GARDENING TELLING THINKING:
GARDENING AND GARDEN NARRATIVE AS PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

This project weaves personal narrative with gardening and the thinking of philosopher Martin Heidegger, and although it takes place in a vegetable garden its purpose is larger. I begin as a feminist believing that new ways of speaking, acting and thinking from within the dominant paradigm of the West reflect diversity of experience and invite discussion. Guided by the thinking of feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero (2000), I use personal narrative as an expression of relational experience. Like Cavarero I believe we are continually shaped by environment, and narrative tells not only of our own experiences but those of others with whom we come in contact. Because the narrative in this project is shaped by my relationship with an abandoned garden, it allows me to illustrate and explore some key concepts of philosopher Martin Heidegger through the work of feminist scholars.

Heidegger’s corpus questions what it means to be human in the world, and is founded on the premise that we relate to the world through care and as feminist thinker, narrator and gardener, care calls to me from within his thinking. My stories come from where I am, a neglected garden and farm north of Kingston Ontario. It is a good place to begin because it is a local example of a much greater neglect. Recognizing that we are in an era of global climate change brought on by a thinking which arose in the West, this
project invites us to consider: how might our world look if we recognized nature not as a reified “thing” and in turn, how might this alter our political choices?
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ABBREVIATIONS

Selected Works by Heidegger

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INTRODUCTION

For many years, I have made my living with my hands. As a professional landscape gardener and artist, I work with—and in the elements attuning myself with the cycles of nature. My gardening practice reminds me continually that I am part of a vibrant, symbiotic community, and my artistic practice, explores this community through sculpture, painting and film. Several years ago I found myself drawn the notion of fugue—a musical form, that runs like a conversation, where a theme is introduced and then answered in various transposed forms. What intrigued me further was its additional meaning. Derived from the Latin, fugæ, which means flight or to flee, fugue is also a psychological state where one forgets their identity and flees from their environment. I was living on the west coast of the United States at that time gardening and working with a group of experimental filmmakers, so I decided to make a Fugue film. The United States had just begun its war on Iraq, and my marriage had recently dissolved. Death and destruction seemed all around me, and the word ‘fugue’ summed up my own loss of identity and flight from environment, as well as that of the country to which I had fled. The film attempted to make personal and political sense of loss and flight in a visual format while invoking a return of creation and life.

Now, while working towards a Masters degree in Environmental Studies, I find myself returning to the following thoughts: I am an artist and a gardener, deeply attuned with the world in which I live, it extends towards me just as I am drawn towards it, and from
out of our playful co-creation, something living yet non-verbal emerges. In my studio, it is sculpture, painting and silent experimental film, and in my gardens—the garden itself. Until now, I have not felt the need to express this meaningful experience in words, however, reading Philosopher, Martin Heidegger has encouraged me otherwise. The vibrancy I sense in the natural world, Heidegger sensed and expressed in language. The meanings of words seem fixed, but as Heidegger explains, their meanings transpose in their usage. If I treat words as vibrant and engage with them as I engage with the natural world in my studio and gardens, if I play with intellectual materials I have become familiar with, just as I do with natural materials in my other practices perhaps a new conversation will emerge. In other words—if a fugue may be composed musically and visually, it may also be composed with words.

I hear many voices as I stand on the edge of this field. There’s an abandoned pick-up truck in the distance, a chicken coop sinking into the ground, broken fences and a lopsided old barn. Plants, insects, animals and people have lived and died here. The land has participated in the unfolding of life and death. Traces of those voices whisper in the tall grass and weeds, in the creaking of the barn and the coo of the morning doves. It is early September and I am new to this place. Like many of its kind in the area, this farm, established over a century ago to support a small family, gradually lost its purpose as industrial farming took hold. A great portion of the land
was sold off, and the five acres that remain are a jumble of grass, weeds and sumac trees. The neighbours tell me the land has raised cattle, chickens, pigs and horses as well as humans, and other animals no doubt—large and small, domestic and wild. Walking through the field, I’ve discover mementos of their lives, birds nests, old tin cans, the wheel from a bike...the last tenant, two years ago, raised horses, and yesterday, on the other side of the barn in a far corner of the field, I found where she’d fed them. It’s a perfect mixture of straw and manure. Thick and spongy near the surface and full of worms in the blackness below—its gardener’s gold...

Narratives, like fugues, transpose in the telling by taking on the flavor of the teller and all of her experience. This tale introduces the broader theme of our project; that we have lost our identity in fleeing from environment, yet the setting is more local and familiar. It begins with the loss of identity and abandonment of a small family farm and opens the way to thinking and interacting with not only the world but with the work of Heidegger and contemporary feminist scholars. With the physical setting before us, we now proceed to our narrative and phenomenological foundations.
Because our project weaves body, voice and mind, it employs many tools. Those of the garden—shovels, rakes, sheers and wheelbarrow to name just a few—are most likely familiar and need no introduction, but the tools of narrative and phenomenological work require a few more words.

**Narrative as Relational Experience**

The narratives that follow resonate with the work of feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero. In *Relating Narratives; storytelling and selfhood*, Cavarero explains that because humans live together they are exposed to each other constitutively through the senses, and as a result our narratives are not our own. They are continually shaped by those with whom we interact, and thus tell of not only our own experiences but also those of other humans with whom we come in contact. Cavarero’s thinking is useful for our project and we proceed from this basis, albeit in a slightly altered form. The narrative here is shaped by my relationship with non-human nature and because of this, it allows illustration of some key concepts of philosopher Martin Heidegger, and aligns his thinking with a nuanced feminist way of speaking.

