Heribert Boeder

Translated, edited, and
with an introduction by
Marcus Brainard

Seditions

Heidegger and the Limit of Modernity

A VOLUME IN THE SUNY SERIES IN CONTEMPORARY CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

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"The most important philosophical thinking since Heidegger is the work of Heribert Boeder. Like his teacher Heidegger, Boeder has devoted his life to a sustained rethinking of the history of philosophy with constant attention to the relation between philosophy's ancient beginnings and its present destitute condition. But what emerges from Boeder's study is a critical reassessment of Heidegger's reading of philosophy's beginnings and development that demonstrates the *accomplishments* of philosophy in the pursuit of its necessary, lawful, and logical task. The essays collected in *Seditions* exhibit the stages in the development of Boeder's thinking and form an excellent overview of his work. Marcus Brainard's introductory essay is extremely good at alerting the reader to the character of Boeder's debt to and departures from Heidegger's thinking."—Joseph Fell, Bucknell University

This is the first book-length work by Heribert Boeder to appear in English. The essays brought together here, several of which are to be found only in this volume, bear witness to a new perspective on metaphysics, modernity, and so-called postmodernity. The "seditiousness" of Boeder's undertaking lies in his twofold intention: to explicate what has been thought in metaphysics, modernity, and postmodernity as self-contained, rational *totalities*—as history, world, and speech, respectively—and by means of those explications to recover dwelling as it has been made visible in the "configurations of wisdom" (for example, in Homer, Paul, and Hölderlin). He approaches each of these totalities by way of Heidegger's thought, which marks the limit of modernity and as such is pivotal to Boeder's enterprise.

"Anyone preoccupied by the question of what it means to think 'after' Heidegger should study this volume. Few, if any, share Boeder's mastery of the Occidental tradition, but for all his profundity and meticulousness he wears his learning so lightly that the uninitiated, with the help of a discerning introduction by Marcus Brainard, will welcome this selection of essays as a breath of fresh air." —Robert Bernasconi, University of Memphis

Heribert Boeder is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Osnabrück, in Germany. He is the author of *Grund und Gegenwart als Frageziel der früh-griechischen Philosophie* (Ground and Present as the Aim of Early Greek Philosophical Inquiry), *Topologie der Metaphysik* (Topology of Metaphysics), *Das Vernunft-Gefüge der Moderne* (The Rational Architectonic of Modernity), and *Das Bauzeug der Geschichte* (The Constructive Elements of History). **Marcus Brainard** is a doctoral candidate in philosophy at the University of Osnabrück .

A volume in the SUNY series in
Contemporary Continental Philosophy
Dennis J. Schmidt, editor

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS
Visit our web site at http://www.sunypress.edu

ISBN 0-7914-3532-6
EAN 90000>
9 780791 435328

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State University of New York Press

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

For information, address State University of New York Press,
State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y., 12246

Production by Marilyn P. Semerad
Marketing by Dana E. Yanulavich

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Boeder, Heribert.
[Essays. English. Selections]
Seditions : Heidegger and the limit of modernity / Heribert Boeder ; translated, edited, and with an introduction by Marcus Brainard.
p. cm. — (SUNY series in contemporary continental philosophy)
Includes bibliographical references and indexes.
ISBN 0-7914-3531-8 (hc : alk. paper). — ISBN 0-7914-3532-6 (pb : alk. paper)
1. Heidegger, Martin, 1889–1976. 2. Philosophy. 3. Philosophy, Modern—29th century. I. Brainard, Marcus. II. Title.
III. Series.
B3279.H49B6313 1997
193–dc21 97-12835
CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Νηρέα δ' ἀψευδέα καὶ ἀληθέα γείνατο Πόντος,
πρεσβύτατον παίδων· αὐτὰρ καλέουσι γέροντα,
οὕνεκα νημερτής τε καὶ ἤπιος, οὐδὲ θεμίστων
λήθεται, ἀλλὰ δίκαια καὶ ἤπια δήνεα οἶδεν·

(But Pontos sired as the oldest of his children, Nereus, who neither distorts nor conceals anything; they call him 'the fatherly one' because he misleads no one and is gentle, nor does he ever lose sight of decrees, but always keeps appointed right and lenient options in view.)

