Well, *mein Alte*, my Herr Professor Martin Heidegger, magician of Messkirch, we are nearing the end of our conversation, and, in view of the ‘turn’, the *Kehre*, our conversation took when I introduced Aletheia, you will not, I am sure, be sorry about this. Notwithstanding your repeated protestations that you did not mean to use the expression ‘idle talk’ in a ‘disparaging sense’ (e.g. BT 157), you did also describe it as ‘the possibility of understanding everything without any previous appropriation of the matter’ (BT 158) and this would certainly be true of the kind of ‘gossip’ I forced us to indulge earlier, in the glade. In the end,

> it is the business of philosophy to protect the *power of the most elemental words* in which Da-sein expresses itself from being flattened by a common understanding to the point of unintelligibility, which in its turn functions as a source for illusory problems. (BT 202)

Believe me, Herr Professor, on this you and I are of one mind. Whatever our differences (and what profoundly different cultures we come from, what utterly different lives we have led), perhaps, on this, one of the deepest things in each of us (if Da-sein is allowed depths), we are utterly convergent. I, too, want to wake up from pre-ontological average everydayness, to hear words and their meanings as if they are being uttered for the first time, to catch the scent of the primordial mystery of our being. It is just that we pursue our aims in a different way. For you, gossip is an appropriate object of philosophical enquiry: it is part of the mystery by which Da-sein reduces everything to the always already, to the known, the taken-for-granted, the plains of ordinariness. It is this for me, as well; but it is also something that philosophy has to incorporate within itself. In this regard, I am closer to Sartre
– with his ‘shop-girls’ talk philosophy’ (as Lévi-Strauss described it) – than to yourself. But before I leave you (or attempt to leave you) to follow my own agenda, as you left Husserl to follow yours, let me allow you your last unimpeded say in your ownmost place.

For I am aware that our previous location, in the glade, was at least as much my place as yours – I appropriated it for my purposes – and you felt extremely ill-at-ease there. Now, however, we move entirely to your place; for, after our walk through the forest, we arrive finally at your wooden cabin, here in Todtnauberg.

‘This hut,’ your adoring disciple Heinrich Petzet said, ‘can be as little separated from his life as the course of his thinking.’ And he cites another thinker who said that ‘we cannot know who Heidegger the thinker and the man is unless we see the “hut”’.\(^{50}\) That’s as may be; but this ‘ascetic dwelling place for thinking’, ‘a simple, wooden structure without any interior or exterior decoration’ where you spent nearly half of most years,\(^{51}\) and where much of *Being and Time* was composed, is, without doubt, your ‘ownmost’ place. Here is the scene of your deepest solitude, here the place of fiercest and longest struggles with all those things – tiredness, distraction, idleness, stupidity, preconceived ideas, fluency, loneliness, boredom, appetite – that prevent thinkers from thinking at the depth, and with the intensity, that makes thought truly the articulation of wakefulness rather than a mere reaction of words to other words. (How slight, Herr Professor, is the difference between really thinking and chattering to oneself or to a page. And how vast!)

I pause at the threshold of your study, with its ‘monk-like furnishings’, where ‘nothing that would delight the eye was to be found in the thinker’s proximity’: ‘Its meagreness works like ice,’ you said. (I imagine there would be no mirror in your study to reply to your presence.) I inhale the scent of bare wood and think back along the echoes of our footsteps. I shall go no further, disinclined to enter a space that reverberated for so long with your self-talk, with all the decades of lonely communion, all the insights, all the drafts and failures, all the excuses, all the self-exculpatory lies. It was not fun, you said, ‘to live up here and to sit alone behind this desk in winter, when the timber creaks in the storm and loneliness creeps through every hole!’ I am afraid that I might smell the staleness of effort, the stink of cowardice, not the cool of original understanding. And I am afraid that I should be unwelcome.

I pause at the threshold and content myself with imagining the hours you spent glancing at, and seeing and not seeing, the view from your window as you looked down the sloping meadows. On the left