

## Aboriginal *Ge-Stell*

“From the start human existence is held in an encountering concern for what can be produced, used, and procured – in the broadest sense, for what it can be concerned with. . . . Human existence’s expecting comes from its making-present: its ordering-up, making-available, taking-possession-of, holding-on-to.”

Martin Heidegger<sup>1</sup>

Heidegger takes *der Bestand*, ‘standing reserve,’ and its correlative *das Ge-Stell*, ‘positionality,’ to be **recent** phenomena: “Positionality is the essence of modern technology.”<sup>2</sup> By ‘modern’ he means mechanized, industrialized, and urban. He contrasts, for example, two ways for a coffin to be:

“The carpenter in the village does not complete a box for a corpse. The coffin is from the outset placed in a privileged spot of the farmhouse where the dead peasant still lingers. There, a coffin [*Sarg*] is still called a ‘death-tree’ [*Totenbaum*]. The death of the deceased flourishes in it. This flourishing determines the house and farmstead, the ones who dwell there, their kin, and the neighborhood. Everything is otherwise in the motorized burial industry of the big city [*motorisierten Besattungsindustrie der Großstadt*]. Here no death-trees are produced.”<sup>3</sup>

Heidegger goes on to contrast peasant farming and agribusiness, concluding with an infamous equation. The ordering imposed through positionality means that

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<sup>1</sup> *Logic: The Question of Truth* (tr. Thomas Sheehan 2010) 341.

<sup>2</sup> *Das Ge-Stell ist das Wesen der modernen Technik*. Heidegger goes on, “The essence of positionality is the being of beings itself [*das Sein selber des Seienden*], not everywhere and not from time immemorial [*nicht überhaupt und nicht von jeher*], but rather now, here [*jezt, da*] where the forgetting of the essence of being completes itself.” “Positionality” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking* (tr. Andrew J. Mitchell 2012) 49. As far as Thomas Sheehan can see, “Heidegger did not give names to any of the dispensations of the clearing over the last three millennia except for two: ‘the age of the world picture,’ which he links with Descartes, and the present one, which he calls *das Gestell* (sometimes: *Ge-Stell*) and which he sees as the calamitous culmination of the millennia-long forgottenness of the clearing.” *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (2015) 257; <https://religiousstudies.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/making-sense-of-heidegger-a-paradigm-shift.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> “Positionality” 25.

“A tract of land is imposed upon [*gestellt*], namely for the coal and ore that subsists in it. . . . The earth’s soil is drawn into such a placing and is attacked by it. It is ordered, forced into conscription. That is how we understand ‘ordering’ [*bestellen*] here and in what follows. Through such requisitioning [*Bestellen*] the land becomes a coal reserve, the soil an ore depository. This requisitioning is already of a different sort from that whereby the peasant had previously tended his field. **Peasant activity does not challenge [*nicht heraus*] the farmland; rather it leaves the crops to the discretion of the growing forces; it protects them in their thriving.**<sup>4</sup> . . . Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry [*motorisierte Ernährungsindustrie*], in essence the same as [*im Wesen das Selbe wie*] the production of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs.”<sup>5</sup>

Sheehan’s summary of Heidegger on *Bestand* and *Ge-Stell* alludes to their recentness; bold emphasis mine:

“Heidegger claims that in the **modern** world of calculative rationality, the instruments of technology and the mind-set of *technik* dominate the way we understand and relate to everything. Earth is **now** seen as a vast storehouse of resources, both human and natural; and the value and realness of those resources, their being, is measured exclusively by their availability for consumption. Things are viewed, at least tacitly, as first and foremost *producenda et consumenda*, stuff to be exploited for commercialization and use. Their significance is measured by the degree to which they can be owned, stockpiled, marketed, sold, and consumed. And in a perverse phenomenological correlation, human beings are valued only for their ability to extract, work, shop, and consume. Exploitability for production and consumption **has become** the ‘truth’ . . . of things, the dominant way they are **now** disclosed and will continue to be disclosed for the foreseeable future.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Heidegger’s contemporary Schumpeter did not share this twee view of peasant farming: “in the economy of the Central European peasant [*circa* 1911]” the peasant “‘calculates’; there is no deficiency of the ‘economic way of thinking’ (*Wirtschaftsgesinnung*) in him. Yet he cannot take a step out of the beaten path; his economy has not changed at all for centuries, except perhaps through the exercise of external force and influence. Why? Because the choice of new methods is not simply an element in the concept of rational economic action, nor a matter of course, but a distinct process which stands in need of a special explanation.” Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest, and the Business Cycle* (tr. of 3<sup>rd</sup> German ed. Redvers Opie 1934) 80, fn 2.