– Hesiod, *Theogony* 233 ff.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Seditions. By whom? And against which authority? Not by Heidegger, not against modernity, as the subtitle of this volume might lead one to believe. But by Heribert Boeder, and yet not against Heidegger and the modernity whose limit he marks but rather against contemporary thought and its Heidegger, its modernity, and, ultimately, its philosophy. And the divisive issue? First and foremost, difference. It is its radical attention to difference that decisively separates Boeder's thought from the contemporary discussion, which is enthralled by difference while, paradoxically enough, allowing it to wither perilously to mere similarity.

Already Plato saw that similarity poses the greatest danger to thinking: "whoever seeks to avoid deception must always and more than anything be on guard against similarities. For they are a very slippery sort of thing" (*Sophist* 231A 6 ff.). Kant, in turn, pinpointed the effect of such deception in expressing his concern about a tendency of his "syncretistic age, when a certain shallow and dishonest system of coalition between contradictory principles is devised because it is more acceptable to a public which is satisfied to know a little about everything and at bottom (*im ganzen*) nothing."[1] Since difference is the element of knowledge, the privileging of similarity has to result in the latter's expunction. And yet if, as Aristotle maintains, "[e]very intellectual teaching and every learning proceeds from a knowledge which was provided in advance" (*APo.* 71^{a}1), then it becomes clear in what way the privileging of similarity poses the greatest danger to thinking: it leaves the latter groundless and thus paralyzed. Since this danger manifests itself most forcibly today in the public's praise of difference, in its pluralistic mentality—for, as will be seen, what it calls 'difference' proves to be just similarity in disguise—the most pressing question has to be: how is this danger to be guarded against? By insisting not only in errancy but even more so in difference. And this is just what Boeder's thought does. Yet how does this set it apart from the aforementioned praise? Insofar as it focuses on that difference which requires a decision, one made on the ground of knowledge and thus following upon the acknowledgment of its necessary precedence over thinking, and in fact as the latter's very possibility.

The difference respected and at work here is not an indiscriminate distinguishing between possibilities, thus not just the generation of mere differences, which are then conjoined in endless series, but rather a distinguishing centered on the disjunction, on the either/or. In this regard the decision called for marks a transformation of what was formerly the judgment: on the basis of knowledge in the sense of what has already been decided, of what has been accomplished, it effects the exclusion of one option in favor of another, and in fact as that which is better—more precisely: the best. Since Boeder attends to thought alone, it is one thought that is excluded in favor of another, but only insofar as it makes a difference in the whole (*im Ganzen*), that is to say: all the difference. Hence, the difference honored here is not arbitrarily exclusive—as its basis in knowledge already indicates—but is made always and only with respect to the whole, whose "everything" is restricted to its integral parts, and in fact in view of constructing it as a totality. Only when a thought does not contribute to the establishment of the whole is it not taken into account. That this emphasis has to strike the public as seditious is already evident in the abhorrence the mere mention of exclusion arouses today; such has to run counter to the desire of a public living under the spell of *différance*. Nevertheless, the difference of chief concern here is ultimately and eminently that in which "everyone necessarily has an interest,"[2] namely, the difference harbored in the knowledge of the destiny of man as it has been voiced in the configurations of wisdom of our history: his destiny to distinguish himself from himself. The recovery of the knowledge of this destiny is Boeder's task. It alone grants the difference operative and of concern here its justification, its significance, and its urgency.

The sense of difference crucial to Boeder's thought gains further determinacy in the consideration of the three principial methodological moments of his undertaking in which it comes to bear—in the ἐποχή, the totality, and the ratio—as well as of the three totalities explicated by means of them—history, world, and speech. In what follows we shall outline in turn the significance of each of these clusters of "fundamental words" to his undertaking.

EPOCHÉ. The enabling moment of Boeder's thought is the ἐποχή. Although it is thematized only later, it nevertheless informs his thought from the very beginning, namely, in his pursuit of the intention to learn, whereby his understanding of intellectual learning rests on the deceptively simple distinction between what is to be learned and what one already knows. And this is bound up with the insight that learning is possible only to the extent that one listens to one who has knowledge. Hence, the attention to what is to be learned, to what one does not know, was seen to require reticence on the part of whomever wishes to learn, which is to say that one must initially cease to assert oneself,

one's own concerns, and instead turn in openness and stillness to what is to be learned. Such reticence with respect to knowledge is the central feature of the ἐποχή operative in the thought presented in this volume.