Heidegger’s thinking is our primary cognitive tool, yet his thoughts have influenced others whom we also find useful, notably feminists Jean Graybeal and Carol Bigwood.
The words of these thinkers not only transport us into new ways of understanding Heidegger, they open up vistas into where we might go with our thoughts. We turn now, and in more depth as the project proceeds, to a brief introduction to Heidegger’s thinking of Being.

**An Introduction to Heidegger’s Phenomenological Thinking**

Heidegger challenged the metaphysical tradition’s objectification of things. He agreed with philosophy’s task, to think the unthought, but called upon philosophy to think that which it had overlooked from its very beginning—to think Being, or existence itself. In *The Nature of Language*, he explains,

> We understand that a thing exists, that it *is*, but what is the meaning of *is*? The thing is here, it is given to us, made apparent by a word given for it but its existence is not. (94)

When something is brought before us whether physically or in our thoughts, because we think in terms of subject and object, we say that it *is*, that it exists and our objectification measures its use. Thinking of being in terms of production and use, Heidegger explains, has led us to regard nature as a “standing reserve”—with serious consequences. By considering nature as distinct from us, and breaking it down into products, measurable and defined by their use, we imagine our selves as severed from the non-human world when if fact we are not. To alter our current thinking he directs us to philosophy’s beginning. By returning to pre-Socratic thought, we revisit that which we overlooked and think Being as such.
Heidegger’s corpus, which commences with his seminal work, *Being and Time*, thinks what it *means* to be human in the world by focusing on how we relate to the world through direct sensorial experience. His writing is dense, he asks us to think about that for which we no longer have words and it is easy to slip into our current understanding and away from his thought. When we do feel we are with him and are on the same path, we realize that his paths of thinking are multi-dimensional and intertwined, and thus not so easily separated and understood. Since his thinking of Being is relational and experiential, a useful entry into it is through narrative.

...The temperature dropped overnight and today with cooler air and a light rain, I am reminded that fall is quickly advancing to winter. The poplar tree outside the back door (the one who chatters playfully with every breeze) has started to shed her leafy voice, while the old maple stands silently by, unmoved by the breeze and cloaked in a kaleidoscope of gold. This is a land of buried treasure, and each time I venture out into it, I am met with still more.

Last night I sleep dreaming of apple trees, so this morning after a quick breakfast, I threw on my rain jacket and headed out the door. A low grey sky, soft rain and dew had settled in over the land, even the birds seemed asleep as I stepped onto the low porch in back of the house. From this
vantage point, I searched the horizon for apples, and straight back from the house, behind a young spruce, and not more than 300 meters away, stood a beautiful old tree adorned in the remnants of golden fruit. I have been so occupied with moving in, I hadn’t seen it shining like a beacon, drawing me with its golden lights. Stepping from the porch, my footsteps traced out the path between my self and the tree. Across the wet grass, I walked leaving footprints in the dew, then into the wild regions, flattening tall weeds in my path, and pushing aside brambles that clung to me—dragging me back and all the while the apple tree grew larger until it dominated my view.

The ancient tree towers over me, long ago split in two from the weight of its golden gifts, which now cover the ground at its feet. I reach up into the tree for one that still clings to its branches, which it gives easily into my hand, along with a light shower or rain. The apple is small, uniquely shaped and bittersweet…

**Narrative as Crucible for Phenomenological Thinking**

Because Heidegger believes that philosophy took a wrong turn at its foundation, he returns frequently to pre-Socratic Greece for the meaning of words we normally take for
granted. One such word is truth. Although we typically understand truth as something exact, measurable and proven with scientific certitude, in ancient Greece light and visibility were its metaphors. Truth was seen as an elusive concept, continually moving, like the weather, day and night or the season’s colors, between *lethia* (concealment or darkness) and *alethia* (disclosure or light), yet since modernity, our word, research “presumes the transformation of truth into certainty or representation” (Villa 1995, 179).

Truth as we have come to understand it is certitude brought into the light by humans. Heidegger revisits this more ancient idea of truth as concealment and disclosure, but changes the locus of light from truth to humans. With humans as light, all disclosure occurs in the locus of the human subject. In making this change, he explains truth as not static factuality, but rather as *meaning* derived from the ongoing flux between disclosure and concealment given to thinking. The meaning of dreams, and buried treasures recovered in venturing out into the land—thinking come alive with this understanding of truth. Things too come alive.

We typically refer to phenomena as *things* that appear to us, either physically or in our minds eye, yet Heidegger reminds us that in pre-Socratic Greece, phenomena implied a revealing of self-in-self, likened to an unfurling over time (BT 73). Things, then, like the old maple tree cloaked in a kaleidoscope of gold, unfurl in truth. As humans, we too can be thought in this way, our unfurling of self Heidegger called Being-in-the-world.

Being-in-the-world and not severed from it objectively, our understanding of philosophical knowledge also transposes. While philosophy has tended to align itself
with the linear thinking of the mathematic based sciences, seeking to explain and convince, the *phenomenological* route chosen by Heidegger, chooses instead to search for the meaning and significance of things. It seeks “to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience” (Abram 1996, 35).

Because we have come to think of phenomena as things that appear to us and are static, when questioned about things we describe *what* they are. Being-in-the-world represents a different way of thinking. Instead of describing what things are, it describes more mysteriously, *how they unfold.* One way to accomplish this is artistically, through narrative.