<sup>5</sup> “Positionality” 26-27. (bold emphasis mine)

<sup>6</sup> *Making Sense of Heidegger* 258-259.

Yet there is evidence that rather than late-appearing, an index-phenomenon of modernity, universal exploitation has been our way of existence since who knows how far back, but certainly no later than the founding of the first states. In other words *Bestand/Ge-Stell* as an index of human being begins with the historical record itself.

In his new work on primeval state-formation James C. Scott remarks that fire “has been mankind’s oldest and greatest tool for reshaping the natural world.”<sup>7</sup> According to Scott, fire-use by hominids goes back at least 400,000 years; i.e., before *sapiens*.<sup>8</sup> Scott cites vivid evidence from an excavation in South Africa for the change wrought by use of fire:

“At the deepest and therefore oldest strata, there are no carbon deposits and hence no fire. Here one finds full skeletal remains of large cats and fragmentary bone shards—bearing tooth marks—of many fauna, among which is *Homo erectus*. At a higher, later stratum, one finds carbon deposits signifying fire. Here, there are full skeletal remains of *Homo erectus* and fragmentary bone shards of various mammals, reptiles, and birds, among which are a few gnawed bones of large cats.”<sup>9</sup>

This reversal of eater and eaten testifies “to the power of fire for the species that first learned to use it.” Fire has the power to level down living things into *Bestand*, feedstock for the flames: “Thanks to hominids, much of the world’s flora and fauna consist of fire-adapted species (pyrophytes) that have been encouraged by burning. The effects of anthropogenic fire are so massive that they might be judged, in an evenhanded account of the human impact on the natural world, to overwhelm crop and livestock domestications.”<sup>10</sup>

The consensus is that anatomically modern humans arose about 200,000 years ago. So the conjecture arises that the ‘irruption’ which is Dasein – “With the existence of human beings there occurs an irruption [*Einbruch*] into the totality of beings, so that now the being in itself first becomes manifest, i.e., as being, in varying degrees, according to various levels of clarity, in various degrees of certainty”<sup>11</sup> – that this irruption got underway with the use of fire. Taking that uncanny entity fire as for-using was the fatal

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<sup>7</sup> James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States* (2017) 38.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Human Origins Program at the Smithsonian Institution hominid use of fire is twice that ancient, dating from about 800,000 years before the present. Timeline here: <http://humanorigins.si.edu/evidence/human-evolution-timeline-interactive>

<sup>9</sup> *Against the Grain* 37.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* 38.

<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (tr. Richard Taft, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. 1997) 160.

first step, the work of the inchoate irruption. To wield fire then is to take a great part of the world as for-burning.<sup>12</sup>

And with burning comes cooking. Scott insists that

“It is virtually impossible to exaggerate the importance of cooking in human evolution. The application of fire to raw food externalizes the digestive process; it gelatinizes starch and denatures protein. The chemical disassembly of raw food, which in a chimpanzee requires a gut roughly three times the size of ours, allows *Homo sapiens* to eat far less food and expend far fewer calories extracting nutrition from it. The effects are enormous. It allowed early man to gather and eat a far wider range of foods than before: plants with thorns, thick skins, and bark could be opened, peeled, and detoxified by cooking; hard seeds and fibrous foods that would not have repaid the caloric costs of digesting them became palatable; the flesh and guts of small birds and rodents could be sterilized. . . . with fire, the range of foods [*Homo sapiens*] could digest expanded exponentially.”<sup>13</sup>

The use of fire pushes outward the horizon of omnivory. Once underway ‘for-cooking’ eventually takes all within that horizon as *Bestand*. So native North Americans, Scott writes, “deployed fire to sculpt landscapes favored by elk, deer, beaver, hare, porcupine, ruffed grouse, turkey, and quail, all of which they hunted [for cooking and whatever else]. The game they subsequently bagged represented a kind of *harvesting* of prey animals they had deliberately **assembled** by carefully creating a habitat they would find enticing.”<sup>14</sup> What Heidegger says in a different context fits here, too: prey “become pieces of inventory of a standing reserve for the fabrication of corpses.”<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, Scott goes on, “The Amazonian rain forest bears indelible traces of the use of fire to clear land and open the canopy; Australia’s eucalyptus landscape is, to a considerable degree, the effect of human fire.” “Fire was the key,” he concludes, “to humankind’s growing sway over the natural world.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Including people. God’s pet name for Arjuna, his favorite human being, is *paraṃtapa*, ‘enemy-burner.’ *The Bhagavadgītā in the Mahābhārata* (tr. J. A. B. van Buitenen 1981) *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> *Against the Grain* 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* 38 (bold emphasis mine).

