alliance headed by Peter Daszak, have shown that there is a deep bat "virome" or reservoir of bat-borne coronaviruses that vary widely in genetic difference (para. 14; Ben Hu et al. 2017). While a lot of these viruses are harmless, within this deep reservoir there are SARS-like, or as is used now, "SARS-related" (SARSr-CoV) coronaviruses that according to Dr. Ralph Baric have an "intrinsic capacity" to spillover

into a human host and initiate infection ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 22:30-22:50). These SARS-related viruses can range in differences up to 30 percent from SARS-CoV-1, but can still utilize the human "angiotensin-converting enzyme 2" receptor (ACE-2) to gain entry into human cells, and they cause SARS-related disease in mouse models, which is an extremely hard to care for end-stage lung disease known as Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS) ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 23:13-23:47). With respect to the current pandemic causing pathogen, it is genetically speaking, about 96% similar to bat-borne SARS-related coronaviruses and roughly 22 percent different from SARS-CoV-1 ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 23:58). This makes SARS-CoV-2 a "kissing cousin" of the original SARS virus.

A majority of the time any reference to the current pandemic is identified with the terms *Coronavirus* or *COVID-19*, but this belies the larger depth of the virus, as gestured towards in the previous paragraphs. COVID-19 stands for "Coronavirus Infectious Disease" and denotes the disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). As of February 11th 2020, the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) decided based on the genetic structure of the virus being about 79 % similar to SARS-CoV-1 or what some have cheekily deemed "classic SARS," it would be identified as SARS-CoV-2, and its disease would be named COVID-19 (WHO n.d.). Just like with HIV and AIDS, there is a distinction between the virus and the disease it causes. While some have rebuffed this nomenclature, since the original SARS taxonomy cleanly contained both the virus and disease all in one, the current taxonomical distinction is accepted and supported (Gorbalenya et al. 2020).

The lasting impression is that those like Zheng-Li Shi, Ralph Baric and Peter Daszak have for many years now openhandedly appreciated the depth of bats and the reservoir of SARS-related coronaviruses within bat populations that have the pathogenic potential to spillover into humans. Now whether these viruses can spread from person to person after spilling over into a human host is a different story ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 22:47). The point remains, there's a deep reservoir of SARS-related coronaviruses in bats that have the intrinsic ability to infect humans. Additionally, this means that no middle or intermediary host is needed. While it is possible that SARS-CoV-2 spilled over from an intermediary animal sold in the open market in China, this does not have to be the case.

On the first of January 2020, in the early days of the then epidemic, the "Huanan Seafood Market" in Wuhan was closed. The closure of the market was due to patients afflicted with an atypical viral pneumonia reporting that they worked in the seafood market (Juan 2020). Given China's past experiences with SARS-CoV-1 and the link to civets, Chinese health officials knew to ask the necessary questions to point at a possible zoonotic introduction and took the procedures to close the market in the hope that like with SARS-CoV-1, shutting the market down would help curb the outbreak. This seafood or "wet" market is a great example within an example of how deep this whole pandemic really is and how inadequate relating to things with the closed fist can be.

Relating to this pandemic with the closed fist can lead to the deceptive perspective that this event is simply due to wild animals or a specific animal that was sold in the open market for human consumption in China. Again, future research may very well yield that there was an intermediary animal sold in a wet market that introduced the

virus into humans, but it is very possible that this virus was simply brought into a city like Wuhan by a person infected with the virus from outside of the city. Serology studies have shown that farmers or those who live in rural parts of China near the entrances to caves that are home to large bat populations, frequently test positive for antibodies for SARS-related coronaviruses (Qiu 2020, para. 18). Exposure to bat-borne coronaviruses for these rural populations and farmers can be as simple as gathering bat guano from caves to use as fertilizer in their fields or the fact that they have their homes in the nightly flight path of thousands of bats. This means that SARS-CoV-2 could have been transmitted from bats directly to a human host(s) in these rural outskirts and brought into the city; setting up a chain of transmission without the involvement of an intermediary animal.

In the wake of the current pandemic, China placed a ban on the trade and consumption of wild animals (Wanli 2020; Yin 2020), but this ban is more of a closefisted way of relating to the problem. Simply placing a ban on the wild animal trade and consumption does not appreciate the deeper reality of what was just mentioned; on a nightly basis thousands of bats fly out from their caves and those that are in close proximity to these populations of bats are at risk of potential exposure. In this scenario, the more openhanded response would be to make room for the kind of research provided by EcoHealth Alliance regarding our cohabitation with nature and specifically with wildlife like bats.

The reality is that as we encroach further and further on the ecological and ontological ground of things like bats, we not only threaten their much needed survival, but we precariously subject ourselves, as well as animals we subsist on like pigs (Qiu

2020, para. 30), to novel introductions of pathogens that are as bad, if not potentially worse than SARS-CoV-2. Thus the problem is not bats, since they provide needed ecological support, but more acutely a commitment to the closed fist, which is indicative of a reluctance to open up to the depth of things like bats. Unfortunately, we will see at the end of this chapter that the Trump administration obliterated any room making for EcoHealth Alliance's important work.

If we consider how this pandemic has unfolded for countries like China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, which experienced the full disruptive force of SARS-CoV-1, they appear to have managed the current crises better than other countries. Similarly, South Korea, which experienced an outbreak of Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) in 2015, has also faired quite well and has been a true example of what a concerted investment in pandemic preparedness, contact tracing, isolation, and testing can afford a society in the midst of an outbreak of a novel infectious disease. These actions are clearly the result of being impacted by SARS-CoV-1 or in the case of South Korea MERS, but more acutely what resulted from those experiences was an appreciation for the depth of novel coronaviruses. Ultimately, this appreciation afforded these countries a more openhanded approach to the pandemic, which allowed for a far more positive response. For a country like the United States whose leadership has largely approached the virus with the closed fist the results have been less than ideal.

If we consider the United States and the current administration's response to the pandemic, it has been dismally closefisted and self-deceptive to the real depth of the virus. Even when we were given a head start with SARS-CoV-2, the United States failed to swiftly enact a pandemic plan. While China's actions in handling the early epidemic

were not sterling and at times closefisted, it is entirely inexcusable to blame China or the World Health Organization (WHO) for the U.S.'s lack of preparedness. The lack of preparedness displayed in the U.S., is truly a lack of openness to the depth of things and a hubristic commitment to the closed fist.