Although Boeder's ἐποχή receives its originary impetus from Heidegger's, which itself is a transformation of the Husserlian ἐποχή, the talk in the foregoing of a knowledge that has precedence over thinking already indicates a crucial point of divergence from Heidegger and, furthermore, should make one hesitate to want to integrate Boeder into the phenomenological tradition, especially as his primary concern lies not at all with phenomena but only with thought as it is purified of all phenomenality. While it is true that for both Boeder and Husserl the performance of the ἐποχή brings about a modification of thinking and while neither allows this modification to give rise to the neutrality that paralyzes thinking and thereby renders it impotent, they part radically with regard to the character and end of the intended modification. On the one hand, Husserl's ἐποχή is purely instrumental; its methodical function is to open up the field of research proper to phenomenology, namely, pure consciousness, which is to provide an absolute foundation for knowledge. This ἐποχή can be employed or not—turned on or off, so to speak—at the will of the phenomenologist in order to effect the shift between the natural and the phenomenological attitudes. The ἐποχή excludes, or brackets, the thesis fundamental to the former attitude, namely, the "world-thesis," or the belief in the existence of the world, and thereby facilitates the move into the phenomenological attitude while also disclosing the desired field of research. If, however, the phenomenologist chooses to stop performing the ἐποχή, he then returns to the natural attitude and its world. By contrast, Boeder's ἐποχή plays no methodical role in the Husserlian sense, for it is rooted not in the foundational intention of an epistemology but in the aim to open a present for each thought that makes a difference. This ἐποχή cannot be turned on and off at will—hence there is no shift between attitudes. Rather, the thinking presented here always takes place, as it were, within it, under its influence. Furthermore, and most importantly, Boeder's ἐποχή does not target a thesis but instead "purifies" thinking of all idiosyncrasy, of all narcissism, which one might be tempted to impose upon what has been thought. The exclusion of narcissism yields the said reticence; such frees one to turn to the "*Sache selbst*" (thing itself) as it presents—that is, gives—itself.

Clearly such reticence was learned from Heidegger and in fact as *Gelassenheit* (releasement). However, whereas for Boeder it forms the starting point of thinking, for Heidegger it has a resultant character, coming to the fore only in the final phase of his thought: it itself is not Heidegger's ἐποχή but only the re-

sponse to the latter. Here *Gelassenheit* follows upon his transformation of the exclusion proper to Husserl's ἐποχή, and in fact in the former's experience of the calamity marked by the "epoch"—a keeping-to-itself (*An-sich-halten*), a retention, even a withdrawal—of that which gives what is to be thought. It is his experience of "the mission (*Geschick*) of the withdrawal of the topic of thinking" that is decisive for his ἐποχή. And this is where Boeder parts with Heidegger, his teacher: instead of receiving its impulse from the latter's negative experience of what has been given, Boeder's thought is moved by the insight into the gift itself in the beginning of philosophy—an insight enabled only by a radicalization of this ἐποχή such that even Heidegger's thought was subjected to it; all thinking within the ἐποχή knows itself to be dependent upon the knower for the "gift," as it were, of the knowledge sought. This radicalization and the said insight necessitated the transformation of *Gelassenheit* into the distinguished sense of reticence operative in Boeder's thought. If for Heidegger *Gelassenheit* is a waiting upon that which withdraws itself from thinking, for Boeder it is the reverent (cf. αἰδώς) attention to what has been given, which entails a *Lassen* whereby one is "no longer determined to leave metaphysics to itself (*sich selbst überlassen*)"—which for Heidegger means leaving it behind—"but rather [is] in a position to leave it to its self and thus to let it be (*sein lassen*)."[3] *Lassen* in this sense at once brings about the liberation of metaphysical thinking from its continuum with technical thinking as posited by Heidegger and its detemporalization. Here, in keeping with the later Heidegger, the piety of thinking is no longer a questioning but rather a listening to what has been said (*das Gesagte*), though this has now taken on the distinguished sense of what is known (*das Gewußte*). It is precisely in Boeder's transformation of this piety into the acknowledgment of and attention to a preceding knowledge, of and to the gift that this knowledge represents, that the productivity of his thought becomes most apparent. It arises from decisions made in accordance with this gift and responds, as Boeder puts it, "logotectonically" to Heidegger's call for a "poetizing thinking" (*dichtendes Denken*).