Narrative expresses a different thinking than that which we adhere to in our day-to-day life, one that allows trees to chatter and call through our dreams. Through it, we can comprehend that not only are we human we are *in* the world. Trees that call out to be noticed defy our traditional understanding of things and open doors to a deeper understanding of our place in the world. When written poetically, artfully, narrative thinks the mystery of *how* a thing is. When it describes, “as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things first arise in our direct, sensorial experience” (Abram 1996, 35), it expresses personal experience phenomenologically.
GARDENING, NARRATIVE, AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

When called by another we typically regard as an object, such as an ancient apple tree we are called to think, not objectively where we “merely struggle with an object in the manner of a scientific problem” (WCT 385), but relationally, where we ourselves are put into question. The apple tree calls us to think, it “appeal[s] commandingly”, we see it, name it, call it into its word to arrive and “it in turn calls” (WCT 390).

A call, says Heidegger, “implies an anticipatory reaching out for something that is reached by our call, through our calling” (WCT 386) [it] “has an assonance of helpfulness and complaisance, [as] shown by the fact that the same word in Sanskrit means something like ‘to invite’” (WCT 387). In calling and being called subject and object, seem to invite each other to meet and mingle as one. How might their mingling unfold?

...Summoned by the apple tree, I have found what was and will be a vegetable garden. While enjoying the bitter sweet fruit, and admiring the path my footsteps had traced from house to apple tree, asparagus ferns appear from out of the weeds, waving to me.

Now, despite the cold and rain, I am carefully clearing grass and weeds from the periphery of a neglected patch of asparagus. The ground around it is a thick mass of roots,
and despite the rain, it’s not easily breached. I force the spade into the ground several times, rocking it back and forth before loosening the roots from the soil. A rhythm enters into my work and I continue in this way, uncovering the periphery of the asparagus patch while the rain continues to drizzle. Wet soil covers my hands and knees, and rain is trickling from the roots of my hair down and off the end of my nose. I stand up, and wipe it away with a muddy sleeve while surveying my work. There is much to be done here. Standing in the cold, wet with rain with the grit of soil between my teeth, I realize I am chilled and hungry, but I am encouraged, I have found an abandoned garden that is rich and full of life...

The tangled mass of roots left by metaphysics may be gradually cleared with a synthesis of narrative and Heideggerian thought. In synthesizing narrative and thinking, we recall an ancient connection between stories and knowledge, one that survives outside of the dominant paradigm, one that Heidegger too, was aware.

Long before our technological age, mythology informed the world. Through direct sensorial contact with the natural world knowledge was shared in the mythic language of song, dance, story and music. With the introduction of the phonetic alphabet, the communal, sensorial knowledge of mythos gradually slipped into the background and logos emerged to take its place (Abram 1996; McLuhan 1969). Logos, a term originating
in ancient Greece has had various meanings all of which center around language as word and knowledge derived from it. The written word slowly redefined the transference of knowledge from that given and received through a mingling of people and the natural world, to the scripted, more linear and sequential knowledge of reason and discourse, or philosophy.

Heidegger’s understanding of *mythos* is unique to western philosophy. He begins by asking why “the traditional doctrine of thinking bear[s] the curious title ‘logic’” (WCT 383) and explains that thinking integrates both *mythos* and *logos* in a gathering of meaning. “Historians and philologists, by virtue of a prejudice modern rationalism adopted from Platonism, imagine that *mythos* was destroyed by logos” (WCT 376), he explains, but *mythos* cannot be destroyed by logic, it can however, be concealed. Like the language of *logos*, *mythos* speaks, although silently. It is “a spontaneous expression of one’s reciprocal participation in the source of existence” (Huntington 2001a, 17) and importantly, it “transcends the unconscious, the symbolic aspects of existence, and cultural values” (Huntington 2001a, 17).

*Mythos* summons us like the apple tree and asparagus patch and when heeded we find ourselves actively connected with the source of Being itself, as though on a thin line charged with reciprocal motion. Like the prongs of a tuning fork, or a musical instrument responding without being played, vibrating in unison to an invisible current, *mythos* calls us into attunement with existence itself. To hear and respond to its ever present but silent call we must practice an attentive listening and allow *mythos* to speak. Heidegger looks
for and finds mythic expression in painting (OWA) and poetry (WCT, LP), yet it is also found in abandoned gardens. *Mythos* is expressed in the quiet imagining of a time gone before and the rhythmic motion that joins body to spade to soil. It is found in rain on skin, water dripping from scalp-to-nose-to-ground, and in soil on teeth.

Both thinking and narrative consist of *mythos* and *logos*. Heidegger understood this because “throughout his work, he asks himself how human being might come into an appropriate and satisfactory relation with Being, to which he consistently answers in one form or another—through language” (Graybeal 1990, 146). Our ways of thinking and saying have transposed over time, and although we believe that *logos* destroyed *mythos*, Heidegger reminds us that mythic expression is merely concealed. Like an abandoned garden obscured by weeds, language and all of nature itself—when cared for, things shines forth their deeper meanings.

Care is central to Heidegger’s thinking. In asking how humans are human, he focuses on how we relate to world through direct, sensorial experience, and arrives at a conclusion that resonates with ours. This project continues by exploring his provocative answer—that humans are human by “relating to the planet through care” (Evernden 1999, 63).

We begin with Heidegger and then situate him in this historical moment by way of caring for a garden and the work of relevant feminists thinkers.
Care

Feminists are drawn to Heidegger’s work for his desire to overcome metaphysical thinking, his life long meditation on what it means to be human and his use of language to express these insights. Also important to feminist and ecological thinking is the inclusion of care in his corpus.

Heidegger considers existence itself or what he calls “Being-in-the-world”, primary to the acquisition of knowledge. Care however, he understands as primordial to Being-in-the-world (BT H202). Care is “the ‘root structure’ of a person without which we live a vacuous life” (Krell 1992, 71). This strange motion by Heidegger, to insert care into philosophy is described as “the single most striking idea of Heidegger’s work”, (Picardi 2001, 433). Since care is a central to Being-in-the-world which includes gardening, thinking and telling, we ask, if care is our root structure and that which defines us as humans, what does Heidegger mean by care?