Looking closely at the response from leadership within the United States, it becomes clear that there was no room made for the pathogenic potential of bat-borne coronaviruses and the continuous warnings from researchers about a zoonotic spillover leading to a serious pandemic.[36] Equally ignored were American researchers affiliated with the Chinese virology community, who were informed by their Chinese colleagues as early as late December of 2019 regarding the severity of the outbreak and the need to take serious measures to contain the spread of the virus ("TWiV Special: Conversation with a COVID- 19 patient, Ian Lipkin," 17:04). There was also no appreciation for the outbreaks of SARS-CoV-1 and MERS-CoV, which given the time since the emergence of both these coronaviruses, means that had we taken the depth of things seriously and not allowed profit to dictate instead, we very well might have had a variety of therapeutic drugs at our disposal to use at the start of this pandemic, if not even an anti-viral that could target the whole complex of betacoronaviruses. Sadly, in a country like the United States the choice made by those at the highest levels of leadership was to approach this pandemic with the closed fist, and like other countries, the result has only amplified the severity of an already very severe disruption.

[36] See Osterholm, Michael T. and Olshaker, Mark. *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*. (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

The Disruption

> I understand this whole situation may seem overwhelming and that disruption to everyday life may be severe. … I told my children that while I didn't think that they were at risk right now, we as a family need to be preparing for significant disruption of our lives.
>
> —Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the National Center of Immunization and Respiratory Disease at the CDC

It was from an apartment in Rome, Italy around 11:00 A.M. on December 31st of 2019 that an online article in *China Daily* caught my eye. The article reported 27 cases of viral pneumonia in the central Chinese city of Wuhan. All the patients reported having a fever and issues breathing. The fateful last line read, "there were no clear signs of human-to-human transmission" (Xinhua 2019). Stoked by intrigue, the *China Daily* report led to a similar article in *The Japan Times* that characterized these atypical cases of viral pneumonia as "SARS-like" in their expression of symptoms ("Japan Times" 2019).

In truth, the global disruption that has become the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19 began much earlier than December of 2019. Data shows that the first patients arrived at hospitals in Wuhan at the end of December and the virus was likely spreading throughout the city as early as October of 2019 (Wen-Hua Kong et al. 2020, 675). That said, the reach of the disruption began to fully make itself known at the end of the first month of the New Year. The first U.S. case of what was then known as "2019-nCoV," appeared in the state of Washington on January 21st. By the 23rd of January the central government of China ordered a complete lockdown of Hubei Province, which included 10 cities; some 32 million people. Key among those cities was the city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the epidemic.

This unprecedented lockdown flew in the face of the usual outbreak policy that suggests if you shut everything down people will head for the exists. Reportedly, the day before the lockdown over 400,000 people left Wuhan by train ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 16:27). The disruption for China and specifically the citizens of Wuhan was in full effect, and to a lesser, but still palpable degree for those countries in close proximity to China. For the rest of the world and from my perch in Rome at the uncomfortable kitchen table, we curiously looked on, that is, if we looked at all.

On the evening of the 21st of January, I was invited to an event at the St. Regis in Rome to celebrate the official kickoff to a program promoting China-Italy Tourism and Culture in 2020 (Liuliu 2020). This was supposed to be a yearlong celebration and associated with the new Belt and Road Initiative. This initiative is China's attempt to reawaken the trade relations of the old Silk Road, which during the Han Dynasty purportedly originated in the modern day city of Xi'an in Shaanxi Province and found its way to Rome. On that evening a representative from Xi'an touted the many benefits of his city and the long list of lavish facilities being built to receive what they and the Italian Ambassador to China, Luca Ferrari, hoped would be an influx of Italian tourists to Xi'an in the months and years ahead (Liuliu 2020).

If there was any disruption at hand, the Xi'an official's extensive inventory about his city's amenities and the regal environs of the St. Regis, absorbed and redirected the disruption and with it the focus back to the glasses of champagne and mini-plates of pasta that were handed out. Clearly though, all was not right in the world and while there was no love for the depth of things during the festivities at the St. Regis, there was more affection shown a few days later at a Lunar New Year performance held within a local

community auditorium. The performance was comprised of various school aged Chinese-Italian children signing and acting out mythic scenes and displays of historical homage to China in front of their parents and teachers. Despite the celebrations, there was a certain pall over the event. The attendees wore the disruption in their movements and on their faces in the form of masks.

By Thursday evening of January 30th the first cases of SARS-CoV-2 were reported in Italy. The first cases were a couple from Wuhan who had arrived in Italy a few days earlier. They were diagnosed in Rome while staying at a hotel in the district of Monti just near the Colosseum, and taken to Rome's Spallanzani Hospital for care ("Rome: Italy Confirms two cases of Coronavirus" 2020). By Friday morning, the Italian government had announced a travel ban on all flights to and from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau (Brambilla 2020). Vendors outside of Roma's main train station, Termini, shelved the souvenirs and began selling hand sanitizer. Walking around the city center of Rome in the Campo Marzo district, the high-end retail store employees all now dawned facemasks and appeared visibly uncomfortable. The discrete signs welcoming Chinese visitors for the celebration of the Lunar New Year that hung above a street just off of Rome's main Via del Corso, were now in curios juxtaposition to the reality of things. All of this though, was only the foreshock of the much larger *terremoto* that came a few weeks later, and was epicentered in the Lombardy and Veneto regions in Northern Italy.

However slight these initial stirrings were, they were a few insights in those early days that would have allowed anyone to appreciate the depth of things and the need to open up to them. This first insight was offered in an interview with Dr. Ralph Baric on

the 26th of January just after Hubei Province went into lockdown. Dr. Baric is a world-leading researcher in coronaviruses and heads his own Lab out of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health. In the interview with Dr. Baric, he was asked to assess the efficacy of the lockdown in China. The valuable takeaway was not the impact of the lockdown, as that is hard to judge in the moment. Instead, the key indicator was Dr. Baric's discussion about why Chinese health officials chose such an unprecedented measure. Central to understanding this decision is an openness to the type of viral spread that was occurring within a city like Wuhan, and how that pattern of spread raised the threat level and was a barometer for a greater amount of concern for China and the world overall ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 10:40-10:48).

