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The (Non)Site of *Atopon*

**Rhetorical Positivity, Hermeneutical Negativity
and the Privative of World**

Abstract

Insofar as the references to the concept atopon within the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer are rare, this obscurity contrasts with the significance Gadamer attributes to the term: it may be read as a phenomenon upon which philosophical hermeneutics is contingent. Our text offers a reading of atopon as it is developed in Gadamer's text "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik". The schema proposed by Gadamer is a transitory series where atopon serves as the grounding phenomenon giving a potential rhetorical or hermeneutical linguisticity. This schema thusly yields a rudimentary image of possible accounts of atopon and serves as an aperture towards a further development of the concept.

Key words

Atopon, hermeneutics, rhetoric, world, topos, thaumazein, Hans-Georg Gadamer

In Gadamer's work the term *atopon* occurs infrequently; these allusions are scattered and oblique. In the auto-collected *Gesammelte Werke* there is the absence of any detailed or sustained meditation on the concept; all references are, in a sense, nascent; nevertheless, this fragmented, heteroclitic status bears an asymmetry with the apparent significance Gadamer gives to the term. Rather than representing a mere supplement, the motifs invoked in the various citations of *atopon* imply it may be assigned a critical location within the hermeneutic programme. In the text "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik", this location is particularly striking; there is the suggestion that the phenomenon of *atopon* is constitutive of any possible hermeneutics. Gadamer writes:

"The lack of immediate understandability of texts handed down to us historically or their proneness to be misunderstood is really only a special case of what is to be met in all human orientation to the world as the *atopon* (the strange), that which does not 'fit' into the customary order of our expectation based on experience. Hermeneutics has only called our attention to this phenomenon. Just as when we proceed in understanding the *mirabilia* lose their strangeness, so very successful appropriation of tradition is dissolved into a new and distinct familiarity in which it belongs to us and we to it. They both flow together into one owned and shared world, which encompasses past and present and which receives its linguistic articulation in the speaking of man with man."¹

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Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection", in: *Philosophi-*

cal Hermeneutics, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles 1976, p. 25.

What is compelling about the fragment is Gadamer's centering of *atopon* in regards to his theoretical schematic, the precise linking of *atopon* to the elementary themes of philosophical hermeneutics: the concept of world, the problem of interpretation, the notions of dialogue and language, the question of tradition and temporality. The acuity of this account of *atopon* may be read as a kernel of a hermeneutic ontology, a certain abstraction of the contingencies, concerns, and movements of a philosophical hermeneutics described here by Gadamer: that the realization of a hermeneutic relation turns on the sequential condition of the disruption of a generic homogeneous topos (the alpha privative (α privativum) as negation, subtraction, absence vis-à-vis the stem topos), this appearance of a phenomenon provoking a *Stimmung* within an "order" and thusly inducing a dehiscence which demarcates a topological variance that gives the hermeneutic structure; the treatment of the dehiscence in turn becomes the hermeneutic task, an encountering whose ground is the dissolution of *atopon* as *atopon* and the articulation of a singular world wherein the difference indexed by *atopon* is replaced by an explicit/implicitly functioning "belonging". In this passage, hermeneutics essentially becomes variations on the following syntagms: a comportment with *atopon*, a being with *atopon*, an ontology of *atopon*, the genitive to be understood in a double sense – *atopon* as the hermeneutic "object"; that a hermeneutic ontology itself is organized around *atopon*.

The pertinence read in this particular fragment coupled with the obscurity of the term in Gadamer's texts delineates an aperture to be researched: how, to what extent, is *atopon* to be read in accord with Gadamer's programme; how is a plausible refinement of the status of *atopon* within hermeneutics to be designed, extrapolated, speculated; preliminarily, what are the prejudices in reading a significance here, what are the motives of the reference, of this recovery of a term from the classical Greek site? Within Gadamer's work there are immediately discernable concepts carrying a similarity: the alien, temporal distance, the fusion of horizons, the strange (i.e., the strange within *Wahrheit und Methode* attributed a correlative elementality: hermeneutics finds itself

"... based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness... [The tension] is in the play between the traditional text's strangeness and familiarity to us... The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between."²)

These ligatures may be confirmed in that *atopon* appears alongside translations in the above remark: *atopon* as "strange", in the following sentence the anaphora when "mirabilia" functions in place of *atopon*. Noting this similarity, the allusion to *atopon* infers the question of the limits of such substitutions and *anaphorae* – in what sense is this particular reference a repetition of these concepts; contrarily, is the reference indicative of a break that introduces an ulterior problematic, an ulterior theoretical space?