Care as anxious concern

Our word care, is derived from the Germanic chara and charon, meaning mental suffering, grief and lamentation (OED), yet we understand care in other ways such as attending to or providing for our own person, another being or thing out of duty or concern. In addition, care may be given or refused. Heidegger’s understanding of care as concern, he considers broadly defined and practical, for example, concern to complete a paper on time. Although his thinking concentrates on “our relationship to the natural world” (Holland 2001, 43) 47, he maintains that his thinking sets out to describe and not
convince, and that it is free of ethical concerns. He settles on a discussion of care as anxious concern to explain the practical way we relate to the world. In Being and Time, he explains his choice. Although we exist within time, in our daily lives we consider others as temporal while putting aside the thought that we too will come to our end. When confronted with our death we suddenly recognize our finitude, and all the tasks of our life seem like “idle chatter” that distracted us from awakening to our temporal existence. Because as humans, we are sense-making beings, but now left without meaning, a stimmung or mood, of care expressed as concern envelops us. We may flee “in the face of” ourselves “shrinking back” to the tasks that have kept us busy in an attempt to silence that which calls, yet we may also face “that which we have anxiety about [namely] our potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world” (BT H191).

...Darkness and crisp cold have crept in and enveloped the world. For weeks now the soil has been stiff, cracked and strangely barren, but today I awaken to a clear blue sky, and a world covered in a blanket of snow. Despite my heavy sweater, I’m shivering. The woodstove is cold and full of ashes, so I shovel them into a metal can before re-lighting it. Not until I carry the ashes outside in back of the house, do I pause to admire the beauty of the snow lying over what now, again is a garden. Underneath it’s smooth blanket the garden seems completely asleep, and for a moment I too, drift away, recalling the difficult work of the fall...cutting down tall grass and weeds, covering the
earth with thick paper and a deep layer of manure, the aching in my body from the difficult work... I am awakened at the remembrance of my body, which I realize is now quite cold. Briskly rubbing my arms and hands, I turn back into the house. There is nothing I can do for the garden now but collect compost and ashes, order seeds on-line, make plans, dream and wait...

In the cold and dark of winter, tucked under a blanket of snow, the garden seems fast asleep, but like mythos concealed by metaphysical thinking it is alive and in need of tending. Collecting wood ash and compost, plans and dreams and seeds, all assist in caring for the garden during its rest and preparing for its re-emergence in spring. Thoughts and creativity like seeds also need compost, ashes and darkness in which to germinate. Thinking, remembering—pursuing in silence while waiting, restores and assists in bringing again to visible life.

There is much to consider in the winter of metaphysical thinking and Heidegger’s writing expands our thoughts. His words inform us that in facing our “potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world”, subject/object thinking dissolves and our understanding of boundary changes. Traditionally thought of as “that at which something stops”, boundary takes on a meaning from ancient Greece and becomes “that from which something begins its essential unfolding” (BDT 356). Why, we ask in this winter of metaphysical thinking, do we only begin our essential unfolding spurred on by care as anxious concern and in the face of death? Why do we not also consider our essential unfolding prompted by care as loving
concern that looks into the face of life (Nagel 2001, 289; Glazebrook 2001, 221; Bigwood 2001, 165; Caputo 2001, 149; Curtin 1991, pp. 60-74))? 

Thinking, and memory pursue “that what is to be thought about” (WCT 372), and we are in pursuit of these answers. By thinking them, pursuing them, we keep them alive, providing them with care through this winter of thought. Like seeds, they are sheltered, kept alive, tended by a constant pursuance of thought.

Rather than grasping as we traditionally have, we think in pursuit. All the great Western thinkers after Socrates, because they’d forgotten to question the meaning of existence, chose a thinking that grasps, holds and claims as truth (WCT 382). Grasping and holding onto thinking, putting it into the written word (literature), Heidegger clarifies, concealed mythos. Like seeds not planted and stories never told, in our grasping and holding we slowly stopped listening and fell out of attunement with the source of Being—a resonate voice, that envelopes us in a mood “neither from ‘outside’ nor from ‘inside’ but arises out of Being-in-the-world” (BT H136).

In explaining the pursuit of thought, Heidegger describes “man” as not just listening and heeding, but depicts him as a sign pointing into the draft of what withdraws (WCT 375). Important to our discussion is feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray’s (1999) interpretation of the draft that man points into and pursues. Writing in her own philosophic style, Irigaray equates air with the feminine saying that since the feminine, like air has not manifested itself in philosophical thinking, it is invisible to Heidegger and thus does not
appear as a being (14). In addition to opening up Heidegger’s thinking to include of the element of air, Irigaray introduces to his thinking that human being is “always at least two” (129). Her writing invites a gendered, thinking of Being, suggesting that if Heidegger is, as he says, “pointing then at something that has not, not yet, been transposed [emphasis mine] into the language that we speak” (WCT 382), alternative forms of expression called for by feminists might be that transposition. In other words, *logos* (literature) itself; that which philosophy entered into, that which concealed *mythos*; may with the inclusion of gendered thinking, reveal *mythos* again.

...The heavy slumber of winter is turning aside and I, too have awakened to the gathering force of spring’s momentum. The seeds arrived in the mail just as the snow was melting. These small brown and black bits that hold so much potential in their hard shells, arrived neatly packaged and labeled. For a month now, they’ve given me visions of their greener lives, and today I am preparing their new, earthen homes.