As has been suggested, our experience with novel human coronaviruses is not extensive, since there have only been three of these events in the 21st century. It begins in 2002 with the disruptive outbreak of "sever acute respiratory syndrome" (SARS) in Guangdong province, China. Then in 2012 there was the outbreak of "Middle East respiratory syndrome" (MERS) in Saudi Arabia. MERS-CoV like SARS-CoV-1, is a bat-borne coronavirus, but the with MERS-CoV it transmitted to humans via dromedary camels (Jie Cui, Fang Li, and Zheng-Li Shi 2019). The largest known outbreak of MERS-CoV outside of the Arabian Peninsula occurred in South Korea in 2015 ("About MERS" n.d.). Now with SARS-CoV-1, the transmission dynamics were such that the spread of infection occurred almost exclusively in and around hospitals ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 10:56-11:00). The reason for this was that when infected with SARS-CoV-1 patients typically developed severe disease, which required hospitalization.

Additionally, patients did not begin to significantly shed virus until they had severe symptoms, by which time they would have been hospitalized (11:30). So the isolation of hospitals and contact tracing helped to curtail the epidemic (11:36). Like SARS-CoV-1, MERS-CoV largely spread in and around hospitals, but with one slight difference. With MERS-CoV, there were not only cases of mild to possibly asymptomatic infection, but instances where those with mild or asymptomatic disease were capable of shedding virus, and this has made outbreaks of MERS-CoV harder to control (11:45).

Now with SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID-19, research published in *the Lancet* at the time of the Dr. Baric interview showed that about 32% of those infected with SARS-CoV-2 developed significant disease and required ICU care (Chaolin Huang et al. 2020). This means that roughly 68% of those infected with the virus had a range of symptoms. As we know now, this range can vary widely from severe to mild and to even asymptomatic. Additionally, there are high enough viral titers in these mild to asymptomatic individuals to allow for instances of person-to-person spread without any real indicator that a person is ill. The kind of transmission dynamics associated with SARS-CoV-2 make it much harder to contact trace and lead to a very challenging flu-like transmission pattern that can easily drive an exponential spread of the virus. Thus for Dr. Baric, the extraordinary decision to lockdown Hubei province was derived from the realization by Chinese epidemiologists and virologists that the spread of the virus had indeed become a "community acquired outbreak," which is very worrisome when dealing with a novel pathogen that the human population is immune naïve to ("TWiV #584: Year of the coronavirus," 14:06,14:13).

The other piece of information at the end of January that silently signaled the depth of the situation and the inevitable disruption to come was found in the same article from the *Lancet*. The article describes the clinical features of the first 41 patients. What stands out is a simple bar graph that shows that while the epidemiological alert was released on December 31st 2019 by the local health authorities in Wuhan regarding cases of atypical pneumonia, the first cases occurred well before that, and a number of these cases had no connection or exposure to the now infamous Huanan Seafood Market (Chaolin Huang et al. 2020, 2, 3). This information was alarming because it meant that simply closing the seafood market would probably, as already discussed, have no bearing on the outbreak of the virus. The reality as we know now, was that the virus had been circulating within the local community for a while before it ever found its way into the market. The market perhaps just acted as an amplification hub for transmission, but was not the main source of the outbreak. This means that the disruptive force of the virus had already started moving far beyond Wuhan and China, and it was only a matter of time before the world would disruptively collide with the virus and its disease.

In Italy, the disruption thundered before all of us on the 21st of February. It was a Friday when the news report indicated that a 38-year-old Italian man, who would be later identified only as "Mattia," tested positive with SARS-CoV-2 in Codogno, Italy (Parodi and Amante 2020). At that time there were 17 reported cases (Godin 2020). By Saturday there were 79 cases, 2 fatalities, and the entire Vento and Lombardy regions were placed in a "Zona Rossa" lockdown (Bruno and Winfield, 2020). By Wednesday of the next week there were 374 cases, 12 fatalities ("ANSAen" 2020), and reports of confirmed cases tied to Italy were coming from Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Croatia, Algeria, and

Brazil ("Coronavirus: Outbreak spreads in Europe from Italy" 2020). Cities like Venice put an early halt to its world-renowned Carnival celebrations and American Universities with campuses and study aboard programs in Italy started pulling their students out; even those students in cities like Rome, which at that moment was yet to be touched by the outbreak (Momigliano 2020; Dickler 2020).

Just as the bar graph in the *Lancet* article depicted that the virus had been at work within the community long before the Huanan Seafood Market was shuttered, the red zoning lockdown of the Lombardy and Veneto regions, and the Italian Prime Minster, Giuseppe Conte's calls for normalcy, were all desperate measures and an indictment that the fuse had been lit long ago. It seemed inconceivable to some that Italy, the EU country that took the most drastic preventative measures by banning flights from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macau at the end of January, could now be the new epicenter of the epidemic (Parodi and Amante 2020, para. 20). There were hopes of being able to trace the start of the spread when initial reports suggested that Mattia had met with a colleague at a café in Codogno who had recently returned from China. Those hopes quickly drifted away when the colleague's test results for the virus came back negative (para. 34)

What was clear was that Mattia originally sought medical attention at a Codogno hospital on the 18th of February, but was not flagged as a case of SARS-CoV-2 because he lacked the necessary travel history to China and was sent home (para. 23). Mattia would return the following day with a worsened condition and was admitted to the hospital with no safeguards in place. He was officially tested on the night of the 20th, but by then his pregnant wife, a friend, five healthcare workers, and at least one patient at the hospital had been infected with SARS-CoV-2 (para. 25). However, as a nurse from the

Codogno Hospital where Mattia was admitted reported, “For at least a week before the first case was discovered, we had observed an abnormal number of pneumonia cases. All these persons were treated and sent back home” (para. 27). The fuse had indeed been lit long ago and the closefisted grasp on Italian life was now pried open by the disruptive force of a single-stranded RNA virus.