<sup>15</sup> *Sie werden Bestandstücke eines Bestandes der Fabrikation von Leichen*. “The Danger,” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Against the Grain* 38-39.

Fire was the first of what Scott calls ‘the four domestications;’ the others being plants, animals, and us. “[I]n the light of the deep history and massive effects of these practices,” Scott urges that domestication “needs to be seen far more expansively than mere planting and pastoralism.” Because

“Since the dawn of the species, *Homo sapiens* has been domesticating whole environments, not just species. The preeminent tool for this, before the Industrial Revolution, was not the plough so much as fire. The domestication of whole environments in turn made possible the other adaptive advantage of our species, namely high rates of reproduction, making us the world’s most successful invasive mammal . . . Whether we wish to call it niche construction, domestication of the environment, landscape modification, or the human management of ecosystems, [or *Weltbildung*, world-formation<sup>17</sup>] it is clear on the long view that much of the world was shaped by human activity (anthropogenic) well before the first societies based on fully domesticated wheat, barley, goats, and sheep appear in Mesopotamia.”<sup>18</sup>

But appear they did. “Settled populations growing crops of domesticated grains, and small towns with a thousand or more inhabitants facilitating commerce, were an autonomous achievement of the Neolithic, **being in place nearly two millennia before the appearance of the first states**,<sup>19</sup> around 3,300 BCE.” This agro-complex “represented a unique new concentration of manpower, arable land, and nutrition that, if ‘captured’ – ‘parasitized’ might not be too strong a word – could be made into a powerful node of political power and privilege.” Accordingly the Neolithic agro-complex “was a necessary but not a sufficient basis for state formation; it made state formation possible but not certain.”<sup>20</sup>

And then something happened to make state-formation more likely. Scott cites evidence showing that “the period from at least 3,500 to 2,500 BCE was marked by

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<sup>17</sup> “three [phenomenological] theses: [1.] the stone (material object) is *worldless* [*weltlos*]; [2.] the animal is *poor in world* [*weltarm*]; [3.] man is *world-forming* [*weltbildend*].” Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (tr. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker 1995) 177.

<sup>18</sup> *Against the Grain* 70-71.

<sup>19</sup> My emphasis. Cf. Lonergan on the complementary features of ‘stability’ (the good of exploitation) and ‘development’ (the good of exploration): “no less than stability, the possibility of development must be considered. Unfortunately, these two can conflict. Schemes [or ways of life] with high probabilities of survival tend to imprison materials in their own routines. They provide a highly stable basis for later schemes, but they also tend to prevent later schemes from emerging.” *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957), *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, Volume 3* (ed. F. E. Crowe and R. M. Doran 1992) 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Against the Grain* 117.

steep decline in sea level and a decline in the water volume in the Euphrates.” This change led to the contraction of local human populations into smaller ranges. “Increasing aridity meant that the rivers shrank back to their main channels and the population increasingly huddled around the remaining watercourses, while soil salinization of water-deprived areas sharply reduced the amount of arable land.” “The shortage of irrigation water confined the population increasingly to well-watered places and eliminated or diminished many of the alternative forms of subsistence, such as foraging or hunting.” Through this process of compaction “the population became strikingly more concentrated, more ‘urban.’”<sup>21</sup>

When it came to pass that “90 per cent of the population lived in settlements of thirty hectares or more” the resulting “grain-and-manpower modules” were “ideal for state formation.” The early ‘statelet,’ as Scott calls it, “battens itself onto this new source of sustenance.”<sup>22</sup>

The trouble is, no one had seen a state before, and a statelet is not an agent. Who started statelets? Southern Mesopotamia “was the heartland of not one but several related state-making experiments between roughly 3,300 and 2,350 BCE. . . . Among the best known were Kish, Ur, and, above all, Uruk. Something utterly remarkable and without historical parallel was taking place here.”<sup>23</sup> Again, who were the experimenters? And what was the material they experimented with?