I have descended upon the garden with a wheelbarrow of tools. My sharpened spade passes easily through the layers of composted paper and vegetation and into the dark earth. I am pleased with the ease of my work, and for a brief moment am reminded of the difficult digging around the asparagus patch last fall.
The early morning sun, low and gently removed when I started, has now risen to meet me, its heat mingling with my blood, warming me as I work. Rhythmically my spade cuts into the earth, rocks back and forth, presses down further and pries the soil loose. I cut, rock, press down again, pry, lift and turn, its heavy weight breaking it into soft clumps, which I in turn form into rows. Every few meters I drop to my knees and with my hand-rake comb out any roots that remain before mounding up the new beds.

Worms curl and flop from side to side. Removed from their nocturnal world, they are food for robins now, and although a good sight for gardeners, I cover them over with soil. The sun and my efforts have warmed me, reminding me of thirst. Dropping the spade, I search for my water bottle, glancing over my hat, jacket and sweater, left where shed, and scattered over the ground as I worked. The water bottle, shaded by my jacket, brings refreshment. The water is still cool from the early morning air, and after a long drink, I begin to survey my work. Birdsong emerges from the background to surround me, earnestly calling back and forth from across the field. I am not alone in recognizing the urgency of spring. Beside me are two robins picking through the soil for worms and plucking the discarded roots for their nests. The birds too are propelled by the
season, instinctively driven to quickly, carefully—build, sow and raise...

We are, each of us, called to thinking, yet because we do not always heed the call we are fugitives running in different directions—in and out of the draft, towards and away from listening to the mythical voice of existence.

In the pursuit of thinking, “way, for Heidegger, ‘means melody, the ring and tone’ ‘from which and to which what is said is attuned’” Heidegger in (Bigwood 2001, 184). His later writing, Heidegger drew upon poetic thought for its rhythmic gathering of meaning. In The Nature of Language, he explains that poetry understands the insufficiencies of a language that attempts to grasp and represent meaning. Like, song, it gives a more rhythmic way of gathering meaning with words (NL 59). In the narrative above, the rhythm of our work draws us deeper into where we are, attuning us with our surroundings, “delivering us over” to the mood of our Being (BT H135), reminding us that our boundaries are that from which we begin our “essential unfolding”. We unfold into earthen rows, as they unfurl into garden beds. We unfold towards the sun yet the sun and the earth also seem to unfold, and like mythos or bird song, they call and reach past our skin and into our blood. Narrative, this project, garden beds, sun, rain, earth, birds, humans are phenomena unfurling in their revealing, propelled by an anxious concern for the urgency of the season, yet tempered with the call of another, sweeter, voice of care.
Care as cure

In *Language and “the Feminine” in Nietzsche and Heidegger*, philosopher Jean Graybeal locates a draft of feminist thinking in Heidegger’s corpus that is relevant to our project, and in her pursuit, she brings us to a more comprehensive understanding of care. As with other thinkers (Scott 2010; Caputo 2001; Picardi 2001; Hyland 1997) Graybeal explains that early in his work Heidegger is drawn to the Latin myth of *Cura* for an understanding of care (BT H198), yet after some thinking he leaves the myth aside. Believing that the role of philosophy is to “think the unthought”, and in our search for alternate voices, it is to this myth our project now turns.

Once when ‘Care’ was crossing a river, she saw some clay; she thoughtfully took up a piece and began to shape it. While she was meditating on what she had made, Jupiter came by. ‘Care’ asked him to give it spirit, and this he gladly granted. But when she wanted her name to be bestowed upon it, he forbade this and demanded that it be given his name instead. While ‘Care’ and Jupiter were disputing, Earth arose and desired that her own name be conferred on the creature, since she had furnished it with part of her body. They asked Saturn to be their arbiter, and he made the following decision, which seemed a just one: “Since you, Jupiter, have given its spirit, you shall receive that spirit at its death; and since you, Earth, have given its body, you shall receive its body (at its death). But since ‘Care’ first shaped this creature, she shall possess it as long as it lives. And because there is now a dispute among you as to its name, let it be called ‘homo,’ for it is made out of *humus* (earth). (BT H198)

In this uncharacteristic insertion of myth into his corpus, Heidegger introduces us to the figure of *Cura*, which he translates as Care. Expressed as a thoughtful and meditative shaper and possessor of humans, who dialogues and disputes with the gods, why would
Heidegger introduce this myth only to leave it aside, and adopt the German word *sorge* for care, more strictly defined as an anxious concern?

Earlier we made the observation that our word care, is derived from the Germanic *chara* and *charon*, meaning mental suffering grief and lamentation, yet feminist thinkers such as Graybeal ask, if care is the “totality” or the “Being” of a person, is not also the ‘carefree’ or joyous? The Latin *cura*, Graybeal reminds us also means charge or healing and is related to our word cure (125). When ill, through nurturance or cure, we find ourselves in a new place of joy.

The myth of *Cura* Graybeal identifies as an early and undeveloped connection between the semiotic voice and the feminine in Heidegger’s work. Cura she tells us, “playfully” positions herself between his description of anxiety and death, silently calling us away from our “infatuation and fascination with the phallic, symbolic order” (124). Cura, like care as anxious concern, “presides over the transition” in Heidegger’s description of what it means to be human in a world determined by time. As with anxious concern then, cure liberates us into a new and uncanny world, however in this instance we are liberated to “a place where signification vanishes and from which the possibility of jouissance arises” (124-5).

Preparing a garden liberates into new and uncanny places where boundaries dissolve. Time, heat and thirst are forgotten, while spade, earth, roots, rows and rhythm appear. When silently working, perspectives change. Soil once distant, covered by weeds or
snow or under our very feet, is suddenly here where we are, encompassing us—curling and flopping with life.