Two days before the United States raised the travel advisory for Italy and South Korea to its most severe level, level 4, I was fortunate enough to make my own arrangements to return to the U.S., and left Rome on the 1st of March. By the second of March, Italy had 2,036 cases and 52 fatalities, and a week later the whole of Italy was told that they would be going into a full lockdown starting March 10th. On March 11th the WHO officially declared the outbreak a pandemic (Chappell 2020), and shortly there after, the White House issued its “Slow the Spread” guidelines, in its own official acknowledgment of the depth of the situation. While the approach to the pandemic for most countries eventually swung in the direction of the open hand, there were and continue to be many instances where a fear of facing the depth of things has led to a rigid and at times violent commitment to the closed fist.

A Commitment to The Closed Fist

At the start of the outbreak in China, a visit to what has become the widely viewed “COVID-19 Dashboard” or “tracking map” created by Johns Hopkins University, showed only a few of the now ubiquitous red indicator dots that mark reported cases of infections and fatalities around the globe. In those early days, the paucity of red dots was another early warning; a call to release the grip on things and open the hand. However like the disruptive breakage of a hammer, the initial disruptive ripples were largely

dismissed and an adherence to the closed fist was sustained. This section deals with some of the ways that this commitment to the closed fist took place both in Italy and in the United States.

While everyone did not feel the early ripples of the SARS-CoV-2 disruption, members of Chinese communities across the globe and individuals of Asian descent could not ignore what was occurring. For these individuals an appreciation for the depth of the situation could not be ignored because they were unjustly associated with the virus and vilified as a result. In late January with the emergence of the first two cases of SARS-CoV-2 in Italy and the aforementioned travel ban put in place by the Italian Government, the fear of the depth of things gave rise to a racist commitment to the closed fist, and similar stories were reported around the world.

One such incident occurred the day after the report of the first two cases in Rome. A popular online forum used by expats ran a story about a café within a coin toss of Trevi Fountain that had banned all Chinese tourists. The sign taped to the window typed in Chinese characters and in English read, “Due to international security measures all people coming from China are not allowed to have access in this place. We do apologise for any inconvenient" (“Rome Bar Bans Chinese Tourists” 2020). By mid-day the café was shuttered and the sign removed. Presumably, the sign was taken down to avoid backlash from concerned community members and the throng of tourists, most notably Chinese tourists taking pictures of *Fontana di Trevi* and eating gelato just across the street from the café.

The true brutality of the closed fist was evident on a cold Sunday evening at the very start of February, when a 15-year-old Chinese-Italian boy was attacked. The boy

was playing basketball alone at a court just as he did everyday in a park in the city of Borgo Panigale just near Bologna (Scarcella 2020). His playing was interrupted when four boys surrounded the teen. They hurled verbal insults at the boy and then attacked him with kicks and literal closefisted punches to his face, as they yelled, "What are you doing in Italy? You bring us diseases. You must go, you and your virus" (quoted in Scarcella 2020, para. 3). The racist assault was only stopped by the fortunate intervention of a forty-year-old Moroccan man who happened to be seated on a nearby bench and who had seen the whole event take place (para. 3). The assailants escaped into the evening, while the 15-year-old boy remained beaten and blooded (para. 3-4).

Sadly, the kind of attack perpetrated on the young boy was not a new development. The attack was merely indicative of a closefisted practice, that while not true for all, it was and is the fear-induced choice for some. In an interview after the assault of the teenage boy in Bologna, Emanuele Russo, the president of Amnesty Italy commented that fear of the virus was simply highlighting "…the Sinophobia that was already present" (quoted in Godin 2020, para. 9). The expression of this fear as a commitment to the closed fist was not always overt and for many it was levied in the form of a more subtle discrimination. The features of this more subtle closefistedness were made apparent to me at a dinner organized by two associations, one of which was comprised of second generation Chinese Italians.

The dinner was held at a well-known Chinese restaurant in Rome's Esquilino district, and arranged to show solidarity and support for the Chinese community. Many Chinese restaurants in Italy suffered a major loss in business after the first cases were reported in Rome at the end of January, and this restaurant was equally deserted except

for two large circular tables that accommodated our group. While the mood was mostly celebratory, for these individuals whose "Italianness" is always questioned, it was clear from discussion that they were now subjected to a new level of closefistedness that was conveyed in more subtle acts of exclusion. These acts ranged from disdainful glances while riding the metro to a racist conversation with a teacher. The teacher had pulled the mom aside one morning and requested that the she leave her child at home, despite the fact that neither the child nor the parents had any recent travel history to China or outside of Italy.

In Italy, as in other countries, the commitment to the closed fist was not limited to acts of racism, but it also revealed itself in desperate attempts to maintain business as usual and in a need to downplay the severity of the issue in order to protect the economy. Tourism in Italy accounts for 13 % of Italy's GDP ("Statista" 2020), and of its 23 million workers, the tourism sector employs 4 million of them (Ghiglione 2020, para. 5). At the end of February, as the outbreak was just ramping up, "Italy's tourism federation, Assoturismo, said up to 90% of hotel and travel agency bookings had been canceled in Rome and up to 80% in Sicily for March, as school trips and conferences across the country were called off, and foreigners opted for caution" (Parodi and Amante, 2020, para. 14). Instead of appreciating this hesitancy to travel openhandedly, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte called for a stop to the panic and asked for Italian news outlet Rai to dial back its coverage of the outbreak (Cuzzocrea and Vitale 2020). But it was Foreign Affairs Minister Luigi Di Maio who modeled a more vigorous closefisted delusion.

Di Maio contended that "fake news" about the virus was doing more damage than the actual virus itself (quoted in Ellyatt 2020, para. 11). Di Maio suggested late February,

"If schools are open, if our children are going to school, tourists and business people can come" (quoted in "The Local" 2020, para. 5). Di Maio further insisted that Italy could be trusted, and that cancellations over fears about the virus were an unjust penalty (para. 15). These kinds of actions were a staggering denial of the depth of things, while also a hypocritical turn of events, since it was Italy who at the first detection of cases at the end of January instituted the travel ban. Now Italy's leadership was imploring the global community that their country was safe and open for business.