The text "Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik" is apposite to a tangible development, according to the rudimentary matrix Gadamer develops. The text is a reflection on the hermeneutic relation to the fields of rhetoric, social science, natural science and psychoanalysis: a series of contiguities are elaborated which seek to identify the extant traits of a hermeneutic operation in these fields. Following the trajectory of "Rhetoric, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik", the dense citation concerning *atopon* is found in a transitory section, as adjunct to a reflection on the rhetorical. Considering the structure of the text, its thematic concerns, the dyad of hermeneutics-rhetoric represents a relevant preludic setting for the interjection of *atopon*; that is, the fact that the concept occurs in this specific adjunct is in itself to be considered theoreti-

cally germane: a cursory ontology Gadamer constructs around the surfacing of *atopon* in regards to the linguisticity (*Sprachlichkeit*) of the hermeneutic and the rhetorical.

When considering Gadamer's overall project as the desired account of a hermeneutic universality, the formulation of rhetoric and hermeneutics in this text suggests a moderate dislocation. There are intersecting and refractory points to hermeneutics and rhetoric, a correlativity alongside a significant oppositional element that marks their difference:

"In rhetoric, linguisticity is attested to in a truly universal form, one that is essentially prior to the hermeneutical and almost represents something like the 'positive' as over against the 'negative' of 'linguistic interpretation'."³

Hermeneutics and rhetoric are linked in the description of linguisticity as the medium through which the rhetorical and the hermeneutical are given; the differences expounded by Gadamer are drawn within the medium of linguisticity itself – there is a temporal difference to linguisticity, evinced in the placing of rhetoric as antecedental to hermeneutics – there are the plausible alterities of linguisticity, the possible fragmentations inherent to linguisticity denoted in the bifurcation positive-negative. The primordially and positivity of rhetoric contrasted with the subsequentiality and negativity of hermeneutics is the substantive dissimilarity Gadamer proposes: hermeneutics is "against" rhetoric, hermeneutics is placed in a (negative) equivocating relation to rhetoric: Rhetoric will be denoted as essentially the foregrounding positive linguisticity of a negative hermeneutics. The sense of these oppositions appear to speak to delimited situations when the former dissolves into the latter, these alterities designed as two possible consciousnesses of a situation where linguisticity responds according to the condition of a difference: what is the logic of this qualitative transition?

What Gadamer here conceives as a rhetoric which is positive and primordial to hermeneutics may be read as a "rehabilitating" of the concept of rhetoric, i.e., similar rehabilitations found in Gadamer's reading of the concept of prejudice, the concept of authority, etc... The pattern of these rehabilitations is that of bringing about the underlying pertinence of a (mis)perceived devalued concept towards the perception of its continued effect, its presence; rehabilitation treats the remnants of the theoretical discourse, its discarded figures, and recovers the place of their significance. Rehabilitation will exhort that the devalued is to be researched in terms of a previous origin, or an archaic space, where statuses are obverse, unconscious statuses to be made conscious in the givenness of a particular situation. In the case of rhetoric, its (positive) rehabilitation moves against the conception of rhetoric as coercive, as a "false consciousness", as the sophistic manipulation of the *demos* through its application – Gadamer sees this possibility of a rehabilitation in Plato:

"Plato, going back behind all the shallow claims put forward by the contemporary teachers of rhetoric, had discovered a genuine foundation for rhetoric that only the philosopher, the dialectician, could carry out: the task is to master the faculty of speaking in such an affectively persuasive way that the arguments brought forward are always appropriate to the specific receptivity of the souls to which they are directed."⁴

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Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*,
Continuum, New York 2003, p. 295.

3
H.-G. Gadamer, "Scope and Function of
Hermeneutic Reflection", p. 20.

4
Ibid., p. 21.

Gadamer gives the rhetorical as a linguisticality contiguous with the problem of relation/(non)relation: there is an ambiguity of content that serves as the foundation as negative (non)foundation, the rhetorical problematic taking the form of a scission. Dialectics and rhetoric appear congruent according to the theme of the presence of this scission – the existence of the interlocutor(s), a dialogue that is a separation of elements, an anomie, a discord, the (non)relational impasse existing between these elements. If dialectics as method is conceived as the alleviation of the scission (i.e., Plato's *sunoptikos*), it accurately transposes itself to the (non)foundation which the rhetorical seeks to address: the impasse is to be subverted through a dialectical appropriation of rhetoric, a relational movement arranged from these (non)relation, the construction of a discourse which concentrates on the method of disseminating the content of the discourse so that it enters into a relation with the "souls", that is, that the unrelatable content becomes relatable, that the content may be conceived in terms of a relation. The scission will aggregate with the possibility of making a discourse compelling, the shared interstice between bodies, between discourses, between prejudices, as realized by a distinct application of linguisticality. This possibility of the interstice *contra* the anomic (non)foundation, the making of (a) content relatable, is where Gadamer's rehabilitation transpires: the coercive effect of rhetoric is limited by the structure of the dialectic, hence the "souls" themselves; the souls serving as a limit concept dictating the extent to which the rhetorical linguisticality can function. This limit will necessitate that the difference is to be addressed in terms of an inclusive positive constitution, of a dialectical consistency, in the sense that a field of representation is to be retrieved from a fractured content, the awareness that this content is the ground, and therefore, what is at stake, in the plausible treatment:

"Rhetoric from oldest tradition has been the only advocate of a claim to truth that defends the probable, the *eikos* (verisimile), and that which is convincing to the ordinary reason."⁵

The specific operation is that of mediation: the Thou and the I construed in terms of a desired dialogic *rapprochement*. The force of the rhetorical is only actualized through the condition of its coherence with the receptors of its voice; its effectivity resting entirely on how it establishes a link with the *eikos*. Hence, an obviation of the I by the Thou: the rhetorical act functioning with a certain concern which signifies the accentuation of the Gadamerian "I-lessness" of language within the rhetorical discourse, thusly placing it into a relation to the fractured content which is the fractured content of the Thou itself, of the I-lessness, i.e., the rhetorical's representation contingent on how this content may be given as a consistent motif in the presence of the break. There is not the proposal of a rhetorical discourse *ex nihilo*, but one elaborated from a prejudicial structure and the discerned fissure within this prejudicial structure, within a particular linguistic world; rhetoric will denote a taking and a returning of the *eikos*: the *eikos* as re-related, re-proposed, re-positioned, in order to diminish the presence of the break. As such, Gadamer's description of the rhetorical function may be abstracted as the restoration of a topos in light of the appearance of a gap (plausibly phrased as the shift from anomie to nomos, in more orthodox phenomenologico-ontological terms, a discourse for the world, for world as Being-with-Others⁶), how the particular application of linguisticality may be giving of a relational situation when there are interruptions in the homogeneity of a topos; the relationality, the re-constituted situation, which rhetoric accomplishes from the indexed (non)situationality of (non)world. This telos of an inclusive world is consistent with Plato's account, rhetoric as "the art by which a man will be able to produce a resem-

blance between all things between which it can be produced”;⁷ what develops in this process is the formalization of a topos through language, these elements which are to be unified in the comprehensive space of an immediate dwelling as established through a series of articulations derived from the facticities of a topos, from the authority of the mundane contents of the dehiscent (non)relation – the divisions that are to be resigned to pronounce the presence of a particular world. In terms of Gadamer’s axioms of the ontology of language, “language as the medium through which understanding takes place”, “Being, that can be understood is language”, rhetoric denotes a lucid example of the positive aspect of these formulas, speaking directly to their imperatives.⁸

Now the sequence adumbrated by Gadamer is that of the hermeneutic as a corollary to the rhetorical, a negativity overthrowing the positivity of the rhetorical, dissipating the specific world and relational content that the rhetorical mobilization has established. If rhetoric is taken syntagmatically as the positive constituting of a world, the hermeneutic problem, the problem of interpretation, will demarcate a break from the rhetorical coherence of the world, the univocating discourse of rhetoric becoming interrupted; Gadamer’s characterization of a negativity as a descriptive turning against the positive constitution, a precise dissolution of the preceding homogeneity. Considering the Gadamerian theses of the universality of the hermeneutic problem, of the hermeneutic consciousness, this is a necessary shift whose eventuality hinges on the specific condition inducing the hermeneutic act (concomitantly, the necessary phenomenon of rhetorical dissolution in terms of this condition); Gadamer intimates this condition in terms of *atopon*. It is in the segment of the text where Gadamer is to equivocate a universalization of hermeneutics with a universalization of rhetoric according to their actualization through linguisticity where the reference to *atopon* is made: The opposition given is that of the “order of custom”/*atopon*, a dyad that mimics the opposition rhetorics-hermeneutics, and becomes the key with which to read Gadamer’s remarks on rhetoric-hermeneutics as antinomies (and in turn, a reading and elaboration of *atopon* in terms of rhetoric-hermeneutics). The architecture of this opposition is the plausibility of perceiving a phenomenon as *atopon*, the alpha privative which constructs *atopon* and therefore pronounces this difference congenial to a latent ontology of the alpha privative: Gadamer constructs the opposition from a singular, homogeneous point, the “order” encountering

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Ibid., p. 24.

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Or, the rehabilitation of rhetoric in these pages as a Gadamerian theory of ideology: the text “Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik” itself is a response to the Habermasian critique of hermeneutics as ideological. There is a subtextual affinity throughout the text made by Gadamer between ideology and rhetoric; thus, in the form of an analysis of rhetoric, Gadamer presents his critique of the Marxian denotation of ideology as false consciousness and the problem of recognizing in ideology the question of an emancipation. The difference here lies in the conception of the break of the (non)relation: the index of the ideological/rhetorical content refers itself to the vulgate, a logical/(non)logical closing of

the scission which occurs – in effect, Gadamer’s anticipation of the Lacano-Althusserian denotations of ideology theory as found in, i.e., Laclau and Mouffe, the ideological functioning as a “filling” of the void in the symbolic order, rhetoric as treatment of a scission – what is germane is an account of how (an) ideology fills this void, how rhetoric reacts to the phenomenon of the scission, the situation that may be formed from an abasement.