TOTALITY. The elucidation of the gift here in question as well as of the productivity to which it gives rise is afforded only by way of Heidegger's question 'What is metaphysics?' and the decisive hint it gave to Boeder's undertaking. It directed his attention to metaphysics as a concluded whole, as a totality whose end was necessitated by its beginning. And yet his investigation of this totality revealed that Heidegger's account was errant: metaphysics proved to be not just a simple totality in the sense of the continuously increasing oblivion of that which gives what is to be thought, a totality whose end was marked by the decay of metaphysical into technical thinking.[4] And it no longer bore out

Heidegger's assertion that this thinking fell in a single epoch of the mission of the withdrawal of the topic of thinking. Furthermore, the topic of thinking was found to be not singular, i.e., not solely the Being of beings,[5] but different. Combined with the insight into the precedence of knowledge, these observations led Boeder to renew Heidegger's question, this time putting it to that metaphysics itself which was held to have come to an end. Its answer became evident as the result of Boeder's complete traversal of the whole of metaphysics, which showed itself to be a totality composed of three epochs, a state of affairs which accorded with the tripartite determination of the whole that metaphysics itself established for thought. Namely, in metaphysics the triad was esteemed as the simplest complete construct[6]—put abstractly: as possessing the unity of the syllogism and consisting of beginning, middle, and end, where the middle mediates the two extremes. A totality circumscribes "everything," though not everything in the usual sense of every single possibility. Rather, it comprises only the necessary parts, where their necessity is confirmed, as Aristotle put it with reference to drama, by the fact that they are "so closely connected that the transposal or withdrawal of any one of them will disjoin and dislocate the whole. For that which makes no perceptible difference by its presence or absence is no real part of the whole" (*Poetics*, 1451a33 ff.). For Boeder a part makes a difference in the whole—that is, all the difference—only insofar as its presence necessarily contributes to the completion of that whole, helps totalize it, as it were; otherwise that part is not integral and thus makes no difference. This is the precise sense of difference on which Boeder's thought focuses; there is no room here for similarity, such as that thrived upon in the discussion of influences and effective histories, but only for rational positions, purified of all phenomenality, that are integral to a given totality.

Boeder has drawn the distinguished positions of each totality together into an architectonic, a topology—first of metaphysics, then of modernity, and now of contemporary thought. The logic employed in doing so is topological insofar as the aim is to differentiate the "complete" rational positions (the τόποι of the system) and then exhibit their relation to other such positions by arranging them in a "well-formed" architectonic—in the said totality. And yet, whereas Boeder's thought is guided by a systematic intention, i.e., to explicate the unity of a given totality, his work is by no means syncretistic, for the construction of a topology as he understands it hinges on the differences between its constituent parts. As will be seen, insofar as the history of philosophy is one of strife, of the crises of principles, there can be no facile reconciliation between divergent rational positions. Though any one type of reason does have three representatives in an epoch which are united by a common task

(e.g., Kant, Fichte, and Hegel in the final epoch) and though that reason has counterparts in the other epochs (namely, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle in the first and Plotinus, Augustine, and Aquinas in the middle epochs), the differences between each position and each epoch are maintained—they are always guaranteed by the role the representative position plays in the fulfillment of an epochally-specific task and its determinative principle. The arrangement of these positions in an architectonic does not preclude difference but in fact preserves it by bringing the differences in the whole to determinacy.

This employment of the topology has obviously been learned neither from modernity nor from so-called postmodernity, which confounds thinking in terms of the totality with totalitarianism. Rather, it is metaphysics that has shown Boeder how to build logotectonically, to construct rational totalities—which were the sole subject of metaphysical thought. In his work, rationality is disclosed by way of interlocking wholes, where the "macrostructure" is given by the "logotectonic," which encapsulates the totalities of history, world, and speech. However, the actual key to the building central to Boeder's undertaking lies in the ratio (τόπος). It enables him to unlock the "microstructure" of the topology's constituent parts (its τόποι) and thereby to bring the talk of reason, rationality, and rational positions to determinacy.