Care calls to us with “an alien voice” Heidegger names the call of conscience (BT H277). It “manifests itself” (BT H277) in us with a message, or mood, “unambiguous and unequivocal” (Graybeal 1990, 120), inviting us out of the void, drawing us into peculiar worlds. Care, the very basis of our Being, calls us into this silent mode of discourse that comes both out of, and over us, and leads us to mythos, that “spontaneous expression of one’s reciprocal participation in the source of existence” (Huntington 2001, 17).

Care calls us into mythic discourse with Being—into death and life. Through the ashes and compost of metaphysics and all that came before it, we may find ourselves called to gardening as mythic expression, where our conviction that nothing mysterious can ever happen, is suddenly, joyfully transposed.

Following in the draft of care Heidegger tells us, requires listening to the language of Being, a language of both mythos and logos. If we listen to the play of language, hear and then proceed with care “we get more truly to the matter that is expressed in any telling and asking” (WCT 389). The play of language that Heidegger is drawn to, the “alien voice” Graybeal describes as the non-metaphysical feminine. The playful dimension of language belongs to the feminine, she suggests and the “weightiness” of care in Heidegger’s concentration on anxiety and death, is lessened by the introduction of joyful play. Other feminist thinkers such as Mechthild Nagel agree, describing feminist
play as “less combative and more communal where ideas are tossed around in a friendly but serious way (Nagel 2001, 291). Although Heidegger is careful to say, “the role of thinking is not that of an opponent” (WCT 378), it is difficult to deny that his discourse lacks the ”friendly” or joyous playfulness, which feminists such as Nagel and Graybeal bring to his thinking.

In her own playful way, feminist philosopher Carol Bigwood adds to our discussion of care. Bigwood reminds us that although Heidegger “tells the grandest and most fundamental philosophical joke of all: that philosophy begins by letting what is most thought provoking remain forgotten” (Bigwood 2001, 169), he too overlooks the obvious, because when he returns to pre-Socratic Greece to recover the unthought, he overlooks the logos of Sappho. Sappho’s thinking enhances this project, so to it we briefly turn.

**Care as bittersweet**

In *Sappho The She-Greek Heidegger Forgot*, Bigwood identifies Sappho’s logic as feminist for its concern with ideas of playful reciprocity and love (176) while highlighting the similarities between Sappho’s logic and that of Heidegger. Sappho lived during the transition from oral to literate culture and was both musician and poet, Bigwood explains. Poetry is closely related to philosophy as confirmed by Heidegger’s thinking and “as Sappho brings the crisis of contact between lovers to poetic word, so Heidegger brings the crisis of contact that occurs in the ontological difference to philosophical word” (183). Interesting and useful for this project is that despite their similarities Sappho’s description of this crisis of contact is always both bitter and sweet.
Perhaps care then, when inclusive of nurturing as well as anxious concern is better described as bittersweet.

Sappho mingles words to describe the mingling of distinct beings. She likewise mingles different points in time with the word deute. In *Eros the Bittersweet*, poet and essayist, Anne Carson describes the Greek lyric poet’s use of *deute* as a mingling of two words with a “stereoscopic effect”. Because “each of the two words that make up *deute* has a different vantage point on time” (Carson 1986, 118) their mingling creates a paradoxical “space-time where absent is present and ‘now’ can include ‘then’ without ceasing to be ‘now’” (117). As many gardeners will attest, time dissolves when called by the bittersweet voice of care into a garden. When called by anxious or joyous care and mingling with soil, plants and weather, all boundaries dissolve, including that of time.

...What came first the plant or the seed? Last week I begin with seeds. Some of these small black and brown bits that have been sleeping in their packages entered a new phase of their life—in the earth. I rose with the dawn, and although my body ached from the labour of the previous week, and there were large blisters on the palms of my hands, the first rows were prepared and planted and I quickly forgot my pain. Now, again, I wait. The rain and I have worked together to keep the soil moist, and I check closely several times a day, anticipating the first showings of life, but the soil has been strangely silent.
It reveals no secrets. What is transpiring below the surface has been hidden from me, so I continue to wait, and today, I am rewarded! This morning, a thin green line has appeared in the arugula bed and several sugar-snap peas began pushing the soil back from their shoulders while raising their heads. What motivates them to be first to burst out of their shells and move rapidly into growth? Do I need to know?

The sky is clear today, but there are grey clouds on the horizon and although the birds are singing, a strange stillness falls on the garden. I am preparing the ground for still more seeds. After moistening the soil, I reach down and carve out a small trench with my forefinger, then fall to my knees beside the row, and gently open a packet of seeds, sprinkling them into the palm of my hand.

Carefully, with the forefinger and thumb of the other hand, I pick up a few tiny husks and rubbing my fingers together, scattering them into their moistened bed. These ones are a mixture of lettuce, and escaped from their package they form a long and colourful strand. I admire their beauty against the darkness of the soil and then cover them lightly and move away, wondering if they are already turning over and awakening in their new beds. As I finish a row of spinach and brush the soil lightly over the seeds,
a light rain begins to fall, watering the beds for me, assisting in this part of my task. I move along the rows more quickly now, opening packets and sprinkling long lines of seeds, but I am noticing them less as I begin to feel the rain. I pull the hood of my jacket up and as I do, the soil on my hands brushes across my face. I look down the rows and then at my hands. Like the seeds, I too am planted in the earth and growing in this garden...