Just like in Italy, but perhaps more horrifically, there were and continue to be instances in the United States where the closed fist was and is maintained over the open hand. This commitment to the closed fist within the United States has not only led to violent hate crimes towards people of Chinese and Asian descent (Ormseth 2020), but an incompetent response to the pandemic by the administration within the White House. For decades if not longer, infectious disease experts and epidemiologists in the United States have gamed out the emergence of an infectious disease with pandemic potential. With respect to the current pandemic, these experts have been strikingly prescient.[37] However, in all of the pandemic scenarios it was perhaps never considered that the weak link in a U.S. response would be the leadership within the executive branch of government. Disturbingly, this was the case with the Trump administration, which routinely reinforced a closefisted policy towards the pandemic.

[37] The Director of the Center for Infectious Diseases Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota, Michael T. Osterholm, displays this foresight in the 2017 work *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*. See Osterholm, Michael T. and Olshaker, Mark. *Deadliest Enemy: Our War Against Killer Germs*. (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

On the 22nd of January, a day after the first case of SARS-CoV-2 was reported in the state of Washington, President Trump in an interview with CNBC narrowly stated, "We have it totally under control. It's one person coming from China, and we have it under control. It's going to be just fine" (quoted in Keith, 2020). Even more closefisted was a comment made to a group of reporters in April where the president suggested that, "This was unexpected…And it hit the world. And we're prepared, and we're doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away" (quoted in Keith, 2020). As detailed in the early sections of this chapter, in many ways a pandemic of this type was indeed "expected," and the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 will most likely not simply "go away." This closefisted approach has led to systemic failures in areas like testing and contact tracing, and more broadly in the activation of a comprehensive pandemic plan that would have provided substantive direction to the American public, state and local governments, and the scientific and medical communities. As disturbing and perceptible this display of the closed fist has been, given the Trump administration's track record it is not surprising. One place where we might be surprised to find a commitment to the closed fist is in the scientific and medical communities of the United States.

In a recent editorial in *Science Signaling* authored by Christopher D. Barrett and Michael B. Yaffe, the pair point to the closefisted reliance on "clinical pathways" of care as one of the many failures that took place within the U.S. response to the pandemic. The editorial focuses on the fact that most medical care in the United States is based on "market-driven 'clinical pathway' model" (2020, 2). Over the last twenty years, the clinical pathway model was formulated, so as to provide uniformity and to normalize

approaches to care for patients afflicted by common diseases. Now the clinical pathway model is not intrinsically problematic. Unlike the old model of care, which meant that "good care" was dependent on a patient's access to a physician with the requisite "intelligence, knowledge, and foresight" (2), the clinical pathway model more evenhandedly distributes the possibility of good care.

The reason for this more equitable distribution of care is derived from the fact that, "All patients with a particular subtype of disease are treated similarly using a proscribed written pathway guide for care" (2). Furthermore, this clinical pathway model has been extremely efficient and lucrative (2). The economic force at work here is that these clinical pathways, often informed by insurance companies, expedite the process of establishing a patient's treatment plan, which means that physicians can quickly categorize and sort more patients, and therefore there is a far greater financial gain for everyone involved save for the patients (2). But just as we have seen throughout this dissertation, and specifically within our conversation about contemporary technicity and its impact on the reading brain, Barrett and Yaffe's editorial sheds light on a very serious unintended outcome of this clinical pathway model. It's the very closefistedness of the clinical pathway model that makes it so efficient and lucrative, but also what makes it disastrous when dealing with a novel disease like COVID-19.

Barrett and Yaffe claim that without the standardized clinical pathway the old model necessitated that physicians stay open to "basic science" [38] in order to provide patients with a sound treatment plan (2). It's this openness to basic science that Barrett

[38] "Basic Science" for Barrett and Yaffe includes things like: pathology, microbiology, physiology, and pharmacology." See Barrett, Christopher D. and Yaffe, Michael B. 2020. "COVID-19: All the wrong moves in all the wrong places." *Science Signaling* 13: 2.

and Yaffe contend we have largely lost in the last twenty years, since physicians have become in the authors' words, "replaceable cogs in giant medical machine" (2). Thus the clinical pathway model can be viewed as a closefisted practice, which has perhaps led to the "enframing" (*Gestell*), to use Heidegger's terminology, of medical care and the role of physicians. Again, while this clinical pathway model has its merits, its merits are only beneficial insofar as it provides a standardized and expedient structure of care for "well-studied disease" (2). But as Barrett and Yaffe note, as soon as a novel disease like COVID-19 emerges, whereby definition there is no pathway to follow, the closefistedness of the clinical pathway model results in a catastrophic failure (2).

The model's failure perfectly mirrors the idea of a disruption of reference alluded to in this chapter and directly in chapter two. It begins with the paralysis that is felt by physicians as they are disrupted by COVID-19. Here young physicians schooled under the pathway model are left in the unfamiliar position of the refusal, wherein it's the clinical pathway that is being refused. This is a critical juncture if we follow the thought of Barrett and Yaffe. With the refusal onset, we can either fully open up to the depth and complexity of COVID-19 in order to appreciate how best to treat patients or recommit to the closed fist, by grasping after a clinical pathway for treating COVID-19.

According to Barrett and Yaffe, the decision point in terms of whether physicians went towards the open hand or stayed committed to the closed fist, all hinged on making room for basic science. Since openness to basic science has been in the authors' eyes "evaporated" under the normalization of the clinical pathway model (2), the ability to fully extend the open hand to COVID-19 was for many in the medical field obstructed. Thus at a time when the open hand was needed most, the medical profession's response

to COVID-19 was to quickly reestablish the closed fist by grasping hold of a "COVID-19 clinical pathway" (2). This is a pathway that was grounded in the, "…absurd demand that these pathways be based on data from randomized clinical trials" (2), that occurred during the very chaotic start of the case surge in the United States. Ultimately, this editorial signals the real value of the open hand for physicians when faced with a novel disease like COVID-19. This of course means that there is a real need to foster openness for basic science in both medical practice and medical education within the United States, so as to mitigate the problems that arise from the closefistedness of the clinical pathway model (2).