RATIO. Contrary to trends in contemporary thought that are imbued with "a certain degree of misology, i.e., hatred of reason" (Kant, *GMS*, 395.33/11)—literally: hatred of the λόγος—Boeder's intention is to honor reason, both in its historical and mundane manifestations and in its present. Such talk already implies a distinction of reason, and in fact one that reason itself demands, for it has shown itself differently in metaphysics, in modernity, and in our present—despite the prevailing habit of viewing reason as somehow continuous, as having had a uniform character extending from some indeterminate "prehistoric" beginning of thought down to our present. Seen from our vantage point, on this side of the closure of metaphysics as well as of modernity, reason has indeed assumed a new actuality. But which? First, regarding its historical manifestations: in each epoch philosophical reason depended on the givenness of a divine reason for its actuality—even in its final epoch, in which the divinity was not a god but rather Nature (cf. *Sed*, 183).[7] In modernity, however, this principle, this ground, was expunged and thus the departedness of philosophical reason was sealed. As a result, reason could no longer be the faculty of principles but only the shadow of its former self, namely, thinking. The groundlessness of modern reason and its consequent indeterminacy has been deepened in so-called postmodernity, where reason is rejected because it is considered to be the source of dominance and terror (Lyotard). In light of these events, how could

reason possibly attain actuality in our present? As strange as it may sound, by way of modernity's very rejection of philosophical reason: "Modernity requires and frees us to translate what has been regarded philosophically as 'reason' into a *ratio terminorum*" (11). By-passing the prevailing habit of confounding reason with thinking, the approach to reason operative here is one based on the acknowledgment first of the departedness of its historical manifestations and then of the fading of its modern transformations; reason regains its determinacy and thus its dignity via the attention to the difference it has made. In fact it was only the renewal of Heidegger's question 'What is metaphysics?' and the thematization of the totality it enabled that gave rise to this acknowledgment and, as a consequence, to the aforementioned translation. How so? In his investigation of the totality of metaphysics, the former science of reason, Boeder found it to be the history of the works of reason, of its philosophical accomplishments. Out of its groundlessness reason has regained its solidity as the *ratio terminorum* and thus has taken on a purely technical significance within the frame of the logotectonic: "Such a ratio, as it is realized in the work, is the only one we can experience and from which we can learn pure reason" (217). It is in this sense, then, that its present actuality is no mere legacy, but instead the result of both a recovery and a violent construction—for reason is not something that is already there waiting to be found, but must be elicited, demonstrated, or more precisely: built. In Boeder's thought it is the ratio that forms the basis of such building.

Here he has responded to Heidegger's call for a "poetizing thinking" (*dichtendes Denken*) first by transforming the sense of *Dichten* into a *Verdichten*, a compression, condensation. His is a poetizing in the sense of a building, and in fact of a refined logotectonic out of integral rational positions. Each of these positions is explicated as a ratio, a word whose usage capitalizes on its twofold sense: on the one hand, ratio as Latin for 'reason', and on the other, ratio as proportion. Due to the aforementioned translation reason is freed from its vague association with an innate human faculty and is now nothing but the ratio—"reason is a mere fiction at the point where it cannot realize itself in a basic and objective ratio" (146)—and rationality inheres in the practice of explicating it and its place within an architectonic built of such ratios but also in that architectonic itself and, by extension, in the logotectonic. The latter is an articulated totality, which is a three-tiered hierarchy of wholes. As for metaphysics, which, as will be seen, is paradigmatic for all of Boeder's building, it is a totality made up of three epochs, each of which consists of three types of reason. Each type manifests itself as a figure, which is the combination of three positions that are unified by a common task. As the smallest whole within this edifice, the ratio

provides the means of laying out the structure of each position as well as making explicit how each fits together with its complementary positions into that figure. The ratio itself is a proportion built out of three terms, which derive from the dissolution of Heidegger's phrase 'the destiny of the topic of thinking' (*die Bestimmung der Sache des Denkens*).[8] The corresponding notation employed in the essays presented here is A (destiny),[9] B (topic), and C (thinking).[10] In the construction of a rational figure it is the term-sequence of its incipient ratio that is determinative of the complementary ratios in that figure. For instance, the first ratio in a figure of natural reason has the sequence C B A. Since the subsequent ratio always begins with the final term of the preceding ratio (and this holds for the construction of any figure within the logotectonic), the second ratio of natural reason has the form: A C B. Hence, the third ratio is written B A C.[11] This figure will be taken up again below in more detail and so in connection with the other types of reason constitutive of the totality of history; for now, at issue is simply the specification of the sequence of the terms as well as how the respective ratios fit together into a figure.