Heidegger explains that traditional boundaries of thinking dissolve revealing our “potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world”, when care calls us out of ourselves and into an uncanny new place, and Sappho’s logic is useful for depicting care’s call as timeless and bittersweet. In memory, I am called to a timeless place where I was also called—this time out of the bounds of my flesh and into the garden to cultivate food. My words as narrative reawaken this call and invite you into the mingling as well. Working in the garden, I am called back into my body when I listen to thirst, sore muscles and blistered hands, and called outward again when listening to joyful call of nurturing garden beds and attuning myself to the colourful strands of seeds. The mood of joy inserted into Heidegger’s corpus by thinkers such as Graybeal, Bigwood, Nagel and Carson, lessens the “weightiness” of anxiety typical of Heidegger’s thought. The combative nature of discourse he inherited and the historical moment in which he lived highlighted by his membership in the National Socialist Party may perhaps explain why he chose to concentrate his discussion on anxiety and death (Krell 1992, 109; Nagel 2001). His involvement in Nazi Germany and continued silence on this subject are taken as evidence
of his personal lack of nurturing care and remind us of the nationalist directions his thinking might take. A feminist thinking of care, as loving, nurturing concern, that is also playful when inserted into Heidegger’s corpus, reveals a more inclusive “potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world”.

Feminist thinking also invites us to practice what we think and get our hands in the soil. Despite his monumental influence on the thinking of Being, in his writing, Heidegger himself “never frequents “any well-watered, fertile spot of land” (Krell 1992, 9), nor does he pursue “his bugs and bees back to the nectar-laden” (Krell 1992, 9). Although he equates cultivation with construction as a way of Being-in-the-world (BDT 353), by his own admission he “limits” his thinking to construction (BDT 353). We continue pursuing his thinking through cultivation and an important word he recalls from ancient Greece—\textit{physis} meaning nature in its unfurling and revealing of self in self.

\textit{Physis}

Bursting forth like a sugar snap pea or an arugula seed, pushing through the dark into a new phase of life, “what presences by means of \textit{physis} has the irruption belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself” (QCT 317).

As humans, we make things from the things of nature. Shovels, and rakes, for the garden and computers, pens and pencils for writing are each derived from natural materials. Technology assists us in bringing forth these things—so often in fact, that our view into the event of unfurling nature is blocked (QCT 338). Nature, brought forth in itself, if we
are fortunate enough to witness its birth, seems inexplicable. Now, again, we find our sense making selves unable to make sense of this event. We may ask what motivates some seeds to be the first to burst out of their shells, or we may meditate on how they unfurl referring to the event as miraculous, mysterious and, yes, even phenomenal.

We see *physis* when bittersweet care calls us into a garden where soil brings forth plants, which bring forth seed, plant and, still more soil or where plants bring forth fungus which bring forth more fungus difficult to remove. We see *physis* in the weather that continually envelops us and disperses like a mood, in the birds that return and play out their spring rituals, and in our own bodies whose hurts and bruises heal. We see *physis* when care calls us to meditative thinking, a thinking which listens devotedly, gathering and safeguarding thought like seeds, biding its time, “awaiting as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen” (Heidegger in Graybeal 1990, 139). We can also see it in the poetic unfolding of narrative.

...The purple beans have long since climbed up their poles and are curling skyward and a pumpkin that I didn’t plant is rapidly covering what remains of the beets. It’s late in the day, and as the sweltering heat of mid-summer recedes, I move about the garden slowly, collecting multi-coloured carrots and beets, onions, a few new potatoes, spinach and peas. Humidity hangs in the air, wrapping about me as I move between the rows, harvesting, propping up plants and checking for insects and disease. The heat
and humidity are so intense that I do most of my work in the early and late hours of the day and despite the late hour, sweat is trickling off my brow and onto the vegetables in my basket. A tomatillo’s arm is sprawling over what remains of its neighbour, the lettuce. As I set down my basket of food to gently bring it back to its place, a faint breeze, the first of the evening appears and I stand up and turn into it, welcoming its cooling caress. It passes over me and disappears and I return to my work, carefully bringing the tomatillo back to its bounds, but upon rising it’s arm, I find that it has been sheltering tender lettuce from the harsh rays of the sun. The rest of the lettuce has gone to seed, but here, under the protection of its neighbour, is a small gathering of colourful leaves. Carefully, after picking some for my dinner, I set the arm of the tomatillo back down, reminding myself to return for both lettuce and seeds, and as I do so, I look around me.

Gone are my well-tended rows. Amidst the rapidly growing bounty of food, I look instead for bare spots to plant fall crops of rutabaga, rapini and kale. The garden is quickly melding into a single mass of life pulsing with breath, birth and growth while any weeds have now blended into the whole. The buzzing of a mosquito in my ear breaks rudely
into my reverie, reminding me that they too are drawn out by the cool of the evening and soon I will be driven inside. Nevertheless, before they dissuade me I must attend the tomatoes. Yesterday while attempting to untangle them and check their green fruit, I found brown splotches on their lower leaves and stems, causing me some concern for the health of the garden. My response to this rude intrusion was quick and invasive—I removed the lower leaves of several plants and instead of putting them in the compost where their disease could spread, I took them out of the garden to the trash.

Summer I realize is advancing to fall. Although the days are still long and warm and things continue to grow, soon they will grow into death. All of my energy goes into supporting and collecting this great force of life as it bursts out of its bounds and melds back into itself...

We think from where we stand (McKay 2001, 70). When we no longer heed the call of care, a call that encompasses bittersweet existence, that mingles now with then, when we no longer follow in the draft of thinking that cannot be grasped but rather imagine ourselves solidly positioned in certitude, we turn our sight from the unfurling of the natural world in the belief that we are in control. When we turn away from, “that which lets the [natural] things … emerge by themselves” (Mitchell 2010b, 62) and no longer allow these things to impress on us their very presence, when we imagine in our certitude
that we are safe within our world, “wild is spoken as negative” (McKay 2001, 70). Yet, despite our attempts at control, wild, untamed nature breaks into and sprawls across our comfortable world like pumpkins we didn’t plant, fungus we didn’t invite in and thoughts that do not congeal.