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Plato, *Phaedrus*, 282e.

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A supplement: if Badiou’s comment is applied here, that the only possible verb for ontological discourse is ‘belonging’, the rhetorical act becomes the ontological act *par excellence*.

atopon, the latter appearing to the former. The image here suggests a particular horizon which is interrupted by the movement of the “*mirabilia*” into the frame; this “*mirabilia*” as some form of excess to the homogeneous topos. This homogeneity implied in the order of custom and the moment of the subversion of the homogeneity through the perception of *atopon* is the instance Gadamer seeks to isolate: there is the initiation of a break incurred by *atopon* – *atopon* is both the break itself and the figure on the other side of the bifurcation. That is, *atopon* synchronously introduces a dehiscence within the custom and a dehiscence between the custom and *atopon*: a topos that in the encountering of the *atopon* is confronted with a disparity, an inconsistency, and is subsequently disrupted. To read the order-*atopon* conflict in the context of the rhetoric-hermeneutic difference, the account of a negative hermeneutics will thusly unfold from the caesura of the positive (rhetorical) topos via *atopon*, a distinct gap consecrating the hermeneutic space, the presence of this privation giving an acute consciousness of the fragility and capriciousness of the rhetorical discourse: the rhetorical linguisticity which makes world relatable transgresses to a negative ontology where the world dissolves into an ambiguity of relation around an isolated unworldly point, an irruption, this phenomenon as a translated “placeless”, a translated “worldless”. Gadamer is identifying a shift within linguisticity consistent with the appearance of the worldless, delineating the instance when linguisticity fails to “suture” the world, but rather functions universally as unveiling the negative discord of the (non)world according to the condition of the disruption of a primordial/positive rhetorical linguisticity, the revealing of the lack of this positive linguisticity. In line with the text, Gadamer thusly proposes the following progression:

1. A rhetorical discourse that orders the world, that homogenizes the world as oneness, the understanding conceiving world *qua* world.
2. An *atopon* appears in the homogeneous topos, it negates the rhetorical oneness of the world, revealing a gap in the rhetorical consolidation of the *eikos* – the rhetorical affirmation of the *eikos* fractured, the *eikos* lost. The tension between the terms *eikos* and *atopon* is evident – certainly, *atopon* is the dissolution of *eikos*, it is the threat to *eikos* – the improbable made apparent, visible, ontically compelling.
3. This dehiscence inflicted by *atopon* brings the hermeneutic situation to light, the rhetorical suture having been undone by the phenomenon of *atopon*; the hermeneutic operation denoting the consciousness of the negativity of the world, an experience of the negative, of the presence of that which is placeless, which is heterogeneous within the previously homogeneous order. There is now the awareness of the phenomenon of alterity, of difference, of interpretation substituting the prior oneness.

This series given in “Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik” is perhaps a recapitulation: it bears a consistency with, and therefore demands to be read alongside Gadamer’s concepts of tradition, prejudice, the historically effected consciousness; necessarily then, Heidegger’s *Geschichtlichkeit*, *Geworfenheit*, the formulation of Dasein where understanding is primordial to interpretation, “the existential constitution of Dasein – the understanding which interprets”⁹: The primordially of the “fore-structure” disclosed in these concepts infer the homogeneous topos, the primordially structuring the world from which the transition to interpretation is subsequently demarcated, an invariance then read as a variance, the form/content at work in the hermeneutic consciousness – therein, the complicity of rhetoric, history, language etc., with

the formation of “orders of custom”, of the prejudicial horizon of world which gives world as such – hermeneutics as the authentic dialogue with these phenomena, the working through of these phenomena. The qualitative differentiations of rhetoric and hermeneutics indicate that Gadamer is repeating these motifs, yet with the novelty of the text’s account located in the addition of the term *atopon* as the decisive fulcrum of these movements: If the rhetorical establishes the topos as topos by a morphology that is complicit with the elements it is addressing within the situation, the rhetorical represents a situation whose homogeneity rests on the lack of *atopon* – in the appearance of *atopon*, there is a transition from a topos to the alpha privative (non)world of *atopon*, a lucidity which presents the world in terms of a limit¹⁰ – ineluctably, when this exception is introduced, the *eikos* becomes suspended, the remainder being that of a hermeneutic negativity.