By now it should be clear, that the choice to maintain a commitment to the closed fist when faced with the depth of things during this pandemic has been nothing short of horrific. A commitment to the closed fist has only led to a lack of preparedness, xenophobic and racist violence, the inability to open up to basic science, as well as death and economic destruction for so many around the world. Alternatively, the force of this disruption has been so great that for many of us we've had no choice but to release our grip on things. As we'll see in the next and final section, when the open hand was extended what followed were acts of extreme selflessness and self-openness that should be encouraging to us all, but tempered with the insight that maintaining the open hand, while being what is needed most, it is difficult to do even in the middle of a pandemic.

The Open Hand and its Difficulty

In early February, there was a video making the rounds of a young Chinese man standing in various piazzas and public areas of Florence, Italy. The young man is Massimiliano Martigli Jiang, the Vice Chairman of the Chinese-Italian Youth Union

("I'm not a virus" 2020). The video depicts Mr. Jiang wearing a facemask and a black scarf covering his eyes holding a sign that reads in Italian, Chinese, and English, "I am not a virus. I am a human. Eradicate the prejudice." Initially in the video we see onlookers simply taking pictures of Mr. Jiang from a distance or posing for a picture next to him. Then the video shifts to scenes of various people walking up to Mr. Jiang to give him a hug or most openly, removing his eye covering and mask to fully embrace him. It's fair to say that Mr. Jiang viscerally understood the need for the open hand. This performance of the open hand perfectly demonstrates how the open hand is not monopolized by any domain or mode of encounter, since neither the aesthetic performance by Mr. Jiang nor the science of Zheng-Li Shi has a monopoly on it, but they both can and do extend it.

On a much larger scale, the open hand became part of all our lives across the world as our normal routines were altered in order to protect those most vulnerable to COVID-19 and to give frontline healthcare workers the ability to treat patients without being completely overrun. In mid-March the White House announced its initial 15-day plan to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and the impact of COVID-19 in the U.S. (Mangan 2020). While individual states were given federalist latitude to implement public health measures in the ways that they saw fit, these guidelines were largely adopted by every state, and in some cases surpassed. This reality was and continues to be a challenge. In some instances this reality meant families were isolated from each other, the joyful stroll through the grocery store has turned into a epidemiological obstacle course, and at the time of writing this, the rise of 40 million jobless claims (Cohen 2020), which for some is a temporary hurdle, but for others is a permanent loss of livelihood.

Despite the hardships, people worked to maintain the open hand in various ways. As restaurants and other eateries closed to dine-in service, people generously supported local business by ordering carryout. The hours at grocery stores were augmented to allow the most at risk citizens to shop early. Construction companies donated unused N95 masks to hospitals and average citizens sewed masks for neighbors and frontline healthcare workers who were in desperate need of Personal Protective Equipment. Across the world frontline healthcare workers were routinely celebrated every evening for their diligent effort in the face of adversity and trauma. The open hand was also frequently expressed in the scientific discourse about the pandemic. On a number of occasions, prominent immunologists, virologists and epidemiologists have uttered the words "we don't know" in response to questions about SARS-CoV-2 or the destructive forces of COVID-19. Far from being a failure of knowledge, this shows the true wisdom of humility with respect to the boundaries of our human understanding and an appreciation for what can and has been fathomed, but also the unfathomable nadirs of this pandemic.

The difficultly that lies before us is that like with any disruption after a period of time, slipping back into the familiar patterns of the closed fist are bound to occur. Relating to things with the closed fist and the open hand is not an all or nothing proposition. Ideally, we would always opt for the open hand, but the practice of the closed fist is so ingrained in who we are as humans, it would be imprudent to think that something like a pandemic would forever do away with the closed fist. Therefore, just like utopia in Laruelle's "non-philosophy," the open hand is a practice not a state (Maoilearca 2015, 291). What we can hope for is that given the blatant depth of this pandemic and how such depth has so disrupted the global grasp on things, perhaps we

have a newfound appreciation for the depth of things, and can see the wisdom in this practice of relating with the open hand, and the deception of self and others that comes with the closed fist.

As speculated, the open hand is critical for solving the many other complex challenges of the 21st century, so using this pandemic to both appreciate and foster openhandedness will serve us well into the future. More immediately though, the current pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its disease COVID- 19 are not going to simply disappear despite our best wishes. At the time of writing this, the exposure to SARS-CoV-2 sits around 54,814,867 cases globally, of which 1,322,963 of those cases have been fatal ("COVID-19 Dashboard" 2020). Part of the deep reality of this pandemic is that a majority of the world is still immune naïve to SARS-CoV-2 and this means that while we can and should maintain a number of public health measures, without a vaccine or immune therapeutics that might help diminish the severity of COVID-19, this virus has a grasp on us and will continue to transmit in away that should have our full respect.

It is likely that SARS-CoV-2 will simply become endemic within the population and eventually lose its pathogenic potential to become just another common contemporary coronavirus. This virus will remain with us forever and primarily cause mild disease, just like the other common coronaviruses ("TWiV # 591: Coronavirus update with Ralph Baric," 48:04-49:09). Moreover, now that SARS-CoV-2, which has a novel receptor-binding domain compared to that of SARS-CoV-1, has travelled well beyond its original environs in China, there are opportunities for the virus to be introduced into new animal reservoirs around the globe. So it's completely possible that this virus, which originated in bats and spilled over into humans, could spill from humans

into a new common animal, including bats. This new animal host could then serve as a reservoir for the virus, allowing it to undergo recombination and selection to potentially "spillback" into humans at some point in the future (25:48-26:57). This is all to say that there is still a very pressing need to maintain the openhanded relation with things and not fall for the ease and familiarity of the closed fist.

Trying to maintain the open hand within the current pandemic does not mean we have to stay locked away; isolated and unable to find toilet paper. The open hand does however mean embracing the depth of things and allowing our actions to be guided by the humility that comes when we self-open. In May, Dr. Anthony Fauci appeared by video during the commencement ceremony for the graduating class of his alma mater Holy Cross. Dr. Fauci's wise words included the remark that, "Now is the time, if ever there was one, for us to care selflessly about one another" (quoted in Dwyer 2020). If we have learned anything from this violent collision with the depth of things, it's that caring selflessly for each other is what has kept us afloat thus far and will be what carries us forward during the long days ahead.