“On one hand, groups of priests, strong men, and local chiefs were scaling up and institutionalizing structures of power that had previously used only the idioms of kinship. They were creating for the first time something along the lines of what we would call a state, though they could not possibly have understood it in those terms.”<sup>24</sup>

Although it’s not part of Scott’s argument the conjecture jumps out here that these starters were forerunners of Schumpeter’s entrepreneur.<sup>25</sup> This ‘type’<sup>26</sup> invents nothing; it re-combines, re-purposes, and re-organizes: “these individuals have done

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<sup>21</sup> *Id.* 121.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* 140.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> “The fundamental phenomenon of economic development” is “The carrying out of new combinations we call ‘enterprise;’ the individuals whose function it is to carry them out we call ‘entrepreneurs.’ The entrepreneur’s “characteristic task . . . consists precisely in breaking up old, and creating new, tradition.” *The Theory of Economic Development* 74, 92.

<sup>26</sup> “entrepreneurs are a special type, and their behavior a special problem, the motive power of a great number of significant phenomena.” *Id.* 81-82.

nothing but employ existing goods to greater effect, they have carried out new combinations<sup>27</sup> and are entrepreneurs in our sense.” The entrepreneurial type has, to Schumpeter’s thinking, “First of all . . . the dream and the will to found a private kingdom, usually, though not necessarily, also a dynasty.” Schumpeter emphasizes the discontinuity forced by the entrepreneur, the break with old ways: “Carrying out a new plan and acting according to a customary one are things as different as making a road and walking along it.”<sup>28</sup> And this guess that ‘the great instauration’ of the statelet was wrought by entrepreneurs suggests in turn that the primordial entrepreneur was an early kind of *Gesteller*, if that word be permitted.<sup>29</sup>

What then, was this *Gesteller’s Bestand*? Or in Scott’s terms what was the raw material of the experiments in state-making?

“On the other hand, thousands of cultivators, artisans, traders, and laborers were being, as it were, repurposed as subjects and, to this end, counted, taxed, conscripted, put to work, and subordinated to a new form of control.”<sup>30</sup>

Control for the purpose of reproduction of subjects in ever greater numbers. “As in all ancient kingdoms, maximizing population was an obsession that usually superseded the

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<sup>27</sup> “Technologically as well as economically considered, to produce means to combine the things and forces within our reach. Every method of production signifies some such definite combination. Different methods of production can only be distinguished by the manner of the combination, that is either by the objects combined or by the relation between their quantities. Every concrete act of production embodies for us, is for us, such a combination. . . . An enterprise as such and even the productive conditions of the whole economic system we shall also regard as ‘combinations.’” *Id.* 14.  
<sup>28</sup> *Id.* 133, 93, 85.

<sup>29</sup> To extend the conjecture: the Neolithic *Gesteller* appears to be a mutation of Lévi-Strauss’s *bricoleur*; the distinguishing feature being the grander scope of the *Gesteller’s* imagination in that the object for ‘taking-as’ is not restricted to physical bits and pieces, odds and ends of practices kept around the *domus* because they might come in handy some day, but rather extends to the whole of human ways of life. See “The science of the concrete” in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (tr. anon. 1966). The immediate ancestor of Schumpeter’s theory of the entrepreneur seems to have been Nietzsche’s “major point of historical method [*Haupt-Gesichtspunkt der historischen Methodik*];” namely, “that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew [*auf neue Ansichten ausgelegt*], requisitioned anew [*neu in Beschlag genommen*], transformed and redirected to a new purpose [*zu einem neuen Nutzen umgebildet und umgerichtet*] by a power superior to it . . . a succession of more or less profound, more or less mutually independent processes of subjugation exacted on the thing, added to this the resistances encountered every time, the attempted transformations for the purpose of defence and reaction, and the results, too, of successful countermeasures.” *On the Genealogy of Morality* (ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, tr. Carol Diethe 1994) Second essay, sec. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *Against the Grain* 140. The strong resemblance this operation bears to Michel Foucault’s ‘disciplinary power’ – another purported index-phenomenon of modernity – does not seem attributable purely to chance.

conquest of territory per se. Population – as producers, soldiers, and slaves – represented the wealth of the state.”<sup>31</sup> “To see the early states as ‘population machines’ is not off the mark, so long as we appreciate that the ‘machine’ was in bad repair and often broke down . . . The state remained as focused on the number and productivity of its ‘domesticated’ subjects as a shepherd might husband his flock or a farmer tend his crops.”<sup>32</sup>