However it is clear from Gadamer’s account that this *prima facie* primordiality and positivity of the rhetorical is not some genetic of world and language: a pure origin from which subsequent fractures develop. The inconsistency in the progression is to be noted regarding the facticity which stimulates the rhetorical. The rhetorical in itself implies a gap in the necessity and task of its function, the consciousness of the scission within a topos. Therefore, if the rhetorical ordering is primordial to hermeneutics, the theme of the dehiscence that provokes both forms of linguisticity becomes clear. The logic of the positive-negative and temporal transition is to be re-thought in terms of the dehiscence: this dehiscence then bifurcates a possibility of linguisticity vis-à-vis the dehiscence. Gadamer becomes aware of this phenomenon, the linearity of the series is placed in doubt, and he revises the series as follows – the function of linguisticity is contemplated in terms of a distinct fault that consecrates linguisticity:

“The rhetorical and hermeneutical aspects of human linguisticity completely interpenetrate each other. There would be no speaker and no art of speaking if understanding and consent were not in question, were not underlying elements; there would be no hermeneutical task if there were no mutual understanding that has been disturbed and that those involved in a conversation must search for and find again together.”¹¹

After the initial divergence of hermeneutics-rhetoric, Gadamer then re-establishes their reciprocative concern; hermeneutics and rhetoric are conjoined, their mobilization of linguisticity as constituted by the “disturbance” that necessitates their approach. There is now the image of an interlacing of hermeneutics and rhetoric, the illustration of a process that occurs through the encountering of *atopon* and linguisticity – the contiguity of rhetorical-hermeneutical envisioned as oscillating between the question of linguisticity and *atopon*, the connection between language and privative, the question of language and limit – the underlying motif at work in both spaces becomes the thinking of the relational to the (non)relational. What is essential here is that Gadamer is conceiving these operations as symptoms of a dehiscence, which are always eluded to in the subtext of linguisticity – the dehiscence which gives the contours of a linguisticity as linguisticity, revealing its base anti-dehiscence function – the act of world formation is an allusion to the negativity

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Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Blackwell, New York 1962, p. 195.

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To extrapolate: we would have now have to isolate this disturbance and its role in the for-

mation of tradition, the historically effected consciousness, prejudice etc...

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H.-G. Gadamer, “Scope and Function of Hermeneutic Reflection”, p. 25.

of experience in a Hegelian manner which compels world, which compels understanding. The thesis is that *atopon* is to be located at all these points of dehiscence, at all demarcations of the ambiguity of relation/(non)relation – it is, brutally, the unbelonging – hence, if ontology is primarily a thinking of belonging or relation, there is an aporetic turn here: these ontologies turn ultimately on a (non)worldly, unbelonging phenomenon, a non or pre-ontological event. The dynamism of linguisticity which intimates the difference between rhetoric and hermeneutics suggests an interstice wherein the transition from understanding to interpretation is opened; a moment when the understanding is subverted, an antagonism to understanding, although an antagonism which is not representative of an interpretation or an understanding, through the very understanding of the absence of understanding which suspends both interpretation and understanding, the privative of both understanding and interpretation: in this interstice is to be located *atopon*.

With Gadamer's proposal of the "disturbance" and its constitutive relation to linguisticity, these descriptions of breaks and traumas to linguisticity allude to a discreet subtraction from Gadamer's ontology of language, i.e., the understanding-interpretation dialogic structure, in that what is altered here is the structure of understanding-interpretation through the significance of the privative of understanding-interpretation: How is this privative of understanding-interpretation, here given as the dehiscence actualizing rhetorical/hermeneutical linguisticity, to be accounted for? Where in the Gadamerian ontology of language is the possibility for this privative? Taking *atopon* as the denotation of this absence, is it precisely in Gadamer's construction of the privative as *atopon*, in terms of *topos*, of world as such? In other words, the question of the phenomenon of *atopon* itself, plausible contents/forms of *atopon*, the question of a phenomenology of *atopon*: what is the realization of its presence, what are the conditions of its appearance, where are the locations of this appearance? The question of presence and appearance seem germane to any delimitation: Gadamer describes *atopon* in conformity with some presence, something that is "met", that is encountered – there is an apparent base separation at work in the confrontational schema of this event, which perhaps yields two distinct physiognomies – the physiognomy of One encountering the physiognomy of an Other. Yet this *atopon* is not merely reducible to an Other: again, Gadamer gives it as something that possesses an alterity in the sense of a compelling force to recognize an absence that exists in the blind-spot of a particular *topos*. Appropriating Heidegger's thesis in *Sein und Zeit*, that Dasein's primordial Being-in-the-world indicates a Being-with-Others, this distinction becomes clear: the primary effect of *atopon* is the delineation of a particular consciousness of difference that opens a series of dehiscences within the notion of 'Being-in-world itself', the absence in this worldliness, in this otherness; the encountering of *atopon* thusly not an equivocation with the facticity of Being-in-the-world as being with Others, as *atopon* occupies the antipodal position of the antagonistic (non)world which nihilates the link to the Other, and that of Dasein in relation to these others, therein, the implication of the privative in terms of the worldliness of Dasein itself. Here the grammatical structure of the term is supplemental and ostensive to this thesis, i.e., the analysis of the alpha privative and its relation to the stem word, the effect of α -privativum and the stem in Greek as negating the stem, conflicting with it, revealing a lack – in this absence, in this alpha privative, is where Gadamer locates the negativity within all situations, all epistemologies, all representations, all worlds.