Lamentably, there are indications that for some the open hand is already starting to close in upon itself; that is if it ever opened in the first place. This is exhibited in a lack of appreciation for social distancing guidelines and the collective benefit of wearing a mask when in public settings. A more stunning example of a commitment to the closed fist was the recent defunding of EcoHealth Alliance. If we recall from earlier, Peter Daszak and EcoHealth Alliance were part of the original investigation to uncover the origins of SARS-CoV-1. Since that time, EcoHealth Alliance has continued invaluable work that includes surveillance of the bat virome by collecting samples from bats to

inform our appreciation for bat-borne coronaviruses, the dynamics of zoonotic transmissions, and research into immune therapeutics and vaccines (Aizenman 2020, para. 2). It should then come as no surprise from what was mentioned earlier in this chapter that a key collaborator in EcoHealth Alliance's research and recipient of some of the funding, which was granted by the National Institute of Health (NIH), was the Wuhan Institute of Virology, where Zheng-Li Shi resides.

Relating to things with the open hand in part means appreciating the fact that there is a depth to things that we cannot grasp hold of. More importantly, when we are made aware of this fact, like we have been during this pandemic, it is beneficial to open up to that depth rather than continuing to grasp after it. One of the many detrimental ramifications of adhering to and proceeding with the closed fist is that one will manufacture something to grasp hold of in the absence of tangibility. An aspect of the deep reality that we have collided with in this pandemic is that there is a vast reservoir of bat-borne coronaviruses that at any moment can spillover into human beings with the possibility of causing severe disease and global disruption. The deeper reality still, is that this bat-borne coronavirus was composed entirely by nature and in a manner completely antithetical to any approach human thought would have taken to construct such a virus (Andersen et al. 2020, 450). Instead of opening up to the deep reality of things, some have opted for the easier and familiar path of the closed fist, and out of such fearful and desperate grasping came the delusional theory that the Wuhan Institute of Virology is either intentionally or unintentionally responsible for the emergence of SARS-CoV-2.

Despite all the data to the contrary and agreement among the virology community as to the bat-borne origins of SARS-CoV-2, this conspiracy theory that implicates the

Wuhan Institute of Virology made its way into a question posed to President Trump at a press conference in mid-April. The question mischaracterized key aspects of the funding and made it appear as though all of the funding was given directly to the Wuhan Institute of Virology (Aizenman 2020, para. 7). President Trump then instructed his team to check to see if any funding was allocated for the lab in Wuhan and if so, it would be immediately defunded (para. 4). The press conference was held on the 17th of April and by 24th of April the NIH sent a notice to EcoHealth Alliance notifying them that their grant had been terminated (para. 4).[39]

This action is a horrific display of the closed fist and an absolute reluctance to open the hand to make room for the depth of things. It is not surprising that no less than 77 Nobel laureates have denounced this action and called for an investigation into the cancellation of funds (Gorman 2020). At no time, but especially during a pandemic, can the application of the closed fist be tolerated or viewed as the wise choice. The difficulty of the open hand is that it's antithetical to the more routine practice of relating to things with the closed fist, and so the closed fist always seems like the easier and more familiar option. The future of this pandemic is unknown and the seas ahead are rough, but as Dr. Fauci advised, now is the time to care selflessly about one another and thus now is the time not to clutch onto what is easy and familiar, but to extend the open hand.

[39] According to an update on EcoHealth Alliance's website, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) reversed its decision to terminate the grant, but the NIH has placed such "impossible and irrelevant conditions" on the funding that it effectively still shuts down and makes the research impossible to undertake.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

O man, take care!
What does the deep midnight declare?
"I was asleep—
From a deep dream I woke and swear:
The world is deep,
Deeper than day had been aware.
Deep is its woe;
Joy—deeper yet than agony:
Woe implores: Go!
But all joy wants eternity—
Wants deep, wants deep eternity.

—Nietzsche, "The Drunken Song," *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

Deep Realism

The hope for this dissertation was to realize a philosophy of openness with the open hand. Again, the impetus for this project was derived from the critical realization that intangible depth inheres in all things human and nonhuman. At the start of this dissertation that claim may have sounded extreme. Hopefully it is now clear, especially in light of the consideration of the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 and its related disease COVID-19, just how important it is to make room for the deep reality of things.

This project began by examining how a normalized commitment to the closed fist routinely inhibits the openness of the open hand. It was shown that this reliance on the closed fist is made even more persistent by the fact that our contemporary technicity can exacerbate closefistedness, if not lead to a foreclosure on the ability to open the hand. The closed fist is so deeply ingrained that even the most promising attempts to move beyond the closed fist are often inhibited by closefisted answers.

In order to avoid the pitfalls of the closed fist, this project winds its way through Heidegger's philosophical thought, and concludes that the central driver of the closed fist and obstacle to the open hand is self-centeredness. In light of this perspective about self-centeredness and in order to conceive of a way to actuate the open hand that is accessible to all, this project sought the advice of Eastern philosophy. Inspired by the thought of Keiji Nishitani, it was asserted that the action we are looking for is the action of non-action that can be understood as self-emptying. The problem that arises from an engagement with self-emptying is that there is often the fearful conclusion that such emptiness leads only to irrationalism and nothingness. By giving space to what I take to be a synergy between Nishitani's thinking about *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in *Religion and Nothingness* and Nāgārjuna's understanding of *śūnyatā* in terms of "openness," we were able to discover that emptiness leads to a fundamental openness, and it is in openness that we are afforded a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves. It should now be clear that when the closed fist unfurls, and the open hand is filled with the deep agentic breath of things, we are not scuttled by a raging squall of irrationalism and nothingness, but pulled into an open and knowledgeable appreciation for the unfathomable swells that surge out from all things. This is to say that with the open hand we align ourselves with reality and more acutely the reality that the world in which we live is one of "deep realism."