And the limiting resource of a population-machine is food. Scott sets out “the grain hypothesis” – “that only grains are best suited to concentrated production, tax assessment, appropriation, cadastral surveys, storage, and rationing;” “that state formation becomes possible only when there are few alternatives to a diet dominated by domesticated grains;” that “So long as subsistence is spread among several food webs, as it is for hunter-gatherers, swidden cultivators, marine foragers, and so on, a state is unlikely to arise, inasmuch as there is no readily assessable and accessible staple to serve as a basis for appropriation.”<sup>33</sup> Accordingly therefore,

“The early state strives to create a legible, measured, and fairly uniform landscape of taxable grain crops and to hold on this land a large population available for corvée labor, conscription, and, of course, grain production. For dozens of reasons, ecological, epidemiological, and political, the state often fails to achieve this aim, but this is, as it were, the steady glint in its eye.”<sup>34</sup>

The steady glint in its eye is the legible, measured, uniform resource Heidegger names *Bestand*.

Scott disclaims any suggestion that the state **invented** slavery. Yet because “concern over the acquisition and control of population was at the very center of early statecraft” coercive measures had to be taken: “a peasantry—assuming that it has enough to meet its basic needs—will not automatically produce a surplus that elites might appropriate, but must be compelled to produce it. . . . In the case of the earliest states, making the lower classes reliably unfree meant holding them in the grain core and preventing them from fleeing to avoid drudgery and/or bondage itself.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *Id.* 142.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* 151.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* 21-22.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* 153.

The foregoing suggests the fundamental theorem of the pristine state: 'Subject is grain, grain subject,—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.'<sup>36</sup>

Subject and grain are *Bestand* to the positioning/combining actions of the early state *Gestellers*; but positioning and combining for what? Schumpeter's analysis of economic development concerns an entity which the early state clearly was not: "a commercially organized state, one in which private property, division of labor, and free competition prevail."<sup>37</sup> Under these assumptions, "the means of production and the productive process have in general no real leader, or rather the real leader is the consumer. . . . Individuals have influence only in so far as they are consumers, only in so far as they express a demand."<sup>38</sup> The elite *Gestellers* of the early state, by contrast, not only appropriated the material surplus produced by subjects; as founder-leaders they also directed the combination of resources to yield a new product, a new 'good' for their exclusive enjoyment and use (consumption): state-power.

Although the early state did not invent slavery it did invent, in response to the demands of administration, a new technology: literacy; a technology which more than any other instantiates positionality.

Jack Goody notes the consensus that the first complete system of writing was developed by the Sumerians about 3000 BCE "from a forerunner which has been suggested as a possible ancestor of other scripts." Goody cites evidence from Uruk showing that the simplest and earliest forms of script "consisted of clay tags or labels with holes and traces of the string by which they were tied to objects. These tags contain nothing more than the impression of a cylinder seal, in other words the property marks of the sender of the objects. Even for these restricted purposes, the limitations were considerable,

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<sup>36</sup> Essentially Marx's conception of labor-value under capitalism: "The value of labour-power resolves itself into the value of a definite quantity of the means of subsistence. It therefore varies with the value of these means or with the quantity of labour requisite for their production. . . . The minimum limit of the value of labour-power is determined by the value of the commodities, without the daily supply of which the labourer cannot renew his vital energy, consequently by the value of those means of subsistence that are physically indispensable. . . . When we speak of capacity for labour, we do not abstract from the necessary means of subsistence. On the contrary, their value is expressed in its value." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I* (ed. Frederick Engels, tr. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling 1887) ch. 6, 'The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power.' Cf. Leonard Woolley on ancient Egypt: "All taxes were paid in kind and stored in the royal magazines; it is illuminating to find that all the goods thus brought in, grain, cattle, wine, linen, are invoiced indiscriminately as 'labour'; in other words, they are put on precisely the same basis as the *corvée* whereby Pharaoh's serfs, the people of Egypt, were called up to build a pyramid or to clean out a canal." As quoted in Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977) 88.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* 5.