Gadamer does infer a plurality of phenomena which may be thought as *atopon*, nevertheless giving only one substantive example in “Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik”: that of the “text”. That hermeneutics arises as the concern of an interpreter towards the presence of some text is congruent with Gadamer’s allusion that hermeneutics has only made the presence of *atopon* conscious; the difference and segregation of phenomena giving hermeneutics, is only the realization of a difference which is prior to any consciousness of hermeneutics – the hermeneutic consciousness intrinsically linked with the consciousness of *atopon*. Hence, if the text is exemplary of *atopon*, and not the singular *atopon* of hermeneutics, this expansion of the denotation of *atopon* can be said to mimic, or rather, coincide with the ontological shift of hermeneutics Gadamer had proposed in *Wahrheit und Methode* – for hermeneutics to conceive itself as ontological, its account of *atopon* must be subtracted from the case of the text. When hermeneutics is re-oriented away from textual interpretation towards world, to the phenomenological worldliness of the world, the *atopon* of the text will be carried over into a worldliness, an aworldliness, a topology, atopology; it is to be recognized outside of the interpreter-text duality. Although the text is in no sense to be devalued as representative of the hermeneutic “object”; rather Gadamer insinuates the thinking of this concept as the thought of that which is out of place, which is dehiscence, which negates, subtracts, circumscribes absence, which appears as (non)relational – a hermeneutic philosophy of the Event.¹²

Yet the difficulty in this thinking once again lies with the *strictu sensu* demarcation of *atopon* as the phenomenon representing these motifs read alongside the obscurity of the term *atopon*. This obscurity, this scarcity, has both a negative and positive effect on the problematic: the scarcity devalues the potentiality of the term according to the minor role it plays – it is always to be read as an equivalence, as referring to an ulterior concept which possesses a more secure, traditional position within the Gadamerian texts – a bricolage of correlative articulations. Contrarily, this ambiguity may be understood as yielding a certain speculative theoretical matrix, where the term is to be read almost “symptomatically”: attempting to uncover the motifs related to *atopon* through intra/inter-textual readings, that in turn, open the space for its development, that take it beyond its truncated status within Gadamer’s work. In light of these delineations, in Gadamer’s utilization of the term there are two clear references put in play: firstly, that of the Greek origin of *atopon*, its classical philosophical context; secondly, the meaning of *atopon* which signifies a privative acutely related to a translated place, world, etc... These two elements present a substantive foundation of the term, which can be used for the concept’s extrapolation in terms of licit movements away from a perceived anaphoric function; thusly, the problematic of *atopon* could be designed cursorily around these primary and immediate motifs of Greece-philosophy and world as follows:

1. The notion of an expansion of the concept of *atopon* as a return to the Greek site: the link of philosophy and wonder had been given by Plato. The propinquity of *atopon-thaumazein*-philosophy is what Gadamer tries to bring forth in the reference made to *atopon* in the text “Language and Understanding”:

¹²

Some possible supplements to an account of *atopon* as Event: of course, the obvious and necessary relation to Heidegger’s *Ereignis*; however, also supplements in the form of Badiou and Laruelle. Specifically Badiou’s

accounts of *being and situation*, the question of how something new appears in the world, the notion of an Event and its (non)relation to a given situation, etc., carry a resemblance to the notion of *atopon* as Event.

“All efforts at trying to understand something begin when one comes up against something that is strange, challenging, disorienting. The Greeks had a very fine word for that which brings our understanding to a standstill. They called it the *atopon*. This actually means ‘the placeless’, that which cannot be fitted into the categories of expectation in our understanding and which therefore causes us to be suspicious of it. The famous Platonic doctrine that philosophizing begins with wonder, has this suspicion in mind, this experience of not being able to go any further with the pre-schematized expectations of our orientation to this world, which therefore beckons to thinking.”¹³