The deep realism of the open hand like Graham Harman's own speculative realist philosophy, goes a step beyond Heidegger in that the incompleteness of our grasp to grab hold of the depth of things is not just an issue that afflicts humans, but is an essential feature of all interactions whether they be between two humans, a houseplant and a

human, or using Harman's favorite example from Islamic philosophy, between "fire and cotton" (Harman 2007, 188.) So while we cannot grasp the depth of fire or a ball of cotton, neither can cotton grasp the depth of fire or ourselves. Understandably, some have suggested that this kind of outlook is nothing new, but simply a rehashing of Immanuel Kant's rift between the *noumenon* and the *phenomenon*[40] in what we might call a, "Kantianism without reserve" (Shaviro 2014, 70). I agree with this assessment insofar as we stay the course with object-oriented philosophy.

For object-oriented philosophy, the real thing "…is a genuine reality deeper than any theoretical or practical encounter with it" (Harman 2012, 9-10). In other words, a real object human or nonhuman does not just have intangible depth as part of its being, but the real object is that intangible depth and therefore there can be no real relations between objects. Alternatively for the deep realist perspective of the open hand, there is no claim made about what ultimately constitutes reality. Instead, what is advanced is that our relationships with things are real, but we cannot merely focus on what we grasp about them and have to tend to the fact that part of our relationships with things and ourselves is a depth that cannot be fathomed. Furthermore, what is tangibly grasped from a relationship with a thing pales in comparison to its depth. Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, "Higher than actuality stands possibility" (2010, 36), meaning that like an iceberg, to relate to what is actual or actually present at the surface of things, would be to ignore the intense depth that lies below their surface presences. While we can't grasp hold of

[40] This is Peter Wolfendale's argument against object-oriented philosophy: See Wolfendale, Peter. *Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon's New Clothes*. (Falmouth, U.K.: Urbanomic Media Ltd., 2014).

this depth, we would be foolish to ignore it, and as was evinced in the discussion about the current pandemic, disastrous when we do so.

While the term "deep realism" has a novel use in this project, the underlying notion of the depth of things is not necessarily new and it's deeper than Harman's object-oriented philosophy or the philosophy of Heidegger. For instance, if we take a moment to make room for the Ohlone,[41] who were the original inhabitants of the San Francisco-Monterey Bay Area, we can find a kind of deep realist perspective at work in their own view of reality. As Malcolm Margolin (1978) writes in *The Ohlone Way*:

> A simplified picture of the Ohlone universe shows it as divided into the ordinary world of the sense, inhabited by people, animals, plants, and physical objects, and the spiritual world inhabited by he animal-gods…But in reality, things were not that simple; for the world of common objects, far from being lifeless and powerless, was in and of itself superbly, anarchistically alive. Not only could ordinary things draw considerable power from the spirit world, but they had an aliveness and power of their own. Everything did: people, animals, plants, bows, arrows, cradles, pestles, baskets, springs, trails, boats, trees, feathers, natural objects and manufactured objects as well. Everything was alive, everything had character, power, and magic, and consequently everything had to be dealt with properly. (141)

Similar to the Ohlone view of reality, at work in deep realism is a Janus-faced notion of things on par within Heidegger's interpretation of truth as *a-lētheia* (ἀλήθεια). This is a complex interplay of tangible truth as "unconcealment" and an intangible side of truth that hides in the darkness and density of things (Bruns 1989, xv). In the philosophy of Nāgārjuna this might be understood as the difference of "coventional truth"

[41] The word "Ohlone" is of disputed origin and is a fictitious name in that there was no Ohlone tribe. That said, it has become the favored name used by descendants of what were about 40 different groups of indigenous tribes that lived in and around the San Francisco-Monterey Bay Area. Ohlone is the preferred name over the Spanish term *Costenos*. See Margolin, Malcolm. *The Ohlone Way: Indian Life in the San Francisco-Monterey Bay Area*. (Berkeley, CA: Heyday, 1978) 1.

(*samvrtisatya*) and "higher truth" (*paramārthsatya*) (McCagney 1997, 87). As we have seen for Keiji Nishitani, it's the distinction between the "near side" and the "far side" of things, or further still, Alfred N. Whitehead wrote of all things having "inside and outside" (Shaviro 2014, 41).

What is meant by this bivalent notion of the Truth of things is not a stark dualism. At work here is the idea that part of our relationships with all things is this unfathomable depth, and so our way of relating with things needs to openly accomodate this depth, and in the phrasing of Nishitani this occurs when we make room for the "far side at the near side" of things. As this project has tried to show, making room for the depth of things at the near surface side of things is achieved with the openness of the open hand and most practically expressed in a humble or self-open style of communication that is accesible to all and monopolized by none. It is this openhanded alignment with the deep reality of things that ultimately results in an enticing conclusion about the mistake that Zeno made and that still endures today.

Loving Reality

If we return to the point made at the outset of this project, what Zeno encapsulates with his metaphors is the outlook that the open hand is a naïve orientation towards things, whereas the closed fist is the reality oriented practice of record, since the deepest knowledge about things is only achieved when the fist tightly closes around them. Even in present day this conclusion about the closed fist's ability to deliver real wisdom and the deepest knowledge is alive and well, and so is the view that there is neither wisdom nor virtue in the open hand. Contra Zeno and the dominant trends in Western thought, this dissertation has gestured towards the idea that the deepest knowledge about things is

not achieved by relating with the closed fist, but with the open hand. However, this is not the knowledge grasped after by the closed fist.

Instead, and just as the founder of the Kyōto School Kitarō Nishida understood, "love is 'the deepest knowledge of a thing' insofar as love 'is the power to seize the basic substance of reality' " (quoted in Carter 1997, 78). In contrast to Graham Harman's plea invoked in chapter two which stated, "The real is something that cannot be known, only loved" (2012, 12), the real can in fact be known, since to love the real is to know the real. To extend the open hand does not mean we fall into nothingness. The self-emptying-opening of the open hand is what actually stops our descent into the ignorance and self-centered deception of the closed fist, and allows for a most intimate and real encounter with all things including ourselves. Moreover, if Dr. Cornel West's conclusion that "justice is what love looks like in the public" holds true, then equal justice for all things may indeed be possible if we display this knowledge and bring our love for the deep reality of all things out into the open. In the end, to say that the fate of humanity rests with the open hand as a philosophy of openness is not to place humanity's fate within a weak or empty gesture. The open hand is a profound gesture of openness, and thus love. This is a love for reality and an endlessly humble and wise love for the intangible depth that inheres in all things human and nonhuman.

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