In recognizing *physis*, we release control and understand ourselves as co-creators of garden, narrative and thinking. We accept that things in our world change, vibrate and radiate with the unfurling of existence, extending beyond boundaries; that words and thoughts like seeds once planted may become seedlings then plants and food; that a tomatillo can be in attunement with both lettuce and us by stretching out its arms, giving shade, unfurling in bounteous provision.

There are many approaches to reawakening an awareness of the vibrancy of things in our world. Political theorist, Jane Bennett for example, in her discussion of edible matter (Bennett 2004) speaks to the active force of food as materiality. Food, Bennett describes as having “the power to shape the dispositions of persons and nations” (Bennett 2004, 43). Educator and author Michael Pollan, takes a slightly different approach by focusing on desire (Pollan 2002). Since the dawn of agricultural practice, he suggests, we have been in a “coevolutionary relationship” with certain plants because they satisfy specific desires of ours while we cultivate and protect their desire to survive as a species (243). Philosopher and cultural ecologist, David Abram reawakens us to the vibrancy of things by exploring perception through the lenses of philosophy, shamanism, storytelling and magic. In *Becoming Animal*, he describes perception as communication when asking
“what is perception if not the experience of this gregarious, communicative power of things” (172) while reminding us that “human speech is simply our part of a much broader conversation” (172).

We may also reawaken to an awareness of the vibrancy of things by working in a garden, composing narrative and thinking with Heidegger.

In his discussion of earth and world, Heidegger give us a more tangible understanding of how things change. “We believe we are at home in the immediate circle of beings [because they] are familiar, reliable, ordinary” (OWA 179). This, Heidegger’s notion of world, is not unlike our own, yet it benefits from some clarification. While world is our experience of being at home in the familiar, Heidegger defines world more actively as, “the structural whole of significant relationships that one experiences with tools, things of nature, and other human beings” (Krell, BW 141).

World as relational, is not static. It is the bittersweet horizon, upon which our day-to-day relationships continuously unfold. We are at home in it—yet while there we have the uncanny experience of new worlds intruding into ours. Heidegger’s notion of earth is tied to that which extends into our world, opening it up to change. “World and earth” he explains, “are essentially different from one another and yet are never separated. The world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world (OWA 174)”. Like purple beans spiraling skyward, cool breezes breaking through humid air, tomatillos breaking their bounds, mosquitoes invading our thoughts, or weeds and disease that seem to appear
overnight, our familiar world continually breaks open and mingles in the wild language of existence. We may pull out weeds, cut back words and tie in new thoughts, but wild earth juts through into world and the call of care invites us to experience the unfurling of Being, weaving us in relationships of mutual concern.

A HARVEST OF FOOD, THOUGHTS AND WORDS

...After watching the corn grow all summer from seed into towering tree, last night, before I could harvest the cobs, the plants were taken down. The raccoons had a party in the corn. Those masked marauders who ignore all boundaries—I thought I’d heard them laughing in my sleep. No matter, there is plenty to share and honestly, it all seems like a gift. Just as I’ve enjoyed bringing this garden back to life and growing food from seed, I enjoy giving food away. Like thoughts and stories, shared between us, even when we share seemingly finite, consumable things like food—something remains. As I look into this basket overflowing with gifts from the earth, the vegetables look different now. Removed from their individual worlds and mingled together they seem to shine with a greater life. The garden looks different too. It seems turned upside down and inside out from its
unfurling and harvest. Much of what’s left is either dying back or in the compost pile for next years growth. I am thinking these thoughts while washing the vegetables with the hose and watching the water run, past my bare feet and back into the earth. Plants, like humans, born from hummus, unfurling self out of self, returning to hummus to human to plant.

“The sounding word returns into soundlessness, back to whence it was granted: into the ringing of stillness” (NL 108), like plants and compost, humans and hummus, words and thoughts we reach across boundaries and vibrate in unison, then return to the stillness, the ringing expanse of existence. In attending to things, “cultivating and safeguarding their provenance, allowing all things the darkness they require and their proper growing time” (Krell BW,142) we are given the gift of seeing things unfurl, come alive and shine with vibrant meaning. Care, as bittersweet concern draws us into this mingling with things.

As the era of global climate change discloses itself, like a nuclear holocaust in slow motion “earth juts through world” and we are brought face to face with a psychological understanding of fugue. We have forgotten our identity and flown from environment. In confronting our reality, we are called by care, invited away from a thinking that shaped this event, and towards a thinking of Being.
This project considers gardening, narrative and thinking as reflecting not only our own experiences but those of others with whom we come in contact. It begins with the call that we have forgotten Being or existence itself and responds by gradually transposing place, narrative and thinking to a reawakened understanding of our constitutive relation with each other through Being. Through gardening, narrative and thinking we begin to see that all “things” are part of a grand orchestration of call and response where not just thinking but stories and actions unfold continually, in many directions.

Philosopher Andrew Mitchell explains Heidegger’s thinking of “the shining of the earth [as] the shining of untethered being, uncontained, and now free to reach out to us, meaningfully” (Mitchell 2010b, 12). We, as untethered beings, participate in this reaching out and mingling. Rather than Heidegger’s view of human as light, where all disclosure occurs in the locus of the human subject, perhaps the locus of light, or meaning is where we gather together with things and come into attunement, collectively constitutively somewhere outside of ourselves in unbounded space.
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