Thus, a correlation to the Greek conception(s) of *atopon*; and, in itself, a reference which may be said to recapitulate the classical hermeneutic problem: the direct citation of the term in Gadamer’s texts speaks to the problems of translation and understanding, the problem of the capturing of a lucidity, of nuances, of the situationality of an articulation, its compositional elements of bodies, histories, prejudices, impulses, environments. The problem of translation is subverted, pacified, through the return to an origin, to a source text and the immediate effect generated by the direct citation of the term – a purity of an initial thought found in the space of the *arche* which the allusion attempts to appropriate, the grasping of a moment Gadamer reads as profound, the theme of capturing the force of an image and what this implies – the image as diffused through a site, the return to a delineated site, the philological research of a distinct conceptual apparatus, the historico-theoretical context of the classical Greek (prominent occurrences of the term we may locate in Plato and Aristotle); as such, historical allusions and the function of the term within these texts are inferred in the mobilization of the concept (alongside the aforementioned significance of the grammatical form of the concept itself). Yet the reference here not only develops possible forms and contents as found in Greek thought. This citation specifically captures the ligation of the tradition of philosophical discourse with *atopon* through the ligation of *thaumazein* with *atopon*: the locus of *theoria*, a specific discourse which can only be counted as Greek, arranged around this phenomenon of wonder; the spontaneity, the isolation of this discourse is illusory in light of the phenomenon needed to give its content. Etymologically this is clear in *theoria* as beholding: something must appear so that the beholding gaze of theory is caught, is affirmed, an a priori dehiscent moment – this moment when the topos becomes fragmented, when the tradition fails – the origin of this particular tradition as a coagulation around the event of the negation of the tradition, a collapse of the prejudice, of the *eikos*, in the heterogeneity of the experienced *atopon*, *thaumazein*. Hence, in this contiguity, Gadamer gives a nascent strategy to approach the history of metaphysics, the history of philosophical/theoretical discourse, which simultaneously acts as both a desired cogency of the links philosophy-*atopon*/hermeneutics-*atopon* and as possible phenomenological descriptions of *atopon*: this discourse to be read syntagmatically as the relation with *atopon* (i.e., the loss of *atopon*, its continued assimilation, and its possible correlation with nihilism/the end of metaphysics); or, phrased differently, a history of the place of *thaumazein/atopon* within the structure of this discourse.¹⁴

2. If the fundamental opposition demarcating the (non)locus of the possibility of *atopon* is that of *atopon*-world, i.e., the alpha privative structure of *atopon* evincing the pertinence of a topos and its corresponding negativity, the trajectory of Gadamer’s account of world has to be followed. In *Wahrheit und Methode* this is developed along the lines of a transition from *environment* (Umwelt) to *world* (Welt). The differentiation of world-environment in Gadamer occurs through a shift to language: the tradition as the apparatus enabling the transition, giving the linguisticity of world. This transmission has for Gadamer a transcendental effect: the dependence of the environment

is obviated by the linguisticity of world, an extraction of the ontic flesh from the environment. Taking the dyad of environment-world and considering it in terms of *atopon*, the transition becomes ambiguous: if worldliness is contingent to the discernment of *atopon*, if the play of understanding-disturbance occurs within language/worldliness, from where does *atopon* emerge? In what sense does the disruption of *atopon* oscillate between the known content of linguisticity and its extremities, by appearing as the absence within a fore-structuring linguisticity-world, yet needing linguisticity for its identification: what is the essence of the lucidity of *atopon*, that is, that a phenomemon may be recognized as *atopon* when it is considered as privative to linguisticity in terms of worldlessness? The very force of the disruption places it outside of the homogeneous order, in a negative relation to the linguisticity of world, in that this privative will reveal the lack within a forestructure – this is the case of the possibility of a lucidity in the very gap of world – the thesis given is that the privation embodies a more primordial striking effect on logos than the order of custom, nomos, the familiar, that with a place, in that it reveals, without a logic, its very out of placeness: through its presence may a situation be halted, overthrown, compelled to think. Thus, in terms of Gadamer's topology, the question becomes that of the ontological status of the ambiguity of world when it is confronted by *atopon*: if *atopon* appears as the privative of a world, if it appears as a transgression of the positivity of linguisticity in terms of linguisticity's giving of world, the sense in which worldliness is lost is to be ascertained – from the contrasting perspective, how the method of the dissolution of *atopon* qua *atopon* described by Gadamer as the denouement of “one and shared world” indicates an essential malleability to world, its fluxuation of a unitariness and discord (or, phrased differently, the paradoxical operation here of reading an *alpha* privative as a copulative privative, an aporetic grammatical structure). There is now to be a revision of Gadamer's topology, its re-formulation through the introduction of a third element that is a (non)topos of *atopon*, these topologies which are more or less fluid in the possibility of relations/(non)relations within a world, or more generically, within a topos;¹⁵ or, the thesis that it is this very ambiguity which

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Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Language and Understanding”, in: *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 14.

14

In his seminar on *thaumazein*, conducted in Freiburg in 1937–38, Heidegger's denotation of *thaumazein* seems to support Gadamer's apparent giving of *atopon* as contiguous, or almost, equivalent to *thaumazein*: “in wonder... everything becomes the most unusual” (Martin Heidegger, *Basic Questions in Philosophy: Selected “Problems” of “Logic”*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1994, p. 144). Here the particular heterogeneity of *thaumazein* has an effect which is congruent with that of Gadamer's account of *atopon* and the order of custom – the relational situation of the order of custom is negated by *atopon*, *thaumazein* read as the negation of all relation *in toto* – consequently, philosophy as the thinking of the relation to the (non)relation, in the same manner as Gadamer develops linguisticity as the thinking of the relation to the (non)relation.