<sup>38</sup> *Id.* 21.

because a detached tag could not be linked with its object. So the system was elaborated by drawing signs for these objects and by replacing the impressions of the seal with written signs. . . . At this stage Uruk writing consists of word signs limited to the expression of numerals, objects, and personal names. It is a system which . . . owes its origin to the needs arising from public economy and administration.”<sup>39</sup>

Writing as practiced by scribes of the early state is a process of, to say it in Heideggerese, ‘unguarding’ (*Verwahrlosung*) the thing. “*In the essence of positionality, the unguarding of the thing as thing takes place.*”<sup>40</sup> For it is not, Goody tells us, “literary works, but administrative lists that dominate the uses of writing in ancient Mesopotamia.” Lists from Ugarit, for example, are “simple, abstract, and categorized;” the information having been “abstracted from the social situation in which it had been embedded.” In this way, “accounting procedures can be used to develop a generalized system of equivalences.” A process greatly facilitated by lists “is the sorting of information according to a number of parallel criteria;” and, once sorted, “the items can afterwards be resorted, rearranged.” Literacy is thus a process of radical decontextualization: “words can more easily be seen to be separate from things when they are seen to exist on their own, in written form.”<sup>41</sup>

The aim of decontextualization is modularity; and modularity is for the sake of fungibility, replaceability, exchangeability. Heidegger again: “One piece of standing reserve is replaceable by another. The piece as piece is already imposed upon for replaceability. Piece of standing reserve means: that which is isolated, as a piece, is interchangeably confined within a requisitioning.”<sup>42</sup>

Literacy’s establishing what Goody calls the “over-generalized schema” is the operation of requisitioning, *Bestellen*, in Heidegger’s vision of *Ge-Stell*:

“In an oral discourse it is perfectly possible to treat ‘dew’ as a thing of the earth in one context and a thing of the sky in another. But when faced with its assignment to a specific sub-grouping in a list, or a particular column in a table, one has to make a binary choice; it has to be placed either up or down in rows, in the left column or the right.”<sup>43</sup> The very fact that it is placed in a list which is abstracted from the context of ordinary

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<sup>39</sup> *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* 82.

<sup>40</sup> “The Danger” in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* 45.

<sup>41</sup> *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* 82, 88-89, 103.

<sup>42</sup> “Positionality” 35.

<sup>43</sup> The contemporaneous invention of the row-by-column table – a powerful instrument for chopping the world into *Bestand* – was another early, major advance in positionality made by the pristine state.

speech gives the result of this choice a generality which it would not otherwise have had; the possibility of choice is now radically reduced because the item is placed in a prestigious list which may be 'authorised' by political and religious forces. . . . Through a series of forced choices, binary choices, literacy established the victory of the over-generalised schema."<sup>44</sup>

"There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism."<sup>45</sup> In the sense that 'documentation' continuously, forcibly repurposes thing into object and human being into subject, the instrumentalities of civilization. As epigraph for *Against the Grain* Scott quotes Lévi-Strauss:

"Writing appears to be necessary for the centralized, stratified state to reproduce itself. . . . Writing is a strange thing. . . . The one phenomenon which has invariably accompanied it is the formation of cities and empires: the integration in to a political system, that is to say, of a considerable number of individuals . . . into a hierarchy of castes and classes. . . . It seems to favor rather the exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind."

For present purposes it's worth quoting a bit more from the same source:

"If my hypothesis is correct," Lévi-Strauss goes on, "the primary function of writing, as a means of communication, is to facilitate the enslavement of other human beings [*de faciliter l'asservissement*]. The use of writing for disinterested ends, and with a view to satisfactions of the mind in the fields either of science or the arts, is a secondary result of its invention<sup>46</sup>—and may even be no more than a way of reinforcing, justifying, or dissimulating its primary function. . . . Writing may not have sufficed to consolidate human knowledge, but it may well have been indispensable for the establishment of an enduring dominion [*pour affermir les dominations*]."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* 105-106.

<sup>45</sup> *Es ist niemals ein Dokument der Kultur, ohne zugleich ein solches der Barbarei zu sein.* Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, tr. Harry Zohn 1968) 256.

<sup>46</sup> In the lingo of evolutionary theory, an exaptation.

<sup>47</sup> 'A Writing Lesson,' chapter 25 of *A World on the Wane* [*Tristes Tropiques*] (tr. John Russell 1961) 292-293.

Under this aspect the early state is the emergence into history of “the endlessly repeated play of dominations”<sup>48</sup> which is Dasein.