The exhibition of a thought as a whole composed of these three terms is said to be a "simplification" of thought (cf., e.g., 150-151), and yet it is a simplification not because it makes a thought easier to grasp or more immediately comprehensible, and so "does not claim to possess any didactic value" (162). Rather, it is as a condensation of that thought into its principal moments. But is Boeder's work not reductive, does the thought thus "condensed" not lose its richness, its "multifariousness," by way of its explication as a ratio? No. The usual sense of reduction implies that something has been left out. And yet insofar as the thought (as a ratio) is a *whole*, insofar as its unity has been demonstrated by means of the interconnection of its terms, there can be no talk of anything having been left out—for the ratio includes *everything* essential to its construction. This condensation has the chief benefit of making the completeness of a given figure perspicuous, and by extension that of an epoch and of the totality in question. And yet while it does enable one to note differences between rational positions more readily, it is not the last word on the characterization of a thought. Already given the repetition of rational sequences within other figures of, say, natural reason in other epochs but also within other types of reason, more information is needed in order to distinguish one ratio from another with the same sequence: for instance, the epochal principle or lack thereof to which the thought is subject, and the latter's corresponding task. These and other features will be taken up in what follows.

While the aim of the foregoing was to sketch the main methodological moments of Boeder's thought as well as to fix the sense of difference crucial

to it, the specific productivity of his work—and hence the difference it makes—is to be seen most clearly in the doing itself, that is, in his explication of the three totalities of history, world, and speech. They themselves form in turn a whole—the logotectonic—the completion of which is the aim of Boeder's entire undertaking. It is on account of this that the present volume is divided as it is; in this way it may be said to give a cross section of his thought to date.

Though they often differ with respect to the totality thematized, the essays collected here are unified principally by the fact that Heidegger's thought is the chief concern or the starting point of each. He remains, to be sure, the mediating figure in Boeder's work, the one who instigated his "seditious" turn to the totalities of thought—beginning with the explication of history and then of the world and ultimately transgressing the latter's limit (and thus parting with Heidegger's thought) into the present of speech—and his consequent demonstration of their rationality in the form of the logotectonic. It is to Heidegger's achievement that Boeder's building responds, even though such building was dismissed by his teacher due to its "technical" character. Oddly enough, it is just the translation of technical reason—that is, logotectonic reason—operative in these essays that has managed to open up a present for the totalities of history, world, and speech, a present which Heidegger, though able to sense the significance of each, was unable to appreciate sufficiently.[12] And yet, as will be seen, wherever Boeder does engage in a critique of Heidegger's thought (which is most pronounced in the first four essays in the first section), such is motivated not by a desire to correct some "error" or to outdo him, but rather by the necessity of disclosing differences that Heidegger's account had to cover over in his effort to clarify and fulfill his own task. Such a critique is not just negative but fruitful, which is most conspicuous in the threefold benefit of the said disclosure: the limits of Heidegger's thought as determined by its task are discerned, philosophical thought is allowed to appear in its proper light, and the present task of thinking comes into view. On the other hand, one would err in reducing Boeder's repeated reference to Heidegger, explicit or implicit, to the mere dependence of a student upon his teacher; rather, such reference finds its justification solely in Heidegger's position within modernity, where he marks its limit, one that points to a new present for thinking. And the latter's task? Such gains determinacy only by way of Boeder's explication of the aforementioned totalities, each of which will be addressed in turn in what follows.

HISTORY.[13] This is the first totality Boeder encountered and explicated, and it has remained decisive—literally: *maßgeblich*—for his thought, in all his building. The turn to the totality was not motivated by some predilection on