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Perhaps the most prominent example of (non)relation from the phenomemonological tradition can be said to be Heidegger's account of death, (finititude): “Death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's own most possibility – (non)relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped” (M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 303). Thus, death as the moment when all relation dissolves, death as not of the world, the placeless: a status mimicking *atopon*. Insofar as the fundamental authenticity of Dasein is constituted by the manner in which Dasein relates itself to death, that is, being-towards-death (this identification of a limit concept as dictating the possible), authenticity is given as the relation with the (non)relation, as the authentic thinking of relation according to the negation of relation. If an example of *atopon* can be found in death, and a qualitative link is established, this would indicate a finality to world which gives world as such; that the formation of world is grounded in its own negation.

constitutes world itself – world not as closed syntax, however one as much constituted by the gaps in this syntax as by its specific elementary content – that world possesses a fundamental relation to its privative. Perhaps this perceived dynamism ultimately bears with it the depth of Heidegger's account, to name here the similar motifs of *Ereignis*, *Stimmungen*, the conception of world as “the clearing of Being”, etc... This intimates a re-configuration of a topological ambiguity in terms of these motifs, the possibility of the treatment of *atopon* resulting in the shifts of *atopon*-topos as related to world as clearing of Being, a tension of the alpha privative of world-*atopon* thusly tied to the placing of Being in a critical relation/(non)relation with world, with Heidegger's *Seinsfrage* itself: when Being is no longer considered in terms of the being of beings, when it is extracted from an ontic research, essentially from the *eikos* of onticity and the *eikos* of metaphysics, does Being not take the form of a question through the very (non)relationality of Being – the *atopon* of Being?

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(Ne)mjesto *Atopona*

Retorička pozitivnost, hermeneutička negativnost i privativno svijeta

Sažetak

Budući su reference na pojam atopon u djelu Hans-Georg Gadamera rijetke, ta se opskurnost kontrastira sa značenjem što ga Gadamer pripisuje terminu: može se čitati kao fenomen na temelju kojega je filozofska hermeneutika kontingentna. Članak nudi čitanje atopon-a kakvo je razvijeno u Gadamerovu tekstu »Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik«. Shema što ju je predložio Gadamer jest kratkotrajni niz gdje atopon služi kao utemeljujući fenomen koji daje potencijalnu retoričku ili hermeneutičku jezičnost. Ta shema tako donosi rudimenarnu sliku mogućih objašnjenja atopon-a i služi kao otvor prema daljem razvijanju pojma.

Ključne riječi

Atopon, hermeneutika, retorički svijet, topos, thaumazein, Hans-Georg Gadamer

Myroslav Feodosijevič Hryschko

Atopon – das Ortlose

**Rhetorische Positivität, hermeneutische Negativität
und das Privative der Welt**

Zusammenfassung

Da Hans-Georg Gadamer in seinem Werk nur selten auf den Begriff des Atopon zurückgreift, kontrastiert man diesen ungewöhnlichen Umstand mit der Bedeutung, die der Philosoph dem Terminus beimisst: Das Atopon ist demnach ein Phänomen, aufgrund dessen die philosophische Hermeneutik kontingent ist. Der Artikel präsentiert eine Lesart des Atopons, wie Gadamer sie in seinem Text „Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik“ entwickelt hat. Nach dem von Gadamer vorgeschlagenen Schema ist das Atopon eine kurze Wortfolge, die den Grund legt für eine potenzielle rhetorische oder hermeneutische Sprachlichkeit. Dieses Schema entwirft ein rudimentäres Bild möglicher Deutungen zum Atopon und dient als Grundlage für weitere Entwicklungen dieses Begriffs.

Schlüsselbegriffe

Atopon, Hermeneutik, rhetorische Welt, topos, thaumazein, Hans-Georg Gadamer

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La place (à part) de l'Atopon

**La positivité rhétorique, la négativité herméneutique
et le privatif du monde**

Résumé

Si les références au terme atopon sont rares dans l'œuvre de Hans-Georg Gadamer, cette rareté contraste avec l'importance que Gadamer lui confère : il peut être interprété comme un phénomène sur lequel se fonde la contingence de la philosophie herméneutique. L'article propose une lecture de l'atopon telle qu'elle a été développée par Hans-Georg Gadamer dans le texte « Rhetorik, Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik ». Dans le schéma proposé, l'atopon est le phénomène constitutif d'un langage potentiellement rhétorique ou herméneutique. Ce schéma donne ainsi une idée rudimentaire des différentes explications possibles de l'atopon et ouvre la voie à d'autres développements de la notion.

Mots-clés

Atopon, herméneutique, privatif du monde, topos, thaumazein, Hans-Georg Gadamer