So are the early state-makers to blame for installing positionality and turning everyone and everything into standing reserve? Did an altogether different dispensation of being prevail aforesaid, *in der ersten Epoche der Seinsgeschichte*, in the first epoch, in the ‘dawn’ of the history of being, *in der Frühe des Seinsgeschichtes*?<sup>49</sup> Even though we may have to concede that the primordial epoch was not the shining Greece of the pre-Socratics but the muddy age of “hunter-gatherers, swidden cultivators, marine foragers, and so on” – even so was that time innocent of positionality and standing reserve? An age of the prevailing of wonder before the onset of the forgetting of the essence of being?

Not plausible on the evidence. Lévi-Strauss gathers a far-ranging variety of ethnographic material from which “one may readily conclude that animals and plants are not known as a result of their usefulness; they are deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first of all known.” The main purpose of this “science of the concrete” is “not a practical one [*n’est pas d’ordre pratique*]. It meets intellectual requirements rather than or instead of satisfying needs.”<sup>50</sup>

What intellectual requirements? “The real question is not whether the touch of a woodpecker’s beak does in fact cure toothache. It is rather whether there is a point of view from which a woodpecker’s beak and a man’s tooth can be seen as ‘going together’ [*de faire «aller ensemble»*] . . . and whether some initial order [*un début d’ordre*] can be introduced into the universe by means of these groupings. Classifying, as opposed to not classifying, has a value of its own, whatever form the classification may take.”<sup>51</sup>

Value for what? “Any classification is superior to chaos and even a classification at the level of sensible properties is a step towards rational ordering [*une étape vers un ordre rationnel*].”<sup>52</sup> “This demand for order,”<sup>53</sup> “the demand for organization,”<sup>54</sup> this “preoccupation with exhaustive observation and the systematic cataloging of relations

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<sup>48</sup> Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *The Foucault Reader* (ed. Paul Rabinow 1984) 85.

<sup>49</sup> “The Danger” 62.

<sup>50</sup> *Elle répond à des exigences intellectuelles, avant, ou au lieu, de satisfaire à des besoins. The Savage Mind* 9.

<sup>51</sup> *le classement, quel qu’il soit, possédant une vertu propre par rapport à l’absence de classement. Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.* 15.

<sup>53</sup> *Id.* 10.

<sup>54</sup> *Id.* 13.

and connections,”<sup>55</sup> this ‘structuring’ [*la «mise en structure»*] “has an intrinsic effectiveness [*une efficacité intrinsèque*] of its own.”<sup>56</sup> Effectiveness for taking the universe as an object of thought: “the universe is an object of thought [*l’univers est objet de pensée*] at least as much as it is a means of satisfying needs.”<sup>57</sup> “The proliferation of concepts, as in the case of technical language, goes with more constant attention to properties of the world, with an interest that is more alert to possible distinctions which can be introduced between them. This thirst for objective knowledge [*appétit de connaissance objective*] is one of the most neglected aspects of the thought of people we call ‘primitive’.”<sup>58</sup>

This *orexis* for objective knowledge is characteristic of *la pensée sauvage* no less than of modern forms. The difference is “mind in its untamed state as distinct from mind cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return.”<sup>59</sup> For even a “heterogeneous and arbitrary classification” proceeds from the impulse “that everything must be taken account of” and “facilitates the creation of a ‘memory bank’ [*une «mémoire»*]”; the “starting point of a speculative organization and exploitation [*à partir de l’organisation et de l’exploitation spéculatives*] of the sensible world in sensible terms.”<sup>60</sup>

Heidegger writes that “the essence of modern technology, positionality, in accordance with its essence, began with the fundamental act of requisitioning [*Grundakt des Bestellens*] insofar as it first secured nature in advance as the fundamental standing reserve [*als den Grund-Bestand in vorhinein sicher stellte*].”<sup>61</sup>

If it is accurate to see the structuring effected by *la pensée sauvage* as the fundamental act of requisitioning, as the first act of securing nature, the world, in advance as fundamental standing reserve under the aspect of *objet de pensée*, as the first step towards the rational ordering and exploitation of everything, then positionality has its origin in a very remote time indeed.

DCW 3/16/2018

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<sup>55</sup> *Id.* 10.

<sup>56</sup> *Id.* 12.

<sup>57</sup> *Id.* 3.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* 2-3.

<sup>59</sup> *Id.* 219.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.* 16.

<sup>61</sup> “Positionality” 40.